

SI, "SHORTY" and THE BOYS

ON "THE MARCH TO THE SEA."

By JOHN McELROY.

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ON THE MARCH TO THE SEA.

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PREFACE.

Serg't Si Klegg and Corp'l "Shorty," of Co. Q, 200th Ind., after their release from Andersonville, spent a time in the hospital, and after convalescing to a certain point were sent home with their companions on sick furlough to regain their health and strength. Si and Shorty went directly to Deacon Klegg's comfortable home on Bean Blossom Creek, in the Wabash Valley, and there, with the abundance of well-cooked, delicious food, prepared by Mrs. Klegg's own hands, and all the comforts of a home, they soon became themselves again. Si and Annabel decided to marry before his return. Shorty was tortured by the usual vicissitudes of feeling of a big, strong, bashful man, desperately in love with a sane, high-spirited girl, whom he feels is so far above him that he scarcely dares admit, even to himself, how much he loves her. He gets fearfully jealous of the school teacher, and has the usual passages from the intoxication of happiness to the gloom of despair. Maria Klegg at last takes matters in her own hands and lets him have a little substantial encouragement.

The wedding of Si and Annabel comes off, but in the midst of the ceremony arrives an order for him and Shorty to go at once to Indianapolis and take charge of a party of recruits, convalescents, and soldiers returning from furlough, and bring them on to the regiment, which is about to start with Sherman on the March to the Sea. All their companions rush to join them, though their furloughs have not expired. They go to Indianapolis, to find that communication with Sherman has been apparently cut off. The Commandant of the Post tries to retain them for prison guards, but they manage, with the aid of Shad Graham, a young volunteer, who has been in Andersonville with them and has now been detailed to engineering duty as an Acting Lieutenant, to get detailed as part of a detachment which is to take a pontoon train to the front. They are taken to Jeffersonville, Ind.



SI KLEGG AND SHORTY.

CHAPTER I.

SHORTY HAS A GO OF ORDERLY DUTY.

The news that morning was still more disturbing. There was no longer any doubt that Hood's whole army had slipped around Sherman, and was now booming northward, along the line which had been fought over the previous Summer, and recovering the ground which has been wrested from it by such terrific fighting, and striking for Chattanooga, Murfreesboro, Nashville—possibly Memphis, Louisville, Cincinnati, and no one knew where else. Forrest's and Wheeler's cavalry seemed to be everywhere, and doing measureless damage to railroads, bridges, depots of supplies and trains. Tennessee, southern Kentucky and northern Georgia suddenly became a ferment of armed rebels, actively bent on mischief.

There were reports of the railroads being cut in a score of important places, of garrisons repulsing furious assaults or having to yield to them, of detachments being surrounded, of alarms all along the Tennessee and the Cumberland Rivers, and of "active preparations for defense" even back on the Ohio.

"There seems to be a hell's mint of rebels nearly everywhere that we know," said Ike Deebble dejectedly.

"Where in creation did they all come from, Si?" asked Shorty, in bewilderment. "I thought that old Sherman had got them that wasn't killed off pretty well cooped up."

"He did have 'em cooped up," answered Si, "but a little bunch o' them's flew the coop. You know how it is when you're penning sheep. You get 100 o' them in a pen, but 10 get away from you, and they make more trouble than the whole lot would 've done. I believe them rebels down there's like whup-poor-wills, much more noisy than numerous, and I'd chance marching this part o' the 200th Injanny Volunteer Infantry right down through 'em to find Sherman."

"But where in the world is Sherman?" inquired Ike Deebble. "Why ain't he showing somewhere in all this ruction?"

"Sherman'll show up somewhere, just when and where the rebels least expect and want him," answered Si, confidently. "He ain't the feller to let all this lobbbery go on without his getting in h's licks s' mewhere. I half believe he's just turned all this shivaree loose on purpose, just to get rid of 'em, and give the fellers in the rear something to do taking care of 'em."

"That's an idee, Si," said Shorty, a new light breaking on him. "I believe that myself. Our play's to get right through to him, in short meter, and pay no attention to this hullabaloo. The real front's where Sherman is. There's our place."

"The surest and quickest way to get to Sherman is to stick to these pontoons," said Shad Graham. "Sherman's bound to have them before he can go anywhere, and he'll wait for them. I'm sure of that."

"Hurrah for the pontoons," shouted Shorty. "We'll stick to them until there's there's a thick coat of ice in the place where they'd burn up like a feather, unless we get to Sherman before."

Shorty's metaphors were somewhat mixed, but they expressed the determination of all concerned.

"If I can manage to steer old Bonesteel according to the compass, we're all right," said Shad Graham, calling Si, Shorty and Deebble into private conference. "The wind that fills his sails are ideas as to red tape and his own rank and dignity as Colonel of Engineers. He's as tetchy on them points as if they were boils, but keep a good, warm, soft poultice on them and we can do anything in reason. He don't seem to care a straw for anything else where they are concerned. I don't see how in the world he ever got married. He must have proposed to his girl on paper of regulation sizes, carefully folded three times, and briefed and numbered in red ink on the back as to its contents."

"Probably makes his wife and children stand at attention, with their heels together, and salute, when they speak to him," suggested Si.

"Very likely," answered Shad. "The way to get along with him is to never seem to have an idea or opinion of your own—you're only carrying out his ideas and orders. Here he comes now. Watch me do the trick. When he comes to the regulation 15 paces, come up to attention as stiff as ramrods, and remain so while he's here, and until after he's passed 15 paces. Mind your eye, now. Don't do it a second before he reaches the regulation 15 paces—that's about that old oyster can there—nor after he's passed that far—that's about that cigar-box lid. Don't say a word, unless he speaks directly to you, which is not likely, and then chime in with what he says."

Apparently none of them looked at the Colonel, but as his foot reached the oyster can all four came to attention as if touched by a spring, and stood there with statue-like rigidity, each right hand, the fingers well-closed, at the side of the cap, with Shad Graham the prescribed one pace in advance of the rest.

"Lieutenant," he said frowningly, after acknowledging the salute. "I had to come to you myself, instead of sending for you. I've had to dismiss two of my orderlies, and have the others on different errands. Tell that man on the left there to bring his heels together and turn out his toes more."

Without turning his head or taking his "respectful gaze" off the Colonel, Shad ordered gruffly:

"Bring your heels together there, you man on the left. Turn your toes out."

Shorty's able feet made the required change of a half-inch or more.

"Lieutenant," continued the Colonel, savagely, "do not receive any more ropes, cordage or other supplies from that little Jew, Heidenheimer. Do not permit him to come upon the grounds. Kick him off if he attempts it. Do it without words or mercy. Do not give him any information as to the work or hold any conversation with him. He had the insufferable insolence to try to slip a \$100 bill under my blotter a few minutes ago. Simply outrageous! To me, a Colonel of Engineers, of all men! I promptly kicked him out of my office, with the information that if he ever dared to enter again I'd break his circumsized neck. Most infernal impudence I ever heard of! Anybody but a Jew would have more respect for an officer of the Engineers. I always suspected and detested him. Rigidly inspect everything that he has so far furnished."

"Yes, sir; I know you did, sir," returned Shad. "You gave orders some time ago, you will recollect, for a most careful inspection of everything furnished by Heidenheimer, and it was done. You will find my reports, Nos. 311 and 312, in obedience to orders, of articles rejected, on file in your office."

"Very good, sir," returned the Colonel. "I will examine and act upon them to day.

By the way, as I must have another orderly, you will order that man on the left to report to my office in an hour for such duty. I shall be back from breakfast then."

"You man on the left," ordered Shad, keeping his eyes straight to the front, "report to the Colonel's office in an hour, for orderly duty. Brush up your clothes and have some style about you."

"I knew that little Jew was trying to snouge the Government all along," remarked Shad Graham, after the Colonel had passed his 15 paces onward, and they were all able to "stand at ease" once more. "And I didn't make any bones about telling him so. That's what started him up to try and bribe the Colonel. That's where he was a fool. The Colonel didn't know a thing about him before he came in and announced himself."

"And he didn't issue the order?" gasped Si.

"No; no more'n you did. But he thinks he did now, and never'll get over telling about his shrewdness in circumventing a man who was trying to rob the Government. He has to think and talk about himself so much that there isn't room in his head for much else."

"I don't want to do no orderly duty, and especially for such an old turkey-gobbler as that," grumbled Shorty. "Why, he has his sidewheel down all the time, and I couldn't get along with him a holy minute. My joints are stiff yet from having to stand at attention so long."

"Yes, you can, you will, and you must," said Shad Graham resolutely. "It's great luck getting you up here. We need you there in our business. This is going to be a mighty lively day for us, and we've got to play our points fine to get off. Everybody's grabbing for all the transportation in sight, and we must be dead sharp or they'll steal it away from us, in spite of Sherman's needs, and we'll get left. You want to clean yourself up as you never did before, get a shave and a fresh collar, button your blouse to the chin, put on a pair of white gloves, and stand there in the office like a basswood man, with no more expression on your face than a graven image, but with your eyes and ears as wide open as a rabbit's. Hustle, now, and get ready. Here, you boys," calling to some negro bootblacks, "put a looking-glass shine on this man's gunboats. Three or four tackle them at once, for it's a day's work for one. We'll chip in to pay for it, for it isn't fair to saddle the expense of such a job on any one man."

While the industrious boys were emptying all their blacking-boxes, to get enough for a layer over Shorty's liberal expanse of cowhide, Shad Graham explained:

"You see, boys, our special job is to get through to Sherman a whole new pontoon train, 250 feet long, and a lot of miscellaneous supplies, canvas, anchors, ropes, bolts, hinges, etc., that they need to refit the pontoons they have already. Alto-

gether they make a good, fair train load. In spite of all our hurrying the things could not be got ready until this morning, but with four such good hustlers as we are to push and drive, and your 100 corn-fed Indianians to do the straight horse-work, we ought to get the things through on schedule time. By rights we ought to have a special train, with get-there orders, and the right-of-way over everybody else. We would've had this if it hadn't been for this awful funk from Dan to Beersheba about Hood's army and a new invasion of the North. He's going to invade the North about as much as I'm going to run a Sunday school on Wabash avenue in Chicago. But everybody that's got a horse or a cow or a wheelbarrow load of goods is scared to death about it, and Governors, Senators, Representatives, and bigwigs generally are keeping the wires hot with alarms and requests, and Commanders of Departments, Districts, garrisons and posts are ordering and begging for cannon, ammunition and men to be sent this very day to places which are certain to be attacked before to-morrow mornin'. I never did see such a muddle of orders in my life. Col. Bonesteel has kept his head so far, but I don't know how much longer he will, with all these big fellows piling into him. Shorty, you stay up there, right in the Colonel's office, if he'll let you, and keep your eyes peeled for everything that's going on. Slip out and let us know, whenever you can. The telegraph operator's an old chum of mine—you know him, too, Deeble—it's Jim Steelyard. You keep run of him a little, while I'm looking out for other things."

"There's no chance for him to hold on to me after the rest of you get ready to start, is there?" demurred Shorty. "I'd rather drive team, even, than be orderly to that old gobbler."

"Don't be alarmed; we'll get you away all right," answered Shad Graham. "Si, you take half the boys, and finish loading them balks that you see there on the cars, Deeble, you take the other half, and go over to that warehouse, and set them to carrying out the anchors and cordage they find there, and put them in that box-car just behind the ones that Si's loading. After you get them well started, set some good man to oversee, and wander up and talk to Steelyard a little. Don't be gone too long, though. I'll go over and see what our chances are for a locomotive."

Shorty reported to the office in spick-and-span neatness, just on time, and met the Colonel entering.

"Name, rank and regiment?" curtly inquired the Colonel, after he had acknowledged Shorty's salute, and seated himself at his desk.

"Elliott, Chas. D., Corporal, Co. Q, 200th Injaniann Volunteer Infantry," responded Shorty, just as curtly, with his eyes straight to the front, and his body as stiff as an icicle.

"Good," grunted the Colonel, making a

note of the name. "Take that chair outside the door, and wait till I call you."

"Well, at least I won't have to stand at attention all the time," murmured Shorty, as he sank into the chair.

A smirking, smiling Jew slipped past him into the office.

"Gunnel," he remarked jocosely, "mein vrendt unt bartner, Misder Heidenheimer, made a liddle misdake dis morning. He pronght a von dundret tollar pill, vhen ve indendat dat id should be a tree hundret. See, I haf pronght de righd shange now."

He displayed three new crisp \$100 bills, which he tried to slip under the Colonel's blotting pad.

"Orderly," said the Colonel, without raising his eyes from his writing.

"Yes, sir," said Shorty, coming to the position of a soldier inside the door.

"Throw this creature out of the room," ordered the Colonel, as he crossed a 't' in his writing, and stopped to study the effect.

"Yes, sir," answered Shorty, and the man was whirled through the door with such velocity that he left his greenbacks lying on the desk.

"Being orderly ain't such slouchy business after all," murmured Shorty, as he gave the contractor a parting kick, and readjusted his white gloves. "Think I may learn to like the job."

"Orderly," called the Colonel.

"Yes, sir," said Shorty, stepping inside and saluting.

"There are some things that person left," said the Colonel, pointing to the bills with his penholder, as if they were nauseous filth. "Remove them from my desk. Find a sheet of paper in that desk. Write on it, 'Money found. To be used for the sick.' Fold it across the bills, and place it inside one of those long envelopes which you will direct to Surgeon Jas. Miller, Wilson Hospital. Got that all? Well, seal it up, and let me see."

He would not even touch the envelope in which the money had been placed, but scanned it in Shorty's hand.

"Handwriting crude, spelling eccentric," he commented, studying the superscription through his glasses. "But I guess it will reach its destination. Throw it in the mail-box there. Return to your place."

A rough, coarse man, smelling of liquor, came in.

"See here, Colonel," he shouted, shaking his fist. "you've ordered me discharged, and I want to tell you right here that you haven't as good a foreman on your whole blamed outfit, and I'm going to have my place back or"—

"Orderly," called the Colonel, as he went on writing.

"Yes, sir."

"Put this man out."

"Yes, sir."

The ex-foreman gave Shorty a tussle that did his soul good. He had not had such a bout with anyone for many a day, and felt in need of something of the kind

to keep him in tune with the world. But the man had too much whisky in him to do his best, and Shorty, in recognition of his manhood, contented himself with dismissing him with a sharp shove after he had gotten him fairly on to the sidewalk.

"Say, this isn't a bad job at all," he remarked pleasantly, as he removed his cotton gloves, which had suffered irreparably in the struggle. "I'd like to tackle that feller when he's sober. I think he knows how to handle himself. I might do worse than stay right here this Winter if we can't get to Sherman."

A fine-looking man wearing a Brigadier-

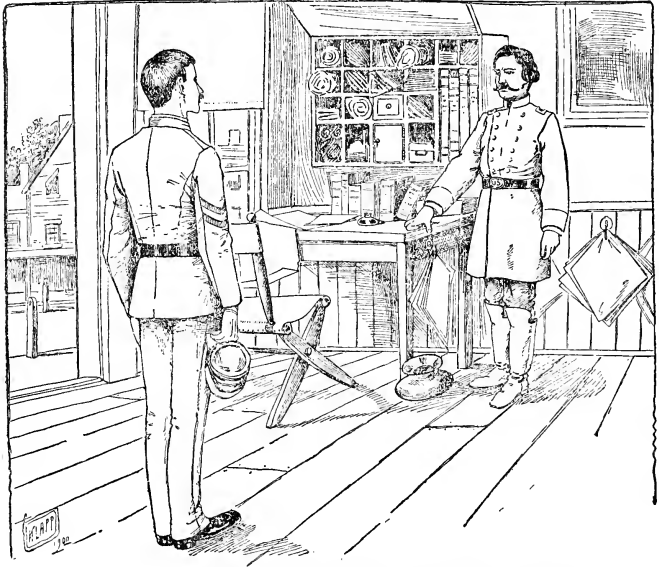
now come to tell you that I must take that."

"Impossible, General," broke in the Colonel.

"But it is possible, and it must be," answered the General, quite as firm in tones as the Colonel. "I have every other engine out, and that is the best one at my command."

"But it is not at your command," said the Colonel hotly. "It is at mine."

"Pardon me, I believe I have the President's direct assignment to this district, and my first duty is to its defense. I have reliable information of an attempt



"SHORTY REPORTED IN SPICK-AND-SPAN NEATNESS."

General's star entered the room, and Shorty became at once vitally interested in his mission, for something presaged that it bore upon the all-important question of getting the pontoon train away that day. The Colonel rose and stood stiffly at attention.

"I've come to see you personally, Colonel," said the General, after the greetings had been exchanged, "because the matter is of the utmost importance. I've had to use every single engine that is at my disposal, except the one which has been assigned to you for your train, which was to start south this evening. I have

to be made by the rebels to effect a lodgment on the river between here and Evansville, and I must send a force at once to repel them. Everything else must give way to this necessity. I hope to have another locomotive soon which I can place at your disposal, but this one I must have."

"You are very imperative, sir," said the Colonel sternly. "But the needs of your small district must give way to those of the entire army. Gen. Sherman is dependent upon the arrival of these pontoon supplies to begin his movement."

"Gen. Sherman will simply have to wait

then until we can straighten up things here in the rear. Our first duty is to the country right around us. It may be only a few days, but everything must yield to the present necessity."

The Colonel looked as if he was about to explode, but he restrained himself. His habits of military subordination asserted themselves, the more strongly because the General was a Regular himself, and "in the old service" had outranked him.

"Possibly you forgot," he said with forced calmness, "that I directly represent the Major-General commanding the Military Division of the Mississippi, and that I am acting immediately under his orders, which take precedence of everything else."

"Except those of the President of the United States, the Secretary of War and the Lieutenant-General Commanding the Armies of the United States," interposed the General. "In view of the urgency of the situation the Secretary of War has sent me this order, clothing me with unusual powers, as you will see by reading it. Everything is placed under my command without reserve, until the emergency is passed, and I am to be the judge of the emergency."

"I shall telegraph to Gen. Sherman that you are preventing my execution of his orders," roared the Colonel.

"You will find that difficult until communications are restored," said the General, with provoking calmness; "and then I should recommend careful thought in framing your dispatch. You know I have always been quite strenuous that high officers should set an example to those under them of cheerful subordination and obedience, and several court-martials have sustained my views. Good morning, Colonel."

"Orderly," said the Colonel, trying to speak with official calmness, "direct Lieut. Graham to report to me at once."

Shorty sped away with the alarming intelligence to Graham. On his return he noticed a large, rather flashily attired civilian entering the office. "If that fellow knewed what was well for him," he commented to himself, "he'd keep away from the Colonel at this particular juncture. The Colonel's as savage as a meat-ax, and liable to take it out on the first man he meets. I hope he hain't sent for Shad to take it out on him. Who's that feller going in? Seems to me I've seen him somewhere. Great Jehosephat, if it ain't old Billings, our old Lieutenant-Colonel! I wonder what devilment he's up to now? Well, he's going into the wrong shop, if I don't miss my guess badly."

He hurried in, and reported:

"Lieut. Graham will report to you at once, sir, as soon as he can change his clothes. He has been helping the men load."

He stood stiffly at attention, awaiting the Colonel's reply.

"Just like these volunteer officers," snorted the Colonel. "I wish they'd just work along with their men, and do us much. Good morning, sir," he continued, glancing haughtily at Billings, and the glossy silk hat which stuck closely on the ex-Lieutenant-Colonel's head.

Billings was evidently prospering. He was dressed in a new suit of black broad-cloth, with a long-tailed frock coat, a heavy gold chain, with numerous seals and charms dependent from it, hung from his vest, ill-fitting, unbuttoned gloves covered his large hands, and he carried a heavy, silver-headed cane. He looked stern and important, and was evidently bent upon doing the overawing act. Not getting the Colonel's invitation to sit down, he dispensed with that formality, but parted his coat-tails and took possession of the chair to the right of the Colonel's desk. This did not improve the temper of the Colonel, who, with another savage frown at the silk hat, still glued fast to Billings's head, seated himself at his desk, and began busying himself with his papers.

"My name's Col. Billings," began that worthy, importantly.

"What regiment, sir?" snapped the Colonel.

"No regiment, now. Formerly of the 200th Indiana Infantry."

"If you're a Colonel, why do you come into my headquarters, without your uniform?" the Colonel inquired, irately, but going on signing his papers.

"Because I've a right to, and because my business brings me here," said Billings, angrily. "See here, Bonesteel, drop all these military furbelows at once. I won't have them. I'm here as a free American citizen, and representing other American citizens. Drop all your Regular Army frills now. The people's sick of them, and I tell you I won't have them. This is business. I come here to represent two clients of mine, who while in the peaceable pursuit of their business have been insulted, viciously assaulted, and brutally battered. Worse than all, they have been robbed of a large sum of money. We have ground for several heavy actions against you which your shoulder-straps will not protect you from, sir. No, sir, they won't protect you for a minute, sir. But the matter can be arranged if—"

"Orderly?" called the Colonel, not raising his head, but pointing with his pen-holder over his shoulder to Shorty.

"Yes, sir."

"Put this fellow out at once."

In all his soldiering Shorty had never received a more welcome order. He made a leap at Billings, and caught him by the collar. Billings struck at him with his cane, but Shorty snatched this from him and grappled crushingly with him. Billings was no mean antagonist in a catch-as-can scuffle, but Shorty quickly tripped

him, and fell heavily upon him. He then dragged him to the door, threw him out, and kicked him as he went.

"Orderly," said the Colonel, repressing himself to severe official tones, "don't kick him. At least, not after he's on the street. That's the State of Indiana. Inside here is the United States. If you want to bring him back in here—but, no,

I'd let him go. Hand the gentleman his hat. I'm glad he get it off his head at last. Orderly, I'd like to make your detail with me permanent."

"I rather think I'd like the Engineer service," grinned Shorty, brushing himself off, "if this is its general style. Hadn't no idea the bridge-builders was so lively."

CHAPTER II.

THE BOYS DECIDE TO GO TO CHATTANOOGA BY BOAT.

The news that they were to be deprived of their engine carried dismay to the boys before Shorty could reach them to confirm it, and call Shad Graham to the Colonel's office.

They were too old soldiers not to keep a pretty good run of what was going on at headquarters. Soldiers have their own ways of getting at even the most carefully-guarded military secrets, especially those that directly concern them.

An idea struck Si, as was always liable at times of an emergency. His was one of those slow-moving minds that work clearest and quickest in moments of great need.

"I was talking to one o' the Maumee Muskrats," he interjected quietly to Shad, Deeble and Shorty, as soon as there was an interval in the angry denunciation of their luck, of interfering Generals, and of scared-to-death citizens, which rose from all lips. "They're keeping it quiet as the grave, but I got out o' him that he came down last night from Cincinnati on that boat you see laying out there, with a lot o' special ammunition for field batteries, which they're running through to Sherman, and which they think'll do great things. They've got it on a steamboat because it's mighty ticklish stuff, and they don't want it banging around on the cars any more'n they can help. That's the reason they're laying out there, where there won't be no danger o' other boats banging into 'em, and they're keeping it dead quiet about they're being here, for they don't want any chance for these Knights o' the Golden Circle to get on to them and blow 'em up."

"'Twould be a great opportunity for them sneaking hell-hounds," remarked Deeble.

"You bet it'd be," continued Si. "They want some more reliable men on the boat, and the Maumee boy wanted us to go with them, but I told him we were going to stick to Shad here."

"Right you were," said Shad. "But how in the world are they going to get that ammunition to Sherman on that boat?"

"Why, they're going to run down the Ohio to Paducah, and up the Tennessee River to Chattanooga. There they'll load it on the cars."

"Why, that's going clear around Robin Hood's barn," expostulated Shad. "They won't get there before Christmas."

"I don't know about that," returned Si. "I've been studying it over, and I think differently. The longest way 'round is the shortest way home, sometimes. That's a fast boat; she ain't half loaded—you can see she sets high up above the water, the river is running at a pretty good stage just now, and she can go right along, night and day, without having to lay on side tracks and wait for trains and burned bridges and torn up track, and"—

"That's so," echoed the other boys.

"And I'll chance their getting there before them that go by rail. I vote in favor of getting our pontoons on that boat and going with them, if it can be managed."

"You're right. It's our best play," said Shad decisively. "It can be done, and it shall be done. Go and hunt up that Maumee boy again, Si, and get all the points you can out of him. Find out who's in command of the boat, and where he gets his orders, while I go up to headquarters and work the Colonel. We'll manage it all right."

Si started out in search of the Maumee boy, and speedily came across him.

"Say, Jake," said Si, "we've been enchered out of our locomotive, and we want to go with you."

"Good enough," answered Jake Dye, jubilantly. "Glad to hear it. Come right along. I know you're the right stripe, and we'll be mighty glad to have you along. As I told you before, we had to leave Cincinnati in such a hurry that we came away short-handed. We couldn't take anybody

and everybody; have to have men that we know and can depend on. Just one spy or stupid blunderer and away we go, boat and all, in a holy minute, and worse than all, Sherman'll lose his ammunition. So the Captain sent me ashore here, as I told you, to see if I couldn't run across some boys that I knew among these returning from furlough and pick up five or six good ones to help out. It's awful hard guard duty—so many places to watch, and you've got to watch so sharp every minute. But it'll be a heap better than pounding over those old railroads, sleeping three on top of one another, and getting your grub as you can. We'll have bunks to sleep in, shelter from the rain, and the boat's cook throws up a good square meal three times a day, with live coffee, condensed milk, soft bread and fresh beef, broiled or roasted—nary fried. Of course, we have a chance o' being sent up into the clouds any minute. But if you go on the train the guerrillas may shoot you, or the train run off the track, and mash you so flat they'll have to send you home in an envelope."

"That's all right," said Si, dismissing that consideration as unworthy further thought. "All war's risky business, and one risk more or less don't matter. If my time comes, it'll come just the same whether I'm on the boat or on the train. Don't you need more'n five or six men?"

"Well," answered Jake, "well, we could use 10 to advantage if they were of the right kind. But they must be all A 1, first-class."

"I'll guarantee the men all right, but I have 100 of them that I must take to the regiment, and we must take a pontoon train with us. But you can easily take that on your boat. Even with the pontoon stuff it won't be much more'n half-loaded. The pontoon's got to go through to Sherman just as much as the ammunition has. He needs the pontoons worse, if anything, than the ammunition. You ought to take us right along, without any more words. It's the right thing to do, and that's all there is of it."

"I see that, clear as you do, and I'd do it in a holy minute. But my Major's an Ordnance Officer, and he hates the Engineers as only a Regular officer can. He thinks they're too stuck-up for anything, and that the only really brainy crowd in the army are the Ordnance fellows. If it wasn't for them the whole business'd go to smash. All the time they have to pull everybody else back into the way they should go. And he's got it in for your Col. Bonesteel worse'n anybody else. Him and old Bonesteel's clawed at one another several times, and old Bonesteel's generally got the better of him. If they were only volunteer officers there wouldn't be the least trouble in the world. They've some common sense, and no matter how mad they might be at one another, they'd see the need of getting both the ammuni-

tion and the train through at once, and that there was no excuse for not taking the best means at hand to do it. But these Regulars'll chew the rag over their dignity, and rank, and the rights of different branches of the service, and try to tangle one another in red tape, until the cows come home, no matter what else is happening. I get so mad at times that I'd like to bust up the whole Regular Army. What's the good of them, I'd like to know? Us volunteers could run the machine a heap sight better. They're only in the way most of the time."

"Well, take me over to see your Major, and let me see if I can't talk him into taking us and the pontoons all along."

"All right. You can try. I'll warn you you'll run up against an awful stiff volume of the Regulations. These Regulars of the staff departments are far and away more regulation than the Regulars we struck in the field that's had some sense knocked into them. Here he comes now."

Si looked, and saw a stilly erect young man, with a Major's shoulder-straps and the lighted shell and other insignia of Ordnance Bureau. He was severely correct in every detail as to uniform and bearing. "Great Scott, a youngster," thought Si. "Only out o' West Point a little while. He'ss be a rough sight worse than the older ones who've learned something."

Si and Jake Dye came promptly to attention, with their little-fingers at the seams of their pantaloons, and then saluted stilly.

"Well, Sergeant," asked the Major, returning the salute and addressing Jake Dye, "have you succeeded in finding any reliable men?"

"I have 100 first-class men, Major, that I'm tryin' to get forward to my regiment, and I"—

"I didn't address myself to you, sir," said the Major severely. "My question was to Serg't Dye."

"This is Serg't Klegg, Major," said Dye. "as good a man as there is in the army. I know all about him. His regiment is in our division—part of the time in our brigade. He has 100 good men with him, but he can't go with us unless he takes them all with him."

"Who says he can't go? He's an enlisted man, and subject to orders. He's got nothing to say about it."

"Have you ever had any experience with ordnance or ammunition?" he continued, addressing himself to Si.

"No, sir; only that which I shot or was shot at me."

"No levity, sir. That's impertinence and disrespectful. You will not do that."

"But, Major," pleaded Dye, "these are some of the very best men I know. I know all about them. I've seen them in camp and in battle, and I know they can be depended on to the last wiggle of their finger-ends. I don't know where I can find any other such men. They're the only ones

that I know that I've been able to find in all my looking around. It's getting late now, and I don't know where to look for any more."

This appeal seemed to move the Major. "Where do you belong?" he asked Si.

"Co. Q, 200th Indiana Volunteer Infantry."

"Humph, I saw the 200th Indiana when I was down to Chattanooga last Fall. A lot of untamed Hoosiers, but they took care of their ammunition. I noticed that. Only regiment that did. Cartridges lying all around the camps of the other regiments. None in the camp of the 200th Indiana. Made a report to that effect. Knew how to use their ammunition, too. I watched them through my glass as they went up Mission Ridge. Didn't fire a shot till they got up on top, and then came into line and fired a solid volley at the rebels. Very pretty thing. Not a shot until orders, and then all at once. Literally swept the rebel line away."

"That's the kind of fellows we are," grinned Si. "When we salt 'em we like to do it by the bushel. Goes further that way."

"No levity, sir. It is particularly out of place in the Ordnance service. There's too much responsibility there for the least trifling of any kind. What are you doing here, sir?"

"I was ordered by my Colonel to go to Indianapolis and bring a detachment on to the regiment. But communications were cut off, and I was ordered by Col. Bonesteel to bring the detachment on here to take his pontoon train through."

At the mention of Col. Bonesteel the Major's face darkened.

"Humph," he snapped, "old Bonesteel got his clamps on you, did he? What in the world did he want of you?"

"He probably knew that they were unusually good men, and was anxious to have them for his special work," ventured Jake Dye, anxious to help along his plan.

"Not likely. What difference does it make to Bonesteel what kind of men he has, so long's they are able to lift and pull? An ox or a mule is generally better for his purposes than a man. No need of any special brains or character among the men of the Engineers, as there is in the Ordnance, where we must have the very best men we can find. Bonesteel just laid hold of you just because he thought somebody else wanted you real badly. That's his style. He is always looking out for a chance to be ugly to some one else, and he probably had a spite against the man that wanted you. Meanest man in the army for that. All the Engineers are given to that sort of thing, but he's the worst of the lot. I never miss a chance to get even with him. Sergeant Dye, upon further thought, I believe that we need the whole of these 100 men."

"You were of that opinion, sir, before we left Cincinnati," said Jake Dye, diplo-

matically. "You felt certain that we would need fully that number to help the boat and her load past the Muscle Shoals. We were so pressed that you had to come away without them, hoping that we might get what help we needed from some garrison near the Muscle Shoals."

Jake Dye looked the Major square in the eye as he said this. He, like Shad Graham, had caught on to the Regular Army trick of assuming that his officer was thought out and expressed his own ideas. It was the easiest and surest method of getting his own way. Maj. Crewet, if he had ever known of it, had given little thought to the impediment of the navigation of the Tennessee River by the Muscle Shoals. He was not a student of geography. His dominant thought was that the rebellion could be put down by the superior ammunition of the Ordnance Bureau, and he gave little attention to anything else.

"You were quite right, Sergeant, to remind me of that," he answered, with a complaisant relaxation of his official severity. "Yes, I had decided that we needed fully 100 men, to properly guard this important cargo, and help us over those shoals. It will not do to trust to getting help from the garrisons. They may have all they can attend to, and we do not know what kind of men they may be. We had better not miss the opportunity of getting the right kind of men, when we have it. Besides, it will make old Bonesteel mad as a hornet to take his men away. It'll pay him up for the way he has been treating me."

"Col. Bonesteel'll be all right, if you'll just take his pontoons along with you," said Si, bubbling over with pleasure at the prospect. "All he wants is to get them through at once. You can easily take them on the boat. There isn't such an awful sight of them."

There is where Si lacked Jake Dye's shrewdness. He made the awful mistake of trying to advise a Regular officer, as he would have done Col. McGillicuddy or any other of his own officers.

"Silence, sir," said the Major severely. "When I desire your advice I'll ask it. I'm not here to oblige Col. Bonesteel. Quite the reverse. Let him get his pontoons to the front his own way. I have nothing to do with them. My boat is not a freight scow. Sergeant, get your pad, and take this dispatch:

"To the Chief of Ordnance, Washington, D. C.:

"Must have 100 good men to properly guard boat, and help her and cargo over Muscle Shoals. Cannot proceed without them. Find here a detachment of 200th Ind. under— (Sergeant, what is your name?) under Sergt. Josiah Klegg, that will just suit me. Veterans returning to the front. Government will gain by their transportation. Please have the Commanding Officer of district assign them to

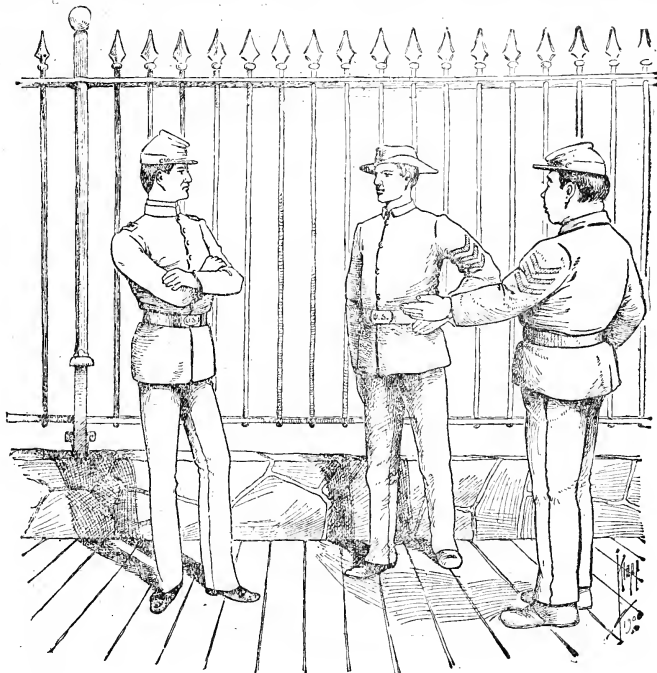
me and by wire, so that I can start at once. Time all-important.

"CREWET, Major, Ordnance."

"Betwixt two stools I'm afraid we'll come to the ground," said Si doubtfully, as the Major walked away.

"You busted things by breaking in when you had no business," said Jake, irritably. "Won't you never learn that these Rega-

"Lieutenant," said the Colonel, "the General, by virtue of orders received from Washington, has taken the responsibility of depriving me of my locomotive, and it will therefore be impossible for you to start to-day or until some other arrangements can be made. It is simply damnable the way these civilians and volunteers interfere with the movements of the army.



"I HAVE A HUNDERD FIRST-CLASS MEN, MAJOR," SAID SI.

lars think it a guard-house offense for an enlisted man to know anything that they haven't told him. Keep a bridle on that tongue of yours after this, and let me do the talking. Go back now, and find Shad Graham, and see what he's been doing. I'll meet you over there at your squad in a little while. Stay around there, so's I can find you at once."

Shad Graham, as quickly as he could get himself into the required neatness for a visit to headquarters, presented himself at the Colonel's office.

They defeat everything, and bring the country to the verge of ruin. They would run it, sir, if it was not for the Regular Army—the educated soldiers, sir. It is simply damnable, sir; simply damnable."

"Is it possible?" answered Shad, with a proper show of indignation. "This means, then, that I shall carry out your former plan of sending the pontoons forward by water, and look around for a boat which will take them."

"Eh? What's that? Precisely. Precisely," said the Colonel, making a mo-

mentary effort to recall when and where he had ever spoken about adopting river transportation. "If we had the time, it would be the better way"—

"Exactly as you said then, Colonel, and it is truer now than then, with all this disturbance along the railroad. You thought that a good, quick boat at this stage of water could run around and clear up the Tennessee to Chattanooga sooner than a train could make it, with all the stops and interferences it would meet."

This was a startlingly bold play, for the Colonel's mind had been fixed solely on the railroad. But Shad was nery and determined. "The old snoozer couldn't more than send me ~~back~~ to my regiment," he explained to the boys afterward, "and that was where I wanted to go."

"You have probably noticed, Colonel," continued Shad, "that the transport Lorena, once under your command, and probably so yet, has just come in from Cincinnati, with a light load of ammunition, bound for Chattanooga, by the way of the Tennessee. I made so bold as to think that you might have sent for me to order the pontoons put on her, carrying out your former idea."

"Something like that had occurred to me," said the Colonel, after a moment's pause. "Gen. Sherman must have the pontoons before he can start. Everything must bend to that."

"The men on the boat say that he must have the ammunition before he can start," suggested Shad.

"Damn their ammunition," exploded the Colonel. "Gen. Sherman's got plenty of ammunition, and of the right sort. It is stored all along his line. This is only some more of the Ordnance Bureau's fancy inventions, that they want him to experiment with, and which will likely kill more of our own men than it does rebels. The Ordnance Bureau is always parading its wonderful new inventions, but it has not anything near so good as the old buck-and-ball we had in the Mexican War. If men want to fight they want something to kill with, and the good, plain old Brown Bess that men fought real battles with for 200 years can't be beat. Napoleon couldn't find anything better, and he was something of a soldier. Lieutenant, go and find out who is in command of the Lorena. I'll take her, and let them get their ammunition forward any way they can. Hold on. Take this dispatch for Chief of Engineers, Washington:

"All locomotives impressed by General commanding district. Mine taken away. Cannot start train. Must go forward today. Essential to Gen. Sherman. Transport Lorena here. Please order her to me. BONESTEEL, Colonel."

Leaving the telegraph office, after filing the dispatch, Shad went over to the detachment, to see how things were going, and found Jake Dye chuckling over the receipt of a telegram informing Maj.

Crewet that instructions had been sent the General commanding the District to place the detachment of the 200th Ind. at his disposal.

"Well, we have a fine mix-up," muttered Shad. "The Lord only knows how this will turn out. The Colonel's as hot now as he can be. I'll have to hurry back and sit on his safety valve."

"Here, Shad, take these along with you, for the Colonel," called Jim Steelyard from the office, as Shad passed. "They'll make the old man boil."

The Colonel tore the envelopes open and read. The first was from the Chief of Engineers, and said: "Transport Lorena claimed by Ordnance Bureau for important service. Will not give her up. Can't you find another transport? You must start pontoons today."

The other was from the General commanding the District, and read:

"Pursuant to instructions from the War Department to me, you will turn over the detachment of the 200th Ind. now under your command to Maj. Crewet, of the Ordnance, for special service. I will replace the men with others, when you require them."

Only lifelong habits of military discipline repressed the temper of the answers which the Colonel dictated to Shad. He informed the Chief of Engineers that no other transport was available, and no other means of getting the pontoons forward, and that the safety of the army was being jeopardized by the delay.

Shad filed these and went over to the detachment again, to find that Maj. Crewet was protesting against his boat being taken away from him, and the men denied.

"The Major has just telegraphed," said Jake Dye, "that the safety of the army will be jeopardized by any delay in getting this ammunition forward today."

"Well," said Shad, complacently, "I think the thing's come to a crisis now, and it'll turn out all right. The Engineers and the Ordnance have locked horns and the matter will be taken straight to the Secretary of War. Old Ed. Stanton will bring things to a head in a jiffy. The Secretary relies a good deal on the General commanding the District, who is an old friend. Geo. Bennett, his Chief Clerk, is a friend of mine. I'll just have Jim Steelyard send George a quiet tip for the General to send the Secretary that the common-sense solution of the dispute is to put the pontoons and us right on the boat with the ammunition and hustle it out of here, without any more red tape. There'll be an order along here in an hour or so that'll make some people's hair curl."

He walked away to send his "tip" to the General's Chief Clerk, and was gone for an hour or more, while the boys waited in anxious suspense. Then he came walking quickly, with a pleased expression on his face.

"It's come out all right," he said. "I've

just left the Colonel in a state of collapse, with only strength enough left to order me to proceed to carry out the orders from Washington, which read something like this:

"Emergency too great for any clashing between departments. Stop it at once,

and combine for execution of orders. Place pontoons and detachment of 200th Ind. on transport Lorena, under command of ranking officer accompanying boat, and proceed with all haste to destination. Same to Maj. Crewet.

"E. M. STANTON, Secretary of War."

CHAPTER III.

THE TRIP UP THE TENNESSEE RIVER DEVELOPS A LITTLE FRACAS.

"Now," said Si, with the manner that came over him when his biggest things were to be done, "everybody off with his coat and roll up his sleeves. Let's get that stuff off them cars and on to that boat, and the boat started before any other orders come. Everybody jump, now, and keep it up, until we're out o' reach o' headquarters."

"Guess nobody's going to countermand Secretary Stanton's orders," remarked Shad Graham philosophically, "but all the same the sooner we're away from here the better. Everybody get the liveliest kind of a move on himself. Dye, you go back aboard the boat, and after the Major has blown off his steam bring him over to that decked flatboat there, which is our wharf-boat. You see that it's clear all around it. We keep it so. He can have no excuse about bumping against other boats. Then you take charge of the loading as the stuff comes. Si, you take the men over to the cars, and load it on to the wagons that I'll send you, and rush it over to the wharf-boat. I'll take a little scout around and see how things are working, and be with you as soon as possible."

Wherever 100 healthy, stalwart young Indians get up a full head of steam for a job on which their hearts are set, they can accomplish wonders in an hour. By that time they had unloaded the whole of the pontoon stuff from the cars onto the wagons, and transferred it to the decks of the Lorena. Si distributed Harry Joslyn and Monty Scruggs along the road, where they encouraged the teamsters to rapid work by animated language, supplementing these with brickbats when language did not seem to be adequate. Sandy, Pete Skidmore and some of the lighter weights played pitch-and-catch in transferring the smaller articles, while Si led the stronger-bodied in a fierce assault upon the timbers, frames, bales, cordage and anchors. In an hour they did the work that would have been a half-day's task for men working ordinarily.

When, glowing with the rapid exertion and satisfaction at having accomplished the work so quickly, Si, hat, canteen, haversack and blanket-roll in his left hand,

his blouse and overcoat thrown over his left arm, and mopping his hot face with his right followed the last load on to the boat, he found Maj. Crewet raging over his defeat, and bestowing his wrath on everything in sight, finding bitter fault with all that was done.

"Here," he shouted from his position on the front of the cabin deck, "what do you men mean by slamming those heavy timbers down that way? Think this boat's made of rock or of iron? Don't you know we've got a load of ammunition? Lay those things down as easy as if there was a percussion shell under them, as there is. Serg't Dye, what's the matter with you? Why are you allowing that? Lay them down easy, I tell you."

The result of this order was several mashed fingers, at which the Major railed: "Of course, you clumsy louts, you will hurt yourselves. Wonder that you don't kill yourselves, and be done with it. Don't stand around and nurse yourselves. Serg't Dye, where are your eyes? Keep those men moving. Don't pile those anchors there on the fore-castle. Don't you see the boat's down too much by the head already? Pick them all up and carry them back on to the fantail. Here, you're getting entirely too many of those timbers on the larboard side. The boat's listing. Pick them up and carry them over to the starboard. Too much noise and confusion down there. Serg't Dye, you must have more order."

Just then his eye fell on Si.

"Serg't Klegg, I am amazed at you, sir," he shouted. "What are you doing in that guise, sir? Put on your blouse at once, sir, and button it up. Don't you know your position as a non-commissioned officer better than that, sir?"

Si choked down enough heat to have easily moved the Lorena's engines, and obediently put on his blouse and buttoned it up to the chin.

"Now," said the Major, "never again let me see you appear on this boat before your men half-naked, like that. Go wash your hands, and clean the dirt off your clothes and shoes, and hereafter show a proper soldierly neatness. It is disgraceful for a non-commissioned officer to be in

such a state as you are. Remember, sir, that you are now in the Ordnance service, the best branch of the service, the flower of the army, sir, where we do not tolerate the slackness and slovenliness of other branches."

From the standpoint of the Colonel's door Shorty had watched the scene of intense activity with keen regret that he had no share in it, and distressing fear that he might be prevented from going with the boys, and their boat pull off without him. He had his things placed convenient, and was meditating snatching them up and making a rush for the boat, if no other way appeared.

Shad Graham appeared. "For the Lord's sake, Shad," pleaded Shorty, in a low voice, so as not to reach the Colonel's ears, "you ain't going to leave me behind, are you?"

"No, no; you're all right," Shad assured him. "We'll get you off somehow."

"I presume, Lieutenant," said the Colonel, as Shad entered and saluted in severely correct fashion, "that that upstart of an Ordnance fellow will be so cut by the Secretary's order that he will leave the boat to the command of his subordinate, whom you will rank, and therefore the Engineers will have charge of the boat, as they properly should. It is true that you are but an acting Lieutenant, but that should make no difference with them. An officer of Engineers always outranks any other officer of the same grade. I always insist upon a Sergeant of Engineers outranking a volunteer Lieutenant. As for these Ordnance fellows, they are only mechanics, at best, and really should not have commissions. You will command the boat. I wish I had someone of higher rank to send, but you'll do. Insist upon your position."

"But, Colonel," interposed Shad, who was determined that Maj. Crewet should not command the boat, "have you changed your mind about going in command? You know how important it will be to have an officer of the highest ability and experience, especially since all this ammunition is going on the same boat."

"I know it. I know it. But I cannot leave my post here. I have no one to leave in charge except my clerks. I am going to rely upon you to get the boat through quickly and safely."

"But, Colonel, Secretary Stanton expects you to take command. His order plainly indicates that."

"O, old Stanton always wants me to do everything that is at all difficult or responsible," answered the Colonel, with a visible swelling of the breast. "He happens to know a good deal of what I have done, and I'll give him credit of having a lawyer-like ability for recognizing the kind of men he has to deal with. He occasionally abuses the Engineer Corps, like the rest of them, but he knows that they can be depended on. But I'm not going, even if Stanton does want me. I know where I

ought to be and what I ought to do quite as well as he does. I'll send you. He can't whip me around the country as he pleases."

"But, Colonel," ventured Shad desperately, "Maj. Crewet thinks that he is to go in command. He is commanding now. He will soon cast off, and be gone. He is playing that this is an Ordnance expedition, and the Engineers are merely his helpers and servants. You just ought to see the way he is carrying on. There, you can see him on the boat now, giving his orders."

This was all that was necessary. The Colonel's face flamed with anger. "He's taken command, has he? He's giving orders to my men, is he? The powder-miller, the cartridge-maker, the upstart. Thinks because he's risen from Lieutenant to Major in two years that he's something wonderful. Never commanded 100 men before in his life. Never commanded anything. I'll show him. Orderly, go to my hotel and tell my man to pack my things in a traveling bag, and come at once to the boat with them. Lieutenant, you will stay here in charge of the office."

This was a startler for Shad, who was as determined as anybody to get to the front. His face was blank for an instant, but he ventured no expostulation. He took the first opportunity to say quietly to Shorty:

"You'll find my things in there all packed up, near yours. Bring them down to the boat with you, but keep them out of sight of the Colonel."

Maj. Crewet was still blistering everybody in sight with stinging condemnation, when he happened to look up from a volley directed at Si to see Col. Bonesteel step on to the gangplank, followed by his servant with his luggage and Shorty and Shad, the latter having come down under pretense of receiving final instructions. The sight took away the Major's breath, and he looked open-mouthed at the depressing spectacle.

"Maj. Crewet," said the Colonel, in his most impressive tones, "I'm astonished at you, sir. It's strictly against the Regulations, sir, for you to speak that way to a non-commissioned officer before his men. And to one of my men, too, sir. I'll not permit it, sir. Not for an instant, sir. Where I command such things are not allowed. Nor any of this confounded confusion and disorder. You are evidently not used to the command of men, sir. Lieut. Graham, take command of the deck there, and get rid of that horrible disorder at once. Is everything aboard?"

A capacious wink appeared in Shad's eye, directed at Si, Shorty and Jake Dye, but they kept their faces like wood, while the other men grinned openly.

"Is everything aboard, Sergeant?" demanded Shad, in severely official tones, of Si.

"Everything is aboard, sir," answered Si, stiffly saluting Shad.

"Everything is aboard, sir," communicated Shad, turning and saluting the Colonel.

"Very good," answered the Colonel. "Cast off the lines at once, and give the order to start. We have not a moment to lose. You can arrange matters while we are under way. First thing, the boat is horribly out of trim. Shows the lack of an Engineer's eye and education. (He said this loud enough to make sure that the Major would hear.) She can't possibly make any speed in this shape, and may wreck herself. Very dangerous, indeed, to attempt to run her this way. Bring those anchors back there forward, and shift those heavy timbers from starboard to port, and get her on an even keel."

"Serg't Klegg," commanded Shad, in a voice of official harshness, "set 20 men to work carrying those anchors forward on to the fore-castle. Set 20 more to shifting those timbers to the other side. Set 20 more to pile up that small stuff neatly. Find some brooms, and sweep the decks from the hurricane down."

"Very good, sir," said Si, saluting.

"Very good men, those of yours, Lieutenant," said the Colonel, noting the alacrity with which they set about their tasks. "Very competent and willing. Not the men to be banged about and abused by every inexperienced bureaucrat that happens to come along."

This last was apparently sotto voce, but quite loud enough for the Major to hear.

"Orderly," continued the Colonel, sharply.

"Yes, sir," said Shorty, saluting.

"Have my things taken up to the large state-room on the larboard side, further end, that they call the bridal chamber, and put in there. Have Julius arrange the room for me, dusting it out, putting fresh sheets on the bed, plenty of fresh towels, and so on."

This roused the Major to the first speech since the Colonel had come aboard. "Excuse me, Colonel," he said, with icy hauteur, "but that is my room. I selected it when I first came aboard, and when the boat was assigned to me."

The Colonel adjusted his glasses, and looked at the Major with a stare that tried to express astonishment that "a mere Ordnance fellow" should presume to have rights or privileges that conflicted with an Engineer's wishes. "Major," he remarked frostily, "in the number of things in the Army Regulations which seem unfamiliar to you, you seem to have specially overlooked that paragraph which gives the commanding officer absolute right to the best and most commodious quarters, and rather makes it obligatory upon him to occupy them. I recommend that you look this matter up. I must have the quarters I have designated, and also those rooms immediately adjoining, for the accommoda-

tion of my staff, Lieut. Graham, Serg't Klegg and my Orderly here, with whom I must be in constant communication. You will promptly have removed any property belonging to you to other rooms which you may select toward the forward end of the cabin."

His back being toward the Colonel, Shad Graham was able to furnish Si and Shorty with a wink that approached a comical leer, but as they faced the Colonel they had to maintain a wooden immobility of countenance.

"But, Colonel," protested the Major, "I certainly have some rights. I was specially assigned to this boat, or rather the boat was assigned to me, and I was put in command of her for a special duty. I cannot be displaced even by your ranking me."

"If you will refer to the telegraphic order from the Secretary of War, a copy of which was furnished you, you will discover that the command of the boat and the expedition was expressly given to the senior officer, which I happen to be. You will therefore proceed to carry out my instructions."

"You are making a wholly unwarranted stretch of your authority, sir," said the Major, shaking with rage. "As an Engineer officer you are specially prohibited from exercising command over troops."

"Hump, fine argument that, for an Ordnance fellow to make," snorted the Colonel. "How dare you, who are only one of the artificers—yes, sir, mere artificers—presume to exercise authority that you claim is not given to the most highly-educated branch of the service? But this discussion before the men is highly improper. I notify you, sir, that I am in command, and that you must govern yourself accordingly."

"I shall report this to the Bureau," said the Major, prudently repressing his ire under the outward calm of official communication.

"As you please," said the Colonel, calmly, turning to walk about the boat. "You will find a telegraph office at the head of the canal on the other side, but as the canal seems clear at present, I doubt if we can stop long enough for you to send a message."

Under Si's and Shad's common-sense methods, which the men could perfectly understand, the boat was speedily put to rights, cleaned from hurricane to boiler deck, and, trim upon her keel, she went through the locks with no delay, and was speeding down the broad "Lower Ohio" as fast as her powerful engines could drive her.

The Colonel presently made a tour of inspection, followed at the proper distance by Shad Graham, and he by Si, and was kind enough to express his official satisfaction with everything.

Their work well done, their end accomplished, and cheery over the swift pace their boat was making, the boys settled

themselves down to gossip over the situation, and enjoy the pleasure of a delightful ride on a pleasant day down "the beautiful Ohio."

The Ohio below Louisville differs markedly from its appearance on Pittsburgh to the "Falls City." The hills through which the broad, placid, silvery current winds its way in long, graceful undulations, are true mountains at Pittsburgh, but they gradually sink in height, and become less abrupt in profile, until below Cincinnati they begin to fall away into the billowy landscape, which leads to the Illinois prairies and Kentucky "bottoms" along the Mississippi. The river broadens to lake-like expansiveness, and its current is too gentle to disturb the mirror-like smoothness of its surface.

It was the first time that most of the detachment had ever ridden on a steamboat, and probably none of them, except Shorty, had ever gone so great a distance on such a vessel. All settled down to full enjoyment of the trip, except Maj. Crewet and Col. Bonesteel.

The Major locked himself up in the state-room, whither he had removed his possessions, ate his heart out in bitterness against Engineers generally, and against Col. Bonesteel in particular, and meditated schemes of revenge. Had he not been taken completely by surprise by Col. Bonesteel's coming aboard at the last moment and ordering the boat away he would not have been caught so. He would have secured an order relieving him from the boat if he had supposed that he was not to remain in command. Now that they had passed Louisville he could not come into communication with Washington until they reached Paducah, and only then if the boat should stop some hours to give time for the exchange of messages. He would remain in seclusion until then.

On the other hand, in all his long years of service, Col. Bonesteel had really never had an actual command of the importance of that to which he had accidentally acceded. He had nearly always been a bureau man, an inspector of drawings, reviser of computations, digester of reports, maker of official papers, and naturally became a theorist and a stickler as to how things should be done, and not a doer of things himself. The importance of his command grew upon him as the boat sped along over the smooth water. Here he had under him, including Crewet's detachment, 125 good men, a great quantity of important supplies, and a swift, stanch steamboat. It was a command quite worthy of even a Colonel of Engineers. It was a command that it behooved him to exercise in a way that would be a pattern to other men of lesser attainments, and thereby bring him credit in the army. He would illustrate his favorite ideas on the subject, to the general advancement of military science. He meditated eagerly over these things in the spacious accom-

modations of the "Bridal Chamber," and began the formulation of a routine of marvelous complexity and iron exactness and rigidity. Inasmuch as he was upon the water, he would combine what he knew of naval discipline with that he fancied should be the rule in the army.

"Having many more than a company of men," he ruminated, "I can properly constitute a battalion, which, with the motive power of the boat, and her valuable stores, will make a fitting command for a Colonel. Lieut. Graham shall be my Executive Officer, this Indiana Sergeant, who seems to be an intelligent, sensible soldier, shall command the right company, the Ohio Sergeant, who is with Crewet, shall command the left company, and my Orderly, who seems to be a model soldier, shall be my Adjutant. Maj. Crewet, if he behaves himself, and accepts the situation, shall be the second in command. If he does not I shall put him in arrest, I'd rather he would do something to warrant that. It would greatly simplify the situation. Now, I must arrange the routine of duties—no, I shall leave my Executive Officer to do that, subject to my approval—and the hours for meals, etc. As the commander of the vessel I shall take my meals alone, in the ladies' cabin, and dine in the center cabin. Maj. Crewet and Lieut. Graham shall constitute a mess. By rights the Captains of the right and left companies should be in the mess, but as they are only non-commissioned officers I shall have to constitute a non-commissioned officers' mess for the smoking-cabin, forward. Heavens, what's the meaning of that disturbance? Orderly! Desire Lieut. Graham to come to me immediately."

The disturbance had been caused by the boat's cook coming to the outside of the kitchen, pounding on the thin, resonant boards with a long iron spoon, and shouting "Grub pile," after the manner of steamboat cooks notifying the deck hands that their meal was ready. The hungry youngsters made a noisy rush in response.

Shad Graham explained this to the Colonel, when he obeyed his summons.

"Exceedingly unmilitary! Disreputable to the last degree," snorted the Colonel. "Not to be tolerated for an instant on one of the Government's vessels. Lieutenant, you will see that it is stopped, and the meal calls properly beaten by the drummer."

"But we have neither drummer nor drum, Colonel."

"Then you will have them sounded by the bugle."

"But we have neither bugle nor bugler."

"Shameful, sir. Why did you allow the boat to leave without these necessary adjuncts?"

"We have not had any drums or bugles in the Engineers, Colonel, and this is but a detachment of men, without regular or-

ganization, and so not provided with musicians."

"Too bad. Very well, then. You will hereafter have the Captains of companies quietly notified when meals are ready, and direct them to fall their men in and march them to the place in an orderly manner. But sit down here, Lieutenant, and assist me in preparing regular orders for government of the vessel during our expedition."

After dinner Si improved the time by getting his men together and beginning the

presence of the enemy, where this would be of the highest importance.

The Colonel found such a world of important detail that he wanted to incorporate into his perfect system that he kept Shad with him all afternoon and far into the night elaborating his orders. Shad only got occasional opportunities to get out and tangle with the boys when he was arranging the momentous matters of the messes. The Colonel dined by himself in solemn state, in full uniform, in the ladies' cabin, at 6 p. m., with Shorty standing



"PUT ON YOUR COAT AT ONCE, SIR, AND BUTTON IT UP."

arduous work of licking them into shape for the regiment. It was his first opportunity. With his own squad acting as non-commissioned officers he began teaching them how to stand, to face and to move. Then he found out through Jake Dye that there were 100 stands of muskets on the boat, which had been turned in on some previous trip, and remained un-called-for. He got these out and issued them, dividing the men up into squads, under Monty, Gid, Harry, Sandy, Alf Russell, Pete, and some veterans returning from furlough, who industriously taught them the manual of arms; to all of which the recruits took readily, feeling that they were going directly into the

stiffly at attention in absolute neatness of uniform, clean-shaved, white collar and gloves, and shoes carefully shined.

Maj. Crewet, who remained most of the time sulking in his room, dined with Shad Graham in the middle cabin, at 3 p. m., while Si, Jake Dye and Shorty had their dinner at 1 o'clock in the forward cabin.

"I'm glad I aint no higher in rank," remarked Shorty, "for 1 o'clock's just the very last minute I can wait for my dinner. I suppose that when the Colonel's a Major-General he won't dine until next day."

The Colonel was still working on his orders when they reached Paducah the next afternoon, and taking on another pi-

lot, turned up into the winding Tennessee.

"Boys," said Shad to Si and Jake Dye, after he had carried out the Colonel's orders to constitute two companies, "now that we are in the Tennessee we're liable to have a little hullabaloo any minute. Better issue about 10 rounds to each man, and have them ready to use. Keep your men out of sight as much as possible, for I want to work a little twist on these guerrillas. They're signaling this boat already, and sending messengers across these big bends ahead of us. Don't show any more men than you can help, and none of them with muskets. Let's make them believe that this is just a common transport without a guard."

By the next morning they were some distance up the Tennessee, and Shad Graham took his position on the front of the hurricane deck, and was scanning the south bank of the river attentively. He had caught occasional glimpses of galloping horsemen who seemed to be carrying messages. The Colonel was seeking relaxation from his arduous intellectual labor on his orders, by a vigorous constitutional up and down the starboard side of the deck. The Major was doing the same on the larboard side. Si and Jake Dye had their men crouching behind the timbers and frames piled up amidships, and Harry Joslyn was lounging around the capstan on the forecastle, ready to communicate any orders to them from Shad.

"Shorty," said Shad loud enough for the pilot to hear, "get your gun, and stand there, where you can keep your eye on that pilot. Shoot him at once, if you catch him making anything like a signal to anybody ashore. Shoot him if he don't obey my orders."

"All right, sir," said Shorty with alacrity, picking up his gun, which he had stowed handy.

"What order is that you are giving, Lieutenant?" said the Colonel, stopping his walk, pricking up his ears, and coming over toward Shad.

"Merely some precautionary directions," Shad started to say, but he was interrupted by a shot from the bank, and a bullet whistled so close to the Colonel's head that it seemed to brush his hair.

"Some fool's fired too soon," muttered Shad.

"I declare, I believe that fellow actually fired at me," ejaculated the Colonel, with an air as if a distinction had been done him.

"He certainly did, Colonel," answered Shad, "and came mighty near hitting you, too."

The Colonel's face flushed with pleasure. Here was an adventure. He was actually under fire, and had narrowly es-

caped. He inflated his chest and assumed a Napoleonic attitude on the farthest point of the hurricane deck, as if challenging another shot. Not to be outdone, the Major came up on the other side of the deck, folded his arms and stood sternly gazing out upon the bank.

"Harry," said Shad quietly, "tell Si and Jake to load and be ready."

"Lieutenant," admonished the Colonel, "be more military. That is not the proper way to give orders. Never call anybody by his first name."

The boat had turned a high, sharp point, and was running into the deep water, close to shore, by a curving bluff, with a little shelf of level ground at its foot.

"Come to, there! Come to, or we'll blow you out of the water," came in a loud voice from the woods, and they saw just ahead of them a shining brass cannon, with the cannoners standing about, and near them a company of dismounted horsemen with guns leveled.

"Pilot, put her nose square into the bank there, just below that cannon," commanded Shad. "Harry, tell Si and Jake to make the rush the second the boat's nose strikes. Pilot, keep the engines going, and let the current swing her side against the bank."

"And be damned sure you do," added Shorty, cocking his gun and covering the pilot.

The instant the boat's prow jarred against the bank there was a mighty rush, Si leading, which went over the boat's quarter and up the bank so tumultuously that the astounded rebels could only fire a nervous volley, and rush for their horses. The cannon did not go off at all. It was an abandoned one, which the guerrillas had picked up and used for "demonstration."

Gaining the top of the bluff the boys poured a volley after the flying rebels which killed three, wounded a number more, and brought down several horses.

"Very well done, Lieutenant," exclaimed the Colonel as soon as he could recover his breath, after his run up the bank after the boys—a more rapid movement than he had made for years. "You have executed my orders admirably and won a complete victory. And you, too, Serg't Klegg, and Corp'l Elliott. I shall mention you all in my report of this handsome little affair."

"You have done very well, indeed, Serg't Dye," said the Major, who had something of the same difficulty in recovering his breath. "I shall take great pleasure in commending you to the Department for the manner in which you executed my orders."

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER SOME MORE EXCITING EXPERIENCES THE BOYS GET UP THE RIVER AS FAR AS MUSCLE SHOALS.

The Colonel now had the additional intellectual labor imposed upon him of preparing a report on the "affair," the only battle he had been engaged in during the war—the only action in which he had commanded. This was something in which he was going down to history, and he could not be too careful in preparing the record. He became so engrossed in this that he was only visible at meal-time and when taking his constitutional, and then wore a preoccupied air, that forbade the intrusion upon him of any such unimportant matters as the conduct of the boat, and Shad and the boys were left more entirely to their own devices than ever.

The Major was also deeply absorbed in making his report of the matter, which would show up creditably the Ordnance Bureau's share of the exploit.

"Lieutenant," said the Colonel, when Shad had made his appearance, in response to a summons through Shorty; "you followed my directions, to gather up the arms left upon the ground of the engagement?"

"Yes, sir. We brought them aboard, to look over. We shall soon have them ready for your inspection, sir, and an order from you to throw overboard such as are not serviceable to us."

"Quite right, Lieutenant. But you will not destroy any of them. I desire to retain all of them as trophies of the victory. You will carefully count all of them, and specify each kind, for incorporation in my report. How many men do you estimate there were of the enemy?"

"O, 100 or such a matter," said Shad indifferently. "I guessed that probably two or three of these guerrilla bands had come together, to raid the boat. There are usually from 25 to 50 men in those bands. Just whatever the leaders can gather up at the time, in hopes of plunder. They didn't expect to find more than 25 men on the boat, and them convalescents and Quartermaster's men. They thought two or three to one would certainly be enough."

The Colonel's brow darkened. "Lieutenant," he said, severely, "your estimate is entirely too low, and you will have to modify it. I surveyed them coolly and carefully, as they stood on the bank, with all their guns pointing at me—the commanding officer. They plainly identified me as the commanding officer, and expected to get the boat by intimidating or kill-

ing me. But I would have died right there rather than to have yielded. There was certainly 500 of them, but I defied them all. Yes, sir, I defied them to pour the concentrated fire of their 500 guns and their cannon into my breast. I defied them, sir."

"You certainly did, sir," replied Shad, diplomatically, "and probably there were more than I said. You certainly acted very gallantly, and your firmness saved the boat and us. You were at the very front when the first shot was fired, and the last. I remember that you went up the bank ahead of me. And you directed the last shot fired, which brought down a horse on which one of them was trying to escape."

"You saw that, did you? I am very glad you did," said the Colonel, much elated. "I am very glad, indeed, that you were a witness. And it was only the instantaneous and impetuous rush of my men that disorganized their aim, and saved my life. It was a very well-planned and executed fight. Nothing better in the history of the war. And yet they say that Engineers have no talent for commanding troops under fire. And that Ordnance officer, he had to come up, too, after it was all over. What business had he there? His place was back on the boat, with his beloved ammunition. He should have stayed back on the boat and looked out for it, while the rest of us were fighting. That was his place as second in command and Ordnance officer. I've a notion to put him under arrest for misconduct. And that cannon? That proves that there must have been at least a regiment there. No small party would have had a piece of artillery with them. You brought it aboard, I presume?"

"Yes, sir. But I was expecting your orders to throw it overboard. I don't think it is any account. It's a condemned piece that the guerrillas have picked up somewhere, and have been hauling around for bluff. You notice there was no lumber-chest with it. Best thing's to pitch it overboard, in some deep part of the river."

"Not under any circumstances, sir," said the Colonel, severely. "On the contrary, you will take the best care of it. I want to send it and these arms to Washington as trophies for the Engineer Corps. It is not every day that the Engineer Corps captures cannon and small arms from the enemy in a regular engagement. I am going to send them all to Wash-

ington, properly labeled, to be put on exhibition."

"Very good, sir," said Shad, saluting and retiring.

"Serg't Dye," said the Major, emerging from his state-room, a little later, pen in hand, "I want you to take particular care of that six-pounder, and those small-arms. They belong to the Ordnance Bureau. It is not often that the Ordnance can show cannon and muskets captured by it from the enemy in battle. I want to send them to Washington, properly labeled, to be put on exhibition as trophies of the Ordnance Bureau."

"Very good, sir," said Jake Dye, saluting.

"Blast the old trumpety," said the boys, consulting together on the deck. "What do we want it around here cluttering up everything for? It ought to be all in the bottom of the river."

As they were approaching Johnsonville, Tenn., a man rose up on a point and waved a red and then a white handkerchief.

"That's a Union scout," said the pilot. "He's got something very important to communicate, and wants to be taken aboard."

"Sure of that?" inquired Shad. "Aint one of your friends, is he?"

"Yes, he's likely one of my friends and a Union scout, too," answered the pilot, angrily. "You'd better take him aboard."

"All right," said Shad. "Put her in, Harry; tell Si and Jake to fall the men in and have them ready."

The scout, who was worn and weary with hard travel, remarked sententiously:

"Git me over to Johnsonville quick as you kin. Then you'd better turn around and skip back as fast as your injines'll push you. The whole country down there's full o' Forrest's men, and they're booming up here this way as fast as their hosses'll bring 'em. There'll be a circus 'round here in a little while sich as you never seed in all your born days. Better turn tail and skip out, if you know what's good for you."

"Guess we'll go ahead, all the same," said Shad, as he went to report the news to the Colonel.

"Act on your best judgment, Lieutenant," said the Colonel, looking up from his paper. "I shall have to rely on you until I get this report finished."

As they neared Johnsonville there came abundant signs to verify the scout's prophecy. When the rolling country could be seen in the distance it was covered with swarms of horsemen. The news became known to the Major, and disturbed him greatly. He came out on the hurricane roof and studied the country through his glass.

"It's sheer madness to go up there," he said nervously to Shad Graham. "I cannot consent to have this valuable cargo of ammunition run such risk of capture.

If the rebels should get hold of it they would destroy our army. We must turn back."

"My orders are to go ahead," Shad replied, "and I'm going ahead, until they're changed. A little bunch of cavalry don't bother me. We can get away from them all right. If you'll look back, Major, you'll see about as many behind us as in front."

"When in doubt in the army," interjected Si, who had come on the hurricane deck to take a view of the situation, "it's always best to go ahead. Let's fire up and push on. If them fellers git too troublesome we can land and run 'em back."

"Jake," said Shorty, "I thought you said this way was so quiet and peaceable? All the comforts of home? No guerrillas, nor nothing to torment us."

"It's only a bunch of cavalry," remarked Jake, with an infantryman's customary low opinion of the mounted service. "If we keep on going we'll soon get by them."

"They're planting a battery over there," said the Major, nervously.

"They seem to've not only planted it, but it's took root and is blossoming," grinned Shorty, as the battery sent a salvo at the transports and a gunboat lying along the wharf at Johnsonville. The gunboat replied with its battery.

"Tell the engineer to put on all the steam he has, pilot," said Shad Graham to the man at the wheel. "Si, you had better go down on the boiler deck, and see that those darkies stick to their furnaces and put in everything that'll make steam."

The sound of the firing brought the Colonel out on the hurricane deck to resume his Napoleonic attitude on the extreme forward position.

"Col. Bonesteel," said the Major, approaching him formally, "I protest against proceeding any farther with this important cargo. I insist that we turn around and retreat."

"My Executive Officer has his orders," said the Colonel loftily, with a wave of his hand toward Shad.

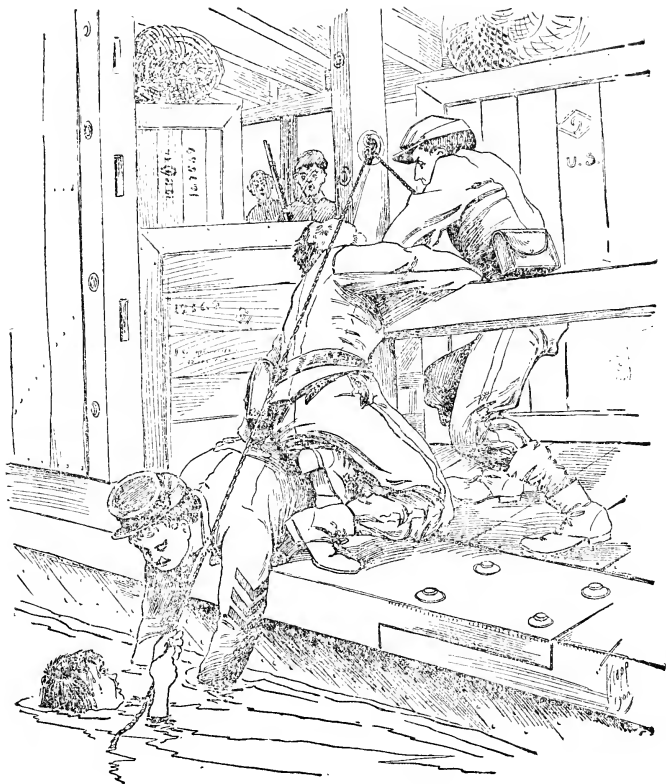
"Si," Shad called down, "Jake says there's some fat pine down in the hold. Have those darkies bring it up and feed it under the boilers."

A transport which had been fired into up the river came flying downward, whistling a shrill alarm.

"I shall immediately prepare a written protest against your course, which is absolutely against my advice," shouted the Major.

"Maj. Crewet, retire to your room under arrest," commanded the Colonel. "I will not have you demoralizing my men in this way. I shall prefer charges against you."

"You shall not order me from the deck when in action. I shall hold you personally responsible if you do," answered



‘SI LIFTED HIM ABOARD BY SHEER STRENGTH!’

the Major, folding his arms and taking his position on the front of the deck.

“Remain, then, till the end of the action,” said the Colonel, mollified by the Major’s show of spirit. “But if you say another discouraging word you must leave the deck.”

In the meanwhile the uproar back toward Johnsonville had become terrific. Other rebel batteries had galloped up close to the bank and begun a furious shelling of the fleet of transports and the immense warehouses on the opposite side. Several of these were soon in flames, at which the rebels cheered wildly and the boys became desperately excited. To merely

run away, without a chance to shoot back, was not to anybody’s taste, not even the Major’s.

“Shad,” called Si, from the cross-trees of the jack-staff, whither he had climbed to get a better view, “see those rebels running down to that point, just ahead? They want to give us a blisterer. See, they’re getting into pontoon boats to come out and take us after the volley. Can’t we run up close to them and give them a regular old 200th Indiana, just where it’ll do the most good?”

“I guess so,” answered Shad. “Pilot, how’s the channel along there?”

“Runs in close to the bank there,” an-

swered the helmsman, who had been acting of late in such a manner as to win everybody's confidence. "Deep water's about 20 rods from the bank. They know that we've got to run in there. That's the reason they're making for that place."

"All right, Si," Shad called down. "Get a good ready, and soak it to them just before we swing out for the point."

"Lieutenant," admonished the Colonel, "I must again forbid you to address your men by their given names, and, more particularly, to allow them to address you so familiarly. It is grossly unilitary and must not be repeated."

"All right, Colonel; I forgot."

Si and Jake Dye quickly arranged their plan of campaign. Their men had already loaded, and were standing behind the pile of pontoon stuff amidship. At the signal they were to rush out onto the guards, Si's squad forward, Jake's on the after, and deliver their fire in the face of the rebels. Shorty and Shad were to give the signal by firing first at the two men whom they should pick out as the rebel leaders. They had a double object in this. By shooting down the leaders they would make a flurry among the rebels which would distract their aim, probably save the Colonel, Major and pilot, and give the boys below time to line up on the guards and deliver their fire most effectively.

In the meanwhile Harry, Monty, Sandy and Pete were carrying out a scheme of which they had great hopes. They had been examining the cannon with great interest ever since it was brought aboard. They found that it was still loaded, but they did not know with what. Harry got a charge of canister and a friction primer from Jake Dye.

"Don't matter what's in it already," he explained to the boys. "If it's canister another dose of canister will only make it more binding. If it's shot or shell, canister will go along with it just as well."

So they rammed the canister home with a capstan bar, and Sandy Baker picked around the vent until he was sure that he had got down to the powder, and inserted the primer. They ran the gun out on the larboard guards, amidships, to where they could rush it forward at the critical moment to the bow and let drive. Sandy was to hold the trail and pull the lanyard, while Monty, Harry and Pete were to run the gun forward and point it, when Harry was to give the command to fire.

"I'll take the fellow that's lining his men up with his sword there by the young sycamore," said Shad, raising his gun, as the boat pushed forward to within good rifle range.

"All right," answered Shorty. "I'll take that feller that's walking along that drift log getting his men behind it. You fire first and I'll follow."

In a second Shad's gun cracked, and

the rebel officer dropped his sword, clutched at his side, and staggered backward. Some of his men sprang to catch him.

"Good," murmured Shorty; "now let me make 'em huddle around the other feller."

His bullet caught the rebel in his thigh and made a commotion among his men, when Si's and Jake's companies manned the guards and delivered volleys, one after the other. As Jake's company fired Sandy pulled the lanyard and the gun belloved.

It probably had a terrific effect on the rebels, but its immediate effect on those on the boat was too startling to allow this to be closely studied. Harry had not thought of the jackstaff in his hasty aiming, and it was cut off as if by a knife. Nor had the boys thought of the recoil from the heavy charge. This took the gun overboard, and Sandy Baker with it. The Major paled with the thought that his ammunition was exploding, and started to rush down to see. The Colonel, without altering his Napoleon-at-St. Helena pose, cast an inquiring glance at Shad, as to what part this event was playing in his program. Harry had presence of mind enough to throw a rope to Sandy, which he caught, and then Si, rushing over to that side to see what had happened, lay down on the deck, caught Sandy by the collar, and lifted him aboard by sheer strength.

The rebels were replying by a sputter of shots, which did no damage, except to the woodwork of the boat, as she swept ahead, and turned to them her big, rapidly splashing wheel, and was soon out of gunshot.

"I declare," said the Colonel, looking at the fearful glare, which made the country for miles around awfully lurid, "it certainly looks as if they were burning up everything in Johnsonville. It is the most frightful conflagration I ever witnessed, and would seem to compare with that of Moscow. The authorities at Washington cannot give me too much credit for having so successfully extricated my command without loss from that disaster. I must go down and incorporate this incident in my report."

Si and Jake occupied themselves in rigging up a new jackstaff, for the pilot to steer by.

"Say, Jake," called Shorty, "what's that you told us about going with you to have a nice, restful, pleasant time?"

"We haven't had nothing so very unpleasant, so far, have we?" Jake answered with asperity. "You want a featherbed in a bomb-proof, I expect?"

For the next 90 or 100 miles they had leisure to think the matter over, and congratulate themselves over escaping the great disaster at Johnsonville, where Forrest had actually captured two gunboats and five transports and burned an immense quantity of supplies. They sped past the old battlefield of Shiloh and the other

points of interest two years before, without a sight of another rebel, and began to hope that their troubles were virtually over, and their road open to Chattanooga and Sherman. But as they neared Florence, Ala., the rebels began to be in evidence again along the southern shore, and when they reached that place they found the greatest perturbation with the news that Hood's whole army was gathered south of the Tennessee River, between there and Decatur, and that terrible things were to be expected any hour. Everyone with whom they spoke—river men, soldiers and citizens—strongly dissuaded them from going any farther, and the Colonel, who suspended his report long enough to listen to the news which Shad reported to him, at length went up town for consultation with the commanding officer.

"The situation seems to be this," said Shad, calling Si, Shorty and Jake Dye into a council of war with him, after the Colonel had gone. "Hood's slipped away from Sherman with his whole army and cut down around through Alabama, aiming at Nashville, to draw Sherman back after him and make another Bragg-and-Buell race for the Ohio River. Hood's got his whole army—50,000 or 60,000 men—out here between this place and Decatur, trying to get across the Tennessee River at these Muscle Shoals, and rush Nashville. Sherman's sent Pap Thomas back with the Fourth and Twenty-third Corps, what troops he can pick up along the railroad, and what will be sent him from the North, to head Hood off, and leave Sherman free to attend to the other job that he has in mind. Sherman's holding the road from Chattanooga to Atlanta, and may be planning to come in on Hood's rear while Thomas is bluffing him in front. That looks like good sense. Above Decatur the river is clear to Chattanooga, and if we could once get to Decatur we'd be all right, and have a nice, easy run the rest of the way. But between here and Decatur are 20 miles of these Muscle Shoals, which they say no boat can get through at this stage of water, even one as light as ours. Even if we could make it, they say we're likely to run into the rebels working their way across the river with pontoons, and wading; they're likely to be on some of the islands with artillery and do no end of things to us. The whole stretch of the Shoals is loney and gloomy, with lots of timber and brush in which the rebels can hide and ambush us."

The boys thought it over for a minute or two silently, and then Si spoke quietly and firmly:

"The orders came straight from Col. McGillicuddy to me and Shorty to join the regiment with these men. Them was Col. McGillicuddy's plain orders, and they go as long as there is the slightest earthly chance of obeying them. Col. McGillicud-

dy's orders lay over everything else, so far as I'm concerned. I'll obey anybody else's as long's they point in the same direction. When they take a different chute then I go Col. McGillicuddy's way. I'll go on this boat as far as it'll take me, and then chance it for the rest o' the way. If she stops, turns back, is burnt, blowed up or sunk I'll take to the woods and march to Chattanooga, if I can't get onto the railroad, and I'll take every man that can walk with me. That's my little speech."

"You hear the mellow trill of his bazoo," said Shorty. "He's the boss of this outfit. He talks for all of us."

"I'm with you, Si," said Jake Dye, "I'm sick of this Ordnance lay-out. I've only stuck to it because it promised a chance to get to my regiment. My boys are the same way. They all belong with Sherman. We'll jump the job the minute there's no show of getting through to the 'Old Man.'"

"Well, boys," said Shad, "I'm with you till Gabriel toots his horn. But the way is to stick to this boat and do our duty as we set out to do. Sherman needs these pontoons, and needs them bad; probably needs them worse than he does us. We'll get along all the better by playing fair all around. We're in charge of this cargo, and we'll come out all the better by hanging on to it and the boat. She's brought us through so far in great shape, and we can't improve on sticking to her. We must get these pontoons through if there's a chance. We can't go back; that's sure. We see what has happened at Johnsonville. We can't stay here. It may be Johnsonville over again here any hour. That leaves us only one thing to do—go straight ahead. They say that we can't get up over the Muscle Shoals at this stage of water. I don't believe it. This boat only draws 16 inches, and I believe we've got a pilot that can find that much water somewhere on the shoals. He's a good, true Union man, and we've found out that we can trust him."

"Since you put it that way," said the pilot, who had come up and overheard, "I'll take you through, or leave the boat's bones to bleach on the rocks. It'll take a lot of hard work, and there's never been a boat of this size taken up the rapids at this stage of water, but I can take the Lorena if any man living can. I'm an East Tennessean, and just as good a Union man as ever lived, and I'd like to show you that you aint a mite more in earnest for the Union than I am. I'll start the minute you say."

"We're all ready," said Shorty. "Jake Dye promised easy times and plenty to eat, if we'd only go with him, and we're going to hold him to his promise. So long as you don't interfere with those privileges go ahead."

"We must wait for the Colonel to come back and hear what he says," said Shad.

CHAPTER V.

THE BOYS HAVE THEIR FIRST DIFFICULTIES IN NAVIGATING MUSCLE SHOALS.

The Muscle Shoals (more properly "Mussel Shoals," from the immense quantities of these fresh-water bivalves found there) are a wonderfully interesting and picturesque part of the wild and varied scenery of the Cumberland Mountains. In the terrific convulsions by which this world was formed the Tennessee River had a strenuous struggle to carry to the sea the mighty flood of waters it had gathered in East Tennessee, Virginia and North Carolina. It broke a sharp, narrow gateway through the wall of the Cumberlands at Chattanooga, whereof Lookout Mountain rises as one gate-post, straight and sheer, 1,200 feet above the surface of the water. The river then meandered southwestward, as if to find the Gulf of Mexico, but another towering high turned it back northward, to find a more vulnerable mountain, struggle savagely with its walls of limestone and flint, finally conquer a passage, and then flow unobstructed through rolling plains to the Ohio River, 260 miles away. Muscle Shoals is the battleground of that gigantic paleozoic conflict between the mighty forces of the Flood and the Rock, and is strewn with the wrecks of the fight. Rather, they are the stout-hearted survivors of the partial victory gained by the Flood, innumerable ages ago, who stood fast when their line was forced, and the weaker ones swept away. Sullen, indomitable pillars of rock, and flinty-faced, frowning bluffs, through centuries like grains of sand, they have stood there, unconquerable, immovable, even, though every few months the River has gathered its forces and angrily assaulted them with all its power. But against their obduracy the River spends its wrath in vain, and when its floods subside, it resigns itself again to wandering hither and yon, by a hundred tortuous channels by such ways as the Rocks have grudgingly conceded to it. For 30 miles the great Tennessee wanders thus through a maze of rocks, islands and bluffs, over reefs, shoals and bars, sometimes spreading out to a width of five miles, in order to get through, and rarely less than a mile in breadth. Some of the islands and bluffs are covered with heavy growths of timber, some with thickets of brush; some are piled with driftwood, many are bare, naked, sullen rocks. Too rugged and forbidding for settlement, the country on either side of the river stretches away for miles in an unbroken

tangle of forest and thicket, with here and there a poverty-stricken settler, most likely a refugee from justice, or a runaway negro, who in a shack hardly more artistic than the lair of the catamounts, lives there with his she-wolf-like wife and their brood of lean-limbed, quick-eyed young barbarians, subsisting mainly on the wild fruits and "varmints," and the myriads of wild ducks and geese gathered there to feed upon the inexhaustible supply of mussels.

The Government has spent about \$5,000,000 in reducing this obstacle to the free navigation of the 800 miles of splendid waterway of the great Tennessee River.

The Colonel came back faster than his usual dignified march. "Pull out, Lieutenant," he said to Shad, "and go somewhere. There are entirely too many Major-Generals around here, and they're reaching for everything in sight. I don't know how many of them are preparing orders for me. We must leave here at once."

The Colonel was apparently quite indifferent to the direction taken so long as he got away from under the control of a superior in rank.

"Col. Bonesteel," demanded the Major, coming up (he had also been up town consulting), "I demand to know where you are going to take this boat."

"My Executive Officer has his orders, sir," responded the Colonel, becoming very military, and with a dignified wave of his hand toward Shad Graham.

"But, sir, I have the right to be informed of your intentions. I have a responsibility to the Ordnance Bureau for the most valuable part of the cargo, if not for the boat itself, and"——

"The boat has been placed under my command, by the express order of the secretary of War," the Colonel condescended to explain. "You are second in command, and unless I fall (and the Colonel swelled visibly) you have no authority or responsibility whatever, sir."

"But I have a responsibility for this ammunition, and that it shall not fall into the hands of the rebels. If they should capture it they could destroy our army with it."

"I have heard Ordnance Bureau fables about the awfulness of its ammunition before," remarked the Colonel, sarcastically.

"It is indifferent to me what you have heard," retorted the Major, verging near disrespect. "I repeat that I am personally and officially responsible for this cargo of ammunition. I have been consulting with the Chief of Ordnance of Gen. Thomas's army. He consents to receive the ordnance from me, and release me from responsibility for it, and unless you immediately retire down the river"—

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said the Colonel, stoutly. He had arrived at no decision where he was to go, except that he would not do anything the Major counseled. "I shall do nothing of the kind, sir. I'm not in the habit of retiring before the enemy, and I shall hear no suggestion of that kind from you, sir."

"Then I shall procure an order from the Chief Ordnance Officer for the removal of the ammunition from the boat."

The Colonel was about to explode in wrath, when Shad whispered, "Let him take the ammunition off, sir. It'll lighten the boat several tons, and greatly help us get through."

"Can you hustle it off in a few minutes, before an order can reach me from headquarters?" inquired the Colonel, sotto voce, as he scanned the shore with a nervous apprehension of seeing a staff officer approach.

"A pile of work can be done in a few minutes by 125 such men as we have," answered Shad. "And every ton we can get off will be that much help."

"Very well, then," the Colonel answered in a whisper. "Get off all you can, but have the boat ready to start the instant I give the word. Maj. Crewet," he continued aloud, "you have my permission to remove all the ammunition you can before I have to start. I see signs indicating that the rebels are attempting to bring up a battery on the opposite bank. (It was some wagon loads of refugees coming across the hill in the distant horizon, upon which the Colonel fixed his eyes.) I do not propose to have this boat caught as were those transports at Johnsonville. I shall start with a very brief warning the moment I think the danger is imminent. You can remove all the ammunition you wish in that time."

"Serg't Dye," commanded the Major, "put your whole force to work removing that ammunition from the boat to the wharf. Work as rapidly as you can at that. You can store it and protect it afterward until the officer here receipts for it. You have your men bring their things ashore, to remain with the ammunition."

"Say, Shad, play fair, now," whispered Jake Dye, as he passed by to execute the order. "Don't you leave without us."

"You're all right; I'll look out for you," Shad assured him. "You go down with your men into the hold to pass the stuff up. Si and Shorty will attend to landing it."

The Colonel took his position on the

front of the hurricane deck, and was apparently studying the southern bank with the deepest interest. In reality he was watching the road to headquarters with anxiety. Shad notified the pilot and engineer to have everything in instant readiness, Sandy Baker and Pete Skidmore were stationed on the wharf at the posts to which were attached the boat's fore and aft lines, respectively, to throw them off when they got the word, and run aboard the boat. Monty was stationed by the cleat forward to ease off the line when he got the word, so that Sandy could throw it off the post, and Harry was to do the same with the after line.

The rest worked with feverish energy getting the heavy ammunition boxes up and out on to the wharf. The Major stood on the wharf and watched them with astonishment. He had never before seen so much work done in so short a time by that number of men, and somehow he got the idea that they were doing this because animated by a desire to get away from the boat and the arrogant Colonel, and remain with him. He actually grew pleasant toward them, and bestowed some compliments. Some tons had been shifted ashore and scattered about the wharf, when the Colonel's eye caught sight of a staff officer coming at a sharp trot. That was enough. He raised his glass to study the southern horizon, and commanded, in a low tone:

"Cast off and start at once, Lieutenant."

"Attention, there," ordered Shad, without raising his voice. "Ease off on the lines, fore and aft."

"Ease off it is, sir," answered Monty, who had grown very nautical in his short experience on the boat.

"Ashore, there," commanded Shad. "Cast off those lines, forward and aft."

"Cast off it is, sir," answered Sandy and Pete, throwing the loops free of the posts, and running aboard, followed by all the men on the wharf.

"Go ahead, as fast as you can, Mr. Pilot," ordered Shad.

The Major had been so intent in scrutinizing some of the boxes which had come up out of the hold that he had not noticed the proceedings until the rush aboard attracted his attention, and he looked up to see the boat swinging out from the wharf. He called out:

"Col. Bonesteel, just wait a few minutes longer. They'll have the whole load off them."

"Very sorry, Major, I cannot comply," answered the Colonel; "that battery is deploying, and liable to fire at any instant. Better get your ammunition under cover as quickly as possible. In the meanwhile I have the honor of bidding you good-day."

"Come back here, men," shouted the Major to his detachment. "You are not to go with the boat. You are to stay

here. Serg't Dye, bring your men ashore at once."

"Serg't Dye is in the hold and can't hear you, Major," said Shorty very politely, "and if he could I don't see how he could obey, as his legs aint 60 feet long."

The Aid trotted down to the wharf and waved a large white envelope toward the departing boat. But Col. Boonsteel kept his eyes fixed on the opposite bank, and if expecting the refugee wagons to unlimber and belch out a storm of shells, while the Lorena's rapidly-whirling stern-wheel flung up a cloud of spray in seeming defiance and derision of Headquarters, Aids, Ordnance Officers, and everything not pertaining directly to the Engineer Corps.

"We probably won't have no trouble till we get to Bainbridge's Ferry," said the pilot. "The river over there to the right is too rocky and swampy for the rebels to get through. But it narrows down at the ferry to less'n a mile wide, with fairly deep water, and there's a road leading up from the south. It's the closest call we're likely to have till we get near the head o' the Shoals, for we can dodge around among the rocks the rest of the way, and avoid 'em. But if they've got to the ferry, with cannon, they're liable to make it warm for us.

"'Twon't be the first time, though, that I've had to run by a battery on the bank. Better let the boys rest, and eat their dinners, and be ready."

"All right," answered Si. "If the rebel cavalry know what's good for 'em they'll let the 200th Injanny carefully alone. We're like a rattlesnake—seen best a good piece off and asleep." And he went down to superintend the dinner.

"I caught sight through a rift in the trees of a good deal of dust raising off away down there," remarked Shorty, as he stood on the bow guards, with a liberal supply of bread and meat in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other, and studied the country toward the south. "Somebody's going to the election. That's sure. Whether it's our men falling back, or them coming on is an interesting question that'll come up later. It don't really matter, though. Jake Dye promised us an easy, pleasant trip, with all the comforts of a home, and we're going to hold him to his bargain."

"The way them geese is flying up," added Si, pointing with his cup of coffee to disturbed flocks of birds, "shows that there's a lot o' men piling in from that direction. Boys, finish your dinner as quick as you can, load and stand ready."

The boat ran to the left of the long, curving island, just above Florence, and approached the ferry. They saw a long-limbed, gaunt man, with a beard like a wisp of hay, sitting on a rock on the right, fishing.

"Shall I shoot him, Sergeant?" inquired Harry Joslyn, who was wrought up to the fighting pitch. "He's a bushwhacker. If

he ain't bushwhacking now he has been and will be again. It'll save bother to get rid of him now."

"No, no," called down the pilot. "Don't harm him. That's Jim Bainbridge, that used to run the ferry afore the war. He's all right. That is, he ain't bad. He don't care no more for Union or Secesh than he does for them wild ducks and geese. Not as much, for he can eat the ducks and geese, and that's a great pint with Jim. He's too consarned lazy to care for anything in this world but laying around, eating and sleeping. He can sleep right along, all day and all night, lay around on the flat of his back the rest o' the time, and eat more'n a boss while he's doing it. Never see such a man. Rebels put him in their army, but was glad to get shet of him in less'n a month. His disease is ketching, and soon the hull rijment was down with it. He simply wouldn't do nothing, in spite o' them, but lay 'round, eat and sleep, and he'd give it to the men they set over him so that they wouldn't do nothing else. He wuz wuss'n the measles in a neighborhood, and he spiled the rijment so that it was never worth much afterward. But I'm going to take him aboard. He knows the Shoals better'n any man alive. Hello, Jim; howdy?"

"Howdy yerself, Zeke, an' see how you like hit," answered the fisherman, looking up lazily, with a piece of corn-dodger in one hand and a chunk of meat in the other. "Air yo' travelin' or jist goin' a piece?"

"Bound for Chattanooga," answered Ezekiel Martin.

"Bound fur Chattanooga," chuckled Jim. "Yo're bound fur Richmond, Virginia, an' Libby Prison, if they don't hang yo' as soon as they lay hands on yo', fur steerin' a Yankee boat."

"That so?" inquired the pilot, with an air of mild interest. "Any rebels 'round here?"

"Hell's mint of 'em over thar," answered Jim, with a nod of his head southward. "Thicker'n fiddlers in the brimstone lake. Hood's hull army's betwixt here an' Decatur. 'Bout a million of 'em."

"So?" queried the pilot, softly. "But they're all laying over toward Leighton and Town Creek, ain't they? None nigh the river?"

"Thar's whar yo're as much mistaken as if yo'd done burnt yer shirt. Ole Steve Lee's out thar at Leighton, but he's humpin' his critter companies up toward the Ferry an' they're likely to be thar any minnit."

"Well, you'd better come aboard, Jim, and get out o' their way."

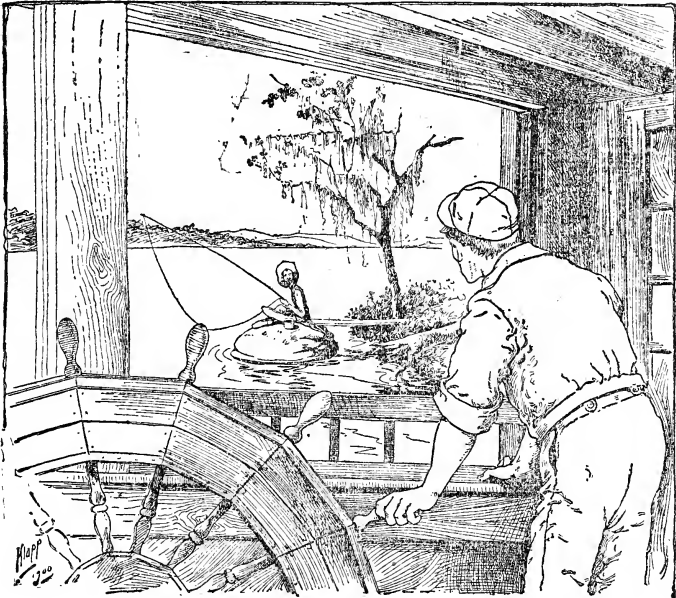
"Nary a time. Perch's bitin' too well to leave jist now. Fust good perch fishing I've had this Fall. Wuz bitin' fine afore yo' done come along with yer ole boat an' riled up the water. Go 'long now an' let the water quiet down."

"Jim, if you'll come aboard and go up

as far as Decatur, I'll give you all the grub you can lay to and a two-bushel bag-full to take home."

"Don't keer fur no more grub," answered the fisherman indifferently, readjusting his pole, which the waves of the steamboat had disturbed. "Rather fish. Don't want no more grub. Killed a shoat

er of its predecessors. Jim made a motion as if to rise, but then settled back and said decisively: "No, I reckon not. Like ter have the salt, but kin git along without hit. If I git hit they'll only use hit up an' then want more. Things taste most as good without salt. Can't leave these perch fur no salt. Rather fish."



"THEY SAW A LONG-LIMBED, GAUNT MAN, FISHING."

yesterday in the riffles. Don't like wheat bread, nohow. Tangles up in my gizzard."

"Jim, if you'll come along you shall have all the whisky you want to drink."

This seemed to stir more emotion than the previous offer. The fisherman debated it for an instant, and then answered:

"No; I calkerlate not. Got a jugfull o' old peach yesterday. Don't like yer kind o' likker, nohow. Got ter drink a kag o' hit ter feel hit at all. Now, the fust dram o' that thar peach ketches hold o' yer throat, an' seems ter tear yer lights right out. No; b'lieve I won't go. Rather fish."

"Jim, if you'll come along I'll give you a heaping peck of salt."

This stirred up more emotion than eith-

"Jim," said the pilot, desperately, "if you'll come along I'll give you a hat-full of genuine Yankee coffee to take to your old woman."

The fisherman rose up suddenly. "A hat full o' coffee? My hat full? This hat full?" he inquired, pulling off his capacious old white wool head-covering and holding it up.

"Yes; I'll fill that hat up to the top of the baud with real Yankee coffee."

"I'll go," said the fisherman, flinging back into the water the fish he had caught. "Come in to that rock thar, an' le'me git aboard."

"Come right up here into the pilot-house with me, Jim."

"No; that's too fur ter climb, an' I hate

ter have glass 'round me. Can't git my breath. I'll set out on the harricane roof."

"Serg't Klegg," continued the pilot, "will you have the cook send up all that was left from your dinner, together with a big pot of strong coffee? Corporal Elliott, will you go into my room and find a bottle of whisky there, under my pillow, and give it to Mr. Bainbridge?"

"No; don't keer fur no whisky now, thankee, if yo're done gwine ter give me a fillin' o' coffee. I'm jist busting fur as much coffee as I kin drink. No likker, thankee; want all my room fur coffee. Tell that cook ter make it good an' strong—strong enough ter bear up an' aig."

"You shall have it jist your way, Mr. Bainbridge," said Si. "Very glad to have you with us."

A spurt of firing was heard in the direction of the Ferry.

"Great Jehosephat, they've got there," remarked Shorty, bringing his cartridge-box to the front and picking up his Springfield.

"Keep amidships, behind the timbers, boys, and wait for orders," called out Si.

"Say," yelled a picket from the northern shore, "you can't go up there. The other side is full of rebels. Turn that boat around and go back."

Just then a roar broke out down the river in front of Florence.

"Hear that?" Shorty shouted derisively at the picket. "Can't you mention some place else for us to go? How'd it do to climb a tree?"

"I declare," muttered Shad to Si, listening to the shelling the rebels were giving Florence, "those really were batteries, instead of refugee wagons, that the Colonel was looking at. He knows more than I thought he did."

"My prompt action in leaving enabled us to escape that bombardment," said the Colonel, from his pose on the front of the deck, whither he had come at the first shot. "I trust that Maj. Crewet is enjoying himself."

The firing up the river became a sharp skirmish, as the Union cavalry resisted the attempts of the rebels to cross. A rebel battery took position on a piece of high hill a half-mile back of the ford, and began throwing shells across at the Union cavalry. Si and Shad glanced at the pilot, who was driving calmly on, to see what effect this was having on him.

"That's all right," he said, noticing their questioning glances, but keeping his eyes fixed on the river ahead. "There's only a narrow clear space at the Ferry, and after the cannon fires one shot we'll be past before it can fire another. It'll be the musketry that'll hurt. Keep your men under cover. Better make 'em lay down. I'm going to run close into the bank as we pass. That's always safest. Botherers their aim, and the nearer we are the quicker we'll be by. All of you lay down."

"Lay down, boys! Everybody lay

down," shouted Si. "Everybody get behind something, and don't shoot till you're sure of your man. Then let him have it below the belt."

He set the example by kneeling down behind the capstan and laying his gun across it. From that position he could command a view of all around as well as his boys, crouching behind coils of rope, anchors, and whatever promised shelter. Shorty lay flat on the cabin deck, with his gun poked through the railing, ready to fire as soon as it bore on something.

"Lay down, Jim; lay down flat on the deck," shouted the pilot, as the boat rushed on and neared the firing which was becoming momentarily heavier. The fisherman, who was industriously devouring the store sent up from the cook-house, was wandering about the deck perplexedly, with the coffee-pot in his hand.

"I'm looking fur some kiver fur this here coffee-pot," Jim explained. "Hit's the best coffee I ever drunk, an' I'm montly afearid hit'll git hit. O, that's the place."

His eyes lighted on the big brass bell, swinging on the fore part of the deck. He shuffled forward, turned up the bell, slipped the precious coffee-pot under its broad mouth, and turned it down again.

"Thar," he said, with a grunt of satisfaction, "no Yankee could've thought of a cuter trick than that. Thar's a double hand's thickness o' brass on every side o' that coffee-pot. No bullet'll ever go through that thar."

The trees below the ferry masked the approach of the boat from the rebels on the bank, until she shot out almost in their faces. The Union troops on the opposite side held their fire, and sent up rousing cheers for her gallant crew. She was going as fast as her engines would send her along, and so wild was the fire of the surprised rebels that the only serious injury it did was to the boat's light woodwork, which was pierced, split and splintered in a hundred places. Sad to say, one startled rebel had fired his gun almost perpendicularly. The bullet went through the light boards of the hurricane deck directly under the treasured coffee-pot, tore a hole in its bottom, struck the inside of the bell a ringing blow, rebounding, wrecked the pot still further, and rolled it out on the deck. Jim Bainbridge saw this and raged. He snatched up a gun leaning against the side of the pilot-house, and running aft fired over the wheel with sure aim into the crowd of rebels back at the Ferry.

"Dod rot yer stinking hides," he yelled, shaking his fist as he saw a man fall, "I'll larn yo' bounds how ter spile a po' man's coffee what hain't had none fur months. Why can't yo' let folks alone what ain't done nothin' ter yo'?"

As the Lorena gained the cover of a little wooded island above the Ferry, on which there were no rebels, the men on her saw at a little distance ahead the reb-

els actively laying a pontoon which they were to suddenly shove out under the cover of the trees, and before the Union troops could take measures against it have it across the river and a crossing secured. There was but little current through the islands there and the conditions were favorable to the work.

"I'd like to butt that thing and smash it into splinters," said the pilot, ringing a slowing bell, to give him time to think.

"Yo' kin do hit, Zeke; yo' kin do hit," drawled Jim, still raging over the loss of his coffee. "Thar's good two foot o' water 'round Possum Head, thar at their center. Hit 'em a good welt thar, and smash through 'em. Then put yer whed haed a-starboard, bring her head 'roun' ter larboard, comin' back inter the main channel, shoving that string o' bridge out afore yo', an' lettin' 'em float down stream whar the Yankee scrimmagers'll 'tend ter 'em."

"That's just what I'll do," answered the pilot, ringing a fast bell, and heading straight for the center of the long line of pontoon.

Si, Shorty, Jake Dye and the rest yelled delightedly, when they saw the pilot's intention, and began firing on the rebels on the landside of the bridge.

The steamboat smashed through the bridge like a bull through garden palings, and turning quickly shoved the section on the larboard, about 100 yards in length, with the men on it, out into the main channel, down which it would float, close to the Union skirmishers.

"Dod-rot yo'; spile a po' man's coffee, will yo'?" yelled Jim Bainbridge, running along the deck and throwing everything he could find at the men on the pontoons. "Hain't had a sup o' coffee fur months, an' then yo'ns spile hit all. I'd like ter wring every one o' yer stinkin' necks."

The Lorena had scarcely straightened up to resume her course in the main channel when a rebel cannon barked viciously from a tow-head up above, and a shell whistled across the hurricane deck.

"They've worked a gun out there to cover the landing of the pontoon," remarked Shad Graham.

"So it appears," answered the pilot. "But how in the world did they ever get it across there? I suppose we'll have to run by it."

"Tell yo' what ter do, Zeke," mumbled Jim Bainbridge, his mouth full of food and in his hand a fresh tin-cup of coffee, which Si had secured for him. "Whirl ter the left, and cut 'round behind that island thar. You'll find plenty o' water thar, but the suck's powerful. But she's runnin' light, an' I reckon her injines kin make hit."

Before the gun could fire again the agile Lorena had been put behind the shelter of the island. But she encountered one of those "sucks" for which the Tennessee

River is noted. The water poured through the narrow channel with a velocity and power against which the Lorena's engines struggled in vain. Fat pine knots were shoved into her furnaces, and the weight on the safety-valve brought out to the end. Her boilers were straining and the loud "cough" of the steam as it left her escape-pipes spoke of her distressful labor to the whole country around. The rebels quickly noticed this, and began working their way over the shoals and islands to get at her.

"There's only one thing to do," said the pilot to Shad. "Let a man take a line overboard and carry it up the bank to that big white-oak on the point. Then we'll warp her with the capstan."

"That spells my name," said Shorty, running down onto the boiler deck, and seizing the end of the long cable coiled there. The pilot yawed the boat a little, so as to bring her into stiller water, behind the shelter of a large rock.

"Jake Dye promised us a quiet, pleasant trip, with all the comforts of a home," continued Shorty, as he jumped off into the cold water, up above his waist, "and I'm going to hold him to his bargain."

He clambered up on the rocks, and ran along them to the white-oak, around which he fastened the line. Si had in the meanwhile got the capstan in readiness, with himself and his strongest men at the bars, and the rest pulling on the line as it left the drum.

So they "walked" the Lorena up through the suck to where her own engines would again suffice to carry her forward. They stood out on the deck, as she speeded away, and yelled all manner of derision and contumely at the disappointed rebels, who were clambering over the rocks and wading through the shallows to get at her.

"We'll have a couple of miles now of clear running," said the pilot. "Let your men rest."

"Well, we're safely through that hornets' nest," remarked Shad to Si. "We've made about five miles, and have got 25 more to go to get out of the Shoals. I hope that the rest will be easier."

"We hain't nothing to complain of," answered Si. "I think that pontoon trick more'n squares accounts. I'm satisfied if they are."

"The worst of it is," continued Shad, "that the rebels now know the boat is in this awful tangle. They'll be dead crazy to get her. She'd be the biggest kind of a help to them in getting across the river."

"Well," answered Si, "we'll stick to her and run as long as we can, and make sure and burn her if we have to give her up. The rebels'll never get her as long as I'm alive."

CHAPTER VI.

ANOTHER CHAPTER OF TROUBLOUS NAVIGATION OF MUSCLE SHOALS.

"I declare, I shall have to expand my report to a volume," said Col. Bonesteel, descending from his perch as soon as the danger seemed past. "It'll be a splendid reiteration of the charge that Engineer officers are unfitted to command troops, and lack decision and enterprise at critical moments. Smashing that pontoon was an inspiration that would have occurred to few men, and hardly to anybody but an Engineer. And what narrow escapes I had! That shot which struck the bell and ruined that coffee-pot was aimed directly at me. The fellow thought to get me by shooting up through the deck. He was cunning, but the motion of the boat saved me. I shall not mourn if I do get a wound before we're through. I can congratulate myself on remaining perfectly cool and collected throughout the whole affair. An instant's wavering at several times would have ruined everything. I want to make the most of all this in my report, for the honor of the Engineer Corps. It is not receiving anything like the credit it should from the other branches, who are perpetually sneering at it. This affair alone will show what Engineers are capable of when given the opportunity."

"First time I ever knew a man to prefer coffee to whisky," remarked Jake Dye to Si, as they were discussing the events of the day, and Jim Bainbridge's part in them.

"You don't know these crackers as well as I do," Si answered. "They are all simply crazy for coffee—the women even worse than the men. Coffee means a great deal more to them than it does to us. Not only are they a great deal fonder of it than we are, but it's something rich and aristocratic about being able to drink 'store coffee, just the same's the quality,' that gets away with them."

"Something like we think about drinking champagne and French brandy," said Jake.

"Precisely."

As they passed the mouth of Town Creek, at a considerable distance from the main bank, they saw a squad of rebels, who spitefully fired a volley at them at long range. They watched the bullets splash and ricochet on the water, but contented themselves with a volley of opprobrium in reply, leveled at everything rebel, from Jeff Davis downward.

"Guess that's the last of 'em," said Si complacently. "There wasn't many of them, and they're probably the right flank of their army."

"Looks that way," Shorty agreed, and turned to continue the drying of his wet clothes on the side of the boilers. Si and Jake Dye busied themselves with the men in getting the decks cleared up and swept. Jim Bainbridge found a warm place where the chimneys came through the hurricane deck, bent his tall form around the sheet-iron stack, and slept the sleep of contentment and a full stomach.

Shad Graham occupied himself in looking carefully over the boat, to provide for any future contingency. The wood-pile gave him some concern. They had not taken on any wood at Florence, and the recent drafts upon it had greatly reduced its volume.

"If we can see a fence anywhere in this wilderness," remarked Shorty, noticing his regretful look, "we'll land and take it aboard. Me and Si and the rest can soon chop it up into lengths."

"Trouble is that they don't have any fences in this part of the country. These crackers are too dumb'd lazy to even build comfortable cabins, let alone fences."

The boat struck dully but heavily, and stopped with a suddenness that wrenched all her timbers and shook every one on board. Her engines kept working, though, and her wheel revolving, without pushing her forward.

"Confound it," exclaimed Shad, in a tone of great annoyance, "we've run into a bar."

"Gosh, Zeke," exclaimed Jim Bainbridge, "I meant ter've told yo' that the current settin' 'round that big new snag up thar has made a bar across the channel here."

"I've found it out," said the pilot grimly. "Lieutenant, you'll have to get your men to the capstan and spar her over."

All Western steamboats go prepared for just such emergencies as these, which are liable at any moment. On either side the bow rises a derrick-like contrivance, to which is rigged a stiff pile, having its lower end shod with iron. This drops down into the water, a rope runs through a pulley-block down to the capstan, and by working this the boat is lifted and pushed over the bar.

The spar was quickly rigged, with Si, Shorty and the strongest men at the capstan bars, and the Lorena began "walking" up the river again. Contrary to their hopes, however, instead of being a narrow bar, this proved to be a long shoal. This had deceived the sharp eyes of the pilot. A narrow, high bar makes a ripple which

quickly betrays its presence, while a continuous shoaling of a few inches may make no sign.

The spurt of vigorous effort which the boys threw into their first attack upon the capstan became a severe continuous strain upon the last atom of their strength, as the spars were time after time lifted and set forward, and the slow walk around the capstan repeated, to drag the boat forward a few feet.

"Great Jehosephat, ain't there no end to this blamed bar," groaned Shorty, as he wiped his perspiring face, while waiting for the tackle to be rearranged. "It seems to be as big as the Bar of Judgment that the preachers are always talking about."

Monty and Harry were stationed outside of the jackstaff, prodding out as far as they could reach with poles, trying to discover some show of the water deepening, without success.

"If it wasn't for the looks of the thing I'd rather walk, as the stage passenger said, who had to carry a rail up hill to pry the coach up, and then walk down behind and pull on a rope to keep the thing from running to smash." This from Si, as he stopped for a brief rest while Shad worked out a kink in the sheaves.

"When I build a boat to run on the Tennessee," volunteered Sandy Baker, "I'm going to put rollers on her bottom or wagon-wheels on the side to run on where it is only a little wet."

"Come, boys, at her again," called out Si cheerily. "We'll get her through next time. This ain't nothing to working a stone-boat over a plowed field. I've had to do that. At her again. All hands to the capstan. Now, strong and steady!"

After straining their muscles until they seemed cracking, they succeeded in pulling the boat forward about a rod, but Monty's and Harry's poles showed no signs of deepening water.

"Jake Dye, this is the pleasant, easy trip you promised us, with all the comforts of a home," yelled Shorty, a little more vengefully than he had spoken before.

"O, rats! Save your breath for heaving and tugging. You'll need it all," snorted Jake Dye, in weariness and anger.

"O, Aunt Jemima's plaster;

The more you tried to pull it off,
The more it stuck the faster,"

sang Monty Scruggs.

"Cheese that, Monty, or I'll chuck you overboard," said Harry, irritably. "This is no time for your blamed quotations."

A gun was fired from a little island half-a-mile ahead, and a bullet sang over the deck.

"Hello," said Si, stopping, wiping his face, and scrutinizing the island. "Who's that? Some condemned bushwhacker. Harry, get your gun, and lay for him. I'm too shaky now to shoot. Come, boys, rally 'round the capstan again. This shoal can't last forever. Chattanooga 's not a great

ways off by this time. All together, now, with a will."

Harry, proud of the distinction, stood up on a box, leveled his gun over the cross-piece of the jackstaff, and watched keenly for the rebel to show himself.

Another straining, tugging promenade around and around the capstan, and the boat was pulled forward another rod. Still Monty's pole met the bottom at a very shallow depth.

The bushwhacker fired again, and his bullet came impressively near Harry, who fired instantly at the smoke, and then strained his eyes as he reloaded, to see the result.

Still worse, another shot came from a little distance from the first.

"Confound it," muttered Si, "that feller's shots 's calling up his crowd. 'Pete, you take that sounding-pole, and let Monty get his gun and lay for this other feller. Harry, try to get that feller next time. Come, boys, one more grand walk around for deep water and Chattanooga."

Their hands were becoming blistered, and their muscles aching, but they planted their feet firmly on the deck at every step, and pushed with all their might, heaving the boat forward another rod.

The bushwhackers fired again, and this time there was a third gun. Harry and Monty fired, but the distance was so great that their shots were probably as ineffectual as those of the rebels.

"That shooting's like the creaking of buzzards," said Si irritably. "It means that they've found something, and are calling up the others. The buzzards want to feast off this boat. How's the water there, Pete?"

"No deeper," answered Pete.

"That's Tennessee all over," grumbled Si. "Always too dumbed much water or too little. Never saw such a country. Come, boys, choose your partners for another walk-around. We must get this boat out of here before any more rebels show up."

"They're showing up faster'n we're getting out," Shorty remarked grimly, as other shots came from the little islands, to the right and rear, and not only Harry and Monty, but others of the smaller boys, became pretty busy in replying to them.

Jim Bainbridge stopped eating and studied attentively the island from which the first shot had come, and others were following as fast as the man there could reload. "Dod burn his wuthless hide, ef that hain't old Hoss Bullock up thar. I reckoned that hit war somebody what knowed the Shoals mouty well, ter work around that-a-way. Durn his pacter, I done tole him I'd kill him if he ever come back into this country arter he hickoried me down thar in the camps 'kase I wouldn't work. I done tole him then he'd better never let me lay eyes on him agin. Now he's done come right back inter the country, jist ter sass me, an' show that he don't keer nothin' fer me. Seemed ter me

I knowed the man when I fust coteh sight of him. Then when I seed his red beard, like a shoemaker top, I wuz sartin' hit s him or me tur hit, now."

He walked down stairs to Harry, and said:

"Sonny, le' me have your gun. I kin fetch that feller. Yo' go back to yo' pole. Yo'll strike deep water purty soon."

"Here, take my gun," said Si. "I won't need it while I'm busy here."

"No; I want this boy's. I've bin watchin' hit, an' know jist how hit carries."

"Let him have your gun, Harry," said Si.

Jim took up Harry's well-cared-for rifle, and looked it over approvingly, and out toward his enemy.

"Hit's an owdashious long shot," he muttered. "Howsumever, I don't want ter fetch him fer awhile yit; anyway, I want him ter know who's arter him. I'll give him one now ter inform him that hit ain't a boy that's a-shootin'."

He fired, and the man with a beard the color of a sumach-tuft seemed so astonished by the close aim that he stepped out from behind his tree, placed his hand over his eyes, and took a good look at the men on the boat.

"I thought that'd 'stonish him," chuckled Jim, reloading his gun. "That's better shootin' than he's bin doin', an' he's naturally curu's ter know who's doin' hit. He'll find out when we git up furdur."

Meanwhile the firing was becoming much heavier from the right and rear, and from his position on the hurricane deck Shad Graham could see the rebels swarming up, wading through the shallower channels, clambering over the rocks, dodging around the masses of driftwood, and getting where their shots were beginning to take effect. Two of the men at the capstan dropped with bullets through their shoulders.

"Lieutenant," said the Colonel, speaking for the first time, and with his nose in the air, as if the enemy gave off a disagreeable effluvia, "are not those people getting objectionably near?"

"They are, indeed, sir," answered Shad, saluting. "We must try to get rid of them."

He called down:

"Jake—I mean Serg't Dye, form your men on the starboard guards and load. Go ahead with your work, Si—that is, Serg't Klegg. I'll land and push them scoundrels back."

Si looked up rebelliously. "They're my men," he started to say. "It's my business to lead them when they go into a fight."

But Shad had not waited for reply. He whipped quickly down the stairs to where Jake Dye was forming the boys.

"Are you all loaded?" he called out. "All right. Don't anybody fire till I give the order. Overboard, everybody."

He set the example by jumping off into the water and wading ashore, followed in-

stantly by the 60 forming Jake Dye's company. Harry, Monty, Alf, Gid, Sandy and Pete gazed for a moment in wonderment that Si and Shorty were not leading the movement, and then yielding to their impulse jumped into the water and followed the others, while Si and Shorty and the others struggled on with the capstan.

Shad pushed forward before his men through the cedars to the other side of the island. Cautiously looking through the brush, he saw the rebels making their way rapidly to a high sandbar separated from where he was by several rods of shallow water. They were evidently gathering there for a rush across to the island and then upon the boat. He passed the word back for those behind to come up quietly without shaking the brush and get under cover at the edge. As he glanced around he noticed the Colonel standing stiff and precise in the brush, at the regulation 30 paces interval in rear of the firing-line.

"All ready now, boys," Shad sent a whisper along the line. "Take good aim, fire low, and we'll give 'em a blizzard that'll make 'em let us alone. Ready, aim, fire!"

The whole crowd of rebels seemed to go down before the instantaneous blast that poured out of the bushes.

Si's crowd, laboring at the capstan, answered the volley with a joyful shout, and inspired by the sound, raced around with the bars. The boat slid along more easily, and finally shot forward quickly, her wheel giving the shoal a disdainful kick as she glided off. The movement was so sudden and unexpected that the capstan "faced," and Si and the rest tumbled in a heap over one another upon the deck.

"Come aboard, Shad," shouted the pilot. "We're off."

"Run for the boat, boys," called out Shad.

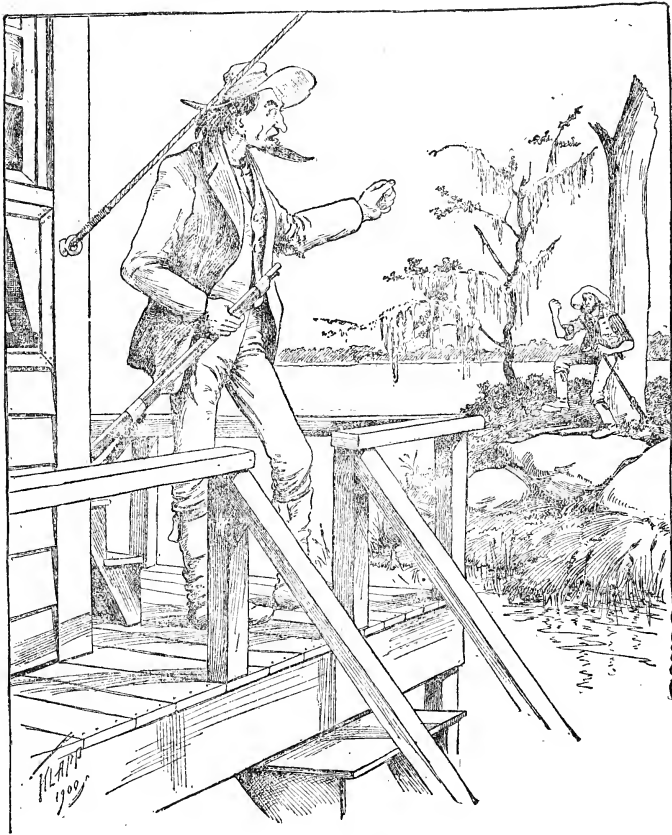
"Lieutenant, Lieutenant," admonished the Colonel. "That isn't the way to retire before the enemy. Form your men, sir, and retire in an orderly manner."

Shad swore a little under his breath at the Colonel's formality, which involved so much delay, but quickly formed the boys into some sort of line, and walked deliberately back, the Colonel stalking solemnly his proper 30 paces in the rear.

"Dumb it, Shad, why don't you hurry?" Si called out impatiently. "It's awful hard to hold the boat here."

"Serg't Klegg," said the Colonel, severely, as he regained the deck, "the manner in which you just addressed your superior officer is simply intolerable. I cannot deal with the offense now as it deserves, but I shall return to it in the future. See that you do not aggravate it by any repetition."

Undisturbed by the occurrences below the red-bearded man had kept up an exchange of shots with Jim Bainbridge, who excited and puzzled him by planting his



"YES, HIT'S ME; JEEMS BAINBRIDGE, O' BAINBRIDGE'S FERRY."

bullets all around and very close to him without actually hitting him. It was clear to him that he had encountered some unusual antagonist, who was worthy of his best efforts. He wanted to fall back when his comrades below were driven, but lingered to dispose of this audacious fellow.

"Slow down, Zeke," Jim called to the pilot, "and run in close to the island thar. Yo'll find good five foot o' water all a'long thar."

Jim left his station by the jackstaff, and stood up on the front of the hurricane deck.

"Hullo, Hoss Bullock," he shouted, as the boat came within a couple hundred yards of the island. "Yo' 'bominable polecat, did yo' know who wuz a-shootin' at yo'?"

"Wuz that yo', yo lazy, lousy, thievin' runnygade—yo' pizen, wuthless po' white trash," shouted Bullock, angrily, coming out from behind the stunted and flood-mangled sycamore and shaking his fist at Bainbridge.

"Yes, hit's me, Jeems Bainbridge, o' Bainbridge's Ferry, yer betters, and the gent yo' hickoried down thar by Gadsden.

I done tole yo' I'd have yer wood-pecker sculp fer that some day, an' I've done come fer nit, yo' fox-faced varmint."

"I didn't give yo' half what yo' deserved, yo' ill-begetten hound," yelled Baulack. "I never enter let yo' get away alive, and I won't next time I'—

"Stop your jawing, Jim," said the pilot, "and get down to business. I can't hold the boat here all day."

"I could've shot yo' long ago," yelled Jim, bringing his gun to his face like a flash. "But afore I done hit I wanted yo' ter know who hit wuz. Take that thar through yer punkin head."

Both men fired almost at the same instant. Baulack sank down, apparently with a bullet through his head. The dust flew from the side of Jim's ragged button coat, and he whined half round as he fell.

"This private dueling is strictly out of order in war," said the Colonel severely, as he came upon the deck, after exchanging his soaked boots and pantaloons for dry ones. "It is not war, but individual murder. It should not have been permitted had I been present. Let us have no more of it."

"Ketch you bad, Jim?" asked the pilot.

"No; I reckon not," replied Bainbridge, feeling his side. "Only raked a little meat offen my ribs. He wuz quicker'n I reckoned. But it was his last shot, and he hustled a little ter make hit."

"Do you suppose, Jim, that we've got shut of 'em all now?" inquired the pilot, ringing the bell for more steam.

"I misdoubt if yo' have. Paruntly thar's other men among 'em that know the Shoals, from the way they 'uns is workin' 'round. See them bushes shakin' on that island at the head o' the bend? Thar's a passel o' they 'uns got in thar."

Even Si's and Shorty's keen eyes had not seen what Jim had detected.

"That means trouble," said the pilot. "They can get a rake right on us."

"Dodge 'em by goin' sharp to larboard, and curtin' in behind that island thar. Yo'll find plenty o' water thar. Hit's nar-rer, but deep and swift."

When the rebels in the brush saw the boat turn away they rushed out and expressed their chagrin in a spiteful volley, no shot from which came within a half-mile of the Lorena.

"You want to give your guns a little hunch when you shoot," Shorty yelled derisively. "Your bullets don't get over the taw-line."

The chute of the river into which they had turned was as narrow as a canal, and ran like a mill-race. The Lorena struggled slowly up it, and her wood-pile diminished at a rate that made Shad, Si and Shorty scan it nervously.

Jim Bainbridge's wound had not affected his appetite, but he suddenly stopped a tin-cup of coffee on its way to his mouth, and his ears seemed to point forward like a horse's when his suspicions are aroused.

"Somebody's choppin' up thar a-piece. What does hit mean?" he asked.

"I don't hear any choppin'," answered the pilot, listening as well as he could between the "coughs" of the escape-pipes.

"They sartainly air," affirmed Jim. "Thar's more'n one—several. Yo' kin tell the different links. They're choppin' something green and solid—a tree."

"You're right, Jim," said the pilot, a few minutes later, as they came nearer. "What does it mean?"

"This chute swings over toward the other shore up thar by the head o' Copperhead Island," said Jim reflectively, trying to reason out the probabilities. "They-uns may've cut across the bend, and then make they-uns's way over the shallers to'd Copperhead, and're now choppin' down trees to clear away for a cannon, or ter make a bridge. Hello, who's they-uns'?"

He saw a number of rebels doing something on top of a large bare rock that overhung the chute on the right hand. They ran down behind the rock, as the boat approached.

"They have poles and pries in their hands," said the pilot, after speaking down through the pipe to the engineer to give her every ounce of steam he had. "I think they are trying to pry that rock down on us. But they're too late."

Shad, Shorty and Si snatched up their guns to fire on the rebels, but they were too well under cover of the rock, and as the boat passed they flung heavy stones down on the deck, which crushed through the light planking.

"Jake Dye's quiet, pleasant trip, with all the comforts of a home, is becoming pleasanter and quieter, and more homelike every minute," remarked Shorty.

As the boat passed up out of musket-shot the boys were surprised to see the rebels swarm up on the rock again and begin working with their pries. The rock at length yielded to their efforts, rocked a little, and then toppled down into the stream with a sounding splash.

"What in the world does that mean?" asked Si. "We aint going back. There's no use stopping up the road after we've passed."

"That's what it means," said Shad Graham, as the boat turned a point and gave a view of a stretch ahead. There they saw a group of axmen run away from a tall tulip-tree, three feet through at the ground, which was toppling to its fall. It came down with a crash, falling straight across the chute, and barring the Lorena's progress. "They've got us in a trap which they think we can't get out of."

The woods rang with the exultant shouts of the rebels, and several bullets sang around as the rebels ran for and secured their guns.

The scene was too much even for the statuesque composure which the Colonel

had so far maintained. For the first time he turned a troubled, wondering look upon Shad, as if feeling that this was too much for the resources of his subordinate.

As usual, in moments of supreme danger, Si's courage rose, and his mind acted with a quickness in exact proportion to the desperateness of the emergency.

"Load, boys," he shouted, "and run back there to the stern, ready to jump off as it swings agin the bank. Shad, I'll go ashore and drive them fellers back, and give you time to think. The sooner I do it the better, for the fewer there'll be. Shad, you'd better take six or eight of the best choppers and charge that log, while I'm holding them back. Monty, Harry, Gid, Alf, Sandy and Pete, you stay aboard, and gather up every light thing you can find, and make piles around on each of the decks. Then stand by them with matches, ready to light, if you see we're whipped. Monty, you take the hurricane deck, where you can see, and give the word. Don't take any chances. If it looks at all like we're being whipped start the fires. The rebels musn't have this boat, no matter what happens. Come on, boys."

He ran back to the stern and jumped ashore, deploying his men as they reached him, in a long skirmish line, to sweep across the little island. They set up a yowl of defiance as they pushed forward, firing at will at every rebel they could see.

With a veteran's shrewdness, Si had realized that comparatively few rebels had reached the island, and they were hoping to hold the boat fast until the others could come up. The thing to do was to immediately clear them out and get possession of the other side of the island, wherever that might be, and hold it, so that no more could come over.

He and Shorty, therefore, rushed the boys forward at all as rapidly as they could, and soon came to the water on the other side, through which the rebels they were pursuing were making their way.

There they saw a flat, rock reef, perhaps 400 yards wide, over which the water ran in rather sluggish current, at depths varying from 10 inches to two feet. The reef was covered with a Midsummer slime, which made it very slippery, and the escaping rebels would frequently fall headlong, and roll over in the water. Besides, there were many deep holes, into which they would sink up above their waists, and flounder around before they could get out. The rebels were swarming up on the opposite side, but the difficulties their comrades were having in getting away did not encourage them to advance in front of the strong force Si was developing. They seemed to be waiting, either for more to come up, or for some formation for an advance.

"We can hold them, Shorty," said Si, with quick decision, as he disposed his

boys under cover, and instructed them to fire deliberately and with careful aim, at the groups across the reef, so as to retard their formation and diminish the chances of an immediate rush. He presently saw that this would not take place, and leaving Shorty in charge, hurried back across the island to see what Shad was doing.

With ready resources Shad had swung the boat's head across the chute, landing his axmen on the opposite bank, where they were attacking the giant trunk at its smallest diameter. While they were doing this he was rigging the boat's cable about that end, so that as soon as they cut through the boat would swing her weight on the log and drag the end around until it fell into the chute and would be disposed of.

"Guess you won't have to burn the boat, boys," said Si to Monty and the rest, as his eyes rested satisfiedly on Shad's preparations. "Three of you'll be enough, anyway. Harry, you, Monty and Sandy can come with me. Alf, Gid and Pete will stay on the boat to set the fires, if necessary."

He wanted to hurry back, because the firing was increasing in a way that he did not like. When he got back he was startled to see how the rebels had increased. Worse than all, some bold directing officer had come up, and assumed charge. He was advancing a heavy skirmish line into the reef, and massing up the other men as they arrived.

"That's likely their Colonel," said Shorty, "and he means business."

"Can't you fetch him?" inquired Si.

"That's what I've bin trying to do, but I'm so shaky from tugging at that capstan that I can't shoot for sour apples."

Si glanced back, and saw Col. Bone-steel standing stiffly on a rock in full view from the other side.

"Better get under cover quick, Colonel. They'll get you," he called out.

"Attend to your own business, Serg't Klegg," answered the Colonel sternly. "When I desire your advice I'll ask it."

Si had enough else to engross his attention, without giving further thought to the Colonel. The rebel skirmish line began slowly working across the reef, the men running and splashing from the cover of one rock to another, while companies deployed along the other shore aided them by firing across over their heads. Shorty was taking nervous, shaky shots at the rebel Colonel, without success. Si listened anxiously to the chopping behind. It was going on as rapidly as eight excited men, relieving one another every two minutes, could do it, and Si's trained ear could tell how deep they were getting into the log.

"Seems as if I never knowed such slow work," he muttered, "and on that soft poplar, too."

The rebels soon got a fair line fully 100 yards into the reef, and their shots were coming distressfully near. Si had

already seen one of his recruits, a fresh-faced, willing young giant, sink with a bullet through his brain, and several wounded had crawled back to the boat. Shorty showed signs of being rattled by his failure to bring down the rebel Colonel.

An exclamation came from Col. Bone-steel, and he caught his left arm with his hand.

"Colonel's got a wad at last," Si thought grimly. "May learn him something. He's little loss, though."

The rebels pushed on, and some of Si's boys began to show disheartenment at not being able to stop them.

"Monty, run back to the boat, and put all the turpentine and camphene you can find on them piles o' kindling," said Si. "Harry, see that rebel Colonel over there? Try to bring him down. That'll do more to stop these fellers than anything else."

Harry, who had just reloaded, took careful aim at the rebel Colonel and fired. The Colonel staggered back, but saved himself from falling. Si led in a cheer at this success, to encourage his men.

The chopping ceased, to Si's great relief.

"They've got the log off, boys," he shouted. "We'll be all right. Just hold 'em five minutes longer."

But the rebels did not propose to be held, and began rushing across the reef.

Just then came two welcome blasts on the whistle, announcing that the way was clear, and to come back.

"Jake Dye, take the men to the left o' that white oak," shouted Si; "break back for the boat as hard as you can, and form on the upper deck, with guns loaded, to cover us. You men to the right stand ready for two minutes. Put it into

'em as lively as you can, and be ready to run back. Steady, now."

Si waited until he thought Jake Dye's detachment had gained the boat, and then shouted, "Run; everybody run!"

He and Shorty waited until they saw the rest started, and then turned and sprang back.

"Sergeant," said the Colonel, in a voice of thunder, as they came up to where he was standing rigidly, still grasping his wounded arm. "Stop that unseemly fight. Halt your men and retire them deliberately."

"O, don't be a dumb-ed Stoughton bottle," said Si angrily. "Get out o' here, while you can."

He and Shorty rushed on, but turned in a few steps and looked back, to see the Colonel dignifiedly wheel and pace leisurely after them. A squad of rebels had gotten across the reef, and in an instant more would have shot the Colonel, or taken him prisoner.

"Condemn that chunk o' military bass-wood," said Si, as he and Shorty rushed back, fired their rifles full in the face of the advancing rebels, and then siezing the Colonel by the shoulders rushed him back, with little ceremony, on to the boat, which was only waiting for him to come aboard.

Jake Dye's men, from the upper guards of the boat, opened a fire on the advancing rebels, which checked them from a too rapid advance, until the boat got out of reach.

"Another chapter of Jake Dye's pleasant rest, and the comforts of a home," shouted Shorty, as the boat steamed out into the broad river.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LORENA AT LAST GETS THROUGH THE MUSCLE SHOALS.

"I had to be dragged from the field of battle," murmured Col. Bonesteel to Shad as he passed him. "I wish you would prepare a report to me of all these operations, and including that fact, together with the one that, though I was severely wounded, early in the engagement, I did not retire from the field nor relinquish command, and that I was the last man to reach the boat."

"Very good, sir," answered Shad, saluting.

"If it hadn't been for the disgrace of having an officer captured he wouldn't 've come aboard at all," remarked Shorty, hotly. "I'd like to have him learn some sense in Libby Prison."

"Come, now, Shorty," admonished Si, "the Colonel isn't so bad. He has his little peculiarities, but he might be much worse. He's stuck on himself and the Engineers, but he's got the sand to back up his stuck-upness, which is a good deal. And then he don't bother us much, which is a heap. He lets us have our own way, and what more could you ask?"

"That's true, Si," echoed Shad. "There's a whole lot of man in the Colonel, when you get through his West Pointism."

"Well, I guess we can all stand him till we get to Chattanooga," replied Shorty.

The Colonel reappeared. He had taken off his uniform coat, and thrown his overcoat over his shoulders. His shirt-sleeve appeared soaked with blood. "I find I am worse hurt than I thought," he said very quietly, almost apologetically. "I'm bleeding quite profusely. Lieutenant, in the absence of a Surgeon I must ask you to do a little surgical duty. Take these cords and wrap them tightly around my arm, above and below the wound, to stop the flow of blood temporarily."

"Why, Colonel," exclaimed Shad, after a moment's examination, "you are hurt far worse than I dreamed. Come, go up to your room, and let me wash and dress your wound. I know considerable about the first things to do in these cases, and I can fix you up to do until we get to Chattanooga and find a Surgeon."

"No," said the Colonel, with quiet firmness, quite different from his usual pompous dignity. "It has reminded me that I must have several men hurt much worse than I am, and I should look after them before attending to myself. Do as I tell you, so that I can go and look after them."

Si, Shorty and the rest could only look at each other in open-mouthed astonishment, at the unexpected phase of the Colonel's character.

The Colonel passed on back to where the wounded had been made as comfortable as possible in the deck-hands' berths behind the boiler.

Alf. Russell, whose knowledge of surgery, slight as it was, exceeded that of any of the others, had been put in charge of the "hospital," and was alternately swelling with importance as he thought of his position, and displayed his skill in cleansing, stanching the blood and bandaging the slighter cases, and trembling with anxiety as to what he should do in the more serious ones.

Four of the six gathered there yielded readily to his limited skill, but the fifth was groaning in agony over a dislocated shoulder, and beads of sweat stood out on Alf's brow as he fumbled over the man, and tried one vain expedient after another to lessen the pain.

"Here, my man," said the Colonel gently, and it was the first time that Shorty had ever heard him say "my man" without internal anger. "I think I can relieve you. I have seen cases like that before. One of you catch hold of him and hold him firmly. Now, Corporal, grasp his arm there, and pull strongly but steadily in this direction."

Shorty did as ordered, the man yelled, but the bone slipped back into its socket, to his intense relief.

"Now, Acting Hospital Steward," said the Colonel, with a return of his old manner, "put bandages around to hold his shoulder in place, and keep them wet to check the inflammation. Use hot water frequently. That is all that can be done."

One look at the sixth case showed that he was past all surgery. The best Surgeon in the army would have been as feeble before him as young, inexperienced Alf. He had been shot through the breast, and was dying from loss of blood that could not and would not be stanching. He was a recruit, brave and enthusiastic to rashness, who had not heeded Si's injunctions to keep under cover.

"My poor boy," said the Colonel, pityingly, "you are dying."

The boy nodded his head in affirmation. Then his eyes brightened. "But we stood 'em off, and saved the boat all the same," he whispered.

"Indeed we did," answered the Colonel. "Men, you must make this man more comfortable. There is entirely too much draft and too much motion of the boat here. Carry him up into the cabin, and put him in one of those forward rooms by

the smokestacks, which are warm. Find some bedclothes in the other rooms and put on him, until he has enough to keep him comfortably warm."

"Colonel, he's bleeding so that he'll spoil everything," Alf ventured to suggest.

"Do as I tell you," roared the Colonel. "Damn the bedclothes. Suppose he does spoil them. The whole of them are not worth one minute of comfort for a man dying for his country. Do at once as I tell you."

"Queer how some pork biles," muttered Si, in the Wabash vernacular, when the Colonel had passed up-stairs, to see that his orders were strictly carried out. He was followed by Alf, to dress his own wound, after this was done. "I never dreamed that was in him."

"The Colonel's a man all the way through," said Shorty, with an oath. "Let him just put on all the frills he wants to. They become him. I like a man to put on frills. Just let me hear any snoozer cheap a word against him."

"How much further have we got to go before we get out o' these infernal shoals?" asked Si, looking apprehensively forward to where the river broadened out, and the clear water was again broken by rocks, towheads and islands.

"About 10 miles," answered Shad. "And the pilot and Jim Bainbridge says that the part up there around the mouth of Elk River is the worst of all."

"More cake-walking around the capstan, I suppose," groaned Shorty, looking at the blisters on his large hands from the previous hard work with the "spars." "I feel that I could give points to a horse in a bark-mill."

"What I'm worried about is wood," said Shad Graham. "We are getting down to where our last store is in sight, and there's no telling where we'll get any more. The pilot says that all the woodyards are on the other side, where the population seems much more numerous than kind and hospitable."

"Might take on a load of that drift-wood over there," suggested Jake Dye.

"Wouldn't make steam in Tophet," said Shad contemptuously. "Too water-soaked. Takes drift-wood two years to dry out, and this gets another soaking from the floods every six months. You could hardly burn it in a blast furnace."

"Ain't no steam, neither, such as we want," added Si, looking at the woods, "in green timber, even if we had time to stop and fell some trees. Green pine'll hiss and spit all day, without getting up heat enough to boil a tea-kettle. I've tried it too often."

"Well, we've got to do something, and that soon," said Shad. "We haven't wood enough to run her more than a couple of miles farther."

"Well, if we can't do any better," suggested Jake Dye, "we can land the boat on the other side and burn her, and foot it across the country to Sherman."

"I'd hate like smoke to haul down that flag before the rebels, after hekin' 'em so far," said Si, "and I'll give 'em one more awful big rastle before I'd get my own consent to do it."

"Before we burn her," suggested Shorty, "let's burn all her upper works to make steam. Maybe we can get to somewhere where we can find some wood."

"That would be like eating soup with a knitting-needle," answered Shad. "Most of her planks ain't more'n half-inch, and have no more heat in them than a shingle. It'd be like feeding a blast furnace with brush. You couldn't peke it in as fast as it'd burn up."

"There's some purty solid wood around," returned Shorty. "Them gang-planks, capstan-bars, spars and beams 'll make a hot fire. We might even burn up the pontoons."

"If there's a wood-pile near on the other side," suggested Si, "let's land her there, and take our chances driving the rebels back, while the wood's loaded. I'll take the job o' standing 'em off rather'n give up the boat."

"Well, we've got to make up our minds to something inside the next quarter of an hour," answered Shad, after another survey of the wood pile. "She's eating up wood like pie in this swift current."

A dugout suddenly shot out from the mouth of a little creek on the right or south shore. There was a man in it, who was paddling hard and skilfully, though he crouched low to avoid the shots sent after him from men lurking in the bushes.

"That's one of our scouts," the pilot called down. "He's trying to make the boat."

Everyone ran to that side of the boat to see what was happening. The Lorena careened, her rudder lost control, and she ran her nose into a sand-bar, at which the pilot and many others swore savagely.

"Come, boys," called out Shad Graham, starting to unshackle the spar, "pay for your uncontrollable curiosity by taking a cakewalk around the capstan."

"It comes high, but you would have it," added Shorty, picking up a capstan bar, and putting in the socket. "Everybody with a will now. Let us see what kind o' beef they grow out in Injianny."

Then began a toilsome strain to pry and pull the Lorena over the bar. In the meanwhile the man in the canoe, though the number of men shooting at him increased, reached the boat and came aboard. Si pulled his canoe up on the deck.

"Let it go," said the scout. "I don't want it any more. You can set me on the other side, and that's all I want."

"Don't know about setting you on the other side," answered Si grimly, "till we get out of here. Moreover, it's made of wood, and wood's what we want more'n anything else, just now, even if it hain't more'n a water-soaked poplar dugout."

"I'm Jim Preston, one of Sherman's secret service men," the scout explained to Shad. "Sherman sent me out from Kingstou to keep track of Hood's main army, but I got tangled up with them, and haven't been able to get away before. I went with Lee's Corps, because I had to many acquaintances in Stewart's and Cheatham's Corps, and you know acquaintances are the most dangerous thing a spy can have. So I got' throwed clear over here, and have been waiting a chance to get across the river. I've been watching your boat all the way from Florence. I could see your flag above the trees, and I've been waiting for you to come near. Say, you ought to pull that flag down. It gives your movements away to the rebels, and they're swarming thicker'n pig tracks in a barnyard all 'round here."

"The flag stays up as long as we do," said Shad, decisively, "though I don't know as we need to hang it so high as to signal the rebels all over northern Alabama."

"Let her fly just where she is, Shad," said Si. "Mebbe if we'd thought about it when we started out we wouldn't 've swung it so high, but now that she's up there let her stay. Don't lower her an inch. We'll take whatever comes, and if we can't stand it we'll lump it."

After some further conversation the scout said: "I'm awful glad to know you've got the pontoon supplies aboard. I happen to know that Sherman's awfully anxious to get them, and is in fact waiting for them. I know that there's been a good deal of telegraphing along the railroad for them. Sherman's Chief Engineer was awfully afraid they'd be cut off somewhere or burned up in some wreck. He sent my partner, Bill Ruckle, up over the road to hunt them up."

"Well, we'll get them through if it is in the cards."

"All right," returned the scout. "I hope you will, but it looks now as if the cards was stacked against you. Too bad, for Sherman needs that pontoon stuff awful-ly."

Si broke off the conversation to help the men straining at the capstan bars to get the Lorena off the bars.

"Dumb her, she sticks to that sandbank like a mortgage to an Indiana farm," grumbled Si, in the intervals of yelling to the boys to push their best.

"I believe she has roots that grow down into the mud," commented Shorty, pausing after a strenuous effort to take in about a hog's head full of air, to replace what he had violently expended.

"I believe she's an old hen that wants to set," remarked Monty, "and thinks that a sandbank's her nest."

There was need of their utmost efforts, for not only was her wood rapidly disappearing, but while they were tugging at the spars, they could see the rebels passing to the islands ahead, and announcing their progress to their friends, by shots from time to time, at the boat.

"Say, Zeke," called out a voice from a little wooded island that lay directly ahead. "There's no use o' yo'uns working so nautily thar. Yo'uns's done kotched, like gilly in molasses. Y're a pilot, and oderer know hit. Y're on the Blue Water bar—no sand, but blue clay, that'll hold yo' like glue."

"Hello, that thar's Smoot Jenkins a-hollerin'," said Jim Bainbridge, with sudden interest. "The White Shoals crowd seems to've come home ter roost, jest like the crows an' wild geese. Smoot's the next orneriest man ter Hoss Bullock on the Shoals. But he's right about the blue clay."

"Of course he's right," answered the pilot, gloomily. "Didn't I know it all the time?"

"Jest let yer men rest," continued Mr. Smoot Jenkins. "I'm gittin' ready ter take 'em an' yer boat in. I'm loadin' men enough on flatboats back hyah ter eat yo'uns up. Ef yo' show fight, we'uns'll be along presently. Just let yer men rest. They 'uns needn't bother 'bout yer boat any more. She's mine. I'll look out fer her an' yo'uns, too."

"I can see them through the brush, a-ting onto the flatboats back there," exclaimed Jake Dye. "Let's set fire to the boat and jump her. We can get away in these pontoons."

"Wait a few minutes," said Si. "I believe that the hair of the dog's good for his bite. We stove this boat on to this mud bar by all running to one side. Let's get her off by running to the other side."

He formed the boys all on the starboard side, and at the command they rushed tumultuously over to the larboard. The effect was immediately perceptible.

"Say, that's the ticket," called down the pilot. "You started her then. Do it again."

They repeated their maneuver three times, and could feel the boat loosening every time. At their fourth rush her bottom let go of the tenacious blue mud, and she began floating backward, just as 300 or 400 rebels came around the islands in flatboats, jaboats, rafts, in skiffs and canoes, and whatever else would float and carry them. They yelled fiercely, and the boys yelled back defiance. Every stick of the Lorena's wood had gone into her furnaces, and she had not steam enough left to stem the current.

"Well, we can at least float as fast as they can," said Shad. "Jake, get your men up on the cabin deck, and sharpshoot at those fellows in canoes and skiffs, to keep them from coming too close."

Si and Shorty attacked with axes the gangways and other bits of solid timber that could be readily spared, and got them into shape to put in the furnaces.

The steam ran up, the Lorena gathered headway and started back upstream, to the great terror of the rebels. Those in skiffs and canoes made frantic haste to paddle out of the way into shallow water,

where she could not reach them. The largest flatboat was reached and crushed into, most of the men jumping into the water to save themselves while the boys fired at those in the more distant boats.

"Don't go any further up, Zeke," warned Jim. "That's a nest o' them just

they saw a cabin and a small clearing. The cabin was one of the usual log-pens, covered with split oak and chestnut clapboards, held in place by poles and stones. Near it was a smaller pen, used as a corn-crib, meat-house and general depository. The clearing was surrounded by a rude



"SHE BEGAN FLOATING JUST AS 300 OR 400 REBELS CAME AROUND THE ISLAND.

ahead. Turn while yo' got steam, an' scoot over ter the t'other side o' that island. They can't reach yo' thar."

Having finished up the heavier timbers handy, Si and the rest were engaged in tearing off the side planking and shoving it under the boilers. But it was light and of little heating power, disappearing almost as fast as they could push it in. Still, they continued to make headway, and presently came around a point upon which

fence, made of logs, stumps and limbs taken from the drift-wood.

"That's Smoot Jenkins's place," remarked Jim Bainbridge. "The feller that's after us so hot and heavy. He hain't been living in hit, though, sence he jined the army."

"There's wood for us," said Si and Shorty in the same breath. "Land the boat, Shad."

Fortunately the water was deep enough

to let the Lorena come squarely up against the bank. Jake Dye, with 10 men, ran forward into the woods to cover the operation from surprise and attack, while Si and the rest in an incredibly short time tore down the house and outbuilding and carried the materials of which it was built, the rude tables and stools which served as furniture, and also the fence around the garden-patch clearing on to the boat. As they were clearing the spot of the last chunk that would burn they heard the voice of Smoot Jinkins from the next island.

"Fore God, Yanks, I allers knowed yo' wuz the all-firedst thieves that ever lived, but I never dreamed that yo'uns 'd done steal a man's house an' garden right afore his own eyes. Don't fer marey's sake, take away the only home I got fer my ole woman an' chillen."

"We'll leave you the ground. You ought to be mighty glad o' that, you old buzzard of a guerrilla. It's more'n you deserve," Shorty shouted back, as they all came aboard, and the Lorena, with a full head of steam, sped up the river.

"Well," remarked Si, looking gleefully over the fine stock of fuel, "we couldn't 've done much better at a regular woodyard. It's all good and dry, and chopping it up will make enough exercise to give us an appetite for our rations. But this is a new trick in stealing, to carry off a man's house and barn, furniture and fences at one swipe. The war's a great thing. By the time it ends I expect we'll know how to just take a man's quarter-section right from under him, and put it inside our own fences. I won't let an old soldier settle within 10 miles of me. I'll have to chain my apple-trees down and rivet my well to the Chinese Wall."

"You needn't look out for the other fellers, Si. The other fellers'll have to look out for you, from the way you've developed from the innocent Sunday-school scholar that I first knowed," remarked Shorty.

"Pilot, land on the north side, at the first good stopping-place," said the scout, "and put me ashore."

"Why, Jim," said Shad in surprise, "come right along with us. We're going to Chattanooga, and we'll get you there easier'n than any other way."

"No," answered the scout dreamily. "I like a moderate amount of excitement and adventure as well as any other man. But I think I'll lead a calmer life, and have more time for meditation, to make my way on foot through the rebels to the railroad, and then chance the guerrillas on to Chattanooga. I like you fellers, but you are rather tumultuous for steady company. The rebels up there on the Elk River Shoals are thicker'n bees 'round a sugar hogshead, and you'll never get this boat through in the Almighty's world."

"So long, Jim. The rebels will have to do a better job of stopping than they've put up yet to get away with us," said Si

as a good-by when the scout jumped ashore.

A great shouting and yelling greeted their ears as they came around the point to Lamb's Ferry. They saw the river full of men and horses. Some of the men were wading and leading their horses, some were holding on to their horses' tails, and as the animals swam through the deep water some were sitting in their saddles as the horses swam across.

"It's the rebel cavalry crossing," said Si. "Let's bulge right on through 'em. They can't do nothing. They've got enough else to tend to, now, without shooting. Don't shoot at the fellers in the water, boys. That's agin the game laws. Shoot at them on the bank."

The pilot whistled a shrill blast of rage and threatening, and ringing for the engineer to give her all the steam he had, dashed through the narrow open space of the Ferry. The boys on the boat banged away rapidly at the rebels on either shore, and the latter replied with vastly more noise than damage.

Looking back the boys could see the rebels and their horses struggling with the great waves thrown up by the Lorena's wheel in the narrow river.

Black night was now coming on, with every promise of a heavy rain. The boys grew apprehensive. Would they not have to stop? How could the pilot see to run?

"We'll go right ahead," said the pilot to Shad. "I'd rather run in the night than in the day. Less danger. Go down and put out all the lights, and hang blankets up in front of the furnaces, so the fires won't show, and we'll take the main channel and run right by them, whatever they've got. I've been afraid they've batteries somewhere to rake the main channel, but we'll chance that better in the dark than in the light. Besides, we've Jim Bainbridge, who's got cat's eyes, and can see better at night than in the daytime."

Smoot Jinkin's bedstead, tables, stools, clapboards, logs and poles were really much better fuel than the Lorena was used to having. They were all of good timber and well seasoned. They burned merrily under the boilers, and made a lively steam that sent her forward at a good gait.

But it was weary going all the same. The rain came down in sheets, and the darkness was like ink. But the pilot, with Jim Bainbridge at his side in the little glass cabin, pushed stolidly forward into the impenetrable darkness, holding the wheel with a grip of iron at one instant, and whirling it around with nervous energy at another, to meet or avoid something which the untrained eyes below them could see as little as things that were in the next County.

But in spite of Jim's cat-like eyes and Zeke's skill, the boat would strike bars, the spars would have to be rigged in the darkness and the blinding rain, and the boys tramp laboriously around the cap-

stan, until the Lorena was dragged into deeper water.

"Pitch in, boys," Si would say, as cheerily as he could. "Only five miles more to deep water, and we want to get out of this tangle, and past a rebel battery at the head of the Shoals before daylight. One more pull together may make it. This may be the last time."

But there were a great many "last times," and the five miles stretched out as never before in Si's memory of weary marching.

The never-discouraged Shorty took occasion from time to time to remind Jake Dye of his promise of a pleasant, easy trip with all the comforts of a home.

They were stimulated constantly by seeing the smoldering campfires of the rebels along the south bank, which warned them of what they might expect if daylight found them in that neighborhood.

Finally, just as dawn appeared, and it seemed that they must all drop from exhaustion, the pilot cheered them with the announcement that they had at length passed the last island at the head of the Elk River Shoals, and were in clear, deep water. All they had to fear now was a battery, which the rebels had established on the south bank.

"I'm in hopes," said the pilot, who looked as weary and hollow-eyed as the rest, "that that awful rain's drowned 'em out, and we can get past before they're awake."

A shot from a picket on the bank quickly dispelled this hope, and through the watery mist they could see the rebels gathering around a red bank in which their

guns were emplaced. They spashed around in the mud and water filling the excavation for the guns, and seemed to have difficulty in getting a piece loaded. The Lorena sped on, but even her engine seemed tired with the long night's severe strain.

When the gun was fired a shell whistled across a hundred yards in front of the Lorena.

"Too high, as well as not a good line-shot," said Shad. "They'll have to do lots better than that, and mighty quick, too, or we'll be out of range. Make 'em poke up the fires there, Si. Throw in some o' that pitch pine."

At the sound of the cannon a low, black gunboat shot out from the mouth of a creek to the right, where she had been lying concealed, and made directly for them.

"Rebel or Yank?" asked Shad nervously, seeing that she hoisted no flag. "If rebel, we're goners. If Yank, we're all right. Shake out the flag there, and show them who we are. If we have to go down we'll go with our colors flying."

The flag, surcharged with water, was hanging against the staff like a rope. Shorty ran to the halyards, worked them up and down, shook some of the water out, and showed the blue field with stars, and some of the stripes. A cheer went up from the gunboat, and at the same instant her heavy 32-pounders boomed out, and their shells threw up a cloud of mud and water in the rebel battery.

"She was just laying for that battery," yelled Si, in chorus with the cheers that rose from all the wearied boys.

CHAPTER VIII.

INCIDENTS OF THE TRIP TO CHATTANOOGA.

The gunboat's heavy 32-pounders speedily settled the fight held guns which the rebels had in battery.

"It's camp-kettles against tin cups," remarked Si, watching the shells fired from the steady platform of the gunboat's deck, with sure aim, land directly in the emplacement and send up in the shower of mud and water fragments of the gun-carriages and limbs of men. "The rebels are boring with gimlets and our fellows with a big auger. I guess that dog's cured o' sucking aigs."

"I never enjoyed having the rebels throw camp-kettles at us," added Shorty, "but it seems real funny to see a gunboat doing it to them. Here's your gunboat. Hurrah for the gunboats!"

Down from the direction of Decatur came at full speed a small tug with a field piece mounted in her bow. She was commanded by an airy young Lieutenant, who was desperately eager to take a hand in the controversy and win favorable mention, if not a brevet. He was correspondingly disappointed to find the thing over before his arrival. He must do something, and he hailed the queer-looking craft sternly:

"Boat, ahoy! Who are you? Come to at once or I'll blow you out of water."

The pilot slowed down and Shad answered:

"The United States transport Lorena. Bound for Chattanooga."

"What a United States transport?" returned the Lieutenant scornfully, as he surveyed the wreck of Smott Jenkins' cabin coveying the decks, and the boat's skeleton sides, from which the sheathing had been torn. "Looks more like a country sawmill that's run away with a cross-roads school-house."

The boat's crew laughed loudly at their commander's wit.

"You mill-pond sailors, you canal-boat marines," shouted Shorty angrily, "if you and your little two-for-a-cent brevet gunboat had been through one-tenth part what we have, you'd 'a' been dead—that's all."

"Stop your engines and come to, there," repeated the Lieutenant, "or I'll sink you."

"What! With that condemned old brass shotgun," Si contemptuously inquired, alluding to the six-pounder in the bow. "You couldn't wake us if we was asleep with that old smoothbore. You couldn't knock a hen off her nest."

"We can't stop our engines," answered Shad. "The current's too swift. We'll go onto a bar."

The mere mention of a bar made all the

sore-handed, aching, strained boys groan painfully.

"Come, no subterfuges with me," shouted the Lieutenant, who was determined that the Lorena should be his prize, if he could make it so. "I'm not to be trifled with. Stop your engines at once, or I'll fire into you."

"Run over the whippersnapper, Shad," said Si, irritably, "and let's get somewhere where we can rest before we drop in our tracks."

But the pilot, much more in awe of gunboat officers, had already stopped the engines and the Lorena began to drift backward.

"Keep your men below there, sir," commanded the Lieutenant, approaching cautiously, with a man holding taut the lanyard of his gun, ready to fire at the instant. "Keep your men below till I look you over. Who are you, sir, and where did you come from?"

"I'm Acting Lieutenant Graham"—

"Acting Lieutenant," repeated the Lieutenant, scornfully. "Anybody can be an Acting Lieutenant. Where did you come from?"

"We came up through the Shoals. Have had a terrible time."

"Come up through the Shoals? That's ridiculous on the face of it. No boat can get through the Shoals. They're full of rebels. Hood's whole army is crossing down there."

"So we found out," said Shad quietly.

"Your story don't go at all, sir. It's false on the very face of it. You are rebels, who have stolen that boat and trying to make a sneak on us. Everything about you shows it. Haul down that flag at once, sir, or I'll put a shot through you."

"You can just bang away," returned Shad, defiantly. "That's our flag and we don't haul it down for any body."

"Keep your men down there, I tell you, sir," shouted the Lieutenant, as the boys, stirred up by the colloquy, began swarming forward, guns in hand.

"Say, stop your dumber foolishness," pleaded Si, anxiously, "and let us go ahead. We'll be back on that bar in a minute, and then have to work till our eyeballs pop to get off. If you had half sense you could see that we're Union."

"I order you once more to haul down that flag," said the Lieutenant, looking meaningly at the man with the lanyard. "I shall not speak again."

The noisy conversation had awakened the Colonel, who came out on deck with his

coat thrown on over his wounded arm. He looked around, took in the situation, and noted the young Lieutenant and his threatening cannon. He immediately swelled to the full dimensions of a Colonel of Engineers.

"Who is this person, Lieutenant?" he inquired of Shad, with a contemptuous flip of his thumb toward the Lieutenant, his petty gunboat, and his shining six-pounder. "And what business is he trying to transact with you?"

"He is a Lieutenant of the Navy, sir, and he's halted us, and will not allow us to go ahead, and we are afraid, sir, of drifting onto a bar. He seems to think we are rebels," answered Shad, respectfully saluting.

"The devil he does," roared the Colonel. "That's just about as much sense as they are putting into the heads of the whipsters they're graduating from West Point and Annapolis now-a-days. All the brains they have run to dancing and 5 o'clock teas. Go ahead, sir. Pay no attention to him. When I want this boat stopped, I'll give you orders, sir."

Then to the Lieutenant:

"Look here, young man, I don't know who you are."

"I'm Lieutenant Wil"—began the officer, with great dignity, but still a little awed.

"I don't care what your confounded name is," broke in the Colonel, getting fiercer with every word. It had been a long time since he had skinned anybody and much acrimony had accumulated. "It's perfectly indifferent to me, sir, whether you're named Smith, or Jones, or Brown. I only know that you are a confounded, impudent, impertinent, interfering coxcomb, sir. I am Colonel Bonesteel, sir, of the United States Engineers, in command of this transport and of this expedition, sir; yes, sir, this expedition."

The Colonel swelled up still bigger at the discovery of this important designation for his command.

"My name is much more important to you, sir, than yours is to me, as you will find, to your sorrow, sir. What do you mean, sir, by the unspeakable impudence of stopping my boat on the broad river?"

"I thought, Colonel"—the Lieutenant began.

"You thought, did you?" roared the Colonel. "You mean you thought you thought. You thought, did you? What the devil have you got to think with. I'd like to know? Get out of my way with that cockle shell, or I'll run over you and save the Government the expense of longer supporting such a blockhead. The idea of you, sir, a paltry little Lieutenant, the latest hatching from an incubator of snobs and fops, a pin-feather gosling from Mother Goose's nursery on the Chesapeake, a little web-foot that's scarcely gotten away from his blackboard and his copybooks, should have the unparalleled impudence, the audacious effrontery, the

reckless audacity, to get in the way of a regular expedition, on a United States transport, led by a Colonel of Engineers, commanding veteran troops, victors in a score of hard-fought battles, such as you never dreamed of—all these to be stopped by a callow, verdant, half-baked, beardless, unlicked, shallow, inexperienced, presumptuous, impertinent, self-conceited, overweeningly impudent cub, who!"

But the Lieutenant waited to hear no more. He ordered his boat about and darted out of range.

"Come back, confound you," shouted the Colonel. "I've got something more to say to you."

"Great Jehosephat!" murmured Shorty, admiringly. "I'd like to go to West Point, just to learn how to cuss. And apparently the Colonel wasn't half through."

"The Colonel's wound will feel better now, since he's got that out of his system," remarked Shad.

"My men," said the Colonel, coming up to Shad presently, and speaking in a tone of the utmost sympathy and consideration, "must be completely worn out by their frightful exertions. They're positively the noblest men alive. They surprised me every minute. I never saw men act so before."

"That's because he haint been with the 200th Injanny Volunteers," remarked Si to Shorty.

"What can I do for them, to show my appreciation?" continued the Colonel.

"Better tell them so, sir. Make a little speech to them. That's all they want. They don't care for anything else."

"That would be quite irregular. Very volunteer-like. No Regular officer ever makes stump speeches to his men."

"As you think best, Colonel," said Shad deferentially. "But as you have discovered, volunteer soldiers are quite different from Regulars. I think that you can get much more out of them than you can from Regulars, and you have to handle them different."

"Lieutenant, I believe you are right. I never would have dreamed it before this trip. They are certainly different from the men we've been getting in the Regular Army. They seem to be made of iron and have hearts of oak. I think I should be justified in doing what you suggest."

"You certainly would, Colonel."

"The idea," said the Colonel, hesitating a little, "of an officer of my rank making a stump speech to his men, just like one of these political fellows. Why, General Grant or General Thomas never"—

"General Sherman, Colonel," interposed Shad, "likes nothing better than to get a crowd of his men around and give them a good talk."

"Very well, then, assemble the men about the capstan there, and I'll speak to them briefly."

It was a wofully tired, worked-out lot of boys that gathered forward about the capstan. The moment that they felt that



"YOU CAN BUY ANOTHER HOUSE SOMEWHERE," SAID SL.

they had gained a position of comparative safety, they realized how terribly exhausting their struggles had been and they could scarcely drag one foot after another, and they looked all that they felt.

"I'm afraid you won't have a very en-

thusiastic audience, Colonel," Shad ventured to suggest. "They're too puffed out to even cheer, which a soldier generally can do as long as he is alive."

"Poor fellows, I don't wonder," said the Colonel, mounting the capstan. "Men, I

want to express the highest thanks of myself, and the Engineer Corps, and the War Department, which I represent, for the splendid manner in which you have conducted yourselves through the trying ordeal."

"Hooray! Hooray for the Colonel!" said the boys, trying to force their weary voices into a cheer.

"You have done splendidly, from first to last. No men could have done better. I doubt if any others could have done as well. I am going to embody it all in my report to the War Department. I am going to urgently recommend Graham, Klegg, Dye and Elliott for commissions!"

"Hooray! Hooray! Hooray! Tiger!" shouted the boys with far more animation than before. "Bully for you. That's the ticket. They deserve it."

"And as for the rest of you," continued the Colonel, "fortunately I have the authority to show my appreciation of your services in a substantial way. I think you have done enough to entitle you to a long rest. As soon as we arrive at Chattanooga, I am going to secure furloughs for all of you."

The Colonel expected that this would arouse the wild enthusiasm of his hearers. But, to his amazement, they shouted back:

"We don't want no furloughs. We want to get to Sherman. That's what we've been tryin' to do all the time."

"I declare, I can't understand such men," said the Colonel, as, after a few more compliments, he descended from the capstan and retired to his room, followed by Shad. "I think it is the first time in the military history of the world that soldiers have refused furloughs, and especially men in the condition of these."

They only stopped long enough at Decatur to have a surgeon attend to the wounds of the Colonel and the others, bury their dead comrade in the soldiers' cemetery, and take on a new pilot, more familiar with the Upper Tennessee, and who would relieve from constant duty the one who had brought them thus far. The Surgeon urged the Colonel and the other wounded to go ashore and remain in the hospital. The boys absolutely refused to leave the boat or go to the hospital, and the Colonel got on his high horse at once at the thought of deserting his "expedition," no matter how much his wound needed attention.

"Thank heavens, you have the pontoons," said an Aide, with whom Shad talked. "Sherman's been stewing around about them for about a month now. You know how the Old Man is. He'll get a thing in his head and never stop fussing until he accomplishes it. I really believe that he's been thinking more about these pontoons than about Hood's Army, and he'll never be happy until he gets them. That's his way."

"Pontoons are mighty necessary things," remarked Shad, who did not propose to be undervalued.

"O, yes; but armies have got along, pretty well without them," returned the Aide, much to Shad's displeasure.

"Are you going to leave us here, Mr. Bainbridge?" Shad inquired.

"O, I hardly reckon not," drawled Jim, reflectively. "Home haint so durned attractive as hit war afore I drapt Ole Hoss Bullock. He's got a powerful sight o' kin that never did banker arter me, an' now they 'uns 'll be layin' awake nights ter git the drap on me. Besides, my ole woman's probably run away agin with Sim Booze, who belongs ter the same rijimint with Hoss Bullock. He's an ole spark o' her'n, and she runs away with him every chance she gits. Wuss'n all, I'm sho' the ruckshon that's bin kicked up down that-a-way has etarnally spiled the perch fishin' ter this season. I wuz moultly afeared hit would the minnit I knowed Hood's Army wuz comin'. Yer grub's as good as rry I ever had, an' I done reckon I'll go on with you'ns up as fur as the Sequatchie, whar the fishin' haint bin spiled. That's allers good fishin' this time o' year in the Sequatchie. I've a own cousin up thar that I calkerlate ter swap some o' this hyah coffee ter fer the best coon dog in the Cumberland Mountains. I'll have no eend o' fun hunting coons with him arter perch quit bitin'."

"Glad to have you along with us," answered Si. "Better enlist regularly."

"What an' git drug away from the Tennessee River? Nary. Wouldn't go ten mile from the Tennessee fer ary army on the everlastin' airth. Nary, sir."

About 50 miles from Decatur, after they had left the last sign of the rebels investing the town far behind, they saw on the south bank a tall slip of a girl actively hailing them with her sunbonnet. Beside her stood another younger girl, and behind them, on a chunk, beneath a spreading sycamore, sat a gaunt, tall woman, with skin the color of corn fodder. A limp sunbonnet, minus its pasteboard slats, hung on the back of her wisp of knotted yellow hair, and she had a gourd of snuff in her hand, into which she poked a chewed stick and then rubbed it on her teeth. All three were attired in linsay gowns, cut almost as skimp and straight as pantaloons legs. None had a stitch on her to spare. Around them yelped several mongrel curs, with ribs showing like the front of a washboard.

"Hello! there. What do you want?" called the pilot, as the boat came within a few yards of the bank.

"We'uns want you'ns ter take we'uns ter Chattynoogy," called out the mother of the girls. "We'uns is obleeged ter go thar. We'uns 'll starve if we'uns don't. We'uns haint had nothing ter eat fer two days, an' look at them dogs. We'uns 've bin waitin' hyah two hull days fer a boat ter take we'uns ter Chattynoogy. Two hull days. Look at them dogs."

"We can give you something to eat," said Si, "without taking you to Chattynoogy, if that's all you want."

"No; but you'ns must take we'uns ter

Chattanooga, too. We'uns must have some place ter stay whar we'uns kin git something ter eat reg'lar, an' something fer the dogs. Jist look at them dogs. The Yankees is g'inin' out rations in Chattanooga, an' that's whar we'uns must go. We'uns 've bin stayin' with our kinfolks up on Mulberry Fork, but the Confederits come along like seven-year locusts, an' nachevul'y et they'uns out o' house an' home, an' left nothin' fer nobody, nor the dogs. Jist look at them dogs."

"Confound the dogs. Let 'em starve. Country'd be a mighty sight better off if several millions of 'em were dead. We'll give you victuals for yourselves, but none for them worthless hounds."

"But yo'uns must shore take we'uns ter Chattanooga," wailed the elder woman. "We'uns haint nowhar else on airth ter go ter keep from starving. 'Deed we'uns haint. We'uns got kinfolks in Chattanooga that'll take keer o' we'uns. We'uns 've bin sleepin' under this sycamore two nights now. We'uns an' the dogs."

"Chattanooga's a bad place for them to go," said Shad, "but it's un-Christian to leave them there to starve under that tree. They can't be worse off anywhere else." Come aboard, madam, and bring your girls, but leave your dogs."

"O, no; we'uns can't do without our dogs," said the woman, obeying with alacrity. "Nary a time. How on airth would we git along?"

Time was too valuable for discussion. The dogs were all aboard sooner than the women were.

The women were taken back to the kitchen and given a supply of food, which they devoured ravenously. They would greedily munch out a few enormous mouthfuls from a piece of bread or meat, and then throw the remainder to the famished dogs, which snapped and snarled and fought for the bits. And there seemed no limit to the coffee the women drank.

"I've heard of people being holler clear to their toes," remarked Si. "I've felt that way myself. But I can't for the life of me make out whar that old woman and girls are stowing all the grub they're laying in. They've already et more'n you could put in a two-bushel bag, and you could pull a two-bushel bag over any two of them together, and almost have room for the oiber."

There came an abatement of their appetites at last, however, and the girl who had done the hailing walked forward, with a tin cup of coffee in one hand and bread and meat in the other, to take a survey of the boat and the passing shores.

"O, mam," she shouted. "Look here. Here's the funniest beard. It's jist like the door on our house down thar on the Shoals, whar we lived afo' the wah. An' laws-a-massy, if thar haint a stool jist like Eetsy's."

Si and Shorty exchanged looks of consternation.

"Land's sake," echoed the woman, coming forward and surveying the remainder of the wreck of Smoot Jenkins's cabin, strewn around upon the deck. "If thar haint our house, or haint ghost. That's the very logs, with the mark on one o' yer father's head, whar he used ter lean back as he sot afo' the fire an' smoked, an' played the fiddle, an' gassed an' tied ter the neighbors. An' sakes alive, that's my ole bread bowl an' wooden spoon. Whar in the world did you'ns come across 'em?"

"Howdy, Mis' Jenkins," drawled Jim Bainbridge, who had in the meantime waked up and was shuffling back toward the kitchen for a fresh supply of food. "Howdy, Nance? Howdy, Bets? How's Smoot?"

"Great Scott! what have we done, Shorty?" gasped Si. "Taken those women's house and home?"

"O, well; they haint been living in it for a long time, according to their own story," answered Shorty. "We aint responsible for their camping out under a tree. Their own people turned 'em out to shift for themselves."

"But what can we do? We ought to do something for them."

"I'll tell what let's do. Let's take up a collection for 'em. I'll chip in \$10."

"I'll put in another."

"Well, for \$20 they can buy another house enough sight better than their's. Twenty dollars ought to buy a whole settlement of such snacks."

Most of the other boys contributed a little to the fund, making quite a little wad of greenbacks, which Si took up to Mrs. Smoot Jenkins and presented to her, saying:

"Madam, the necessities of war compelled us to take your house for wood for the boat. We're awfully sorry, but it had to be done, and we've taken up a collection with which you can buy another house somewhere that'll be just as good. Here's the money."

The woman's faded blue eyes lightened up as she gazed on the pile of bills in her lap, and she exclaimed:

"Land's sake, what a heap o' money! Yankee money, too! Didn't know thar wuz so much in the world afo'. Never seed but two bills afo', an' them the man sot as much store by as his eyes. And all fer that ole cabin. 'Twas jist alive with chinchies, anyhow."

Si and Shorty nervously felt in their clothes.

"Never seed sich a house fer chinchies. Jist alive with 'em. Think them dod-gasted pigeons use'er bring 'em. Tell yer what, gals, jist as soon's we git ter Chattanooga, we'll buy each one of us one o' them jinnwine Yankee hoopskirts that we'uns 've bin wantin' so long. My, won't we'uns make some o' the other women feel sick? I reckon not! An' we'uns 'll buy a sheep fer the dogs ter eat."

CHAPTER IX.

THE BOYS START FOR ATLANTA.

When the Lorena had passed Bridgeport, Ala., and was approaching the mouth of the Squatchie, Jim Bainbridge uncurled himself from around the smoke-stack, and began to make preparations for going ashore.

"Awful sorry to have you leave us, Mr. Bainbridge," said Shad, bringing up to him a sack containing twice as much coffee as the pilot had promised. "You have been the greatest possible help to us. In fact, I do not see how we should have ever got through without you."

"That's so," echoed Si, heartily. "We never could've brung the boat through without your help. You were like the 10 fingers—always on hand when wanted."

"Come along with us, Jim," urged Shorty. "Sherman 'll reward you by a brevet of some kind—brevet Admiral of the army's fleet of prairie schooners, or brevet Commodore of the Fourteenth Corps' ammunition squadron. You don't know what fun it is to manuver a fleet of prairie schooners in a six-mule breeze. Beats steamboating all holler. Don't have to cut wood nor heave on the capstan. All you've got to do is to ride around and cuss. The infantry and the mules, mainly the infantry, do all the rest."

"I'd like powerful well ter go along with yer," drawled Jim; "fer a likelier passel o' gentlemen I never seed. Yo'uns is all perfect gentlemen. Thar haint a stuck-up one among you all; yo'uns don't take no sass from nobody, an' a sprier crowd with their wepuns don't breathe. Ef yo'uns wuz gwine ter run up an' down the Tennessee I'd stay with yo'uns till the last dog was hung. If yo'uns want ter turn 'round an' go right back through the Shoals I'll go with yo'uns, an' gladly."

"Thanks, awfully," interjected Shorty. "But no more of it in mine. I'm giddy yet from bark-mill-horsing around that capstan. I went round it enough to've wound up the war."

"But I won't go 10 mile from the Tennessee, on no airthly account," continued Bainbridge. "I wuz born on hit, I've done lived on hit all my life, an' I'll die on hit when my time comes. But I 'low ter have a heap o' fishin' an' coon-huntin' afore then. I've already done had more fun at that than any other man in the country, an' I aint more'n half through. I reckon I'll hang up 'round the Squatchie till arter Chrissmus at least. Thar won't be nothin' fur me down at the Shoals. Hood's army has skeered away all the fish, an' done ef up everything that goes on four

legs. Much obleeged ter yo', gents, fer all this grub yo've give me. Hit'll last me a long while, mebbe till I see yo'uns agin. If yo'uns ever come my way agin, give me a cail. So long, gents."

He labored ashore under all the rations he could possibly carry. It was not until the boat was swinging out again that Mrs. Jenkins suddenly discovered that in some mysterious way he had taken one of her dogs with him, and she set up a shriek of anger and dismay.

"Hi, yo' wuthless runnygade, Jim Bainbridge," she yelled, as soon as she could free her mouth from the snuff-stick, "what air yo' totin' off my best coon-dog fur? Yo' po', ornery, low-down, white nigger trash; would yo' steal a lady's boss-dog, right afore her own eyes? Bring that thar hound right back hyah, this very minnit, or I'll done tell Smoot on yo', an' he'll make yer heels break yore varmint neck when he ketches yo'. Bring him back hyah, I done tell yo'; if yo' know what's good fer yo'."

But Jim humped his bag of provisions further up on his shoulders, and walked stolidly on, with the dog following close behind.

"Make him bring that ere dog back, Mister Captain," she sternly demanded of Si. "Shoot him if he don't."

"Searcely," remarked Si. "Let him take all the dogs he wants. Wish he'd taken the rest."

"Well, then, I'll shoot him," she said, furiously, snatching up a musket. Evidently she was no stranger to guns, and handled it in a way that boded trouble for Bainbridge, had not Shorty wrested it from her grasp.

"O, what'll Smoot say when he comes home from the war?" she wailed. "His heart'll be done broke, and he'll just skim me alive fer not takin' better keer o' that thar hound. I didn't mind hit so much when Sal run off with a teamster, an' Lize with a hoss-doctor. He couldn't blame me fer that, fer gals is as sho' ter skeet out as bees is ter swarm, an' he didn't think so much on them, nohow. They leaned ter be peart, an' sassy, an' no 'count jinerally, arter they growed up. But I orter tuck good keer o' the dog, no matter what happened. The country's full o' gals like Sal an' Lize, but thar haint another sich a dog fer coons as Punk on the hull Tennessee River. 'Deed thar haint. The last words Smoot said ter me when he went away wuz that if I vallered my life ter take keer o' Punk

while he was off fountin' fer our liberties. We must lose our liberties, but if I lost Punk he'd sho'ly bust my head when he got back. An' now Punk's gone, arter all my worritin' over him. Yo' must put me right ashore till I foller up Jim Bainbridge, an' git Punk back. Put me right ashore."

"Nonsense," said Si. "We haint no time to fool around landing. We're in a hurry to get to Chattanooga and Sherman. The army's waiting for us. We wouldn't stop for all the dogs in the kingdom, and especially for as mangy a lick-skillet as that one."

"If yo' don't stop the boat an' put me off this livin' minnit," said Mrs. Jenkins, "I'll done throw a fit, an' make yo' wish yo' had."

"Throw a fit or a misfit," said Si, irritably. "Throw anything you dumberd please, except throw away our time. This boat simply can't stop till we get to Chattanooga. That's all there is of it."

Shorty looked apprehensive. He remembered his experience with the woman on the banks of Elk River, not far away as the crow flies.

The woman's eyes suddenly seemed starting from her head; she began to froth at the mouth, and her limbs to twitch and contort. Presently she fell to the deck in apparent mental agony, with her daughters screaming. Si ran for Alf Russel, but that callow medie's art, which reveled in gunshot wounds and maully maladies, swooned at the thought of anything so awfully mysterious as a woman, and one in convulsions. Alf turned so pale at the sight that they thought he was going to faint, and Si hurried him away again.

All was wild commotion on the deck— incomparably more excitement than had been occasioned by all their previous exciting experiences. The girls shrieked and wailed, the dogs howled, Pete and Sandy burst into uncontrollable tears, and some of the young recruits acted as if they would jump off the boat. Those who were not too awe-struck to speak offered all manner of suggestions based on what they had seen their mothers do to women suffering from anything from tight stays and hysterics to dropsy, but no one had the courage to go near Mrs. Smoot Jenkins or carry any of the propositions into practice. The spectacle of a writhing, foaming woman was utterly unnerving to those young, inexperienced men.

"Seems to me its largely nervous," said Shad, perplexedly, consulting with Si, Shorty and Jake Dye. "But that does not help out. Her last conscious words, if I remember, were a desire to be put ashore."

"Yes," said Si, "and because we would n't stop brung the spasms on her."

"And my idea is," added Shorty, "that the sooner we stop the boat and put her ashore the sooner she'll come to."

"Why, it'd be barbarous to put her out

there on the bare banks, in her present condition," gasped Shad.

"Don't know about that," said Shorty. "It's true it looks tough. But she's used to the open air. Been roosting around a tree when we took 'em aboard. Mebbe the air here's too close for her."

"About as close as it is in a saw-mill," suggested Si, looking at the stripped timbers of the Lorena.

"Even a saw-mill may be too close for a woman that's been used to nothing more confining than county lines. Then, there's the smell o' the engine, and the motion o' the boat. Anyhow, if she stays aboard we'll all go crazy."

"Well, we must do something. I'm afraid the boat will sink, next thing, from the way things are going," concluded Shad. "Our business is to hurry on to Chattanooga—sick woman or no sick woman. We've got to get rid of her, any way we can. Bring out three or four blankets to carry her ashore in, and lay over her. Jake, get up a lot of rations to leave with them."

The blankets were brought, and the pilot instructed to make a landing. But nobody could be gotten to pick Mrs. Jenkins up and lay her on the blankets. Shad appealed to three or four of the older unmarried men, to come forward and do this, but the moment they saw his glance turned toward them they bolted for hidden parts of the boat.

"Well, Si, it's you and I for it," said Shad, desperately. "Take hold of her feet while I lift her shoulders, and we'll lay her on."

Si summoned all his determination, took hold of her worn calfskin shoes, as if he was expecting an electric shock, and Shad lifted her shoulders with equal gingerly timidity. They placed her on the blanket, in which they and Jake and Shorty carried her up the bank, and laid her on a thick drift of leaves under the shelter of a beech tree, and put a liberal supply of rations beside her. They ran back to the boat, which was sheering off with the current, but saw over their shoulders that the alarming convulsions at once disappeared, the woman stood up and began examining the rations and the blankets.

"All this row over a worthless cur that's not fit to even make into soap-grease," murmured Shad, wearily, as the Lorena was driven ahead faster, to make up for lost time.

"Hi, you Yankee scamps, gi' me back my dogs. Yo'uns mustn't steal my dogs, yo' villains," came in an angry woman's shrill scream from the bank. "Stop that thar boat, an' gi' me back my dogs, yo' onlung rascals."

Looking back Si saw the woman and her daughters running along the bank toward the point ahead, shaking their fists, and yelling at the top of their voices.

"What on earth's happened now?" inquired Si.

A rushing column of savage oaths, sounds of whacking blows, and yelps and howls ascended from the direction of the kitchen.

"Them blasted dogs," explained Shorty, coming up, "noticed that everybody was drawn out o' the kitchen by that woman's conniptions, and they rushed in there and began filling themselves. Nobody thought o' them when we wuz putting the old woman ashore, and they wuz left behind. They've already et about as much as'd fill a male-wagon."

"Stop that thar boat, I tell yo', an' give me back my dogs. You've got my rabbit dogs. What'll we do fer meat?" screamed the woman on shore. "Stop the boat ter-wunst, if yo' know what's good fer yo'-uns."

"Let's go down and chuck the beasts overboard," said Si. "They can swim like beavers. If they can't, let 'em drown, and a good riddance it'll be."

But the dogs seemed to have scented danger as quickly as food; they had betaken themselves to dark lurking places, and not one could be found.

"Jake, I suppose an old woman with the high-strikes is one of the comforts of a home you promised us," Shorty remarked sardonically.

It had become quite dark by the time they came under the giant shadow of Lookout Mountain, but they were in high hopes of getting to Chattanooga that night. But they struck the terrific "Suck," where the waters of the Tennessee rush through the narrow gateway cut in the granite, and after struggling wearisomely with the maelstrom for a little while Shad said, resignedly:

"It's no use. We're too tired. It aint in us to work as we did when the rebels were all around us. Flesh and blood have had all they could stand. We'll lay by tonight and take a start at daylight. That'll bring us in quite as soon as they're ready for us."

The first good night's rest they had had for many days gave them fresh energy to battle with the swirling waters, and when the boat's engines, and all the assistance they could give with poles, were baffled, they jumped ashore, and with a will worked the great windlass which had been prepared for such emergencies. The Lorena was dragged by main strength through the resistless rush of water.

By the time the bright November sun was fairly above the high wall of Missionary Ridge their long trip was over, and Monty and Harry, standing waiting, fore and aft, with the great cable loops over their shoulders, gladly executed the order:

"Take those lines ashore and make fast."

They were at the lower wharf of Chattanooga.

Shad went to the Colonel's room to

awaken him, inform him of the end of the journey, and receive instructions as to securing a train to take the pontoons on to Atlanta.

A crowd of idlers, citizens, white and black, employees of the Quartermaster and Commissary, teamsters, soldiers, etc., gathered around, curious as to the battered and distressed looking steambot, whence she had come, and what experiences she had passed through.

"Call that a steambot?" said one. "Pah! A bridge span's give away under a locomotive, and fell on a flatboat."

"Looks more like they've bin robbin' some steambot graveyard, and run away with a skeleton," said another.

"Look at them smokestacks," said another, pointing to the Lorena's chimneys, which had been knocked about badly by the overhanging limbs in the narrow chutes. "Been burning crooked driftwood and got 'em clear out o' plumb."

"Her bones back there look like a dead hoss's that the buzzards 've bin after."

"Say, boys, if you don't cover that boat up better she'll get frost-bit these cold nights."

Si and Shorty, who were busily engaged in getting the boys packed up and ready to take the train, and the pontoon stuff in shape for transfer, became weary answering these jibes, and more pleasant interrogatories, and were either inresponsive or snubby to those on the wharf.

Presently some one demanded sharply, in a commanding tone:

"What boat is that?"

Si and Shorty, who were bending over a bundle of canvas, with their backs to the bow, made no answer, though it seemed to them they had heard that voice before.

"What boat is that?" asked the voice, a little more sharply.

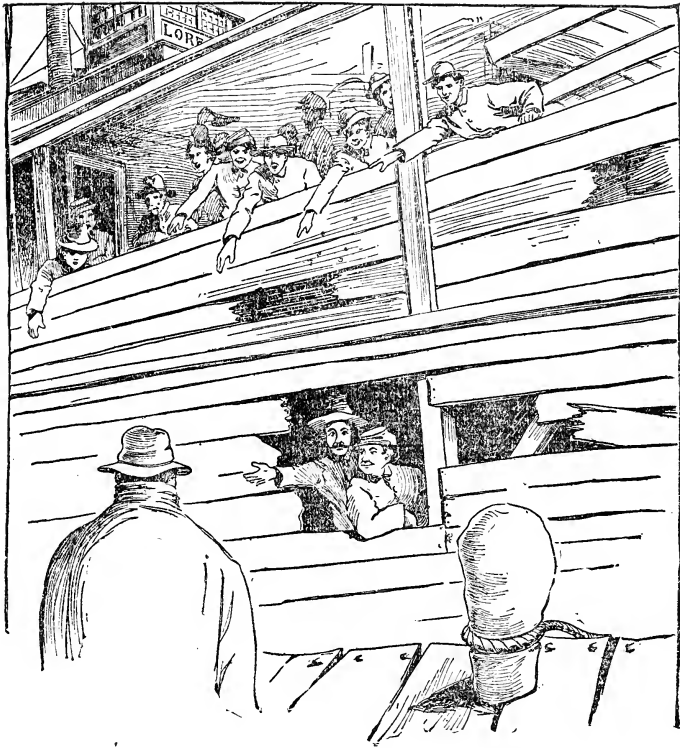
"Steambot," answered Shorty. The idlers haw-hawed.

"Glad to know it. Wasn't quite sure from the looks but it was a floating kindling-wood factory in hard luck. What's her name?" returned the voice, more pleasantly than might have been expected.

"Dumb it, can't you read her name on the pilot-house," Si answered crossly, for he had just broken his thumb-nail trying to tighten the rope. "Use your eyes, and don't ask so many fool questions."

"Look here, sir, you mustn't answer me that way," said the voice, sharply.

Shorty, who had barked his shin against one of the anchors, and was ready to quarrel with anybody, looked around and saw a tall, rather spare man, on foot, with an officer's overcoat, buttoned up to the chin, and a badly-battered campaign hat, pulled down over his eyes. Below appeared a short, rugged, red beard, which somehow appeared familiar, but Shorty could not place it. It seemed to him that it was the Quartermaster of the



"THIS IS THE GOOD BOAT 'KICK-UP-BEHIND.'"

1st Oshkosh, whom he had no reason to like. "Why shouldn't he answer you that way, I want to know?" he flared up. "We ain't no information bureau. We wasn't enlisted to read boat's names and things for commissioned officers who'd played hooky instead o' going to school, and missed their education. Get some o' them niggers around there to read the name for you, Captain. We're too busy."

"Captain—that's good," chuckled the crowd ashore.

"There, there, sir," returned the officer, "you have wasted enough breath and time to have told me the whole history of the boat, and yet said nothing."

"Well, if you must know, this is the good boat Kick-Up-Behind, Capt. Sour Dough Master, loaded with meerschams nankeen pants, and patent-leather slippers, for Sherman's army, and bound across Buzzard Roost by the way of Kenesaw Mountain for the Ocmulgee River. That's the solemn truth, Colonel, little as I want to tell it."

"Colonel!" The crowd laughed again.

"Good enough," said the officer. "I think I'll put you on my staff, to furnish information to the newspapers. You'd make a fine war correspondent. Your imagination is only equalled by your disregard of the truth. But we have had enough of

this chaff," he added in a tone which made Si and Shorty involuntarily stop their work and begin to straighten up. "Stop that, come to attention, and answer me promptly and truthfully. What boat is that?"

"United States transport Lorena," answered Si, coming to attention and saluting. "Loaded with pontoon supplies for Gen. Sherman's army."

"Hello," said the officer in a tone of exultation, "the pontoons at last. Who is in command?"

"Col. Bonesteel, United States Engineers, sir," said Si, still more respectfully, as recollections of the officer's appearance began to vivify in his mind. "I think he must be one of the Corps Commanders," he whispered to Shorty, "but I can't just remember which."

"Very good, Sergeant; find Col. Bonesteel at once, present my compliments to him, and tell him that Gen. Sherman desires to see him immediately here on the wharf."

"Gen. Sherman," gasped Si and Shorty, hastily buttoning up their blouses and straightening their caps.

"Fall in, guards; fall in promptly," Si shouted to his men.

"Never mind the guards," said Gen. Sherman, impatiently. "Find Col. Bonesteel at once."

Si went up to the cabin deck as rapidly as his broad Wabash feet would carry him, to startle Col. Bonesteel and Shad with the announcement of Gen. Sherman's presence. Shad had just finished, under the Colonel's directions, a report to the Commandant of the Post of the Lorena's arrival, and a requisition on the Superintendent of Railroads for a train to be ready early the next morning to take the pontoons on to Sherman.

"You will take that personally," said the Colonel, pointing to the requisition, "to the Superintendent and insist upon having the train not later than tomorrow morning. He will try to put you off, and get another day, but do not allow him to do so. If he will not agree to it, come back to me, and I'll go to him. We must have it."

"Gen. Sherman's out there on the wharf and wants you to come to him at once, Colonel," said Si, so full of his message that he forgot his military manners.

"Gen. Sherman out there on the wharf, and wanting to see me," gasped the Colonel, and shaken from his fastnesses.

"Yes; and he can't wait a minute. He's very impatient."

The Colonel looked dazed for a minute, and then, with Shad's and Si's assistance, got his cloak on over his wounded arm, and went down the stairs and out on to the wharf, where Gen. Sherman was nervously pacing up and down, twitching a riding-switch and giving jerky orders to

members of his staff who had come up in the meanwhile.

"Hello, Bonesteel," he called out, as the Colonel came over the gang-plank. "Glad to see you. So you brought my pontoons on yourself, did you? Glad you appreciated the importance of my getting them. Awfully afraid they wouldn't reach me."

"Had a terrible time getting here, General. Ran through the whole of"—

"Yes, yes," broke in the General, impatiently. "All having tough times now. Usually do in war. Put it all in your report. Got all the stuff there, have you?"

"Every bit your requisition called for, General. Thought I never would get through at times. Men acted nobly, and"—

"Always do. Always do. Finest army in the world; men can't be beat. Give them full credit in your report."

"I was myself severely wounded, and"—

"Too bad. Sorry to hear it. But we must expect to get hurt. No Surgeon aboard, I suppose? Brown, gallop over there to Surgeon Miller and tell him to come here at once and examine Col. Bonesteel's wound. Got the stuff all ready to go aboard the cars, Colonel?"

The Colonel looked inquiringly at Shad, who formally reported:

"All perfectly ready, Colonel, the moment we can get the cars."

"All ready, General, and I have prepared a requisition for the train, which I have asked for to be ready tomorrow morning, without fail."

"Tomorrow morning! Tomorrow morning? That stuff's got to leave here in an hour. I am going myself, and it's got to go along."

"Lieutenant, go to my office and get the requisition, carry it to the Superintendent and explain the necessity for immediate action."

"No, Lieutenant," said Sherman, with nervous impatience. "I had that requisition to Bradley, there. Bradley, you tell Wright that train must be ready, behind mine, in an hour. Roberts, go and bring teams enough here to haul that stuff over in a single load. Rush, now. Pick up teams wherever you find them. Lieutenant, when those wagons come, load them as you never loaded wagons before, and get that stuff on the cars as if on the wings of the wind. Don't you be a minute over an hour, at your peril. Good morning, Colonel. Take good care of that arm of yours."

The Colonel was agast and hurt at the unceremonious manner in which his "expedition" had been ended, and the whole matter taken out of his hands. He had grown to feel like a conquering hero, making a triumphant entrance to a city, and here found himself reduced to the ranks of those who had simply done an obvious duty well, and contributed his ex-

pected mite toward the success of a great movement. He walked back to his cabin in bitterness of heart, at the vanity of human greatness, and for the moment even felt like burning up the report upon which he had expended so much labor.

The Surgeon came and dressed his wound, and after a little hospitality and chat the two lighted cigars and walked forward, to see Shad, Si, Shorty and the rest in a fever of hurry to get the stuff on the cars and started for the front. Sherman's nervous eagerness had imparted itself to them. They had no ambitions to be thwarted, no self-importance to be wounded. They were simply glad they had done their work well so far, and eager to do more, and be with their comrades, who were to share in great things. As the Colonel watched them he caught the infection from them.

"They're the finest men alive," he said, finally. "It's honor enough merely to command such men. I am going along with them."

"Indeed, you are not," said the Surgeon, decidedly. "You are going to stay right here until your arm gets much better, unless there is a good chance to send you back home."

"I was not aware that I was under your command, Doctor," said the Colonel, with some asperity.

"Well, you are, very much so. It's my duty to see that no wounded or sick men go to the front, except such as I think entirely fit. The army is stripped for battle, and must have no incumbrances. I shall not let you leave this place, except to go to the rear."

"Army's got in a fine condition when Pillbags give orders to Colonels commanding independent expeditions," said the Colonel, bitterly.

"Be that as it may, I have my orders, and am going to obey them. Come, you have done enough for the present. Your life is too valuable to the country to be needlessly endangered. There are some things that I am absolute in, and this is one. You shall not go."

Before the hour was up the last stick was in the wagons, and the boys, learning that the Colonel could go no farther with them, lined up on the wharf to give him three cheers, before they rushed off for the train. The Colonel bowed from the deck, but could say nothing. He watched them as they hurried for the train, listened with sinking heart for the cheers with which they announced their leaving, and sank into a chair murmuring:

"A great opportunity of my life gone. There is no telling what I might not have done at the head of those men."

CHAPTER X.

A CLASH OF AUTHORITY BETWEEN SHORTY AND GEN. SHERMAN.

Gen. Sherman's train, and that following it, had the right of way back to Kingston, where the General had temporarily established his headquarters.

Every switch they passed the boys saw was loaded to its fullest extent with trains bearing northward the great army's stripplings for battle. Every man whose physical condition did not promise to stand the test of the severest trials had been ruthlessly weeded out by the Surgeons and sent to the rear. The worst had been sent back long before. Those going now were of the later and more rigid cullings of the men who wanted earnestly to stay with their companies, and hoped that they would tone up sufficiently to satisfy the exacting requirements of the medical despots, who knew neither fear, favor nor affection in their gleaming after men who were likely to break down on a hard march and cumber the ambulances. They were going, back reluctantly, their only hope being that they would join Gen. Thomas and share in his exploits. But this would not be with their own regiments.

"Do smuggle me into your squad, and take me along with you, Sergeant," pleaded Ben Camp, one of the 1st Oshkosh, whom they met at a switch. The pallor of illness showed through in spots where the sunburn of the long campaign had flaked off. "I went through the campaign all right—never missed a march, a fight or a roll-call—but I broke down after we got into Atlanta. Guess it must've been the too sudden change to soft bread and sleeping under cover."

A wan smile played over his thin face. It could be seen at once that he was a boy who had lived upon his nerve. By sheer force of will he had kept up through the terrible hardships and strains of the campaign, but had collapsed when victory came and the city was captured.

"I had a pretty lively tussle with the brakebone," he continued, "and the doctors gave me quinine till I thought my head was a hotel gong; but I pulled through, and the minute I heard that the army was going to move, I gave the hospital the cold shake, and slipped back to my company, and with the boys' help I played off on the Surgeons for awhile. But the last time they went through the camp with a fine-tooth comb, and caught me. But I'll be all right if I can only get out with the boys on the march once more."

"He's just at the turning point," com-

muned Si with Shorty, "where a good strong push, like a bad cold or a hard march, may send him down the hill to his grave. He mustn't go along, though I like Ben awfully."

"Don't know about that," answered Shorty. "Ben's one o' the best men in the 1st Oshkosh. His heart's set on going along. Likely that'll bring him right out and cure him. If he's sent back he'll like as not fret himself to death in the hospital. Let's take him along."

"As you say," acceded Si. "I'll do anything in the world for Ben. The chances are about equal whether it kills or cures him, but he'll die happier in the front than in the rear. Ben, you watch your chances, and skip across, when nobody's looking."

Ben started to act on this advice.

"Here, you sick man," called the sharp, rasping, imperative voice of Gen. Sherman from up toward the locomotive, "go back to your own car at once. Go back, sir."

"Confound that meddling Old Bricktop," said Shorty; "he's always interfering with something, if it's only boiling a cup of coffee. I never saw such a General. The others don't pay no attention to things that don't concern them. But he's always nosing round into everything. He's worse'n a new Fifth Corporal anxious to show off. Ben, just lay low for a minute, and watch your chance, and you can dodge Old Bricktop."

"Young man," said Gen. Sherman's voice, so close that it made Shorty jump, "do you know that you are grossly disrespectful, and liable to severe punishment, in alluding to your Commanding General as 'Old Bricktop?'"

Everybody sprang to "attention," saluted, and looked wonderingly as to what the General would do. Shorty, with the feeling that he was liable to in emergencies, "that you might as well be hung for an old sheep as a lamb," faced about, came to attention, punctiliously saluted, looked the General square in the eye, and said:

"General, you know your hair is a little red."

"May be—may be," said the General, snappily. "Your own looks as if you cut off a lock you'd bleed to death. But I like that kind of men. They're sandy fellows who'll go wherever you send them and do what you tell them. But I'm not going to discuss hair. You get right back in your car there and keep very mum. If

I catch you again encouraging these men to come over to your car, there'll be a red-headed Corporal not far from here know what it is to have his stripes taken off and be tied up by his thumbs."

"Now, you men," continued the General, turning to those on the other train, "don't think you are being condemned and laid on the shelf. You go on back to Nashville. You'll find Gen. Thomas there, with a big job on his hands, and he'll find enough for you to do—that is, all that's able to do anything. He's got the whole of Hood's army down there, and you may help fight the battle that will end the war. You'll have all you want to do."

"Three cheers for Gen. Sherman," they shouted. "Three cheers and a tiger for Uncle Billy. We'll come around and meet you at Mobile, General."

There were many other trains beside those bearing sick and wounded, making their way back to Chattanooga. There were miles of cars laden with tents and camp equipage, discarded artillery, surplus rations and ammunition, hospital stores, personal baggage of officers, sutler's goods, etc., etc. Sherman had relentlessly cut down everything to the barest necessities of the march. He was going to start with 60,000 absolutely strong, well, healthy young men, with only the barest necessities for 20-days' march in their wagons, and these not to be touched until they had eaten the country bare.

Never before in the history of the world was there an army stripped down to such clean, unincumbered force, capability and aggressiveness. It was all bone, muscle and high-spirited courage.

The experience of the boys on the boat had been prejudicial to what martinets would regard as proper discipline. It had begotten a disposition to take things into their own hands and rely on themselves, instead of waiting for orders. This was particularly the case with Shorty. He had never been nearly so amenable to discipline as the more staid and methodical Si, and his officers had always had to frequently bring him up with a round turn. The rush of men and material to the rear, while they themselves were going forward, the intense activity and eagerness everywhere excited him. He forgot that he had left the boat, where he was one of the directing forces, and was now again in the army, where he was but one of the cogs in the great wheels. He wanted to take charge of almost everything he saw going on, or at least give his valuable advice as to how it should be managed.

While the locomotive was taking water at the Oonnesauga River, he walked along and took a severe oversight of another train on a siding, with a load of extra limbers, surplus ammunition, and barrels of pork.

"Here," he called, in a commanding tone, "that aint no way to load a car. You'll have them limbers and boxes scat-

tered off over the State o' Georgy the first time you go around a sharp curve. You ought to know better than sling things on to a car like that."

From his tone, and his coming from the headquarter train, the men supposed that he was Gen. Sherman's messenger, and began apologizing.

"We were in such an awful hurry to get off," they began, "the main thing was to get the stuff aboard any way."

"No sense in pitching things on so they'll tumble off agin at the first opportunity," said Shorty, severely. "You've got time now. Take 'em off, and fix 'em up so they'll stay."

The men jumped to the work, and speedily had much of the stuff on the ground.

"Say, what in the name of sense, do you men mean by taking that stuff off?" demanded Gen. Sherman, who had also taken a fancy to walk back and inspect the train.

"Why, that man there told us to," answered the men.

"General," Shorty began, answering the sharp look the General turned on him, "they had slung the stuff on any way, and when they'd go around one of these sharp curves it'd be sure to"—

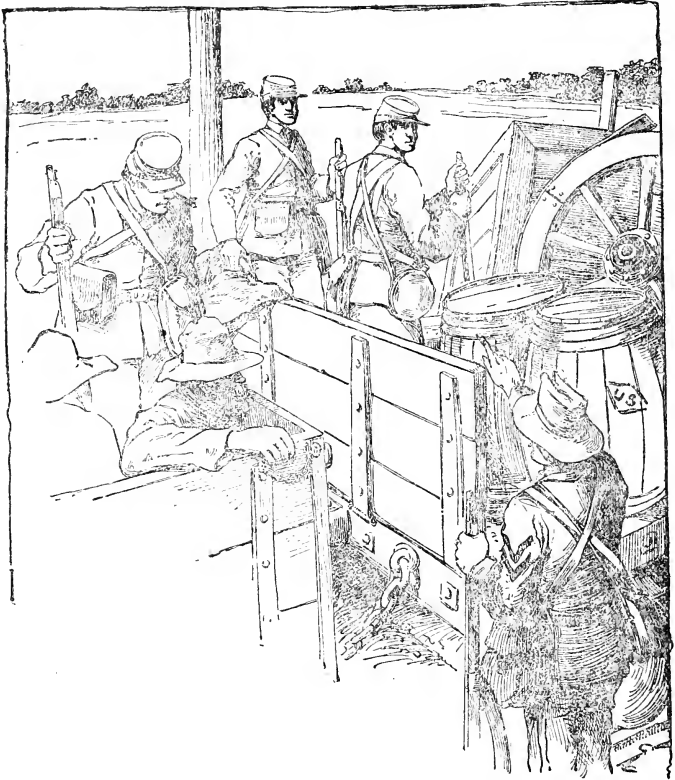
"You'll be sure to get back in your car, and that mighty quick, and devote your whole time and strength to minding your own business," snapped the General. "When I want you to do anything I'll give you orders."

"There it is," grumbled Shorty, as he climbed back into his car. "All the thanks a man gets for looking around an' trying to be of use. Old Sherman's got to be spooking about where he haint no business and interfering with them that's trying to get things in proper shape. Why don't he tend to the army and let other fellers tend to their business? He's got enough to do at headquarters. No wonder everything's going at sixes and sevens around the army. They can just spill barrels o' pork and limbers all over Pigeon Mountains, for all I care, I'm done."

"Come, Shorty, and get your dinner," called out Si. "We've got a bully dinner. That Hospital Steward back there gave us a lot o' potatoes and onions, and we've made a stew while you were out there helping run the army."

The fragrance of the savory stew dissipated Shorty's anger, and by the time he had eaten all he could hold and lighted his pipe, he had forgotten all about the incident, and was looking around for another opportunity to make himself useful.

They were now about to cross the Oostenaula River, at Resaca, and Gen. Sherman decided to consolidate the two trains into one, to be pulled by the engine that was drawing the pontoons, which was a better runner and puller than his own. The other locomotive would be sent back with the cars which had accumulated ab



"HERE," CALLED SHORTY, IN A COMMANDING TONE, "THAT AINT NO WAY TO LOAD A CAR."

Reena. Some cars had to be cut off to re-arrange the train and cut these out, and Shorty, who could not resist the temptation to boss the job, became convinced that they had made a mistake and cut out the wrong cars. Under such circumstances the more circumspect Si would have satisfied himself of his facts before doing anything, but Shorty was not built

that way. He was very liable to become dead sure of anything on quite insufficient evidence, and then a balky mule was not more obstinate. Just as the making-up of the train was about completed, he rushed back and called to the trainmen:

"Say, you've made a big mistake. You've cut out the wrong cars. Those cars there are the ones that you must take along. You're to leave those cars there that you've put in."

The conductor—only recently detailed for the duty—was alarmed.

"Are you sure?" he asked nervously.

"Sure! Dead sure. I noticed that the

cars the General pointed out for you to leave had 'L. & N. R. R.' on their doors, while those you were to take along had 'N. & C. R. R.' You see them that you've left have N. & C. R. R.' on their doors, while those you've kept have L. & N. R. R.'

"That's so," said the conductor, stopping the engineer and hurrying to make the exchange before the General should notice his blunder.

As the train started on its way for Calhoun it passed on the other side of the cars, and Shorty was horrified to see that the doors on that side bore the letters "L. & N. R. R."

"Great jumping Jehosephat," he muttered, "I'm in for it again. They have been mixing the doors on them cars. Condemn a country, anyway, where nothing's ever certain but short rations and bad roads. I expect Old Billy'll just take my sorrell topknot clear off when he finds it out. But maybe he won't till after I've got away. He won't be thinking about the cars until we get to camp. I'll jump the train just as soon as we strike the edge of camp, and before he gets a chance to look over the cars I'll be safe in the 209th Infantry. I'd like to be around and hear him skin that basswood conductor, though."

Alas for his calculations. The train stopped at Adairsville, and Gen. Sherman wanted to send an Aid over to Peplar Springs, where there was a brigade encamped. A horse was quickly secured, but the Aid wanted his own saddle, which was in the car containing the headquarters baggage. But the car was missing.

Gen. Sherman stormed at the conductor, in his characteristically impetuous way.

"I had the right cars on, just exactly as you pointed out," the trembling man managed to say between outbursts, "and then I changed them, because a Corporal from your headquarters came and told me I had made a mistake."

"A Corporal from my headquarters?" said the General; "I have no Corporal with me."

"Yes, there he is now," said the unhappy conductor, pointing to Shorty, who had overheard the breaking of the storm and was trying to slip over to the cover of some trees and wait for the next train.

"Come here, you rascal," commanded the General.

Shorty, seeing that he was cornered, turned around, marched up to the General, came to attention, gravely saluted, and inquired:

"Did you speak to me, General?"

"Yes, confound you; I spoke to you and you know it, for you recognized your name. Did you tell this man to change the cars?"

"Yes, sir," said Shorty boldly. "I was watching you when you pointed out the cars to him, and noticed that the cars you wanted left had 'L. & N. R. R.' on their doors, while those you wanted taken had 'C. & N. R. R.' on theirs. When he made

up his train again I saw that he had it just the other way. I never told him I was from your headquarters. He only guessed it. But he ought to be a better guesser. But I'm to blame for the rest, only I think it's playing it pretty low down on a fellow to have different letters on each side of the cars.

"And you, a Corporal, took the liberty of changing the orders of the General Commanding the Army, did you?" said Sherman, in a terrible voice.

"No, General," answered Shorty firmly. "I wasn't changing your orders; I was only doing my best to carry them out, as I always do. But I say again, I think it is playing pretty low down to have different letters on each side of the cars. That isn't giving a feller a fair shake. It's ringing in a cold deck on a feller, and you know it, General."

Gen. Sherman's moods could change as rapidly as those of a Spring day. Already his active mind was reverting to things of mighty importance, and he wanted to close this trifling incident—dismiss it. Shorty's frankness and boldness took his fancy. He looked him over again, with a sarcastic glance, and dismissed him with:

"Young man, after this you and I will have to be careful to take separate trains. Between us there is too much intellect for any one train. It overloads it, and embarrasses its movement. For the rest of this trip I'm going to insist on you severely suppressing yourself and giving me a chance. You take a much-needed rest and give me a chance to run this train. I mayn't do it as well as you would, but I want to try. Go back to your car and keep very quiet—very quiet, indeed—for the rest of this trip. Brooks, send a message back to Resaca to send forward those two cars by the next train without fail, and report to Kingston when they start. Williams, you'll have to ride a common saddle. Start the train at once, and tell the engineer to push things. We've only been crawling along. Shake him up."

The General's sarcasm hurt Shorty much worse than if he had given him the lively cursing he expected. He could not understand all the words the General used, but felt that they meant something awful. He went back to his car in a wrathful mood, but quieted down after awhile and began to grumble at the slow pace of the train. He shared the General's impatience to get on, and was not long in reaching the conclusion that he could get more speed out of the locomotive than the engineer was doing. If he could only do this, he would win the General's approval and regain his lost honors.

At the next stop for water he went forward, ingratiated himself with the engineer by a pleasant story as to his abilities and experience in running an engine, was invited up into the cab, and finally given charge of the throttle over a piece of clear, easy track. The engineer had been worked

to the last limit during this driving time and he was frightfully tired, nearly dead for sleep, and welcomed any relief. He watched Shorty run for a few miles, gave him occasional directions, and saw with approval his management of the engine, relaxed his own strain of attention by degrees, and before he knew it was asleep, sitting on the left side of the cab.

Shorty gained in confidence as the miles sped back under the wheels. He made the fireman rush up the steam, opened wider the throttle, and struck a pace that pleased him. He grew so self-confident that he did not think it necessary to awaken the engineer as they approached Kingston, but decided to run in himself.

A freight train, loaded with Commissary goods, was pulling onto a switch, to get out of the way, just as he came around the curve outside of Kingston. Shorty guessed that it would get onto the switch in time and did not slacken his speed, though he

blew the whistle, which wakened the engineer, who gave a quick glance and sprang for the throttle and the whistle rope, to give a shrill call for brakes. He was too late. The locomotive struck the second car from the rear of the freight train, which was directly across the track, squarely near the center, and sent pork and crackers flying all around that section of the country.

Shorty skipped back to the boys and said to Si:

"Si, lookout for my things and bring them on with you. I guess I'll walk the rest o' the way to Atlanta. I want to take a look at the country."

Gen. Sherman walked forward and looked at the wreck, and remarked:

"Somehow, I've got a suspicion that a certain redheaded Corporal is at the bottom of this. If I can get hold of him, I'll make him sit down here and eat up all these rations that he's spoiled."

CHAPTER XI.

"OTHER AND IMPORTANT DUTY."

The instant Gen. Sherman arrived at Kingston he had things before him of a thousand-fold more importance than the investigation of an unimportant railroad accident. He was rolling two great waves of armed men in opposite directions—one, under Thomas, toward Nashville and the north, to head off, defeat and destroy Hood; the other, under himself, toward the south, or east, to a destination that even he was not certain of. The 60,000 men whom he was to personally command, with their 3,000 wagons and four-score cannon, were distributed over thousands of square miles, extending from Rome and Kingston to Atlanta and Decatur. At his word of command all these were to flow together in a mighty, irresistible tide, converging on Atlanta, and leaving behind it desolation—burned mills, factories, bridges, destroyed roads and exhausted food supplies. The wave rolling on toward Thomas was to leave similar devastation in its rear.

The fighting ground of the past bitter battle Summer was to be made an inhospitable desert of ruined towns, desolated farms, felled forests, moldering forts and breastworks, wrecked railroads and burned bridges.

Even the buzzards would soon leave it, after having picked white the bones of the starved animals.

Gen. Sherman's sweeping thoughts took in the imperial expanse of country, and

in his mind's eye he saw where every regiment, battery and train of his mighty host was camped, just what he wanted it to do, and when and how to march to timely coalesce and co-ordinate with the stupendous whole.

As soon as he alighted from the cars his quick eyes took in every detail of the great activity everywhere in sight, and he began to order, admonish, correct, stimulate and lash everyone within range of his voice.

Though all were busy, none seemed to be working fast and hard enough to suit his impatient desires. He wanted to direct everything himself, without waiting for the circumlocution of giving orders through his staff.

"Here, you Sergeant, there," he called to one who had charge of a gang of negro laborers, and had stopped a moment to look at the wreck and wipe his face. "Don't stand around idling. Put your men to work clearing the track of this wreck. Shove that car off to the right. Pile the other things on it, so that they'll all burn, and help burn the road. Put some men to work with sledges to break those axles and wheels, so that the rebels can't gather them up and use them. Where's the Lieutenant in charge of this train?"

"Here, sir," said Shad, saluting.

"Lieutenant, rush this train through to Atlanta as fast as you can, and deliver

the stuff to Col. Poe, for assignment and distribution. Tell him from me that it must all be distributed and arranged by tomorrow evening. As soon as you can get the stuff off hurry right back here with the train."

"You mean that I only shall come back with the train, General, do you, and let the men go to their regiments at Atlanta?"

"No; bring them back with you. They're a compact force of good men, such as I need, and I'd better keep them awhile than disorganize a regiment. Bring them all back with you."

"Confound it, Shad, why did you ask him that?" grumbled Si, as Shad came back to them. "Why didn't you just say nothing, and let us jump the train at Atlanta and make for the 200th Injanny? I'm all on edge to get back to the regiment and report to Col. McGillicuddy. Sherman'd never thought about it if you'd just let us go."

"Don't you fool yourself a minute, Si. Sherman not only knows how many I have, but he knows every man in this detachment by this time, and has something mapped out for us. It'd've been as much as my life was worth to have come back from Atlanta without you. I suspected so, and made sure by asking. I don't take any chances on anything when Sherman's around. It's altogether different from what it was with Bonesteel."

Shorty, who had been watching proceedings from the cover of a freight car, came out and rejoined the boys as they jumped upon the cars.

"Glad to have you in here with us, Shorty," said Si. "I was afraid you'd want to run the engine some more, and try to pass another train on the same track or butt a hole in the Allatoona Mountains, or some other experiment of that kind. You ought to know that the only way to pass another train on the same track is by climbing over it, and so fix up your engine with scaling ladders. Mebbe you thought we were still on the Lorena, and could spar over that other train."

"O, dry up, Si," answered Shorty, irritably. "It wasn't my fault at all, but the engineer's of the other train. He didn't know enough to get his old meat-wagon out o' my way. As I was running the headquarters train, he ought've had sense to know that I had the right o' way, and give me a clear track. Oughtn't to let such dunderheads have hold o' throttle-valves."

"Can't be too careful in picking the men to handle the throttle-valves," returned Si, significantly. "Anyhow, we'll all feel better now that you're with us, instead of on the engine. By the way, did you hear Gen. Sherman's orders to Shad? We're not to go with the regiment from Atlanta, but must come back here."

"The thunder we must," gasped Shorty.

"Well, you fellers can come back, but as for me and Pete we're going on to join the regiment, and we'll strike out for it the minute we hit Atlanta. I'm sick and tired o' being out in the weather. I want to git home, and home's the 200th Injanny Volunteer Infantry. I want to settle down to straight soldiering, instead of pirouting around like a lot o' stray dogs. Me and Pete's goin' to answer roll-call in Co. Q tomorrow morning, and have some quiet and peace of our lives. I'd 'a' been on my way to the regiment now, but for leaving Pete. I've been afraid all along they'd try to press us into service with the pontoons, and that's the reason I've been urging Si to jump the train as soon as we struck the town, and get away to the regiment before they'd have a chance to detail us. But you fellers can do as you please. Me and Pete are going back to the regiment as straight as we can go. Col. McGillicuddy needs us."

"Them's my sentiments to a hair," echoed Si. "I'm awful homesick to see the regiment, and settle down to plain, every-day soldiering, where you don't have nothing to bother you. The 200th Injanny's good enough for me. I'll stay there the rest o' the time. But Shad thinks that we've got to come back."

"Well, Shad may think as he pleases. No law against his thinking. And you fellers can do as you see fit. But you hear the pensive notes of my bugle: Just as soon as we hit Atlanta, me and Pete are going to point our gunboats in the direction of the 200th Injanny Camp, and stop on no switches for through trains until we hear the grateful music of Capt. Bowersox cussing the teamsters."

They had stopped at Marietta, when Shad came back into the car, and the conversation was substantially repeated.

"Now, Shorty," he remonstrated, "you shouldn't talk that way. It's our duty to all go back, just as Sherman's ordered. I happen to know that he's got a very high opinion of this detachment, and I'm sure that he wants it for some particular purpose, something out of the ordinary. He asked me all about our coming through the Muscle Shoals, and praised the performance quite as highly as Sherman ever praises anything. You know he never slobbers over anybody. He thinks that when you've done the very best you can you've only done what you ought to, and don't deserve any special praise. But he said we'd done a very good, soldierly piece of work, and that he hoped Col. Bonesteel would properly report it to the Department. That's a great deal for Sherman. Now I feel sure that he wants us for some special purpose, where we can be of better service than with our regiments, even, and it's our duty to obey."

"Mebbe he wants to slip off somewhere and surprise and capture a town," said Si, hopefully, catching at the idea.

"Mebbe," said Shad. "Or mebbe he

knows where we can gobble a big rebel General, or the Governor of Georgia, possibly even Jeff Davis himself. You know he was down near here not a great while ago."

"If he wants anything extra-hazardous done with neatness and dispatch he's struck the right crowd," said Si. "We can squeeze through a narrower hole without barking our shins than any other men in the army. You'd better stay with us, Shorty. Don't go back on us now. Let's all go to the regiment together. It'll probably only be a few days more."

"I'd strongly recommend it," said Shad. "Sherman's ordered it, and he's got a long memory. You may dodge him now, but he'll come up with you, sooner or later, and make you wish you hadn't."

"The motion to reconsider has carried," said Shorty, after a moment's thought. "Though I long for a quiet life in the bosom of the 200th Injanny Volunteer Infantry, I'll take just one more whirl with you, if it's for big game."

They reached Atlanta, turned over the pontoon stuff, which had cost them such an infinity of worry and trouble, to the Chief Engineer, bravely resisted the temptation to abandon the train for their regimental camps, and returned to Kingston, reaching there again early in the morning, to find Gen. Sherman already up, and impatiently pacing up and down the platform, overseeing everything, and commenting, criticising, blaming, directing and ordering in an incessant flow of energetic language.

"Dayton," he called to his Adjutant-General, "prepare an order to Gen. Corse, at Rome, to immediately burn everything there that can be of the slightest use to the rebels, and start for this place tomorrow morning. Impress upon him that the destruction must be complete and thorough; not a mill, factory, storehouse, locomotive or car must be left in shape to be of any use to the rebels. He must destroy the bridges as he marches."

"Gen. Steedman," he continued, addressing a fine-looking man with a leonine face and mane of curling hair, "I must now say good-by to you. Give Gen. Thomas my compliments when you see him, and impress upon him that I expect him to destroy Hood, and not let a fragment of his army recross the Tennessee. You will take this train, which has just come in, to Chattanooga, and gather up your men from Resaca onward. I'll send another train after you, which will be the last to go north, and pick up those from here to Reaca. After it passes over Oothcaloga Creek I'll have the bridge burned and cut my communications with God's country. When they will be restored again, and where, God only knows. Only, I'm sure that we'll come out all right somewhere on the coast, after having made the State of Georgia feel that it is very serious business to begin an unjusti-

fiable rebellion against the authority of the United States, and continue the war in hardness of heart and reprobacy of spirit. Good-by. Make thorough work of Hood, and leave us to take care of ourselves."

"Lieutenant," he called to Shad, "have your men make coffee and get their breakfasts by that fire there. Make short work of it, for I want you to take this train in a few minutes. You will go out on it as far as the first large bridge, and get off on this side of the bridge, letting the train go over. After it has passed you will burn the bridge. Burn it thoroughly, so that not a stick of timber shall be left to rebuild it. While it is burning destroy the telegraph for some distance—a mile or so. You must get through by noon. At noon march up the creek a couple of miles until you come to where the Adairsville and Cassville road crosses the creek by an old log meeting-house. Halt there, and you will receive further orders."

"What in the world has he laid out for us, Si?" asked Shorty, full of wondering expectancy. "Do you know of any town down there in this neighborhood that's worth taking? There aint no big rebels around in this part o' the country, is there?"

"I haint no idee," answered Si, "and I suppose it don't matter much if I haint. It's some big thing, or Sherman wouldn't be so positive about it. That's enough for me, but I admit I'd like to know what he's cut out for us."

"Burning a bridge aint no great shakes of a job," remarked Si, as they got off at the creek, and let the train go on over. "Most anybody could do that. But let's make an extra good job of it. None of us own any real estate round here, so we won't be taxed to rebuild it."

Some fat pine logs were found, in the woods near by, which were cut up and placed in between the timbers of the trestle. These were supplemented by all the pine knots Pete and the rest of the smaller boys could find. In an hour they had made it certain that when the match was applied the flames would speedily run to every timber, and not stop devouring as long as there was anything left to feed upon.

"There, that'll do. That's enough. Come off the bridge, boys," Shad shouted, taking out his matches. "Here goes the last link with home. Good-by, God's country. Good-by, folks, and churches, and school-houses, and all good things. We're going to raise hell in Georgia."

He touched the lighted match to the pile of fat pine shavings he had prepared and which flashed up like turpentine. In a few minutes the bridge was a roaring mass of fire.

They cut down the telegraph poles, and broke up the wire into pieces, to throw into the creek and otherwise hide.

Before noon they had done their work



“WHAT!” HOWLED SHORTY; “WE DRIVE A HERD OF CATTLE?”

well, and were anxiously waiting that hour and what their new orders would bring them.

They found the old log church where the road crossed the creek, as Sherman had said, but there was no one there.

“What does this mean?” wondered Shad.

“There’s an awful sight of dust raising over there beyond the crick,” remarked Si, scanning the northern horizon anxiously. “Looks as if there was at least a brigade of infantry or a regiment of cavalry coming. Wonder if it can be Wheeler trying to attack Sherman’s rear? Load, boys, and deploy along the bank

there. Keep down out of sight, and don’t fire till they try to cross the crick.”

They watched the advance of the cloud of dust anxiously. They could hear yells and loud commands. Presently a mounted man in partial citizen’s dress appeared on the other side of the creek and scanned the opposite bank.

“Probably a scout. Keep out o’ sight, boys, and let him come on,” said Si.

The man studied the opposite bank a minute or so, and then rode through the ford.

“Blue parts, blue vest, rebel hat, citizen’s coat, Yankee saddle, Yankee boots,” said Si, studying each detail. “U. S. on flank of horse. Guess he’s a Yankee.”

The man saw Si and Shorty, and rode directly up to them, and they were joined by Shad Graham and Jake Dye.

"I was ordered to meet Lieut. Graham here at noon," explained the man.

"That's my name," said Shad.

"Well, I'm Lieut. Ermentraut, of the Commissary Department. I'm ordered to meet you here, and turn over to you 500 cattle, with the orders to take them on to Atlanta with all reasonable speed. You will be there with them not later than day after tomorrow evening. The cattle are now reaching the creek. You will go down with me and count them as they come over, and receipt for them. There are just 501. You will be allowed to kill one on your way for meat, but you must deliver 500 even to the Chief Commissary at Atlanta."

"What!" howled Shorty, as he gathered the purport of the stranger's communication. "We drive a herd of cattle! We soldiers become a pack o' cow-punchers! I'll see Sherman and his whole army go without fresh beef till they're as gray as African badgers before I'll play butcher's boy and drive cattle to the slaughter-house. It's not my business. I'm a United States soldier, not a barefooted boy with a straw hat and a stone-bruise, hired for a quarter a day to run foot-races with brindle steers. I'm no partner to a yaller herd-dog and apprentice to a butcher-shop."

"I guess there must be some mistake about this," said Si, with sinking heart, as his vision of some noteworthy service dwindled down to this prosaic and humble job. "Gen. Sherman said he had some special and very important duty for us. He couldn't've meant cattle-driving."

"What more important duty could you expect than taking care of such a herd as this?" inquired Lieut. Ermentraut, hotly. "What more important duty can there be than in supplying the army? Now, don't go to putting on any airs, for I won't have it. I've brought this herd this far, and you're no better than I am. If I do it, you ought to think it quite good enough for you. Besides, the minute you get across the Etowah River you're liable to

have all that you can tend to. Joe Wheeler's down in that country, somewhere, and would like awfully well to have 500 leaves in good condition to put his ragged rebels on. This is the last herd to come through, and it must be carefully guarded all the way. That's the reason that Gen. Sherman ordered you here. There's bush-whackers enough down in the country beyond the Etowah to take the herd away from all the guard I have. But I haven't time to waste in argument. You'll simply do what Gen. Sherman orders. Here come the cattle now, and I'll be obliged to you, Lieut. Graham, if you'll begin the count at once, and hurry through with it, as that train you came up on is waiting for me and my men, and we must get to it as soon as possible. I have six horses that I and my helpers have been riding, which I'll turn over to you, for such men as you want to mount."

"After our good work with the pon-toons I never thought Gen. Sherman would put us to cattle-driving," murmured Shad, reproachfully, at which Lieut. Ermentraut fired up again:

"I'd like to know who you are, anyway, that are putting on all these frills? You're mighty glad to get fresh beef when it's brought to you, and yet you kick when it's your turn to bring it. Are you so much better than anybody else that you can lie in camp, and have somebody else wait on you? I tell you, I've had to do it, and I've done it because it was a necessary duty, that somebody had to do, and I'm as good as you fellows, any day in the week. I've been in the army just as long, and seen just as much service. Now, just stop looking down your noses, and grumbling, and count these cattle, receipt for them, and let me go. I'm in a hurry, and you'd better be."

"The Lieutenant is right," said Si, his usual cheerful acceptance of necessary conditions asserting itself. "We aint really had our share of cattle-driving, and we've no business to shirk it when it comes up to us. Besides, it's only for two or three days. Let's be glad we didn't have to bring the herd clear from Nashville. Bring on your cattle."

CHAPTER XII.

A FEW DAYS' EXPERIENCE WITH "GENTLE, LOWING KINE."

Ready, resourceful and cheerful as Shad Graham had heretofore shown himself for every duty and in every emergency, he drew a decided line at cattle driving, and would have absolutely none of it.

Shorty, as usual, after his first burst of temper, and cursing by name everybody in the army, from Gen. Sherman down, had accepted the situation, and energetically set about making the best of it.

But Shad was grieved to the heart by the downfall of his expectations of some special service of thrilling importance, and sulkily refused to take the least interest in the herd, or in getting it on to its destination. Possibly his association with the Engineers had something to do with his aversion.

"I know somebody's got to do the Commissary act, and it's very necessary," he said in reply to Si's remonstrances, "but let it be those fellows whose minds run to meats and groceries. It ain't in my line. I'll dig ditches and make roads and build bridges, and do all that sort of drudgery just as hard as anybody, but I simply won't associate with cattle and hogs on any terms. It used to break my heart to have to bring up the cow to milk, and I've been whipped oftener about it than anything else. I'll go along with you, because that's now the best way to get to the army, but I'll only be a passenger. You take charge of the whole outfit. You understand cattle and know how to manage them. You take command. I'll be responsible for all you do, so you see I'm not shirking my share."

As was habitual with Si, when he saw he had to do a thing, he went at it with all his might and cheerfully.

"It's all right, boys," he called out blithely. "It's only a two or three days' march to our regiments at Atlanta, a sort of a pleasant promenade, and we'll have the cattle for company. I always liked to drive cattle when I was at home. They're so quiet and steady-going that they're no bother at all, like hogs and sheep, who're always cutting up didoes. Jake, deploy out a few of your men on both sides of the road there, and keep the cattle together as they come across the creek, and me and Shorty will count 'em. Monty, you and Harry take distance down the road there, one on each side, and count, too, so that there won't be no mistake. Alf, Gid, Sandy and Pete, you go down across the creek and skirmish 'round and help hustle the beasts over. The rest of you boys go

over and hide behind those cedars there, so's as not to scare the cattle by showing too big a crowd. Keep hid till they've passed. It's easy enough driving stock if you only go about it right. It's all in the knack."

They could hear the locomotive whistle sounding impatiently for the men to come aboard.

"Hurry up, Lieutenant," said Lieut. Ermentrout. "They're calling loud for me."

"Hurry up, yourself," said Si. "We're ready to take your cattle as soon as you pass them over the creek to us. Start 'em over."

"Here, rush those beasts along. What's the matter with you?" yelled the Lieutenant back to his men.

"We can't. They won't budge. They're skeered o' something over there," yelled back the men.

"Put the gads to 'em. Make 'em come," yelled the Lieutenant.

"We have, and it don't do no good," shouted the men back. "We've nearly licked the hides often some and it only seems to make 'em worse. They seem to smell something. Must be something dead over there."

"Nothing dead around here but my ambition," remarked Shad, saturninely. "That oughtn't to scare them."

"No, there's nothing dead around here," answered the Lieutenant. "It's probably the only place in Northern Georgia where there ain't. Lick old Jo Wheeler there, across the ford, and the rest'll follow."

"We call that lead steer, with the hell on, Jo Wheeler," explained Lieut. Ermentrout, "because he's such a runner, and he always runs faster when he comes near infantry."

"We've tried it, and it don't do no good," they yelled back. "He just runs 'round and 'round, and hides in the brush. He must smell something."

"Singularly delicate nose, that, for any one around this army," commented Shad. "Can't have been long in the service."

"Mebbe he smells that meat I mashed up at the station," remarked Shorty, with returning good humor. "Possibly it was the remains of a loved relative."

"It's likely the smell and sight o' so many strangers," suggested the more practical Si. "Here, you fellers, up there; move down below the road and get to leeward. You're not a bunch o' roses, nohow, after being cooped up on that steamboat and the cars."

Still the cattle grew momentarily more fractious and unruly. The drivers would lash them down to the edge of the creek, when they would snort, throw up their tails and dash back through the brush.

The whistles from the engine became more imperative. "Say, send some of your men across the creek there to help mine get the drove across," begged the Lieutenant. "I'm afraid thy won't wait for me on that train, and it's the last chance I'll have. I must get back."

"Scarcely," said Shad, who saw an opportunity of evading the duty. "Your business is to deliver the cattle to us this side the creek. We've no orders to go over there after them. We were simply to march up the bank of the creek and wait there. If you want us to drive your cattle, you must bring them over here. We ain't going after them. They'll be trouble enough after we get them. We ain't going around hunting for trouble."

The Lieutenant sat on his horse and watched the growing commotion in his herd with deep distress depicted on his face. "I must get back on that train," he said to Si and Shorty. "I've been in the field now since the very first and never asked for a furlough till now. My mother is not in good health, and there's no telling how long she'll live. I'd like to see her once more."

"Too bad, but most of us have mothers that we'd like to see," remarked Si, but with a touch of sympathy in his voice. "But they'll have to wait until the campaign is over."

"Besides," continued the Lieutenant, his face growing so red that it showed through the tan, "I'm engaged to be married to a girl who's waited for me ever since I first enlisted, in 1861. I hate to ask her to wait any longer. Besides, it ain't safe. There's a widower with a big farm after her, and her father and mother favor him."

"You go right over there and take that train," said Si decidedly. "We'll look after your cattle."

"That we will," echoed Shorty, with even more decision. "Get back home as quick as you can, if there's a rich widower after your girl. Don't lose a minute. Wouldn't trust a widower far's you could sling an ox by the tail."

"You give me your word of honor that there's 500 cattle over there?" asked Si as a final precaution.

"I give you my solemn word of honor, as an officer and a gentleman, that there are 501 over there."

"All right," answered Si. "Break for your train and save your girl from that widower, at any cost. May you be happy and have lots o' children. We'll take care o' your herd all right. I've bin used to cattle all my life and know just how to manage 'em."

Si and Shorty and Jake Dye went over the creek with the Lieutenant, and re-

ceived from him his horses and those of his helpers, and saw them rush off for the train. Si sent Sandy over with the Lieutenant's horse for Shad and took the next best himself.

"Now, boys," said Si encouragingly, "there's going to be no trouble about this. All that's required in driving cattle is a little patience and knack. They're the best and kindest things in the world, if they're only handled right. There's a great deal o' natural cussedness in pigs and sheep, but cattle's naturally good. Treat 'em gently and kindly, and you're all right. Jake, you take 50 men, go down the crick a little way, deploy them around in the rear of the herd and rush 'em forward. Be sure and don't skip none. Search the brush thoroughly for 'em. I'll go down and find this lead steer, this Jo Wheeler, as they call him, and start him across the crick myself, and I think the rest'll foller all right. Them other fellers have been nagging and fretting him until they've got him wild."

"Where is this Jo Wheeler, Pete?" he asked, coming up to that youth, who, oblivious to the worries of his seniors, was employing his leisure in trying to beguile a fish to bite at a fat grub worm he had found in the rotting wood and fixed to a hook he had taken from his pocket.

"The last time I saw that white-faced skeezicks," answered Pete, indifferently, as he made a jerk in response to a nibble, "he'd started with his head and tail up for Chattanooga, as if there was a circus there and he must see the parade."

And Peter carefully cast his hook for another trial.

"Here, drop that pole, put that hook-and-line back in your pocket, and 'tend to your business, Pete," said Si irritably. "The United States ain't paying you \$16 a month to catch sunfish. Come with me and find that steer, and be quick about it."

Pete sighed at a lost opportunity, but put up his tackle, and the two started in search of the herd leader. The cattle were all now quietly browsing around in the little valley. Several red steers were found, but none of them had the white face, the crop in the left ear, and the other distinguishing characteristics of the sought-for Jo Wheeler. That individual seemed to have disappeared as utterly as if the earth had swallowed him. Si began to be feverish, as the afternoon was passing away. He galloped back to Jake Dye, to find that all the rear of the herd had been closed up, but there was no Jo Wheeler among them.

"Where in time can that measly wind-sucker be?" said Si, wiping his face and making another tour of the cattle.

He made a vain effort to have one of the other red steers assume the lead, but each of them, after being urged forward a little ways, would suddenly slip off to one side, and presently fall to quietly munching the grass, while the other cattle would

“HERE THEY COME! CLEAR THE TRACK, EVERYBODY!”



not pay sufficient attention to the performance to look up from their browsing.

Si sent Shorty back for some more of the men, and they deployed as a skirmish line to work through the herd, and the ground it occupied, in search of a red steer with a white face, a bell on, and a crop in his left ear.

A precious hour was spent in this vain search, and Si lost his temper as far as to make some acrimonious remarks to Jake Dye and his men about their carelessness in looking to the rear, which had let the steer escape.

Si stopped on a little knoll not far from the ford, to think over what to do next, and gather in his lieutenants for further directions.

Pete took advantage of the lull to look around for another worm to bait his hook. He presently yelled:

"Sarjint, there's that confounded steer, hid in that bunch o' cedars there. He's bin there all the time, standing so still that he hain't even tinkled his bell. That's just like an ox. That's just what makes me despise an ox."

Si rushed up there, to find Jo Wheeler gazing with mildly contemptive, indifferent eyes upon the turmoil around him, as if it was a matter in which he had only the most languid and spectacular interest.

Time was so important that Si violently restrained his angry desire to rush at the bullock with his whip. Besides, he remembered his admonitions to his men as to kindness. He moved quietly around to the rear and ordered him out.

Jo Wheeler's mood underwent a lightning transformation. Before Si could think he suddenly dashed out of the copse and started on a gallop up the creek, to the left and away from the ford, a way that none of them had so far shown the slightest desire to go. The others as suddenly stopped their browsing and started after him on a dead run.

Si jumped into the saddle and started after, circling around to head him off.

"Dumbed if I ever saw a horned critter run so in my life" exclaimed Si, as he stopped to rescue his hat from the brush. "Must be crossed with a deer. I'd like to send him back to Injanny to trot in single harness for a prize. But he can't keep up that gait for long. Nothing covered with sole leather can."

But a mile had been passed, and Jo Wheeler's wind and bottom seemed unimpaired in the least. Though Si had a good horse, and could ride him for all that he was worth, he had trouble keeping Jo in sight.

"Think I'd like to have that steer," remarked Shorty, "and get the contract for carrying the fast mail to San Francisco. Don't think he'll stop in Chattynogy. He wants to see friends in Nashville."

But a half mile farther Jo Wheeler seemed to conclude that over-exercise might be bad for his heart. He whirled

suddenly to the left and plunged into a paw-paw thicket, where he stood as motionless and silent as if carved out of wood. The others stopped, lolled out their tongues and panted.

But he could not play that trick twice on Si, who was old enough skirmisher to watch for the bushes shaking. He rode carefully to a little knoll in front of the copse, and as he looked back from it he could see the country around the ford, and the cattle still turmoiling around there, utterly refusing to start across the creek. His patience was clear exhausted, and, besides, he was so far away that any exhibition of temper would not have a bad effect on the boys. There were piles of large rounded pebbles, called "dornicks" by the people of that country, just the size for a strong man to hurl with deadly effect. Si picked up one of these and threw it into the brush with all the might that flaming rage could lend to his stalwart arm, and when Si threw a stone it was no joke. It hit Jo Wheeler's side with a whack like a note on a bass drum, and startled him from his meditations on what fools men were who tried to drive cattle. Before he could formulate his ideas another one struck him on the rump with such force as to almost knock him onto his knees. Jo Wheeler had been around the army long enough to know that that "position was no longer tenable," and as he did not have time to think of any other way, he started on a gallop back on that on which he had just come.

Si gathered his hat full of the dornicks, leaped into his saddle and galloped after him, flinging a stone after him at every opportunity, and accompanying it with a volley of "Dumb you!" "Consarn you!" "Plague take you," and similar Wabash expletives boiling out at white heat.

"Here they come! Here they come! Clear the track, everybody," yelled Shorty, laughing, as they came in sight. "I'll bet every cent I've got, two to one, on the bay steer—out of Bullbeef, and damned by everybody in the army. Who'll take it? Three to one, and no offers. Hump yourself, Si, he's a-gaining on you. Push on the reins. Don't throw stones and swear, Si. That's not kind. Always treat cattle kindly."

Si sent a stone flying in the direction of his partner, who dodged as it whizzed by him.

Si was landing the stones with such effect on Jo Wheeler that when the latter reached the ford he turned and dashed across it and up the hill on the other side, still followed by Si, and he by the cattle, who no longer showed antipathy when they saw their leader go. They went over with such a rush now that Monty and Harry could not make an accurate count. But they were certain that fully 500 had passed, and would have been willing to make the number near double.

The cattle continued moving at a rate

which promised to make up a good deal that was lost by their previous stubbornness. Jo Wheeler maintained his lead, and paced along at a gait which kept Si's horse moving. Riding by the side of Shad Graham, Si would look back from each rise and note with satisfaction the mile-long column pressing on through the narrow valley. As there were cleared fields on either side of the road, there was now little difficulty in keeping the cattle together. But Si began to fear that he pace at which they were going would soon break them down, and he tried to get Jo Wheeler to strike a slower gait. That erratic individual, however, had ideas of his own as to traveling, and showed such disinclination to be interfered with that Si, after several attempts, prudently let him have his own way, especially as they were now going over a hill, which had brush on either side the road, and offered endless possibilities of scatterment.

They descended into a wide, open valley, which struck Si at once as a good place for rounding up and bedding down the cattle for the night, and also to graze them for an hour or two in the morning. The sun was now beginning to sink behind the mountains, and it would be soon necessary to stop. He brought all his herding skill to bear. He got Shad, Shorty and the rest of the mounted men immediately behind him on the right side of the moving line, and as the column descended onto the plain, began to press its head slowly and carefully over toward the left. Jo Wheeler bore off to the left to keep a distance from the horsemen closing quietly and persistently in upon him, slowed down, and presently found himself describing a wide circle around the valley, coming back toward where he entered it. Presently the whole herd was "milling" around in the most satisfactory manner, with the horsemen gradually contracting the circle. At length Jo Wheeler stopped, gazed contemplatively for a minute or more on the darkling mountain tops and meditated on the mutability of mundane affairs and the vicissitudes in an ox's life. Then his fore knees suddenly bent, but his haunches came first to the ground, and without any apparent preliminaries. He continued his speculative gaze on the mountain crests, gave a resounding sigh over the vanity of bovine existence and man's inhumanity to the whole horned race, and then began deliberately chewing his cud, and sinking into deeper and deeper reflections. The rest followed his example, and soon the whole herd was lying in a compact mass, engaged in contented rumination.

"Must be some fun about being a steer, after all," remarked Shorty, gazing on the scene. "He eats his grub twice and swallows it three times, and so gets at least twice as much good out of it. But, then, when he hain't none, he must be twice as hungry as other people."

"We're all right, now," said Si satis-

fiedly, as he disposed his men for the night and came back to take a last look at the herd before it became too dark. "We had a little trouble starting them, because we were strange to them, and they strange to us. But we done that rounding up in great shape. Oldest cow puncher in America couldn't have done it better. I'll make a detail directly, to take turns riding herd all night, and keeping from being disturbed, and tomorrow morning we'll just unwind 'em just the way we wound 'em up to-night, and start 'em right along without any trouble. All we've got to do is to keep 'em from being disturbed to-night, and I don't think there'll be any trouble about that, for there ain't anything alive in this part of the country. What ain't been killed has been scared off. I think my strongest point is stock, and I'll go into stockraising and handling, after the war. There's a pile o' money in it for a man's who's built for the business."

"If you heave another dornick so close to my head as that'n to-day, you're liable not to live to see the end of the war," remarked Shorty, as they sauntered back to the fire for their coffee and crackers. "You throw stones too well to make it funny. I'd rather have a rebel flinging shells at me."

The crisp evening air was redolent of the fragrance of boiling coffee and frying meat. The tired partners sat down in deep content to a full meal of the grateful viands furnished by the Commissary.

"Driving cattle isn't so bad, after all," remarked Shorty, as the mollifying effects of a good supper began to make themselves felt. "I guess I'd about as soon go on to Atlanta this way as any other."

"Sooner go this way than be cooped up on the cars," echoed Si, contentedly.

A white mule, which had escaped from his corral, or had been turned loose to die in the Summer, had surveyed the scene from the hill top, which had been his refuge and range during his period of freedom. The sight of the fires and the smell of the coffee and meat brought homesickness to his hybridized heart. It brought back memories of the happy days of companionship with his fellows, of regular rations of rich, golden corn, and the fragrant, filling hay, with the soulful voice of the teamster lifted in curdling profanity. He would rise and go back to his home, and the bins of forage, for which his soul an-hungered. He stole down the hill like a ghost and approached the fires.

The cattle saw him and began to throw up their heads and sniff. Some labored to their feet.

"Something's scaring them beasts," said Si, stopping, filling his pipe, and looking anxiously at the herd. "What can it be? Can't be no wolves or painters in these mountains, and all the dogs was starved out long ago."

Their campfire of pitch pine sent a bright beam of light directly into the cen-

ter of the herd, where Jo Wheeler had risen to his nimble feet.

"Keep quiet, boys, so I can listen," said Si. "Shorty, you circle down quietly to the right, and I'll take the left, and see if you can see anything. Make as little noise as you can and keep a few rods away from the herd."

The mule had by this time arrived quite near, and mentioned his hunger for regulation rations, his abject loneliness and his

gladness at finding old friends in a series of brays so loud that they pealed back from the neighboring hills.

That was enough for Jo Wheeler. With a bellow of fright, and head and tail up, he struck out for the neighboring hills as if shot from a catapult. There was a rush as of mighty waters, as every one of the 500 cattle, with clattering horns and hoofs, dashed madly away in the gloom, leaving Si almost paralyzed with dismay.

CHAPTER XIII.

ANOTHER DAY WITH THE FRESH BEEF DETACHMENT.

If the red-hot torrent of curses which Shorty poured on the stampeding cattle could have been transmuted into any form of physical blastment every hoof and horn would have perished then and there.

He snatched up a musket and tried to shoot the too vociferous mule, as a relief to his feelings. But the musket did not happen to be loaded, and before he could get a cartridge Pete and Sandy, who had appropriated the mule, interposed to save their steed. They had not been assigned horses in the distribution, and felt slighted. The mule was a Providential interposition to right an injustice. Besides, they were genuine boys, and so had a warm welcome for any vagrant animal. They had been in the army long enough not to get excited over anything that did not immediately concern them, and so, while the turmoil was going on in front, they led him away to a quiet spot, fed him hardtack and bunches of grass, admired his shape, pitied his loneliness, and congratulated themselves upon their prize.

"Aint he nice, Sandy?" asked Pete, stroking his long hair, where it had not been frayed off by the brush. "He's so kind and gentle. I always did like mules. I don't believe in swearing at 'em, as most people do. A mule has feelings same's we have. We'll call him Abednego, because he's one o' the Lost Children of Israel."

"Abednego wasn't one of the Lost Children," Sandy corrected him. "He was one o' them that went through the fiery furnace."

"What was the name o' the Lost Children, then?"

"Didn't have none, that I ever heard of. Lost their names when they lost themselves, I suppose."

"Well, Abednego's a good name, anyway. It shall be his. Old feller, you're to answer to Abednego after this, and

you'll be a good, decent mule, won't you, and not be too spry with your heels?"

"Great heavens, Si," groaned Shad, watching the mighty rush of the cattle, "what will become of them? At the rate they're running they'll fall into the Atlantic Ocean by morning."

"No," answered Si, who was beginning to pull himself together. "Steers aint long-distance runners. They aint geared for much over two-mile-an-hour, as a regular thing. They can light out like a scared dog for a mile or two, but then their bellows need mending, and they come down to a regular log-chain gait."

"But even two-mile-an-hour'll scatter them all over Georgia by morning," protested Shad. "Eight or 10 hours, even at two miles an hour, with each scared brute striking out in a different direction, will scatter them like a tick of feathers in a hurricane, and you'll have about as much chance of gathering them up again. I'm simply ruined for life. How much do you suppose those cattle are worth a-piece?"

"Let me see? Pap got \$150 for a yoke o' steers he sold last Spring."

"Great heavens! 588 times \$75 is \$37,500, and the Government won't let me off a single steer. I'll simply have to stay in the service for the rest of my life for my board and clothes. Fine outlook for a young man who wants to go back home at the close of the war, if he lives through, marry his best girl, and grow up with the country."

"O, it aint near so bad as that," said Si, consolingly. "I don't think they'll scatter so badly as they seem. They're in a valley, and cattle hate to run up-hill as bad as men do. You mount and ride after them. Do not press 'em; just keep within sight or hearing. I'll be along with you at once. Shorty, you and Monty and Harry mount and follow me. Keep a sharp lookout for by-roads, and when we

strike one, one of you follow it, and look out for cattle. Jake, get the men together and march after us. We mustn't crowd the stock; just follow them until they run themselves out."

In spite of his cheering words to Shad, Si was much distressed. He knew too much about the vagaries of frightened steers to be very confident of his own assertions, and felt that his chances of getting together again more than 300 or 400 of the original 500 were not at all bright.

"That dumberd Joe Wheeler," he muttered to himself, "haint much more meat on him than a deer, and can run like one. I believe he's got deer blood in him. Looks and runs like it. If I ever get hold of him again I'll cut him up and send him round to headquarters for venison. Wonder why they ever bought such a beast for the army. He's already run a hundred times as much meat off the rest than he has on his own plaguery bones. Wonder if I'll ever get him again? He may be 20 miles from here by daylight."

Si jogged down the road, keeping a proper distance behind the rearmost of the herd, and listening anxiously for every significant sound that came from the clatter of horns and hoofs. At each by-road that he could make out in the darkness he sent some one to explore it, expecting that bunches of cattle, hard pressed by those in their rear, would break out to the side along such paths.

As near as Si could make out in the star-lit darkness, the valley in which they were running rose and narrowed toward a high range that formed the eastern skyline. Between him and that limit the country was surging and roaring with the rushing animals. He looked apprehensively at the woods and brush on either side, but comforted himself with thinking:

"They're all steep, and cattle won't run far up-hill. Besides, cattle are afraid o' strange woods, especially at night. If there's only a nice valley on the other side o' the ridge, the left o' them may round up there again. In the morning I'll deploy the men back here, and skirmish through the woods, and bring in the stragglers."

He was right in his reasoning. The cattle were already tired with their day's journey, and the ascent of the ridge took out of them most of their remaining strength. Si watched them against the sky, slowly laboring over the crest, felt confident that several hundred must have remained together, followed at a little distance the rear of the column, looked down from the ridge to see the valley below filling up with the stagnating mass, put his boys into bivouac as they came up, and sat down against a tree to wait for daylight.

Not having any particular duty assigned them, Sandy and Pete busied themselves with their mule. In his gladness at getting back again with human beings he

was remarkably docile, and responded kindly to their petting. They slung their blankets and haversacks on him, contrived a bridle out of their gun-slings, with a piece of telegraph wire, which Sandy had carried away for a memento, as a bit, and drew cuts which should have the first ride. Pete won, mounted Abednego, with Sandy's assistance, and jogged along in the rear of the infantrymen, following Jake Dye.

The mule had been so long in the woods that he had acquired a wild-beast odor, which the sensitive nostrils of the cattle instantly detected, as the wind was up the valley, and it filled them with great alarm. Every few minutes the marching men would yell, and scramble out of the road, as some steer, filled "with the terrors of the night," would dash by, snorting or bellowing.

This greatly angered Si. He ran down under the hill so as to shut off his voice from the herd, and shouted:

"Stop that yelling back there, at once. Stop fretting them cattle. You'll stampede the herd again. Treat 'em gently. You needn't drive 'em now, anyway. Wait till morning. That'll be time enough."

"Confound it, we aint driving 'em," they would shout back. "They're driving us. They're charging us just like rebel cavalry. They must be rebel cattle. They've knocked over several of us already."

Si peered through the darkness, and caught sight of a white, ghostly shape moving forward.

"It's that blasted mule again," he shouted back. "He's scaring the cattle. Some o' you go back there and shoot him."

"Ifi, there! Hi, there! Don't shoot! I'm on the mule," yelled Pete, as several gun-locks clicked. "You mustn't shoot this mule, nohow. He belongs to me and Sandy. He aint doing nothing to nobody. He's the nicest, kindest mule that ever lived. He wouldn't harm a skeeter!"

Whether Abednego could not stand so much praise to his face, whether the pleasures of human association were beginning to pall on him, whether he decided that he had been good long enough, or whether he comprehended the danger he was in, he certainly acted quickly and decisively on the impulse that moved him. He whisked about like a flash, and by an indescribable movement sent Pete and his belongings off into a pile on the ground, caught one of the canteens as it fell with a kick that sent it over into a smuch thicket, and with a loud, discordant bray bade farewell to the society he had found uncongenial, and started back the way they had come.

"There," whimpered Pete, as he extricated himself from the mass. "That comes o' your plaguery fooling. Why can't you let me and Sandy alone? You're always imposing on us, just because we're boys."

You don't want us to have no fun at all. We wasn't doing nothing to you. Sandy, you stay here and take care o' the things, while I run back and catch him. Cope, cope, Abednego."

Si had fully intended to remain awake all night, but he fell into cat-naps, as he sat against the tree. He awakened with a start shortly after daylight, to find several hundred of the cattle quietly feeding in the abandoned fields belonging to a double-log house situated in the center of a long, tolerably wide valley. The owner had apparently only cut and shocked his wheat when the irruption of the armies had compelled him to fly with his family to some more peaceful locality. There were 25 or 30 acres of sparse standing corn, off which and the meadows, springing up afresh, after the Fall rains, the cattle were making a fair breakfast.

"We've played in great luck, after all," remarked Si to Shad. "There must be 300 or 400 of the beasts down there, and they're getting their paunches full. I don't see how our cavalry and Quartermaster came to leave all that forage. The infantry's been along here. You can't see a rail, nor a chicken, nor a hog."

"But think," groaned the hopeless Shad, "if we're only 100 short—100 at \$75 a-piece is \$7,500, or the price of a splendid farm. I'll scratch a poor man's head the rest of my days."

"O, it aint so bad as that," said Si encouragingly. "'Taint near so bad, I'm sure. But we'll find out just how bad it is. We'll slip down in there among them as they're grazing and count 'em. We can separate 'em up into fields and get at the number pretty certain."

Shad was first-class in mathematics, and used to rapid and accurate counting. Si went at the task, slowly, regularly and deliberately. With Sid's and Alf's assistance, he got the cattle all on one side of the road or the other, and then separated into groups in the fields, for the easier counting. He then deliberately went over each group several times, tallying each by notches on a stick, in the approved Wabash way, until he could make his counts agree with each other, and with the swifter ones of his assistants. Sid had made his count with knots on a string and Alf by tallies on a pad of prescription blanks. Si figured up the result with a stick in the sand, and announced with disdain:

"I can't find but 386 of 'em. We're 114 short."

"I came to that conclusion a good while ago," said Shad. "I've counted them over to my certainty, if not satisfaction, and if there's one more than 386 I'll agree to eat him for supper. Let's see: 114 times \$75 is \$8,550. A mere trifle (and he laughed sardonically). Nine-tenths of the elderly men in Indiana have worked all their lives, and struggled with chills

and fever, and dodged the Assessor, to lay up an average of about half that. If the Government would give me time, and let me pay it off at the rate of \$100 a year, it would take me over 85 years to get out of debt. Start your cattle on to Atlanta. I'm simply another victim to this cruel war, only I'll probably die in the penitentiary or the poorhouse, instead of on the battlefield."

"Now, don't be so discouraged, Shad," remonstrated Si. "We'll probably gather up a lot more in the brush. I'll go back now and start the boys out skirmishing for them."

"No, no; don't bother. Don't tire the boys out for nothing. I might as well be hung for an old sheep as a lamb. A few more or less won't make any difference. Suppose you should find as many as 25 or 30. I should still be owing the Government \$6,000 or \$7,000, and my hopes wouldn't be a bit less blasted. No; save your shoe-leather and mine, and start your cattle on for Atlanta. The sooner we get there, and the sooner I begin working out my sentence, the sooner I'll get through. Start your cattle."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," answered Si. "I'll not go until I'm sure that there's not a steer left anywheres round."

As he spoke, Monty came up, driving 10 cattle, which he had found in a by-path, but Shad refused to be encouraged.

"It's true it reduces my indebtedness \$750, but it'd still take me 78 years to pay off at the rate of \$100 a year, and 75 years from now I won't care for a matter of seven or eight years, one way or the other. These trifling reductions are merely aggravations. Drive on your cattle."

Then Harry came up with nine more he had found in a little pocket in the woods, but Shad was obdurate that these were mere drops in the bucket, and only accentuated his trouble by presenting harrowing details. Shorty came back with 16, and Jake Dye's skirmish line succeeded in rounding up enough stragglers to increase the total in the valley to 450. But this seemed the end. The boys on the skirmish line were positive that they had searched every nook and cranny of the valley, and no more could be found.

"What'd I tell you in the first place?" inquired Shad, despairingly. "You're still 50 short, which makes me owe the Government \$3,500, which is in effect just as much as at first, for it's a load that I never can get rid of. The others have probably run into the Atlantic Ocean. We're losing time. Start your cattle."

But it occurred to Shorty that he had not gone to the end of the by-road upon which he had found his bunch of 16, at the bottom of a hill. He had assumed that they had stopped there, rather than climb the hill, and that that was all there were of them. He rode back and exam-

ined the place. The ascent beyond it was gravelly, and showed no marks of travel, but as he rode farther to make sure he thought that a number of cattle must have passed on beyond. He followed the road, which wound along the summit of the hill, for three or four miles, when it descended into one of those little circular, secluded valleys peculiar to those moun-

comes to figures," he communed with himself, "but I'll bet a doubloon to a picayune there's 75 cattle over there. That's 25 more'n Shad needs to stand pat with the Quartermaster, but that's his lookout. If he stood to lose the price of a good farm by being 50 short, he may gain a horse and lot by having 25 ahead. I'll debate this after I drive 'em in."



"HE SAW ANOTHER MAN, DRESSED IN BLUE, RIDING A HORSE."

ains, and known as "coves." To his delight he saw a lot of cattle gathered there, peacefully grazing on the lush grass of the fertile little valley. Among them was Jo Wheeler, whose bell gave an occasional mellow tinkle.

Yes; the whole 50 were there, it seemed to Shorty; but the matter was so important to Shad that he determined to make sure by counting them, and arithmetic above 10 was rather hard work for Shorty. He counted carefully, and was astonished to find that he made out 75. He rubbed his eyes and counted again, and made out 76. He went over them again, and found 74. This was getting exciting. He reached up into the pine tree above him and pulled off a twig for every steer he saw, and the twigs certainly numbered 75.

"I'm a little stiff in the joints when it

The bright sky suddenly became overcast, as is frequent in the mountains. Little wisps of mist floated about. The cattle stopped feeding, sniffed, gave low bellows, and began to gather more compactly.

Shorty started to follow the path skirting around to his left, to round them up and start them on. He saw coming out of the haze another man, dressed in blue, and riding a horse. Naturally, Shorty's first thought was that it was one of his comrades, who had also come across the stragglers. Then he looked more carefully and saw that he was none of his detachment. Then it occurred to him that possibly it was a man from some other detachment that happened to be in the neighborhood, and hopes of a surplus of 25 for Shad began to fade. He looked the man over carefully. He was riding a McClel-

lan saddle, and was in complete blue, from cap to boots, but there was something about him that betrayed he was not a Union soldier. No matter how old, ragged and dirty a man's uniform got, yet there was always something about him that showed he was a soldier, and not a camp-follower who had picked up cast-off bits of uniform and put them on. In some indescribable way he looked and acted as if he belonged to the uniform, and the uniform belonged to him, and that it had been reduced to its present condition on his body and no other.

Shorty had thoughtlessly come away without any arms, but the new-comer showed none, and Shorty thought he would advance and investigate him. The man caught sight of him in the indistinct haze of the wood's edge, and called out:

"Hello, Todd. Did ye pick up any mo'?"

The voice and intonation were so unmistakably Southern that the truth began to dawn on Shorty. This was one of a gang of cattle-thieves, of the guerrilla element, who dressed themselves up in cast-off clothes found around abandoned camps and watched an opportunity to run off cattle. He had not expected that any had been left in this desolated country. He imitated his questioner's tones in his reply:

"No; they'uns's 've gathered all the balance up, an' gwine on."

"W-a-l-l," drawled the other. "We'uns orter to be satisfied with last night's work. Biggest haul, by long odds, we'uns ever made, an' come so unexpected. Reglar windfall. I hadn't no sort o' idee that any Yankee cattle was comin' along this-a-way now. Makes a mouty purty sight, don't hit?"

While the man was talking Shorty had jumped from his saddle, and cut a straight young hickory, nearly an inch in diameter, and lopped off its top after he remounted. Both were now riding slowly toward one another, the rebel looking over the cattle, and gloating on the wealth that had accrued to him and his companions.

"I 'spect we'uns'd better tote the critters over ter Buckalew's Cove at onct," continued the rebel. "This is too mouty close to the big road fer sich a passel. They're gettin' restless, anyway. They smell a storm. We'uns'd better skeet 'round that-a-way, an' begin pressing 'em over toward the Buckalew road."

As they came nearer, Shorty saw that while the man carried no gun, there was the unmistakable bump of a navy revolver under the faded blue overcoat. Shorty was riding a quick, springy young horse, and he grasped his hickory pole lance-fashion, and decided what he should do when the recognition came, as it must come within a few seconds.

"Reub and Ike must be comin' up this way 'bout now," continued the rebel, look-

ing backward, as if to see them. "When they come"—(a whoop from the hill behind interrupted). "Why' thar's Todd, up thar! Who air yo'?"

The rebel straightened up, bent a piercing gaze on Shorty, and reached under his overcoat flap for his revolver.

"Haint no time now to swap biographies, you black-muzzled thief," said Shorty, taking aim at the man's stomach with his pole, and sticking the spurs into his horse. The force of the punch lifted the rebel out of his saddle and onto the withers of his horse, whence he rolled ingloriously to the ground, clutching at the horse's tail as he fell. Shorty leaped to the ground to wrest the revolver from his hand before Reub and Ike should come up. But as he grabbed for it he heard them call from a neighboring rise:

"S-a-y, Pollock, yo' an' Todd stop yer eternal foutin' an' come up hyah ter-wunst, an' help 'tend ter these critters. They're gwine ter break away. Come up hyah, I done tell yo', or we'uns'll loose every one on 'm. Quit yer dratted foutin' an' 'tend ter yer bizniss."

The warning came too late. Out of a wreath of mist behind Shorty had come a ghost-like form, that announced its arrival with a resonant bray, that conveyed a mule's heated views on a variety of subjects connected with the war. The sight and sound were too much for Joe Wheeler's already shaking nerves. He had not found the cove the haven of peace he sought when he separated from the main herd. He would now go back to them by the quickest and shortest route. He echoed Abednego's bray with a resounding bellow, and with head and tail up started off on a trail leading to the right, which would eventually take him back into the road which he had left miles back. The rest of the herd went crashing and clattering after.

"Hi, Corpril Elliott. Where are you? Where are you?" called Pete's shrill voice, from Abednego's back. "There's a sneaking bushwhacker up here, trying to get the drop on you."

A shot answered this, aimed at Pete's voice, but it went wide of the mark, and Pete trotted up to Shorty just in time to see him tear the revolver from the struggling rebel, and take all the fight out of him by a couple of terrific kicks in the ribs.

Todd, who had gotten an imperfect but sufficient view of what was happening from a little distance, now fired a wild shot with a view of expressing his feelings, and disappeared as fast as his horse could carry him.

"Where in the world did you come from, Pete?" asked Shorty, as he mounted again. "Aint you lost?"

"No; but I come purty near being this time. You see, I run back to catch Abednego, and when I got him and mounted

and was coming back I saw you turn up into this road, and I followed you. I had quite a time with Abednego, who wanted to go straight ahead, instead o' turning after you. That's what made me so far behind. He's a nice mule, but he wants his own way."

"Well, get off him and get on that rebel's horse there, and we'll follow up these cattle. They're going the right way, if I have the lay o' the land straight, and will soon run into the other herd. We'll keep behind, and see that none o' them straggle off into the brush."

But Pete would not abandon his mule. He whipped the saddle and bridle off the horse, and on to Abednego, and remounted. His short legs would not reach the stirrups, however, and he had no time to shorten them, for Shorty, fearing that Ike and Reub would be somewhere, attempting to turn the herd, slipped the revolver into his overcoat pocket, picked up his hickory pole, and started off on a sharp trot after the herd, followed by Pete with his stirrups clattering against Abednego's sides. The rebel's horse, for lack of other suggestion, followed.

Shorty was not mistaken. Out of a left-hand by-path a little ways ahead came Reub and Ike, shouting.

"Hyah, yo' infernal fool, who air yo', an' what air yo' a-doin'? Don't yo' see yo' air a-runnin' them thar critters right over ter whar the Yankees is? Come across this way, an' head 'em off."

Shorty changed his pole to his left and charged Reub's midriff as he had Pollock's, but with a force that seemed to actually cave him in. Shorty reined up a little, and, half-turning, settled Ike with a sweeping crack over the head. Then he and Pete swept on after the cattle.

Si, riding with Shad ahead of the now regularly-moving herd, had come across little bunches of steers which had outrun the main body a mile or so before stopping, and gathered them up until they had 25 altogether, but Shad refused to be consoled.

"It's true that we're only 25 short now," he said, "but that's all we can possibly get, and 25 are worth over \$1,800. It'll take me 18 years to pay it at \$100 a year, or six years at \$300 a year, which is the very most I could save. You're very good, Si, but it's scarcely mollifying my trouble, not curing it. I'd better stood a court-martial for disobedience of orders in not receiving the brutes at all."

Jo Wheeler came tearing down a side road through the thick brush on a hill to the left, halted an instant to look up and down the main thoroughfare, saw his late companions pouring over the hill to his right, gave a sounding sigh of gratification, and started on a slow, tired walk in the direction the herd was pointing, assuming his customary position as leader, as if nothing had happened. Behind him came his 75 companions of the cove, with

Shorty, Pete, Abednego and the rebel's horse bringing up the rear.

"Why, there's Jo Wheeler," said Si, delightedly. "Where in the world did he come from? And (counting the others, as they filed down through the brush) there's your 25 lost steers, Shad. And, great Scott! There's a lot more, some with C. S. brands on 'em. What does this mean? 20 with U. S. and 30 with C. S. Why, Shad, we're 50 ahead of the game. Hello, Shorty, where did you find 'em, and what 've you been doing?"

"O, me and Pete have been back there a little ways transacting business with some gents who seem to've been going into stock at the expense of the United States and the Southern Confederacy. They seemed to be neutral sort o' cusses, who didn't care who they stole a steer from so long as they got him."

"Yes," piped up Pete, "and you ought t've seen Corpril Elliott poke 'em in the gizzard with that long pole. It was more fun than a circus. I'll bet it turned their stomachs and bent their backbones. And I've got this horse for Sandy."

The other cattle, now coming up, began to sniff, shy off and plunge.

"Here, Pete," said Si, "that dumberd mule o' your's is scaring the cattle again. Take the blamed ghost away and kill him. Make sure he never comes near the herd again. Take him away, I tell you."

"That's always the way," muttered Pete, as he disappeared in the brush. "Always blaming me for everything because I'm a boy. 'Taint my fault, nor Abednego's. It's because the cattle are such blamed fools. I aint going to kill him. He's going along, if I go along, and nobody shall hurt him. I'll ride him, and Sandy'll ride the horse."

He went back in the woods out of sight, and waited for his partner to come along.

"Say, Shad," said Shorty, after they had rounded up the cattle for the night, and were eating supper. "I aint taking no credit for bringing that herd in. It's just what I ought to've done, and I'm mighty glad I had the good luck. But I want you to have the benefit of them extra cattle. How much are they worth to the Government?"

"About \$3,750," answered Shad.

"Well, the Government ought to give you a nice house for your mother, or that other lady. This morning you stood to lose about \$8,000; tonight your chips would cash in \$3,750 ahead."

"Makes no difference," said Shad. "Since I'm an officer, I must be responsible for any property turned over to me. I don't get any premiums on honesty."

"Then no commission for me," said Shorty. "I aint going to play no game with the United States, nor with nobody else, where heads it wins, and tails I lose. I thought the Government'd be above such a thing."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BOYS GET THE CATTLE INTO CAMP.

The boys of the 200th Ind. knew Si well enough to not want him to speak twice to them about anything, so Pete and Sandy felt that prudence dictated their keeping Abeinogo out of sight and action, a good wade at least, after receiving Si's positive orders to take him off and kill him. It was the first time that they had thought of disobeying Si, but their boyish hearts went out to the vagrant mule, and, boy-like, the more trouble he made the better they liked him. They kept themselves well to the rear during the day, exploring the corn-fields by which they passed for overlooked ears and blades for forage for their steeds. When the column halted at sundown they took their animals into a little sheltered nook of cedars, where they carefully tethered them, and lay down before them the substantial provision which they had accumulated. They hid their saddles, bridles and other traps under the cedars, and then went forward to join the other boys.

As the evening approached Si had entered a steep-walled cove, of fair size, which offered all the requirements for a good stopping-place for the night. There was plenty of water and grass, with some fields of corn. The sides were high and steep, and the only egress from the gap was at the farther end, through which the creek made its way. In the center stood what had been a comfortable hewed-log house, before the turmoil of war had driven the owner away. Shad, who had taken a deeper interest in cattle-driving since he found himself with 50 more head than at starting, assisted Si in the process of rounding-up. Jo Wheeler, who had apparently had quite enough of travel and adventure for the day, yielded readily to the suggestion of Si's horse closing in upon his left, turned from the road into the fields, and after a little circuit came to a willing halt in the stable-yard, as if it offered the home he had been seeking. Taking, with soulful eyes, his customary thoughtful survey of the darkling horizon, his knees bent, and his hanches suddenly came to the ground. He gave the same far-sounding sigh over the hopeless limitations of a steer's existence, and then philosophically devoted himself to the sensuous enjoyment of his end. The rest of the drove wearily followed his example, and soon were bunched up close around the house. Shad carefully counted them, with a little swelling of the

heart, as he made sure of having 550, and entered the sitting-room of the house, where Si, Shorty, Jake Dye and some of the others were starting a blazing fire in the great black cavern at the end of the house by means of a tickful of straw which had been emptied on the floor, at the migration of the family, and boards torn from the "dressers" and cupboards around the room.

"We must have something more substantial than these boards," remarked Shorty. "I think I noticed a smoke-house standing as I came in. I'll go out and tear it down. It'll furnish us enough to keep up a fire all night."

"I wouldn't do anything to make a noise," objected Shad. "It might scare the cattle. You know how fearful they are."

"Eh? What's that, Shad?" asked Si, looking at him in surprise.

"I mean that men who have \$30,000 or \$40,000 worth of Government property in charge cannot be too careful. And here we've picked up \$3,000 or \$4,000 worth more, and that doesn't grow on every bush, I tell you."

"Hello, what's come over you all at once, Shad? I haint been able to get you to take no interest in the drove at all so far."

"I've been doing a good job of able-bodied thinking this afternoon. I never before thought of the close relations between cattle and money—and big lots of it."

"Close relations?" echoed the more agricultural S., in wonderment. "Why, they're twins, and if anything cattle's the best o' the two. I'd a heap rather have a steer than \$75 in notes of an Illinois bank. He's a heap safer to hold. He can't be counterfeited, and his president and cashier aint liable to skip out betwixt two days with all his insides."

"That's so," admitted Shad. "But I'd never thought of it before. I'd only thought of cattle as a cow you had to go after when you wanted to stay with the boys and play town-ball, and which broke down the fence at night and spoiled the garden, and gave milk that you could buy from the neighbors at five cents a quart."

"Well, they're also a stack of steaks that'll cost you 25 cents a pound in the market and the things that grow the stuff for your \$15 boots," added Si.

"That's all true; but it's just come to me. I've been **thinking** over what Shorty

said last night. If we bring \$30,000 or \$40,000 worth of mighty skittish and losable property through this tangle of mountains all right, we're probably only doing our plain duty and what's expected of us, but I'll look out that they'll never shove such a job as this on us again. Why, this drove's worth more than the Lorena, with all her load. That was plain sailing, and easy in comparison. All we had to do was to stick to the boat, push her along, and fight off all comers. No particular credit in that. It was our little biz. But if we not only bring through all that we were intrusted with, but increase it by \$3,000 or \$4,000 worth, old Sherman ought to be tickled to death. I don't want anything for myself, except a certificate of good conduct and non-indebtedness, but he ought to do the handsome thing by you and Shorty and Jake. He ought to at least give you commissions."

"Don't want one," said Si, decisively. "We've got the best officers in the army in the 200th Injianny, and I wouldn't want to take the job away from one of them, even if I was suited for an officer, which I aint."

"Same here," echoed Shorty, who had come in with a load of the smoke-house logs. "I'm Third Corpril now, in Co. Q, 200th Injianny Volunteer Infantry, and that's good enough for any reasonable man."

"Mc, too," echoed Jake Dye. "I'm Second Sergeant now, and can be Orderly whenever I'll take it. But I'd rather somebody else'd call the roll and make details. I get as much cussing as I can stand in my present place."

"They are wanting good non-commissioned officers to take commissions in colored regiments," suggested Shad. "Sherman ought at least to make Si a Captain or a Major in one of those regiments, and Shorty and Jake First Lieutenants."

"No Captaincy of contrabands for me," answered Si. "Rather be a file-closer of Co. Q than command a regiment of woolly-heads."

"Same here," echoed Shorty. "Prefer chevrons to shoulder-straps every day. Don't catch on your overcoat."

"Don't know about that," said Jake. "I've often thought it'd be lots o' fun to take 100 field hands and drill 'em into first-class soldiers, and smash with 'em through a rebel line. But I'm not stuck on the job. If it came my way I might take it; that's all. Just now I'm most anxious to get back with the boys of the 1st Oshkosh. But I think that if there's any pie handed out for this job it ought to go to Shad, who run great risks and ought to have a big winning to pay up. I'm for everything for him."

"Same here," echoed Si. "Shad deserves everything. None of the rest of us took any risks. We were just putting

in our three years, unless sooner discharged."

"I follow that suit clear to the end of the hand," heartily agreed Shorty.

"Let that pass," said Shad. "I'll be well repaid if they appreciate how much you boys have done in this last service. Let's get supper, and then go out and make sure that our cattle are safe for the night."

After supper they lighted their pipes and went over to make a careful survey of the drove. They found all the wearied cattle lying quietly, glad of undisturbed rest. The clouds had cleared away, and the moon came out in all her glory. Si made a detail, who were to relieve one another in riding around the herd all night, a guard was set, and making themselves comfortable around great fires built in the wide chimney-places in the various rooms of the house, and fed by logs from the stable and other outbuildings that had so far escaped the camp-fires which had licked up the fences.

The next morning Shad was up betimes, and carefully counted the cattle before he would come to breakfast. He found them all there, peacefully feeding on the abundant herbage of the cove. His heart swelled with an unwonted pride over the 50 extra cattle, and he went over to where they were and scanned each steer with a sense of special ownership.

"We're to deliver these cattle to Capt. Hinkley Dingbat, Captain and Commissary of Subsistence," said Shad to Si and the others, looking over his orders, after breakfast. "I hope he's the right kind of a man. He ought to just swell up with joy at such a windfall, and make a big report on it. If he's got the right stuff in him he'll take us straight up to the Commissary-General and Sherman and make a red-hot report."

Shad was all impatience to move, but Si waited stubbornly until the bright sun was well up over the high eastern ridge before he approached the regal Jo Wheeler, and started him out to lead the line-of-march.

"We'll save time by letting them have their fill," he insisted to Shad. "They'll drive easier from having all they can hold, and we want to get a long pull out of them today. It's the last good feed we can give them. There isn't probably much around Atlanta."

"Well, we ought to cross the Chattahoochee by noon, at the farthest," answered Shad. "and be near Atlanta by night. I haven't any idea where we'll meet the Hon. Hinkley Dingbat, Captain and Commissary of Subsistence, but I'd rather it'd be in the morning, after he has had his breakfast, and is enjoying a good cigar, and in the humor of appreciating a big thing when he sees it."

As they rode forward through the

bright, crisp day they talked happily from time to time of the successful ending of a duty upon which they had entered reluctantly, and indulged in pleasant anticipations of what would be said and done at headquarters when they arrived. The full cattle jogged along regularly, even though they were pushed to a faster pace than usual, and there was no trouble even in getting them across the pontoon over the Chattahoochee. Jo Wheeler apparently did not see anything about it differing from an ordinary bridge, walked unhesitatingly across, and was followed with no more hesitation by the rest. Si stationed Shorty, Monty and Harry by the bridge to count, and they all concurred in 550 passing. Evening came on as they reached Peach Tree Creek, crossed the stream and rounded up their cattle in front of the moldering rifle-pits that crowned the crests. They had entered the outlying camps and corrals of the army. Si divided his detachment into three details for guard during the night, with Jake Dye as officer of the guard, and deployed a chain of sentries around the drove. He kept everybody ready to jump at a minute's notice, for now there were more dangers of a stampede, and besides he knew too well the thievish propensities of the hangers-on around a great army.

While he was doing this Shad went in search of Capt. Hinkley Dingbat. He returned late in the evening to report that while he had not seen him, he found that he was at his headquarters, some four or five miles down the road toward Atlanta. He had learned that he was a young West Pointer, very tenacious of his dignity and of regulations.

"That's all right," said Shad, hopefully. "After Col. Bonesteel, I think I can get along with that stamp of fellows. They're not so bad after all. They have only a few ideas, and they're concentrated on their own importance and that of red tape. Just cotton to them and you're all right. You bring up the cattle in the morning, Si, and I'll do the Regular Army act to Mr. Huckleberry Dinkelbinkelhheimer in one time and three motions. I'd like awfully well to have old Billy Tecumseh come riding around in his usual nosing, prying way, and give me a lot o' sass about the cattle we'd lost, like the others have, and allow me a chance to lay it in to him, right before you all in great shape."

"You can do it, Shad," said Shorty, fascinated at the prospect.

They had their breakfast at daylight the next morning, and rudely disturbed Jo Wheeler's mind by insisting that he rise and lead off, without any preliminary browsing. He rebelled at this, but Si had become pretty well-acquainted with him by this time, and would not permit any of his vagaries.

They all rode forward full of hopeful anticipations of Capt. Dingbat's astonishment and pleasure, and of receiving the coveted favorable mention from headquarters.

Shad caught sight of that gentleman standing in front of the only wall-tent they had so far seen. He was young, slender, wasp-waisted, stood very erect, with coat closely buttoned, gloves on hands, smoking a cigar, and looking over the corrals scattered around with an air of supreme and complacent proprietorship.

As he was on foot, Shad dismounted as he came up, threw the bridle over his arm, drew himself up rigidly at 10 paces distance, saluted and inquired:

"Capt. Dingbat, I believe?"

"Capt. Hinkley Dingbat, yes, sir," corrected the other, with official severity, and looking sternly at Shad's heels, which were much too far apart for a man standing at attention. Shad had been riding a good deal of late.

"Capt. Hinkley Dingbat," said Shad, bringing his heels together. "I'm Acting Lieutenant Graham, in charge of a drove of 500 cattle, which by this I'm ordered to deliver to you."

"And you've lost 100 or so of them on the way, like the rest," broke in the Captain. "Well, you'll have to explain that to the General, and probably a court. It's not my business to listen to excuses. I've no time. I'll simply receipt to you for what you turn over to me."

"On the contrary, Captain," broke in Shad, "I've got the full number, and more than that"—

"No matter about more than that," interrupted the Captain. "I've no time for anything but what your orders call for. If you've got your full quota it is most surprising. I don't believe it. Don't you try to play any tricks on me. I'm a Regular Army officer, sir; none of your slipshod volunteers. You received at Coolahchuckee Creek, according to this order which you have handed me, 500 steers, in good condition, and all branded U. S., which you were to deliver to me, in like number and condition. Drive them up, and let me see them. Walsh, you and Peters take your position there on either side of the road and count. Drive up your cattle, sir."

Boiling inwardly, Shad turned and motioned to Si to come on. Jo Wheeler passed majestically through the counters, followed by the others.

"Hold on, there," presently called out Walsh. "There's some steers branded C. S., Captain; they're trying to ring in some outside cattle."

"Just as I expected," sneered the Captain. "I knew you hadn't your number, and you've been stealing from the country. But you can't do it. I warned you

not to attempt it. Turn those cattle out at once."

"But, Captain, let me explain," said Shad.

"I don't want any of your explanations, sir. Explanations are not in my line. Make them to someone else. Turn those

charges against you for this attempted imposition, sir," he informed Shad. "And it will go hard with your shoulder-straps, sir."

Si worked the C. S. cattle around to the rear, and Shad waited patiently for the result. Presently Walsh reported:



"THE GENERAL RODE ON, WITHOUT WAITING FOR REPLY."

cattle out, and bring on what you have left."

It was a hard job cutting out the C. S. cattle, as they had worked themselves into the middle of the drove; but Si at last accomplished it, while Shad stood by and listened to the Captain's condemnation of the slack, tricky volunteers, and his own praises of his inflexible honesty and unparalleled shrewdness. "I shall prepare

"Full 500 have passed through, Captain, all correctly branded."

"Eh, what's that, Walsh?" inquired the Captain, looking over the drove, and then back at the 50 cattle still remaining. "You are sure of your count?"

"Perfectly sure, Captain," responded Walsh.

"There was just 500, and no mistake, Captain," said Peters, saluting.

"Strange," said the Captain, frowning. "But I've got to give you your receipt."

"Wilkins, fill out a receipt for 500 cattle to Mr. Shadrach Graham, and bring it out, with a pen."

"But, Captain," interjected Shad, "I've 50 more here that I want to turn over to you. Let me explain."

"I tell you, sir, explanations are not in my line. I have no time to listen to them. I have no business with any other cattle than those you were ordered to deliver to me."

"But can't we turn these in with yours? We want to get rid of them."

"No, sir; you cannot. Not for a minute, sir. I don't want to know how and where you got the cattle. Probably the Provost-Marshal will have to make the inquiries. I want no complication with them. Take them away from here at once, sir, and take them beyond all my corrals. Walsh, you and Peters mount and ride along, and see that these cattle are taken outside of my lines, and kept there."

The Captain handed Shad his receipt, and without saluting turned on his heel, and walked back into his tent.

Accompanied by the vigilant Walsh and Peters Si drove the cattle on for a mile or more with increasing trouble, for the beasts were getting hungry, and they smelled the forage issued out in the corrals on either side of the road. They made a break for a pile of fodder near the top of the hill, but Walsh and Peters, assisted by the men in charge, drove them off and back into the road.

They were now past the cattle corrals, and Shorty, who had begun swearing at the Captain's tent, made a final effort and blistered everything in the army, particularly the men who had graduated from West Point. The rest gathered around and listened admiringly to his fluent expression of their own burning feelings.

"My friend," said a calm, gentle voice from outside the circle. "You really must not swear that way. It's awful to hear you taking the name of your Maker in vain. You will have to answer for that some day at the Judgment Seat."

They all looked up, and saw that the speaker was a smallish man, riding a good horse, and wearing a soldier's overcoat, with an officer's cap. The new-comer had but one arm. "Excuse me, Chaplain," said Shorty, choking himself off; "I didn't mean to swear before you. But I don't know as you've got any business around here. This is a matter of cattle driving, and Chaplains who know their business keep away from mules and cattle, and so save their ears."

"But I'm not a Chaplain," said the new-comer, quietly. "I'm Gen. Howard, commanding this wing of the army, and it's against my orders to indulge in profanity at any time or for any cause. You'll re-

member that in future, and govern yourself accordingly."

Returning the salutes of the men the General rode on, without waiting for reply.

"So that's Howard, is it?" said Si, looking after him. "He's a good soldier and a brave man, but he'll have a sweet time getting his trains through without swearing."

The road they were now going over led between corrals of mules. From every one of these men rushed out yelling at Shorty and Shad to take those cattle back where they belonged, and not bring them down there to fret the mules and steal the forage. The cattle would break away to get at the hay and fodder piles, the men on guard would rush out with clubs and stones to drive them off, Si's men would attempt to defend the steers while driving them back, and there were free fights going on all along the lines between the mule-guardians and the cattle-guards. Si, Shad, Shorty and Jake Dye wore themselves out trying to keep the peace and gather their cattle together. After an hour or two of this they got their drove past the mule-corrals, and into a little hollow, where they paused to rest, get dinner and take counsel.

"This is a pretty how-d'ye-do," said Shad, disgustedly, "to be treated this way, after bringing \$4,000 worth of fresh beef that no one expected into camp. If old William Tecumseh only knew about this he'd make somebody's ears rings. I'm going to march this drove right up to his headquarters, and tell him the whole story and show him the cattle. I'll bet!"

A wild rush and clatter interrupted him. The cattle had caught sight of or smelled the forage pile of a cavalry regiment in camp a half-mile to the right, and rushed for it in a bovine torrent. Si jumped on his horse and, followed by the others, dashed after to stop and turn them. The cavalymen saw the danger to their much-prized forage, and swarmed out to defend it. Their horses at the picket-line began neighing, plunging and kicking, and some, breaking away, galloped wildly about. The Officer of the Day, with his broad sash of office prominent, galloped down, to stop his men, and head off the comers, and collided with Shad plunging forward to round back the leading steer. The two horses and the steer went down in a mix, and the following horses, steers, infantry and cavalry turmoiled together in a mad confusion of oaths, yells, bellows, bad temper, horns, hoofs, arms and legs. One of the forage guards, in order to put in the time, snatched up a carbine and shot one of the steers, and another guard ran madly about striking with his saber everything and everybody in his reach.

Si and Shorty managed to retain their seats and their presence of mind. One

dragged Shad out, and the other the Officer of the Day.

"What do you mean, you scoundrels, by trying to rush my forage pile with your infernal cattle?" yelled the latter, as soon as he could recover breath, and drawing out his saber.

"You yaller-legged idiot, couldn't you see that I was trying to head off the rush?" yelled Shad, with equal cordiality. "Have some sense, if a cavalryman can, and call your men off."

"Come, come, now," said Si. "That's no way to talk to one another. Cool down, both of you, and help quile this ruction."

They did so, and after some effort the tangle was straightened out, Shad gathered up his men and cattle and went back to the road, while the cavalry camp subsided into its accustomed order.

"We've got to get these dumbered brutes something to eat," said Si, as they moved down the road, "before we can take them anywhere, or do anything with them. Let's turn down that holler there, and take them outside the lines, and find a place where they can graze and give us time to think."

They turned to the left, and proceeded to carry out this intention, when a mounted officer at the head of the squad, who had been observing them from a distant knoll, galloped down, and put himself across their path.

"Halt, there!" he commanded. "Who are you, and where are you going with those cattle?"

Shad started to explain to him, but he broke in with an expression of absolute incredulity. "Your story won't go for a minute," he said. "I've been watching you for some time, and know what you're up to. You've stolen those cattle, and are trying to run them off. 'Twon't work, my fine fellow. That game's been played too often lately."

"Now, don't be a measly fool," said Shad, savagely. "We're no cattle-thieves, and you ought to have sense enough to know it. We're all straight soldiers, belonging to different regiments here in this army, and we're going to them, as soon as we can properly dispose of these cattle. They're hungry now, and unmanageable, and as soon as we can graze them a little while we're going to hunt up the proper officer and turn them over to him."

"Likely story," sneered the other. "You've brought them straight away from the cattle corrals. I've been watching you. I'm Provost Marshal of this division. You just stop those cattle right here and turn them over to me. I'll take charge of them, and take you up to headquarters. You're caught this time, my laddy-bucks."

"We'll do nothing of the kind," said Shorty. "You can't play that trick on us. You're trying to steal these cattle yourself. We've seen fellows play provost guard before. We're no recruits. You skip out

of here, and tend to your own business. We'll attend to ours. Git out, or we'll make you."

"Call up the reserve, Riley," said the officer to the bugler. A cavalry company seemed to spring out of the ground in answer to the call.

"Now, gentlemen," said the officer, with fine irony, as the cavalry galloped up, "will you favor me with some more of your sass, or will you quietly turn back into the road, and mosey along according to orders?"

"You've got the call on us," answered Shad. "But we demand to be taken straight to Gen. Sherman's headquarters. He knows us, he gave me my orders, and he'll understand this matter at once."

"Very nice, and very modest," answered the officer. "But this isn't Gen. Sherman's day for receiving cattle-thieves. He only receives them Wednesdays and Saturdays. This is his day for blockade-runners and quinine-smugglers. You'll have to be satisfied by being received by another General — the Provost-Marshal-General. He's a very sociable sort of a man. He'll talk to you quite freely. Forward, march."

The sky had been overcast for some time, and now it began a cold, cheerless drizzle, which suited with the crashing hopes of the boys. With their hungry, sullen cattle they began plodding along the chafed road, which became a sea of mud as soon as the rain began.

It was two long, weary miles to the Provost-Marshal's headquarters. On the way they came to a comfortable-looking double-pen house of hewed logs, with a wide porch in front.

"That's Gen. Sherman's headquarters today," said the officer. "Too bad he isn't holding his regular cattle-thieves' levee today. There he is, now, walking up on the porch."

"I'm going to speak to him, all the same," said Shad.

"You'd better not," answered the officer. "You'll wish you hadn't. Better save your eloquence for the Provost-Marshal-General. You'll need all of it there."

"Gen. Sherman! Gen. Sherman!" Shad called out, as they came up.

"Well, well, what is it?" answered the General, with harsh impatience, stopping in his nervous walk, and looking sternly at his interrogator.

"I'm Lieut. Graham, that you sent back from Kingston for those cattle."

"Yes, yes; and you lost a lot of 'em, I suppose," said the General, irritably.

"No, we caught him trying to run some of them out of camp," explained the officer.

"General, that is not true," protested Shad. "I've got here Capt. Dingbat's receipt for every head. These cattle here didn't belong to the herd."

"What were you doing with them,

then?" asked the General, sternly. "But I haven't time to bother with you. Take them on up to the Provost-Marshals."

"But, General," protested Shad. "This is an entire mistake. We're the men, you recollect, who brought the pontoons through. We wouldn't wrong the Government of a cent. We picked these cattle

up by the way, and were trying to get some officer to receive them."

"Story isn't at all probable, on the face," said the General, snappily. "But I remember you men, and the good work you did. Dayton, go out there and look into that matter."

CHAPTER XV.

SHERMAN STARTS DOWN TO THE SEA.

Col. L. M. Dayton, Sherman's Chief of Staff, and a bright, handsome, alert young man, dressed in a mounted officer's jacket, embellished with gold-lace shoulder-knots, came out on the porch, pen in hand, in obedience to the General's call.

"Appears to be some tangle there about some cattle, Dayton," said the General, curtly. "Look into the matter and straighten it out."

"What seems to be the dif-few-culty, Captain?" asked Col. Dayton, jollily, addressing the Provost-Marshal.

"Why," answered the Captain, "I'd been noticing for some time these men philandering around in a suspicious manner with this bunch of cattle. They came from the direction of the cattle corrals, didn't seem to belong anywhere, or be going any place in particular. Finally they turned and started out of camp with the cattle, and I arrested them, and am taking them up to the Provost-Marshal's headquarters, to give an account of themselves."

"You were quite right," answered Col. Dayton. "And the prisoners would rather discuss the matter with Gen. Sherman than with the Provost-Marshal, eh? Well, that's matter of taste. Depends also on the humor the General's in. He's not in a Sunday-morning-church frame of mind today, and they'd much better go right up to the Provost-Marshal-General and have it out with him. They'd better keep as far away from the General as they can until things straighten out a little up the road."

"I don't care how mad he is," said Shad, resolutely. "Gen. Sherman's never so mad that he'll be unjust. After all the good work we've done, we're not going to be yanked up before the Provost-Marshal like a gang of deserters and bonny-jumpers. Gen. Sherman ought to give us a fair hearing. We deserve it."

"Dayton," called the General from inside the house, "get through with that job and come in here. I want you."

"In a moment, General," answered the

Colonel. "Look here, boys; you'd better go right on up to the Provost-Marshal's. He's straight and fair, and will give you as long a hearing as you want. Don't bother the General today. He's crosser than a bear with a sore head. I'd as lief deal with old Nick himself. I'd be mighty glad if I were you to get off with a turn with Col. Ruggles. Take my advice and go on."

"Well, we will not, unless we're forced," said Shad, stubbornly, and desiggedly raising his voice so that it might reach the General inside. "It's no way to treat men who have done so much good service. We don't propose to be sent back to our regiments from the Provost-Marshal's headquarters. 'Tisn't fair, nor even decent, after all we've been through. Gen. Sherman wouldn't allow it for a minute if he really knew it."

"Come, we've talked enough," said the Captain. "We'll have to start. Move out, there."

"Hold on a minute, Captain," said Col. Dayton, as a thought struck him. "Say, Lieutenant, aren't you Shad Graham?"

"That's my name," answered Shad.

"I think I remember you," said Col. Dayton. "Weren't you the Ohio Sergeant that pulled me out of the creek, into which my horse had fallen, the night of the first day at Shiloh?"

"I was."

"And weren't you the Sergeant who went out with a squad and me, a few days later, on a scout, and fixed a crossing over Owl Creek, so that we got over and captured those rebels?"

"I was."

"Hum," said the Colonel to himself, "I guess that a man's got the right to pick up a piece of fresh meat now and then, if he wants it. But 40 or 50 cattle is rather wholesale work. I'd've sent him about his business if it'd been only one or two." Then aloud: "Captain, present my compliments to Col. Ruggles, and tell him that I know this man, Lieut. Graham, and

that he's a first-class soldier, and request him to consider everything as favorably as he can."

"But I insist, Colonel," repeated Shad, loudly, "that we should not be sent to the Provost-Marshal's at all. It's all wrong, and we don't deserve it. It's a matter that Gen. Sherman ought to look into himself."

"Dayton, why don't you come in here?" inquired Gen. Sherman, angrily, striding out of the house. "What are you wasting time out here for, wrangling over this matter? Send them all up to the Provost's, and let him settle the matter. It's his business."

"Gen. Sherman," said Shad, desperately, "we don't want to go to the Provost-Marshal's"—

"Nobody does; nobody does," broke in the General; "but they go all the same."

"Gen. Sherman," continued Shad, "we didn't want anything to do with those cattle"—

"No excuse; no excuse, sir. Men don't do what they like in the army, but what they are ordered to. You can't pick and choose your duty, sir."

"We had no intention of doing so, General. We did that duty faithfully, and brought through every head all right. Then we had some others, which the Commissary refused to receive, and"—

"Likely story. Likely story. But I haven't time to hear it. The Provost-Marshal-General's the man to hear such tales. Go on up to him."

"Gen. Sherman," said Shad, desperately. "This isn't fair nor decent. We're the men who brought the pontoons through with all that trouble. Then we brought the cattle through, according to your orders, instead of going to our regiments. Now you want us to go up to the Provost's, to be sent back to our regiments under guard, like a lot of bounty-jumpers and stragglers. That isn't a square deal, by any means. We don't deserve it at all, and I'll tell you so, right to your face."

"Gen. Sherman, you can't be so unfair as to do that," said Si, earnestly.

"Look here, General, that's a low-down play to make to such men as us," added Shorty.

The General turned his stern glance from Shad's set face to Si's seriously reproachful countenance, and Shorty's, blazing with ill-concealed anger. His rugged countenance changed, and a softer light came into his piercing, steel-blue eyes. "Yes, yes; I remember you now," he said. "You were under Col. Bonesteel on that boat. You certainly are entitled to consideration and a hearing. Dayton, I'll let Maj. McCoy do what I'd intended for you. Look into this matter carefully, and do the right thing. Don't let any injustice be done. I'm too busy, men, to attend to it myself."

"Thank you, General," said Shad and Si, saluting.

"What's the matter with Uncle Billy

Sherman?" yelled Shorty. "Nothing's the matter with him. H-e-s—a-l-l—r-i-g-h-t! Three cheers for Gen. Sherman."

They were given with a will by everybody. The rain stopped, the clouds cleared away, and the sun came out.

Col. Dayton listened to Shad's story and accepted every word of it.

"Certainly. Certainly. Plain as day," he said. "I knew you were all right, as soon as I got you placed as the Sergeant that pulled me out of the creek at Shiloh. Just like Dingbat. West Point never turned out a bigger fool, which is saying a great deal. He is dead-letter perfect on regulations and red-tape, has a medal for knowledge of his own importance, but as to ignorance of everything else he would win two heats out of three in a race with the Aztec children. Why, he'd starve a regiment to death rather than issue rations on a requisition that didn't have every 'i' dotted and 't' crossed. He spends most of his time writing letters to the General, protesting against the irregular way in which everybody, Generals and all, insist on doing business with him. Captain (to the Provost officer), you can leave these men and cattle with me. I'll be responsible for them."

"Say, boys," continued Dayton, familiarly, "let's tell short stories, for I've a heap to do today. Tomorrow the great movement begins, and we'll cut loose from here for God knows where—may-be Richmond, may-be Augusta and Charleston, may-be Pensacola, may-be some other spot in this God-forsaken Southern Confederacy. All that I know is that we'll make Secossia yowl wherever we go. I've got an idea. I'm going to send you over with a note to Col. Amos Beckwith, the Commissary-General, who'll be tickled to death to see you. He's been having a pile of trouble getting his cattle through, and he'll rise up and call you blessed, for having more than your quota. I don't know any worse dig that I can give Dingbat than to have you tell your story to Beckwith. Beckwith is Dingbat's direct superior. He's a West Pointer and regular, but he's been in the army since the year 1, and the Indians and the rebels have pounded a whole heap of hard sense into his Vermont Yankee head. I'd like to be there when he calls up Dingbat."

Col. Beckwith, a strong-faced, capable-looking man of about 40, remarked pleasantly, after reading Col. Dayton's note and listening to Shad's story:

"I'm as glad to see you as the flowers in the Spring. You've done a good piece of work, and I shall make it the subject of a special report to Gen. Sherman. I've got a friend, a nervous, conscientious officer, who's worrying himself sick over a shortage in his drove. He's afraid he'll lose his home, and have his wife and children turned out without a shelter, because of his deficiency. Your bunch will fit in snugly, and make him whole."

"Take them and welcome," said Shad

with great earnestness. "Take them, right away. I don't want to see another steer as long as I live."

"You can't take 'em too quick for me," echoed Si.

"Where's your man?" inquired Shorty, enthusiastically. "Let me see the man that wants to have charge of this bunch of cattle. I don't want to lose a minute in making his acquaintance, and I'll beg him for his ambrotype, to keep as a friend in my hour of need. Where is he? Let me look at once on his blessed countenance."

The Colonel smiled, and said:

"I'll send at once for him. Your men must be hungry, Lieutenant. Take them right over by that old house and go into camp for tonight. You'll find plenty of wood and water there, and I'll have all the rations issued that you can eat and carry away. For once, you needn't stint yourselves. I've a lot I've got to get rid of. By the way, Lieutenant, I need very much a few good men such as you've shown yourselves to be to be permanently attached to my headquarters during this movement. I must have them. I'm going to apply to have you detailed."

"Not on your life," yelled Shorty. "No more details for us. We're for peace and quietness. We're going as straight as we can go back to the 200th Injanny Volunteer Infantry, and stay there."

"Thank you very much for the honor, Colonel," said Shad. "But I think that we've been away from our regiments for a long time, and prefer to go back to them at once."

"Preference doesn't play much part in the army," said the Colonel, quietly. "It is not what a man would rather do, but what he ought to do, and where he will be of best service, and that must be usually determined by somebody else than himself. But take your men over there and put them into camp. Think it over during the night, and I'll talk with you about it again in the morning."

Not since the boys had left Deacon Klegg's well-provided house had they had such a feast as that night. Not only Commissary supplies, but sutler goods, had to be sacrificed to the inexorable question of transportation, and there was not only an abundance of the finest sugar-cured hams to go with their fresh beef, but there was all they could eat of canned peaches and tomatoes, desiccated vegetables, condensed milk, cove oysters, sardines, and similar expensive camp dainties.

As soon as they had had leisure to think Si and Shorty had begun to worry about Pete and Sandy. They could not recall having seen the boys since they broke camp on the morning of that eventful day. The boys, not seeing any probable need of their services, had quietly slipped away after breakfast, while the cattle were being started, and gone back to where Abdenego and the rebel horse had been tethered

during the night, with a sufficiency of forage. They gratified their boyish curiosity during the day by riding around seeing all the strange sights of the great army. They kept in long range of the detachment, so as to rejoin it at any time that it might look as if they were needed, and when it dropped its cattle and went into camp for the night they came boldly up, fastened their steeds near-by, provided them abundant forage from the Commissary-General's piles, got their suppers, and soon had a circle around them, listening to their accounts of all the wonderful things they had seen during the day.

"Look here," said Shorty to the rest, as they sat around and smoked, after supper. "I move that we shab out of here pretty soon. It won't do to stay here tonight. That Commissary-General has his eye on us, and he'll detail us tomorrow morning, sure as little apples. Then we'll have to drive cattle and help wagon trains all the rest of our natural lives. I want some comfort of life. I want to get back to the 200th Injanny."

"There's something in that," said Si, struck with sudden fear, and taking his pipe from his mouth to consider. "If I knowed where the regiment was I'd get right up and start for it this minute. But it'd be worse than hunting for a needle in a haystack to look for the regiment in this ruck tonight. But we'll get up bright and early tomorrow morning, as we intended to do anyway, and we'll be out of reach before they are stirring at headquarters."

"I don't like staying here tonight," said Shorty, uneasily. "We aint safe. That Commissary-General's a mighty nice feller, but I don't want any more details from him or anybody else but Col. McGillicuddy."

"The boys are now pretty well-fixed for the night," said Si, after a moment's consideration. "I don't want to disturb them. And I don't want to march 'em away from all this good grub, without one more hack at it. It would look like a sin. We'll turn out at the first notes of reveille, fill ourselves plum full of this grub, and he well on our way before the sun's fairly up."

The sound of a horse's hoofs came out of the darkness.

"I'll bet that's a detail now," said Shorty, apprehensively. The rest clutched their blankets and began rolling them up. Col. Dayton appeared in the circle of light.

"Hello, Graham," he said; "I've been looking for you. I've got some good news for you. I've been at the General about you. I've told him what kind of men you are, and got him to order you permanently detailed for service at headquarters and"—

He was interrupted by the sound of a general rush. Let by Si and Shorty, every one had snatched up his belongings and bolted into the darkness, out of sight.



“YES, YES; I REMEMBER YOU NOW,” SAID THE GENERAL.

“Well, I’m blessed,” said the Colonel, in amazement, as he comprehended what had happened. “That’s the first time I ever knew of men running away from soft duty at headquarters. Most of them you have to club to make them let go.”

“The boys have had all they want of details,” laughed Shad. “The varied experiences of the last two weeks have filled them up to their chins. They prefer the quiet and seclusion of domestic life with their regiments.”

Si and Shorty did not halt until they had reached the covert of a cedar thicket, where they felt they could not be found during the night. They did not sleep

much, for early in the morning of the eventful 16th of November, 1864, they were awakened by the thunder of the explosions in Atlanta. The sky was ruddy with the flames of burning buildings, for the city was a seething conflagration. They cooked a hasty breakfast, and marched out on a high point which commanded a good view of the devouring ocean of flame. The spectacle was grandly awful, and they stood and watched, wrapped in the wonder of it. Presently the sun rose bright and clear, and revealed another panorama still more fascinating to their soldierly eyes. As far as they could see the roads and fields were

filled with white-topped wagons, with droves of cattle, with batteries of artillery, with endless waves of marching men, whose bright gun-barrels sent back a sheen of brilliant light from the sun's rays. A brigade band started up "John Brown's Body," and from the throats of tens of thousands of the stalwart, enthusiastic marchers rolled the song in mighty chorus. The boys joined in the wave of tumultuous cheering, which was echoed back even from the towering, granite sides of Stone Mountain.

The great March to the Sea had begun.

"There's the Fourteenth Corps' flag now," said Si, more excited than wont. "There's the Acorn, I'm sure. Can't you see? I can make it out plainly. Let's start at once. We get to it once, and there won't be no trouble finding the regiment."

"Where's those blasted boys?" said Shorty, looking around for Sandy and Pete. "We musn't start without them, or they'll never find us in the world. I'm afraid they're lost. Anybody seen them?"

Nobody had, but everybody began looking for them.

"Come on, Shorty," said Si, impatient to join in the march. "They're hanging around somewhere, as usual. They'll watch us, and follow us up. Come on."

"Never do in the world," answered Shorty. "I won't stir a step until I've found them. They'll never find us if we leave them. I'll skin them both when I catch 'em, the brats."

Everybody started anew in an excited quest of the truants, but they were nowhere in sight.

A more terrific explosion than ever shook the ground and the air. It was that of a large brick building on the outskirts of Atlanta nearest to them. The

air was filled with powder-smoke, flying bricks, beams, planks, doors, rafters and windows. Shells burst like from a cannonade, and there was a venomous hiss of bullets through the air.

Out of the powder-smoke dashed a white mule, going at such a rate that he only seemed to touch the ground where it rose in hillocks. On his back, with his arms around his neck, holding on for dear life, was a boy, with a face like a sheet popping eyes, and no cap. Behind came a horse, with another boy, in a similar frame of mind.

"That's Pete and Sandy, sure's you're alive, on that cussed mule," said Si, rushing down to the road.

Abednego stopped from sheer exhaustion, about half-way up the hill, and Pete slipped from his back. A piece of shell had scraped his cheek, and Abednego's flank had been creased by a bullet. Sandy had something like the same hurts.

"Where in the world have you brats been?" Si angrily inquired, as Pete slowly recovered his breath.

"Why," gasped Pete, "me and Sandy thought we'd ride down and take a look at the fire, while the rest of you was getting ready to start. We'd never have another such a chance. We was right near a big brick house that we thought was a hospital, it looked so quiet like. We didn't think no different, until we see some fellers ride up from this side, light a train, and then gallop away. We was then on the other side o' the house, and had to gallop right past it. If Abednego hadn't been such a good runner we'd 'a' been blown up, sure. He saved my life."

"Forward, march," called Si. "I think I see our brigade flag right over there."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE 200TH IND. IS AT LAST FOUND, IT HAS A PLEASANT SOIREE WITH A RAILROAD, AND THE BOYS VISIT OLD FRIENDS.

It was easy enough to find the Fourteenth Corps. It seemed to fill the whole of that part of Georgia with its endless columns of marching men, its miles of light batteries, its immense droves of cattle, its interminable strings of white-topped wagons, its long-drawn-out pontoon and ambulance trains.

It was quite another thing to find the 200th Ind., which, with all the importance attached to it by Si and the rest, was yet but a small unit of the mighty whole. Its less than 500 effective men were but a minor fraction of the great corps' 15,000. Besides, in the months that Si and Shorty had been away the casualties of the service had swept away or changed the corps' old landmarks. There had been sweeping changes in officers of all grades, from the Major-General commanding the corps, down. Maj.-Gen. Jeff C. Davis now rode at the head of the corps, instead of Maj.-Gen. John M. Palmer, who had succeeded Gen. George H. Thomas, and was in command when the boys were captured. Divisions had been remodeled, brigades transferred, regiments changed and consolidated. Old ones of imposing size had shrunk to battalions, and new ones, as big as the whole of the rest of the brigades, had been added. The smooth faces of young officers had become heavily whiskered; trim, natty fellows, looking like fashion plates, and brilliant with gold lace and buttons, had become bronzed and rugged campaigners, who did not care much how they looked, so long as they got there.

Nobody knew where the 200th Ind. could now be found; nobody knew to what brigade it belonged now; nobody knew what division it was in. If they did know these things, there would be no telling where to look for it, because the order of march had not become familiar to the men. The corps had been scattered about a good deal lately, and it would take a day or two of marching and camping before they would get shaken down into regular shape again. Besides, everybody was too full just now of the objectives of the great movement to have much thought of anything else.

Those who thought they knew were still worse, for they gave absolutely misleading directions, which sent the boys on a vain journey, with wearisome struggles with the swift-marching columns, the trains and the batteries.

In the course of these they separated, Jake Dye taking his squad off in a different direction, in search of the 1st Oshkosh; Shad finding another clew to his regiment, and leaving Si and Shorty to follow their own judgment as to the whereabouts of the 200th Ind.

It was very disheartening. To them the whole universe revolved around the 200th Ind. The rest of the army were mere appendages to their regiment, and its position and movements should have been of as much interest to everybody as those of Gen. Sherman himself. They grew angry, and said insulting things to men who did not know anything about the 200th Ind., did not know whether it belonged to the corps now, did not remember to have seen it since the army left Chattanooga, and were indifferent as to whether they should ever see it. One man was impudent enough to say that he supposed that the war might possibly go right along without being seriously hindered if the 200th Ind. was still back in Chattanooga, or some other safe place.

Shorty would have thrashed him then and there, but his partner pulled him away. Si was reaching that point of view which showed so much to do in the world that he hated to see energy wasted on inconsequential things.

"Don't lick him, Shorty," he remonstrated. "Save ourself for something more important. We seem to've struck the back townships of the corps. They've never heard of the 200th Injanny, and we've never heard of their regiments. It's about quits. Let's stop here and make some coffee, and then make a break straight for corps headquarters. They'll know there where the regiment is."

"But Corps Headquarters are 10 or 15 miles from here," grumbled Shorty. "And it'll take us all day and all night to go that far through this freshest of regiments and trains. By that time Corps Headquarters will have picked up its feet and gone on another 10 or 15 miles, and we'll be as bad off as before. That looks like our old division, across the valley there, on that other hill. I'm sure I know them headquarters wagons and teams."

Another toilsome march of three or four miles, only to find when they had come up to the column that the 200th Ind. did not belong to that division, and no one knew

exactly to which one, if any, it had been assigned in the last shuffle.

Then Si led his weary men back toward the railroad, to execute his first plan of going directly to Corps Headquarters. He presently saw that the army was halting and going into camp. He decided that it would be the best plan to halt, too, and wait till things had settled down a little, when he could move about more freely, and get certain direction as to the precise location of the Corps Headquarters.

Then he found an Aid, who informed him that Headquarters had been established four or five miles ahead, but could tell him nothing of the 200th Ind.

"Of course, he don't know anything about the 200th Injianny," said Shorty, in deep disgust. "Did you ever see an Aid that knowed anything useful or that he ought to? He wouldn't be allowed on the staff if he did."

"Well, let's waste no more time," said Si. "He's told us the way to Headquarters, for which we're obliged to him. Fall in. Forward—March."

It was a weary trudge to Headquarters, but it was easier going now, with everybody pulling off the road into camp. They reached their destination about sundown, and found the Adjutant-General of the corps standing outside, in his shirt sleeves, superintending the arrangements of the tents.

"The 200th Ind.," he answered promptly. "Yes; it's coming up by way of Snapfinger, and will strike the railroad about four or five miles back. You go right down the railroad and you'll come to it. It ought to be there about this time."

"Why, we just came from there," gasped Si, amazed at the easy certainty with which the Adjutant-General kept the movements of every regiment in mind, contrasted with the exasperating ignorance of everybody else, especially Aids, and disgusted at the same time with the idea of having to march back. "We were right at the railroad, about five miles back, when we started for Headquarters."

"Too bad," said the Adjutant-General, nonchalantly. "If you'd only stayed there your regiment would have come up to you. It went down by Snapfinger to clean up the forage in that locality, and was to turn to the left to strike the railroad in line with the rest of the division. I'm afraid that all you've got to do is to toddle right back the way you came."

"That's all right, boys," said Si, his natural cheerfulness asserting itself. "Now we know something for sure. We're near home, and no mistake. Only five miles at most to the old regiment, that we've been hunting so long. Put some spring into them brogans of your'n, and we'll soon be home, where we'll have a good night's rest. Forward—March."

The boys were animated by his hopeful

words, and began making the best time of the day.

"Snapfinger, DeKalb Co., Georgy," mused Shorty, as they marched along. "Si, I've been thinking all day, as I looked up there at Stone Mountain, that this country was familiar, and now I understand it. We must be near our old layout among the barn'ts, and the home of Uncle Ephraim and Aunt Minerva Ann. You know them guards were all from around Snapfinger, DeKalb County, Georgy. Remember how they used to say it? and we used to mimic them. Snapfinger—devil of a name."

"I declare, that's so," answered Si, scanning the perpendicular sides of Stone Mountain, and then the country around. "I hadn't thought of it before. We can't be far from the homes of those kindly-disposed gentlemen who were determined to hang us. If we get a chance, we must go over and pay them a social visit."

"Let's go and see Uncle Ephraim and Aunt Minerva Ann first," said Shorty. "Business before pleasure, always. It's our business to look out for our friends first. After that we may take a little recreation in hanging our enemies."

"Your program's a good one," answered Si. "We'll arrange it that way."

"I'll bet a year's pay to a sutler check," said Shorty, indulging in blissful anticipations, "there'll be a regular Mardi Gras, with the lid off, in the old 200th Injianny's camp to-night, after we get there. The boys'll be so glad to see us that they won't pay no attention to tattoo, but keep it up till midnight. I expect Col. McGillicuddy 'll discover a strawberry mark on your left arm, Si, and find that you're his long-lost brother. As for Cap. Bowersox, I know that he'll at once turn over the command of Company Q to me, and give me an order on the Commissary for a straight barrel of best minie-bullet whisky, 800 yards point-blank range."

"Well, he won't, if I know him," answered Si. "He'll be mighty glad to see you, but if he allows a drop of whisky in the company he's not the officer he used to be. No, the fun'll be to have a good supper, and then sit around the great fires, and have the boys tell us all that has happened since we left. Won't that just be great? An hour o' that'll be worth all that we've been through."

They went up on to the railroad and marched along it, to make sure of not missing their regiment. To their left, and some feet lower, ran the wagon road, with a thick curtain of bushes between the two. They were watching eagerly down the line of track for a sight of a regiment, when they heard Col. McGillicuddy's well-remembered voice command:

"Battalion, HALT! Front! Right dress! Front! Backward march to clear the road. Halt! Right dress! Front! Order, ARMS! Stack, ARMS!"

"Now, men," continued the Colonel, riding down the road to the center of the regiment, to address it in a more conversational tone:

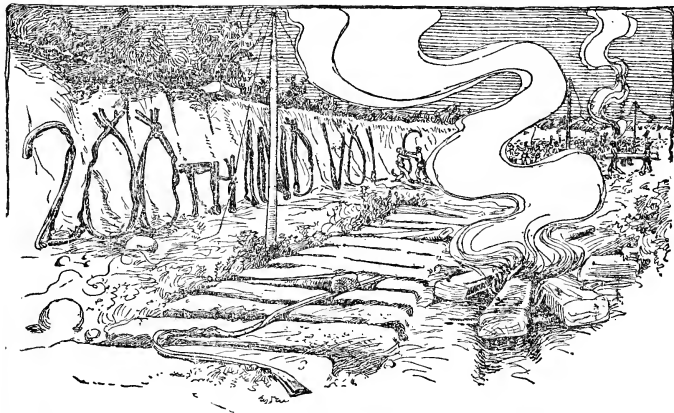
"Break ranks, and cook your supper. After supper we'll"—

He was interrupted by a wild cheer from the railroad bank above of: "Hooray for the 200th Injianny Volunteer Infantry! Three cheers for the 200th Injianny!"

The cheers were followed by a tumultuous rush through the brush, as Si and his

"No apologies, Sergeant; none is necessary for a minute. I'm so very glad to see you that we won't stand on ceremony of any kind."

"Col. McGullicuddy," said Si, in the most formal manner, "I have to report the arrival of myself and Corporal Elliott, with 5S furloughed men and recruits of the detachment we were ordered to take charge of at Indianapolis. We lost one man killed on the way, and left one severely wounded behind in the hospital at Des-



'THEY LEFT THE MARK OF THE REGIMENT IN RAILS AGAINST THE CLIFF'

squad tore down from the embankment and rushed into the breaking ranks. The veterans of the regiment recognized their old comrades at once, sent up an answering cheer, and everybody pressed around to shake Si's and Shorty's hands, who tried hard to take all of them at once.

As the commotion subsided a little, Col. McGullicuddy rode up and said smilingly, as he extended his hand to Si:

"Sergeant, that is a very unceremonious way in which to enter my camp."

"I know it is, Colonel," said Si, bethinking himself and becoming very soldierly. "I beg your pardon. I knowed better than to come in this way. I intended to do it properly. But it seems to me that we've bin trying to get to the regiment for more'n a year, and had all sorts o' times in doing it, and we've bin hunting you through the corps all day, and when we suddenly heard your voice and saw the regiment, I just couldn't control myself nor the boys."

atur, Ala. All the rest present and accounted for."

"A very excellent report," answered the Colonel, in his official manner. "Make a written report to the Adjutant of the actions in which you were engaged. Much better than I could have expected. Adjutant, take charge of these men and distribute them to their companies. Sergeant (resuming his friendly tone), I'm more glad to see you than I can tell you. I felt all the time that you would come through, if it was in the cloth, but I gave you up after we started from Atlanta. I suppose you have had quite a time. The first leisure we have I want you to come to my tent and tell me all about it. Tonight we've a big job of railroad destruction on hand. You had better go right over to Co. Q and get your supper."

It was hard work for Si and the rest to eat all they wanted after their long march; drink as much coffee as their systems demanded, and answer all the ques-

tions that the eager members of Co. Q fired at them. They had scarcely gotten half as much as they wanted when the bugle blew "Attention," and the regiment fell swiftly into line.

"Now, men," said the Colonel, walking down to the center, "the plan is this: Co. A will go up the road about half a mile, just this side of that clump of trees, and deploy as skirmishers, about a pace apart. The other companies will follow and do the same, back to here. Then when the bugle sounds 'Forward,' the line will move to the railroad, and each man will station himself opposite the end of a tie. When the bugle sounds 'Ready,' he will stoop and take hold of the end of the tie. At the sound 'Fire,' he will lift his end up and throw it over. Follow the bugle promptly, and throw the whole length of the track over at once, just like an 'Order, Arms.' After you've thrown the track over, pull the ties, stringers and rails apart—some tools and sledges will be distributed by the Quartermaster, to help you do this—make piles of the stringers and ties, set them afire, and lay the rails on them. After the rails get redhot, twist and bend them in some way, so that the rebels cannot straighten them out and use them again."

"Say, Si," said Shorty, with a nod of approval toward the Colonel, "old man's a planner, ain't he? Shad couldn't 've laid out that job better."

"Great head—long as a watermelon," answered Si.

Though tired with their day's march, the regiment went at the work with enthusiasm, and quickly the word went along the line that everybody was in place.

"Ready," blared the bugle, and each man bent down and took hold of the end of a tie.

"Fire," rang the bugle, and a half mile of track rose up and went over into the ditch. The ties and stringers were wrenched apart by the upheaval. Sledges and crowbars quickly separated the rails from the stringers, the ties and stringers were made into piles and were soon glowing fires. The rails were gathered up and thrown on these. The glare of the great fires and the thrill of the immense destruction excited the participants, and as they rushed about in the lurid light, yelling as they piled on more ties and other rails, it looked like a view of some demoniac saturnalia, with the bending rails as serpents writhing in the flames.

Miles up and down the line other regiments were doing the same thing—but few with the quickness and completeness of Col. McGillicuddy's method. They learned it afterward, and thereafter not only regiments but brigades, and sometimes whole divisions, would raise and throw over miles of track at the sound of bugle.

The men began a rivalry to see which

could twist and bend the rails into the most curious shapes.

"I say, boys," shouted Shorty, "let's do something to show that the 200th Injanny's bin here. Let's leave the mark of the regiment in rails, up against that cliff."

They all yelled in assent. The cliff rose as straight and smooth as the wall of a house, and overlooked the valley for miles. It was far easier to bend the rails into fantastic shapes than to a resemblance of letters, but by midnight they had finished it, and the regiments, which marched by the next day, saw leaning against the face of the cliff

"200th Ind. Vols."

"There," said Shorty, as he wiped his face, after placing the last rail in position, "these blamed fools mayn't know the 200th Injanny, or where it is, but they'll all know where it has bin."

"Let's lay down," said Si, surveying the work with equal satisfaction. "We want to get up early to-morrow morning, and make a circuit out to Uncle Ephraim's and Aunt Minerva Ann's. We can never go past where they live without calling. It'd be awfully ungrateful."

Learning their object, the Colonel readily gave them permission to make the detour, and join the regiment in the evening at Peachstone Shoals, on the Ocmulgee River. As they now knew their division and brigade, there would be no trouble in finding the regiment.

There was little trouble in finding Mr. Benjamin Small's plantation, and by brisk marching they came to the place on the road where they had turned off to go to the home of the "harnts" by the middle of the forenoon.

How differently everything looked from what it did months before, when they were skulking refugees, anxiously watching every turn of the road, every field and every house, and avoiding the sight of white men. Now it was the white men who avoided their sight, as they strode masterfully along, fully armed, and eager to encounter those before whom they had then shrunk. They were surprised at the quickness with which they had covered what had before seemed long distances, and before they realized it were at the well-remembered by-road down which Uncle Ephraim, Aunt Minerva Ann and the others had come with their welcome loads of food.

Resisting the temptation to revisit the scene of the Harpster tragedy, which had been their home for several days, they turned to the left, and quickly came to the row of negro-quarters.

Aunt Minerva Ann was out in her cold-lard patch, knife in hand, seeking the material for Uncle Ephraim's dinner, and singing in a powerful and musical con-

tralto:

"On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,
An' cast a wistful eye,
T' Cane-yun's far an' happy land,
What my secessions lie."

"No, not 'secessions,'" she communed with herself. "Secession's bad an' wicked. Dat's de way I sing hit at de house, t' tickle de white folks. When I sing hit fo' myself hit's whar my—my—O, yes, recessions lie. Recess is what dey had at school, when dey gits out. Dat's a good time—Whar my recessions lie."

"Good morning, Aunt Minerva Ann," called out Si, blithely.

"In de name ob God, who dat?" said the terror-stricken old darky, dropping her knife and looking with starting eyes on the file of starwart blue-coats that came out from behind the bushes.

"Why, Aunty, don't you know us?" said Si. "We're the Yankee soldiers that you fed last Summer—the fellers that was up there in the home o' the hagn'ts."

"No, yo'n ain't. Dey's all done daid. Dey killed dey'uns. Ebbery one ob dem. Dey'uns done killed dey'uns. Cut deir froats, an' piled rocks on dem in de crick. Dey done tole us so. Dey showed us de place. Yo'uns is ghosts. O' don't hurt me. I's only a po' nizzah!"

She started to scream at the top of her voice, but Si caught her arm.

"Nonsense, Aunty. Don't be a fool," he said. "We're all alive and well. Every one of us. Rebels couldn't kill us. Here's little Pete, that you liked so much. Come up here, Pete."

"Here I am, Aunty," said Pete, jumping off his mule and running up to her.

"O, yo' bressed leetle soul," ejaculated the negress, forgetting all at once her hysterical fear, and taking him in her motherly arms. "Is it raly yo'? yo' bressed leetle, teenty Yank?. An' dey said dey'd done cut yo' froat, an' buried yo' in de crick, an' heaped great heaps o' rocks on yo'. An' yo' ain't dead, an' yo'r froat ain't cut, an' dar hain't a heap o' rocks piled on yo', an' yo've done growed more'n a mile taller. Lawd, bress yo' soul, so yo' have."

Pete extricated himself from the smothering embrace and said:

"Yes, it's me, Aunty, and I believe there is some more of me than there was when you were so kind to me. I've brought you a whole lot o' genuine Yankee coffee. I told the rest o' the boys about you, and they all chipped in some and made quite a bag. I'll get it."

He ran back to his mule and brought a large bag of fragrant coffee.

"And here's some more things, Aunty," said Si and Shorty, producing various articles that they thought would please the woman and her husband. "And here's Uncle Ephraim, too. Uncle, we're on our way with the army. We're in a great hurry, but we felt that we couldn't go by

without stopping and thanking you all for your great kindness to us when we were in lots o' trouble. We'll come back again when the war's over, and do you some good."

Every negro on the place seemed to have learned of their presence, and was gathered around, devouring every detail with their great white eyes. They pressed up close to touch the hands or even the clothes of the boys.

One white-haired old uncle began a thanksgiving at the top of his sonorous voice, and a middle-aged negress, whose speciality was shouting at camp-meetings, spilt the air with

"Glory to God! Glory to God!"

that it seemed ought to be heard back in burned Atlanta.

"Well, good-by, all," said Si hastily, shaking hands with Uncle Ephraim. "Let me thank you again. We must go, but you'll likely see us again, soon, when the war's over. Good-by."

"But we'uns 's a-gwine wid yo'uns," said Aunt Minerva Ann, with sudden decision. "We'uns 's a-gwine right erlong. I's stood on Jordan's stormy banks an' cast my wistful eyes plum long enough, an' I's done gwine whar my recessions lie."

"Dat's what we'uns 's a-gwine fo' t' do," said Uncle Ephraim, catching inspiration, as he usually did, from his wife.

"But you can't," said Si, appalled. "You can't go with us, at least not now. We're traveling light, and going fast, and we can't have nobody with us. You just wait till the war's over, and we'll come back."

"We'uns 's done a-gwine wid yo'uns," said Aunt Minerva Ann decidedly. "I got a sign las' night, when I dreamed ob de Angel Moses and Gabriel wid his horn. I knowed de sign meant something de minnit I dreamed hit, an' now I know hit meant fo' we'uns t' go, an' we'uns 's a-gwine."

"No, I tell you, you must stay back," said Si, peremptorily, as he extricated his squad from the crowd and started down the road in quick time.

"If I have my bearings right," said Si, as they came on top of a hill, and he took a survey of the country, and its relations to the bare walls of Stone Mountain, "that town, where they had us in jail and started to hang us, lays down there to the right. I think we can make a circuit through it, and burn that old jail, for the benefit of humanity, and otherwise make them sorry that they did not hang us when they had the chance."

"I think we can do it, and yet make Peachstone Shoals all right by right," said Shorty. "Any way, let's try it."

"Goodness, just look there," said Monty Scruggs, pointing back to Mr. Benjamin Small's plantation, which was clearly visible in the distance. Uncle Ephraim had hitched up the mule team, and with Aunt

Minerva Ann seated beside him, was driving along the road, after them, followed by all the negroes on the place, each carrying some article which he or she supposed would be of special value in the future. Some had cooking utensils, some baskets of food, but the most had bits of fine raiment, apparently obtained from "the house," which seemed to have been abandoned by Mr. Small and his family. Uncle Ephraim's head was adorned by a fine silk hat, and Aunt Minerva wore a red

shawl, and a rich bonnet, profusely decorated with artificial flowers, and carried a silk parasol, all treasures of Mrs. Small's holiday wardrobe.

"If they'll come, they'll come," muttered Si. "I done all I could to keep 'em back."

"No time to waste on them," said Shorty. "Forward to the beautiful city of Hang-Town, with its fine public institutions—particularly jail—and merciful, Christian people."

ON THE MARCH TO THE SEA.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BOYS REVISIT THE TOWN WHERE THEY SO NARROWLY ESCAPED HANGING—THEY MEET AND RECOGNIZE A NUMBER OF OLD ACQUAINTANCES—THEY GIVE THE GEORGIANS AN UNLOOKED-FOR AND VERY IMPORTANT LESSON.

Si and his squad soon came to the top of a hill which overlooked the straggling, squalid little village of Hang-Town, as Shorty and the rest persisted in calling it. Without showing themselves out in the road, they halted for a few minutes to study it, and recall their miserable experiences there the previous August. That was only a little over two months away, but it seemed a century. Such an infinity of things had happened since. Then they were hungry and haggard, unutterably sore in every limb, hunted down by day and night, in the midst of a community where every white man was more dangerous than a wild beast, and their brightest hopes were merely to escape with life and limb from perils which beset every step. It seemed that there was not a drop in sorrow's cup left untasted by them. The vicious rabble into whose hands they had fallen were confident, impudent and defiant—heaping hatred, contumely and derision on the sacred cause which was dearer to them than life itself. After having cost 10,000 Union lives, Atlanta still mocked and defied the Union army. The boys had only been rescued from an ignominious death by a fortuitous chance.

Since then they had been home, and drunk new and greater drafts from the fountain of the Beauty and Glory of Life. Si had had the crowning joy of union with the beloved of his heart; Shorty had felt that some measure of the same happiness was vouchsafed him. Each of the others had had something come in to greatly vivify and broaden life. Atlanta was now but a heap of smoldering ruins—a thing

of so little moment that they could march off and leave it without further care or thought. The Union army was sweeping resistlessly over Georgia. It seemed as if the world had turned clear around since those dreadful August days, but that miserable little village had not changed a particle. It lay there in the bright November sunshine, just as they remembered it in the glare of August. There was the same gang of long-haired, unkempt, shabbily-attired loafers hanging around the rambling, shackling, weather-beaten old tavern; the same ragged, gnarled locusts in front, suiting with the dilapidation of men and building; the same forlorn meeting-house, the same villainous "grocery," with emptied whisky barrels in front; the same evil-looking little jail. The boys even made out the eight scrub oaks, which had been trimmed up for their gallows. And as they looked, they saw a sour-visaged man, with a broad hat, and riding a fine horse, pace dignifiedly up to the tavern, where he was received with marked distinction by some of the more respectable-looking men, who had apparently gathered there to meet him.

"I declare, if there isn't Elder Hornblower, even," exclaimed Si. "I wonder if he has come to preach his famous sermon about the 'spoilers coming upon all the high places through the wilderness?' His sermon's coming truer than bedreamed o'."

"We're playing in great luck to find him here," said Shorty, with a grim significance, that boded no good to that sand-hill Boanerges. "There'll be some spoiling now that he can preach about with feel-

ing—if he lives to preach any more. I'm glad those trees are still standing, and all ready. They'll come handy now."

Si noticed to the right a creek flowing from the hills, with a deep, willow-vailed ravine, which would enable them to get quite near the tavern without being discovered.

"They've got some very good horses there, Shorty," he said, "which they've saved from the rebel's pressing agents, and which our army needs. I want that one myself which the Elder is riding."

"Confound it, I wanted that one myself," grumbled Shorty. "Trust you to pick out the best boss on sight. You ain't the son of a Baptist Deacon for nothing."

"We'll argue that at some future time," said Si. "The main thing now's not to let any o' them get away, nor their hosses. I think I recognize several gents there that we've an account to settle with. Let's skirt along through the woods until we come to the head o' that holler, and then foller the crick down to the road. Don't anybody make the least noise. Pete, you and Sandy can stay back here, keeping under cover, until you see us raise the bank, and then you gallop down, yelling at the top o' your voices."

The crowd about the tavern were so engrossed by the arrival of the Elder, with his budget of news of the war, that it was easy for Si and his squad to make their way unsuspected to the point aimed at.

Apparently, the Elder's message was so important that it had to be communicated in the form of a public speech. He was not reluctant to this. He was one of those old-time Gospelsers, who felt it their duty to "improve every occasion with a few remarks." He suffered himself to be led to the horse-block, which he mounted, flourished his red bandanna like a signal flag, and blew his nose with a trumpet sound, to give his hearers time to settle around, and get in a properly expectant frame of mind.

"Friends—ah, feller-citizens—ah, beloved brethren—ah," he began. "I've bina-preachin' t' yo' the Word fer many years—ah, and I've frickwently took as my text—ah, the 12th verse—ah, o' the 12th chapter—ah, of the Prophecies of Jeremiah—ah, which says—ah:

"The spoilers are come upon all high places through the wilderness—ah. The sword shall devour—ah, from one end of the land—ah, even to the other end of the land—ah. No flesh shall have peace—ah."

"Same old string—same old hurdy-gurdy," said Si, looking at the cap of his gun.

"I declare, there's that weazened, knock-kneed, little sardine, Tite Brown," said Shorty, "the orneriest little whelp in the gang, that'd picked me out to hang, because I was the biggest in the squad. I won't do nothing to him but naturally break him in two, and throw each half to the dogs."

"Hist! not so loud," warned Si. "Yes, and there's that pot-bellied old loafer, Tim Scads, who got my rope ready for me. I'll bring him down here to the crick and souse his face in it. That rum-blossom nose o' his'll make the water so hot that it'll kill all the fishes."

"Belov-ed hearers—ah," continued the Elder, with his most effective croon, "the prophecies in the Holy Book always come true—ah, and this one has come tru—ah, but not in the way we expected—ah. In-stid of our soldiers carrying the sword o' the Lord from the wilderness to the high places of the Abolitionists, and spoiling from one end of their land even to the other end of the land, the Lord has saw fit to chasten us fer our slackness and lukewarmness—ah. We hain't laid our hands to the plow as we should—ah, but 've looked back to our own selfish interests—ah—to our farms an' homes—ah; to our ease and safety—ah. So, the hosts o' Belial have for a space prevailed—ah. They've done took Atlanty—ah, an' burned hit to the ground—ah, and air now spreading over the land—ah, devouring hit from one end—ah, even to the other end—ah. Now, I come among you to-day—ah, not with the Word, but with the sword—ah; not to preach peace—ah, but fer war—ah. You have not went to war before—ah, bekase that meant leavin' yer homes—ah, which yo' claimed you couldn't well do—ah. Now, the sons of Beelzebub have come to yer homes—ah, and you will not have to go away to fight them—ah. They're right over the hill thar—ah."

Tim Scads, Tite Brown and some of the rest showed very evident signs of alarm at this announcement. They lost interest in the speech, and began to shamble off.

"Now, belov-ed friends and brethren—ah," continued the Elder, after wiping his face with his bandana, "rouse yerselves to battle fer yer freedom and yer firesides—ah. March at once to attack the brutal invader—ah. Rush upon him wherever you kin find him—ah; shoot him down whenever you kin see him—ah. Do hit at once—ah. Within this very hour—ah. He's right over thar, and you kin not help finding him, ah. Show him no quarter—ah. Smite him, hip-and-thigh, as Joshua done the Amalekites—ah. I'd be glad to go with you, belov-ed brethren, and die leading you in defense of yer homes—ah, but I must go on, and rouse the people elsewhere—ah. I long to put myself at yer head—ah, and"

"Forward, double-quick, left into line—MARCH!" shouted Si. They all dashed up in front of the tavern, and came to a halt with guns leveled.

"Halt, there. Throw up your hands, every one of you. Don't one of you move, on your lives," sternly commanded Si, bringing his Springfield to bear on the Elder.

"O, for the Lord's sake, don't shoot, Mister," begged the Elder. "Don't shoot."

I'm a minister o' the Gospel. I'm a man o' peace. I hain't never had nothing t' do with the army."

"Purty preacher you are," said Shorty. "You old whangdoodle hyena. Hell's full of a mighty sight better men than you are."

Pete and Sandy charged up with shrill yells, catching Tite Brown and Tim Seads in the midst of a hasty retreat, and whipping them back to the crowd with hickory switches. The boys had their guns, with their bridles, in their left hands, and long whites in their right.

"Ouch, that hurts," whined Tite. "You ortent t' hit a man that-a-way what never done nothing t' yo'uns."

"Say, my good young friend," pleaded the red-nosed Tim Seads, "you orter be keerful 'bout striking a white man and a gentleman. I'm an older man'n yo' air, and father of a family."

"Nice father you are, you old swill-tub," said Sandy, giving him another vicious cut. "If I had a yaller dog that'd own you for a father I'd kill him. Get back to the rest, before I do worse to you. Get, I say."

"Say," implored Tim, "you rayly ortent t' strike a white man with a whip afore niggers. Tain't decent. 'Twill take away all their respect."

Pete and Sandy looked around. They had been so absorbed in watching Si's movements that they had not noticed that Uncle Ephraim and Aunt Minerva, followed by the rest of Mr. Benjamin Small's negroes, had come up close behind and were eager spectators of events.

"Strike you with a whip, you worthless old soak," shouted Sandy. "Lose the respect of the niggers! You were crazy to hang a white man, whose finger nail was worth more than your run-pickled old carcass. Hustle. Don't waste time talking, or I won't leave a well place on you."

"Glory to God," shouted Aunt Minerva Ann, "dat I've libbed long enough t' see ole Tim Seads walloped. He de meanest pup dat ebber sucked aigs. He meaner'n ary nigger dat ebber wore wool. He purtend t' be a gemmen, and steal de coppers offen a daid nigger's eyes. He lay 'wake nights t' tink ob cussedness t' do t' a pore nigger. De only wuk he'd ebber do would be t' jine de patterole, jist fo' de fun ob lickin' niggers. He lick me w'en I wuz a leetle gal, jist fo' de fun ob hearin' me holler. Hit him again, young mas'r."

"There's a welt for the sake of Aunt Minerva Ann, and there's another for Uncle Ephraim," said Sandy, bringing down his withe with all his strength.

"Hit him a few for me, Sandy," said Si, "and don't let 'em be love taps, neither. Then you might add a few for the neighborhood. He's bin a bore and a nuisance to it all his worthless life."

"He ain't gittin' a lick amiss," remarked the Elder, in an undertone to the man next to him. He was beginning to recover

a little from his fright, for Si's attention had been directed away from him, and the dreadful muzzle of that Springfield rifle was pointed elsewhere than toward his head. "Though I hate t' see hit done by Yankees, an' afore the niggers. The way I've wrestled t' no effect with that onregenerate, desartless, guzzlin' ole sinner, an' tried t' win him from his evil ways. He's mocked at me, fer a chicken-eatin' boss-tradin' ole hypocrite, an' now a judgment has come onto him fer his railin' ag'in a minister o' the Lord."

"Now," said Si, addressing the crowd, "I want you all to mosey over there to them trees that you fixed up to hang us last August, and set down flat on the ground. Forward—March!"

The crowd looked at one another, but the boys were in a hurry, and hustled them along in no gentle way. The Elder brought up the rear as slowly and dignifiedly as he could, with the muzzle of Harry Joslyn's gun punching him in the back.

"Do be keerful with that there gun, my young friend," remonstrated the Elder. "Guns air orful things. You never know when they're goin' off."

"You needn't be so blamed particular about a few minutes, you old hunter of fried chicken and wheat biscuits," Harry answered. "Or whether you're shot accidentally or on purpose. You're going to be pretty soon, anyway."

"You don't mean t' say that you think o' shootin' a reggerly ordained minister o' the Gospel?" gasped the Elder. "That'd be wuss'n heathenism."

"Well, mebbe, being a minister will make the Sergeant change it to hanging, instead," Harry consoled him. "Bein' shot's a soldier's death. Mebbe he won't think you deserve it. Sit down there."

"But the ground's cold and wet. I'll ketch my death o' cold," expostulated the Elder.

"Do as he tells you, and at once," said Shorty, bringing his heavy hand down upon the Elder's shoulder. "You needn't bother about cold. In 15 minutes you'll be where it's warm enough."

The Elder's knees bent under Shorty's grip, and he sat down violently, but he raised himself a little, pulled out his bandana and a wallet of papers, and carefully placed them under him, to shield him from the chill, wet soil, groaning:

"This's one of the trials o' the Lord's follerers. I must endure hit."

"Now, Shorty," said Si, after he had got the crowd settled down, and he and his companions had picked out the rest of the would-be hangmen, "you take these eight gents, who was so anxious to string us up, and make 'em do one job of honest work in their lives. Make 'em gather up them empty whisky barrels, and all the truck around here, and pile it in and around that calaboose, so that it'll be sure to burn to the ground. Then set it and that grocery,



"FORWARD, DOUBLE-QUICK, LEFT INTO LINE—MARCH!" SHOUTED SI.

a-fire. Hurry up, for we've no time to waste."

The eight loafers had never done so much hard work in a day as they did in the next 10 minutes, with Shorty, a long switch in his hand, moving among them delivering swishing cuts to animate them to greater swiftness in gathering logs, rails, barrels, boxes, and other fuel to heap in and around the old jail.

"Another judgment on the wicked," said the Elder, as he saw the flames roll up from the groggery. "Hit supports me in my trials I see that evil place destroyed. I've preached ag'in hit fer years an' prophesied hits destruction. I never could

git a cent out o' anybody who went thar fer the support o' the Gospel."

His scare was disappearing. He felt that the men would sate their vengeance otherwise, and let him go.

"Glory to God!" shouted the negroes, who were watching the amazing conflagration of two places so full of dire associations in their minds. "The Day of Judgment hab come, sartin."

"All, come here," said Si grimly, as, having finished their work, the eight panting loafers were again hauled up before him by Shorty. "This gent, here, whose name I learned some months ago, is Mr. Timothy Scads, a free and independent

citizen of Georgia, and an ornament to its Society, haint drunk nearly as much water in the course of his life as a decent man should. You go and get that hoss bucket full of water and a board, and administer to him as much water as you think his system needs, to make up for lost time."

The negroes roared, and even the whites would have laughed, but that Si's set, stern face forbade.

Tim Sends took the first two gourdfuls with avidity, for he was very hot and dry from his labor. He swallowed the third with some effort, but pushed the fourth away. "I've got all I kin hold," he said.

"O, no; you're mistaken," said Alf. "You haven't hardly begun. This is only the first bucketful, it ain't half empty, and there's lots more in the well. If that gives out, we'll got to the creek. Down with it at once."

Tim gulped it down, and another one with more difficulty. Then he begged:

"O, mister, I can't drink no more. I rayly can't. I feel my liver floatin' round, and tanglin' up with my gizzard."

"O, yes, you can," said Alf. "Let me feel your pulse. Gracious, you ain't half full yet. Down with this at once."

Two more gourdfuls were forced down, and Tim begged again:

"O, Lord, don't make me drink no more. I kin feel the water rummin' inter my lights now, an' drownin' out my heart. I can't drink another mouthful."

"O, yes, you can," said the obdurate Alf. "Let me see your tongue. Just as I thought. You ain't half full. The water ain't up to your waist yet. You've got to drink until it's level with your teeth. What you think is water is only steam from your hot coppers that haint had any water for years. You'll feel better after you've drunk this bucketful and another. Open your mouth and down with this gourdful at once."

"Ef I drink another mouthful I'll either bust or be water-logged for life," whined Tim. But Alf called Gid and Monty to hold him and his nose, and forced a couple more gourdfuls down him.

"I think he's got all he can hold for the present, sir," said Alf, turning and gravely saluting Si. "It's beginning to run out of his ears."

"Very good," said Si, as gravely, returning the salute. "Take him and the other seven over to those trees, where they were going to hang us, and tie each of them to a tree. Got those hickories ready, Corporal Elliott?"

"Yes, sir," said Shorty, saluting, and showing eight substantial hickory withes, which he had in the meanwhile cut from the neighboring second growth.

"Very good," said Si. "Now, whipping such trash as that is too dirty work for Yankee soldiers and gentlemen. You will select eight able-bodied negroes from this crowd, and let them do it. Let them give 40 stripes, save one, as the Bible directs.

You will superintend the job, and see that they are well laid on."

Shorty selected a bow-legged, squat negro, with thick lips and a flat nose, but strong arms, to devote himself to Tite Brown.

The loafers yelled with pain as each blew descended, and the negro women shouted with excitement, sang snatches of hymns and prayed.

"More deserved punishment I never knowed," commented the Elder, who now felt comfortably certain that this would exhaust the vengeance of the Yankees, and leave him unmolested and free. Hit's a righteous judgment on them sealawags, every one o' which has bin itchin' fer jest sich a skinnin' all their lives. They haint got hit a minnit too soon, or a lick too many. More owdacious vagabonds never drained the breath of a worthless life."

While this was going on Si moved around, getting ready to start. He found eight good horses in the lot, which he put in charge of Pete, Sandy, Alf and Gid, with instructions to start off down the road with them. He wanted Pete to take one of the horses for himself, but Pete would not give up Abednego, the mule, for any horse.

As the whippers came from their task they were mounted on some of the horses, and Uncle Ephraim was directed to follow, and, conducted by Monty and Harry, disappeared behind the curtain of bushes at the bend of the road, leaving Si and Shorty alone with the crowd, leaning on their muskets, in front of the heavy curtain of bushes.

"Elder Hornblower," said Si, gravely, "we've now tended to the lesser villains, and it comes your turn."

"Don't call me a villain, young man," said the Elder, hotly. "I'm a mister o' the Gospel, an' a Magistrate under the laws o' Georgy. You haint got nothin' t' do with me. I'm a peaceable citizen, an' never had nothin' t' do with the army. Hit's agin the law t' molest me in any way."

"Just now we're engaged in making new laws, Elder," said Si, with an air of patient explanation, "which same will apply to your case."

"But I wasn't gwine t' hang you," expostulated the Elder. "Hit was them fellers that you've done licked."

"Elder Hornblower," continued Si, with the same patient air, and repeating as well as he could remember the turgid fulness of the sonorous old indictments under the criminal law of Indiana, "you have, being instigated by the devil, and not having the fear of God before your eyes, been for years wickedly, maliciously, and with malice prepense and aforethought, rampaging up and down the country, preaching treason, sedition, murder, arson, and other things against the peace and dignity of the United States of America, and the statutes in those cases made and provided.

You deserve the doom of all traitors, which is death, and it has become our duty to shoot you dead, dead, dead, as the law directs, and may God have mercy on your sinful soul. Have you anything to say, before sentence is executed?"

Si stopped and wiped his face, for the prodigious mental effort had made him sweat.

"But you can't shoot me. You dassent shoot me. I'm a minister of the Gospel, I done tole you," shouted the Elder, struggling to his feet.

"You're not speaking to the question, Elder," said Shorty, examining the lock of his gun. "We said we were going to shoot you. That's settled, and no longer debatable. Any other remarks?"

"Elder," said Si, "we are in a great hurry, and have no time to waste. We've heard you, with our own ears, preaching treason in its worst form. We've also listened twice to your great sermon on the spoilers from the wilderness. We're them, just as the Bible describes. Now, having done your preaching, you can pray. We'll give you five minutes by the watch, counting from now, to do the best praying you ever done in your life, for it will be your last. Go over and kneel down by one of them trees, where you were going to hang us, and do your praying. You other men go over and kneel down with him. Now, at the end of five minutes I'll count three, and at three we'll shoot. Hurry up now. Your five minutes is passing."

The Elder gave a despairing look at the stern, set faces of Si and Shorty, without finding in them a ray of mercy. Groaning audibly, he went over, knelt down behind Tim Seads, and began praying in a tone that echoed from the hills. The others knelt down in line with him, and Si and Shorty exchanged covert grins at noticing that they all carefully assumed positions that would take them out of range of an ill-aimed shot at the Elder. They were certain not to get behind him, or very near on either side.

Unconsciously, the Elder drifted into one of his regular, thunderous prayers, which were so effective in his meetings. He prayed for the success of the Southern Confederacy and the utter destruction of the Abolition hordes; for more blessings and strength to Jeff Davis, and confusion and distress to Abraham Lincoln; for a sweeping away of the "Yankee mercenaries," as Semacherib's hosts had been swept away, and for victories for Lee and Hood, like those which had blessed Joshua and Gideon.

"One!" called out Si, when he had got as much of this as he could stand.

The Elder whirled about with hands upraised, and shouted:

"O, Mister, for God's sake, spare my life. Remember my holy calling; remember my peaceful character; remember my wife and family; remember!"—

"Turn around, there, and go ahead praying," said Shorty, sighing at him; "You didn't remember our holy calling, our peaceful character, our wives and children, when you were egging on that crowd to hang us. Turn around, there, or I'll shoot you at once."

The Elder resumed his devotions, and those on either side of him began groaning, shouting and praying in sympathy. The crackling of the burning loggery, and the crash of the falling roof and walls of the jail mingled with their voices.

The Elder began mingling with his invocations for Heavenly mercy, solicitations for blighting curses on those soulless vandals who were to do him to death.

"Two!" called out Si. "Next to last call for eternity. Next station, the grave," added Shorty.

The Elder whirled about again, but immediately whirled back, for he saw the two guns at the boys' faces, ready to fire, and his voice was tremulous with tearful emotion. His companions were now simply howling with agonized suspense.

Si and Shorty stepped noiselessly around the screen of bushes and disappeared. The precautions were needless. The men were all in such nervous terror that they could not have heard the march of a regiment. A hundred rods away the boys could still hear them groaning, shouting and praying. Then the partners ran forward to the horses, which they mounted, and led their procession onward.

"We certainly gave them a bad half hour," said Si, as they jogged along. "But I doubt whether we made 'em as much misery as they made us. I guess they know now that there's a God in Israel. I wonder how long the Elder will keep up his praying? One thing I'm sure of: he's lost a mighty nice horse, and, I declare, I believe this is the same one I took from him before. It is, as sure's I'm alive. The next thing is as to what we're going to do with Uncle Ephraim and Aunt Minerva Ann. You know the orders are strict against negroes following the army."

"Well, orders or no orders, we've got to take care of them, since they would come along," answered Shorty. "I believe Col. McGillienny'll help us out."

"He certainly will if he can. Anyway, we can't let 'em go back there. Old Hornblower and his crowd would whip every one o' them to death, if he could get the chance."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SCRIMMAGE WITH THE JAWGY RESERVES AND UNCLE EPH'S AND AUNT MINERVA ANN'S NEW RELATIONS TO SOCIETY.

"I couldn't resist the temptation, any more'n you could, Si, of taking these fine hosses away from the rebels," remarked Shorty, as they jogged along toward Peachstone Shoals, to meet the 200th Ind. "As a matter of principle every fairly good hoss should be taken from the rebels on sight, but are we going to have such a circus getting rid of them after we reach camp as we did with the cattle? If there is any prospect o' that, I vote that we shoot 'em just before we reach camp, and save trouble."

"Never do it in the world," answered Si, whose farmer instincts revolted from the barbarity of shooting a good horse. "I'm going to give this hoss o' the Elder's to Col. McGillicuddy. He's better and faster than the one he's riding. You can give that one you're on to Lieut.-Col. Strode, and we'll distribute the others around. This looks like it's going to be a march when lots o' the officers 'll want to ride, and a few extry hosses will be welcome. I'm a heap more puzzled about Uncle Ephraim and Aunt Minerva Ann. I see a peck o' trouble ahead over them."

"Fret not thy gizzard over them," answered Shorty, philosophically. "Niggers can do a heap o' taking care o' themselves in this country, and we'll be where we can be lending a helping hand, now and then."

"Say—Mas'r—big Mas'r Yank," called out Uncle Ephraim.

"Uncle Ephraim," said Si, in a tone of mild reproof, "you musn't call me master. You musn't call anybody master now. You're a free man, and have no master any more. Drop the word."

"No mas'r nowhar?" queried Uncle Ephraim, looking bewildered; "I t'ought you's t' be my new mas'r now."

"No, no; there are no masters anywhere, any more. I'm nobody's master."

"You's nobody's mas'r," echoed Uncle Ephraim, still more bewildered. "You's nobody's mas'r? Why, I done t'ought, from de way you went on, dat you's de biggest mas'r dat I eber done see. When eber you done speak to' dese udder Yankee's, dey jump, an' dy keep on jumpin' till dey's done what you tole dem. An' what dey says t' de white folks 'round hyah is done in a burry. I tell you. T'ink ob burnin' de jail an' de ole Stalin's grocery, an' you aint de big mas'r."

"No; I'm no master, of anybody."

"An' a-lickin' Tim Scads, an' Tite Brown, an' Jerry Lumpkin, an' Tod Blin-

kins, an' de rest ob dese ole whisky-tarriers in an inch of deir lives, an' you no mas'r."

"No, indeed."

"An' makin' ole Elder Hornblower, who's done bin whoppin' an' hollerin' froo dese woods for fer de Lord knows how long, an' a-runnin' t'ings t' suit hisself, git down on his marrer-bones, an' beg fer mercy, an' you no big mas'r."

"No, Uncle Ephraim. 'm no master of anybody. There aint no more masters in this country, except in the Southern Confederacy, and we're busting them up as fast as we can get at them."

"Well, if you isn't a big mas'r, deñ de good Lord nebber made one. You's my mas'r, an' 'Nervy Ann's, now an' forebber more—kingdom come."

"Yes, indeed you is," echoed Aunt Minerva Ann, in her regular amen intonation.

"Now, look here, Uncle Ephraim, Aunt Minerva, and all the rest of you," said Si, impressively. "Stop that. I'm not your master, nor is anybody else, any more. You're free—absolutely free, do you understand? Free as anybody—free as I am. Freer than I am, just now, for I'm a soldier under orders, which you are not. You're as free as (the stopped to think about some comparison that would make the matter clear to the negroes' comprehension) as free—as—as—Tim Scads, Tite Brown, or Elder Hornblower."

"Lan's sake," ejaculated Aunt Minerva Ann, "we'uns don't want t' be lack dat pore white trash, in no shape ner manner. Dey'uns's wives an' chillun's allers hungry fer bread an' meat, an' haint cloze t' cover deir nakedness. An' if I t'ought dat Eph'd go bellerin' 'bout de country lack Elder Hornblower, an' leabin' me t' hoe de grass outen de cotten, I'd take a water-elm club an' break his fool neck—so I would. You hear dat, Eph?"

"Yes, 'Nervy,'" meekly answered Uncle Ephraim.

"Well, I repeat that you're free, now, and musn't call anybody master."

"But we don't want t' be free niggers—dat's lower down dan de wufless white trash," returned Aunt Minerva Ann. "A free nigger's like a stray dog; eberybody gives him a kick, an' nobody a bone. We'uns want t' belong t' somebody. We'uns want t' belong t' you an' Fadder Abraham."

"Well, you can't belong to neither of us. There's no use of talking about it. That

ends it. You musn't call me master, but Serg't Klegg, of the 200th Injianny Volunteers. Understand that?"

They did not understand it, but their ears were quick to catch sounds, and after a few trials Si got them so that they could pronounce "Serg't Klegg," and "Corporal Elliott," and "200th Injianny Volunteer Infantry."

"Dat's de name ob our new mas'rs," said Uncle Ephraim to the rest, in a tone of authority. "Now, I want you common niggers t' farn dat, hard an' fas', an' neber 'low me t' h'ar nutting else from yer tick lips."

"But, Uncle Ephraim," Si began to protest anew.

"It's no use, Si," interrupted Shorty; "they'll have to learn what freedom means otherwise than by words o' mouth."

The discussion was interrupted by the sound of two or three shots a quarter of a mile ahead, then a couple of shots from some point nearer, apparently in reply; then a sputter of shots, as others came up and joined in. Si and Shorty galloped forward, to find that Pete Skidmore and Sandy Baker, riding ahead as an advance guard, had come upon a squad of men preparing to burn a bridge over a narrow and deep creek. These had fired on them as soon as they came in sight, and their bullets had come so unpleasantly near that Pete and Sandy had jumped from their saddles and behind trees before replying. Harry, Monty, Gid and Alf, who were strung along back, talking with the negroes, had come up, one by one, and jumping from their horses had fired at the squad of rebels. Abednego, the mule, was entering into the spirit of the occasion, by occupying the center of the road, regardless of the bullets whistling back and forward over him, and kicking, with lightning swiftness and great precision of aim, at every horse that came within range of his long-reaching heels. These came perilously near Si's head, as he leaned forward to reconnoiter the scene of action.

The sound of the guns started the emotional negroes behind into a tumult of loud shouting, singing and praying.

Had it not been that he thought there was more pressing use for it, Si would have given the recalcitrant mule the contents of his gun.

He sprang from his horse, and ran up on the high bank, where Monty, Harry, Gid and Alf had gathered and were reloading. Down the slope, a little to the left, were Pete and Sandy behind trees.

He could see the bridge, 300 or 400 yards away, upon which the rebels had been piling fat pine-knots and dry brush, when they had been surprised by Pete and Sandy's appearance. They all seemed more or less crippled, and one man, limping along on a crutch, toward the bridge, was carrying a lighted brand, obtained from a house near by, swinging it around, as he hobbled along, to keep it alive, and burning freely. A one-armed man, standing out boldly in front of the bridge, was loading his gun with difficulty, holding it

against his body with the stump of his right arm, while he charged the cartridge, drew rammer and rammed cartridge with his left hand. It was clear that he was making a brave effort to stand off his assailants until the man with the brand could reach the bridge.

Two other maimed men at the opposite end of the bridge had dropped their loads of stuff and were hobbling toward their guns, which leaned against trees.

There was something familiar about the one-armed man, and Si dropped the gun which he had raised to cover him, and shouted to the others:

"Hold on, boys. Don't shoot that man. He's one-armed Sheriff, who stood by us last Summer."

He was not an instant too soon. All the reloaded muskets were coming down with deadly aim. He was not quite soon enough. Sandy and Pete heard him at the instant of firing and instinctively depressed their aim from the man's breast, but one of their bullets caught him in the thigh, and he fell to the ground, firing his own gun as he did so.

Shorty could not bring himself to fire on the cripple with the crutch, but dashed forward, hoping to intercept him before he reached the bridge. He yelled at him that he would shoot him if he did not stop, but the man gave him a look of hatred and defiance, saw that if he had really intended to shoot he would have done so before running at him, and hobbled frantically forward. Just as Shorty clutched his shoulder he threw the brand into the pine leaves and knots on the bridge. They flamed up like powder. Shorty flung him down and rushed onto the bridge, to kick the burning stuff into the water. It was no use. The bridge itself was old, and constructed of pine, from which the resin had been melted out by the sun in great welts and sheets, covering the timbers with a thick scale, which flamed up at once, so that Shorty had to run from the bridge to save himself. His first thought was to help the cripple to his feet, and away from the intense heat.

Then he looked with dismay at the roaring flames, and the deep, impassible creek which blocked their farther progress toward camp.

Si and the rest ran forward, picked up the Sheriff, and carried him back from the flames.

"Awful sorry, Sheriff, you was shot," said Si, as they laid him down. "We really didn't intend to, as soon as we recognized you. Hope it aint anything serious. Alf, look at his wound, and see what it is."

Si forgot his chagrin at the destruction of the bridge in his anxiety for the man who had stood by them so nobly.

"It isn't serious," said Alf, after a minute's examination. "It's on the outside, not near any veins or arteries. I can stop the blood, and he'll be all right. Good thing, Sergeant, that you spoke as soon as you did. The boys had evidently a good aim on his heart, and dropped their muz-

zles. You can see it was a good line shot."

"All right," chuckled the Sheriff. "I aint gwine t' mind that thar scratch, long's we've saved the bridge from yo'uns. Soon's I got my orders t' burn all the bridges and block the road in front o' yo'uns' army, I called out a posse, but in all my born days I never see sich a run o' chills an' fever, an' rheumatiz as thar was on this creek. Very queerly, all the men wuz down with them, an' they didn't tetch the women at all. The women wuz as lively as crickets, but the men all groau-in', an' unable t' move hand or foot without yellin'. Only these three ole Confeds that'd bin plugged by Yankee bullets afore seemed t've escaped the fever-an'ager, an' rheumatiz, and willin' t' go erlong with me, an' try another whack at yo'uns. But we'uns burned the bridge, an' 've got yo'uns. Yo'uns've done run inter a dead-fall, an' we'uns'll have yo'uns back in Andersonville by to-morrow night.

The Sheriff chuckled again, as he looked at the burning bridge.

Si and Shorty shuddered at the mention of Andersonville, but they picked up the Sheriff and tenderly carried him up to the house, where, the flow of blood having been stanch'd, he was laid on the bed, and Aunt Minerva Ann was called in to help make him comfortable, and prepare for him and his companion the food which the boys gave from their own haversacks.

Si and Shorty returned to the bridge, to consider the situation and decide what to do.

"Dumb the luck," said Si, looking at the steep, rugged banks, lined with rocky cliffs and the deep, swift current; "we could manage to get over, if we wuz afoot and alone, but we can never get those hosses and women and wagons over in the world. I misdoubt if many o' them negroes can get across."

"Well, there's no use discussing anything but taking the niggers along," answered Shorty. "The hosses may go to blazes, for all I care, but we've got to look out for these people. I'll meander down here to the left, and you go up to the right, and see if there aint a chance to get across."

"Pete, get on that blamed ghost o' yours," commanded Si, "and ride up there to that spur, and see how it looks for a crossing. Be back here in five minutes."

They all returned from their explorations, with discouraging reports. The banks were even worse farther up and down.

"We'll have to build a bridge, I'm afraid," said Si, looking at some tall trees standing near the bank, and studying the facilities for approach.

"Sandy, you and Harry go up to that house, and get all the axes you can find and bring 'em here."

Aunt Minerva Ann came bustling down from the house, her broad face full of rage and anxiety.

"Say, Serg't Klegg, you orter come right up inter de house an' kill dat ole lop-sided

Sheriff Bardsley done daid, right off—not leave him live a bressed minnit. Why didn't you shoot him daid when you had de chanst?"

"Why, Aunt Minerva Ann, what's the matter?" asked Si.

"Why," spluttered the negress, "jes's soon's yer back wuz turned, arter doin' all you could fer him, he done called Miss Barnstable's little boy, an' done sent him off on deir best hoss on de gallop, to Cap'n Stonebroose, who has de critter company, t' come hyah ter wunst wid his company, fer he done had eight Yankees an' a lot o' Mas'r Ben Small's niggers an' hosses an' sich, hyah, all bagged, an' dat he could take dem in, but he mus' come on de jump. T'ink ob dat arter all you've done fer him, an' sabin' his no-account life. I done hearn hit all froo de doo', as I wuz bilin' de coffee, which I wish't would pizen him. I come away jes' as soon's I could t' tell yo'. He orten t' be allowed t' lib a minnit. I'll make Eph go up dar an' cut his froat, if you say so."

"Not on your life, Aunty," said Si, earnestly, in spite of the disturbance of his mind by her message. "You must be just as kind to him as you have bin. Don't mistreat him in any way."

"The question before the house," remarked Shorty, casting his eyes around the horizon, "is how far off the aforesaid Capt. Stonebroose may be, how long it'll take that boy to reach him, and consequently how soon we may expect a call from him. I'm afraid that we'll not be allowed any time for bridge-building this afternoon."

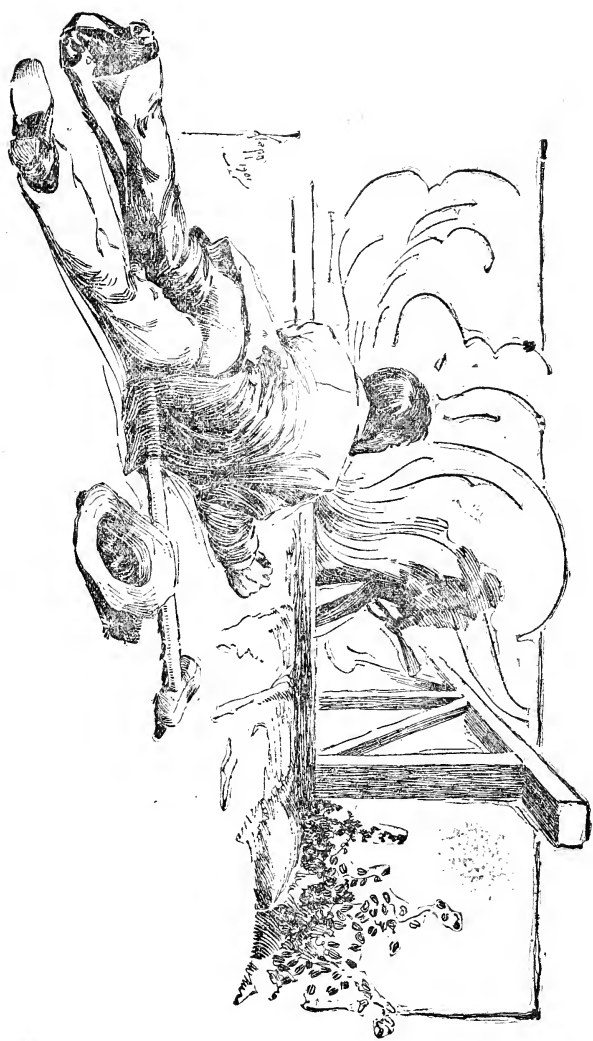
"I tell you what we'd better do," said Si, with troubled face: "we'll tell the darkies to take to the woods, and make their way to camp as best they can, while we're standin' off Stone Jug, or whatever his rebel name may be."

"Sense me, Serg't Klegg," said Uncle Ephraim, coming up, pulling off his master's silk hat, touching his foretop, and scraping his feet on the ground, after the approved slave fashion: "'sense me, Mas'r—I mean Corpril Elliot—but did I understand dat you gemmen wanted t' go t' Peachstone Shoals?"

"That's where we were striking for, Uncle," said Si, "before this bridge-burning stopped us. Now, I was just coming back here to tell you to scatter yourselves through the woods, and"—

"Sense me, agin, Mas'r—I mean Serg't Klegg," said Uncle Ephraim, again touching his foretop still more deferentially, and scraping the ground with his foot. "Jes' le' me talk a minnit now. What I done started t' tell you gemmen afore, when we branched off on t' de subjick ob mas'r's, wuz dat if we all wuz a-gwine t' Peachstone Shoals, dat we'd sabs a hull lot ob trabbel by turnin' off right hyah, an' a-cuttin' froo de woods behine dat big rock dar. Peachstone Shoals is right ober dar, not more'n two sees an' a good holler, an' by goin' dat-a-way we kin make hit afore sundown."

“SHORTY FLUNG HIM DOWN AND RUSHED ONTO THE BRIDGE.”



"Sure of that, Uncle?" asked Si, with lifting heart, but scanning the horizon doubtfully.

"Shore as yer bawn, chile—I mean, Mas'r—I mean Serg't Klegg," answered Uncle Ephraim, with another dab at his foretop, and scrape with his toes.

"He's all right," said Shorty, confidently. "Trust a nigger and a woodchuck for the shortest way home. Foxes and rabbits go the longest way around, but a nigger can smell home, like a hoss, and cut across straight for it."

"Uncle Ephraim, take that road with your people as the Lord'll let you," said Si, impressively. "And don't you stop until you reach our pickets, Capt. Stonejug, or something like that, with his cavalry company, is after us, and you."

"Cap'n Stonebroose," echoed the other negroes, with dismay.

"Yes; Cap. Stonebroose. Me and my men are going to stay behind and fight him off, while the rest of you are getting away. Now, hurry off, and go as fast as you can."

"Nerry Ann," called out Uncle Ephraim, walking over to where the Sheriff's gun had been left lying, "git up in dat wagon, an' take dem lines, an' lead de percession. I'm gwine t' stay hyah wid de soljer gemmen. Whar dat cartridge-box? Ole Stallins take hit wid him?"

"Good man, Eph," shouted Aunt Minerva Ann. "I'll git hit fer you."

She ran back to the porch, picked, up the Sheriff's cartridge-box, and as she flung it to Eph on her way to the wagon she admonished him:

"Stan' up like a man, now. If you run a step afore de Serg't Klegg done tell you, I nebber lib wid you agin so long's you done got ha'r on yer haid."

She climbed upon the wagon-seat, gathered up the reins, and sat looking expectantly.

"Go on, Aunt Minerva Ann," said Si. "Whar are you waiting for?"

"I wanted t' see you all kill dat Sheriff afore I started," she explained.

"Go on. Hurry off," said Si. "I'm not going to kill the Sheriff. Drive off, and go fast."

"Denn you's gwine t' make Eph do hit, same's lickin' dat pore white trash. Eph, don't git wobbly, now, an' miss. Hold yer gun tight."

"No, Eph's not going to do it. We're not going to kill the Sheriff, or hurt him at all, I tell you," said Si, impatiently. "Drive off at once, and get out of the way. The rebels may be here at any minute."

"Dem Yankees is suttinly cur'us," Aunt Minerva Ann communicated to another sable matron, who had taken the seat beside her. "Lick de hides offen some ob de whites what wasn't doin' nuffin' t' dem. an' den pet an' coddle anudder what shot at dem, an' tried t' hab em all cotched an' killed. Yankees 's lots cu'user'n our folks."

After seeing that the negroes had fairly started, and deploying the boys to watch for Capt. Stonebroose, Si and Shorty went up to bid gooy-by to the Sheriff.

"Are you all comfortable, Sheriff? Anything more that we can do for you?" asked Si.

"Thanks, gentlemen," he answered, "yo'uns's very kind, but I require nothin' more. I'm as comfortable as possible, an' expect some friends, who I think will interest yo'uns, even if they don't make yo'uns comfortable."

"Yes," said Shorty, not to be outdone by the Sheriff's geniality, "we understand that you sent for Capt. Stoneshoes, or something like that, to entertain us. We're on the look-out for him, and will try to keep the flies off him, when he comes."

"It was my duty t' send for him, sir, an' I done hit," said the Sheriff, stiffening up.

"That's all right, Sheriff," said Shorty, cordially. "As we didn't put you on parole you had the right. A little thing like that shan't interfere with our friendship for you. How many men is your friend, Capt. Stone Jews, likely to have with him?"

"That, sir," said the Sheriff, stiffly, "would be giving information t' the enemy. I refuse t' tell you, sir. But I will say that he'll have enough to make hit hopeless fer yo'uns t' fout him—perfectly hopeless, sir."

"It's clear you're not acquainted with the 200th Injianny Volunteers, Sheriff," said Si, pleasantly. "Your friend, the Captain, will have some very different ideas about a sure thing, after he's monkeyed with us for a few minutes. But we're net here to talk o' that, but to say good-by, thank you again, and leave you a little more coffee. We hope to see you after the war."

A far-away shout came over the treetops.

"That's Cap'n Stonebroose now," said the Sheriff, hobbling out on the porch and sending up a ringing shout in reply. "Gentlemen, I like yo'uns, an' I advise yo'uns in a friendly way not t' put up a fout, fer hit 'll be useless. Cap'n Stonebroose!"

"Thank you, Sheriff," said Si, starting back to the boys, "but the 200th Injianny's in the habit o' deciding for itself about fighting or not. Grab a root, boys, and don't fire till you see something to shoot at."

In a minute the woods on the opposite side of the creek was full of yelling horsemen.

"Hello," said Si, in amazement, "what in the world are they doing over there? Harry, do you see anybody coming down on this side?"

"Nobody at all, sir," replied Harry, "and I can see a good piece."

"Cap'n Stonebroose," shouted the Sheriff, angrily. "What in the name o' sense air you all doin' on that side o' the creek? I done sent you word t' come down on this side."

"Well, haint I on this side o' the creek?" shouted back the Captain.

"You gourdheaded reserve," shouted the Sheriff, "you haint got no more sense than the rest o' ole Windsucker Joe Brown's pets. None o' yo'uns know enough t' come

In when hit rains. I done tole you t' come down on this side o' the crick."

"Stop callin' me an' the Governor o' Georgy names, you impudent jail-keeper, you," shouted the Captain. "You hant talkin' t' sculawags in jail now, you big-gity office-holder. You wuz on this side o' this crick this mornin' when you done talked t' me 'bout comin' t' you. How wuz I t' know you'd done went acrost? What'd you burn that bridge fer? The boy you sent said come down on this side o' the crick, I tell you. Whar air them Yankees an' niggers?"

"The Yankees are right here, Captain, very much at your service," said Si, stepping out from behind his tree. "Come right over. We're anxious for a closer acquaintance."

He raised his gun and shot down the Captain's horse. The other boys fired, and there was a general jumping from horses on the other side and scrambling for cover. Uncle Ephraim, imitating every motion of those around him, had taken cover behind a log, and succeeded in bringing down a horse on the other side. He jumped up and shouted:

"Glory t' God!"

There was a lull as the boys reloaded, the Captain picked himself up, found shelter behind a tree, and his men anxiously sought cover behind rocks and trees.

"Yo'uns 's jes' 'bout as much good over thar," shouted the Sheriff, "as yo'uns'd be in Guiney, but that's as much good as yo'uns ever air, anywhar. You sneakin', cowardly, stay-at-home, sorghum-cuttin', yam-diggin' Reserves. Yo'uns think more o' yer sorghum an' yer yams than yo'uns do o' yer country, or bein' free men. I hope the Yauks'll conquer yo'uns, an' make you dig yams an' cut sorghum all yer lives, and drive ole Joe Brown into the fields with you. Go home t' him. D— yo'uns. Him an' the hull passel o' yo'uns aint wuth the salt that'll keep

yo'uns from rottin'. Go home, I tell yo'uns."

"I'm a-gwine t' report them words straight t' Gov. Brown," shouted the Captain back. "He'll natcherally break yer stuck-up neck fer talkin' that a-way about yer betters. You can't lay the blame on we'uns. Hit's all yer own fault. We'uns 's hyah ready t' do our duty, an'—"

"Gentlemen," said Shorty, stepping out from behind his tree, "this serious disagreement between friends is very painful to witness. We very much wish that we could smoothe this trouble over, and bring you together, which we can't do without throwing the Sheriff acrost the crick. Much as we would like to, we haint time to stay with you any longer. We have a pressing engagement to supper this evening with Gen. Sherman, and must hurry off to keep it. Take that, Capt. Stone Blues, you old string-halted guerrilla, as my blessing and good-by."

He suddenly raised his gun from an "order" and fired at the Captain's head, which had been stuck out from behind the tree to listen to the extraordinary exordium. The bullet knocked the bark off the tree, and filled the Captain's face with splinters and dust.

"Good-by, gentlemen of the Reserves," said Si, motioning to the boys to start off. "Go back to your sorghum fields, and your yam-patches, keep out of the way of the Yankees, and pray God every day to make you loyal men. Good-by, Sheriff. Your intentions were good, but for sense an Injianny ox can give a Georgian a hundred yards start, and beat him every time."

They mounted, and soon overtook Aunt Minerva Ann's caravan.

"Did you kill anybody, Eph?" she asked eagerly.

"Nuffin' but a boss," answered Uncle Ephraim. "Too fur away. 'Fraid I'd miss de man if I shot at him."

"Why didn't you go up closeter?" she asked, disapprovingly.

CHAPTER XIX.

UNCLE EPHRAIM'S SKILL AS A WOODS PILOT—A CAMP OF REFUGEES—VIGOROUS ASSERTION OF CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS—A SAVORY MEAL—THE ORDERS AGAINST BRINGING NEGROES INTO CAMP.

Skilled in woodcraft as Si and Shorty thought themselves, they were no matches for Uncle Ephraim. Without hesitation he found fairly easy roads where they could only see cliffs, ragged gulches and impenetrable thickets. Aunt Minerva Ann was scarcely less road-wise. Turning her mules sharply to the left, she drove them into a clump of tall, dry weeds and briers, and came to a gap, invisible before, in the cliffs, where a fallen rock, covered with earth and low brush, made a good roadway to the summit. It was barely wide enough for the passage of the wagon. It was narrow, but Aunt Minerva Ann did not need an inch more than was absolutely necessary for the width of the wheels. From the top of the hill she had viewed the encounter with Capt. Stonebroose, and then, Uncle Ephraim, mounted on one of the spare horses, and clutching in his hand, as the most valuable possession he had ever had, the Sheriff's Enfield rifle, came up and took the lead.

"What'd I tell yon about niggers and woodchucks, Si?" asked Shorty, gleefully, when, as the sun was beginning to set, they came out of the tangle of hills and hollows and woods, and again approached the level openings of the creek valley. "They don't really know the way the way we know things. They just smell it out something like a dog does his master's steps."

"Whatever it is," answered Si, "I wish I could sense the lay of the ground as well as Uncle Ephraim. 'As near as I can guess,' he continued, looking backward, 'we've about come our two 'sees,' and it mustn't be more'n a good long 'holler' yet to our camp."

"Peachstone Shoals lays right ober dar, whar yo' done see dat dar tall yaller pine, wid a buzzard nest in de crotch."

"I can see the buzzard's nest plainly, but not the yaller pine," remarked Shorty. "And I see smoke beginning to rise. The boys must be going into camp over there."

"My goodness gracious," remarked Aunt Minerva Ann, "what a heap of smoke, an' what a pile ob choppin'. Mus' be clarin' off a powerful sight ob new ground ober dar, t' raise sumfin'."

"Yes, Annty," answered Shorty, "they're getting ready to raise the Southern Confederacy, right out of its boots, and hang Jeff Davis on a sour-apple tree."

"Hang Jeff Davis on a sour-apple tree,"

murmured Aunt Minerva Ann to the woman sitting beside her. "My, ain't dat a awful langwidge fer t' use? Se'ems much wuss'n cussin'."

"Say, Shorty," said Si, "the pickets can't be far away. Let's ride forward and find them. Boys, close up the column and keep it well together, a little ways behind."

They rode down the hill along a faint trail through the deep, dark woods of the bottoms, which were as lonely and far away as only such woods can seem. The sound of the chopping faded away as they descended from the crest, and soon a profound, oppressive silence reigned. Had it not been for the faded markings of the trail they might have thought themselves in some forgotten wilderness, where the foot of man had never trodden.

Si gave a sharp command to the boys to look to their guns, keep well closed up and be in readiness for anything that might turn up.

Oppressed by the silence and the somber shadow, Aunt Minerva Ann began crooning a hymn, and was joined by the other emotional negroes, until stopped by Si's stern command for silence.

Then went ahead cautiously for a half mile, when their quick senses detected the smell of burning wood upon the cool, crisp air.

"We're nearing the pickets," said Si. "I smell a fire."

"So do I," answered Shorty, "and I smell meat frying and bread baking."

"That's so," answered Si, "but that means the reserve. Where are the videts? Can we have slipped past them?"

"Don't seem likely," said Shorty, as they both halted instinctively, and looked about for the outlying pickets. "Say, Si, do you notice there's no smell of coffee with that meat? And that's cornbread they're baking."

"That's so," answered Si, after taking a full sniff. "Rebels around that fire, sure. Mebbe a nest of guerrillas or reserves."

He raised his hand to halt the column behind and jumped from his horse. The boys stopped the negroes, whispered an order to them to keep perfectly still, and formed up in front, while Si and Shorty, with cocked guns, slipped forward noiselessly over the damp turf to see what was in front.

"They presently heard voices in conversation.

"Bushwhackers, planning a raid on our rear," he whispered to Shorty, and they both shook their fists at the boys behind, as an injunction for the most absolute silence. "We'll bust them wide open."

As they crept forward they heard one screechy voice ring out above the rest in angry vehemence:

"I done tell yo', I'll die right in my tracks afore I'll give up my rights ter take my slaves inter the Territories!"

"But yo' hain't got no slaves, Wash Hartshorn; an' you never had; an' hit be-gins ter look as if nobody'd have purty soon; an' as fer them Territories, they're lost ter we'uns already," said another deeper, calmer voice.

"Whether I have any niggers or not don't make no difference with my rights," answered Hartshorn's shrill voice. "I've done got the right ter take them thar, whether I have 'em or not, and I'll die afore I'll give hit up. An' I don't think hit's nice in you, Mr. Ben Small, ter tant me with my poverty. I've got jes' as many niggers now as you had afore you married ole Cunnel Whitesides' only da'ter hyah, an' inherited his big plantation. And as fer the Territories, they're Constitutionally ours, an' I won't give up our Constitutional right ter secede, an' 'stablish a free an' independent Government, an'!"

"But if we secede and form an independent Government of our own," answered Ben Small's deeper voice, argumentatively, "we hain't no Constitutional rights, and nothin' ter do with their Constitution. We'uns 've done got a Constitution of our own."

"That's jes' like you Old Line Whigs," screeched Hartshorn; "yo'uns wuz always tryin' ter 'reason,' as yo'uns called hit, outen anything we'uns had our hearts sot on. Yo'uns never could be depended on fer ary real Southern prinsepul, 'cept ter hold out ter yer niggers, an' work every cent outen 'em you could git. But I've allers bin ready ter fount ter the last ditch an' die in hit fer any Southern prinsepul."

"Seems like we've struck a rebel political meeting," whispered Si; "somebody's running for Congress."

"Sounds like talk we used to hear about 100 years ago—somewhere in Kentucky—long before Stone River, even," answered Shorty, with an effort to remember the dim and misty past.

Holding his cocked gun in instant readiness, Si slipped silently forward to the cover of the trunk of a large live oak, from which he could see the speakers. He gave a glance, and beckoned Shorty to come up. They both looked, and then, with a wave of their hands, which telegraphed to the sharp-sighted youngsters that there was nothing to fear, motioned to the boys to come on. Experience soon teaches soldiers to see a great deal more in

a mere wave of the hand than civilians can read.

What Si and Shorty saw was a camp of citizen "refugees" hiding out in the deep woods from Sherman.

The one whom the partners placed as Mr. Benjamin Small—a large, portly, good-looking man, with touches of gray in his hair and whiskers, and whose face indicated that he had not let anything in life so far worry him seriously—was seated in a large hickory-bottomed rocking chair, with a cob pipe in his mouth, and holding an umbrella over his head, to shield him from the night dew, and rocked and smoked leisurely, while arguing with Washington Hartshorn, and superintending a couple of negro men, who were fixing up a shelter for the night. Near him, in another rocking chair, also smoking and holding an umbrella over her head, sat his wife, a spare, hard-featured woman, who devoted most of her attention to directing two "likely" negroesses, with bandana turbans, who were cooking supper. Opposite him, in an uncomfortable, split-bottomed chair, sat Mr. Washington Hartshorn, who was of the hickory-lawyer and cross-roads-politician type, who whittled a stick and chewed plug tobacco and expectorated tremendously. Near him, on another hickory chair, sat his wife, a thin, sallow, peevish-looking woman, with few teeth, and a snuff-geourd and stick, which she used industriously. From the conversation and the attitude of all it developed that Mr. Small, who had been with his wife at his other plantation, had become alarmed at the advance of the army, and started out provided to go into hiding for a day or two, until the army had passed, and had unwillingly picked up Hartshorn and his wife, who did not move in the same social circle with them. This was quite clear to anyone who looked on the group. Wash Hartshorn felt his social inferiority, but tried to make up for it by continual assertive reminders to Mr. Small that he was quite as good as he was, if not much better in some respects, in spite of the latter's wealth and negroes. Mrs. Hartshorn felt it still more keenly, but she did not have her husband's resources. She could only reply to Mrs. Small's depreciatory glances and words with others meant to express righteous condemnation of the wicked arrogance of "rich folks," and meanwhile sought consolation in her snuff-stick.

Mr. Small had brought away from his farm a wagon, in which he had had loaded some bedding, the chairs and the cooking utensils and food. He had proposed that he and his wife should have a comfortable bed in the wagon, under the low-growing branches of a beech, while the negroes slept around the fire. What to do with Mr. and Mrs. Hartshorn was a problem. They resolutely refused to put themselves "on an equality with the niggers," by sleeping around the fire, not even if

they were given a separate fire. Mr. and Mrs. Small as strenuously objected to putting themselves on an equality with them, by sharing their sleeping accommodations in the wagons.

When Si arrived on the scene Hartshorn was trying to force an admission from Small to equality, and a share in the wagon-bed by an appeal to general political principles and an assertion of his superior devotion to Southern Rights. Small might have possibly waived the point if he and Hartshorn had been alone involved, but Mrs. Small was adamant against the slightest descent toward Mrs. Hartshorn's level.

"I done tell yo'," said Hartshorn, waving his knife and his stick in the air, and firing a great volley of tobacco-juice with precision at a neighboring toadstool. "I'm so strong in my ijees that I wouldn't leave nary Yankee alive. They'uns orter t' be killed jes' as fast as our men kin git at they'uns."

"Of co'se they'uns orter t' be killed," acceded Mr. Small. "I've allers held that."

"What's the sense, I'd like t' know," snapped Mrs. Small, "of we'uns a-keepin' that whole passel o' they'uns down thar at Andersonville, feedin' 'em victuals that we'uns've t' raise, an' which had orter be sent t' the soldiers in the field? Why didn't they jes' shoot 'em down when they kitched 'em, an' be done with 'em?"

"Suttinly," echoed Mr. Hartshorn, delighted to be in accord with Mrs. Small. "That was my ijee, 'zackly. I"—

"Kind, Christian folks," whispered Si to Shorty.

The discussion was interrupted by orders given to the negroes as to the preparations for the night and for supper. At the first opportunity Hartshorn renewed it with the assertion:

"I tell you, no man on airth has bin truer ter Southern prinsepuls nur me. I've fit fer them all my life, an' I'll fout fer 'em as long as I live, an' ter the las' drap o' my blood."

"Fer a foutin' man you'd done managed mouty well in dodging the conscript officers," sneered Mrs. Small.

"I done went inter the army quite as fast an' quite as fur as yer husband done went, Miss' Small," said Hartshorn, with a leer of triumph at his shot. "My cabin mus' be a mile or two neareder Atlanta than his house, or rather you'n, for hit was your'n, and not his'n."

"My husband jes' plum couldn't go ter the war, on 'count of a bealin' in his year, mem," Mrs. Hartshorn put in spiritedly. "He jes' wanted ter go moutily, all the time, mem. But I jes' knowed he couldn't, an' kep' him at home. 'Thar wuz nothin' at all the matter with yer husband, mem. He could've went, if he'd 'a' wanted ter."

"The law obleeged my husband ter stay at home, an' take keer of his niggers, Wash Hartshorn," answered Mrs. Small, contemptuously ignoring the wife. "You

don't know much o' law, but at least you know that much. An' you know, if you know anything vallerble, which I much misdoubt, hit was even more needful fer them what had niggers t' stay with 'em an' keep 'em at work raisin' pervisions fer the army than hit wuz ter fout. Common folks, who hadn't nothin' else, could fout. That's all they kin do t' pay up fer livin' an' cumbrin' the airth. We'uns have t' take keer o' they'uns all the time, same's we'uns do our niggers, an' why shouldn't they'uns go an' fout fer we'uns?"

"Yes'm, I know all about yer 20-nigger law, an' a heap more law besides, that's bin made to grind the faces o' the pore," answered Hartshorn, lashed into anger by the woman's superciliousness, "an' when the war's over, an' the pore men git back, thar'll be a settlement with you paw-paw quality that you'uns won't like at all, I warn you. Inheritin' or mebbe stealin' a nigger or two can't allers make some folks Pharaohs, t' trod down an' run over folks what hain't got none. I tell"—

"You darst talk that-a-way t' me, right afore my face, Wash Hartshorn, you pore, contemptible wind-sucker," shouted Mrs. Small, rising from her seat in a rage. "You jes' git up an' mosey right outen hyah, an' take that snuff-dippin', clay-eatin' wife o' your'n with you. Cf'ar out, I done"—

"Come, come, Sally," interposed her peace-loving lord. "Don't git yer dander up that-a-way. Ain't no occasion fer hit. Wash Hartshorn likes t' hear hisself talk. He'd talk the years offen a cast-iron pot, an' when he's through hit don' 'mount t' as much as last year's pig-weed. But he hain't half as bad as his tongue. I'm mouty hongry, an' supper's ready. Le's all set up an' eat. After supper we'll all be in a better humor."

The temptation of a very much better meal than they were in the habit of having made Mrs. Small's scorn endurable by the Hartshorns. They were hardened to that sort of thing. The poor white in the South was always a parasite on those who were a little better off, and though he might at times snarl and snap, he rather expected contumely and always came back for more. It was the usual thing on both sides. There was a certain formal assertion of position in the way the well-to-do tolerated their inferiors, and the inferiors accepted this as a recognized part of the general game.

Si and Shorty had listened to the row with interest. It was an insight into the relations of the different strata of Southern people to one another. The social atmosphere was wholly different from that in Indiana. The degradation, the ignorance, the pretentious self-assertion, mingled at the same breath with abject servility were as astonishing on one side, as the haughty disdain, mingled with easy tolerance, was on the other. Deacon Klegg may have despised some cheap, noisy, cross-roads demagog from the backwoods of

Posey County, but he would have either treated him civilly as a man and an equal, or else ignored him altogether.

But the sight and smell of the food heaped upon the improvised table interested the boys more than philosophic reflections on the scheme of social relations.

The negroes served out great dishes of the smoking and odorous bacon and collards, the fragrance of which reached back to Harry, Monty, and the other boys, and made their mouths water. It was intoxicating to Si and Shorty, who had eaten nothing since morning, and who remembered vividly how good those viands tasted when they were escaping from Andersonville.

Then, there were great pones of corn-bread baked in Dutch ovens, fat yams roasted in the hot ashes, the inevitable fried side-meat with the hot grease for gravy in which to sop the corn-bread, and coffee made from a mixture of roasted sweet potatoes, peanuts and wheat.

"I declare, I can't live another minute, unless I have some o' that bacon and collards," whispered Shorty.

"So must I," answered Si.

The Smalls and the Hartshorns had drawn up to the stump on which the table rested, and were about to begin when Mr. Small felt the back of his neck touched by the muzzle of a Springfield rifle. He looked around with a start.

"Seuse me," said Shorty, reaching down for his plate of collards, "you hain't asked a blessing, and a heathen who won't ask a blessing oughtn't to have nothing to eat. For what we are about to receive make us duly thankful. Amon, Ma'am, I'll trouble you to hand me that knife and fork. I'd get 'em myself, but it's very impolite to reach across the table."

"Sorry to disturb your supper, ma'am," said Si, as he appropriated Mrs. Small's plate. "Always hate to discommode a lady, but you're in no special hurry for your supper, while we are. We're on nrgent business for the United States, and must eat and run. You've plenty more where this come from, and won't mind waiting half-a-hour, which you can spend in conversation with Mr. Hartshorn, until some more can be cooked."

"Here, Pete, Sandy, and the rest of you, come up," yelled Shorty to the boys, after he had swallowed the first succulent mouthful. "Here's plenty of bacon and collards for all of you."

But Pete and Sandy did not find much left on the plates they snatched from Mr. and Mrs. Hartshorn. Nothing but instant death would prevent those worthies from insatiable devouring from the moment they sat down at a well-filled board.

"Another wicked invasion o' the South's Constitutional rights," groaned Wash Hartshorn, as he gazed on the boys rapidly emptying the collard-kettle, and devastating the corn-pones and sweet potatoes. "I'll fout ter the las' drap o' my blood

agin the despotism o' the black-hearted tyrant, Lincoln."

"Shut up," said Pete, making a kick at him. "You mustn't call President Lincoln names while I'm around, or I'll whale the life out o' you."

"Me too," echoed Sandy, with his mouth full.

Mr. Small gave a look at the blue uniforms, shoved his chair back from the table, picked up his umbrella and pipe, and accepted the situation in silence.

Not so Mrs. Small. Her dumbfoundment lasted scarcely a minute, and then the torrents of her rage broke out. It was the first time she had ever really seen a Yankee soldier, and had an opportunity to tell him face to face all the hateful things she had been thinking during the four years of war. She poured forth a stream of bitter invective, at which Si and Shorty, intent upon their bacon and collards and corn-bread, merely grinned greasy grins from countenances smeared with the unctuous mess.

She snatched up a long wooden spoon from the bread-bowl, and struck at the side of Si's head. Si brushed a wad of corn-dough from his ear, and went on grinning and eating. She struck Shorty over the shoulder, and Shorty merely dodged out of her way, and grinned. She broke the spoon over Harry's head, but Harry grinned, and went on to the collard-pot, to see if there was any more. She started, threw down the piece of the spoon, and picked up a stick, with which she started for Pete, but Pete, as well as Sandy and Monty, proved entirely too nimble for her, and interposed trees between them and her wrath.

Uncle Ephraim, Aunt Minerva Ann, and the rest arrived upon the scene, and were struck with consternation.

"Fer de Lawd's sake," gasped Uncle Ephraim. "'Nervy, dar's Mas'r Ben Small, an Miss' Sally." Shame-faced, he grabbed off his master's silk hat, and hid it behind his back.

"Sho's y're born, ehile, hit's dem," echoed Aunt Minerva, hastily reducing the Sunday bonnet and the parasol to less conspicuousness.

Mr. Ben Small looked up and around, and recognizing his former chattels, asked angrily:

"Ep, you black rascal, what are you doin' hyah? Who gave you leave to leave the place? Whar air you gwine?"

Uncle Ephraim, dazed by the presence of his owner, too new yet in his freedom to boldly assert himself, stood in the old slave attitude, dabbing at his forehead, and scraping the ground with his foot, unable to reply.

Aunt Minerva Ann boldly rose to the emergency.

"We's come off de place, Mas—Mistah Small, 'kase we don't belong dar any more. We'uns don't belong t' you no more. We'uns is free, an' belong t' Fad-

der Abraham, an' glory t' God, we'uns 's gwine right wid him."

"What's that, you black hussy?" shouted Mr. Ben Small, for once allowing himself to become greatly excited, and picking up a hickory withe, he started for her. "Go back to the place at once, aud take

"That greasy wench a colored lady!" screamed Mrs. Small, raising her whip and starting for Aunt Minerva Ann. "She free, an' gwine off with the Yankees? I'll skin the black trollop alive this minute."

Aunt Minerva Ann quailed more before



"HOLD ON, MR. SMALL," SAID SI, PUTTING HIS GUN IN FRONT OF HIM.

these people with you, afore I whip every inch o' hide offen yer black carcass."

Aunt Minerva Ann's lips trembled, but she confronted him with steady eyes, and made no move to avoid his uplifted whip. Uncle Ephraim fumbled his gun nervously.

"Hold on, Mr. Small," said Si, putting his gun-barrel in front of Small, and pressing him back toward his chair. "Go back and sit down, and keep quiet. This colored lady is a friend of mine, and you'll have to treat her with the greatest respect, or I'll not like it."

"And I shall be positively vexed," added Shorty, catching Mr. Small by the collar, and pulling him back to his chair.

her mistress than she had before her master; but little Pete could not stand the coarse epithets applied to his sable friend and the threat of violence to her. He had just burst open a large, fleshy, roasted yam, and in his anger he flung it straight into Mrs. Small's face, covering her anger-distorted features with a poultice of the hot, mushy inside.

"Pete, what did you do that for?" asked Si, severely. "You must never strike a woman on any account."

"Well, she shan't hit Aunt Minerva Ann," yelled Pete. "I'll throw the whole kitchen at her if she lifts her hand to her again."

Aunt Minerva Ann deliberately restored the bonnet to her head, and hoisted the parasol. Uncle Ephraim regained courage to put on his hat again.

"Halt, who comes there?" sharply challenged Shorty, springing out into the road, at the sound of marching footsteps.

"Who are you, yourself?" came back, with the sound of clicking gun-locks. "Answer at once."

"Squad of the 200th Injanny," promptly answered Si, striding out beside Shorty and leveling his gun. "Hooray for the Union! Who are you?"

"Picket detail, First Brigade, Third Division, Fourteenth Corps. Advance one and be recognized."

Si walked forward and was confronted by the Captain who was taking out his company to establish a picket line. He was accompanied by an officer of the brigade staff, to direct the location of the line, and report back to headquarters in regard to it.

"All right," said the Captain, after Si had finished his story. "Bring your men right in. You'll find the camp of the 200th Ind. just over the hill there a little ways and to the left of the road. But you'll have to leave the negroes outside."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," said Si, determinedly. "The darkies have got to come right along with us. They helped us, and we're going to stand by them."

"You can't bring them in, all the same," answered the Captain. "You pass on in, and leave them out here. They'll take care of themselves all right."

"But, Captain," pleaded Si, "these are darkies who fed us when we were escaping from Andersonville and kept us from starving. We're not going to desert them now, on any account."

"I don't blame you," answered the Captain, sympathizing at once with Si; "but the orders are strict. I don't know but—"

"Well, you can't bring 'em in," said the Aid, decidedly. "That's the end of it. You take your men on to your regiment at once, and leave the niggers outside. We can't have them in here eating up our rations and constantly in the way of every movement."

"But I tell you, Lieutenant, there are special reasons for bringing these darkies in. They're"—

"O, there's always special reasons," broke in the Aid. "Everybody has some reason for bringing in his particular nigger, and if we allowed them the camp would soon be swarming with niggers. I order you to leave them outside, and go on at once with your men to join your regiment."

"You can't order me," said Si, firmly. "You're only a staff officer. I don't take orders from nobody but Col. McGillicuddy and the officers of my regiment."

Then turning he said:

"Harry, mount your horse, and ride over there and find Col. McGillicuddy and tell him the trouble."

"Make yourselves comfortable right

here, boys," said the Captain of the pickets, kindly, "with your contrabands. We'll have a fire started here for the reserve and throw the pickets out farther."

"Say, Cap," said Si, "there's a camp o' refugees--the owners o' these niggers--down there a little ways. Keep 'em outside your line."

"Owners of the niggers, eh?" answered the Captain. "Well, I'll see that they're not let in. Make yourselves comfortable here with me and the reserve. Lieut. Mallon, take 50 men, advance about 200 yards, and deploy them to the right, until you connect with the left of the Second Brigade's pickets. If you find any citizens out there push them back to a good distance in front of your line."

Apparently Harry did not have to go very far, for the Adjutant of the 200th Ind., soon rode up, and, with a cheery "Good evening, Captain; how are you, Serg't Klegg," remarked, officially:

Captain, Col. McGillicuddy presents his compliments, and directs that you admit Serg't Klegg and whoever he may have with him."

"Very good, sir," said the Captain, saluting.

"Come along, Sergeant, with your contrabands," said the Adjutant, "and tell me what you've been up to today."

"I shall report this to the General," said the Aid, severely, as he galloped off toward Brigade Headquarters.

Si was showing his train to Col. McGillicuddy, and telling his story, when the Aid trotted up, and, dismounting, stiffly saluted, and said in severe, official tones:

"Col. McGillicuddy, the General presents his compliments, and desires to know if you are aware of the orders against the admission of negroes to our camp, while on the march?"

"Return to the General, sir," said Col. McGillicuddy, with equal formality, "with my compliments, and inform him that I am fully aware of those orders, and take the entire responsibility of my action."

In a few minutes, and while Si still stood talking to the Colonel, the General himself appeared, wearing a stern look on his face.

"Good evening, Col. McGillicuddy," he said coldly. "You have a very pleasant camp here. But what are all these negroes doing here?"

"General," answered the Colonel, "when Serg't Klegg, here, and some more of my men, were escaping from Andersonville last Summer, and almost starving, these negroes hid themselves and fed them. The negroes were terribly whipped for so doing. With my permission, Serg't Klegg took his squad out today, found them, and has brought them in. And their master is just outside of the lines now. If he should get hold of them I don't know what would happen to the poor, faithful creatures. With all respect to you, General, I'll say that as long as I have control of my own camp they shall stay in."

"They hid and fed your men, Colonel?

These same negroes? You're sure they're the same?" said the General, warmly, forgetting for the minute his official formality. "Well, I declare. Master just outside the line wanting to get them back?"

Then he recollected himself, and became very military again.

"Lieutenant," he ordered the Aid, "ride at once to the Officer of the Pickets, and direct him to take unusual care that no

citizens enter the lines under any pretext whatever—under any pretext whatever, sir. Col. McGillicuddy?"

"Yes, sir," said the Colonel, saluting.

"I again call your attention to the orders against the admission of negroes to your camp; but I will add, d—n a man who won't stick up for his friends. Good evening, Colonel."

CHAPTER XX.

WITH THE FREEDMEN IN CAMP—THE COLORED PEOPLE'S FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH COFFEE—AUNT MINERVA ANN'S TALENTS AS A SONGSTRESS—THE ENGINEER'S CAPTURE OF THE TRAIN—A SURPRISE FOR SI AND SHORTY.

"Sergeant, take your colored friends over there by the creek and make them comfortable," said Col. McGillicuddy. "Don't be at all worried about them. I'll stand off Gen. Sherman himself, if he should come around after them."

"Thankee kindly, Colonel," said Si, gratefully, and formally saluting.

"Much obliged, Colonel," added Shorty, as he also saluted. "Call on us at sight, any time, for anything you want done. The tougher the job the better."

The partners hurried their contraband friends off to the place the Colonel had indicated, and soon had them happy around a big, blazing fire, at which the food they had brought with them was cooking. The boys of the company contributed a supply of hardtack, which the negroes received as the most marvelous and delicate viand. It was the first "Yankee bread" any of them had ever seen, and they had had but few bites of wheat bread in all their lives, so that it was a double luxury. Better than all, they were given enough coffee to make a large camp kettle full, and this, more than aught else, convinced the negroes that they had really entered the Promised Land. Coffee had always been the one unattainable luxury of the "house," where their master and mistress lived. The master and mistress and their guests had it in limited quantity, carefully doled out from locked drawers, and the best favored house servants got was the privilege of boiling over the grounds. The poor whites never had any coffee, except by rare luck, and they, as well as the negroes, looked upon a cup of coffee as a cherished prerogative of the wealthier whites. Coffee was the badge of aristocracy—of social station—and valued accordingly.

Therefore, when Uncle Ephraim and Aunt Minerva Ann found themselves lord

and lady of a great big camp-kettle full of unmistakably genuine coffee, whose fragrant fumes diffused themselves like the savor of a good deed, it seemed that life had little more to offer them.

The proprietary airs they gave themselves in dispensing the precious beverage to their companions were comical. In their low opinion of these, they feared that they did not properly appreciate this bounty of Heaven and Father Abraham.

"Now, yo' niggers," said Uncle Ephraim severely, as Aunt Minerva Ann prepared to dip out the coffee and distribute it to each, "yo' musn't ack like pigs at a trough. Yo's now free, an' longs t' Fadder Abraham an' Serg't Klegg, an' mus' ack like ladies an' gemmen. Wait yo' turns, don't jostle one anudder; don't spill an' waste none! don't gulp hit down lack hogs in a puñkin' field tryin' t' gobble up ebberythin' afore de rest kin git a bite, but drink hit slowly an' reverently in de fear an' admission of de Lawd an' Fadder Abraham."

"An' yo' wenches," added Aunt Minerva Ann, trying to remember all the disparaging things she had heard against the use of coffee, "recollekt dat too much coffee spiles de complexion, blackens de skin, rots de teef, makes yo' lay wake ob nights, an' gibs yo' palpitation ob de heart. Be mouty keerful how much yo' drink."

"Ladies fus, now," said Uncle Ephraim, as Aunt Minerva Ann prepared to dish out the steaming beverage. "No scrougin' now. Let de oldes' come fust."

"Well, I'm de grayes' rat in de hole, when hit comes t' age," said Aunt Betsy, coming forward with the biggest gourd she could find. "Fill hit up, Nerry. Don' min' my complexion. Charcoal make a white mark on me, now. An' as fer my teef, dey's jes' done got t' stan' hit dis

time, as dey's done had t' stan' many nder tings afore dis."

And the jolly negress laughed loud and untidiously at her own humor.

"Bets," said Aunt Minerva Ann severely, "yo' sartainly don't mean t' say dat yo' done t'ends t' drink coffee outen a gourd?"

"So," said Aunt Betsy, a little abashed, "Whyfo' not? Drink water, an' milk, an' whiskey outen a gourd. Why not coffee?"

"De ignurrence ob dat nigger," said Aunt Minerva Ann, rolling up her eyes in horror. "An' she wants t' be a free woman. Who ebber heard ob anybody drinkin' coffee outen a gourd? What sorter broughten up has she had? Why, dey'd done frow her outen church fer dat. No, Miss' Bets, yo' shan't insult de good Lawd, an' Fadder Abraham by drinkin' none ob his coffee outen a gourd. Show yer mauners an' religion by gittin' a tin-cup."

Aunt Betsy bridled at this rigid regulation as to table etiquette. She had always been restive under Aunt Minerva Ann's absolute Queenship of the "quarters," and had more than once broken out in open rebellion, generally having to succumb in the end.

Si, who, with the rest, was enjoying the scene, averted the storm by saying:

"Here, Aunt Betsy, is my tin-cup. You can have it. I'll get another."

This favor to the sable Elizabeth gave her a distinct lead and aroused Aunt Minerva's jealousy.

"What fer yo' give her dat cup?" she asked Si, angrily. "An' yo' call her Aunty, too? She no aunty t' nobody. She not raised on de place. She's only a bought nigger—done bought at a voodoo—done bought at a bankrupt voodoo, when olde Cunnel Turpin's niggers wuz sold off, t' pay his gamblin' debts. She no"—

"That's all right, Aunt Minervy," said Shorty, anxious to prevent the jollity of the occasion being disturbed by a feminine row. "Here's my cup. Now that starts you both fair."

"But she's not yer aunty, is she?" asked Aunt Minerva Ann, unappeased. "Yo' won't have no aunty bought at a mortgage voodoo, will yo'? She's only plain Turpin's Bets."

"That's because she was sold to pay Turpin's bets," said Shorty. "No, you're our only Aunty—only, original Jacobs of an Aunty, name blown in the bottle, and fac-simile of signature. All others are imitations and counterfeits."

This flow of words that she could not understand satisfied Aunt Minerva Ann, and she set about serving out the coffee. Uncle Ephraim stood by with a stick to preserve order and make every one take his or her turn.

Soon they all had a large cupful of coffee, and their hands full of bread and meat, and, seating themselves around the glowing fire, began, as they felt the exhilaration of the delicious beverage, to sing, Aunt Minerva Ann leading with her

rich, strong contralto, and Uncle Ephraim thundering in his heavy baritone.

After singing a verse or two of her favorite hymn, "On Jordan's Stormy Banks," Aunt Minerva Ann began to wander off into the improvisations for which she was famed, when excited, in which she took well-known hymn themes and embroidered them with additions expressive of her thoughts at the moment.

The thrilling events of the day, the passage from slavery to freedom, the strange faces and sights around, the unwonted stimulus of deep drafts of strong coffee, all combined to work her up to a high pitch, where she seemed like one of the inspired priestesses of old. Her wonderful contralto voice rang out through the somber pine woods like a silver clarion, the lurid glare of the fire flashed upon strongly-wrought features, and her companions, infected by her looks, gestures and words, swayed by the mystic power of her ringing voice, responded to her soul-welling strains, in an impassioned chorus, perfect in harmony, time and pitch.

"On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,

An' cast my wishful eyes,

On Fadder Abraham's happy land,

Whar blessed Freedom lies,"

rang out Aunt Minerva Ann, and Uncle Ephraim came in like a big brass horn in an orchestra:

"O, gib me my harp,

O, gib me my crown;

Dar le' me lay my life down

In de arms of A-bra-ham!"

Like a well-trained corps of flutes, clarionets, haultboys and French horns in a wave of perfect harmony came in the others:

"O, carry me straight

T' de golden gate

An' de arms ob A-bra-ham."

Aunt Minerva Ann again:

"Dar is a happy lan'—

Far, far away.

Dar saints in glory stan'—

Bright, bright as day.

O, den t' Freedom run,

Cl'ar t' dat shinin' shore;

Be a crown an' kingdom won,

Lib in dat Summer sun,

Free ebbermore."

And the antiphonal Uncle Ephraim replied:

"O, gib me my harp,

O, gib me my crown;

Dar let me lay my life down

In de arms ob A-bra-ham."

And the chorus swelled:

"O, carry me straight

T' dat golden gate,

An' de arms ob A-bra-ham."

The flood of sweet melody, filling the crisp evening air, and mingling with the grateful incense of the burning cedar, attracted the soldiers everywhere, until a great crowd had gathered around. They were in the humor to appreciate and enjoy it all. Young, ardent men, teeming with the vigor of life, proud of their past achievements, enthusiastic for greater ones, confident of success, well-fed, well-led, everything going as they would like it, they were in the mood that comes but rarely in life to any man. They made the woods ring with cheers for the singers, and incited Aunt Minerva Ann to higher efforts. She poured out:

"Plunged in a gulf ob dark despa'r,
De wretched rebels lie;
Ole Satan's done got dem by de h'ar,
He'll sizzle dem by-an'-by."

And Uncle Ephraim's organ-like tones answered:

"O, gib me my harp,
O, gib me my crown;
Den let me lay my life down
In de arms of A-bra-ham."

All the pipes of the grand human organ raised in chorus:

"O, carry me straight
T' dat golden gate,
An' de arms ob A-bra-ham."

"Good! Good! Go ahead! Give us some more. Hooray for the intelligent contrabands," shouted the soldiers amid their cheers and laughter. "Go on. Give us more!"

Aunt Minerva Ann was stimulated still higher and rolled out:

"Ole Pharaoh's heart was hard an' cold—
He would not let de people go.
De deep Red Sea ober Pharaoh rolled,
He would not let de people go.
Ole Jeff Davis's heart is hard an' sour—
He would not let de people go.
But now he trimbles at de Almighty's power—
He jes' mus' let de people go."
Uncle Ephraim boomed on the air:
"O, gib me my harp,
O, gib me my crown.
Den let me lay my life down—
In de arms ob A-bra-ham."

The singers among the soldiers by this time caught the words and air, and a thousand voices helped ring out the chorus:

"O, carry me straight
T' de golden gate,
An' de arms ob A-bra-ham."

"Sergeant," said the voice of Col. McGillicuddy, "you seem to have picked up a band of sweet singers of Israel. I think I shall send them home as a present to my church. They would create a sensation in Indiana."

Si looked around to see the Colonel and the rest of the officers standing near, greatly enjoying the music.

"O, Colonel," he said, saluting, "there's something I wanted to say to you, but I didn't think it proper before—until you made your decision. I've got a mighty nice hoss over here, which I intended for you. If I'm any judge, he's a straight Hambletonian, and a better hoss than there is in the division. He's just the kind you ought to have, and I want you to ride him."

They walked over to the horses, and the Colonel was delighted with the looks of the animal. "I started out with as good a one as I could find," he said. "But this one lays away over him. I can see that at first glance. I'll take him, and am very much obliged to you, Sergeant."

"I'm too much a friend of yours, Sergeant," he added, with a quizzical look at Si, "to ask where you got the horse. I'll take him all the same. People in the army shouldn't ask too many questions."

"The name of your hoss is 'Elder Hornblower,'" said Si. "You'll find that his wind never gives out."

"Adjutant," said Shorty, "I've got mighty nigh as good a hoss here for you. We'll take these two up to headquarters and turn the rest over to the Quartermaster, and get them off our mind. I ain't hankerin' for any more responsibility for live stock. Had enough o' that to last during my enlistment."

"Well, you shan't turn over my mule," piped up Pete. "He don't belong to you. Me and Sandy got him ourselves."

"The Fourteenth Corps is bound for Milledgeville—Gov. Joe Brown's capital," said the Adjutant, as the partners started to go back to hunt up Co. Q's quarters for the night. "We've going down there to capture the State Government and put Georgia back into the Union. We'll camp to-morrow evening on the banks of the Ulocofauhatchee Creek. If you boys have got any more accounts to settle, I'll give you a pass to leave the column and rejoin us in the evening on the banks of the Ulocofauhatchee, near a town called Eudora."

"Thankee," said Si, "but I think we'll stay at home to-morrow and get acquainted with the regiment. We had a pretty lively time on the Ulocofauhatchee last August, but, after all, we came out ahead of the game, as near as I can recollect. Perhaps Shorty wants to go over to a certain old maid's house, and pay for a supper she didn't intend us to have."

"Hardly," answered Shorty. "I've had my fill of the society of Southern ladies. I ain't pining for any more. Co. Q's society is good enough for me."

The Quartermaster had plenty of employment for Si's negroes the next morning, in shifting the loads of some wagons, and he put both men and women at it. Si and Shorty arranged with him that the negroes should go with him during the day, while they themselves indulged in the long-interrupted experience of a day's



IN THE WAKE OF CO. Q.

march in the ranks of Co. Q. Pete Skidmore and Sandy Baker wanted so much to do the same, that they gave Abednego over to the care of Aunt Minerva Ann. Uncle Ephraim was to drive the wagon he had brought from home, and in which the negroes things were placed, together with some of Co. Q's property. To make sure of Abednego, Aunt Minerva Ann was to ride the mule.

"I declare, this feels real good and home-like," said Si, as he threw his haversack and canteen over his shoulder, followed them with his blanket-roll, picked up his gun, and took his long-vacant place as file-closer on the left of Co. Q. "I'm just sick of rampaging about the country, on my own hook, or no hook at all, and I'm glad to get back to a quiet,

steady life, where I belong. Fall in, promptly, boys."

"That's what I say," echoed Shorty. "Fellers that like special details may have 'em. Hereafter my house number and street address will be 200th Injianny Avenue, four blocks west of the colors; office hours, from reveille till taps."

In reality, it was a day and an exercise that any healthy man might enjoy. The bright November weather was perfect for marching; the light soil had been packed hard enough by the rains to prevent any dust, and yet make no mud; the streams were running a good stage of clear water, and the march was through a fairly-good farming country, with the rugged mountains back of Atlanta rapidly sinking into billowy hills, which were in turn fading

into the broad plains of Eastern Georgia. The march was just brisk enough to be healthful exercise and develop an appetite for their rations. The day's course was so well-ordered that there were no annoying waits or delays, but each regiment and brigade pressed rapidly forward in its assigned place, and in the afternoon all came together upon their designated camping-grounds, as if pulled into place by cords held in one controlling hand.

Occasionally there would be brief, fitful firing in the distance, between the cavalry and small bands of reconnoitering rebels, but there was never enough of it to more than make the men cast a glance of slight inquiry in that direction, as they plodded onward.

Si and Shorty had for the first time an opportunity to study the old regiment and get acquainted with the changes made in it since they were captured on that disastrous day at Kennesaw. The old Captain of Co. Q was now Colonel; the Captain of Co. A was Lieutenant-Colonel; Lieut. Bowersox, of their company, was Major, and the Captains and Lieutenants were boys who were Sergeants when the Atlanta Campaign opened. Co. Q was now commanded by George Buxton, a young divinity student, with coal-black hair, and great, womanly eyes, who was Orderly-Sergeant of Co. B when the regiment crossed the Ohio River. He was a good soldier and a pleasant, though reserved comrade. Si and Shorty liked him, and gave him willingly all the respect and obedience his position required, though down in their souls they never could get reconciled to anybody but Col. McGillicuddy commanding Co. Q. To him they always instinctively turned as their Captain, and on his part he could not escape the feeling that he was more the Captain of Co. Q than the Colonel of the regiment. This made him most liable, at critical moments, to turn to Co. Q and lead it forward, to clear a wood or gain some information, to the neglect of the rightful privileges of other companies and their Captains for that service.

"I declare, there's that engineer that brought us up from Andersonville—Tom Rabbone," said Si, noticing a man in the next file ahead. "I say, Tom, I haven't had an opportunity before to ask you how you came out with that train that we were going out with you to capture?"

"Got it," said Tom, who was as laconic and as vindictive as ever.

"What did you do with it?"

"Shot that overhearing Lieut. Turley, who was always gassing about the greasy mudsills, through the leg, so that it had to be taken off. I didn't want to kill him outright. Wanted him to live, and remember every day that he hobbled around on crutches and mourned for his lost leg, that he had deserved to lose it for his meanness to Yankees, and to mechanics, and to every one of whom was more of a

man in a minute, without half trying, than he could be in a year, do his best."

"Get anybody else?"

"Got a raft of poor white conscripts, who were as glad to be spared as if their lives were worth something. If those poor whites knew more they might know how mean and worthless they really are, and then they'd thank somebody to kill them. One feller got down on his knees and begged me for his life. I told him I wouldn't kill him, out of regard for the buzzards—didn't want to poison them. The only decent man on the train was my partner, here (indicating a man marching on his left). He was the engineer, and one of my main objects in going out was to bring him through the lines, as well as get even with that brute of a Lieutenant. Him and me both shot the Lieutenant, and we wouldn't let nobody else lay a finger on him. We went up to him and told him who we were after, and we dropt him, and reminded him of how much he deserved all that he'd got."

"What'd you do with the locomotive and train?"

Tom's partner exploded with a laugh at the recollection, and Tom answered with a chuckle:

"O, that was fun that you'd given one of your teeth to have seen. Where we stopped the train was a field which had been cleared a few years before, and was filled with pine stumps that'd rotted away until all that was left of each 'em was the part that was plum-full of rosin and'd burn like a turpentine ball. We told the conscripts that the only thing that'd induce us to spare their lives would be to do the hardest and fastest work they ever done in prying up them stumps and piling 'em on the engine and cars. They took sledges and crowbars off the tender, and, Simon Peter, you'd ought to've seen 'em make those fat pine stumps fly. In half an hour they had enough of that stuff aboard to've burnt up Greenland's icy mountains. Bill Grimshaw—that's my partner here—and me were fixing up a job on Hogmouth Wangel, who is the only rebel engineer on the line. Bill knew that he was follering him, about an hour and a half behind, and we thought we'd give him a little surprise party. We got everything ready, with just enough water in the boiler, and just as soon as we heard Hogmouth whistle as he left the station below, fastened everything on the engine down tight, chucked the firebox full of fat pine, set all the cars afire, and opened the throttle and started her back, and ran up on the hill, where we could overlook the line for miles, and waited to see the fun. We'd calculated that the engine, running her liveliest, with the cars all blazing, would butt into Hogmouth just as he came around that sharp curve, where he couldn't see 100 yards ahead, and then and there get up an impromptu, hand-made hell that would interest Hog-

mouth, if nothing more. It worked all right, except that we'd been a little too previous somehow in our calculations. The train rushed back, blazing like a prairie fire, but it got around the curve before Hogmouth did, and was within a half-mile of him when he saw it, reversed his engine, and begun running back for dear life. Our train chased him for a mile or two, and was gaining on him right along, when all at once the crazy old boiler couldn't stand it any longer, and busted like a bomb-shell into a thousand pieces, tearing up the track, and making a noise that might've bin heard clear back to Macon. That ended the performance for that day. We shot at the conscripts to make 'em run and scatter 'em, and made our way back to camp, and Bill here enlisted in the company with me. Got any tobacco? Talking so much always makes me want to take a chew."

"If our plan had only worked out as we thought," said Grimshaw, also helping himself to a liberal chew, "and our engine had bucked them burning cars right over Hogmouth and his train, I'd 'a' felt easier in my mind, as being somewhere near even with them. As it didn't, I concluded to enlist, and see if I couldn't somehow get another whack at 'em."

"A very pleasant and entertaining narrative," remarked Shorty. "I think you boys promise to become ornaments to Co. O."

"Yes," agreed Si. "I think you will find yourselves at home with us. Hello! It looks as if we were going into camp."

"That's what we're going to do," said the Captain. "That's Uleofauhatchee Creek, just ahead, and we're going into camp on the other side."

"Captain," said Si, "I'd like to go back to the wagons, and see how our colored friends are getting along."

"Very good. Go ahead," answered the Captain.

But though all the rest of the negroes were there, Uncle Ephraim and Aunt Minerva Ann were not, and no one knew anything of them.

"They were with us all right for an hour or two," said the Quartermaster. "Then I had a little trouble getting across a creek. I had everybody forward, working on the jump to get across, and when I finally made it, and looked around, those two, with their wagon, and the white mule the woman was riding, were nowhere, and nobody had seen them go. I had no time to look for them, for I had to jump to keep my place in column. They've probably got enough of the army, thought better of it, and gone back home."

"Dat's lit," said Aunt Betsy. "Dat 'Nervy Ann allers wuz a powerful stuck-up, fix-away nigger, who didn't want t' sociate wid common fel' hands."

"Most likely, somebody's stole them," said Si, full of wrath, as he communicated the news to Shorty.

"Most likely that thieving 1st Osh-

kosh," raged Shorty. "We'll go over there after we've fixed down, and if we find they have we'll have 'em, or bust the regiment wide open."

"And our mule's gone," wailed Pete. "We'll shoot anybody that tries to take Abednego from us. We'll go out and look for him at once. Come on, Sandy."

"Stay here, boys, till after you've had your supper," said Si. "Then we'll all go over to the camp of the 1st Oshkosh. They were just behind us all day, and probably they've got them."

They busied themselves making ready for camping for the night, and the sound of axes filled the air, and the ground began to be brilliantly dotted with mess fires. A rich contralto voice rose above the hubbub of axes, falling trees, and laughing, talking men.

"Whar is de 200th Injianny Volunteer Infantry? Whar de camp ob de 200th Injianny?"

"There's Aunt Minerva Ann now," ejaculated Pete, dropping his load of canteens in which he was bringing water and rushing forward. "Aunt Minerva Ann, where's our mule?"

"Heah he is, honey, an' heah I is, bress yer soul," answered Aunt Minerva Ann, beaming down on them over a clump of low cedars, which had hidden her approach. "Whar Serg't Klegg?"

"Here I am, Aunty."

"Well, Serg't Klegg, me an' Uncle Ephraim done got a nice supper cooked an' waitin' fer you an' de boys ober in a cabin near by. Come right along wid dem, an' git hit. We only lack some coffee, but de water's a-bilin' fer dat. Bring yer coffee along."

The boys gave a whoop and started after her. They speedily came to a cabin, with Uncle Ephraim standing guard at the door with his gun. Inside the great fireplace was filled with a blazing fire, before which were standing sundry pots, ovens and skillets, and in the center of the room was a table covered with dishes, knives and forks, cups and saucers, jars of honey, and sorghum molasses, and even a big dish of butter. The boys gave another whoop at the sight.

"Why, Aunty, where in the world did you get all this?"

"What 'd dat Cunnel man tell yo' about axin' no questions?" said Aunt Minerva Ann, beaming with triumph. "Sot down dar, while I make de coffee. Hit'll be ready in a minute. Jes' as soon's me an' Uncle Eph found out whar you all wuz done gwine, we knowed de shortest way t' git dar, an' we done tuck hit, wid-out sayin' nuffin' t' nobody. We knowed you'd be tired gwine away round dat way, an' so we shoved on, an' gederred up some stuff t' git supper fer yo' when yo' got heah. O, yo' leetle, tenty Yank," continued she, suddenly breaking off and catching Pete in her arms, "I done kep' yer mule fer yo', an' heah he is."

The boys, with watering mouth, gath-

ered around the table, and Aunt Minerva Ann began dishing out the smoking viands.

"Hollo, what have we here?" said a well-known voice, and Col. McGillicuddy and the Adjutant strode into the cabin. Everybody dropped his knife and fork and sprang to attention.

"That's all right, boys," said the Colonel, gaily, as he returned their salute. "I smelt that bacon and collards away down in camp, and it smelt awful good, and the Adjutant and I followed our noses until they brought us here. Serg't Klegg, I congratulate you on your mess, but I think your sense of hospitality would suggest that you invite a couple of hungry men who have been traveling all day to

sit down with you, even though they happen to be your Colonel and Adjutant. Don't be proud, though you are well off."

"Why, Colonel," gasped Si, "sit right down here, you and the Adjutant. You shall have all the bacon and collards you want. You'll find them the best you ever et. We know all about Aunt Minerva Ann's cooking. She can't be beat. We'll wait till you're through."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said the Colonel, seating himself at the foot of the table. "Sit down there at the head, Sergeant. I'm dining with you. We'll play tonight, till this meal's over, that the war's ended, we're all mustered out, and once more plain citizens of Indiana."

CHAPTER XXI.

UNCLE EPHRAIM AND AUNT MINERVA ANN PROMOTED TO HEADQUARTERS. MURDER OF FORAGERS AND SWIFT VENGEANCE METED OUT.

"I declare," said Col. McGillicuddy, as he finally laid down his knife and fork, "I don't know when I have enjoyed a meal so much. As for you, Adjutant, I'm afraid you've eaten so much that you will be incapacitated for the light and agile performance for which you are noted, of the duties of Adjutant of the 200th Ind."

"Don't bother about me, Colonel," laughed the Adjutant, wiping his mouth. "I'm all right. I just feel nice and smooth, as the little girl said."

"I wish every man of the regiment could have as good a meal as this every day," continued the Colonel. "We'd be able to tear the State of Georgia up by the roots, then."

"We seem to be getting pretty near down to the roots as it is, Colonel," said Si, with a grin. "I don't know what more we could've done to that railroad, unless we had tipped the embankment over and turned the tunnels wrong side out."

"That was a pretty thorough job," said the Colonel, retrospectively. "And we are doing about as effective work in other directions. I looked back from the top of a hill today, and could mark the line of march of each division by the fires rising from burning cotton-gins, railroad stations and rebel storehouses. We are now on the way to Milledgeville, after the Government of the State of Georgia. I wish we could destroy it as thoroughly as we have the railroads, and replace it by a loyal administration."

"At any rate, we're making these folks pretty sick of having fired on Fort Sumter," remarked Shorty. "It'd 'a' been a heap o' money in their pockets if they'd kept that powder for a Fourth of July celebration."

"I do hope Uncle Billy is heading us for South Carolina," said Si, with his mouth full. "We ought to do an everlasting amount of wholesale arson, burglary and highway robbery here in Georgia, to pay up for Andersonville; but if we get into South Carolina, we simply ought to burn everything, and sow salt on the ground, so that there won't be no chance to raise another crop o' traitors."

"I'm not in the confidence of Gen. Sherman," answered Col. McGillicuddy, "but I'll miss my guess very badly if he hasn't his weather eye fixed on South Carolina, and is putting up a full dose of physic for her, before he shuts up his pill-bags."

"By-the-way, Sergeant," continued Col. McGillicuddy, after a moment's silence, "coming down from general matters to personal, I've a great notion to appropriate something myself. I believe I'll capture your cook here, and take her for my headquarters."

"As usual, Colonel," said the Adjutant, "you anticipate my thoughts. So good a cook as Aunt Minerva Ann should be kept in the 200th Ind., by all means. If she stays with Co. Q, some Colonel, or Brigadier-General, or Major-General is

nable to get scent of her bacon and collards and take her away. It's lucky that Gen. Sherman himself hasn't caught the fragrance, or he would have had her, sure."

"Hear that, Aunt Minerva Ann?" asked Si, delighted with the favor she had found in the eyes of his officers. "The Colonel is so pleased with your cooking that he wants to take you for himself."

"What? What?" asked the negress dubiously. "Me go cook fer de Cunnel-man? De Cunnel-man moutry nice man, but I don't wantier cook fer nobody but you, an' Corpril Elliott, an' Leettle Pete. Who take keer ob Leettle Pete, if I go away? An' who take care ob Eph? Eph's an ole fool 'bout lots ob t'ings, an' needs me wid him ebbery minnit."

"I think Uncle Ephraim could make himself useful about headquarters, Adjutant," said the Colonel, surveying his strong, well-knit frame and intelligent face.

"I kin beat any nigger on de hull Ocoonee bottoms takin' keer ob hosses, Mistah-Cunnel-man," said Uncle Ephraim, showing his ivories, touching his foretop, and scraping the ground with his foot.

"But I hain't a-gwine nowhar from Leettle Pete," said Aunt Minerva, obdurately. "He hain't no mudder, an' I must take keer ob him."

"But, Aunt Minerva Ann, Pete'll be near all the time," said Si. Aunt Minerva Ann continued to look obstinate.

"O, you're here, are you, Colonel?" said Maj. Bowersox, coming in and surveying the remnants of the feast. "I guess I've come too late. I was looking for you to invite you to dinner. I picked up today what I think's a very good cook. They call her Aunt Betsy Turpin, and she's now down at my tent getting up a meal, and I've been hunting you to see if you wouldn't join me. But now I think I'd better have joined you."

"You certainly had, Major. I've had the best meal that I've had since we entered Georgia, and I'm now trying to arrange for a continuance by engaging the woman who cooked it."

"Hear that, Auntie?" said Si. "Betsy Turpin is going to cook for the Major. The Colonel's a heap bigger man than the Major, and as the Colonel's cook you can just rank her clear out of her boots."

"What, dat Turpin's Bets settin' up fer a cook?" said Aunt Minerva Ann, jealously. "Dat nigger, bought at a mortgage-vandoo, purtendin' ter be a cook. Why, she nebber baked a pone ob wheat bread in her life, an' nebber knowed de taste ob soffee, till las' night. She a cook? Why, she can't cook as well as Eph, hyah, an' he de biggest fool wid pots an' skilletts dat I ebber seed. She cook fer de Major-man? I'll go right along an' cook fer de Cunnel-man, and show what a rayle collud lady, what wuz raised on de place, kin do, beside a nigger wench bought at a mortgage-vandoo. An'

Leettle Pete, he'll be nigh, whar I kin see him, ebbery day?"

"Yes, Auntie," said Si, glad to have the matter happily disposed of, "Pete's residence and place of business will be always in a 'holler' or at least a 'see' of regimental headquarters and your kitchen, so that you'll be all right."

"Uncle Ephraim," said the Adjutant, "go and get that wagon, and those mules, and drive them over there to headquarters. They'll be safer there, and come in handy to carry our things, as well as yours and Co. Q's."

So it happened that Uncle Ephraim and Aunt Minerva Ann found themselves installed at the headquarters of the 200th Ind., and immediately the overwhelming dignity of the position began to possess them. Their eyes, quick to note all indications of social station, took in every detail of the deference paid the Colonel by all inside or outside the regiment, all the respectful standing at attention and saluting; all the deferential speech and action; all the curt, sharp commands from the Colonel, and the instantaneous obedience of his 500 men. By the end of the first day they began to feel a great deal of this greatness reflected upon them. On the second, they distinctly assumed the attitude that the favored "house-servants" always observed toward the "field-hands." They began to speak of themselves as "headquarters people," and hold the other negroes at a rigid distance.

"Come t' 'tenshun, dar, an' salute me, you low-down, ignerrunt nigger," Uncle Ephraim sternly commanded one of his former associates, whom the Quartermaster had sent up to borrow a shovel. "An' my name's Mistah Ephraim. See dat you pay dese headquarters proper respect arter dis, or I'll break ebbery bone in yer brack carkiss."

Aunt Betsy got the same law laid down for her when she strolled up to the headquarters kitchen to indulge in a little gossip over camp-matters.

"Look hyah, Bets," said Aunt Minerva Ann, with the dignity of a duchess, "dis hain't no common nigger quarters on ole Ben Small's place. Dis is de army, an' dis is rijimintal headquarters, an' you want t' know hit, an ack 'cordingly. You mustn't come loafin' up hyah, wid yer cloze ebbery-which-way, like as if yo' wuz gwine t' de corn-crib or de 'tater-patch. Yo' wantier dress yerself right, an' stau' up straight, an' put yer heels togoder, an' salute, an' speak t' me 'speckful as Miss 'Nervy. Yo' wants t' member all de time dat I's cookin' fer de Cunnel-man, while yo's only cookin' fer de Major-man, which makes all de difference in de world. If yo' don't treat me like a lady, I'll take dis single-tree t' yo', sho's yer born."

They lived up to the requirements of their position in every way. Uncle Ephraim had associated much with those aristocrats of the slave population—the hostlers, and he brought all his acquired

knowledge into play for the benefit of the Colonel's horses. He seized upon every loafing negro that came in his way, and always found some useful work for idle hands to do, so that the Colonel's horses, and especially "Elder Hornblower," were the admiration of the division. Aunt Minerva Ann, for her part, devoted herself even more enthusiastically to the care of the Colonel's tent and the preparation of his meals. She packed his bedding in the wagon at the commencement of the march, and made his couch up carefully after his tent was pitched, and from the time she arose with the reveille, until tattoo sent her to bed, was busy planning, contriving and executing something for his comfort, and that of Pete Skidmore, whom she made report to her in the morning before they started, and in the evening after arriving in camp.

On the march Uncle Ephraim rode as near as possible to Co. Q, and at any moment he saw Si and his squad leaving the column, would hand his horse over to a young negro and join them, musket in hand.

Stories began to come in about foragers and others absent from the main column being shot down mercilessly and shamefully mutilated by guerrillas.

As the division approached the little village of Shady Dale the 200th Ind. came up to the 1st Oshkosh, to find the regiment in a frenzy of rage over the discovery of five of its number, who had been sent out in the morning, lying by the roadside, each shot in a dozen places, apparently in pure malice, after having been killed, and his throat cut. The 200th Ind. raged sympathetically with its sister regiment, to which, in spite of frequent little tiffs between the members, it was as devotedly attached as only two regiments of the same brigade will get to be after a campaign together. Dire vengeance was vowed, but as both regiments were deep in the marching column that and the next day, there was no opportunity to execute the threats.

The next day and the day after there were other bodies of murdered soldiers, all shamefully maltreated, exposed along the roadside. Some men, after being shot, were hung up to trees, and their bodies made targets.

Shorty raged and swore terribly at each exhibition, but Si soon passed the point where he said anything. He had reached that dangerous stage with him when he merely looked, set his teeth, and went on with a savage glare in his blue eyes, which every one had learned to know and beware of.

The next day the 200th Ind. at last came to the head of the column, but, to Si's disappointment, Lieut. Muffler, with 10 men of Co. A, was sent forward with the foraging detail.

"How's that, Adjutant?" said Col. McGillicuddy, as he saw the Lieutenant

march out. "Do you think Lieut. Muffler's the man for the duty today? He's had very little experience, if any, on such duty. Owing to his wounds he has been very little with the regiment, and I have never known him to be out with a detachment."

"That's just it, Colonel," explained the Adjutant. "Lieut. Muffler feels that he has been overslaughed in details for duty, and is very sore about it. He has not had a single tour of special duty since he received his commission, and had no opportunity to show what he could do when he was out by himself. He is a gallant young fellow, has had hard luck in being wounded both times as soon as he went into action, and so kept away from the regiment during most of its service, convalescing. He put it to me in such away that I couldn't refuse him the detail."

"I see," answered the Colonel. "But, somehow, while Muffler is brave enough, I've always had some doubts about his coolness and judgment in a tight place. We've had so many ugly things happening lately, that we've got to be unusually careful. Ride back to Co. Q and tell Capt. Buxton to give you Serg't Klegg and his squad. Tell Klegg to follow up Muffler at a little distance and keep an eye on him, but, of course, not to let him know that he is being followed and watched. It's hardly the thing, I know, to set a non-commissioned officer to watch an officer, but I'd trust Klegg as I would no other non-com. in the regiment."

"Your judgment is right, as usual, Colonel," said the Adjutant, as he wheeled his horse to go back after Si.

When Si took his squad out of line and started in quick time across the fields, to get to the head of the regiment, Uncle Ephraim jumped from his horse and joined them, gun in hand and cartridge-box on. Pete Skidmore ran back, mounted Abednego, and overtook Si just as the Adjutant was pointing out the direction in which Lieut. Muffler had gone.

With Pete trotting ahead on Abednego, Si pushed on as rapidly as possible for some miles, but only caught a glimpse or two, from the top of a hill, of Lieut. Muffler in the far distance. The Lieutenant was evidently bent on making his mark on his first expedition, and was letting no grass grow under his feet.

Presently, from the top of a hill, Si heard the sound of guns two or three miles ahead, and a column of smoke arising in the same direction indicated that something was happening near a house.

"Muffler has found a plantation with a lot of stuff on it," said Shorty, "and is having a row with a squad of reserves. Let's get there, quick."

They started on a run down the hill into the heavily-timbered bottom, and presently came to a fork in the roads, where they stopped to take breath and consider which fork to take.

"My judgment is to take the right-hand one," said Shorty, starting off impatiently in that direction.

"Dat way's de shortest t' de house," said Uncle Ephraim, pointing to the left-hand branch. "De udder's de way de

but I can't tell what, I believe they've got Lient. Muffler."

"Forward—double-quick!" shouted Si. As they rushed down the slope of the hill they could see a squad of men in butternut clothes excitedly rushing about the



"DIS AINT NO COMMON NIGGER QUARTERS—DIS IS DE ARMY!"

wagons go—roundabout. Dis's de way de hossmen an' niggers cut acrost."

"I believe you're right," said Si. "Pete, trot up that way over the rise, and see what you can. Be quick."

In a minute or two Pete dashed back, stammering in his excitement:

"O, Sergeant, there's a mint o' rebels over there by the house, and something's happened. They're all doing something,

front of the house. Presently Si and Shorty made out that some of them were dragging bodies in blue uniform out from various parts of the farmyard to the road, and kicking them and stabbing them with knives, and beating them with clubs.

A large man, whom Si and Shorty dimly remembered as having seen before, stood on the porch directing the operations.

Si halted his men for an instant behind a screen of bushes, to get their breath and look to the caps on their guns, and then, raising a savage yell, rushed them forward.

The surprised rebels gave one look, and started to run.

"Fire!" shouted Si.

Three rebels fell dead. Si and Shorty leaped the fence and brought down two more with blows from their gun-barrels.

When the smoke raised not a rebel was to be seen except those on the ground.

"Dey run right back dat-a-way," shouted Uncle Ephraim, excitedly, pointing with his smoking gun-barrel. "Dey's hid in de brush an' yaller grass on de banks ob de creek. Come down dis way t' de creek bank, an' we'll cut dem off."

Si and Shorty, followed by Harry, Monty, Alf and Gid, rushed after him to the creek bank, where they turned, and beating back through the weeds, grass and brush, drove out six ill-favored rascals and took them back toward the house.

On the porch was a crowd of white and colored women, screaming at the top of their lungs. They found Pete and Sandy standing guard at the front and rear of the entry passing through the house.

"Two o' them," explained Sandy, "them that was bossing the job, ran into the house. We're waiting for you to come back to go in after them. We wanted you to keep these women off of us."

There was need of this precaution. A stalwart woman, with iron-gray hair, apparently the mistress of the house, and her three equally stalwart daughters, all armed with pokers, were alternating their screams with threats of destruction to the boys if they dared set foot to enter the house.

With a movement like a flash Shorty snatched the poker from the elderly woman's hand, shoved her aside, and started to enter.

"No; let us go in and get them. They're our meat," pleaded Pete. "We holed them."

"Go on, then," said Shorty. "But be careful. One of you look, and the other stand behind him, ready to shoot."

With their guns cocked, Pete and Sandy rushed in. There was no one in either of the lower rooms, nor any place for one to hide, and they ran up-stairs. They saw the bed, and ran to it, Pete raising the valance, while Sandy stood back with leveled musket.

"Git out o' here," said Pete, kicking on the soles of a pair of large boots, that he saw there with toes down. "Come out, or I'll shoot you where you lay."

A large man backed slowly out, covered with dust, and stood upright. The boys saw a large pepper-box revolver in his belt, and instantly recognized him as the "Cunnel" Messack who had so thirsted for their blood when they were hiding on the island the previous August.

They gave a whoop of triumph to an-

nounce this to their comrades outside. At the sound another man under the bed in the other room, rushed down-stairs and tried to dash away, but was arrested by a blow from Shorty's stalwart fist.

In the meanwhile Si had been surveying the sickening scene. To his soldierly eyes all that had happened was as clear as if he had seen it enacted.

Lieut. Muffler had found the house and its stock of forage and provisions. There were no negroes about, and, seeing no signs of rebels, he had set his men hurriedly to work hitching up horses to the wagons and the buggy to carry his spoil into the camp. There was need of the greatest haste, if he would reach the 200th Ind.'s place in column. "Cunnel" Messack, an experienced hunter, had kept his men well concealed in the yellow grass and brush, until Lieut. Muffler's were all far from their arms, and scattered through the stables and yards, hunting up harness and getting the animals, which were restive at the sight of strange men, hitched up. Then "Cunnel" Messack had rushed out, blown away the Lieutenant's head with a charge of buckshot, and the rest had been shot down almost instantly. Not one had escaped. Those only wounded by the first fire had been finished by a second shot, delivered so close that the powder burned and blackened the skin. Every body had several bullet holes, besides being hacked with knives and pounded with clubs.

Si looked over "Cunnel" Messack, as Sandy and Pete brought him up, with a glare that shriveled the rebel's soul. Si said nothing, but, drawing the pepper-box revolver from the rebel's belt, noted that each of its six long barrels had been recently discharged. He picked up the double-barreled shotgun, lying on the porch, and asked one of the women:

"Is this Col. Messack's gun?"

"Yes, it is," answered the woman.

Si noted that both barrels had been fired lately, and the "Cunnel's" pouch was full of buckshot.

"Cunnel" Messack essayed to ask a question, or make a remark, but there was something so awful in the still, set look of Si's face that it froze his utterance.

"Each of you men go to that stack there," said Si to the prisoners, "and get an armful of straw and lay it in that wagon." He spoke very low and soft, but there was something terrifying in the deadly calmness of the even tones. The prisoners sprang to the work.

"Now, pick up each one of those bodies, carefully and gently," he continued, "and lay them on that straw. Shorty, take Harry, and gather up all the rope you can find. There's a clothes-line over there."

The women were on their knees on the porch praying loudly.

"Uncle Ephraim," commanded Si, "mount that wagon and drive as straight

as you can for the road on which the column is marching. See if you can't strike in about where the 290th Injanny is."

This was the last word that Si spoke for an hour. At a motion of his hand the prisoners huddled behind the wagon, and the boys formed behind them, and Uncle Ephraim started off. They reached the road without a word being said by any one.

Si looked to the left and saw the head of the column coming over the hill a mile back. Everything had gone on so swiftly that they had actually outmarched the army, in spite of their divergence. That, however, had led them on a shorter line.

Si knew that the troops coming were the 200th Ind. He and Shorty exchanged looks in recognition of this, and Si, speaking for the first time, halted Uncle Ephraim in a low tone. The bodies of the 200th Ind.'s dead were taken from the wagon and tenderly laid by the roadside, on the thick, high, yellow grass.

While this was being done Shorty took a piece of rope, and, measuring it with his arms, cut off the right length and fashioned a noose. Imitating him, Pete, Sandy, Alf and Gid did the same, while Uncle Ephraim, Harry and Monty kept the prisoners covered with their muskets. Si and Shorty walked along the opposite side of the road, examining the live oaks. When they saw one that suited, they would nod their heads, when Sandy or Pete would climb up and out onto the projecting limb and fasten a noose.

Col. McGillicuddy and the Adjutant came riding up, and their cheery salutation to Si was checked on their lips by the

sight of the dead bodies. They saw it all at a glance, and comprehended equally the import of Si's dread preparations.

As he saluted, Si gave a questioning glance at the Colonel, who responded by a simple affirmative nod. Then, turning in his saddle, the Colonel, by a wave of his hand, directed the march of the regiment a little off the road. Without audible command it halted in front of the trees, faced into line and came to parade rest, with every one looking on the dead bodies, and on Si's preparations. Every one understood the whole thing at a glance. Soldiers get a special talent for comprehending things with a look, and they gathered more in a second than would have made a volume.

And there was something a thousand times more impressive in the stern, deadly silence which reigned than there would have been in the stormiest denunciation.

As the regiment faced about, Shorty motioned the prisoners into the wagon. Absolutely cowed, they shambled forward and obeyed, Shorty catching two or three and almost lifting them up. Shorty sprang into the wagon, and, as Uncle Ephraim drove along, he adjusted a noose around each one's neck and shoved him off the wagon.

The stout branches bent up under the load, the doomed men's limbs convulsed wildly, and all was over.

Co. A wheeled out of line and carefully buried their dead where they lay, and marked their graves with pieces of cracker boxes, on which their names and date of death were hastily penciled.

CHAPTER XXII.

SI AND SHORTY LET SOME BIG FISH SLIP PAST THEM—A SESSION OF THE LEGISLATURE OF GEORGIA—ORDINANCE OF SECESSION REPEALED, AND OTHER PROPER LEGISLATION PASSED.

The army was now in the heart of the fairest portion of Georgia—in the fertile belt which lies between the rugged mountains of the northwest and the vast stretch of sparsely-wooded pine-barrens, the inhospitable sandy plains reaching clear to the ocean, on the southeast.

The plantations were all larger and finer than any the army had seen since leaving the rich middle Tennessee country around Nashville, and there was everywhere an abundance of food and forage, thanks to the providence of Gov. Joe Brown, who had brought his militia home to gather their crops, and they did it just in time to have them convenient for Sherman. Sherman could not have arranged that part of the campaign better, if he had ordered it himself.

Never did an army live better than Sherman's during this period. There was flour, meal, sweet potatoes, fresh and cured pork, hams and beef, chickens and turkeys, sorghum molasses, honey, collards and turnips enough for everybody, and to spare. The men drew nothing from the Commissary wagons but coffee, sugar and salt. Every night the camp-kettles smoked with the most savory messes, and every morning the men started on their march with their stomachs full of the fat of the land. The horses, mules and beef cattle on foot fared equally well, and grew fatter and sleeker every day.

After the 200th Ind. passed Murder Creek, and was nearing Milledgeville, the Colonel remarked to the Adjutant:

"As we were coming over the hill back there I noticed some mounted men passing through an opening a mile or so ahead. They looked like citizens, but you'd better go back and send Serg't Klegg out with his squad to take a look at them."

"If it's necessary to hang any of them he'd better wait again for the regiment to come up, hadn't he?" suggested the Adjutant, as he started down the column.

"I'll trust Klegg's judgment as to that," answered the Colonel.

Taking Uncle Ephraim as his topographer, Si marched swiftly across the country, and presently came to a thickly-wooded knoll, from which he could see a trail leading through the woods from the point where the Colonel had descried the horsemen in the distance. Hearing ap-

preaching voices, and the sound of horses' hoofs, and rattling of wheels on the frozen ground, he concealed himself and men and waited developments. As the woods in front were tolerably open, he could see fairly well for several hundred yards ahead.

The leader of the party was a full-bodied, rather a large man, with a silk hat of long-before-the-war vintage, a black frock coat, and "copperas"-dyed vest and pantaloons. His large, full face was shaved clean to the base of the jaws, whence descended a heavy black beard. He rode a fine, quick-stepping bay horse, with "three white stockings and a white nose," and his fat face was drawn with anxiety. He fretted his spirited horse by nervous tapping on his flank with a switch, and kept glancing back at a farm wagon, laden with household goods hastily thrown in. Behind him rode a matronly woman, clothed in a combination of "store goods" and homespun, and a couple of strong-faced, clean-shaved, tobacco-chewing men.

"Now, Cato," he called out fretfully to a negro who was riding in the front of the wagon, carrying a large picture in a heavy gold frame, "be mighty careful not to lose anything out o' the wagon, as we go through the woods. And be mighty careful of that picture. If you git it banged or scratched I'll take your hide off."

"I done got it heah on my knees, takin' de best keer in de world ob hit," answered the negro.

"Did you wrap it up in a blanket, as I done told you before we started?" asked the woman, looking back.

"No, missus," answered the negro. "Didn't hab no time."

"Get out a blanket at once," commanded the man, stopping the wagon, "and wrap it up carefully as you would a baby. These branches will scratch and whip it and the frame all to pieces. It won't be fit to be seen."

In obeying the command the negro turned the picture so that Si got a full view of it. It was an oil-painting, representing the man in front in full black clothes, with a high standing collar, and a voluminous black neckerchief. His hair was carefully roached above his forehead, he had a look of stern importance on his face, and an official-looking paper in his

hand. Glass cases containing books were in the background, and on a table other books and official papers, and an inkstand with quill pens sticking in it. It was one of the regulation pictures of the day of public men, and an imitation of the current portraits of Webster, Clay, Calhoun, etc.

"Only some citizens skipping out o' Milledgeville," said Si, relaxing. "Let 'em go. We don't have anything to do with 'em."

"Probably a Justice o' the Peace, or Probate Judge," echoed Shorty, laying his gun down, and feeling around for some tobacco for a smoke. "If you're ever elected Justice of the Peace, Si, I expect you'll get some sign-painter to paint a picture of you that'll fill the side of a room, and have enough red in it to go over a wagon. It'll take that much to do justice to your hair and your nose."

"Dry up, Shorty," said Si, giving his partner a nudge, "and give me some o' that tobacco. No, I don't mean that Georgia leaf. Got plenty o' that myself. I mean that bright plug you were just whittling down. I want a change to something of Uncle Sam's. Don't talk vanity to me, you old peacock, you."

"Hist, there's some more coming," whispered Pete Skidmore, as the wagon rolled on out of sight and hearing.

The partners laid down their pipes and picked up their guns, as the sound of other voices and hoofs came nearer.

It was a group of citizens, all men past middle life, many of them quite old. Several wore the rusty-black suits, with high hats, affected by the country lawyers, Justices and minor public functionaries; several were plain farmers. They had all left hastily, and were grumbling at the kind of horses they had been able to secure. Each had picked up some bit of personal property to take along. One or two carried law books under their arms, one had a bundle of printed speeches, others had carpet-bags, umbrellas, canes, etc., in their hands. Some were chewing tobacco earnestly, others smoking cob-pipes. One fat old planter had only been able to secure a string-halted old wagon-horse, which still had on the collar, hames and traces. He kept up with the others with difficulty, constantly implored them not to leave him, and was answered with jeers and injunctions to "whip up and come along."

"Just some more citizens," said Si, laying down his gun and reaching for his pipe.

"Looks like a gang o' Township Trustees going to a road meeting," remarked Shorty, scratching a match to light his pipe. "Wasn't even a decent horse in the lot. We'd better strike over toward the left and join the regiment. Uncle Ephraim, go ahead and show the way."

"Hello, who's coming here?" asked Si,

after they had gone ahead a few hundred yards. "Take your trees, boys."

Five or six men, riding very poor horses, and carrying guns, came down the road, occasionally facing to the rear, and scanning the country back of them.

"I declare, they're all one-legged, or one-armed," said Shorty, after studying them carefully.

"So they are," said Si, stepping out into the road in front of them. "Come out, boys. Surrender, there!" he called out to them. "Throw down your guns. We've got you."

"I reckon you have, sah," replied the tall, one-armed Sergeant, who appeared to be in command, recognizing with soldierly readiness the impossibility of successful resistance to the nine muskets, including Uncle Ephraim's, which were leveled at them in a very businesslike way. "You greatly outnumber us in every way, sah—in legs, arms and muskets. You've got the drop on us, sah. Where did you come from? We weren't expecting any Yankees that way."

"Naturally," answered Si, in a kindly tone. He was touched by the plucky effort of the maimed young fellows to make a soldierly show. "We usually try to make our visits to you men unexpectedly. Who are you, and where did you come from?"

"We are regular Confederate soldiers, sah," said the Sergeant, proudly, indicating their gray uniforms with a glance. "We're on special duty, sah."

"Well," remarked Shorty, surveying their sadly-crippled appearance, "the Southern Confederacy's robbing the cradle and the grave, but I had no idee that they were going into the amputation wards of the hospitals to force men out to fight."

"We were not forced, sah," exclaimed the Sergeant, with a hot flush in his young face. "We're not that kind of men, sah. No forcing about it, sah. We just saw our duty, and tried to do it, sah."

"My partner didn't mean anything offensive," said Si, in a conciliatory tone. "None of us would insult disabled men. We're very sorry that you have had such misfortunes. Where are you from? And what are you doing here?"

The stern hauteur of the Sergeant's face relaxed at once, under Si's kindness, and he answered in a softer tone:

"We have been on duty at the State Capital, sah, and when Gov. Brown, and the Legislature retired before your forces, sah, we fo'med a rear-guard to coveh their retreat, sah."

"Very proper and soldierly," said Si. "Sergeant, for I see that you have the same rank as myself, I have my canteen here full of cold coffee. Won't you take a good long drink? I think you need it, and it'll do you good. Drink all you want. We've plenty more."

Shorty and the rest each handed their

canteens to the Sergeant's companions, who received them eagerly.

"Thank you, sah," said the Sergeant, after he had inhaled a pint or more. "Great Caesar's ghost, but that's the best stuff I've drunk since the beginning of the war. I can feel it clear to my toes. I'll say, sah, that you Yankees are awful cute in cutting off ouah coffee, sah. If we could get coffee, I believe we'd lick you out of youah boots, sah."

"Well, you shan't have any coffee," said Si, good-naturedly. "You're hard enough nuts to crack, as it is."

"Where are you from, Sergeant?" said the rebel, dropping all his dignity, and becoming quite social.

"We're from Injianny. We belong to the 200th Injianny Volunteer Infantry."

"You don't say so? We bucked up against the 200th Ind. at Kenesaw. I tell you they're thoroughbreds, every man of them. They acted as if they'd walk right over us, in spite of abatis and breast-works 10 feet high. They just kept coming in through a fire that it didn't seem a jay-bird could live through. Never saw such we didn't stop fellows. There's where I lost my arm. I saw the fellow plain who shot me. He'd got clear through the abatis, and was standing on the back of the ditch. He was a large man with red hair, and"—

"You've been on duty in Milledgeville," exclaimed Si and Shorty, together, anxious to turn a conversation which threatened becoming entirely too personal. "What's going on there?"

"Say," said the Sergeant, with a look of disgust. "This is a great crowd of politicians that you are fighting for. We're hearing all the time about Northern politicians, but if they're any worse'n these down here, God pity the country, sah. If he could only make them get together and fight the thing out themselves, what a blessing it'd be, sah."

"I think they're mostly dodging the draft on the grounds of whiteness of the liver, and progressive softening of the backbone," ventured Shorty.

"Just ought to've seen that crowd up there at Milledgeville," continued the Sergeant, taking another swig at Si's canteen, and becoming more communicative. "The moment the news come in that your men had crossed Murder Creek, and were heading that way, every member of the Legislature had the buck-fever. He grabbed up whatever was handiest, made a break for the nearest horse, mounted, and skipped out for dear life. I was plum ashamed that such men were Georgians, I was for a fact. They didn't wait for any motion to adjourn, but each fellow lit out for himself."

"Couldn't the Governor rally them, and hold them?" inquired Shorty.

"O, the Governor! The Governor!" sneered the Sergeant. "Why, he was the

worst of the lot. Old Joe Brown was like a hen on a hot griddle from the very minute the news come in. You'd've thought that Governor's room, that he's had fixed up so stunningly, and where he's been swelling around for years, had become a Dutch oven to a horse-fly. He didn't seem to care nothing for the arms, magazines and people in town—only to get away himself, with his wife and such things as he could carry. He was particularly anxious about the picture of his high and mighty self that a conscripted Dago has been painting, to keep himself out of the army. Old Joe had it grabbed up the first thing, and when he went by us he was looking out for it as carefully as if it was the warranty deed of his salvation. I'm getting less use for old Joe Brown every"—

"Hey, what's that?" asked Si, suddenly comprehending. "Man with a picture, that went down this way a little while ago? Do you mean to say that was Joe Brown, the Governor of Georgia?"

"Certainly, sah," answered the Sergeant. "Who else do you think we were acting as reah-ward for, sah, but Gov. Brown, and the Legislature of Georgia?"

"The Governor and the Legislature of Georgia," shouted Si and Shorty in concert. "You don't mean to say that raft of measly sapsuckers and fly-up-the-crieks that just went down the road was the Governor and Legislature of Georgia?"

"I'm your prisoner, gentlemen," said the Sergeant, with dignity, "and I cannot resent as I should your abuse of my superior officers, but I ask you if you think it is right to insult a prisoner that way?"

"No, Sergeant," said Si. "We ask your pardon. We were naturally shook up to find out that we had let such big game as that slip through our fingers."

"You forget that we were their rear-guard and escort, sah," said the Sergeant, with mantling pride. "You would have had a great deal of trouble before you got them, sah. We Georgians will fight to the death in defense of our State, sah."

"We know how well you Georgians fight, Sergeant," said Si, chivalrously humoring the maimed, crippled man's harmless pride. "Let me present you with this coffee, Sergeant. Sorry I haven't more for you. Good-by. We must be going. Hope you'll have good luck."

"The Governor and Legislature of Georgia," groaned Shorty, as they started ahead in quick time. "Si, are there any bigger fools than we are?"

"Not outside of an idiot asylum," answered Si. "But there's no use crying over spilt milk. From the banging ahead there, and the smoke's that rising, there's something lively on the carpet. Forward, quick time!"

They soon came to the little town of Milledgeville, to find it ablaze with burning factories, magazines and arsenals. The

Georgia Penitentiary, from which the convicts had been liberated to fight the Yankees, was burning fiercely. There was the crash of exploding ammunition, and the loud shouts of men as they turned over the railroad track, and fired the depot buildings and cars. But these sights and sounds had become familiar to everybody, and Si and his squad turned up the street toward the open grounds in which stood the State House.

"We can go up and take a look at the nest, even if we did let the birds get away from us," remarked Shorty, grimly; but the subject was too painful for Si to speak about.

On the columned portico they recognized Shad Graham, who called out:

"Hello, Si, Shorty. Come in here. We're going to have some fun."

They pressed on through the crowd after Shad, and entered the hall of the Georgia House of Representatives. The flags which adorned the chamber had been torn down and taken away, but the walls were emblazoned with the great seal of Georgia—three columns, surmounted by an arch, inscribed "Constitution." Scrolls on the columns bore the words, "Wisdom," "Justice," "Moderation."

A crowd of laughing, shouting officers and men filled the chamber. Shad ascended the Speaker's dais, and, rapping loudly, shouted:

"Silence. The Legislature of Georgia will now come to order for the regular transaction of business. The Speaker, having shamefully deserted his post in the hour of greatest need, I move, as the sense of this honorable body, that his office be declared vacant, and the Hon. Benj. F. Breeze, of—what County, Captain?"

"We camped last Winter in Catoosa County," answered the officer addressed, a bright, jolly-looking man, "and I think I gained a residence there. We gained everything else, from bad colds to new breeds of graybacks."

"That Hon. Benj. F. Breeze, of Catoosa County," continued Shad, "be unanimously elected Speaker of this House. All in favor of the same signify it by saying aye."

A thunder of "ayes" followed. The vote is unanimous, and very complimentary, Captain," said Shad, handing him the gavel. "It is not necessary to put the negative."

"Gentlemen of the Legislature of Georgia," said the Captain, taking the gavel, "I thank you much for the unexpected honor conferred on me. I came into Georgia expecting to do almost anything to the State except to preside over its deliberative body. You were wise enough to burn down the penitentiary before you gave me a chance at you. Since I cannot send you there, as you richly deserve, I'll have to keep you here. I'll not take up your time, however, with a

speech, as we have much important business to transact. What is your further pleasure?"

"Mr. Speaker, said Shad, "I move that the Hon. Alfred Russell, of Andersonville, Sumter County, be elected Secretary, and Hon. Montgomery Scruggs, of—of—what was that county where they were going to hang you, Si? O, yes, Rockdale County—be elected Reading Clerk."

The nominations were unanimously indorsed.

"I now move you, Mr. Speaker," continued Shad, "that the Reading Clerk call the roll of the Counties, that we may fill up all vacancies in their representation."

There was a laughing squabble among the men who claimed to represent the Counties in which their regiments had been, and those who could not gain the honor were assigned to other Counties to which the army would probably go.

"Mr. Speaker," called a young Lieutenant.

"The gentleman from Lumpkin," recognized the Speaker.

"I move you, sir," continued the Lieutenant, "that it be the unanimous sense of this honorable body that the Governor of Georgia, having shamefully deserted his post in the face of the enemy, the office be declared vacant, and that the Hon. Wm. T. Sherman, late of Ohio, but at present of almost any old County in Georgia, be elected his successor."

The Army of the Tennessee men raised a storm of cheers.

"I move to amend," said an officer wearing an Acorn badge, "by substituting the name of the Hon. George H. Thomas, late of Virginia, but now a resident of Milledgeville."

Vociferous cheers from the Army of the Cumberland men.

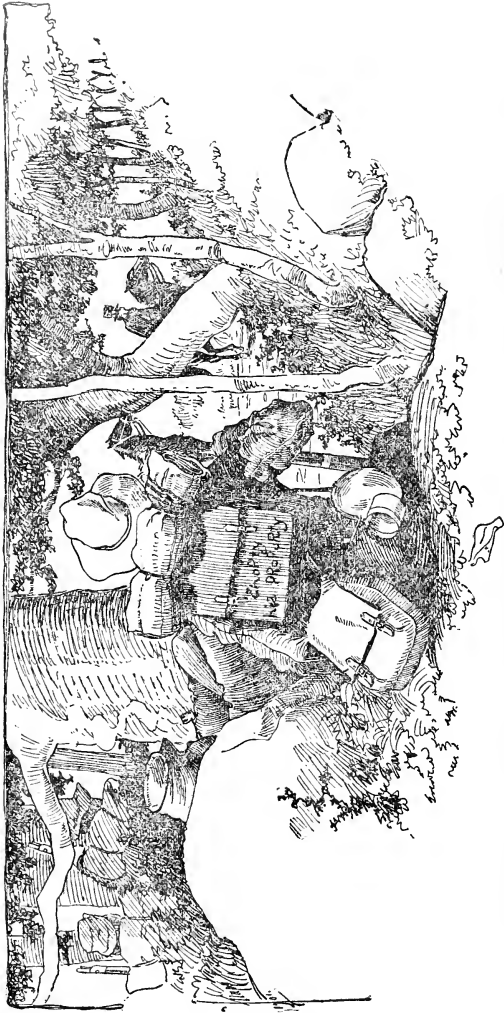
"I want to say in advocacy of my amendment," continued the Fourteenth Corps man, "that the Hon. Geo. H. Thomas is a much older resident of Georgia than his competitor. He came into the State several months before Gen. Sherman, and at once became prominent in its affairs. At a great meeting held at Chickamauga he was unanimously pronounced the foremost citizen of the State. He has been connected with our great public works. He has had more to do with railroads than any other man who ever lived in Georgia, and he developed the great Snake Creek Gap route."

Another storm of cheers from the Army of the Cumberland.

"And I hold," continued the Acorn man, "that W. T. Sherman is ineligible for the office, for reason that he is now, and has been for months past, in actual, though not acknowledged command of the Confederate forces in Georgia."

A roar of cheers and laughter from everybody.

"I object," called out a man with a white arrow on his breast. "You Four-



"PROBABLY A JUSTICE O' THE PEACE, OR PROBATE JUDGE," SAID SHORTY.

teenth Corps fellows want to hog everything."

"I call the distinguished gentleman from the Seventeenth Corps to order," said Shad. "Hog is unparliamentary language."

"I shouldn't think that a man from Indiana ought to object to hog in any form," retorted the White Arrow man. "That's what they live on, and they don't know much else."

"I'll go over there and bust the honorable gentleman's head if he don't come to order," roared Shorty. "No Mississippi alligator like him must allege against the State of Injianny."

"Gentlemen will address the Chair," shouted the Speaker, pounding with his gavel. "The Chair rules that the word hog, when applied to the useful animal which furnishes the sustaining principle for that grand aggregation of patriotism known as Sherman's army is entirely parliamentary and proper. But when used by a member of the Army of the Tennessee to describe the moral qualities of the Fourteenth Corps, it is highly unparliamentary and improper. The gentleman from the Vicksburg District is out of order, and will take his seat."

"I appeal from the decision of the Chair," shouted the Seventeenth Corps man. "Everybody knows that the Fourteenth Corps hogs everything away from the rest of the army. That is what their badge means. Hogs live on acorns."

There was every symptom that the session would break up in a first-class row. A shrill loud voice called for peace.

"Mr. Speaker," it said, "I propose as a substitute for the original motion that the Hon. Geo. H. Thomas be elected Governor of Georgia, and the State cast its electoral vote for the Hon. Wm. T. Sherman for President of the United States."

Wild acclamations greeted this, and peace was restored.

"Mr. Speaker," said a new voice from another part of the hall, "your Committee on Federal Relations have unanimously agreed upon a resolution, which I herewith send to the Clerk's desk, to have read."

Monty Scruggs's voice rang out sonorously as he read:

"WHEREAS, in the year of Our Lord, 1861, an assemblage in this town, being instigated by the devil, and his chief emissaries, Jeff Davis, Robert Toombs, Howell Cobb and others, did wickedly, maliciously, and with felony aforethought usurp powers not belonging to it, and treasonably declare Georgia out of the Union, therefore, be it—

Resolved, That the aforesaid ordinance of secession, which was conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity, is hereby, at once and forever, repealed, nullified, set aside, and made void, and of no effect whatever, the State of Georgia is declared to be, now and forever, completely under

the jurisdiction and control of the Constitution and laws of the United States."

"Hold on, Mr. Speaker," shouted some one. "Before that is put upon its passage I rise to a parliamentary inquiry."

"The gentleman from Pokeberry will state his inquiry," said the Speaker.

"I desire to ask if that will re-enact the Fugitive Slave Law in Georgia?" asked the man.

"The gentleman is referred to the Freedman's Bureau," said the Speaker. "Gentlemen, you have heard the resolution. All in favor of its passage will signify it by saying Aye. Contrary, No. The Ayes have it unanimously, the resolution is adopted, the Ordinance of Secession is repealed, and Georgia is again in the Union."

As the roar of cheers subsided, a voice was heard:

"Mr. Speaker, the Committee on Crimes, Offenses and Misdemeanors has placed a resolution in the hands of the Clerk, which it desires read and acted on."

Monty read out, in full, round tones:

"WHEREAS, certain evil-disposed persons, to-wit: John B. Hood, Wm. J. Hardee, Joe Wheeler, P. G. T. Beauregard, and others conspiring, collegued and consorting with them, have been and now are disturbing the peace and dignity of the State, by bloody and seditious acts: Therefore, be it

Resolved, That the aforementioned men, and all those found in their company, are hereby declared and denounced as outlaws and traitors, and all loyal, honest men are hereby commanded to pursue them with arms, and shoot down and exterminate them on sight, for which this shall be their full warrant."

"Adopted by acclamation," announced the Speaker.

"Mr. Speaker," called out a new voice, "the Committee on Reforms in the Laws presents the following, and asks for its immediate passage:

"Be it enacted by the Legislature of Georgia, that any man who shall hurrah for Jeff Davis, or in any manner aid or abet the present rebellion, shall suffer death, or such other punishment as it may be convenient to inflict, besides forfeiting all his cattle, hogs, chickens and forage to the Commissary Department."

"Passed by acclamation," announced the Speaker.

"Passed unanimously," announced the Speaker.

"Mr. Speaker," called still another, the Committee on Education presents the following, and requests its immediate passage:

"Be it enacted, That the song beginning 'We'll hang Jeff Davis on a Sour Apple Tree' is hereby adopted as the State anthem of Georgia, and all teachers are required to teach it in the public schools."

"Mr. Speaker," came from still another

voice, "the Committee on Finance reports the following, and asks its immediate passage:

"Be it enacted, That taxes shall continue as heretofore, to be paid in kind, but their collection by the officers of the so-called Southern Confederacy is strictly prohibited. That duty is hereby transferred to the officers and men of the Union Army, who are hereby authorized and instructed to seize whatever cattle, hogs, forage, and other necessities that in their judgment said army may require."

"Passed by acclamation," announced the Speaker.

"Gentlemen of the Legislature of Georgia," said the Speaker, rapping with his gavel and rising. "I must congratulate you on the progress you have made. Never in the history of Georgia has there been so much good, wholesome and practical

legislation passed in so short a time. Speaking for the great, free, independent, sovereign Commonwealth of Georgia, I—"

"Say, Capt. Breeze," shouted a Regimental Adjutant, striding into the hall, "what are you doing here? Don't you know you've been detailed as Picket Officer? You want to get over to your detachment immediately, and establish your line for the night. I've been looking for you everywhere."

"Here, you men," echoed an officer of the provost-guard, appearing at the head of a squad, "get back to your regiments, every one of you, officers and all. Get, I say."

"O, yes; O, yes," proclaimed Shad, snatching up the Speaker's gavel, as a souvenir, "the Legislature of Georgia stands adjourned, *sine die*. The devil take the Commonwealth of Georgia."

CHAPTER XXIII.

OUT ON THE FLANKS AGAIN—THE PARTNERS THINK THAT THEY WILL GO OUT AND HELP THE BOYS ESCAPING FROM MILLEN—FORAGERS FROM THE FIFTEENTH CORPS—CAPTURE OF A RAILROAD TRAIN.

"Our next station is Sandersville, and all the army will concentrate there," reported Capt. Buxton, coming back to the company from regimental headquarters, after they had left Milledgeville.

"Sandersville?" commented Si, studying the map of Georgia from Mitchel's Atlas, which Alf Russell providently carried with him; "that means South Carolina, as sure's you're born, and we'll soon be making the Palmetto aristocrats howl for firing on Fort Sumter. First, we'll go right down there to Millen, and release the prisoners, then turn back on Augusta, where the rebels have their biggest arsenals, armories and factories of guns, cannons and powders. We'll wipe them off the face of the earth, and then cross over into South Carolina, where Uncle Billy 'll simply turn us loose, and after we've gone over the ground they'll have to grub deep to even find the roots of anything."

"Suits me," agreed Shorty. "I'm for South Carolina as soon as you please, but I was in hopes that we'd take in Andersonville on the way. We're pointing away from it now. I'd a heap rather go down and help the boys out there, and then 'tend to South Carolina later. But

in the army it's not what you want, but what you can."

"They say," said Si, "that all the prisoners who were able to walk have been taken away from Andersonville, and that there's quite a bunch of them over here at Millen. I think I'll go up to the Colonel, and ask him to let us pirouette out toward Millen, as the army advances, and see if we can't help out the boys who are trying to get away from there and through to us. There's likely to be a lot of them, and we'll know a heap more about where to look for them, and how to help them out, than fellows who haven't had our experience."

"That's the scheme that's been cooking in my mind ever since we mentioned Millen," agreed Shorty. "Your tongue's got a hair-trigger, Si, and always goes off quicker'n mine."

"Excellent idea; go ahead," said the Colonel, when the idea was broached to him. "You will do much better service, generally, out on the flanks than you will in the ranks, until we strike something solidier than we have been running up against lately, or is in sight at present. There's nothing in front but a musketo cloud of Wheeler's cavalry and Georgia

militia. I guess you can take care of yourselves with them."

Taking one day's rations of hardtack, and all the coffee, sugar and salt they could get, Si, with his squad increased by Uncle Ephraim and Tom Brainard and Bill Grimshaw, who insisted on going along, worked his way out through the army and toward the right, in the direction of Millen. They carried their blankets and shelter tents, and a full supply of 40 rounds of ammunition, so as to be prepared for any contingency in two or three days' absence from the column. As they passed out they met droves of cattle and hogs, and long lines of farm wagons, carriages, buggies, carry-alls, and every kind of a vehicle that could be found on the plantations, and made to carry to camp a load of provisions for man and beast.

Every man seemed in keen rivalry to get the biggest possible load, and hurry it into camp. And besides his contribution to the general fund, he invariably carried some luxuries for the special delectation of his mess—chickens, turkeys, a jar of honey, a jug of molasses, bucket of milk, etc., etc.

"If a man wanted to make a moosyum of all the road-rackers in use since the flood," remarked Si, studying the parade of wheeled antiquities strung along the road, "all he'd have to do would be to gather up the collection he'd find in camp tomorrow morning. I declare, Columbus must 've come over in some of them when he discovered America, and they've had hard use ever since. I used to think that a Posey County camp-meeting could rake the four corners of the earth for tough things on wheels, but Posey County isn't to be mentioned in the same day with this layout."

"Looks like a wagonshop yard with delirium tremens," remarked Shorty. "Some of those things look so old that they'd blue-mold the grub the boys are carrying in them, before they get to camp. Why, Jeff Davis ought to be ashamed to be found dead near one of them."

As they approached the crossing of the Little Ogeechee River they heard a sharp little volley, followed by some deliberate shots in reply. They hurried forward, and presently came to a house, where they found five or six soldiers wearing Fifteenth Corps badges, deliberately wringing the necks of some chickens which they had driven into a tobacco shed. In an old carryall, hitched up and standing in the road, were some sacks of flour, sweet potatoes, collards, jugs and a small bee-gun.

The firing was going on pretty lively, and bullets sang over their heads, but the men were devoting themselves to their work without paying the least attention.

"What's up, boys?" asked Si, as he came up on the double-quick, and speaking to a soldier who came out to the carry-

all and threw in a load of headless chickens.

"O, nothing in particular," answered the soldier, wiping his forehead with his sleeve. "There's 25 or 30 of Joe Wheeler's cavalry across the river there wanting to come over and mix up with us. Four or five of the boys are down there at the ford holding them back till we get through. Say, boys, you'll have to go on further. We aint going to leave nothing here worth while. This is the anniversary of our fight at Lookout Mountain—our company was the first one above the clouds—and we're going to celebrate it by a big chicken potpie, with batter cakes and honey on the side."

He spoke deliberately, and paid as little attention to the firing and the bullets that occasionally sang overhead as if they were miles away.

"Why don't you go over there and run that cavalry off?" inquired Si, gathering himself up, as if he would do it.

"O, what the devil's the use?" said the others scornfully. "They aint doing no harm, so long's you keep 'em back, and the boys that's down there at the ford can do that, and not try hard. Aint got no shoe-leather to wear out chasing rebel cavalry. And if you run 'em back 10 miles they'd turn and foller you again. Nah; got better use for our time than loping around the country after Joe Wheeler's long-distance runners."

A bullet clipped through the leather top of the carryall.

"Here, Jim," yelled the Fifteenth Corps man to his companions at the ford. "What's the matter with you fellows? Going to sleep down there? Shove them rebels back further. That last bullet come within a foot of the milk jug. You let 'em bust that jug, and you'll go without cream in your coffee tonight. Hear that?"

"Well, we'll go down there and rout them," said Si. "We don't believe in letting the rebel cavalry hang around."

"Don't you do it," said the Fifteenth Corps man sharply. "You just keep where you are. This is none of your scrap, and we don't thank fellows from other corps coming around and mixing in before they are invited. We're perfectly able to take care of our own front."

"No offense, comrade," said Si. "We simply offered our help."

"Well, we don't want your help. The boys wouldn't like it a bit for you to mix in. There's five as good shots down there as there is in the Army of the Tennessee, and they can stand off a mighty big billing of rebel cavalry without turning a hair. If they can't, there's six or seven more of us here just as good as they are. The rebels aint bothering us at all. If you don't like the way we're doing things, go off to your own corps, where they're managed to suit you."

"Look here, partner, there's no need of

your getting on your ear. We know that the Fifteenth Corps is generally able to run its own machine. But as we happened to be going out that way, we thought we'd just clean out the rebels as we went along."

"Well, you just remember this is our own little affair, and you'll please keep out of it until you're invited," returned the other, obdurately. "You'll have enough to do to shabby on your own side."

"Say, Lisha," called up a voice from the ford; "I expect that you boys had better come down here for a little while. There's a mint more of rebels coming up."

"I should say there was," said Elisha, looking with a little perturbation on a cloud of horsemen galloping up. "Come out here, boys. Raily on the wagon."

Then he noticed Si moving down, and his corps pride asserted itself. "I say, Sergeant," he begged, "do keep out of this. I tell you we're entirely able to take care of our front. You Army of the Cumberland men are always talking about taking care of us and saving us. I've heard it ever since Shiloh, and I'm sick of it. I'll tell you what, you can take all that grub, if you'll just go off to camp and let us handle this business ourselves."

"What do you take us for?" asked Shorty, hotly. "Do you think we're that kind of—"

But Si, who sympathized with the man's soldierly pride and jealous regard for the honor of his corps, interrupted:

"Go ahead, Sergeant. I think you're able by yourselves to stand them off. We know what stuff the Fifteenth Corps has in it. We won't interfere unless we're sure we're needed. Go ahead. We'll look on, and see you do it."

"Thank you," said Serg't Elisha gratefully, as he ran forward with his companions toward the river bank.

In a few minutes the skirmish became quite sharp, with the rebels on the opposite side of the river banging away promiscuously, to intimidate the defenders, who kept well under shelter, firing carefully and slowly whenever they saw a chance to bring down a man or a horse.

"Good soldiers," nodded Si, approvingly to Shorty, as they watched and listened from a position behind some buildings. "I guess they'll beat them off, and ought to have the full credit. I'll tell you what we might do. That field over there on the knob must be in plain view of the rebels. We might march around there in such a way as to make them believe we're moving about a regiment to cut them off."

They all ran at once for the knob, and began the old trick of marching past a gap in the bushes, coming around and passing across again. They were so successful that at the second round they heard the rebel bugle blow the recall, and

soon all the butternuts were in full retreat.

Si and Shorty came back to compliment the Sergeant and others upon the handsome fight they had put up, and shake hands and part, the others to go back to camp and their chicken potpie celebration of the battle above the clouds, and Si and Shorty to push over the Little Ocmulgee toward Millen.

They watched the rebel rear-guard pick up their wounded and carry them into some near-by cabins, instruct women there about taking care of them, and having the negroes bury the dead man, strip the dead man of his arms, and drive forward the men whose horses had been killed, and who were lingering behind to gather up their property. They pulled off their saddles and bridles, and went forward with them on their shoulders, until they could find other horses.

Si and Shorty slipped forward under the cover of the trees to get an opportunity to pick up some of these men, without alarming the rear-guard, and bringing on another fight. But the rear-guard was vigilant, gathered all the stragglers up, and urged them forward. Suddenly one of them, a tall, slender young fellow, threw down his saddle, exclaiming, with an oath:

"Thar that blamed ca'tridge-box's worked loose agin, and dropped. I've got to go back for it."

"Let hit go, Bill," said the Lieutenant in command. "You kin git another."

"No, I can't," said the man. "An', besides, hit wuz plum full o' ca'tridges."

"Make haste, then. Don't go fur," said the Lieutenant. "Hyah, hand me up yer saddle. I'll tote hit fer yo' till yo' git back."

The man handed up the saddle, and started back with his head down, apparently scanning the road for his cartridge-box. The rear-guard pressed on, for the column was moving at a good gait, and the guard was losing distance.

The man came straight toward where Si and Shorty were standing behind trees.

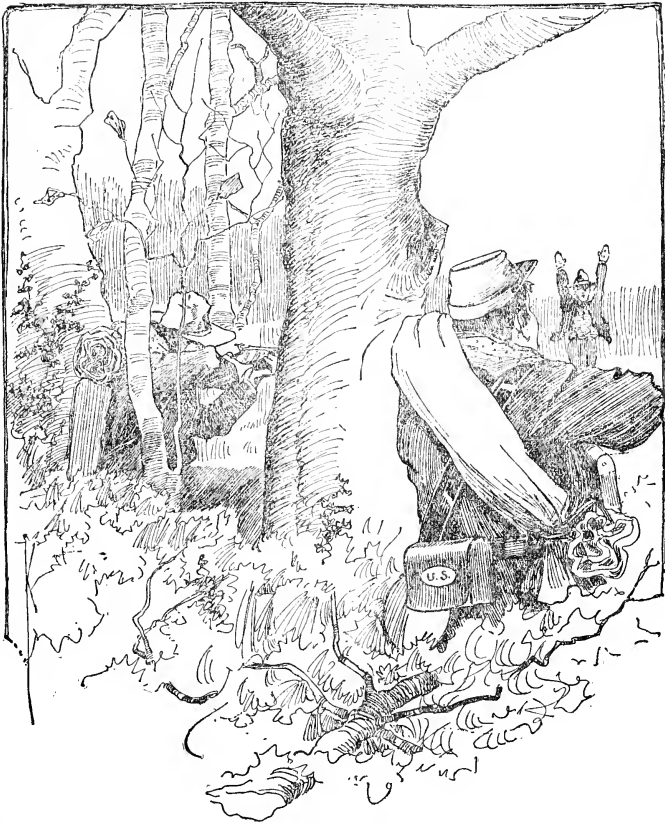
"Halt!" they commanded when he was 50 yards distant.

"That's all right, Yanks," he said, promptly throwing up his hands. "I was looking for you all the time."

There was not a touch of Southern twang in his voice.

The Lieutenant of the guard, looking over his shoulder at the man, noticed his action, faced his guard about, and started back, but Si showed up his whole force in the opening, at which the Lieutenant faced about and continued his march.

"Hello, Bob," said Bill Grimshaw, coming up to the new-comer and joyously shaking hands, after the Lieutenant faced about. "Awful glad to see you, brother. Say, you played that very fine, you did, for a fact; I've been worrying about you a good deal. I knew that they'd put you



"THAT'S ALL RIGHT, YANKS," HE SAID; "I WAS LOOKING FOR YOU ALL THE TIME."

into Wheeler's cavalry and that you'd get away the first chance. I didn't recognize you, though, till I heard your voice."

"Sergeant," continued Grimshaw, "this is my brother, Bob, who's a printer, and, like me, was tempted down South by good wages, and then pressed into the rebel army about a year ago. He's as loyal a boy as ever lived. Ticked to death to see you alive and well, Bob."

"Yes, boys, you'll find me sound on the

goose," said Bob Grimshaw. "I think I've wasted more cartridges for the Southern Confederacy, and done less damage to the Yankees than any other man in the rebel army. A Yank would've had to be at least 1,000 feet high that I ever hit when I was shooting."

"Glad to have you with us, Mr. Grimshaw," said Si, shaking hands with him. "Make yourself at home with us. We've come out to try and help get away any of

the boys who may be trying to escape from Millen. Know anything about any?"

"There's lots of them trying to get away," answered Bob. "And they've been picking them up all along through the country. They're jumping from trains, digging tunnels and getting out of the stockades by all sorts of tricks. Awful sight to see when we pick them up. Nothing but skin and bones, and without rags enough to cover their nakedness. So weak and sick that some of them just simply lay down and die as soon as they see they are recaptured. I tell you, boys, you don't know how many kinds of hell this Southern Confederacy is until you get on the inside. It's a hundred times worse on the inside than it can look to be from the outside."

"I suppose that they're mostly coming out this way?" inquired Si. "Trying to meet Sherman?"

"Mostly," answered Bob. "Though there's a great many going the other way, trying to get to the sea. The cavalry, the conscripts, and the reserves have orders to watch the crossings of the creeks, and I think that every ford along the Little Ogeechee is pretty well watched today for them."

"We'll just skin down this side of the river, then," decided Si, "and see if we can't drive the watchers off, and pick up some of the boys. Where do you think that cavalry has gone?"

"I heard them say," answered Bob, "that Joe Wheeler would have his headquarters tonight at Tenille Station, over on the railroad, in that direction. I think they're going to join him."

"That throws them away off to the left," said Si. "I don't think we need bother any more about them. Let's push right along. We can probably lick anything we find along the banks of the river."

Without any attempt at concealment, therefore, they marched along the road following the course of the river. Occasionally they would see small squads of reserves in the distance, who speedily proceeded to put a big stretch of Georgia landscape between them and the Yankees. They looked into all the fords, and Pete, on Abednego, scoured the country around, in search of hiding places for escaped prisoners. But he found none. He did find some good horses concealed in these likely hiding places, and by the middle of the afternoon the whole squad was well mounted. They made much better progress now, and toward sundown came to the Georgia Central Railroad, running from Macon to Millen, Augusta and Savannah. They heard the whistle of a train in the distance, coming from the direction of Macon, hastily piled some logs and stones on the track, concealed their horses in the brush and trees, and lay down among the sumach and cedars above a deep cut to wait for it.

The train came on, the engineer caught

sight of the obstruction as he entered the cut, whistled for brakes, reversed his lever, and looked around, to encounter Si's musket leveled at his head.

"Stop that train right there; don't you move an inch, or off goes your roof," sternly commanded Si.

Shorty, with the rest of the boys, was attending to the guards on the top of the cars, while Si was dealing with the engineer.

"Stand right where you are; drop them guns; don't you try to get down, if you don't want to land in hot brimstone," shouted Shorty, and the frightened reserves hastened to obey.

"I ain't wanting to go any further," said the engineer, very cheerfully. "This suits me well enough."

"Hello, Mockbee," shouted Brainerd and Grimshaw, delightedly, at the sound of his voice. "Good boy. Come right over here."

The engineer jumped from the train, and ran up to join his old friends.

"What does this mean? Come down, men," shouted the Captain and Lieutenants of the guard, rushing from the inside of a car further to the rear, and drawing their swords. "Jump down on the other side, men, and form."

"Excuse me, Captain, and you, too, Lieutenant," said Shorty, with great show of politeness, as he covered the Captain.

"This ain't your ante. I believe I have the age. Pass the buck, please. In other words, both of you toddle right up here, and hand me them toad-stickers. You won't have no further use for them."

"What's your rank, sir?" said the Captain, swelling a little. "I'm a commissioned officer, and don't surrender to no Corporal."

"I'm afraid you'll have to, all the same, this time," said Shorty, sadly. "My regular commission hasn't arrived yet, but I carry one good enough for every-day use right here," and he tapped his gun. "So toddle right up here, my laddie-bucks, and hand over your swords, before I'm under the painful necessity of blowing your heads off. Be in a hurry, for I'm nervous holding this gun out so long, and it's liable to go off."

The officers clambered up the bank and handed over the swords.

"Yip! yip! hooray!" yelled eight or ten of Kilpatrick's cavalry, who were in the front car, as they caught their guards, and flung them out. "Hooray for Abe Lincoln, and Billy Sherman."

They jumped out, snatched up the rebels' guns, and joined the rest on the bank. Leaving Harry, Monty and the rest to gather up the prisoners, Si and Shorty walked back to look over the train. It was a small one of six cars, made up to carry the family of the Superintendent of the machine shops at Griswoldville, and those of some other high officials to a place of safety. The last three contained the ladies of the families, with whom the

Captain, Lieutenant and conductor had been flirting at the time Si rudely interrupted the passage. The first car had the captured cavalymen and guards, the second fine tools and delicate machinery from the shops, and the third provisions and household goods.

Some of the women had promptly fainted, but not receiving much sympathy or attention from their sisters, had recovered and gone to screaming. The rest were looking as if the end of the world had come.

"Don't be alarmed, ladies," said Si, politely lifting his hat. "Sorry to have interrupted your journey, but you'll be perfectly safe. Conductor, as we haven't any use for you, you'll stay here and take care of the ladies."

Tom Brainard jumped into the cab, and seized the throttle, while Bill Grimshaw uncoupled the four rear cars, and Shorty set the prisoners to work removing the obstruction.

Brainard ran the engine, with the two cars, ahead a little way to where there was a rail fence on one side of the road, and one of pine stumps on the other.

"We'll just make a big bonfire of her, and send her howling down to Tenille Station with our compliments to Joe Wheeler," he said, as he began fastening down the safety valve with a piece of telegraph wire. "I hope she'll run right into the middle of his camp and bust wide open, and blow him and his whole yelling, thieving crew into the middle of next month."

While Shorty was making the prisoners pile rails and stumps on the cars, Grimshaw and the other engineer were picking out rich bits of fat pine with which to stuff the firebox, and fill the cab.

With coals from the engine, Shorty started big blazes in the cars, and Brainard, cramming into the firebox the last splinter of pine that it would hold, set fire to the stuff in the cab, and pulling open the throttle, jumped from the cab and let her go. The boys raised a cheer as she sped down the track, and then started to regain the road upon which the army was advancing.

Col. McGillicuddy had been detached during the day and sent forward with his regiment to push back Joe Wheeler's cavalry, and not finding any particular difficulty in the job, had pushed on to Tenille Station, where he arrived about dark, and went into camp upon some open, level ground along a switch of the railroad. His tent had been put up near the track, a pleasant fire built of railroad timbers, and he and the Adjutant were seated near it smoking, while Aunt Minerva Ann was busy preparing a savory supper at another fire. The rest of the regiment was near by, all lively, occupied in getting their evening meal and fixing for the night.

It was as pleasant and picturesque a camp-scene as was ever beheld. The bright fires sparkled in the darkness; all was quiet, save for the hum of a greasy occupation; the day's march had been an enjoyable one, with just enough excitement with the cavalry to give it zest, and the Colonel and the Adjutant were talking about the end of the war, and what they would do when mustered out.

Suddenly a huge mass of flame came tearing up the railroad with a frightful, deafening roar. Everybody sprang up, and stood looking at it, with his eyes protruding, and his heart in his mouth. What could it be?

An enormous meteor?

A new kind of a rebel infernal machine?

Aunt Minerva Ann collapsed to her knees and began hysterically shouting: "De Judgment Day! De Judgment Day! Gabriel blowin' de horn! O, God Almighty, hab mercy on a pore nigger!"

The switch was open, and the frightful mass whirled from the main track, and up toward Col. McGillicuddy's quarters. Everybody ran back in terror.

Col. McGillicuddy quickly divined what the thing was, and his smooth, soft, bugle-like tones rang out penetratingly.

"Steady, men! It's only a train on fire!"

"Steady, men!" repeated the officers.

The engine dashed against the stopping block at the end of the switch and rolled over on its side.

"Look, out, there! Look, out!" yelled a number. "She's going to bust!"

Col. McGillicuddy thought of "Elder Hornblower," who, in a spasm of terror, was vainly kicking and straining to break his stout halter. Around him were horses, all frantic with fear. Regardless of their flying heels, the Colonel sprang in to rescue his beloved steed from the danger of the explosion. He was followed by the Adjutant, similarly intent for his own horse's safety. They cut the halter straps, led the animals away, and quieted them with assuring words.

The expected explosion did not take place, and the panic quickly disappearing, the laughing, yelling boys gathered around to inspect the thing as the flames died down, and indulge in comments upon the marvelous happening.

"Another scheme of the damned, cowardly rebels to murder us all," said the angry Adjutant.

"I doubt it," said the Colonel. "I doubt if they had time to think of such a thing since we've been here. It's most likely the other way, and I wouldn't be surprised to find Si Klegg and Shorty mixed up in it somehow. I've somehow got in the habit of connecting them with everything that's unexpected."

CHAPTER XXIV.

APPLE DUMPLINGS AND A GIANT CAVE—SI FINDS OUT A TREASURE OF APPLES AND A MAMMOTH CAVERN—THE ADJUTANT FINDS OUT HOW MUCH HE DOESN'T KNOW ABOUT COOKING.

There were few apples raised in Georgia before the war, and the production was almost wholly confined to the mountain region where the small, old-fashioned varieties grew, almost without care or attention.

Like all healthy, normal boys, Si was exceedingly fond of apples. On his way back to the column his attention was excited by the unusual sight in that section of an apple orchard, and, more unusual still, it seemed thrifty and well-tended. It was probably the property of some man who had traveled in the North, and acquired an appetite for its delicious fruit. Possibly some Northern school-teacher had married down there, and longed for the pleasant things of her girlhood's home. Following up the natural train of thought Si looked toward the house, and saw there one of these peculiar institutions of Kentucky and Tennessee, a straw-pen. These are pens of rails, with thick layers of straw inside, to protect against the cold the Winter's supply of apples, sweet and lish potatoes, etc., stored there.

Hope sprang up in Si's breast. Leaving the rest to move on, he rode over to the straw-pen, and the fragrance that greeted his nostrils when he came close justified his hopes and made his mouth water. There may be a more delicious, pure and penetrating perfume than that of Winter apples in storage, but no one has yet pointed it out. That of roses and pinks is not equal to it. It always was to Si what a whiff of whiskey-scent is to a thirsty drunkard. He dismounted, thrust his hand far in through the straw, and brought out a big, blushing, fragrant Rome Beauty.

"Somebody from the Ohio River country planted that orchard," he remarked, as he rubbed the chaff off with his hand, preparatory to a capacious and luscious bite. "There's more of God's country in this than anything I've seen in the whole of Georgy. When Georgy's brought back into the Union, they ought to plant apples all over the State, to cure 'em of being rebels."

In a corn-crib near by he found a couple of sacks, which he filled with the fruit—one for his mess and the other for Col. McGillicuddy, whom he knew to be quite as fond of apples as he himself. He threw these across his horse and made his way after the detachment.

For three days the army deliberately concentrated around Sandeysville, to mislead the rebels that an attack on Augusta was intended, and an invasion of South Carolina. The 200th Ind. remained quietly resting at Tenille Station.

Having nothing to do Col. McGillicuddy's mind turned toward luxuries. Si's bag of apples made his tent redolent of intoxicating odor, suggestive of home things.

"Adjutant," he said one morning, as, after signing up the morning reports, they sat on some railroad ties in front of the tent, contentedly smoking, and watching the men boiling, washing and mending their clothes. "There's nothing in the world I'd give so much for, this minute, as a great big mess of apple-dumplings, like those mother used to make. The smell of those apples has set me to longing for them."

"Nothing easier than to have them," answered the Adjutant, confidently. "Aunt Minerva can cook anything. Here are the apples. We have plenty of sugar and flour, and it is an easy matter to get milk. That's all that's needed."

"Well," answered the Colonel, "I'm going to ride over to brigade headquarters, to find out what's in the air. I'll be back about 1 o'clock, hungry as a wolf, and shall expect a fine dish of smoking apple dumplings. I may bring the General with me."

Adjt. Willoughby was one of those invaluable young men about headquarters, who have no doubt in the world as to their ability to manage anything in the universe, and are eager to undertake any job suggested to them.

"Great Christopher," he soliloquised, as the Colonel rode away, and he walked back to Aunt Minerva Ann's boudoir by the wagon, "if apple-dumplings is what the Colonel wants, apple-dumplings he shall have, and by the peck. Nothing easier. Aunt Minerva Ann, the Colonel wants a big mess of apple-dumplings for dinner."

"Apple-dumplings?" inquired Aunt Minerva Ann, with a blank look. "What's dem?"

"Apple-dumplings?" echoed the Adjutant, somewhat taken aback. "Why, they're apple-dumplings, that's all. Don't you know what apple-dumplings are?"

"Nebber heard ob sich t'ings in all my

born days. Heard lots of apple-jack, which old Mas'r useter take fer his mornin's mornin', an' what sets common folks t' foutin' an' killin', but nebber heard ob no apple-dumplings. Heard ob people makin' pies ob apples, but nebber seed hit, nor believed dey could do hit."

"Well, they do make pies out of apples," gasped the Adjutant, beginning to comprehend the negress's ignorance, "and mighty good ones, too. Apple-dumplings are something like pies, only they're boiled instead of baked, and eaten with sweetened milk."

"Nebber made no pies in all my life, Ole M'am Lize, she made all the pies, an' all de wheat bread up at de house. She jealous ob de rest ob we'uns, an' nebber let we'uns see how she done hit. Done druv we'uns all away when she wukked at hit."

"Why, it's all dead easy," said the Adjutant, with the easy confidence of youth and inexperience. "You just mix up your flour and water, with a little salt and saleratus, just as you do your meal and water, and then—and then—and then you just coat your apples with it, and boil them together, and you have your apple-dumplings. You get a perfectly-clean camp kettle, and fill it with water, and set it on to boil, and get your flour and water, and I'll bring out the apples."

Aunt Minerva Ann did as directed, and got out the wooden bowl which she used to mix the dough for the corn-pone. Under the direction of the Adjutant, who became momentarily more sure that he had mastered the whole art and mystery, she mixed up flour and water until she had it about the consistence of corn-dough.

"I was as puzzled at first as bad as George III., in the poem was, as to how they got the apples into the dough," commended the Adjutant with himself. "As I remember it, the poem don't explain how they do it, but I've thought it out. All you need about cooking is a little common sense, just as you need it in everything. The trouble with that old wooden-headed King was that he didn't have any sense about anything. Aunt Minerva Ann, now you just wash off those apples very carefully. Be sure that every one's perfectly clean. Nothing like cleanliness in cooking. There's where all men and so many women make a great mistake in cooking."

"Now," he continued, as Aunt Minerva Ann brought back the apples, dripping from the washing, "take each one up by the stem this way, and take a knife, and plaster about a quarter of an inch of dough all around it."

Aunt Minerva Ann tried to obey, but her fingers were clumsy at the unaccustomed work. The dough would not stiek to the knife, still less to the wet surface of the apples.

"Fore Gawd, Mas'r Adjutant," she exclaimed, as she laid down the apple and knife, after a vain effort, to wipe the boiling sweat from her perplexed face, "dat's

de hardest wuk I ebber tried t' do. I'd a heap radder plow corn dan make apple-dumplings."

"Contend the clumsiness of these Georgia field hands," said the Adjutant, crossly. "You'd think every one of their fingers were toes, and big toes at that. Give me that knife, Aunty, and let me show you how."

But he succeeded no better than the lady of the kitchen. The dough would stick neither to the knife nor to the wet skin of the apples.

"The trouble is, you havn't got this dough thick enough," said the Adjutant, as he also began to sweat over the work, and was also accumulating the paste on his hands, face, and uniform. "Get some more flour, Aunty."

They stirred in more, until it became like mortar. With his efforts at this, and at coating the apples, and with wiping his face of the sweat which boiled out as profusely as on Aunt Minerva Ann, the Adjutant became pretty liberally covered from head to foot with flour and paste. He finally got one apple tolerably covered, and holding by the stem, surveyed it, while he soliloquized:

"Don't look as workmanlike as those mother used to make, but looks will make no difference with the taste."

"Hello, Adjutant," said the Surgeon, who happened to be passing. "What are you trying to do? Whiten yourself up to play off ghost on somebody this evening?"

"I'm trying to show the cook here how to make apple-dumplings," answered the Adjutant, very briefly.

"Apple-dumplings?" echoed the Surgeon. "I don't know anything about them except that the apples ought to be peeled and quartered, which you don't seem to have done."

"I declare, that's so," gasped the Adjutant, as the Surgeon passed on. "I quite forgot it, but I never saw a whole apple in a dumpling. I remember that mother used to peel and quarter her's."

Aunt Minerva Ann had never peeled an apple, but she quickly learned how, under the Adjutant's instruction. He had learned that much in his frequent forced labor in his mother's kitchen.

Then came the additional perplexity of keeping the segments together, while plastering the paste around them. The Adjutant added much to his wheaten coating in his efforts. The flour on his face mingled with the sweat into a thin paste. His hands were thickly clogged.

"I declare, I never did see such a sticky stuff as this Georgia flour," he grumbled. "Sticks to everything but the apples. Mother's dough didn't used to act that way. You could handle it like wax."

The negroes, male and female, became interested in this unusual exhibition of Yankee cookery, and gathered around, watching the proceedings with open eyes, and wondering what great results would

come. This did not improve the Adjutant's temper.

He heard the bugle sound the dinner call as he finally got a round ball of the paste formed, with the four quarters of the apple somewhere inside of it, and scraped it off his hands into the kettle.

"The blasted things will boil all right," he muttered, "if they won't do anything else. They can't help boiling, and that is about all there is to dumplings. It won't matter if they do look a little ragged when they come out. The milk will cover that up."

He toilsomely elaborated another swad of the paste and apple-quarters, but before he dropped it into the kettle looked there for the other. The water had dissolved the paste into a thin gruel, and the four quarters of the apple were lying at the bottom of the kettle.

"Hello, Adjutant," said Col. McGillicuddy, coming up with the General. "How are you getting along with those apple-dumplings?"

That the General should see him in this humiliating predicament, wrecked the last dike against the Adjutant's boiling temper. He stood in the greatest awe of the General—a thorough, punctilious soldier, a stickler for etiquette and routine, for trim uniforms, and deportment becoming an officer and a gentleman. To be seen by him now, in this plight, consorting with negro cooks, was ruinous to the young man's self-esteem.

"Damn the apple-dumplings," exploded the Adjutant, giving the kettle a kick which sent it over, and flinging away the knife and a wad of the paste. "Colonel, if you want apple-dumplings, you'll have to get some one else to make them. The United States Government did not commission me as a pastry-cook."

"Well, it did me," said the General, with a genial laugh illuminating his strong bronzed face. To everybody's surprise he began taking off his coat and rolling up his sleeves. "It commissioned me to know and be able to do everything necessary for health and comfort in the field. I'm not going to miss so good an opportunity to get some nice apple-dumplings, for which my mouth's been watering, ever since the Colonel mentioned them. Come back, Adjutant, a sulky cook spoils the meat. Come back, and get a very important lesson in the great trade of soldiering. Come back and get something to make you appreciate better your mother's accomplishments."

Throwing the paste out of the bread-bowl, the General gave Aunt Minerva Ann an object lesson in the proper preparation of dough, sending to the hospital for some seidlitz powders, to use in lieu of baking-powder. He kneaded the dough thoroughly, and then taking a little wad, placed the four segments of the apple on it, and easily worked the dough up into a smooth ball around it.

"Law, bless me, how easy hit is, when

you knows how," exclaimed Aunt Minerva Ann, deftly imitating her teacher.

"My boy," said the General kindly, to the Adjutant, as they started back to the tent to wash up, while the dumplings were boiling. "I'm glad to have had the opportunity to give you that lesson. You are a bright, promising soldier, and I want to see you succeed. There's nothing that a real soldier oughtn't to know, and especially about the properties and management of wheat flour. On that frequently depends the health and lives of his men. If I had my way I'd make every West Point Cadet serve an apprenticeship in a bakery. After I'd been on the frontier awhile I saw the need of going to work and learning the trade thoroughly. If I'd done it before I would possibly have saved some of my men's lives. I certainly would have added much to their comfort and my own. After we have washed up I'll show you how to make a boss dip for the dumplings. Old Maj. Jenkins taught it to me. He was the toughest old martinet in the army, and took the best care of his men. He taught me about all I knew of soldiering."

Retaining his horses, Si started out early the next morning to prosecute his original intention of hunting for prisoners escaping from Millen, and helping them through our lines. He started for Williamson's Swamp, a noted place in that region. It was formed by a tributary of the Ogeechee River, and its intricate recesses, Bob Grimshaw informed him, were famous hiding places for "liers-out" from conscription, and runaway negroes. It was altogether likely that many "escapes" had taken refuge in there.

Si rode along till near noon, investigating every place in which it seemed possible that an escaping prisoner might be hidden. To the people in the houses they passed—women, old men, and some so badly crippled that even the rebel conscriptors would not take them—they represented themselves as part of Wheeler's cavalry, looking for deserters and escaping Yankees. As usual, in these interviews, Si let Shorty do all the talking. His partner could speak Southern dialect perfectly, and lie with an ease and plausibility that Si never emulated.

From these they usually learned that all of Joe Wheeler's cavalry in the neighborhood were being withdrawn and hastened across our front to Waynesboro, to resist the advance on Augusta. They occasionally saw, in the distance, squads moving northeasterly.

"Kilpatrick'll 'tend to 'em," said Si, with a wave of his hand in that direction. "Let 'em go."

"I intended to," answered Shorty, complacently.

"But how about these?" Si hurriedly inquired, as he happened to glance backward, and see about a battalion of cavalry,



"I'M TRYING TO SHOW THE COOK HERE HOW TO MAKE APPLE-DUMPLINGS," ANSWERED THE ADJUTANT VERY BRIEFLY.

coming over a high hill a couple of miles in the rear.

"I guess we'd better be going," remarked Shorty. "Let's strike for that big road down in front, which apparently leads to Louisville. We'll get there before they see us, and probably find some by-path off."

But as they reached the road and looked to the left they saw another battalion rising over the hill beyond, with their faces set toward the northeast.

"That's probably the rear of the column," Si hastily assumed. "We'll turn to the right and go southwest."

He did so, but as he ascended the next hill, he was dismayed to see approaching a brigade of cavalry.

"Great Scott, Shorty," he exclaimed, drawing back to be out of sight, and glancing apprehensively toward the road leading in from the west. "We've got in between the advance and the main column, with that other crowd on our flank."

"Had we better leave the horses, and break for the woods?" suggested Bill Grimshaw, who had the strongest reasons for not falling into the rebels' hands. He and Tom Brainard were always willing to take any risk but that of being captured.

"Say, Sargint," suggested Uncle Ephraim, who was studying the roadside brush, "somebody's done gone froo right dar."

Si looked, but could see no entrance into the impenetrable hedge of briars and brush. But he had confidence in Uncle Ephraim's bush-knowledge. "Go ahead, Uncle," he said, briefly.

Uncle Ephraim made his way through the brush with much less difficulty than expected, and the other horses followed. Before the head of either column appeared they were all behind the wall of bushes, which closed up again and showed no sign of their passage to eyes less sharply trained than Uncle Ephraim's.

"Somebody's done hid hyah afore. Dar's a hidin' place 'round hyan, somehow," Uncle Ephraim continued, as they dismounted and led their horses along through the thick-growing cedars along a shelf above the creek. "Bofe niggers an' white men 've bin hidin' hyah."

"How do you know, Uncle?" inquired Si.

"I done seed some nigger-wool on a brier, whar we come in, an' den I seed a piece ob paper back dar. De hidin' place bin used a good while ago, an' den quite lately," remarked Uncle Ephraim, and Si, following his gaze, saw a whittled stick that had rotted, and a bit of rag, that had not yet become weather-beaten.

"Whar in de world dat hidin' place?" continued Uncle Ephraim, looking around anxiously, for they could hear the brigade on the road halting, manifestly with the intention of waiting for some other portion of the command to come up.

"Whar in de Kingdom he? On top de hill? No; dat bare, an' kin be seed 'fom de udder hills. Whar he? O' dar he."

His eyes had at last caught sight of enough broken branches and disturbed foliage to indicate a direction, and he followed it, leading his horse.

It led him down toward the creek, and he carefully avoided shaking the bushes and attracting the attention of the men on the road. His raised finger made Si and the rest equally circumspect. Turning around a thick clump of laurel, he came suddenly under a high cliff, beneath which all the horses could stand, and drew his horse there followed by the others.

On the opposite side of the creek jagged, precipitous rocks rose quite high, and on the scanty soil on and among them grew cedars and briars.

"This is good enough," said Si, looking at the cliff. "I don't think that anybody is liable to climb up on those rocks over there to look in and discover us. But it seems to me I smell a fire, and there's

been some cooking near here. Hello, what's this?"

He had kicked against something, which he picked up and examined. It was a bootie, fitted with a wooden bottom to make a water-bucket.

"There's a prisoner of war around here," he said. "Where can he be?"

The noise of the talking, and the sound of comrades on the road increased. Inquisitive little Pete climbed back to where he could get a peep at the road, and hear something of what was being said.

"Appears to be a row over the men deserting," he reported to Si. "General's skinning the Colonels for not holding on to their men better, and the Colonel's a-blaming it on the Captains."

"Attention!" called the ringing voice of the Colonel, and the tumult stilled. "The Orderly-Sergeants will call the rolls."

Then ensued the well-known sounds, as the Orderly-Sergeant rattled off the names on the rosters, and those present responded. Every company had to report some "absent without leave."

"We haven't as many as we started with," said a man who appeared to be the Adjutant. "I believe some's left since we stopped here."

"That's so," said a Captain. "Sergeant, where's Jim Hobcaw, and Wils. Dunner?"

"Dunno," answered the Orderly. "They wuz hyah a leetle while ago. Probably sneakin' off inter the bushes, as usual. They uns 's always tryin' t' git away. We uns've done brung 'em back 20 times. Thar's their hosses."

"Damn them," roared the angry Colonel, "I'll shoot them when I can lay my hands on them, as a warning to others. Captain, send out a Sergeant and squad to look through the brush for them. Shoot them down if they attempt to run, and shoot any other man you may find out there away from his command."

"Looks as if we've got to git out of here, unless we want to fight the whole brigade," said Si, looking anxiously for some way of egress from the cave. There seemed none. A high wall of solid rock lay in their way.

Meanwhile Pete had seen two men, carrying their carbines, slipping furtively through the cedars toward him. He called in a low tone to Sandy to come up beside him, and with their guns they covered the approaching man.

"Halt!" they commanded, when the men were within a few yards. "Throw down those guns. Where are you going?"

A look of dead sickliness had come into the faces of the men at the startling summons. Then they brightened up as they saw the blue clothes.

"Is you uns Yankees?" gasped one of them.

"Yes, we're Yankees," answered Pete. "Come on up here, and don't make no noise."

"That's all right," said the other man,

scanning with satisfaction the unmistakable Union clothing and equipments of the boys from head to feet—caps, overcoats, pantaloons, shoes, belt-plates, cartridge-boxes and haversacks. "I wuz afeared fer a minnit you'uns wuz some of our fellers, with Yankee clothes on. We'uns is tryin' t' git away from they'uns. We'uns 'll go with you'uns all right."

"Well, come right down here," echoed Pete, picking up their carbines and motioning them to follow Sandy.

"Why, this is the cave we'uns wuz makin' fer," said one of them, as they came under the cliff. "I found it years ago, when I was huntin' 'saug. I intended t' lay out in hit, but the conscripters done ketched me afore I could git t' hit. I never tole nobody about hit but Wils., my pardner hyah, an' we'uns concluded t' break fer hit whenever we'uns come a-nigh hit. Yo' sec, Wils., jes' as I done tole yo', this hyah's the biggest cave in all Washington County, an'——"

"Cave?" echoed Si, looking around, "I hadn't noticed any cave. Why, there does seem to be one back there."

"I should say thar wuz," said Jim Hobcaw. "Lots o' big caves 'round hyah, but this's an ole he-one. Daddy of 'em all. Runs clean back thar t' Atlanty or Macon, or hell, or some other 'bominable place. I wuz afeared t' go in very fur, fer fear o' sperits. Why, thar's bones o' men in thar 50 feet high, an' o' the critters they usefer ride, an' all sorts o' things. 'Nough t' skeer any man. Why, I wouldn't go in thar alone fer a bushel o' silver dollars."

Si was so used to the gross superstitions and exaggerations of the poor whites of

the South that he paid little attention to this part of the man's story. He walked back a few steps, and as his eyes became used to the darkness, he saw that there was a cave of immense extent, and he saw some large bones. Then he was recalled by a message sent down from Pete.

"They're sending out a Sergeant and four or five men to look for these men."

"Well, since we can't get away from here, we'd better stay," said Si. "Shorty, you'd better take four or five of the boys and look out for them. If you see they're likely to find this place, bring 'em in. That'll be safest. I'll take a look around at this cave and see what chances it may offer."

There was far more truth than usual in James Hobcaw's statement. Si was in one of the largest of the great fossil caves for which Washington County, Ga., is noted. Icicle-like stalactites hung from the high roof, and white pillars of stalagmites rose from the bottom. Great bones of long-extinct animals lay here and there. Entering a still darker portion, Si's foot struck against something soft but solid. He lighted a match to see what it was. To his horror he discovered it to be the dead body of an escaped prisoner.

"Great God, Si Klegg, where did you come from?"

The voice which came from a little farther in the darkness, was that of Steve Bigler, one of Shad Graham's assistants on the tunnel at Andersonville, and who had been wounded in the attempt to escape.

Si was so startled that he dropped the match, but immediately lighted another.

CHAPTER XXV.

A LIVELY SKIRMISH WITH THE JEFF DAVIS DRAGOONS—THE BOYS SHUT UP IN THE CAVE—THE REBELS TRY TO ROAST THEM OUT.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Si, as by the light of his second match he surveyed Stephen Bigler's emaciated form and tattered rags. "Where did you come from, Steve, and how did you get here?"

"Give me something to eat, Si, and something for the boys, and then I can talk. We're all starving."

Si felt around in his haversack for a hardtack. "There's one for you," he said, handing it to him. "How many are there of you?"

"God only knows now," mumbled Bigler, as he broke off a piece of the cracker with a stone and placed it in his mouth. "Can't bite now," he added, apologetically. "You know how it is, Si. Teeth gone with the scurvy. But let me take the rest of this cracker back to my partner. It may save his life. He's worse off than I am. He can't walk at all."

Si could not wait for him to come back, for he heard a commotion at the mouth of the cavern, and hurried forward to see what occasioned it.

"That thar foxy varmint, Sarjint Glasscock, 's done found our trail, an' headin' straight for the cave," remarked Jim Hobcaw, his face sicklied with fear, as Si came up. "Damn the mangy hound. He's done kitched we'uns afore. We'uns orter've killed him las' night when he wuz asleep, as I wanted yo' t', Wils. The Corpril's done went out t' stop him."

"He must do it without making any noise, to alarm the rest," said Si, with a face full of concern. "We can't fight the whole brigade."

"Don't yo'uns give up an' let 'em git we'uns," pleaded Jim Hobcaw, terror-stricken. "They'uns 'll shoot we'uns down in our tracks if yo'uns do. We'uns'll die right here afore we'uns'll give up."

"You had certainly better," remarked Si, coolly. "And so had all of us, from the looks of those poor prisoners back there. But keep quiet. Don't make any noise. Mebbe we can get out of the scrape without a fight."

As Si went forward he saw that Shorty had left Alf and Gil, with Tom Brainard, Bill Grimshaw, and Uncle Ephraim in reserve, and they crouched around the entrance, clutching their guns, and with every nerve taut. Cautiously looking beyond, he saw his partner, with Harry, Monty, Sandy and Pete, lying in

wait for the advancing rebel Sergeant and his squad, like so many panthers crouching for a spring upon animals going down to a spring to drink. They were so absolutely motionless that it took Si a minute to see where they all were.

Shorty was standing erect behind a tall, thick cedar, past which the Sergeant must come. Monty, Sandy, and Pete were lying in the brush behind a fallen tree trunk, to get the three men who were following directly after the Sergeant, while Harry had crawled to the left, to look out for a man who was making explorations to the side.

"They'll get 'em all right, except that feller Harry's after," flashed through Si's mind. "He's a lively lot and liable to make trouble. I'll go to Harry's help."

He crouched and crawled out toward Harry, and was near him, when the Sergeant, his eyes fixed on the signs of the trail ahead, attempted to pass the cedar behind which Shorty was concealed. Shorty's long right arm came out like a flash, encircled the Sergeant's neck, and forced his head back so that he could not open his mouth. A professional garroter could not have done it more artistically.

As they saw the Sergeant's form writhe in Shorty's hug, Sandy and Pete called out in a sharp whisper:

"Halt, there! Drop those guns!"

The three startled rebels looked to the right, each to see a musket-muzzie within a short yard of him. The carbines fell to the ground.

"Do you surrender, you rebel whelp?" demanded Shorty, relaxing his arm so as to give the man a chance to speak. "Or shall I wring your neck like a chicken's?"

"'Nough! 'Nough!" gasped the Sergeant, as soon as he could get his tongue back into his mouth. "Say, Yank, that warn't a fa'r holt."

"Haint no time to debate P. R. Rules with you now. Get!" answered Shorty, taking him by the back of the neck and shoving him along to where Tom Brainard and Bill Grimshaw could reach him. "Don't chirp above your breath, or off goes your head. Bring the others along, boys. Shoot 'em, if they holler."

But the man whom Harry was laying for—a slender youth, whose alertness had from the first disturbed Si—was not to be managed so easily. While Si and Harry

were waiting for him to come out into the little opening, a few steps nearer, his quick ears caught the rustle of Shorty's struggle with the Sergeant, and he turned his eyes in that direction. They saw the danger, and in low, stern tones, commanded:

"Halt, there! Throw down that gun! Surrender!"

There was, however, none of the slow stupidity of his companions about him. With the quickness of a flash he leaped backward to put a hickory tree between himself and their threatening muzzles.

Si and Harry sprang toward him like panthers, but he was as quick as they, and firing a hasty shot, which passed near Harry, from his carbine, he broke back through the cedars, yelling at the top of his voice:

"Yankees! Yankees! Yankees!"

Leaving Monty to take charge of their prisoners, Sandy and Pete ran across to intercept him. Once he tripped and fell, and they were nearly on top of him, but he sprang up again, and leaving his hat and carbine behind, bolted on down the hill, yelling:

"Yankees! Yankees! Yankees!"

Si and the boys halted on the brow of the hill an instant to peer through the bushes, and see what the effect of his alarm would be.

"Thar's a hull passel o' Yankees up thar," he panted to the crowd which gathered around him.

"Nonsense, you fool," said the Colonel, irritably. "There's no Yankees within 10 miles of here. Like the rest of these superstitious fools, you have been scared out of your wits by harnts."

"I tell yo', Cunnel, hit's true. The woods is full o' Yankees. They'uns 've done got Sarjint Glasscock, an' Quigley, an' Buckbee, an' Clark. I done seed 'em take 'em. Thar's 'bout a thousand o' 'em up thar."

"Puterbaugh's not easily rattled, Cunnel," said the Captain, "and I thought I saw some signs of Yankees myself."

"We have no time for foolishness," said the Colonel, a little convinced. "We ought to be starting now. But, Captain, deploy your company, and scour those woods quickly. Listen for the recall, and come back promptly when it sounds."

"While they're deploying that skirmish line and coming through we might drop the hosses and skip back through the woods on foot and get away," suggested Shorty, as he and Si held a hurried council. "We can pick up more hosses."

"We might, but we won't," said Si, after an instant's reflection. "I'm not going off to leave Steve Bigler and the rest. I'll kill them to be recaptured. I'll fight the whole rebel army first."

"Same here," echoed Shorty.

"We can stand off those hounds a long time before they get to the cave," contin-

ued Si, "and in there we can hold 'em off till we starve. Before that some of our men will come along somewhere and give them something else to think about. The first thing's to gain some time. Let's all run forward to that brow of the hill, and pour a dose into those fellers in the road. You look out for that Captain, and I'll attend to the Colonel. That'll give 'em something to study over while we're making other arrangements."

Tom Brainard and Bill Grimshaw were called out, leaving Alf and Gid to look after the prisoners, and Uncle Ephraim came also. As they ran along Pete, Sandy, Harry, Monty, and Shorty snatched up the carbines which the rebels had dropped.

"Pick your men now, boys, and be sure to fetch 'em," said Si, as they came to the brow of the hill. "I'll take the Colonel, and Shorty the Captain. Fire after me."

The Captain was using the flat of his saber to settle a dispute as to who should be horse-holders, and the Colonel was improving the time by rating the Quartermaster as to the deficiencies in his department.

"Hate to shoot when they aint expecting it," said Shorty, and then yelled:

"Good morning, Johnnies! Hooray for Abe Lincoln!"

The Colonel looked up and reached for his saber-hilt. Si's bullet went through his body, and he fell from his horse. The Captain went down with a bullet through his shoulder. The others fired their muskets, and then the rebel carbines. The latter was as much to increase the idea of their number as to hit anyone. Uncle Ephraim saw a tall rebel fall before his shot, and grinned over the satisfaction he would have in describing it to Aunt Minerva Ann.

"Shorty, you stay with the boys, and work your way back," said Si, "while I go to the cave and get things in shape. Come along with me, Uncle Ephraim."

Shorty and the rest reloaded, and waited for the next move of the rebels. Against his will, Uncle Ephraim followed Si back to the cave.

Si's first thought was to get rid of the incumbrance of the horses. They filled the space under the cliff before the mouth of the cave, and would be sadly in the way in a fight. A huge rock, which had fallen from the hill into the creek, shut off the farther side of the cliff, but Si noticed that there was a space between it and the straight wall of the hill, closed by a young hemlock. Si caught hold of the hemlock, which was shallowly rooted in the soil on the rock, and pulled it out of the way. Then he found a space wide enough for a horse to pass into a cove, about the size of a town-lot, walled around by still higher rocks. He drove Abednego up through the opening, and the horses followed docilely.

He found the Sergeant and the three

other rebels seated on rocks contentedly munching crackers, which Gid and Alf had given them.

"Start a fire, Uncle Ephraim," he commanded, "and make some coffee for those poor men who have escaped. As soon as you have got the fire well started go back here and hunt all around for them, and do what you can to make them comfortable."

Si, calling Jim Hobeaw and Wils Dunnell to his assistance, started to arranging the loose stones for a breastwork, behind which the mouth of the cave could be defended.

"What, go back dar, in de da'k, 'mong dem sperets an's ghosts!" exclaimed Uncle Ephraim in terror. "Nebber! Nebber in dis libbin' worl! I'm jes' as nigh dem now as I'm a-gwine, I done tell yo' fer a fact. Don't like t' be dis close. Heap radder be outside whar I kin see de debblis in de bright sunshine, an' shoot right at dem like as if dey wuz painters."

"It's no use making him go," thought Si. "He wouldn't find some of them, and he'd be in such a tremble all the time that he couldn't do anything for them if he did find them." He looked at the rebel Sergeant and his companions, and said:

"Alf, you can leave Gid to guard those men. Light this piece of fat pine, and go back and take a good look for those boys."

Uncle Ephraim had succeeded in getting the water to boiling in a quart cup, and now put in some coffee. The fragrance at once filled the cave.

"Gracious, but that smells good," said the voice of Steve Bigler, as he emerged once more from the darkness. "It makes me feel alive again. Are you going to give me some?"

"Yes, Steve," answered Si. "We were making it for you. You shall have a swig of it, just as soon as it cools a little. Alf, pour out a little in this cup for Steve, and take the cup with you, and give each one you find some. Be careful about letting them drink too much at first. How many are there of you, Steve?"

"Ten of us jumped the train when they were taking us from Millen, in the night," answered Bigler, speaking much more freely and strongly under the grateful stimulus of the draft of coffee. "Two broke down on the way, and had to be left behind in the swamp. I expect they died. Seven of us were brought here by a negro. He left some grub with us, and promised to bring us some more, but he hasn't been back since. I'm afraid he's been caught or killed. Seems to me that was a week ago, but I can't tell much about the days. I've been so hungry I couldn't think straight. The country's been so full of rebel cavalry that we've kept far back in the cave, to run no risk of being seen. Poor Jimmy Babington's been carrying water for us, but I haven't seen him for some time. I'm awfully afraid

he's fallen into the creek. I was looking for him when I ran against you."

Si sorrowfully recalled the boot-peg water bucket, and the dead body he had found upon entering the cave. Firing began over by the road. He picked up his gun, and looked fixedly at Serg't Glasscock and his rebel companions.

"Better shoot 'em ter-wunst an' git rid o' they'uns," suggested Jim Hobeaw, picking up his carbine to assist in the execution. Wils Dunnell did the same. "They'uns deserve hit, 'specially, pizen ole Reub Glasscock."

"They'uns'll make trouble if we'uns don't," added Wils Dunnell.

"I'm just studying what to do with you," said Si, addressing himself to Serg't Glasscock. "We're going to have a lively fight to hold this cave, and"—

"Better surrender t' me, ter-wunst, an' save the fout," saucily broke in Glasscock. "Yo'uns can't make nothin' by hit. Yo'uns got t' give in in the end. We'uns 've got a hull brigade out thar, an' hit'll be dod-blasted foolishness fer t' fout, an'"

"You're not speaking to the subject," interrupted Si. "I wasn't asking your advice about fighting. I've settled that. It's what to do with you. I can't parole you. The wisest thing would be to shoot you, and"

"O, for God's sake, don't shoot us," begged Glasscock, suddenly changing his attitude from boastfulness to supplication. "We'uns air prisoners of war, and hit aint right!"

"Hear the old hypocrite talk," shouted Jim Hobeaw. "We'uns've done seed him shoot Yankee prisoners. Let me shoot him, anyhow. We kin manage the others."

"No! no! for God's sake, don't shoot us!" begged Glasscock. "We'uns won't do nethin'. We sw'ar we'uns won't."

"I tell you what I think I'll do," said Si. "I'll run you into the back part of the cave, and make you stay there until the fight is over. Git up, now, and mosey back there, clear out of sight."

"O, no; for God's sake, don't make we'uns go back thar 'mong the sperits," pleaded Glasscock. "We'uns ruther be shot ter-wunst. Them ghosts back thar drag us right down t' hell."

"Git up an' git, as y're toid, yo' ole parsecutin' hellion," said Jim Hobeaw, enjoying his late superior's terror, and raising his carbine as if to strike him. "Git back thar, as y're toid."

The firing seemed nearer, as if Shorty and the rest were falling back, and Si was impatient to be out with them.

"Hold up your hands and swear that you will conduct yourselves as prisoners and take no part in the fight," he commanded. All their hands went up, and they answered with one accord:

"We'uns sw'ar hit."



"DO YOU SURRENDER, OR SHALL I WRING YOUR NECK LIKE A CHICKEN'S?"

"Steve, do you feel strong enough to handle a gun?"

"Yes," answered Steve.

"Well, take this carbine, and sit down on that rock, and watch them. If they make a move toward escaping, or mixing in, shoot the first one that does it. Come on, boys. Let's go outside."

Alf Russell was still on his mission of mercy, but Gid and Uncle Ephraim went out with Si, leaving Jim Hobcaw and Wils Dunnell standing at the mouth of the cave, anxiously watching the progress of events.

With flaming torch of fat pine in hand, Alf Russell had succeeded in finding all five of Steve Bigler's comrades who were

yet living. He did not come to one of them an hour too soon. They had been three days in the cave without food, which, added to their utter weakness and exhaustion when they arrived, had brought each one of them to the point of death. The noise in the front of the cave had aroused them from their deathly lethargy. They were dimly trying to comprehend where they were, and what was happening. With much forethought, Alf crumbled a cracker into his cup of coffee, and gave each of them a few spoonfuls of the liquid. The effect was immediate, and some began to speak a few words.

"Where am I?" dreamily inquired Ross

Blakely, turning his dim eyes from Alf's lurid torch to the ghostlike forms of the stalagmites and the glistening white bones covering the ground. "Is this Rusurrection morning? Is this the other world?"

Alf remembered him three months before as the cheeriest and most undiscourageable of their detachment at Andersonville, always with a joke on his lips, or a word of hope and helpfulness for his despairing companions.

Alf filled the bootleg-bucket with water and washed all their faces and hands, which made them much brighter. He made another cup of coffee, crumbled another hardtack in it, and again went their rounds, giving each a few spoonfuls at a time.

"I guess I have given them all the food and stimulation that is safe at this time," said he to himself. "I'll go out now where the boys are. They may need me."

They did.

Out of the confusion in the rebel regiment aroused by the unexpected volley and the fall of the Colonel and Captain arose a commanding voice, shrill and penetrating as a steam-whistle:

"Steady, men! Steady! Count off for fighting on foot! COUNT OFF!"

Shorty stepped forward and parted the bushes to get a view of the owner of the voice. He was a small, slight man, with a black beard, who had mounted his horse, and was gesticulating with his sword, as he called the men into line.

"Apparently the Major or Lieutenant-Colonel," said Shorty to those next him. "I'll get him presently. Keep cool, boys, and only shoot when you get a good aim on something. Fire low. Aim at their belts. Harry, you and Sandy scatter out more to the right, so as to give them an idea of more of us. Monty, you run over to that rock on the left, and get behind it. Brainard, you and Grimshaw stay near me. All of you take a look at me occasionally, and fall back as I do."

Some of the more excitable rebels were firing wildly into the woods, where they thought they saw something, or merely to shoot and make a noise, and show their interest in the affair. These were stopped and brought into line, and the counting off for horseholders proceeded. Apparently, the men had little liking for the advance into the woods, for as the count came to each fourth man, who had to hold horses, he would shout "Bully," instead of "Four," and brought out a chuckle of congratulation from the other lucky horseholders.

"Stop that, you cowardly scoundrels," yelled the shrill-voiced little Major. "That's no way for the Jeff Davis Dragoons to act. Captains, make No. 1's hold horses, and send No. 4's forward."

A simultaneous groan rose from the disappointed men.

The Major dressed the line a little in the road, and then commanded:

"Attention," battalion. Forward—march!"

The line started slowly into the woods, and the Major turned to follow it, when an Aid dashed up.

"Major, are you in command?" he inquired. "The General's compliments, and what the devil's the matter back here?"

"We have been fired upon by a strong force of Yankees up there in the woods," answered the Major, halting the line. "The Colonel and Capt. Dost, and some men have been wounded, and I'm just moving forward to drive the Yankees out."

"Pooh! Pooh!" said the Aid, scornfully. "There's no Yankee force within 15 miles. That's only a squad of those thieving bummers. We've no time to fool with them. We must go on to Waynesborough, to save Augusta. Drop them and join the column."

"I tell you it's no squad of bummers, sir. It's a regular Yankee command, probably a company—may be a battalion, sir—and I'm going to whip them."

"O, stuff and nonsense," said the Aid, impatiently. "I tell you there's no force of Yankees around here that a company can't handle. This is no time to be shell-ing peanuts. We're needed to save Augusta—every man that we can get. Send a Sergeant out to reconnoiter and come on. There goes the headquarters bugle now."

"I did send a Sergeant out, sir," said the Major, whose fighting blood was up. "They captured him. I'm going to punish them for shooting the Colonel. Give my compliments to the General, sir, and say that I will finish up this little job in a hurry, and overtake the column before night, sir."

"I shall report to the General, sir," said the Aid, galloping away to overtake the column.

"Now, men," said the Major, turning to his line, "Let us go up there with a whereas, and root those fellows out in a hurry. They aint worth but a few minutes, and that's all we've got to give them. Don't waste any time taking prisoners. Shoot them down as fast as you come to them. Forward—march!"

"Let them come through that first fringe of brush before you shoot, boys," commanded Shorty. "They're too far off yet."

The Major came on resolutely, riding through the brush at the exact place where Uncle Ephraim had led the boys through. "He's got real sand, to ride while the others is on foot," remarked Shorty, drawing a bead on the Major. "But my business obliges me to drop him."

He fired, but to his amazement saw

through the smoke the Major sitting erect on his horse, urging the line forward.

The other boys fired, and the rebel line stopped and began a return fire.

"Forward, there! Go ahead!" shouted the Major. "Don't stop! Push on!"

Shorty hastily reloaded, and fired again at the Major, with the same ill-success.

"Blast it all, what's the matter with me?" he exclaimed as he ran along the line to fire at another place and give the impression of greater numbers. "I'm shooting as if I was badly rattled."

The rebels were now firing rapidly, and yelling as they pushed through the brush. Shorty caught a glimpse of the Major above the smoke, but just as he drew down on him his enemy dropped. Tom Brainard had shot his horse.

The bullets were cutting the twigs above the heads of the boys, but they had kept so well under cover that none had been wounded. But the rebels were pressing on so strongly, under the Major's adjurations, that they had to run back from one tree or rock to another, and presently were near where the descent began to go under the cliff.

Si came rushing up, with Gid and Uncle Ephraim. He took in the situation with a quick glance, and then ran over to a rock to the left, where he could get an enfilade fire and make a distraction as if a new force had appeared on the rebel flank. Alf came up in time to catch sight of him and run after.

They reached the rebels' right flank, all fired at once, and yelled at the top of their voices. For a moment the manuver seemed effective. The firing died down, and the advance stopped, as the rebels looked around to see what this new alarm meant.

But the shrill-voiced little Major was not to be bluffed.

"Go ahead there," he shouted to his men. "What are you stopping for? Go ahead! Capt. Peters, throw your company around, and smash those fellows. Forward, battalion!"

Si now rushed back to the center to be with Shorty, and meet the brunt of the attack. Shorty had shot twice in the direction of the voice of the Major, who was now on foot, and out of sight, but apparently without effect, as the stentorian commands continued, and the line pressed forward. The rebels had now found the flanks of the line, and were pressing it inward and backward to the cliff.

"It's no use staying out here any longer," said Si. "We'd better get into the cave as soon as possible."

He motioned to Sandy and Pete to run back to the cave, and ran over to tell Alf, Gid and Uncle Ephraim to do the same. While he was gone, Shorty, who was reloading, heard the voice of the little Major quite near, and looking under the

brush saw him but a few rods away. He made a sudden dash forward to catch the Major, and yank him in bodily, but tripped on a vine when within a couple yards of him, and fell headlong, just in time, however, to avoid several shots from the men immediately around the Major, whom Shorty had not seen. Si came back in time to see the mishap of his partner, and before the rebels could collect their senses dashed forward, with Tom Brainard at his heels. They fired their guns into the group of rebels, helped Shorty to his feet, and ran back behind the big pine which stood at the top of the descent to the cliff. There Si, Shorty, Brainard and Grimshaw waited till the rest had passed on down. Then Si and Shorty waited until Brainard and Grimshaw went, and then followed them under the cliff.

Shorty's dash had disconcerted the Major for an instant, and this gave the boys time to get under cover.

The Major came on presently, revolver in hand, and peered cautiously around the pine, to see where his enemy had gone. Shorty improved the moment to put a bullet-hole through the Major's hat, and then fell to cursing himself again for his bad aiming.

There was a long pause, while the Major reconnoitered the situation, and decided upon his next plan.

"Say, Yanks," he called down presently. "Surrender. We've got you. You can't get away."

"Go to the devil, you little, sawed-off hop-o'-my-thumb," Si shouted back. "If you want us come and take us."

"Yanks, if I have to come down there after you I won't leave a man alive."

"We know you won't. But you won't come down. We won't leave a man of you alive, if you try, you jackass-lunged little thimble-full of treason," Shorty yelled back.

The Major took another look around and saw the inaccessibility of the cliff from every point except the narrow path by the pine.

"Now, men, surrender, and save any more trouble and bloodshed," he began, argumentatively.

"We aint in business to save trouble and bloodshed," Si interrupted him. "We enlisted for the purpose of making it and for just such little runts of traitors as you."

"Yanks, if you'll surrender I'll treat you fair and square, as prisoners of war."

"Go to blazes, you homeopathic vial of cussed secession," yelled Shorty. "We know how you treat prisoners of war. We've been to Andersonville."

"Come on with your trouble and bloodshed, you fi'-penny-bit edition of Jeff Davis, and let's see who'll get sick of it first," shouted Si. "We come near licking your whole regiment, and we'll do it

yet. We're from Injianny, and one Injiannian can lick 10 Georgians any day in the week. Hooray for Injianny!"

From the crashing of stones down into the creek they could tell that the rebels were walking around on top of the cliff, but this did not disturb them. There was no way on the other side to get down.

The rebel Major was getting angrier every minute. There was a little pause, and then he called out:

"I shall waste no more time in parleying!"—

"Who's asking you to talk, you black-muzzled little tadpole?" yelled Shorty. "You're keeping up the conversation for your own pleasure. It's seldom that you get a chance to speak to gentlemen. Shut up, and play your cards."

"I'll give you just five minutes to surrender and come out," said the Major, speaking very deliberately. "At the end of that time I'll roast you alive in that hole, as I would a den of rattlesnakes. Serg't Gillen, take five men and run back to the wagons for axes."

The boys gave a startled look at Si at this new proposition, but Si calmly reassured them with:

"Let him try it. He thinks this is just a common cliff, as we did. This cave reaches back that way mebbe a mile. He can't get wood enough down here to roast out a little corner of it."

"You'll roast your own men if you roast anybody," shouted Shorty, but this apparently produced no effect.

"Don't wait any five minutes," said Si. "We aint-asking no time from you, you

blasted little nubbins of villainy. You're a cowardly little bull-frog, with your bazoo the biggest part of you. You're afraid to fight us man-fashion. Georgia crackers never would stand up before Injiannians. Hooray for Injianny!"

"For God's sake, le' me git out," begged Serg't Glascock. "I don't want to be barbecued. Taint fa'r nur Christian t' keep we'uns hyah."

"Sit still, you infernal rebel," said Steve Bigler, cocking his carbine with an effort. "You'll stay the play out, alive or dead."

Brush, limbs, fat pineknots, and portions of trunks of trees came crashing down over the cliff, and then they heard the sound of axes. Shorty got on the far side, and keeping out of the way of the falling stuff, tried in vain to get another shot at the Major. Si lighted a pine-knot, and began a composed survey of the apparently interminable recesses of the great cavern.

In a little while the light was shut off from the front by the mass of stuff thrown over the cliff.

"One more chance," called the Major. "You can see that I can roast you alive. I'll do it if you don't surrender this minute. One more minute, and then we'll throw fire down into that truck."

"Go to the seventh cellar of brimstone, you ill-begotten little whelp of perdition," shouted Shorty, firing at the sound of the voice.

A blazing pine-knot fell into the stuff, and the mass of small limbs and twigs flamed up fiercely.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THRILLING EXPERIENCES IN THE CAVE—OLD ACQUAINTANCES APPEAR ON THE SCENE.

All large caves "breathe."

This is particularly noticeable when the entrance is very much smaller in comparison with the extent of the cavern.

It is a phenomenon depending upon the changes in temperature. When the outside air heats up and becomes rarified, the denser, colder air inside flows out, frequently in a strong, propulsive current, and vice versa.

Following the unusually cold spell, the weather in central Georgia had become very warm, and the air in the cave where Si and his friends were swept outward to help restore the equilibrium.

When the flames began to leap up, Si had called to the rest to come and carry the prisoners to a large, high, dry chamber, which Alf Russell had found, and where they would be likely to be least affected by the smoke.

But to Si's astonishment no smoke at all came back into the cave. It was all carried forward by the strong outward breathing of the lungs of the earth.

"Do you notice that, Shorty?" exclaimed Si jubilantly. "No smoke at all coming in. All blowing out. The Lord's interfering in our behalf."

"The Lord's always been mighty good to us," answered Shorty reverently, "because we've been on His side. But I hope He won't interfere when we come up with them Jeff. Davis Dragoons again. We want to settle with them all by ourselves. Let Him just stand off, and He'll see the he-est old fight that He ever looked on."

"Come, now, Shorty, don't talk that way," remonstrated Si, as he watched the roaring, crackling flames. "We want the Lord's help to save them fellers particularly for us, and run us up against them somewhere soon, while this is fresh in our minds. I'm awfully fraid that Kilpatrick 'll get the first whack at them, and leave nothing for us. This is worse than Andersonville, even. Why, their intentions were good to roast us all alive."

"No, Si; nothing could be worse than Andersonville. It'd 'a' been God's mercy to thousands of those poor fellows we've seen to've run 'em into a cave, as these fellers intended us, and burned them up at once. I'd a heap rather be toasted to a crisp in a few minutes, than starve and rot

to death with the scurvy. But, then, that's no thanks to the Jeff. Davis Dragoons. Their hellishness is all the same."

Through the crackling of the flames they could hear the rebels yelling boisterously and triumphantly.

"You think you are paying us up for that Colonel and Captain," said Shorty, slaking his fist in their direction. "Yell while you can, you un-hung traitors. We haint scarcely begun yet. We'll go through that regiment o' yours worse'n a run of cholery."

Then they heard, from a distant hill, the bugle sounding the recall strongly and repeatedly.

"They'll go now," said Si. "That's their brigade bugle, calling on them to quit fooling, and come along."

A piercing yell rent the air behind him. It was a shout from Ross Blakely, now wildly insane. His reason, tottering from the long-drawn-out misery of imprisonment, disease and starvation, from the hardships and excitement of the escape, now reeled into delirium at awakening in the tomb-like gloom, amid the white bones of horrible beasts, the ghostly stalactites and stalagmites, looking like shrouded corpses of giants, the groans of his fellow-prisoners, the roaring flames in front, with dark, spectral forms flitting about in the lurid glare.

"O, God," he cried, "this is hell! Dear Jesus Christ, what have I done that you would not save me from here? I know I have sinned, but have I deserved this? I tried hard to be good. O, dear Jesus Christ, you will not let me burn here forever, without a drop of water to moisten my tongue? Did I not suffer enough on earth to atone for my sins? Have mercy on me, O, God."

"Come, Ross, old boy," said Si, running to him, and trying to put his hand on him. "Calm down. You're all right. We're all—"

"You here, too, Si Klegg?" shrieked the poor maniac, recoiling from him. "My God, this is awful. And there's Steve Bigler's bones. Poor Steve; he died before I did. I saw him die. And there's Capt. Wirz," he continued, with a wilder shriek, as he caught sight of Serg't Giasacock in the ruddy glare. "My God,

they've sent us to the same hell with Capt. Wirz. We'll stay here forever."

"Ross! Ross! Don't you know me?" asked Alf, running up, and catching hold of one of the skeleton-like hands. "I'm Alf Russell, Co. Q, 200th Indiana Volunteer Infantry. I'm alive, we're all alive; and"—

"No, no; you're a devil. You're come to torment me. You've come to drag me into the flames, there! Keep off!"

He broke away, and snatching up a long bone from the floor of the cave, struck with it frantically.

"We'd better keep away from him, and leave him alone," advised Alf. "We can't do anything for him until the fit works off. He'll calm down then, himself, if it don't kill him."

"That's what I'm afraid of," remarked Si despairingly. "That fire excites him. If we could only put it out he might quiet down. Shorty, let's look around for some poles. The rebels are probably gone by this time, and we might shove those logs off into the creek, and put out the fire."

Ross Blakely's shrieks had stirred up the other prisoners, who were moaning dismally. Con Gildea, an Irish boy, was fumbling feebly at his beads, which he had kept, though nearly everything else went. Suddenly his eyes blazed, and he began shrieking, too.

"Tain't hell, b'yes," he yelled. "It's only purgatory. We'll be out by-an'-by. O, Mother o' God, send us speedy deliverance! O, Virgin Mary, pray for us! O, Queen of Hivin, take us out av this! O, Blissid Virgin, save us from hell! O, Mother of God, have mercy on us! O, Mother of Christ, put out the fires of purgatory. B'yes, b'yes, this ain't hell. It's only purgatory."

Then he, too, caught sight of Serg't Glasscock, moving back to escape the increasing heat, and shrieked as he fell over on his side:

"O, God in Hivin, it is hell! There's Capt. Wirz himself!"

Si and Shorty had succeeded in finding some poles, but the fire had grown so hot that they could not get near it. They came back at this fresh outbreak of shrieks, and looked around in dismay.

"They're all going crazy as March hares," Si murmured despairingly. "It'll kill every one of them."

Then it flashed through his mind that he had heard something of the calming effect of music upon insane people. "Try singing to them, Alf," he called out.

Never had Alf Russell's sweet tenor rung out with such a pure, liquid, flute-like gush of melody as when he filled the echoing aisles and grottoes with:

"Yes, we'll rally 'round the flag, boys; we'll rally once again.

Shouting the battle-cry of Freedom.

"We'll rally from the hillside, we'll gather from the plain,
Shouting the battle-cry of Freedom."

Si and the others sent in a thundering chorus:

"The Union forever—hurrah, boys,
hurrah!
Down with the traitor—up with the star;
While we rally 'round the flag, boys—
rally once again,
Shouting the battle-cry of Freedom!"

Ross Blakely stopped shrieking, stopped brandishing his mastodon's fore-leg, and turned his look on Alf, who continued:

"We are springing to the call of our
brothers gone before,
Shouting the battle-cry of Freedom,
And we'll fill the vacant ranks with a mil-
lion freemen more,
Shouting the battle-cry of Freedom."

"Sure, they don't sing songs loike that in purgatory," said Con Gildea, sitting up after the boys had roared out the chorus. Again Alf Russell thrilled out:

"We will welcome to our numbers the
loyal, true and brave,
Shouting the battle-cry of Freedom.
And altho' they may be poor, not a man
shall be a slave,
Shouting the battle-cry of Freedom."

"Say, boss, sing dat ober agin. I want t' larn hit," said Uncle Ephraim. "Hit jes' jines in wid my mind better'n ary hymn I ebber heard afo'."

Alf repeated the verse, and Uncle Ephraim joined this time in the chorus with unusual unction.

All the prisoners were quiet, now, and listening, with a new light shining in their eyes. When Alf finished the last verse—

"So we're springing to the call; from the
East and from the West,
Shouting the battle-cry of Freedom.
And then we'll hurl the rebel crew from
the land that we love best,
Shouting the battle-cry of Freedom."

They attempted, with feeble lungs, with wasted throats, and with scurvy-distorted mouths to join in the booming chorus, filling the cavern with a new and strange volume of harmony.

"They're all right now," said Si, in a tone of satisfaction. "Alf, I guess they can stand a little more to eat, now. Being so hungry makes 'em likelier to go crazy. Better have Uncle Ephraim fix 'em up some light skillagalee that'll set on their stomachs. And, Uncle Ephraim, you'd better get all the cups together, and make coffee for all of us. I'm beginning to feel like a snack myself."

"Whar in de libben' worl' will I git de

"water?" gasped Uncle Ephraim, looking at the roaring wall of flame between him and the creek.

"O, look around back there a little ways," answered Si, "and you'll likely find a fine spring. There generally is one in these big caves."

Uncle Ephraim's fear of the "sperits" and "harn'ts" was subsiding somewhat, under the influence of his companions' contemptuous indifference to these ever-present terrors to the negroes and poor whites, but Alf had to go ahead of him with a fat-pine torch before he would venture far back into the darkness. Following the sound of dripping water, they soon came to a fine, crystal spring, but Uncle Ephraim was too nervous to examine it. Carefully keeping Alf between him and inky blackness beyond, he hastily filled all his cups, and toddled off in a hurry toward the welcome light in the front. Nor could Alf persuade him to go back to the spring alone after more water.

Si and the rest made a good dinner off the contents of their haversacks, giving the two deserters and the four rebel prisoners a fair share. Though Steve Bigler begged hard for more, Si thought it wisest to confine him to a half-cup of coffee, a single hardtack, and a small piece of lean meat, lightly broiled.

The fire in front was losing its fierceness, and subsiding into a great bed of embers. Though Si believed that the rebels had left in obedience to the imperative bugle-call, he was disturbed by hearing continuous chopping, apparently from the hill over the cave, and from time to time fresh logs had fallen over to feed the fire.

"Mighty poor axman doing that chopping," Si commented, with his customary judicial opinion of that class of work. "'Taint even good nigger chopping."

Presently a dead pine fell lengthwise over the cliff, with its top in the creek, and the flames greedily ran along it. The sound of the chopping ceased, and no more chunks came down.

Pete Skidmore, who had all along worried more over the fate of Abednego than anything else, was crazy to get out and see if his steed had escaped roasting.

With their poles Si and Shorty began pushing forward the fire, so as to clear a way through it. But the rocks had become so hot that it was hard work, and they made little progress.

Si ordered Uncle Ephraim to take the bootleg bucket and go back to the spring for water, but, obedient as that colored gentleman usually was, nothing would induce him to go back there alone.

Pete, however, jumped at the suggestion. To the right of the entrance, as they looked out, there had been much less fire than elsewhere. The shape of the overhanging rock protected it, a soggy

stump had been rolled down, which refused to take fire, and there had little stuff fallen around. Pete came back with the bootleg full of water, which he used judiciously on the embers, and then shoved them forward. He worked industriously and perspiringly at this until he had made a hole through which he could hope to rush out with nothing worse than a severe scorching. With another bootleg of water, Sandy drenched him from head to foot, and he made a bolt.

He was half-blinded by the smoke and the heat, and it seemed as if his skin was cracking all over him, but he finally gained the open air, and crawled cautiously up on a rock to take a look around. He had to rub off his singed eye-lashes before he could see anything. The first thing he saw was that the hill above the cave was all on fire. The flames running up the dead pine which they had heard cut down, and which fell lengthwise, with its top in the creek, had fired the stuff on the hill, and it was burning ravenously. The smoke from the carpet of leaves was so dense that Pete could see but a little ways, but he worked his way over the rocks until he could see the horses, and rejoiced to find that, aside from their fright, they were safe and unharmed. There was a wide wall of high rock between them and the fire under the cliff, and that on the hill did not reach down to them. Seeing no rebels near, Pete slipped down into the cove, and patted and caressed Abednego, to restore the animal's peace of mind, and assure him that his friends were looking out for him. Then he climbed to the summit of the rocks again to make a cautious reconnaissance for the rebels. A gust of wind opened a vista through the smoke, and Pete dropped down behind a rock, for there, at the very top of the hill, and the farther edge of the burning, he saw a man seated on a rock, which, when it was clear, commanded a view all around, and especially of the cove in which were the horses. The smoke closed in again, and Peter, keeping down out of sight, waited for another gust to make further developments. When it did come Pete recognized, to his amazement, that the man was Elder Hornblower, seated there, out of reach of the fire and the smoke, with his glasses on, reading a newspaper. He had his coat off, and leaning against the rock were an ax and a shot-gun.

The Elder had ridden up to the brigade in time to see the Jeff. Davis Dragoons closing in around the cliff, and was with Maj. Spileman when he decided to roast the Yankees under the cliff. In fact, it was the Elder who suggested that proceeding, and helped manage its details. With his fine scent for horseflesh, he had noticed the horses in the cove, which none of the others had, and he did not call their

attention to them. When the regiment was hurried away by the bugle call, he remained, and then proceeded to put some finishing touches on the operation, and make sure that the roasting would be complete. It was he who had cut down the fat-pine, and it was hard work for a man as little used to the use of the ax. But in addition to his bitterness of revenge against the Yankees, he had a prospect of 11 fine horses to animate him. He was now awaiting the fire to do its work, and cool down sufficiently to allow him to remove the horses. That might not be until some time the next morning, but 11 horses were worth even a sleepless night of watching to a dignified man of middle age. He had a "snack" with him, as was his custom, so that he would not suffer from hunger, and he proposed to attend to the matter all by himself, and not have to share his booty with anyone. The Elder was a thrifty man, especially about horses, as old-time Elders were likely to be.

Pete sighed that he had not brought his gun with him, and after a little further look around, without seeing any rebels, slipped back to report to Si.

Pete had stayed out so long that Shorty became alarmed, and was busy, with Sandy's help, in enlarging the passage so that he could go in search of him. Pete therefore, got in again, with little trouble, and they crowded around to hear his report.

Pete wanted to take his gun and go out and bushwhack the Elder, but Shorty restrained him.

"No; Pete," he said, "it aint right to go out gunning for ministers of the Gospel, even if they are rebels, and tried to fry us in our own grease. Allowances must always be made for preachers. He's naturally huffy at Yankees, and I must say I don't blame him. I'll go out and take a look around for the rebels, and if everything's all right I'll bring him in, and we'll have some fun with him."

Shorty worked himself out, crawled up on the rock, studied the smoke-drift until he caught the lay of it, and could conceal himself with it, and then made a reconnaissance which satisfied him that all the rebels were gone. He then circled around to cut off the Elder's retreat, and finally came upon him leaning against a cedar growing on the rock, and heavily dozing, from his unwonted exertion. He seated himself beside the Elder, took an easy position, and then gave the Elder a sharp nudge with his elbow.

The Elder awoke with a start, and gazed with open-mouthed terror at the Yankee sitting placidly beside him, regarding him coolly. For a minute neither spoke, and then Shorty broke the silence with:

"Howdy, Elder? Glad to see you again. We seem to've gotten in the way of meeting up pretty often, haven't we? But you don't seem to be as tickled as you might be, seeing such an old acquaintance as I am. I tell you, old fellow, we've had great time together, haven't we?" continued Shorty, giving the Elder a slap on the thigh, which made him wince. "Now, haven't we had great times, just? Nothing ever like 'em. Sometimes you seemed on top, and then I seemed to throw you, and so it went." Shorty laughed boisterously at the recollections, but the Elder's fat face was ashy.

"Say, old feller," Shorty went on, "I heard you preach that great sermon of yours about the spoilers coming down through the wilderness on to the high places three several times. Lucky, wasn't I? Never had to put a cent in the contribution box, either. First time we were nearly starving to death, and we stole your grub and your horses. Mean, wasn't it? But a hungry stomach has no conscience. Say, that was a fine race we had across the country, wasn't it? Don't think that was ever equaled in the State of Georgy. You have your faults, but you're a good rider, and a dead hard one to get away from in a stern chase. The next time I heard your sermon you were getting up a hanging-bee, with me and my partner to play the star parts. It wasn't your fault that you slipped up at the last minute, and we were reserved for drowning at some future period. The third time I heard your sermon—but the memory of that is perhaps painful to you. I'll omit it. Say, you've a great text now for a new sermon. You've been copying after that Prooshan King—he was a Prooshan King, wasn't he?—who tried to burn three Hebrew children in a kiln, heated seven times as hot as usual? You tried to do that same thing with some Yankees, and, like the Hebrew children, there aint even the smell of fire on our garments. I want you to come right down with me to where the boys are, and see if it aint so. Pick up your coat and gun and your ax, and come right along. The boys are waiting for you."

Without venturing a reply to the railery, the crushed Elder, whom Fate seemed to delight in betraying, took up his things and did as bidden, Shorty considerably helping him on with his coat, and picking up the spectacles which had fallen from his nerveless hand.

"Here, boys," shouted Shorty, as he worked the Elder through the opening into the cavern, "is our old and favorite minister, the Elder Hornblower, who it has been our privilege to listen to so often in the past few months. He's got a new sermon now, on a modern edition of the wonderful escape of the Hebrew children from

ON THE MARCH TO THE SEA.



“THE ELDER AWOKE WITH A START, AND GAZED WITH OPEN-MOUTHED TERROR AT THE YANKEE SITTING PLACIDLY BESIDE HIM.”

the fiery furnace. Walk back there, Elder, to that beautiful pulpit, and give us the sermon.”

Before they could proceed further with the Elder, Sandy Baker called out:

“Say; Say! Just look over there!”

The news that a squad of Yankees were roasting to death in a cave on Rocky Creek had gone through the country, and a great gathering of negroes, with some whites, rushed over to see it. The smoke

showed them the way, but the fire prevented their approach from that side, and they swarmed up on the rugged rocks directly opposite. These were soon covered with them, gazing with horror-struck, open eyes and mouth upon the glowing fire in front of the cavern. They worked themselves up into great emotional excitement over the shrieks and groans they thought they heard proceed from the doomed men writhing in the flames.

They wailed and shouted:

"O, Lord, do hab mercy!"

"Bressed God Almighty, sabe deir souls!"

"Good Lord Jesus, come down an' help dem!"

"What in the world is the matter with the people over there?" asked Si in wonder. "Are they holding a revival meeting in the brush, or have they come there simply to go crazy?"

"Dey t'inks we uns is burnin' t' def,"

Uncle Ephraim explained, with a wide-reaching grin, "an' dey've come t' see hit, an' pray oveh hit. Dese Washington County niggers 's a powerful prayin' lot."

"Too bad that they should be feeling so sorry over us," said Si. "Let's go out and show ourselves, and relieve their minds."

The opening had now been considerably widened, and they all, Steve Bigler included, ran out onto a ledge at the water's edge and shouted lustily:

"Hooray for the Union! Hooray for Abe Lincoln! Hooray for Billy Sherman! Hooray for old Fuzjanny! We'il hang Jeff Davis on a sour apple tree. Don't worry about us, friends. Rebel fire can't hurt us."

The apparition seemed, if anything, to increase the excitement among the negroes. It appeared to them a wonderful miracle.

"Great God Almighty, wonderful are thy ways," shouted a stentor-lunged negro. "See dem walking right froo de fire, lack de Hebrew children."

"Dat's ole Kummel Hanson's Simeon," explained Uncle Ephraim. "He's de powerfulest exhorter an' prayer in all dese parts."

"Glory to God," shouted the other negroes. "Jes' lack de Hebrew children. Not a smell ob fire on deir garments."

"De Yankees is de Lawd's own people. Dis shows hit," continued Simeon. "De wicked an' de powers ob darkness cannot pervail agin dem. Bress God fer all His marcies."

"O, jes' see dat man," exclaimed one of the more observing, pointing at Steve Bigler. "He's bin wickeder dan de rest, an' de fire done burn all de meat off his bones."

This was too much for the boys, who exploded into a laugh that was a severe shock to the highly-wrought religious fervor of the gathering.

Si brought it down still nearer the plane of every humanity by calling out:

"Say, friends, have you brought along anything to eat? We've got a good many men here, and not much provisions, and we don't know when we'll be able to travel out of here."

"Eh, what's dat?" repeated the stentorian Simeon, stopping his praying, and requiring, as was usual with the Southern

negroes and whites, a question repeated before he would comprehend of answer.

Si repeated his question, but before the negro could answer a loud tumult was heard approaching from the direction of the road. It was a crashing, beating din, and above it rose a sound as of commands. It reached the negroes' ears, who stopped praying and shouting and turned their eyes in that direction.

"Better get back in the cave, boys, and get your guns," said Si. Then he called to the negroes across the creek:

"Can you see who's making that noise?"

"What dat?"

"Can you see who's making that noise?"

"Kin we uns see who's dat makin' de noise?"

"Yes; yes," said Si, impatiently. "Can you see them?"

"Kin we uns see dem? Of co'se we uns kin."

"Well, who is it?"

"Who it it?"

"Yes; yes. Who is it? Answer at once, without talking back."

"How kin we uns answer widdout talkin' back?"

"Tell me at once, you dumbed block-heads," said Si, savagely, "who's that coming over from the road?"

"Ober f'om de big road dar?"

"Yes, over from the big road?"

"Why, dey's a hull passel ob critters-back soldiers. Dey's lef' deir hosses in de road, an' are trompin' froo de brush."

"What kind of soldiers are they—Yank or rebel?"

"Which? Dem soljers ober dar?"

"Yes; them soldiers over there?"

"Why dey's all got blue cloze on, an' day's Yanks, bress de Lawd."

"What are they making all that noise about?"

"What dey makin' all dat noise fer?"

"Yes. Why are they kicking up such a rumpus?"

"Why, dey's cut down cedar brushes, an' beatin' out de fire as dey come along."

Si understood now, and his heart bounded. Without waiting for his gun he jumped down and waded through the creek, out of reach of the fire, clambered up on the bank, ran forward to the knoll on which they had made their last stand before retreating to the cave, and shouted at the top of his voice:

"Hello, boys! Hooray for the Union! Hooray for Abe Lincoln!"

An instant reply came in Shad Graham's voice:

"Hello, Si Klegg. Is that you?"

"Bet your bottom dollar. How are you, Shad?"

In a minute or two Shad made his way through the smoke. His hands and face were black and sweating, his hair and

clothes singed, and he had a cedar brush in one hand and his gun in the other.

"Why, where in the world did you come from, Shad?" inquired Si, after shaking hands heartily with him.

"O, I was making my way across the country with a poutoon train, when I heard from the niggers about the rebels

roasting some Yankees in a cave. Left the poutoon back there in the road, and started out for here. How are you, anyway? Still alive?"

"Alive? Well, I should say so. Lived Yanks south of the Ohio River. JeL Davis 'll find that out before we're through with him."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BOYS LEAVE THE CAVE AND TAKE UP QUARTERS IN A HOUSE WHICH HAS SHELTERED REBEL DIGNITARIES.

"What in the world have the Johnnies been trying to do to you, Shorty?" asked Shad, as the former came up, and they all stood for a moment looking at the great heap of glowing timbers. "Did they think of serving you up on toast?"

"Something of that kind," answered Shorty. "They've been having Yankees in every other way until they're plum sick of them, and so they concluded they'd try how they'd go barbecued. But they botched the job, as they usually do everything."

"I rather leaned toward the Universalists before the war began," said Shad savagely. "But if there isn't a hell already, there ought to be one incorporated and chartered at once for fellows who'd work a trick like that. And it oughtn't to be a one-ringed circus, about the size of Rhode Island or Delaware, but about as big as Texas, so's to hold the whole Southern Confederacy."

"O, we don't owe them nothing, except for their intentions," answered Shorty, with a shrug. "They didn't bother us any. We're ahead of them on the game at least one Colonel and a Captain, and they had all their trouble for nothing. All the same, we're anxious to come up with the Jeff Davis Dragoons again, and have the play out."

"Well, we've had pretty fair luck so far in Georgy in coming up with gents we had a grudge against," said Si grimly, "and I hope it'll continue."

"Boys," commanded Shad to his men, "a couple of you go back to the wagons, and get a pick and shovel, and make a road to get down here under the cliff. The rest of you work down there to the creek, dip your brush in the water, and beat out the fire till we can get into the cave easily."

While this was going on Uncle Ephraim, who had, since joining the army, managed

to secure himself a complete uniform, exhibited himself, gun in hand, and cartridge-box and belts on, to the assembled negroes across the creek. Perched on a rock at the water's edge in easy conversational distance, he gave a thrilling account of the sanguinary fight before the retreat to the cave, with the prodigious number of rebels slaughtered, and the particularly painful death of those who fell before his own murderous aim.

Next to ghosts and other superstitions there is nothing that a negro likes so well to talk about as bloodshed.

"I done tells yo'," he said, "dar wuz jes' a milyun ob dem—ob Jo Wheeler's cavalry. Dey stretch clean from Atlanty t' Kingdom come, wid more comin' from ebery whichway. De whole country looked rusty wid dem."

"Didn't dat skeer you plum t' deff?" inquired Simeon.

"Hit sho'ly would've, if I hadn't 'a' bin wid Sarjint Klegg an' Corpril Elliott. Dey's de mos' wonderful men alibe. Dey's more dan men. Dey's got a gif', lack dem ole 'postles. Dey's not feared ob nuffin'. Why, dey'd go right inter de lion's den, lack ole Daniel, an' biff aside ob de head any lion dat dar git he back up. De same way wid de harnts an' sperits. Dey go right 'round a whole nest ob harnts an' ghosts an' pay no more 'tenshun t' dem dan yo' would t' a settin' hen. De sperits is afear ob dem."

"Dey'd orter be," said Col. Hanson's Sim. "Dey'unns come straight from de Lawd, an' Fadder Abraham."

"Why, back dar in dat cave," continued Uncle Ephraim, warming up with his story, "de harnts is plentier'n swallers in a chimbley. Dat's de bigges', awfulest cave in de world. Why, hit's bigger down dar dan hit is all out-ob-doors, 'round hyah. Why, hit must be de place whar

de giants libbed afore de flood, an' whar dey went when dey sassed Noah, an' done tole him t' go 'long wid his ole ark, hit warn't a-gwine t' be much of a rain, no-how. Yo' see de bones dar ob men 10 feet high, wid skulls as big as bee-gums. Dar's ghostes dar tall as a hay-stack, all in deir white grave-clothes. Sarjint Klegg says dey're nuffin' but tall white rocks, but I know's better. Dey's only white rocks when Sarjint Klegg looks at dem, fer den dey've got t' be. He makes dem mind. But when dey catches me alone, an' he ain' lookin', den dey's sho'-nuff' ghosts, an' arter dis nigger. Yo' hear de flutter ob deir wings back dar in de dark, an' yo' see dem peakin' out ob de corners an' cran-nies, watchin' yo' wid eyes like sparks ob fires."

"Yas, yas," shuddered Sim and the rest. "We'uns've done seed dem, an' heard dem in de caves ober by de swamp, an' in de graveyards, an' behine de meetin'-houses ob dark nights, when de wind wuz a-blow-in', an' de rain comin' down."

"No, Sim, yo' nobber seed nuffin' lack dese," said Uncle Ephraim, sharply, jealous of the incomparable superiority of his cave and its horrors over anything within the knowledge of his auditors. "All de caves dat yo' common niggers hab seed aint a knot-hole t' dis one, an' de ghostes aint a chipmunk 'longside ob a painter. T'ink ob ghostes as big as an ole sycamore, ob men 10 feet high. But Sarjint Klegg an' Corpril Elliott an' de rest keer no more fer dem dan if dey wuz corn-stalks. Dey say dat all dat flutterin' wuz only bats, when I knows"—

"Tell us 'bout de fout, Eph," broke in Simeon.

"My name's Mr. Ephraim Klegg, sah," said Uncle Ephraim, with dignity. "Hostler to headquarters, 200th Injanny Volunteer Infantry. Yo'll please 'dress me dat-a-way."

"Whew! What a long tail our ole cat's done got," said Simeon. "Well, Mistah Ephum Clag, boss hostler, please tell we-uns 'bout de fout."

"Well, as I wuz a-done tellin', de Johnnies wuz a-comin'—"

"De Johnnies? Who's de Johnnies?"

"De rebel cavalry—Jo Wheeler's men, yo fool. Don't yo' know deir right name? Well, de Johnnies wuz out dar by de mill-yun, an' more a-comin' on ebbery road, an' we'uns thought we jes' lay low, an'—"

"We'uns? Who'd 'yo' mean by we-uns?"

"Me an' Sarjint Klegg, an Corpril Elliott, an de rest."

"Jes' see dat sassy nigger puttin' himself up 'mong white folkses," ejaculated someone, who evidently did not hold Uncle Ephraim in high esteem.

"Shet dat punkin haid of yo'u'n, afore I come right ober dar an' bust hit wide open," answered Uncle Ephraim, savagely. "Free cullud pussions like me kin go wid white folks, but low-down slave niggers lack yo' mus' keep deir distance."

"Shet up, Hoss-head," said Simeon authoritatively. "Go 'head wid yer story, Mistah Ephum. Don't mind dat wufless Hanson nigger. Yo' done frowned him out ob church once fer raisin' a fuss an' 'ruptin' de mo'ners, an' he's nebber liked yo' sense. Go 'head."

"As I wuz sayin' when dat yam-spiller 'rupted me," continued Uncle Ephraim, "we'uns 'cluded we'd lay low an' let dey-uns go on wid deir 'possum-hunt. But jes' den Jim Hobcaw an' Wils. Dunnell sneaked 'way from dey'uns, de Cap'n sount old bottle-nose Giascock an' free udders arter dem, an' dey wuz runnin' right on ter we'uns, an' we'uns 'cluded dat if dey wanted t' hunt porcupines, porcupine-huntin' dey should hab. So Sarjint Klegg he jes' blowed de lights out ob Kunnel Manypenny, an' Corpril Elliott salumvated Cap'n Sidwell, an' I let daylight froo Sile Stunyard, what wuz obsecer on Misteh Ben Small's place fer awhile."

"My goodness gracious! Sakes alibe!" gasped the delighted negroes, reveling in the tale of slaughter.

"Den dey all came at we'uns, jes' lack a nest ob hornets, continued Uncle Ephraim, warming up with his theme. "An' all we'uns lit inter dem as fast as we'uns could load an' shoot, an' piled dey'uns up jes' lack a rabbit-drive. Lan' sake, how we'uns did kill dey'uns off. I mus' hab killed two or free dozen my own self, an' my gun got so hot, an'—"

"Why, den, did yo let dey'uns run yo' back inter de cave?" inquired Hoss-head. "Why didn't yo'uns go right on, an' kill off de whole bilin' ob dem, an' finish up de war?"

"Hoss-head," said Uncle Ephraim severely, "dat wuz lack de question yo' axed de preacher, an' what made me frow yo' out ob de meetin'. Yo' know as little ob military as yo' do of theology. Keep yo' yam-trap shet, or I'll shet it fer yo'. Dey-uns didn't run we'uns back inter de cave. We'uns jes's natcherully sidled back in a military way, an' went in dar t' rest, an' spit on our hands an' start in fresh agin."

"Say, Si," said Shorty, who had been listening, "Uncle Ephraim has de makings of a fine stump-speaker in him, hasn't he? We'll take him home and put him into politics. All he needs is a little more misinformation to carry everything before him and have a fine future."

The application of brush dipped in water was very effective in getting the heat under control, when the burning logs and chunks were shoved off into the creek and the mouth of the cave cleared out.

A smooth path was opened to the road, and Ross Blakely, Clint, Rogers, Alex. Winslow, Con Gildea and Bob Brady were carefully carried to the wagons, and placed on a bed of cedar branches covered with blankets. Steve Bigler insisted on walking, and was supported on the way by Shad Graham, in whose "90" he had been at Andersonville.

Jimmy Babbington's wasted body was

brought out, and the contorted limbs straightened as far as possible, while a grave was dug on the top of the hill, near where the Elder had been found.

"I might go back to the wagons and get some boards, and make him a coffin," suggested one of Shad's men.

"No," answered Shad; "here's my new U. S. blanket. No soldier would wish a better coffin. Ten thousand of the best men that ever breathed have been buried in U. S. blankets. It is the noblest sarcophagus that a soldier can have. It is all that I shall want around me in my grave."

"I'm a reggerly-ordained minister of the Gospel," said the Elder, in a propitiatory way, as he sat on a rock and watched the arrangements for the burial. Nobody had been paying any attention to him, and he was getting more and more anxious as to his fate. Perhaps he might soften their hearts by a ministerial act. "As you have no clergyman present," he continued, "I will, if you wish, conduct the services at the grave."

"No, you canting old rebel hypocrite," said Si savagely. "It'd be rank blasphemy to have any of your seecsh pow-wowing over the grave of a man you have starved to death. We won't have poor Jim's memory insulted by such prating. Uncle Eph-ram?"

"Yes, sah."

"You say that man over there is a leader in the prayer-meetings?"

"Yes, sah, de powerfulestt pray-er an' exhorter in de whole county."

"Well, go and bring him around across the creek, and let him offer up prayer beside this grave."

The other negroes followed their leader, and as Jim Babbington was laid away for his eternal rest the soldiers uncovered their heads, and stood at parade rest, while the woods rang with the rude but fervid and devout appeal to the Throne of Grace from the lips of the poor field-hand who, no matter how inept his words, felt in his soul all that the most eloquent divine could have said at the graveside of one who had died that an enslaved race might be free, and justice and right not depart from the earth.

Willing black hands filled the grave and heaped above it a great pile of stones, as a monument to one of Freedom's martyrs, while Shad hewed flat and smooth a space on the trunk of a pine growing at the grave's head, and wrote there James Babbington's name, company, regiment, and approximate date of death, and below it—

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was
born across the sea,
With the glory in His bosom that trans-
figures you and me.
As He died to make men holy, let us die
to make men free,
While God is marching on."

Then Si ordered a volley fired over the grave, and they went back to the care.

"What in the world are you going to do with your prisoners, Shad?" asked Si.

"My prisoners?" retorted Shad. "I have no prisoners. They're yours. You took them. I've nothing to do with them."

"Indeed you have. You're my commanding officer. You ranked me the minute you came on the ground. I'm mighty glad you came, for that reason alone, for I was racking my brain what to do with them, and now the responsibility's on your shoulders. I don't want to be bothered with them. The Provo-Marshal grumbled at the others I bring in. He's worried enough over what he's already obliged to guard and feed. I hate to turn 'em loose, and it wouldn't be right to shoot them."

"Might shoot the Elder, to show your good-will," suggested Shad. "He richly deserves it."

"No; we've monkeyed with him all we care to. His disappointment'll be punishment for him. It nearly broke his heart to lose one hess. Think how he must feel over losing 'll at once."

Shad, Si and Shorty looked over the rebels thoughtfully.

"Jim Hobcaw and Wils. Dunnell," asked Si, "if we let you go do you think that you can keep out of the hands of the rebels in future?"

"Sartin! Sho," they answered at once. "They'uns'll never lay hands on us agin. Shoot we'uns if they do."

"We'uns, too," said the three of Serg't Glasscock's squad. "We'uns's plum tired o' the war, an' want t' git back home. If you'll let us go thar we'uns'll swar we'uns'll stay thar forever. We'uns know whar we'uns kin lay out an' they'uns'll never find us agin in God A'mighty's world."

"I reckon I mout as well jine the mourners' bench, too," remarked Serg't Glasscock. "I'm gettin' dog-sick o' bein' licked, an' gittin' hit wuss every day. Hits bin gittin' licked every time since Chickamauga, an' I'm no hog. I know when I've got enough."

"That shows common sense," remarked Si. "What we've given you already is only a beginning of what we've got laid up for you. Better get in early and avoid the shower."

The Elder had been watching the proceedings attentively, and hope dawned in his mind at the favorable reception by Si and the rest of these propositions. He arose from the rock, and with the dignity with which he was accustomed to address his audiences, remarked:

"Gentlemen, as much as I grieve to confess it, I perceive—ah, that the cause of the Southern Confederacy is hopeless—ah. The spoilers have indeed come down from the wilderness upon our high places—ah, and we must bow to the will of God—ah. It'll be just and merciful in you gentlemen—ah, to allow us citizens of Jawgy



"I DONE TELLS YO', DAR WAS JES' A MILYUN OB JO WHEELER'S CAVELRY."

to return in peace to our homes and fire-sides—ah, and there abide until the war is over—ah."

"Get out your Bible, Elder," briefly commanded Shad.

The Elder reached in his bosom and produced a small, well-worn volume, which had evidently been re-bound by a shoe-

maker, with a piece of fine calf-skin, sewed at the back with wax-thread.

"Now, Elder," commanded Shad, "I want you to administer the following oath to these men, and take it yourself: We, repentant rebels, and citizens of Georgia, do, of our own free will and accord, solemnly swear that we shall go home, and

remain there in peaceful obedience to the laws of the United States, and give no further aid and comfort to the so-called Southern Confederacy, or any other enemies of the United States. So help me God. Now, all of you take hold of the Bible, and kiss the book after you've sworn."

After the swearing Shad took down their names with great formality in his memorandum-book, which he assured them was part of the archives of the United States, and liable to rise up in judgment against them if they violated their oaths.

"Elder, the rest'll likely keep the oath, and you'd better," Shorty took occasion to say in an aside. "You know you can't lose us, and when we meet up with you again we're liable to know just what you've been doing."

Pete Skidmore had already gotten out Abednego, and was overwhelming him with kind attentions, to make up for the fire-scare.

The rest of the horses were brought out, they all mounted, and followed Shad and his men back to the road.

"Good-by, friends," said Si, waving his hand to the negroes.

"So long, Elder," said Shorty. "Be a loyal citizen from now on, and preach repentance to those who have sinned against the Union, that thy days may be long in the land the Lord thy God gavest us."

"Tell you what we'd better do," said Si to Shorty and Shad, as they rode along. "Those boys are in no shape to go far. We don't know where we'll strike a hospital and a Surgeon. Every mile we go with them in their present shape is dead against them. We'll stop at the first good house we come to, give them a wash and a fix-up, and some light food, and see if we can't bring them around into better shape."

"There seems a house of that kind right ahead," said Shad, according with the idea, and pointing to a large white frame a mile or two ahead in front, which shimmered in the sunshine. Around it were some negro-quarters, glimmering with whitewash.

They came to a small but fairly-kept plantation of several hundred acres, and turned up to the house through a lane of the carrot-shape-topped, sickly-looking cedars, which are inseparable accompaniments of every pretentious house in the South.

"If I owned a plantation the first thing I'd do would be to chop down and burn up every one of those blasted cedars," said Shad, surveying the tree trunks, where the bark had scaled off, showing an unhealthy, leprous white. "I hate the sight of them. They look as if they had some awful skin disease, like a mangy dog, or worse. They're associated in my mind with all the thriftlessness and lack of comfort in these Southern houses—with their doors hanging by one hinge, their rundown farms, their famished, flea-pest-

ered dogs, their lean cattle, and hog-and-hominy victuals."

On the broad porch in front sat in hickory rocking-chairs three women, apparently the aged mother and her two tall, hard-faced old maids or daughters, the latter having been born early in the century, calloused and tanned by its many severe Winters and scorching Summers. They were clearly expectant of a momentous crisis in their lives—a visit from the "plundering, robbing, insulting hordes"—about which the bombastic proclamations of Gov. Joe Brown and Gen. Beauregard sufficiently alarmed them. They had put on their best clothes, and come out to meet their fate, like the Roman matrons and maidens of old.

"Take all we have, but spare our honor," said the elder of the two daughters, a hatchet-faced woman, with a rasping voice, rising and delivering her ultimatum, as Si rode up.

"Confound your honor," said Si. "We want a place to lodge and care for some sick men. Have you got some rooms we can put them in?"

"What! Take nasty, sick Yankees into our house?" shrieked the woman, coming down at once from her heroic to house-keeping details. "What! Take a passel of sick Yankees into the house where President Davis and Vice-President Stephens and Secretary Cobb has slept? Never. Go 'long with them, sah."

"But we are not going along, madam," said Shad firmly. "They are coming in. Jeff Davis's bed, and Aleck Stephens's bed are none too good for them. They are better men than those rebels ever dared be. You ought to do this in mercy and compassion. But if you don't want to do the ministering angel act, you'll have to take them in anyhow."

"If you attempt to bring them in here," shouted the woman, as they began to help the boys out of the wagon, and she caught sight of their ragged, emaciated forms, "we'll throw boiling water on them."

"Indeed you won't, madam," said Shad, coolly but so firmly that they could not mistake him. "Unless you want your house burned down over your heads. Be women, now, and gentle and pitiful to men who are almost dying."

"Take 'em 'round to the nigger-quarters, if you must leave them," shouted the woman. "Don't bring them into where white people live."

"They are not going into the negro-quarters, madam," said Shad. "They are white men and gentlemen—just as true gentlemen as you ever met, and they're going to be taken care of as such. Come, show us some of that famous Southern hospitality, or at least be plain, Christian women."

In the meanwhile Si had gone around behind the house, and there found, as he expected, the wash-house.

He called to the boys to bring the prisoners in there, and set some of them to

filling up the kettles with water, and building fires under them. He saw a pair of sheep-shears sticking in the timbers of the shed, and with these he cut the boys' long, unkempt, matted hair close to their heads, and threw the hair in the fire. They were undressed, and their clothes followed their hair, thus freeing them from hordes of insect persecutors which gave them no rest, night or day. When the water was warmed Si, Shorty and Alf carefully washed the poor bodies with soft soap taken from gourds about the shed, of the thick, varnish-like grime of resin, soot, and dirt accumulated by months of hanging over the pitch-pine fires, and lying afterward in the sand. Shad presently came up with socks, underclothing, shoes, pantaloons and blouses which he had gathered up from the spare ones in his detachment. Once more clean, verminless, and comfortably clad, the boys were carried up to the Jeff Davis room, the Vice-President Aleck Stephens room, the Secretary Cobb room, and laid in the soft beds once occupied by those worthies.

The women saw this desecration with speechless anger, but Shad reminded them that they were getting off very luckily, and the better grace with which they took it, the better it would be for them in the end.

Then, under Alf's directions, Pete and Shad killed some chickens, the negress-cook was discovered, and set to work preparing some broth. Good wheat bread, found in the cupboards, fresh butter and sweet milk brought from the spring-house, and Alf guardedly fed the boys what he thought their stomachs would stand. They soon fell into the first sweet, refreshing sleep they had known for many months of misery and starvation.

Shad went on with his train to the Ogeechee River, while Si, after feeding his horses from the plantation-cribs, and having his boys cook supper for themselves, had them spread their blankets on the porch and prepare to spend the night.

After going with Alf to see the invalids, giving them another portion of gruel and food, and doing whatever else was necessary to make them comfortable, Si and Shorty lighted their pipes, and sat down on the front steps to talk over the situation. Out to them came Miss Sophronia Sutton, the elder of the two daughters. She had accumulated much vitriol under Shad's suppression, and now that he was gone thought she could work it off advantageously on the two partners, who seemed much easier propositions than the self-possessed, authoritative Acting Lieutenant of Engineers.

"Now, since that high and mighty officer is gone, I want you to at once take those nasty fellows out of my beds, and carry them off. I don't want them nor you around here any longer, polluting a Southern home with the presence of an enemy."

"Why, ma'am, them boys aint able to be

moved," expostulated Si. "It'll endanger their lives."

"Well, it don't matter much; they're only Yankees," she snapped. "Anyway, you must take em out of these beds that've been honored by the greatest men in the country. Take 'em out to the nigger-quarters. That's plenty good enough for them."

"Madam," said Si, removing his pipe from his mouth and speaking slowly and deliberately, "them men'll stay right where they are until they are able to be moved, and they'll be given the best kind of care, and it'll be money in your pocket to"—

He was interrupted by a young cavalry Lieutenant dashing up considerably in advance of his men. He called out to his command:

"Here, men, come up here and burn this house. Get the people and things out, and treat the people well, but burn the house."

Miss Sophronia's lips, which were pursed for another tirade, grew ashen, and her knees trembled.

Si stepped out from behind the lilac bush which had concealed him from the sight of the Lieutenant, saluted, and said:

"Good afternoon, Lieutenant. What is the trouble?"

"We were fired into by some bushwhackers back there, and who ran over in this direction, and I'm going to burn this house as a lesson."

"Were any of your men killed?"

"No; luckily none was more than scratched. But that does not alter the principle of the thing. This bushwhacking must stop. Who are you?"

"I'm Serg't Josiah Klegg, Co. Q, 200th Injanny Volunteer Infantry. I'm out looking for prisoners escaping from Millen. I've found six, who are nearly dead, and they're here in the house of these kind ladies, who have given up their best beds to them, and they're receiving every care in order to save their lives. Will you come in and see them?"

"No, I haven't time," answered the Lieutenant, with a look at the blue-coated squad which had risen to arms behind Si, and corroborated his story. "Rebel women taking care of escaped Yanks! Most astonishing thing. But it'll save their house for them. Tention. Fours about—march! Forward—march! Look out for those bushwhackers, Sergeant."

"If you come across a Surgeon, Lieutenant, please send him here," said Si as he walked back to where Miss Sophronia was standing.

"You needn't be in a hurry about moving those men," she said. "He may come back."

Night was falling, and Si posted a guard.

Si, Shorty and Alf were making another turn with the invalids, whom they found sleeping soundly, when the dogs began a noisy alarm in the rear of the house, Si

stepped to the back window and looked out. It was too dark to see anything, but presently a raucous voice called out:

"Hello, the house! Hello, Miss S'phrony!"

"Is that you, Zeke Backhouse?" Miss Sophronia's voice instantly answered. "What do you want? What're you doing away from your regiment?"

"Rijimint's gone to thunder, 'long with the rest o' the Southern Confedrisy. We-uns air plum done with hit, an' the whole shootin'-match. Call off yer dogs ter wunst. We want t' see you."

"How dare you speak to me that way, you low-down trash?" answered Miss Sophronia, angrily. "Get back to your regiment, you nasty deserters, or I'll tell your Captain on you. Go away. Go back and fight for your country, like men."

"Jes' drap that style o' gab, S'phrony Sutton," answered the voice, impudently. "We'uns've done heared all we want of hit, an' the time's come fer stoppin' hit. We'uns've bin takin' the sass o' you rich folks, an' starvin', traipsin' through the mud an' rain an' foutin' yer battles, while yo'uns wuz lollin' at home, jes' as long as we'uns air a-gwineter. Now the time's come fer changin' 'bout, which is only f'ar play. Come down offen yer high hoss, git us the best yo' have in the house t' eat, an' then we'uns'll tell yo' what more we'uns want."

The man had come through the guard of barking, snarling dogs to within a few feet of Miss Sophronia, and by the light of the candle she held Si could see that he

was leering into her face with all the hatred of poor whites for the well-to-do class. The woman was one that had probably given abundant reason for their hatred.

"Get down off this porch at once, and leave the place," she answered, defiantly. "Get, you sealawag, Caesar, jump on your horse and ride over to Col. Allison, and tell him some of his whelps are molesting us."

"Caesar'll not go a step," said the man, advancing still closer. "T'wouldn't do no good if he did. Kunnel Allison's done gwine off ter Waynesboro. Come, now, S'phrony Sutton, hit's our turn t' order. Yo' jes' stand aside, an' let we'uns have what we want. Yo' needn't yell, nor ramp' round. T'won't do no good. Our time's come. Thar's no help for yo'."

"Think not, you brindle-hide sardine," said Shorty, appearing, gun in hand, at the head of the others, in the circle of the light thrown by the candle. "Surrender, or I'll"—

But the deserter did not wait for the rest. He gave a brief glance at the astounding apparition, and turned and leaped down from the porch. Shorty charged after him, but Zeke and his companions knew the grounds too well, and were at once out of sight and reach in the darkness.

"Think you'd better take a second thought about moving them men, ma'am," said Shorty, politely, as the boys went back to their blankets on the porch.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN EXCITING NIGHT, AND BAD LOT WELL-GOTTEN RID OF.

When Si returned to the porch, after the unsuccessful chase of Zeke Backhouse and his ruffianly companions, he was astonished to find the change in the women. Angelina, the younger sister, overflowing with hysteric tears, was attending to the old mother, who was on the very point of swooning with fright. Sophronia's stony face looked as if carved from gray limestone, and the hand that held the cradle trembled violently.

"Where is he gone?" she gasped.

"Don't know," answered Si, indifferently, as he set down his gun. "Far enough, probably. If he kept up the gait he struck at starting he'll be across the Savannah River, into the middle o' South Carolina, before midnight.

"That man," stammered Miss Sophronia, "that Zeke Backhouse, is the very worst man in the whole world."

"That's saying a good deal," commented Si. "Georgy seems to run to bad men, and one appears to be just about as cussed as another. Shake 'em all up in a bag, and it'd be hard to tell which'd come out first. Little choice, far as I can see."

"I'm more afraid of him," she said, "than anything that lives—even a rattlesnake or a painter."

"Well, you didn't act like it for a holy second," said Shorty, who had come up, and was wiping the sweat from his face. "If ever a man got it hot from the griddle, it was the way you laid it into him."

"It's the only way to deal with this poor white trash, and scoundrels of that kind," she answered. "They're like painters and catamounts. You must face them down, and never let on you're scared, to keep them from jumping you. The minute you flinch, or take your eyes off them, you're gone."

"Why is he so much worse than the others?" asked Si.

"O, he comes of vicious stock from the beginning of time. My grandfather bought his off a convict ship, and paid for him in tobacco. But he was such a lazy, thieving, murderous brute that grandfather finally drove him off the place, off into the woods, and he and his breed have lived there ever since on what they could steal from us and others. When Zeke was a little boy his father got so audacious that my father had to hang him and make a warning to the rest. Zeke grew up even worse than his forebears, and he

had that grudge against us, but he was powerfully afraid of Brother Albert, and never wanted to start Brother Albert out on a hunt for him, such as father made for his father. As soon as the war begun they put Zeke Backhouse into a regiment, and they've kept him there as close as they could. Now, he's got away from the regiment, and he knows that Brother Albert is at Point Lookout, if he's alive at all, and now's his chance. What in heaven's name are we going to do?"

"Well, he won't bother you any more for tonight," Si suggested. "I'll take him the rest of the night to walk back here from where he's run by this time."

"You don't know him! You don't know him!" she wailed. "You never know where that wretch is. Why, when they would say that he was in camp, there would be cattle hamstrung and fodder-stacks burned 10 miles away. Why, he's got more appetite, activity and cunning for deviltry than a fox and a catamount rolled together."

"Well, he'd better keep out of gunshot of us," said Si, "or his name'll be carrion."

"You don't know him, you don't know him, I tell you. Even now he may be fixing to burn us out of house and home and then charge it to you Yankees."

Shorty's quick eyes, peering into the thick darkness, had caught the faintest glimmer of a spark in the distance. He quietly slipped down and out to investigate. He passed by the negro-quarters, and out to the end of the stable grounds, and halted by a large shed filled with the tops and blades of corn. The spark became more palpable. It approached, waveringly and uncertainly, but came on. Shorty was puzzled at the eccentric action, but he sagely concluded that it was too late in the year for a fire-fly, too big for a mere chimney spark, and that bits of fire that large did not go wandering about without human impulse. Therefore he kept very quiet and waited.

He could make out, a few rods in front of him, the outlines of a fence surrounding the stable yard. Presently the spark reached this, and jiggled up and down, as the man tried to climb over.

Shorty then made out that it was a small piece of fat pine, which the man carried in his right hand, while he shielded it from sight from the house, and from the wind, with his hat, carried in his left.

He occasionally blew upon it to keep it alive.

"Hist! Hist, there!" said Shorty, in a stage whisper.

The spark executed a tremulous dance. "Don't you move," said Shorty, in the same tone, "or off goes your roof. Is there anything about there to catch fire?" "N-n-n-o! N-o-t-h-i-n-g a-t a-l-l!" said the bearer in a quavering voice, that accorded with the motion of his hand.

"Drop that brand to your feet, then, and come right in here."

The spark fell to the ground, and the sound of footsteps indicated obedience.

"Who's out there?" whispered Shorty, thrusting his muzzle in the other's face.

"Ouch! Don't! That thar gun's likely to go off."

"It will go off, for sure, if you don't talk fast and to the point. Who's out there?"

"Zeke Backhouse, and a passel o' others."

"How many?"

"A hull lot. A dozen, mebbe."

"Where are they?"

"Right back here, kivering me with their guns, t' see that I didn't flinch with the girn."

"You've got a rocky job—shot if you do, and shot if you don't."

"Yes, an' they'uns wuz a-gwine t' hang me, anyhow, unless I did."

"Well, you are poor life insurance. Who are you, anyway?"

"I'm Sarjint in Zeke's company, and wouldn't desert when him an' the rest did, but they'uns made me come with 'em. They'uns 've a grudge agin me. I useter have t' do the buckin'-an'-gaggin', an' tyn' up by the thumbs, an' sich. They'uns wuz a-gwine t' hang me, but'd let me off if I'd sot fire t' the fodder."

"Well, you"—

"Hi, there," came in a shrill whisper from the fence, "you guard—drap that gun or I'll bust you."

"Lord A'mighty," gasped the rebel, "Zeke's crep' up on me."

"Hi, there, yourself," whispered Pete, who had noticed Shorty go out, and followed him. "Drop your own gun, or I'll bust you."

"Yo' will, will yo'?" called another voice from the fence. "I've done seed yo' all the time. Drap yer gun, if yo' don't want t' be busted right off."

"What's that you say?" demanded Sandy, who had naturally followed Pete. "I've had you covered right along. Drop your gun and hold up your hands, or yo'll start the busting in a holy second."

They were all startled by the developments around them, but both sides hesitated to fire, for fear of bringing down the reserves, and in hopes of making the capture without it.

"This beats the devil," grumbled Shorty. "If I could see the sights I'd let that feller have it, anyhow."

The rebel Sergeant improved the opportunity to jump behind a post.

A door of the house suddenly opened, throwing a broad ray of light along the fence. Si, who had become anxious as to what was going on out back, and whose quick ears had caught something of the whispered interchange of challenges, was standing on the porch, with gun leveled, waiting for developments. He saw the line of rebels on the fence, and fired at the nearest one, who dropped with a bullet in his thigh. Shorty and the rest fired, but while they could see the rebels plainly, it was too dark for them to aim. On the other hand, the rebels were too much startled to shoot straight, even if they could have distinctly seen their enemies. They banged away, nervously, and ran back in the direction whence they had come. It was no use pursuing them, so Shorty secured the rebel Sergeant, while the rest picked up the wounded man, and all came back to the porch.

"He's gone, and you didn't kill him," screamed Miss Sophronia. "Why didn't you kill him when you had a chance. I threw the door open to give you light to shoot by. Why didn't you shoot him instead of that measly little hyena, 'Lish Miggles," she added, scanning the wounded man. "He's only a mongrel fice that runs around after Zeke Backhouse. Zeke's the man you ought've shot. And you, Ab Watersmith," she addressed the big, hulking Sergeant, "you're a nice man, to let that gang force you into burning other people's property."

"They'uns'd suttinly shot me or hung me, if I hadn't done jes' as they'uns said, mum," said the Sergeant, apologetically.

"S'posing they had, s'posing they had," she snapped. "It wouldn't've been any great loss. Never good for much but to suck whisky and get into fights on court-days."

"Scuse me, mum, if I'd liefer live for that e'er, than die for other people's property," ventured the Sergeant, rather humbly.

"What I might expect of you, you scal-awag," answered the woman contemptuously. "You haint as much real spunk as a brindle steer. You let a few of those scabs scare you until your melt turns to water."

"That wuz 12 o' they'uns, mum—three set o' fours—sides Zeke, an' they all had guns, an' I hadn't none, 'sides"—

"Don't talk back to me, you chicken-liver. Clear out. Get off the porch." And she picked up a heavy hickory broom to enforce her order.

"Let him alone, ma'am. He can't go. He's a prisoner," said Si, looking up from his work of helping Alf dress the wound of the other rebel, and make him comfortable. "Let him alone, and come here and take care of this man. Where do you want us to put him?"

"Put 'im?" she snarled savagely. "Put

him some place, anywhere, out of the way, at once. Put him in the ash-hopper; fling him into the creek; throw him to the hogs. Anything to get rid of him."

"But, ma'am, this is one of your own people," remonstrated Si. "He is badly hurt, and requires care and attendance to save his life."

Again Si was reminded of the utter heartlessness of the aristocratic classes of the South toward the poor whites. The higher classes there have every courtesy and consideration for those in their own rank of life, but are destitute of all feeling but that of contempt for the pariahs who owned neither negroes nor land.

"How dare you say he is one of my own people?" she asked angrily. "Creatures like him are never dared allowed to come even in your yard. He's not a man. He's only a varmint, that skulks through the woods like the rest of the beasts of prey."

"But he was good enough to fight your battles for four years," remonstrated Si.

"Yes, he fought because he was made to, as other creatures are. It's the only good that could be got out of such brutish things. Take him away at once. I'd sooner have a stuck hog on my porch."

"Let's carry him out and put him in the nigger-quarters, Si," suggested Shorty.

The house was comfortably furnished—even luxuriously, for a Southern residence, but when they entered the negro quarters they found not even a floor in the cabin. There were neither beds nor other furniture, except stools. The slaves, with their heads wrapped in rags of clothing, slept on the ground, with their feet to the fire.

Si sent the slaves out to the shed for bundles of tops and blades of corn, with which he and Shorty made a comfortable pallet for the wounded man, and Alf exhausted his art in dressing and bandaging his wound.

As Si completed his work and stopped to look around a little, one of the negroes gave him a look that indicated he wanted him to come outside. When out of sight and hearing of the wounded rebel, and the folks in the house, the negro said:

"Say, mas'r, dar's five or six more jes' sich Yankees as yo' firs' brung in out dar in de swamp, whar we'uns've bin totin' vittels t' dem."

"Where?"

"Right out dar, a long ways—two, free, five miles, mebbe."

"Go out at once and tell them to come in."

"Dassent. Zeke Backhouse's gang out dar in de way. We'uns've got a lot ob grub ready, but bin afeared t' go, afeared ob Zeke Backhouse. He'll kill a nigger jes' he'd hamstring a hoss—jes' t' spite mas'r. An' dey needs de grub powerful bad, too. Dey's jes' starvin'."

"Come along with us, and show us where they are, and we'll get them," said

Si. "Better bring some of that grub along."

"Lord sabe me, I don't want t' go no-whar whar dar's shootin' an' killin' gwine on. Nebber wuz so skeered in my life as I wuz a while ago. Got all ob dat I ebbber want, an' a heap more."

"Le' me go long, Uncle Scip," asked a bright-eyed, young negro of about Pete's age. "I know whar dey is, an' I kin duck an' run if dey begins t' shoot. I likes t' heah de guns go off."

"Yo' kin go, if yo' wants t', Hannibal," replied the other, gravely. "Yo's de least 'countest nigger on de place, an' hit don't matter much if yo' do git killed, while I's wuf \$1,500, afore-de-war prices. Go long, chile."

"What! You don't mean to say that you men are all going off, and leave us three women and all this property defenseless?" shrieked Miss Sophronia, as Si gathered his squad together and explained their mission. "And you know that villain and his gang is right out there? I call this contemptible, unmanly, outrageous."

"You didn't want us here, ma'am," Si began.

"You didn't offer us the hospitality of your Southern home," Shorty broke in. "You didn't invite us in to be your guests. I don't know as we're under any particular call to stand guard over you."

"You're just as well off as before we came," said Si. "We didn't bring Zeke Backhouse into the country. Up in Injanny we'd've put that fellow away where the dogs wouldn't bite him years ago. You ought to be obliged to us that we've scared him as much as we have. I don't think he'll come back again tonight. Boys, leave your blankets and haversacks. We'll come back here before morning."

"And you'll leave us exposed to the worst that scoundrel can do, just for the sake of a passel of sick, starved Yankees, like them you brung in before," gasped Miss Sophronia, almost collapsing with apprehension. "That's as much respect for women as I could expect from Northern men."

"Push out lively, now, boys," said Si. "Those poor fellows may be dying, and we can save their lives by reaching them in a hurry."

With Pete, Sandy and Hannibal—among whom had sprung up a sudden friendship—a little in advance, they strode swiftly out along the beaten path leading from the rear of the house. They presently, as the moon began to rise, came to the big road, and walked noiselessly over its sand. Full of the secrecy of the errand, Hannibal would not walk in the road, but slipped along like some lithe, feline young beast of prey, through the weeds by the side. Not the crack of a breaking twig betrayed his progress, and



"HALT! WHO COMES THAR?" CALLED OUT ZEKE, SPRINGING INTO THE ROAD.

the boys would not have known where he was had he not from time to time stood up and turned his grinning face toward them, when the moonbeams would reflect his white teeth, and big, shining eyes.

At each bend in the road he would halt them until he slipped forward and reconnoitered it, and motioned them to come on. Presently he called Pete over to him by snapping his thumb and finger, and whispered:

"Dar's someone layin' in dat bend jes' ahead."

"How 'd you know?"

"I smell dem. White men."

Sandy slipped back to warn Si.

Pete strained his eyes in vain to see anything, until presently there was a brief, faint flash, as someone moved a

gun-barrel, on which the moon's beams fell.

"There certainly is," said he.

"Lay low as snakes till I see who dey am," said Hannibal, and disappeared in the brush. In a few minutes he returned with the report:

"Zeke Backhous an' his whole gang's layin' out dar fer somebody, likely fer we'uns. Dey's sottin' 'round dar on logs an' chunks, wid deir backs agin trees. I done crep so nigh I could've pulled de coat tail, but I didn't wanter. Come, I show yo' a way t' sneak in behine him."

To the left of the road ran a broad, level wash of sand. They walked along this in single file until they came to another leading down from a gully cut through the cedars on the knoll ~~where~~

Zeke was concealed. The wet sand did not give the slightest sound of their foot-steps. They gained a point whence they could see the forms of the rebel deserters against the moonlight, and were on the point of a rush when they heard the sound of approaching hoofs. A rustling sound among the deserters showed that they heard it, too.

"Keep quiet, boys," whispered Zeke. "Thar's only one. I'll step out and stop him. Keep him kivered, and don't let him make a rush an' git away, if I should miss him."

Si and Shorty took advantage of this to get where they could have a sure aim. Pete and Sandy followed Hannibal in wriggling around to where they could cut off retreat. Uncle Ephraim crawled up noiselessly behind a big log, and laid his gun across.

"Halt! Who comes thar?" called out Zeke, springing into the road and leveling his carbine.

"A friend. As good a Confederate as ever lived," answered a well-known voice as the rider reined in his horse and recognized the rebel butternut. "I'm Elder Hornblower, friends. Just escaped from the hands of the Yankees, where I had perils oft, and hardships many, as the Apostle Paul says. I'm on my way to the Sutton house, and expect to spend the night and some days in the home of those godly ladies. Please let me pass at once, friends, for I've had some terrible days, and badly need rest for both body and spirit."

"Well, Elder, I don't think you've bin havin' anything like as tough a time as we'uns've bin havin' fer four long years," answered Zeke with a sneer. "We'uns've had perils oft, hardships many, thorns in the flesh, woundings o' the sperit and sich, like as yourn' couldn't hold a candle to, while you've bin ridin' 'round the country, livin' on wheat bread an' chicken doing', an' sleepin' on a feather-bed every night. We'uns've concluded the time's come fer we'uns t've some o' the good things o' this world, too. So, you'll much obleege we'uns by climbin' down offen that hoss, an' handin' over the cash yo've bin collectin' through the country. We'uns need hit wuss'n the gospel does, jes' now."

"Why, you villains, would you rob a preacher of the Word?" gasped the Elder. "You're worse 'n the Yankees!"

"Shall we let them rob him, Shorty?" whispered Si.

"It's a case of dog eat dog, but they're the meanest sort of hounds. Let us stop them."

"Surrender, there!" shouted Si. "Don't a man move or we'll kill him."

They all stood still as statues, except the Elder, who gathered his reins for a dash.

"Stop, dar, Elder," exclaimed Uncle Ephraim, springing into the road in front.

"De gemmen 'cluded you in deir remarks."

"That's all right, Yanks," said Zeke, recovering himself, and noting the blue uniforms, as Si pushed the rest of the deserters forward into the bright moonlight in the road. "We're friends. We've deserted, an' wuz makin' our way to yo'uns. Awful glad to see yo'uns. Plumb sick an' done out with the rebel army."

"Yes, yes; we know all about that," said Si. "We'll discuss that later. Form twos, close order, here."

"Dar's someone else in dese woods," remarked Hannibal. "I look up de road, when we'uns run out, an' I see a man take a look an' den run back. I believe he one dem prisoner-Yankees."

"That's likely who he is," said Sandy. "Let's run up the road and call to them."

"Go ahead, boys," said Si. "Be careful, though."

"Hello, boys! Come out! It's all right," shouted Pete and Sandy, as they reached the point where Hannibal had seen the man disappear. "We're Yankees. Hooray for the 200th Indiana!"

Six feeble, gaunt boys rose from behind logs where they had been crouching, and ran into the road, trying to shout.

"We got so hungry that we were desperate," said the leader, as he recovered from his motions sufficiently to talk, and was walking down beside Sandy toward Si. "The negroes didn't come with food as they promised, and finally we got up and started. We thought we might as well be recaptured as die of starvation, though it was almost a toss-up to decide which was better. I saw the commotion in the road, but couldn't make out what it meant."

In spite of their famished condition the new-comers were in far better physical condition than the ones found in the cave, and walked along quite briskly under the stimulus of their newly-acquired freedom.

Si had them pick up the arms the rebel deserters had thrown down, and then they all marched back along the road to the Sutton house.

Miss Sophronia was like a fury when she saw Zeke, and overwhelmed him with a torrent of abuse. She snatched up the poker and would have attacked him had not Si and the Elder restrained her. Zeke merely grinned at her. He was confident that the deserter plea would avail him, and that he had nothing to fear.

"We'uns's playin' in great luck, arter all," he confided to his followers. "They'uns'll turn us over t' the Provo-Marshal ter-morrer, we'uns'll take the oath, an' be sot free, an' we'uns'll jes' go through that thar Yankee army fer all hits wuth. Them Yankees' ve money an' things, no end. Why, yo' recollect Josh Doodelpeas—him that the Kunnel had shot back thar at Licksillet? He deserted t' the Yankees, got \$25 fer his gun, took the oath, an' 'red with 'em 'bout two months. Then

hit got too hot over thar fur him, an' he slipped back t' we'uns, playin' off escaped prisoner. He had more'n \$1,000 in greenbacks, and a watch in every pocket, besides lots of other things. He lost hit all at keards in a week or two, an' then tried t' git back t' the Yankees agin, but they cotched him, an' the Kunnel made an example of him, as he done called hit."

Si added to Miss Sophronia's indignation by drawing on her stores sufficiently to give Zeke and his gang a good supper, which he issued to them in a negro cabin he had made their prison, leaving them to cook the stuff as best they could by the open fireplace. He stationed a guard over the cabin, and took the rescued prisoners to the washhouse, where their hair was cut and burned; they gave themselves a good washing, and such of their clothes as would do to wear longer were boiled. Si hunted through the house for men's clothing to supplement these, and again thrust the iron deep into the women's souls by taking garments that had family and historic associations.

A little after midnight he sat down on the porch with Shorty to smoke and discuss the situation.

"A good day's work, Shorty, but what in Sam Hill are we going to do with Zeke Backhouse and his caboodle? It would've been better to've shot 'em down instead of allowing them to surrender. But we have done it, and we can't very well shoot them now. We shouldn't turn them over to the Provo-Marshal, because he don't want them, and they'd play off deserter on him, and he'd likely turn 'em loose in camp, which'd give them a chance to do no end of harm."

"Might give Miss Sophronia a butcher-knife and turn her loose in that cabin," yawned Shorty. "All that'd be needed afterward would be to dig holes to put them in."

"Say," whispered Pete, bustling up full of news, "Miss Sophronia's back there in the ell with the Elder, trying to fix up a comfortable place for him to sleep. She's awful mad because we've taken all her best beds for the boys, and left none for the preacher; but he's made her happy by telling her that her brother Albert's been exchanged, and's back in command of his company, on the other side of the Ogeechee. He's watching our front out there. But he can't come home because this is inside our lines, and he daresn't leave his company, anyway, now, but she's going to write a letter, and fix up a bundle of things to send to him by the Elder, if he can get away, and she's awful mad because Brady Stevens is wearing Brother Albert's best pants, and Serg't Walsh his coat, and she can't send 'em to him. I overheard it all when I went back there to look after Abednego."

"Too bad about the clothes," commented Si. "But, then, our folks have given

him better ones while he was in prison."

Si smoked thoughtfully for a few minutes, and then said:

"Shorty, I've an idee"

"Out with it. May possibly be a good one"

"We'll let the Elder go on his way rejoicing in the morning. We'll follow after, giving him time to reach Brother Albert, and tell his little story"

"Yes," said Shorty, catching on. "And we'll drop Zeke Backhouse, et al, where they can pick 'em up?"

"Precisely! Well, let's take a look around, and then lay down. I'm awful tired."

"So'm I. We'd better let Serg't Watersmith go, too, so's to give plenty of evidence."

"All right. You see that the guard's all right, and I'll take a look at the boys up-stairs."

The tip was given to the rest of the boys, and the next morning they were all so busy caring for their horses, for the invalids, for the newly-rescued, getting breakfast, etc. that none of them noticed the furtive preparations made for the Elder's escape. They did not seem to see his horse cautiously led out by a negro to a willow copse, and shortly thereafter a bundle carried thither by another negro, nor the expounder of Jeremiah presently wander carelessly in the same direction. They all kept carefully away from where they could see any of these things. Si and Shorty suffered themselves to be beguiled by Miss Sophronia, who was visibly nervous, but unaccountably complaisant, into a long conversation, on the opposite porch, while the Elder mounted and rode away. Serg't Watersmith had also disappeared by the time that Si deliberately assembled his squad, mounted them, and got his prisoners out, who were to march on foot. Zeke tried to be communicative, but Si discouraged his advances, and finally flatly ordered him to keep silent.

Zeke looked a little disappointed when the column started toward the Ogeechee, instead of back toward the army. He showed absolute worriment when Si pushed directly across the river, and out toward the enemy's country, but told his followers that Sherman had probably moved on, and they were taking a short cut to him.

A rebel stood on picket on the hill just beyond the river, who fired his gun and galloped back across the open fields to the woods beyond.

Giving a significant look to the rear guard not to let any of the prisoners get away, Si pushed on after the retreating videt, down to the center of the valley beyond, when a company of rebels in line emerged from the woods on the hill just ahead.

At this Si ordered an about-face, and

led the way in a gallop for the other side of the river, leaving the prisoners to their fate.

As they gained the opposite bank, and faced about to defend its passage, they heard a sound of rapid firing over the hill, and saw Zeke Backhouse gain the top of the hill, only to fall before the pis-

tol of an officer, whom they imagined to be Brother Albert.

"If any of them got away it wasn't our fault," said Shorty, sending a long shot at the officer to warn him not to come any farther.

The officer raised his hat in salute, and rode back out of sight.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ANOTHER DAY AT THE SUTTON HOUSE—VISIT OF A REBEL OFFICER.

"Brother Albert don't seem dead anxious to revisit his old home," remarked Si, after they had waited a couple of hours on the river bank, without any sign of a forward movement by the rebels on the other side. "Of course, the Elder told him just how many there was of us, and if he'd been dead gone to see those charming sisters of his he'd 'a jumped us at once, and tried to run us back."

The thought flashed into Shorty's mind that if Maria and Annabel were over there only a few miles the whole rebel army would hardly stop him and Si from seeing them, if only for a brief five minutes.

For an instant there took complete possession of him the home-sickness which had been growing on him of late at every moment's respite from danger and straining activity to have the march end somewhere where they could get the mails and be once more in communication with the object of all his heart's desires.

Si, who was looking at him, saw his face take on a look he had never seen there before, became alarmed, and asked: "You aint appearing well this morning, Shorty. Feel agerish?"

"Wonder when we'll ever get any mail again, Si?" Shorty asked, with entire irrelevance.

Si understood, for he felt his face take on the look he had noticed in Shorty's, and his being convulsed with surging emotions, that were becoming more undeniable every day. There was a gnawing hunger at his heart, and to divert it he turned and spoke sharply to Pete:

"Pete, how often have I got to tell you about hitching that blamed white mule so near the horses that he can get a chance to pester them? Go this minute and take him away so far that he can't reach them with them india-rubber legs of his or them grave-stone teeth. Take him so far that they can't even smell him.

Why don't you shoot him, and pick you up a decent hoss?"

"He aint doing nothing to them," rebelled Pete. "Only defending himself. They won't let him alone. That's the trouble. They begin picking on him, just because he's a mule, whenever they can get at him. They're all rebels, them hosses is, and they torment him because he's a Yankee. I'll shoot the whole billing of them, first chance I get. Come here, Abednego, you poor feller. We'll get even with them cantankerous brutes before we're through with them, you bet."

"I've no doubt the Elder's told Brother Albert something besides our numbers and situation," said Shorty, pulling himself together, and coming down to practical facts. "He's probably told him that the country back there's full of our folks, coming up from all directions, and that if he comes across the river he may not get back again, but go to board at Point Lookout, or Camp Chase, or wherever he was, again."

"Well," remarked Si, "we didn't set out to picket the river. That aint our business. We haven't time to fool away, if he's not inclined to transact business with us. We'll go back to the house, and see how the boys there are getting along. 'Twon't do to let that woman back there get the idee that we're gone for good, until some of our men come up. There's no telling what she might do to them boys."

"She might go around and bite each one of them," suggested Shorty. "That'd be mortally fatal, at once."

"Mount, boys," said Si to his squad, "and start back, two at a time. Harry, you and Monty lead off. Go to the left, through those woods, so they can't see you from the other side, if they're watching. Stop on that first rise, dismount and go into line. Me and Shorty'll bring up the rear, and watch if we're followed."

No signs of the rebels appearing as Si and Shorty warily withdrew, they galloped forward, joined the rest, and all moved briskly toward the Sutton house.

On the road, some distance in front of the house, Si met Serg't Foster Walsh, leader of the escaped prisoners that they found during the night.

He was out enjoying the delicious experience of walking around in the Southern Confederacy without caring whether any white man saw him or not.

"Hello, Sergeant," called out Si. "How are you getting along?"

"Inexpressibly happy, thank God, for His crowning mercy," replied Foster Walsh devoutly. "I feel as if tons of weight had dropped from my sinking shoulders—as the Pilgrim did when his burden of sin fell from him—as Lazarus did when the Savior called him forth from the sepulcher into the light of day. But I cannot understand why I have been spared for this great joy, when the clods of the valley have rolled over so many better men."

"O, you have just played in great luck. You run across the 200th Injanny," Shorty started to remark irreverently, but Si, who was religiously much in harmony with the thought and speaker, interrupted him:

"God elects, for His own good will and pleasure, men to different fates. He has elected you, Foster, to be saved, and He probably has some great work for you to do. How's Miss Sophronia bin treating the boys?"

"That old Jezebel," said Foster Walsh, savagely. "Just as soon as your backs were turned she called to the negroes to come and take the boys out of those beds. I remonstrated with her, and told her that it might kill some of the boys, and quoted the Bible to her as to her Christian duty. She told me to shut up and get out of the house—she wasn't taking her religion nor her Bible from any Yankee Abolitionist. The Word of the Lord being ineffectual, I had to try His sword. I had some of the boys take those rebel carbines and stand guard, and I informed her that we'd kill any negro who attempted to disturb the boys. She asked me if Yankee Christianity taught that it was right to go into peaceable Christian homes, rob them of their property, insult the women and threaten murder. I told her that the Bible commanded love, mercy, peace and charity upon all, to be kind to the poor and compassionate to the sick, and I proposed that that thing should go wherever I was, sure as she was a foot high. If she felt the rod it was because she deserved it. It was for her chastening, and for her growth in the fear and admonition of the Lord."

"What'd she say to that?" asked Si, much interested.

"She said she'd always heard that the Devil could quote Scripture, but she

didn't know before that a Yankee could, and she ought to baste me over the head with the poker for my blasphemy. While she was running abuse like an cave-spout in March, a colored woman came in to tell her that they'd heard the Yankees had burned a lot of rebel rations they'd found down at McClinton's Store; that the Yankee foragers were over on Buf-fum's plantation, next one to her's, and that there were a lot of Yankees coming up the road. I looked out and saw them, and told her that while I would not advise deceit, the best thing that she could do was to represent that her house had been made a hospital for Union soldiers, and that it and everything around it ought to be spared on that account. I never saw a woman take a hint so quickly. By the time the squad turned up from the road she remembered that her folks had all been Union people, and voted against secession. Before they reached the house she felt that it was the womanly thing to care for the sick and wounded, whether friends or enemies, and by the time they hailed her she was a ministering angel, who delighted in good works. O, yes, she told the Lieutenant her house was filled with rescued Union prisoners; everything possible had been done for them, her best beds had been given up to them, and clothes from the wardrobe of her own brother. The Lieutenant looked incredulous, as well he might, to find any Union feeling down here in this morass of slavery, but Brady Stevens and I were pointed out in evidence, and as he was in a hurry he passed on, ordering that nothing should be touched. You just ought've seen that old Jezebel breathe mercy, peace, grace and forgiveness on him as he rode away, and then turn and, with us with a this-won't - last-always-and-I'll-have-my-turn look. But she is guileful enough to understand that's the best card to play until the army goes by, and we'll get along splendid for awhile. But it's better to leave no sick Yankees behind to her tender mercies."

"We're going to take no chances as to that," Si answered. "The reason that we came back, instead of going on toward Millen, was to get into communication with a Surgeon, somewhere, and have the boys transferred to a field hospital."

"Do start for Millen as soon as you can, for I must go with you, and I'm possessed of the spirit to get there as soon as possible."

"What's your hurry to get back to Millen?" inquired Shorty. "I thought you were straining every nerve to get as far away from there as possible. You're in no shape to go forward. Better go back and squat as near a commissary wagon as possible, and get some meat on your rack of bones."

"I'll look out for getting meat on my bones. The Lord'll provide for that, now that I'm out of the hands of those sons of

Belial, who are persecuting and murdering His servants. With the Lord on my side, and a fat country like this, I'll get meat on my bones fast enough. I'm going back to Millen with you, and I want to start right away. The Lord calls me."

"What's your sweat to get to Millen?" asked Shorty. "Can't we do all the business to be done there?"

"Well, I'll tell you. My partner is back there, dying. He's a blue-eyed, fair-haired, pure-souled boy, that I care more for than any creature on earth, except my mother and sisters. I was his teacher in Sunday school, and would have married his sister if she had lived. But she was too good for me, or this earth, and God wanted her among His angels, whence she looks down upon me all the time. I was getting ready to enter the ministry when she passed away, and I interpreted it that God meant me for sterner work than peaceful ministrations in the church with her by my side. I had no longer heart for a service that I'd always planned we should labor in together. As the clay fell upon her coffin, I turned to those gathered about and said that the Flag of our country was now the cross I should henceforth follow, and invited those who were like-minded to come to me. This boy, against my will, insisted on going. I tried to take every care of him his sister would have done. I was with him every moment that I could be. At Ream's Station I could have got away, but he could not jump the ditch as I did. I jumped back to help him, and we were both captured. I took every care of him through Andersonville, Savannah and Millen—fought at the wells for pure water for him to drink, and avoid the diarrhea and dropsy; I sold my shoes and everything else I had to get him vegetables and keep off the scurvy. At Savannah the guard shot at me, and grazed my arm for stealing boards with which to make him shelter. I helped dig a tunnel there, and got him out and as far as the Ogeechee River, though I had to almost carry him part of the way, his legs were so stiff with the scurvy. Then we were recaptured, and brought back. He got better the first weeks at Millen, because the ground was fresh and clean, and the weather grew cooler. Then when those terrible rains came on he took the fever, and wasted away to a skeleton, with his big blue eyes shining like his sister's before she died. O, God, how I have prayed—not for myself—but for him. I don't murmur at any visitation God chooses to send on me. I probably deserve it for being stiff-necked and perverse to His will. Let Him do anything to me, so long as He spares him."

"Where is he now?" asked Si.

"He's back there in the hospital at Millen. The rebels broke up the shanty I had built for him, as they did all the others in the pen, in their rage because we wouldn't enlist in the rebel army, and as

I had no shelter for him from the awful rains I got him out to the hospital, where Newt Greble, one of our company, could look after him. Newt's his cousin. I managed to get out to see him nearly every day, and wash him, and take care of his clothes, but he seemed to grow weaker every day. Finally, I could stand it no longer. I could not bear the sight of his eyes looking appealingly at me. The Spirit seemed to tell me that I could get through to our men, and bring them back to the rescue of those boys. Brady Stevens and I mixed up with some poor wretches who were going out to take the oath, and slipped away between the stockade and the Captain's office. We mixed up with the paroled men on detail, and others, and worked our way out into the woods, where we came across four others who had done the same thing, and we we all started for our lines. Sherman was farther off than we thought, and we'd've starved to death if it hadn't been for the negroes. It's taken me much longer than I expected, and now we mustn't lose any time getting there, if we hope to find poor little Angus alive. I should have tried to get that other squad to go, but I dared not leave those poor fellows in the house until you should come back, or our army come up. I felt I had a duty toward them."

"You were right," answered Si, much moved by the story. "We'll do everything we can for you. How much of a rebel force do you think there is now at Millen?"

"Very small. Not more than we, with God's blessing, can handle. They'd run a good many of the prisoners off to Savannah before we left, and the guards had gone with them. More were going every day. Probably there isn't more than a company or two of rebels there now, and they're Georgia militia guarding the hospital and those in the stockade, who are unable to walk and are dying. They don't want to give them up as long as there's a breath of life in them. I want to fall on them as Gideon did on the Midianites, in the valley of Jezreel, and put every son of Belial to the sword."

"That's all right," said Shorty. "We're in the sword business whenever it comes to any of these infernal stockade guards. I can kill one of them with less qualms than a yaller dog. Let's start as soon as we can, Si."

"We must first make sure of the boys we've already got," said Si. "We mustn't take any chances about them. Aint sure there's no more Zeke Backhouses 'round here. Elder Hornblower may come back here any moment, and betwixt him and that shining light in his congregation, Miss Sophrony, there's no telling what might be done to the boys. A Southern preacher and a Southern woman would cook up another Andersonville right here in no time. But our folks must be near here by this time. That smoke rising

over the hills yonder looks as if it came from camp-fires. Monty, you and Harry ride over there, and see if you can't strike a camp, and a Surgeon who'll come over here and take charge."

"What did you do with Zeke Backhouse and his gang?" eagerly inquired Miss Sophronia, as Si rode up to the porch and dismounted.

"Turned him over to your brother Albert and his gang," Si answered curtly, as he began to unsaddle.

"What?" she exclaimed in startled amazement. She was silent for a minute, and then curiosity triumphed, and she asked:

"You're telling me the truth?"

"Don't tell anything else. Aint that kind of a man," answered Si, throwing his saddle on the porch.

"You flatter yourself, thinking we'd lie to you," said Shorty, taking another view. "Why should we?"

Her stony face flashed with anger at the tone of contemptuous disparagement, and she was silent for another minute. Then curiosity again dominated, and she inquired:

"Are you sure the Confederates got them? How did you know it was Brother Albert?"

"We're as sure that the Johnnies got them as we are that cattle'll run into a clover field if you let down the bars, and you know as well as we do, who's in command of the rebels out there," answered Si, as he threw his bridle on the porch beside his saddle.

"Then," she exclaimed, exultantly, "you've done the best day's work Yankees ever did. If we've got rid of Zeke Backhouse and his crew the Yankees may come. They won't stay long, while Zeke and his following was with us always. Come in, and I'll have the best supper cooked for you you ever ate."

"Don't want your supper," Si replied ungraciously. "We'll cook our own supper. If you've anything good give it to those poor boys, whom your people have been starving to death."

As Si now felt secure he set no guard, and let everybody busy themselves with getting supper, caring for the horses, and for the rescued comrades. Uncle Ephraim cooked supper for him and Shorty, while they were moving around, overseeing and helping, and keeping an eye out on the country, that they might not be surprised.

It came on very dark while this was going on, and still Harry and Monty had not returned.

Poster Walsh, who had conducted a brief evening prayer-meeting, after supper, around the big fire in the wash-shed, where most of the boys had gathered, came to the front porch, where Si and Shorty were seated, pipe in mouth, awaiting the return of the messengers, and holding their usual evening council of war. He came to urge, as the moon would rise brightly after awhile, that, if

the expected relief came up, to push forward toward Millen that night. But Si and Shorty decided that as they had had an exciting night before, and a very lively day, that it would be better for all to take a good night's rest and started early in the morning.

As the discussion was terminating Pete came slipping up, and whispered to them:

"Say, Miss Sophrony slipped out of the house awhile ago, and is now down there behind the spring-house talking to a man."

"Let her," said Si, indifferently. "Don't spoil any chance for her to get a husband. She's cantankerous enough as it is. It might sweeten her up a little to get a husband."

"I wonder which of the boys she's sweetened up on?" Shorty wondered lazily. "Aint either Grimshaw or Radbone, or one of the prisoners, is it?"

"No; it aint any of our crowd, I'm sure, though he wears a Yankee overcoat and cap. When I first noticed him he was hanging around in the dark with one of the house darkies with him. He seemed to be keeping out of the light. Presently the darky went into the house, and the man walked off. He seemed to know just where he was going. In a little while Miss Sophronia came out and walked right out to the spring-house and up to him."

"What sort of a looking man was he? Could you tell?"

"As near as I could make out he was a well-put-up sort of a feller, about the size of you or Corp'l Elliott."

"We've run up against a romance," said Shorty, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and chuckling at his own humorous fancy. "That's some timid lover, who wants to carry off the fair young flower of this happy household, yet fears to brave the wrath of the justly-indignant parents, and so must meet his love by moonlight alone."

"She did kiss him, when she met him," said Pete, always eager to back up any of Shorty's theories.

"Poor man," groaned Shorty. "I hope it won't mortify. I'd rather be kissed by a fly-blister."

"I left Sandy to watch 'em," continued Pete, "while I slipped around to tell you. Here he comes now."

"They've gone into the house," whispered Sandy. "She went first, and a few minutes after he walked along, keeping out of the light, until he came to the porch, when he walked boldly up, and went straight to her room."

"It couldn't've bin none of us," said Pete triumphantly. "None of us'd've gone into the house, and certainly none would've bin bold enough to go to Miss Sophrony's room."

"No, indeed," ejaculated Shorty, heartily.

"Probably a rebel spy," meditated Shorty. "Well, he's welcome to all that



"GOOD EVENING, CAPTAIN," SAID SI.

he can find out here. Still, we don't want that class of cattle pecking around. Blast his impudence, to come right in here among us."

"O, let 'em enjoy love's young dream," said Shorty, sardonically. "Feller that'd make love to a woman like that has punishment enough. He haint sense enough

to be dangerous. I'm going to lay down awhile."

Si, gun in hand, got up, stepped noiselessly across the porch, and pushed the hall-door open. He knew that the mother and Angelina slept in the rooms to the left of the hall, and he could hear that they were in deep slumber. He took a

few steps on the strip of rag-carpet lying in the hall, and came to the door of the sitting-room to the right. It was open, and looking diagonally across he could see into the door of Sophronia's room in the ell beyond. He kept under the shade of the jamb, and saw her sitting before the bright fire, and in another chair sat a man, whose family likeness showed to be a younger brother. He had thrown off his cap and overcoat, revealing the uniform of a rebel officer, with gold lace on the sleeves of the gray coat, and the double bars of a Captain on his collar.

"Her brother Alfred," commented Si to himself.

The man was making a hearty meal off the food which Sophronia had evidently brought to the room in anticipation of his coming.

"Yes," he said between mouthfuls. "You needn't have any more fear of the Backhouse gang. I didn't let one of them get away. This neighborhood's free from them until their children grow up. I wasn't going to let such a chance pass to make clean work."

"Now, finish your supper in peace," she said as she rose. "You needn't be at all disturbed. You're safe as long as you're in my room. The Yankees never come a-nigh it. They have some points which make me think that they're almost human. I'll go and wake mother, and Angelina, and get them ready to see you. You can stay here till towards morning, and then slip out without being seen. I heard the Sergeant say that he wasn't going to put out any guards."

Si slipped back through the hall door, and closed it again, so that the draft would not betray its opening to Sophronia as she passed to her mother's room, and touched Shorty with his foot, who sprang up instantly.

Si whispered the situation to him in as brief words as possible.

"The devil," said Shorty, rubbing his eyes. "I suppose we have got to take him in."

"I suppose so," agreed Si, with a touch of regret in his tone. "Let's let him finish his supper first. He's got a mighty nice one there."

"Why not let him alone altogether, and let the fellows who are coming up take him?"

"I wouldn't do at all. They'd have a great laugh on us about not knowing he was here."

"I suppose that's so."

They waited what they thought was

ample time, and then stole noiselessly in. Sophronia was still occupied in her mother's room.

"Good evening, Captain," said Si, appearing before Sophronia's door, and interrupting the Captain in the act of filling his pipe. "Don't be disturbed. Go on and fill your pipe, and light it, and then step out here. Sorry, but we must do our duty."

"Great God!" exclaimed the Captain, rising in agitation, and dropping his pipe. "This'll ruin me."

"No," said Si, consolingly. "Just throw them Yankee togs out of the window, and there'll be no evidence against you as a spy. We didn't see you wearing them."

"It isn't that," groaned the man. "It isn't that. I've been in the hands of your people ever since last Winter, and have only been back with my command a month. I've been talking of how well your people treated me until I have got my own suspicions of me. They begin to talk of me in the regiment as more than half-Yankee. Nothing will convince some of them that I didn't come back into your lines on purpose."

Hearing the talking, Sophronia came rushing into the room, and started a torrent of abuse. The mother and other daughter, divining that something was wrong, began a noisy lamentation, the mother calling for her son.

"Stop," said Si, authoritatively to Sophronia. "You're liable to make matters much worse. Go, quiet your mother and sister at once."

"Besides," continued the Captain. "I was under orders to join the regiment at Waynesboro. I was to've marched this evening. But I hadn't seen my poor old mother for so long, and I didn't know what hour she might pass away, and I was so near, and so I took the risk. I can never recover from this."

Si and Shorty's eyes met.

They heard the sound of hoofs approaching on the road. It was Monty and Harry coming back with a detachment.

"Quick," said Shorty.

Si stepped back into the hall, and called out to Miss Sophronia.

"I hear men coming," he said. "I'm going out to see who they are. I think it is a force that I have sent for to relieve us here, and take charge of the house and these men. If you're harboring anybody here that you shouldn't you'd better get him out, for I don't know who'll be in command. Come on, Shorty."

CHAPTER XXX.

MISS SOPHRONIA MEETS SOME MORE YANKEES—THE BOYS REACH MILLEN.

Si went out to meet the new-comers.

He found there a detachment of 25 men from the 1st Oshkosh, under the command of a very curt and positive Second Lieutenant, and a pale, slender, undersized, spectacled Assistant Surgeon.

"Had a hard day, Sergeant?" inquired Lieut. Gillen of Si, as soon as he ascertained that he was in command. He spoke pleasantly, but quickly and decisively. "Very well; I'll relieve you. Serg't Ballou, you'll act as Officer of the Guard, and detail enough men to relieve all the Sergeant's sentinels. How many have you stationed, Serg't Klegg?"

"I haven't put any out yet."

"No guards out, and two hours after dark? Sergeant, I'm surprised at you. Very unmilitary. I shall have to mention it in my report."

"Mention it or not, as you please, sir," answered Si, calmly. "We'd just come back from the river, and knew there were no rebels this side of it, and we were keeping a good lookout all the same."

"Nothing will justify not putting out sentinels at dark," said the Lieutenant, severely. "Never do it again, under any circumstances. If you haven't but two men, keep one on guard all the time."

"Wonder how much more he's learned of war in the two years and a half that the 1st Oshkosh has been in than the 200th Injanny learned that crossed the Ohio a month ahead of them?" commented Shorty, as the Lieutenant turned to instruct his Sergeant about posting the guard.

"Let me have your list of the men you have recaptured from the enemy," demanded the Lieutenant, on his return. "How many are there?"

"I haven't any list," answered Si, confusedly. "Didn't think about making one. We just took them in as fast as we could find 'em, and took care of 'em best way we could, and"—

"Exceedingly unmilitary. You should have at once entered every one's name, rank, company, regiment, when and where captured, and"—

"Excuse me, Lieutenant," apologized Si. "I was more interested in getting hold of 'em, and saving their lives, and making 'em comfortable, and standing off the rebels, than I was in setting their names down. Besides, I clear forgot to bring any paper and pens with us."

"An officer who goes out in command

of men should never forget those things, any more than he should forget ammunition and rations for his men. They are indispensable to command. Don't let this happen again. How many are there of them?"

"How many?" repeated Si, scratching his head, and trying to think. "There's Steve Bigler, he belongs to a Pennsylvania regiment; and Con Gildea is a Regular. That's two. Then there's that battery boy who's lost all his teeth from scurvy, and that cavalry boy who can't talk—that's four. The boy we buried makes five, and"—

"Them two of Ellett's Marine Brigade makes seven," Shorty helped out.

"Yes: seven we found in the cave. One's dead, the rest we brung away. Then there's Foster Walsh's squad; there's six of them, aint there, Shorty? That makes 12, altogether."

"Well, I shall hold you accountable for 12," said the Lieutenant. "Come, show me where they are, and I'll give you a receipt for them."

"I don't want any receipt," answered Si, rousing to anger. "They aint Commissary or Quartermaster goods, to be delivered on requisitions. They're human beings, who should be known man by man."

"I've no time to discuss methods with you, sir. Your ideas and methods are clearly different from mine. You'll do my way. You have reported 12 men. Show me them at once, that I may make an accounting of them."

Miss Sophronia, after hurrying her brother off, had come to the front door to study the newcomers, and see if there were any danger of pursuit. She listened to the Lieutenant's lectures to Si with surprise, not comprehending how so forceful a man as Si should quietly accept the Lieutenant's assumption of superiority.

Womanlike, she had to mix in, and side with the under-dog.

"You've no business to talk to him that way," she said sharply, indicating Si with a gesture. "If you'd've been as busy as he has you'd've had no time for book-keeping, either."

The Lieutenant turned on her a look of cold, piercing surprise.

"Madam," he said, in chilling tones, "when I desire your advice on a matter of camp discipline I shall ask it."

A Second Lieutenant can put on more

chilling hauteur than any Brigadier-General that ever wore a double-breasted coat, and Miss Sophronia recoiled a little, but she was not to be put down that way. Her temper flamed up at once, and she said:

"I never was spoken to that way in all my life, by any man, white or black, and I've entertained the highest in the land—President Davis, Vice-President Stephens, Secretary Cobb, and others. I'll not stand it from any man, especially a Yankee. Get off my place at once, you ill-bred vandal."

"Madam," responded the Lieutenant, with the same overpowering, icy calm, "you are not in command here. I am. You are under martial law. Your house is now a part of the camps of the army of the United States, and I am regularly assigned to its command. You and all in it will obey my orders, or I shall take means to see that you do."

Miss Sophronia gasped as if stunned by a blow. Ever since her imperious girlhood she had lived in a little community where her word was law. She had yielded a little to Si, as one does to natural forces, but here was a man, a young one at that, and one of the hated enemies, who was actually trying to dominate her by sheer manner, and, what was worse, was doing it. It was a staggering experience. The idea of her being under any man's command, and obeying his orders! For once in her life she was momentarily bereft of speech, and while her tongue stammered in search of fitting words, the Lieutenant, with a calm assumption of having said quite sufficient for his purpose, turned to the doctor with:

"Surgeon, you will proceed at once to examine these men and report to me upon their condition. You will convert this house into a hospital, and use everything in and around it, as your judgment shall indicate, for the best care of these men. All the people, white and black, are placed under your orders, and must give you whatever assistance you desire. I will establish my headquarters here in the sitting-room, where you can report to me from time to time."

"Do you mean to say, you nigger-stealing Hessian, you Abolition hireling, that you'll come right in here and coolly take possession of a lady's house and everything that's in it?" blazed forth Miss Sophronia, whose tongue at last found utterance. "Why, this is worse than—"

"Madam," interrupted the Lieutenant, transfixing her with the steady gaze of his cold gray eyes, "such disturbance as you are creating will excite the sick and hinder their recovery. It cannot be permitted in a building devoted to hospital uses. Hush at once, and retire to your room. Remain there until I give you leave to come out. If you disobey!"

The Lieutenant finished the sentence with a look which meant unutterable things.

Manner always counted for far more in the South than in the North, where the substance of things was reckoned above looks. Women of the stamp of Miss Sophronia were particularly amenable to manner. She felt her soul wither under the mesmeric gaze of the Lieutenant, and retired precipitately to her room, to gather her forces for a fresh encounter.

There the Surgeon, wandering through the house, in attendance on his patients, found her rocking in a chair before the fire, raging inwardly, a deadly look in her eyes, and yet a cowering at the idea of another interview with the imperturbable officer.

"Sorry to trouble you, ma'am," said he in a mild, propitiatory voice, "but have you any old linen that you could give me for dressings? It's so much better than the bandaging supplied by the Government, as it's softer and less irritating."

"Rags, you beast," she had framed her lips to say, when she took a good look at the Surgeon. He seemed incomparably the gentlest, neatest, frailest man she had ever known, and had a deprecatory, apologetic way about him that appealed strangely to her coarser-fibered nature and rude strength. He was not only under-sized, but very slight. He had a high, white forehead, hands as slender and delicate as the most refined woman's, a small mouth with red lips, complexion of pink-and-white, like a girl's, on which lay a slight camel's hair mustache. He spoke as diffidently and softly as if afraid of the sound of his own voice.

As she looked her gaze turned to admiration as she noted these details, and for the first time in many years she saw a man whom she really wanted. His feminine refinement and grace seemed a complement to her own ruggedness.

"I have a lot of coffee here," said he, gently, appealing to the dominant feminine passion in the South, "which I'd be glad to exchange with you for some old linen, if you care to." He touched a haversack, the fragrance from which filled the room. "It is freshly browned by my own men."

"Are you a married man?" she asked, irrelevantly.

"No."

"Engaged?"

"No; I entered the army as soon as I graduated."

"All doctors ought to be married," she suggested.

"Not necessary in the army—not desirable, in fact," he ventured, diffidently. "Patients there don't mind whether you're married or not."

"Good, active young doctor'd do well to settle down here," she remarked, tentatively. "All the doctors around here are old and breaking down fast."

"It's a fine country," he responded.

"Especially," she continued, "if he could marry into a leading family, with

large connections, and his wife have property enough to give him a good start in life."

"That would certainly be a windfall for a young physician starting in practice," he remarked, non-committally.

Never had she heard such a musical voice from the lips of man. The men of his regiment usually alluded to their Assistant Surgeon as "Miss Nancy," and said that he was the leading soprano in the church choir at home; but it seemed to Miss Sophronia that it would be rare happiness to always hear that voice. All the emotions are strangely related in women, and the very anger that filled her breast predisposed her to much softer sentiments.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Charles Augustus Brooks, M. D., Assistant Surgeon, 1st Oshkosh Volunteer Infantry."

"Brooks? Brooks? There are Brookses over on the Oconee, and they are quality people. Own a big plantation and about 40 niggers."

"Probably no relatives, ma'am," he piped up, with a feminine pride of ancestry. "We Brookses are descended from Maj.-Gen. John Brooks, of the Revolution, Washington's intimate friend, and who was promoted for gallantry in storming the German works at Saratoga. There are a great many Brookses in the country, but they are no connection of ours. My sisters call them the 'muddy Brooks.' Many of them spell their name with an e. None of them are our kin."

"How do you find your patients, Surgeon?" inquired the Lieutenant, in a dry, official tone, as he came up. "I am waiting for your report."

"You shall have it presently, sir," responded the Surgeon, quite as officially as his softer voice could assume. "I found some cases that required immediate attention, and stopped in the preparation of my report to give it to them."

"You will prepare your report first, sir, and attend to them afterward. I desire the information at once."

"Excuse me, Lieutenant," said the Surgeon, as quietly as if asking a young lady for a cup of tea; "the care of these men is a professional matter, which I must perform in my own way. I'll furnish you the report in due time. If you want a list of the men, send around one of your own men to make it. I'm not your clerk."

"You are under my command, sir," said the Lieutenant, doing the authoritative act up fine.

"Yes and no. You are in command of the camp. I am in charge of the sick. We have our separate functions, and I shall discharge mine properly. I hope you'll do the same."

"I'll see you later about this," said the Lieutenant, striding off.

"Goodness gracious," gasped Miss Sophronia. "I was afraid he was going to

eat you up. I picked up the poker to hit him if he laid a finger on you."

"O, he isn't going to bother me," replied the Surgeon, placidly. "I outrank him. He's only a Second Lieutenant, while I rank as a First Lieutenant. Lieut. Gillen is a very interesting man to study. He has great confidence in himself, and more of that force commonly termed mesmeric or odic, than any young man I ever met. These qualities are essential to leadership, and if he has judgment equal to them will make himself distinguished. I always like to study him when he is exerting them on other people. But when he tries them on me I simply put them under a microscope, and analyze them, same as I would examine his heart-beats with a stethoscope."

"How perfectly lovely you talk," she exclaimed, admiringly. "I never heard a man talk so well before, in my life—not even President Davis, or Vice-President Stephens. I could listen to you always."

"I should like very much to stay here and talk with you," he replied, flattered, as a young man always is, by any preference exhibited by an older and more experienced woman. "You seem a remarkably intelligent woman. But my patients need me. Have you any old linen you can give me? Here, take this coffee."

Miss Sophronia opened a press and took out a linen sheet, which she tore into strips with a quick, strong grasp that aroused the Surgeon's admiration.

"How very capable you are, Madam," he murmured with a graceful bow. "Such women are rare."

"I'd go with you and help you, if you'd like," she said. "Only that horrid man ordered me to remain in my room."

"Come along," he answered, delightedly. "Don't mind him. As I told you before, I outrank him. Besides, this house is now a regular United States hospital, and everybody in it under my command. Come along."

She followed him about, looking with admiring eyes on his gentle, sure touch on the aching, scurvy-contorted limbs of the poor boys, and his tender, almost sisterly sympathy with their disease and pains. It was necessary several times to use the knife, and he did it promptly, decisively, and with sure guidance. She stood patiently by, holding the candle, and handing him the basin and the towels with an instant, intelligent helpfulness and lack of fussiness or blundering that delighted him.

"I say again, you're a most wonderful woman," he remarked, as he was carefully washing his hands after he had finished, and she was standing near with a towel. "Quite a remarkable woman, Mrs.—Mrs.—I don't believe I have heard your name."

"Miss Sophronia Sutton," she answered, with a strong accent on the "Miss."

"That's awful long, though. You may



“WITH FEVERISH EAGERNESS HE TOOK HIM IN HIS ARMS.”

call me 'Phrony when we're alone," she added, with as much tender archness as she could command in her strongly-graven features. "And I'm going to call you Augustus. It is a very genteel name, and so sweet."

"Brooks? Brooks?" she communed with herself, after retiring to the privacy of her room. "Brooks, without the e. Those Brookeses over there spell their name with an e. They are the 'muddy Brooks.' Their great-grandfather that they boast so much about was only a Captain and Quartermaster in the Revolution, while Augustus's (and her meager bosom swelled with pride as if he were already her's) was a Major-General, and mentioned in history. I don't care if he is a Yankee. There must be some good men among the

Yankees, as well as other people, and he's one of them."

"I observe, Surgeon," remarked Lient. Gillen, with official austerity, as the Doctor came into his room to submit his report, "that you are becoming quite friendly with that woman in there. Such things are very dangerous to the discipline of a camp."

"My social and personal relations are not subject to your criticism, sir," replied the Surgeon, tartly. "You will please direct your attention to my report, which I herewith submit to you."

"Say," commented Shorty, after witnessing the Lieutenant's discomfiture of Miss Sophronia, and while he and Si were fixing down for the night, "that Second Lieutenant puts on frills enough for old

Sherman himself, but he certainly took the starch out of that she-cesh gallinipper to the Queen's taste, and he has my thanks. He has front enough for a town-hall, but he's business, all the same, from the ground up."

"Blast him and his front," said Si, sleepily. "Let's lie down. I've arranged with the Sergeant that we be waked just before daylight. Better get what sleep we can."

Even before the Sergeant came around the next morning the restless Foster Walsh had wakened them, had made his own coffee, had saddled a horse he found in the stables, and was impatiently waiting them to get ready and start.

It was full daylight when Si took his place at the right of the line, and just as he put his foot in the stirrup to mount the Lieutenant strode out on the porch and demanded:

"Serg't Klegg, do you presume to leave camp without first reporting to me, and securing my approval?"

"Why, Lieutenant," stammered Si, embarrassed at being caught in another military blunder, "I supposed you knew all about it. We talked it all over last night and decided. I thought you heard it all, and supposed"—

"You are never to suppose anything in the army, sir," the Lieutenant sternly cut him off. "It is your duty, sir, to officially inform me, as commander of this post, of any move you contemplate making, and receive my sanction or disapproval."

"Why," began Si, but Shorty, who was fidgeting to get off, interrupted with a loud whisper:

"O, stop the chin-music, Si. Report to him officially, and let's get away."

Si brought his heels together, took the position of a soldier, saluted stiffly, and said:

"Lieut. Gillen, I desire to report that I am about to start with my detachment in the direction of Millen, on a scout to secure information and assist prisoners who may have gotten away from the rebels."

"Amend your report, Sergeant," said the Lieutenant, returning the salute, "by adding, 'in pursuance of my orders.'" "But it wasn't your orders at all," Si started to remonstrate, but Shorty interferred:

"Say it, Si; say anything, and let's get off."

"Yes, yes; humor him," added Foster Walsh, impatiently.

"In pursuance of your orders," said Si.

"Very good, Sergeant," responded the Lieutenant, in his dry, official tone; "you have correctly understood my wishes, and I herewith hand you a written order to that effect. You will report to me from time to time the progress you make."

Si restrained himself into a respectful salute as he received the order, but there was something vindictive in the way he

jammed it into his blouse pocket as he turned and sprang into the saddle.

"If that feller's official dignity," snorted Shorty, as they rode away, "should be exposed to the weather, and get wet and swell up, it'd take a whole State for him to turn around in. Lucky the country's open around here. He'd never get it through the woods in the world."

"Surgeon, you are not going away?" remarked the Lieutenant, noticing that the Surgeon was bringing up the rear.

"I have carefully provided for all the sick during the day, sir," responded the Surgeon, officially saluting.

"But it is not my desire that you should go, sir."

"But it is mine to go, sir," said the Surgeon, saluting, and turning to follow.

"O, Augustus, you are not going to leave me, are you?" wailed Miss Sophronia, rushing out on the porch. But he was already too far away to hear her appeal.

Foster Walsh led the way in a rapid ride in the direction of Millen. Willing and eager as Si and Shorty were they could not keep up with him. He was all the time a quarter of a mile ahead, and far in advance of Pete and Sandy, who, as usual, acted as advance guard. At every hill-top, after scanning the country in front, he would turn and look back with impatience at the slowness with which the column came on. Si and Shorty were not a little anxious lest he be bush-whacked, but they could not get near enough to urge caution, and it would have been useless if they had.

Shortly after they crossed the Ogeechee River they saw four horsemen come on to the crest of the hill far ahead. The instant Foster Walsh caught sight of them he rushed up the hill at them, and though they hastily fired, he waited until he was close on to them, when he shot one through the heart. The rest turned and dashed back over the crest. Si and Shorty galloped forward, with Pete and Sandy, to see Foster Walsh overtake one of the others, who was trying to escape by a side road to the left, and knock him out of his saddle by a blow with the barrel of his carbine.

"Say, what did you rush into them so for?" remonstrated Si, as Walsh came back, leaving the man where he lay. "They might've been the advance guard of a whole company. I thought they were at first."

"It would have been the same if there had been," Walsh answered. "The Lord inspired me. His will directs me. Though a thousand fall at my side, and ten thousand at my right hand, it shall not come nigh me."

"May be the Bible, but it aint soldiering in Georgy," commented Si. "You should use more strategy. Pete, you and Sandy had better ride over there and bring that man in. We'll do what we can for him."

"He don't need any help, the son of Belial," said Foster Walsh. "The spirit of the Lord nerved my arm, and I landed on the back of his neck, just as I aimed. They were some of the guards who've been shooting' us from the stockades all Summer, and now've deserted, and are trying to sneak away home. I recognized them as soon as I laid eyes on them."

"He's as dead as the fellow back there," decided the Surgeon, after a brief examination of the body which Pete brought in lying across the withers of Abednego. "His neck was broken by the blow. First instance I have seen of such a thing, but the bones of these poor whites are soft, and yield readily under a blow."

"Lay him beside the road there," commanded Si. "We'll tell them at the first house we come to to go back and get the bodies and bury them."

"Follow me faster," shouted Foster Walsh, as he rode off. "We must get there before sundown."

From time to time during the day they saw men, sometimes singly, sometimes in squads. Foster Walsh would dash at them, and they would scurry away at the sight of the bluecoats coming up behind him. Some would fire long-distance shots, without any effect, but Foster Walsh would not fire until he was certain of deadly effect.

"The Lord has not put weapons into my hands to frighten, but to slay them," he remarked to Pete and Sandy once when they came together for a minute. "They only nock at Him when they escape death. They think there is no judgment when the bullets turn aside from them. They must die to atone for their wrongdoings."

Noon passed, and yet all were too eager to stop for dinner. They pressed on after the fireless Foster Walsh.

"Say, Foster," said Si, coming up to him as they were working through a swamp, "I notice that all the fellers who have run back lately have gone that way. They're gathering on us over there, somewhere. We'd better go a little slow and get our bearings."

"Come on; come on," answered Foster Walsh, impatiently. "We're getting near there. The Lord tells me that if I can get there before sundown, I'll save Angus's life. If the sun goes down on him once more he'll give up all hope and die during the night. That's the way they all do. Come on."

Si closed up his squad, to be ready for anything, and pressed on after. Presently they saw a squad of five mounted men whom Si divined had been sent out from

a force behind to reconnoiter, but before he could plan his battle, Foster Walsh dashed at and through them, bringing down one with a shot through the head.

"Let's follow, on the jump," said Si to Shorty. "It'll be the safest."

Shouting to the others, "Forward! Charge! Gallop!" he and Shorty put the spurs into their horses' flanks, mixed up with the reconnoitering party, and with it dashed through the line of prison guards drawn up along a low crest a mile from the stockade. For a lurid minute there was an exciting turmoil, with the guards, afraid of hurting their own men, firing excitedly and at random, and the Union soldiers taking as good aim as they could from the excited and plunging horses. Then every guard that was still able to struck out for the neighboring woods as fast as his legs could carry him.

Leaving the fight to be decided as it might, Foster Walsh had dashed ahead to a line of low shacks thatched with tufts of long-leaved pines, which constituted the prison hospital. Three or four skeleton-like figures sitting against the trunks of the pines tried to rise up and shout at the sound of the firing and the appearance of the galloping men in blue coats, but he paid no attention to them.

He sprang from his horse and ran into the corner shack.

"Angus, are you still alive? It's— Foster," he shouted.

The fearful death-odor, the noisome exhalation from men whom Death has sealed for his own, and which always filled those prison-hospitals, struck his nostrils and almost made him faint, but his eyes eagerly searched the emaciated forms lying on the litter of pine-boughs, and presently with a groan he sprang at one with a mop of matted fair hair, and blue eyes set in a stony glare.

With feverish eagerness he took him in his arms, and felt his pulse, and then an out and raised a shout for the Surgeon so loud and imperative that the Doctor turned from the wounded man and ran toward him.

"Your flask, Doctor," shouted Walsh. "Quick as you can."

The Surgeon forced a few drops of brandy between the set teeth. The rigor of the boy's form departed, and his blue eyes closed.

"We have saved him! He's going to live! I know it! It is the Lord's will!" said Foster Walsh, and sinking on his knees on the disease-tainted pine-tufts, he poured forth his soul in devout thanksgiving for the boy's life thus far, and earnest supplication for his recovery.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A DAY AT THE PRISON STOCKADE NEAR MILLEN.

There was a great similarity in rebel military prisons.

Almost all of them were simply great, open pens, inclosed by a high stockade of heavy pine logs.

The design and execution were very crude and simple, probably borrowed from the old Indian wars.

A deep ditch, with straight sides, was first dug around the site of the intended prison. This was probably two feet wide and five feet deep. Then pine logs, 25 feet long, were set on end in the trench, and the earth packed firmly about them.

It made a very solid wall, which would resist even field artillery.

At intervals along the top of this wall were little perches for the guards, who could overlook the entire interior of the prison.

"Camp Lawton," as the prison near Millen was officially termed, was constructed in this manner. Inside the stockade was merely bare ground, with no sort of shelter or other provisions for the thousands who were turned into it.

Outside the stockade rose a strong fort, mounted with field guns, to overawe the prisoners, and the garrison was sheltered in rude huts and shacks.

An apology for a hospital was established in the shape of shacks of pine-boughs, which afforded a little shelter from the cold, drenching Fall rains for those prisoners who were sinking under the exposure and hardships inside the stockade.

Though the prison had been established less than two months, had held less than a fifth as many prisoners as were confined in Andersonville, and thus lacked many of the horrors of that terrible place, the evidence on every side of the misery of the poor captives sickened Si and Shorty as they walked about and looked.

All the prisoners able to walk had been sent away. The rebels took no chances. They would spare no man who had in him the least probability of being dangerous to the Southern Confederacy. Men with their legs stiffened and swollen with scurvy and drawn up near to their bodies, men with their teeth dropping out, men bloated with the dropsy, men coughing their lives away in galloping consumption, men reduced to skeletons with dysentery, were all sent off, though every ear on which they rode had its ghastly burden of dead before they reached Savannah, 90 miles away. They were sent on open

flat cars, in the midst of a pitiless, marrow-searching November rain, which beat through their enfeebled bodies to their very hearts. Only a few wretched and hopeless invalids at the very brink of the grave, and who it did not seem possible could live more than a day or two, were left lying on the noisome pallets of pine-boughs, in the abject makeshift for a hospital. They and their wretched surroundings seemed like some horrible nightmare—some racking dream of the tortures of the Inquisition. Si and Shorty walked to the great gate of the stockade—that portal toward which the prisoners' eyes were always turning with deep interest, to see the rations come in, fresh batches of prisoners arrive, the dead carried out, or in expectancy of that happiest of all events—"exchange."

The two comrades looked in and their eyes traveled sorrowfully and indignantly over the lonely and desolate interior of the prison, every feature of which was eloquent of measureless human misery—the hateful dead-line, with its visions of malicious young brats of guards shooting prisoners on the slightest pretexts; the holes—now filled with water—that scarred the surface of the ground, showing where the boys, with no tools but their hands and sticks, had burrowed to get some sort of shelter from the elements; the poor hovels laboriously fabricated by the luckier or stronger out of pine-boughs and tufts of leaves; the unsightly vessels, roughly carved out of chips, in which they had mixed their coarse cornmeal. Wherever the comrades looked they saw some mournful reminder of the dire destitution and needs of the poor captives.

In an old field a little removed from the stockade was the last dolorous chapter in this ineffable tragedy. Long lines of freshly-turned yellow sand showed where hundreds had been laid away where the malice of traitors could trouble them no longer—hunger and hardship felt and feared no more. Treason had done its worst. Its victims now had suffered the last pang. Forgiveness of their torturers was now as impossible as repatriation. The case was before the Judgment Seat of God, and they must be the accusers.

"Say, Shorty," said Si, abruptly, turning away, and pulling himself together with an effort. "Let's go away and do something. I can't look on this any longer, or my heart would turn to stone, and

I'd start into killing every living thing in Georgy. I'm afraid I can never be merciful again to anything that wears butternut."

"I don't want to be," answered Shorty. "I wouldn't be right to the boys whom they wouldn't be merciful to."

"I wish them cowardly henyas of guards had had a little more sand," Si remarked regretfully. "I'm afraid we did not kill one of them, after all our talk what we'd do when we came up with them. Never saw men scatter and run so quick in my life. It was like landing in a parcel of rats. I was looking for the captain, as my special meat, but before I could make out which he was the gang was out of sight and range."

"I suppose there's no way of getting them, except by running them down with dogs," said Shorty. "I'd like awfully well to lay hands on about a half a dozen, so's to sleep easier after looking at that pen."

"I expect the best things to go back to Foster Walsh, and see if we can help any there. There's nobody left alive in the pen, and all the rebels have struck out for tall timber for all their lives were worth."

"If they couldn't run any faster than their lives were worth," Shorty answered, wrathfully, "a snail would overtake them the first rod. If I had the chance, I could kill 1,000 of them this minute, and then not feel half-satisfied. Wasn't there a feller in the Bible, Si, that let loose a lot of wolves on his enemies, to cut their throats and suck their blood?"

"No; you're thinking of Samson, Shorty, and they were only foxes, that burnt up their fields."

"Well, foxes wouldn't suit me. I want wolves, painters, catamounts, something that's fierce for cutting throats and sucking blood. Then I'd want to go in and kill the wolves and painters for having so much rebel blood in 'em."

"There's a couple o' rebels now," said Si, instinctively bringing down his gun, as he noticed some men walking out toward them from among the shacks. "I wonder who they can be?"

"Let's shoot 'em and inquire afterward," suggested Shorty, cocking his gun. "I feel as if I can't live another minute without killing something rebel."

"Hello, Indianny," shouted one of the men, as they came forward. "Awful glad to see you."

There was no mistaking. Though the garments were those of Esau, the voice was that of Jacob. It was a clear-ringing, bell-like Western voice, such as no rebel ever had.

"Hello, Kankakee, is that you?" said Si, recognizing him and lowering his gun. "Where in the world did you come from? What are you doing with them togs on?"

"Yes, it's me," said the Illinoisan, advancing. "I've often, since I was incarcerated, tried to sophisticate that it was some one else, since I've got an ap-

petite somewhat superfluous in its rapacity, but now I'm mightily sublimated that it's me. Got some hardtack with you?"

"Kankakee," who appeared on the band-bills he used to distribute before the war as "The Kankakee Wizard." "The seventh son of a seventh son; born with a caul on his head, foretells the future and reveals the past," was a tall, dark man of about 30, with a wide mouth, thin lips, and long, coal-black hair. He had, before enlistment, been a wandering lecturer on phrenology, mesmerism, spiritualism, and temperance; an auctioneer, a street-corner and country-fair fakir of soaps, liniments, tooth-ache drops, and corn salve; an Indian herb doctor, or anything else that gave him an opportunity to talk and use big words, in whose length and sound he revelled, without thought or care of their real meaning. The more syllables they had the better he liked them, and the greater his assurance in using them. He was something of a juggler, and a ventriloquist, and at heart generous and kindly, and made a good soldier of the happy-go-lucky kind, who simply obeyed orders and was always ready for duty without concerning himself in the least as to the why or wherefore of anything, so long as he got his regular meals and a place to sleep. He was the life of the camps, especially on pleasant evenings, when upon the lightest call he would sing his old rough-and-ready fakir songs, or deliver a lecture upon any possible subject, full of the most astounding words, delivered with the utmost earnestness and gravity, and lasting as long as anybody would listen to him, or until tattoo cut him off.

"Drop that, Kankakee," said Shorty, handing him a cracker. "We're in a hurry. We haven't time for anything but plain United States, and that in words of one syllable. Where did you come from?"

"Most surrepshusly, from the pile of empty meal-sacks in the commissary at headquarters, where we've bin sequestered, waiting for the Yanks to degostigate into view, so to speak."

"How did you get there?"

"The Adjutant took me out to propagate in his intellect how to tell fortunes by cards, win any woman for your sweetheart, and cure in-growing toe-nails without the use of a knife. He was suffering in his mind to know all these, and as I am the only original Jacobs of a professor in that line, I made a bargain with him for extra rations for me and my co-operator here, until I learned him these invaluable secrets. You bet I didn't endanger brain fever by rushing knowledge into his head. I wasn't going to let him graduate until I could strike some other good lay for rations, or get a chance to skip to our lines. We were all banged up trying to get away from Savannah. Where did we pre-empticate these garments? They're the paraphernalia of hell, aint they? The rebels traded hats

with me and Salamagundy here when they dislocated us from the skirmish line in front of Jonesboro. We jumped the outfit that night, and the next day we went into a house to get some sustenance and I got this coat and britches for learning the woman a verse that'd keep her baby from having fits. It'll do it every time. The next day we went into another house, and I got the coat and britches for Salamagundy by pounding up some weeds and bark to cure the man's horse of the bots. We snatched the shirts from a line one night and thought we was in good shape to make our way back to our lines, but we run into a patrol one night and the next day they was about to hang us for spies, when we owned up who we was and they sent us to Savannah. We got through a tunnel there, got across the Ogeechee, and was getting along fine when we struck a bush-meeting, where they was waiting for their preacher, and we said we was strolling evangelists—you know Salamagundy there can sing like a cat-bird. I gave them the best sermon they'd ever heard in all their born days—nearly all of them said that—and Salamagundy, he'd sung "There is a gulf of dark despair in a way that sent the women into hysterics. The bench was crowded with mourners, and we'd just took up a bully collection—had a hat full of Confederate notes—when they come after us with the hounds. I'd heard the hounds coming for some time, but didn't think they'd sic 'em on zo a minister of the Gospel, in the very act of preaching the Word. But they did that very blasphemous thing. Abracadabra, high-cockalorum, you ought t've seen that meeting. Five or six old pennyroyal bulls who hadn't throwed even a shin-plaster into the hat was roaring mad about us swindling the people, and they'd 've welted the immortal souls out of us if the soldiers hadn't took pity on us and jumped in and saved our lives. As it was them pennyroyal bulls got away with the whole collection, which was worse than the larruping they gave us. They took us back to Savannah and then brung us out here. As soon as we was able to walk again, I begun to play to get outside. I made myself solid with the Adjutant, and was beginning to learn the Colonel how to feel bumps and mesmerize, and was gitting extry rations when I was sending to the boys inside, when the stampede took place. They tried to rush us into the gangs they was sending off, but me and Salamagundy dodged them one way and another, and finally hid in empty meal-sacks right behind the Colonel's tent, where no one thought of looking for us. We intended to light out tonight for our lines.'

In the meanwhile Foster Walsh and Surgeon Brooks had been laboring anxiously with Angus McLean. Foster lifted the boy in his arms as tenderly as he would a baby, carried him carefully to the comfortable cabin which had been

built for the Colonel, and there laid him on the Colonel's bed of straw. Every motion was made with dread anxiety lest the least roughness might jar out the feeble, flickering spark of life. Surgeon Brooks walked by Foster's side to give him unneeded cautions. With the scissors taken from his surgical case, Dr. Brooks carefully trimmed off the boy's hair close to his scalp, and then washed him all over with a luckily-discovered piece of the Colonel's toilet soap and water heated to milk-warmness. He would not even trust Foster Walsh to do this. Then the empty cotton meal-sacks were used to make a soft bed, and cover the poor little invalid warmly.

"What he needs now is nourishment," said the surgeon. "A few spoonfuls of chicken broth would be worth more than all the medicines in my case. But I don't suppose there's a chicken left within 10 miles of this wretched place."

"If there is one," remarked Si, who had looked in, "Uncle Ephraim can find it."

"Decd, I kin, boss," said Uncle Ephraim.

"Well, scout out, and find one as quick as you can. Take Pete and Sandy with you, if you want to."

While the surgeon was laboring over Angus McLean, Alf Russell, with the rest to help, was imitating his proceedings with some dozen or more other miserables whom the surgeon had decided that there were some chances of saving. As to some two score others, he had said sadly:

"Absolutely no use. They'll never see the sun rise again till Resurrection Morn. Don't even touch them. It'll disturb their last moments. Put all your work where there's some hope."

They carried those whom the surgeon had indicated as having some hopes into the officers' cabins, cut their hair and washed them, and covered them on the straw bunks with the empty meal-sacks.

Alf Russell was lucky enough to find some pieces of fresh meat and bones in the quarters that belonged to the force which they had scattered, and from these started in to make a beef-tea.

Foster Walsh was momentarily torn by contending emotions. When there would come a faint flush of color stealing into Angus's wan cheeks, his hopes would soar, and he would kneel and lift his voice in thanksgiving. When Angus would sink away again he would be swept with uncontrollable rage, and rushing out fling a firebrand into the first cabin or shack he came to.

Uncle Ephraim, Pete, and Sandy galloped out into the country with eyes on the eager look-out for signs of chickens. The prospects were poor. It was a country given up to the poor white trash whose only poultry were the scarce wild birds of those sandy barrens. Only an occasional house was seen where it looked as if people had attempted to raise a little flock of chickens in spite of the



"HELLO, INDIANNY! GOT SOME HARDTACK WITH YOU?"

owls, hawks, foxes, minks, and wildcats. Where there were signs that the poultry had managed to survive these, it was found that they had succumbed to the host of new enemies from the hungry guards about the prison.

They went a mile farther, to get out of easy range of these, and came to a house showing a little more thrift. There were no chickens running around anywhere.

"But dar's bin some chickens roosting in dat dar cedar," said Uncle Ephraim. "An mouty lately, too," he continued, as

he examined more closely. "Dey's got some chickens somewhar. See dem aigshells dar."

"Where can they be?" said Sandy and Pete, straining their eyes in every direction for a sign of feathers, without catching sight of any haughty chanticleer bravely leading his clucking troop afield.

They looked through the grounds, poked under the lilac bushes, investigated the stable and cribs, and searched the hay-mow and fodder stack, in hopes that they might find a hep on a nest,

All in vain.

"Dey sartinly hab chickens hyah," persisted Uncle Ephraim. "See dar, whar dey cl'ared deir coffee dis mornin' wid an aig."

They looked and saw where the coffee pot had been emptied after breakfast of its crusts of bread, bits of parched sweet-potatoes, parched wheat, and other poor substitutes for the coffee-bean. In the midst of the "grounds" was a perfectly fresh egg-shell.

"And here's a sure-enough chicken track in this damp spot by the well," said the sharp-eyed little Pete. "Let's inquire in the house."

"Might be as well," said Sandy, sardonically, "seeing no chance to steal any chickens, we might try to get them honestly. Nice lot we're getting to be."

"Madam," he addressed the woman who came to the door, "we want very much to get some chickens."

"You do," she answered scornfully. "I gathered as much from watchin' you pi-routin' round the roosts and the hen's nests. I didn't s'pose you'd come electioneering, or to give a war widow a nice surprise by gettin' in her Winter wood. Well, you kin jes' mosey on. I haint nary sign of a chicken left. You guards down thar at the bull-pen done stole every one I had afore you'd bin thar a week. Jes' mosey on, now, afore I set the dogs on you."

That the woman should mistake them for some of the prison guards was not unnatural, as she had never seen any Union soldiers, and the Georgia Reserves wore any clothes that they could get.

"We need some chickens awfully, ma'am," pleaded Sandy, "for some poor dying men down at the prison. They'll die unless we can get a little broth for them."

"Old story," she snapped. "Done heard it a hundred times, if I've heard it once. Never seed sich men as them down thar at the bull-pen to be dying for want of chicken gruel. You'd think the whole army lived on chicken gruel, and died jes' as soon's the supply shet down. You'd think that I'd bin appointed to raise chickens fer their gruel. But I ain't. I've got enough to do to raise plain corn and yams enough to keep us alive till my ole man gets back from the army. Go off, now, I tell you agin. I haint no more time to waste on you. You done seen for yourself whar haint a feather or the place."

Her determined assertion convinced Sandy, even in spite of the egg-shell in the coffee-grounds, and he was about turning away to go on further, when Pete saw muddy remains of a chicken track on the porch. This gave him an idea. He drew nearer the door, as if interested in the colloquy between his partner and the woman, which was growing hotter every minute, and peeped in. There was a bed on the opposite side of the room, and round it a valance. Presently he saw a motion against the valance which convinced him that his idea was

correct. He gave a little signal to Sandy to keep up the row with the woman and draw her out a little ways from the door. Another signal to Uncle Ephraim brought that worthy close to his side.

"The hard-heartedness of you low-down sand-hillers is just awful," said Sandy, and the woman's face flushed with anger at the epithet with which she had become only too well-acquainted since the arrival of the Georgia militia from other parts of the State. "Is just awful, I tell you. Never see anything like it in the decent country."

"Who are you calling a sand-hiller?" she retorted. "You stuck-up, goober-eating, sorghum-drinking trash. Go right along, now. Git often the porch this minute. Don't you dare try to come into the house, or I'll baste you with this poking-stick, and report you to your Colonel, and have you tied up by the thumbs as I did them other imperdent whelps. I follered them right into camp, and picked 'em out, right afore his eyes, jes' I'll do you, if you don't mosey right off. Go, I tell you agin."

"You're nothing but an old hen yourself," said Sandy, apparently flushing up into anger, "to deny your miserable chickens to dying men. You know you ain't telling the truth. You've got —"

"What's that you say, you owdashus blackguard," she shouted, rushing at him with the poking stick. "Tell me I lie. Git often the porch, afore I break your head."

As she cleared the door Pete and Uncle Ephraim bolted in and threw up the valance. They might miss other things, but when either of them reached for chickens, the chickens came.

Each brought out three pullets in his sure grasp, and wrung off their heads as he ran down the porch, and jumped into his saddle.

"There's some genuine Yankee coffee," said Sandy, flinging his haversack to her, as he ran after them. "That'll more than pay you for your old chickens. We're not rebels, madam. We're Yankees. Sherman's men! Hooray for the Union!"

"To think," sobbed the woman, surveying the heads in tears and rage, "how much trouble I've bin to for weeks drivin' them chickens in under the bed at night and every time I seen a soljer coming down the road. The war's an awful hard thing on us poor wimmen. What'n the world did they ever begin hit for, I wonder."

"What's that that little feller said when he flung that bag at me?" she presently said, recovering from her tempest of grief, and catching the odor of coffee from the haversack. "Real Yankee coffee there? Why, I declare, so there is. More'n a quart! My, don't hit smell better'n anything else in the world? I'll go right in and make me some. But whar in the world'll I git an aig to cl'ar hit with? And them fellers was not our

folks at all, but Yankees! Laws-a-massy, I'm awful glad I didn't know hit afore. I'd 'a' bin skeered to death as to what they wuz a-gwine to do to me. Well, they're gone anyway. I'll go right in and make me some coffee. Haint had a mouthful for years."

Everybody had made a very busy day of it back at the stockade. Each one had worked with the utmost zeal to do everything possible for the poor fellows they had found, and Surgeon Brooks was tireless in helping, directing and ministering. There was none of his feminine daintiness in the way he attacked the most noisome things, handled the ulcerated limbs and went boldly among the swarming vermin.

The burning cabins and shacks filled the air with smoke, and diffused a strong, resinous odor everywhere. As night came on the scene was lurid and forbidding.

A horse was heard coming at a sharp

pace, and as Si and Shorty picked up their guns and stood expectant, Miss Sophronia Sutton rode into the strong light of the fire by which they were standing, listening to Surgeon Brooks's final directions for the night. His face was grimed with sweat mingled with the soot from the pitch-pine, and his hands were soiled and limp from much hard work.

"O, Augustus," shrieked Miss Sophronia, springing from her saddle, and rushing toward him, "are you safe and well? Men have been running past the house all day telling of the awful fighting down here, until I just couldn't stand it any longer, and had to come and see how you were."

"Phrony," he shouted in alarm, raising his hand to warn her back. "Don't come nigh me. I'm fuller of bugs than the Land of Egypt ever was, and they're a worse kind. Get back off that pile of pine needles. It's swarming with them."

CHAPTER XXXII.

DESTRUCTION OF AN AMMUNITION TRAIN.

"Miss Sutton," said Surgeon Brooks, recovering equilibrium after the shock of Sophronia's startling appearance, and resuming his usual grave, professional manner, "if you will kindly retire to the Colonel's quarters, which is probably the least verminiferous spot about this pestilential place, I shall endeavor to make myself a little more presentable, and then do myself the honor to visit you."

"Verminiferous," murmured Kankakee. "That's a bully word, that I must remember. That's doctor Latin for graybacks, Salamander. But it don't seem a bit bigger'n they do at night."

"O, Augustus, I don't care for anything, so long's you're alive and well," feelingly spoke Miss Sophronia. "Those men who came past told such awful stories of the fighting, and the number of Yankees killed. I inquired of each one if he had noticed a handsome young officer, rather smallish, but of elegant form, and each one said he had, and had shot him himself. At least a dozen different ones remembered distinctly killing him."

"The cowardly rascals, they didn't stop to kill anybody. They were too anxious to escape being killed themselves. But retire to the Colonel's quarters, Miss Sutton, and I shall join you there as soon as I can."

"Say, Doc., that old maid seems considerably stuck on you," ventured Shorty, as they were standing by the fire, carefully brushing the swarming insects off themselves and each other, into the flames, preparatory to washing up and making ready for the night.

"Miss Sophronia Sutton," returned the Surgeon, in his severest manner, "is a lady of most remarkable abilities and strengta of character. She has shown an interest in my welfare which I never can forget."

"Whew! He's a-goner," Shorty whispered to Si. "Who'd 'a' thought it? Pickle and cucumber. Whey and cream. Lion and the lamb lying down together."

"Wouldn't 've dreamed it," answered Si philosophically. "But there's no telling how some pork'll bile. Let's get a bite to eat and lay down. I don't feel much like eating, after all we've seen today, but I suppose it's better to hoist in something and get some sleep. Don't know what's before us tomorrow."

"Can't say that I'm slumberiferous," remarked Kankakee. "Feels so good to be free that I think I'll set up all night to enjoy it. Can't bear to waste none of it."

"Sergeant," said Surgeon Brooks, coming out of the Colonel's quarters, "I'm going to ride back home with Miss Sut-

ton. I've done all I can here for those poor fellows for the present, and should go back and see how the others are getting along at the house. I shall probably come back in the morning."

"Don't you want some of us to go along with you? It's a pretty risky ride back there. Some of those guards may be hanging around, and bushwhack you."

"No, I think I'll chance it. Miss Sutton is familiar with the country, and I'll trust her to pull me through."

"Better take Pete and Sandy with you, at least," urged Si.

"No," said the Surgeon softly. "I don't think I'll need anybody. I'd rather be alone, I think."

And his cheeks grew so red that it was visible by the light of the fire.

The Colonel's quarters were given up to Angus McLean, and all kept away from it, except Foster Walsh, who lay on his blanket on the floor, sleeping little, and watchful for the least sound from the bed. He was wild with anguish in the early morning watches, when the feeble light of life seemed flickering out, and he prayed as he never had before. But the rising sun seemed to bring animation with it, and presently the light of recognition shown in Angus's eyes, and his lips moved with Foster's name. Then Walsh's heart went out in gratitude to God for answering his prayers.

While they were getting breakfast Kankakee came up to Si and remarked:

"I've just bin fabricating with a nigger out here, who heard that the Yankees was here, and come in. He adumbrates that there's a train load of grub and ammunition out here eight or 10 miles on the Augusty Railroad, stalled or broke down. I supplicate that mebbe you'd like to know it."

"What's that, Kankakee? What's that?" said Si, arresting his cup of coffee in its way to his mouth. "Drop your infernal highfalutin, and talk plain United States—First Reader words."

"Nig-ger says rail-road train with grub, powder, and shot, stalled out here a-ways," answered Kankakee, imitating a child reading "an easy lesson."

"Where? How far away?"

"A-bout 10 miles. On the Au-gus-ty rail-road."

"Bring the darky here at once."

"Dey was a-rushin' a train froo t' Waynesboro," explained the negro, a like-ly young fellow, who had apparently been taken from the field to wait on his young master in the army. "Hit was de las' train dey expected t' git froo from Sa-yannah, an' had a lot ob t'ings dat dey wanted de cavalry at Waynesboro t' hab, an' dey wuz jes' a-crackin' on all de steera dey could bile, t' git froo. Dey wuz jes' a-gwine up dat steep hill afo' yo' git t' Hoss Crick, along in de middle ob de night, when sumfin done bust 'bout de injine, an' she stopped, deader'n a nit. Dey

had t' send a man on hossback on t' de next station t' ax fer help by de wire, or sunfin. I done heard de Yankees wuz ober hyah, an' I sneaked off, while de rest was fussin' 'round de injine."

"When did this happen?"

"Some time jes' afore daylight. Hit come day jes' as I come up on de hill back dar."

"How many are with the train?"

"O, a hull heap."

"What do you mean by a whole heap? A dozen?"

"O, yes, sah. More'n dat: A right smart passel."

Si knew the negroes too well to waste time trying to get the man down to anything like exact figures. Negroes and the mass of the poor whites had only the vaguest ideas as to what "50" or "100" meant. When they tried hard they could count up to a dozen, but beyond that their minds wandered and became utterly unreliable.

"Who is in command of the train?" he asked.

"Who dat in what?"

"Who's the master—the boss? Who gives the orders?"

"'Most ebberybody gib orders. But my mas'r—he jinerally had de las' say."

"Your master? Who's he?"

"Mas'r Ralph Sloan. He's Fus' Lieutenant."

"O, a First Lieutenant's in command," said Si, with the feeling that he had arrived at something. "Then it's likely there ain't a company on with the train. Probably not more than 25 or 30 men."

"Unless he should happen to be in command of the company," suggested Shorty. "Say, Sam, does your master always have the last say?"

"O, no, sah. W'en Cap'n Wilson 'round Mas'r Sloan he jes' stand an' lean on his sword, an' say nuffin. Cap'n Wilson he holler all de time, 'cept when the Cunnel hollers. Cap'n Wilson he usually hollers jes' arter de Cunnel do, an' den de men do t'ings. But Cap'n Wilson he done went on ahead on anudder train, wid part ob de men, an' leave Mas'r Sloan t' bring up de rest."

"About 25 or 30 men, as I said before," said Si. "We can handle them. I'd go over and give them a whirl if the whole company was there. Saddle up, boys, quick as you can. We haven't any time to lose. We want to get there before the help does."

"I think I'll promulgate with you," remarked Kankakee. "I kin captivate a hoss somewhere along the road. Come on, Salamagundy. We'll go on ahead, and seek for means of rapid transportation."

"I think Angus can spare me for a few hours, and the Lord moves me to go, too," said Foster Walsh. "You may strike a bigger crowd out there than you think, and need me."

"All ready, there?" inquired Si. "Look

out carefully for your girths, for we're going on the jump. Pete, you and Sandy lead off, and we'll start. Hello, who's this coming?"

A couple of mounted infantrymen galloped up, and one of them, drawing a large official envelope from his belt, presented it to Si.

It looked big and important enough to have come from the Headquarters of the Army, and for an instant Si palpitated with the thought that it might be a personal communication from Gen. Sherman himself. Then he thought of the unlikelihood of that. It could not be from one higher than the Commander of the Left Wing—Gen. Howard. Somehow he dismissed that thought, too, and began to imagine that it might be from the General commanding the Division, then the Brigadier-General, and finally Col. McGillicuddy. But when he looked carefully at the bearers, he saw that they were 1st Oshkosh boys. He opened the letter carefully, however, and read:

Headquarters 1st Oshkosh Volunteer Infantry,

Sutton's Plantation, Ga., Nov. 24, 1864.

Serg't Josiah Klegg, 200th Ind. Vol. Infantry Vols., Commanding Scouting Expedition.

Sir: I have waited in vain for a report of your operations, of which I have heard only by hearsay, through Surgeon Brooks. This is a grave discourtesy to your commanding officer that borders on positive insubordination. I am reluctant to report it to headquarters, and prefer charges, as is perhaps my duty. In order to avoid this disagreeable necessity you will at once send back by the bearers a full report of your operations up to date, with a plan of your further movements, with a request for approval and instructions to proceed to execute them. Give full details of what you have accomplished, with lists of killed, wounded, captured, etc., and of the enemy's property captured or destroyed. Await where you are for my farther orders.

Very respectfully,

Aristarchus C. Gillen,

Second Lieutenant, 1st Oshkosh Infantry Vols., Commanding Post.

"Consnarn the skeezicks," said Si, angrily, crushing the mandate in his hands. "Pestering me at this time about reports. I hain't no time now to fool around writing reports."

"Tell the popinjay to go where it's hotter," said Shorty. "He haint no business with us, nohow. We don't belong to his regiment. Let him go soak his head."

"I don't know, though," Si considered, his sense of military subordination asserting itself, "but he may have orders to take command of us. I'm awfully afraid we'll lose all chance at that train, fooling

around with a measly report, but I'll try to make one. Come and help me, Shorty. Two heads are better than one, if one is a sheep's head. Here, we'll take some of this rebel Colonel's paper."

Si borrowed a pencil from Alf Russell, wet it between his lips, and the sweat began to start from the labor of composing the report.

"Suppose I've got to say 'in pursuance of your orders.' How do you spell 'pursuance', Shorty?"

"See him damned first," snorted Shorty. "He didn't give no orders. We'd planned this job before we'd ever knowed that there was such a colt as he is foaled. 'Pursuance' is too big a word for him, anyhow. Nobody but a Major-General can spell a word like that."

"Well, then," continued Si, biting his pencil to assist his brains, "in obedience to your orders." Do you spell obedience with a d or a j, Shorty? I got turned down in school on that, once, and I've clean forgot which way it was."

"I never spelled the blamed word. It's bad enough to have to do it. I ain't writing things that I hate. It ain't no obedience to him, nohow. We ain't obeying to nobody but Col. McGillicuddy. It's all right from him, but from nobody else. As to this fly-up-the-crick"—

"Well," said Si desperately. "We hain't got no time for spelling lessons, nor red-tape foolishness of any kind. Them rebels are galloping for that train, and we've got to get there ahead of them. Here goes."

And he scrawled rapidly:

"Prison Stockade, nere Millen,

November the 25th, 1864.

Second Lieutenant A. C. Gillen. First Oshkosh Volunteers.

Sir: Got here yesterday afternoon. Busted wide open about 50 of the prison guards, who tried to stop us. Don't seem to have killed none. They run too fast. They're probably running yet. Found a whole lot of our men. Most all dying. Will save some. Didn't lose nobody, except Bill Grimshaw's hoss stepped in a hole and throwed him over his head. He lost a lot of wind, but picked it up again, and is all rite today. Am off now to get a train which is stalled out here. Hoop you are well.

Very Respectfully,

Josiah Klegg, jr.,

"Sergeant, Co. Q, 200th Injianny Volunteer Infantry."

"Come, boys, strike out lively, now," said Si, hastily folding the letter, and handing it to one of the messengers. "Every minute counts, if we're going to get that train."

They had gone but two or three miles when they came up to Kankakee and

Salamagundy, mounted on two very fine horses, and armed with shot-guns.

"Mighty good hosses you have there," remarked Si, eyeing them with instinctive judgment. "Where'd you get them?"

"Found some tracks that looked promising, and then followed them to where they was hid in a swamp. Owners no doubt willing to sacrifice every thing for Southern independence, except their hosses. Then we gobbled saddles and bridles from the first house we came to, and at the next gave the woman the prettiest fairy story you ever heard, to get the shot-guns. I told 'em"—

"Well, wait till we get back to camp to tell the story," broke in Si. "We've got something of much more consequence on our minds just now. You and Salamagundy had better ride on ahead, and scout in advance of us. Ride with Pete, Sandy and Foster Walsh a little bit, until they get well acquainted with you and your hosses, and so they won't shoot you by mistake. They're awful quick on the trigger—especially Foster Walsh—when they see a butternut coat—and you can't be too careful with them."

It was a dull, overcast day, with occasional brief showers and heavier ones threatened, but Si pressed on with such rapidity that before noon he knew that he was nearing the railroad, and began to be a little more circumspect. He slowed down the pace, and rode forward to his advance guard to caution them, and especially to restrain Foster Walsh, whom he feared would rush at the first rebels he saw, and flush the game.

Kankakee and Salamagundy came up from a long circuit to the left, with the information that they had gained a hill-top from which they could see the road, and the train still standing there. Apparently no more rebels had come up, but they thought they had seen, away off in the direction of Waynesboro, the smoke and steam of an approaching locomotive, and heard her whistle.

Si rode forward a little ways to the edge of the hill, and looking down saw eight or 10 rebel soldiers coming from the direction of the railroad toward a fair-looking house in the center of the valley.

"That's all right," Si counseled with Shorty and the rest. "Everything's quiet around the train, and they ain't expecting anything for awhile, and they've come away to find something to eat."

"Better let 'em get into the house. We can hive 'em easier," suggested Shorty. "Ride forward and show yourselves, Kankakee and Salamagundy. They'll think you're rebel cavalry, and get in quicker, to get a head of you."

"I'll go, too," said Foster Walsh, look like a rebel, too, at a distance."

"Now, Foster, you must be very careful," warned Si. "Hold yourself in. There'll be enough fighting when we get to the train. We want to get these fel-

lows without firing a shot to alarm the others."

"I promise you I won't shoot," said Foster Walsh, taking his bayonet out and fixing it.

It worked as Si had expected. The infantrymen shouted to one another, as Kankakee and the others showed themselves.

"Get to the house before them, blamed cavalry, or there won't be a thing left."

Kankakee and his companions rode leisurely down, saw the soldiers stand their guns up against the wall on the porch, and bolt into the house, each afraid that the others would gobble everything before he could get a chance.

"Well, I never did see men exorcise themselves so completely before," remarked Kankakee, as with a significant wave of his hand to Si, he rode forward, and jumped from his horse a little distance from the door. With shot-guns ready, he and Salamagundy tramped on to the porch, and placed themselves between the guns and the room the rebels had entered. "Turkeys going into a trap ain't nothing to it."

"Don't be in too much of a hurry," whispered Foster Walsh. "Let me get around to the rear, and stand for the people, before the Lord in the gap."

"Git out, critter-back—thar's nothin' for yo'uns," shouted the men inside, as Kankakee appeared in the door. "We'uns done got here afore yo'uns this time, you ole butternut ranger. Cl'ar out."

"O, please save me suthin'," pleaded Kankakee, imitating the Southern tone, as he cast his eye over his shoulder, to see that Si was not quite near enough yet. "I'm jes' powerful hungry, so I am."

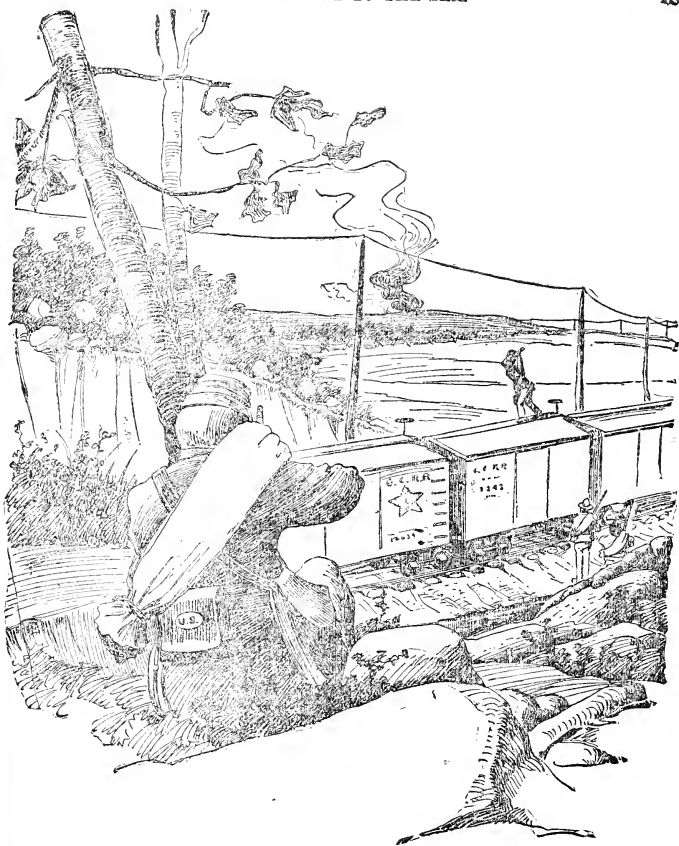
"No; cl'ar out with yo'uns. Git on yer critters and skeet out somewhar else. Thar's not enough hyah for we'uns an' we'uns mus' git back t' the kyars."

Si was now nearing the house.

"Well, you just will give me something, you congregated imps of damnation," shouted Kankakee, raising his gun. "It'll be your worthless carcasses. Surrender, every mother's son of you! I'm a Yank. Surrender!"

Each rebel dropped the bread and meat which he had snatched from the cupboard, and looked around to see the front yard full of blue-coats.

"This way, fellers," shouted the rebel Sergeant, starting for the back-door. Foster Walsh ran up the stone steps. At the sight the Sergeant snatched a revolver from his belt, but before he could raise it, Foster Walsh leaped at him and drove his bayonet through his breast. The Sergeant fell and twisted the gun from Foster Walsh's hands, but the grim veteran put his foot on the rebel's body, pulled his bayonet out, and turned to spring at the next rebel, but Si, who had run in, pulled him back. All the rebels were now holding up their hands.



"BULLETS WERE STRIKING AROUND HIM, AS HE DASHED THE DEMIJOHN TO PIECES ON THE ROOF."

"I haven't time to fool with you," Si hurriedly addressed them. "I don't want to kill you, if I can get along without it. Will you swear, if I parole you, to go on up over the hill there, and not come near the railroad?"

"Yes, indeed. All we'uns will," they answered in chorus, with their eyes still fixed on Foster Walsh's bloody bayonet.

"Well, consider yourselves sworn,"

commanded Si. "March out of that door, single file, and each man pick up his gun and smash the barrel and lock over that mounting-rock out there. Grimshaw, you and Radbone stand by the rock, and see that every man busts his gun for good. Be in a hurry about it, and then start up the hill. Forward, march!"

It took but a few minutes to execute this order, but before it was completed

Si was on his horse leading off, and listening anxiously for what he thought was the whistle of a locomotive away off to the northeast.

"If that was a whistle I heard it must be almost 10 miles up the road," he remarked to Shorty. "It'll take them the best part of an hour to reach here. By that time, if we attend strictly to our knitting, we ought to clean up these fellers, and burn their train."

"The signs are favorable for somebody being licked inside the next 15 minutes," said Shorty, catching sight of the steam locomotive through a rift in the trees, and raising his hand to halt the boys behind. "If those fellers are not all asleep the curtain'll raise right off."

"Yankees! Yaukees! Fall in, men!" shouted a commanding voice in the woods in front of them, and a sputter of firing followed, as the train guards gathered about their officer, and he indicated the direction of the enemy.

"The curtain has raised," remarked Si. "Jump down, boys, tie your horses, and form *7* skirmish line along there. Be spy, now."

The injunction to celerity was needless. Every boy in that squad had long since passed the point where any suggestion or urging was necessary when a fight opened. Every body knew precisely what should be done, and proceeded to do it with the swiftness gained by long practice.

Led by Si and Shorty, they pushed briskly into the woods, firing at every glimpse of the enemy, who made a noisy return, but continued to fall back before them. Si was anxious, and pressed forward as fast as he could prudently, for he hardly knew as yet what he had to encounter. But the audacity of his attack told, and presently he came to the edge of the woods, and saw the rebels flying across the open space in front, and taking refuge behind the motionless train.

The place where the engine had become disabled was the top of a high grade, just before beginning the descent to the creek beyond. For 100 yards or more on either side of the track the ground had been dug away to make the fills in the hollow behind and the approach to the creek in front.

The woods through which Si had driven the rebels came up to this clear space. The rebels soon found that they did not get sufficient shelter behind the cars from the Yankees in the woods, and ran across the open space to the high bank covered with woods on the opposite side.

This worried Si. He watched them as they ran across, and saw that, if anything, they had more men than he, and that a dash across at them behind their shelter would be doubtless of success.

It was very necessary to do something at once, for he had heard the locomotive whistle again, and this time it was unmistakable. The rebels heard it, too, and

sent up a cheer from their covert in the woods.

The rebels were sharpshooting to prevent any approach to the train, and as they could see under the eaves, they made it very risky for any one to try to cross the open space from Si's position.

"Shorty, we must get to the train at once and set it afire, though I'm dubious about it's burning, it's so wet. But I'm going to make a break for that caboose, and start the fire there. You cover me, I'll try to keep in line with the wheels, so's they can't shoot me under the cars."

"I'll go with you," said Shorty. "Let Harry, Monty Grimshaw, and Radbone work up there to the left, as far as possible, and begin banging away from there, as if we had some designs on the locomotive. Then me and you will rush for the caboose."

This was done, and as soon as rapid firing broke out on the extreme left Si and Shorty made a rush for the caboose. When they got inside they were astonished to see Foster Walsh climb up after them.

"The Lord moved me to go with you, and I think I can help," he said.

Si and Shorty immediately began jerking down the bunks, and piling them with the furniture in the center, where Si started a fire with some splinters. Foster Walsh noticed a large demijohn in one corner, and his temperance instincts made him at once spring at it, to break it. He caught an odor from it as he dragged it out, then smelled it closer, and said with a voice of exultation.

"It's full of camphene."

"Throw it on here," said Si.

"No; I can do better with it," answered Foster, jumping out of the car. "Hand it to me."

Divining something of his daring intention, Shorty handed him the demijohn and jumped to the ground where he was. They ran along the train until they came to the center, where the carefully-locked ammunition cars were. Foster caught hold of the iron ladder at one end to climb up.

"Here, Foster," called Shorty, "I intended to go up. Come back, and let me."

"The Lord calls on me to go up," said Foster calmly, ascending to the top. "Hand me that demijohn."

Shorty passed it up to him, and though he had attracted the attention of the rebels, and the bullets were striking around him, he walked to the middle of the car, and dashed the demijohn to pieces on the roof.

"You sons of Belial," he said, turning toward the rebels, and shaking his fist, as he pulled out a match-box, "prepare to meet your doom."

He scratched the match on the box, and threw it and the box into the camphene, from which shot up a sheet of

flame. He sprang to the ground and he and Shorty ran for the cover of the bank.

As they were clambering up they saw Grimshaw and Radbone doing the same a little further to their right. They had made a rush for the engine, and while Radbone was gathering up the rags and pouring oil upon them, Grimshaw had seized the sledge and knocked a hole through the side of the car next to the tender. Radbone threw the blazing rags through this, and then they ran for their lives.

The steep bank was slippery from the showers, and they had scarcely gotten over behind it, when the explosion of the car upon which Foster had poured the camphene came with such terrific force as to knock them down. Iron and splinters rained all around, and they sprang up to see the fire spreading to the other cars.

Everybody ran to his horse, untied him, and rode back farther. The locomotive whistle was heard sharp and near, and riding around to the left they came out upon a knoll where they could see the relief train stopped on the other side of the creek, with the soldiers pouring out of the cars.

They rode down to where they would be in plain sight of the foiled rebels, took off their hats, and gave three cheers for the Union, three for Uncle Billy Sherman, three for Abe Lincoln, and a tiger on general principles. They then rode off in triumph.

Half-way back to the stockade they met the two mounted infantry messengers, who had come in search of them. They handed Si another portentous-looking official envelope, which he tore open without much ceremony, and read:

Headquarters, Detachment 1st Oshkosh
Volunteer Infantry,

Sutton's Plantation, Nov. 25, 1864.

Serg't Josiah Klegg, jr., 200th Ind. Vols.,
Commanding Scouts.

Sir: Your report of even date is entirely irregular, lacking in details, and generally unsatisfactory. You will at once prepare another, with more attention to the proper form, and comprehending all the points upon which I required information, and transmit it to me without delay. As to the expedition against the railroad, send me full information as to what you contemplate. If the enterprise promises results of sufficient importance to justify it, I may come forward and take command of it myself.

Respectfully,

Aristarchus C. Gillen,

Second Lieutenant, 1st Oshkosh Inf. Vols.,
Commanding Post.

"Go back and tell Lieut. Gillen that I'll make up my report to Col. McGillcuddy," said Si. "I ain't going to have the 1st Oshkosh hog the credit for what the 200th Injianny does."

CHAPTER XXXIII

A HUNT AFTER POULTRY FOR THE SICK—FOSTER WALSH METES OUT VENGEANCE.

"Shorty," said Si Klegg, as they were making their way back to the stockade, "you'd better take half of the boys and strike off there to the right, and see if you can find a house where you can pick up something for those poor fellers back here to eat. I'll turn 'em here to the left. The country is getting pretty poor, but maybe we can find something delicate to build 'em up with."

"If there's any chickens and turkeys in these sand-hills they'll have to have eagle's wings if we don't get 'em," answered Shorty. "Come on, Pete, Sandy, Harry and Monty."

"I'm moved to go this way," said Foster Walsh, turning his horse's head directly into the open pine woods, and leaving Si with the remainder to follow the left-hand road.

"Look out, Foster, that the bushwhackers don't get you," Shorty shouted after him.

"The rebel had better look out that he don't get him," muttered Si, looking after him as if doubtful about letting him go off by himself. "In the temper he's in he's likely to kill on sight everything that wears rebel clothes, and burn up property without reason. And he'll do it all in the name of the Lord. He's a mighty dangerous man to be running around loose in the Southern Confederacy; but, then, I don't know's I'm responsible for the peace and prosperity of the Southern Confederacy, nor of this particular part of Georgy."

The road which Si had taken did not look very promising. It was a mere trace through the waste of column-like pines, and appeared badly weather-beaten since last used, but presently Uncle Ephraim's sharp eyes were encouraged by seeing a tolerably fresh wound on the bark of a young sweet gum.

"A wagon's done went dat way," he said, pointing ahead, "an' dar's suttinly a big house in dar' somewhar, or dey wouldn't hab so good a wagon, an' sich strong hosses. You done see dat dey tore de bark offen dar' thicker'n yo' thumb. Takes good hosses t' do dat, an' de bark and wood's bit off sharp, as if dey wuz gwine right along. An' hit was in de new moon. Yo' see dat by de way de sap's a-runnin'."

Half-an-hour later Si said:

"Uncle Ephraim, I'm afraid you're mis-

taken. That trail seems to've run up a tree. We've lost it altogether. And we're veering away from camp all the time. I'm afraid we've got to tack to the right, and strike in the direction of the stockade."

"No, no; come on a leetle fuder," pleaded Uncle Ephraim. "Sho's Judgment Day dar's a big house right nigh hyah."

"Why, there's no fences and fields anywhere in sight to show it, Uncle Ephraim," said Si, peering through the many-columned solitude.

"We'll come to fences an' fields bimeby soon," answered Uncle Ephraim, with undiminished confidence. "I's seed lots ob grains ob corn all along. Dey's done bin haulin' heaps ob corn outen hyah for de prison stockade. Whar dat comes from dar's heaps more, an' sumfin else besides."

"Go ahead, then, for a mile or two further," said Si, with a look at the position of the sun. "But if you miss your guess there'll be a slim chance of our getting anything for the boys today, and Shorty'll have the big laugh on us. He's sure to find something."

"What'd I done tell you?" exclaimed Uncle Ephraim, triumphantly, a half-mile farther, as he pointed to a piece of a mule shoe. "Dey has mewels. Only plantations has mewels. Whar dey has mewels, dey has hosses, an' lots ob t'ings. Dat plantation's right behine dat crick whar you see de brush growin'."

Sure enough, as they neared the dense thicket which indicated the course of the creek, the trail began to be more distinct and finally led to an opening in the brush and a ford. Crossing this, they came out, as Uncle Ephraim had predicted, upon a plantation, with a double-pen house of hewed logs, and mud daubing between the logs whitewashed, a roof of cypress clapboards, large chimneys of sticks and clay at either end of the house, and a wide porch in front, on which were saddles, bridles, rakes, hoes, etc.

"Don't see any signs of chickens anywhere, though," said Si, studying the plantation, which was much inferior to an ordinary Indiana farm.

"O, dey has some chickens," answered Uncle Ephraim, confidently. "Dey has dem somewhar 'round. Dey's got t' hab some t' purtend t' be quality, for deir Sunday dinner an' fer company, an' when de preacher comes 'round. Dey mus' had a turkey or two for Chrissmus. Dey eats

bacon an' collards mos' ob de time, jes' like de po' whites, but dey has t' hab some poultry t' be gentry. Whar dey got dem, d'yo' s'pose? Hid away from de soljers at de stockade, ob course; but whar? Not under de bed, dis time. Dey've got turkeys, an' yo' can't hide turkeys under de bed. Whar he?"

"Turkeys? What makes you so sure they have turkeys?"

"Dey's 'bleeged t' hab turkeys to be 'spectable. Ebbery one-nigger planter's 'biceged t' hab a turkey dinner at Chrissmus an' quarterly meetin's, to be in society. Besides, I done seed some turkey-feeders as we come along."

"Where in the world can they be?" echoed Si, scanning the bare fields, the trees about the house, the stable-yards, and the outbuildings.

"Dar's an ole man gwine out froo de field, wid a basket on his arm," soliloquized Uncle Ephraim, fixing his eyes on a moving figure in the distance. "He's a white man, kase he's got a gun; he's de owner ob de place, kaze all de dogs 'round de house hab gone wid him. He ain't takin' out dat basket to gedder hickory nuts, kaze he's too ole t' care for dem vanities; he's got sumfin in dat basket, from de way hit pulls down his arm, an' he changes hit from one t' de udder. 'Taint meat dat he's totin' ober t' his neighbor in dat basket, kaze de dogs haint jumpin' an' smellin' 'round hit. Hit's sumfin' most as heavy as meat, though. I'll jes' bet a side ob bacon dat he's got corn in dat basket, an' 's takin' hit out t' feed de turkeys and chickens he's got hid out in de bresh, way from de soljers. Sergeant, jes' go on t' de house, an' ax for turkeys. Me and Gid and Alf'll git down offen our hosses, an' trail dat ole man out into de woods. If we don't bring back some drumsticks an' white meat for de boys I'll be disappointed."

Si entered the house, and found an elderly lady sitting in a rocking-chair at the left of the fireplace, knitting on a long stocking of blue yarn, probably for herself. She mistook them for foragers from the prison guards, and received them with acerbity.

"Hyah yo' done come agin," she remarked crossly, "trackin' mud over my clean floors. Dinah, git the hickory broom an' sweep that mud off clean. What do yo'uns want now? We haint got nothing for yo'uns, so yo'uns may as well pick up them cowhides o' your'n an' mosey on. They've pressed all our corn for them scalwags down to the stockade, until we won't have near enough to winter our stock, and didn't leave us near enough meat to last till Spring. I don't see what in the world they'uns wanted to go an' git up this war for, anyhow. Jes' to take everything away from them that'll work an' make something, to keep a lot o' loafers that never'd do nothin'. Three-quarters of them guards down thar in the

camp never had sich good eatin' afore in their lazy lives. They'uns 've got nothin' to do but lay 'round, an' 'ave the victuals that other folks 've raised hauled into them. An' sich beggars. Every day comes a gang of them out hyah to beg for something to eat. They've done et us outen house and home. We've scarcely got enough left to keep soul and body together till Spring. But yo'uns go right away now. I done tell you that we haint got nothing for you."

"Madam," said Si gravely, as soon as he could get in a word, and not caring to disabuse her mind of the idea that they were guards from the prison, "we're very anxious to get some chickens or other poultry for some very sick men down at the hospital, and we're willing to pay you good prices for them."

He produced a large roll of Confederate money, which someone had given him back at Milledgeville.

"Pay, in that stuff," she snapped. "Much account that is. We've done give all our good vittles for that truck that we're a-gwine to. Why, I done sold a dozen aigs for \$10, and when I went to the store at Millen they wouldn't give me even a skein of black patent thread for the whole \$10. No; I don't want yer money. Folks 's got to live by eatin' in this world, an' I'll not part with something to eat for something that you can't eat, nor do nothing else with. Go 'long, I tell you."

"Well, if you won't sell them we'll take them anyhow," said Si, turning away. "It'll save those men's lives to have some delicate food that'll nourish them and we're going to have it. Let's go out back, boys, and look around."

"You scalwags," she shouted; "if you don't go right away I'll blow the horn for my ole man, and he'll ride over to the camps, an' git the provo'-guard, an' they'll buck-an'-gag yo'uns all. Go, now."

Paying no attention to her furious remonstrances, Si and the rest began ransacking the premises. They found evidences that there had been chickens and turkeys on the place—there were bones and feathers to tell of former savory potpies and roasts; but no biddies clucked around the barn-yard, no cock led his feathered harem through the tangle of dead weeds in the garden, no matronly hen was disturbed on her nest by the careful search of the hay-mow and the fodder-pen.

While this was going on the woman snatched a horn down from the wall on the porch, and blew a signal to recall her husband.

In spite of the woman's complaints of the way the rebel impressment agents had levied upon them, Si found plenty of corn in the crib, which was carefully locked. He smashed the large padlock on the smoke-house with the butt of his gun, and found inside a good store of meat, from

which he took a couple of hams, tied the bark strings by which they were suspended together, threw them over his shoulder, and proceeded to another outhouse, where the loek-washing was repeated. There he found some sacks of meal and flour, semi-circles of dried pumpkins on poles, strings of red pepper, bunches of sage, barrels of dried cow-peas, and a hickory basket of dried peaches. He turned over the food possibilities for the sick men of all these, and finally decided that their proper preparation was beyond the limited culinary skill of any of his command, and contented himself with taking a partially filled sack of flour, which he handed to Bill Grimshaw, to throw across his saddle.

Bill Grimshaw, though, was fascinated by the sight of the dried pumpkins, which reminded him of the delicious pies his mother used to make.

"I'm going to take one pole of them along," he said, unfastening it from its bark hangings. "I don't remember just how mother used to cook pumpkins, but I guess you can boil them most anyway, and they'll be good. Pumpkins are always good, no matter how you cook 'em."

He was at a loss how to carry them, but finally decided that for the short distance back to camp he could just carry them as they were, with the pole laid across his shoulder.

The woman raged as only Southern women can rage, while this was going on, but it produced about as much effect as the cawing of the crows in the next field. Then her husband, answering the horn-signal, came back. He was a fierce old man, who was probably a terror to his poor white neighbors and the negroes.

He brandished his shot-gun, and swore terribly for a minute or two. Then he ordered them to throw down those things and get out in the road, when he would march them back to camp and turn them over for punishment.

Si merely looked at him and then at his own gun, and went ahead with his preparations. Then the old man rushed back into the yard, seized a horse, bridled and saddled him, and galloped off toward the stockade to bring the provost-guard.

Si marshaled his squad in the road, and waited for the return of Uncle Ephraim. Presently he came around the bushes. He wore such a wide grin of triumph that it seemed as if it came into view a little bit before Uncle Ephraim himself did. He had a turkey in each hand, and behind him came Alf and Gid, each carrying as many chickens as his hands could grasp the legs of.

"I tell yo', dat ole grizly b'ar he mouty cunnin'," explained Uncle Ephraim, as he tied the legs of the turkeys with pawpaw bark and flung them over his horse, while Alf and Gid did the same with their chickens. "He done built a rail-pen out

dar in the thick bresh, an' covered hit wid rails, an' done hit so slick dat he didn't break de bresh out 'round hit, nor leab no tracks. He 'd geddered all his chickens an' turkeys dar, an' toted corn out t' feed dem, while de soljers wuz 'round hyah. He didn't see us slippin' up on him, an' we wuz jes' a-gwine t' jump him when de horn blowed for him to hurry back t' de house, an' den we went frow de pen widdout no molestation."

"Did you leave any?" asked Si.

"Not habbin' four hands apiece we had t'," answered Uncle Ephraim, regretfully. "A passel ob chickens, an' two turkies—one ob de male and de udder of de female persuasion. Dey's too ole, anyway, for sick men t' chaw."

"They'll do for him to start his flock next year. I'm glad you left them. Now, let's strike for camp. I wonder what luck Shorty's had? I expect he's got a wagon-load. Let's pretend we couldn't find anything until we see what he has. Uncle Ephraim, you and the rest keep to the rear. Hello, what's that?" continued Si, feeling the back of his head, and looking around to see if the old man had given him the benefit of a load from his shot-gun.

"Excuse me, Sergeant," said Bill Grimshaw, in confusion. "The pole wobbled before I knew, and hit you. I'm awful sorry."

"That's all right, Bill," Si answered good-humoredly, as he jumped off to pick up some of the pumpkin half-moons which had been jarred to the ground. "Here's your pumpkins. That was a rattler you gave me. Made me think somebody'd basted me with a brickbat. I don't believe you can carry them things on that pole."

"Yes, I can," persisted Grimshaw. "I'll be careful in future."

"Say, Bill, for goodness sake, look out," yelled Gid, as the other end of the pole struck him alongside the head, knocked his cap off and almost unseated him.

"Awfully sorry, Gid," Bill humbly apologized. That was real careless in me. I was thinking about the Sergeant, and forgot that anybody was behind me. I won't do it again."

Some more pumpkins had fallen, which Tom Rabbone brushed off and replaced on the pole.

"For de Lawd's sake, Mr. Grimshaw, do you t'ink I'm a sunfish, dat you done spear me dat-a-way?" yelled Uncle Ephraim, a moment later, as Grimshaw's horse suddenly came down from a trot to a walk, and the end of the pole took the colored brother in the neighborhood of the belt. "'Fore de Lawd, I'll hab colic for a week from dat punch."

"Excuse me, Uncle Ephraim. You know I wouldn't hurt you for anything," apologized Bill Grimshaw, and Uncle Ephraim was so mollified by the heartiness of the

regret that he jumped down, picked up the fallen pumpkins and replaced them on the pole.

"Here, I'm going to ride behind all of you," said Grimshaw, waiting for the rest to pass. "That pole's unhandier to manage than I thought, and I'll get where I can't hurt anybody with it."

He looked ruefully at his pumpkin representations of the moon in her last quarter. They had suffered much in looks and shape from their falls.

"A little dirt won't matter," he said. "Every man must eat a peck of dirt, anyhow. I can clean most of it off before I put 'em in the pot."

Si was pushing ahead pretty rapidly now, and the horses began to get warm. They came to a creek, and all stopped to drink. Grimshaw's horse smelled the water, and made a rush for it, as rear-most horses will, seeming to think that those in front will drink it all from them. In spite of himself, therefore, Grimshaw, pole in hand, charged down into the mass, halted to drink. His pole grazed his partner's side and lifted Alf Russell clear out of his saddle. Pole and pumpkins went into the creek, in Grimshaw's excited efforts to control his steed.

"I don't really care much for pumpkins, nohow," he said. "I begun to have doubts as to whether I actually know how to cook the stuff."

When they reached camp they found that Shorty had already come in and was waiting impatiently for them.

"Did you find any chickens?" he asked. "No, I couldn't find one," Si answered, evasively.

"I got a couple of fairly good hams here, though. What'd you find?"

"Hams ain't what sick men want," put in Shorty, in a lordly way. "Hams ain't no good for sick men. We started out to find chickens. I told you I'd find 'em if they were in the country. Awful poor country, this, around here, though. Soil so thin that you'd have to manure it to make good brick, and people poorer than Job's turkey. Never saw such a lot, even up in Tennessee. Hain't actually nothing. But I went for chickens, and I usually get what I go for."

Si knew his partner was boasting to cover up a lack of success.

"Where are your chickens?" he asked.

"O, we turned 'em right over to the cooks, so that they could make some broth for the sick. They needed it bad."

"Hope you got enough to give them plenty all around," said Si.

"We got every last one in the country," said Shorty, diplomatically. "More'n that nobody could do, and it seems it's better 'n you did."

Just then Pete's shrill voice rang out at a little distance. Grimshaw had been confiding his trouble to his sympathetic ears, and Pete was disposed to match it with his own sorrows. "I tell you," he said,

"it was the sorriest country we've struck yet. Couldn't see a sign of a chicken nowhere—guards around here had gobbled up what few the poor crackers had. We just'd 'a' bin clean skunked on the poultry exhibit if I hadn't went into a cabin and found an old hen setting on a nest in the chimney corner. We wouldn't 've looked at her agin, if it hadn't been for hating to come back dead beat. So I yanked her off and brung her along, and they're now trying to bile her tender. I don't know when they'll ever do it."

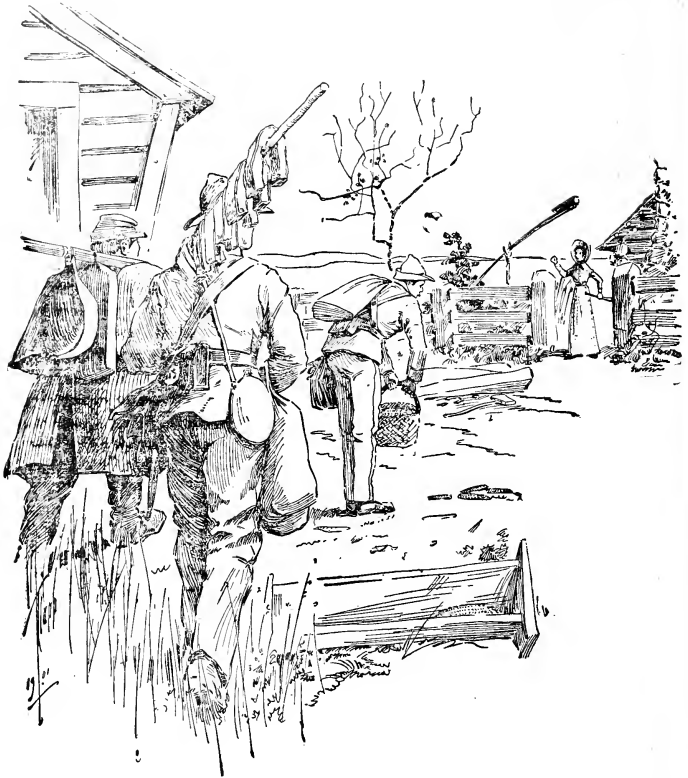
Si looked at his partner with a derisive grin. "Just throw that old setting hen out of the pot, Shorty. I'm afraid she'll not set well on the stomachs of these sick fellers. You oughtn't to play down on them that way, Shorty. Uncle Ephraim, bring up your turkeys, and let the boys fetch on their chickens."

Shorty looked with astonishment at the show-down made in front of the campfire, but covered his defeat with the taunt:

"Si Klegg, I verily believe that you're getting to be a bigger liar 'n I am, which is wholly unnecessary."

"I didn't lie to you, Shorty. I told you I didn't find a chicken, and I didn't. I had to give up, and take hams and flour instead. Uncle Ephraim and Alf and Gid found these."

Jabez Turnbull, who managed the bloodhounds at Millen, decided that he would not run away when the guards did. He had no liking for duty at the front, and was afraid that if he went with them he would get tangled up with the regular command somewhere, and be put into the ranks. With all his viciousness toward Yankees he had an incurable repugnance toward being where they could shoot at him. Before the war he had followed the business—as far as he followed any business—of running down negroes and criminals with his bloodhounds, and managed to make a fair income, as incomes went in Georgia. When the rebel conscription act went into force he added to this duty that of tracking unwilling patriots who required unusually strong persuasion to get them to "take up arms in defense of Southern Rights." By his usefulness in this work he managed to keep from being conscripted himself, and when the prison was established at Millen he was put on duty there with his dogs. He saw, from a safe distance, Si scatter the guards, and then retired to his secluded cabin to wait the progress of events. The location of his cabin was such as a man of his instincts would select. While it could not be seen, he had a good view of the road up and down for miles, and could retire from it back into the deep tangle of woods leading to the swamp which bordered the sluggish creek. In the cabin he lived with an old crone of a negress, whom he had taken for his fee from a moneyless planter, who owned four or five "unlikely" negroes, whom he worked and starved so



**"THE WOMAN RAGED, BUT IT PRODUCED ABOUT AS MUCH EFFECT AS THE
CAWING OF THE CROWS IN THE NEXT FIELD."**

that they were continually running away, and he was constantly in need of Jabe's services to recapture them.

The withered negress was Turnbull's housekeeper and sole field hand. He worked her cruelly, and she was, beside, the victim of his savage ill-temper when things did not go right with Mr. Jabez Turnbull, and they very often did not.

That afternoon, after having beaten her for not having supper ready for him, Jabe

was sitting on a stool, switch in hand, cursing her, as she hobbled around the fireplace clumsily laboring with the heavy pots and skillets.

The dogs raised an alarm of some one coming through the woods from the rear, and Jabe peered out angrily, thinking that some lurker in the swamps was approaching his dwelling, probably with thieving intent.

He still thought this when he saw

Foster Walsh, clothed in Brother Albert's coat, and otherwise in Southern homespun, ride out.

"Hyah, yo," he called out savagely, mistaking him for one of the guards, "what're yo' doin' away from yer command? Go on an' jine hit ter-wunst, an' save me the trouble o' takin' yo' thar. Go on. Yo' can't git nothin' t' eat hyah. Go on, an' jine yer company. Thar's the place t' git rations. How many o' you'ns is that out thar? An' yo', too," continued Jabe, addressing another, who seemed to have taken heart from Foster's appearance to show himself. Foster looked at him in surprise. He was really one of the miserable guards, a cadaverous, aguish, long-haired, round-shouldered man, without a hat or a bit of military equipment, and looked as frightened as a hotly-chased rabbit. Foster instantly saw that he had been scared nearly to death by the fight, and, throwing away everything, had rushed into the swamp, from which hunger now forced him. Foster paid no further attention to him, but jumping from his horse threw the bridle over a jagged limb of a pine tree, and walked straight up to Jabe, fixing his bayonet on his gun as he walked.

"Do you recognize me, Jabe Turnbull?" he asked sternly.

"N-n-n-o-o," stammered the master of the hounds, stepping backward, and reaching out vaguely with his hand for his shot gun.

"You're a liar; you do!" said Foster, approaching still close. "Don't you move another step, or I'll kill you instantly. You recognize me as the Yankee prisoner who with a fair-haired boy, you ran down with your dogs when we were trying, with some others, to escape."

"I wuz only doin' my duty," stammered Turnbull. "I had my orders. I couldn't help hit."

"You're a lying, cowardly, cruel villain," said Foster in slow, measured tones, without a particle of heat in them. "You had no business to be in the work of hunting down your fellow-creatures like wild beasts. That showed you to be a brute, without a particle of saving grace. I doubt if you have a soul, in spite of the Scriptures. If so, you were elected from the beginning to be eternally damned."

The sweat was starting from Jabe's gaugled, ugly face, in an agony of fear.

"Did you have orders, after you caught us," continued Foster implacably, "to torture us, as we stood there, wet, worn out with fatigue, unarmed and defenseless, sinking under our ill-luck, by setting your dogs on us, while you sat in your saddle and hissed them on?"

"I-was-tole-t'-let-the— dogs-rassle-vo't-o-skeer-the-others-from - tryin'-t'-git-away," stammered the luckless man.

"And you sat in your saddle and laughed when you heard that poor boy's screams and saw the blood running from

his mangled limbs. I care much less for what you did to me, than what you did to him. I was a man and your bitter enemy. Perhaps you had a right to torture me as an Indian would. But to think what you did to that poor, delicate boy. I told you then that the Lord would some day deliver you into my hands to requite your wickedness, and you struck me with your whip, and cursed me for a nigger-thieving Abolitionist. Worse than that, you struck that boy because he wouldn't go faster."

"I wuz-obleeged-to-hurry back-t'-camp-with yo'uns," mumbled Jabe.

The dogs, seeing their master talking with the new comer, ceased their noisy barking, and gathered about the two men. The runaway guard, with his long, bony hands hanging limply by his side, looked on with dumb wonderment in his faded eyes. The old negress, wooden spoon in her shriveled talons, stopped stirring the dough and listened.

"I haven't forgot you, Jabe Turnbull, for a minute since then," continued Foster, with the awful slowness of a Judge pronouncing the death sentence. "I was afraid you'd have sense enough to run away with the rest of the guards. But this afternoon, after we had burned the train, an inward voice seemed to whisper to me that my prayers would be answered, and that the Lord's time for delivering you into my hands had come. I knew then that I would find you at this house, and something led me through the woods straight to it. Jabez Turnbull, I am going to kill you. Get down on your knees, confess your sins to God, and ask for His forgiveness, for you have but only so much time to live as it will take you to do that."

Without lifting his feet, Jabe had edged backward a little toward his gun. Now he made a frenzied spring for it.

But Foster Walsh's leap upon him was like a panther's. Jabe fell with his hand within an inch of his gun and Foster's bayonet drove through his breast deep into the hard boards of the floor.

The dogs sprang upon Foster as he wrenched his bayonet out. He turned and threw them off, and then drove them into the room where their master lay, bayoneting the two bloodhounds over his corpse. He shot another one with his gun, and then picking up the shot-gun, continued to fire until he had killed them all.

"That'll be something to tell Angus," he said, as he surveyed the scene and re-loaded his gun. "I can go back to him now with a good heart, to tell him that his torturer and all his infernal dogs are dead. It'll help the boy get well. Here, you," he called to the guard who stood as if petrified, "take what you want to eat from the house. I want you to tell everybody that it was a Yankee—an Ohio soldier,—who killed this man, and that he did it in pay for this scoundrel's treatment of the Union prisoners. Say that the Yankee who did it was Foster Walsh—get

the name straight—a prisoner, whom this villain had tortured. Let his death be a warning to all Southerners who mistreat prisoners."

Foster mounted his horse and rode off to join Si and the rest at the stockade.

There he handed his musket to ~~Kankakee~~ Kankakee, saying:

"Take it and keep it, Kankakee. It's the last time I shall ever use a gun. I shall henceforth devote myself to the service of the Lord."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN UNEXPECTED WEDDING AT THE SUTTON HOUSE.

Si Klegg found that Surgeon Brookes had come back from the Sutton House, and was very busy with the sick, all of whom were showing marked signs of recovery under his treatment, and particularly from the relief to their poor, tortured bodies of the cleansing, and the delicate, appetizing food, and to their minds from once more being with friends.

Surgeon Brookes surveyed what Si had brought in with delight. "Capital. Nothing could be better," he exclaimed. "Will do more for the recovery of these poor fellows than all the medicines that could be poured down their throats. We will make some more broth for them this evening, and in the morning give them some solid food which they will relish. They'll be ready for it by that time. I wish you'd have some of your men clean out that oven over there by the Colonel's quarters, and get some wood for it. We'll tell the sick we'll have some roast turkey and baked chicken and biscuits and sweet potatoes for them in the morning, and it will revive them like a Summer shower does wilted grass."

The Surgeon hesitated for a moment, as if there was something else, on another subject, that he wanted to say, then grew red in the face, and hurried away to his duties.

Despite his nervous delicacy—probably on account of it—Angus McLean rallied much more rapidly than any of the others. Fine, highly-organized natures will frequently survive shocks under which coarser fibers will succumb.

When Angus McLean heard Foster Walsh's step and voice approaching, he turned over quickly, his eyes lighted up, and he put out his thin, girlish hand, with the greeting:

"Oh, Foster, I'm so glad to see you. Where have you been so long?"

"I never can praise God enough, my

dear boy, that I see you looking so much better," answered Foster, tears of gladness filling his eyes, as he slipped his arm under the boy's neck, and raised his head, that he might see him better. "God has been very good to us to-day. I had promised Him that if He would restore you to health and deliver Jabe Turnbull into my hands I would shed no more blood during the war. I've just slain Jabe Turnbull, and now you are getting well."

"Killed Jabe Turnbull?" echoed Angus, with a light shining in his big, blue eyes. "You killed Jabe Turnbull? He's dead?"

"Yes, my bayonet went through his wicked heart, and he's now lying out there in his cabin, with his dead hounds piled on his sinful carcass."

"Then he won't tear any more prisoners with those awful dogs of his," murmured Angus, with a look downward toward his own unhealed wounds. "Thank God."

"No, Angus; he never will again, unless the Lord sends him back to torment some one for his sins, as he did us to try our faith. But lie down and try to sleep, until I can get you something to eat."

"Sergeant," said Surgeon Brookes, approaching Si, as the latter, after setting guards, was preparing to turn in for the night, "can I have a few minutes private conversation with you?"

"Certainly," answered Si, wondering what the Surgeon could have to communicate in that manner. The thought flashed across him that it was probably some disagreeable thing from Lieut. Aristarchus C. Gillen, from whom Si had not heard since sending him his independent message.

"Well, I suppose that Mr. Stiff-as-a-Ramrod is hotter'n a hornet," remarked Si, in an anticipatory way, as they sat down on the edge of the Colonel's porch, out of ear-shot of the rest.

"I don't know about that," answered

Surgeon Brookes, busy with his own thoughts. "He's getting very sweet on the other sister. Besides"—

"Getting sweet on Miss Angelina," interjected Si. "It must be funny to see him shinning up to a woman. How does he do it? Take the position of a soldier, advance three paces to the front, and salute the colors?"

"Besides," continued the Surgeon, "he's only a Second Lieutenant, while I am a Captain. He belongs to the line, while I'm a staff officer, and staff officers are not in the habit of considering very deeply what view line officers of the lower grades may choose to take of their actions, particularly in outside matters."

"But I don't see what his getting soft on Miss Angelina has to do with me," said Si. "I don't believe he's got any right to command me when we're away from him, and he shan't hog the credit belonging to the 200th Injanny Volunteers, and so I sent word to"—

"What are you talking about?" asked the Surgeon. "I wasn't saying anything about his commanding you. You're out under one set of orders, and he under another. Of course, he'll try to command you. He'd try to command the whole army if Sherman should get killed, and he saw any show for him. But that is not what I wanted to talk to you about. You are a married man, I believe?"

"Y-es, so to speak," said Si, with a clutch of memories at his heart, followed by a sickening fear that the Surgeon might have in some way got bad news from Annabel. "I was married and hurried right off, because of orders, to join the regiment."

"You were married all right. That's the main thing. That's the reason I wanted to talk to you privately, where the rest couldn't hear. I feel sure of your sympathy and support. Those other reckless roysterers would only laugh and jibe at me. They cannot yet comprehend, if they ever do, the awful yet delicate responsibility resting upon a man when a gently-reared, well-bred woman proposes to unite her life with his."

"So you've left a girl behind that you're going to marry as soon's we get through, have you, Surgeon?" said Si, beginning to comprehend the drift of the Surgeon's thoughts. "I understand your feelings."

"I expect that they will laugh at me, and make me the subject of all the jokes that are customary on such occasions," continued the Surgeon, without noticing the interruption. "It is inevitable, and part of the price a man pays for his happiness. I know that much will be said about the disparity in our ages, but her heart, which is everything, is maiden and fresh, it is even much younger than mine, which has been hardened by years of association with medical students and soldiers—the toughest creatures that the

Lord makes. While she may not be so beautiful as some women, she has qualities that no other woman I have ever met possessed, and"—

"What business is it of theirs how she looks? They ain't going to marry her. They may never see her. What do you care what these fellers around here may say?"

"I'm particularly afraid of Shorty," continued the Surgeon. "Shorty's got a tongue sharper than a lance."

"What need you bother about Shorty? Shorty ain't going to follow you home. He's probably got fish of his own to fry."

"Serg't Klegg, what is the matter, that you don't understand me?" said the Surgeon, irritably. "I'm going to marry Miss Sophronia Sutton."

Instinctively Si's lips puckered for a whistle, but his natural, ready tactfulness restrained him in time, and knowing how futile it was to argue with a man who had made up his mind to marry a woman, he hastily tried to think of something complimentary to say. This took him some seconds, and the result was:

"Well, she is the finest looking woman that we've seen since we've been in Georgy."

"Thank you for saying so. I was afraid my partiality had prejudiced me in thinking so. But her real charms are internal—not on the outer surface. Though, perhaps, rather plain outwardly, she has a rare inner loveliness."

"I'd take the first opportunity to turn her inside out," Si wanted to say, but restrained himself.

"She has simply a wonderful mind," the Surgeon continued, growing in enthusiasm, as men in his position are wont. "So solid, so rich in useful knowledge, so open to new facts. She will make an invaluable adviser and helpmeet to a physician, and I never met anyone who understood me as well as she does. But if"—

"Great Scott! They all talk that way," Si groaned inwardly. "All that a woman has to do to catch a man is to tell him she understands him better than anyone else does."

"But if I get started talking about her I'll never know when to stop," said the Surgeon, starting up. "I must go over and superintend getting those fowls ready for the oven tomorrow. Do you know that fellow Kankakee, while one of the most atrocious humbugs that ever walked the earth, really knows some things very well? I have discovered that he is as fine a cook as I ever knew, and I have had him at work stuffing those turkeys, making bread out of your flour, and getting the chickens ready for baking. It is so simply wonderful what ingenuity and readiness in the culinary art the thorough-paced fraud has. I'm going to try to keep him with me. I'm only afraid that he'll get some of his bad English mixed up into

his cooking and poison somebody. You have the oven all ready to fire up first tain'g in the morning."

"It's all ready."

"Well, you'd better have your guard start the fire sometime before daylight, so that the oven will be good and hot by the time we get up, and then we can serve the food soon after we get the patients straightened around and ready for their breakfast. By the way, I haven't informed you yet that the wedding will take place tomorrow afternoon, at Sophronia's house, and I'd like very much to have you and the rest there. I want you, particularly, to come, and bring Shorty, if you can restrain his tongue."

"We'll be there, unless something comes up to interfere. Good-night, Doctor."

The announcement of the proposed marriage created much excitement among the boys, and they waked up those who had gone to sleep, to discuss it.

Foster Walsh denounced it as a wicked lust'g after a daughter of the Moabites.

Kankakee opposed it as "politically conglomerate."

The embryotic attorneyism of Monty Scruggs asserted that it came under the prohibition against giving aid and comfort to the enemy.

The medical-minded Alf Russell thought that a physician of Surgeon Brookes's genius would be thrown away in such a country.

Always military Harry Joslyn was sure that marriage with women of the enemy was injurious to military discipline, and should be banned by regulations. Then he made some remark about Surgeons being after all not really officers, at which Alf Russell took offense and mixed up with him, and Si had to stop the fight.

It struck Gid that the rebel woman must have used some trick to capture the Surgeon, and then he and Kankakee had a scrap as to the use of tricks generally, which Si had also to stop.

Tom Radbone and Bill Grimshaw, who had had all they wanted of Georgia, could not comprehend how any sensible man could ever want to leave the North and live there.

Pete and Sandy were entirely too young to understand why a man who had a chance to be in the army should care anything about a mere woman, or for anything else than soldiering. That was all they wanted in this world.

Shorty ended the discussion with:

"Oh, all you fellers are shooting off your mouths in the air. You don't know no more what you're talking about than a hen does as to when to cross a road. None of you are going to marry that woman. The Surgeon is. You mayn't want her, but you can't tell any more what he may want than you can tell when he's hungry or thirsty. I think it's all right. He needs just her hemlock-tanning for his fine-ladyness. Together, they'll aver-

age up well. Anyhow, that's his business. He's been all right since he's been with us, and it's our place to stand by him for all we're worth. We'll all go over there tomorrow and give him as good a send-off as we know how. You hear the soft murmur of my 'scape pipe."

Si was so interested in the feast for the sick—or as they could now be more appropriately termed, the convalescents—that he had himself waked an hour or two before daylight, and took personal charge of heating the oven. This, built of clay and stones for the use of the Colonel commanding the post, was a fairly good affair, and Si had found an abundance of dry wood in the material of the shacks and sheds which had escaped Foster Walsh's incendiarianism.

Kankakee, too, was up betimes, full of enthusiasm as to what his cookery was going to accomplish for his comrades. Uncle Ephraim had been his willing assistant, and learned lots as to Yankee ways, of which Aunt Minerva Ann would receive the benefit in the future.

With the assistance of seidlitz powders from the Surgeon's stores as baking powders, Kankakee had contrived some very fair biscuits, Uncle Ephraim had gone out into the country and found some sage and onions, and with crumbled hardtack a very good stuffing for the turkeys and chickens had been elaborated. There was an abundance of fresh sweet potatoes to bake along with the fowls, and the convalescents grew visibly better as the good things being prepared for them were fully described by the boys. In addition to the viands, each was to have the first real drink of army coffee which had been allowed him.

By the time the Surgeon finished his rounds, in which he found everywhere a notable improvement in pulses, tongues and general appearance, they had had their hands and faces washed, and had taken their regular prescriptions, the air about them was filled with the intoxicating aroma of roast fowl, warm bread and coffee.

"That smell'd be enough to raise Lazarus," remarked Angus McLean.

"Angus, it took the Lord's power to raise Lazarus," said Foster, reprovingly. "Be a little more careful in the selection of your illustrations. Say the sleepers of Ephesus."

Surgeon Brookes went around with the squad carrying the victuals, and prescribed just how and of what kind each man should have. From his decision there was no appeal. For once, in the matter of food, the boys rigidly obeyed orders.

The Surgeon was so liberal, however, that there was comparatively little left. This was carefully put away, under the charge of Foster Walsh, Kankakee, Salamagundy and Uncle Ephraim, who were to remain behind, while the rest went to the wedding.

"I think it'll be all right to leave so few," Si remarked, when the decision was made. "I don't think there is any danger. We haven't seen a sign of a rebel cavalryman or bushwhacker around here since we've bin here."

"Yes; go ahead. There's nobody around here to molest us, since Jabe Turnbull's gone." Foster replied, confidently.

They cleaned up themselves and horses as well as possible, to make a good showing as the bridegroom's friends, and following at Si's command, dashed after the Surgeon in his impatient, eager ride back to his expectant bride.

The squad of the 1st Oshkosh took arms, formed, presented arms, and cheered as they came up. This brought Lieut. Aristarchus C. Gillen to the door, from his tete-a-tete with Miss Angelina in the rear of the hall.

"Serg't Wilcox," he demanded sternly, as he buckled on his sword, "who gave the men orders to fall in?"

"Nobody," answered the Sergeant. "We all did it of our own motion, to show the boys how glad we were to see them again and give 'em a compliment for that train job."

"Well, sir, understand that I am the one to order the men under arms, and the paying of all compliments. Especially to such insubordinate men as you are, sir," he continued, directing his remarks to Si, who had dismounted, approached and saluted. "I have forwarded a report of your conduct to headquarters, and I should have taken more severe notice of your course, if I had not received orders to hold my command in readiness to return to the regiment as soon as the ambulances arrive for the sick. You can rest assured, however, that I shall not let the matter rest."

"Do as you please, Lieutenant," said Si, indifferently.

"Come right in here, men," called the Surgeon.

They entered the sitting-room, and found there, all dressed up, very prim and dignified, and wearing the expression that they usually assumed for funerals while in the presence of "the remains," but occasionally darting freezing looks at "the Yankees," several aunts of Miss Sophronia, who had been hastily summoned.

They had brought with them their daughters, who had at first scornfully regarded Lieut. Gillen and his men from behind the window blinds, and were surprised to find them so good-looking. Presently their curiosity demanded a closer acquaintance with the 1st Oshkosh boys, who, as usual, did not venture into the house, but were scattered around outside, mending their clothes, sewing on buttons, reading, writing, sleeping, and otherwise putting in their leisure.

They took no notice of the bright eyes scanning them, though these made their observation momentarily bolder, scorning at last concealment behind the blinds.

Finally one of the bolder girls determined upon a decisive maneuver. With great austerity of manner, and pulling her skirts aside that they might not by any possibility touch the boy who was sitting fully six feet away, absorbed in scrupulous cleaning of his gun-nipple, she tip-toed across the porch to pick up a strap or something hanging on the banister, and swishing about deftly caught her skirt in a splintered banister. She uttered an exclamation of impatience, but apparently could not release the cloth. The soldier dropped his gun, was on his feet like a flash, and instantly released the skirt.

"Thank you," she said snappishly. "I didn't imagine you Yankees could be polite."

"Yankees are always polite," responded the soldier. "Particularly to ladies, and to them who are so young and pretty."

"I don't want no compliments from invaders of my country," she said haughtily, turning as if to leave his hateful presence, but still halting to hear his next words.

But the ice had been broken, and presently all of the girls were in eager discussion of the war with the Wisconsin boys, and exceedingly surprised to find how attractive young men in the horrible blue clothes could be.

The aunts inside whispered to one another, in the manner that they interchanged ideas at a funeral.

"Could hardly git my own consent to come. But 'Phrony has a masterful way, and I'll own up that I was powerful curious to see the man she'd got at last."

"Thought she'd 've died before she'd married a Yankee."

"She'd 've died without marrying at all if she didn't marry him. It was her only chance. All the men 'round here was afraid of her. I don't believe she's had anybody keep company with her for 10 years. The last one that I kin recollect was Sim Croft, that went to Californy, and was killed by a rock caving in on him. That was when 'Tildy was a baby. I recollect him taking 'Tildy from me and carrying her to rest me, and 'Tildy's now grown."

("Tildy was the one who had started the flirtation with the Wisconsin boys.)

"'Phrony set herself too high in the first place. It's the old story of the crooked stick. But to take a Yankee of all men."

"But he's a doctor, and doctors ain't real Yankees. Only school-teachers, peddlers and soldiers are real Yankees."

"Well, I'd a heap ruther 'Tildy 'd die than to marry a Yankee of any kind."

"Well," answered the other, shifting her seat a little, so as to get a better view of what was going on in the noisy, laughing group outside, "'Phrony's disease seems to be ketching, and if you don't want a Yankee son-in-law you'd better stir yourself. I see 'Tildy walking down there toward them laylock bushes with a

Yankee, and I think he's got hold of her hand."

"Tildy Butler, come in here this minute," screamed the mother, and the others echoed her alarm, with imperative calls of their daughters' names. The girls reluctantly fluttered back into the sitting-room, and gathering behind their mothers began to scan and whisper giggling comparisons on Si's squad, who, caps in hand, were lined up in chairs on the opposite side of the room trying to keep their faces in the expression they thought proper to this extraordinary occasion.

Presently who should enter but Elder Hornblower, Bible in hand, and with the slow step and dignified mien he assumed for ceremonial occasions. He walked slowly by the line of sisters, shook each one by the hand, and inquired as to her health and that of her family, and presently coming to the end of them cast his eye to the other side of the room, and recognized Si and Shorty. He stopped, startled, and his face grew red.

The boys' instinctive reverence for a preacher in the exercise of his functions moved them to do something, and that something instinctively took the soldierly form of standing at attention and saluting.

This seemed to restore the Elder's equilibrium. He gravely returned the salute, took his position in front of the fireplace, and opened his Bible.

Miss Sophronia Sutton came out of her room, attired in a gown which had probably been made for a similar occasion in the remote past, and laid away when the event failed to come off. Behind her came her mother and sister, in clothes which, like Sophronia's, diffused an odor of dried roseleaves with which they had long been packed.

Assistant Surgeon Brookes and Second Lieut. Aristarchus C. Gillen entered the room from the hall in as nearly full-dress uniform as their campaign kits would permit.

The Elder gave the customary lecture about the sanctity of marriage, and added: "There are some thoughts about this union which rise in my mind, and to which I am tempted to give utterance. But the fact remains that when two persons of lawful age, sound minds, and free from impediments, determine to enter into matrimony, it is the duty of a minister of God to unite them. That duty I shall proceed to do, though I shall be glad to hear of any just cause or reason why the marriage shall not be solemnized."

Not hearing any, he proceeded with the ceremony, pronounced the two man and wife, and gave Sophronia an unctuous pastoral kiss.

Si stepped forward to shake hands with the Surgeon, and wish him joy, when the sound of galloping hoofs attracted everyone's attention. Si dropped the Surgeon's hand and went out on to the porch, fol-

lowed by his boys, each one seizing his musket.

"It's Kankakee coming on a dead run," said Shorty. "There's trouble at the stockade."

Every one ran for his horse, untied him, mounted and rode out, in readiness for Si's orders.

"Sergeant," shouted Kankakee, as he reached Si. "Foster Walsh dispatched me with the imperious information that"—

"Words of one syllable, Kankakee," said Si, curtly.

"Com-pan-y-reb-el-cav-al-ry coming to attack stockade," said Kankakee, with his First Reader manner.

"Sure? Is Foster Walsh sure?" asked Si.

"Dead sure."

Si vaulted into his saddle, rode to the head, and shouted "Forward."

"How did you find out, Kankakee?" Si asked, as they slowed down to cross a muddy ford.

"Well, Dan Kilp, a measly hungry guard, that Foster didn't kill when he laid out Jabe Turnbull, come in shortly after you left, and said that if we'd give him something to eat he'd tell us something that we ought to know. We filled him up pretty well, and then he told us that while he was laying out he overheard two rebel scouts talking. They'd bin sent out to see who was down at the stockade, and if a train coming up from Savannah could not be got past the junction. They was going back to report to their company that it could gobble up everybody there easy, and hold the junction. Foster Walsh was sure the man was telling the truth, and started me on the jump for you."

"Hello, Sergeant; caught up with you at last," said Surgeon Brookes, reigning in his foaming steed alongside of Si.

"Hooray! three cheers for the Surgeon!" shouted the boys. "He's a brick."

"Why, Doctor, I'm astonished," said Si. "Why didn't you stay with your wife? We didn't expect you to come with us."

"I've told Sophronia right along that our marriage must not interfere an instant with my duty. We only married to make sure that we should not lose one another. The ambulances have come up for those men back at the house, and now my whole duty is with those at the stockade. I'm sure I can save some of their lives by being with them. And I want to be with your squad, anyhow."

They were relieved to find, as they came near the hospital grounds, that they were ahead of the rebels.

Foster Walsh, who had been on the anxious look-out, came out to meet them, carrying in his hand a long hickory stick about an inch thick, which he had freshly cut and trimmed into a serviceable weapon.

"I've got the roads barricaded," he said, "with a good high fence across the

one that they're likely to come in on. Salamagundy, Uncle Ephraim and Ham Stoughton, who felt able to use a gun, are down there behind it."

"But you hain't any gun," said Si. "Can't you find one for yourself?"

"No; I shall not use one. I promised the Lord I wouldn't shed any more blood during the war. But I cut this stick, which I think I can use to effect in helping stop them, if they come to close quarters."

"You're sure they're coming, are you?"

"O, yes; they can't be more than two or three miles away this time. I sent Dan Kilp out for more information, and he climbed a tall hickory and saw them coming."

Si had his boys dismount and securely tie their horses, when they ran down to the barricade.

"Fore God I'm powerful glad yo'uns done come," said Uncle Ephraim. "I wuz moultly aferead dat Aunt Minervy Ann'd be a widder dis arternoon."

They took positions behind the barricade, extending it with logs and stumps to the right and left, with Foster Walsh leaning on his stick in a clear place at the left flank and waited the attack.

They did not have long to wait. They soon saw the rebels coming straight up the road in a column of fours, and riding at a sharp trot, without advance guard or flankers.

"They intend to ride right over us," said Si. "Steady, boys. Don't fire till they come closer. Me and Shorty, and Radbone and Grimshaw will try to bust the head of their column. The rest of you wait till they come closer."

The four fired and brought down a couple of horses.

"Forward, men!" shouted the Captain, whom it flashed upon Si he had seen before, as he leaped his horse across one of the fallen ones. "Forward! Ride right over them!"

There was a wild turmoil of shots, yells and curses, as the others opened fire, and the rebel cavalry dashed their horses for-

ward. In spite of his losses the rebel Captain drove straight at the barricade, and leaped it in the face of Si and Shorty, Radbone and Grimshaw, who jumped back a little ways to finish loading their guns. Then they brought the Captain and the man who had followed and their horses down with shots, and joined the rest in beating down the others with their gun-barrels. Four or five had tried to ride around the line to the left, but had encountered Foster Walsh, swinging his hickory like a saber, and dismounting all who came in reach of his long arm.

All the guns on both sides were now empty, and when the rebels behind saw the fate of their Captain and those who followed him, they turned and galloped off.

"Ain't you Capt. Alfred Sutton?" inquired Si, as, looking around the field, he came up to where the wounded officer sat up beside his dead horse.

"Yes; that's my name."

"Are you badly wounded?"

"It seems I've got a bullet through my shoulder," responded the officer, feeling there with his hand. "I think it hasn't done anything more than break a small bone or two, but it's bleeding pretty badly."

"I guess that can be stopped," said Si, kindly. "Here comes your brother-in-law. He'll take care of you."

"My brother-in-law?" gasped the Captain. "I haven't any."

"O, yes you have," said Si cheerfully. You're playing in better luck than you thought. A brand-new brother-in-law. Not worn a bit. Just out of the preacher's hands today. Here he comes now. Surgeon Brookes, this is Capt. Alfred Sutton, brother to the lady who was once of the same name."

"Capt. Alfred Sutton," said the Surgeon, rushing forward. "I hope you haven't killed him."

"Oh, no," answered Shorty. "He's only hurt a little. Something that you can soon cooper up. It'll help you to get acquainted with your family."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE GREAT BATTLE WHICH NEVER CAME OFF—SHERMAN SHREWDLY
OUTMANEUVERS BRAGG.

"I'm getting real homesick to be back with the regiment," Si confided to Shorty, as they sat by the fire and smoked, after the others had turned in. "I hate to be so long away from Col. McGillicuddy and the rest."

"Ditto here," echoed Shorty.

"Of course, we hain't loafed any since we've bin away," Si argued with himself. "We've earned our hardtack and pork nearly every day, I think."

"But what does that matter, if Col. McGillicuddy and the regiment don't know it?" grumbled Shorty. "I'd give more for their knowing it than all the world beside."

"Of course they do know it," Si tried to convince himself. "They know it when we tell it to 'em, and when they hear it from other sources. And they know that we've always put in full time, wherever we've been."

"But it ain't like having Col. McGillicuddy actually see it, and of reporting to him every night. Then the tally's kept straight, and there can be no pollyfoxing. Let's get back to the old regiment as soon's we can. There's home."

"That's my idee, too. We've been running an independent campaign long enough. It ain't fair to Col. McGillicuddy. He get's big pay for bossing us. Let's give him a chance to earn his money."

"There's no use of our hunting for any more escaped prisoners now," agreed Shorty. "We're to the end of that lay. And the big fight for Augusty's bealing to a head. Everything points that way. I heard the cannon up to the northeast all day. We ought to be with the regiment when the grand culminating fracas comes off, and we can't start too soon."

"They say that old Bragg is again in command at Augusty," continued Si, "and that he proposes to give us a Stone River and Chickamaungy rolled into one, with some extras thrown in."

"That's reason enough for our going to the regiment at once. Let's start first thing in the morning."

"Can't do it. Must provide for these convalescents first. But something tells me that some of our men'll be along tomorrow, and then we can turn them over and skip out."

In the morning they could see no signs of the army, except the smoke of the burning railroad in the distance. But that kept coming nearer, and before noon the advance of the Seventeenth Corps came along the railroad, destroying it as they came.

Presently the bugle blew the halt for dinner, and the men, after making their coffee by the heat of the burning ties, wandered up to take a look at the prison of which they had heard so much. A tall, wiry man with red hair and the double stars of a Major-General rode by with his staff, was received with cheers by the men, looked for a little bit curiously at the prison and its surroundings, and then went off some distance to a clear knoll in the woods, and dismounted for dinner.

"That's Gen. Frank P. Blair, commanding our corps," one of the Army of the Tennessee boys explained to Si. "He's a dandy, and don't let it slip your mind. He's always right up where the main business is going on, and does his full share."

"Do you know where the Fourteenth Corps is?" asked Si.

"No; only it's to the left somewhere. Hain't seen nothing of it since we left Milledgeville. The Fifteenth Corps is off there to the right, somewhere. That's the only one I know anything about. It had the job of tearing up this railroad until we relieved it, and then it sidled off to the right to look after Hardee and McLaws, who was said to be coming up with a million men or more to eat us up without salt. Lord, if you'd listen to these citizens our graves are already dug, but I don't believe the Fifteenth Corps had to put out mor'n a skirmish line yet."

Still louder and more enthusiastic cheering broke out in another direction. Caps were thrown in the air, and men seem to run from every side.

"That must be Old Billy himself," said Si.

"That's just who it is," echoed Shorty, as the rugged face and towering form of the commander of the Union army appeared coming through the crowd on a tall, quick-stepping horse, which seemed to share his master's impatience in motion.

"Take arms; fall in, boys," shouted Si. "He's coming our way. Present arms!"

The General's quick, roving eye seemed

to take in and comprehend everything as he returned the salute; the prison with all its past horrors, the poor convalescents rising from their beds to feast their eyes upon him; the sweep of the landscape and its strategic possibilities; the present situation of the troops, and each individual in Si's squad.

"Damned scoundrels! Damned scoundrels!" he remarked savagely, as he surveyed the stockade. "Made a regular hell on earth here for our men. Yet they whine about my barbarity. Burning 100 Atlantas wouldn't pay up for Andersonville and this place. Colonel," he continued, speaking to an officer of the Seventeenth Corps, and pointing toward the fine junction depot at Millen. "What are you sparing that building for? Burn it."

"Osterhaus, with the Fifteenth Corps, must be about over there by this time," he continued, speaking to his staff. "He's due at Scarboro tonight, and that Flying Dutchman is always on time. That road there must lead to Scarboro. One of you take it and see if you can find Howard or Osterhaus."

"Hello," he went on, turning to Si. "What are you Fourteenth Corps men doing here?"

"Col. McGillicuddy sent us out here to pick up escaping prisoners, and we got quite a lot of them," answered Si. "We pushed on here, run off the guard, and got forty or fifty prisoners, that we've been waiting to turn over."

"All right! All right! Good job. Nichols, go in and see that those sick are out in charge of some one. You're relieved, Sergeant. Get back to your regiment as soon as you can."

"That's what we want to do, General. Can you tell us where our Corps is?"

"Yes; it is going into camp around Lumpkin's Station, on the Augusta Railroad, about 10 miles from here, in that direction. Take that road there, and it'll lead you right to it. Make haste, and you'll get there before nigat."

"Thank you, General," said Si, saluting.

Emboldened by the General's frank, friendly manner, Shorty asked:

"Are we going to get a chance to whale the life out of old Bragg up there at Augusta, General?"

"Don't know. Don't know. Tell more about that in a day or two. Bragg's up there, with all the men he can gather. Where's Blair? I want to find Blair."

"Gen. Blair's right over there, General," said Shorty, pointing him out.

"Attention, forward march!" commanded Si. "Three cheers for Gen. Sherman."

When they rode blithely through the open pine woods to the northeast they found the country full of troops closing up at the Millen & Augusta Railroad.

"That looks like a battle, sure," remarked Si.

"They had to pass directly through the

Twentieth Corps, formed of the old Eleventh and Twelfth Corps of the Army of the Potomac.

There were recognitions and salutations on all sides, and everybody said:

"We're up against old Bragg again. But we've licked him every time, and we'll do it again at Augusta, and that'll end the war."

"Kilpatrick's out there with his cavalry fixing up things for a big battle. Directly the infantry'll have to go in and settle Bragg's hash."

Herds of cattle and trains of wagons were being closed up to the main body, as if in anticipation of a battle.

Whenever the boys crossed a hill-top they would catch the faint, sullen boom of Kilpatrick's guns off toward Waynesboro, where he and Jo Wheeler were settling the usual preliminaries to a great conflict.

"From the sound it sometimes seems to me that we're driving them, and then again it appears like we're being driven," remarked Si, irritably. "That's the way with the tormented cavalry. A plaguey regiment of them'll fight all over a whole condemned, measly County, and you never can tell whether they're licking or being licked, until they run back behind the infantry, with their tails betwix their legs."

"Never mind, Si," said Shorty, more cheerful. "The cavalry's just putting in the time, as usual, until Sherman gets good and ready. By tomorrow he'll have the army all up, and then you'll see the fur fly. We'll be in plenty of time. We're getting near the Corps. See the acorns on them wagons there?"

The sight of the familiar old corps badge gave new impetus to their progress, and thanks to it they had little trouble in making their way through the throng of teams and cattle and other impedimenta of the rear of an army, and soon came in sight of their division flag. Then it was only a short distance to the camp of the 200th Ind. where they were received with enthusiasm.

Soon there pushed through the crowd of handshaking, cheering boys surrounding them Aunt Minerva Ann, vibrating dignity as "de chief cook-lady ob de regiment" and her palpitating eagerness to see little Pete.

The attention and praise which Aunt Minerva Ann had gotten from the officers—especially the Adjutant, and more especially the Colonel—seemed to her far more than any other colored woman had received in the world, and her natural vanity grew like a mushroom. She was certain that Col. McGillicuddy was the greatest man in the world, and much of his greatness reflected directly upon the sable matron who was the presiding genius of his household. She remembered all the airs put on by those colored aristocrats

erats, the house-keepers on the plantations, and assumed every one herself, with additions of her own invention. She was always remembered by the officers, when the factories and depots were being destroyed, and any piece of finery discovered was sure to be given her. She was consequently the best dressed of any of the "culled ladies" in the Corps, and her turban of yellow silk, a remnant of cloth confiscated at Milledgeville, was a gorgeous creation that excited general admiration and jealous envy. It was the joy of her life, for it far outshone those which the favored house-servants used to wear as a badge of their superiority to the field hands.

She stalked down from regimental headquarters, with her turban showing like an exaggerated sunflower, the boys made way for her, as they always did, and she addressed the youngster with the voice of awful authority:

"Pete, yo' young wagabond, why don' yo' come straight' t' headquarters, an' report t' yer Auntie, who's bin powerfully worried 'bout you? Don't yo' know yer duty better'n dat? What yo' loafin' down hyah wid dese high privates, when yo' orter come straight' t' headquarters? Don't let dis happen agin."

Then headquarters manner had to succumb to maternal affection, and she caught Pete's head to her ample bosom, murmuring ecstatically:

"O, yo' darlin' leetle honey lamb. Why fo' yo' done stay away so long f'om yer ole Auntie, when yo' mus've knowed she wuz jes' a-dyin' fo' t' see yo'? Yo' jes' come straight away up t' headquarters, whar I gib yo' de bes' meal yo' ebber had in all yo' bo'n days. Ebbery time I cook sumfin' nice, I done lay away a leetle bite fo' yo'. Yo' done got t' eat hit all up. Come right along. Yo' done got back, too, has yo', Eph? Xpected dat. Can't lose yo'. Come 'long, too. I've got enough fo' bofe ob yo'."

"Sergeant," said Col. McGillicuddy, coming up with the Adjutant, "I am very glad to see you back. I know you have been doing good work. I have heard of it from several sources. But we need you here now. The rebels promise to give us the time of our lives before we get Augusta, and have our old friend Bragg up there in command."

"Thank you, Colonel. We heard something of that, and hurried back as soon's possible," answered Si. "We didn't want you to go into a fight without us. What's old Bragg going to give us this time, Colonel? Stone River, Tullyhomy, or Chickamauga?"

"Can't say just what sort of an entertainment Mr. Bragg has in store for us. All that we can do is to be ready for anything that he may choose to set up."

"We'll be that-all right," said Shorty confidently.

"Well, from the looks of things, serious

business will begin about tomorrow. Turn your horses over temporarily to the Quartermaster. Tell him it's only temporary, for you may need them again. Until this thing's over you'll stay with your company. Get enough to eat and all the sleep and rest you can tonight, so's to be in fine shape for tomorrow."

"Thank you, Colonel. We'll be with you to the end tomorrow."

As they had now been fully three months without any real fighting, the imminence of the great battle sobered every one. The companies were carefully inspected, the cartridge-boxes were filled, the guns were all seen to be in good order, all unnecessary things were piled into the wagons, the haversacks and canteens were filled, and then the companies were dismissed and the men set themselves to writing letters home, or sat around and talked of the probabilities, while the officers gathered in groups and discussed the operations.

By the light of a blazing pile of pine-knots Si wrote a short letter to his wife:

"Dere Annabel: Though weve bin wakin up the snakes in Georgy since we left Atlanty, we are all well, nobody even wounded. Col. McGillicuddy says that me and the boys have done mighty well, and when he's satisfied I'm proud.

"We are now about to have a great battle for the big city of Augusty, and we expect the rebels will make a he old fight before they give it up. But we are bound to lick them. I expect to come through all right as I always have, but if I don't, I don't—that's all. He love you all the saim.

"Love to all.

"Yours till death,

"SI."

Shorty, seeking the seclusion which the severity of the intellectual labor and his own incurable shamefacedness about anything connected with Maria demanded, had built a little fire behind a screen of bushes, and lying flat on his blanket before it with his paper on a board in front of him, strained fingers, eyes and brain over this missive to his soul's idol:

Deer Miss Maria: I fele as hungry as a bear at the end of a long Winter to hear from you, but there ain't no hopes till we get out of this wilderness of Georgy, which there's no telling when it will be. We can only trust in God & Billy Sherman, who probably know where he's a-coming out, which is more than anybody else duz.

We are up against old Little-More-Grape Bragg again, & this time Augusty, Georgy, is the stake. Its our move, & we'll land in the king-row, as usual. But we expect a regular snollygoster of a fight, for if the rebels lose Augusty they'll lose all their factories for making powder and cannon, & might as well hang up the

fiddle. Of course, there'll be a pile of rubbing out done in the course of the ruction, but I expect to draw my rasshuns as yousual the day after, but if they should happen to spel my name Dennis I rite this to let U no that I think moar of U than all the world beside, & hate worst of all the thot of going off somewhere whare U ain't, & won't never kum, U maik all the briteness of this world fo me.

Luv to all.

Yores alwais,

WM. B. ELLIOTT.

Corporal. Co. Q, 200th Injianny Volunteer Infantry.

These letters were handed to the Chaplain to mail when opportunity should come.

Pete Skidmore would not eat any of Aunt Minerva Ann's good things unless Sandy Baker were brought along to share, and while the boys were eating and enjoying, as only boys can, Aunt Minerva Ann delivered the lecture to Pete that she had been carefully preparing during his long absence:

"Now dis's de las' time I's gwine t' let yo' go rampagin' 'round de country wid big men, gittin' into all sorts ob danger, jes' 'kase dey does. Yo's too leetle t' run wid big, rough men. Yo's jes' lack one ob dem leetle fices, dat wants t' run an' bark wid de mastiffs an' bloodhounds. Fus' t'ing yo' know one ob de big dogs snap yo' up, an' yo' won't be a good mouthfull fo' him. Yo' hear dat? Yo's got no mudder wid yo' t' look out fo' yo', an' I's done got t' be yer mudder. Yo's gwine t' stay right hyah at home, wid de rijmint, whar yo' won't be in no danger, arter dis. Me an' de Cunnell's fixed dat. Yo's t' be de Cunnell's orderly, an' yo' kin had yo' yer white mewel t' ride all de same. Dat's what I'se done fo' yo', kase yo's my own boy, an' I's yer mammy."

"But what's Sandy going to do?" protested Pete. "I ain't going to leave Sandy."

"But yo' mus'," said Aunt Minerva Ann, with determination. She had the common womanly belief that Pete's companion was the one who led him into all sorts of troubles, and was resolved to break up the companionship. "Sandy he go back t' de company an' stay dar. 'mong de common folks. Yo' stay hyah at head-quarters wid de quality. Dat's de Cunnell's orders."

"Yes, Skidmore," said the Adjutant, coming up in time to hear the last. "You've been detailed as the Colonel's Orderly. Go down and get your mule and bring him up. Aunt Minerva Ann will fix a place for you to sleep."

"But I won't leave Sandy," protested Pete. "Sandy's my partner."

"Well, I guess I can fix that," an-

swered the Adjutant good-humoredly. "I need an Orderly, too. I'll detail Baker for mine. Go down and get your horse, Baker, and report to me."

"Dar's all my pains fo' noffin," grumbled Aunt Minerva Ann. "I wanted t' git rid ob dat Baker boy, who's bin leada' leetle Pete into all sorts ob debbilmity. But I'll had him hyah, whar I kin keep my eye on him. Eph, I wants yo' t' go into battle termorrow"—

"I's a-gwine t', 'Nerv," answered Uncle Ephraim, with his mouthfull.

"An' I wants yo' t' stan' right up t' de rack, fodder or no fodder, jes' lack a white man, an' not go t' gigin' back lack yo' allers does, when I ain't wid yo'. Yo' hear dat? I wants yo' t' kill a rebel, sho', or nebber come back to me."

"Look hyah, 'Nerve," said Uncle Ephraim, angrily. "Yo' jes' stop a-bossin' me. Yo' haint my boss no mo' since we's free. I's yo' boss. Sarjint Klegg's my boss now. I don't mind no one else. Yo' go ax him if ebber I gig back. Yo' jes' shet yer mouf."

Stunned for an instant at this mutiny, Aunt Minerva Ann soon rallied enough to look around for a stick to enforce her authority, but Uncle Ephraim thought it was time to go out and take a look at the way the Colonel's horses had been cared for during his absence, and then find his way back to Co. Q.

The bugles roused them all before daylight, for the coming fray, and soon the whole country roundabout was resounding with the notes of busy preparation. Campfires blazed up everywhere, as far as the eyes could reach, to get the men's breakfasts. Orderly-Sergeants were calling the rolls in sharp, nervous rhythm; officers were shouting pre-emptory orders for quick action in getting things ready to move, while back among the trains there was a turmoil with teamsters shouting and cursing, and mules braying, in the usual morning storm of hitching up and pulling out into line in readiness for any contingency.

With daylight came sounds from the front indicating that the whole line of cavalry, miles long, had begun the action.

Rolling volleys and storms of cheers indicated that one regiment after another of the horsemen going into action, and these were answered by other volleys and rebel yells. Then the cannon began making the Winter air shudder with their thunders.

The regiments of the Fourteenth Corps formed up promptly and then consolidated into brigades, which in turn united into divisions, and moved forward to the positions assigned to them.

It was a thrilling and imposing sight to see the horde of men scattered around their campfires, extending over many square miles, quickly, and without mistakes and confusion, come together in a



"AUNT MINERVA HAD FOLLOWED THE REGIMENT DOWN THE HILL AND WAS SITTING ON HER MULE BEHIND THEM."

long, well-ordered line of battle, reaching through the open fields and woods, over the hilltops and across the ravines, as far as the eye could reach.

Batteries galloped up to the commanding positions, unlimbered at a run, and the gunners sprang to their pieces ready to launch out a volcano of destruction. Trees were hastily chopped down in front to give them better range.

The uproar of the cavalry battle mo-

mentarily grew louder and steadily drifted back toward the infantry line.

Presently came an order for the brigade to which the 200th Ind. belonged to advance through the woods and support the cavalry.

"The old story," remarked Si. "Now trouble begins in earnest. Keep cool, boys. Wait for orders, and fire low."

"Uncle Ephraim," remonstrated Harry Joslyn, "you must try to keep step better,

or you'll have to go to the left of the line. You're tramping my heels clear off me."

The brigade moved forward to the brow of a hill which commanded a good view of the exciting scene of the cavalry battle.

For miles to the right and left the country was filled with men and horses in all the wild excitement and manifold diversity of incidents of a great cavalry combat. Some regiments were dismounted and firing from behind the cover of fences, some were charging on foot, some were mounted and charging and counter-charging by regiments, while many others were fighting in squads or as single individuals. Batteries of flying artillery, Union and rebel, were galloping hither and yon, hastily unlimbering from time to time to get in their shots where they thought they were most needed, either on one another, or to assist their side at a critical moment.

It was a bewildering storm of noise and intense action.

"Good Lawd A'mighty. Angel Gabriel, is de Judgment Day gwine t' be lack dat?" they heard Aunt Minerva Ann ejaculate, and looking around, saw her seated on a mule in the rear.

"For heaven's sake, Aunty, what are you doing here?" exclaimed Si. "Go away. This is no place for you.

"I's come t' look fo' Leetle Pete, an' I's gwine t' stay yah as long as he does," she replied determinedly. "Pete, yo' keep away from down dar. D'yo' min'? Yo' stay right by de Cunnel, whar you'll be safe."

The idea of nearness to the Colonel being a place of safety brought a guffaw from the whole regiment.

As the brigade took its position a regiment of cavalry directly in front made a gallant charge upon the rebel line, and drove a portion back over the meadow into the woods, and the brigade cheered it lustily. In a minute the regiment was seen coming back with a whole rebel brigade after it, yelling and shooting.

"Col. McGillienny," commanded the Brigadier-General, "advance with your regiment and help that cavalry out."

"Attention, 200th Ind.!" commanded Col. McGillienny. "Forward, double-quick! March!"

The regiment rushed down the hill to a high fence at the foot. The Union cavalry bugles sounded, and the regiment whirled to the right, and passed by the 200th Ind.'s left, uncovering its front.

"Fire!" commanded Col. McGillienny, and the rebel rush stopped, whirled around and rode back toward the cover of the woods, leaving the meadow dotted with dead and wounded. Scores of riderless horses galloped with it.

"I'm sho', Eph., you didn't hit a man dat time," said Aunt Minerva Ann's voice.

"I watched de man yo' aimed at, an' he rid right off. Dar he is now, waving his sword, and yelling at his men t' git togedder."

As the boys reloaded they looked around to see that Aunt Minerva had followed the regiment down the hill, and was sitting on her mule directly behind them.

"Yo' t'ink I can't shoot! Yo' t'ink I can't hit a man, 'Nerve,'" said Uncle Ephraim, angrily. "'Yo' jes' wach me now bring dat feller down."

He sprang over the fence, ran forward to the little creek, waded it, and lay down behind a log on the opposite bank. In an instant his gun cracked, and the rebel officer was seen to go down.

"Hello! What yo' t'ink ob dat, 'Nerve?'" shouted Uncle Ephraim, throwing up his hands and his gun in exultation.

"I believe yo' only done hit his hoss," said Aunt Minerva Ann, with determined disparagement. "See dar, dey's helpin' him up. I tole yo' so."

Before they could determine this the view was cut off by a battery of artillery galloping out in front of the rebels, and unlimbering on a slight rise.

"Grab a root! Grab a root!" yelled everybody. "Lay low! It's coming!"

"Jump down off that mule, Aunt Minerva," ordered Si, as he crouched behind the fence.

She slid to the ground, and just in time, for the volley from the battery sent the rails flying in every direction. That was that battery's last effort, for before its guns could be reloaded it received such a crushing volley from a couple of Union batteries that its survivors began lamely pulling their guns back by hand.

Everybody's blood was now up, and the rest of the brigade advanced, followed by the rest of the division, and the rebel cavalry abandoned the field.

The Union line advanced to the top of the hill, and there saw across the valley the rebel army busily engaged in cutting down trees, making abatis, and preparing for a desperate resistance to the assault.

The artillery began a noisy cannonade and the cavalry, clearing the infantry's front, resumed its stormy combat far up the valley to the left.

The 200th Ind. was pushed forward to reconnoiter the rebel position, and as night came on halted on a spur of hill-top running toward the rebel works, and built big camp-fires, which brought them occasional long-range shells from the rebel lines.

"I wonder what that order to build big fires means, Shorty?" inquired Si. "We never did that before, before a big fight. See, they're building them everywhere. It must be to show the rest of the army where we are. Well, let's get something to eat and lay down. We're likely to have a big day tomorrow."

ON THE MARCH TO THE SEA.

They were waked early the next morning, to go through the tiresome ordeal of standing to arms until after daybreak.

They saw the long line of camp-fires still glimmering, but they heard none of the noises of preparation for the coming battle, which they had expected. As the day dawned they could see no troops to the right or left of their brigade. There was only a little crackling of cavalry fighting off in the distant.

"What's up now?" asked Si, wonderingly.

"It means," said the Adjutant, yawning, "that the much-talked-of battle for Augusta is off. Postponed indefinitely, on account of pressing engagements elsewhere. Sherman don't want Augusta, and never did. The whole thing was a grand bluff to make old Bragg hive all his troops up here at Augusta, and leave Sherman free for other jobs. The whole army is now marching toward the sea, and we are to bring up in the rear. Sherman's played it very fine on Bragg, and manuvered him clear out of his way. Only

I wish some other corps than the Fourteenth had been used to make the bluff and bring up in the rear. I was mad as a hornet last night about midnight, when I was told how we were all fooled, as well as old Bragg; but that's war, and we've got to take our share of it, as well as other people."

"Hooray for Billy Sherman," said Si. "I had hoped that we'd end the war today; but it's all right, if Sherman's outwitted Bragg so badly."

"Just think of the strain upon my feelings," remarked Shorty, angrily. "I do hate to make up my mind for a big fight, and then be disappointed. I'd give anything," he added to himself, "if I could only get that letter back from the Chaplain that I wrote to Maria. How she'll have the laugh on me when she gets it."

"Let your men get breakfast, Captain," said Col. McGillicuddy. "I don't think the rebels have found out yet that the army is gone, and they'll stick close to their works. We are to bring up the rear to-day."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FIRST DAYS OF THE GREAT FLANK MARCH ON SAVANNAH—KEEPING UP THE ILLUSION OF THE ATTACK ON AUGUSTA—THE BOYS GET FOOLED IN TURN.

Though it was a little to its liking that the Whip-Poor-Will Brigade became the rear guard of the whole army in its new and momentous movement, and that the 200th Ind. became the tail-end of the brigade, yet it was compensated for by the fun of the huge joke perpetrated upon their old enemy—Gen. Bragg—and the army which had been hastily assembled to defend Augusta.

At the first streaks of light the rebels had resumed their vigorous and noisy chopping along their whole line to cover their front with infernally-entangling abatis.

As the light grew the boys looked with a glee they had never felt before in contemplating such works, the long embankments of freshly-turned earth, which momentarily grew stronger from the incessant stream of shovelfuls of earth coming up from the ditches; the obstructions everywhere, the artillerymen working like beavers to get their guns placed, the feverish effort in every direction to get ready for the impending attack.

"Go it, you condemned whangdoodles," chuckled Si, as he munched his bread and

meat and sipped his coffee. "Work the daylight out o' your tormented hides, you seeds o' perdition. It's the first time I ever enjoyed seeing you build them things, and I like to see you racking your plaguey bones, and wearing out your rotten carcasses in building traps that we've no mind to go into."

"Never did see such cussed fools as rebels, anyhow," Shorty remarked sardonically. "The oftener Uncle Billy flanks 'em the easier it seems to be, and the more certain they are that he aint a-going to do it again. Most everybody else in this neck of woods has long since found out that the thing that Billy Sherman makes the most show of going to do is the thing that he has no idee of doing. But a punkin' headed rebel never drops on to that."

"They haint no more sense than Pete Bohannon's old sow," said Si. "You know Pete Bohannon's farm joins pap's on the north, and he's got a field of splendid bottom corn land. Pete had an old sow that was too cunning to live, and she'd rather steal than have her feed given her. She kept getting into his corn field in a

way that puzzled him, until one day he tracked her up, and found that there was a big, crooked, hollow log, that he'd used for part of his fence, that she went through. He got at it and turned the log over so that both ends was outside the field, and then he got off a little way and watched her. Up she come, and crawled through the log, and Pete nearly bust with laughing when he saw the look she gave at finding herself on the same side of the fence that she was when she went in. But she was a determined old beast, and she knowed that she had got into the corn-field by crawling through that log, and she turned around and went in again, and kept it up until she wore herself down to skin and bone. She'd rather starve trying to steal corn than go with the rest of the hogs to the trough and get it in a respectable way. That's the same way with these rebels."

"Good morning, Col. McGillicuddy," said the Brigadier-General, coming up, with a look of amusement on his face. "Our friends over there on the hill are wonderfully industrious this morning, aren't they? I always like to encourage industry, especially when people are so harmlessly employed. They might be doing so much worse. We've an hour or two to spare, while the trains are getting well out of the way, and I propose to put in the time entertaining these industrious gentlemen. The battery has some shells that they're doubtful about, and I'm going to let them try them on those works. I've sent the 1st Oshkosh about a mile over there to the right, to make a noisy reconnaissance, and I want you to do the same with your regiment out there in front. Make all the noise and bluster that you can, but don't get anybody hurt."

"That salient out there," answered the Colonel, pointing to a projection in the rebel lines toward the left, "is where I had supposed the main assault would be delivered. The rebels seem to think so, too, from the way they're working to cover it with abatis. I think I'll go through some of the motions I'd thought out in case I had the honor to lead the assault."

"Very good," said the General. "I'll tell the battery to pitch a few shells over there as a guaranty of good faith. Don't push your men too far; keep them well under cover. We don't want to lose any of them in this fooling."

"Serg't Klegg," said the Colonel, "do you see where that tongue of brush runs down the hill, away over there to the left?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, take your squad over there, and get as near those abatis-builders as you safely can, and raise all the particular thunder that your tempestuous disposition inclines to, so long as you don't get any

of your men hurt. I'll amuse them from this flank."

The 200th Ind. had run up against so many abatis, and particularly that in front of Kenesaw, that there was vengeance in Si's heart against the builders of the infernal contrivance. He got all his boys well under cover behind logs, trees and piled-up chunks, at the edge of the brush, within good, though long range of the choppers and pilers, and then they all began murderous sharpshooting on the abatis-builders. The rebels stopped chopping and ran back to the cover of the works. A man near the lower edge of the abatis, who had been struck down by Shorty's bullet, arose and tried to hobble after them, and then fell again. Si ordered the rest to stop firing, and going to the front shouted:

"Say, you fellers! Come out and get that man. We won't shoot. But get him in quick. We're going to salivate you condemned galoots, for the Lord's sake."

A couple of rebels sprang over the works, and hastily carried the man back and as soon as they gained cover the whole squad fired again, and were answered by a crashing volley from the 200th Ind. on the other flank. The rebels manned the works and began replying. A rebel cannon sent a shell over into the woods where Si was, and then the Union battery crashed a volley into the salient.

"Why, there's nothin' the matter with those shells," said Si, watching the dirt and logs fly. "What was the General talking about? Nothing doubtful about them."

The other regiments were now at work with tearing volleys, and the rebels were swarming into their works, to repulse the threatened assault.

An idea occurred to Si. From the foot of the hill, from their coverts, Si and his squad kept up a steady fire, aiming deliberately, and producing visible commotions in the gathering mass which led them to believe that their shots were taking effect.

But presently Si noticed something which alarmed him. An officer, with his glasses lying on the bank, and only showing the top of his head, was clearly studying their position, and the movements inside the works seemed to indicate the possibility that he had discovered the weakness of the detachment, and was meditating a sally, which would expose the bluff the brigade was making. This would mean no end of trouble. A plan at once presented itself to Si, and he proceeded to put it into execution. Calling Shorty's attention to the field-glasses, he asked him to put in his closest shooting at them, to get rid of their owner, or at least shake his nerves and confuse his vision. Si then crawled down through the brush and weeds to the little creek at the bottom of the hill. On the other side of the creek a fence of dry pine rails, pieced out with

stumps and brush, ran up to the abatis. The wind was blowing quite a strong breeze in that direction, and Si conceived that a fire might run up that way, and burn the abatis, and cover the scene with smoke. He crossed the creek, and gained the corner of the fence, which was filled with dry brush and weeds. He furtively gathered some more together, from as far as he could reach, struck a match and at once the whole was in a blaze, when he ran back to his place. The strong wind sent the fire along the fence and weeds, and it caught in the "trash" of the abatis. "Hold on, boys! Cease firing," shouted Si. "Now all load up," he continued, "take a good aim at the top of the works, and then we'll yell at the top of our voices. They'll think the charge is coming, and jump up to meet it. Then pour it in to them. Every man bring down his meat."

"All ready?" he inquired. "Hooray for Injianny! Hooray for the 200th Injianny Volunteers! Hooray for Abe Lincoln!"

The rebels swarmed on the works. Every shot from Si and his companions brought down a man. The rebel front blazed with a volley, but at the same instant the flames rushed through the fallen timber of the abatis, and raised a veil of fire and smoke all around the rebel front. The rebels seemed to think that the Yankee charge was coming straight on through this. They could see nothing beyond the fire, but Si could hear the shouts of the rebel officers as they rushed their men to the threatened point, and lined them up on the works.

The sweeping volleys were directed down the face of the hill, to meet an enemy supposed to be advancing up it, and only the stray shots of excited men came over as far as where the boys were, but Si said:

"I guess we'd better get back into the ravine, where we'll be entirely out of range. I hear them bringing up a battery, and it'll be sifting canister through that abatis to beat the band. Get back into the gulch, boys."

They gathered there, and listened amusedly to the roar of the cannon and the fearful hurdling of the canister through the limbs of the abatis. They would break out into cheers at times to convey the idea of reinforcements coming in. Occasionally they would catch glimpses through the smoke and flames of the cannoners working like demons. Where they were they were as safe as if at home, except that an occasional wild shot, striking on a tree, would bound back.

"I'm much obliged to those gentlemen for all these fireworks, I'm sure," remarked Si. "I've often wanted to look at a battle when I'd have nothing on my mind to disturb me, and now I'm satisfied. I'd like to stay longer, and see this to the end, but I guess we've had the best of the show, now, and have kicked up enough

Kallabaloo to satisfy the Colonel. Let's get back to the regiment. Forward, march!"

On the way they met Aunt Minerva Ann on her mule, tearing through the woods in search of them. The low-hanging limbs had torn off her gaudy turban, and the brush had whipped into tatters the gay calico skirt of which she was so proud—the first calico she had ever worn. The spuds of wool on her head had lost their trim plaiting, the strings binding them were loose, and they were frazzled like wisps of black tow. Tears stood in her big eyes and coured down her cheeks. At the sight of Pete marching along, safe and unharmed, she burst out with a mingled croon of joy, thanksgiving, wrath, and reproach:

"O, yo' worrisome leetle brat, I've jes' gwine t' skin yo' alibe, so I is. An's yo's not hurt eben a leetle mite, when I t'ink, ebbery time dat one of dem big cannons go off dat time, sho's preachin' yo's blowed allt' pieces. I jes' died my own self, whenebber one ob dem awful cannons bow-wowed, lack de crack ob doom, I nebber 'spected t' see yo' alibe agin, yo' darlin' leetle honey-boy, an' now yo' come straight up t' de Cunnel, an' I'll see he'll hab ebbery bit ob hide took offen yo' for runnin' away, so he will. If he don't I'll done kill yo' my own-self."

"Well, Sergeant," said Col. McGillcuddy, when they reached the regiment, "you certainly have stirred up a bobbery over there, that'll give our vis-a-vis something to think on for some hours. They are clearly expecting the main attack from that side, and as we have no objection to their thinking that way, the battery's moved over to throw a few shells in to the force they've massed there. That young Lieutenant who is in command of the battery takes a deep professional pride in the number of rebels that he can knock out, and he thinks it a finer chance than he's had since he came into command. After he works off all the shots that the General's allowed—and I think the General entirely too stingy in his limit—he will fall back by that road running down there, and we'll bring up the rear. You'd better go over there to the Quartermaster and get your horses, and act as rear-guard to the regiment."

The march to rejoin the Corps was very deliberate, as a number of trains, coming in from various directions, had to be covered by the brigade, and the 200th Ind. must keep a proper distance in the rear to make sure of this.

After the excitement of the morning this was very stupid work, and presently became irritating. There was just enough movement to keep the boys from getting

any rest, which they needed after the early morning routing out and the subsequent excitement, and not enough progress to secure them the stimulus of a march.

Si was ordered to habitually keep on the next range of hills behind the regiment, so as to give timely notice of any pursuit, or the approach of the rebel cavalry.

But the long hours passed without a sign of a rebel of any kind to break the monotony of watching for the regiment to move forward off the next hill, and starting to follow it, finding that it had reconsidered, and come back to its hill, till the trains could be gotten across a ford, or some other obstruction overcome.

It was the first time that they had had to bring up the rear for so long a time that they had forgotten all about the annoyances of that position on the march, and it was such a contrast to the exciting rushes they had lately been making as to be very exasperating. Everybody grew sleepy, tired, and savagely irritable. Harry and Monty had their usual mill over nothing in particular; Alf and Sid came to blows as to whether the army was started for Savannah or Charleston; Radbone and Grimshaw quarreled over the merits of wood-burning and coal-burning locomotives, and Si spoke crossly to Shorty about moving off before he was certain the regiment was going.

Uncle Ephraim had returned to the headquarters, to look after the Colonel's horses, and he and Aunt Minerva Ann had a bitter wordy strife over whether he as hostler had any right to "boss de chief cook-lady ob de rijimint."

There was some friction at headquarters between Pete and Sandy over Abednego having kicked Sandy's horse.

"It'd put us all in better humor, Shorty," suggested Si, "if we had something good to eat. You might ride over to some of those houses there, and see if you can't pick up something."

"Bout as much sense as your suggestions usually have," snorted Shorty. "What do you suppose is left after Kilpatrick's Cavalry and the Fourteenth Corp's both been over the ground? And the 1st Oshkosh's right ahead of us, too. Why, a crow couldn't smell out enough in a Township to make an Irish stew."

To add to their discomfort, a searching, drenching rain set in, which soon made them all wet as drowned rats.

This did not facilitate progress at all, but rather made it more aggravatingly slow. The mules, as was their wont, became discouraged, and the drivers more profane, blundering, and helpless.

The roads at once became muddy ditches, the creeks rushing torrents, and the crossings blind and confusing.

"There's always shades and differences in misery," remarked Si, philosophically, as from the top of the hill he watched the whole brigade struggling to get the trains across an overflowed swamp. At that distance the men, plodding around in the mud, looked like a great flock of disconsolate turkeys and chickens, in a dreary, steaming barnyard, on a sad, rainy

day. Faint echoes of yells and curses came back through the drizzled mist. "I guess I'd rather be here than mud-marking down there with the boys and mules. But we'll stand it till we get into camp, boys. It can't last much longer. Tomorrow it'll be the 1st Oshkosh's turn to bring up the rear."

"Hello, there's some rebel cavalry, at last," exclaimed Shorty, pointing to the hill in the rear. "Now we'll have something to keep off the blues. Come on, gents; we're out here to welcome you with bloody hands to hospitable graves."

There seemed to be 20 or 30 of the rebels, but they showed no desire for a closer acquaintance. They remained on the hill out of range of musketry, and seemed to be simply watching the progress of the column.

"Torment the plaguey gnerrillas," grumbled Si; "they'll just hang around now, and watch for a chance to rush us, or cut out a wagon. They'll be there and everywhere, and we can't get rid of 'em, because they won't stand for a fight, and they'll scatter all over the country if we attempt to charge 'em. But tomorrow the 1st Oshkosh 'll have to look out for 'em."

Pete came back with a doleful account of the trouble the brigade was having in getting the trains across the swamp, and the probability that they would not make camp by midnight, at which they all expressed savage discontent, in their various methods, ranging from Shorty's fluent profanity to Si's more decent, but none-the-less bitter "Condemn the luck," and "Torment it."

Si sent Pete back to the Colonel with the report of the appearance of the rebel cavalry, and tried to relieve his feelings by starting on a charge across the valley at the rebels. But at the first sign of a movement against them these broke and disappeared, leaving Si angrier than ever.

The trains were finally worried across the swamp, and Si followed at a distance, only to find when he reached the hill beyond that the rebels were coming down from the hill behind, and making their way through the swamp by paths which they alone knew.

Darkness now closed down, making it all the more necessary for Si to be watchful. So the wearisome hours dragged on till past midnight, with Si and his men standing in the rain, beside their shivering, hungry horses, and waiting till they nearly dropped from fatigue for Pete to bring the news that the trains had at length been gotten over another swamp, and they could move back to the next hill.

At last, when it seemed that flesh and blood could stand it no longer, Pete reported that the trains had at last been closed up near the column, and they would go into camp, but Si must remain where he was in observation of the rebel cavalry.

"Torment it," said Si, "that means standing-guard the rest of the night, with



"HE STRUCK A MATCH AND AT ONCE THE WHOLE WAS IN A BLAZE."

no fires. But it can't last always," he added, cheerfully, for the benefit of the rest. "It'll be only a few hours now till daybreak, and then we'll go to the head of the column, and the Wisconsin Badgers 'll have this fun all to themselves. Plague take them, they deserve just such a job as this."

There was nothing for the hungry horses to eat, not even soft green branches, for they were in one of those lonely pitch-pine forests, which are destitute of all small growth. Nor was there anything for

the boys. They had got so used to living on the country that they had forgotten their old care about full haversacks. Si divided his squad into two watches, one under himself and the other under Shorty, and while the relief that was off gained a little sleep lying at the roots of the tall pines the other kept a sharp lookout for the lurking rebel cavalry.

At length the welcome daylight appeared, but the chill, grendching rain showed no signs of abatement. They all stood to horse to wait the onset of rebel

cavalry, which would be made then if ever. None came, however, but as the light grew stronger they saw their old acquaintances gathering on the hill in the rear, with little show of desire for closer company.

Tired and hungry as they had ever been in their lives, Si and the rest waited patiently for the orders to come up and join the regiment and get their breakfasts.

At last Pete appeared, and he was in such a rage that he began shouting as soon as he came in sight:

"Say, do you know what that blasted old dodderer of a Colonel of the 1st Oshkosh has went and done? Well, he pretended that there was a lot of rebels out in his front somewhere, and the first thing this morning he pushed out after them. He's miles away, somewhere, and can't be got back, so the order's come that we've got to bring up the rear today, again, or until we come to him. None of us believe that there's any rebels out there, and that it's only a trick of his to get out of doing rear-guard today. The Colonel's hotter'n a hornet about it. But he says you've got to stay where you are and look out for that cavalry. Uncle Eph's bringing you back some grub."

A yell of rage went up from every throat, and Shorty wound up a general denunciation of the tricky Wisconsin men by a distinct promise to maul the head off of the first 1st Oshkosh man he could find.

Just then Uncle Ephraim came up with a camp kettle of hot coffee swinging from a pole, and balanced across his horse by a hickory basket full of hardtack and fried pork. For awhile they all forgot their rage in the avidity with which they attacked the grateful viands. Then they found a straggling corn-field near, which was too unpromising to attract the attention of the foragers, but which yielded them enough to give their horses a good breakfast.

"Now," said Si, "if those whangdoodles out there could be got in range of a good volley which would scatter them, I'd feel like life was worth living again."

The rebels continued as offish as ever, and the same dreary program of the day before began to be carried out in the same pelting rain.

The rebel cavalry was growing stronger from hour to hour, and as there would be frequent rushes forward of little groups, it seemed to act a little more boldly, though never within good musket range. Si became worried at what they might do, and besides was getting so savage over the annoying duty of bringing up the rear, that he thirsted to hurt somebody, by way of diversion. He rode forward to the Colonel, and unfolded a plan for trapping the rebels. The wagons were then crossing a creek with a wide margin of swamp and thick woods on the far side. The trains were to go on over the next rise,

and the Colonel was to leave the rest of Co. Q hidden behind the crest, while Si was to file to the right, immediately after crossing, go down and hide in the thicket, and wait until the rebels should come over; when he was to make a rush, and get between them and the swamp, when, at the sound of the boy's yells, Co. Q would advance up the hill and catch the rebels between two fires.

"It'll be pretty risky business for you, Sergeant," said the Colonel. "The rebels may wipe you off the face of the earth, in spite of all the rest of the company."

"Let us look out for ourselves, Colonel," said Si, confidently. "We're in the habit of getting out of bad scrapes, and one of them will be relief to this beastly work."

"Go ahead, then," answered the Colonel. "I feel that way myself, just now. It'll be a great relief to shoot somebody."

Si led his squad through the swamp, turned off to the right a half-mile below the crossing, concealed his men and horses in a dense brake of cane and young sapplings, and waited. The rebels watched the column labor over the hill and disappear, leaving no one on the summit.

Si, watching cautiously through the brush, saw them come through the swamp and advance slowly toward the rise beyond. He waited till they had all cleared the swamp, and there was quite a strip of open pine-woods between them and the covering thickets. Then he gave the order to mount, and they dashed out for the rebels, yelling like Indians. The rest of Co. Q appeared on top of the hill, and opened fire. When Si got near enough to see clearly the stampeded mass he was amazed at the sight. There was no thought of resistance on the part of the rebels. Many of them, as soon as they saw their retreat was cut off, had slipped from their horses, and were kneeling in the mud, with their hands uplifted, begging that their lives might be spared. Si checked his squad at the strange sight, and looked the crowd over carefully. It was mostly poor old white men, in all possible stages of decrepitude, with a few negroes among them. What guns appeared were squirrel-rifles and shotguns, some of them flintlocks. The horses were all old, and bad specimens of bone-racks. But each was loaded down with the most astonishing collection of things thrown away by soldiers on the march or in camp. There were buckles and bits of harness broken in the struggles of the mules with the bad roads and obdurate crossings; broken whiffletrees, pieces of chains, mule-shoes, linchpins, saddles, bridles and lines, blankets, haversacks, canteens, boots and shoes, coats and pantaloons, hats, caps, underclothing, cups, knives, cooking utensils, pieces of tents, and so on through the whole litter to be found in the camps and line of march of a large army. Many of the things had been thrown away as useless, and others had been lost in the strug-

gles with the roads and crossings. But anything that was either cloth, iron, or leather was a treasure trove to the poor whites of the South. They could make use of it somehow or somewhere. Everything had been eagerly hunted down, and the lucky finder had bound it securely to his saddle with strips of paw-paw bark and withes.

"For God's sake, don't hurt we'uns, Mister," begged an old man, whom Si recognized as somewhat the leader of the crowd. "We'uns haint bin a-doin' nothin' wrong. We'uns wuz a-follerin' you'uns up to gether the things what you'uns

threwed away. We'uns haint stole nothin', nor hurt none o' you'uns, nor didn't intend to. We'uns 'll give all this truck back, if you'uns say so. Only don't hurt none o' we'uns." Please don't, Mister."

"The devil," said Shorty, in deep disgust, giving a kick to a pile of the old trumpery. "All this flummery over a gang of spavined, wind-sucking old camp-followers. Say, I'll kill the first galoot that lispes a word of this to the 1st Oshkosh."

"You can't always fool other people," echoed Si in deep dejection. "Sometimes you get it on you, and get it bad. Torment the luck."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE LONG MARCH THROUGH THE PINE BARRENS—FORAGE BECOMES PRECIOUS, AND PETE BRINGS ON A PRIZE FIGHT.

For the next few days the army marched through the apparently endless plains of sandy pine barren which constitute lower Georgia.

There was something weirdly melancholy in the vast stretches of sand, with giant pitch pines, standing as far apart as telegraph poles, a ragged little cluster of the limbs at their very tops, and nothing on the starved ground below but thinly-growing wire-grass.

The pines had evidently completed their growth centuries before, and since drawn up into their great, tall trunks all the nutriment there was in soil around them, for there were no flowers, no herbage, no thickets, no shrubs, no young saplings growing up to take their places. It was a barren desert, modified only by the pines' rigid, rugged, unkindly, uncompromising columns and every few miles a sluggish creek, wandering through a wide-spreading, fetid, malarious swamp, which grew rank with briars, vines, cane, and fat weeds.

It was a wonderful and depressing change from the towering mountains, with their dense forests and tangled laurel thickets of northern Georgia, and the rich farming country in the center of the State.

The men had gotten used to the mountains, the woods and the thickets. They had learned their qualities and limitations, and how to make use of them for their own defense, and for offense against their enemies.

It was the same with the hills and the rolling landscape in the middle of the State. It was something like their own

homes, the country with which they were familiar.

But there was something vague, somber and mysterious in this great starved waste, where one could see for miles through the wide spaces between the giant pillars of pines, and yet feel that one was not seeing. There might be some lurking danger hidden where no hiding-place could be seen. It seemed as if the army were drifting off into some shoreless sea, which would disperse and scatter its fragments.

More disturbing than phantom fears was the fact that food was running low. No longer the comfortable farmhouses and gathered crops of Middle Georgia to forage from for the man and beast. There were few plantations in the piney barrens. In the scattered cabins dwelt the poorest and most ignorant people of the State, descendants of the paupers and jailbirds who in early times had been transported to the colony, to get them out of England, and be slaves of the land-owners in building up the new country.

There had been food enough and more than enough for the whole army on every day's march in Middle Georgia. The rear-guard found plenty after everybody else had taken all they wanted. Now, there was not enough anywhere for the advance guard even, and every ear of corn and flitch of meat disappeared before the main body came up.

The Generals and Colonels began to look with austere parsimony on the ration wagons and the daily issues. No more

prodigality, no more carelessness. Nothing must be wasted. Every ration wagon must be brought through, no matter what the trouble. The standard regulation ration only must be issued, and that with scrupulous exactness as to weight. Nothing must be lavished on the swarming negroes following the army. There was now no telling where the march would end, and more supplies be obtained. An obstruction to the forward movement by the force which Hardee was gathering in front would point toward siege diet, until a battle could be fought.

The first to grumble at this was Aunt Minerva Ann, and she grumbled more than the whole regiment.

Col. McGillivuddy was one of those officers who believed in the same rule for himself as for his men, and when the stinting of rations began, he commenced it on his headquarters and himself.

"Fer de Lawd's sake!" she exclaimed, in sour discontent, as she surveyed the meager allowance issued her for the rations for the day. "What sort ob truck dat t' git a 'spectable breakfast wid? 'Cept de coffee, fer which Fadder Ab'um be thanked, hit's jes' lack gibbin' out pervizions fer de nigger quarters, only haint so good. Dat dar pork haint no lean streaks—all fat, an' fries right down t' a cracklin'. All grease an' no meat. An' dat wheat bread, hard as chips, no more stick t' de ribs dan a snow-ball t' a shingle. How kin dey' spect a 'spectable cook-lady t' git up a breakfast ousen sich truck as dis fer de Cunnel ob de regiment? Why, hit wouldn't do fer ole Eph, de mornin's dat I's mad at him. De Cunnell starve t' deff, an' den I'll be blamed. If ole Eph wuz worf his salt, which haint, he'd go out in de country an' git some aigs, an' hams, an' yams, an' sich like."

"Aigs, ole woman," hooted Uncle Ephraim. "Yo' ole fool, whar d'yo' 'spect t' git aigs in de piney-barrens? Whar de chickens? Whar dey roost? A chicken hab't had wings lack Noah's dove t' fly up t' de top ob dese ole pines t' roose. Talk a leetle sense, won't yo', fer a change?"

"Eggs, Auntie?" echoed Shorty. "If there's an egg in this back-lot of the United States it'd have to be laid by the American eagle, and then it'd belong to Uncle Billy Sherman. Nobody else'd have any right to it."

"That's all right Auntie," said Si cheerfully. "Just stand it for a few days. We're coming down to the rice plantations. Then we'll have plenty to eat again. You know rice"—

"Nebber seed none ob hit," remarked Aunt Minerva sullenly. She was not in the humor to be pleased with anything.

"Well it's the nicest stuff to eat," continued Si, jubilantly. "Makes the nicest custards and puddings. You just ought to eat some of the custards and puddings mother used to make. Never could get

enough of them. And it's so easy to cook. You just put it in and boil it." and Si stopped, choked with the memories of his first attempt at boiling rice. "Only you musn't put too much in de kittle at first, and must keep it well-stirred so it won't burn."

"Don't want no rice, nor adder new-fangled truck," answered Aunt Minerva Ann obdurately. "Ah t' waat is some good corn-meal, hams, bacon, collards, aigs, an' yams. I know how t' cook dem, an' dey's good enough fer anybody. When I get t' hebben all I 'speck dis, enough young collards an' ole bacon, an' yaller corn pone. De white angels kin had all deir wheat bread an' fancy fixings, fer all ob me."

The Brigade Wagonmaster came up, swearing about the disappearance of fodder from his pile during the night, and suspiciously scrutinized where Si and the rest had fed their horses, but he found nothing there to satisfactorily trace his missing forage, and passed on, grumbling and swearing, to the other regiments.

Presently the Chief Hoster at Brigade Headquarters came by with the same thing on his mind. He was not so fluently profane as the Chief Wagonmaster—nobody in the army could swear with the ease and finish of a Chief Wagonmaster, but he said enough to reveal that he was very angry, and would do something terrible to the man he caught stealing his forage. Si and Shorty and the rest only laughed indifferently at him. Their withers were unprung. They had managed to pick up forage enough during the day for their horses, and so lacked any motive for stealing from the general stock.

But in the meanwhile Abednego was faring better than any horse in camp.

That day's march took them still deeper into the great waste, still farther from even such reminders of "God's country" as they found in middle Georgia, and no nearer as they could see toward any proper coming-out place. Rations and forage were still scantier. Aunt Minerva Ann became still sourer, and the Wagonmaster raged more furiously around about the thefts from his forage-pile. He was sure the forage had been taken by men right there in the brigade, and he was going to stop it, if he had to kill somebody. He was going to have a guard stationed with strict orders to shoot anyone caught stealing from the forage-pile.

"Go on! Go on! You old mule-skinner," Shorty jeered him. "Don't be letting off your hot air around us. We haint none of your pine-shavings and burdock weeds that you feed your mules on. We manage to get some real feed for our horses."

Shorty took a turn up to where Abednego was tethered in a little hollow surrounded by bushes. The mule had a liberal supply of corn blades lying around him, and the contented expression on his

countenance contrasted sharply with the whinnings of dissatisfaction which came from the corrals at night. Some uneaten corn lying near told the story. It was a kind not found in that part of the State, but had been hauled from further up the country.

"Pete, that Chief Wagonmaster's awful hot about some one stealing his forage," said Shorty. "He threatens to do some shooting. I want you to let his stuff alone. You'll get into trouble."

"Let him shoot," replied Pete. "Abednego's going to have enough to eat, no matter if the rest of us have to go on short rations. He has to carry me and work hard all day. I may go hungry, but he shan't."

"Well, I tell you to stop it, that's all," said Shorty, decisively, passing on.

That night there was a lively banging about of fire-arms, but when the regiment sprang to arms, it was found to be neither picket-firing nor a raid of rebel cavalry. It came from the neighborhood of the forage-piles, and from the teamster guards, blazing away with the rusty guns carried in their wagons.

The next morning the Brigade Wagonmaster came around with a story of more stealing, and of several of the thieves having been shot by his guards, and in spite of his efforts to conceal it, Si and Shorty saw clearly that he was spying around among their squad for wounded men as well as for signs of the forage taken.

Again they were able to present a clean bill of health to his scrutiny. None of them had been hit by the shots, and their forage had been gathered on the inhospitable line of march. But Shorty, presently going by Abednego, saw that he was faring sumptuously on the far-fetched corn and "roughness," and the mule seemed to favor him with a shrewd wink of his off eye as to what fools Chief Wagonmasters were, on general principles.

"Did you get hurt last night, Pete?" he asked severely.

"N-a-h! Get hurt by them teamsters? Well, I guess not. A teamster couldn't hit nothing if he had the best gun ever made, and they hadn't cleaned them guns since they left Chattanooga last Spring. I'd 'a bin more afraid of a lot of old women with broomsticks."

"Now, Pete, I tell you again to stop that. That moth-eaten mule of yours can get along on short rations for a few days just as well as the Colonel's horse and ours can. He lived all Summer on nothing, and had to browse for it. I want you to let the forage pile alone. Some of those teamsters 'll kill you. They'd like to have a chance to even up on a soldier and you'd be a huckleberry for them, you young brat. Stop it, now, I tell you. I'm not going to have you running any risks for a picayune, shave-tailed, lop-eared mule, that wasn't

worth picking up in the first place, and's got worthlesser every day since."

If Shorty had turned around suddenly as he walked away, he would have seen caught on Pete's face an angry sulk at the opprobrium hurled at his pet, and a stubborn determination to do as he pleased about forage.

"Taps" had sounded, and Shorty was just knocking the ashes out of his pipe, preparatory to turning in, when a hulla-balloo broke out in the direction of the forage pile. Shots were fired, and shouts of "There he goes!" Catch him!" "Kill him!"

Instinctively feeling that Pete was the source of this disturbance, Shorty ran toward the forage pile. There he saw, by the light of a pitch-pine fire, across which Pete was unwisely running, that youngster, with a sheaf of corn-blades under one arm, and a nose-bag full of corn in the other hand.

Pete was loyally heading for the 1st Oshkosh, to give the impression that the thief was from that regiment, and not the 200th Ind.

After him were a number of infuriated teamsters, some throwing clubs, some trying to run him down, and some to head him off. They all wanted to get hold of him to make an example of such depredators, as well as from a teamsters' chronic itching to thrash a soldier when they could get a chance.

Shorty rushed to the rescue. But before he could reach Pete, the latter had been overtaken by his enemies, hampered as he was by his load. But Pete had swung his nose-bag in the first one's face, and knocked him down, and then adroitly tripped the second, so that he fell headlong. This was only temporary relief, for the rest were quickly on top of him. He was knocked down, and being kicked, when Shorty jumped in and began knocking right and left, until he came to the Chief Wagonmaster, who was a foeman worthy of his steel, and was giving him pretty nearly as good as he sent, until the provost-guard rushed up to restore peace by the summary process of knocking down with their gun-barrels every one who showed a disposition to fight, especially if he were a teamster, until they came to Shorty and the Chief Wagonmaster. They were so evenly-matched, and putting up so pretty a fight that the Sergeant did not have the heart to interfere.

Instinctively, he and his men formed a ring to see it out, and Shorty was just on the point of getting in his favorite butt-of-the-ear knock-out blow, when one of the guards in a loud whisper:

"Cheese it, boys! Here comes the Lieutenant."

"I'll see you later," said Shorty, dropping his fists.

"Say, that's a go," cordially answered the Chief Wagonmaster. "You're a

mighty good one, and I'd like to have this out, fair and square. We'll stand off this Lieutenant."

"I'm with you," answered Shorty.

"Here, what's all this row about?" demanded the Lieutenant, as he rushed up. "Take all these men off to the guard-fire. Sergeant, buck-and-gag the ring leaders."

"We ain't to blame," groaned the man whom Pete had knocked over with the nose-bag. "That little whelp there's bin stealing forage every night, and"—

"No row at all, Lieutenant," said the Chief Wagonmaster, giving him a furtive kick to enjoin silence. "Me and this gent here was having a little sparring match for the Brigade Belt, and we was enjoying ourselves, being very well matched, and"

"Twan't nothing of the kind," groaned the man whom Pete had tripped, and who was only regaining the breath which had been knocked out of him. "That little scamp there 'd bin stealing forage. You see, he's loaded down with it now. And we"

"Take that boy away and buck-and-gag him," commanded the Lieutenant, sternly. Then turning to the Chief Wagonmaster, he said with an interested tone:

"You are pretty well-matched, Shuck, for a fact. You seem at last to've run up against some one who could hold you level—something I've been wanting for a long time. I'd like to see the mill. But you ought to have more sense than to stir up such a row after taps. Put it off till we halt to-morrow afternoon, and send me a bid. Don't forget. I want to see it, sure. Sergeant, buck-and-gag those two fellows who have been jumping that little boy. The rest of you get to your tents, quick as scat, and keep quiet. Be glad you get off so lucky."

"It's an engagement, sure, for to-morrow afternoon, is it, Shuck?" anxiously inquired Shorty, as they turned to go their respective ways.

"Yes; just as soon as we've halted and fed the mules," answered the Chief Wagonmaster, cordially. "Come down to the wagons, and we'll find a place where we won't be disturbed. Bring your friends. Say, Lieutenant," he called after the officer. "I'd let that boy off. I think this 's his first offense, and he didn't get much, after all."

"Shuck, you're a gentleman," said Shorty, putting out his hand. "I'm glad to meet you, and I'll be glad to see you to-morrow."

"All right, my boy," responded the Chief Wagonmaster, shaking hands. "I think I've got on to the way you handle your left, and I'm going to wake you up. Anyhow, it'll be a satisfaction to find out just who's the best man in the brigade."

"Only stealing forage," whispered the Sergeant to the man who was to do the

bucking; "don't be hard on that boy. But give it to them maugy mule-skinners."

The result was that while the unlucky teamsters were tied till the strings cut into their wrists, and rigidly gagged, Pete was at but little more inconvenience than that of having to sit for some time in one position. In an hour, however, all were released.

Then the teamsters wanted to take their spite out by cuffing Pete, but the Sergeant sent them to their quarters with a couple of cuffs of their own to think about.

"You big hulks," he said, "you shan't impose on a boy when I'm around. Now, you little rascal, get back to your quarters, and let the forage pile alone after this."

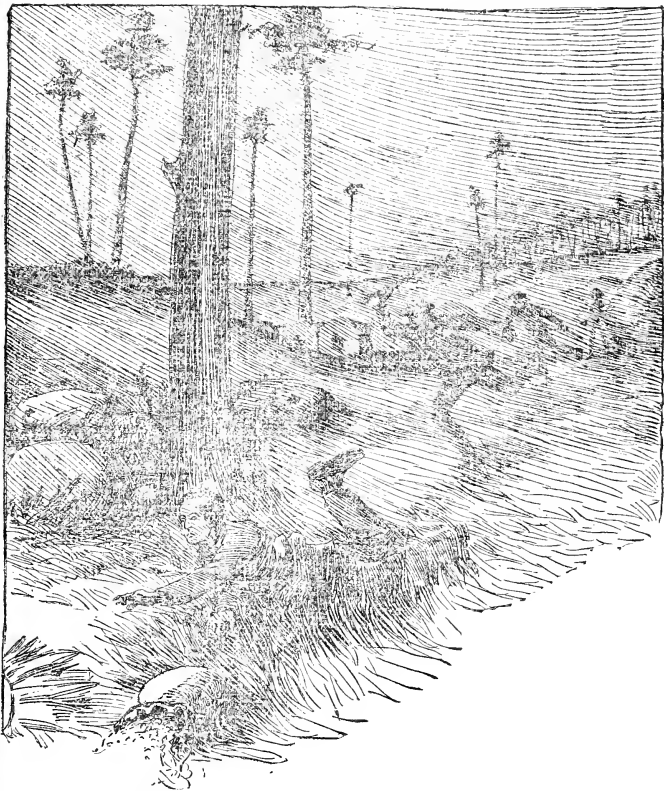
The most serious punishment to Pete was that he had got Shorty into a fight with the Chief Wagonmaster, who was the bully of the brigade, and unlimited confidence as Pete had in his protector, he feared that he would not be a match for the brawny, loud-voiced tyrant who ruled the trains and the corrals, the big-limbed, turbulent teamsters, by sheer force of muscle. Pete had seen him quiet so many drunken, riotous teamsters with a single blow of his big fists, that he felt a dread of him. He got so worked up over the matter that he waked up Sandy and proposed that they get their guns and assassinate the Chief Wagonmaster, but Sandy, after mature reflection, decided that it would be better to take their guns to the place of meeting, and only use them in the emergency of the Wagonmaster getting much the better of Shorty, as to which he had some doubt.

The news of the proposed fight spread rapidly through the brigade, on the march next day, and everybody was keenly anxious for the march to end and camp be made. The 200th Ind. were of course, confident that Shorty would simply wipe up the earth with any other man in the brigade, unless it were Si Klegg. While the 1st Oshkosh, to which the big lumberwoods foreman, Shuck Dilworth belonged, had never seen him whipped and did not believe that he could be.

The Corps finally halted at a point in the endless stretch of sand, not apparently because it had gotten anywhere, but because the orders were to halt and go into camp at 3 o'clock. The trains were parked, the mules unhitched and fed, the men got their dinners, and everybody was on the alert for the combat.

"I want you to act as my second, Si," said Shorty, as he prepared himself by a careful wash, and had Alf Russell cut his redundant hair close to his head. "I'll tell you what to do."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," said Si, firmly. "You know I'm dead against prize-fighting, and I'll have nothing to do with it. The church is set against such things, and any how I don't believe they're



"AFTER HIM WERE A NUMBER OF INFURIATED TEAMSTERS, SOME THROWING CLUBS."

right. There's nothing between you and Shuck Dilworth, and you've no business to fight. It's down right wicked, and I won't countenance it. I won't go near it, and if you take my advice you'll keep away."

"And let Shuck Dilworth and the 1st Oshkosh crow over me and us?" Shorty answered savagely. "Much I will."

"If Shuck starts to crowing, then lick him. That'll be all right, for he's insulting you. If any of the 1st Oshkosh crows

over the 200th Ind. in my presence, I'll lick him, because he's insulting the regiment. We can manage to keep the peace, somehow. The 1st Oshkosh wants this fight to come off, because they haven't made anything like the record of the 200th Injianny, and they think they can even up by having that big two-fisted shoulder-jolting lumber-boss lick you. That's another thing that makes it wicked. Let them make their record same as we've done, and not by fighting in-camp."

"Tom Radbone, you have been at fights," said Shorty, "You know what's to be done. Will you be my second?"

"You do me proud," murmured Tom, blushing at the honor.

"And I'll be time-keeper and referee," said Abe Grimstead, producing the silver watch of his railroad days.

"Good; we're all right now," said Shorty. "You'll not have to call time on me, remember. I'll tee the mark every time, before the 30 seconds is up. You hold the watch on the other fellow. He's dull and soggy. Been living too high back there in the middle country. If he'd been out there with us in the cave he wouldn't have so much meat on him. Come along, I guess they're ready by this time."

Shorty had pulled off his shirt, drawn his cartridge belt tightly around his waist, and with his pantaloons tied at the bottoms was ready for the ring. He threw his blouse over his bare shoulders and stepped off lively, followed by the most of Co. Q.

Pete and Sandy, in spite of remonstrances, carried their gun, but no one knew that they had been freshly loaded and capped. They secured a position which commanded a full view of the ring. The remainder of the 200th Ind. had already gathered there, and raised a cheer as Shorty strode up, shied his cap into the ring and leaped in after it.

The ring had been made in a piece of soft yet firm sand, from which every chunk, and twig-stump had been carefully removed. It was inclosed by a picket-rope, fastened to stout stakes driven into the ground. The burly Wagonmaster of the Kankakees, armed with a heavy pine-knot club, officiated as ring-master, and maintained order around the rope.

The officers of the 200th Ind., who had been making a strong show of knowing nothing about what was going on, came slipping along after their men, and taking unobtrusive places in the rear of the spectators. Some of them wore private's blouses. The officers of the Kankakee regiment and the 1st Oshkosh did the same.

Presently, Col. McGillicuddy, the Major and the Adjutant, seemed to think that they ought to make a reconnaissance of the woods out in that direction, and only Si and the Chaplain were left in camp.

Soon after Shorty's arrival a cheer from the side of the 1st Oshkosh, announced the appearance of Shuck Dilworth, who sent his cap into the ring, and jumping in after it,

it, threw his coat off his bare shoulders, walked to the scratch, and shook hands with Shorty. Tom Radbone dropped his sponge and water-bottle, and coming up, reached his hand across those of Shuck and Shorty, and clasped that of Denny Mulcahy, Shuck's second.

Abe Grimstead was chosen as time-

keeper, and Jem Wilcox, an English Orderly-Sergeant of the Kankakee's, referee.

The seconds tossed up for corners, and Shuck got the one with the afternoon sun at his back, at which the Wisconsin boys cheered.

Then the knowing ones of the 200th Ind. looked the two men over and heartened up their comrades.

Shuck was certainly taller and broader than Shorty, his muscles stood out in great lumps, and his fists were enormous. He clearly outweighed as well as outreached Shorty.

But, as Shorty had predicted, fat living and the easy life of riding around and bossing others had told on him. He was undoubtedly getting fat, and this would tell on his wind also.

On the other hand, Shorty was in the pink of condition. His fair skin shone like satin, his tendons stood out like whips, and there was no loose bagginess anywhere. He stepped around like a game-cock, with his toes more on the ground than his heels.

There was intense excitement, as Abe Grimstead called time, and the two faced each other with a grin at the scratch.

The first round was an exhibition of scientific sparring, which excited the admiration of all, and showed both to be adepts in the manly art. It ended with a clinch, from which they promptly broke at the command of the referee, and each retired to his corner to be sponged off by his second.

They came up grinning again, but with more determination showing in their faces. There was a little less science now, and more effort to land blows. Shuck at length sent a crusher through Shorty's light guard, and Shorty tried to jump away from the long arm, but the last of its force reached his mouth. Shuck followed it with a rush, and they did not break away so promptly this time at the referee's order. When they did it was seen that Shorty's lips were bleeding, and the enthusiastic Badgers claimed first blood.

"Say, you must wind him, and either keep outside, or get inside them long arms of his," said Tom Radbone to Shorty, while the latter was seated on his knee being sponged off. "If he gets a good lick in on you, it'll be a settler."

"I'll do both," said Shorty. "I'll work his wind out of him this round, and the next I'll finish him up."

The next round, in spite of the jeers of the Wisconsin boys, Shorty danced around the giant, eluding his smashing blows, which were every second becoming wilder, while tormenting him with lightning like passes. In the clinch they both went to the ground together, and Shuck lay there till his second lifted him and carried him back. Shorty, however, was up instantly, and seated himself on Radbone's knee.

"Ill finish him in about three seconds," he said.

The excited Wisconsin boys were now yelling at Shuck to force the fighting.

"Force him! Push him to the ropes! Sail right in and smash him! Grind him to pieces!"

The blood of both men was up, and they no longer grinned when they came to the scratch. They both had a look of vicious determination, and Shuck's long right arm shot out in a smashing blow, which reached Shorty's ribs with a resounding thud. But Shorty stayed right inside the big man's guard and rained blows on his chest, which took away his remaining wind. Then as the Wisconsin man staggered, Shorty saw his opportunity, and delivered his famous settling blow on the jugular vein which sent his opponent to the ground in a heap.

The 200th Ind. yelled themselves hoarse. "Time!" called Abe Grimstead, as calmly as he could.

Shuck made a spasmodic effort, but could not rise from his second's knee.

"One, two, three, four, five," counted Abe slowly and distinctly, following the

movements of the second hand; "six, seven, eight."

Denny Mulcahy threw up his sponge, in acknowledge of defeat and the Kankakees joined the Indians in the chorus of victory.

"What's this? What's this?" cut the hubbub like a knife, in the clear commanding tones of the General, who came riding up. "A prize-fight in camp? Shameful! And I did not know a word of it? Outrageous. Why wasn't I notified in time to see it? I never get to hear anything at headquarters. Adjutant-General, why didn't you find this out, so I could be here? Officers present, too! Fine state of discipline. Some of them in private's uniform. Scandalous! Splendid-looking fellows, both of them. Game, skillful and good condition, you say? A beauty of a fight? Just my luck to have missed it. I'll have something to say to you officers about this breach of discipline. You men go to your quarters at once. Adjutant-General, send a bottle of whisky with my compliments to the man that got beaten, and say that I hope he'll have better luck next time."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

RATIONS GET DOWN TO THE LOW DIET POINT—SUCCESSFUL SKIRMISH FOR A RICE PLANTATION—DIFFICULTIES OF A NEW KIND OF FOOD.

There was no longer any doubt as to the objective of the army, for it was approaching the principal city in Georgia—the seaport of Savannah. Occasional prisoners, picked up from McLaws's command, told of a great force being collected there to oppose them; of powerful fortifications, heavy guns, and flooded rice-fields, which they could not pass.

More apprehension was felt on account of food, which was running lower every day, and there was absolutely nothing in the country. Rations were being cut down until Si and Shorty began to fear a return of Chattanooga conditions.

Though it was hard work finding forage for them, Si and his squad retained their horses, and were kept at the front, scouting, and looking for prisoners who might be trying to escape from Savannah.

One day, when both men and horses were feeling the grip of hunger sorely, they came out of the open pines, upon cultivated fields, lying near the Savannah River.

"Queerest-looking farm I ever saw," said Si, studying the landscape. "Seems

to be all medder, with banks of earth for fences, and ditches running between. Raises lots of hay, though, from them stacks standing around the house."

His further reflections were cut short by a series of shots coming from behind the stacks.

"A handful o' rebel cavalry over there, after forage," he remarked, dismounting, and getting behind a tree, which example was followed by the rest. "Guess we need that hay for ourselves, and had better drive 'em away. Queer looking hay, though. Yaller as straw. Must be straw—it's bound up in sheaves. But they ain't raising no wheat nor oats down this way. Can this be that rice we've bin hearing so much about? Never thought about how rice growed before. Thought probably it growed like seeds in a gourd. Anyway, there's something over there that them fellers want, and if they want it, we need it, and we must drive 'em away. Take good cover, boys. Don't any of you get hit. We'll work up through them swamp medders and get over there to the house."

Before them lay a number of rice fields,

of about five or six acres each, separated from one another by banks two or three feet high, and ditches. The level surface was covered with a high, yellow stubble, and fringes of brush grew along the banks.

One hundred yards from the house, and running from the Savannah River, ran a larger ditch, about six or seven feet wide, and having Osage orange trees growing at intervals along its banks.

Putting himself in the center, Shorty on the extreme right, and Harry Joslyn on the left, Si deployed his squad into a long line, and began a cautious advance.

Leaving the large pine behind which he was taking observation, he ran down the slope, and gained the cover of the nearest bank, though a rebel, stepping out from behind of one of the stacks, took a long shot at him.

He lay there a minute to recover his breath and his steadiness of hand, and watched the rebel reload his gun, cap it, and then sheltering himself behind the stack, gaze warily out for his foe. Si took careful aim across the bank, and fired. His bullet knocked out a bunch of straw into the rebel's face, disturbing his aim, and sending his return shot wild.

"What's the matter? Old gun's getting to carry to the left again," he commented, as he turned over to load. "Needs cleaning. Must 've got a rust-spot inside."

From the popping to the right and left, Si could see that the others were getting into position and to work.

Feeling secure behind the network of rice-fields and ditches, the rebels were disposed to be quite saucy, and show themselves recklessly. They indulged in a great many bantering gestures and rough taunts.

"You're at the end o' your rope, Yanks," they shouted. "Yo'uns can't git no furdur. We'uns 's a-gwine to bury all yo'uns in these hyah swamps."

"Look out, Yanks; the alligators's arter yo'uns. They'll done cotch yo'uns sure."

"Alligators like Yankee meat even bett'n they do nigger meat or dog-meat. We'uns 's a-gwine to fatten 'em on yo'uns."

"Look out, thar, Yank; thar's a great big 'gater arter you now."

"Yo'uns ain't a-foutin' no Jawgy goober-grabbers now. Yo'uns 've run up agin South Caroliny gentlemen, an' we'uns 'll make yo'uns wish yo'uns 'd never bin born."

"Come out from behine them mud-banks, an' show yo'selves, like we'uns do. Don't sneak thar like the pole-cats yo'uns is, but stand up an' be men."

"Is ole Kilpatrick over thar? I want to git a pop at him. He's my meat, when-ever I lay eyes on him."

"We'uns 've got a thousand Yanks buried over hyah now, an' we'uns 's a-gwine to put yo'uns with 'em."

The man in front of Si was particularly and ingeniously insulting in his gestures. Si fired at him, in the midst of one of his antics, holding his gun enough to the right to correct its deviation, but its only effect was to make the rebel put his thumb to his nose, and take a derisive "sight" at Si.

But he fired back, and Si took advantage of his re-loading to jump the ditch in front, and rush through the stubble to the next bank. The rebel fired again as Si dropped behind the cover. This made the rebel think he had killed him. He dropped his gun, flopped his arms like a rooster, and crowed. Hoping to catch him in this Si fired without properly aiming, and only stimulated the rebel's chattering.

From the rebels' jibes at their shooting, the freedom of exposure, the guffaws, and the obscene taunts, Si knew that the rest were doing no better marksmanship, and he became a little hot and anxious.

He whistled, and everybody's attention was drawn to him. "Pass the word along," he said, loud enough for those next to him to hear, "to draw their fire, and then we'll make a rush for that big ditch in front. Then somebody will have to fish, cut bait, or go ashore, in short meter. There ain't any more of them than there is of us, so there's no fear o' them rushing us."

Following Si's motions, they all fired almost simultaneously, and the instant the rebels returned the volley they sprang up and ran for the big bank, which they reached before their enemies finished reloading.

"Now, you pot-bellied, clay-chewing traitors," yelled Shorty, "we're after your scalps, and are going to have 'em. Saltpeter won't save you, you splay-footed, knock-kneed, mud-gorging mongrels. We're after South Carolinians. They're the Secesh offal that we're going to fatten the alligators on. If you want to save your worthless lives dig out there, for we'll be on top of you the next minute. Git! I say."

"My sakes, how owdashiously that thar Yankee talks, Sarjint," they overheard one of the rebels call out. "Jes' like we'uns. He must be a bodashiously bad man. Can't yo' kill him? If yo' can't mebbe we'uns better had go. He's awful sassy."

"Shet up, Niggerpeas," said the Sergeant, who had been doing the crowing. "Keep behind the stack and 'tend to your shootin'." They'uns kin never git across that big ditch thar, an' we'uns kin whoop 'em back, spite o' themselves."

Si secured a good place behind the roots of an Osage orange, about six inches in diameter, and which had outgrown the bank, so that its roots formed a gnarled revetment. The other boys found similar shelters.

Lying there, fully protected, Si thrust a little strip of woolen rag through the holes in the head of his ramrod, and deliberately cleaned the inside of his gunbarrel, while the South Carolinians were scraping the top of the bank with bullets in their endeavor to reach him.

"Say, South Carolina," he called out, when he had finished and loaded his gun, "you fellers are only tolerable shots. You wouldn't get more'n the hide and taller prize in an Injianny shooting-match. We're Injiannians, and we're after your meat. We'll get it if you stay there five minutes longer. We've been hunting for South Carolinians ever since the beginning of the war, to pay you up for starting it. You're the first we've come across, and we're going to salivate you for keeps."

"Lordy, that thar Yank talks nigh as bad as t'other one," exclaimed Niggerpeas's voice. "That thar hull crowd must be rantankerous. Mebbe we'uns better had shab outen hyah, afore hit's too late."

"Shet up that yamp o' your'n, Niggapeas, I done tell you," said the Sergeant savagely. "We'uns ain't a-skeered o' no Yankees that ever wore blue britches, an' stole niggers," he shouted back at Si. "We'uns 'll feed every one o' yo'uns to the catfish in that ditch, afore the sun goes down. Hyah goes fer yer own skelp."

He fired, and cut the bark on the tree so close to Si's head that he felt the chips strike him on the forehead.

"Pretty good shot, reb," Si shouted back, "but here's a better." He fired at the only part of the rebel exposed—his arm, while he was reloading—and tore up his sleeve.

Jeering and taunting now stopped. Each side was too seriously intent upon killing to waste words. They were so close together, and all such good marksmen, that the exposure of so much as a cap-rim or a part of the sleeve was sure to get a bullet through it. Both sides were as desperately savage as hungry panthers, and as feline in their careful crouching. The South Carolinians were clearly as veteran on the firing line as the Indianians, and took their cover as skillfully. Neither side had so far been able to score a disabling hit.

After a sharp interchange of shots for a few minutes both stopped, apparently for a brief breathing spell.

"Say," called out the rebel Sergeant from behind the stack, "whar'd yo'uns say yo'uns wuz from?"

"Injianny," replied Si, wiping his gun out carefully.

"Injianny? Whar's that?"

"That's a State out West, you ignorant saphead."

"Never heard tell on hit afore. But yo'uns ain't all like them Yankees we'uns 've bin foutin' in the Army o' the Potomac. They'uns 'd come right out, in

hull droves, fer we'uns to shoot at. Why don't yo'uns do that-a-way?"

"None o' your condemned business," answered Si. "We ain't fighting that way. When we fight rattlesnakes we fight the best way to kill 'em. Same with pizen South Carolinians."

While the rebel's attention was attracted by the conversation, Shorty put into execution a plan he had been considering for some minutes. In the middle of the field in front of him lay a large scow which had been used for carrying the loads of rice-sheaves. It had apparently floated in there when the field was flooded, and been left when the water was drained off. If he could gain it he would have good cover, and at the same time be able to send in his bullets behind the stacks, with an enfilade fire.

He sprang up, and with a leap of his long legs cleared the wide ditch in front and gained the cover of the scow. Tom Radbone jumped up to follow his example, but hesitated at the width of the ditch, and the possibilities of alligators. A rebel noticed him and hastily fired, cutting the ground under his heel, at which Tom jumped with such alarm that he cleared the ditch and joined Shorty. As soon as the two got their nerves calmed down to shooting key, they put in some bullets with such effect as to demoralize the rebels, who became excited, and started to run for their horses. This gave Si an opportunity to shoot the Sergeant through the shoulder, and Uncle Ephraim to put a bullet in a South Carolina leg.

Wounded and all gained their horses and dashed away, before the boys could get across the ditch and reach the house. They left a two-horse wagon they were loading with "paddy," or "rough rice."

As soon as the excitement of the fight was over the boys all became as hungry as bears, and there was a rabid search for something to eat. They brought their horses up to the house, but the yellow rice straw seemed as uninviting as the stacks left by the thrashers at home, and there was nothing else. Even the place of weeds and grass about a Northern house was taken by stalks of "volunteer" rice. When, however, they took the bridles off, they were astonished to see the horses eagerly attack the straw.

"Looks a good deal like oats, and yet it ain't oats," said Si, investigating the contents of the sacks. "'Tain't wheat, neither, nor rye, nor barley. Looks more like oats, though, than anything else."

Farmer-like, he took up a grain and tried to rub off the husk, between his thumb and forefinger. It would not rub off, and taking out his knife, he peeled the grain. Then the white, pearly seed revealed itself clearly.

"Why, boys, this must be rice," he exclaimed. "Who'd 'a though o' that chalky bird-shot growing this way? If I'd ever



“HE CLEARED THE WIDE DITCH IN FRONT AND GAINED THE COVER OF THE SCOW.”

thought about it at all before, I'd 've supposed it grow'd like seeds in a cucumber. But how in sin do they get the husk off? If they have to peel it off with a knife they'd starve to death while getting ready for dinner. We can't boil it whole. A bran-mash may do for a sick horse, but it 'd tear our gizzards out, and leave us looking like a frame-building with the weather-boarding off."

Meanwhile the resourceful Sandy Baker had been spying around the house, with the other hungry boys, for something to eat. He found nothing, for it was a mere cabin for the shelter of the slaves during the rice season, and contained nothing, even of the ordinary supplies and comforts of the negro quarters. But Sandy spied a big block, hollowed out in the center, like a mortar, and near it a much-used pestle. Around it was the accumulation of years of chaff, some rotted into black earth, the rest in different stages, to the fresh layer of the past season. He studied the chaff, the possible uses of such an instrument as the block-mortar, the worn end of the pestle, and then saw the whole thing. He dipped and rubbed the water out of the mortar, went to the sacks, filled his cap full of the rough rice, poured it into the mortar, and began beating it with the pestle. The others gathered around and watched him curiously. After a minute of hard pounding he stopped, fanned the chaff aside with his cap, and, sure enough, there were a quantity of the naked white grains covering the bottom of the mortar.

"You've called the turn, Sandy," said Shorty, looking at the result. "Dinner's in sight, only we'll have to work for it."
 "That's certainly the trick, and that's what they used that old dingus for," commented Si, studying the clumsy block and pestle. "Great Scott! what'd these folks think of a thrashing machine, or a clover-huller? It'd scare their condemned dumb-souls out of 'em. They'd think the devil was in it, sure."

They were too hungry, however, to waste too much time in comment and criticism. They brought up one of the sacks, and while one of them wielded the pestle, the others found a big iron kettle, in which the rice had been cooked, filled it with water and built a fire under it. They spread their blankets on the ground, and threw the rice, as fast as it was pounded out, up into the air, to blow away the chaff and dust. It was tiresome, dirty work. The sharp awns of the rice got in their collars, their noses and their eyes, and irritated them intolerably.

"Plagued if ever I'd eat rice puddings or custards, even if mother did make them," grumbled Si, as he wiped the stinging beards off his sweaty neck, "if I had to get 'em by such work as this. It's a thousand times worse than thrashing

backwheat, and these tormented lunkheads haven't sense enough to get up even a fanning-mill."

They managed to fan out most of the remaining dirt with their caps and bits of shingle, and then threw the rice into the kettle. Mindful of his first experience in cooking rice, Si restrained them to a double-handful for each man.

"If we only had a little meat," remarked Si, "we'd have a nice stew. Look through your haversacks, boys, and see if you haven't some chunks of fat pork that're left over."

Each one managed to find a greasy remnant of his rations, which he tossed into the kettle.

"I'll git yo' some meat, boys," remarked Uncle Ephraim, carefully selecting a limb of Osage orange, which he trimmed to a long, light club.

They watched him with interest, as he made his way back through the rice-field. At every few steps a rabbit would start up, at which Uncle Ephraim would strike at, invariably missing, much to the boy's amusement, for he would make no chase. Instead, he would move to the right or left a few steps, and wait, with his club raised. Presently the rabbit, making a circle, would come hopping to near where it started from, and then fall under Uncle Ephraim's unerring blow.

"Dar's a hare apiece for each ob us," he said, coming back with his hands full, and sitting down to skin them. "White man mouty good for many t'ings, but he jest haint no sense at all 'bout hunting hares. Nigger'll kill more hares in a day dan a white man in a year. Way to do is to let dem do de runnin', an' jest wait for dem."

Some onions growing wild on the banks were discovered, and collards which had escaped gathering.

"I declare," Si remarked, satisfiedly, as he carefully stirred the mass to keep from any danger of burning, "we're going to have one of our regular old-time feasts. If this eats as good as it looks and smells I'll take back all I've ever said against rice, and the ration wagons can go hang. We needn't be so plaguey particular about when we get to our ships. We can live on this a long while."

It did eat quite as good as they expected, and they ate of the hot, fragrant, luscious mass until, as Shorty expressed it, "there aint a wrinkle left on me, either inside or outside, and I feel just nice and smooth."

They gathered up the rest of the cleaned rice to carry back to Col. McGillicuddy and Capt. Everett, loaded the remaining sacks into the wagon, piled on top sufficient straw to last their horses until the next day, and returned to the regiment.

They were astonished to find themselves

received with cheers. The brigade had only quarter-rations that day, and theirs was the first forage wagon which had come into camp for days. It looked so full and comfort-bringing as to arouse the liveliest hopes.

They drove to the Colonel's tent, reported, and handed him a portion of the cleaned rice. He ordered the sacks turned over to the Commissary for issue to the companies.

Shorty took a liberal portion of the cleaned rice up to his late antagonist, Chief Wagonmaster Shuck Dilworth, who received it with great gratification, and the immediate restoration of cordial relations between him and Shorty.

"Glad to see you, Corporal," said the Commissary, as Shorty brought the wagon up, while Si went to report to the Captain. "We need something badly, and apparently you've managed to get a good load. What's this?" he continued, opening one of the sacks and taking out a handful.

"Why, that's rice," answered Shorty, with a pained look at the officer's incomprehensible ignorance. "Real Georgia rice—first class, I tell you. We've just filled up on it ourselves, and it's mighty good eating."

"Rice?" echoed the officer, turning over some of the grains in his hand. "Does rice grow like that?"

"Certainly. How did you expect it to grow?" answered Shorty in his most superior manner. "On trees, like hickory nuts, or in the ground, like potatoes?"

"Of course not—of course not," answered the officer, trying to recover himself. "Rice is a grain, I believe, and must therefore grow like grain. But it's very white, and this must be some other kind."

"No," answered Shorty, implacably, "this is perfectly white, when you peel it—beautiful white as you ever saw."

"Just so, just so," said the Commissary, hopelessly trying to understand the construction of the grains, and avoid appearing to know less than an enlisted man. "But how do you peel it?"

"Different folks have different ways," said Shorty, loftily. "Some who are very particular, and not in a hurry, take a case-knife; some folks use a common husking-peg, and others just run 'em through a corn-sheller."

"Stuff! nonsense!" said the Commissary, who was a cock-sure fellow, and disposed to be airy with the enlisted men. "Don't talk that way to me, Corporal. I know better than that."

"Probably you do," said Shorty, with an injured air. "The Government pays you \$200 a month for knowing all about commissary matters. It only pays me \$16 a month, and all I'm expected to know is how to stand guard and do the facings. But it's your rice, you can husk it as you

please. The Colonel ordered us to turn it over to you, and here it is."

"Confound the rough, rasping stuff," grumbled the Commissary. "I don't know anything about how to handle it. Here, Sergeant, just issue this to the companies. Let them find out how to handle it as best they can. The Government didn't commission me for a thresher, miller or general manufacturer—only to receive and issue what is given me. If the men want to eat that stuff whole, it's none of my business. Let the Surgeons look out for the consequences."

There was a commotion in the regiment after the rice was distributed, and anxious inquiries from all sides as to what was to be done to reduce it to an eatable condition.

After enjoying their superiority of knowledge for awhile, and jibing the others about their lamentable ignorance of a common article of food, Si and the rest came down, and explained to Co. Q the process of pounding. Si cut down a young maple, and hollowed out the trunk into a trough, in which the rice was quickly pounded huskless with the butts of the guns. But Si had forgotten the ink-making qualities of the maple, and was horrified by finding the rice turned black as it boiled. There were a few moments of awe-struck silence, but Si examined the improvised mortar again, and decided that it was sure-enough maple and nothing poisonous.

"It'll be nothin worse than sucking your pens when you used to go to school, boys," he assured them.

"You can just chaw a little blotting paper afterward and you'll be all right," Shorty added.

Co. A, Co. Q's rival in all things, was still more unfortunate. They cut down a young pine tree to make the trough, but after laborious pounding, found that they had been pounding the rice and chaff into a stiff paste with the turpentine and rosin exuding from the green wood, and so had lost their rations entirely.

The other companies took a choice of evils, and borrowed Co. Q's trough, preferring to be poisoned rather than starved.

The Colonel came wandering down, overlooking with interest the labors of the men in getting supper, and noting the success of the devices for hulling the rice. As he reached Si he remarked:

"That was a very brilliant operation of yours, today, Sergeant, and the regiment is indebted to you for a most welcome supply of food. We certainly needed it, and I am sure the boys will work out some way to make the rice palatable. It is all right, as food, and as there is plenty of it down in this country, we can manage to live on it for a while, if we should miss connection with our ships. Plenty of rations have been sent to meet us, but they

may not be where we come out, and our friends, the enemy, may interpose obstacles to our coming out at all. We must be prepared for emergencies, and we must rely on the rice plantations to help us out. I have been talking to the General to have you sent over to the right, toward the sea, to try to make our way to the coast, to listen for the signal guns of our ships, and endeavor to get into communication with them. I think it will be done. But that's further along. Just now I have some internal troubles of my own. That cleaned rice you brought me is beautiful, and I thank you again for it. Aunt Minerva Ann is a treasure, and the best cook I believe in the division, if not the Corps. But she has her peculiarities. One of them is that she does not know anything about rice, and resents being taught. She has a prejudice against it because she has heard it was the food of the 'low-country niggers,' whom she despises as being about on the level with the beasts of the field, and to have anything to do with it would reduce her to their level. I'm as hungry as the rest of you, but she is in the sulks, and will absolutely not touch the rice."

"Confound her cranky stubbornness," said Si, but then reflecting how much he owed to Aunt Minerva's courage and firmness he added, "I think I can bring her around, Colonel. I'm her oldest friend in the regiment. I'll go up and see her."

"I wish you would," said the Colonel, "for I'm getting hungrier every minute, and there's absolutely nothing but that rice."

Si found Aunt Minerva Ann seated in a hickory rocking chair, taken from some house, and one of the most valued of the possessions of the time when she could call herself and anything else her very own. It went along in the headquarters wagon, no matter what else was left. Seated in it, as she had often seen her mistress at home, she felt that she was really an independent woman, and the queen of all around her. Her black brow was corrugated with unshakable determination, and with one leg thrown over the other, she rocked back and forth and crooned:

"Dar's a home in Hebben, what a joyful thought,

As de pore man toils in his weary lot;
A sure sign that there was a lot of sullen thunder in her atmosphere. Around her were the fire burning under the kettles full of water, and the scorched rice, spread out on a piece of shelter-tent.

"Why, Aunty, what's the matter? Why ain't you cooking supper?" Si exclaimed, cheerfully. "Not sick, are you?"

"No, not a mite sick," answered she. "Jes' mad, dat's all. Dey 'spects me, de chief cook lady ob de rijimint, t' go t' work an' cook up a lot ob hog-feed. Dat's a insult, so hit is. Nobody eats rice but hogs an' dem low-down swamp niggers, who isn't much better. Den dey axes me t' cook dat stuff fer de Cunnel ob de rijimint. Nebber do hit long's I lib. Wouldn't dirty my kittles wid hit. Nebber git hit out agin in de world. I've hearn folks say dat hit sticks tighter dan hair t' a dog's back."

"But the Colonel's very hungry."

"Well, he'll had t' be hungry. Hit's no stuff fer a gentleman t' eat. Better be hongry dan eat dat low-down nigger-grub."

"Come, now, Aunt Minerva Ann, be reasonable."

"I is reasonable, I done tell you. I'se reasonable dan dem what wants me t' make up a mess of slop fer de head-man ob de rijimint. He's too nice t' eat dat truck, an' you knows hit. I'd be ashamed t' set hit afore him, an' he'd 'spise me fer hit."

"But I tell you the Colonel's very hungry."

"Well, let him send some ob you men off t' git something fit for him t' eat. You orter git suthin' better'n dat truck. Nice lot ob soljers you is' t' git nuffin' better'n dat."

"But Aunty, I tell you there's nothing else to be had in the country, just now, and we must eat that or starve. We've just eaten a lot of it, and it goes very well, I tell you. But I just met poor little Pete, who didn't get to go with us, and he's so hungry that he could hardly keep the tears back. I never saw Pete so hungry in all my life. You know a boy gets much hungrier than a man. He needs food or his growth 'll be stunted."

"What dat? What dat?" exclaimed the negress, aroused to sudden interest. "Leetle Pete so hongry dat he cryin'? If he don't git sumfin' t' eat hit'll stunt his growth? I habn't seed dat brat dis whole day, an' t'ought he off agin wid yo'uns, tryin' by turns t' break his neck an' git his belly-full, as usual. Yo' say dat rice's rayly good t' eat, an' yo' likes hit? Fatch him up hyah, an' he shall hab all he kin stuff."

She sprang from her chair, and began fanning the dust and chaff out of the rice.

"Colonel," said Si, hunting up the officer in the camp, "I've brought Aunt Minerva Ann around. I guess she's got supper about ready for you."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

NEARING SAVANNAH—STRUGGLES WITH THE SWAMPS AND MORASSES,
TORPEDOES IN THE ROAD.

Except the Fifteenth Corps, the entire army was now pressing down the long, narrow peninsula lying between the Savannah and the Ogeechee Rivers, and which grew narrower as the city was approached, until now it was nowhere more than 18 miles wide.

This was so cut up by creeks, swamps, rice-canals and dikes that it afforded splendid opportunities for the rebels to obstruct the onward march of the army, and at that time any prolonged halt would mean starvation. There was nothing in the country but rice, with most of that behind the rebel lines, and 60,000 men would eat a great deal of rice every day.

The rebels had all the will in the world to give this obstruction, and they fully comprehended how fatal it might be to the bold invaders. Trees were felled across the roads and into the fords; lines of rifle-pits covered the distance between heads of swamps running to the rivers on either flanks; ugly forts rose to command the crossings, and the long lines of causeways through the marshes; the gates were shut, and the rice fields and dikes were flooded; and heavy skirmish lines would obstinately cling to the high banks and dispute further progress, while a mile or more away cannon much heavier than field-guns, and indicating the presence of regular siege works, would bellow out sullenly, and send their shells roaring through the melancholy wastes. Then would come the swift deployment of heads of columns, eager search for hog-paths through the swamps, weary floundering of skirmish lines through the mud and flood of rice-fields, the cutting down trees under fire to make foot-bridges for daring skirmishers to rush across and gain positions of advantage, and the final coming up against a solid line that seemed to finally bar the way.

But the Fifteenth Corps was flying light on the south side of the Ogeechee, and bringing all these plans to naught by "a-gittin' 'round our eends," as the rebel prisoners expressed it.

Behind such obstructions as filled the tongue of land between the Savannah and the Ogeechee 10,000 men could have held Sherman's army back for months. The 10,000 men were there, but over beyond the sluggish Ogeechee the agile Fifteenth Corps was roaming at will, finding fords

and crossings, and perpetually coming in behind the obstinate obstructors, threatening them with capture.

The tall, wide-scattered, somber pines were now giving way to sturdy live-oaks, from whose hundred arms hung long festoons of the funereal-looking Spanish moss, giving a graveyard gloominess wherever there was a grove.

The dismal swamps, the endless maze of flooded rice-fields, the ghostly drapings on the strange-looking trees, the barrenness of the uncanny land, the awful stories of the alligators and other slimy monsters a hundred times more horrible, which were circulating among the negroes, and especially the anxious look upon the faces of the Colonel and the Adjutant, the way they and the other officers would move off to one side, and talk in low tones about rations, the arrival of the ships, prospects of coming into communication with our fleet, and the necessity of the most careful husbanding of supplies, filled Aunt Minerva's soul with corroding fears.

"Dis seems de very roostin'-place fer harnts," she said to Uncle Ephraim, one evening, as she detained him by her side. Her independence of him and occasional fine scorn were all very well when they were back on the highlands. Now she wanted his supporting presence all the time. "Dis's de very hatchin'-place fer dem. Dey breed down yah like skeeters in a duck-pond. Dem long things a-hang-in' from de trees is deir clothes in which dey go t' visit deir friends in de grave-yards. An' hit's gittin' wusser an' wusser. Ebery day we's a-gittin' farder inter dese awful swamps. Eph, doesnt yo' know some Bible verses yo' kin say dat'll be good t' keep off de sperits?"

"I useter, but I done forgot all dat conjure bizniss since I come inter de army. Sergeant Si says hit's plum wicked t' conjure, and Corpril Elliott he jaffs an' says hit's wuss dan wicked—hit's dam foolishness, only fit fer niggers and pore whites."

"Ephum McGillicuddy Klegg," gasped Aunt Minerva Ann, "how dares yo' use cuss-words in sich a place as dis? Something may fly away wid yo' any minnit."

"Stop talkin' dat fool nigger-chatter," said Uncle Ephraim, imitating Si's manner of sweeping aside the superstitions of slave-days. "Mustn't t'ink an' talk

dat-a-way, now dat yo's free. Nuffin' fly w'ay wid nobody in Sherman's army. Der ain't de kind dat's flied away wid."

"Well, den, hit may come swinmin' an' creepin' along froo dis black water, an' kotch yo' an' drag yo' down under de roots ob de trees, 'mong de nasty slimy mess ob weeds an' water-grass; whar mosses long as a fence-rail 'll bite yo', an' bigger'n a saw-log, wid moufs bigger'n a barn-door, and teef like a cotton-gin 'll swaller yo'," said Aunt Minerva Ann, bursting into tears. "Better pray, Eph, dan say cuss-words. If we'uns ever git on dry ground agin den yo' kin cuss all yo' wants t', an' I won't say a word."

Uncle Ephraim shuddered. He had thought too much of those awful things himself.

"'Spect I had better stop cussin' til we'uns git outen yah," he conceded. "But den Corpril Elliott, he goes right along, cussin' like a house a-fire ebbertying down hyah, an' sayin' dat he don't gib a d— fer de rebels an' all deir works. O, Lord, fergib me, I done said d— again, an' I didn't mean ter, at all."

"It's plum nigh skeered t' deff all de time," said Aunt Minerva Ann, between sobs of uncontrollable weeping. "It's 'lin watchin' de Cunnel an de Adjutant. Dey's awfully skeered, spite ob deir tryin' t' not let on. De Cunnel's face so long dat he could eat outen a churn, an' de Adjutant he nebber sing nor whistle no more. I oberheard him sayin' sumthin' t' de Cunnel 'bout nebber gittin' outen dese awful swamps; de furdur in we went de wvass tangled up we got, an' hit made my heart jes' stand still. I'm not gwine t' sleep a wink dis night. It's gwine to sot by de fire, an' be ready if de Angel Gabriel he blow his horn."

"Well, Sarjint Klegg ain't skeered a mite," said Uncle Ephraim, by way of encouragement. "Sarjint Klegg, he say hit make no difference—we's bound t' lick de rebels, any way, an' dat right off. Once dey got behine rocks an' mountains, but we licked dem out jest de same as we're gwine t' do when dey're behine mud an' water. Corpril Elliott he jes' cusses all de time, an' says he don't gib a d—, O, Lord, dar I done said hit agin."

"An' dem big guns, dey's a-shootin' now," groaned Aunt Minerva Ann. "Bigger'n a cotton-gin, an' beller like a whole field o' bulls. I t'ink I jes' die ebbery time I hears one of dem roarin'."

"Sarjint Klegg, he say dat dey don't 'mount t' nuffin', only t' make a noise, an' he hopes 'our ships 'll hear dem. Corpril Elliott he jes' rips an' cusses when dey shoot, an' says he don't gib a d— how many dey has ob dem. O, Lord, dar I said hit agin. What shall I do?"

"An' dis rice," moaned Aunt Minerva Ann. "Nuffin' t' eat but rice. No more fit t' eat dan basswood shavin's, no more heart in hit dan beeswax. One peck of

good ole yaller meal wuf more'n a wagon-load ob rice. Ebberbody starve t' death purty soon, though he fall t' de neck wid dat cold, clammy rice. Look at hit, dar 'n de pot. Not half so much life in hit as ole whitewash. An' dar's lectie 'Pete'—"

"Pete don't seemed t' be skeered a mite, nudder," interjected Uncle Ephraim.

"Dat's de aggravatin' part ob hit," burst out the obdurate Aunt Minerva Ann. "He's like de rest ob yo'—hain't sense enough t' be rayly skeered. Me an' de Cunnel's got t' be skeered fer de whole rijimut. Dat's allers de way hit is wid a pore woman."

And her weeping became more vociferous.

The army was now within 15 miles of Savannah, and the resistance of the rebels was hourly becoming more obstinate. The Ogeechee River was sinking into such a maze of swamps, channels, canals, ditches and creeks that the Fifteenth Corps was having much trouble in finding the flank of the rebel force.

A long, precious day, while the rations were running still lower, was spent in bitter bickering between the skirmishers, wallowing in the mud, wading through the dikes, forcing their way through the miry brakes of cane and briars, and the rebels, who were mainly better off in knowing the country better and standing on the defensive. But the indefatigable Yankees would come upon them in the most unexpected ways, and through places that they had reckoned as absolutely impassable, their flanks would be turned in a way that they had deemed impossible, and in the race back for cover many of them would be captured.

Meanwhile the marches lagged most aggravatingly, and everybody became still more morose, anxious and fretful.

The 200th Ind. was in advance on one of the roads, when the army came up in front of works which covered all the high ground between a network of creeks and swamps running down to the Savannah, with a similar maze of morasses extending to the Ogeechee. The 200th Ind. was constantly edged off to the right, and the Ogeechee, as the line was extended by other regiments coming up, and so got farther and farther into the swamps. As the regiment had gone in left in front, Co. Q, with Si and his squad on the flank, and got the very worst of the swamp. They plunged straight ahead, guiding themselves by the sound of the firing to their left, and making their way the best they could through the terrible growth, which, besides cane and weeds, the inevitable tall cypress, with its cone-like top and immense "knees," embraced a world of strange trees. There was no use looking for paths or "good places;" all was alike, and any way to get through had to be taken. The thick growth made a

dusky twilight all around, except where some unusually large cypress had driven back the growth with its far-spreading knees, and let in a little more light through its thick but now bare branches.

Getting through was not the only difficulty. One never knew where to step. A seemingly solid hammock of ground would, when the foot landed on it, turn out to be a mass of ooze, which would let the unlucky stepper in up to his waist. Then the rest would scramble to get him out, and save his gun and cartridge-box from being wet.

At last, inexpressibly wet and muddy, covered with swamp-slime, they gathered on the wide knees of a great cypress, to rest, get their bearings, and take a fresh start.

They looked around, and everywhere saw some wild animal gazing with astonishment on these first invaders of their haunts. Blue herons gave a shriek of alarm, and vanished like a flash of light. A panther turned its yellow eyes on them, screamed, and ran up a tree. Foxes looked, barked and vanished in the thick growth. Flocks of raft-ducks covered an open spot of water in the distance.

"Great Jehosephat," muttered Shorty, listening to the firing away off to the left, "what a place this'd be to hunt in when you ain't hunting something else."

"Lucky it's Winter," remarked Si, "or there'd be more snakes around here than any man with the jim-jams ever saw. It must literally squirm with 'em. Seems to me, Shorty, if we point for that big magnolia over there, we'll keep in line with the boys, and be most likely to come out on the flanks of them rebels that's doing the shooting. Put your cartridge-belts around your necks, boys, and you'll be most likely to keep your boxes dry. Better put your gun-slings over your shoulders, guns butts up, so's you can use both hands at the next plunge. Take another good long breath, and we'll start. Keep as close together as possible, so's to help one another."

"Say, what a funny big hole," said Pete, who, boy-like, was attending to everything else than the business in hand. "Something's gone in there. I wonder what it is. I'm going to see."

He picked up a bit of rotten limb, ran it down into the hole, and felt it almost instantly snapped off.

"Hello, there's something down there, for a fact. See how it broke this stick off," he called out.

Sandy rushed over, and ran his gun down the hole. Something grabbed it and tried to pull it out of his hand. "Come here, Pete, quick, and help me," he shouted. "It's trying to get my gun away."

Pete caught hold, but the gun was being pulled down, in spite of all the boys could do, when Si caught hold of the stock. But it required both his hands,

and all his strength to pull the gun back, and as he slowly did so the long, saw-like jaws of a young alligator came into view, with the gun-barrel held between them as in a vise.

This was a startler, but Si's nerve was superior to it. He held onto the stock and continued to pull. Abe Grimstead caught on to help him, and a reptile between three and four feet long was brought to the surface. He was vicious over the disturbance and full of fight. A lightning sweep of his tail struck the too-curious Pete's ankles, and knocked the youngster's feet from under him.

Uncle Ephraim, who had followed the squad with far more reluctance than he had ever done before, and kept every instant as near to Si as possible, gave a yell of horror, and, falling on his knees, began to pray. Shorty jumped at the reptile, and struck it across the neck with his gun-barrel. There was an exciting punching with the gun muzzles and striking with the barrels by the others for a few minutes, with the alligator's tail getting in some vengeful work on their legs, but they were too many for him, and he finally gave up the gun-barrel and the ghost.

"Pete, you little brat," said Shorty, as he wiped the sweat off his forehead, and made ready to renew the advance, "you stop hunting around for holes. We hain't lost none."

"Yes," added Si, panting a little with the exertion, "if the alligators want to crawl into their dens and sleep during this ruction, let 'em. We hain't no business disturbing 'em."

"Fore God," gasped Uncle Ephraim, surveying with terrified eyes the direction in which they were going, "you don't see no more ob dem holes ober dar, does yo? I's sho' t' die if I stays hyah, an' one ob dem t'ings'll eat me if I go ober dar. What's dis nigger a-gwine t' do, I'd like t' know."

"Come along, Uncle Eph," said Si cheerfully, as he started. "I guess the alligators won't bother us if we let them alone. This is Winter, when they'd rather sleep than eat—even a colored brother."

"Don't know 'bout dat," muttered Uncle Ephraim, doubtfully, as he gingerly followed Si. "Allers heard dat 'gators 's powerfully fond ob niggers."

They were getting far more knowing now about swamps, and gained the big magnolia with less trouble than they had previously experienced, but they were all very careful to avoid suspicious-looking holes.

They came to another broad, table-like cypress knee, upon which they gathered, listened to the distant firing and tried to get their bearings. They felt that they were now getting toward the edge of the swamp, and approaching firm ground.

Making as little noise as possible, and avoiding shaking the bushes, they gained



THE
MARCH
TO
THE
SEA

“UNCLE EPHRAIM GAVE A YELL OF HORROR AND FALLING TO HIS KNEES BEGAN TO PRAY.”

the solid ground. They halted and listened again. They were certainly much nearer the thick of the firing, which seemed a mile or more away, and more to the front.

"I guess we've got in the rear of them, Si," said Shorty. "But where do you suppose the regiment is? I hain't heard or seen a thing of it since we made that long circuit to the right, more'n an hour ago."

"Hush!" whispered Si. "I hear voices."

They all became silent, while Si, turning sidewise, edged his way cautiously through the brake, without breaking a twig or shaking the brush-tops.

Shorty followed in the same way, keeping just in sight of Si, so as to receive his signals, and Uncle Ephraim, his fear of alligators having abated on the dry ground, followed after Shorty.

The voices became more distinct, and were approaching. Presently Si was able to make out that they were rebels, and someone in command giving orders.

He turned and signaled Shorty to come up cautiously, and bring the others.

"I can't see nothing nowhere of the regiment," he said, briefly explaining the situation to Shorty, "but I feel sure that we've got ahead of them and in behind the rebel line. The lay of the land looks that way. I should judge our boys must be back there a full half-mile to the left, working through the upper part of the swamp. These are rebels coming. What must we do?"

"Jump 'em, of course," answered Shorty, looking at the cap of his gun.

"Exactly," accorded Si. "Boys, look carefully to your locks, and make sure that your guns 'll go off. Better put on fresh caps."

Though the rebels could not be seen, they were now quite near, and pushing down a faint, vine-entangled trace, which Si had noticed, before he stepped back behind the cover of a densely growing orange tree.

"There's a lot of Yanks working their way through the swamps over there," said the commander, "aiming to get around our flanks and take us in the rear. I want to lay for them and surprise them. There's a big cyprus laying out there that we'll get behind, and lay for 'em, as they come out of the swamp, into the clear ground. Every man keep down, and be careful not to show himself until I give the order. Then every man raise his head above the log, pick out his man, aim below the belt, and let him have it. Don't let a shot be wasted; take plenty of time aiming, but make sure you get your man. Then we'll jump up and finish the rest with our revolvers. We musn't let a maugy hound of them get away."

"Who is that pleasant, amiable gentleman? He's an old acquaintance. Where have I heard his kind, gentle voice before?" whispered Shorty.

"So've I heard it before, and not long ago," answered Si. "Who can he be?"

The rebels had passed on by this time, leaving a pretty broad trail, into which Si entered and followed. Presently he came to where the brush was not so thick, and looking cautiously out he could see the rebel officer lining his men behind the fallen cyprus.

Away in front of a cleared space before the prostrate trunk, the shaking bushes in the swamp, and the sound of Col. McGillicuddy's sweet, penetrating voice, encouraging, urging and commanding, showed where the 200th Ind. was working its laborious way through the morass.

"Steady, men," said the rebel officer. "Deploy more there to the left. Don't make so much noise. Every man keep down till I give the order. Rest your carbines on top of the log, and take careful aim. Steady, now."

Si looked around to see that all of his boys were up and cocked his gun. "Come forward a little more into line, there, boys," he said in a loud whisper. "Pick out your man, each of you. I'll take the fellow in command. Don't fire till I give the word, or till I do."

"Let's belt into 'em at once," said Shorty. "I'll bust that Sergeant there."

"No," answered Si. "I'll not fire into their backs, without giving 'em a chance."

"Ahem," he continued, in a loud, penetrating voice.

The startled rebel officer whirled around.

"Sorry to disturb your arrangements, just as they're finished," said Si. "But if you don't surrender at once off goes your head."

The rebel glanced along the line, and it seemed as if the brush was filled with Yankees with leveled guns.

"What's your rank?" he shouted. "I'm a Major!"

"No back talk," said Si sternly. "I've got rank enough for you. Drop that sword, or I'll drop you."

"Lay down your guns, men," said the rebel. "The woods are plum full of Yankees."

"Leave them guns where they are," commanded Si, "and move over toward that oak on the right. Pete, rush through that clear space, and yell to Col. McGillicuddy to come on; we're here."

The firing away toward the center suddenly stopped, and was followed by the deep-throated Union cheer, as the men rushed over the line lately held by the rebels.

"For de Lawd's sake," ejaculated Uncle Ephraim, scanning the rebel prisoners, "if dey'un ain't dat Jeff Davis Cavalry, dat tried o' roast we'uns alibe in de cave."

"That's so," said Shorty with an oath. "Why didn't we shoot 'em down as soon as we saw 'em? Let's kill 'em now."

"No, we can't now," said Si, pressing

down Shorty's gun. "They've surrendered. Too bad we didn't know it before."

"Hello, Sergeant," said Col. McGillicuddy, coming up, badly dragged with the mud and slime of the swamp. "You got in ahead, as usual. Picked up a nice bunch of prisoners, too. Well, take them back down that way to the main road and turn them over to the Provost-Marshal." "I think you'll find him over there only a little ways—a mile or so. The fight seems to be over, and we've got the works. I guess we'd better go into camp right here, and rest until we get orders. Come back here, Sergeant, after you are relieved of your prisoners."

Si marched his prisoners over toward the main road as ordered. He had to go farther back to reach this than the Colonel supposed, and as it came in sight Si saw a squad of Union officers come riding forward. He hastened forward to meet them, to inquire where he could find the Provost-Marshal.

At that instant a terrific explosion tore up the ground in the road, and when the smoke and shower of clay and sand subsided, Si saw the leading officer lying on the ground, while the horse he had been riding was torn to fragments, and scattered in every direction.

As soon as the other officers could control their terrified horses they dismounted and came forward to see what had happened. Si's first thought was for his prisoners, but as he turned to look he saw Shorty knock the rebel Major down with his fist, and so repress any disposition they might have to take advantage of the confusion. Si ran forward then to help the wounded officer, a handsome young fellow, with Captain's straps. One foot had been blown off, and his leg horribly mangled.

Si carried him back a little ways, and laid him on a bed of branches, and busied himself helping stanch the blood, while one of the officers galloped after a Surgeon. They looked around to find the cause of the catastrophe, and discovered that the rebels had planted eight-inch shells in the road, so arranged that the pressure of a foot would explode a cap and fire the fuse. While they were swearing about this, and glowering at the terrified prisoners, Gen. Sherman, attracted by the unexpected noise, rode up, and began a cross-examination, in his nervous impetuous way, of all of them. As the truth developed he burned into a towering rage, that made even those who were accustomed to his fits of temper open their eyes.

"Damned scoundrels! Damned scoundrels," he raged. "This is not war. This is black, brutal murder. Every infernal villain of them ought to be hung. If I could lay my hands on them I'd hang them higher than Haman. I would, by G—d. There was no fighting here. Noth-

ing under heaven to excuse this cowardly brutality. Here, who's got charge of those prisoners?"

"I have, General," answered Si, saluting. "until I can find the Provost-Marshal."

"Well, Sergeant, send back to the wagons for some picks and shovels. Give each of those prisoners one, and see that he goes ahead and digs up everything that may look like a torpedo. Here (to one of his staff), you ride back to the first pioneer wagon you meet, and bring it forward with picks and shovels enough for this squad."

"But, General," protested the rebel Major, as the Aid rode away, "we had nothing to do with this. We knew nothing of it—absolutely nothing."

"The h— you didn't," roared Gen. Sherman. "You're probably lying, for a man that would do such a thing wouldn't hesitate to lie about it. At any rate, you're no better than they that did. You're in the same box. If you didn't it's because you didn't have a chance."

"But, General, I'm an officer and a gentleman, and a prisoner of war. You've no right to treat prisoners that way. It's against the laws of war."

"The devil it is," shouted the General, getting still angrier. "You'll talk to me about the laws of war, in the face of such a trick as this, you pompous, ill begotten little traitor, you. Here, Sergeant, when those picks and shovels come, be sure that this cheeky Major-fellow has one, and put him in the lead. Make him dig, or shoot him. I don't care a straw which you do."

"Very good, General," answered Si, saluting. "He'll dig or die."

"General, here are the picks and shovels," said the Aid, reporting.

"Very well. Sergeant, you have your orders."

"They shall be carried out, General," said Si, saluting.

"Major," said Shorty, grimly, as he handed him a shovel, "I'm very glad to meet you again. You probably don't recognize me as one of the gents you tried to burn up in that cave back there. I'll now introduce you to this useful tool, and you will proceed to perform the first good piece of work you've ever done in your long and misguided life. That little stick there in the middle of the road shows where another of them shells has been buried. You'll jump right over there and dig it up, if you don't want to lose the top of your head in a holy jiffy. Go!"

The Major looked around on the set, merciless faces, sighed, picked up his shovel, and walking gingerly over to where the bit of stick stood upright began digging cautiously around it.

"Come, come; you're a yard away from it," said Shorty, fingering his gun-lock.

"We hain't no time to waste while you're

excavating a house-cellar. Set your shovel in closer."

The Major groaned, for the shovel handle was already blistering his soft hands. But he could see as well as the others where the soft earth was, and with infinite care he dug it away, and rolled out another eight-inch shell, cunningly arranged for explosion.

In the meanwhile Si with the rest was making a careful examination of the road bed for other signs of shells. They could find none, but to make sure, as soon as the Major had finished his task, he was put at the head of the squad of prisoners, and with Si and his squad running

along the side, they were made to double-quick up and down the road several times for a distance of half-a-mile or more.

"General," reported Si, as they came back, "I believe the road is now clear. I'm sorry that we couldn't find any more torpedoes, for we wanted awfully to have them fellows step on one. They deserve it. We know 'em of old."

"Very well, Sergeant," replied the General. "You're relieved. You can turn your prisoners over to the Provost-Marshal here, who will keep them patrolling the road tomorrow, and until we are satisfied that the rebels have given up planting torpedoes."

CHAPTER XL.

THE ARMY RUNS UP AGAINST THE SIEGE WORKS AROUND SAVANNAH, AND THE BOYS START OUT TO FIND THE SHIPS.

"We're up against the works of Savannah itself now, good and hard," said Si, as he climbed down out of a tall cypress, from which he had been taking a survey of the steeples and masts of Savannah, now five miles away, and the country intervening. "It's a regular Atlanta of a place, only worse, for they've mud and water that you can't climb over. They've got the same old forts, with bigger guns than ever; the same old works, running from here to the Day o' Judgment, with slashings of abatis till you can't rest, and infantry piled in behind 'em thicker'n hair on a dog's back, and in front of 'em ditches, canals, ponds and lakes and mud enough to break the heart of anybody but an alligator."

"Great Jehosephat," exclaimed Shorty, "looking at the miry stretch immediately in front of them, 'why didn't somebody think to start a breed of web-footed men for soldering in a country like this? I'm getting as mouldy from the damp as we was up there around Tullyhomy."

"Scatter, boys, and lay low, they're going to shoot," shouted Pete, coming down from another cypress, in a tangle of Spanish moss. "They've caught sight of us."

A big siege gun, a mile or two away, boomed, and a huge shell moaned dully, as it swept deliberately along just above their heads, cutting off large limbs and small trees as easily as if they were slender sticks of candy, and finally exploding in a marsh sent up a geyser of mud, water, sticks, roots, small alligators, snakes and fish.

"That's right," said Shorty, sardonically.

"Just because you're mad at somebody, go on and tear up your own old swamps, and kill the pretty little alligators, and moccasins, and other innocent ornaments, that haint been doing nothing to you. About as much sense as you could expect from a rebel."

"Struck something here, Sergeant?" inquired Col. McGillicuddy, coming up on foot. "What's the matter? Trying to fight a 64-pounder, or a gunboat, with your Springfield?"

"Looks as if we'd struck an Atlanty combination, with Vicksburg trimmings," said Si. "Get up in that cyprus, Colonel, and take a look. Here, let me lay that sapling against it, so that you can get up easy. They won't fire that gun again for some time."

"I'll get up in that other one, Colonel, and watch for them to shoot," said Pete.

"All right, Pete," said the Colonel, climbing up. "Look out for the gun, while I'm taking a general survey."

"They're sponging out the gun, two men working the rammer," called out Pete. "Now they seem to be working around the touch-hole. Now one man is bringing a red cartridge, and sticking it in the muzzle. Now two men have hold of the rammer pushing it down. Now two men come up, carrying a big shell by a pair of tongs, with one hand on each other's shoulders. Now they're putting it in. Now three men have got hold of the rammer pushing it down. Now a man's sticking in the primer, and jumping down and running off to the end of the string. Now they are all around the

britch of the cannon with handspikes slewing it around and aiming it, as an officer standing behind with a glass motions his hand. He's on to you, Colonel. He's aiming right for you and sighting along the gun himself. Better jump, for that feller's straightening the lanyard."

The Colonel clambered down, just as the dull boom floated over the dreary swamps, and the shell cut out a gash in the side of the tree just above where his feet had been.

"Well," said the Colonel, brushing the shower of bark splinters from his clothes, "that artillery officer certainly knows his business. I never saw so good a shot made by a big gun before. You couldn't 've done better than that with your rifle, Sergeant. This means a siege, sure as you are born. And it's got the groundwork for a very tough one. It's what we have been expecting, though, and now it is here. But our brigade is not to be in the line of investment—at least for a while. We are to move over to the right, toward a place called King's Bridge, to help the Fifteenth Corps open a way to the coast. Since we are going to have a siege the first thing is to get into communication with our vessels, which have orders to watch for us all the way from Charleston to Florida. I don't imagine they have any present idea of just where we are now, for they have had no means of knowing what direction we have been taking. For all they are likely to know we may be in South Carolina, or away down toward the Florida line. Several scouts have been sent down the river in canoes, to make their way to the blockaders, but we have no idea whether any of them have got through. Kilpatrick's cavalry has gone off away down to a place called Darien, nearly 100 miles down the coast, so as to make sure. Gen. Howard seems to be even more anxious than anybody else, and talking with him a little while ago, I told him I had some men who would find the fleet, if they had to wade to the Gulf Stream for it. He said send them out by all means. He further directed that you go across the Ogeechee, and follow its course down to the sea, or to Ossabaw Sound, which it runs into. You will get as near as you can to Fort McAllister, which is at its mouth, on the right hand side of the river, because some of our vessels are sure to be near there, watching for blockade runners. You will listen for the guns of the ships, and when you hear them try to make your way to them. The Adjutant will give you a small flag to use in signaling our ships when you come in sight of them. The main thing will be for you to tell the fleet that we are here. Then report with all possible speed to Gen. Howard. I hope you'll bring the first news and beat the cavalry."

"If we don't get to the ships before the cavalry, Colonel, it's because we're drowned trying," said Shorty. "And we're

all mighty good swimmers. I've swum the Mississippi over and back again without resting."

"Well, good-bye and good luck to you," said the Colonel.

"Say, you just beat that cavalry, and you'll tickle the old man to death," said the Adjutant, as he handed Si the flag. "There's been a good deal of chinning around headquarters, over the matter, and the Colonel's been giving them a very gay note on his bazoo as to what you could do. If you don't see the ships when you strike the shore, wade out a few miles and look for them. They are out there somewhere, between Baltimore and Key West, and you can't miss them if you go far enough."

"We'll find the ships if we have to charter an alligator to tow us out to them," promised Shorty, while Si was fastening the flag on to his saddle-bow, and the boys were dividing up the extra rations of coffee, sugar and salt issued to them.

"You can't miss your way," said the Adjutant, showing Si and Shorty a map. "All you've got to do is to keep right along the Ogeechee, which, you see, runs into the Ossabaw Sound, with Fort McAllister at the mouth. You'll probably not meet any rebels of consequence until you get near Fort McAllister, and then you'll have to look out for the garrison. Probably, also, the rebels have patrols out along the coast, which you'll have to look out for, but you'll know how to take care of them."

"Don't bother about garrisons and patrols," said Shorty, confidently. "Get your ears ready to hear news from the ships. The rebels, all kinds, will keep till we see Old Glory flying from a masthead."

They galloped away eagerly for the southeast side of the Ogeechee River, but for hours their impatient progress was impeded by the throng of men and trains pressing over toward the right to extend the investment of the works. They chafed intolerably at the delay, but had to submit. There was no cutting across the fields and through the woods as in the up-country. Nowhere was there more than a slender thread of road and dry ground between the swamps, the flooded fields and the ditches, and this became quickly packed with men or teams. Colonels were too intent upon getting their regiments into position, and wagon-masters to get their trains closed up to care about the convenience of a squad of mounted men under the command of a mere Sergeant. Even Generals found difficulty in making their way along the crowded roads to their places.

As for Aids, whom it was every enlisted man's religion to dislike and jeer, they got the hoarse hoot from all sides.

"O, go swim," the tired, impatient men would yell, in response to their pleadings to make way, and let them through. "Trade your horse for a set of fins and flippers, and paddle through the swamp.

We need all this dry ground in our business. You get the big trees in a fight. Leave us something."

Si tried a detour to avoid the jam, and get through, but regretted it, after they had floundered through a swamp. The swarming infantry had found and was holding every decent passage through the country.

"Say, boys, let us through," pleaded Si, at last. "Gen. Howard has sent us out to find our ships, and we're in a hurry."

"Hello, going to find our ships? Hooray!" they shouted. "Go ahead, and good luck to you. Open out there, boys, and let 'em through. Crowd back into the swamp there. Don't mind if you do get your little tootsie-wootsies wet. Twon't be the first time. Open up, there."

As they would ride in single file through the ranks they would be greeted with cheers.

"A cross between a tormented rear-jam and a grand review," commented Si.

They managed to get across the Ogeechee River that afternoon, however, and into country in which there was no troops, but the country itself was the most forlorn and baffling they had yet struck. It was poorer, even, than the sand hills they had just left. Everywhere was a stretch of low-lying sand between the oozy, fetid mire of the eternal swamps and their dense brakes of cane, reeds, and brush. The swamps seemed to have sucked every particle of nutriment, out of the yellow sand, and crowded it back as exhausted and worthless. Nothing grew on it, but scattered, stunted pines and sparse growths of a peculiar weed, or shrub, which looked like a green palm-leaf fan, with the greater part broken off.

"Of all the condemned countries I ever saw, this is the worst," said Si. "Even a razor-backed hog would starve to death on a range of 50 miles of it, unless he could live on the snakes in the swamps. Wonder what they live on?"

"I'd like to fence Jeff Davis in on it," said Shorty, "and make him live on what he could raise."

Occasionally they would come upon the miserable shack of some ague-smitten parish, whose ancestor had probably been a pauper or a criminal transported from England, to work the "new plantations," but had been driven off as absolutely worthless. The man, his house, his family and his surroundings were more miserable than anything they had ever seen even back in the mountains. The shack would be the most wretched shelter ever erected by human beings. The man did not have energy or skill to cut logs, build them up into a pen, and cover them with split shingles. Instead, he gathered such odds and ends of logs and branches as he did not have to carry too far, and made such a shelter as his laziness permitted, covering the place with pine boughs and stuff

from the swamps. Around the hut would be a little, thinly-scratched space, in which stood some thin corn-stalks about the size of gas pipes, and some tall collard stalks. There were no chickens, pigs, nor animals of any kind, except a few lank, melancholy-eyed curs.

An inexpressibly limp, weak, shaggy, weak-eyed man would lounge listlessly in front of the shack, and gaze at them without the slightest show of interest, while from the covert of the logs they would see a sterner, livelier gaze from the sour-eyed woman. The children, nearly naked, though it was Winter, and wilder than the dogs, would scurry away to hiding-places, like so many rabbits.

"And such people not 25 miles from the great city of Savannah," said Si. "There was some excuse for that sort of thing up in the mountains, but none that I can see down here. What they need is school houses, and good, red-hot Methodist preachers to stir 'em up with the danger they're in from hell-fire if they don't wake up from idleness and sin."

"Aint worth it," answered Shorty. "Cholery's the only thing that'd do them justice. But the next breed would be just as bad. A man to live in this water-logged country's got to be so mean that even an alligator won't eat him."

"What the Adjutant said about follerin' the Ogeechee ight down to the sea's a good deal easier than done," said Si, after they had worked for hours around and through the interminable network of swamps, creeks and lagoons. "Taint so plain by a long sight as it was on that map just where the Ogeechee lays."

"A map of this country," said the disgusted Shorty, "to look anything like, would have to resemble the insides of that man on the front page of the almanac."

"I think the Ogeechee lays over there much further," said Si, with a wave of his hand. "I've been watching the sun, and I believe we're getting too far south."

"No, I believe this is the Ogeechee, the real river, that we've been coming along," insisted Shorty.

The dispute grew a little warm, and they called upon a "cracker" lounging in front of his shack to settle it.

"Where's the O-gee-chee River, stranger?" asked Si, pronouncing the unfamiliar name slowly and laboredly, almost spelling it.

"What's what, strangers?" inquired the man in turn, after waiting a full minute to let the question soak into his sluggish understanding.

"Where's the O-gee-chee River?" repeated Si impatiently.

"Dunno; none 'round hyah. Aint never seed none."

"Oh, yes you have," put in Shorty, with a suspicion that Si had not the right pronunciation. He was familiar with the peculiarities of the Southern dialect. "What's that over there?"



“WHERE'S THE O-GEE-CHEE RIVER?” REPEATED SI IMPATIENTLY.

“That thar over thar?” slowly repeated the man, deliberately studying the ground as if a new object. “W’y, that thar’s the ma’sh.”

“I know it’s the marsh, you basswood second cousin to a spavined alligator,” said Shorty. “But what do you call that clear water beyond?”

“What do I call that thar cl’ar water beyant the ma’sh?” inquired the man, after a few seconds’ pause to digest the question, and frame an answer. “W’y, that thar’s the Gitchie.”

“Oh, the Gitchie, you call it,” said

Shorty, triumphantly. “I told you that was the river, Si.”

“But ain’t the Gitchie up there, too?” asked Si, pointing in the direction he thought the river lay.

“The Gitchie up thar, too?” repeated the man, after a pause. “Oh, yes; the Gitchie’s up thar, an’ over thar, an’ all ’round hyah, ’most down t’ the Medway.”

“But which way does the Gitchie run?” asked Si.

“Which-a-way does the Gitchie run?” repeated the man, after the customary pause. “Hit don’t run nowhar, as ever I

knowed on. Hit jes' lays right out thar doin' nothin', 'cept when the wind blows, an' hit lays thar then, too."

"Well, which way is Oss-a-baw Sound from here?" asked Si.

"Which way's what?"

"Oss-a-baw Sound."

"Never heard tell on hit. No sich place 'round hyah."

"Which way is Fort McAllister, then?"

"Which way is what?"

"Fort McAllister."

"Dunno no sich place. McAllister's plantation is right over that-a-way, some whar, on the Sawby."

"On the what?"

"On the Sawby—the Sawby Soun'."

"He means Ossabaw Sound, Si," said Shorty, catching on.

"How far is it to McAllister's plantation?"

"Deed I don't know. Never was thar. Right smart piece, though. Not sich a powerful ways, nuther. Git thar in a day if yo' travel hard enough."

"How far is it to the ocean?"

"The oshun? What's that?"

"The ocean? Why the sea! How far is it to the sea?"

"I dunno nothin' 'bout no sea nor oshun. Never heard tell on 'em afore in all my life."

"Why, dummy, the big water where the ships sail."

"Never had nothin' t' do with nothin' but the Gitchie. Was once t' the Medway, an' never wanted t' go agin. Gitchie's enough fer me, an' more'n 'nough some times. I have the ager a great deal, an' I'm powerful afear'd t' have hit catch me away from home. Never wuz fond o' galivantin' 'round like some folks, anyway. Jim Boarded's ackchelly bin t' Savanny twict. I never wuz thar in my life. They all say Savanny's a powerful bad place."

The man seemed entirely exhausted by this unusually long speech, with the amount of thought involved and collapsed as if feeling a return of his perennial enemy, the ague.

"Rouse up, and come along and show us the way to the McAllister plantation," said Si. "Get a move on yourself."

"Show yo'uns the way t' the McAllister plantation? Can't do hit nohow. I done tell yo' I never was thar in my life. 'Sides, f dassent move nary step now. My ager-fit's come on. I must go in an' drink some dogwood an' boneset."

"No use wasting any more time on him, Si," said Shorty. "He hain't as much sense as a Wabash loon, even when the ager aint on him, and none at all when it is."

"Well, which way do the people come from when they're coming from McAllister's plantation?" persisted Si, not to go away entirely bootless of information.

"They'uns've got t' come that-a-way,"

chattered the man, his thin lips turning blue from the attack, and his cheeks taking on the hue of dirty ashes. "The only way they'uns kin git 'crost this arm o' the Gitchie is by the ford up thar by them palmettoes."

He pointed in quite a different direction from what either Si or Shorty had thought of going, but they turned, and spurred their horses that way.

"Si, how much good do you think your Methodist preacher and your school-house would do that feller?" Shorty inquired as they rode off. "If you spend a dollar trying to learn him anything, you'd lose \$1.50 of it, sure. The only use that could be made of that feller would be to keep meat from spoiling, and it'd be spoiled worse'n ever after it d've become him."

"Well, anyway, he's probably saved us a half-day's journey, and no end of worry," said Si, taking a quick, comprehensive survey of the ford they were approaching. "This is clearly the way out of this tangle of bogs and creeks, and yet it is about the last place we'd've thought of looking for it. Come on lively. We don't want the cavalry to get ahead of us."

As they made the crossing they were thrilled by the distant boom of a heavy gun. They all pricked up their ears, and turned their eyes eagerly in the direction whence came the sound.

"Thunder? No. No thunder in December. Gun? Yes," coolly reasoned Si, as was his wont.

"Yankee thunder. I hope," said Shorty. "Good sort of thunder. Brings rain. Brings a rain o' rations."

"Brings a reign of peace and liberty," punned Si. "Couldn't've bin one of them Savanny guns. Savanny lays back that way, according to my calculations. Mebbe though, the boys are feeling around away to the right. Mebbe a gun at Fort McAllister."

"Don't sound to me like a gun on land," said Shorty. "Got a different ring to it. I believe it's the ship's gun. And it's right over there, where I believe the sea lays."

"It's certainly too far to the east, as I make out the east from the sun, to be anywhere around Savanny, even if the boys have got clear around the city, reasoned Si. "It may be from Fort McAllister, and it may be from our ships. Either way, it points our course. Forward, trot."

Presently another boom rolled out.

"That's certainly a bigger gun than any o' them around Savanny," commented Si, hopefully. "And it's got a different beller to it. If it is a signal gun we can tell by it's being fired regularly. I wish I had counted between them. Didn't think of it, though. Forward, trot."

They struck a road which had evidently been considerably traveled.

"We're coming to somewhere," Si warned the rest. "Probably this is the road that leads to the fort."

"Yes, dat goes to de fort," said Uncle Ephraim. "See dose ole ca'tridge papers dat dey've frowed away, layin' dar?"

"That's so. Boys, close up, get your guns ready, and keep your eyes peeled. No talking now. We may bump into a crowd from the fort any minute."

They entered the dense woods bordering the Ogeechee, and rode through them for some minutes, when another gun boomed out.

"Signal guns, sure as you're a foot high," jubilantly exclaimed Si. "We've gone just about as far between each one. They wouldn't fire that slowly and regularly in any sort of a fight, and the gun gets bigger and sounds more different the closer we get to it."

They caught a glimpse of the broad river occasionally through intervals in the trees, and knew that it was really the river, because it had a well-defined course, and occasionally the banks rose into low bluffs.

Suddenly, from one of these bluffs a clear space opened out before them for more than a mile. They quickly pulled back into the cover of the trees, and began a careful reconnoissance. The space in front had been cleared to give range for the guns of the fort. The great live-oaks had been cut down and converted into a mass of impenetrable abatis, chevaux-de-frise, and other cunning entanglements. Beyond, where the river widened out into the sea, rose the high mud walls of a large and powerful fort, with the rebel flag floating from a tall staff in the center. Not even around Nashville, Chattanooga or Atlanta had they seen quite so formidable-looking a fortification. Swamps and ditches helped out the fearful abatis, its high banks were held in place by log revetments, and a stockade of sharp-pointed stakes surrounded the whole like porcupine quills.

A crowd of men were busy adding to the entanglement.

"Glad we haint lost any fort today," Shorty remarked, with a shudder. "But there's a big job for somebody."

Their eyes traveled on over the fort to the expanse of water beyond that stretched to the horizon.

"That's the sea, all right," remarked Si with satisfaction. Yet it was the first time his eyes had ever rested on salt water.

"Yes, and sure's there's a God in heaven, there's one of our vessels," said Shorty excitedly, as a sullen, dark mass, with smoke pouring from her chimneys, and the Star Spangled Banner floating from her mast-head, swept into view. She was too far away to distinguish anything on her decks, or more than that her flag had stripes running up to a blue field.

"Cheese that, boys," said Si, sternly, for he instinctively felt their wild impulse to cheer. "Keep awful quiet. We musn't let 'em know we're here."

The vessel circled around toward the fort, and then there shot out from her side an angry torrent of fire, and a great cloud of white smoke, while earth and water shook with the thunder. The eager boys distinctly saw the huge shell curve up into the air, and sail with slow majesty over toward the fort, making a fierce droning in its passage through the air.

"Splendid line-shot for the flag-staff," ejaculated Shorty.

"And a good guess as to distance," added Si, as the shell fell behind the ramparts of the fort and threw up a volcano of dirt and timbers when it exploded.

Shorty sprang at Pete, and clapped his hand over that excitable youngster's mouth.

"If she does that again, I'll just bust, if I can't holler," complained Pete, when Shorty took his hand away.

"She aint wasting no time, while she's signaling us," remarked Si. "She's killing two birds, and several rebels with every signal. Good for her. Now the thing to do is to get aboard of her. I want to shake hands with the man that's running her. We'll strike off that way for the coast down there, and try to hail her as she comes around again. Mount! Head of column to the right! Forward—March!"

CHAPTER XLI.

PETE AND SANDY LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT OYSTERS—ALSO ABOUT SHARKS—TROUBLE IN GETTING A BOAT.

"We've got to keep in the woods, and out of sight o' their lookouts on the fort," said Si to them as they were tightening their girths, and rearranging their saddle-furniture. "That'll take a ride of at least eight or 10 miles, for the clearing extends much farther on that side. They seem to have bin expecting an attack from the sea, from a force landing from the ships, and pushed out their abatis, and other infernal inventions much farther. But now we know for certain where the salt water and our ships' are, and can make straight for them."

"I wonder if this is really the sea, that we've bin' reading about always?" said the inquisitive little Pete. "Somehow, I can't actually believe that we've come to it. I'm going to run down there and taste the water, and see if it's really salt."

"O, Sandy, just come down here, and taste it, too," he called presently. "It's regular brine. And I believe I see some real oysters, in the shell, growing right on the bushes."

"Oysters don't grow on bushes, Pete. What nonsense is that you're talking?" said Sandy, hurrying down. "Oysters are a shell-fish, that grow in the water, like mussels."

"Now, don't be so awful smart," answered Pete. "You'll get took down agin, like you was about that rice. You said that rice probably growed like sunflower seed, or broom corn seed, or cucumber seed. You never can tell about things down here."

"I was only making wild guesses then," Sandy humbly admitted. "I'd never thought how rice growed. I didn't even know it was a seed, but when I came to think that it growed at all I saw it was likely to be a seed, and then I began figuring out how it was likely to have growed. But I do know that oysters are a kind of a fish, and that trees are—well, they're trees—and there's no earthly sort o' connection between fish and trees."

"Well, you smart Aleck," said Pete, triumphantly, as his partner reached the water's edge. "Ain't that a tree? And that? And that? And that?"

"Well, they're saplings, at least," admitted Sandy.

"And what's them things growing to their roots, and to the branches there that run down into the water? Ain't them oysters?"

"They certainly do look like oysters in the shell," admitted Sandy reluctantly. "They certainly look as if they were growing there, same as walnuts and apples. But I can't understand it. And I can't understand anything growing from the roots and the limbs both and at the same time. It ain't at all according to nature. And, look, Pete. There's a dead tree laying out there that got's more than any of them. That beats all."

"Let's wade out and get some," said Pete, probing the water with a stick. "It'll be great fun to pick raw oysters right offen the trees and eat them."

"I guess we can catch up with 'em," said Sandy, easily persuaded, and sitting down to pull off his shoes. "I'd like to know how an oyster tastes when it's pulled green."

"We'll have plenty o' time," said Pete. "The Sergeant and Corporal are looking at a horse's hoof and pounding in the nails on his shoe. Come on."

They waded 'out some distance on the soft, smooth sand, and began examining curiously the oysters fastened to the limbs and roots.

"They are oysters, sure as you're alive," said Sandy, breaking one off, forcing open the shell with his knife, and finally tasting. "Just as sure oysters as you ever paid two bits a plate for. My, how good it tastes! After all, they don't grow on trees; they just stick to the trees and grow."

"Now, Smarty, try to argy out of it," said Pete. "You'll never allow that I can possibly know more'n you, you stuck-up cuss. I said they grow on trees, and they do grow on trees, and you can't make nothing else out of it, talk as long as you please."

"I wish we'd brought our nosebags out to carry a lot to the boys," Sandy began, when he was startled by a rush of fish and other animals past his naked legs. He turned his eyes out on the river and saw a sharp, shining fin cutting through the water toward him like a flash. He shouted at Pete, who gave a glance, and saw that the fin belonged to an enormous fish, now rising to the surface.

"An almighty big gar," he exclaimed, breaking for the shore, whither Sandy had already fled. They were so frightened that they tripped and fell headlong in the water. As they floundered up

again, and turned their heads backward they were almost paralyzed with seeing a gigantic white body shoot upward above the water, and a long mouth, far more terrible than the alligator's, open with a yard-long gape, showing an awful array of sharp, white, saw-like teeth. In his rush after the small fish the shark had struck a sand-bar, which shunted a large part of him above the water. The boys let off agonizing yells, which certainly should have been heard in Fort McAlister.

"Pete, you blamed little brat," shouted Shorty, running back, "what in the world are you up to, now? Caught another alligator?"

"Worse'n an alligator—a hundred times worse. Give me alligators, every day, rather'n that," moaned Pete, gaining the shore, and pointing to the shark. "Can he come on shore and chase us?" and he started for his horse, without waiting to put on his shoes.

"Go back and get your shoes, Pete," said Si, coming up and taking a survey. "You're safe. I should say that was a big, man-eating shark, from the pictures I've seen. Wish we dared shoot him."

"Pete, you meddlesome little scrub," said Shorty, cuffing him, "will you never learn any sense? I never did see such a busy hunter after trouble as you are. Why don't you go and get your shoes, as Si ordered you? Go and get them, and mount your horse, and stick close to me after this or I'll break your pestiferous little neck. Go and get your shoes now. I declare, if I had another boy like you to look after, it'd take every minute of my time. And you're just as bad, as he is, Sandy. Go, both of you, and get your shoes. I tell you."

The boys needed all this repeated ordering to go back after their shoes, for the shark was still wriggling on the sand-bar, and they were afraid as death that he was gathering himself for a jump on shore after them.

"I declare, it felt good to have Shorty slap me," Pete confided to Sandy, as they recovered their shoes and retired to a safer distance. "It made me understand that I was alive yet."

"Anyway, we're sure this's the sea, now," answered Sandy, philosophically. "There ain't any sharks nowhere else. And we know how oysters grow."

"Yes; they grow on trees," persisted Pete.

"No; they stick themselves onto the trees, and grow," reiterated Sandy.

The periodic roar of the signal guns continued as they threaded their way through the live-oak woods and helped to guide their tortuous course toward the sea.

As the sun was setting the rebels seemed to think that the ship was getting too impudent, and they suddenly fired a

volley of heavy cannon to sink her or make her keep farther away.

The boys listened to the awful crash with sinking hearts. It seemed as if she must be literally blown off the water by such a terrific storm of noise and fire.

The rebels followed with a ~~series of~~ which seemed to announce their success in destroying her.

Then there was a long, most sickening silence, broken only by the screams of the gulls as they sought their roosts for the night.

"I'm afraid there's no use looking for her any more," Si gloomily observed to Shorty. "She's gone; probably nothing left of her but splinters and old iron."

"Well, we've got to go on, anyway," replied Shorty. "We'll find the shore and look for another one. Where there's one there's sure to be more."

Darkness was settling down rapidly, to add to their gloom, when suddenly they saw a glare through the rifts between trees, and the same gun which they had been listening to all afternoon thundered out louder than ever.

"They never touched her," gasped Si, gripping Shorty's shoulder hard enough to bring the blood. "She's there as fresh as a four-year-old. Great Scott, I never wanted to yell so in my life. But we mustn't cheep. There's likely to be a patrol around here somewhere."

They had come out on a low sand dune, which was covered on the side back from the sea with shrubby cedars. These were thick and high enough to conceal them and their horses. They dismounted, tied their horses to the cedars, shook down something for them to eat, and crawled up on the dune to take a survey of what was in front. A wide, smooth, slightly shelving beach ran down to where the waves rolled up incessantly, breaking with a low roar. Near them ran a well-beaten path in the sand.

"Made by the patrol," said Si, pointing it out to Shorty. "We'll lay for them a little while. I think I hear their voices now. Lay low, boys."

Apparently, the squad had come together from various duties, with one man who had been in the fort during the day, who was telling the others of the occurrences.

"Never seed a Yankee gunboat ack as sassy as that'n today," he was telling them. "At least, not since they burnt the Nashville, over our heads, last Spring a year. She jes' circled 'round an' 'round, couin' nearer every time, an' whenever she got right in front she'd give us one that'd rip up the fort an' send things flyin' every which way. Maj. Anderson he held the men from firin' back, wantin' t' toll her nearer. Finally, when he thought he done had her jes' right he let fly at her with the hull sea-battery terwunst, expectin' t' blow her clean inta

the middle o' every month. Golly, but yo'uns jes' oughter've seed the water fly up all over her. Hit went clean over her masts an' smokestacks, an' I thought for sure she was sunk. But when the water fell back agin, thar she wuz, paddlin' away like a raft-duck, an' Loot Wood-yard, who wuz watchin' her through a telescope, said us how he seed them Yankee sailors makin' their thumbs t' their noses an' turnin' round, an' siappin' themselves at we'uns. Hit's jes' plum scandalous the way them Yankees do ack."

"That's so, for a fact," accorded the others.

"The orders I brung over tonight," continued the voice, "is to keep a brighter look-out than we'uns ever did t' keep the Yankees from up-country from gittin' word t' the Yankees on the gunboats. Ole Hardee says that if they'uns kin be held apart, they'uns 'll soon starve t' death in the rice-swamps. He'll do his sheer o' holdin' they'uns back, an' they'uns kin never git him from behine his works. Maj. Anderson he says that if they'uns kin be kep' from jumpin' him both ter-wunst, he'll stand they'uns off in great shape. He's done licked the ships slathers o' times, an' kin do hit agin. An' he kin jes' shoot the life outen anybody that tries to git through them 'tanglements an' over them thar torpedoes. But he wants they'uns t' come at him one side at a time, so he kin have a fa'r show. So, we've got to smash every boat along the shore an' keep a moity peart look-out that nobody gits to the gunboats in any way."

"But we've already done smashed every boat along here," said another voice. "Thar hain't a skift, a canoe, or even a holler-log anywhar 'round hyah, 'ceptin' the boat you come over in."

"All the same," replied the first voice, as it passed out of range, "we'uns 've got to"—

The rest was lost in the distance.

"Hum," said Si, reflectively. "If all the boats are destroyed that they can find, there's little use for us looking around for one. If they can't find one we're not likely to."

"The only one around here," said Shorty, continuing Si's line of thought, "is the one that sardine came over in."

"That's so," mused Si, "and that's the one we'd better try to get. It's up there by the fort, somewhere, and probably under guard."

"We've seen things under guard before," suggested Shorty.

"Yes," agreed Si, "and it seems the only thing to do, if we're going to reach that ship tonight, and reach her we must, if we're going to beat the cavalry; and beat the cavalry we must, if we're going to go back and report to the Colonel; and go back and report to the Colonel we must, if we're going to stay in the army, and we're going to stay in the army."

"God hates a coward," said Shorty, impatiently. "Come on. We can find that boat by taking these fellers' back track. I'm going to toller it if it takes me right into Fort McAllister but what I get that boat. Pete and Sandy, you little whelps, put gags on yourselves. No alligator or shark-hunting tonight. Come on."

"Yes, keep mum as them oysters you were after," said Si, "and everybody move lively. We don't know how far that patrol's got to go, and we want to get that boat and get away before they come back. Silence in ranks. Forward."

A strong and increasing breeze was blowing onto the land from the southwest, rolling up the waves into breakers which broke upon the wide beach. The half-moon would occasionally shine out very brightly, and then be obscured by the dark clouds. Once when she shone out they caught a full view of the war-ship, plowing along, slowly now, over the heaving billows. Then the clouds shut her from view.

They had little difficulty in following the path when the moon shone, and after a sharp walk came to where it led in a sinuous trail through the entanglements.

The fort loomed up, dark, sullen and ominous, beyond. They could see, against the sky, the sentinels pacing the ramparts, and hear them call around the half-hour.

"That tormented boat must be right under them," murmured Si, as he stopped for a moment, leaned against a live-oak abatis and studied the situation. "They're thicker'n bees in there, and they'll all swarm out at the least alarm. It's going to be a ticklish job, and's got to be managed like eating roast potatoes with the devil."

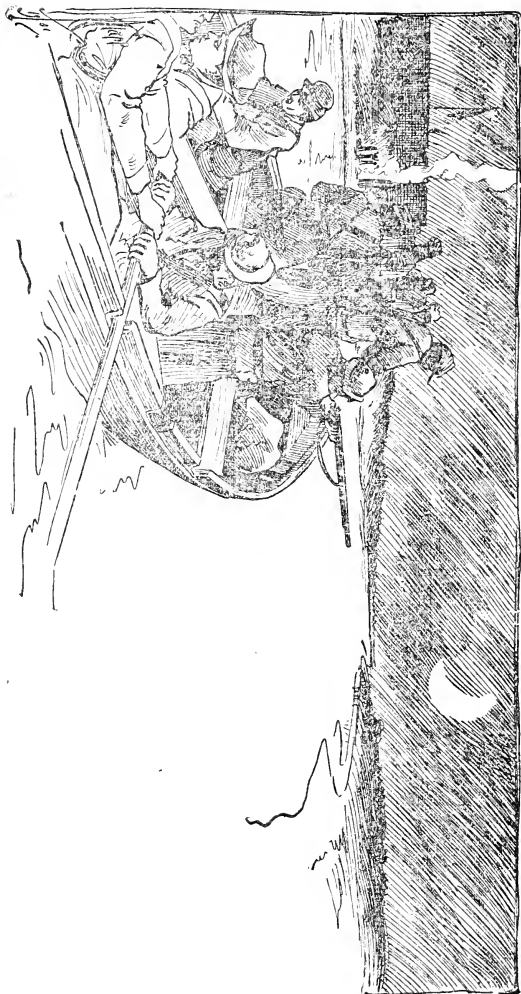
"We'll get it, if the whole blim-blamed garrison's a-setting right on it," said Shorty, desperately. "Since we've come this far for it, we're going to have it."

"Probably it's laying at the end of this path in the deep, wide ditch that runs clear around the fort," reflected Si. "Probably there's one or two men left on to guard it. We'd better halt the boys here, and me and you fix bayonets and slip forward and try to jump the guards without making any noise. We may catch 'em laying asleep in the boat. There's nothing to do but put the bayonet square through their hearts if they attempt to cheep."

"Bayonet 'em first, and order 'em afterward to keep quiet," said Shorty.

"Tom and Abe," whispered Si, "fix your bayonets and go back a few rods, and look out for that patrol. We don't want them to come on top of us while we're getting the boat. They'll come stringing through along this path, one by one. Bayonet the first one, without halting him, and as many of the others

“WE AINT DESERTERS; WE’RE YANKS.”



as you can. Don't fire or make any noise unless you have to. Come on, Shorty; I'll go first."

It was very dark now, for a deep cloud obscured the face of the moon. Si and Shorty took advantage of it to push forward as rapidly as they could, but were caught and tripped by the entangling brush of the alatis projecting into the path. But they did not stop to grumble or swear. They were too deeply intent upon what was before them for such trivialities.

As Si had surmised, the path led to the main ditch surrounding the fort. But it was much wider than he had fancied. A momentary gleam of the moon's entire face revealed that it was an arm of the sea, putting back behind the fort.

"So much the better," he muttered to Shorty. "We can row right down it to the ship. I was afraid we might have trouble getting out of the ditch into the sea. But where in the world is the boat?"

It was now dark again as they came into an opening near the water's edge, and strained their eyes looking for the boat and its guards.

"Great, jumping Jehosephat," exclaimed Shorty. "They've taken it back. There it is on the other side."

Si's heart grew sick as he looked across the water. There was a windbrake of pine boughs, built parallel to the sea, and intended for the double purpose of protecting the sentinel there from the sea wind and of screening the guard fire from the observation of the Union war vessels. The guard was stationed there to prevent any boat party coming up on that side of the fort and to communicate with the patrols along the beach.

There, with the light of the guard-fire shining on it, lay a large row-boat, with the negroes who pulled it lying asleep around the fire.

"What in creation are we!"— Si began, dumbfoundedly, as he looked around, in the vain hope that there might be a scow or something left on this side.

"I'm going to call that boat over here," said Shorty, with desperate inspiration.

"Be careful what you say," said Si, clutching at the idea. "You may make it. But the least mistake 'll bring us a volley, and spoil all."

"Hello, over thar," yelled Shorty, imitating as well as he could the voice he had heard. "Send the boat over hyah."

"Hello, Bill Elliott, is that you?" the guard answered.

Si's and Shorty's hearts jumped.

"There are Elliotts in the rebel army, too, I s'pose," said Shorty, after an instant's reflection. "Yes; it's me," he called back. "Send that thar boat over hyah. Kick them thar niggers an' wake 'em up."

"What brings yo' back so soon?" inquired the guard, as he punched the ne-

groes with the butt of his gun to arouse them. "Warn't 'specting yo' for hours yit. Two o' the nigs 've went up into the fort for something."

"Never felt so little like gossip in my life," whispered Shorty. "Had t' come back," he shouted over to the rebel. "Had something t' report t' Maj. Anderson. Hurry up that boat, thar. I'm 'bleeged t' see him ter-wunst."

"That so?" drawled the guard deliberately, as he prodded the two negroes toward the boat with his gun-butt. They were sulky about being aroused from their sleep, and two being made to do the work of four in rowing the boat. "What 'd yo' strike out thar, Bill? Hit must 've rattled yo'. Yer voice don't sound nach-erul."

"No, I hain't rattled, but I've bin shuck up a leetle, all the same. I guess hit's my ole quincy comin' back. Damp air's settin' hard on me. But hurry up them thar lazy niggers. They ack as if they'd bags o' shot tied t' thar feet. Belt 'em over the head, an' wake 'em up. I'm powerful anxious t' see the Major."

"He wants t' see yo', too," answered the guard, giving the negroes jabs with his musket. "Stop pokin' thar, yo' measly mud-turkles, an' git the boat over. I think the Major's anxious to see yo'uns. I believe I hear him comin' now. See any Yankee's signs, Bill?"

"Tell yo' when I git over thar. Hurts me to talk so loud agin this hyah wind. Hurry up, thar, yo' tarnation sut-bags, an' git that thar boat over."

The whole garrison was alert and excited over the presence of the Union forces in the neighborhood and anxious for news. Men kept drifting down to the guard-post to learn the latest, until a large group had collected. Si's heart lifted as he noticed that none of them carried guns. They were all heavy artillerymen, who only took up their muskets when expressly ordered.

Never had Si seen men handle oars and a boat so clumsily and lazily as those two negroes. They were clumsy at best, and now doubly so, because of their sourness at being made to do the work that was usually done by four. They jowered at one another and their missing partners in the barbarous jargon of the rice-field negroes, and seemed likely to let the boat be taken out to sea by the strong tidal current.

Si and Shorty could hardly restrain themselves from breaking out in loud abuse of them, but never was restraint more necessary, for the crowd on the opposite shore was still increasing. These, however, were making up for it, by their yells at the awkward oarsmen.

The moon hid her face opportunely, as the prow of the boat struck the bank, and was immediately seized by Si. "Catch 'em and choke 'em speechless," whispered Si to Shorty. "I'll take the right-

hand one. Monty and Harry, grab the boat. Pete, run back and bring up Tom and Abe. Everybody pile in and grab the oars."

"Git outen the boat," said Si to the negroes. "And do hit quick." As they did so Si caught the throat of the first one with a strong, sure grasp that shut off his wind without allowing more than a gurgle. Shorty did the same with the other, and holding their hands there long enough to be sure that the negroes were reduced to insensibility, they pulled them back under the abatis and left them there, while they turned their attention to hurrying the boys into the boat.

If there had been any other place to go that did not promise immediate death Uncle Ephraim would never have gone into the boat. He had never been so scared before, and would not have gotten in at all if he had not become so accustomed to moving with the rest that he went in in spite of himself. To a negro who had never stood on anything but firm ground the boat and the water were overwhelming terrors. He fell down on his knees in the boat and began praying.

Tom Radbone and Abe Grimstead, who knew something about boats, immediately seated themselves on the second seat, picked up the oars, and began helping manuver. Imitating them, Harry and Monty took the next seat, while Pete perched himself up in the bow, and Sandy worked back and took up the steering lines. Alf and Gid took the rear seat. Si eased the boat off and climbed into the front seat, and Shorty, giving her a final shove, seated himself beside him.

"Why, yo' done brung the hull squad back, Bill," remarked the guard, as he made out the filling up of the boat.

"No," answered Shorty, to gain further time. "Only a few o' them. The rest air down that away, follenin' up a trail. They'uns 'll be along arter awhile."

"Left! Left! Left!" Si timed in a low,

penetrating tone, to bring together the frantic dabs the boys were making with their oars. "Steady, boys. All together. Left! Left! Left!"

They quickly caught on, and began to pull deliberately and in unison, and the boat gathered headway.

"Here, men, where are you going?" called out the authoritative voice of the Major commanding the garrison, who had arrived on the scene. "Turn her head this way and come straight across."

"In a minute, Major," answered Shorty. "The current's running away with us, and these lazy niggers won't pull. Eph, you git up thar on that seat and take Gid's place or I'll blow your black head off."

Under the impulse of the strong, nervous arms, which were every minute getting more accustomed to the work, the boat shot ahead in a way that rendered longer concealment impossible.

"Head her straight out, Sandy," commanded Si. "Hold her firm, and we'll do the rest."

"If you men don't turn right around and come across I'll fire on you," said the Major, who began to suspect they were deserters. Make ready that howitzer up there. Come back here, or I'll fire. Come back here, you deserters. Aim that howitzer at them, and blow them out of water. Once more!"

The moon was suddenly obscured by a dense cloud.

"Good-by, Major," shouted Shorty, as he and Si bent their shoulders for a mighty stroke. "We ain't deserters; we're Yankees. Hooray for the Union!"

"Whirl her to the left, quick and sharp, Sandy," commanded Si, "and dodge that canister."

The howitzer's charge churned the water into a foam 100 yards to their right.

"Now, watch for the ship, and steer to head her off," commanded Si.

CHAPTER XLII.

AFTER A LIVELY TRIP ON THE SOUND THE BOYS REACH THE SHIP.

"Pete," said Si, sharply, "your chief business in life now is to look out for that ship. Keep your eye peeled as you never did before in all your life. We want to make a bee-line for her. As she is moving all the time, we want to point a good ways ahead of her. Do you see anything of her now?"

"I did see 'er, a minute ago, but that black cloud come up and hid her."

"Well, she's out there, not very far from where she was then," said Shorty. "Watch for her like a hungry hawk. Them gimblet eyes of yours are quick enough to bore into any mischief. Make 'em do good work, now. Don't be gawking around for whales, and leviathans and calathumpians. We can find them some other time. That ship's our business just now."

This was certainly a great deal to expect from a boy on salt-water for the first time in his life, and amid such "wonders of the deep" as abounded in Ossabaw Sound.

The wind had died down, the waves were sinking into smooth rollers, and the clouds had drifted from the face of the moon, allowing everything on the face of the water to be seen with tolerable clearness.

The ship could not be seen. Si reasoned that she was hidden by some point of land and would probably soon reappear. He ordered the boys to cease rowing and rest, while they waited for their direction.

This was unfortunate for Uncle Ephraim. In obedience to Shorty's sharp order he had taken up the oar from Gid Mackall's weaker hands, and his natural imitativeness of what he saw white men doing made him a fair oarsman in a minute or two. As long as he was straining to pull the oar through the water, in unison with the rest, his mind was occupied, and he forgot the terrors to his land-lubberly mind of being in a frail, rocking boat, in the midst of the rolling waves, with water stretching around him without end. When he stopped rowing, and had an opportunity to look around and reflect, all this came back to him with crushing terror. With his feet firmly planted on solid ground he had been afraid of nothing but a "harmt." He would stand beside Si and Shorty, and as long as they did not quail he was as firm as oak. Even in the trying scenes

in the cave his courage had been unshakable, except in his dread of "harmts."

But now.

The gulls screeched overhead like legions of evil spirits, and every glint of the moonlight on the waves showed more terrible monsters than when under the influence of Preacher Gabriel's most "awakening" sermons, he had imagined to be in the infernal regions.

The boundless black water stretched away in rolling waves, each of which seemed hungry for him. And it seemed as deep as it was wide, and in it one would sink into an eternity incomprehensible in its awfulness. There was nothing between him and fathomless doom—but a few wet, unstable plank, which might go to pieces or slip from under him any instant.

There was nothing left to him but to pray, and yet prayer seemed such an inadequate help for him in the midst of these yawning horrors. Yet he was so frightened that he could not frame any connected appeal to the Almighty. He could but mumble out:

"O, God Almighty, do take keer ob a pore nigger."

"I's bin an orful sinner, Jesus Christ, but do take my pore soul to You."

"O, Lord, spare me jes' dis onct, an' I'll lub an' praise you forebbermore."

Then he would catch sight of some new giant horror that would freeze his blood.

"O, Heabben, dar's a turkle, bigger'n a barn-door, wid a head on him like a bee-gum. He kin swaller de boat an ebberybody in hit at one gulp. O, Lord, de debbil's sent him straight for dis nigger."

"That is a pretty pig turtle, for a fact," remarked the more experienced Tom Radbone. "He won't hurt nothing, though. He's asleep. They come to the top of the water to sleep. I've heard that that's the way the folks down here catch 'em. They row up alongside, and spear 'em in the neck. We might bayonet one as we're coming back, and take him ashore and cook him. They're mighty good eating."

"We'll nebber come back—nebber—nebber—cept as ghostses," wailed Uncle Ephraim.

A monster sun-fish, which, with his fins outspread, was as large as an old-fashioned counterpane, floated slowly by, asleep on the surface of the water.

"O, Lord, dars a' whale, like dat which

swallowed Jonah," moaned Uncle Ephraim. "He'll suck us all down his throat."

"Shut up, Ephl.," said Shorty, looking at the funeral cut off rear of the fish. "That ain't no whale. That's only the first platoon of one. The other platoons 've lost distance, and'll be coming along presently."

Momentarily new and startling shapes would develop in from the teeming marine life of the semi-tropical sound. Everywhere were things with arms like wriggling ropes; things with mouths that puffed, snorted and threw up spray; things that rolled and tumbled over the crests of the waves, showing grotesque outlines and uncouth bulk. Some of the forms seen were frightful; some nauseous and repulsive; some light and graceful. Blazes of baleful phosphorescent gleams would break out from time to time, as if the sea were catching fire and about to disappear in sulphurous conflagration. Uncle Ephraim was sure that these lights came direct from hell.

"Great Jehosephat, Si," Shorty whispered. "I'm mighty glad I hain't bin driuking nothing lately. I'd be dead sure I had 'em again."

"Torment them things," said Si, irritably. "I hain't no time to watch them. Where in time do you suppose that condemned ship's gone?"

An agonized yell from Pete startled everybody. He had not been able to keep his eyes strained on the horizon, as ordered, in search of the ship, but would let them be attracted by the marvelous sights in the water around the bow of the boat. At last his unlucky genius impelled him to make a grab for some particularly bright and shiny thing that he saw. He felt his hand close upon something, and the next instant was chilled with horror to find an awful, sucker-like thing fasten itself to his hand, and a snake-like something wrap around his arm. He threw up his hand with a shriek, a dozen rope-like arms writhed snake-like from the thing on his hand, and he was deluged with a shower of black ink.

Shorty sprang up, and, forgetful of what danger there might be to himself, seized Pete's arm, and tore the slimy, nauseous thing from it. It turned its horrible, wriggling arms upon him, but he was so nervous, almost frantic, in his movements, that he quickly tore it to pieces and flung the remnants into the sea, while deadly qualm arose that almost overcame him.

"I wonder if that black stuff's poison that the thing squirted on Pete?" he asked, with sickening apprehension.

"No, I think not," answered Tom Radbone. "At least I never heard that it was, and I think I would, if it had been."

Alf Russell examined Pete's arm critically for a sign of a bite, and they were all relieved when he could find none.

"I think he got hold of what I've read somewhere is a cuttle-fish," Alf said. "I never read that the ink was poisonous, but it's likely to set, unless we can get it off soon, and make Pete black for the rest of his life. We ought to get to that ship at once, to get something from the Surgeon to take it off."

"Now, Pete," said Si, "you understand the situation. If you don't want to be black as a nigger the rest of your life, you'll stop hunting suckers and watch for that ship with all the eyes you've got."

"I wasn't trying to catch suckers," whimpered Pete. "I saw something down there that looked brighter'n a diamond, and I—but I'll look for the ship now; you bet. There she is, now. See that big light coming up out of the water?"

"A light?" queried Si, turning around to look. "She hain't been showing a light before. She wasn't advertising herself to the rebels. Ain't that light a star?"

"No; it ain't a star," Pete confidently asserted. "It's lots too bright. There, you can see the stars away beyond it. And it's coming too fast. When I first noticed it, it was just at the edge of the water. Now you see it's way above the water."

"That's so," said Si, after a brief study. "It's certainly much brighter'n a star, and you can see the stars behind it. It seems to be coming right this way. Now, boys, bend your backs; send her along. We won't have to go more than a mile or two before we strike her. Left! Left! Left! Sandy, hold her square on that light."

With renewed hope in their hearts they rushed the boat along at a rapid rate.

"She's coming right along. The light's getting bigger every minute," reported Pete. "It's now about 10 feet above the water."

"That's good," Si called out encouragingly. "Push her along, boys. We'll soon be there."

They went probably for another mile, when the rapid pace compelled a halt for rest.

"How is she now, Pete?" Si asked, over his shoulder.

"The light's away up above the water, and don't seem to be coming nearer," answered Pete, slowly and uneasily.

A throb of sickening doubt shook Si as he whirled around and took a long look at the light. It was brighter than ever, but away up in the sky, and it seemed to have sunk back into line with the other stars.

"Great Jehosephat, I believe it is a star that we've bin chasing," murmured Shorty. "Some bumptious star that's got too far front on parade and had to dress back."

"It may be a light at the top of her mast," said Si, trying hard to make himself believe. "She may carry it there for a signal."

"It's my opinion," said Shorty, with

clammy disappointment settling down on his heart, "that if we reach that light it'll have to be in a balloon, with God Almighty's lightnings to whip us along. That's a star, as sure's you're a foot high."

Pete began to cry, for they seemed lost in a boundless expanse of water, and Uncle Ephraim doled out that they were in "de midst ob de wilderness ob sin an' death." The anguish of death was upon him. He was suffering all the mortal fear his nature was capable of.

Si himself looked stunned, and even bewildered. He glanced back and could not see the shore, which was hidden in the night-mists. He had not realized how far they had come, and was uncertain as to the direction. The ocean was as new and strangely bewildering to him as to the rest. He had been kept up by his vehement purpose and his confidence that he could row right out to the ship, just as he could have rowed across the Wabash to some point he had in mind. But now he suddenly realized that he was in the midst of pathless waters—possibly in the wide ocean itself—and much worse lost than those dumbfounded travelers on the Indiana and Illinois prairies, of whom he had heard so much in his youth. For once in his life he momentarily lost heart. Then, remembering his responsibility for the lives of those with him, he stiffened up again and began to peer anxiously around for some mark of guidance. If they could only go on rowing their minds would be occupied, and they would not be so much alarmed. But then he thought they might be already outside the path of the ship, and farther would take them into the boundless ocean.

"Say, there's something coming" from over there toward the left," called out Pete. "It looks like a big log, but it's likely one o' them daddies of all turtles or the grandfather o' the alligators."

"I declare, I believe it's a boat," said Si, as his ear caught a drumming in the water, that did not seem at all like the noise any fish would make. "It's coming very fast, too. Take up your arms, boys."

There was a spitting flash from the object, the roar of a howitzer, and a shot shrieked by them.

"Boat ahoy, there," came in a sharp challenge. "Heave to or I'll sink you. Who are you?"

"Ahoy yourself," shouted Si, as he and Shorty took aim at the men who could now be seen reloading the howitzer. They feared it was a boat sent after them from the fort. "Who are you? Stop loading that gun or we'll kill every man there. Who are you? Answer at once or we'll fire."

"Steady, boys," he spoke to the rest. "Let her come nearer, so that you can pick your men. Wait for the word, and the minute you fire drop your guns and

pick up your oars. Sandy, put us straight on her, and we'll settle things hand to hand."

"We're the United States ship Flag, d—n your impudent souls," shouted the voice in reply. "Surrender or I'll blow you out of water."

"Hooray!" yelled Shorty. "We're Union soldiers from Sherman's army. Hooray for Injianny! Hooray for the Union!"

"Union soldiers?" said the voice, expressing mingled astonishment and doubt. "Likely story. How did you get out here?—Don't you move an oar till I come up and look at you. Port your helm," he said to his steersman, "and bring us around alongside. Keep away from her bow. Train that howitzer right on their waist. Ready with your muskets there. Keep them covered."

"Steady yourselves, there," said the cautious Si. "Go slow. Don't you attempt to rush us or we'll salivate you. How de we know you're Union? Can't you show a light so's we can see your uniforms?"

"Well, I like your nerve, you blasted land-lubbers," said the voice, not ill-naturedly. "Sassing a United States vessel that way. We don't usually take as much back talk from anybody. Open up the light there, Brown, and throw it on them."

The bright glare showed the Lieutenant in command of the steam-launch, a line of boys in blue uniforms, crouching behind the gunwale of the boat, with their cocked muskets leveled on his crew. To exhibit their uniforms more distinctly Si and Shorty were standing up, with their guns covering the Lieutenant and the man holding the lock-string of the howitzer.

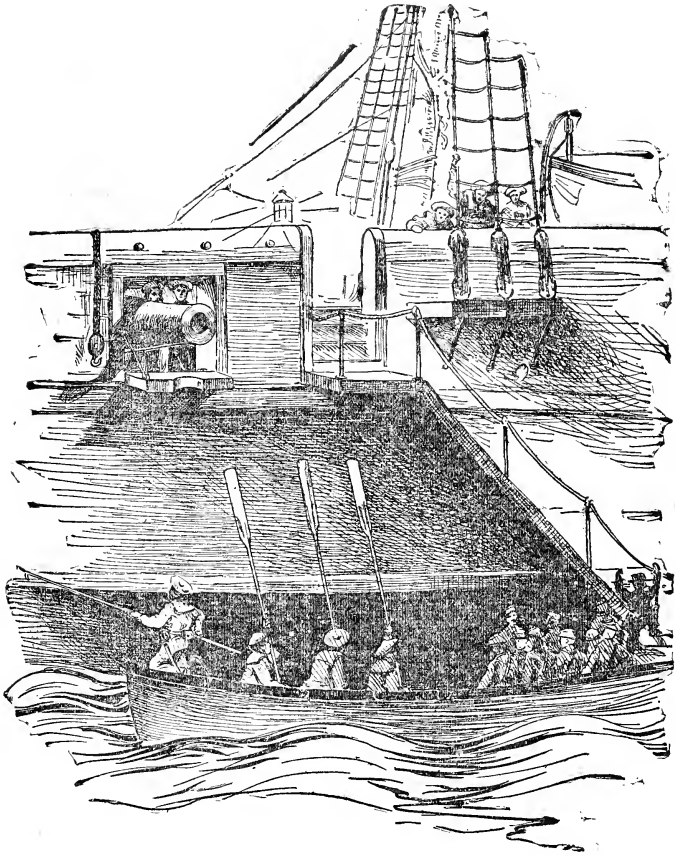
"I guess you're Yankee, all right," said Si, lowering his gun, as he made out the officer's unmistakable blue garments. "Steady, boys. Recover, arms!"

"Union soldiers, sure enough," said the Lieutenant. "Avast, men. Stand at ease."

"Where in the world did you come from? And how did you get here, Sergeant?" he continued, addressing himself to Si.

"We came straight from Sherman's army. We were sent out to find you. The whole of Sherman's army's right up there, back of Savanny, going into siege against the place."

"The devil it is. This will be news for the Old Man. It'll tickle him to death. You've been expected to come out some other place, farther down, or higher up. But there has been a great deal of banging around up Savannah ways for several days that we couldn't understand, but we thought probably some of you were slashing around out there. But you say the whole army's there?"



"SI AND SHORTY WERE TAKEN AT ONCE TO THE CAPTAIN'S CABIN."

"Yes; the whole army," answered Si.

"Except that very important part," interjected Shorty, "which is now rocking in an old boat, in the middle of a collection of marine curiosities that'd make Barnum's eternal fortune if he could only take them out West and show them."

"How in the world did you get out here?" asked the Lieutenant.

"We speaked this boat from the fort

and started out to find you. We saw you shelling the fort this afternoon."

"Devil you did? Well, I pointed that gun myself, and I think laid in one or two right where the rebels lived."

"You did, for a fact," answered Si. "Purtiest shooting with a big gun I ever saw. I said then I wanted to shake hands with the man who put that shell right in by the flagstaff."

"Well, you can have that honor," answered the Lieutenant, jollily. "We've been watching you for nearly an hour, and puzzling as to who you were. We couldn't imagine what you were up to. At one time we thought you might be a party trying to torpedo the ship, for they've been trying that. But you made so much noise that we gave up that idea, and you rowed so badly that we saw you were landsmen."

"I told you, Si, that you'd learned to row poling a flat-boat on the Wabash," said Shorty. "You spoiled all my fine work."

"Throw up a red rocket there, Brown, to let 'em know on the ship that we've got our game," commanded the Lieutenant. "Throw us your painter, Sergeant, and we'll tow you back to the ship. We must lose no more time in taking you to the Captain. He'll be overjoyed to see you."

"We're in a hurry to get to the ship, too," answered Si. "We want to see your Surgeon. One of our boys met with an accident a little while ago, and he needs attention."

Pete, who, in the excitement, had forgotten all about the ink-squid, now remembered how terribly he had been hurt and uttered a deep groan.

"Poor fellow," said the Lieutenant, in deepest sympathy. "Pass him over the side here. We can make him more comfortable in the lanch than you can in that open boat."

Shorty lifted Pete, and the rough sailors, handling him as tenderly as if a baby, made a couch for him in the lanch, stripping off their own clothes to add to its softness.

They found the U. S. S. Flag lying at anchor under the deep shadow of a grove of palmettoes growing out of a swampy island in Ossabaw Sound. This was her customary lurking place while watching for blockade-runners passing in and out of the Ogeechee River.

"Rig a whip there," said the Lieutenant. "We have a wounded man to send aboard."

With the same careful tenderness Pete was put in the sling, hoisted on board, and passed down to the sick bay, whither the Surgeon hurried to attend him.

Si and Shorty were taken at once to the Captain's cabin to make their report, while the rest mingled with the excited crew, now all awake and on deck, eager to hear their wonderful story. Harry, Monty, Alf, Gid, Tom Radbone, Abe Grimstead, Sandy and Uncle Ephraim found themselves such heroes as they never dreamed of being, with each surrounded by a group of earnest listeners, who plied them with questions and rewarded them with commendatory ejaculations.

"You steered for that light you saw coming up out of the sea," laughed a

young Lieutenant, as the latter was telling the story of their search for the ship. "You'd had a fine time reaching it. It was only about 30,000,000 miles away. That was Mars, which has only lately appeared in these skies, and is very near the earth now. The rebels made a worse mistake than you did. The first night they sent a boat out and tried to torpedo it."

"I want to go and see how my partner is getting along," said Sandy, to whom the memory was not pleasing. "Where'd I find him? They've carried him to your hospital."

"I'm all right, boys," said Pete, coming up the steps and dancing gleefully along the deck. "Surgeon says I ain't hurt a mite. There's no poison in them ink-snakes, and he wet a sponge in harts-horn and washed all the black off of me. See? It's all gone. Come, Sandy, let's look about the ship. I want to see all over her. Goodness, ain't everything wonderful?"

Pete immediately became the center of a larger group than any one else. All sailors love a fresh, unspoiled boy, and especially one who has had just come through such marvelous experiences.

They crowded around him, asked him questions, answered his, showed him the things about the ship, and explained their uses, gave him little personal trinkets, and paid him such flattering attentions as to excite the burning jealousy of a youngster of about his own age, who had up to this time been the baby of the ship. He indulged in various flings and innuendoes in Pete's hearing, and, finding these unnoticed, finally placed him squarely before Pete and announced:

"I think you're a great big baby to git so flummixed over a footy little cuttlefish not bigger'n you're hat, and flummix everybody else about it. I've bin stung by a stingaree as long as a handspike, and didn't git over it for months, and I didn't blubber a bit about it. All the crew know that. You army boys hain't no sand."

"Look here; you mustn't talk that way to him, nor about army boys," said Sandy, doubling up his fists. "I won't stand it."

"See here. Take one o' your size, won't you?" said another, little larger ship's boy, no less jealous, thrusting himself before Sandy. "Knock that skewer offen my shoulder, if you dare."

"Leave this feller to me, Sandy," said Pete, doubling his fists. "You call me a baby again, and I'll punch your nose, darn you."

"You're nothin' but a big baby," reiterated the boy, and Pete promptly made good his threat with a stinging blow, while Sandy as promptly knocked the wooden skewer off the other boy's shoulder. There was instantly the liveliest kind of a mix-up, with the sailors forming a ring, and encouraging both sides.

The Captain came walking out of his cabin with Si and Shorty. "Mr. Wilmarth," he said severely to the Officer of the Deck, "what does this disorder mean, sir?"

The Officer of the Deck sprang forward and scattered the ring, while Si and Shorty pulled Pete and Sandy away from their clutch on their antagonists.

"Pete, you little scamp, will I have to break your neck to keep you out of mischief?" said Shorty, giving him a vigorous shake, and as Si crushed Sandy down into quiescence the two ship's boys were cuffed and sent below to wash up.

"Order is restored, sir," gravely reported the Officer of the Deck, saluting the Captain.

"Probably you are right in your determination to return ashore at once, so as to report to the General," said the Captain, continuing his conversation with Si, as if the interruption were a mere incident of routine. "I had thought that possibly you had got those fellows over there so stirred up that they would be on the lookout for you, and that you had better wait until tomorrow afternoon for them to cool down a little."

"Our experience has been, Captain," said Si, "that the best way to catch 'em napping is when they're tired out looking for you. We've always outwinded 'em and beat 'em that way. Anyway, the General's waiting for us, and the Colonel's expecting us. We'd go back tonight, if we knowed the whole rebel crew was out there watching for us. You don't know how anxious Gen. Howard and the Colonel is to know whether we've got through. We started out to beat the cavalry, and we're going to do it."

"All right; go ahead, then," said the Captain. "But we'll have to play a little strategy on those fellows. They're probably watching us like hawks. They can't see us, but they know pretty well where we are, and they're looking for every sign. I'll send out some boats as if we were going to set you ashore down there near the fort. They'll show up pretty clearly, and the patrol and whatever may be sent from the fort will gather there to beat off the boats. I'll put you in the launch and send you off on a long circuit to port, which will bring you ashore a couple of miles farther down the beach, where they won't be looking for you."

"All right; that won't be far from where we left our horses," said Si. "I don't believe the patrol's found them. Why can't we go back in our own boat?"

"Never do in the world," said the Captain, decisively. "They can hear you rowing that boat a mile, the Lieutenant reports."

"What'd I tell you, Si, about your flat-boat education?" said Shorty, with a grin.

"I'm going to put some coal-heavers and landmen in that boat," continued the Captain, "and send it out with the oth-

ers, to help fool the rebels into thinking its coming back. The launch, which was built for this kind of work, will run five miles while they're rowing one, and make no more noise than a porpoise. That's her business."

He called the Executive Officer to him to give the necessary instructions, and then went to his cabin to write the letter Si was to deliver to Gen. Howard.

"For lub ob God, Sargeint Klegg, we hain't a-gwine on dat black water agin tonight, mong dem goblins, an' hoojee-hoo-jee debils, is we?" groaned Uncle Ephraim in abject despair.

"Yes; we've got to go, Uncle Ephraim. We must carry the good news to the Colonel, that we've found the fleet. Don't be scared. You've lived through it once. You will again. You'll see Aunt Minerva Ann tomorrow afternoon and have a wonderful story to tell her. Brace up, now. It won't take us as long to go as it did to come."

"O, dear Jerusalem," groaned the negro. "If my heabbenly home lay acrost dat water, I'd nebber go dar as long as I libbed. I want t' see 'Nervy Ann monty bad, but I wouldn't go a rod ober dat water for a 10-acre fiel' ob 'Nervy Anns. 'Nervy Ann's a monty fine woman, but she haint so fine in a year as one ob dem t'ings is awful in a minute. Jes' t'ink ob deir great green eyes an' deir arms like hangman's ropes. O, good Lord, do sabe me."

"Brace up, Uncle," said Shorty, giving him a slap on the back. "Think of the stories you'll have to tell Aunt Minerva Ann."

"Yes; an she'll say hit's a shame for me t' be sich a liar at my age. I orter set a better example t' de young folks."

Preparations were going on swiftly for the movements. Everybody was eager to go. The boats were lowered, and the armed sailors poured over the side into them. Si and his squad took their places in the launch, which, with lights screened, steamed away noiselessly in a wide circle to the south.

"I remember a little cove where a creek comes in, that I think'll be just the place for you," said the Lieutenant. "There's a hard bank on this side that you can land on and go right huck into the country. I've been back that way two or three miles."

Having given the directions to the helmsman, the Lieutenant was studying the face of the sound with his night-glass.

"The boats are all off," he said, "and starting almost straight toward the fort. The rebels can't help noticing something soon. Hear that old boat of yours pound? Those coal-heavers couldn't make much more noise if they were beating bass-drums. That'll wake the rebels up if nothing else does."

"They're waking up," said Si presently.

"I hear some kind of a noise coming from the fort. It's likely the long roll. And I see lights. They're stirring up the fires."

"There is a squad of men moving down near that cove," said the Lieutenant, uneasily, as he stopped the engine and allowed the launch to float along on the inflowing tide. "They're acting as if they may have seen us."

"If that's so," answered Si, "the only thing's to wade ashore and fight our way through them. We can find some shallow place, can't we, to land?"

"Hold on a minute," said the Lieutenant. "The boats up there may draw them away. Hello; they have discovered them. There goes that gun in the southeast bastion. That's the one that bears nearest to the landing-place, but it can't reach the spot by a half mile. Jack Gibson, who's in command, knows the place. There's where the blockade-runner Twilight was beached, and we went over and burned her. Blaze away, my bucks. You're only wasting powder."

"Hello; there goes a rocket," said Si. "What does that mean?"

"That must mean to call up the patrols," said the Lieutenant, musingly. "It's a green one—a new signal to us. We've got to know all their ship-signals pretty near as well as they do, and that's no ship-signal. Yes; it means the patrols. They're beginning to move up toward the fort."

Other guns on the fort began to speak out, to the Lieutenant's amusement. "They can't hurt anybody," he said. "They've tried that before, and we didn't lose a man from them while we were burning the Twilight."

A howitzer from one of the boats replied. It sounded comically, like the yelp of a terrier in answer to the savage note of bull-dogs.

"That's Jim Ogden," said the Lieutenant, with a little laugh. "He's got the boat farthest to starboard, and he's speaking out just to let them know he's there. A great fellow, Jim. He always wants to make out that where he is is the center of the fight."

The ship's guns thundered out.

"Hello," said the Lieutenant, "the Old Man's taking a hand. I didn't think he could keep out. He always wants his

spoon into everybody's mess, and now he's blazing away just to relieve his feelings and show where his sympathies lie. The Old Man's a daisy, for the whole 24 hours of the day, too, and don't you forget it."

"I guess they're having enough ruction to attract their attention," said Si, in whose veins the fever of battle was burning. "Let's get ashore quick, as possible and be doing something."

"All right," said the Lieutenant. "It won't take us more than a minute to get there now."

"Go ahead there—fast," he spoke to the Engineer. "Four bells."

They turned in sharply, ran up into a small creek, and glided alongside of a steep, firm bank.

"Praise God, I'm safe on dry land once more," ejaculated Uncle Ephraim, as he sprang ashore.

"Now for our horses," exclaimed Si, exultantly. "If they haven't got them I wouldn't take a million dollars for our place."

"Good-by, Lieutenant," said Shorty. "You're a trump—gilt-edged—A1—2½-carat fine—cylinder escapement—13 jewels. We won't forget you."

"Good-by, gentlemen," answered the Lieutenant. "Good luck to you. I'd give a year's pay to go with you, but I've got to get back and report, and call the boats back. The Old Man'll be mounting that fort with the ship if I am not back soon."

Si rushed impatiently along the road to where they had hidden their horses, and his eager boys were close at his heels. They soon came to the dune, which they at once recognized, and bolting back into the scrub found their horses all standing just as they had left them.

"Great Jehosephat," said Shorty, as he untied and mounted. "When we get where we can, I'm going to holler for a straight week, just to get out all the cheers that's lodged in my system."

"Now, boys, for Col. McGillicuddy and Gen. Howard. I'm sure that we've beat the cavalry," said the more self-contained Si. He had to say something to choke down his own wild cheers. "Not a cheep from anybody until we strike our pickets."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE RETURN FROM THE SHIP—UNCLE EPHRAIM GETS INTO TROUBLE, BUT SHOWS HIS MANHOOD—THE CAMP OF THE 200TH IND. IS REACHED AT LAST!

The firing died down as the boys made a wide circle around the fort, to reach the main road coming down the right bank of the Ogeechee. They were so eager to get back that Si decided to take this extra hazardous course, which was the most direct route. He was so wrought up over their success thus far, and the importance of the message he was carrying, that he rather scorned the whole rebel army.

As they rode forward the firing died down, first from the sea, as the boats retreated, in obedience to the signal from the ship that the men had been safely landed; then from the fort, as their enemies slowly retired out of range. Then came on the night breeze the faint sound of the garrison's enthusiastic cheering at having beaten the boats back.

"You sons of Belial," muttered Si, "we'll give you something in a few days to make you cheer from the other side of your mouths."

"When the Fourteenth Corps takes a promenade in this direction," added Shorty, "those yelpers over there'll find it quite different from fighting handsfull of men in flimsy little boats. I'd like to see our old battery come on that bluff where we were, and take a fall out of the rebel artillery. Wouldn't their head-logs fly? The blasted bomb-proofers, they've never had the pleasure of meeting a Union battery that's learned its business before Atlanta."

"Uncle Ephraim," said Si, as they struck the broad, sandy road, "you've probably recovered your senses, since you're on solid ground again, and you're horse makes the least noise of any. Ride ahead about 100 yards, and keep your eyes skinned. If you run into anybody, play off that you're a nigger from Col. Palmer's plantation—that's the one we found laying over there, somewhere, going down to the fort for the doctor, for Col. Palmer's wife. She was sick as we went down, and probably hasn't got any better since."

"Yes; I understand all erbout Mis' Palmer," answered Uncle Ephraim, promptly riding forward.

"Hist, there's some one coming up the road," said Pete, presently, and they became very quiet to listen.

"Don't hear nobody, Pete," said Shorty,

in a whisper, after hearkening for a few seconds. "Guess you've dropped asleep, and got to dreaming that shark was chasing you."

"There was somebody," persisted Pete, "on a horse. He was riding over hard ground. Now he's in the sand, and you don't hear him. Let me and Sandy wait here for him."

"All right," said Si, briefly. "Don't stay long, and get too far behind. That ink-fish may gobble you."

Pete and Sandy slid off their horses, and hid in the branches of an evergreen magnolia.

"He's probably some great big, strapping feller, with a sword, Sandy," said Pete a little nervously, as they caught another sound of the horse's hoofs. "But we've got to get him, if he's 10 feet high. The boys have had quite enough laugh on us."

"I'll rest my gun on this limb," said the methodical Sandy, "and get a good bead on him. You halt him, and if he makes any motion, shoot. I'll wait on you, and if you miss him I'll be sure to get him."

"Now, you'll be sure to get him, if I miss?" inquired Pete, with trepidation. "I'm sure he's an awful big man. He's riding a big horse, anyway. Just hear him."

In the stillness of the night the horse's hoofs did crash down most alarmingly.

"That certainly is a big horse," answered Sandy. "Sounds as big as an elephant. I wish we had asked Monty and Harry to stay with us. But you halt him before he comes to that light spot in the road. I'll have my gun bearing right on it, and if he comes across I'll bore him right through the body."

"Halt! Who comes there? Dismount and disarm," quavered Pete, the next minute.

"Hi, there, wot's de matter wid youze?" answered the rider, in a shrill treble that matched Pete's, as he reined in his horse. "Cheese foolin' d'ere an' le' me go on, you Bill Ward fellers. You'ze all know me. I'm Patsy, the Kinch—the dispatch carrier. I'm on me way to headquarters with a dispatch from Maj. Anderson. Don't monkey with me, for I'm in a hurry, and Maj. Anderson 'll make it hot for youze."

"Guess you'll have to climb down off that horse, and do it very sudden," said Pete, gaining a great increase of confidence, from the sound of the voice, and a glimpse of the small figure on the horse. He was trying to act as he had seen Si do in similar cases. "Get down quick, or I'll plug you."

"You Bill Ward foler's gittin' too sassy to live," grumbled the rider as he climbed down. "Youze 's a puttin' on a heap more scollops every day, since youze got on outside duty. But Maj. Anderson's goin' to bring youze inside tomorrer, an' give youze every day work, like the rest. Now, what do youze want wid me? Don't youze know very well who I am, an' what me lay is?"

"Can't tell just yet," answered Pete, "but we're going to do our best to find out. Come right up here, without any more back talk."

Still grumbling, the rider walked up, leading his horse, until Pete and Sandy could see that he was a mere boy, probably some years younger than Pete, and that his only arms was a not-dangerous pepper box revolver. Pete looked him over contemptuously, and demanded:

"Well, you little rebel brat, hand over that pepper-box."

"And that dispatch you're carrying," added the more practical Sandy.

"Who's youze callin' a rebel brat, I wanter know?" flashed the other hotly. Then he studied the boys' uniforms as well as he could, in the indistinct light, remembered their different speech, and a thought flashed into his quick mind. "Say, cully," he asked eagerly, "who is youze, anyhow? Are youze Yankees?"

"That's what we are," answered Pete. "Yankees from Injiamy, and Sherman's army. Pass over that sprinkling-pot. Not that there's any danger in it, but because you're a prisoner."

"And that dispatch," added Sandy.

"Say, cully, shake," answered Patsy the Kinch, delightedly, as he surrendered the ancient weapon, and the yellow envelope. "Youze just the blokes I've bin hopin' to strike. I've bin t'ampin' me knowledge-box ever since we've got on to youze bein' out dere, how to give these corn-dodger geezers de grand shake, an' me an' me pardner, Doesy, to get out to youze. Weze—me an' Doesy—don't belong to them hog-an'-hominny bums, no how. Weze N'Yorkers."

"How in the world did such a kid as you get down here, and into the rebel army?" asked Sandy. "But mount your horse, and get in between Pete and me, and you can tell us as we ride along. We must hurry up, for the Sergeant's rushing right along."

They put their horses to the gallop, but had to ease down presently for a muddy place, and then Patsy revealed:

"Youze see me mudder cookin' an' washin' fer de sailors 'long de docks in N'York, an' at last she got a steady job on a little

coaster, an' de coaster got a load fer Savannah. But the blockade ketched her in Savannah, an' she couldn't go out agin. Den de Confedrits seize her fer de navy, an' sets me an' mudder ashore. Doesy's fadder was ketched de same way. Doesy's fadder was Second Mate on a coaster, an' tuk him wid him. Dey-pdt Doesy's fadder in de army, an' left Doesy widdout any home, an' widdout anyone fer take care o' him, an' ter-root 'round wid de dogs in de street, fer what he got ter eat. It was orful hard rubbin' fer me mudder, 'cause de nigger-wenches down here do de work she's useter, but she took Doesy in. Weze got a place ter stay in an old warehouse, an' lived on what weze could pick up, 'most generally fish that me and Doesy sneaked away from de boats or de men give us. Me an' Doesy's et fish till weze couldn't pull off our clothes. Dey'd ketch on de bones stickin' out o' weze. Den dey was scrapin' 'round to put everybody in de army, an' dey ketched me an' Doesy. Ncider of weze wuz big enough ter carry a gun, but dey made a powder-monkey of Doesy, an' put me on a horse, ter carry dispatches. Holy Jee! If I could only git me mudder and Doesy away, an' back ter old N'York, an' see de kids on Water street, an' git a good meal, I wouldn't trade wid Astor."

When they finally caught up with Si, he took the dispatch, and he and Shorty entered a dense thicket of magnolias, where they read by the light of matches: Maj.-Gen. Lafayette McLaws.

Sir: I have just repulsed an attack by boats, supported by the fire of the Federal ship lying off the fort. The attack was made with spirit, and was probably intended to throw a landing party ashore and communicate with the enemy. But all the boats were driven back, and none succeeded in landing. The enemy's navy seems to have become aware of the presence of their army in rear of Savannah. If possible, more men should be sent me, to reinforce my patrols and effectually prevent communication.

Very respectfully,

Geo. W. Anderson,
Major, Commanding Fort McAllister.

"More locking the stable after the horse is stolen," chuckled Shorty. "Let him have more patrols, by all means. They'll be so useful."

Uncle Ephraim rode a pacer, which was easily the fastest goer in the squad. Perhaps Uncle Ephraim's gladness at escaping from the sea had something to do with it—possibly he had more than his share of eagerness to get back to the camp, and tell the glad news. At any rate, he was so absorbed in the stirring memories that he let his horse take his own gait, and neither thought of keeping the prescribed distance, nor maintained his usual sharp lookout for lurking foemen. He must have been a mile or more



"SIR, I HAVE THE HONOR TO REPORT THAT WE HAVE REACHED THE SHIP."

ahead, when, at the entrance of a dark cut through a swamp, he felt his bridle grasped from both sides at once, and his horse reined back.

"Hello, boy; who air yo,' an' whar air yo' a-gwine?" demanded a surly voice.

Though his heart almost stopped, Uncle Ephraim was quite equal to the occasion, and replied blandly:

"Gemmen, I's Col. Palmer's Uncle Ephum, an' I's done bin t' de foht, fo' de doctor, fo' Mis' Palmer, who's monty sick."

"Cunnel Palmer's Uncle Ephum." answered one of the men. "I don't recollect any Ephum 'bout Cunnel Palmer's place."

"O, yes," answered Uncle Ephraim,

with easy confidence, "I's 'longed dar all my life."

"Singer that I never seed you," said the man, "an' I thought I'd seen all o' Cunnel Palmer's niggers."

"'Spect I must've bin wukkin' out in de fields, or mindin' de hosses in de stable, chery time yo' was dar, den," replied Uncle Ephraim blandly. "I was 'most all de time dar' stid ob frolickin' 'round."

"What're you doin' with that gun, ca'tridge-box an' belt, nigger?"

"O, one ob de men in de foht gib dem t' me, t' tote out t' de place fo' him. Dey's a-gwine to send him out dar t'-morrer. He's powerful sick an' run-down."

"What's the name of the man what gi'n 'em to you?"

"'Deed I doan' jes' recollect his name. He wuz a peaked-faced, light-complected man, what seemed t' be all run-down."

"Likely, Jeff Green, of Cap. Sales's company," suggested one of the men, who seemed disposed to believe Uncle Ephraim. "He's bin ailin' powerfully fer a long time, an' nothin' didn't seem to do him no good."

"Jeff Green—dat's de man's name. A thin, runt ob a man," said Uncle Ephraim. "So thin that it 'peared as if yo' could see all he et. Please le' me go, gemmen. I's in a powerful hurry. Mis' Palmer'll be worried 'bout my stayin' so long."

The man had released his hold on the bridle, and Uncle Ephraim had begun to wonder how he was going to turn round, and get back to warn Si, when the other voice said:

"Say, that's no nigger from round yah. Can't yo' tell that by the way he talks? Yo' never heard a rice-country nigger talk that way in yer life."

"And he's ridin' a soldier's saddle," said the first voice. "Climb right down out o' thar, an' let we'uns have a good look at you."

Uncle Ephraim lifted up an internal prayer as he dismounted, for he felt that death was nearer to him than ever that eventful night. There was entirely too many things about him to betray his real character to make any hope of his coming through an examination successfully.

"Let's take him back ter the Cap'n," said the first voice.

They caught Uncle Ephraim's arms, and leading his horse walked him back a short distance through the brake to where several men were slumbering around near a nearly-dead fire. The chunks were kicked together, and some pitch-pine thrown on, which leaped up at once into a ruddy blaze, and Uncle Ephraim saw that he was lost. A touch awoke the Captain in a surly humor.

"We'uns 've picked up a nigger, Cap, that don't give a straight account o' hisself."

"Whar d' yo' belong, boy?" asked the Captain, opening his eyes, and taking a look at him. The light flared up, and

showed Uncle Ephraim's blue blouse, the U. S. on his belt, the Springfield rifle he still carried in his hand, the Union haversack and canteen. He half started to tell his story about being Col. Palmer's slave, but then, feeling that he was doomed, he would not die with a lie on his lips. He recalled himself, and answered calmly:

"Cap'n, I'm from Newton County."

"What air you doin' down yah?"

"I's wid de Yankee army."

The Captain sprang to his feet and looked at him. "A spy," exclaimed the men, cocking their guns. "Kill him. Kill the damned nigger."

"Hold on a minute, men," said the Captain, raising his hand. "What air you doin' with the Yankees, boy?"

"Whatebber dey tells me," said Uncle Ephraim, calmly. He was going to die now, and the plain truth was the best.

"They come along and took you away from your master, and made you go into their army, did they?"

"No, sah. I run away from my master an' joined they'uns."

"What, you infernal scoundrel," roared the Captain. "Did you run away to join the Yankees?"

"Yes, sah; me an' my ole woman."

The Captain roared again, and the men waited for him to give the order to shoot.

"Whar do you come from now? Whar air the Yankees you've just been with?" he asked, as soon as he cooled down a little.

"I reckon I've done talked enough," said Uncle Ephraim, composedly.

"Come, now, boy," said the Captain, a little coaxingly, for he was anxious to know where the Yankees were from whom or to whom Uncle Ephraim was going. "Tell me whar the Yankees is that you was gwine to?"

"I reckon I've done talked enough," remarked Uncle Ephraim, resignedly.

"You blasted, fool, runaway nigger, if you don't tell me whar you've bin, an' whar you wuz a-gwine, I'll blow yer head offen you."

"I reckon I've done talked enough," answered Uncle Ephraim.

"Look here, boy," reasoned the Captain. "Don't be a blamed fool. I order to kill you, at once, fer runnin' away from yer master, an' joinin' the Yanks. But I won't do hit if you'll tell me whar them Yankees is you've bin with, and whar's them that you wuz a-gwine to."

"I reckon I've done talked enough," replied Uncle Ephraim.

"Shall we shoot him, Cap?" inquired the men, bringing their guns down against Uncle Ephraim's head.

"No, not yit. Tie his hands behind him an' seet him thar by the fire, an' let him think awhile. He'll come to his senses bime-by. Wake up the rest o' the boys. Thar must be more Yankees nigh. This old coon wuzent fur from the rest. Thar's

probably two bunches of 'em, and he was sent from one to the other. We must be on the lookout for them. Tie his hands so tight that the strings'll cut. They'll help him think. Look here, you black beast, I'll string you up, and whip every inch of skin off'n your owdashous karkis if you don't tell whar them Yankees is."

"I reckon I've done talked enough," answered Uncle Ephraim, setting his teeth, under the pain the cords gave him.

"Look hyah, boy," said the Captain, changing his tone again, for he was becoming every minute more excited as to the whereabouts of the enemy, "don't throw yourself away. If you'll tell me whar them Yankees is I'll give you my solemn promise that I'll do nothin' more than turn you back to your master."

"I reckon I've done talked enough," said the poor negro, almost fainting under the torture.

"Don't make so much noise thar, you blasted fools," said the Captain, irritably, to his men. "You kin be heard half a mile. Git your arms, and stand ready, and keep dead quiet. Stubbs, you an' Logger slip back to the road, an' see if hit's clear. If hit is, we'll march back to 'rd the fort, and stay till mornin'."

"I sent a colored man ahead to spy out the road," Si remarked in a troubled tone to Patsy the Kinch, whom he had riding alongside to inform him as to the route. "But I haven't heard anything from him for a long time, and I'm getting uneasy. What could've become of him?"

"Probably Bill Ward's men've gobbled him," suggested Patsy. "As I laid it into you before, they's out pipin' off this road for runaway mokes an' for deserters tryin' to make the ships. They're awful fly on their job, an' don't let many git by 'em—at least theyze brags theyze don't. But I've got on to where theyze layin' now, an' I kin steer youze round it."

"How many men has Bill Ward?" asked Si.

"O, sometimes eight or 10; sometimes a dozen or more. Jist happens."

"I guess there's no need of going round him; I'd rather go through him."

"Will youze lick him?" said the boy, kindling at the thought. "Holy Jee, wouldn't that be scrumptious! Bill Ward an' his gang's the meanest mob 'bout the fort. Theyze stay up night t'inkin' how to be mean. I'd jist eat my coat to see theyze licked. Say, I kin take youze right on to where theyze is snoozin. I piped off theyze layout last night."

Patsy went on to explain where the place was, and it was arranged that as they came near the dark entrance to the swamp crossing Patsy was to ride ahead, and receive their challenge, while Si and Shorty were to follow close behind on foot and seize the challengers. Then they were all to follow the path to where the rest lay around the fire.

As they neared the crossing Si enjoined

the strictest silence. He and Shorty threw their reins to Harry and Monty, and, dismounting, followed close behind Patsy. The moon was now far in the west, and threw all the shadows against them. Presently Patsy felt his reins grabbed, and called out cheerfully:

"Hello, Snoops; is dat youze? It's Patsy the Kinch. How's the gang?"

"Taint Snoops; hit's Logger," replied a voice. "Howdy, Patsy? See any Yankee signs down that-a-way? Jes' come from"—

The rest of the question was throttled in his throat by Si's strong hand, while Stubbs's neck was encircled with Shorty's strangling garrote.

"Set down there against that tree," Si fiercely whispered in Logger's ear, as he dragged and flung him to the place. "Don't cheep, if you think your life's worth as much as a blind kitten's. Pete and Sandy, put on your bayonets, and stay and guard 'em, and hold horses. Sock the bayonets through 'em if they so much as whisper. The rest of you jump off and foller me. Go ahead, boy."

Silently as panthers they threaded the path toward the fire, which they presently began to see. Si and Shorty put on their bayonets as they walked, for they had no desire for any more noise than was absolutely necessary, and it looked as if there was going to be a chance for close, quick work.

The Captain was standing with his left side toward them, gazing with intense rage and perplexity upon Uncle Ephraim, sitting by the fire, moaning from the pain of the cruel cords.

"Damn the thick-headed, mulish nigger," the Captain muttered half to himself; "I never seed one so stubborn afore. If I kin only make him tell, hit'll save me a world of trouble, an' I'll have something to report to the fort. He's got to tell. Blobbs, go out thar an' cut me some stout withes. Two more of you trice him up to that dead tree thar. Look hyah, boy; I'm gwine to lick you till you tell whar them Yankees is, if I have to take every mite o' your black hide off from your head to your heels. Better tell now, an' save yourself, fer you've done got to tell."

"I reckon I've done talked enough," moaned Uncle Ephraim, through his set lips.

"You low-down hell-hound, defend yourself," hissed Shorty, springing past Si with leveled bayonet. The Captain whirled and snatched his revolver from its holster. Shorty waited till he started to raise it, and then sunk his bayonet in his breast. Si bayoneted in the hip one of the men who had started to trice up Uncle Ephraim, and Tom Radbone, Abe Grimstead, Harry and Monty quickly felled the rest with their gun-barrels. It was all over in an instant, and only the man who went to cut withes escaped. Si

ent Uncle Ephraim's cords and helped him on his horse.

"Jee-whizz!" exclaimed the delighted Patsy the Kinch. "Chin 'bout yer lightnin' transformations, that wuz one. Beat anything I ever see in de Bowery T' eater, a full mile an' a half. Jee! didn't ole Bill Ward ketch it good an' hard! He's jest bin itchin' for something like that all his life, blast him. Jee! dat was de suddenest ting dat ever was. Zip! zip! zip! An' it wuz all over. Holy Jee, Corpril, if de Bowery boys only knowed you dey'd love you to death, so theyze would. Kirby he ain't nowhere to youze. He useter wrap hisself up n' 'Merikin flag, fire off a hoss-pistol, an' die like a son-of-a-gun, an' set de boys wild, but he jest ain't in it 'longside o' youze, so he ain't."

They hurried back to the road and mounted their horses.

"Let them fellers go, Sandy and Pete," ordered Si. "They can't get back to the fort in time to give any news. Just let 'em go."

"Jee-whizz! why don't you stick 'em, too?" exclaimed Patsy the Kinch, in astonishment. "Theyze jest as bad as the rest."

"No; don't do anything to 'em. Let 'em go," reiterated Si. "How about the road ahead, boy?"

"Road's all clear way up to de pickets, an' I knows a way to git 'round dem. Me an' Docsy useter go dat way, when we sneaked up to Savanny to see me mudder."

They galloped ahead until the first streaks of dawn were coming up out of the sea, and then, warned by Patsy, turned to the left, to avoid the rebel pickets.

It was scarcely daylight when they reached the Union pickets, and Si's ears

were delighted by a deep-toned, unmistakable Union challenge.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Great Jehosephat," murmured Shorty, "how good it sounds to hear a man pronounce 'there' properly."

"Union scouts—200th Injianny Volunteers, without the countersign," replied Si, promptly dismounting, and advancing alone, with his hands above his head.

They only stopped on the picket-line long enough to get directions as to their corps, division and brigade from the Officer of the Pickets, and then pressed eagerly forward.

Reveille was now sounding everywhere, and they recognized their own sweet-toned bugle and rode straight for it.

The Adjutant had come out of his tent to wash up for breakfast, when Si, leading a string of unutterably weary men and horses, rode up, dismounted and formally reported:

"Sir, I have the honor to report that we have reached the ships, informed them as to the army's presence, and brought this letter, from the Captain of the United States steamer Flag."

Entirely regardless of the strict military etiquette which was supposed to reign always in the camp of the 200th Ind., the Adjutant gave a triumphant yell, which interrupted the Orderlies' roll-call of the companies and brought everybody toward his tent.

"Bless you, my sons," he said to Si and Shorty, as he took the envelope; "you bring tears of joy and pride to your happy father's eyes (the Adjutant was probably a year or two older than Si). Let me get this to the Old Man. He's liable to spoil your shirt-bosoms by weeping his overflowing happiness on your manly breasts."

CHAPTER XLIV.

GREAT NEED OF MEAT IN THE ARMY—PETE AND SANDY DRAW SOME
"CONFEDERATE FRESH PORK"—CONTRITION AT DECEIVING THE
COLONEL—THE COLONEL'S VIEW OF THE MATTER.

"Now, whar's yo' done bin all dis time, yo' ole wagabon?" was Aunt Minerva Ann's greeting to Uncle Ephraim, as following by Patsy the Kinch, he wandered down to her balliwick, and she noticed that he brought her nothing to eat. "Bin galumphin' 'round de country as usual, 'tendin' t' ebberything but your nacheral business ob findin' pervizions fer me an de Cunnel. What yo' t'ink we lib on, anyway? Eh? Dis cold, white rice? Dis nasty, pasty whitewash stuff? Dar hain't no more meat an' bone in hit dan dar is in de white ob an aig, or a pig's lights. See how I'm pinin' away under hit, 'til yo' could stuff a pillar anywhar inside my dress. An' de Cunnel's gittin' peakeder every day, 'til yo' could a'most shave yourself wid his face. An' yo' goes off and stays days traipsin' 'round de country, an' den comes in empty-handed, an' 'spects me t' feed yo'. What sort ob a husban' is yo,' anyway? Dar hain't nuffin' hyah, not eben rice 'nuff fer me an' de Cunnel ter-morrer. Nuffin' but coffee an' sugar an' salt. Not a speck ob meat ob any kind."

"For de Lawd's sake, den, gib me a cup ob coffee, anyway, 'Nervy, for I's a'most daid, so I am. An' one fer dis boy, hyah."

"Who dat brat?" asked Aunt Minerva Ann, viewing Patsy the Kinch with severe disapproval. Uncle Ephraim had hoped that she would take to him on sight as rapturously as she had done to Pete, but physically capacious as Aunt Minerva Ann's bosom seemed to be, there was no room in it for but one love.

"Dat boy," explained Uncle Ephraim, in tones of admiration, intended to move Aunt Minerva's heart, "is Patsy the Kinch, one ob de finest boys in de whole worl'. He belongs in Fort McAllister, but he piloted us froo de rebel lines, an' done sated my life."

"Huh, not a great deal dat," grunted Aunt Minerva Ann, determined not to condone in any way the mortal offense of failure to bring in something to eat. "Leetle good sabin' de life ob a man what hain't gumption 'nuff t' find sumfin t' eat. Take him away. Don't want no rebel brats hangin' 'round headquarters."

"But, 'Nervy,'" pleaded Uncle Ephraim, "jes' gib us a cup of coffee. I's a'most daid, I done tells yo'!"

"Your own fault, den," snapped Aunt Minerva. "'Kase ob your fool projec kin' 'roun' de country, 'stid ob 'tendin' t' your business. Where kettle Pete?"

"Here I am, Aunty," exclaimed Pete, running up to be folded to her ample bosom. "Had an awful time. Thought I was never going to see you again several times."

"Did yo', yo' pore honey," exclaimed Minerva Ann, with her eyes full of tears. "Well, I's bin savin' sumfin fo' yo' t' eat, fearin's yo'd done come in hongry. Set down, an' I'll git it for yo', an' make yo' some coffee. I'll make some for yo', too, Eph, yo' ole loafer, though yo' don't des- sarve hit."

In spite of the meagerness of the rations at headquarters, Aunt Minerva Ann had laid by some tit-bits for Pete, and no hunger of her own would induce her to touch them.

Pete was cute enough to perceive that there was a domestic storm, with Uncle Ephraim out in the rain, and while Aunt Minerva Ann's back was turned, superintending the boiling of the coffee, he sily divided his stock of "goodies" with Uncle Ephraim, who at once divided with Patsy the Kinch.

"Not a speck ob meat in de camp," grumbled Aunt Minerva Ann, over the kettle, casting occasional baleful looks at Uncle Ephraim, "only de griddle-greaser, an' I has t' lend dat t' de Mis' Whiffletree, de lady w'at cooks fer de Cunnel ob de 1st Oshkosh. De woman w'at cooks fer de Captain wanted t' borry hit, but I done tole her hit wuz a Cunnel's greaser, and couldn't go no lower dan a Major, by no means. A great big country, big as de worl', an' a lazy, good-fer-nothin' nigger, w'at kin eat a shoulder ob fresh pork at a meal, when somebody else provides hit, say he can't find no meat. Let his wife an' Cunnel starve fer meat, an' pertend he can't find none—not a shoat, nur a chickeu, nur a tu'key in hundreds ob miles, I s'pose. What'd de folks lib on' roum' hyah—tell me dat?"

"Aunty, we just had de greatest time you ever heard of," said Pete, trying to lighten the atmosphere, as he sipped his coffee and munched his food. Uncle Ephraim and Patsy, in order to conceal that they were eating, turned their backs upon the irate dame of the Colonel's kitchen.

"We've bin clear down to the sea, and out on it!"

"An' seed turkles big's a haystack, sun-fish broad as a bed-kivver, an' snakes bigger an' longer'n ary grape-vine yo' ebber seed," broke in Uncle Ephraim, unable to contain himself.

"Shet up, Eph, sabe yer bref fer coolin' yer coffee," snapped his spouse. "Yo' al-luz was an onaccountable liar 'bout what yo'd done seed." Then to Pete: "My! honey boy! why did you go out 'mong dem orful t'ings? Why don't yo' stay wid de Cunnel, an' be safe? Wuzzent yo' powerfully skeered?"

"Um—um—a little bit," admitted Pete. "I was wuss skeered dan I ebber was in all my born days," said Uncle Ephraim. "I jes' t'ought ole Satan wuz habbin' a circus parade ob all his managerie, t' pick out de one he was a-gwine t' feed me to."

"Ob course yo' was," retorted Annt Minerva Ann, scornfully. "Yo'd alluz jump when yo' hear an owl hoot."

"An' one ob dem did bite Pete, an' turned him all black as your shoe."

"O, laws-a-massy, bress my soul, yo' don't say so?" screamed the negress. "Whar, Pete? Le'me see de place at onct."

"No; 'twasn't nothing," said Pete, shame-facedly, and to change the conversation related, "and some bushwhackers caught Uncle Ephraim, and was about to lick him to death if he wouldn't tell where we was, but Uncle Eph stood it like a man, and gave 'em the frosty turn-down. We jumped in and took him away from 'em."

"Jes' like Eph to go moseyin' 'round, not watchin' out fer nothin'," commented Annt Minerva Ann, little interested in the incident. "If he had 'a' told, I'd 'a' skinned him worse'n they'uns wuz a-gwineter. I'll skin him anyway, if he don't find some meat. But le' me see de place whar dat orful t'ing done bit yo', honey."

"Why in de world don't youze git dat wench some meat?" asked Patsy, as they walked away, after finishing their coffee.

"Whar in creation, I'd like t' know," grumbled Uncle Ephraim, "kin I git any meat? Mout as well hunt fer de grace ob God 'mong de rebels as fur meat whar dar ain't none, an' a hundred t'ousand men lookin' fur hit. A pig or a chicken dat'd lib 'round hyah a day would hab t' eider fly higher dan a tu'key-buzzard or run faster'n a bullet."

"Dere's jist plenty o' meat here if youze'll only go fur it," answered Patsy.

"Weze allers had plenty at de fort, such as it was, and it was good enough when youze couldn't git no other, which was most o' the time. It was better'n de meat dez issued to weze. I kin git youze all de fresh Confederit pork youze want to eat."

"You can?" said Pete, eagerly. Let's

go for it at once. I'd sell my shoes to get Auntie some fresh pork."

"Well, cully, sherry down to camp, and tip youze pardner, Sandy, to come up wid his gun, and weze'll pad de hoof right over to de Confederit commissary, and draw all de steaks, cutlets and chops dat wench wants."

"Can't we git enough for Serg't Klegg, and the rest o' the boys?" asked Pete, starting. "They're very hungry, too."

"Let's git some fer de wench fust," said Patsy, cautiously. "She's beefin' most 'bout meat. Den weze'll see 'bout de odders."

Pete and Sandy came back with their guns.

"Clap de frog-stickers on," commanded Patsy, as he led the way to a swamp. "Bring a butcher-knife wid youze, Uncle Ephraim."

Pete and Sandy looked a little startled at these preparations, but they were too proud to ask questions or hesitate.

"Dis here's de Confederit Commissary," said Patsy, after they had threaded their way some distance into the swamp. "It's jist full o' meat, an' I'll show how dey draw it down at de fort."

He cut a stout pole, and began looking for alligator-holes. He presently came to one whose size and appearance suited him, called Uncle Ephraim to his side, and gave these directions to Sandy and Pete:

"Dere's a Confederit pig in dere, an' weze a-goin' to haul him out. He's a little diffrunt from his brudder dat runs t'rough de woods. He's not so thin, an' he's got a bigger jaw an' tail, an' lots more meat on him. When I poke dis stick down he'll grab it, an' Uncle Ephraim 'll pull him out. When he comes out, keep clear o' his tail, fer he kin hit an awful swipe wid it, an' look out to job him wid yer beyonets jist behine de foreleg. If youze hit him right youze'll settle him to-wunst. But youze got to be spry an' cool at de same time."

"I think I can ring the bell," said Sandy, warming up to the scheme, and not wanting to appear inferior to the New York boy. "Le' me get on this side, Pete, and you take the other. The left's nearest the heart. Then if I miss you can prod him. Now, don't get rattled."

"Who's going to get rattled?" indignantly inquired Pete. "I'm no more likely to lose my nerve than you, Mr. Smarty."

Pete's manner did not support his words, for he was a little shaken by his experience with the fauna of this region. Uncle Ephraim looked very rueful that he had come along, but it would never do to back out now, before the boys.

Patsy thrust the pole into the hole, and felt the jaws grasp it viciously. He called on Uncle Ephraim, and the negro's strong arms dragged to the surface a lively young alligator, who showed such resentment at



"I'LL BREAK EBERY BONE IN DAT WUFLESS OLE EPH'S KARKISS FER FOOLIN' ME DAT-AWAY."

being disturbed that Uncle Ephraim took refuge on a high cypress knee.

Pete, forgetful of Patsy's instructions, regarded the savagely-swishing tail as the point of assault, and began frantic but futile attempts to bayonet it. Sandy, after one successful thrust, got his range, and succeeded in landing his point in the vital spot, and the alligator gave up the ghost.

"Jee-whiz, he's a dandy youngster," said Patsy, regarding the result with satisfaction.

"Yes, we've got him," said Sandy, wiping off his bayonet with some leaves. "But what's he good for?"

"Good for?" echoed Patsy. "Dere's more meat on him dan a razor-back hog, an' it's a heap better chawin' an' fillin'. Take yer whittle, dere, Uncle,

an' rip open his bread-basket, an' take off his hide."

Uncle Ephraim descended slowly from his perch of safety, cautiously approached the alligator, made sure that he was really dead, by giving the carcass a kick, and then turned it on its back.

"Skin him jest like youze would a calf," directed Patsy.

This Uncle Ephraim understood. He made a long slit down the breast and belly, others for each of the legs, and the skin came off as readily as would a cow's.

"He do look like a pig," remarked Uncle Ephraim, surveying the carcass, after the repulsive head, skin, paws and tail had been removed.

"Jest as good pork as youze ever et," said Patsy. "Heap better'n dese alligator hogs dat runs in de woods. Dere hain't so much diffrunce betwixt one dat paddles in de swamps an' de one dat gallops over de sand. Both live on snakes, fish an' sich truck. I likes de swamp feller better. He's fatter an' tenderer."

"My, how he smells of musk!" ejaculated Pete.

"Dey all does, an' so does de razor-back hog. But youze don't have to eat de smell. Dat goes off in de air."

If Uncle Ephraim had any scruples they quickly vanished at the sight of the tempting fresh meat, and he soon carved the carcass into very presentable shoulders, hams, spare-ribs, etc.

"Dar's suttinly a mouty nice-looking lot ob fresh meat for de ole woman," he remarked, contemplating the result, as it lay spread out on the clean, shining magnolia leaves. "Dat suttinly orter satisfy her, an' stop her tongue. Le's tote hit right up t' her. Don't say nuffin, 'bout whar we done got hit. 'Nervy's de best ole woman in de worl', but she's got some 'culiar notions, an' yo' nebber know jes' whar she's a-gwine t' break out."

Aunt Minerva Ann's dark brow cleared up, as she saw them stringing along toward her, headed by Uncle Ephraim, and each bearing in his hand pieces of meat lying on the dark-green leaves.

"Done tole yo' dar was plenty ob meat in de country," she remarked, "if you'd only stir yourself an' look fer hit. What yo' got dar?"

"Confedrit fresh pork," remarked Uncle Ephraim, laying his share down.

"Laws-a-massy, what nice meat!" she exclaimed, delighted. "But what a queer smell hit has."

"All de hogs 'round hyah smells dat-a-way—smells ob musk—sumfin' dat dey eats," answered Uncle Ephraim. "Recolleck how our hogs useter smell ob hickory-nuts an' punkins in de Fall?"

"Probably these 've bin livin' on muskmelons," suggested Pete.

"I must hurry up an' cook some ob dis fer de Cunnel, afore I eat any myself, though I's awful hongry fer meat," said Aunt Minerva Ann, enthusiastically. "Pore man, he's jes' starvin'."

Uncle Ephraim went over to the headquarters stables, to see how his substitute had been taking care of the Colonel's horses, taking Patsy with him, and was soon absorbed in rating his underling for his shortcomings, and in repairing them. Patsy lay down on some rice straw, and was soon sleeping the sleep of youth and fatigue.

"Now, what devilment have you youngsters been up to?" remarked Shorty, as Pete and Sandy came slipping back and quietly replaced their guns in the stack. "You look so mild and quiet that I'm sure you've been at something that you oughtn't. Over there by the fire you'll find some rice and sweet potatoes we've saved for you. 'Tain't much, but it's the best that can be done now. After you eat it you'd better lay down with the rest and get some sleep. You need it bad, as we all do. The Sergeant's bin asleep for an hour. So've I, until I woke up to wonder what'd become of you. I'm going to lay down again, and have my sleep out. You do the same."

Shorty stretched himself on his blanket, and was soon snoring.

"Sandy, I wonder if alligator meat is really good meat?" Pete whispered, as they devoured their rations in a silence that showed that both had something on their minds besides the adventures they had just been through.

"I guess so," answered Sandy, hesitatingly, showing the doubts in his own mind. "Patsy the Kinch says it is. He ought to know. Why shouldn't it be?"

"Don't know. Patsy ain't just our kind, you know. And, then, alligators look so horrible."

"That's because we ain't used to them," answered Sandy, trying to persuade himself. "These alligator hogs would look just as bad, if we'd never seen 'em before."

"Do you really think they would?" asked Pete.

They ate along slowly and silently for some minutes, with each doing much thinking. Presently Pete broke silence:

"Sandy, do you think it was just the right thing to palm off that alligator meat on Aunt Minerva Ann and—the—the Colonel for fresh pork?"

"Aunt Minerva Ann was nearly starved for fresh meat," answered Sandy, trying to stifle his own conscience.

"I know, but she wanted real pork, or chickens, or something."

"Patsy said it was all right—what they'd bin eating down at the fort."

"I tell you again, Patsy ain't our kind—the rebels ain't our kind," almost blubbered Pete. "He'd do lots o' things that me and you wouldn't. And we shouldn't 've told no lie to Aunt Minerva Ann, and more especially to the Colonel. Think of playing off on the Colonel!"

"We didn't tell no lie," said Sandy, feebly.

"No; but we acted it, which is worse."

Think of what Aunt Minerva Ann and the Colonel will think when they find it out."

"They may never find it out."

"But they will—they will. They can't help it," groaned Pete. "And if there was nothing wrong about it, why did we both sneak back to the company and say nothing? Why didn't we bring some of the meat back to the boys, and tell where we'd got it, which we would 've done if it'd bin all right, and we'd just stole it?"

"Don't say anything more, Pete," said the badly-disturbed Sandy. "Let's lay down and take a snooze, and think it over."

They fell into a troubled doze, from which Pete woke with a yell that startled the others into wakefulness. He had dreamed that the Colonel had changed into an immense alligator, with big, dull, fierce green eyes, who was tearing him limb from limb, while Aunt Minerva Ann stood by and looked on approvingly. He was so broken up and blubbering that Si and Shorty had to turn to Sandy for an explanation, which was given with the look and accent of confessing a murder.

Si and Shorty looked grave as they listened to the story.

"There's nothing to do but go right up to headquarters and make a clean breast of it," said Si. "Come on, Shorty; come on, Pete and Sandy."

They found the Colonel and Adjutant just rising from a hearty dinner, while Aunt Minerva Ann, beaming with satisfaction, nibbled at fragments of the feast, as she cleared away the things.

"I declare, Adjutant," said the Colonel, producing a gold toothpick, "though that meat was quite rank"—

"Outranks you, Colonel," said the Adjutant, reproducing a usual army joke.

"Yes; outranks me, or even the Major-General commanding the corps," accepted the Colonel; "yet it was fresher even than you are (and the Colonel made a poke at the Adjutant's ribs). Yet, I don't know when I've ever enjoyed a meal more."

"That musky flavor was very peculiar, and very strong," remarked the Adjutant. "It must come from something that the pigs eat down here. I suppose that there's some plant which produces musk that they're fond of. I tell you what, Colonel, we've got the best foragers in the 200th Ind. that there is in the whole army. Think of their finding fresh pork, and lots of it, in the midst of this ocean of hungry men!"

"It's simply wonderful," answered the Colonel. "If it was not for losing the best scouts and fighting men from the regiment, I'd move everything to have Sergt' Klegg made Commissary of Subsistence for the corps, with his squad as his assistants."

"Never do in the world to lose them from the regiment," answered the Adjutant, shuddering at the thought. "But here he comes, with his partner, walking

as if they were going to a funeral. Poor fellows, how tired they must be. That last trip of theirs was enough to wear out iron men. Hello, Sergeant, what are you doing up? Your orders were to sleep and rest for the next 48 hours."

"Colonel," said Si, as they all saluted with the utmost gravity, and with the look and accent of delivering the boys' cver to instant execution, "these thoughtless little brats here (indicating Sandy and Pete with a solemn wave of his hand) are the best boys in the world, but they will get into more trouble in a minute than a grown man will get 'em out of in a month."

"Boys will be boys," said the Colonel. "Recollect that you were a boy once yourself, Sergeant."

"They found Aunt Minerva Ann there," continued Si, determined to have the whole sad truth out at once, "complaining about not being able to get any fresh meat—that you and she were starving for lack of it. Being moved and instigated by the devil, and that little imp of a New York boy, from the fort, that we captured, who told 'em he would take 'em to the Confedrit commissary, where they could draw plenty of Confedrit fresh pork, they went out into the swamp, and without thinking at the time what it all meant they caught and killed a young alligator, skinned him and brought the meat to Aunt Minerva Ann, there, to cook. They didn't say nothin' to us when they came back, but directly they begun to think it over—

Pete broke down into a loud, uncontrollable blubber, while Sandy took the position of facing the firing squad at once.

"Alligator meat!" groaned the Adjutant, beginning to grow white about the gills.

"'Gator meat!" screeched Aunt Minerva Ann, making a bolt for the back of the camp, where she was soon heard, apparently trying to throw up the soles of her substantial army brogans.

"Alligator flesh?" said the Colonel, with amused interest. "I'm so glad of it. I've just been reading Du Chaillu's travels in Africa, and he tells us how much he enjoyed, when he was hungry, eating alligator steaks and cutlets. I've thought I'd like to try them myself. Why not? Turtle is very good eating. Gourmants think it is the best that can be found. Alligators must be very like them. They live the same way, and on pretty much the same things. Here, Aunt Minerva let's see some of that meat."

Aunt Minerva Ann's retching stopped at the sound of the Colonel's voice, and the Adjutant's face resumed its usual color.

"As nice looking meat as I ever saw," said the Colonel, examining some of the meat. "Looks very much like turtle steaks."

"Confederate pork?" said the Adjutant. "Well, that is a good joke. Let's play it on some of the other fellows. It's

too good to keep to ourselves. Sergeant, keep this mum as the grave, and as soon as you get rested go out into the swamp and kill a young, fat alligator"——

"And I'll send a mess of Confederate fresh pork up to the General, with my compliments, as an exhibition of the enterprise of my foragers," said the Colonel, catching on.

"I'll break ebery bone in dat wufless ole Eph's karkiss fer foolin' me dat-a-way," grumbled up Aunt Minerva Ann, picking up the stout poker, and glaring around for her husband. "I done wonder whar he is?"

"Can you tell me where I'll find Gen. Howard's headquarters?" asked a very tired and muddy cavalryman, riding a very muddy horse that looked ready to

drop with fatigue. "Ah, Colonel," he continued, saluting; "excuse me. I didn't see your straps at first. Since you're a Colonel I'm at liberty to say to you that we have succeeded in communicating with our ships in the sound, and informing them of the army's presence."

"O, go chase yourself with your stale news," burst out Shorty, in his gladness to have Pete out of the scrape. "The Colonel's had his own men down to the ships, long ago. Go off and hunt butter-milk and chickens. That's all you cavalrymen are good for. The 200th Injanny can beat you every day in the week finding ships. Tell us about the crucifixion, or the firing on Fort Sumter, or something that you know something about."

CHAPTER XLV.

FORT McALLISTER IS CAPTURED AND THE MAIL LINE OPENED UP.

"Got pretty well rested, Sergeant?" inquired the Colonel, the next day, Dec. 12, 1864, when, in answer to a summons, Si appeared at regimental headquarters. Of course, Si was always well rested when there was a suggestion of further service.

"Good as new, Colonel," he answered confidently. "Got anything on hand?"

"Sure of it?" inquired the Colonel, dubiously. "That was an awful hard trip you just came off of."

"O, well, there have been worse times. 'Twasn't near as bad as a day or two in Andersonville, or even the Tullyhomy campaign. Never felt better in my life."

And Si straightened up still stiffer, and inflated his chest.

"And how are the rest of the boys?"

"Right as a trivet. Ready for anything. What have you got on hand, Colonel?"

"I've been talking to Gens. Sherman and Howard about your trip. They are about to send out a division—Hazen's—to capture Fort McAllister, and open up communication with our ships. They're both very anxious that the thing shall come right off according to program, without any balks, mistakes as to the road, or delays of any kind. Therefore it occurred to Gen. Sherman that as you had just been over the ground twice, and had the lay of the fort fresh in your minds, it would be a good thing for you to go along as guides."

"We'd all like it best of anything in the world," answered Si, enthusiastically. "I sort o' picked out just the way I'd go

into the fort, while I was looking at it, and I'd like to lead a force right that way."

"No; I don't want you to do any fighting," said the Colonel. "You just go along to show the way. Save your fighting strength for some job of the 200th Ind. This is Hazen's Division's job, and we need not mix in. After you've brought them up in sight of the fort your duty will be done, and you can pull off under shelter, and watch how the Army of the Tennessee fellows put in their licks. May be you will get some points for us. Understand, it's my orders not to go under fire, or expose yourself in any way."

"Very good, Colonel," answered Si, saluting. "When do you want us to start?"

"Hazen's Division is now lying on the other side of the Ogeechee, at a place called Lloyd's Plantation. It is not more than five or six miles from here. It will not move till morning. You had better get another good night's rest in camp, and start early in the morning. You will find Gen. Hazen and report to him. I'll give you a letter from Gen. Howard to him, and also one from me. You know Hazen—used to command a brigade in Crittenden's Corps. He was the man that held the center at Stone River, and commanded that expedition in pontoon boats that opened up the cracker line at Chattanooga."

"Yes; I know all about Hazen. Good soldier, but a little too much style and Regular Army about him."

"Well, he's had a lot of that knocked

out of him in the last year or two. Regular Army style has suffered in this war nearly as badly as the Southern Confederacy. Well, good luck to you. Mind that you take care of yourself. I know that you will of the boys."

"Thank you, Colonel. We'll look out for ourselves."

They were so eager to take part in the capture of Fort McAllister that they all set to work preparing for an early start in the morning. Horses were rubbed down and given extra rations of rice straw and whatever else could be found for them. Arms were gone over and put in good shape, and haversacks and canteens filled. As soon as darkness approached Si made them all lie down, and they were then at that stage when to lie down meant to go sound to sleep at once.

Si arranged with the Sergeant of the Guard to be awakened at the first streak of dawn. His first thought was of the weather, and he cast his opening eyes at the sky. There was every promise of a bright, clear day, and his heart rejoiced.

They quickly boiled some coffee, saddled their horses and dashed off through the keen, crisp air for Lloyd's Plantation. The bugles began sounding reveille as they neared where they expected to find the division, and instantly bright fires began to blaze out.

"This must be the Second Division of the Fifteenth Corps," remarked Si, noting the quick response of the fires to the bugles, "and the boys are keen for their day's work. They ought to be."

"It's going to be the time of their lives," answered Shorty. "They ought to be red-hot about it."

"Where's Gen. Hazen's headquarters?" Si inquired of an Orderly-Sergeant, who was turning out his company.

"O, go right ahead, about a mile," he answered. "You can't miss it. Big plantation house, lots of trees around it, and horses and pup-tents around. Division flag flying in front. Go right on. Fall in lively, boys. Wake up, there Slobbs. Turn out in a hurry, Wat. Get out into your gunboats, there, Tubbs. Wake up, everybody, and hear the little birds singing praises to God. Damn your souls, look lively. We're going down to take Fort McAllister today, and bring in the boats that's got letters on from our girls. Everybody that wants a letter from his sweetheart jump, now. Fellows that are not in line wont get none."

"Letters from sweethearts," gasped Si. "I really wonder if they've had sense enough to send our letters down here to meet us?"

"Letters from our girls?" thought Shorty. "Great Jehosephat, if I was sure there was a letter out there from Maria, I'd swim out to the boat to get it, after licking every man in the fort."

"There's the headquarters, now," said Si, pointing out a handsome mansion, sur-

rounded by a spacious lawn and magnificent trees. Live-oaks, heavily festooned with Spanish moss, superb magnolias with their glistening green foliage, orange and lemon trees diffusing a sweet fragrance on the bright, sparkling air, helped make a scene of fascinating loveliness.

All was activity about the house. The headquarters guard were getting their breakfasts and packing up. Officers were coming and going at a gallop, stablemen were grooming and saddling horses, teamsters were hitching up, to the usual accompaniment of their own profuse maledictions of mules in general, and their own in particular, and the loud protests of the over-worked beasts. Officers were hurrying up their servants and orderlies, and from the nearby camps came the sharp monotones of Orderly-Sergeants glibly repeating the rosters, and the staccato answers of the men.

An officer, wearing a Brigadier-General's single star, strode out on the broad veranda, apparently having risen from a hasty breakfast, and gave curt orders about packing up and getting ready. He was immediately surrounded by a group of Colonels and staff officers, coming for final orders. He took them, one at a time, and answered and dismissed them with military curtness and readiness.

"He's evidently on to his job," said Si, much pleased. "He's got his work cut out, and settled exactly what everybody's got to do."

"He's had time enough to learn his trade," answered Shorty. "He's been in it from the very beginning, and all the time where big things were going on."

They studied the General while waiting. He was a man about 35, of medium height, fair hair and blue eyes. Like a majority of the younger officers of the Regular Army at that time, he was thoroughly under the dominance of the French military school, as were many of the volunteers, especially of the Army of the Potomac. Pose, manners, words and gestures were all very French—quick, snappy, alert and dashing. He wore a mustach and imperial after the style of Napoleon III.

"Remember your places," he remarked. "The First Brigade—Col. Theodore Jones—takes the advance, and will form the right, moving down to the seashore. The Third Brigade will be in the center, and the Second Brigade—Col. John M. Oliver—will form the left, and reach to the river. The line will deploy when we come in sight of the fort, which is nine or 10 miles from here. Gens. Sherman and Howard have promised to come down on the opposite side of the river and watch the assault. That ought to inspire us to do our very best, even if we didn't have the incentive of opening up the mail line, and hearing once more from our sweethearts."

"That's the word to pass along," said

the officers. "Let's tell the boys that the mail-carrier is just beyond the fort, with bushels of letters from their best girls, and we want to open the door for him to come in. That'll make 'em fight as nothing else will—not even Gen. Sherman looking on."

"Well, Sergeant?" said the General, inquiringly, as the officers rode off.

"I'm Serg't Klegg, 200th Injanny Volunteer Infantry," answered Si, saluting. "I was ordered to report to you for duty as guides. Here are letters from Gen. Howard and Col. McGillicuddy."

"Very good," the General answered, after glancing over the letters. "Quite thoughtful in Gen. Howard. You'll be of great assistance. Had your breakfasts?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. For the present you'll fall in behind my escort there, so's to be handy when you are wanted. I suppose that road out there leads straight to the fort."

"Straight to it, General."

"Very good. Orderly, tell the bugler to sound the 'advance.'"

The silver-throated headquarters bugle at once sang out the glad signal, and was immediately answered by the eagerly-waiting brigade and regimental buglers and the enthusiastic cheers of the men.

"Mail! Mail! Go get your letters."

"Letters from your girls! Letters from your girls!"

"Go to the Chaplain's tent and get your letters," they sang, trying to fit the words to the trumpet notes.

At once the various discordant movements in the camps linked themselves into harmonious motions. Squads of men formed into companies, companies took their places in the regimental lines, and the regiments became brigades. The First Brigade moved out upon the broad white road of sand and shells, like some enormous deep-blue serpent with scales and bristles of shining steel.

The day carried out its promise of being clear and bright, and the men were full of enthusiasm as to ending the campaign with one great stroke.

The General had placed himself at the head of the long column, and would occasionally turn around in his saddle and view the imposing spectacle with pride and bounding confidence. He sent Si and his squad ahead as scouts, but they saw no sign of a rebel until they were within a couple of miles of the fort. Then Pete, who had found a side road to the right, and had ridden down it, came slipping back with the information that there was a mounted picket standing in the road, with no reserves near. Si sent him, Sandy, Monty and Harry back the same way, to try to cut him off, while Si and Shorty would make a rush straight at him.

Si and Shorty rode forward cautiously, keeping as well as possible under the cover of the great festoons of Spanish

moss swinging slowly in the light breeze from the ocean.

Presently they saw the picket clearly outlined against the sky. Apparently Pete and the rest, in their eagerness, had not kept well under cover, for the picket's gaze was turned in their direction. He swerved his horse around and raised his gun.

Si and Shorty set their spurs home and made a rush. He heard the clatter of the hoofs on the hard shell road, and looked about, to see the two horsemen almost on him. He tried to fire and whirl his horse at the same moment, but succeeded only in the latter, and almost before he started Si and Shorty were on either side of him.

"Give up, Johnny," said Si. "It's no use. We've got you."

"I reckon you have, Yanks," replied the rebel, lowering his gun, and slackening his bridle-rein. "You were coming too many ways at once for me."

He took the matter so good-humoredly that they fell into conversation with him.

"While I'd've shot you if I'd got a chance," he said, "I'm not heart-broken that you got me with no more trouble. I think the jig's up for the Southern Confederacy. I've been telling the boys in the fort that I didn't believe it worth while to put up much of a fight for this little patch of the State, when you folks'd got all the rest. They might as well let the tail go with the hide. I've made myself rather unpopular with them on that account."

"They want to fight, do they?"

"O, yes; they've never had any of it, while I've had all I really want. I went into the war dead hungry for a fight, and to just wade through the blood of the Yankees. But Shiloh gave me all the fight I wanted for the rest of my life. I never hankered for any more, I tell you, and the two battles of Corinth overloaded my stomach. Then my father, who's a lot of influence, got me transferred to the garrison at Fort McAllister, where I'd be near home and out of danger, and I've been there ever since. All the boys down there are sons of prominent citizens of Savannah, who got up the organization to save them. Maj. Anderson, who commands the Fort, is a son of the Mayor of Savannah. None of them have ever seen any fighting, and they've been jeered at so much as 'feather-beds' and 'bomb-proofs' that they're anxious for a fight. Let them have it. I think it's rank nonsense. It's worse than that. It's murder. With all their big guns, and their entanglements, and ditches and stockades and torpedoes they may be able to hold the Yankees off for a while; but what's the good? You are going in there, same as you did into Atlanta and Vicksburg, and it's only killing men for nothing."

"Torpedoes, did you say?" asked Si, pricking up his ears.

"O, yes; no end of torpedoes. They're around there so thick that it was dangerous for any of us to move. I'd never venture out this road at night, and I was mighty careful about where I set my feet even in daytime."

Gen. Hazen had now come up, and they turned the prisoner over to him, Si remarking:

"General, he says the road just ahead is full of torpedoes."

Everybody was startled. "It is?" said the General, frowning. "I think you would be a good man to set at work digging them up."

"Excuse me, General," said the prisoner, with the greatest urbanity. "I'm not built for an excavator, but I'll gladly point out where they are, if you will find gentlemen of finer muscular development than me to wield the spades."

"I'll compromise with you on that," laughed the General, amused by the prisoner's bonhomie. "I want to send a brigade off to the right, to reach the side of the fort next the sea. Which road had they better take?"

"Excuse me, General. I cannot and shall not give you any information as to that."

"Why, I thought you were willing to help us."

"Not by any means. If there was any way of keeping you from taking the fort I'd gladly do it. I'm just as much a Confederate and your enemy as ever, though I think it is wrong to make a useless fight and needlessly murder men. I'm willing to point out these torpedoes in the road, because I think it is wrong and unsoldier-like to plant them there. They will only kill men, and not stop the assault on the fort. It's like bushwhacking. As for the torpedoes you'll come on nearer the fort, that's your lookout. It's as proper to have them there as to shoot at you with cannon and rifles."

"You're right," said the General, after a moment's hesitation. "I've no right to ask you to assist in the attack by giving information."

"Serg't Klegg, send two or three of your best men to report to Col. Theo. Jones, commanding First Brigade, to assist him in finding his way," said the General. "No; don't go yourself. I want you and your partner and some other good men to stay with me."

"Harry, Monty, Gid and Alf," said Si, "you remember the lay of the country down there. Go over to the First Brigade and report to Col. Theodore Jones."

"Return here whenever he dismisses you," said the General.

The First Brigade—the gallant veterans of the 6th Mo., 30th Ohio, and 116th Ill.—turned its head of column to the right, to follow the road leading to the sea.

The rest moved forward a short distance, to the edge of the clearing, and there stood the fort, in the clear sunlight,

in all its ugly strength and immensity, and glaring defiance to them.

A gasp and a shudder ran through the ranks, and sobered every one, as he drank in the formidable immensity of the works and comprehended, a detail at a time, the difficulties that had been put in the way of an assault. The rebels had been rapidly learning the lessons of the war as well as ourselves, and Fort McAllister represented every idea that had come to them in the way of making an impregnable fortification.

The fort itself had high mud walls, with still higher traverses between every two guns, to prevent their being enfiladed. Big-mouthed, black cannon yawned hungrily over the steep banks, and the groups of men gathered about them seemed eager to open their flaming volcanoes.

At the foot of the banks was a stockade of high, strong, sharply-pointed timbers, firmly fastened in the ground, and which it seemed impossible that any man could scale. In front of the stockade ran a wide, deep ditch, quite capable of drowning regiments at a time.

All around the fort, for a width of 600 yards, the ground, except where broken by ponds, creeks and ditches, was covered with trunks and limbs of live-oaks, so interlaced that even a pig or a dog could not get through them, and frequently staked down to prevent their being moved. The only roads through these entanglements led directly under the black mouths of the cannon, which would instantly sweep the intruders to destruction.

Familiar as they had all been with the formidable works around Atlanta, which had been made as strong as labor and skill could achieve, they shuddered at the appalling strength of this one. It seemed to Si and Shorty much uglier and stronger than it had appeared when they looked on it before. Then they had only casually thought of taking it. Now the real difficulties loomed up before them.

"Going to be some trouble getting to the postoffice," remarked Shorty, with that quiet irony which marked his desperate moods, "but we've got to have our letters all the same."

"Shorty," said the practical Si, "do you notice that strip of gravelly beach over there by the river? They can't lay abatis there, because the tide or the water rises and falls. Let's keep our eyes on that. If we're not ordered to do anything else, we'll go over there, and make our way right up to the fort under the river bank, where they can't shoot as until it comes to hand-to-hand work."

"Good head, Si," approved Shorty. "We may be the first ones into the fort, and put another feather into the 200th Injanny's cap."

Every one looked anxiously at the General, to see the effect of the spectacle upon him. He was studying the place through his glass, and as far as they,

could read his face he had found nothing unexpected, and was planning out how each obstacle could be successfully surmounted.

They all took heart from his cheerful, sanguine expression.

"L-a-y—d-o-w-n—Y-a-n-k-s—they're going to fire!" shouted a stentorian voice in the ranks, and at the same instant one of the big cannon pointing toward them belched out a tornado of smoke and fire. A great shell droned over into the woods, and burst with a stunning crash.

"General, I'm here for orders," said a gallant young artillery Captain, eagerly. "Shall I not take my battery out on that point there and answer them?"

"No," said the General, deliberately. "I don't see any good in wasting your ammunition on those heavy works. Save it till it'll do more good. Keep under cover for the present."

"Scatter, gentlemen," said the General. "We are presenting an entirely too tempting mark for the enemy. They are going to bring those other guns into action."

As the General predicted, the other great cannon opened up with thunderous sounds, and tore the limbs out of the trees with their heavy missiles, while the artillerymen fidgeted and fretted at not being allowed to reply.

The formation for the attack went on rapidly, uninterrupted by the fire. The Third Brigade—90th and 48th Ill. and 70th Ohio in front, and the 15th Mich. and 99th Ind. in reserve, Col. John M. Oliver commanding—was given the post of honor, in the center of the line, where it would have to move over the worst of the obstructions, directly in face of the heaviest fire.

The Second Brigade—Col. Wells, S. Jones commanding, 47th and 54th Ohio and 111th Ill. in front; 37th and 53d Ohio and 83d Ind. in reserve—took the left of the line, with the 47th Ohio next to the river. Si and Shorty and the remainder of the squad had been kept busily employed, answering the General's questions, exploring the ground for him, piloting regiments to their places, changing their positions, and making daring investigations into the character of the ground in front.

The hours were passing, and the formation was not progressing as rapidly as the nervous General desired. He got more curt and snappy constantly.

Everybody was excited, nervous and tensely eager for the conclusive work to begin.

The skirmishers were working forward into the edge of the abatis, 600 or 700 yards from the main works, where they could begin to reach the men on the parapets with their rifles.

"Boys, those big cannon seem to be fretting the General," said the gallant young Illinois Captain in charge of the center skirmishers. "Let's see if we cau't

shut 'em up and get a chance to think. Work forward behind those live-oak logs there, and see if you can't pick off those gunners."

Daring boys immediately ran to the nearest shelter, lay down behind it for an instant, surveyed the ground in front, and then leaped over the brush, or broke through it for the next log.

The rebels had been swarming openly around the cannon, but now they began to drop under the accurate, long-range fire of men who had learned well how to handle their Springfields. Two rebels were swinging the ponderous rammer of a 10-inch gun preparatory to sending a charge home. One fell beneath a sharpshooter's bullet. His stiffening hands still clutched the rammer-staff, and dragged his partner with him. Another man sprang forward, released his hands, and caught hold of the rammer, while others carried the dead man back out of the way. But the sharpshooters were now getting good range, and the first sponger went down. There was only halt enough to pull his body back, when two more men came out and seized the sponge-staff. They succeeded in ramming the charge home before they, too, fell. The rebels nervously tried to depress the muzzle so as to reach the riflemen, and as the smoke lifted they were seen anxiously looking for the effect of the shot on their tormentors.

The man who pulled the lockstring, the Sergeant who aimed the cannon, and the Lieutenant standing behind with his glasses, all went down at once. The rest seemed panic-stricken, and ran back under cover of the parapet.

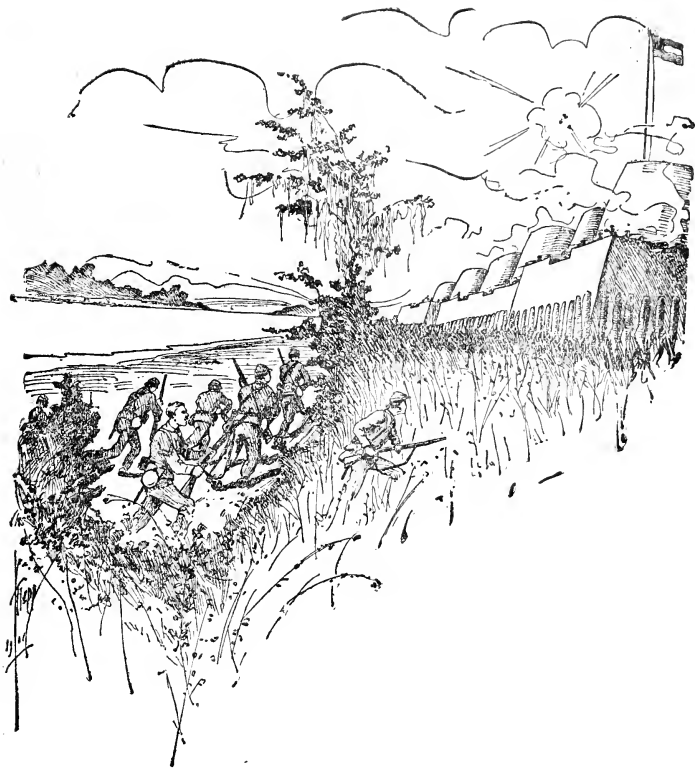
The excited Unionists raised a great cheer at this success.

An officer was seen leading the men back to the cannon, and pointing with his sword and commanding.

They were more cautious now about exposing themselves, and the officer himself kept well under cover, and though the sharpshooters brought down two more men, the rebels succeeded in loading and firing the gun again, but it was the last time. The rebels cheered over their achievement in firing, but as the smoke lifted so many bullets were pouring into the emplacement that the whole squad, with the officer, went down like grass before a scythe, and but two or three arose again, to limp out of the death-hole. The next 10-inch gun was served in the same way and the awful thunders of the two heard no more.

But the spiteful popping of the rifles increased in virulence as the skirmishers worked forward to closer range, and the riflemen of the fort tried to pick them off. Smaller cannon—fieldpieces and howitzers—joined in the fray with sharp, angry crashes.

"The general orders are," said the General, repeating his instructions to some



“SI AND HIS SQUAD RUSHED ALONG THE GRAVELLY BEACH.”

officers who had come up, “that the line shall be formed at the edge of the abatis, in single rank, so as to reduce the effect of the enemy’s fire. The signal for the advance will be given by the headquarters’ bugle—the ‘assembly’ three times, and then ‘forward’—when the whole line will move forward—every fellow for himself—every man making his way as best he can, over the obstructions. The signal will be given as soon as I can hear that Col. Theodore Jones has succeeded in getting into position.

Monty Scruggs came up, his horse and himself covered with fresh, slimy mud.

“Col. Jones presents his compliments,”

he said, saluting, “and directs me to say that he has found very difficult country down there, but has succeeded, he hopes, in getting across the worst place, and can now move forward faster.”

“Signals from the other side of the river, General,” reported the Signal Officer, “Gen. Sherman and Gen. Howard are in that rice mill over there. Gen. Sherman presents his compliments, and wants to know how you are getting along.”

“Tell Gen. Sherman,” answered the General, turning his glass on the rice-mill across the broad surface of the Ogeechee River, “that we are getting along all

right, though we are having some trouble getting into position. It's mud and water that's bothering us, most of anything. Everybody in fine fettle, though."

Harry Montague rode up, still muddier than Monty. He dismounted as he saw the General was on foot, and reported: "Col. Theodore Jones presents his compliments, and directs me to say that he found a still worse creek than ever, but has succeeded in crossing it, and now hopes to have no further serious trouble."

"Too bad," muttered the General. "But I hope he's through at last. Ride along the line, there," he continued to his staff, "and explain what causes the delay. Tell them the advance will be made the instant Col. Theodore Jones can get through."

Another muddy man and horse approached, which turned out to be Gid Mackall.

"Col. Theodore Jones presents his compliments," he reported, "and begs that you will have patience with him and not start until he is ready. He is now in sight of the works, and hopes for no further trouble."

The whole army was now straining like hounds in a leash. The skirmishers had reached a high board fence, about midway of the entanglements, and placed there to surely break any line advancing against it.

They had driven all the rebel skirmishers outside of the works back under their cover.

"Gen. Sherman presents his compliments," reported the Signal Officer, "and says that it is now past 4 o'clock, and the assault should be made at once."

"Tell Gen. Sherman that I am momentarily expecting to hear that my right brigade is in position," replied the General. "The moment that it is I shall make the assault."

A heavy roar came up from the sea, and two shells sailed over the rebel works and exploded inside.

"Hello," said Si, joyously; "the Old Man on the Flag has found out that something's going on, and wants a hand in it."

Looking as if he had fallen into a gutter, and been dragged for some distance through it, Alf Russell rode up to report:

"Col. Theodore Jones presents his compliments, and directs me to say that he has encountered a sluice, running down to the sea, the worst obstacle he has encountered yet, but he will manage to get across it, some way, and make the assault."

"We can't wait any longer," said the General, shutting his watch with a snap. "We'll have to go forward with what we have. Sound the signal."

The silver bugle was now harsh, shrill and peremptory as it rang out the "assembly" three times. Every brigade and regimental bugle instantly repeated it. The men sprang to their feet with cheers.

"Forward," commanded the headquarters bugle.

"Forward," repeated the bugles at the heads of the brigades and regiments.

To the great delight of the General, the bugles of Col. Theodore Jones's Brigade, away to the right, responded in the next breath, and its flags appeared above the rushes and reeds of the swamp.

Instantly the tide of eager, earnest men rushed forward. Si had his squad well in hand, and they galloped over to the river bank, where they dismounted, hastily tied their horses, and rushed along the gravelly beach. Pete ran along on the top of the bank, winding around the edge of the obstructions like a fox, and reporting from time to time to his comrades below how the charge was progressing.

"They're all going forward in great shape," he said. "Jumping over the abatis like hounds, breaking through it, and pulling it aside. Everybody's going as if they meant to get there. That Ohio Col. Jones, commanding the Second Brigade, is ahead of his brigade with his staff, and is acting like a hero. Now, they've killed him, and several of his staff, and they're carrying him back; but that Illinois Colonel has taken his place, and is pushing right ahead. They're all racing with their flags to get there first."

The keen-eyed Colonel of the 47th Ohio saw the advantage of the beach, and now that it was low tide, it was wide enough for his whole regiment. He shouted to his men to move to the left flank, and the perfectly-drilled regiment, though in the midst of the excitement of the fight, instantly obeyed. Si and his squad were swallowed up in the rush and became part of it. The rebels saw the attack coming from that side, and swarmed on the parapets. The regiment promptly swung into line on the beach, and fired two crashing volleys, which drove the rebels below the cover of the works, and with a yell the regiment rushed up the bank and planted its colors on the high parapet.

As Si and Shorty reached the summit and looked over they found to their astonishment that the Third Brigade had also reached the other front, with the 48th Ill. and 70th Ohio, in a mad struggle to be the first to place their colors on the works. The color-bearer of the 48th Ill. stepped on a torpedo, and was blown to pieces. Another man ran forward and snatched up the colors, when he also stepped on a torpedo, and was instantly shattered. Another man snatched up the colors, and climbed the stockade, his comrades boosting him over.

The Color-bearer of the 70th Ohio, clambering over the stockade, was killed as he handed the colors to a comrade already over, but the man ran with them to the top of the works.

For an instant everyone stopped on top of the works to breathe, and see what

was going on. Then the still unsubdued garrison opened fire on them from the parade, directed and incited by a fine-looking young Captain of artillery and Maj. Anderson, the commander.

Si and Shorty joined in the fierce rush that was immediately made, the rebels were scattered, and the brave artillery Captain shot, bayoneted and struck over the head with a musket barrel almost at the same instant.

The rebels retreated to their casemates, and were instantly followed up in a series of hand-to-hand fights that overcame all opposition in a minute.

As the fighting stopped, from there being no more to fight, Gen. Hazen and staff rode into the fort.

"Well," said the Adjutant-General, looking at his watch, and making an entry in his notebook, "it's been just 12 minutes since the 'forward' was sounded, and I must say I never saw a livelier 12 minutes in my life."

"Twelve minutes," echoed Si. "I'd've said it was 12 hours."

"Present my compliments to Gen. Sherman," said Gen. Hazen to the Signal Officer, "and say that the action is over, and we are in possession of the fort. Let us have a flag hoisted at once, to show to the fleet."

For a while there was a perfect tumult of rejoicing. Everybody was overwhelmed with delight that the campaign had led to such a glorious result, and they studied the wonderful fort with its immense guns and its myriad of strange appliances with mounting pride. And beyond was the wonderful sea, which they had at last gained, with our ships in the distance flying the glorious Stars and Stripes. That meant home and friends and restoration of communications. The regiments which had been left behind in reserve came up and joined the exultant throng.

Order was presently restored, and the serious work of occupation begun. The dead and wounded were gathered up, the

prisoners put under guard, and the 70th Ohio, after a little contest as to which regiment deserved the most, where all had done so well, was awarded the honor of being the garrison of the fort.

Si, after he and the boys had measurably appeased their curiosity, returned to their horses, fed them, and came back to the fort to report to Gen. Hazen, hoping to be dismissed and allowed to return to the regiment with the glad news. They found the General at supper, and before they could get a chance to speak to him there was a commotion on the river side, with loud cheering and shouts from the sentinel.

"Turn out the guard! Turn out the guard!"

They ran over in that direction, to see Gen. Sherman spring out of a row-boat and run up the walk as full of animation as a happy boy.

"Where's Gen. Hazen? Where's Gen. Hazen?" he inquired, impetuously, as soon as he could make himself heard amid the cheering. "Yes; you did splendidly, boys. Never saw a finer charge in my life. You are all heroes. It was just grand. Where's Gen. Hazen?"

"Right over there, at supper, General. We'll show you the way."

Presently a light was seen coming up the river and a shot was fired to bring the vessel to.

"Ship ahoy!" called out an officer. "Who are you?"

"United States Steamer Dawn," replied from the ship. "Col. A. H. Markland, United States Postoffice."

"Where are you going? What's your business?"

"We have got about 20 tons of letters and papers for Sherman's army on board that I want to get to the army."

The cheering became wilder than ever.

"The mail route's opened, Shorty," said Si, jubilantly slapping his partner on the back.

113
114
115
116
117
118
119
120
121
122
123
124
125
126
127
128
129
130

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE BOYS STRIKE A LOT OF RATIONS IN AN UNEXPECTED PLACE.

"I'm just as keen as you are to get back to camp with the news," said Shorty, as he and Si stood around, and waited for the interview between Gens. Sherman and Hazen to end, so that they could report and be dismissed. "But, if anything, I'm a heap keener right now to get something to eat, and take the wrinkles out of my form. I feel holler clean down to my toes. There's no stay to them everlastingly watery, windy sweet potatoes and rice, even if we'd had enough of them, which we didn't by several cart-loads. There must be a lot of grub around these oid gohper-holes, somewhere."

"Doubtful," said Si, with a deliberate, searching look around. "Them Fifteenth Corps fellers are, if anything, better foragers than we are. They've been in here nearly an hour now, and if there'd been anything here they'd 've smelt it out. They're keener on the scent of grub than Norway rats. You saw them break for the rebel commissary the very minute they busted the head of the last man in the garrison that showed fight. I don't think they found much. You know what Patsy the Kinch told us about them living on alligator meat."

"Nonsense. That might do for the common trash, like Patsy had to run with, but you can bet your shirt them swells from Savanny didn't have to live on Confederit fresh pork. Their families wouldn't allow it. And that Major who was in command's father is Mayor of Savanny. D'you suppose that if your father was Mayor of a big city, only 10 or 15 miles from camp, that you'd have to live on varmint? Not on your sumptuous chevrons you wouldn't, if he had to levy on a wholesale grocery store every week, and send it over to you, to satisfy your raging appetite. That Major's got a private stock o' grub somewhere, and I'm going to find it."

"I don't believe it's any use," said Si. "You see how those Fifteenth Corps fellers are ransacking the place. It's about like hunting for a chunk of fire after a freset, as to look for any grub where they've been."

"They're not hunting grub so much as relics and keepsakes," persisted Shorty. "They've been away over on the right all the time, where they've found lots more to eat than we have in the center. Come,

let's go up to the fort headquarters and take a look at the lay o' things around there."

They found the headquarters, which were lighted up by the Surgeons' lanterns. Our Surgeons were at work over the rebel wounded who had been carried in, and among them Si and Shorty saw the young artillery Captain who had been so terribly used up in the final resistance.

"Why, there seems to be life in that feller yet," said Shorty, in a tone of surprise. "I brought my gun-barrel down on his head just as you were bayoneting him, and Harry squirmed in and got in a shot. I must be failing, for I let him have it good and hard."

"You were a good deal winded at the time," Si consoled his partner, "from climbing the parapet. Somebody told me that that Captain was a brother-in-law of the Maj. Anderson who commanded Fort Sumter. Well, since we've got the fort, I hope that he'll live, and have a chance to repent."

"Well, here's the headquarters kitchen," said Shorty, "but there's nothing in it. The Fifteenth Corps's been here."

"As I told you," Si reminded him.

"Here's a well-beaten path leading from the kitchen to somewhere else, most likely where the Major kept his provisions," said Shorty. "I'm going to follow it and my nose."

It led to one of a row of magazines in the center of the fort, which were log houses, covered, roof and sides, with several feet of sand. Each had a door of heavy timber, with a large padlock.

A sentinel was walking up and down in front of each, to keep stragglers from entering with lights and blowing up the magazine—possibly the fort. There had been some tragedies of this kind in captured fortifications, and the thoughtful officers had taken precautions.

"They're only magazines; nothing in them we want, Shorty," said Si, turning away.

"I'll just bet there is, all the same," said Shorty. "Don't you see that this is the most traveled path that leads to any of them? And the path leads straight to the Major's kitchen? They wasn't carrying ammunition back and forward through his kitchen. He was keeping something else in that magazine beside cartridges

and shells. Say, Si, I'll bet we'll find the key to that big padlock hanging in the Major's kitchen."

They went back, and, sure enough, found the key hanging behind the Troy (N. Y.) cook-stove—a luxury, by the way, which they had never before seen in any rebel quarters.

"You've guessed right, Shorty," admitted Si. "That magazine's likely the Major's meat-house. The next problem's how to get rid of that sentinel. He looks tired, but we can't rush him. If we make any disturbance the whole camp'll be up, and even if the magazine's full of grub we'll get precious little in the grand rush that'll be made."

"I guess we can work the old trick, Si," said Shorty after a moment's thought. "Things are pretty well shaken up just yet, and the guard isn't settled in his own mind. You fall us in behind headquarters there, and march us down and relieve all those guards. They'll think it's all right."

"Fall in, boys," Si commanded. "Forward, file left."

He marched them around the headquarters, and came upon the guard from that direction.

"Halt! Who comes there?" challenged the guard.

"Sergeant with relief," answered Si. "Guard, halt. Advance, No. 1."

Monty advanced, with musket a-port, and Shorty by his side.

"What are your instructions, sentinel?"

"Maj. Anderson, the rebel commander, has his private property in here," answered the guard across his a-port musket, "and nobody is to be allowed to approach the door or enter it."

"Very good, guard," said Si. "You're relieved altogether, and needn't fall in behind. Go straight to your company and lie down. You're probably tired enough."

"Indeed I am," answered the guard, throwing his musket over his shoulder. "We've had a hard day of it. I'm mighty glad you've come. I oughtn't to've bin put on guard at all. I only come off picket this morning."

"Seems to me I've heard something like that before," commented Shorty, quizzically, as there probably never was a guard set that those detailed did not grumble at being selected.

They had to go through the operation of relieving all the other guards on the magazines, in order to avoid suspicion.

Shorty tried the key in the lock, and found that he had again guessed right. He opened the door and stepped inside.

To keep from exciting suspicion, Si went ahead with the squad, Harry acting as Corporal, and relieved the rest of the sentinels. From these he learned that the other magazines really contained ammunition.

Si hurried back to join Shorty. They

had no time to lose. The men returning to their companies relieved from their posts would excite questioning, and the Officer of the Guard might not be far off.

The air inside the magazine was so grocery-like in its odor that Shorty unhesitatingly struck a match, and was delighted to see a half-dozen fine hams hanging from the roof. There were hitches of side-meat, barrels of sweet potatoes, rice, stock-peas, etc., and a number of jugs, kegs and wine-baskets.

"As I imagined," said Shorty to Si, who had come in, "the Mayor of Savanny was not the man to allow his son to waste away with hunger, or grow flippers and a sole-leather hide from a steady diet of alligator meat. Well, there's no time for long stories. I think I'll take a ham and that demijohn over there, which I guess the Colonel and Adjutant will appreciate. You'd better have each of the boys take a piece of meat. Better let Tom Radbone throw that sack of meal over his shoulder. You'd better not take anything. You'll have to go inside and report to the General. We'll stop some place outside and cook supper, as soon's he dismisses us."

"If I go away without this ham," said Si, picking out the finest one, "my Sunday-school training has been wasted, and my gizzard would never forgive me."

Running a string through the handle of the demijohn, and the withe in the ham, Shorty threw them over his shoulder, and walking to the left of the line relieved Tom Radbone, whom he instructed to go inside, similarly provide himself, and relieve Abe Grimstead, who was to do the same and relieve the next man.

"Be awful quick, slick and quiet," enjoined Shorty. "If these thieving whelps out around here get an idee of what's up there'll be a rush, and we won't get much of anything. If we play the thing fine we'll get away with about everything in there that's worth having, and have the grand laugh on the Fifteenth Corps, that think themselves such slick foragers. Won't it just grind 'em, to steal everything right out from under their noses."

The operation went on quietly and very successfully. The crowds of eager hunters wandering through the fort kept a good distance from the magazines, which promised nothing except a disastrous explosion to unwary seekers.

Pete was the last one to go in, and Si was walking the beat in front, waiting for him to come out, to give the word to march.

Pete had found too much that was inviting. He was very anxious to get something that Aunt Minerva Ann would especially prize. He had loaded himself down with strings of sausages, a chunk of dried beef, a string of red peppers, a codfish and a jar of honey, when he saw a jug of New Orleans molasses that he

knew would be particularly dear to her African heart. He was almost breaking under his load already, and could not see how he was going to carry it all on his horse with his gun. But Aunt Minerva Ann was worth making an effort for, and he could not bear her missing any of these things just because he was to lazy to carry them to her, so he picked up the jug of molasses.

Shorty was getting fidgety over the delay, which every minute made more dangerous.

He saw a squad marching toward him, and gave a loud "hist" to warn Si and the rest.

"Halt! Who comes there?" he challenged, when the squad reached the distance.

"Sergeant of the Guard, with relief," was the answer.

"O, come off," answered Shorty. "You can't play that. 'Tain't time for the relief yet. What're you fellers up to? There ain't nothing 'round here you want. Only ammunition and shells. Don't come no nearer. Orders are strict that everybody must keep a good distance. Go off and hunt somewhere else. Stand back there."

"Come, guard; don't be a fool," expostulated the Sergeant, and Shorty became sure that he was trying to play a trick. "The orders are to relieve you tired men and put on fresh men from other regiments that weren't in the fight. Bring your musket to port, and stop this nonsense."

Shorty at once became the impersonation of severe military integrity.

"Stand back, there. Get offen my beat. You Illinois Suckers ought to be ashamed of yourselves, projecting around here trying to steal something, and get some poor guard into trouble. Don't think you can play your slick games on us. I'm no recruit. You just let things alone that don't belong to you, and go back to your quarters, and lay down, like decent soldiers. Get offen my beat, I tell you, or I'll have to make you."

"Just hear him gas," said the Sergeant. "You'd think he was Chaplain of the regiment. What's that you've got over your shoulder?"

"Here, guard," said the Officer of the Guard, striding up, with his sword trailing in the sand behind him. "What are you doing with this crowd? Why don't you make them get off your beat? What are you chinning with them about? Here, men, you must not get so near these magazines. Fall back, all of you. Who are you, anyway?" he continued to Shorty, studying him in the darkness and trying to recognize him. "To what company do you belong? I don't remember you when you went on. What's that you've got over your shoulder?"

"They're all loaded," exclaimed one of

the men in the rear. "They've struck something. See this man."

"Sergeant of the Guard," called the Officer loudly, "come here with the guard at once."

Si gave a whistle, yanked Pete out and started around the headquarters, followed by the rest.

The stragglers made a rush on the magazine, and there was a scramble between them, the Officer of the Guard, and the squad led by the Sergeant. The news spread through the fort like electricity that a stock of provisions and liquors had been found, and everybody was on hand in a minute to join in the looting. They were further excited by getting brief glimpses of Si and his well-laden squad making rapid progress for the sally-port of the fort.

"Well, we've got away all right, for a wonder," said Shorty, as they crossed the bridge. "I was afraid that some of those fellers would jump us and try to take away the proceeds of our honest labor."

Pete was struggling along valiantly in the rear, but it is very hard work to carry a pot of honey under your left arm, with a gallon jug of molasses and a Springfield rifle in your right, and a heavy load on your shoulders, and Pete was falling behind. A couple of soldiers noticed this and made a rush for him. Pete heard them, and in his desperation gave the honey jar a fling over the left, that he might change the molasses jug to that hand.

There was an appalling crash, for the jar struck a torpedo, and everybody was covered with a shower of clay and sand. The men pursuing Pete ran back into the fort, but Si and the rest, after finding Pete unhurt, hurried on to the house where Gen. Hazen had made his headquarters.

Si handed his ham to Shorty, smoothed himself down a little, buttoned up his blouse, entered headquarters with a military stride, took the position of a soldier, with his heels together, and formally saluted.

"General," he inquired, "have you any further orders for us? If not, shall we return to the regiment?"

"You men have been of much service to me," answered Gen. Hazen pleasantly, "and have done well the duty to which you were assigned. I'd like to keep you for a few days longer, but doubt whether I should do it without Gen. Howard's permission. I think"——

"Can you men row as well as you can ride?" asked Gen. Sherman, suddenly. Si had supposed him gone.

"Have you just come from the fort?" asked the General curtly.

"Yes, sir," answered Si, with a little apprehension girding at his heart, but still determined to tell the truth.



“THEN GLANCED UP, HORROR-STRUCK, TO SEE GEN. SHERMAN, WITH HIS AID, STANDING OVER THEM.”

"What's the occasion of all that disturbance over there?"

This was putting the spear pretty near home, but Si replied manfully:

"I think they've found a lot of rebel grub, and the boys are raiding it. Something fell on one of those torpedoes and burst it, but nobody was hurt."

An Aid came back at this moment and reported:

"It seems that some of those superlatively keen foragers of the Second Division found that one of the magazines was filled with Maj. Anderson's stock of provisions and liquors, and got in and confiscated the stuff."

The General's face flamed up with furious anger. "They did? The infernal scoundrels," he shouted. "Who allowed that? Who allowed that, I want to know? I gave express orders that Maj. Anderson's private property should be rigidly respected. He and his family are old friends of mine, and I owe that much to him. I gave strict orders that guards should be placed over everything that he said was his. I'll cashier the officers that allowed that to be done, and shoot the men who did it. I'll see whether I can have discipline or not. I never heard of such flagrant disobedience. I'll make somebody suffer for this to-morrow. Go back and tell Col. Brown that I'll hold him personally responsible for the arrest of every one engaged, beginning with the Officer of the Guard. I'll see if I can have my orders obeyed or not. Tell Col. Brown to make an immediate search for the stuff taken, and if he shoots some of the thieves in the act it will have my hearty approval. Shoot them right down, the — rascals."

Si felt a hearty wish to be back in the camp of the 200th Ind., with all his men, and possibly not so much to eat.

He stood, however, with a perfectly immovable face, looking straight at the General, with an expression of waiting for an answer to his question.

"Well, Sergeant," said the General, presently, in a quieter tone, as he calmed down, and noticed him again. "Let me see? What was it you wanted?"

"If you have nothing further for us, General," said Si, coolly, "we should like to go back to the regiment."

"Well, I don't know of anything further, just now, but I don't know what may turn up. What's your hurry? Why not stay a day or two longer? I'll make it right with your Colonel. You are valuable men, and I hate to lose you."

"Thank you, General. We'd like to stay, if there's a prospect of our being of use. But we heard tonight that the mail was going up to the army, and we're awful anxious to get our letters. Otherwise"

"That's so; that's so," said the mercurial General, his mind at once starting off on a new tack. "I appreciate your

anxiety. I'm pretty hungry for letters myself. You can"

Si could hardly wait for the conclusion of the sentence, but he was startled by the voice of Gen. Sherman, whom he had supposed gone, breaking in:

"Hold on a minute," commanded Gen. Sherman, rising from the examination of some papers. "Can you men row as well as you can ride?"

"I don't know, General," answered Si, with sinking heart. "We can try."

"I want some men to row me out to the man-of-war lying off there. Can you do it?"

"We rowed out there, sir, once, but the Captain of the ship did not speak very highly of our rowing."

"Where are your men? I'll take a look at them."

Consternation seized the listening boys, and they began dumping their loads into the jessamine hedge near which they stood.

"Better bring your men up onto the veranda, Sergeant," suggested Gen. Hazen. "It'll save the General going down."

"Come up here, boys," commanded Si.

They were in such a state of agitation as they filed up onto the veranda that Gen. Sherman was not at all impressed with them.

"Oh, no," he said, in his quick, nervous way. "You'll not do at all. Never do in the world. Dry ground's the best place for you. I wouldn't trust myself a minute in a boat with you."

"Go over to the camp of the 47th Ohio," he continued, turning to his staff. "That's an Ohio River regiment, and they must have a lot of good boatmen among them. Tell them I want six first-class oarsmen at once."

"Present my compliments to Col. McGillicuddy," said Gen. Hazen, pleasantly, to atone for Gen. Sherman's brusqueness. "Tell him that you have been of great service to me, and I thank him for you. I may ask him in a day or two to lend you again to me. I hope you'll each get several letters from your sweethearts."

"Thank you, General," said Si, saluting. "We'll always be glad to serve you whenever you want us."

"Great Jehosephat," shivered Shorty, as they fished their stufl out of the Jessamine, "I never was so scared in all my born days, as when Sherman started out to inspect us. It meant hard labor on the Dry Tortugas for every one of us, even if me and you had escaped being shot on the spot."

"It was as uncomfortably close a call as we ever had," admitted Si. "I won't breathe quite free until we're back in the camp of the 200th Injanny."

"Well, that scare's made me hungrier'n ever," said Shorty, as they got behind a hedge a little ways from headquarters, "and I feel so weak that I don't believe I can get back to camp, unless I have

something to eat. We're now out of sight of headquarters and everybody. Let's stop right here, build a fire, make some coffee and fry a little meat."

The suggestion was too welcome not to be instantly acted upon. In a few minutes the air was fragrant with the smell of boiling coffee. Some of the meal was mixed into hoecakes, and was browning before the fire; slices of ham were broiling, and Sandy and Pete were decided that Aunt Minerva Ann would not miss two of the links of sausages, if they should cut them off and broil them for themselves.

They were all so busily engaged that they did not hear footsteps approaching, and then glanced up horror-struck, to see Gen. Sherman, with one of his Aids, standing over them. He had, with his usual quick insight into the lay of the land, taken a short cut to reach his boat.

"Say, boys," he said pleasantly, "that smells awful nice. Much better than the dinner I've just had with Gen. Hazen. Like the rest of us, he's on short commons till our ships come in. What's that you are broiling there, you young roosters? Smells like sausage, and mighty good sausage, too."

"It is sausage, General," murmured Pete, more dead than alive.

"Got any more? If you have, just give me that piece and broil yourself another. There's nothing that I like so well, at this time of the year, as good, country-made sausage. You know (he continued to his Aid) those farmers up there around Lancaster, O., are the best farmers in the world, and they have the best things to

eat of anybody that lives. But there was nothing that I remember as a boy enjoying more, along in November and December, after hog-killing, than their good fresh sausage. Wonderfully good when you come in from hunting or nut-gathering. Bub (to Sandy), give your piece to the Major, here, and broil yourself another."

"Now, isn't that nice?" he continued, taking off a mouthful. "Seasoned just right—just like those Lancaster people used to. Wonder where they got their sage? Haven't noticed any in this region. I'd like to stay here and have some more, but we must hurry on. Where in the world did you get this down here, boys? But, as the darkey said, I'm too good a friend to the cullud man to ask where he got his chickens. I like to see my soldiers well-fed too well to ask many questions about where they get their grub. It is enough to know that they have it. Much obliged, young rooster, for that sausage. No; don't mind forming; no ceremony. Go on with your cooking. You're all hungry, I know. Good-by."

"Si, is my hair turning white?" Shorty asked solemnly, as the General's footsteps receded in the distance.

"Not that I can see, Shorty," answered Si, beginning to feel his appetite return.

"Well, if it ain't, there's no truth in the story that a man's hair can be bleached by a scare. The two that I've had tonight are enough to've made it look like wool."

"I want to get back to the camp of the 200th Injianny for a quiet life," murmured Si.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE BOYS ENCOUNTER MANY DIFFICULTIES, BUT FINALLY REACH THE
200TH IND. WITH THEIR BOOTY.

"Let's get back to the horses, boys," said Si, after they had satisfied their hunger. "The smell of that sausage may bring old Hazen himself out here, and we won't get off so easy as we did with Sherman. By the greatest luck in the world we caught the Old Man just right. He's tickled to death over getting the fort and opening up communications with the fleet. If we'd happened to strike him in one of his sour moods there'd 'a' been thunder and lightning round here that wouldn't 've left a grease spot of us. But we mustn't let old Hazen catch us. He'd shoot us, just to clear the reputation of his division—the thieving guerrillas."

"What them Fifteenth Corps fellers wouldn't steal," remarked Shorty, with an air of severe morality, as he picked up his ham and his demijohn, "would have to be chained down."

They found their horses all right, but had much trouble arranguig their spoils so as to carry well.

Shorty was particularly anxious about the big two-handled demijohn, which a cursory examination showed to contain fine French brandy, probably imported direct by the Major's father, and equally probably was much the choicest thing in the Major's stores. Very likely, it was reserved for great occasions, when the General commanding the district came down to inspect the fortifications. At least, it was very nearly full, and Shorty reveled in the anticipation of how the Colonel and Adjutant would prize it.

"Won't the Old Man just cackle to the rest about his demijohn of fine imported French brandy, brought right from the private cellar of the commandant of Fort McAllister?" he chuckled to Si. "Nobody else in all the army'll have anything half so good. It'll make the Commissary and pine-top that they've bin drinking taste like camphene and turpentine. The Colonel'll send for the Brigadier-General, and mebbe the Major-General. And when he has to go to their tents, and they offer him nothing but plain Commissary, or this Georgia sorghum, he'll say, 'Scuse me; my foragers keep me supplied with imported liquors, and I've got so used to them that I really can't make up my mouth to home-made sod-corn, that makes me feel like as if I was swallowing a torchlight procession. Come over to my tent, and I'll give you something that'll

make you dream you're a French Dook, with ostrich feathers in your hat six feet long, and flirting with the Emprèss Eugeny.' That's what he'll say. But how in Georgy, which is the other name for the infernal place, am I going to rig this thing on the horse's back so's it'll carry?"

For further precaution he wrapped it up in his blanket, but this did not solve the problem of transportation.

He gave his ham to Si, that he might devote his entire attention to the demijohn. He threw his gun over his shoulder, in its sling, and took the demijohn in his right hand to carry it by his side, while he managed his reins, cavalry fashion, with his left. He had scarcely started this way, when he became alarmed lest some other horse would bump against it, or his own side up against a tree. He dismounted again, borrowed Si's blanket, and made a cushion in front of him, on which he could set the precious vessel, and hold it close to him.

Pete was having even more trouble with his jug of molasses. A jug is a miserable thing to carry at best, and on horseback it becomes devilish. Besides, he was heavily weighted down with his other load. His strings of sausage and red pepper, thrown over his shoulder like an Officer of the Day's scarf; his chunk of dried beef, and fitch of side-meat, made a big load in themselves. Sandy could not help him, for Sandy had very much more than he would have loaded himself with on fatigue duty.

The boys slung their guns over their shoulders, and with the assistance of their comrades managed to mount. Pete held his jug on his pommel in front of him.

It was a clear, frosty, star-lit night, and they started back to camp in high spirits. They made good progress for a time, and as the road was smooth Shorty and Pete did not have any serious trouble with their tender vessels.

Presently they heard horses' hoofs coming at a rapid rate over the bit of shell road nearly a mile behind.

"Sounds as if it might be officers, Shorty," said Si. "May be even Gen. Hazen himself. If they're officers they're likely to be too condemned curious about what enlisted men have and where they get it. If it should be Gen. Hazen he wouldn't be curious; he'd be furious."

"We're confining our official acquaint-

ance now to them that's in the 200th Infantry," answered Shorty. "No others need apply till this cruel ride is over. Let's cut off in the brush there to the left, and let 'em go by."

"I was sure I saw them just ahead, a little while ago," said one of the Aids, as the horsemen passed. "I guess they're not far off now, and we'll catch up with them after we pass this swamp. I wonder why the General didn't keep those Indiana fellows while he had them. It'd saved us all this ride after them. I'm not in the humor for riding tonight. I've been in the saddle since before day-break."

"So have I," responded the other.

"I wonder what he wants those Indiana men so bad for, any way?" persisted the first. "He didn't think he needed them when he dismissed them, and nothing's come up since."

"I believe he's an idea that they got away with some particularly fine stuff from those stores of Maj. Anderson's."

"And does he think he can find any of that stuff on them?" asked the first with fine scorn. "They're no recruits. They're old hands. If they stole a haystack you couldn't find so much as a head of clover on them when you came to search them. He ought to know that; he's tried it often enough, the Lord knows."

"I should think so. I heard that they played some trick on the guard—the old relief trick—to get at the stuff. That's a breach of discipline that makes the General hot under the collar. It riles him to have outsiders come in from another division and eucher his men. It grinds."

"All the same, I'll bet we're being punished worse than they'll be," remarked the Aid, disconsolately, as they passed out of hearing.

"So the Old Man's after us?" remarked Si. "Well, let him catch us. He's mad because we've outwitted his division. Let's see if he's any smarter'n the rest of 'em. We'll follow right along after them Aids."

"But they'll get to the pickets first, and order them to stop us," suggested Shorty.

"Well, we'll have to try to get to the pickets somewhere else. This road's too good to leave just now. Forward—march!"

A mile farther on they met a string of wagons going down to the fort, with the camp equipage of the division.

"Say," said the Wagon-Master, after they had exchanged information as to one another, "I'll jest bet you're the fellers them two Aids is after that we met up the road. Mighty sappy Lieutenants they wuz. Inquired if we'd seen you, and when we told 'em we hadn't, said we lied; we'd bin bribed to say nothing about you. I axed 'em if they ever knowed a teamster to lie, or be bribed, and they told me to shut up my joshing, or they'd bust my

head; I was nothing but a mullet-headed maltreater of mules, nollow. That's the way they talked to me, the Assistant Wagon-Master of the division. Some men think that bekase they wear shoulder-straps nobody else's got no rights of free speech. Teamster's treated like dogs in the army, and yit the army couldn't git along an hour without 'em. If I kin ketch them Lieutenants in citizens' clothes I'll bust their heads, just to show 'em I'm a gentleman and their ekal. Say, what does a mullet-headed maltreater of mules mean, anyway? Is it a shooting word?"

"Indeed it is," said Shorty, solemnly. "I'd never let a man live who called me that."

"So I thought," raged the Assistant Chief Wagon-Master. "The shoulder-strapped upstarts. I'll get even with 'em some day for that if it takes me as long as I live. See if I don't. To think that they'd expect us to tell on you. That teamsters'd go back on soldiers, for the sake of officers! What in the world'd they take us for? Even if we'd 'a' knowed we'd bin strung up before we'd 'a' told."

"That we would," chorused the teamsters.

There is where he over-played the part. This profession of affection of teamsters for soldiers was too strong a strain on the credulity, and Si and Shorty drew back a little and began wondering what his game was. It was revealed by a yell from Pete:

"Let go, there! Go off! You shan't have them things!"

Si and Shorty glanced around, and the whole plot was at once apparent. The officers had let the teamsters know of the booty the squad had secured. The moment the teamsters had come up with the boys they had recognized them, and determined to secure the spoils for themselves. They had contrived a plot. While the Assistant Wagon-Master was interesting Si and Shorty with his chatter the teamsters were quietly dismounting from their wheel-mules, and slipping up alongside ready for a rush when the Wagon-Master should give the signal. As the boys all had their guns slung over their shoulders, and their hands were full, the teamsters anticipated little trouble, especially as they had two stout men for every one of the squad.

"Go for 'em, boys!" shouted the Wagon-Master, spurring his horse forward to grapple the apparently logy and certainly encumbered Si. Many people beside the Wagon-Master had mistaken Si for logy and slow, but none of them was ever more quickly undeceived. Si had his own meat fastened to his saddle, and was carrying in his right hand the large ham Shorty had given him. He waited until the Wagon-Master had reached just the right distance, and then the hand and ham

came up like a flash and knocked the would-be smart Wagon-Master out of his saddle as suddenly as if he had been shot. Si was out of his own saddle the next instant, to go to the help of the others.

Shorty was more deliberate, as he thought there was time. He gave a kick with his long leg at the teamster who tried to pull him down, which sent that worthy into the brush with the impression that his side was permanently caved in, and then carefully dismounting put his precious demijohn behind a tree, for protection against accidents, joined in the melee.

Tom Radbone, having only the sack of meal to look out for, was freer than the others, and the first to arrive at Pete's side, but Abe Grimstead came up the next instant. Pete was holding on to his jug of molasses for dear life, and kicking and howling, while the teamsters had Sandy down and were stripping him of his plunder.

Hampered as they were, with their guns over their shoulders, and other impediments, Si, Shorty, Tom and Abe were more than a match in fisticuffs for any number of teamsters that could run up against them, and they speedily had the whole gang lying in the road, or the bushes at the side. When the soldiers struck they knew who they were hitting, and where to hit, while the teamsters' blows were frequently at random.

"Let this be a lesson in honesty to you," said Shorty, giving the last one a sounding kick. "It's sinful for teamsters to jump soldiers at any time and try to take the property they have gained by honest toil. It's worse'n sinful—it's bad judgment, for you're pretty sure to get licked. Soldiers don't go out and capture grub just to give it up to teamsters, as soon as they get back to camp. Let this moral lesson sink into your young minds, and keep you from the ways of iniquity hereafter. Don't never try to rush soldiers, no matter what advantage you may think you have. Rushing and being rushed is the soldier's little biz, and he can always play the game better'n any teamster that ever straddled a mule. If you'll let this great truth soak into your understanding it'll save you a great deal of trouble in the future."

And by way of impressing it upon them, Shorty conscientiously sought out each one, and gave him a sounding kick in the ribs.

Then the boys readjusted their loads, remounted, and pursued their journey, with Shorty carefully nursing his demijohn in front of him.

The excitement of the affair had made Si forget about the officers who had gone ahead and the possible warnings given the pickets.

The moon had come out brightly, and as they approached a wide stretch of open ricefields, beyond which they expected the

pickets would be stationed, they saw the two officers coming from a distance to the right and left of the main road, whither they had gone in search of the elusive squad. Their horses looked jaded, and moved as if worn out, and the officers lumped down in their saddles from sheer fatigue. The roads upon which they were coming converged to the main road a half-mile ahead, and Si instantly concluded that there was the main picket.

"I don't see anything to do but to rush those pickets, Shorty," he conferred with his partner. "We've got to take chances of being shot, which ain't much, for everything's been mighty quiet out on this front, and the boys ain't alert. They're probably all asleep, except the one on post, and he's thinking much more about the mail that's to come in tomorrow than about any rebels out here. We can slip down under the shadows of that brush there, until we get within a couple hundred yards of the post. Then we can go through on the gallop, and if we're caught we'll pretend that we thought them officers out there were rebels leading squads to cut us off."

"All right," agreed Shorty, adjusting himself for the rush. "I guess I'll put this demijohn behind me somehow, so's to shelter it from any chance shot."

He changed his cushion to the cantle of his saddle, and finally got his demijohn on it, holding it in position with his hands behind his back. With injunctions as to silence, Si led the squad along the grass and weeds at the side of the road, where they would be covered by the shadow of the bushes, now thrown forward by the westerling moon, and their horses' hoofs make no noise. They heard nothing from the picket, but away beyond they could see the dim light of a smoldering fire, where the reserve was stationed.

"We'll strike right for that fire," said Si, "and pretend to the reserve that we're foragers being chased. Them officers'll ride after us, but we'll leave them and the pickets to settle things between them, while we're making for camp. Them officers never can catch us in the world, on them tired horses."

When they reached the point in the road aimed at, Si whispered loudly,

"Now, boys," and set the spurs into his horse's flanks.

They all swept forward at a gallop, with a great clatter.

Instantly came a shot from the picket, which went through the skirt of Shorty's overcoat. It was quickly followed by other more random shots, as the other pickets sprang up, seized their guns, fired to give the alarm, and ran back toward the reserve, before the galloping horsemen.

"Don't shoot, boys! Don't shoot!" shouted Si, at the top of his voice. "We're friends. Hooray for the Union!"

"O, goodness," wailed Pete, above the

din; "I've broke my jug o' molasses, and it's run all over me."

"Hold on, Lieutenant," Si shouted to the officer who was lining up the reserve to meet the rush. "Don't fire on us. We're Union. We belong to the 200th Injanny Volunteer Infantry. We've bin down helping take the fort, and are now on our way back to the regiment. We saw some men out there that we thought was trying to cut us off, and we made a rush to get to the forks of the road first, and we run into your pickets."

"O, is that it?" answered the Lieutenant. "Recover—arms! Order—arms! Parade—rest! How many men are out there, Sergeant?"

"I don't know," answered Si, truthfully. "We saw only two, but we didn't like their actions, and made a rush to get past the crossroads, ahead of them."

"You were in a devil of a hurry for only two men," remarked the Lieutenant, in not very good humor over the disturbance. "Seems to me you might have stopped and found out who they were, and whether there was anybody behind them. But go on to your regiment that you're so anxious to reach. Ser'g't Brown, take these pickets back to their post, and take a good look around the front."

"Great Jehosephat!" muttered Shorty, examining the bullet-hole as they rode away. "That was an awful close call. That picket wasn't near as sleepy as we imagined. I believe if I'd had that demijohn in front of me the bullet'd 'a' gone through it. It scares me to think of it. I guess I'll put the demijohn around in front now. It may come into those fellers' head to shoot after us."

"O, my," wailed Pete. "All of Aunt Minerva Ann's molasses is gone, and it's run all over my legs and Abednego. Will it hurt him?"

"It's probably fatal, Pete," said Shorty. "He'll probably catch cold in his mortification over its being outside his hide instead of inside, and never got over the loss."

"To think how far I carried them molasses!" whimpered Pete, "and how much Aunt Minerva Ann liked them, and would 've enjoyed them!"

"Shut up, Pete," said Si sharply. "Keep quiet, everybody. Listen."

"Them Aids have reached the pickets," he continued to Shorty. "They've halted 'em. They'll get inside and come after us. Let's light out for camp. They can never overtake us on them tired horses."

They got across the Ogeechee without trouble, and reached their own camp just as reveille was sounding.

Bare-headed, and in his shirt, pantaloons and shoes, the Adjutant was standing in front of his tent, overlooking the awakening of the regiment, when Si and his squad rode up.

"Hello, boys," he shouted cordially.

"You've got back, have you? Now I know the fort's taken. We heard it was, last evening, but it was only a camp rumor."

"Yes, Adjutant, the fort's taken," answered Si. "Purtiest little fight you ever saw. Only lasted 12 minutes, but it was a scorcher, from the first note of the bugle. Couldn't've got livelier work inside of every minute. We wuz inside the fort as soon as anybody."

"Whoopee! I know you were," shouted the mercurial Adjutant.

"What's that?" inquired the Colonel, sticking a frowsy head out of his tent.

"Fort McAllister's taken, and our boys were with the head of the column," said the Adjutant.

"Good," said the Colonel, withdrawing his head. "Only I ordered Klegg to keep out of the fight."

"And, Adjutant, the mail-boat came right up, and will be here today, sometime."

"Whoopee—Whoopee!" shouted the Adjutant. "I'll get a stack of letters from her."

"And, Adjutant, we couldn't bring you a flag from the fort," said Shorty, "because there wasn't none that anybody could find; but we've brought you a fine ham, and a demijohn of"—

"Come back here, where the Colonel can't hear you," said the Adjutant.

"Don't mind me. I've gone to sleep again," called the Colonel.

"We've brought you a demijohn of real, imported French brandy—here, you can see for yourself, on the label—right from the private stock of the commander of the fort," said Shorty, after they had gone behind the tent.

"Goodness; come over here farther, where the Colonel can't possibly hear you," whispered the excited Adjutant.

"Old Hazen's just tearing mad about our getting the things," said Si. "We yanked them right out from under the noses of his guards."

"The devil you did?" exclaimed the delighted Adjutant. "Took them right away from under his guards?"

"Yes; and he's hotter'n a hornet about it. He didn't find it out until after he'd dismissed us, and we'd gone, and then he sent a couple of Aids after us to bring us back where he could skin us alive. We dodged 'em all the way back, but they'll probably come clear here after us."

"They'll have a lively time getting you," remarked the Adjutant, grimly. "Say, you haven't reported to me yet, you know," he added meaningly. "This is merely a little informal visit, which don't count and nobody knows anything about. Don't be in a hurry about reporting. Tomorrow morning, or the day after, will do just as well."

"But we want to get our letters," said Si, apprehensively, "just as soon as they



"COME BACK HERE, WHERE THE COLONEL CAN'T HEAR YOU," SAID THE ADJUTANT.

come in. That's one reason why we hurried back."

"Don't worry about your mail. It'll be promptly sent to your address," the Adjutant assured him. "And you snatched this stuff right from the rebel commander's private locker, right under the nose of Hazen's guards?" the Adjutant

chuckled, looking over the demijohn fondly. "Yes, here's the direction, still on the demijohn: 'To Major Geo. W. Anderson, commanding Fort McAllister.' Wou't that be something to show and crow over? It'll be some time before I let those smart Alecks in the Fifteenth Corps hear the last of this. They think they

are so everlastingly cute, and the Fourteenth Corps is only a lot of jays."

"The brandy's fine—prime—first-class—best I ever tasted," he continued, smacking his lips over a taste. "But it ain't anything to the rub on old Hazen, and the Fifteenth Corps smarties. I wouldn't take a \$100 bill for that direction on the demijohn. Tell me all about how you got it. Speak low, so the Colonel can't hear, nor anybody else."

Si gave a full account.

"And, Adjutant, I feel awful sorry about that alligator meat," said Sandy, stopping up. "We really didn't intend to fool you. I've brought you this string of sausage to make up for it."

"Alligator meat?" said the Adjutant. "O, yes, I recollect now. O, that's all right. We got that back with big interest off the Brigadier-General. Had more fun than a box of monkeys. And did this come from the rebel commander's private stock, too?"

"Yes, indeed. Everything did."

"Well, you fellows beat the world. Make yourselves scarce now. Go back to your quarters, and devote yourselves to getting a good rest. Get a good one while you're at it."

Pete rode over to where Aunt Minerva Ann was grumbling her discontent as she laid pieces of cypress on the fire, preparatory to cooking the Colonel's breakfast. Among other reasons for profound discontent with the low country was cypress wood for the fire. It did not burn nor smell as any wood she had been accustomed to in the hill-region, and therefore she hated it. She was wailing bitterly, as the sound of Abednego's hoofs made her raise her eyes. She saw the string of red peppers across Pete's breast, the string of sausage next, and the smear of molasses over his legs and over Abednego. The idea that flashed into her mind mechanically was that Pete had been terribly mutilated and he and Abednego were daubed with his blood. She proceeded to fall over into a fit of shrieking hysterics.

Everybody rushed up to see what was the matter. Pete, as soon as he could disengage himself from his sticky saddle, clambered down, and leaving a trail of molasses, ran to her side.

"What in the world's the matter, Auntie?" he inquired, anxiously. "Has something bit you? Have you cramps? What've you bin eating?"

"O, my honey-boy's dead at last. Dey've killed him, as I knowed dey would," she wailed between fits. "Dey's done tore him all to pieces."

"Are you meaning me, Auntie?" asked Pete, finally comprehending. "Well, they hain't killed me, by a long shot—40 rows of apple trees. Look up here, Auntie. I'm as live a boy as they make 'em, though I'm awful tired and hungry. But see what I've brung you."

And Pete laid down the flitch of bacon,

the hunk of dried beef, and began pulling off the strings over his shoulders.

Aunt Minerva Ann's convulsions had abated at the sound of his voice, and ceased as Pete stripped off the peppers and held them out in his hand.

"Fore de Lawd, honey-boy, I done t'ought dem was yer innards, when I fust looked at you, and I wuz done skeered to deff."

"I had a gallon jug of the best New Orleans molasses, which I gobbled for you, and carried almost here," said Pete, showing the handle of the jug, as corroboration, "but the jug got busted in the rush through our lines."

"Pete," said the Adjutant, who came back to give Aunt Minerva Ann the viands to cook, "you're like a girls' school in the country—mo' lasses than boys—sweet but refined. Lucky it isn't Summer, or the bees would eat you up."

An hour later, while Si and the rest were sleeping on full stomachs and piles of rice straw, the sleep of youth and fatigue, two unutterably tired young Lieutenants, who were seeking Col. McGillicuddy's tent, presented themselves, and were most cordially received by the Colonel and Adjutant.

"We belong to the staff of Gen. Hazen," they explained, "and present his compliments to you."

"Glad to meet you, gentlemen," said the Colonel. "Come in and be seated. Gen. Hazen, I understand, performed a very brilliant feat yesterday, and captured Fort McAllister. Please take my warmest congratulations to him, express my sincere hopes that the additional star, which he earned a long time ago, will now come to him at once."

"Thank you, Colonel."

"You look very tired, gentlemen. Adjutant, haven't we something we can offer these gentlemen?"

"Certainly, Colonel," said the Adjutant, appearing with some glasses, which he handed around.

"Why, Colonel, this is not Commissary, at all," said one of the Aids, sipping his drink with the air of a connoisseur. "If I'm any judge, this is fine old French brandy. Where in the world did you get it?"

"I don't know," answered the Colonel. "Where did we get it, Adjutant?"

"Why, Colonel," answered the Adjutant, with easy assurance, "you remember that fine stock of wines found back there on the plantation we passed just this side of Milledgeville, that the General distributed among regimental headquarters?"

"O, yes, yes," answered the Colonel.

"Well, this isn't any of that," added the Adjutant to himself, as a salve for his conscience.

"By the way, would you let me look at the bottle," said one of the Aids. "I'm a

little of a sharp on age and brands, and I'd like to verify my guess."

"Yes. Where did I put it?" said the Adjutant, apparently looking around for the bottle. "I remember; there was just four drinks left, and I have had to divide 'em up. I didn't bring it in."

"I'd like very much to see it, and take it, if it's empty."

"I'll look for it," said the Adjutant, going back into the other tent.

"I think Aunt Minerva Ann must have breakfast ready, and I hope you gentlemen will join me. I know you must be very hungry," said the Colonel.

"Very, Colonel," they answered.

It was really a capital breakfast they sat down to. A little flour had been found somewhere, of which Aunt Minerva Ann had made very good biscuits; she had broiled the ham and the sausage to a turn, and with plenty of coffee a first-class meal smoked on the board.

"Country-made sausage, and excellent ones," said the Aid. "I haven't tasted anything so good since I left Ohio. Where in the world did you get them, Colonel?"

"I don't know. I never ask any questions. Providence and Aunt Minerva Ann run my kitchen. I take whatever's set before me and return thanks."

"And such delicious ham, too. I'm sorry, Colonel, to requite all this with the performance of an unpleasant duty. Those men you lent the General for guides proved themselves most valuable."

"I'm very glad to hear it," said the Colonel. "But I knew they would do well. They are good representatives of the 200th Ind."

"But after doing so well, and assisting in the capture of the fort, the General has reason to believe that they were the ones who succeeded in breaking into the private stores of Maj. Anderson, the commandant of Fort McAllister, and carrying away a large amount of his private property. You see, Gen. Hazen is an old time friend of Maj. Anderson and his family. When the General was a Lieutenant stationed down here, he was quite intimate with the Anderson family, and received many favors from them. He was quite anxious to show every courtesy to Maj. Anderson, and gave strict orders that his private property should be carefully respected. But somehow your men managed to get away with the guards, and obtain property."

"Never could have been my men," said the Colonel warmly. "You don't know those men. I'd trust them with all the money in the Treasury. That Serg't Klegg is the soul of honor. I know him and his family. There isn't a better man in the State than Deacon Klegg, and I'd trust Serg't Klegg or any of his men with any sum of uncounted money. No, sir; he wouldn't steal. Have another piece of this ham, Lieutenant. It is very good."

"What! Klegg and his crowd steal!"

said the Adjutant, with an expression of horror. "Never in the world. I only wish everybody was as honest as Serg't Klegg and his squad. Take that other piece of sausage, Lieutenant. You don't know when you'll get another like it."

"That's true," said the Lieutenant, helping himself. "All the same, I'm very sorry to say that the circumstantial evidence appeared so strong to the General that he sent us to bring the men back to him for examination. We haven't been able to find them, and we came on to you to ask that upon their arrival in camp you will order them to return to Gen. Hazen."

"Tell Gen. Hazen," said the Colonel, "that just as soon as the men arrive—report (he speedily corrected himself) I shall subject them to the most searching examination, and if any evidence is found I shall bring them before a court-martial."

"Why not order them to return at once to Gen. Hazen's headquarters?"

"Well," said the Colonel, debating, as if about to accede.

"Let me see," broke in the Adjutant. "Didn't you say that Gen. Hazen had dismissed them to their regiment?"

"Yes; I think he did."

"Well, in that case, as they belong to another corps, and even another army, they cannot be returned, without orders from the Generals commanding the corps and the army."

"I didn't think of that," admitted the Aid.

"Well, we'll do all we can," said the Colonel, cordially. "I understand precisely Gen. Hazen's feelings, and he naturally feels outraged. Tell him that I'll do all I can. Hadn't you better lie down in my quarters and take a rest before starting back? No? Well, Adjutant, let's have a stirrup cup of that brandy, if there's any more, for these gentlemen."

The Adjutant had taken the precaution to pour some of the brandy into an empty whisky bottle, and now handed it around.

"Well," said the Aid, looking at the bottle, "I never saw such good brandy as that come out of a sutler's whisky bottle. There must have been a mistake in the bottling place, and it was a costly one for them."

"Give my warmest congratulations to Gen. Hazen upon his victory," said the Colonel, as they shook hands to ride away.

"Orderly," said the Adjutant, coming back to where Pete was vigorously washing the molasses out of Abednego's hair, "go down to Serg't Klegg and tell him quietly that there will be an inspection of his men and quarters tomorrow morning. Tomorrow morning, recollect."

"If those boys have any of that stuff left by tomorrow morning," the Adjutant chuckled to himself as he walked back to the tent, "their appetites are failing. Tomorrow is as soon as Hazen can expect a report."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

PATSY THE KINCH PROVIDES A NEW FORM OF ENTERTAINMENT—ARRIVAL OF THE MAIL.

The boys were awakened from their deep slumber about noon the next day by the most tumultuous cheering they had ever heard in camp since they had been in the army.

"What in time is up?" inquired Si, rubbing his eyes. "Has Grant took Richmond, or Thomas walted the immortal stuffing out o' Hood?"

"No," said Pete, who had been investigating, "an officer's just come up from King's Bridge, who says that the mail-boat's there, and they're now sorting out the mail according to the corps and divisions, and it'll be up here presently."

"The mail!" gasped Shorty. "I wonder if I'll get anything from"—

He stopped short, and his sun-burned face grew as red as a September pumpkin, for he feared he was revealing to the world the deepest secret as well as the most fervent wish of his heart.

"The mail?" said Si, with a flush of happy expectation reddening his face. "There ought to be several letters there from Annabel—my wife." He grew redder still, for this was the first time he had ever ventured to speak out loud the sacred name of "my wife." "When's the mail likely to be up here, Pete?"

"Didn't think to ask," answered Pete. "I ain't going to get no letters, so I didn't worry about when it come. Say, Sandy, do you suppose we could find some of them oysters growing on trees if we went over to the river?"

"Now, Pete," admonished Shorty. "You just keep away from the water, unless I'm along. You can get into quite enough trouble, for all practical purposes, on dry land. You'll have enough to do to take care of yourself from the Johnnies, without having unnecessary tackles with alligators, sharks, and devil-fish."

"Well, I guess none o' them has killed me yet," grumbled Pete, sitting down on the ground beside Sandy, at Shorty's command. "They astonished me a little at first, but I know all about 'em now."

The restless youngsters, boy-like, chafing under their enforced inactivity, immediately began whispering to one another suggestions and propositions to make the rest of the day lively, while Si and the rest were all eagerness about the mail, and could think of nothing else.

Harry, Monty, Alf and Gid were all

expecting letters from mothers and sisters, and with possibly even more anxiety from girls, not yet progressed to the definiteness of sweethearts, who had promised to write, or whom they hoped would think enough of them to do so.

Pete and Sandy were still at the hobbled-hoy period, when "girls' letters" and everything relating to them were scornfully regarded as weaknesses to which "men" should be superior.

Nor did Abe Grimstead expect letters. He would have given much if he could. For three long years he had been as dead to his family, and to one who had promised to be his wife, and to wait for him, while he went South to earn the higher wages there, the sooner to provide themselves with a home. Was she unmarried and still waiting for him, or had she shaken him off as a rebel and a traitor, absolutely unworthy of her? That the rebels had forced him into this appearance to her gave a positive venom to his hatred of them, and a savageness to his acts that surpassed even Tom Radbone's bitterness for the insults and oppressions he had endured at their hands. It was always before Abe Grimstead's eyes that the rebels had in all probability robbed him of the woman he loved as well as of the three years of his life that he wanted to devote to building a home for her. This made him bitterly vindictive against every one who in any way represented the Confederacy.

Tom Radbone, on the other hand, had been able to communicate with his family and his betrothed before the army started on the march, and to get the glad news that she was still unmarried, and apparently waiting for him. He had written to her, and expected a letter from her.

"Say, cullies," said Patsy the Kinch, coming up breathlessly, "I've fixed it up with some of the boys over there to have an alligator fight. 'Twill be more fun than a three-ringed circus, with a dozen clowns, and band o' minstrels t'rowed in. Holy Gee, but it'll be a lark. Youze mustn't miss it for nothing."

"An alligator fight?" queried the boys, pricking up their ears. "Who's going to fight the alligators?"

"Why, don't you twig? The 'gators is going to fight themselves, Dat's where de

stacks o' fun comes in. It's lively fun fightin' them youze self, but it ain't a marker to having theize fight theyselves. But I hain't no time to gas. Youze see where dem two tall cyprusses is? Well, youze just break for dem. Don't lose no time, for de certain'll raise jest's soon I kin git over dere."

"A fight between two alligators?" exclaimed the boys, gathering themselves up, with the light of keen anticipation in their eyes. "Why, that'll be something to see. That'll be just a he-old scrap. Let's get over there, at once—mustn't miss that."

"Orderly," said the Adjutant, coming on, and addressing himself to Pete, "you and Baker saddle up at once, and go over to Division Headquarters for the mail. Here's the order for it. Be spry, now, for everybody's crazy for his letters."

"Concern it," grumbled Pete, as the Adjutant passed out of hearing, and he looked around sourly for Abednego's saddle and bridle. "That's the way in the army. They never want a boy to have no fun. He just come down here and give me that order to make me miss that fight. I never get to see nothing. Somebody's always interfering just that way."

"Dog-gone it," echoed Sandy Baker, with a longing look at the two cyprusses; "if they wanted the mail in such a hurry why didn't they send some of these fellers who are so crazy to get letters from their girls? I never could see any sense in a fellow being struck on a girl. Gives him more trouble and worry than anything else in the world. And what's the good, any how? What use are girls, I'd like to know? They're always in the way, and you can't do this, and you mustn't do that, because there are girls around."

"That's so," agreed Pete. "They make so much trouble that I sometimes wish there wasn't no girls nowhere. Us men'd get along lots better."

"Hustle, there, boys," commanded Si, sharply. "Get a move on yourselves. We're all anxious for our letters."

"Jump, there, Pete," added Shorty. "What's the matter with you? You're slower than molasses in Winter."

In their impatience Si and Shorty, and finally the others, rushed over to the steeds and helped Pete and Sandy saddle, and lifted them to their seats.

"Now, don't let the grass grow under your feet, you young rascals," Si admonished them, giving Abednego a sharp cut with a switch to emphasize his words. "We're all on needles till we get our letters."

"Concern 'em," muttered Pete, angrier than ever, because of the treatment of Abednego; "why don't they ride their own hosses to death, if they're in such a plaguey hurry for letters from their spougey girls? S'pose I'm going to stove up Abednego just to get a passel of love-sick trash for a lot o' growed-up men to

philander over? I ain't a-going to do it for nobody. Steady, Abednego. Slow down, old feller. No need o' breaking your neck. Nobody shan't hit you again. Poor boy! Steady, now! Take it easy."

And he turned and rubbed the mule's hanch soothingly, for they were now out of sight, behind a clump of Osage orange.

"Say, Pete," said the wily Sandy, who had been studying the lay of the land. "we can go over to headquarters and get the mail, and then come back by the way of those cyprusses. 'Tain't much further that way, and we can give an excuse that we thought the road better."

"All right, then; let's hurry up," replied Pete, digging his spurs remorsefully into Abednego's hide. "Git out o' here, you lazy, fatherless imp. We don't want to miss any of that fun. You kin loaf all you please on the way back."

"Yes, hurry up," urged Sandy. "Don't you see them all making their way over there? There's going to be an awful crowd. We'll be late if we don't hurry."

They dashed down to Division Headquarters to find two sacks of mail for their regiment almost ready for them. The smaller one, which contained the letters, Pete took up in front of him, while the larger one, containing the papers and magazines, was handed over to Sandy.

They rode away impatiently, for they could hear shouts coming from the direction of the cyprusses.

In the meanwhile Patsy the Kinch had gathered his forces around the cyprusses, and laid out the campaign for them. He had found two alligator holes within a rod of one another, and was satisfied that each contained a lively young reptile of about the age and size to make a good fight.

A stalwart boy from the 200th Ind. had provided himself with a long, stout, green pole, sharpened at the end, and was stationed by the west hole, with three of his comrades near by to help, and while the champion of the 1st Oshkosh, similarly equipt and accompanied, was put at the east hole.

Patsy the Kinch, swelling with all the importance he had seen assumed by ring-masters of the P. R., stationed himself on a high cypruss knee and gave directions, in a voice of certain authority. It was his day of glory.

Fully 1,000 men of the brigade had learned of the "event," and had gathered around. The cypruss knees were crowded with them, and every limb of the surrounding trees loaded to the breaking point with those who had climbed up to get "box-seats," as Patsy termed them. Soldier-like, they all wanted to bet, and as they were well-loaded with Confederate money, the bets ran up into immense amounts before the game was called.

"Gentlemen," called out an enthusiastic Hoosier, "I don't know the first blamed thing about this hippodrome, but I'll bet-



“ABEDNEGO WAS ON HIS FEET LIKE A FLASH, AND HAD DELIVERED A KICK WITH HIS UNERRING AIM.”

\$100 blind that Injianny wins the first heat; \$200 that she wins the second; \$300 that she wins the third, and \$500 that she wins all three.”

And he flashed a big roll of Confederate and began to skin off the bills.

“Gentlemen,” answered a no less confi-

dent Badger, “my Sunday school teacher always hammered it into me that it was the wrongest thing in the world to be bet against a lay-out that I didn’t understand, but I’ll see that ager-faced Indianian and raise him \$1,000 that old Wisconsin gets first blood, second blood,

third blood, and the first knock-down. Hooray for Wisconsin!"

"Gentlemen," said Patsy, in the usual tone of ring proclamations, as he caught sight of Shorty, who had strolled over to see what the excitement was, and to while away the time until the mail should arrive and be distributed, "I appoint Corp'l Shorty, of the 200th Ind., and Wagonmaster Shuck Dilworth, of the 1st Oshkosh, referees. Theyze-ll keep order. Gentlemen, this is a fight to a finish, with all holts allowed, and all blows fair and regular. No fouls is to be claimed on no account. You men with the poles, are youze ready?"

"All ready, sir."

"Den, when I clap my hands de third time, youze'll ram youze poles down into de holes, an' prod de 'gators. When dey ketch hold, youze'll say so, an' wait for de word to haul out. Only three men must take hold of each pole to help haul out, an' youze must haul fair an' square, an' bring 'em both out at de same time."

"We understand," said the men, spitting on their hands, while their helpers closed in a little nearer.

"One, two, three; run de poles down," called Patsy, clapping his hands as he counted.

The poles went down with a vigorous prod as they reached the bottom. A few more, and the men felt the powerful jaws of the vicious reptiles close upon them.

"They've taken hold," the pole-men both reported at the same instant.

The boys broke into loud cheers.

"Dog-fall! Dead-heat," decided Shorty and Shuck in the same breath. "All bets on first event are off."

"Haul away," commanded Patsy, amid more cheering.

The three helpers sprang to the poles, and the spectators watched for a minute with breathless interest the struggle with the giant lizzards, and then began shouting encouragement to the different sides.

"Pull, there, Hoosiers," shouted the Indians. "Straighten your backs, you prairie-dogs. What's the matter with you? Were you fed on sod-corn, that turned your back-bones to putty? Pull, you Vigo County mules."

"Yank him out, you limp and lazy Badgers!" yelled the Wisconsin men. "Yank him out! What's eating you? Think he's froze in there? Show your Winnebago muscles."

Each side was sweating in its efforts to get ahead of the other, but the two ugly snouts showed above ground at the same instant, amid the wild yells of the spectators.

"Dead heat again," shouted Shorty and Shuck. "All bets on second event are off."

"Jerk theyze out an' t'ard each other, an' jump away quick," shouted Patsy. "Keep clear o' theyze tails."

The men made a prodigious effort,

snatched the reptiles out and to within a few feet of one another, and sprang back into the crowd, amid the cheers of the excited throng.

The hideous brutes, each mistaking the other for the intruder upon his Winter's nap, glared upon one another with a terrible look in their ugly green eyes, and the air stank sickeningly of musk.

"A thousand dollars on the Indiana beauty," shouted a Hoosier, holding his nose, and brandishing 10 \$100 Confederate bills "A thousand dollars that knocks the Wisconsin musk-factory out"

"Five thousand dollars on the Pride of Wisconsin," replied an enthusiastic Badger, trying to keep from gagging at the noisome odor "If he's only as strong as he smells he'll make mince-meat of the Hoosier stink-bag. Five thousand dollars on the Winnebago County Terror."

With a hoarse, dull roar, and a quickness that was inconceivable in their lumbering forms, the two enraged reptiles sprang at one another. The one the 200th Ind. was betting on made a savage snap at the other's foreleg with his long, cruel jaws, but received a crashing slap from the other's tail that turned him over on his side.

"Hooray! First knock-down for Wisconsin! Wisconsin's the dandy! Winnebago County! W-i-n-n-e-b-a-g-o! W-i-n-n-e-b-a-g-o!" shouted the delighted Oshkosh fellows.

"I acknowledge the first knock-down," said Shorty. "Our fellows'll get his second wind, though, and settle yours."

"I'll trouble you for that \$1,000, Indiana," said the Wisconsin man, and the "Confederate" was passed over to him.

The alligators were now approaching each other more warily, but delivering and dodging blows from each other's tails with a swiftness that was beyond the eye to follow. They changed position so rapidly that Shorty and Shuck began disputing which was the Indiana champion, and which the Wisconsin, and the dispute extended to the spectators.

The alligators suddenly widened the circle they were making, and the excited on-lookers rushed back to avoid blows from their awful tails.

At that unlucky juncture Pete came pacing up, excited lest he lose all the fun. A sweep of one of the tails caught Abednego, just on the balance, and over he went, scattering Pete and his bag of letters all over the battleground.

There was a yell of dismay from all sides as they saw the catastrophe.

Abednego was on his feet like a flash, and in another he had delivered a kick with his unerring aim that tumbled over one of the alligators.

Desperately alarmed about the letters, Shorty snatched a gun from the hand of a relieved guard, who had been drawn thither by the cheering, and succeeded in planting a shot on the other reptile

which had the same effect as Abednego's kick. Shuck Dilworth snatched away another gun, and shot the first reptile. The heavy bullets at short range stunned the alligators into slowing down, and a few more quieted them until it was safe to approach and bayonet them in the places which Patsy pointed out.

"All bets are off," announced Shuck and Shorty, "owing to the fight having been stopped by the referees. It interfered with a United States mail train. Lucky we done so, as it would've been as easy as counting the teeth on a buzz-saw as to keep track of them varmints."

They proceeded to carefully gather up the letters. The first one that Shorty picked up caused his heart to at first stand still, and then to swell out till it seemed there was not room enough for it inside his ribs, for it was postmarked "Beanblossom Creek, Ind.," and plainly directed in Maria's handwriting:

"Corporal Wm. D. Elliott,
"Co. Q, 200th Indiana Infantry, Vols.,
"Fourteenth Corps,
"Sherman's Army."

"Pete, you little scamp," he muttered between his teeth, as he thrust the letter into his bosom, "how did you dare risk these things this way? I ought to skin you alive."

"All this fuss about some measly love-letters," grumbled Pete. "You don't think nothing of the lick that Abednego got—poor feller. And you wouldn't have got no letters at all, if he hadn't saved my life and them, by kicking that varmint stiff. That's all the thanks we get, when we're trying to do our duty."

And Pete went over to rub Abednego's legs, and condole with him.

Shorty was so thrilled by finding still another letter from Maria that he forgot Pete. Then he came across several for Si, and with this his interest in the rest waned.

"Sandy," he commanded sharply, "you help Pete gather up those letters and get 'em to headquarters in a mighty hurry. If you ain't livelier than fleas you'll stand a good chance o' being tied up by the thumbs, as you ought to be. Stir yourselves!"

"There's some letters for you, Si," said Shorty, handing them to his partner with his left hand. His right was inside his blouse, holding with a tight grip and concealed from the world's rude gaze the two precious missives.

Si's heart lifted into his throat as he clumsily shuffled them over, and saw, among those from his father, mother, and sisters, several pink-tinted envelopes directed in Annabel's girlish script. He drank in every line and curve of the dear

handwriting, which seemed to cling and twine around the tendrils of his heart. He could not decide which to open first, and as he hesitated the Orderly-Sergeant called out sharply: "Fall in for roll-call, Co. Q," an order that veterans promptly obey, as if by instinct. As the Orderly concluded and turned to report to the Captain, Pete came down from headquarters with the mail for the company, and tears in his eyes.

"I never got such a combing-down in my life," he complained to the boys on the left of the company, "as the Adjutant gave me. He was madder'n a wet hen, over me and Sandy going over to that alligator fight, and threatened to buck-and-gag me. All about waiting a few minutes for a handful of girls' letters. The letters'd keep, but the fight had to come off. I never saw such a place to impose on a boy as the army is. I'—"

"Peter Skidmore," called out the Orderly, holding up a little white envelope, with a patriotic emblem.

Pete gasped with astonishment, and then swelled up with a sense of new manly dignity, as he realized that some girl had actually written him. He strode forward with an imitation of Shorty's walk, to catch the letter which the Orderly flipped toward him.

"That's no way to treat a man's letters," he remarked, as he picked it up from the ground and walked back to the left. "Letters 's precious things, and ought to be handled carefully and delivered promptly."

"Abe, here's something that'll interest you," said Tom Radbone to his partner, who was reading with wet eyes a letter from his affianced. He drew his partner aside, and read to him the postscript.

"Lucy Martin came over to see me as soon as she found out I'd heard from you. Poor girl, she is almost crazy as to what's become of Abel Grimstead. She thought nebbe you had said something about him, but I had to tell her you hadn't. If you know or can find out anything about him, do let me know."

Si studied the postmarks, and decided to open first the letter having the oldest one. He carefully opened the seams of the envelope, and the first words that caught his eye were:

"Dear husband."

He immediately sought the concealment of an orange grove, to give him the seclusion he wanted while he read the remainder.

Shorty walked off a little distance, turned his back, and opened one of his letters. He saw it began:

"My Dear William."

He was seen no more that day.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A BATCH OF LETTERS, AMONG WHICH IS A VERY IMPORTANT ONE FOR SHORTY.

Sandy Baker received two letters.

One, like Pete's, in a small white envelope, adorned with a patriotic emblem, and directed in a school-girl's hand, upon lines scratched on the envelope with a pin.

He held it in his hand for a minute or two, gazing at it in absolute wonderment. It seemed to him the most curious thing in the world.

"Here, Sandy, is another for you," said the Orderly-Sergeant, handing him a large yellow envelope—business size—with his full name, company, regiment, brigade, division and corps, painstakingly written out in crabbed, wavering letters, every line and curve of which revealed the effort it had cost.

Sandy's heart filled at the sight, and tears came into his eyes, as he scanned the work of his mother's thin, toil-worn hands, and turned the envelope over, and saw where it was fastened with a bit of sewing-wax, stamped down with her thimble.

Forgotten for the moment the bustle and excitement of war, the great army stretching its coils around doomed Savannah, the swing of marching men, the crawling trains, the angry spitting of the skirmishers' rifles, the sullen boom of the distant siege guns, the blare of bugles, the cheering and the commotions in the nearby camps, the restless men in his own.

He was no longer the reckless young soldier, but his mother's son.

He saw again the little frame house in Indiana, which was all that his father—a skilled machinist—had to leave to his mother when he was crushed by a bursting fly-wheel. He saw the little sitting-room, in which she had sat and toiled with her needle from early dawn till late at night, to support himself and her, during the 10 lonely, sad years of her widowhood. Everything about the neat, cosy little room, from the rag carpet on the floor to the white curtains, showed rigid economy and painstaking "contriving" to make the most out of the slenderest materials.

There, on the table piled with sewing done, doing or to be done, was her little, green-shaded sewing-lamp. The sewing had been pushed back a little while, while she had hunted up his school-boy ink and pen, found paper in his copy-book, and an envelope somewhere, and set herself to the unaccustomed task of writing.

Every word written had been a labor, but a labor demanded by the irrepressible yearning of her mother-heart for her far-away boy.

Sandy tenderly opened the letter and read:

"Dear Son: I know that God has you in His merciful keeping somewhere, but just where only He knows. We are all worried sick as to what has become of Sherman's army, but the preacher constantly bids us take comfort and trust in God, who will bring the army out all right. Our cause is right, and the Lord, who has blessed Sherman's army with victory so far, will not let it now come to harm.

"But I cannot help being sick at heart, when I am away from his comforting words, and sitting here in the evening at work. I think of you constantly, and wonder, till my head swims and aches, where you are. It is far more awful than when the army was in front of Atlanta, because then I heard from you every little while, and I knew that if anything happened I would know it from the papers or neighbors. There was a chance then that if you needed me I could go to you. But now I can only sit at home, and think of you with every stitch, and pray till I wonder if God does not become weary.

"It was very good of you to send me all your money, before you started, but I cannot bring myself to use a cent of it. It seems to me as if it was the price of you, and I at times hate the sight of it. You will find it all there for you when you get back.

"But I must talk to you of more cheerful things. I am very well—except for the heart-ache about you—Never better in my life. I have all the work I can do, and they are paying very good prices for it, but everything is going up so that I don't have much more at the week's end than when I didn't have so much work, or get so good prices. But if you come out right all will be right.

"Everybody is very kind to me. Old Mr. Folsom brought me in a nice lot of Neshannock potatoes—enough to last me all Winter. Mr. Wright brought me in a big load of dry hickory wood, and that poor old crippled Ezra Reed sawed it, split it, and piled it up nicely in the shed. He said he wanted to help all he could in the war, and that's the best he could do—do your work while you were away.

And he hasn't a cent—only what he makes doing odd jobs when he is able to work.

"Put your trust in God, be a good boy, and write as soon as you can to

"Your Loving Mother."

"Dear little mother," sighed Sandy, "she must have a letter written her this very day. But she'll know by tomorrow at the furthest that we've got through all right—that is, the army has, and to her the army means me, only. Dear little mother. Every cent I get in the army I'm going to put into a horse and buggy, for her to drive around, just like a lady. She shan't work any more after I come home. I'll find something to do that'll make money enough to keep her as nice as anybody in town. She's worked enough."

"Say, Sandy," said Pete, coming up with an envelope in one hand, and a sheet of pink paper in the other, "do you remember Nelly McBride, who was in the next class below me?"

"Nelly McBride?" answered Sandy, making an effort to remember "Little, carrot-headed"—

"Not carrot-headed. Just bright and warm-colored."

"Irish girl."

"Yes, she was Irish."

"Freckleder than a guinea egg."

"She had some freckles, but not so many as some other girls."

"Sassier'n a tame crow."

"She would say what she thought, same's we all did."

"Spitefuller'n a setting-hen."

"Now, Sandy, that ain't nice. She used to run with that tow-headed minx, Mat Irwin, who had more devilry in her than her plaguey white hide would hold. She was always putting Nelly up to things, and Nelly got blamed for lots that Mat done."

"Hum! Mat put Nelly up to things! I thought it was just the other way. Mat was a terror, but Nell—w-h-e-w! She had the longest, limberest legs"—

"I don't know as that's a nice way to speak of a young lady," murmured Pete.

"In some way she could bend 'em clear around the desk, and kick me on the shins, just when I was doing my purtiest to get hold o' the Rule 'o Three, and it'd hurt so that I couldn't help hollering out, and then old Snipes'd come down and rap me over the knuckles, for not tending to my lessons, and disturbing the school, and she'd make faces at me, all because she caught me once stoning that old antelope of a cow of her mother's who'd got into our garden. She wore copper-toed shoes in Winter, and it hurt awfully. How in time she could bend them thin, freckled legs o' hers?"—

"Sandy! Sandy! You musn't speak that way of a young lady."

"Young lady! W-h-e-w! That sub-nosed brat a young lady! Why, she hadn't got

through the Third Reader, and was only beginning long division."

"But that was a long while ago, when me and you were only boys. Now we're men. Don't you suppose anybody else's growed, too? Look there. That's Nelly McBride."

He took out of the envelope a tintype and handed it to Sandy. It represented a tall, callow girl, with her hair in a rope down her back, and her dress coming down to a little below her knees.

"Shes got a good deal better looking," remarked Sandy, after studying the picture a minute. "But the legs are the same."

"Sandy Baker, if you say another word about them legs, 'll just bust your ear, so I will. 'Taint at all decent or respectful."

"She wrote you, and sent you this, did she?" said Sandy, ignoring the threat. "Let's see her letter."

Pete grew red in the face and hesitated. He had somehow a vague idea that it was not right to show a young lady's letter to another, but he could think of no reason to give why his partner should not be as free with his letters as they were with everything belonging to one another. He finally passed it over, and Sandy read:

"Mr. Peter Skidmore: I suppose I've got to call you Mister, because mother and the rest says that I'm getting so big now that I must call all the boys mister and gentlemen, but it comes awful un-acherul to call little barefooted scrubs like you that, though you are in the army. They say you're making a very good soldier, but I never expected it. You're too scatter-brained and tormenting to be good for anything. Recollect how the teacher used to whale you for being up to everything but getting your lessons? But I never told on you, did I?"

"I'm writing to you just because all the big girls are writing to boys—men" they call them—in the army, and looking very big and important about it. They say they do it just to cheer and encourage the men. Big girls are awful liars, ain't they? They do it because they want to, and it's something to put on airs over us smaller girls about. Do you suppose I'll be such a fibber when I get so I wear skirts down to my shoes, and put my hair up? Very likely. I couldn't think of anybody else, so I write to you. Don't you tell anybody. I'll put on just as many airs now as they do.

"I'm now through with McGuffey's Fifth Reader, and we begin Mandeville's Rhetoric after New Year's. I'm away over in Interest and Discount, in the arithmetic, and I'll take the first prize in geography."

"I send you my picture, that you can see how much I have grown since you went away."

"I want you to write me a letter, about anything, just so's I can have the envelope, with the army postmark, to flash before them hateful, stuck-up big girls. If you can't write better than you used to, get some good writer to direct it. Spell my name, Nellie—all the big girls are writing their names with an *e* now.

"Have you learned to spell 'ocean' yet? You never could.

"Hurrah for the Union.

"Nellie McBride."

"Well, I declare," said Sandy. "But that reminds me. I got a letter, too. Let me see; where is it?"

Sandy opened the letter, and read down the page to the signature, and then said with a whistle of surprise:

"W-h-e-w, if it ain't from Mat. Irwin!"

"That tow-headed, pasty-faced terror?" exclaimed Pete.

"Pete," admonished Sandy, as he studied the letter, and a melaineotype inclosed, "that's no way to speak of a young lady who writes to me."

"Young lady!" sniffed Pete. "She was the worst tom-boy in the school. She could run and throw down any boy of her age, and liked to do it. She loved to torment us older ones. Recollect how she slipped a briar into my seat just as I was setting down?"

"O, she was blamed for lots of things that she never thought of doing," said Sandy. "That little McBride hussy!"

"You're speaking of Miss Nellie McBride, please remember," Pete warned him.

"She's grown to be a very fine-looking young lady," said Sandy, studying the tintype.

Pete took the picture from his hand, and remarked,

"Same old mop of light hair. Looks like a bunch o' tow after a gale o' wind."

"Pete Skidmore," said Sandy, severely, "be more careful with your flings at ladies."

"Le' me see her letter," demanded Pete.

"I don't know as it is the correct thing for a gentleman to show a letter written to him by a young lady," demurred Sandy with dignity.

"O, rats!" exclaimed Pete, indignantly. "You made me show Miss Nellie McBride's letter; now you show!"

"O, that didn't amount to nothing. That was only a scrawl from that little brick-topped Irish!"

"Look here, Alexander Baker," said Pete, doubling his fists. "I'll bust your ear, sure's I'm a foot high, if you don't take back every word of that. Nellie McBride was a better girl every day in the week than that tow-headed tom-boy!"

Sandy jumped at him.

Co. Q looked with amazement and then amusement upon the two partners engaged in a lively scrap. It was the first shadow of dissension that had ever mani-

festated itself between the two loyal little chums. They all took sides, some shouting for Pete and some for Saddy. Si heard the laughter and yelling, and rushing out of the brush where he had been reading Annabel's letters, pulled them apart, cuffed them both and set them down on the ground with more emphasis than grace, threatening to do unmentionable things to them if they did not subside at once. He returned to the perusal of his letters, and Sandy and Pete, curtly ordering their curious comrades to go away and mind their own business, looked at one another shamefacedly.

"Pete, I was a fool," said Sandy. "Miss Nellie McBride is a very fine young lady."

"I always liked Miss Mattie Irwin," Pete cordially admitted.

"Here's her letter. You can read it and welcome," said Sandy, picking up the missive, which had fallen to the ground and been trampled on in the hurly-burly. "She writes a nice hand, and it's a very lady-like letter," he added, tenderly brushing the sand from the precious sheet.

"She does write a nice hand," heartily conceded Pete, "but I confess I like the back hand that Miss Nellie writes better. Not but what the other is just as pretty," he added hastily. "And it's more fashionable."

He proceeded to read the letter.

It was evident that Miss Irwin had resorted to the assistance of a Ready Letter Writer, and had selected a "Note of Police Inquiry to a Public Man," as her model, for the missive ran:

Alexander Baker, esq.

Respected Sir: I take the liberty of addressing you to inquire after your health and prosperity. This is a matter of interest to us all, and we all join in the wish for the best of health and fortune for any one who is serving his country so well. Any news that you may choose to give us regarding yourself will be very welcome to a large circle of friends. Accept all our compliments.

Very respectfully,

Your Sincere Friend,

Matilda Irwin.

(P. S.—Say, Sandy, the above is just a stiff. I want you to write me something—anything—so's I can call down that hateful Mamie Martin, who always comes to school with a letter in her hand from her young man in the army. I believe she's carried the same one six months. And she's only a year older than me.)

(N. B.—Don't let anybody know that it's you writing to me, and I won't.)

(P. S. N. B.—I send you my picture, that you may see how I've grown since you went away. Don't let anybody see it.)

Mat.

But of all the letters received in the regiment that day, the one that "had the



“THE TWO PARTNERS ENGAGED IN A LIVELY SCRAP.”

most momentous effect upon the issue of the war," read as follows:

Beanblossom Creek, Dec 1. 1864.

My Dear William: Since writing my last letter my thoughts have been very busy about you. The anxiety that we have all been in regard to the probable loss of Sherman's army, has brought sharply home to each one of us what our personal loss would be in such an awful calamity. I blame myself much that I have let you go away without knowing something of the loss that this would mean to me. You must at times think me utterly heartless, but I am not. You are dull enough about some things to drive a girl to almost anything. You really should take a good eye-opener.

This may never reach you. Sherman's army may be swallowed up as Pharaoh's was, and other armies have been. That you may be even at this moment in the greatest dangers and difficulties is all the more reason for my no longer delaying to say that my heart is with you, wherever you may go, and that should anything happen to you it will be a blow to me which I shall feel as long as I live. That you, as well as Si, shall be delivered from the dangers that compass you roundabout is my daily prayer to God. Possibly I pray a little more earnestly for you than for Si, for he has one now to do particular praying for him.

When you get this—if you get it—you will know, what your own sense should have told you long ago, that you are more to me than any other man alive, outside of my own family. I wish you had known it before entering upon this last campaign, for it might have helped sustain you in very dark hours. But it is useless to regret. If you come through safely no one will rejoice nearly so much as I.

Take good care of yourself for my sake. Make the most of all the good that is in you for my sake. Be true to the highest manhood for my sake, and be sure that I will value and appreciate it all as no other will. Affectionately yours,

Maria Klegg.

How many times Shorty read this letter over can never be told. Every time re-read wrought another step in a mighty change going on in him.

It was a change akin to that made by the revelation of the life in Deacon Klegg's home. To a man whose life had been spent as Shorty's, amid the rough, turbulent, frequently vicious men of the Ohio, Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, there could be nothing more astonishing than the quiet, purity, peace, and kindness of the Klegg home, combined with the stalwart, unaffected, never-uncertain manliness of the Klegg men.

Now, in Maria's letter came something as startlingly different from his old ideas of love and love-making as the Klegg home had been from his previous abodes.

It was something as far above the usual admissions of young women of partiality for their lovers as the pure, free air of the mountain-tops was to the fetid atmosphere of the swamps, where the army was now encamped. It was the fairest, the sweetest, the purest of all womankind, reaching down her hand to him from her own unapproachable height, to help him up toward her level. Into the radiant sunshine of joy that filled his bosom at the first reading of the letter, crept again the chill fear, as he re-read, that he was hopelessly unworthy such a pearl of great price, and nothing could ever make him less so. Then would come again his usual sanguine courage as to his capability of achieving whatever he determined to, and his heart would swell with plans and determinations as to his future conduct.

"I'm lots respectabler than I used to be," he mused, "but I ain't lining up on Si yet, by the depth of a brigade or so. Still, I'm within easy signal, and I'm gaining distance. I don't cuss now, except when it's absolutely necessary, and hain't slipped a card on a man since I used to skin that rebel at Andersonville out of his Confederate, to get something to buy the boys grub. Even Maria couldn't've blamed me for that. I only gamble now with fellers that think they're too infernally slick with cards to live, and it seems God's justice to learn 'em what tin-horners they are. I'm stopped gambling altogether, from this time. Let somebody else do all that's necessary. I hain't been full for so long that even the Chaplain's forgot when it was, and wouldn't hesitate to recommend me for an officer in the Sons of Temperance. Long ago the boys quit asking me to go out on apple-jack scouts. My temper ain't so much on the hurricane order as it used to be, but there's lots o' room for improvement there. I musn't slosh around so much. Si's got a lots better grip on himself. I'll take note of him. I'll not make any play to be a Methodist preacher, though I'd be that or break my neck trying, if Maria 'd say so, but I'll walk so straight a mark that Maria shan't be ashamed of me, and when the Deacon gets off one of his thundering family prayers against evildoers of all kinds, I won't have to blush so that I can feel it singeing the roots of my hair."

The bugle was now sounding a roll-call and supper. He folded up the precious letters as tenderly as his strong fingers would admit, looked at them longingly, reluctant to lose for a minute sight of what her hands had touched, folded them in the silk handkerchief, which contained his other treasures, and made his way back to the company, to answer his name.

He was not the only one in Co. Q or the regiment—or the whole army, for that matter—who was in a state of mental exaltation. Every one in the company had received something from home, which had elated him, more or less, and the company was in such a mood for cheering and

laughing, that it was impossible to preserve the usual attentive quiet of Co. Q's roll-call.

Si's face literally beamed. Now that they were really married, and she felt that she was his very own, Annabel let the long-repressed fountains of her affection flow freely, and had poured out her heart to her young husband, in a way that made him feel that the whole world was a mass of sweetness and light.

Patsy the Kinch came up as they were eating supper, with his eyes full of great things.

"Say, I've found two udder holes, wid big 'gators in dem, just right for de hunkidoriest fight youze ever see. De holes ain't more dan 30 feet apart, an' bigger'n a beer-kag. De 'gators in dem must be as big as palmetto-logs, an' full o' ginger an' fight."

"Where's the place?" asked Shorty, pricking up his ears.

"Right over dere. I'm keeping it awful dead quiet, for I wants our fellers to have the first show. Youze and dat Wagon-master feller be de ringmasters, and an' git youze own men to hold de ground, an' run de fight. I won't say nothing to nobody else 'bout it, till youze is all ready."

"That's right, Patsy," said Shorty, full of lively interest. "We'll just put up a show that 'll make a record. Co. Q shall have first seats at the performance, and well make the others take the rear. I'll go right over and see Shuck Dilworth, and arrange the program, to come off first thing in the morning after guard-mount. You'll be time-keeper, Si."

"I shall not have anything to do with it," answered Si quietly.

"Why, what in the world?" asked Shorty, looking aghast at his partuer.

"It's all right to kill alligators," explained Si. "Kill as many as you please—kill 'em for meat, kill 'em to get rid of 'em, kill 'em just because they're alligators. But to set 'em to fighting for our fun is barbarous, and I won't have no share in it."

"But they fight among themselves any way," remarked the stupefied Shorty.

"That's their business. If they get to fighting of their own accord, it's none of our affair one way or another. It may be God Almighty's way of killing 'em off, just as Sherman's army's God Almighty's way of killing off the rebels. But it's quite another thing for a set of grown

men to nag these animals to fighting one another, and stand around and yell at the pain and misery they're giving one another. It's brutalizing to every one mixed up in it. I don't see that it's a bit better than getting up chicken and dog fights, and I won't have nothing to do with one more than the other. But I'm speaking for myself only. That's just the way I feel."

"But the alligators ought to be killed."

"Mebbe, and mebbe not. The Lord made 'em for some purpose. They ought to be killed if there's any reason for killing them. If we need 'em, if they are in the way, if they're doing any harm, or are likely to, kill 'em. If there's any reason for killing 'em, I'll go out with you and kill any number you like. But that's a very different thing from making them fight just for our fun."

"Well, I'll be —," gasped Shorty, but he thought of Maria's letter just in time to prevent his saying the word that came to his lips.

"Of course, the way I look at this needn't influence you in the least," said Si, turning away to some retreat where he could think undisturbed of the wonderfully sweet letters. "That's merely my private views, and not necessarily intended for publication."

The idea that anything wrong could be possibly done to an alligator, or in connection with one, was a stunning thought to Shorty. It was a flash of that higher Klegg morality which he could not understand, but which he felt he must understand for Maria's sake. He thought it over till his head buzzed, without arriving at a solution. But one thing was clear: If Si thought it was wrong, then Maria was likely to think it wrong, and that prospect was unendurable.

"That settles it," he said, when he had slowly reasoned around to this conclusion. "I was just planning how I could jockey our alligator so's that he'd chaw up them Wisconsin fellers' in about three shakes of a sheep's tail, but I wouldn't have that look on Maria's face that came into Si's for all the alligator fights between now and the Fourth of July."

"Patsy," he said, when that young worthy came around, "you'll have to get some one else to be Ringmaster. My correspondence will keep me busy all day tomorrow, and I must catch the next mail,"

CHAPTER L.

THE ORDER TO ASSAULT THE WORKS AROUND SAVANNAH—THE BOYS
WRITE SOME LETTERS—THE FIRST LINE GAINED.

"Well, gentlemen," said the Colonel, on the evening of Dec. 18, to the officers of the 200th Ind., as they lined up before him and saluted, after the Adjutant had dismissed the parade. "It seems that it's our move next. Gen. Hardee has replied to Gen. Sherman, declining to surrender Savannah, and the next order of business is to apply moral suasion to him. We will leave the reserve in the morning and take our place in the line for an immediate advance upon his works."

The officers clapped their hands enthusiastically at the announcement.

"The bugle will sound reveille an hour earlier," continued the Colonel, "and immediately after breakfast we shall take up the line of march, starting not later than 7 o'clock. You will have an inspection of cartridge boxes, and issue enough ammunition to make up 80 rounds per man. Three days' cooked rations will be taken in the haversacks."

There was the usual excitement of marching orders and preparation for battle, though not so demonstrative as in the older days. The 200th Ind. were now veterans, to whom marching orders had come so often as to lose their intoxicating novelty. But though not nearly so noisy every man was much more thorough now in his getting ready. It was serious business, rather than a matter for yelling. There must be no mistake now about having a sufficiency of ammunition and three full days' rations. Clothing, arms, and equipments must be in best condition for three full days of arduous service, with probably a severe battle. Any slackness or defects likely to be the source of bitter repentance later on.

Therefore, everyone was silently intent on making his preparations as complete as possible, and getting to bed, to have all the sleep he could before the reveille came to arouse him to something of which no one knew the end.

Commissary-Sergeants called out for the different companies to come and get their rations; Sergeants hurried back with supplies of cartridges; cartridge-boxes were inspected and filled, and the air was full of the odor of cooking meat.

After having attended to their haversacks and cartridge-boxes, nearly everyone sat down around the fires, with a board in his lap, and wrote a brief letter.

Si's read:

"My Deare Little Wife:

"This is a postscript to the letter I wrote you yesterday. Old Hardee has hardened his hart, like Pharaoh, and in his wicked pride refuses to surrender Savannah, and to-morrow morning we move out to put the bud to him and make him change his mind. Wele do it all right, though he has fortified from here till Christmas, and it looks as if we was going to have a mighty tuff job. The 200th Injanny Infantry Vols. has got its old post in front, and we are going to make a strong push to be the first regiment into Savanny. Doant be at all afraid about me. The rebel bullet haint bin molded that'll separate you and me. The Lord diddent give so good a thing as you to me just to snatch it away again.

"With lots of love.

SI."

Shorty's ran:

"Deer Maria: Yore sweet letter filled me so with happiness that I haint had room for nothing else. I don't want room for nothing else. Happiness is good enough filling, and Ile taik it strate. Specially the kind of happiness you give. What I started to say was I was feeling so wonderfully good, that I diddent want to do nothing but sit around and feel good. I tried hard to write to you at once, but thair was so many things pushing to be said first, that I cood not make up my mind whair to begin. I cood rite you a letter as long as the Declaration of Independence on a hot day, and then not say haff that is crowding up.

"We are ordered to move in the morning to bust Hardee, and taik Savanny, and we're going to do it, sure's little apples. All the boys is riting to thair girls. I dassent say it even to myself that you are my girl, but if you really are then I've drawed the biggest prize that ever a man did in the whole world, and I would-dent change places with even Gen'l Sherman for a minnit. I feel that I cant live long enuf, nor do haff enuf to pay you, but all of me that the United States doant claim belongs to you, and whenever the Government lets go its hold Ime all yours till deth.

"Thair goes tattoo. I must stop.

"Yore, heart and soul,

"William."

Pete and Sandy felt that they had to follow the example of their elders. Pete's pot-hooks and hangers resolved themselves into the following, which he gravely inclosed in an envelope, and took to the Orderly-Sergeant to address:

"Miss McBride,

"I talk mi pen in hand 2 inform u that ime well, fat, & sum ov them sais sassy.

"I start in the morning, with general Sherman to capcher Savanny.

"Theyrez lots of mockin' birds round hear, & ime going 2 send u one.

"Sai, Nell yore pickcher is a Beaute.

"No moar from Pete."

Sandy had found a "Complete and Elegant Letter-Writer" himself, in the possession of one of the boys, and followed carefully one of its "model epistles":

"Respected Miss:

"Your polite inquiry as to my health has been received, and I thank you much for your kind interest. I will say in reply that my health is excellent, and I earnestly hope that it will continue so during the next three days, if not longer, as to-morrow morning we move out to fight Hardee for Savannah.

"Thank you for your picture. It is very pretty. Will send you one of me as soon as I can get one taken.

"With sincerest wishes for your health and well-being, I have the honor to be,

"Very respectfully,

"Your Obedient Servant,

"Alexander Baker.

"To Miss Matilda Irwin."

The regiment ate breakfast by the light of the pitch-pine fires, and as the chill dawn came stood in solid ranks in the dense fog, waiting the Colonel's order. It looked a portentous and mighty engine of war—the men's stalwart forms magnified by their heavy overcoats, and exaggerated by the vapor-cloud around them. There were 600 youths from the fertile lands of Indiana, well nourished in bone and muscle by the fruitful soil on which they were reared, hardened, strengthened, and trained to perfect soldiery by years of incessant practice of the highest feats and achievements in the great trade of war. Every one was as perfect a soldier as humanity ever developed, and collectively the 200th Ind. was as formidable a military missile as was ever hurled against a foe in battle. Each man had the most supreme confidence in himself, his comrades, and his officers, and firmly believed them superior to any men that could be arrayed against them. There was simply nothing that any 600 men could do which the 200th Ind. could not accomplish.

They had no idea as to what they were going to be called upon for, but they were ready for anything, and certain that they could achieve it if within the range of human possibility.

The Colonel mounted, the bugie sang "Forward," and, like some prodigious serpent of the far-off paleozoic age, the regiment wound out of the woods into the broad, sandy road leading toward Savannah.

An Aid, waiting for them at the forks of the road, loomed up out of the fog, and said:

"You are very prompt, Colonel. On time to the minute. I had only just taken my post. You will file to the left, this way."

The Aid led them through the woods to a little rise of ground and said:

"There, Colonel, you will deploy your regiment at the edge of the woods, and advance at your discretion. The Oshkosh regiment will be on your right, and the Kankakees on your left, and among you you will cover the ground between that canal over there and that one over there. From the looks of things, I should say that they have picked out for the brigade about the knottiest stick they had in the wood-pile."

"That's all right," said the Colonel, cheerfully. "We can take care of the job if anyone can. They picked out their best brigade for the hardest task, but we are used to that honorable distinction, and we'll show the rest of the army how it is best to send a full-grown man to mill when there's a big grist to be ground."

"The right spirit, as ever, Colonel," said the Aid, brightening up. "We can always rely on you. You'll have the center, and the other regiments will line on you. Use your own discretion about working forward. We all know you'll go as fast as you can, and bring honor to the brigade."

"Present my compliments to the General," said the Colonel, "and my thanks for the position of honor which he has assigned to the 200th Ind. I hope to be able shortly to report to him in the city of Savannah, ahead of any other command, with the 200th Ind.'s flag the first on the enemy's works."

"I hope so. Good luck to you," replied the Aid, saluting as he rode away.

They could see above the fog the spires and masts of Savannah, only three miles away, and the sight thrilled and inspired them.

It was a far bigger, richer city than they had yet come up against. It was a great and important seaport, which had in it a thrill for those landmen, who had heard its name all their lives as one of the principal places of the country.

"It's nearer than we got to Atlanta before we took the city," said some of the men, hopefully. "And there ain't any hills for them to build forts on."

"Well, I'd rather climb hills than wade through mud," said another. "Wait till this fog raises, and see what they've fixed up for us. You bet it ain't any picnic.

The Aid said it was the toughest part of the line. He knows. I'll bet that before we get to them churches we'll have more and more various kinds of hell than the preachers in 'em ever imagined. The rebels have always had some new surprise for us wherever we've gone. As this is a lots bigger city than Atlanta, I'll bet they've done lots more to keep us out."

"Well, I don't care what they've got and done," said Shorty, "we're going in all the same, and ahead of everybody else. Things can't be worse than they were down there at Fort McAllister, and we must do as well as the Fifteenth Corps done."

There was a terrific crash of heavy guns in the direction of Savannah, and the fog was torn by great shells, which shrieked viciously above the heads of the regiment, and burst in the woods beyond.

"Good morning, gentlemen," said the Colonel, waving his hand toward the guns. "You know we're here, it seems."

"They needn't be so infernally enthusiastic about it," remarked the Adjutant, leading his petted horse back to the shelter of a big cypress. "Six-pounders would've done just as well to salute with as 64-pounders. Needn't waste iron on our account, I assure you."

The men shivered a little in the chill morning, but grasped their guns more firmly, while they waited for the next happening.

"Captains, deploy your companies out to the right and left," said the Colonel, speaking just loud enough for them to hear. "Do it with as little noise as possible, and let everybody get what shelter he can. The rebels have clearly found out we are here, but we do not know where they are until this fog lifts a little."

Si led his squad to the extreme left of the regiment, and took position behind some stumps and logs that lay at the edge of a rice-field. They peered anxiously into the veil of fog to see what its lifting would reveal.

It thinned out slowly before the rising sun, and developed immediately in front of them a field covered with water of an unknown depth. The sluice-gates had been opened, and all the rice-fields flooded, to bar the advance of the army.

Across the field the fog rose in clumps and banks, which might be men, or might be trees and bushes, with or without men behind them.

"Don't fire till you see something to shoot at," said the Colonel, in a low tone. "The way they're aiming those big guns shows that they think we're farther back than we are. When you shoot, you'll give them something to aim at."

The chill of the fog was very penetrating, and everyone shivered as if he had the ague. Some minutes passed in anxious, silent expectancy. Would the fog never rise?

Shorty sneezed!

Shorty's sneeze was not one of the quiet, confidential affairs that some men can make of such an event.

He did not sneeze often, or just for fun, or to put in the time.

He sneezed just because he had to, and he put all his energy into one great explosion that would last him for some time and be done with.

When he did sneeze the whole regiment knew it.

The parade ground seemed to quake, and the flag-staff to wobble. It was to the regiment what to a church is the sneeze of the most important deacon, delivered during the rapt attentiveness of the opening prayer or a marriage ceremony.

This time Shorty apparently threw the whole of his 200 pounds into the effort, and gave a whoop that vied with the roar of the 64-pounders.

It would have lifted the fog, if noise could.

His example was instantly infectious, as it usually was, and every man in the regiment imitated him as loud as his individual nose and lungs could.

"There, you've played thunder," said Shorty, addressing his delinquent nose, which had turned quite red with a blush of mortification. "Some day you'll sneeze your condemned fool head off with such nonsense, and it'll serve you right."

A still more startling response came.

A volley crashed out from a line of rebels lying behind the bank on the other side of the rice field. Bullets whistled wickedly over their heads, spatted in the water in front, struck the logs behind which they were lying, and cut twigs off the brush.

The Colonel's horse was struck in the neck, and began plunging.

"I've caught one," said a boy to the right of the squad, pressing his hand on his thigh, and climbing down to limp back. He had been standing on a stump, trying to look over the fog-bank.

The Colonel walked back to soothe his horse, and led him behind a tree.

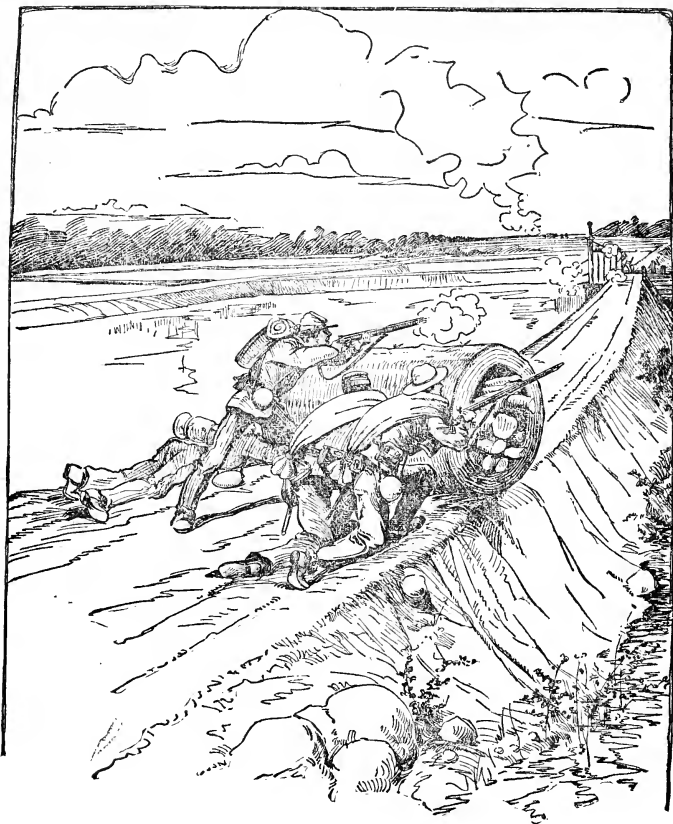
The big siege guns roared out, and their shells came closer to the ground as they howled by.

"That feller meant me, sure's you're born," said Pete, pointing to the top of his cap, which was torn and waving. "He's right over there. Let's get him, Sandy. He's right in that fog-bank there."

The two took careful aim and fired.

Si's eyes had been fixed on the bank of earth which ran straight out from their front toward the rebels, and formed the boundary of the field. He did not regard hopefully any attempt to get through the mud and water of the field, and was studying the bank's possibilities for a rush along it with his squad.

"Say, Shorty," said he, giving his partner a nudge, "that bank's the only chance,



"AS ALL FOUR WERE DEAD SHOTS, THIS PRODUCED A TURMOIL IN THE GROUP BEHIND THE GATE."

They know that. Do you notice how they're centering all their fire on it. See the bullets knocking up the dirt out there? And cutting the twigs off the brush. Very few are coming across the water, or striking in it. They're expecting us to come that way."

"That's so," answered Shorty, "and them big guns are firing right along it, too. There's no use trying a rush, at least now. They'd mow us down. I'm going to try how deep the water is out in front. Pass the word along to cover me while I take a pole and sound it."

Si jumped and ran along the line to the Captain, to tell him what Shorty intended.

"All right," said the Captain. "It's a daring thing to do, but somebody ought to do it at once, before an order comes for us to advance into the field. I'll cover Shorty with the whole company, and ask Capt. Brooks to do the same with his company."

The two companies began a severe and rapid fire, while Shorty cut down a long cane, and, walking out into the water, deliberately prodded around for the bottom.

"It's no use," he said, when he came back. "The water's nearly three feet deep everywhere, and probably gets deeper toward the center, and it's as cold as ice. The mud is nearly a foot deep."

"Go back to the Colonel, Sergeant," said the Captain, "and report to him what we've found."

The fog had now risen until the whole breadth of the field could be seen, and the bank beyond, thickly lined with riflemen sheltered behind it.

The Colonel looked sorely perplexed.

"It'll never do to order the men into that field," he said. "They'll sink into the soft mud until the water comes up nearly to their shoulders, and they can hardly walk, while those fellows over there will shoot them down at their leisure. This is worse than the Atlanta abatis. Those banks are so narrow that they can take them, and besides have a cross-fire. The Oshkoshes and Kankakees seem to have just as difficult a proposition before them, and are not going ahead any faster than we. We'll simply have to keep up a vigorous sharpshooting until we can decide on something."

Si was turning to go back to his squad, when his eye fell upon a big sycamore which had been felled for some use on the plantation. Like most old trees of that species, it was hollow, and this was the reason it had been selected for felling. The lower part of the trunk had been sawed into lengths of six or eight feet, probably for well-curbs, walls for springs, ash-hoppers, grain-bins, or other uses to which these "gums" were put in the South. An idea struck him as he looked at it, and he turned and studied the width of the bank. He walked over to the trunk

and examined the sections. There was from six to 10 inches of good, solid wood around the great hole which had rotted out of the interior, and the diameter of the trunk was about four feet. It was so round that the section would roll easily, which he assured himself by giving it a shove.

"What are you going to do, Sergeant?" inquired the Adjutant, noticing the interest he took in the matter. "Going into the lumber business? Think of cutting them up into wagon wheels?"

"I've an idea," said Si, quietly, selecting an eight-foot length, and rolling it a little.

"Let him alone, Adjutant," said the Colonel, with his eyes brightening. "I think I see what he's up to, and is a good idea. Go ahead, Sergeant."

"Shorty," said Si, going to the edge of the bank and calling down, "you and Abe and Tom come up here."

As soon as they could be made to hear, they ran up to him. They took the "gum" and hastily cut some brush, and filled in the gum with chunks and sticks, held in place by the brush.

"I think it's bullet-proof now, boys," said the Colonel approvingly. "Let me make one suggestion: Get some props to put behind it, so that it'll stay if they fire on you with artillery, which they'll be likely to."

"Good idee," said Si. "Here they are," and he picked up a couple of skids which had been cut for loading the guns on the wagon.

They rolled it down to the bank, and the boys gave a loud cheer as they came. Everybody was getting nervous and fretful over the continued long-range firing, which accomplished nothing. This was something new, at least, and promised well.

The rebels quickly caught sight of the alarming object, and concentrated their fire upon it.

Si, Shorty, Tom, and Abe took shelter behind it, and were delighted to find it entirely bullet-proof. They could hear and feel the balls strike, but none came through.

"Bully; she's a regular Monitor," said Shorty. "Hunch her forward, boys. We're safe so long as we keep behind her. Say, Si, yell to the fellers to keep down the cross-fire. I stretch out farther than the rest of you fellers, and one o' them cross-shots may hit my little tootsie-wootsies. I distinctly felt the wind of a bullet going by my high-bred instep about a minute ago."

"Great Scott, you don't expect we can get anything big enough to shelter them feet of yours," protested Si, as he pushed the gum forward. "You know we never could build the breastworks high enough for that."

The boys' back in the rear saw the dan-

ger, and kept the rebels so busy that they did not have much chance to make long-range cross-shots behind the gum.

Si raised his head carefully to the top of the gum, took deliberate aim at one of the men standing up behind the sluice-gate at the farther end of the bank, and dropped him. He then dropped himself, to reload and help roll the gum forward, while Shorty rose and fired. Then, one after another, Tom and Abe did the same.

As all four were dead shots, this produced a turmoil in the group behind the gate, and other men were hurried up to concentrate their fire upon the gum.

Monty, Harry, Alf, Gid, Sandy, and Pete slipped in behind, and were followed by the whole of Co. Q, who now regarded the rolling gum as a company affair, and were wildly eager to make it a success. Four of the strongest were called up to take the work of rolling the gum forward, while Si and the others were to devote their whole attention to the duel with the men behind the timbers of the sluice-gate, who were now making their utmost efforts to stop the steady advance of the terrible thing.

The rest of Co. Q crawled along the bank, and kept up a regular oblique fire on the rebels on the farther bank. Some of the other companies imitated Si's tactics by rolling the other gums down on the cross-banks. But Si was already so far ahead that it was clear that Co. Q would have the chief glory of the success, if it was going to be a success.

"Look out! Look out! Brace her with those skids, quick!" shouted Si, as he dropped down from firing. "They've got a field-piece trained on us, and are going to give us something hot."

"Lay low, everybody!" shouted Shorty, fixing the skid on his side in the bank, while Si did the same with the other. "Hug the ground, if you ever did. If it's a solid shot or shell, good-by."

It was not either, but a heavy charge of "horse-canister," such as batteries fire to cut down carriages and horses. It struck the gum a fearful blow, driving the skids back into the ground, and filling the air with splinters. But the gum stood the shock, and its protective power was unimpaired.

"Keep down! Keep down!" Si yelled at those who wanted to jump up and cheer. "The next'll be a shot or a shell. Let's see how she takes that."

But before the "next time" Col. McGillicuddy's foresight came in. He had had a couple of guns worked up into a good position, where they instantly let drive at the rebel cannon with such effect as to give the rebels something more to occupy their minds than the improvised gabion.

"I guess that dog's cured of sucking aigs," said Si, after a couple more shots from our guns did not get a reply from the rebel cannon. "They socked it to him

good and hard the first pop, and are kicking the carcass. Roll her forward, boys."

The constantly shortening range of Co. Q's fire was now rapidly thinning the defenders along the farther bank, but the men at the sluice-gate held on obstinately.

The gum was now not more than 100 yards from them, and every time that those behind it fired they brought down some one at the gate.

The big siege-guns, half a mile away, decided to take a hand in the game, after the crushing of the field gun. It was close work now to hit the enemy without any risk to their own men, but the gun was carefully trained on the gum, and fired. The aim was very good, and the shell burst only a rod short of the gum, with a terrific crash, tearing a big hole in the bank.

Si at first thought the shell had come from a siege gun on our side, and shouted to the men to roll forward, that he might take advantage of the confusion among the rebels.

He was startled to see the gum drop into the hole made by the shell, leaving him and the rest uncovered, but his nerve did not fail him for an instant.

"Up, everybody! Forward, double-quick—charge!" he yelled, and rushed over the gum straight at the rebels behind the gate.

The audacity of the thing, coming on the heels of the nerve-shaking explosion, paralyzed them. They glanced around to see that their supports on either side had gone, and that there was no way of retreat, excepting along the narrow bank behind, and they threw up their hands in surrender.

"Hooray for the 200th Injianny Volunteers," shouted Si and the rest, jumping on the gate-posts. "The 200th Injianny's the first over the works. Run back, Pete and Sandy, and bring the Color-Sergeant up. We're half a mile ahead of the others. Hurry him up!"

But he needed no hurrying. Col. McGillicuddy, the Adjutant, and he had been eagerly watching from the hill behind every step of the advance. They trembled when they saw the rebel shell burst, but the instant they saw Si unburt and running forward, they knew that the line was won, and the Sergeant ran forward at the top of his speed with the flag, yelling at those in front to make way for him. The whole regiment was pouring after him in a stream which filled the bank, all yelling as if to burst their lungs.

The whole rebel line was now running back, and the shouting Union soldiers were pressing after them along the banks, through the shallower water and the swamps, and wherever they could find foothold.

So the first line was forced, and the army found itself a mile nearer Savannah than it had been in the morning.

CHAPTER LI.

THE SIEGE OF SAVANNAH—THE ADJUTANT'S TROUBLES—ANOTHER REBEL LINE CARRIED.

"The General directs that you halt where you are and fortify," said an Aid, making his way up to Col. McGillicuddy, as the brigade lined up with the regiment along the bank, and gazed across the expanse of flooded rice-fields, canals, ditches, abatis, chevaux-de-frise, and other terrible entanglements, which lay between them and the main line of works around Savannah. "He says you have done magnificently, and are far ahead of the rest of the line. You will wait here until the rest of the line has advanced even with you."

"I don't see any need of fortifying," said the Colonel to the Adjutant. "It'll be as hard for them to get at us, as it will be for us to get at them."

"He means for you to fortify the men," said the punning Adjutant. "Make them as comfortable as possible, after their hard work, and have them ready for anything else that may come up. I think that a good dinner would be the very best fortification that we could have now."

"There is something within me, just below my belt," answered the Colonel, "that says the same thing. Is there any way to restore communications with Aunt Minerva Ann?"

"Heaven only knows where that sable Sultana of the soups and sauces is by this time," sighed the Adjutant. "I saw her come forward to the edge of the bank, to look out for little Pete, just before that big siege gun let drive at us. Then she gave a yell that I could hear above the roar of the shell, and I saw a piece of calico and a large pair of brogans flying back toward Atlanta, like feathers in a high wind. She's probably away over the Ogeechee River by this time."

"Well, we must eat, though darkies may fly," said the Colonel. "Take Orderly Skidmore back with you. He'll find her, if you can't."

"Come on, Pete," called the Adjutant.

As they gained the higher ground back of the rice-fields they came upon the fearful destruction wrought by the siege-guns of Savannah in their rear. Great holes had been dug in the sand, trees cut down and mangled, which in falling had torn other trees, and so that the ground was a chaos of debris.

"So glad that we was in a safe place out in front," murmured Pete, gazing at the widespread ruin with a shiver. "But where in the world is Aunt Minerva Ann?"

he added, as deepest apprehension seized him.

"I hope nothing has happened to the headquarters wagon," muttered the Adjutant, turning a little pale. "There are niggers enough around here to patch pandemonium a mile, though it might be rather hard to find another as good a cook as that wench. But there's not another such a demijohn of French brandy this side the ocean. Where in the world can that wagon be?"

"Say, there's Bill Dodds, the headquarters teamster," said Pete, pointing to a distracted-looking individual, who was making his way through the rack of branches, trunks and brush. "Say, Bill! O, Bill! Where's Aunt Minerva Ann?"

"How in thunder do I know?" answered the man angrily. "I ain't keeping track o' no nigger wenches. I'm looking for my mules. Did you see any mule over that a-way?" Where in blazes have they run to?"

"Durn your old mules," shouted Pete. "What's a mule, any way? You can git plenty o' them. Where's Aunt Minerva Ann?"

"O, confound your old nigger wench! What do I care about her? You can find a thousand o' 'em over there in camp, if you want that kind of live-stock. Come over here and help me hunt my mules."

Pete picked up a club to throw at the teamster, but the Adjutant's presence restrained him.

"Say, Dodds," asked the Adjutant, "where's the headquarters wagon?"

"Headquarters wagon blowed to hell," answered the teamster sententiously. "One o' them big camp-kittle shells bust'd right 'n under it and sent it up where the rain comes from. It's all mixed up with the clouds now. Come over here and help me hunt for my mules."

"Did you notice anything of a demijohn anywhere in the scatterment, Dodds?" asked the Adjutant, eagerly. "A two-gallon demijohn? Big bottle, covered with basket-work?"

"Dimmyjohn be damned," roared the teamster. "Spouse I wuz looking out for any kind of blamed budge, when my mules wuz so skeered that they wuz throwing seven kind o' fits in a minute. I'm afeared their system is totally wrecked. Twan't no time to think about guzzling of any kind. Come over here, and help me hunt my mules."

"That fellow hasn't a soul above mules," muttered the Adjutant, disgustingly. "He has no more idea of French Brandy than he has of the delegated powers of the Constitution. Come over this way, and let's look for the wagon."

A few steps brought them to a havoc-center.

There, around a deep hole torn out by the explosion of the huge shell, were the fragments of the headquarters wagon, and its contents. The shell could not have struck more fairly under the wagon if it had been deliberately laid there, and its work had been complete. The hind wheels stood near, but the front wheels had disappeared. Remnants of the Adjutant's desk, his and the Colonel's trunks, the wagon-bed, clothing, boots, caps, papers, horse-furniture, and the like, had been blown into the rent and tangled brush roundabout. A pair of the Colonel's drawers was waving like a flag of truce from the top of a tall cyprus, far above the Adjutant's dandified dress-coat, with its wealth of gold-lace shoulder-knots which had caught on a lower limb. His "boiled shirts," which he had been carefully saving for the gala days at the end of the campaign, were now white flecks on widely-separated parts of the landscape. His neatly-kept papers were the sport of the vagrant winds.

"The teamster was right," said the Adjutant, surveying the wreck. "That shell simply blew the wagon and all that was in it to — well, The Colonel's wardrobe and mine seem to be pretty impartially distributed over the Southern Confederacy, and we'll be mighty good marks for the first clothes-dealer that happens around. Well, most of the duds were pretty well worn, any way, and we both needed a new outfit. It's awful about the regimental papers, but I'll have to report, 'Lost in Action,' and start a new set. Some fellows will be mighty glad to have it so, for it will sponge off their blackboards, and give them a fresh start in life. But it simply breaks my heart to lose that demijohn. I'll never get over it as long as I live. One never ceases regretting the drinks he might have drunk. And such drinks as they were. Well, life abounds in bitter disappointments, and I suppose I must have my share of them. I wonder where Aunt Minerva Ann can be?"

"Here's piece of her dress," sobbed Pete bitterly over a fragment of linsey he found on a bush. "Poor Aunt Minerva Ann. I'll never see her again."

"Nonsense," said the Adjutant. "It'd take a heap bigger shell than that to wipe her out so completely. There's lots more of that substantial female around somewhere. I only hope there's enough left uninjured to get us dinner."

Only respect for his superior officer prevented Pete from blurting out that the Adjutant was an unfeeling brute.

"Hustle around, Pete," said the Adjutant, gathering up some of the papers, "and see if you can't find some trace of her, and more particularly of the mess-chest. I don't see any trace of it here. It must have been taken out of the wagon before the shell struck."

Pete wiped his eyes, and began a doleful search around, expecting every minute to come upon some ghastly find of his friend's mangled remains.

There was no further trace of her immediately around the wagon, and Pete pushed out farther into the bushes. Possibly the fragrance of boiling coffee and cooking meat attracted him, for, in spite of his grief, he was very hungry. He heard voices, and saw before him a high bank of fresh earth, thrown up by the rebels in the many fortifications they started to oppose Sherman while still a distance from the city.

There seemed something familiar in the sound of the voices, as Pete drew nearer, and as he climbed up on the bank to look over he distinctly heard Uncle Ephraim's voice saying:

"Now, I tells you, 'Nerv, foh de fortieth time, dat dar haint none ob dem killed. Dar haint none ob dem been hurt, foh I watched dem till dey got to de furdur bank, an' stopped. Dey'uns is all right ober dar, an' hongry as bounds. Dey'uns haint nuffin' dar t' hile der coffee wid, an' I'm a-gwine t' tote dat kittle t' dem soon's hit's ready. You go right ahead an' make hit. You haint no cause t' be skeered. None ob dem bumbs kin hit yo' behine dis hyah bank. Ye's as safe hyah as if yo's back on de plantation. Yo go right ahead wid yore cookin', or I'll lay this hickory on yo' back agin. Shore I will."

"O, dey's all killed, sure," wailed Aunt Minerva Ann, sitting down, and giving way to a paroxysm of grief. "Dey's all done killed, and we'uns 'll be killed if we'uns stay here. Don't yo' heah dem bummin' away ober dar, wusser'n ebbor."

"Shet up, an' don't let dat meat dar burn," said Uncle Ephraim, imperatively. "'Tend t' yore business, woman, or I'll gib yo' suffin' to cry foh."

Pete crawled to the top of the bank and looked over.

There on the side of the trench made by excavating the earth, sat Uncle Ephraim, with a stout switch in his hand, which he held in a way to inspire his wife with fear. He had learned enough of war to see the advantages of this place when the regiment moved forward in the morning, and he was left behind with the headquarters spare horses. He had had the mess-chest unloaded there, and the horses were tied near by. He had built a fire, and settled himself there for the day. But Aunt Minerva Ann's curiosity had led her forward with the regiment, until the big guns opened, when panic seized her, and it became necessary for Uncle Ephraim to run her down, and bring

her back to a place of safety. He had resorted to the plantation prescription for her hysteria of fear, as the switch in his hand testified.

Aunt Minerva Ann attended to the meat, and then began another wail, which was interrupted by Pete calling out from the top of the bank:

"O, Aunt Minerva Ann, I'm tickled to death to see you alive and well. I've been hunting for you everywhere."

He slid down the bank and ran to her, to be taken in her arms in a rapture of joy. He released himself, saying:

"I must run back and tell the Adjutant. He's sent me to hunt you, for he's awful hungry. If he could only find that demijohn now, that Shorty got for him, he'd be happy, in spite of the loss of his clothes."

"Dat dimmyjohn?" exclaimed Uncle Ephraim. "I done got dat 'dimmijohn right heah, so I has. I done tuk hit outen de wagon wid de mess-chist, foh I nebber trust none ob dem teamsters wid nuffin to eat nor drink. Heah hit is."

He went to the brush near by, and produced it, carefully wrapped up in an old overcoat.

"O, to Grace how great a debtor,
Daily I'm constrained to feel.

Let Thy goodness like a fetter,
Bind my soul in hoops of steel,"

murmured the Adjutant, anxiously hefting the demijohn to see that none of its contents were missing. "Life resumes its roseate hue. Uncle Ephraim, you are the immediate jewel of my soul. I shall never part with you—so, never."

The coffee was soon boiling and the meat cooked. The next thing was to get down to the firing-line. Uncle Ephraim had provided two kettles: one for the Colonel and his staff; one for Si and his squad. He cut a pole, and hung these from its ends. Aunt Minerva Ann was to follow with the rest of the food. But the moment that she thought of going out again to face those awful siege guns she had a fit of terror, and Pete had to take her load.

The Adjutant started along, carrying the precious demijohn. As he reached the crest of the bank, a bullet from a rebel sharpshooter whistled close to him and struck a tree.

"O, Praxiteles Jones," he exclaimed nervously, "it'll never do to expose this to the chances of a bullet. Nor will it do to take it down there, where those thirsty fellows will gulp it down like Commissary. There wouldn't be a drop left in 15 minutes. Nor will it do to leave it with that hysteric negress. No telling what she would do with it. Might drink the whole of it to drown her sorrows, or she might bang the demijohn around the roots of a tree. I want to go back to the Colonel awfully, but I guess I'd better stay back and look after my papers, and—it. Pete,

report to the Colonel that I have to stay behind, and gather up the regimental papers, and ask him to send the Sergeant-Major back. But I won't trust this to anybody but Uncle Ephraim."

The regiment was lying under the cover of the bank, from the spat of sharpshooting bullets from the rebels, but Uncle Ephraim marched coolly along with his kettles, and was received with cheers, for there was no room nor wood on the bank to make fires.

Details were sent back from the companies to make coffee, and the Colonel, noticing that it was now low-tide, had the sluice gate opened, and as the water ran out, they gained more room on the bank, though the gain was slimy mud.

As soon as Si and Shorty had eaten their dinner, they began a careful reconnaissance of the terrain beyond, with reference to the advance which the regiment might at any moment be ordered to make.

They were still about 600 yards from the main line of the rebel works, which were packed full of men, who yelled saucy and obscene defiance to them to come on.

The steeples and masts of Savannah were clearly outlined in the bright Winter sky, and a clock in a church-yard solemnly struck 1.

It affected them all strangely to have this reminder of peaceful life in the midst of the turmoil and stress of boisterous war.

Immediately before the regiment was another flooded rice-field, and beyond it a main canal, probably 10 feet wide and six or eight feet deep. Beyond this was another rice-field, apparently not so deeply flooded, but filled at the farther side with abatis, and a ditch ran along immediately in front of the rebel breastworks.

"Condemn the luck," exclaimed Si, gazing dejectedly at the expanse of the rice-field. "I hate a country that draws 50 feet of water. And there's no bank, like there was before to work along to get at them fellers. What in sin can we do?"

Shorty started to swear in his usual fluent way, when he thought of Maria and his good resolutions, and subsided into Si's equally savage but less profane "Consnarn it," and "Plague take it!" Suddenly he remarked:

"Say, Si, that sluice-gate's opened this field, too, and the water's running out. See?"

"So it is," said Si, ignoring the rebel sharpshooters, and going over the bank to examine. "It's fell more'n a foot now. It'll all be out in a hour or so, and we'll only have the mud to contend with."

"That's so deep we'll stick fast in it, like flies in molasses," said Shorty, relapsing into despondency.

Si thought a minute, and then said: "What's the matter with corduroying it?"

"I don't catch on."

"Couldn't we lay down a roadway of

ON THE MARCH TO THE SEA.



"IT SENT A STORM OF CANISTER INTO THE RANKS OF THE MUSKETEERS."

brush, same's we done once back there by Tullyhomy, and roll our sycamore gum along it?"

"I begin to see. Let's go and talk to the Colonel about it."

The town clock over in Savannah struck 2.

The Colonel took a look at the rapidly-falling water in the field, went over himself and probed the mud, and coming back, ordered the Major to take the rear rank of the regiment back into the woods and cut brush.

The rebels saw the men filing back, and mistaking it for a retreat, raised a yell of triumph, to which the front rank responded with a sharp volley.

"We're here yet, tending strictly to business, and mean to stay until ye get ready to go forward," said Si, as he brought down a saucy rebel who had jumped up on the works and swung his hat, in order to be able to yell louder.

Si, Shorty, Tom and Abe went back to where their gum had fallen in the hole, rolled it out, and examined it. The horse

canister had only gone through one thickness at most, and many of the balls had only penetrated the tough, hard sycamore a couple of inches.

"Bully for the old Monitor," exclaimed Si. "I always thought sycamore a mighty poor wood, but it seems it's good for something. Roll her forward, boys. We'll take Savanny with her yet."

The town clock struck 3.

The watching rebels were astounded to see the brush of the distant woods come marching down the bank toward them, as the men of the rear rank filed back, each one bending under all he could carry of the green orange, cedar, myrtle, pine and cyprus brush.

The big siege gun in the fort thought that it was something that it should attend to, and sent a shell so close that the brush-carriers scattered in a lively way. But two rifled field-pieces which had been sent up there to look out for the big gun, took this for their cue to speak up, and sent in their shells with such close aim around the big gun, that it thought it would have enough to do to attend to them, and began an angry effort to shut them up.

While the artillery duel was shaking the earth the brush-carriers rushed down to Si and Shorty, who threw their bundles in front of the gum, and began rolling it forward over the improvised causeway.

The rebels concentrated a musketry fire on it, but Si and Shorty were careful only to expose themselves at the instant of throwing the brush over, and to hold the bundle well before them as they rose. They caught several bullets in the bundles, which staggered them with their force, but they remained untouched.

The noisy firing excited the Adjutant almost to the point of forgetting the precious demijohn. He ran forward with it in his hand to the brink of the bank, and took a quick glance of the situation. He saw Uncle Ephraim working his way back with his coffee-kettles slung together over his shoulders, to take up less room in the crowd.

"Drop those kettles and take that, Uncle," said the Adjutant, passing the demijohn to him. "Run back for your life with it, and get behind that bomb-proof, and stay there as long as there is—and stay there as long as there is a shot fired. Don't risk it, any more than you would your immortal soul. Sergeant," said he to a young non-com. of a battery, who had been sent up to see if he could be of use, but who was fretting because the rebels were out of range of his 12-pound Napoleon, "you want a job. There's one for you. Unlimber your gun, load with double canister, and work it forward by hand to that bank, and help the boys out. Quick! I'll run ahead and clear the way for you."

The Sergeant and his squad sprang to their work as if set off by electricity, and

were right at the heels of the Adjutant, as he walked along the bank, shouting:

"Open out there for the artillery! Clear the way for the gun."

This is an appeal that infantry always respond to instantly. Men in the rear, tired of being unable to do anything, sprang up to help rush the gun along.

"O, this is a picnic," muttered the battery Sergeant, as he wheeled his gun around on the bank behind Si and Shorty and put his hand on the elevating screw. "It's the chance of a thousand. Just the right range for canister, and they're over there thicker 'n fiddlers in hades. Won't I just salivate 'em. Ready? Break away."

He stepped back, raised his hand, the man drew the lanyard taut, the Sergeant dropped his hand, and the gun seemed to yell with a fiendish delight as it sent a storm of canister into the dense ranks of the musketeers behind the works. The gun recoiled and ran down the bank into the mud.

Instantly as many hands as could lay hold on it were dragging it back up the bank for another shot.

"Another shot like that, Sergeant, will sign and seal your commission," said the Colonel delightedly, walking up to the gun.

But the Sergeant was too busy preparing for another shot to waste time listening to compliments. Almost as the Colonel spoke the gun gave another of the deep-mouthed roars of the Napoleons, and again bounded back into the mud just in time to avoid a shell which a rebel field-piece hurled at it. This in turn waked up a rifled gun which had been hurried up on the hill behind to the support of the Napoleon, and it sent a shell to distract the attention of the rebel piece.

The air was rent with cheers, and Si and Shorty rushed their gum to near the center of the field. Company Q, flat on the brush behind, with only room between the ranks for the brush-carriers to pass, was pushing up close behind them.

"Pretty soon we might chance the mud the rest of the way," said Si, taking advantage of the confusion in the rebel ranks produced by the canister, to study the ground in front. "Tain't very far now, and once behind that canal bank we're safe. We've got so much mud on us already that a little more won't matter."

"Let's try it now," said Shorty, after a moment's look about. "That canister right in their faces is flustering them so that they can't shoot. The right wing sees it and they're throwing down their brush, and running out on it without any protection. Let's beat 'em to the canal bank."

"Up, everybody! Up, everybody! Forward! Forward!" shouted Si, at the top of his stentorian lungs as he seized his gun, and sprang out into the mud, and waded forward.

There was a mad race all along the line to reach the shelter of the canal bank, while all the cannon belched at one au-

other overhead, and the Sergeant and his squad tore up the top of the rebel works with caustic.

Pete and Sandy slipped and fell headlong in the mud, to be instantly snatched upright by Si and Shorty. The other boys splashed and stumbled forward, while the bullets splattered the mud around them, but just before their breath gave clear out, the whole squad flung themselves panting on the safe shelter of the canal bank, and were soon joined by the rest of Co. Q.

Every one was covered with a layer of slimy mud, but their cartridges were all right, and as soon as they recovered their breath a little, they climbed a little higher on the bank, and began sharpshooting at that closer range, to help the rest of the regiment get across with as little loss as possible.

"Don't expose yourself for your men, Sergeant," said Col. McGillicuddy, wading along in the mud behind them. He seemed even worse muddied and bedraggled than they. "The whole regiment is now over, and we are perfectly safe behind this bank. We can hold it a good deal longer than the rebels can that over there. The Kanakees and Oshkoshers seem to be having a hard time, but I guess they'll get through all right. We can't help them, any way. You can just lie still and rest awhile. I think we've done all we can for today. I wish I knew how we are going to get over that infernal canal."

The clock in the Savannah steeple struck 4.

The rifled guns on the hill behind had now such good range on the rebel works that the firing from them died down to infrequent shots, and the boys took the Colonel's advice, and began cleaning off the clinging mud. They scraped off all they could, took off their shoes, and emptied them, and washed their socks and their feet in the pools. A lot of driftwood lay along the top of the bank, which they pulled down, and started little fires under the shelter of the bank to dry themselves.

As early darkness came on, the firing died clear down, and Si and Shorty rose above the bank to study the looks of things beyond.

Some rebels appeared above the breastworks, and one of them called out:

"Say, Yanks, king's ex. If you won't shoot, we won't."

"All right," answered Si. "We've had enough shooting for awhile. What do you think of the Yankees by this time? You can't stop us no way you can fix it."

"O, you's think you's air mou'ty smart, don't you's, jest becase you's got crost them fields?"

"Well, you tried your best to keep us back."

"O, that was only jest a warmer. You's hain't hardly begun your troubles. We'uns allers expected you's 'd git to that canal thar. But you's 'll never git

acrost hit in the living world. We'uns 'll pile you's up thar like rabbits in a battoo. An' any o' you's that git acrost 'll be ketched in the abatis in front. And that ground is full o' torpedies. You's 've got no more chanst o' gettin' into Savanny than Abe Linkhorn has o' 'scapin' the devil."

There was a guffaw from the rebels, at this flash of wit.

"Is that so?" inquired Si, with interest. "Who's in command over there?"

"Lootenant General Hardee."

"O, old Hardee. We know him of old. We begun licking him at Stone River, two years ago, and a thousand miles from here. We've done it ever since wherever we could catch him, until he ain't holding hardly enough ground to bury you. You don't think you can keep us off'n that measly little patch o' alligator pasture, do you?"

"That buzzard-roost, where you live off of the dead fish that floats ashore?" said Shorty.

"What's that you're sayin' 'bout the great city o' Savanny, yo' nigger-thief?" retorted the man angrily, reaching back for his rifle.

As usual, Pete and Sandy were putting in the time exercising their passion for investigation. A little ways to the left they had found a foot-log across the canal, and had cautiously crawled along it to take a closer look at what was on the other side. There was a staging leading through the field from this, for the use of those passing in and out, and they crawled cautiously along this for some little distance. They heard a voice among the rebels say warningly in an undertone:

"Hist! Not so fast. Keep on jawing until you git more o' them up thar. Ain't quarter enough yit. Besides, the guns ain't ready yit."

The boys could then make out sounds of the movement of cannon, and their loading. They slid back in all haste, and warned Si and the rest.

Everybody, tired of crouching under the bank, was now sticking his head up to hear the wordy battle between the two sides. Si passed the word along what was threatening, and to be ready to disappear like a flash.

"What's the matter with you fellers, anyway?" Shorty taunted them. "A' first you blowed about one of you being able to lick five Yankees. Now, a few of us have licked a whole State full of you. We've run you from one end of Georgy to the other, and 've got the tail end of your army cooped up like a skunk in a muskrat hole. We'll settle you along about day-break so quick that your heels 'll break your neck, you alligator-eating traitors."

The Union line yelled and laughed in uproarious applause of Shorty's malediction.

"What's that yo're a-callin' me, yo'.

blue-bellied hound?" roared the rebel, snatching up his gun.

"Down, all you'ns," commanded a voice on the rebel side.

"Hunt your holes, Yanks!" yelled Si, at the top of his voice.

Everybody was instantly behind the bank, like a village of prairie-dogs disappearing.

It was not an instant too soon, for the whole rebel front blazed with cannon-fire,

and a storm of canister swept the bank the whole length of the regiment.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Si, "how many condemned guns have they packed down in there? They seem set on holding this part of the line, if nothing else. Them cannon will make lively work in the morning. I hope our officers have noticed this, and 've got some more cannon up there to 'tend to these."

The clock in the steeple struck 6.

CHAPTER LII.

A WET, COLD NIGHT IN THE SWAMPS—DIFFICULTIES OF THE ADVANCE ON AN IMPREGNABLE POSITION—THE REBELS BRING ALL THEIR TOIL TO NAUGHT BY EVACUATING.

Si was right in his predictions. The thoughtful General had anticipated the massing of the rebel artillery in front of the most advanced part of the line. Rifled guns had been quietly collected on the bluff behind, and the storm of canister from the rebel guns was immediately answered by a volcano of shells, which dropped with great precision behind the rebel works.

"Now, will you be good?" exclaimed Shorty, jubilantly, as the inside of the rebel line was lighted by the baleful fire of the bursting shells, and fragments of the gun-carriages, with the garments carried on the limbers, rose high in the air. "You sow canister and reap the wrath of God. I only wish we were over there to help out those shells. I only hope the shells'll make sausage-meat out o' the whole biling of you unsanctified whelps."

As the infernal crash died away into occasional shots when the watchful battery-men detected some movement among the rebels, the town-clock in Savannah deliberately tolled forth seven as calmly as if marking the flight of peaceful hours for the people, instead of recording an eternity of time, an age of anxiety, fierce passion and pain, mutilation, suffering and death for the thousands of strong men struggling in the chill morasses and the gloomy night for possession of the city.

The church bells began ringing for the usual Monday evening services, and the women and old men thronged thither to send up fervent prayers for deliverance "from battle, murder and sudden death."

"Hear that clock," said Col. McGillicuddy, pulling out his watch to compare with it. "Enough for a century has happened since it last struck: The poet says, 'We live in deeds and not in years.'

"A heap of fellers heard it strike 6 that didn't when it went 7," commented Shorty. "Them shells struck their time o' day in great shape. Mighty fine work that. Them battery boys are getting so they can shoot off a gnat's heel without harming the gnat. Sometimes wish I'd joined the artillery."

"One of them church-bells over there sounds just like the one at home," commented Si, with memories tugging at his heart. "It says 'Come to God! Come to God' just as plain."

Under the cover of the shelling the work of making roadways across the fields by laying down brush had been going on actively. Studying it through the clear starlight Si said:

"They're fixing to reinforce us. They intend we shall be the head of the spear they punch through the rebel lines."

"Well, let 'em start us as soon as they please. I'd rather do anything than lay here on this damp bank with my feet in the mud. I've been in the water so much that I feel I'm spreading out below like one of them cypresses."

"Goodness, don't!" exclaimed Si. "We want some room around here for the rest of us. But I'm getting to feel rather water-logged myself. Let's stir 'round, and see if we can't find some way to get across this canal."

The night air was crisp to frostiness, and after the excitement of the shelling they stiffened with cold in that dreary expanse of mud and water all about them, from which there was no escape.

The blankets on which they lay on the wet bank were speedily soaked with water. Their feet were constantly in the cold mud, and everything they touched had a penetrating, damp chill. Pete and

Sandy were blue with the cold, and their teeth chattered.

"We'd better stir the boys up to something," said Si. "It'll just kill them to lay still here all night, after they've been so hot and tired. Them fellers over there 've got their bellies full o' shooting for a while, and we can move around, I guess, without much danger. Let's go and talk to the Colonel about a bridge across the canal."

"Yes, Sergeant," answered the Colonel, when Si opened the matter to him. "I've thought out about bridging the canal, and the Adjutant has gone back to superintend the cutting of some logs and stuff and incidentally to look after a certain precious demijohn, the early history of which I do not know, but which mysteriously appeared in my quarters the day after the fall of Fort McAllister. By the way," he continued, teasingly, "I have been so very busy that I have never made the investigation that I promised Gen. Hazen I would make. After we get into Savannah I may have more leisure."

"Let me know before you begin, and I'll get that demijohn out of sight, Colonel," grinned Shorty. "It's all that's left now."

"Well, not to change the subject, but rather to continue what I was saying," replied the Colonel, "as soon as the Adjutant gets the stuff cut he will send it forward, and you can begin building the bridges. You'd better be picking out the places."

"Sandy," said Si, "you and Pete might slip across that log again, and work your way out to the left, and see if you can find any gates that'll open and drain that field. Be as still as cats, now, you young whelps, and don't wake up those rebels over there."

Si and Shorty selected as the place for the first bridge where the canal had been narrowed two or three feet by the projection of the roots of a clump of brush and saplings. These had been cut off cleanly a couple of feet from the ground by the fearful blast of canister.

"That's right in the range of a gun over there," Si communed with Shorty, "as is showed by the clean-cut-off it has made of the brush. Didn't leave a stick standing."

"Mebbe the shells have knocked the gun out since," suggested Shorty.

"Mebbe. Anyway, the gun was pointed so that it went two feet above the bank, and we can avoid it by scrouching down. Best of all, that that's left standing and the brush that's cut off makes a screen behind which we can work. The roots will make good foundation to lay the ends of our stringers on. I'll go to that log that the boys found, and cross over, and crawl down behind them bushes. You stay on this side, and pass the logs over

to me. Keep the boys back here quiet, and we'll build the bridge right under the rebels' noses without their knowing it. If they shoot, don't let any of the boys here shoot back, but let them on the right wing answer, so that they'll think that we're coming over there."

Si got down on his hands and knees, and crept across the log and back to the cover of the stumps. He was now about 200 yards from the rebels, and the sounds from behind their works came very plainly to him across the flooded field. They were still engrossed with repairing the damage done by the shells and caring for their wounded. An officer was swearing about some men whom he had sent off with the dead and wounded and not returning. Several wounded men were moaning, and one was whining because the Captain would not let him go back.

"No, Rattleweed," said the Captain, "You'll stay right where you are. This's the first time we've ever got you into a fight, and you've only got a scratch—not as bad as the nosebleed. You've got to stay here and take the place of better men that we've lost. Shut up, now. I won't have you whining around."

"Great Scott," murmured Si, "ain't they just in tune over there for the 200th Injanny to light in among 'em. I'm hungry to get at 'em."

His shrewdness did not fail him in his eagerness. He studied the ground, or rather water, in front, and began cautiously moving the fallen bush-tops to increase the area of curtain. He was careful not to move any piece quickly enough to attract attention, nor to suddenly change the outlines of the clump, which they were no doubt sharply watching. He kept the shape and height of the dark mass the same, but slowly extended it each way.

He heard a splash in the water behind him, and looking around saw Shorty shoving a small log over to him. He caught the end, lifted it, and placed it firmly on the roots on his side.

"Good enough," he whispered back, "Rush them along, and we'll have a bridge in no time."

The clock in the steeple struck 8.

The Adjutant had luckily found a grove of cyprus saplings, tall, slender and straight, and from three to six inches thick, and had these cut into 12-foot lengths. A strong man could carry two of these, and Si soon had enough to make a bridge on which four men could march abreast. He sent back word for a grapevine, with which he and Shorty bound these together in the middle, so that they would not push apart under the men's feet.

"Very good, Sergeant," said the Colonel, inspecting it. "Excellent, in fact. I'd go right ahead and extend it at this place, I believe, so as to make room for a pla-

toon or company front to pass over, if you can."

"Good idee, Colonel, except that you must recollect that their cannon rake this place. You can see that by the way the canister has mowed off the brush."

He suddenly pitched forward into the water as he spoke. The visit of the Colonel had thrown him off his guard, and he had unthinkingly raised the pole in his hands above the cover of the bushes, and a watching sharpshooter, taking it for a man, had put a bullet into it.

"You see, Colonel, they're recovering from the effects of the shelling over there," said Si coolly, as he scrambled back onto the bank, out of the water. "We've got to be more careful, or else do more shelling."

"Both, probably," answered the Colonel, much rejoiced to find that Si was unharmed. "I'll send back to have those guns open again. No use of being economical with ammunition now, since we have reached the fleet. I'll go over to the right of the line, and order them to make a thrashing in the water, and talking and shooting, as if they were laying the bridge there. This will distract their attention from you."

In a few minutes a rifled gun on the bluff behind blared out, as if angry at being waked up again, after the hard work of the day. A shell howled maledictions across the dreary expanse of mud and water, and tore a head-log off of the rebel works.

One after another the other guns followed suit, and the torment of the rebels was renewed.

A turmoil arose on the extreme right of the regiment. A company fired a volley, followed by a continual popping of shots. There was splashing in the water, mingled with low shouts of—

"Shove her right along;

"Take hold, there, boys."

"Lift, now, every one of you whelps."

"Get her end up on the bank," etc., etc.

This was responded to by an order from the rebel Colonel to man the works and open fire. Then an artillery officer commanded:

"Action. Load! Ready! Aim! Fire!" and a storm of canister swept the banks, hurting no one, since every head was kept carefully behind the dike, except back on the left, where Si and Shorty were laying down poles as fast as they could be brought. Si had his own squad over on his side, slowly working the brush out as a screen.

The rebel guns drew the fire of the rifles on the bank, and while the row lasted Si and Shorty got down a gangway wide enough for a company front across the canal.

They were very tired and wet, but they crawled over the bridge, and carefully examined it, to see that they had left no

hole to trip up some unlucky one, and break the rush across, when the time should come.

"Horse-high, bull-strong, pig-tight," muttered Si, satisfiedly, repeating the old Indiana fence formula.

The clock in the steeple struck 10.

They lay down on the bridge to rest, for it was the only dry spot in the neighborhood.

"We're all right now for the canal," said Si. "But how are we going to get across the field, I'd like to know? We can't work any of our other plans there, as I can see."

"I'm going to let the Colonel do the thinking for that," said Shorty, wearily, as he stretched himself out. "He showed some management about this bridge. Let's encourage him. He's run with us long enough to begin to understand his business. I'm tired of running the regiment. Let him have a chance. It's his business to get us over there."

Pete came back, running along the foot of the bank, in order to make more speed than by crawling along the top. "Say," he whispered to Si, "me and Sandy couldn't find no gates at all, though we went a long ways down there. But we found down there three flatboats loaded with rice-straw, that Sandy thinks mebbe we can use to get across the field. He's stayed there to watch 'em, and sent me to tell you."

"Let's go back and look at 'em, Shorty," said Si.

They found the batteaux good-sized ones, with about a ton of straw on each. They lay in a little bay within probably 100 yards of the rebel line, whither they had been probably brought with a view to using their loads for the garrison.

Si and Shorty looked at them with a view to making an assault from there, but the farther ditch looked too broad and deep.

"Better take 'em up in front of the regiment," they decided, "though it's going to be ticklish work moving 'em out right under them fellers' noses."

The old moon was now far down in the west, throwing all her light directly on the breastworks, while filling the other side with shadows.

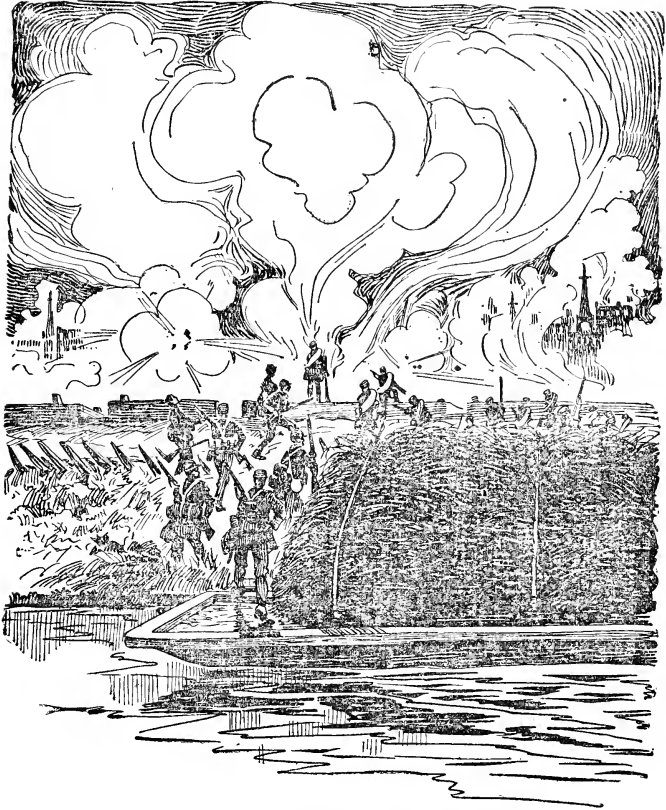
Si and Shorty looked the boats over again in the moonlight.

"Recollect how them fellers went across the Rappahannock at Fredericksburg, Shorty?"

"Yes—in pontoons."

"Well, what's the matter with us trying the same thing with these? If they did it we can."

"Sure. Them Army of the Potomac fellers can't turn any trick that we can't. I believe that straw'll stop a bullet. It's wet and heavy. We can keep it in front of us, and trust to the artillery to keep down their infernal canister. Let's try it."



"THE FIRE IN THE FORT BECAME SO VIVID AS TO LIGHT UP THE INTERIOR OF THE BREASTWORKS."

"There's no use starting from here. Let's take the boats up in front of the regiment, and let the whole company in with us. I believe the boats'll carry all of Co. Q."

"I guess so."

"Pete," said Si, "run back to the Colonel, and tell him that we're going to bring the boats up, and ask to please stir up that hullabaloo again, to distract their attention. Sandy, go back and bring Tom, Abe, and the rest of the boys. Let each

of 'em pick out one of the lightest of those poles and bring it along."

When Sandy returned with the boys, flushed for the new adventure, and eager for anything that would break the deadly chill of lying on the wet bank, the rattle of firing and the murmur of shouts and orders broke out again on the extreme right of the regiment.

Pete came running back, breathless, as they pushed the boats out.

"Hear 'em?" he said. "The Colonel's

poing 'em up with a long pole, just as you wanted. More fun than a barrel of monkeys. I wanted to stay and help, and then I wanted to be with you worse, so I run back."

"Get in here, Pete, and lay down behind the straw, and keep down and don't say a word," commanded Shorty, pulling him in. "We may get a volley any minute, and I want you safe."

"But I'm going to stand up and pole, like Sandy and the rest," said Pete to himself, a minute later. "He shan't put on no airs over me, about what he done in this frolic more'n me."

He picked up a pole and joined the others in silently pushing the boats along under the shadows of the banks.

The poles were pushed into the water so carefully that they made no noise, and the boats moved along so slowly that the rebels behind their works, peering at the dark bank, mistook the movement for the customary illusions of sight when staring into growing darkness.

At last the boats stopped in front of the clump of brush mowed by the canister, behind which was the bridge. Not a shot had been fired at them from the other side, and Pete jumped ashore to run to the Colonel, report their arrival, and say that there was no longer need of continuing the racket.

The clock in the steeple struck 11 as one by one Co. Q filed into the boats and lay down behind the rice-straw, which had been heaped on the farther sides, weighted down by poles laid across, and reinforced by heavy plank set on edge. It made a rampart with which they could hope to encounter the fierce fire certain to greet them as they neared the works.

Veterans as they were, the danger they were braving sobered them to dead silence. They held up their tin cups and bayonet scabbards as they lay down, that they might not strike upon the boards and alarm the enemy. The scraping of a musket against a canteen or a belt-plate jarred upon their strained nerves and brought a low, sharp hiss of condemnation upon the careless one.

With minds equally tense, the other companies lay along the bank, their muskets leveled on the opposite side, ready to pour in a terrible volley the moment the rebels should discover the advance.

The moon was now setting, and the dark shadows lengthening out from the shore. It was Si's plan to push the boats out sidewise toward the rebel works, under the cover of these shadows, and get as near the abatis as possible before being discovered. After that Fate would have to rule the event, but Co. Q would do all that brave men could.

He and the strong men in each boat set

their poles in the mud and began working the clumsy, heavy-laden boats slowly forward.

It was straining work forcing the cumbersome craft forward sidewise, and all the more straining because of the necessity for absolute silence. But the advance was so gradual that sharper eyes than the rebels had would not have detected the change in the mass of blackness lying on the face of the water. It was so noiseless that the anxious men could hear their hearts beating against the boards on which they were lying.

All the noises behind the rebel works had ceased, too. Were they all asleep, or were they waiting with cocked muskets and taut lanyards for the boats to come where one tremendous volley of bullets and canister would sweep all of them off the face of the earth?

The clock in the steeple clanged out 12, and Si, wiping his hot face, cautiously raised his head above the rampart to see that the boat was almost across the water and near the edge of the abatis.

"Somebody's got to say something condemned soon, or——" whispered Shorty, but before he could finish the sentence a tremendous explosion far over toward the city shook the earth. Another followed, almost instantly, and then there was a succession of them, coming from all parts of the long line. Lastly came one from the fort behind the works upon which they were advancing.

A column of flame shot up in the air, with timbers and planks flying in its lurid glare.

Then great fires began to blaze at different points.

The fort in front began to burn.

"Great Scott—they're evacuating," said Si, as the truth began to dawn upon him.

Everybody sprang up from behind his shelter. The fire in the fort became so vivid as to light up the interior of the breastworks.

Excited, Pete and Sandy jumped off the boat onto the plank staging that led to the works and rashly ran along it clear to the parapet.

"They're all gone! They're all gone!" they shouted back. "There's not a plaguesy soul here. They've slipped away."

"Yes, thar's some o' we'uns left still," called out some deserters, crawling from their hiding places. "Don't shoot. We'uns want to surrender."

"Evacuated! Sneaked off! Run! After all the trouble that we've been to to get at 'em, the cowardly——" roared Shorty, and, forgetting Maria, forgetting his good resolutions, he deluged the neighborhood with a torrent of raging profanity that seemed to curl and blight the leaves on the orange trees.

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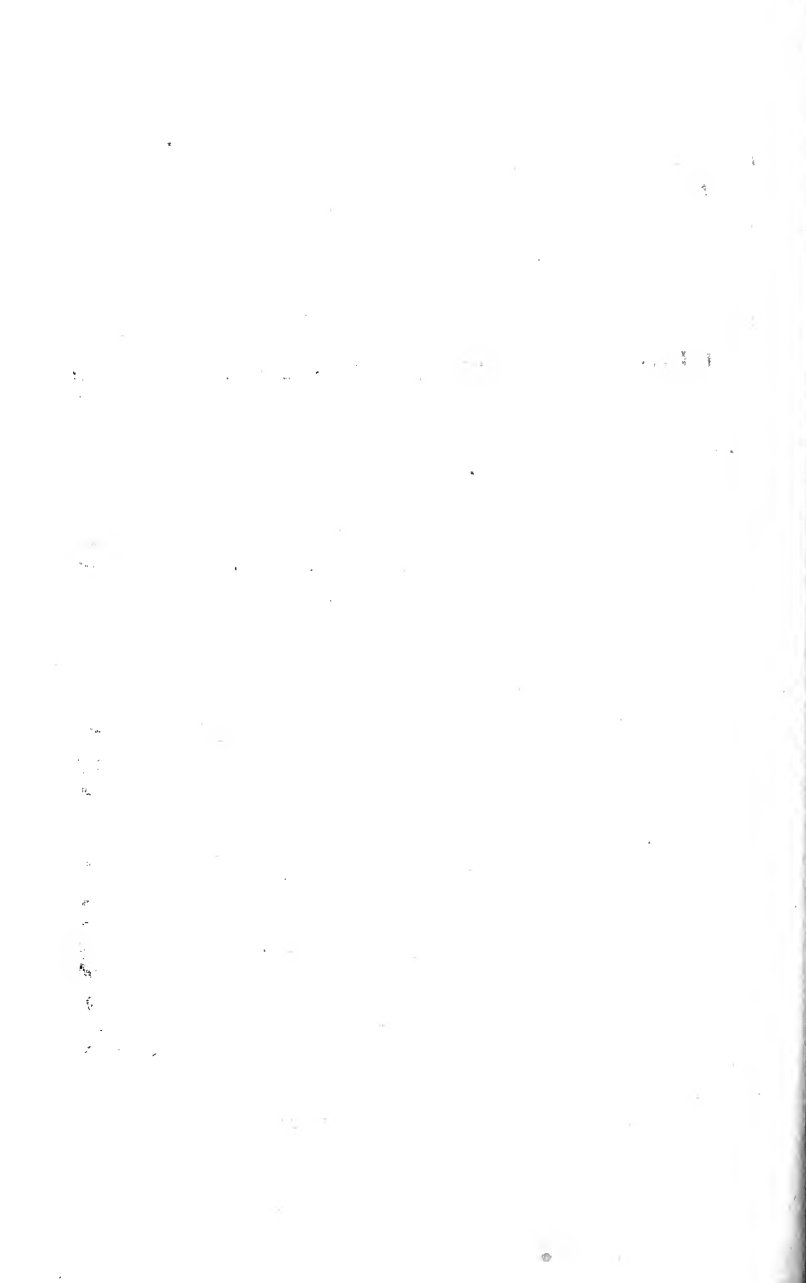
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