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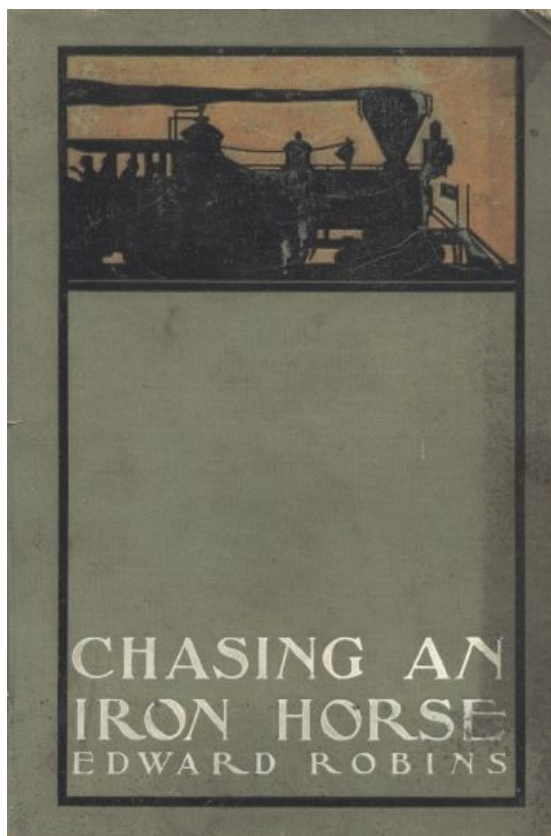
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"THE NEXT MOMENT WAS A BLANK"

Chasing an Iron Horse

Or

A Boy's Adventures in the Civil War

By

EDWARD ROBINS

*Author of "With Washington in Braddock's Campaign,"
"A Boy in Early Virginia," etc.*



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Preface

The locomotive chase in Georgia, which forms what may be called the background of this story, was an actual occurrence of the great Civil War. But I wish to emphasize the fact that the following pages belong to the realm of fiction. Some of the incidents, and the character of Andrews, are historic, whilst other incidents and characters are imaginary. The reader who would like to procure an account of the chase as it really happened should consult the narrative

of the Reverend William Pittenger. Mr. Pittenger took part in the expedition organized by Andrews, and his record of it is a graphic contribution to the annals of the conflict between North and South.

EDWARD ROBINS.

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Chasing an Iron Horse

CHAPTER I

HAZARDOUS PLANS

The lightning flashes, the mutterings of thunder, like the low growls of some angry animal, and the shrieking of the wind through swaying branches, gave a weird, uncanny effect to a scene which was being enacted, on a certain April night of the year 1862, in a secluded piece of woodland a mile or more east of the village of Shelbyville, Tennessee. In the centre of a small clearing hemmed in by trees stood a tall, full-bearded man of distinguished bearing. Around him were grouped twenty sturdy fellows who listened intently, despite the stir of the elements, to something that he was saying in a low, serious tone of voice. None of them, strangely enough, wore a uniform, although they were all loyal Union soldiers belonging to the division of troops commanded by General O. M. Mitchell, then encamped on the banks of Duck River, only a couple of miles away. For the country was now engaged in the life-and-death struggle of the Civil War, when Northerner fought against Southerner—sometimes brother against brother—and no one could predict whether the result would be a divided or a reunited nation.

"My friends," the speaker was solemnly saying, as a new flash from the darkened heavens lit up the landscape for a second, and showed how resolute were the lines of his face; "my friends, if you go into this scheme with me, you are taking your lives into your hands. It's only fair that I should impress this upon you, and give you and all of you a chance to drop out."

There was a quick, sharp clap of thunder, which was not loud enough, however, to drown the earnest protest of every listener. "We're not cowards, Andrews!" "We'll stick to you through thick and thin!" "Nobody's going to draw back!" These were among the fervent answers which greeted the leader addressed as Andrews. The latter was evidently pleased, though by no means surprised. He was dealing with brave men, and he knew his audience.

"All the better, boys," he went on, with a complacent ring in his soft but penetrating voice. "You see, this is the situation. The Confederates are concentrating at Corinth, Mississippi, and

Generals Grant and Buell are advancing by different routes against them. Now, our own General Mitchell finds himself in a position to press into East Tennessee as far as possible, and he hopes soon to seize Chattanooga, after he has taken Huntsville, Alabama. But to do this he must cut off Chattanooga from all railroad communication to the south and east, and therefore all aid. In other words, we men are to enter the enemy's country in disguise, capture a train on the Georgia State railroad, steam off with it, and burn the bridges leading in the direction of Chattanooga, on the northern end of the road. It is one of the most daring ideas ever conceived, and its execution will be full of difficulties. If we fail we shall be hanged as spies! If we succeed, there will be promotion and glory for all of us, and our names will go down into history."

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There was a murmur of encouragement from the men, as one said: "We must succeed, if only to save our necks." The next moment the barking of a dog could be heard above the whistling of the wind.

"Be careful," cried Andrews, warningly; "some one may be listening."

Hardly had he spoken before two figures bounded from the encircling trees into the open space wherein stood the startled conspirators. While flashes of lightning played through the branches, and gave fitful illumination to the scene, the men saw revealed a lad of about fifteen or sixteen years of age, flushed and breathless, and at his heels a tiny Yorkshire terrier, bright of face, and with an inquiring glance that seemed to say: "What is all this fuss about?" As the animal danced around the boy it was evident that the latter was by no means frightened, or even surprised, by the strangeness of this meeting in the forest. His regular, handsome features and intelligent, sparkling gray eyes denoted excitement rather than fear. He sprang forward, and, pulling a letter from an inner pocket of his blue jacket, made straight for Andrews.

11

"Why, if it isn't George Knight," muttered one soldier, "and his chum, Waggie."

The dog, hearing his own name, came up and fawned upon the man who had spoken, while the boy thrust into the hands of the leader the letter which he had so carefully guarded.

"This is from General Mitchell," explained young Knight. "He said it was most urgent—and I was to fetch it to you as soon as possible."

Andrews opened the letter, as he replied kindly to the lad: "You look out of breath, George. Did you have a hard time reaching here?"

"As Waggie and I were hurrying up the Shelbyville road in the darkness," returned George Knight, "we ran into a company of Confederate guerrillas. They paid us the compliment of firing at us—and we had to run for our lives. But we gave the fellows the slip."

Thereupon Waggie gave a growl. Andrews, who was about to read the letter from General Mitchell, assumed a listening attitude. So did every one else. Out on the highroad, not a hundred yards away, could be heard the tramping of horses. Involuntarily the men put their hands towards the pockets which contained their revolvers.

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"The guerrillas!" muttered the boy, as Andrews gave him a questioning look.

"How many are there of them?" asked the leader.

"Hard to tell in the dark," answered George. "I think there were a dozen or so."

"Oh, if that's all, let's give 'em a scare, boys!" laughed Andrews. Suiting the action to his words, he pulled out a pistol from his hip pocket, and fired it in the direction of the highroad. His companions, nothing loath, quickly followed his example. George and his canine chum looked on expectantly, as if regretting that neither of them possessed a weapon. Now there came the clatter of hoofs, like a stampede, and the guerrillas seemed to be engaged in a wild scramble to get away. They were an intrepid party, without doubt, but the sudden volley from the mysterious and darkened recesses of the woods (which might come, for all the Southerners knew, from a whole regiment of troops) demoralized them. In another instant they were scampering off, and the sound of the horses on the road was soon lost in the distance.

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Andrews replaced his revolver, with a little chuckle of amusement.

"They are a daring lot to venture so near our army," he said. Then he began to read the letter, with the aid of a dark lantern provided by one of his companions.

While he is engaged in this occupation let us ask two questions. Who is Andrews, and who is George Knight? James Andrews, though a Virginian by birth, has lived in the mountains of Kentucky for many years, and is now a spy of the Union army, in the employ of General Buell. The war is only fairly begun, but already more than once has the spy courted death by penetrating into the lines of the Confederacy, in the guise of a merchant, and bringing back to the Northern forces much valuable information. He is a man of fine education and polished manners, despite his life in the wilds, and is tall, aristocratic-looking, and full of a quiet courage which, in his own dangerous profession, answers far better than the greatest impetuosity. He has plenty of daring, but it is a daring tempered with prudence. Although he has masqueraded among the enemy at times when the slightest slip of the tongue might have betrayed him, he has thus far returned to the Union lines in safety. How long, some of his friends ask anxiously, will he be able to continue in so perilous an enterprise? Yet here he is, planning, with the consent of General Mitchell, a scheme bolder than anything yet dreamed of in the annals of the war.

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And what of George Knight? He is an active, healthy-minded drummer boy belonging to one of the Ohio regiments in General Mitchell's division. His mother had died in his infancy. At the

outbreak of the war, a year before the opening of our story, he was living in Cincinnati with his father. The latter suddenly gave up a prosperous law practice to go to the help of the North, secured a commission as a captain of volunteers, went to the front, and was either captured or killed by the Confederates. Since the preceding Christmas nothing had been heard of him. George, with an aching heart, stayed at home with an uncle, and chafed grievously as he saw company after company of militia pass through his native town on the way to the South. Where was his father? This he asked himself twenty times a day. And must he, the son, stand idly by whilst thousands of the flower of the land were rushing forward to fight on one side or the other in the great conflict? "I must enlist!" George had cried, more than once. "Pshaw!" replied his uncle; "you are too young—a mere child." But one fine day George Knight had himself enrolled as a drummer boy in a regiment then being recruited in Cincinnati, and, as his uncle had a large family of his own, with no very strong affection to spare for his nephew, there was not as much objection as might have been expected. So the lad went to the war. He had now become a particular *protégé* of General Mitchell, who had taken him into his own service as an assistant secretary—a position in which George had already shown much natural cleverness.

15

After reading the letter just brought to him, Andrews tears it into a hundred little pieces which he scatters to the winds.

16

"What's the matter?" ask several of the men, as they crowd around him.

"Hurry's the matter," laughs the leader, as unconcernedly as if he were speaking of nothing more dangerous than a picnic. "The General tells me we must start at once, if we want to accomplish anything. To-morrow [Tuesday] morning he takes his army straight south to Huntsville. If he captures the town by Friday, as he expects to do, he can move eastwards, to Chattanooga. So we will do our bridge-burning and our train-stealing on Friday, before the railroad is obstructed with trains bringing Confederate reinforcements to the latter city."

Even in the darkness one could detect the gleam in the eyes of the men as they saw before them, with pleasure rather than fear, the risky part they were to play in the drama of warfare. The eyes of George sparkled, likewise.

"If I could only go with them," he thought. What was camp life compared to the delight of such an adventure? Waggie gave a bark. Even he seemed to scent something interesting.

17

"You soldiers," continued Andrews, "must break into detachments, make your way eastward into the Cumberland Mountains, and then southward, well into the Confederate lines. There you can take the cars, and by next Thursday night you must all meet me down at Marietta, Georgia. The next morning according to a plan which you will learn at Marietta, (which is on the Georgia State Railroad) we will put our little ruse into effect—and may providence smile on it."

"But what will the men pretend to be while on their way down to Marietta?" asked George, who could scarce contain either his curiosity or his enthusiasm.

"Look here, my boy," said Andrews, in a quick though not in an unkindly way. "I don't know that you should be hearing all this."

Had the scene been less dark one might have seen the flush on the boy's face.

"I didn't think I was playing eavesdropper," he retorted.

Andrews put his right hand on George's shoulder. "Come," he said, in a spirit of friendliness; "I didn't exactly mean that. I know you're to be trusted, from what General Mitchell has said of you. But you must keep a tight rein on your tongue, and not say a syllable, even in camp, of this expedition. There's no reason why the whole army should be discussing it—until the thing's done. Then you can talk about it as much as you want."

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George no longer felt offended. "You can depend on me," he said manfully. "I won't even tell the General."

At this there was a peal of laughter from the men, which seemed to be answered, the next instant, by a blinding fork of lightning, and then a fresh outburst of thunder. Andrews lifted up his hand warningly. He was very grave, as befitted a man on the verge of a mighty responsibility.

"Not so loud," he protested. "You boys must impersonate Kentuckians who are trying to get down south to join the Confederate army. A great many fellows have gone from Kentucky to throw in their lot with the Confederacy, and if you are prudent you will have no trouble in making people believe you. If any of you fall under suspicion on the way, and are arrested, you can enlist in the Confederate army, and then escape from it at the first opportunity. The Southerners are glad to get all the recruits they can, suspicious or otherwise. But I hope you will all reach Marietta in safety. Pray be careful of one thing. If you meet me as we are traveling, don't recognize me unless you are sure no one is watching us. At Marietta we will contrive to meet in the hotel near the railroad station, where I will tell you all that is to be done the next morning."

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"We have no money for the journey," interposed a young volunteer. "Uncle Sam doesn't pay us privates very large salaries, you know, Mr. Andrews."

Andrews produced a large wallet from the inner pocket of his overcoat. It was fairly bulging with paper money.

"I've seen to that," he explained. "Here's a whole wad of Confederate currency which will pay your expenses through the Southern lines." And with that he began to deal out the bills to the

men, who hastily stowed away the money in their own pockets.

"Now, boys," went on the leader, "I want you to divide yourselves into parties of three or four, so that you may travel in separate groups, and thus avoid the suspicion which might be aroused if you all went in a body. And remember! One party must have nothing to do with another."

Thereupon, in the gloomy woods, the future spies formed themselves, as their inclinations directed, into six parties or detachments, four containing three men each, and two containing four. Andrews was to proceed southward alone, without an escort. Poor George Knight and Waggie appeared to be left out in the cold. George was burning to join the expedition. Even the rain which suddenly began to fall could not quench his ardor.

"Mr. Andrews," he said, coming up close to the leader, and speaking in a whisper, "can't I go to Marietta, too?"

Andrews peered at the boy in admiring surprise. "By Jove," he answered, "you're not afraid of danger, even if you are little more than a child. It's bad enough for grown men to risk their lives—and bad enough for me to drag them into such a position,—without getting a plucky boy into the scrape also. No! Don't ask me to do that."

"But I won't be in any more danger in the South than I am here," pleaded George. "If I stay here I may be shot in battle, while if I go to Marietta I—"

"If you go to Marietta, and are found out, you may be hanged as a spy," interrupted Andrews. "I'd rather see you shot than strung up with a rope."

"The Confederates would never hang me if I am little more than a child, as you call me," urged the lad.

Andrews was evidently impressed by George's persistence, but he hastened to say: "Anyway, I have no authority to send you off on this chase. You are a member of General Mitchell's military household, and he alone could give you the permission."

"Then promise me that if I get his permission you will let me go."

The spy hesitated. He could just discern the earnest, pleading expression in the upturned face of the boy, upon which the rain-drops were pouring almost unnoticed.

"Well," he said, at last, "I am going back to camp now, and I start out before daylight. If you can induce the General to let you accompany us before that time I'll make no objection."

George gave a little exclamation of delight. "Come," he said, snapping his fingers at Waggie, "let us see what we can do to talk the old General into it."

The rain was now coming down in torrents, while the sharp, almost deafening cracks of thunder sounded as if the whole artillery of the Union army were engaged in practice. Soon all the conspirators were hurrying back to camp. Andrews was the very last to leave the woods where he had divulged his plans.

"Heaven forgive me," he mused, half sadly, "if I am leading these boys into a death trap." But as a sudden flash of lightning illuminated the wet landscape, as with the brightness of day, there came into the leader's strong face a look of calm resolution. "It's worth all the danger," he added.

An hour later George Knight came running into the tent which Andrews occupied in the camp on Duck River. The leader was enveloped in a woolen overcoat, and on his well-shaped head was a slouch hat of the kind generally worn by Southerners. By the dim, sickly light of the candle which sputtered on a camp stool it could be seen that he had been writing, for pen, ink and a sealed letter were spread out upon the top of a leathern army trunk.

"Well," cried Andrews, picking up the candle from its tin socket and flashing it in the radiant face of the boy. "Ah! No need to ask you! I see by your dancing eyes that you have wheedled old Mitchell into allowing you to do a foolish thing."

The smile on the lad's face vanished. "Don't you want me to go along with you?" he asked, in an injured tone.

The leader replaced the candle in the socket and then took one of George's hands between his own strong palms. "George," he said cordially, "you're a boy after my own heart, and I'd like nothing better than to have you for a companion; but it's because I do like you that I'm sorry you are about to run such a risk—and that's the truth. How did you contrive to persuade the General?"

George seated himself on Andrews' bed, and laughed. "It was hard work at first," he explained, "but after he had refused me twice I said to him: 'General, if you were a boy in my place, and had heard of this expedition, what would you do?' 'By all the stars,' he said, 'I would run away to it rather than miss it—and get shot afterwards as a deserter, I suppose.' 'Then don't put me under the temptation of running away,' said I. At this the General laughed. Then he said: 'Well, tell Andrews you can go—and that I'll never forgive him if he lets anything happen to you. After all, the Confederates would never hang a child like you.'"

"So he too calls you a child!" laughed Andrews.

"Of course I'm not a child," cried George proudly, as he jumped from the bed and stood up very straight, to make himself look as tall as possible; "but the General may call me a six-weeks' old baby if he only lets me go along with you."

"There is no time to waste," announced Andrews. "In the third tent from mine, to the right, you will find Privates Macgreggor and Watson, of the Second Ohio Volunteers. They have just offered to go with us, and I have accepted them in addition to the rest. Go to them, ask them to get you a suit of plain clothes, put it on instead of your uniform, and stick to them closely from the moment you leave camp until you meet me, as I hope you will, at Marietta. And be particularly careful to have nothing about you which could in any way lead to your identification as a Union soldier in case you should be arrested and searched."

"Hurrah!" said George, half under his breath.

"May we all be hurraing this time next week," returned Andrews. "Here, George, as you go out give this letter to the sentry outside, to be sent off to-morrow in the camp mail." As he spoke he took the sealed note from the army trunk, and handed it to the boy. "It is written to the young woman I am engaged to marry," he explained, "and if we all get out of this bridge-burning business with our heads on our shoulders you can come dance at my wedding, and be my best man."

"I'd dance at twenty weddings for you," enthusiastically cried George, who was beginning to have a great admiration for his new friend.

"You don't want me to be married twenty times, do you, my boy?" protested Andrews, smiling.

"I would do a great deal to oblige you," retorted George. Then, after warmly grasping his leader by the hand, he bounded out of the tent. The night was black, and the rain was still descending in a veritable torrent, but to the lad everything seemed clear and rosy. He only saw before him a mighty adventure—and that, to his ardent, youthful spirit, made the whole world appear charming.

CHAPTER II

NEARING THE GOAL

It was the Thursday afternoon succeeding the Monday night described in the former chapter. On the north bank of the Tennessee River, not far from the town of Jasper, three drenched figures might be discerned. They were looking somewhat longingly in the direction of a white frame house not fifty yards away from the stream, which, swollen by the recent storms, was in a particularly turbulent mood. There was nothing very attractive about the building save that it suggested shelter from the rain without, and that the smoke curling up from its large chimney held forth vague hopes of a palatable supper. Certainly there was little in the landscape itself to tempt any one to remain outdoors. The three wanderers seemed to be of this opinion, for they suddenly made a move towards the house. They were roughly dressed, their clothes were soaking, and their high boots bore the evidence of a long, muddy tramp across country.

"Well," grumbled one of them, a thick-set, middle-aged man, with a good-humored expression and a four-days' growth of iron-gray beard on his face; "why did I leave home and home cooking to enlist in the army and then wander over the earth like this?"

"Mr. Watson!" exclaimed the person next to him, in a tone of boyish surprise; "how can you talk like that? Why, *I* am having the time of my life."

The speaker was George Knight. There was mud on his face, and the natty drummer boy in blue uniform had given place to a young fellow who outwardly resembled an ordinary farm hand. But there could be no doubt, from the light which shone in his bright eyes, that he was enjoying himself to the full.

"Humph!" returned Watson. "When you get as old as I am, my boy, you won't take such keen delight in walking through mire."

The boy laughed, and turned to the third member of the party. "Are you tired, too, Macgreggor?" he asked.

Macgreggor, a compactly built, athletic young man of twenty-seven or thereabouts, with a light-brown beard and mustache which made him look older than he really was, shook the rain from his hat and said cheerily, "I've done a good deal of mountain climbing since Tuesday morning, but I'm not too tired to eat a good supper, if we are lucky enough to find one in this place."

It need hardly be repeated that Watson and Macgreggor were the two men in whose care Andrews had placed George Knight. They were both brave, resourceful men. During their long trudge across the mountainous country between Shelbyville and the Tennessee, Watson had uttered many a grumble, but his complaints meant nothing more than a desire to hear himself talk. When it came to fording a stream, climbing a precipice, or fairly wading through the slush, he was quite as willing and energetic as the other two members of his party.

George knocked loudly at the door of the house, as he and his companions hastily sheltered themselves under the little piazza which ran along the front of the place.

"Be on your guard, boys," whispered Watson. "Stick to your story about our being Kentuckians, and say nothing imprudent that may arouse suspicion. Remember! we *must* be in Marietta by to-morrow night."

The meeting at Marietta had, at the very last moment, been postponed by Andrews from Thursday night to Friday night. "It is well he did postpone it," thought Macgreggor; "we are far enough from Marietta as it is."

The door was suddenly thrown open by an old negro "aunty" behind whom stood a neat, bustling little white woman. The latter was evidently engaged in the business of preparing supper, if one might judge from the fact that her bare arms were almost encaked in flour.

"We are three Kentuckians from Fleming County on our way to enlist in Chattanooga," spoke out Macgreggor, in a voice which seemed to have the ring of truth in it. "Can we spend the night here, so that we can cross the river in the morning?"

The expression of the woman, which had at first been one of surprise and irritation at being stopped in her work, softened immediately. "Come in," she said, quickly; "my husband's only a farmer, and we can't give you anything very fine, but it was never said of Mandy Hare that she turned away from her house any loyal friend of the South."

With that she led her gratified visitors through a scantily-furnished parlor into a kitchen which seemed to them like a Paradise. Over the roaring fire in the great hearth several vessels were simmering and emitting the most delightful odors, while a table near by was already set for the coming meal. On a chair facing the fire a fat, white cat was purring blissfully. The room was delightfully warm; the whole scene had an irresistible attraction and air of domesticity.

"Make yourselves at home," commanded Mrs. Hare, cheerfully. "My husband will be home from Jasper in a few minutes, and then you'll have something to eat—such as 'tis."

At this instant there was a querulous little bark, which appeared to come from the region of George Knight's heart. Mrs. Hare looked around in surprise; the white cat stirred uneasily. The next second the boy had shaken his overcoat, and from out of a large side pocket jumped the diminutive Waggie. The cat, with one bound, took a flying leap to the kitchen stairs, and brushing past the half-opened door at the bottom of the flight, fairly tore up to the second story, where she disappeared. Waggie gave a shrill yelp of emotion, but evidently concluded that it was safer not to chase a strange and muscular cat in a strange house.

"Gracious me," cried Mrs. Hare; "did you bring that little fellow all the way from Kentucky?"

"When I came away he followed me," replied George. He spoke the truth, although he did not add that he "came away" from a Union camp rather than from Kentucky. Waggie had been consigned to a member of General Mitchell's staff, to remain with him during his owner's absence, but George had not proceeded five miles on his journey before he heard a joyous bark behind him—and there frisked and capered Waggie. "You'll have to turn spy now," George said. It was too late to send him back. Thus the dog joined the party, much to the pleasure of all concerned.

Hardly had Waggie made his theatrical entrance into the kitchen before a lean, prematurely shriveled man of fifty, whose long shaggy beard proclaimed him a veritable countryman, came shambling into the room. At sight of the three strangers a curious look came into his restless eyes. It was almost as if the look was one of triumph. George, observing it, shivered, although he could hardly say why he did so.

"This is my husband," explained Mrs. Hare, with an awkward attempt at courtesy. "These men," she continued, addressing her lord and master, "have the good of the Southern cause at heart, and are on their way to Chattanooga, to enlist in the Confederate army." She cast such an approving glance upon the wanderers as she spoke, and was so good-natured, that George's heart smote him at the deception which was being practised upon her. He was a frank, honest boy, who hated the very idea of appearing anywhere under false pretences. But he realized that he was playing a part for the good of his General, and his General's cause, and he resolved to maintain, as well as he could, his new character of a Southern sympathizer.

Farmer Hare gave to each of the visitors a surly recognition. Waggie walked up to him, sniffed about his boots, and uttered a low growl. It was plain that the dog did not approve of the master of the house.

"You fellows are taking a pretty long journey to serve the South," remarked Mr. Hare at last, in a nasal tone sadly at variance with the customary soft Southern cadence.

"Can he suspect us?" thought Watson. The same thought went through the mind of Macgreggor, but he merely said: "We are nearly at our journey's end now. By to-morrow we will be in Chattanooga."

"Sit down and make yourselves comfortable," snarled Hare, with the air of an unwilling host. The visitors took the chairs which Mrs. Hare had placed for them at the supper-table. They were joined by husband and wife, and the negro "aunty" was soon serving a delicious meal of corn bread, Irish stew, and other good things. They all ate with a will, including Waggie, who was given a private lot of bones by the fireside. When the supper was over the farmer arose abruptly. "I s'pose you fellows have had a pretty long tramp, and want to go to bed," he said. "We keep good hours in this house, anyway, and turn in early at night—so that we may turn out early in the morning."

"Give them a chance to dry themselves before the fire," urged Mrs. Hare.

"Let 'em dry themselves in bed," muttered the farmer. Whereupon he lighted a candle, and turned towards the door leading to the second story. He was evidently in a great hurry to get his guests up-stairs. Watson, Macgreggor and George looked at one another, as if trying to fathom the cause of their peculiar reception at the hands of Farmer Hare. But each one silently decided that their only cue was to be as polite as possible, and refrain from any altercation with their host.

"After all," thought Watson, "if we can spend the night here we will be off again at dawn—and then let our surly host take himself to Kamchatka, for all we care."

Half an hour later Watson and Macgreggor, thoroughly tired out, were sound asleep, in one of the small rooms in the second-story of the house. George, however, lay tossing from side to side on a bed in the adjoining room, directly over the kitchen, with Waggie curled up on the floor close by. The more he thought of the strange behavior of Hare the more uneasy he became. Why had the farmer regarded him and his two companions with such a suspicious glance? Then George suddenly recollected where he had seen that face before. Yes! There could be no mistake. While he, Macgreggor and Watson were dining that day at the village tavern in Jasper, Hare was loitering on the porch of the place. But what of that? The three pretended Kentuckians had told their usual story, and professed their love for the Confederacy, and no one there had seemed to doubt their truthfulness for a moment.

In vain the boy tried to fall asleep. At last, hearing voices in the kitchen, he rose quietly from his bed, stole out of his room, and stealthily walked to the little hallway that led to the kitchen stairway. At the head of the staircase he halted. It was clear that Farmer Hare was saying something emphatic, while his wife was entering a feeble protest. An intuition told the listener that his own party was the subject of discussion. Slowly, cautiously, he crept down the stairway, until he almost touched the closed door which led from it to the kitchen.

"I tell you, woman," Hare was saying, "these three fellows are spies of some sort, and the sooner we have them under arrest the better."

"I can't believe it," murmured the wife.

"I don't care whether you believe it or not," rejoined the husband, in a harsh tone. "Don't I tell you that when these two men, and the boy, were at the tavern in Jasper to-day, one of the men was recognized by John Henderson. Henderson is a spy in the service of General Beauregard, and was in the camp of General Mitchell only a few days ago, disguised as a trader. There he saw this fellow—the one with the brown beard—and he swears there's no mistake. But he didn't tell us in time—the three disappeared. No; there's mischief of some sort brewing here, and I intend to stop it, if my name's Hare. We don't want any spies around here."

"Spies!" exclaimed the woman. "Then if they are caught within our lines they will be shot!" It seemed as if she shuddered as she spoke.

"Or hanged," added the farmer, with an unpleasant laugh.

"Let them go," whispered Mrs. Hare, pleadingly. "I'm just as good a Confederate as you are, Jake, but don't let us have the blood of these fellows on our hands. That nice little chap with the dog—I would as soon see my own son get into trouble, if I was lucky enough to have one, as that bright-eyed boy. Turn 'em out of the house, Jake, if you suspect them—tell them to go about their business—but don't set a trap for them." Her voice became almost plaintive. It was evident that the strangers had made a favorable impression upon Mrs. Hare, and that her woman's feelings revolted at the idea of betraying them, even though they were the secret enemies of her cause. "I hate war, anyway," she added. "It sets friend against friend, brother against brother, father against son, state against state. All this trouble between the North and South might have been fixed up without fighting, if there'd been a little more patience on both sides."

"Don't preach," muttered Hare. "There ain't time for it. Where's Uncle Daniel?"

The listening George did not know that "Uncle Daniel" was the black farm-hand who helped Hare, but, from the name, he felt sure that a slave was meant.

"Uncle Daniel is out in the barn, I reckon," answered the wife. "What do you want him for?"

"Wait and see," rejoined her husband, gruffly. With that enigmatical reply he opened a door leading to the barn, stalked out, and disappeared. There was a half-stifled cry from Mrs. Hare, but she apparently made no effort to detain him. "The Vigilants! Oh! the Vigilants!" she repeated, in accents of distress.

"The sooner we get out of this the better for our necks," thought George. He had no sense of fear; he was only filled with one consuming idea. He must get word to his two companions, and at once. Just what Hare contemplated in the way of a trap he could not tell, yet it was evident that the sooner Watson and Macgreggor were awakened the more chance would all three have for escaping from whatever fate the farmer had in store for them.

Cautiously George crept back until he was at the door of the room where the two men were heavily sleeping. His first impulse was to rattle at the knob; but he recollected in time that this would make a noise that might bring Mrs. Hare to the scene. He stood still and reflected. It would be foolish to invite the attention of her husband or herself before a plan of action could be decided upon. For nearly five minutes he stood in the hallway, wondering how he could awaken his tired fellows without making a disturbance.

"I wonder if I'm very stupid," thought the boy. He could hear the kitchen door open, as Hare came back into the house, and began talking to his wife in low tones. He could distinguish but

one word. It was "Vigilants!"

At last he gave a faint exclamation of satisfaction, and stole back to his own room. Waggie, who was now lying on the bed, moved uneasily. George lighted a candle and examined the plastered wall which ran between his room and the one where the unconscious Watson and Macgreggor were gently snoring. He knew that the bed on which they slept was directly on the other side of this wall, and he judged that the partition itself was very thin. In this theory he was correct: the laths and their plaster covering formed a mere shell, which was not much thicker than an ordinary wooden partition. Taking a large jack knife from his waistcoat he began to cut into the wall, about four feet from the floor. Before long he had made a small hole, not bigger than the dimensions of a five-dollar gold piece, straight through the plaster. Looking through it, with the aid of his candle, he saw that Watson and Macgreggor were stretched out in bed on the other side, each half-dressed and each sleeping as if there were no such thing in the world as war or danger.

41

"They deserve a good sleep," said the boy to himself; "but it can't be helped, so here goes!" At the same moment he extinguished his candle, pulled it out of the candlestick, and poked it through the hole. He directed it in such a way that it fell squarely on the face of Macgreggor. The man suddenly stopped snoring, turned his body from one side to the other, and then started up in the bed, in a half-sitting posture.

"Macgreggor! Mac!" whispered George; "it's I, George Knight. Don't speak loud."

42

"Where on earth are you?" asked the newly-awakened sleeper, in a startled voice.

"Never mind where I am," answered George. "Only don't make a noise. But get up, light your candle, and open your door for me without letting them hear you down-stairs."

By this time Watson was awake too, and had jumped to the floor. When Macgreggor lighted his candle, and saw the little hole in the wall, at which appeared one of George's eyes, he almost gave a cry of surprise; but prudence restrained him, and he merely touched Watson's arm, pointed to the hole, and then quietly unlocked the door of their room. George soon crept carefully in, and proceeded, in as low a voice as he could command, to tell the two men what he had heard from the kitchen.

"The Vigilants!" whispered Watson. "Why, don't you know what that means? When we were in Jasper to-day I saw some of them standing around the village grocery store, and even talked with them. They thought I was a good 'Confed,' and I found out that they are organized into a band to arrest suspicious characters, keep things in order in this section of the county and even turn guerrillas when they are wanted."

43

"I see the whole thing," said Macgreggor. "This Hare has sent his negro over to Jasper to bring the Vigilants here to take charge of us, and to string us up, no doubt, to the first convenient tree. The sooner we get away from here the better for our lives. Jasper is only two miles off, and the Vigilants will be riding over here before we have time to say Jack Robinson."

"There's still time," said George, "and as there's only one man here against us now—I mean Hare—we can seize him, tie him to something, and then escape into the darkness."

"So we can, my boy," replied Watson, who was thinking as deeply and as calmly as if a game of chess, rather than a matter of life and death, were the issue. "There's no trouble as to our escaping. But remember this. It's pitch dark and raining again like cats and dogs; we don't know our way; we are sure to get lost before we have run fifty yards from the house, and these Vigilants, who understand every foot of the country, will divide into small parties, and hunt us down, as sure as fate. And if they can't, they will put hounds on our track—and then we'll be beautifully carved up into beefsteaks. I have seen hounds, and I know how they appreciate a nice little man hunt." Watson smiled grimly.

44

Macgreggor walked silently to one of the windows, opened the sash just a crack, and listened. He could hear nothing but the downpour of the rain. Yet it would not be long before the Vigilants dashed up to the house. No doubt they had all been telling anecdotes in the corner grocery store, and they would take but a short time for the mounting of their horses. Cautiously closing the window he returned to the centre of the room.

"It's a dark night," he said, "and all the better for a plan I have to propose. We are each secretly armed with pistols, are we not? Well, then, let us put out this candle, and open the window to the left, looking out towards the highroad to Jasper. When the Vigilants come riding up the road and get in front of the house we will suddenly fire on them. This may cause a panic, as the fellows will not be able to tell just where the enemy are, and then——"

45

"Pshaw!" interrupted Watson. "You don't know whom you're dealing with. These Vigilants are as brave as they are reckless, and there are at least twenty-five or thirty of them. Three men can't frighten them. They would only get us in the end, even if we did succeed in disabling one or two of them in the first surprise."

"Then what are we to do?" asked George eagerly. Watson was so composed that the boy felt sure he must have some better plan for escape.

"I have a scheme," said Watson, quite simply. "I have been hatching it in my brain while we were talking. But the quicker it's put to the test, the quicker will we save our necks. Are you willing to trust me blindly?"

There was a whispered "yes" from both the other conspirators. Watson inspired confidence by his assurance.

"Then let us get all our clothes, shoes, everything on at once, and walk boldly down-stairs."

Three minutes later the trio were marching down-stairs into the kitchen. Hare and his wife were standing at the fireplace, looking the picture of surprise, as their guests burst into the room, with the irrepressible Waggie at their heels. The old negro "aunty," who had been dozing on a stool near the hearth, jumped to her rheumatic feet in consternation. "Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" she cried, throwing her withered arms above her turbaned head. For the guests held revolvers in their hands, and the "aunty's" heart always sank at the thought of gunpowder.

The farmer took a step forward, as if uncertain what to do or say. At last he said, trying to smile, yet only succeeding in looking hypocritical: "You ain't going to leave us this time of night, are you? Wait till morning, and get some breakfast."

"It's a nice breakfast you'd give us in the morning," laughed Watson, with a significant look at their host. "A halter stew, or some roast bullets, I guess!"

Hare jumped backward with such suddenness that he almost knocked into the fire his frightened wife who had been standing directly behind him. "What do you mean?" he hissed.

"You know perfectly well what I mean, Mr. Hare," said Watson, looking him straight in the face, whilst the other spectators listened in breathless interest. "You have sent word to the Jasper Vigilants to ride over here and arrest us, on the suspicion of being spies."

Had the heavens suddenly fallen, the countenances of the Hares could not have shown more dismay.

"How did you find that out?" asked the farmer, quite forgetting to play his part of amiable host.

"Never mind how," cried George, who was burning to play his part. "Only it's a pity you haven't as much mercy in you as your wife has."

"Listen," said Watson, as he motioned the others in the room to be silent. "George, you will watch this old negress, and if she attempts to make a sound, or to leave the room before we are ready, give her a hint from your revolver."

With a scream of fright, comical in its intensity, the "aunty" sank back on her stool near the hearth, and covered her dark face with her hands. There she sat, as if she expected to be murdered at any moment.

"And you, Macgreggor," continued Watson impressively, "will keep the same sort of watch over Mrs. Hare. Happen what may, there is not to be a sound from either woman."

Mrs. Hare started in confusion. Her husband made a bound for the kitchen door. With another bound no less quick Watson darted forward, caught the farmer, pushed him back at the point of the pistol, and bolted the door.

"What do you want to do?" demanded Hare. "Are we to be murdered?"

"No," cried Watson, "but——"

Then there came the sound of horses' hoofs in the distance. Every one listened eagerly, and none more so than the farmer.

"You're done for," he said slowly, casting a half-malevolent, half-triumphant glance at the three Northerners.

"Not by a great deal," said Watson. "March with me to the parlor, open the front door just a crack, and, when the Vigilants come up, say to them that we three men have escaped from the house, stolen a flatboat, and started to row across the Tennessee River. Send them away and shut the door. I will be standing near you, behind the door, with my pistol leveled at your head. Make one movement to escape, or say anything but what I have told you to say, and you are a dead man!"

The patter of the horses was becoming more and more distinct.

"Will you do as I tell you?" asked Watson, very coolly, as he toyed with his revolver.

"If I won't?" asked Hare. His face was now convulsed by a variety of emotions—fear, rage, craftiness, and disappointment.

"I give you three seconds to choose," said Watson. "If you refuse, you will be stretched out on that floor."

Mrs. Hare, with white cheeks, leaned forward, and whispered to her husband: "Do as he tells you, Jake. Better let these Yankees go, and save your own life."

"One—two——" counted Watson.

Hare held up his right hand, and then dropped it listlessly by his side.

"I give in," he said sullenly. "You've got the better of me." He looked, for all the world, like a whipped cur.

There was not a second to lose. The horsemen were riding up to the house. Watson motioned to the farmer, who walked into the parlor, which was unlighted, closely followed by the soldier. There were sounds without, as of horses being reined in, and of men's gruff voices. Hare opened the parlor door a few inches, while Watson, safe from observation, stationed himself within a few feet of him, with cocked revolver. "Remember!" he whispered, significantly.

"Is that you, boys?" shouted Hare. "Those three spies I sent word about escaped from here ten

minutes ago, stole a boat on the bank, down by the landing, and started to row across the river."

"They will never reach the other side a night like this," called out some one.

"What did you let 'em get away from you for?" asked another of the Vigilants.

"How could I help it?" growled the farmer. "They were well armed—and 'twas three men against one."

"Pah! You've brought us out on a wild-goose chase, and on a durned bad night," came a voice from the wet and darkness.

"Perhaps they'll drift back to this side of the river, and can be caught," one Vigilant suggested. But this idea evidently met with little approval. It was plain, from what Watson could hear of the discussion which ensued, that the Vigilants were disgusted. They were ready, indeed, to give up the chase, on the supposition that the three fugitives would either drift down in midstream, or else be capsized and find a watery grave.

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"Come, we'll get home again," commanded a horseman, who appeared to be the leader. "And no thanks to you, Jake Hare, for making us waste our time."

"Say Jake, won't you ask us in to have something warm to drink?" cried another Vigilant.

Watson edged a trifle nearer to Hare, and whispered: "Send 'em away at once, or else——"

Once bring the Vigilants into the house, as the soldier knew, and capture or death would be the result.

Hare could almost feel the cold muzzle of the revolver near his head.

"Go away, fellows," he called, "You know I ain't got nothing for you."

A jeer, and a few sarcastic groans greeted this remark. "I always reckoned you was a skinflint," yelled one of the party.

52

There was a derisive cheer at this sally. Then, at a word of command, the Vigilants turned their horses and cantered back towards Jasper. The sound of hoofs became fainter and fainter.

"Shut the door," ordered Watson, "and go back to the kitchen."

Sullenly the farmer obeyed. When the two were once more by the blazing hearth, George and Macgreggor, who had been guarding Mrs. Hare and the negress, rushed forward to grasp the hands of their deliverer. They were about to congratulate him upon his successful nerve and diplomacy when he interrupted them.

"Don't bother about that," he said; "let us get away from here as soon as possible, before our kind host has a chance to play us any more tricks."

"I suppose you think yourself pretty smart, don't you?" snapped Hare, casting a spiteful glance at Watson.

"So smart," put in George, "that if you don't want to be laughed at from now until the day of your death you'd better not tell the citizens of Jasper about to-night's occurrences."

53

"Come, boys, let us be going," exclaimed Watson impatiently, as he offered his hand to Mrs. Hare, and said to that lady: "Thank you for the best supper we've had since we left—home."

Mrs. Hare refused to shake hands, but she regarded Watson with an admiring expression. "I won't shake hands with you," she replied, half smiling, "for you may be an enemy of the South, but I'm glad you've escaped hanging. You've too much grit for that. As for you, Jake, don't ever pretend to us again that you're the brainiest man in the county."

"Hold your tongue, woman," cried the amiable farmer.

In a couple of minutes the three travelers were striking out from the back of the house into the slush, and rain, and blackness of the night. Waggie was occupying his usual place inside a pocket of George's overcoat. He had supped regally at the Hares on bacon and bones, and he felt warm and at peace with the world.

Before the party had more than emerged from the garden (a task by no means easy in itself, on account of the darkness), something whistled by them, to the accompaniment of a sharp report. Looking behind them they saw the meagre form of Hare standing in the kitchen doorway. He held a rifle in his right hand. The kitchen fire made him plainly visible.

54

"Pretty good aim, old boy," shouted Macgreggor, "considering you could hardly see us. But I can see you plainly enough."

As he spoke he drew his revolver. Hare was already putting the rifle to his shoulder, preparing for another shot. He had hardly had a chance to adjust the gun, however, before he dropped it with a cry of pain and ran into the house. A bullet had come whizzing from Macgreggor, and struck the farmer in his right arm.

"Just a little souvenir to remember me by," laughed the lucky marksman.

"Hurry up!" cried Watson. "To-morrow night we must be in Marietta. We are still many miles away, and in a hostile, unknown country."

So the three pushed on into the gloom. The prospect of meeting James Andrews at the appointed place was not reassuring. Their only hope was to keep on along the bank of the Tennessee River until they reached Chattanooga. From there they could take a train for Marietta.

55

"Shall we make it?" thought George. Waggie gave a muffled bark which seemed to say: "Courage!"

CHAPTER III

MINGLING WITH THE ENEMY

It was weary work, this tramping along the Tennessee shore, through mud, or fields of stubble, over rocks, or amid dripping trees; but the three kept on towards Chattanooga for a couple of hours, until all the good effects of their warming at Farmer Hare's were quite vanished. Watson, having showed by his mother-wit and presence of mind that he was a man to be relied upon, had now resumed his privilege of growling, and gave vent to many angry words at the roughness and unutterable dreariness of the way.

"Why was America ever discovered by that inquisitive, prying old Christopher Columbus?" he grunted, after he had tripped over the stump of a cottonwood-tree, and fallen flat with his face in the slime. "If he had never discovered America there would never have been any United States; had there never been any United States there would never have been any war between North and South; had there never been any war between North and South I wouldn't be making a fool of myself by being down here. I wish that fellow Columbus had never been born—or, if he was born, that he had never been allowed to sail off for America. Ugh!"

In a few minutes they reached a log cabin situated on an angle of land where a little stream emptied itself into the now stormy waters of the Tennessee River. There was no light nor sign of life about the mean abode, and the travelers were almost upon it before they saw its low outline in the dense gloom.

"Look here," said Watson, calling a halt. "There's no use in our trying to go further to-night. It's too dark to make any sort of time. And we are far enough away now from Jasper to avoid any danger of pursuit—even if our amiable friend Mr. Hare should inform the Vigilants."

"Don't be afraid of that," said Macgreggor and George in the same breath. Hare was not likely to relate a joke so much at his own expense as their clever escape had proved. Even if he did, they reasoned, the chances of capture were now rather slim, whatever they might have been when the three fugitives were nearer Jasper.

"Then let us get a few hours' sleep in this cabin," urged Watson. "Some negro probably lives here—and we can tell him our usual Kentucky story. Give the door a pound, George, and wake him up."

George used first his hands and then his boots on the door, in a vain effort to make some one hear. He took Waggie out of his pocket, and the shrill little barks of the dog added to the noise as he jumped around his master's feet.

"Let's break the door down," urged Macgreggor. "The seven sleepers must live here. We might pound all night and not get in."

With one accord the three threw themselves vigorously against the door. They expected to meet with some resistance, due to a bolt or two; but, instead of that, the door flew open so suddenly that they were precipitated into the cabin, and lay sprawling on the ground. It had been latched but neither locked nor bolted.

"We were too smart that time," growled Watson, as the three picked themselves up, to the great excitement of Waggie. "The place must be deserted. So much the better for us. We can get a little sleep without having to go into explanations."

He drew from inside his greatcoat, with much care, three or four matches. By lighting, first one and then the others, he was able to grope around until he found the hearth of the cabin. Cold ashes marked the remains of a fire long since extinguished. His foot struck against something which proved to be a small piece of dry pine-wood. With the flame from his last match Watson succeeded in lighting this remnant of kindling. He carefully nursed the new flame until the stick blazed forth like a torch. Then the travelers had a chance to examine the one room which formed the whole interior of the lonely place. The cabin was deserted. It contained not a bit of furniture; nothing, indeed, save bare walls of logs, and rude mortar, and a clean pine floor.

"This palace can't be renting at a very high price," remarked Macgreggor, sarcastically.

"It will do us well enough for a few hours' sleep," said George.

Watson nodded his head in assent. "It's a shelter from the rain, at least," he said, "and that's something on such a pesky night." While he was speaking the rush of the rain without confirmed the truth of his words, and suggested that any roof was better than none. Ere long the pine stick burned itself out; the intruders were left in absolute darkness. But they quickly disposed themselves on the floor, where, worn out by the fatigues of the day and the stirring adventure of the evening, they were soon fast asleep. They had closed the door, near which Waggie had

settled his little body in the capacity of a sentinel. George dreamed of his father. He saw him standing at the window of a prison, as he stretched his hands through the bars and cried out: "George, I am here—here! Help me!" Then the boy's dream changed. He was back in the dark woods near Shelbyville, listening to Andrews as the leader outlined the expedition in which they were now engaged. In the middle of the conference some one cried: "The Confederates are on us!" George tried to run, but something pinned him to the ground—a wild animal was at his throat.

He awoke with a start, to find that Waggie was leaping upon his chest, barking furiously.

"Hush up, you little rascal!" ordered George. He felt very sleepy, and he was angry at being aroused. But Waggie went on barking until he had succeeded in awakening Macgreggor and Watson, and convincing his master that something was wrong.

"What's the trouble?" demanded Watson.

"Listen," said George, softly. He was on his feet in an instant, as he ran first to one and then to the other of the two windows which graced the cabin. These windows, however, were barricaded with shutters. He hurried to the door, which he opened a few inches. The rain had now stopped, and he could hear, perhaps a quarter of a mile away, the sound of horses moving cautiously through the mud, along the river bank. In a twinkling Watson and Macgreggor were at his side, straining their ears.

"Can it be cavalry?" asked Macgreggor.

"Mounted men at least," whispered Watson. "Perhaps the Vigilants are on our track, bad luck to them!"

"Can Hare have told them, after all?" queried George.

"Don't know about that," muttered Watson, "but I think we have the gentlemen from Jasper to deal with once again."

"Let's decamp into the darkness before it's too late," said Macgreggor.

"Come, come," whispered Watson impatiently. "If they are on the scent, and we leave this hut, they will only run us to earth like hounds after a fox."

The baying of dogs which were evidently accompanying the party gave a sudden and terrible effect to the force of Watson's argument. And now the Vigilants, if such they were, came nearer and nearer. The three Northerners who listened so anxiously at the doorway could already detect the sound of voices.

"There's but one thing for us to do," quickly murmured Watson. "We must stay in this cabin."

"But they won't pass the place by," urged Macgreggor. "If they know it to be deserted by a tenant this is the very reason for their looking in to see if we are hiding here. And when it comes to defending ourselves, how can we put up any sort of barricade?"

"When you can't use force, or hide yourself, try a little strategy," answered the soldier. "Can either of you fellows talk like a darcy?"

"Not I," said Macgreggor. Had he been asked if he could speak Hebrew, he would not have been more surprised.

"Can you, George?" asked Watson, as he shut the door.

"I might," whispered George. "When I was up in Cincinnati we boys used—"

"Never mind what you boys did—only do as I tell you, and if you can give a good imitation you may save us from arrest, and worse!"

The horsemen now seemed to be within a few yards of the cabin. They had evidently halted for consultation. Meanwhile Watson was whispering some instructions to George. After he had finished he leaned against the door with his whole weight, and indicated to Macgreggor that he was to do the same thing. The latter obeyed in silence.

The horsemen without made a great deal of clatter. If they were pursuing the fugitives they did not seem to think secrecy of movement very necessary. "Whose cabin is this?" demanded one of them.

"It did belong to old Sam Curtis, but he's moved away, down to Alabama," some one answered.

"Some darcy may live in it now, eh?" said the first voice.

"Perhaps it's empty, and these tarnation spies are in it," was the rejoinder in a lower tone.

The men moved their horses closer to the house, which they quickly surrounded. No chance now for any one to escape; it seemed as if the three men in the cabin must inevitably be caught like rats in a trap. Yet they waited courageously, breathlessly. It was a tense moment. Another minute would decide their fate. Would they remain free men, or would they fall into the hands of their pursuers, with all the consequences that such a capture implied?

Already one of the Vigilants, evidently the leader, had dismounted. Approaching the door of the cabin, he gave it a push as if he expected it would open at once. But there was no yielding; Watson and Macgreggor were still leaning firmly against the other side.

The leader began to knock on the door with a revolver. "Here, here," he shouted; "if there's any one in this cabin, come out—or we'll have you out!"

At first there was no response, save a bark from Waggie. The leader rattled savagely at the door. "Let's break in," he cried to his companions, "and see if the place has any one in it!"

The Vigilants were about to follow the example of their leader, and dismount when there came a wheedling voice—apparently the voice of a negress—from within the cabin.

"What you gemmen want dis time o' night wid poor Aunty Dinah?"

"A nigger's living here," muttered the leader, in surprise.

"What for you gwyne to disturb an ole niggah at dis hour?" asked the voice from within.

"It's all right, aunty," called out the leader. "We only want some information. Come to the door."

"In one minute I be with you," was the answer. "I'se a nursin' my old man here—he done gone and took the smallpox—and—"

The smallpox! Had the voice announced that a million Union troops were descending upon the party the consternation would not have been half as great. The smallpox! At the mention of that dreaded name, and at the thought that they were so close to contagion, the Vigilants, with one accord, put spurs into their horses and rushed madly away. The leader, dropping his revolver in his excitement, and not even stopping to pick it up, leaped upon his horse and joined in the inglorious retreat. On, on, dashed the men until they reached the town of Jasper, tired and provoked. Like many other men, North or South, they were brave enough when it came to gunpowder, but were quickly vanquished at the idea of pestilential disease.

"Bah!" cried the leader, as they all reined up in front of the village tavern, which now looked dark and uninviting; "those three spies, if spies they are, can go to Guinea for all I care. I shall hunt them no more."

There was a general murmur of assent to this fervent remark. One of the Vigilants said, in an injured tone: "I wish Jake Hare was at the bottom of the ocean!"

In explanation of which charitable sentiment it may be explained that Farmer Hare, on the departure of Watson, Macgreggor and George Knight, had run all the way to Jasper. Here he told the Vigilants that the three men had returned in the boat (which he had previously declared they had taken) and landed on the bank of the river. They could be easily caught, he said. He carefully suppressed any account of the way in which he had been outwitted by Watson. The fact was that Hare made up his mind, logically enough, that the fugitives would keep along the Tennessee until morning came, and as he had seen the direction they had taken he determined to set the Vigilants on their track. His scheme, as we have seen, was nearly crowned with success.

"A miss is as good as a mile," laughed Watson, as he stood with his two companions in the pitch black interior of the cabin, listening to the last faint sounds of the retreating Vigilants.

"There's nothing like smallpox, eh?" said George.

"Or nothing like a boy who can imitate a darky's voice," put in Macgreggor. "Where did you learn the art, George?"

"We boys in Cincinnati had a minstrel company of our own," the boy explained, "and I used to play negro parts."

"I'll never call the minstrels stupid again," said Watson. "They have been instrumental in saving our lives."

"Rather say it was your own brains that did it," interposed George.

So they talked until daybreak, for they found it impossible to sleep. Meanwhile the weather had changed. When the sun came peeping over the horizon, between tearful clouds, as if afraid that it was almost too damp for him to be out, the trio were pushing cautiously along the bank of the Tennessee, in the direction of Chattanooga.

"I don't know who brought the Vigilants out for us the second time, unless it was our dear friend Hare, and I don't know whether they will give us another chase this morning," said Watson, as they were laboriously ascending one of the mountain spurs which led down to the river shore, "but we must go steadily on, and trust to luck. To delay would be fatal. This is Friday—and we must be in Marietta by this evening."

On they trudged, over rocks and paths that would have taxed the ability of a nimble-footed chamois, as they wondered how the rest of their friends were faring, and where might be the intrepid Andrews. Sometimes Waggie scampered joyously on; sometimes he reposed in his master's overcoat. The clouds had now cleared away; the sun was shining serenely over the swollen and boisterous waters of the crooked Tennessee. Nature was once more preparing to smile.

"I'm getting frightfully hungry," cried George, about noon-time. "I wouldn't mind a bit of breakfast."

"There's where we may get some," said Macgreggor. He pointed to an old-fashioned colonial house of brick, with a white portico, which they could see in the centre of a large open tract about a quarter of a mile back of the river. The smoke was curling peacefully from one of the two great chimneys, as if offering a mute invitation to a stranger to enter the house and partake of what was being cooked within. In a field in front of the mansion cattle were grazing, and the jingle of their bells sounded sweetly in the distance. No one would dream, to look at such an

attractive picture, that the grim Spectre of War stalked in the land.

"Shall we go up to the house, and ask for something?" suggested Macgreggor, who was blessed with a healthy appetite.

Watson looked a little doubtful. "There's no use in our showing ourselves any more than is necessary," he said. "Rather than risk our necks, we had better go on empty stomachs till we reach Chattanooga."

But such a look of disappointment crept over the faces of George and Macgreggor, and even seemed to be reflected in the shaggy countenance of Waggie, that Watson relented.

"After all," he said, "there's no reason why there should be any more danger here than in Chattanooga or Marietta. Let's make a break for the house, and ask for a meal."

Hardly had he spoken before they were all three hurrying towards the mansion. When at last they stood under the portico, George seized the quaint brass knocker of the front door, and gave it a brisk rap. After some delay a very fat negress opened the door, and eyed the strangers rather suspiciously. Their tramp over the country had not improved their appearance, and her supercilious, inquisitive look was not strange, under the circumstances.

"What you folks want?" she asked, putting her big arms akimbo in an uncompromising attitude. Watson was about to reply when an attractive voice, with the soft accent so characteristic of the Southerners, called: "What is it, Ethiopia? Any one to see me?"

The next instant a kindly-faced gentlewoman of about fifty stood in the doorway.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" she asked pleasantly.

Macgreggor proceeded to tell the customary story about their being on their way from Kentucky to join the Confederate army further south. His heart smote him as he did so, for she was so gentle and sympathetic in her manner that he loathed to practice any deception, however necessary; but there was no help for it. So he ended by asking for something to eat.

"Come in," said the mistress of the mansion, for such she proved to be, "and take any poor hospitality I can offer you. My husband, Mr. Page, and both my children are away, fighting under General Lee, and I am only too glad to do anything I can for others who are helping the great cause." She smiled sweetly at George, and patted his dog. The boy regarded her almost sheepishly; he, too, hated the idea of imposing on so cordial a hostess.

Mrs. Page led the party into a great colonial hallway, embellished with family portraits. "By-the-way," she added, "there is a Confederate officer in the house now—Major Lightfoot, of the —th Virginia Regiment. He reached here this morning from Richmond and goes to Chattanooga this afternoon on a special mission."

Watson bit his lip. "We're coming to too close quarters with the enemy," he thought, and he felt like retreating from the mansion with his companions. But it was too late. Such a move would only excite suspicion, or, worse still, lead to pursuit. "We must face the thing through," he muttered, "and trust to our wits."

Mrs. Page ushered the strangers, including the delighted Waggie, into a large, handsomely paneled dining-room on the left of the hallway. She made them gather around an unset table. "Sit here for a few minutes," she said, "and the servants will bring you the best that Page Manor can offer you. In the meantime, I'll send Major Lightfoot to see you. He may be able to help you in some way."

She closed the door and was gone. "I wish this Major Lightfoot, whoever he is, was in Patagonia at the present moment," whispered Watson. "It's easy enough to deceive the Southern country bumpkins, and make them think you are Confederates, but when you get among people with more intelligence, like officers——"

"What difference does it make?" interrupted Macgreggor, looking longingly at a mahogany sideboard. "Didn't you hear Mrs. Page say the Major was a Virginian? He doesn't know anything about Kentucky."

"That's lucky," laughed Watson, "for we don't either."

"Hush!" came the warning from George. The door opened, and several negro servants began to bring in a cold dinner. What a meal it was too, when the time came to partake of it, and how grateful the three hungry travelers felt to the mistress of the house. When it had been disposed of, and the servants had left the dining-room, George said, almost under his breath: "Hadn't we better be off? We have a good number of miles yet, between here and Marietta."

Watson was about to rise from the table when the door opened to admit a tall, stalwart man of about thirty, whose cold, gray-blue eyes and resolute mouth denoted one who was not to be trifled with. He was dressed in the gray uniform of a Confederate officer, but he had, presumably, left his sword and pistols in another room. The visitors stood up as he entered.

"Glad to see you, my men," he said, shaking hands with each one.

"Is this Major Lightfoot?" asked Watson, trying to look delighted, but not making a brilliant success of it.

"Yes," returned the Major. "I hear you boys are Kentuckians."

"We are," said Macgreggor stoutly; "we are ready to die for our country, and so we are journeying southward to enlist."

"You're a pretty young chap to take up arms," observed the Major, eyeing George keenly.

"One is never too young to do that," answered the boy. He was determined to put a bold face on the affair, and he saw no reason why the Confederate officer should suspect him if he spoke up unhesitatingly.

"The South has need of all her loyal sons," remarked Watson, who felt no compunction in deceiving the Major, whatever might have been his sentiments as to hoodwinking Mrs. Page.

"So you all come from Kentucky?" went on the officer. "That interests me, for I come from Kentucky myself!"

The jaws of the three strangers dropped simultaneously. Had a bomb fallen at their feet they could not have been more disconcerted. What did they know about Kentucky, if they had to be put through a series of cross-questions by a native! But there was no reason, after all, why the Major should dwell on the subject.

"I thought Mrs. Page said you belonged to a Virginia regiment," exclaimed Macgreggor, almost involuntarily.

"So I do," replied the Major, "but I only settled in Virginia two years ago. I was born and bred in Kentucky, and there's no state like it—now is there?"

"No!" cried the trio, with a well-feigned attempt at enthusiasm. They felt that they were treading on dangerous ground, and resolved to play their parts as well as they could.

"Do you all come from the same part of Kentucky?" queried the Major, as he sat down on a chair, evidently prepared for a pleasant chat.

"From Fleming County," said Watson carelessly, quite as if he knew every other county in the State. "I fear, sir, we must be moving on towards Chattanooga. We are in a hurry to enlist, and we have already been delayed too long."

The Major completely ignored the latter part of this sentence. "From Fleming County," he said. "Well, that's pleasant news. I know Fleming County like a book. There is where my father lived and died. What part of the county do you come from?"

Had the Major asked them to tell the area of the United States in square inches he could not have propounded a more puzzling question.

"Dunder and blitzen;" thought Watson. "If I only knew more of Kentucky geography I might get myself out of this scrape."

"We come from the southeastern part of the county," said Macgreggor, after an awkward pause.

"Near what town?"

Another pause. Oh, for the name of a town in the southeastern part of Fleming County, Kentucky. The Major was looking at the visitors curiously. Why this sudden reticence on their part?

At last Watson spoke up, although evasively. "We were a long distance from any town; we worked on adjoining farms, and when the call to arms came we determined to rush to the rescue of our beloved Southland."

The Major gave Watson one searching look. "Humph!" said he, "that's all very pretty, and I'm glad you are so patriotic—but that won't do. What is the nearest town to the places you live in?"

The name of Carlisle flashed through Watson's mind. He recalled that it was somewhere in the part of Kentucky in which Fleming County was situated. A man he knew had once lived there. He would risk it.

"The nearest town is Carlisle," he said shortly. "And now, Major, we really must be off! Good-bye!"

He started for the door, followed by George and Macgreggor, who were both devoutly wishing that such a state as Kentucky had never existed.

"Wait a second," suddenly commanded the Southerner, stepping in front of the door to bar the way. "You seem to be strangely ignorant of your own county. Carlisle happens to be in the adjoining county."

"Here, sir, we're not here to be examined by you, as if we were in the witness box," cried Watson, who hoped to carry the situation through with a strong hand. He would try a little bluster.

A sarcastic smile crossed the firm face of Major Lightfoot. "Don't try to bluff me," he said quietly but sternly; "for it won't work. I see very clearly that you fellows have never been in Fleming County, nor do I think you have ever been in Kentucky at all, for the matter of that. You certainly talk more like Yankees than Kentuckians."

"Then you don't believe us?" asked Macgreggor, trying to assume an air of injured innocence.

"Certainly not," answered the Major. He folded his arms, and regarded the visitors as if he were trying to read their inmost thoughts. "You are lying to me! And as you've lied to me about coming from Kentucky, it's quite as likely you've lied to me about your being on your way to enlist in the Confederate army. For all I know you may be Union spies. In short, my friends, you are acting in the most suspicious way, and I put you under arrest!"

George's heart sank within him. He was not afraid of being arrested, but to think that he might

never take part in the bridge-burning expedition. Lightfoot turned the key in the door.

Watson walked up to the Major, and tapped him on the shoulder. "Look here," he said, in the tone of a man who is quite sure of his position. "You talk about putting us under arrest, but you're only playing a game of bluff yourself. We are three to your one—and I'd like to know what is to prevent our walking out of this house, and knocking you down, too—or, if you prefer, shooting you—if you attempt to stop us?"

80

Lightfoot laughed, in a superior sort of way. "Go, if you want," he said curtly; "but I don't think you'll go very far." His eyes glistened, as if he thought the whole scene rather a good joke. "Half a mile back of this mansion there's a squadron of Confederate cavalry picketed. If I give them the alarm they'll scour the whole countryside for you, and you'll all be in their hands within an hour."

Watson turned pale. It was the paleness of vexation rather than of fear. "Why were we fools enough to come to this house," he thought. He knew how quickly they could be caught by cavalrymen.

The Major smiled in a tantalizing manner. "I think you will take my advice and surrender," he said, sitting down carelessly in a chair and swinging one of his long legs over the other. "If, on investigation, it proves that you are not spies, you will be allowed to go on your way. If there's any doubt about it, however, you will be sent to Richmond."

Macgreggor, with a bound, leaped in front of the Confederate, and, pulling out a revolver, pointed it at Lightfoot's head. "Unless you promise not to have us followed, you shan't leave this room alive!" he cried with the tone of a man daring everything for liberty. George fully expected to see the officer falter, for he had seen that the Major was unarmed.

81

But Lightfoot did nothing of the kind. On the contrary, he gave one of his provoking laughs. "Don't go into heroics," he said, pushing Macgreggor away as though he were "shooing" off a cat. "You know I would promise anything, and the second your backs were turned I'd give the alarm. You don't think I would be fool enough to see you fellows walking away without making a trial to get you back?"

Macgreggor hesitated, as he looked at George and Watson. Then he answered fiercely, handling his pistol ominously the meanwhile: "We've but one chance—and we'll take it! We will never let you leave this room alive, promise or no promise. You are unarmed, and there are *three* of us, armed."

The Major did not seem to be at all startled. He merely changed the position of his legs, as he answered: "Killing me wouldn't do you any good, my boy! If you do shoot me before I can escape from the room the shooting would only alarm the house—the cavalry would be summoned by Mrs. Page, and you would find yourself worse off even than you are now."

82

Watson touched Macgreggor on the shoulder. "The Major's right," he said; "we would only be shooting down a man in cold blood, and gaining nothing by it. He has trapped us—and, so long as those plagued cavalrymen are so near, we had better submit. I think I've got as much courage as the next man, but I don't believe in butting one's head against a stone wall."

Macgreggor sullenly replaced his pistol. He could not but see the force of Watson's reasoning. The Major rose to his feet. He was smiling away again, as if he were enjoying himself.

"We surrender!" announced Watson with a woebegone expression on his strong face.

"You'll admit," said Lightfoot, "that I was too clever for you?"

There was no answer. George picked up Waggie. "Can I take my dog along with us, wherever we go?" he asked.



THE MAJOR MERELY CHANGED THE POSITION OF
HIS LEGS

The Major suddenly advanced towards George, and patted the tiny animal. "Hello! Waggie, how are you, old man?" he cried. 83

George gasped. "How on earth did you know Waggie's name?" he asked. For Waggie had been chewing at a bone on the floor ever since the entrance of the Confederate, and his master had not addressed a word to him during that time.

"I know his name almost as well as I do yours, George Knight," said Lightfoot.

In his excitement George dropped Waggie on a chair. The three Northerners heard this last announcement with open-mouthed astonishment.

Lightfoot burst into a great laugh that made the mystery the more intense. "Why, comrades," he cried, "I ought to go on the stage; I had no idea I was such a good actor. Don't you know your friend, Walter Jenks?" The Southern accent of the speaker had suddenly disappeared.

The listeners stood dumfounded. Then the whole situation dawned upon them. They had been most gloriously and successfully duped. This Major Lightfoot was none other than Walter Jenks, a sergeant from General Mitchell's camp, whom Andrews had sent out on the bridge-burning party. He had shaved off his beard, and assumed a Southern accent (something he was able to do because he was a Marylander), so that the guests at the Page mansion had failed to recognize him. 84

Jenks shook the three warmly by the hand. "It was a mean trick to play on you fellows," he explained, lowering his voice, "but for the life of me I couldn't resist the temptation."

"How on earth did you turn up here in the guise of a Confederate officer?" asked Watson, who now felt a sense of exhilaration in knowing that he might yet join Andrews at Marietta.

"It is too long a story to tell," whispered Jenks. "I'll only say here that I got lost from the other two fellows I was traveling with—was suspected of being a spy in one of the villages I passed through—and, to avoid pursuit, had to shave off my beard and disguise myself in this Confederate uniform, which I was lucky enough to 'appropriate.' I was nearly starved—stumbled across this place on my way down—told a plausible story (Heaven forgive me for deceiving so delightful a lady as Mrs. Page)—and here I am! And the sooner we set off from here, the sooner we will meet at the appointed town." 85

"When the war's over," remarked Macgreggor, "you can earn a fortune on the stage."

Half an hour later the four Northerners had taken a grateful farewell of the unsuspecting Mrs. Page, and were hurrying along the bank of the Tennessee. By four o'clock in the afternoon they had reached a point directly opposite Chattanooga. Here they found a ferryman, just as they had been given to expect, with his flat "horse-boat" moored to the shore. He was a fat, comfortable-looking fellow, as he sat in tailor-fashion on the little wharf, smoking a corn-cob pipe as unconcernedly as though he had nothing to do all day but enjoy tobacco.

Watson approached the man. "We want to get across the river as soon as possible," he explained, pointing to his companions. "This officer (indicating Walter Jenks, who retained his Confederate uniform) and the rest of us must be in Chattanooga within half an hour."

The ferryman took his pipe from his mouth and regarded the party quizzically. "You may want to be in Chattanooga in half an hour," he said, in a drawling, lazy fashion, "but I reckon the river's got somethin' to say as to that!" He waved one hand slowly in the direction of the stream, which was, without a shadow of doubt, an angry picture to gaze upon. Its waters were turbulent enough to suggest that a passage across them at this moment would be attended by great risk. 86

But to the anxious travelers any risk, however great, seemed preferable to waiting. If they missed the evening train from Chattanooga to Marietta their usefulness was ended. No bridge-burning adventure for them!

"I tell you we *must* get over to-night," urged Jenks, who hoped that his uniform would give him a certain prestige in the eyes of the ferryman. "I am Major Lightfoot, of the —th Virginia, and I'm on an important mission. Every minute is precious!"

"That may be true enough, Colonel," replied the man, ignoring the title of "major," and taking a whiff from his pipe. "That may be true enough, but I calculate nature's got somethin' to say in this world. And I calculate I ain't a-going to risk my life, and the happiness of my wife and five children, by tryin' to stem the Tennessee in this turmoil."

George's heart sank within him. To be so near the realization of his dream of adventure, and to be stopped at the eleventh hour by this stupid, cautious boatman! Waggie, who had been frisking near him, suddenly became solemn.

Watson pulled from his coat a large pack of Confederate money. "There's money for you," he cried, "if you'll take us over!"

The ferryman eyed him in a sleepy way, and took another pull at that provoking pipe.

"Money!" he said, after a long pause, during which the Northerners gazed at him as if their very lives depended on his decision. "Money! What's the use to me of money, if we all get drowned crossing over?"

As he spoke the river roared and rushed downwards on its course with a heedlessness that quite justified him in his hesitation. "Wait till to-morrow morning, and the Tennessee will be quieter. Then I'll help you out."

"Wait till doomsday, why don't you say?" thundered Jenks. "We must take the risk—and I order you to take us over, at once!"

"You may be a very big man in the army," answered the ferryman, "but your orders don't go here!" He produced a small tin box from the tail of his coat, leisurely poured from it into his pipe some strong tobacco, and slowly lighted the stuff. Then he arose, walked to the edge of the wharf, and beckoned to a lad of nine or ten years old who was half asleep in the boat. The boy jumped up, leaped upon the wharf, and ran off along the river's bank in the opposite direction from which the four strangers had come. He had received a mysterious order from the ferryman.

"What's the matter now?" asked Macgreggor, who had a strong desire to knock down this imperturbable fellow who refused to be impressed even by a Confederate uniform.

"Nothing," replied the man, stolidly. He sat down again, crossed his legs, and took a long pull at the pipe.

"For the last time," shouted Jenks, shaking his fist in the smoker's face, "I order you to take out that boat, and ferry us across the river!"

"For the last time," said the man, very calmly, "I tell you I'm not going to risk my life for four fools!"

George walked up closer to Watson, and whispered: "Let's seize the boat, and try to cross over ourselves!"

Watson beckoned to his two companions, and told them what the boy suggested.

"We will be taking our lives in our hands," said Jenks, "but anything is better than being delayed here."

"Besides," added Macgreggor, "although the river *is* pretty mischievous-looking, I don't think it's any more dangerous than waiting here."

Jenks took out his watch, and looked at it. "I'll give you just five minutes," he said, addressing the ferryman, "and if by that time you haven't made up your mind to take us over the river, we'll take the law into our own hands, seize your boat, and try the journey ourselves." Waggie began to bark violently, as if he sympathized with this speech.

The man smiled. "That will be a fool trick," he answered. "If it's dangerous for me, it'll be death for you uns. Better say your prayers, partner!"

"Only four minutes left!" cried Jenks, resolutely, keeping an eye on the watch.

The ferryman closed his eyes and resumed his smoking. The others watched him intently. Meanwhile George was thinking. Two minutes more passed. The boy was recalling a saying of his father's: "Sometimes you can taunt an obstinate man into doing things, where you can't reason with him."

"Time is up!" said Jenks, at last. "Come, boys, let's make a break for the boat!"

The ferryman placed his pipe on the ground with the greatest composure. "Take the boat if you want," he observed, rising to his feet, "but you fellows won't get very far in it! Look there!"

He pointed up the river's bank. The boy who had been sent away a few minutes before was coming back to the wharf; he was now, perhaps, a quarter of a mile away, but he was not alone. He was bringing with him five Confederate soldiers, who were walking briskly along with muskets at right shoulder.

"You fellows looked kind o' troublesome," explained the ferryman, "so as there's a picket up yonder I thought I'd send my son up for 'em!"

Watson made a move towards the boat. "Better stay here," cried the ferryman; "for before you can get a hundred feet away from the bank in this contrary stream those soldiers will pick you off with their muskets. D'ye want to end up as food for fishes?"

The men groaned in spirit. "It's too late," muttered Jenks. He could picture the arrival at Marietta of all the members of the expedition save his own party, and the triumphal railroad escapade the next day. And when the Northern newspapers would ring with the account of the affair, his own name would not appear in the list of the brave adventurers.

Suddenly George went up to the ferryman, and said, with much distinctness: "I see we have to do with a coward! There's not a boatman in Kentucky who wouldn't take us across this river. Even a Yankee wouldn't fear it. But you are so afraid you'll have to get your feet wet that you actually send for soldiers to protect you!"

92

George's companions looked at him in astonishment. The boatman, losing his placidity, turned a deep red. "Take care, young fellow," he said, in a voice of anger; "there's not a man in Tennessee who dares to call Ned Jackson a coward!"

"I dare to call you a coward unless you take us over to Chattanooga!" answered the boy, sturdily. "You're afraid—and that's the whole truth!"

Jackson's face now underwent a kaleidoscopic transformation ranging all the way from red to purple, and then to white. All his stolidity had vanished; he was no longer the slow countryman; he had become the courageous, impetuous Southerner.

"If you weren't a boy," he shouted, "I'd knock you down!"

"That wouldn't prove your bravery," returned George, regarding him with an expression of well-feigned contempt. "That would only show you to be a bully. If you have any courage in your veins—the kind of courage that most Southerners have—prove it by taking us across the river."

93

The soldiers were gradually drawing near the wharf. Meanwhile George's companions had caught his cue. He was trying to goad Jackson into ferrying them over the riotous stream.

"Humph!" said Macgreggor; "a good boatman is never afraid of the water; but our friend here seems to have a consuming fear of it!"

"He ought to live on a farm, where there is nothing but a duck pond in the shape of water," added Jenks. Jackson was actually trembling with rage; his hands were twisting nervously.

Watson eyed him with seeming pity, as he said: "It's a lucky thing for you that you didn't enlist in the Confederate army. You would have run at the first smell of gunpowder!"

Jackson could contain his wrath no longer. "So you fellows think I'm a coward," he cried. "Very well! I'll prove that I'm not! Get into my boat, and I'll take you across—or drown you all and myself—I don't care which. But no man shall ever say that Ned Jackson is a coward!" He ran to the boat, leaped into it and beckoned to the Northerners. "Come on!" he shouted. Within a minute George, Macgreggor, Watson and Jenks were in the little craft, and the ferryman had unmoored it from the wharf.

94

"Never mind," he cried, waving his hand to the soldiers, who had now reached the wharf. "I don't want you. I'm going to ferry 'em over the river—or go to the bottom! It's all right."

Already were the voyagers in midstream, almost before they knew it. It looked as if Jackson, in his attempt to prove his courage, might only end by sending them all to the bottom. Waggie, who was now reposing in a pocket of George's coat, suddenly gave a low growl. George produced from another pocket a bone which he had brought from Mrs. Page's house, and gave it to the dog.

"Well," laughed Watson, in unconcern, "if Wag's to be drowned, he'll be drowned on a full stomach—and that's one consolation."

"He's the only critter among you as has got any sense," snarled the ferryman; "for he's the only one who didn't ask to be taken across this infarnal river!"

CHAPTER IV

PLOT AND PLOTTERS

95

In after years George could never quite understand how he and his companions reached the Chattanooga shore. He retained a vivid recollection of tempestuous waves, of a boat buffeted here and there, and of Ned Jackson muttering all manner of unkind things at his passengers and the turbulent stream. They did at last reach their destination, and bade farewell to the ferryman, whom they loaded down with Confederate notes.

No sooner was the latter embarked on the return voyage than Watson said: "That was a clever ruse of yours, George. That Jackson was a brave man at heart, and you put him on his mettle. He wanted to show us that he wasn't afraid of the water—and he succeeded."

George laughed. He explained that it was a remark of his father's which had put the idea into his own head, and then he wondered where that same father could be. Was he dead or was he still living, perhaps in some prison? 96

It was not long before the party reached the railroad station at Chattanooga. Here they purchased their tickets for Marietta, and were soon in the train bound southward for the latter place. The sun had nearly set as the engine pulled slowly out of the depot. The car in which they sat was filled with men on their way down South, some of them being soldiers in uniform and the rest civilians. Macgreggor, Watson and Jenks were at the rear end of the car, while George had to find a seat at the other end, next to a very thin man who wore the uniform of a Confederate captain.

"Isn't it strange?" thought the boy. "To-morrow morning we will be reversing our journey on this railroad, and burning bridges on our way back to Chattanooga. But how are we to steal a train? I wonder if Andrews and the rest of the party will be on hand to-night at Marietta." Then, as he realized that he was in a car filled with men who would treat him as a spy, if they knew the nature of his errand to the South, there came over him a great wave of homesickness. He had lived all his life among friends; it was for him a new sensation to feel that he was secretly opposed to his fellow-travelers. 97

The thin Captain who sat next to him turned and curiously regarded Waggie, who was lying on his master's lap. He had shrewd gray eyes, had this Captain, and there was a week's growth of beard upon his weazened face.

"Where did you get your dog from, lad?" he asked, giving Waggie a pat with one of his skeleton-like hands. It was a pat to which the little animal paid no attention.

"From home—Cincinnati."

George had answered on the spur of the moment, thoughtlessly, carelessly, before he had a chance to detect what a blunder he was making. The next second he could have bitten out his tongue in very vexation; he felt that his face was burning a bright red; he had a choking sensation at the throat.

The emaciated Captain was staring at him in a curiously surprised fashion. "From Cincinnati? Cincinnati, Ohio?" he asked, fixing his lynx-like eyes attentively upon his companion.

Poor George! Every idea seemed to have left him in his sudden confusion; he was only conscious that the Confederate officer continued to regard him in the same intent manner. "I say," repeated the latter, "is your home in Ohio?" 98

"Yes, Cincinnati, Ohio," said the boy boldly. "After all," as he thought, "I had better put a frank face on this stupidity of mine; a stammering answer will only make this fellow the more suspicious."

"So then you're a Northerner, are you, my son?" observed the Captain. "I thought you spoke with a bit of a Yankee accent!"

"Yes, I'm a Northerner," answered George. As he felt himself plunging deeper and deeper into hot water he was trying to devise some plausible story to tell the officer. But how to invent one while he was being subjected to that close scrutiny. One thing, at least, was certain. Once he had admitted that his home was in Ohio he could not make any use of the oft repeated Kentucky yarn.

"And what are you doing down here?" asked the Captain. He spoke very quietly, but there was an inflection in his voice which seemed to say: "Give a good account of yourself—for your presence in this part of the country is curious, if nothing more." 99

George understood that he must think quickly, and decide on some plan of action to cover up, if he could, any bad results from his blunder. He was once more cool, and he returned the piercing look of the officer with steadfast eyes. His mind was clear as to one thing. There was no need of his trying to invent a story, on the spur of the moment, with a man like the Captain quite ready to pick it to pieces. For it was plain that this Confederate was shrewd—and a trifle suspicious. The boy must pursue a different course.

"My being down South is my own concern," he said, pretending to be virtuously offended at the curiosity of his inquisitor.

The Captain drew himself up with an injured air. "Heigh ho!" he muttered; "my young infant wants me to mind my own business, eh?"

George flushed; he considered himself very much of a man, and he did not relish being called an "infant." But he kept his temper; he foresaw that everything depended upon his remaining cool. He treated the remark with contemptuous silence. 100

The officer turned away from him, to look out of the window of the car. Yet it was evident that he paid little or no attention to the rapidly moving landscape. He was thinking hard. Not a word was spoken between the two for ten minutes. Most of the other passengers were talking excitedly among themselves. Occasionally a remark could be understood above the rattle of the train. George heard enough to know they were discussing the battle of Shiloh, which had been fought so recently.

"I tell you," cried a soldier, "the battle was a great Confederate victory."

"That may be," answered some one, "but if we have many more such victories we Southerners will have a lost cause on our hands, and Abe Lincoln will be eating his supper in Richmond before many months are gone."

At this there was a chorus of angry dissent, and several cries of "Traitor!" George listened eagerly. He would dearly have liked to look behind him, to see what his three companions were doing, or hear what they were saying, at the other end of the car. But he was not supposed to know them. He could only surmise (correctly enough, as it happened) that they were acting their part of Southerners, although doing as little as possible to attract attention. One thing worried the young adventurer. He distrusted the continued silence of the Captain.

101

It was a silence that the officer finally broke, by looking squarely into George's face, and saying, in a low tone: "When a Northerner travels down South these times he must give an account of himself. If you won't tell me who you are, my friend, I may find means of making you!"

As he spoke the train was slowing up, and in another minute it had stopped at a little station.

"Now or never," thought George. He arose, stuffed Waggie into his pocket, and said to the Captain: "If you want to find out about me, write me. This is my station. Good-bye!"

The next instant he had stepped out of the car, and was on the platform. He and an elderly lady were the only two passengers who alighted. No sooner had they touched the platform than the train moved on its way, leaving the Captain in a state of angry surprise, as he wondered whether he should not have made some effort to detain the boy. It was too late to do anything now, and the officer, as he is carried away on the train, is likewise carried out of our story.

102

What were the feelings of Watson, and Jenks, and Macgreggor as they saw George leave the car, and the train rattled away? They were afraid to make any sign; and even if they had thought it prudent to call out to the lad, or seek to detain him, they would not have found time to put their purpose into execution, so quickly had the whole thing happened. Not daring to utter a sound, they could only look at one another in blank amazement. "What was the boy up to," thought Watson, "and what's to become of him?" He was already devotedly attached to George, so that he felt sick at heart when he pictured him alone and unprotected at a little wayside village in the heart of an enemy's country. Nor were the other two men less solicitous. Had George suddenly put on wings, and flown up through the roof of the car, they could not have been more horrified than they were at this moment. Meanwhile the train went rumbling on, as it got farther and farther away from the little station. It was now almost dark; the brakeman came into the car and lighted two sickly lamps. Some of the passengers leaned back in their seats and prepared to doze, while others, in heated, angry tones, kept up the discussion as to the battle of Shiloh. The civilian who had hinted that the engagement was not a signal victory for the Confederates got up and walked into a forward car, to rid himself of the abuse and arguments of several of his companions.

103

Watson was sorely tempted to pull the check rope of the train, jump out, and walk back on the track until he found the missing boy; but when he reflected on the possible consequences of such a proceeding he unwillingly admitted to himself that to attempt it would be the part of madness. He would only bring the notice of every one in the train upon himself; suspicion would be aroused; he and his companions might be arrested; the whole plot for burning the bridges might be upset.

"What can have gotten into George's head?" he said to himself a hundred times. Jenks and Macgreggor were asking themselves the same question. Steadily the train went on, while the sky grew darker and darker. In time most of the passengers fell asleep. Occasionally a stop would be made at some station. Marietta, in Georgia, would not be reached until nearly midnight.

104

"Where had George gone?" the reader will ask. The question is not so hard to answer as it may seem. The moment that the Captain had become inquisitive the boy had made up his mind that the sooner he could get away from that gentleman the better it would be for the success of Andrews' expedition. He saw that the train stopped at different stations along the road, and he began to map out a scheme for escape. Thus, when the cars came to the place already spoken of, he jumped out, as we have described, and stood on the platform with the elderly lady who had alighted almost at the same instant. The latter passed on into the station, and left the platform deserted, except for George. Hardly had she disappeared before the conductor pulled the check-rope, and the train began to move. As it slowly passed by him the boy quickly jumped upon the track, caught hold of the coupling of the last car, and hung there, with his knees lifted up almost to his chin. In another second he had grasped the iron railing above him; within a minute he had raised himself and clambered upon the platform. The train was now speeding along at the customary rate. As George sat down on the platform, he gave a sigh of relief. No one had seen him board the car. For all that the inquisitive Captain knew he might still be standing in front of the station. And what were Watson, Jenks and Macgreggor thinking about his sudden exit from the scene? George laughed, in spite of himself, as he pictured their amazement. He would give them a pleasant surprise later on, when they reached Marietta. In the meantime he would stay just where he was, if he were not disturbed, until they arrived at that town. Then it would be late at night, when he could evade the lynx-eyed Confederate officer.

105

Having settled his plans comfortably in his mind George was about to put his hand in his coat

pocket to give a reassuring pat to Waggie (who had been sadly shaken up by his master's scramble) when the door of the car opened. A man put out his head, and stared at the boy.

"What are you doing here, youngster?" asked the man. George recognized him as the conductor of the train. 106

"Only trying to get a breath of fresh air," replied the lad, at the same time producing his railroad ticket and showing it in the dusk. The conductor flashed the lantern he was holding in George's face, and then glanced at the ticket.

"Well, don't fall off," he observed, evidently satisfied by the scrutiny. "You were in one of the forward cars, weren't you? Where's your dog? In your pocket, eh?" He turned around, shut the door, and went back into the car without waiting for an answer.

"One danger is over," whispered George to himself. Then he began to pat Waggie. "You and I are having an exciting time of it, aren't we?" he laughed. "Well, there's one consolation; they can't hang you for a spy, anyway, even if they should hang me!"

So the night passed on, as George clung to the railing of the platform, while the train rumbled along in the darkness to the Southward. The conductor did not appear again; he had evidently forgotten all about the boy. At last, when Waggie and his master were both feeling cold, and hungry, and forlorn, there came a welcome cry from the brakeman: "Marietta! All out for Marietta!" 107

In a short time the passengers for Marietta had left the train. Watson, Jenks and Macgreggor were soon in a little hotel near the station, which was to be the rendezvous for Andrews and his party. As they entered the office of the hostelry all their enthusiasm for the coming escapade seemed to have vanished. The mysterious disappearance of George had dampened their ardor; they feared to think where he could be, or what might have become of him.

The office was brilliantly lighted in spite of the lateness of the hour. In it were lounging eight or nine men. The pulses of the three newcomers beat the quicker as they recognized in them members of the proposed bridge-burning expedition. Among them was Andrews.

"Yes," he was saying, in a perfectly natural manner, to the hotel clerk, who stood behind a desk; "we Kentuckians must push on early tomorrow morning. The South has need of all the men she can muster."

"That's true," answered the clerk; "Abe Lincoln and Jefferson Davis have both found out by this time that this war won't be any child's play. It'll last a couple of years yet, or my name's not Dan Sanderson." 108

Macgreggor and Jenks walked up to the register on the desk, without showing any sign of recognition, and put down their names respectively as "Henry Fielding, Memphis, Tennessee," and "Major Thomas Brown, Chattanooga." The latter, it will be remembered, wore a Confederate uniform. Watson wrote his real name, in a bold, round hand, and added: "Fleming County, Kentucky." Then he turned towards Andrews. "Well, stranger," he said, "did I hear you say you were from Kentucky? I'm a Kentuckian myself. What's your county?"

He extended his right hand and greeted Andrews with the air of a man who would like to cultivate a new acquaintance. Andrews rose, of course, to the occasion, by answering: "I'm always glad to meet a man from my own state. I'm from Fleming County."

"Well, I'll be struck!" cried Watson. "That's my county, too! What part of it do you live in?" 109

After a little more of this conversation, which was given in loud tones, the two men withdrew to a corner and sat down. "We are all here now except two of our men," said Andrews, in a low voice. "Half of the fellows have gone to bed, thoroughly tired out. But where's George? Isn't he with you?"

"It makes me sick to think where he is," whispered Watson, "for——"

Before he could finish his sentence George entered the office, followed by Waggie. He had lingered about the Marietta Station, after leaving the platform of the car, until he was safe from meeting the Captain, in case that gentleman should have alighted at this place. Then he had cautiously made his way to the hotel.

Watson rose as quietly as if the appearance of George was just what he had been expecting. "What did you lag behind at the station for, George?" he asked. Then, turning to Andrews, he said: "Here's another Kentuckian, sir—a nephew of mine. He wants to join the Confederate army, too."

George, as he shook hands with Andrews quite as if they had never met each other before, could not help admiring the presence of mind of Watson. 110

"You young rascal," whispered the latter, "you have given me some miserable minutes."

"Hush!" commanded Andrews, in the same tone of voice. "We must not talk together any more. As soon as you go up-stairs to bed you must come to my room—number 10, on the second floor, and get your instructions for to-morrow. Everything has gone very smoothly so far, and we are all here excepting two of us, although some of us have had a pretty ticklish time in getting through to this town. Remember—Room Number 10."

Andrews moved away. Soon all the members of the party assembled at the hotel were in their rooms up-stairs, presumably asleep, with the exception of George and his three companions. They were able, after considerable coaxing, to get admittance into the dining-room. Thereby

they secured a nocturnal meal of tough ham, better eggs, and some muddy "coffee." The latter was in reality a concoction consisting of about seven-eighths of chickory, and the other eighth,—but what the remaining eighth was only the cook could have told. The meal tasted like a Delmonico feast to the famished wanderers, nor was it the less acceptable because they saw it nearly consumed before their hungry eyes; for Waggie, who had a power of observation that would have done credit to a detective, and a scent of which a hound might well have been proud, made his way into the dining-room in advance of the party, and jumped upon the table while the negro waiter's back was turned. As George entered, the dog was about to pounce upon the large plate of ham. Mr. Wag cast one sheepish look upon his master, and then retired under the table, where he had his supper later on.

111

After they had finished their meal, the four conspirators were taken up-stairs by a sleepy bell-boy, and shown into a large room containing two double beds. The servant lighted a kerosene lamp that stood on a centre table, and then shuffled down to the office.

Macgreggor lifted the lamp to take a survey of the room. "Take a good look at those beds, fellows," he said, with a grim chuckle; "it may be a long time before you sleep on such comfortable ones again. For if we come to grief in this expedition—"

112

"Pshaw!" interrupted Jenks impatiently, but in subdued tones. "Don't borrow trouble. We are bound to succeed."

Macgreggor placed the lamp on the centre table, and began to take off his shoes. "I'm just as ready as any of you for this scheme," he answered, "but I can't shut my eyes to the risks we are running. Did you notice on your way down that the railroad sidings between Chattanooga and Marietta were filled with freight cars? That means, to begin with, that we won't have a clear track for our operations to the Northward."

Watson smiled rather grimly. "The more we appreciate the breakers ahead of us," he whispered, "the less likely are we to get stranded on the beach. But we really can't judge anything about the outlook for to-morrow until we get our detailed instructions from Andrews."

As he spoke there was a very faint tap at the door. The next moment Andrews had cautiously entered the room. He was in stocking feet, and wore neither coat nor waistcoat.

"I thought it better to hunt you fellows up," he explained, in a voice that they could just hear, "instead of letting you try to find me. I was listening when the boy showed you up to this room." He proceeded to sit upon one of the beds, while his companions gathered silently around him. "Listen," he continued, "and get your instructions for to-morrow—for after we separate to-night there will be no time for plotting."

113

"To-morrow we must reverse our journey and take the early morning train to the northward, on this Georgia State Railroad. In order to avoid suspicion, we must not all buy tickets for the same station. In point of fact we are only to go as far as Big Shanty station, near the foot of Kenesaw Mountain, a distance of eight miles. Here passengers and railroad employees get off for breakfast, and this is why I have selected the place for the seizure of the train. Furthermore, there is no telegraph station there from which our robbery could be reported. When we board the train at Marietta we must get in by different doors, but contrive to come together in one car—the passenger car nearest the engine. After all, or nearly all but ourselves have left the cars at Big Shanty for breakfast, I will give the signal, when the coast is clear, and we will begin the great work of the day—that of stealing the locomotive."

114

Here Andrews went into a detailed description of what each man in the expedition (he had now twenty-one men, including himself, and not counting George) would do when the fateful moment arrived. George, who sat listening with open mouth, felt as if he were drinking in a romantic tale from the "Arabian Nights," or, at least, from a modern version of the "Nights," where Federal soldiers and steam engines would not be out of place. He thrilled with admiration at the nicety with which Andrews had made all his arrangements. It was like a general entering into elaborate preparations for a battle. The two soldiers who were to act as engineers, those who were to play brakemen, and the man who was to be fireman, had their work carefully mapped out for them. The other men were to form a guard who would stand near the cars that were to be seized; they were to have their revolvers ready and must shoot down any one who attempted to interfere.

"We must get off as quickly as possible," went on the intrepid Andrews. "From what I hear to-night it is evident that General Mitchell captured Huntsville to-day, which is one day sooner than we expected him to do it. We must cut all telegraph wires and then run the train northward to Chattanooga, and from there westward until we meet Mitchell advancing towards Chattanooga on his way from Huntsville. I have obtained a copy of the time-table showing the movement of trains on the Georgia State Railroad, and I find we have only two to meet on our race. These two won't trouble us, for I know just where to look for them. There is also a local freight-train which can be passed if we are careful to run according to the schedule of the captured train until we come up to it. Having gotten by this local freight we can put on full steam, and speed on to the Oostenaula and Chickamauga bridges, burn them, and run on through Chattanooga to Mitchell. There's a glorious plan for you fellows. What do you think of it?"

115

There was a ring of pride in his lowered voice as he concluded.

"Admirable!" whispered Walter Jenks, "It's a sure thing, and the man who invented the scheme has more brains than half the generals in the war!"

116

As George pictured to himself the stolen train flying along the tracks, in the very heart of the enemy's country, he could hardly restrain his enthusiasm. "It's grand!" he murmured. Had he dared he would have given a great cheer.

The leader smiled as he saw, in the dim lamplight, the radiant face of the boy. "You have lots of grit, my lad," he said, in a kindly fashion, "and God grant you may come out of this business in safety." Then, turning to Watson, he asked: "How does my plan, as now arranged, impress you, Watson?"

After a minute's silence, during which the others in the room gazed intently at Watson, that soldier said: "I have as great an admiration for James Andrews as any one of our party, and I am ready to follow wherever he leads. Whatever my faults may be, I'm not a coward. But we should look carefully on each side of a question—and I can't help thinking that owing to circumstances which we have not taken into account our expedition stands a very decided chance of failure."

117

"What are those circumstances?" asked Andrews.

"In the first place," was the reply, "I find that there is a large encampment of Confederate troops at Big Shanty. Escape in a captured train would have been very easy while those soldiers were elsewhere; but, being there, do you suppose that the sentries of the camp will stand idly by when we seize cars and locomotive and attempt to steam away to the northward? In the second place—and this is no less important—the railroad seems to be obstructed by numerous freight trains, probably not on the schedule, and flying along the track towards Chattanooga will not be as plain sailing as you believe. One unlooked-for delay might be fatal. We are in the midst of enemies, and should there be one hitch, one change in our program, the result will be failure, and perhaps death, for all of us."

There was a painful silence. At last Andrews said, very quietly, but with an air of strong conviction: "I think the very objections you urge, my dear Watson, are advantages in disguise. I know, as well as you, that there's a big encampment at Big Shanty, but what of it? No one dreams for one second that there is any plot to capture a train, and no one, therefore, will be on the lookout. The thing will be done so suddenly that there will be no chance for an alarm until we are steaming off from the station—and then we can laugh. If we strike any unscheduled trains, they too will be to our advantage; for they will make such confusion on the road that they will detract attention from the rather suspicious appearance of our own train."

118

"Perhaps you are right," answered Watson, rather dubiously.

Andrews arose from the bed, and solemnly shook hands with each of his four companions. Then he said, very impressively: "I am confident of the success of our enterprise, and I will either go through with it or leave my bones to bleach in 'Dixieland.' But I don't want to persuade any one against his own judgment. If any one of you thinks the scheme too dangerous—if you are convinced beforehand of its failure—you are at perfect liberty to take the train in any direction, and work your way home to the Union camp as best you can. Nor shall I have one word of reproach, either in my mind or on my lips, for a man whose prudence, or whose want of confidence in his leader, induces him to draw back."

119

Andrews was an adroit student of men. No speech could have better served his purpose of inducing his followers to remain with him. It was as if he declared: "You may all desert me, but I will remain true to my flag."

"You can count on me to the very last," said Watson stoutly. He was always ready to face danger, but he liked to have the privilege of grumbling at times. In his heart, too, was a conviction that his leader was about to play a very desperate game. The chances were all against them.

"Thank you, Watson," answered Andrews, gratefully. "I never could doubt your bravery. And are the rest of you willing?"

There were hearty murmurs of assent from Jenks, George and Macgreggor. Jenks and the boy were very sanguine; Macgreggor was rather skeptical as to future success, but he sternly resolved to banish all doubts from his mind.

120

"Well, George," said Andrews, as he was about to leave the room, "if you get through this railroad ride in safety you will have something interesting to remember all your life." In another moment he had gone. The time for action had almost arrived.

CHAPTER V

ON THE RAIL

121

At an early hour the next morning, just before daylight, the conspirators were standing on the platform of the Marietta station, awaiting the arrival of their train—the train which they hoped soon to call theirs in reality. They were all in civilian dress; even Walter Jenks had contrived to discard his uniform of a Confederate officer, regarding it as too conspicuous, and he was

habited in an ill-fitting suit which made him look like an honest, industrious mechanic.

Andrews was pacing up and down with an anxious, resolute face. He realized that the success of the manœuvre which they were about to execute rested upon his own shoulders, but he had no idea of flinching. "Before night has come," he was thinking confidently, "we shall be within the lines of General Mitchell, and soon all America will be ringing with the story of our dash."

122

George, no less sanguine, was standing near Watson and Macgreggor, and occasionally slipping a lump of sugar into the overcoat pocket which served as a sort of kennel for the tiny Waggie. There was nothing about the party to attract undue attention. They pretended, for the most part, to be strangers one to another, and, to aid in the deception, they had bought railroad tickets for different places—for Kingston, Adairsville, Calhoun and other stations to the northward, between Marietta and Chattanooga.

Soon the train was sweeping up to the platform. It was a long one, with locomotive, tender, three baggage cars and a number of passenger cars. The adventurers clambered on it through various doors, but at last reached the passenger car nearest to the engine. Here they seated themselves quite as if each man had no knowledge of any one else. In another minute the train, which was well filled, went rolling away from Marietta and along the bend around the foot of Kenesaw Mountain. "Only eight miles," thought George, "and then——"

The conductor of the train, a young man with a very intelligent face, looked searchingly at the boy as he examined his ticket. "Too young," George heard him mutter under his breath, as he passed on to the other passengers.

123

A thrill of feverish excitement stirred the lad. "What did he mean by too young?" he asked himself. "Can he possibly have gotten wind of our expedition?" But the conductor did not return, and it was not until long afterwards that George was able to understand what was meant by the expression, "Too young." The man had been warned by the Confederate authorities that a number of young Southerners who had been conscripted into the army were trying to escape from service, and might use the cars for that purpose. He was ordered, therefore, to arrest any such runaways that he might find. When he looked at George it is probable that he thought: "This boy is too young to be a conscript," and he evidently gave unconscious voice to what was passing through his mind. Fortunately enough, he saw nothing suspicious in any of the Northerners.

The train ran rather slowly, so that it was bright daylight before it reached Big Shanty. "Big Shanty; twenty minutes for breakfast!" shouted the conductor and the brakemen. George's heart beat so fast that he almost feared some one would hear it, and ask him what was the matter. The hoarse cries of the employees as they announced the name of the station made him realize that now, after all these hours of preparation and preliminary danger, the first act of his drama of war had begun. Every one of his companions experienced the same feeling, but, like him, none had any desire to draw back.

124

No sooner had the cars come to a standstill than nearly all the passengers, excepting the Northerners, quickly left their seats, to repair to the long, low shanty or eating-room from which the station took its unpoetic name. Then the train hands, including the engineer and fireman, followed the example of the hungry passengers, and hurried off to breakfast. The engine was deserted. This was even better than the adventurers could have hoped, for they had feared that it might be necessary to overpower the engineer before they could get away on their race.

The twenty-one men and the one boy left in the forward passenger car looked anxiously, guardedly, at one another. More than one felt in his clothes to make sure that he had his revolver. Andrews left the car for half a minute, dropped to the ground, and glanced rapidly up and down the track. There was no obstruction visible. Within a stone's throw of him, however, sentries were posted on the outskirts of the Confederate camp. He scanned the station, which was directly across the track from the encampment, and was glad to see, exactly as he had expected, that it had no telegraph office from which a dispatch concerning the coming escapade might be sent. Having thus satisfied himself that the coast was clear, and the time propitious, he reentered the car.

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"All right, boys," he said, very calmly (as calmly, indeed, as if he were merely inviting the men to breakfast), "let us go now!"

The men arose, quietly, as if nothing startling were about to happen, left the car, and walked hurriedly to the head of the train. "Each man to his post," ordered Andrews. "Ready!"

In less time than it takes to write this account the seizure of the train was accomplished, in plain view of the puzzled sentries. The two men who were to act as engineer and assistant engineer clambered into the empty cab of the locomotive, as did also Andrews and Jenks. The latter was to be the fireman. One of the men uncoupled the passenger cars, so that the stolen train would consist only of the engine, tender, and the three baggage cars. Into one of these baggage cars the majority of the party climbed, shutting the doors at either end after them, while the two men who were to serve as brakemen stationed themselves upon the roof. Watson and Macgreggor were in this car, while George, with Waggie in his pocket, was standing in the tender, his handsome face aglow with excitement, and his eyes sparkling like stars.

126

"All ready! Go!" cried Andrews. The engineer opened the valve of the locomotive; the wheels began to revolve; in another second the train was moving off towards Chattanooga. The next instant Big Shanty was in an uproar. As he peered over the ledge of the tender, and looked back, George saw the sentries running here and there, as the passengers in the breakfast-room came swarming out on the platform. There were shouts from many voices; he even heard the

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report of several rifles.

But shouts or shots from rifles could not avail now. The engine was dancing along the track on the road to Chattanooga; Big Shanty was soon many yards behind. George took Waggie out of his pocket, and held him up in the air by the little fellow's forepaws. "Say good-bye to the Confeds," he shouted, "for by to-night, Wag, you'll be in the Union lines!" The dog barked gleefully; and jumped about on the platform of the tender, glad enough to have a little freedom again. Then Waggie was replaced in his master's pocket.

Andrews, who was sitting on the right-hand seat of the cab, looked the picture of delight.

"How was that for a starter?" he cried. "It's a good joke on Watson: he was so sure the sentries would stop us, and the soldiers didn't realize what we were doing until it was too late—for them! Hurrah!"

It was all that the four men in the cab, and that George in the tender, could possibly do to keep their balance. The road-bed was very rough and full of curves; the country was mountainous, and the track itself was in wretched condition. Yet it was a magnificent sight as "The General," which was the name of the engine, careered along through the picturesque country like some faithful horse which tries, with all its superb powers of muscle, to take its master farther and farther away from a dangerous enemy.

But suddenly the engine began to slacken its speed, and at last came to a complete standstill. Andrews, who had made his way into the tender, with considerable difficulty, in order to speak to George, turned a trifle pale.

"What's the matter, Brown?" he shouted to the engineer.

"The fire's nearly out, and there's no steam," was the rejoinder. At the same moment the men in the baggage car opened the door nearest the tender, and demanded to know what had happened.

Andrews called back to them that there would only be a short delay.

"It's only the fire that's out," he added; "and I'm thankful it is nothing worse. When I saw the train slowing up I was afraid some of the machinery had broken." No one understood better than he how a broken engine would have stranded all his men in the enemy's country, only a short distance away, comparatively, from Big Shanty and the Confederate camp.

George worked with a will in assisting the men in the cab to convey wood from the tender into the engine furnace. In three minutes "The General" had resumed its way.

"I wonder," thought George, as the train twisted around a curve and then sped across a narrow embankment, "if any attempt will be made to follow us." But the very idea of such pursuit seemed absurd.

Andrews turned to Jenks with a smiling countenance. "The most difficult part of our journey is already over," he said triumphantly. "There's only one unscheduled train to meet, in addition to the two regulars. After I meet it, probably at Kingston, twenty-five miles or more farther on, we can put the old 'General' to full speed, and begin our work! We have got the upper hand at last."

"Don't forget your telegraph wire is to be cut," said Jenks, as he jammed his shabby cap over his head, to prevent it from sailing off into space.

"Wait a couple of minutes," answered the leader. "We'll cut it." He knew that although there was no telegraph station at Big Shanty, yet the enemy might tap the wire, if it were not cut, and thus send word along the line that a train manned by Northern spies was to be watched for and peremptorily stopped. The simplest obstruction on the track would be sufficient to bring this journey to an untimely end.

"Brown, we'll stop here," commanded the leader, a minute or two later, as the engine was running over a comparatively level section. "The General" was soon motionless, whereupon Watson, peering out from the baggage car, called out: "Anything wrong?"

"Only a little wire-cutting to be done," shouted Andrews. Then coming to George, he said: "Look here, my boy, how are you on climbing?"

"Never had a tree beat me yet," said the lad.

"Then try your skill at that pole yonder, and see if you can get to the top of it."

Without waiting to make answer George handed Waggie to Jenks, jumped from the tender to the ashy road-bed, and started towards the nearest telegraph pole, only a few feet away from the engine. It was a far more difficult task to coax one's way up a smooth pole than up the rough bark of a tree, as George soon learned. Twice he managed to clamber half way up the pole, and twice he slid ignominiously to the ground. But he was determined to succeed, and none the less so because the men in the baggage car were looking on as intently as if they were at the circus. Upon making the third attempt he conquered, and reached the top of the pole amid the cheering of the spectators.

"Now hold on there for a minute, George," called Andrews. He produced from one of his pockets a ball of very thick twine, or cord, to one end of which he tied a small stick of kindling-wood, brought from the tender. Next he leaned out from the cab and threw the stick into the air. It flew over the telegraph wire, and then to the ground, so that the cord, the other end of which he held in his left hand, passed up across the wire, and so down again. To the end which he held Andrews tied a good-sized axe.

"Do you see what I want?" he asked the boy, who was resting himself on the cross-bar supporting the wire.

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George needed no prompting. The cord was eight or nine feet away from him; to reach it he must move out on the telegraph wire, hand over hand, with his feet dangling in the air. Slowly he swung himself from the cross-bar to the wire, and began to finger his way towards the cord. But this was an experience new to the expert tree-climber; ere he had proceeded more than three feet his hands slipped and he fell to the ground. The distance was thirty-five feet or more, and the lookers-on cried out in alarm. The boy would surely break his legs—perhaps his neck!

But while Master George might not be an adept in handling a wire he had learned a few things about falling from trees. As he came tumbling down he gracefully turned a somersault and landed, quite unhurt, upon his feet.

"I'll do it yet," he maintained pluckily, running back to the telegraph pole.

"Wait, George," shouted Andrews. He leaped from the cab, and taking a new piece of the cord, tied it around the lad's waist. "If I had the sense I was born with I might have done that first," he muttered.

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George began his second ascent of the pole, and this time reached the top without hindrance or mishap. Andrews now fastened the axe to the cord, of which George had one end; in a few seconds the axe had been drawn up by the boy. Then, with his left hand holding on to the cross-bar, and his legs firmly wound around the pole, he took the axe in his right hand and hit the wire. Three times did he thus strike; at the third blow the wire snapped asunder, and the longer of the two pieces fell to the ground. He let the tool fall, and slid down the pole as the men cheered him lustily. Andrews now took the axe, cut the dangling wire in another place, and threw the piece thus secured into the tender.

"They can't connect that line in a hurry," he said, as he turned to George with the remark: "Well, my son, you're earning your salt!" George, blushing like a peony, felt a thrill of pride.

"And now, fellows," added Andrews, addressing the men in the baggage car, "it will be best to take up a rail, so that if we are pursued, by any chance, the enemy will have some trouble in getting on any further."

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The occupants of the car, headed by Watson, sprang to the ground. Andrews handed him a smooth iron bar, about four feet in length. "We have no track-raising instruments," explained the leader, "but I guess this will answer." Watson managed to loosen some of the spikes on the track, in the rear of the train, by means of this bar; later several of his companions succeeded in placing a log under the rail and prying it up so that at last the piece of iron had been entirely separated from the track.

The perspiration was dripping from Watson's brow. "Great guns!" he growled, "we are acting as if we had a whole eternity of time before us."

"Don't worry about that," said Andrews, reassuringly, as he leaped into the cab; "we have been running ahead of schedule time. But hurry up; there's lots of work before us!" In the next minute the Northerners were once more on their way.

After the train had run a distance of five miles, Andrews signaled to the engineer, and it was brought slowly to a stop. The chief jumped from the engine, walked along the track to the end car, and gazed intently to the southward.

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"No sign of pursuit thus far," he said to himself. Then, turning back and speaking to the men in the baggage car who had once more opened the door, he cried: "There's time, boys, for another wrestle with the telegraph—only this time we will try a new plan." This time, indeed, a pole was chopped down, and placed (after the wire had been cut) upon the track directly behind the last baggage car.

"There," said Andrews, "that will have to be lifted off before our friends the enemy can steam by—even if they have an engine good for seventy miles an hour."

Walter Jenks came walking back to the cab. He looked pale and tired.

"What's the matter?" asked Andrews.

"I strained my back a bit in helping the fellows to put that pole on the track," was the answer.

"Go back into the car and take a rest," urged the leader. "George can take your place as fireman. Eh, George?"

The boy, coming up at that moment, and hearing the suggestion, smiled almost as broadly as the famous Cheshire cat. He longed to know that he was of some real use in the expedition. So Jenks retired to the baggage car, carrying with him, for a temporary companion, the struggling Waggie, who might be very much in George's way under the new arrangement of duties.

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Off once more rattled "The General," and George, in his capacity of fireman, felt about three inches taller than he had five minutes before. The spirits of Andrews seemed to be rising higher and higher. Thus far everything had gone so successfully that he began to believe that the happy ending of this piece of daring was already assured.

"Now, my boys, for a bit of diplomacy," he said, at last, as the occupants of the cab saw that they were approaching a small station flanked by half a dozen houses. "Stop 'The General' here, Brown, for I think there's a tank at the place."

As the train reached the platform and slowly stopped, the station-master, a rustic-looking

individual with a white beard three feet long, shambled up to the cab.

"Ain't this Fuller's train?" he drawled, gazing curiously at the four Northerners, as he gave a hitch to his shabby trousers. He could not understand the presence of the strangers in the engine, nor the disappearance of the passenger cars.

Andrews leaned out of the cab window. He knew that Fuller was the conductor of the stolen train, whom they had left behind at Big Shanty. "No," he said, in a tone of authority, "this is not Fuller's train. He'll be along later; we have the right of way all along the line. I'm running a special right through to General Beauregard at Corinth. He is badly in need of powder."

"Be the powder there?" asked the station-master, pointing to the three baggage cars.

The men hiding in one of them had received their instructions; they were as silent as the grave, and their doors were closed. The brakemen sat mute on top of the cars.

"Yes, there's enough powder in there to blow up the whole State of Georgia," returned Andrews.

"Wall, I'd give my shirt and my shoes to Beauregard if he wanted 'em," said the man of the long beard. "He's the best General we have in the Confederate service;—yes, better even than Robert Lee."

"Well, then help Beauregard by helping me. I want more water—I see you have a tank here—and more wood."

"You can have all you can hold," cried the station-master, enthusiastically. He was only too glad to be of use.

Thus it happened that ten minutes later "The General" was speeding away from the station with a fresh supply of water and a huge pile of wood in the tender.

"That yarn worked admirably, didn't it?" asked Andrews. The engineer and his assistant laughed. George shut the heavy door of the furnace, into which he had been throwing wood, and stood up, very red in the face, albeit smiling.

"But even if the story was true," he suggested, "you couldn't get through to Corinth."

"Exactly," laughed the leader, "but our goat-bearded friend at the station didn't think of that fact. Corinth is away off in the state of Mississippi, near its northern border, nearly three hundred miles away from here; besides, if I were a Southerner, I couldn't possibly reach there without running afoul of General Mitchell and his forces, either around Huntsville, or Chattanooga. However, I knew more about Mitchell's movements than the station man did—and that's where I had the advantage."

"We may not have such plain sailing at Kingston," said the engineer, as "The General" just grazed an inquisitive cow which showed signs of loitering on the track.

"We'll have more people to deal with there," admitted Andrews, "and we must be all the more on our guard."

Both the men spoke wisely. It was just two hours after leaving Big Shanty, and about thirty miles had been covered, when the alleged powder-train rolled into the station at the town of Kingston.

"I hope we meet that irregular freight train here," muttered Andrews. There were certainly plenty of cars in evidence on the sidings; indeed, the station, which was the junction for a branch line running to Rome, Georgia, presented a bustling appearance.

No sooner was "The General" motionless than a train-dispatcher emerged from a gathering of idlers on the platform and walked up to the locomotive. He held in his hand a telegraphic blank. As he saw Andrews, who was leaning out of the cab with an air of impatience that was partly real and partly assumed, the dispatcher drew back in surprise. He recognized "The General," but there were strange men in the cab.

"I thought this was Fuller's train," he said. "It's Fuller's engine."

"Yes, it is Fuller's engine, but he's to follow me with his regular train and another engine. This is a special carrying ammunition for General Beauregard, and I must have the right of way clear along the line!"

The dispatcher scanned the train. He saw nothing to excite his suspicions. The baggage cars were closed, and might easily be filled with powder and shot; the men in the engine, and the two brakemen on the top of one car had a perfectly natural appearance.

"Well, you can't move on yet," he announced. "Here's a telegram saying a local freight from the north will soon be here, and you must wait till she comes up."

Andrews bit his lip in sheer vexation. He had reasoned that this irregular freight train would already be at Kingston on his arrival, and he hated the idea of a delay. The loiterers on the platform were listening eagerly to the conversation; he felt that he was attracting too much attention. But there was no help for it. He could not go forward on this single-track railroad until the exasperating freight had reached the station.

"All right," he answered, endeavoring to look unconcerned, "shunt us off."

Within three minutes the train had been shifted from the main track to a side track, and a curious crowd had gathered around "The General."

It was a critical situation. The idlers began to ply the occupants of the cab with a hundred

questions which must be answered in some shape unless suspicion was to be aroused—and suspicion, under such circumstances, would mean the holding back of the train, and the failure of the expedition.

“Where did you come from?” “How much powder have you got on board?” “Why did you take Fuller’s engine?” “Why is Beauregard in such a hurry for ammunition?” were among the queries hurled at the defenceless heads of the four conspirators. 142

George, as he gazed out upon the Kingstonians, began to feel rather nervous. He realized that one contradictory answer, one slip of the tongue, might spoil everything. And in this case to spoil was a verb meaning imprisonment and ultimate death.

A dapper young man, with small, piercing eyes and a head that suggested a large bump of self-conceit, called out: “You chaps can’t reach Beauregard. You’ll run right into the Yankee forces.”

“I’ve got my orders and I’m going to try it,” doggedly answered Andrews.

“And run your ammunition right into the hands of the Yankees?” sneered the dapper young man. “I don’t see the sense in that.”

An angry flush came into Andrews’ cheeks. “When you have been in the Confederate army a little while, young man, as I have,” he said, “you’ll learn to obey orders and ask no questions. Why don’t you go serve your country, as other young men are doing, instead of idling around at a safe distance from the bullets?” 143

At this sally a shout of laughter went up from the crowd. It was evident that the dapper young man was not popular. He made no answer, but went away. “Will that freight never turn up?” thought Andrews.

Suddenly there came a barking from the baggage car nearest the tender, wherein were confined the majority of the party. George’s heart beat the faster as he listened; he knew that the querulous little cries were uttered by Waggie.

An old man, with snow-white hair and beard, cried out: “Is that dog in the car part of your ammunition?” His companions laughed at the witticism. For once Andrews was nonplused. George came bravely to the rescue.

“It’s a dog in a box,” he said, “and it’s a present to General Beauregard.”

“Well, I hopes the purp won’t be blown up,” remarked the old man. There was another titter, but the story was believed.

“Things are getting a little too warm here,” Andrews whispered to George. As the words left his lips he heard the screeching of a locomotive. “It’s the freight!” he cried. 144

It was, indeed, the longed-for freight train; puffing laboriously, it came up to the station and was quickly switched off to a siding.

“Now we can get rid of these inquisitive hayseeds,” said Andrews.

“Look,” cried George; “I see a red flag!” He pointed to the rear platform of the end freight car, from which was suspended a piece of red bunting. Andrews stamped his foot and indulged in some forcible language. He knew that the flag indicated the presence of another train back of the freight.

Andrews was out of the cab like a flash. “What does this red flag mean?” he demanded of the conductor of the freight train, who was about to cross the tracks to enter the station.

“What does *what* mean?” asked the conductor, in a tone of mild surprise.

“Why is the road blocked up behind you?” asked the leader. Had he been the President of the Southern Confederacy he could not have spoken more imperiously. “I have a special train with orders to take a load of powder to General Beauregard without delay! And here I find my way stopped by miserable freight trains which are not a quarter as important as my three cars of ammunition.” 145

“I’m sorry, sir,” explained the conductor, “but it ain’t my fault. Fact is, Mitchell, the Yankee General, has captured Huntsville, and we’re moving everything we can out of Chattanooga, because it’s said he is marching for there. We have had to split this freight up into two sections—and t’other section is a few miles behind. Don’t worry. It’ll be here soon. But, look here, sir! You’ll never be able to reach Beauregard. General Mitchell will get you long before you are near Corinth.”

“Pooh!” replied Andrews. “Mitchell may have taken Huntsville, but he can’t stay there. Beauregard has, no doubt, sent him flying by this time. And, anyway, I’m bound to obey orders from Richmond, come what may.”

“I wish you luck, sir,” said the freight conductor, who was impressed by the authoritative bearing of Andrews, and believed the spy to be some Confederate officer of high rank. 146

The leader returned to the cab. It was still surrounded by the curious idlers.

“This is what I call pretty bad railroad management,” he grumbled, loud enough to be heard by the Kingstonians. “This line should be kept clear when it’s necessary to get army supplies quickly from place to place. What are fifty freight trains compared to powder for the troops?”

The minutes passed slowly; it seemed as if that second freight train would never come. At last a dull, rumbling sound on the track gave warning of the approach of the second section. In a few

moments the heavily-laden cars, drawn by a large engine, had glided by "The General," down the main track. The men in the cab gave unconscious sighs of relief. Now they could move onward. But what was it that the sharp eyes of George detected? Yes, there could be no mistake. At the end of the second freight train was another red flag.

"Look!" he whispered. Andrews saw the flag, and turned white.

"How many more trains are we to wait for?" he said.

After regaining his composure he left the engine, to seek the conductor of the new train. He was back again in five minutes.

"Well?" asked George.

"I find from the conductor that there's still another section behind him," explained Andrews. "The Confederate commander at Chattanooga fears the approach of General Mitchell and has ordered all the rolling stock of the railroad to be sent south to Atlanta. The new train should be here in ten minutes."

In the meantime the people around the station had all heard of the danger which threatened Chattanooga from the Union army. The train-dispatcher came running over to the engine, and doffed his cap to Andrews.

"It ain't none of my business," he said, with supreme indifference to any rules of grammar, "but they say Mitchell is almost at Chattanooga—and you'll never get through to Corinth."

Andrews assumed an air of contemptuous superiority.

"I happen to know more of General Mitchell's movements than you do," he said, "And, what's more, no Confederate officer takes orders from a railroad employee."

"I didn't mean any offense," answered the train-dispatcher.

"Then go back and see that the switches are ready for me to move on the instant the next freight gets here," ordered the leader. The young man walked away, with a nod of assent.

"He talks proud enough," he thought; "he must be a relation of Jefferson Davis, from his airs."

After the dispatcher had gone, Andrews whispered to George: "We ought to let the boys in the car know the cause of our detention—and warn them that in case of anything going wrong in our plans they must be prepared to fight for their lives. Could you manage to get word to them without attracting suspicion?"

The boy made no verbal answer. But as he left the cab and vaulted to the ground, his looks showed that he understood what was wanted, and proposed to execute the commission. After sauntering among the men who stood near the engine, he crossed the track of the siding, directly in front of "The General's" headlight, and soon leaned, in a careless attitude, against the car in which so many of his companions were waiting. He was now on the opposite side of the track from the Kingstonians, but directly alongside the main track, and in full view from the station.

George began, in a very low tone, to whistle a few bars from "The Blue Bells of Scotland." It was a tune he had often indulged in during his travels from the Union camp. As he finished there came a bark of recognition from Waggie, and a slight stir in the car.

"Are you there, Watson?" asked the boy, under his breath. "Can you hear me? If you can, scratch on the wall."

There was a moment's pause, and the faint sound of footsteps was heard within the car. Then came an answering scratch.

George went on, in the same tone, as he leaned against the car, and apparently gazed into space: "Andrews wants you—to know—that we're waiting—till some freight trains—get in—from Chattanooga. But if anything—should happen—before we—can get away—be ready to fight. Keep Waggie from barking—if you can."

Another scratching showed that Watson had heard and understood. But Waggie began to bark again. George was filled with vexation. "Why did I let Waggie go in the car?" he asked himself.

Just then a welcome whistle proclaimed that the third freight train was approaching. It was time; the delay at Kingston must have occupied nearly an hour—it seemed like a whole day—and the men about the railroad station were becoming skeptical. They could not understand why the mysterious commander of the powder-train should persist in wanting to go on after hearing that Mitchell was so near.

When George returned to the engine the new freight went by on the main track directly in the wake of the second freight, which had been sent half a mile down the line, to the southward. The main track was now clear for Andrews. But the intrepid leader seemed to be facing fresh trouble. He was standing on the step of the cab, addressing the old man who had charge of the switches.

"Switch me off to the main track at once," thundered Andrews. "Don't you see, fool, that the last local freight is in, and I have a clear road!"

There was a provokingly obstinate twist about the switch-tender's mouth.

"Switch yourself off," he snarled. "I shan't take the responsibility for doing it. You may be what you say you are, but I haven't anything to prove it. You're a fool, anyway, to run right into the

arms of the Yankee general.”

His fellow-townsmen indulged in a murmur of approval. The men in the cab saw that another minute would decide their fate, adversely or otherwise.

“I order you to switch me off—in the name of the Confederate Government!” shouted the leader.

More citizens were running over from the station to find out the cause of the disturbance.

“I don’t know you, and I won’t take any orders from you!” said the switch-tender, more doggedly than ever. He walked over to the station, where he hung up the keys of the switch in the room of the ticket-seller.

In a twinkling Andrews had followed him, and was already in the ticket room.

“You’ll be sorry for this,” he cried; “for I’ll report your rascally conduct to General Beauregard!” He seized the keys as he spoke, and shook them in the old man’s face.

The latter looked puzzled. He had begun to think that this business of sending powder to Beauregard was a trick of some kind, yet the confident bearing of the leader impressed him at this crisis. Perhaps he had made a mistake in refusing to obey the orders; but ere he could decide the knotty problem Andrews took the keys, hurried from the station, and unlocked the switch. Then he jumped into the cab, as he shouted to the men near the engine: “Tell your switch-tender that he will hear from General Beauregard for this!” He gave a signal, and the engineer grasped the lever and opened the steam valve.

“The General” slowly left the siding and turned into the main track. As the train passed the station, heading towards the north, the switch-tender was standing on the platform, with a dazed expression in his eyes. Andrews tossed the keys to him, as he cried: “Forgive me for being in such a hurry, but the Confederacy can’t wait for you!” Soon Kingston was left behind.

“Keep ‘The General’ going at forty miles an hour,” said the leader. “We have only the two trains to meet now—a passenger and a freight—which won’t give us any trouble. I tell you, we had a narrow escape at Kingston. More than once I thought we were all done for.”

“I was pretty well scared when that rascal of a Waggie barked,” observed George. The train was now gliding swiftly on past hills and woods and quiet pasture-lands. After the long delay the sensation of rapid motion was delightful.

“By Jove!” cried Andrews, with a tinge of humor. “You must bring that rogue back with you into the engine. When he barks in a place where there’s supposed to be nothing but powder the thing doesn’t seem quite logical. It throws discredit on an otherwise plausible story. Let us stop a couple of miles from here, near Adairsville, do some wire-cutting, release Waggie, and see how the fellows are getting along in the baggage car.”

When the stop was made the men in the car quickly opened the door and came tumbling to the ground. They were glad to stretch their legs and get a breath of fresh air. Waggie bounded and frisked with delight when he espied George.

“I’ve had a time with that dog,” said Jenks. “I had a flask of water with me, and he insisted on my pouring every bit of it out on the palm of my hand, and letting him lap it.”

The other occupants of the car were crowding around Andrews, as they discussed with him the fortunate escape from Kingston. Watson, who seemed to be fired with a sudden enthusiasm, addressed the party.

“Boys,” he said, “when I heard that switch-tender refuse to put us on the main track I thought our hour had come. But the coolness and the presence of mind of our friend Andrews have saved the day. Let us give him three cheers! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!”

The cheers were given with a will.

“Thank you, comrades,” said Andrews, modestly. “But don’t waste any time on me; I only did what any other man would have done in my place. Let’s get to work again—time’s precious.”

At a hint from him George clambered up a telegraph pole, taking with him a piece of cord by which he afterwards drew up an axe. Then he cut the wire, while others in the party were removing three rails from the track in the rear of the train. The rails were afterwards deposited in the baggage car occupied by the men, as were also some wooden cross-ties which were found near the road-bed.

“All this may be a waste of time,” said Andrews. “We shall probably be in Chattanooga before any one has a chance to chase us.”

“Yet I have a presentiment that we shall be chased,” cried Macgreggor. “I believe there will be a hot pursuit.”

His hearers, including Andrews, laughed, almost scornfully.

“Just wait and see,” returned Macgreggor. “A Southerner is as brave, and has as much brains as a Northerner.”

We shall see who was right in the matter.

AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE

On sped the fugitive train once more, and in a few minutes it had stopped, with much bumping and rattle of brakes at the station called Adairsville. Hardly had the wheels of the faithful old "General" ceased revolving before a whistle was heard from the northward.

Andrews peered through the cab up the track. "It's the regular freight," he said, and calling to the station hands who were gaping at "Fuller's train," as they supposed it must be, he told them the customary story about the powder designed for General Beauregard. They believed the leader, who spoke with his old air of authority, and they quickly shunted his "special" on to the side track. No sooner had this been accomplished than the freight made its appearance.

As the engine of the latter passed slowly by "The General" Andrews shouted to the men in the cab: "Where's the passenger train that is on the schedule?"

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"It ought to be right behind us," came the answer.

"That's good," whispered Andrews. "Once let us pass that passenger, and we'll have a clear road to the very end of the line."

In the meantime the freight was moved past the station and switched on to the siding, directly behind the "special," there to wait the arrival of the passenger train.

George began to grow restless, as the minutes passed and no train appeared. At last, with the permission of Andrews, he jumped from the cab, and walked over to the platform, Waggie following close at his heels. He looked anxiously up the track, but he could see nothing, hear nothing.

Two young men, one of them a civilian and the other evidently a soldier who was home on furlough (to judge by his gray uniform and right arm in a sling), were promenading up and down, and smoking clay pipes.

"I don't understand it," the soldier was saying. "They talk about sending powder through to General Beauregard, but it's an utter impossibility to do it."

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"You're right," said his friend. "The thing looks fishy. If these fellows are really what they——"

"Hush," whispered the soldier. He pointed to George as he spoke. "Well, you're beginning railroading pretty young," he added aloud, scrutinizing the boy as if he would like to read his inmost thoughts.

"It's never too young to begin," answered the boy, carelessly.

"What is this powder train of yours, anyway?" asked the soldier, in a wheedling voice which was meant to be plausible and friendly.

George had heard enough of the conversation between the two young Southerners to know that they were more than curious about the supposed powder train. And now, he thought, they would try to entrap him into some damaging admission. He must be on his guard. He put on as stupid a look as he could assume (which was no easy task in the case of a boy with such intelligent features), as he replied stolidly: "Dunno. I've nothing to do with it. I'm only fireman on the engine."

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"But you know where you're going?" demanded the soldier, with a gesture of impatience.

"Dunno."

"Who is the tall chap with the beard who has charge of the train?"

"Dunno."

"How much powder have you got on board?"

"Dunno."

"I don't suppose you even know your own name, you little idiot!" cried the soldier. "The boy hasn't got good sense," he said, turning to his friend.

"You were never more mistaken in your life," answered his friend. "He's only playing a game. I know something about faces—and this boy here has lots of sense."

George called Waggie, put the animal in his pocket, and walked to the door of the little station without taking any notice of this compliment to his sagacity. Under the circumstances he should have preferred the deepest insult. He felt that a long detention at Adairsville would be dangerous, perhaps fatal.

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Opening the door, the boy entered the station. It comprised a cheerless waiting-room, with a stove, bench and water-cooler for furniture, and a little ticket office at one end. The ticket office was occupied by the station-agent, who was near the keyboard of the telegraph wire; otherwise the interior of the building was empty.

"Heard anything from the passenger yet?" asked George, as he walked unconcernedly into the ticket office.

"Just wait a second," said the man, his right hand playing on the board; "I'm telegraphing up the

line to Calhoun to find out where she is. The wires aren't working to the south, somehow, but they're all right to the north."

Click, click, went the instrument. George returned leisurely to the doorway of the waiting-room. He was just in time to hear the young soldier say to his friend: "If these fellows try to get away from here, just let 'em go. I'll send a telegram up the road giving warning that they are coming, and should be stopped as a suspicious party. If they don't find themselves in hot water by the time they get to Dalton I'm a bigger fool than I think I am."

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George stood stock still. Here was danger indeed! He knew that to send a telegram up the road would be but the work of a minute; it could go over the wires to the north before the "special" had pulled away from Adairsville.

At this moment the station-agent came out of his office. "The passenger is behind time," he said, and he ran quickly across the tracks to speak to Andrews, who was looking anxiously out from the cab of "The General."

"It's now or never," thought George. He turned back into the deserted waiting-room, entered the ticket-office, and pulled from the belt under his inner coat a large revolver—the weapon which he carried in case self-defense became necessary. Taking the barrel of the revolver, he tried to pry up the telegraphic keyboard from the table to which it was attached. But he found this impossible to accomplish; he could secure no leverage on the instrument. He was not to be thwarted, however; so changing his tactics, he took the barrel in his hand and began to rain heavy blows upon the keys, with the butt end. In less time than it takes to describe the episode, the instrument had been rendered totally useless.

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"There," he said to himself, with the air of a conqueror, "it will take time to repair that damage, or to send a telegram." He was about to leave the office when he discovered a portable battery under the table. It was an instrument that could be attached to a wire, in case of emergency. George hastily picked it up, and hurried into the waiting-room. It would never do to leave this battery behind in the office; but how could he take it away without being caught in the act? His eyes wandered here and there, until they rested upon the stove. There was no fire in it. An inspiration came to him. He opened the iron door, which was large, and threw the battery into the stove. Then he closed the door, and sauntered carelessly out to the platform. The soldier and his friend were now standing at some distance from the station, on a sidewalk in front of a grocery store. They were engaged in earnest conversation. Over on the side-track, where "The General" stood, the station-agent was talking to Andrews. George joined his leader, and sprang into the cab.

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"From what I hear," said Andrews, "the passenger train is so much behind time that if I make fast time I can get to Calhoun before it arrives there, and wait on a siding for it to pass us."

"Then why don't you move on," urged George, who happened to know how desirable it was to get away, but dared not drop any hint to his leader in the presence of the station-agent.

"You're taking a risk," said the station-agent. "You may strike the train before you reach Calhoun." He was evidently not suspicious, but he feared an accident.

"If I meet the train before we reach Calhoun," cried Andrews, striking his fist against the window-ledge of the cab, "why then she must back till she gets a side-track, and then we will pass her."

He turned and looked at his engineer and the assistant.

"Are you ready to go, boys?" he asked. They quickly nodded assent; they longed to be off again.

"Then go ahead!" ordered Andrews. "A government special must not be detained by any other train on the road!"

164

"The General" was away once more. George began to explain to Andrews what he had heard at the station, and how he had disabled the telegraph.

"You're a brick!" cried the leader, patting the boy approvingly on the shoulder; "and you have saved us from another scrape. But 'tis better to provide against any repairing of the telegraph—and the sooner we cut a wire and obstruct the track, the better for us."

Thus it happened that before the train had gone more than three miles "The General" was stopped, more wires were cut, and several cross-ties were thrown on the track in the rear. Then the train dashed on, this time at a terrific speed. Andrews hoped to reach Calhoun, seven miles away, before the passenger should arrive there. It was all that George could do to keep his balance, particularly when he was called upon to feed the engine fire with wood from the tender. Once Waggie, who showed a sudden disposition to see what was going on around him, and tried to crawl out from his master's pocket, came very near being hurled out of the engine. Curves and up grades seemed all alike to "The General"; the noble steed never slackened its pace for an instant. The engineer was keeping his eyes on a point way up the line, so that he might slow up if he saw any sign of the passenger; the assistant sounded the whistle so incessantly that George thought his head would split from the noise. Once, at a road crossing, they whirled by a farm wagon containing four men. The boy had a vision of four mouths opened very wide. In a second wagon and occupants were left far behind.

165

In a space of time which seemed incredibly short Calhoun was reached. Down went the brakes and "The General" slid into the station to find directly in front, on the same track, the long-expected passenger train.

"There she is!" cried Andrews; "and not before it's time!"

It was only by the most strenuous efforts that the engineer could keep "The General" from colliding with the locomotive of the opposing train. When he brought his obedient iron-horse to a standstill there was only the distance of a foot between the cowcatchers of the two engines. The engineer of the passenger train leaned from his cab and began to indulge in impolite language. "What d'ye mean," he shouted, "by trying to run me down?" And he added some expressions which would not have passed muster in cultivated society.

166

"Clear the road! Clear the road!" roared Andrews. "This powder train must go through to General Beauregard at once! We can't stay here a minute!"

These words acted like a charm. The passenger train was backed to a siding, and "The General" and its burden were soon running out of Calhoun.

"No more trains!" said Andrews. His voice was husky; the perspiration was streaming from his face. "Now for a little bridge burning. There's a bridge a short distance up the road, across the Oostenaula River, where we can begin the real business of the day. But before we get to it let us stop 'The General' and see what condition he is in."

"He has behaved like a gentleman, so far," said the engineer. "He must be in sympathy with us Northerners."

"Slow up!" ordered Andrews. "The old fellow is beginning to wheeze a little bit; I can tell that he needs oiling."

167

Obedient to the command, the engineer brought "The General" to a halt. As the men came running from the baggage car, Andrews ordered them to take up another rail.

"It's good exercise, boys," he laughed, "even if it may not be actually necessary."

Then he helped his engineers to inspect "The General." The engine was still in excellent condition, although the wood and water were running a little low. It received a quick oiling, while George climbed up a telegraph pole and severed a wire in the manner heretofore described. Eight of the party were pulling at a rail, one end of which was loose and the other still fastened to the cross-ties by spikes.

Suddenly, away to the southward, came the whistle of an engine. Had a thunderbolt descended upon the men, the effect could not have been more startling. The workers at the rail tore it away from the track, in their wild excitement, and, losing their balance, fell headlong down the side of the embankment on which they had been standing. They were up again the next instant, unhurt, but eager to know the meaning of the whistle.

168

Was there an engine in pursuit? Andrews looked down the track.

"See!" he cried.

There *was* something to gaze at. Less than a mile away a large locomotive, which was reversed so that the tender came first, was running rapidly up the line, each instant approaching nearer and nearer to the fugitives. In the tender stood men who seemed to be armed with muskets.

"They are after us," said Andrews. "There's no doubt about it." He was very calm now; he spoke as if he were discussing the most commonplace matter in the world.

His companions crowded around him.

"Let us stand and fight them!" cried Watson.

"Yes," urged Jenks, who had forgotten all about his sore back; "we can make a stand here!"

Andrews shook his head. "Better go on, boys," he answered. "We have taken out this rail, and that will delay them. In the meantime we can go on to the Oostenaula bridge and burn it."

169

There was no time for discussion. The men yielded their usual assent to the orders of their chief. They quickly scrambled back into the train, to their respective posts, and Andrews gave the signal for departure.

"Push the engine for all it's worth!" he commanded; "we must make the bridge before the enemy are on us." The engineer set "The General" going at a rattling pace.

"How on earth could we be pursued, after the way we cut the wires along the line," muttered the leader. "Can the enemy have telegraphed from Big Shanty to Kingston by some circuitous route? I don't understand."

"Are you making full speed?" he asked the engineer, a second later.

"The old horse is doing his best," answered the man, "but the wood is getting precious low."

"George, pour some engine oil into the furnace."

The boy seized the oil can, and obeyed the order. The speed of "The General" increased; the engine seemed to spring forward like a horse to which the spur has been applied.

170

"That's better," said Andrews. "Now if we can only burn that bridge before the enemy are up to us, there is still a chance for success—and life!" His voice sank almost to a whisper as he uttered the last word. With a strange, indescribable sensation, George suddenly realized how near they all were to disaster, even to death. He thought of his father, and then he thought of Waggle, and wondered what was to become of the little dog. The boy was cool; he had no sense of fear; it seemed as if he were figuring in some curious dream.

Suddenly Andrews left the engine, lurched into the tender, and began to climb out of it, and thence to the platform of the first baggage car. George looked back at him in dread; surely the leader would be hurled from the flying train and killed. But he reached the car in safety and opened the door. He shouted out an order which George could not hear, so great was the rattle of the train; then he made his way, with the ease of a sure-footed chamois, back to "The General." He had ordered the men in the car to split up part of its sides for kindling-wood. By the use of the cross-ties, which they had picked up along the road, they battered down some of the planking of the walls, and quickly reduced it to smaller pieces. It was a thrilling sight. The men worked as they had never worked before. It was at the imminent risk of falling out, however, and as the train swung along over the track it seemed a miracle that none of them went flying through the open sides of the now devastated car.

171

On rushed "The General." As it turned a curve George, who was now in the tender, glanced back to his right and saw—the pursuing engine less than a mile behind.

"They are after us again!" he shouted. "They have gotten past the broken rail somehow," he said. "They must have track repairing instruments on board."

Andrews set his lips firmly together like a man who determines to fight to the last.

George made his way back to the cab. "Will we have time to burn the bridge?" he asked.

"We must wait and see," answered the leader, as he once more left the engine and finally reached the despoiled baggage car. He said something to Jenks; then he returned to the cab.

172

"What are you going to do?" anxiously asked the boy. He could hear the shrill whistle of the pursuing locomotive. "Com-ing! Com-ing!" it seemed to say to his overwrought imagination.

Andrews made no answer to George; instead he shouted a command to the engineer: "Reverse your engine, and move backwards at full speed!"

The engineer, without asking any questions, did as he was told. Jenks ran through to the second car and contrived, after some delay caused by the roughness of the motion, to uncouple it from the third. This last car was now entirely loose from the train, and would have been left behind had it not been that the engine had already begun to go back. Faster and faster moved "The General" to the rear.

"Go forward again," finally ordered Andrews. The engine slowly came to a standstill, and then plunged forward once more. Now George could see the meaning of this manœuvre. The third car, being uncoupled, went running back towards the enemy's tender. Andrews hoped to effect a collision.

But the engineer of the pursuing locomotive was evidently ready for such an emergency. He reversed his engine, and was soon running backwards. When the baggage car struck the tender no harm was done; the shock must have been very slight. In another minute the enemy's engine was puffing onward again in the wake of the fugitives, while the car was being pushed along in front of the tender.

173

"That didn't work very well," said Andrews, placidly. "Let's try them again."

Once more "The General" was reversed. This time the second car was uncoupled and sent flying back. "The General" was now hauling only the tender and the one baggage car in which the majority of the members of the party were confined. The second attempt, however, met with no better result than the first: the enemy pursued the same tactics as before; reversing the locomotive, and avoiding a serious collision. It now started anew on the pursuit, pushing the two unattached cars ahead of it, apparently little hampered as to speed by the incumbrance. And now, unfortunately enough, the bridge was in plain view, only a few hundred yards ahead. As the enemy turned a new curve George caught a view of the tender. A dozen men, armed with rifles, were standing up in it; he could see the gleam of the rifle barrels.

174

"More oil," ordered Andrews. The boy seized the can, and poured some more of the greasy liquid into the fiery furnace. He knew that the wood was almost exhausted, and that it would soon be impossible to hold the present rate of progress. Oh, if there only would be time to burn the bridge, and thus check the pursuers! But he saw that he was hoping for the impracticable.

"Shall we stop on the bridge?" asked the engineer, in a hoarse voice.

"It's too late," answered Andrews. "Keep her flying."

Over the bridge went the engine, with the pursuers only a short distance behind.

"Let us have some of that kindling-wood for the furnace," shouted Andrews to the men in the baggage car. The men began to pitch wood from the door of the car into the tender, and George transferred some of it to the furnace.

"That's better," cried the engineer. "We need wood more than we need a kingdom!"

175

"Throw out some of those cross-ties," thundered the leader. The men dropped a tie here and there on the track, so that a temporary obstruction might be presented to the pursuing locomotive.

"That's some help," said Andrews, as he craned his neck out of the cab window and looked back along the line. "Those ties will make them stop a while, any way." In fact the enemy had already stopped upon encountering the first log; two men from the tender were moving it from the track.

"We've a good fighting chance yet," cried Andrews, whose enthusiasm had suddenly returned.

"If we can burn another bridge, and block these fellows, the day is ours!"

"The water in the boiler is almost gone!" announced the engineer.

George's heart sank. What meant all the wood in the world without a good supply of water? But Andrews was equal to the emergency. "Can you hold out for another mile or so?" he asked.

"Just about that, and no more," came the answer.

"All right. We are about to run by Tilton station. A little beyond that, if I remember rightly, is a water tank." Andrews, in his capacity as a spy within the Southern lines, knew Georgia well, and had frequently traveled over this particular railroad. It was his acquaintance with the line, indeed, that had enabled him to get through thus far without failure.

Past Tilton ran "The General," as it nearly swept two frightened rustics from the platform. Then the engine began to slow up, until it finally rested at the water tank.

"I was right," said Andrews. He leaped from the cab, and gazed down the line. "The enemy is not in sight now," he cried. "Those ties are giving them trouble. Put some more on the track, boys. George, try some more wire-cutting. Brown, get your boiler filled."

In an incredibly short space of time the telegraph wire had been cut, the engine was provided with water, and some more ties had been placed upon the track in the rear. What a curious scene the party presented; how tired, and dirty, yet how courageous they all looked.

"Shall we take up a rail?" demanded Macgreggor. Scarcely had the words left his lips before the whistle of the enemy was again heard.

"No time," shouted the leader. "Let's be off!"

Off went the train—the grimy, panting engine, the tender, and the one baggage car, which was now literally torn to pieces in the frantic endeavor to provide kindling-wood.

"We want more wood," George shouted back to the men after they had proceeded a couple of miles. Some wood was thrown into the tender from the baggage car, with the gloomy news: "This is all we have left!"

"No more wood after this," explained George.

"All right," answered Andrews, very cheerfully. "Tell them to throw out a few more ties on the track—as long as they're too big to burn in our furnace."

The order was shouted back to the car. It was instantly obeyed. There was now another obstruction for the enemy; but George wondered how Andrews, full of resources though he might be, would find more wood for the engine. But Andrews was equal even to this.

"Stop!" cried the leader, after they had passed up the line about a mile from where the ties had been last thrown out. "The General" was soon motionless, breathing and quivering like some blooded horse which had been suddenly reined in during a race.

"Here's more work for you, boys," cried Andrews. He was already on the ground, pointing to the wooden fences which encompassed the fields on both sides of the track. The men needed no further prompting. In less than three minutes a large number of rails were reposing in the tender. George regarded them with an expression of professional pride, as befitted the fireman of the train.

"No trouble about wood or water now," he said, as "The General" tore onward again.

"No," replied the leader. "We will beat those Southerners yet!" He positively refused to think of failure at this late stage of the game. Yet it was a game that did not seem to promise certain success.

Thus the race continued, with "The General" sometimes rocking and reeling like a drunken man. On they rushed, past small stations, swinging around curves with the men in the car sitting on the floor and clinging to one another for fear they would be knocked out by the roughness of the motion. As George thought of this terrible journey in after years he wondered why it was that engine, car and passengers were not hurled headlong from the track.

"We are coming to Dalton," suddenly announced Andrews. Dalton was a good-sized town twenty-two miles above Calhoun, and formed a junction with the line running to Cleveland, Tennessee.

"We must be careful here," said Andrews, "for we don't know who may be waiting to receive us. If a telegram was sent via the coast up to Richmond, and then down to Dalton, our real character may be known. Brown, be ready to reverse your engine if I give the signal—then we'll back out of the town, abandon the train, and take to the open fields."

George wondered if, by doing this, they would not fall into the hands of their pursuers. But there was no chance for argument.

The speed of "The General" was now slackened, so that the engine approached the station at a rate of not more than fifteen miles an hour. Andrews saw nothing unusual on the platform; no soldiers; no preparations for arrest.

"Go ahead," he said, "and stop at the platform. The coast's clear so far."

It was necessary that a stop should be made at Dalton for the reason that there were switches at this point, owing to the junction of the Cleveland line, and it would be impossible to run by the station without risking a bad accident. It was necessary, furthermore, that this stop should be as

brief as possible, for the dilapidated looks of the broken baggage car and the general appearance of the party were such as to invite suspicion upon too close a scrutiny. Then, worse still, the enemy might arrive at any moment. Andrews was again equal to the occasion. As the forlorn train drew up at the station he assumed the air and bearing of a major-general, told some plausible story about being on his way with dispatches for Beauregard, and ordered that the switches should be immediately changed so that he could continue on to Chattanooga. Once again did his confident manner hoodwink the railroad officials. The switch was changed, and "The General" was quickly steaming out of Dalton. The citizens on the platform looked after the party as if they could not quite understand what the whole thing meant.

181

"Shall we cut a wire?" asked George.

"What is the good?" returned Andrews. "The enemy's engine will reach Dalton in a minute or two—perhaps they are there now—and they can telegraph on to Chattanooga by way of the wires on the Cleveland line. It's a roundabout way, but it will answer their purpose just as well."

"Then we dare not keep on to Chattanooga?" asked George, in a tone of keen regret. He had fondly pictured a triumphant run through Chattanooga, and an ultimate meeting with the forces of Mitchell somewhere to the westward, accompanied by the applause of the troops and many kind words from the General.

"Not now," answered the leader. "We may yet burn a bridge or two, and then take to the woods. It would be folly to enter Chattanooga only to be caught."

At last Andrews saw that he must change his plans. He had hoped, by burning a bridge, to head off the pursuing engine before now; his failure to do this, and the complication caused by the telegraph line to Cleveland, told him that he must come to a halt before reaching Chattanooga. To run into that city would be to jump deliberately into the lion's mouth.

182

"Let us see if there's time to break a rail," suddenly said the leader. The train was stopped, within sight of a small camp of Confederate troops, and the men started to loosen one of the rails. But hardly had they begun their work when there came the hated whistling from the pursuing engine. The adventurers abandoned their attempt, leaped to their places in cab and car, and "The General" again sped onward. There were no cross-ties remaining; this form of obstruction could no longer be used. It was now raining hard; all the fates seemed to be combining against the plucky little band of Northerners.

Andrews began at last to see that the situation was growing desperate.

"There's still one chance," he muttered. He knew that he would soon pass a bridge, and he went on to elaborate in his mind an ingenious plan by which the structure might be burned without making delay necessary, or risking a meeting with the pursuers. He scrambled his way carefully back to the baggage car.

183

"Boys," he said, "I want you to set fire to this car, and then all of you crawl into the tender."

There was a bustle in the car at once, although no one asked a question. The men made a valiant effort to ignite what was left of the splintered walls and roof of the car. But it was hard work. The rain, combined with the wind produced by the rapid motion of the train, made it impossible to set anything on fire even by a very plentiful use of matches.

"We'll have to get something better than matches," growled Watson. He had just been saved from pitching out upon the roadside by the quick efforts of one of his companions, who had seized him around the waist in the nick of time. Andrews went to the forward platform of the car.

"Can't you get us a piece of burning wood over here," he called to George.

The lad took a fence rail from the tender, placed it in the furnace, until one end was blazing, and then contrived to hand it to the leader from the rear of the tender. Andrews seized it, and applied the firebrand to several places in the car. But it was no easy task to make a conflagration; it seemed as if the rail would merely smoulder.

184

"Stop the engine," he ordered. "The General" was brought to a halt, and then, when the artificial wind had ceased, the rail flared up. Soon the torn walls and roof of the car burst into flames.

"Into the tender, boys," cried Andrews. The men needed no second bidding. The fire was already burning fiercely enough, despite the rain, to make their surroundings anything but comfortable. They scrambled into the tender. The engineer put his hand to the lever, pulled the throttle, and the party were again on the wing although at a slow and constantly lessening rate of speed. At last they scarcely moved.

"The General" was now passing over the bridge—a covered structure of wood. Andrews uncoupled the blazing car, and climbed back into the tender. The engine again sped on, leaving the burning car in the middle of the bridge. The scheme of the leader was apparent; he hoped that the flames would be communicated to the roof of the bridge, and so to the entire wood-work, including the railroad ties and lower beams.

185

"At last!" thought Andrews. He would have the satisfaction of destroying one bridge at least—and he would put an impassable barrier between the enemy and himself. His joy was, however, only too short lived. The Confederates boldly ran towards the bridge.

"They won't dare to tackle that car," said George, as "The General" kept moving onward. Yet the pursuing engine, instead of putting on brakes, glided through the bridge, pushing the

burning car in front of it. When it reached the other side of the stream the car was switched off on a siding, and the enemy prepared to sweep onwards. The bridge was saved; Andrews' plan had failed. The Northerners gave groans of disappointment as they fled along in front.

Finally it was resolved to make a last stop, and to attempt to pull up a rail. The enemy was now some distance behind, having been delayed by the time necessarily consumed in switching off the car, so that there seemed a reasonable chance of executing this piece of strategy. When the men had again alighted on firm ground several of them felt actually seasick from the jolting of the engine and tender. It was now that one of the party made a novel proposition to Andrews. The plan seemed to have a good deal to recommend it, considering how desperate was the present situation.

"Let us run the engine on," he said, "until we are out of sight of the enemy, and are near some of the bushes which dot the track. Then we can tear up a rail, or obstruct the track in some way, and quickly hide ourselves in the bushes. The engineer will stay in 'The General,' and, as soon as the enemy comes in sight, can continue up the road, just as if we were all on board. When the Confederates reach the broken rail, and prepare to fix it, we can all rush out at them and fire our revolvers. They will be taken by surprise—we will have the advantage."

"That sounds logical enough," observed Andrews; "it's worth trying, if——"

Again the enemy's whistle sounded ominously near. There was no chance to argue about anything now. The men leaped to their places, and "The General" was quickly gotten under way.

Watson looked at Jenks, next to whom he was huddled in the tender.

"How long is this sort of thing to be kept up?" he asked. "I'd far rather get out and fight the fellows than run along this way!"

Jenks brushed the rain from his grimy face but made no answer.

"This all comes from that fatal delay at Kingston," announced Macgreggor. "We would be just an hour ahead if it hadn't been for those wretched freight trains."

The enemy's engine gave an exultant whistle. "Vic-to-ry! Vic-to-ry!" it seemed to shriek.

CHAPTER VII

ENERGETIC PURSUIT

Who were pursuing the Northern adventurers, and how did they learn the story of the stolen engine? To answer these questions let us go back to Big Shanty at the moment when the train having the conspirators on board reached that station from Marietta. The conductor, William Fuller, the engineer, Jefferson Cain,—and Anthony Murphy, a railroad official from Atlanta, were among those who went into the "Shanty" to enjoy breakfast. They were naturally unsuspecting of any plot; the deserted engine seemed absolutely secure as it stood within very sight of an encampment of the Confederate army.

Suddenly Murphy heard something that sounded like escaping steam. "Why, some one is at your engine," he cried to Fuller, as he jumped from his seat. Quick as a flash Fuller ran to the door of the dining-room.

"Some one's stealing our train!" he shouted. "Come on, Cain!" The passengers rushed from their half-tasted meal to the platform. The conductor began to run up the track, followed by his two companions, as the train moved rapidly away.

"Jerusha!" laughed one of the passengers, a gouty-looking old gentleman; "do those fellows expect to beat an engine that way?"

The crowd joined in the fun of the thing, and wondered what the whole scene could mean. Perhaps it was but the prank of mischievous boys who were intent on taking an exciting ride.

"What's up, anyway?" asked Murphy, as the three went skimming along on the railroad ties, and the train drew farther and farther away from them.

"I'll bet some conscripts have deserted from camp," cried Fuller. "They'll run up the line a mile or two, then leave the engine and escape into the woods." He did not imagine, as yet, that his train was in the hands of Northern soldiers.

On, on, went the trio until they reached the point where George had cut the wire.

"Look here," said Cain; "they've cut the wire! And look at the broken rail!"

One glance was sufficient to show that the engine thieves, whoever they might be, knew their business pretty well. There was something more in this affair than a mere escape of conscripts.

"Look up the road," said Murphy. He pointed to some workmen who had a hand-car near the track, not far above him. Hurrying on, the trio soon reached these men, explained to them what had happened, and impressed them into the service of pursuit. In two or three minutes the

whole party were flying up the line on the hand-car.

"Kingston is nearly thirty miles away," explained Fuller, as they bowled along. "I don't know who the fellows are, but they'll be blocked by freight when they get there, and we may manage to reach them somehow." Even if the unknown enemy got beyond Kingston, he thought he might yet reach them if he could only find an engine. The whole escapade was a puzzle, but the three men were determined to bring back "The General."

Thus they swept anxiously but smoothly on until—presto! The whole party suddenly leaped into the air, and then descended into a ditch, with the hand-car falling after them. They had reached the place where the telegraph pole obstructed the track. They had turned a sharp curve, and were on it, before they realized the danger.

"No one hurt, boys?" asked Murphy.

No one was hurt, strange to say.

"Up with the car," cried Fuller. The hand-car was lifted to the track, beyond the telegraph pole, and the journey was resumed.

"Shall we find an engine here?" thought Fuller, as the car approached Etowah station.

"There are iron furnaces near here," said Murphy, "and I know that an engine named 'The Yonah' has been built to drag material from the station to the furnaces. It's one of the finest locomotives in the South."

"I hope that hasn't been stolen too," said Cain.

Now they were at the station. They knew that it would be impossible to make the necessary speed with a hand-car. If they were to reach the runaways they *must* obtain an engine, and quickly at that.

"By all that's lucky," shouted Murphy; "there's 'The Yonah'!"

There, right alongside the platform, was the welcome engine. It was about to start on a trip to the iron furnaces. The steam was up; the fire was burning brightly.

Etowah was ablaze with excitement as soon as the pursuers explained what had happened.

"I must have 'The Yonah,'" cried Fuller, "and I want some armed men to go along with me!" No question now about seizing the engine; no question as to the armed men. With hardly any delay Fuller was steaming to the northward with "The Yonah," and the tender was crowded with plucky Southerners carrying loaded rifles. The speed of the engine was at the rate of a mile a minute, and how it did fly, to be sure. Yet it seemed as if Kingston would never be reached.

When, at last, they did glide up to the station, Fuller learned that the alleged Confederate train bearing powder to General Beauregard had left but a few minutes before. Great was the amazement when he announced that the story of the leader was all a blind, invented to cover up one of the boldest escapades of the war.



FULLER WAS STEAMING TO THE NORTHWARD WITH
"THE YONAH"

But now Fuller was obliged to leave the faithful "Yonah." The blockade of trains at Kingston was such that it would have required some time before the engine could get through any farther on the main track. He seized another engine, which could quickly be given the right of way, and rushed forward. Two cars were attached to the tender; in it were more armed men, hastily recruited at Kingston. They were ready for desperate work.

"The Yonah' was a better engine than this one," said Murphy, regretfully, before they had run more than two or three miles. He spoke the truth; the new engine had not the speed of "The Yonah." The difference was quite apparent.

"We must do the best we can with her," said Fuller. "Put a little engine oil into the furnace. We'll give her a gentle stimulant."

His order was promptly obeyed, but the locomotive could not be made to go faster than at the rate of forty miles an hour. Murphy and Cain were both at the lever, keeping their eyes fixed as far up the line as possible, so that they might stop the train in good time should they see any obstruction on the track. Thus they jogged along for some miles until the two men made a simultaneous exclamation, and reversed the engine. In front of them, not more than a hundred yards away, was a large gap in the track. It marked the place where the Northerners had taken up the rails south of Adairsville. 194

"Jupiter! That was a close shave!" cried Murphy. For the train had been halted within less than five feet of the break. Out jumped the whole party, Fuller, Cain and Murphy from the cab, and the armed men from the cars. The delay, it was supposed, would be only temporary; there were track-laying instruments in the car; the rails could soon be reset. But when it was seen that each of the rails had disappeared (for our adventurers had carried them off with them) there was a murmur of disgust and disappointment.

"Why not tear up some rails in the rear of the train, and lay them in the break," suggested one of the Southerners.

"That will take too long," cried Fuller, and to this statement Murphy readily assented. As it was, the stolen "General" was far enough ahead of them; too far ahead, indeed. If the pursuers waited here for such a complicated piece of work as this tearing up and re-laying of the track, they might lose the race altogether. The conductor and Murphy started once more to run up the road-bed (just as they had footed it earlier in the morning at Big Shanty), and left the rest of the party to mend the track. 195

Were they merely running on in an aimless way? Not by any means. They had not gone very far before the freight train which Andrews had encountered at Adairsville came groaning down the track. The two men made violent gesticulations as signals to the engineer, and the train was slowly stopped.

"Did you meet 'The General'?" cried Fuller.

The freight engineer told the story of the impressed powder-train that was hurrying on to Beauregard, and of the fine-looking, imperious Confederate who was in command.

"Well, that Confederate is a *Yankee*," came the explanation.

The freight engineer made use of some expressions which were rather uncomplimentary to Andrews. To think that the supposed Confederate, who had acted as if he owned the whole State of Georgia, was an enemy—a spy! Why, the thought was provoking enough to ruffle the most placid temper. And the engineer's natural temper was by no means placid. 196

"I must have your engine to catch these fellows!" said Fuller. Naturally there was no dissent to this command. He quickly backed the train to Adairsville, where the freight cars were dropped. Then Fuller, with engine and tender still reversed (for there was no turn-table available), hurried northward on the way to Calhoun station.

"This engine is a great sight better than the last one I had," said the conductor, in a tone of exultation, to Bracken, his new engineer.

"Ah, 'The Texas' is the finest engine in the whole state," answered Bracken, with the air of a proud father speaking of a child.

They were tearing along at a terrific speed when Bracken suddenly reversed "The Texas" and brought her to a halt with a shock that would have thrown less experienced men out of the cab. On the track in front of them were some of the cross-ties which the fugitives had thrown out of their car. Fortunately Fuller had just taken his position on the tender in front and gave the signal the instant he saw the ties. As "The Texas" stood there, all quivering and panting, the conductor jumped to the ground and threw the ties from the track; then he mounted the tender again, and the engine kept on to the northward with its smoke-stack and headlight pointed in the opposite direction. The same program was repeated later on, where more ties were encountered. 197

When "The Texas" dashed into Calhoun it had run a distance of ten miles, including the time spent in removing cross-ties, in exactly twelve minutes.

"I'm after the Yankees who're in my stolen engine," cried Fuller to the idlers on the platform. "I want armed volunteers!" He wasted no words; the story was complete as he thus told it; the effect was magical. Men with rifles were soon clambering into the tender. As "The Texas" glided away from the platform Fuller stretched out his sturdy right arm to a boy standing thereon and pulled him, with a vigorous jerk, into the cab. The next minute the engine was gone. The lad was a young telegraph operator whom the conductor had recognized. There was no employment for him as yet, because the wires were cut along the line, but there might be need for him later. 198

Fuller was now aglow with hope. He was brave, energetic and full of expedients, as we have seen, and he was warming up more and more as the possibility of overtaking "The General" became the greater. From what he had learned at Calhoun he knew that the Northerners were

only a short distance ahead. His promptness seemed about to be crowned with a glorious reward. He might even make prisoners of the reckless train-robbers.

And there, not more than a mile in front of him, was "The General"! He saw the engine and the three baggage cars, and his heart bounded at the welcome sight. Then he espied the men working on the track, and saw them, later, as they rapidly boarded their train. The Southerners in the tender of "The Texas" cheered, and held firmly to their rifles. At any second now might their weapons be needed in a fight at close quarters.

199

Of the chase from this point to Dalton we already know. Before Fuller reached that station he knew that it would be possible to send a telegram to Chattanooga, by way of Cleveland, even if the Northerners should cut the wires on the main line.

"Here," he said to the young telegraph operator, "I want you to send a telegram to General Leadbetter, commanding general at Chattanooga, as soon as we get to Dalton. Put it through both ways if you can, but by the Cleveland line at any rate." The conductor took a paper from his wallet and wrote a few words of warning to General Leadbetter, telling him not to let "The General" and its crew get past Chattanooga. "My train was captured this morning at Big Shanty, evidently by Federal soldiers in disguise," he penciled.

On the arrival at Dalton this telegram was sent, exactly as the shrewd Andrews had prophesied. Then "The Texas" fled away from Dalton and the chase continued, as we have seen in the previous chapter, until a point of the railroad about thirteen miles from Chattanooga was reached.

200

In the cab of "The General" Andrews was standing with his head bowed down; his stock of hopefulness had suddenly vanished. At last he saw that the expedition, of which he had cherished such high expectations, was a complete failure. A few miles in front was Chattanooga, where capture awaited them, while a mile in the rear were well-armed men.

"There's only one thing left to do," he said mournfully to George, who was regarding his chief with anxious interest. "We must abandon the engine, scatter, and get back to General Mitchell's lines as best we can, each in his own way!"

Then the leader put his hand on the engineer's shoulder. "Stop the engine," he said; "the game is up; the dance is over!"

The engineer knew only too well what Andrews meant. He obeyed the order, and the tired "General," which had faithfully carried the party for about a hundred miles, panted and palpitated like a dying horse. The great locomotive was, indeed, in a pitiable condition. The brass of the journals and boxes was melted by the heat; the steel tires were actually red-hot, and the steam issued from all the loosened joints.

201

Andrews turned to the men who were huddled together in the tender.

"Every man for himself, boys," he cried. "You must scatter and do the best you can to steal into the Federal lines. I've led you as well as I could—but the fates were against us. God bless you, boys, and may we all meet again!"

As he spoke the leader—now a leader no longer—threw some papers into the furnace of the locomotive. In a twinkling they were reduced to ashes. They were Federal documents. One of them was a letter from General Mitchell which, had it been found upon Andrews by the Confederates, would in itself have proved evidence enough to convict him as a spy.

The men in the tender jumped to the ground. So, likewise, did George, the engineer and his assistant. Andrews remained standing in the cab. He looked like some sea captain who was waiting to sink beneath the waves in his deserted ship. He worked at the lever and touched the valve, and then leaped from his post to the roadbed. The next moment "The General" was moving backwards towards the oncoming "Texas."

202

"We'll give them a little taste of collision!" he cried. His companions turned their eyes towards the departing "General." If the engine would only run with sufficient force into the enemy, the latter might—well, it was hard to predict what might not happen. Much depended on the next minute.

There was a whistle from "The Texas." "The General" kept on to the rear, but at a slow pace. No longer did the staunch machine respond to the throttle. The fire in the furnace was burning low; there was little or no steam; the iron horse was spent and lame.

The adventurers looked on, first expectantly, then gloomily. They saw that "The General" was incapacitated; they saw, too, that the enemy reversed their own engine, and ran backwards until the poor "General" came to a complete standstill. Pursuit was thus delayed, but by no means checked.

"That's no good," sighed Andrews. "Come, comrades, while there is still time, and off with us in different parties. Push to the westward, and we may come up to Mitchell's forces on the other side of Chattanooga."

203

Soon the men were running to the shelter of a neighboring wood. George seemed glued to the sight of the departing "General." He felt as if an old friend was leaving him, and so he was one of the last to move. As he, too, finally ran off, Waggle, who had been released from his master's pocket, bounded by his side as if the whole proceeding were an enjoyable picnic. When George reached the wood many of the men were already invisible. He found Watson leaning against a tree, pale and breathless.

"What's the matter?" asked the boy anxiously.

"Nothing," said Watson. "This rough journey over this crooked railroad has shaken me up a bit. I'll be all right in a minute. Just wait and we'll go along together. I wouldn't like to see any harm happen to you, youngster, while I have an arm to protect you.

"Come on," he continued, when he had regained his breath; "we can't stay here. I wonder why Mitchell didn't push on and capture Chattanooga. Then we would not have had to desert the old engine."

The fact was that General Mitchell, after capturing Huntsville on April the 11th, had moved into the country to the northeastward until he came within thirty miles of Chattanooga. At this point he waited, hoping to hear that Andrews and his companions had destroyed the railroad communications from Chattanooga. No such news reached him, however; he feared that the party had failed, and he was unable to advance farther, under the circumstances, without receiving reinforcements. But of all this Watson was ignorant.

The man and boy stole out of the wet woods, and thence a short distance to the westward until they reached the bottom of a steep hill which was surmounted by some straggling oaks. They started to walk briskly up the incline, followed by Waggie. Suddenly they heard a sound that instinctively sent a chill running up and down George's spine.

"What's that?" he asked. "Some animal?"

Watson gave a grim, unpleasant laugh. "It's a hound," he answered. "Come on; we don't want that sort of gentleman after us. He'd be a rougher animal to handle than Waggie."

George redoubled his pace. But his steps began to lag; his brain was in a whirl; he began to feel as if he was acting a part in some horrible dream. Nothing about him seemed real; it was as if his sensations were those of another person.

"Anything wrong?" asked Watson, as he saw that the lad was falling behind him.

"Nothing; I'm coming," was the plucky answer. But fatigue and hunger, and exposure to the rain, had done their work. George tottered, clutched at the air, and then sank on the hillside, inert and unconscious. In a moment Waggie was licking his face, with a pathetic expression of inquiry in his little brown eyes, and Watson was bending over him. Again came the bay from the hound and the distant cry from a human voice.

CHAPTER VIII

TWO WEARY WANDERERS

"Poor boy," muttered Watson. "He is done out." He saw that George's collapse was due to a fainting spell, which in itself was nothing dangerous. But when he heard the distant baying of the dog, and heard, too, the voices of men—no doubt some of the armed Southerners from the pursuing train—he saw the peril that encompassed both himself and the boy. Here they were almost on top of a hill, near the enemy, and with no means of escape should they be unfortunate enough to be seen by the Southerners or tracked by the hound. If George could be gotten at once to the other side of the hill he would be screened from view—otherwise he and Watson would soon—But the soldier did not stop to think what might happen. He jumped quickly to his feet, seized the unconscious George, and ran with him, as one might have run with some helpless infant, to the top of the hill, and then down on the other side. Waggie came barking after them; he seemed to ask why it was that his master had gone to sleep in this sudden fashion. Watson paused for a few seconds at the bottom of the hill, and placed his burden on the wet grass. There was as yet no sign of returning life. Once more came that uncanny bay. The man again took George in his arms.

"We can't stay here," he said. He himself was ready to drop from the fatigue and excitement of the day, but hope of escape gave him strength, and he ran on through an open field until he reached some bottom-land covered by a few unhealthy-looking pine-trees. Here he paused, panting almost as hard as the poor vanished "General" had done in the last stages of its journey. He next deposited his charge on the sodden earth. They were both still in imminent danger of pursuit, but for the time being they were screened from view.

Watson bent tenderly over the boy, whilst Waggie pulled at his sleeve as he had been accustomed to do far away at home when he wanted to wake up his master. George finally opened his eyes and looked around him, first dreamily, then with a startled air.

"It's all right, my lad," whispered Watson cheerily. "You only fainted away, just for variety, but now you are chipper enough again."

George stretched his arms, raised himself to a sitting posture, and then sank back wearily on the ground.

"I'm so tired," he said. "Can't I go to sleep?" He was utterly weary; he cared not if a whole army

of men and dogs was after him; his one idea was rest—rest.

"This won't do," said Watson firmly. "We can't stay here." He produced from his pocket a little flask, poured some of the contents down the boy's throat, and then took a liberal drink himself. George began to revive, as he asked how he had been brought to his present resting-place.

"In my arms," exclaimed Watson. "But I can't keep that sort of thing up forever. We must get away from here. Every moment is precious."

As if to emphasize the truth of this warning, the baying of the dog and the cries of men began to sound nearer. Watson sprang to his feet. The increase of the danger gave him new nerve; he no longer looked the tired, haggard man of five minutes ago.

"We can't stay here," he said, calmly but impressively; "it would be certain capture!"

George was up in an instant. The draught from the flask had invested him with new vigor.

"Where shall we go?" he asked. "I'm all right again."

"To the river," answered Watson. He pointed eagerly to the right of the pines, where they could see, in the darkening light of the afternoon, a swollen stream rushing madly past. It might originally have been a small river, but now, owing to the spring rains and freshets, it looked turbulent and dangerous. It was difficult to cross, yet for that very reason it would make a barrier between pursued and pursuers. Should the former try the experiment?

"Can you swim?" asked Watson.

"Yes."

"Then we'll risk it. After all, the water's safer for us than the land."

Out through the pines they ran until they were at the water's edge. The sight was not encouraging. The river foamed like an angry ocean, and a strong current was sweeping down to the northward.

The soldier looked at the boy in kindly anxiety. "The water is a little treacherous, George," he said. "Do you think you're strong enough to venture across?"

"Of course I am!" answered George, proudly. He felt more like himself now; he even betrayed a mild indignation at the doubts of his friend.

"Well," began Watson, "we had—but listen! By Jove, those rascals have discovered us! They're making this way!"

It was true; the barking of the dog and the sound of many voices came nearer and nearer. Waggie began to growl fiercely, quite as if he were large enough to try a bout with a whole Confederate regiment.

"Take off your shoes, George," cried Watson. "Your coat and vest, too."

Both the fugitives divested themselves of boots, coats and vests; their hats they had already lost in their flight from "The General." In their trousers pockets they stuffed their watches and some Confederate money.

A sudden thought crossed George's mind. It was a painful thought.

"What's to become of Waggie?" he asked. "I can't leave him here." He would as soon have left a dear relative stranded on the bank of the river.

"I'm afraid you'll have to leave him," said Watson.

"I can't," replied George. There was a second's pause—but it seemed like the suspense of an hour. Then the lad had a lucky inspiration. He leaned down and drew from a side pocket of his discarded coat a roll of strong cord which had been used when he climbed the telegraph poles. Pulling a knife from a pocket in his trousers he cut a piece of the cord about two yards in length, tied one end around his waist and attached the other end to Waggie's collar. The next instant he had plunged into the icy water, dragging the dog in after him. Watson followed, and struck out into the torrent with the vigor of an athlete.

George found at once that his work meant something more than keeping himself afloat. The current was rapid, and it required all his power to keep from being carried down the river like a helpless log. Waggie was sputtering and pawing the water in his master's wake.

"Keep going," shouted Watson. "This current's no joke!" Even he was having no child's play.

Just then George had his mouth full of water; he could only go on battling manfully. But he began to feel a great weakness. Was he about to faint again? He dared not think of it. There was a loosening of the cord around his waist. He looked to his left and there was Waggie floating down the stream like a tiny piece of wood. His head had slipped from his collar.

Watson tried to grab the dog as he floated by, but it was too late. He might as well have tried to change the tide.

"Go on, George, go on!" he urged, breathlessly. The boy struggled onward, but he had already overtaxed his strength. He became dizzy; his arms and legs refused to work.

"What's the matter?" sputtered his companion, who was now alongside of him.

"Go on; don't mind me," said George, in a choking voice.

"Put your hand on my belt," sternly commanded Watson. The young swimmer obeyed, scarcely

knowing what he did. Watson kept on like a giant fish, sometimes in danger of being swept away, and sometimes drawing a few feet nearer to the opposite bank.

The next thing that George knew was when he found himself lying on the river's edge. Watson was peering at him anxiously.

"That's right; open your eyes," he said. "We had a narrow escape, but we're over the river at last. I just got you over in time, for when we neared shore you let go of me, and I had to pull you in by the hair of your head."

"How can I ever thank you," said George, feebly but gratefully.

"By not trying," answered Watson. "Come, there's not a second to lose. Don't you hear our enemies?"

There was no doubt as to the answer to that question. Across the river sounded the baying and the harsh human voices. Almost before George realized what had happened Watson had pulled him a dozen yards away to a spot behind a large boulder.

"Keep on your back!" he ordered. "The men are on the other bank."

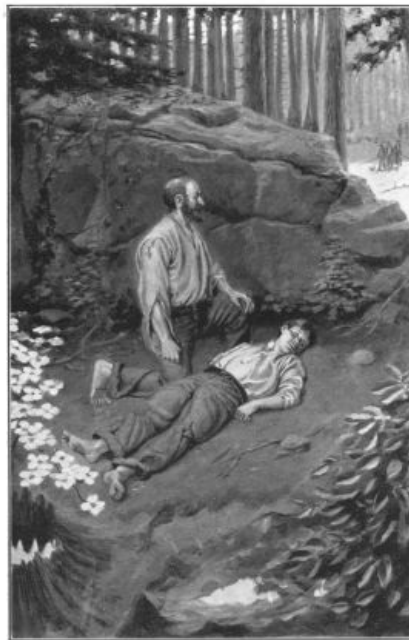
None too soon had he executed this manœuvre. He and George could hear, above the noise of the rushing stream, the tones of their pursuers. They had just reached the river, and must be searching for the two Northerners. More than once the hound gave a loud whine, as if he were baffled or disappointed.

"They can't be here," came a voice from across the river. "We had better go back; they may be down the railroad track."

"Perhaps they swam across the stream," urged some one else.

"That would be certain death!" answered the first voice.

There was a whining from the dog, as if he had discovered a scent. Then a simultaneous cry from several sturdy lungs. "Look at these coats and boots!" "They did try to cross, after all." "Well, they never got over in this current!" "They must have been carried down the Chickamauga and been drowned!" Such were the exclamations which were wafted to the ears of the two fugitives behind the rock.



NONE TOO SOON HAD HE EXECUTED THIS
MANŒUVRE

"The Chickamauga," said Watson, under his breath. "So that's the name of the river, eh?"

There was evidently some heated discussion going on among the unseen pursuers. At length one of them cried: "Well, comrades, as there's not one of us who wants to swim over the river in its present state, and as the fools may even be drowned by this time, I move we go home. The whole countryside will be on the lookout for the rest of the engine thieves by to-morrow—and they won't escape us before then."

"Nonsense," interrupted a voice, "don't you know night's just the time which they will take for escape?"

"Are you ready, then, to swim across the Chickamauga?"

"No."

"Then go home, and don't talk nonsense! To-morrow, when the river is less angry, we will be up by dawn—and then for a good hunt!"

Apparently the advice of the last speaker was considered wise, for the men left the river bank. At last their voices could be no longer heard in the distance. The shades of twilight began to fall, and the rain ceased. Then Watson and his companion crawled cautiously from behind the boulder. They were two as dilapidated creatures as ever drew breath under a southern sky. With soaking shirts and trousers, and without coats, vests, or shoes, they looked the picture of destitution. And their feelings! They were hungry, dispirited, exhausted. All the pleasure seemed to have gone out of life.

"We can't stay in this charming spot all night," said Watson, sarcastically.

"I suppose a rock is as good as anything else we can find," answered the boy gloomily. "Poor Waggie! Why did I try to drag him across the river?"

"Poor little midget," said Watson. "I'll never forget the appealing look in his eyes as he went sailing past me."

"Do you hear that?" cried George.

"Hear what? Some one after us again?"

"No; it's a dog barking!"

"Why, it sounds like Waggie, but it can't be he. He's gone to another world."

"No, he hasn't," answered George. He forgot his weakness, and started to run down the bank, in the direction whence the sound proceeded. Watson remained behind; he could not believe that it was the dog.

In the course of several minutes George came running back. He was holding in his hands a little animal that resembled a drowned rat. It was Waggie—very wet, very bedraggled, but still alive.

"Well, if that isn't a miracle!" cried Watson. He stroked the dripping back of the rescued dog, whereupon Waggie looked up at him with a grateful gleam in his eyes.

"I found him just below here, lying on a bit of rock out in the water a few feet away from the bank," enthusiastically explained George. "He must have been hurled there, by the current."

Watson laughed.

"Well, Waggie," he said, "we make three wet looking tramps, don't we? And I guess you are just as hungry as the rest."

Waggie wagged his tail with great violence.

"Think of a warm, comfortable bed," observed the boy, with a sort of grim humor; "and a nice supper beforehand of meat—and eggs——"

"And hot coffee—and biscuits—and a pipe of tobacco for me, after the supper," went on Watson. He turned from the river and peered into the rapidly increasing gloom. About a mile inland, almost directly in front of him, there shone a cheerful light.

George, who also saw the gleam, rubbed his hands across his empty stomach, in a comical fashion.

"There must be supper there," he said, pointing to the house.

"But we don't dare eat it," replied his friend. "The people within fifty miles of here will be on the lookout for any of Andrews' party—and the mere appearance of us will be enough to arouse suspicion—and yet——"

Watson hesitated; he was in a quandary. He was not a bit frightened, but he felt that the chances of escape for George and himself were at the ratio of one to a thousand. He knew actually nothing of the geography of the surrounding country, and he felt that as soon as morning arrived the neighborhood would be searched far and wide. Had he been alone he might have tried to walk throughout the night until he had placed fifteen or twenty miles between himself and his pursuers. But when he thought of George's condition he realized that it would be a physical impossibility to drag the tired lad very far.

Finally Watson started away towards the distant light.

"Stay here till I get back," he said to George; "I'm going to explore."

In less than an hour he had returned to the river's bank.

"We're in luck," he said joyously. "I stole across to where that light is, and found it came from a little stone house. I crept into the garden on my hands and knees—there was no dog there, thank heaven—and managed to get a glimpse into the parlor through a half-closed blind. There sat a sweet-faced, white-haired old gentleman, evidently a minister of the gospel, reading a chapter from the scriptures to an elderly lady and two girls—his wife and children I suppose. He can't have heard anything about our business yet—for I heard him ask one of the girls, after he stopped reading, what all the blowing of locomotive whistles meant this afternoon—and she didn't know. So we can drop in on them to-night, ask for supper and a bed, and be off at daybreak to-morrow before the old fellow has gotten wind of anything."

Soon they were off, Watson, George and Waggie, and covered the fields leading to the house in unusually quick time for such tired wanderers. When they reached the gate of the little garden in front of the place George asked: "What story are we to tell?"

"The usual yarn, I suppose," answered Watson. "Fleming County, Kentucky—anxious to join the Confederate forces—*et cetera*. Bah! I loathe all this subterfuge and deceit. I wish I were back

fighting the enemy in the open day!"

They walked boldly up to the door of the house and knocked. The old gentleman whom Watson had seen soon stood before them. The lamp which he held above him shone upon a face full of benignity and peacefulness. His features were handsome; his eyes twinkled genially, as if he loved all his fellow-men.

221

Watson told his Kentucky story, and asked food and lodgings for George and himself until the early morning.

"Come in," said the old man, simply but cordially, "any friend of the South is a friend of mine."

The minister (for he proved to be a country preacher who rode from church to church "on circuit"), ushered the two Northerners and the dog into his cozy sitting-room and introduced them to his wife and two daughters. The wife seemed as kindly as her husband; the daughters were pretty girls just growing into womanhood.

"Here, children," said the old man, "get these poor fellows some supper. They're on a journey to Atlanta, all the way from Kentucky, to enlist. And I'll see if I can't rake you up a couple of coats and some old shoes."

He disappeared up-stairs, and soon returned with two half-worn coats and two pairs of old shoes, which he insisted upon presenting to the fugitives.

"They belong to my son, who has gone to the war," he said, "but he'd be glad to have such patriots as you use them. How did you both get so bare of clothes?"

222

"We had to swim across a stream, and leave some of our things behind," explained Watson. He spoke but the simple truth. He was glad that he did, for he hated to deceive a man who stood gazing upon him with such gentle, unsuspecting eyes.

It was not long before Watson and George had gone into the kitchen, where they found a table laden with a profusion of plain but welcome food. Waggie, who had been given some milk, was lying fast asleep by the hearth.

George looked about him, when he had finished his supper, and asked himself why he could not have a week of such quiet, peaceful life as this? Yet he knew that he was, figuratively, on the brink of a precipice. At any moment he might be shown in his true light. But how much better he felt since he had eaten. He was comfortable and drowsy. The minister and his family, who had been bustling around attending to the wants of their guests, began to grow dim in his weary eyes. Watson, who was sitting opposite to him, looked blurred, indistinct. He was vaguely conscious that the old gentleman was saying: "These are times that try our souls." Then the boy sank back in his chair, sound asleep. He began to dream. He was on the cowcatcher of an engine. Andrews was tearing along in front on a horse, beckoning to him to come on. The engine sped on faster and faster, but it could not catch up to the horseman. At last Andrews and the horse faded away altogether; and the boy was swimming across the Chickamauga River. He heard a great shout from the opposite bank—and awoke.

223

Watson had risen from the table; the pipe of tobacco which the minister had given him as a sort of dessert was lying broken on the hearth. There was a despairing look on his face. It was the look that one might expect to see in a hunted animal at bay. Near him stood the old man, who seemed to be the incarnation of mournful perplexity, his wife, who was no less disturbed, and the two daughters. One of the latter, a girl with dark hair and snapping black eyes, was regarding Watson with an expression of anger. On the table was an opened letter.

224

"I am in your power," Watson was saying to the minister.

What had been happening during the half hour which George had devoted to a nap?

"Poor, dear boy, he's dropped off to sleep," murmured the minister's wife, when she saw George sink back in his chair. She went into the sitting-room and returned with a cushion which she proceeded to place under his head. "He is much too young to go to the war," she said, turning towards Watson.

"There was no keeping him from going South," answered his companion. "He would go." Which was quite true.

The minister handed a pipe filled with Virginia tobacco to Watson, and lighted one for himself.

"It's my only vice," he laughed pleasantly.

"I can well believe you," rejoined the Northerner, as he gratefully glanced at the spiritual countenance of his host. "Why should this old gentleman and I be enemies?" he thought. "I wish the war was over, and that North and South were once more firm friends." He proceeded to light his pipe.

225

They began to talk agreeably, and the minister told several quaint stories of plantation life, while they smoked on, and the women cleared off the food from the table.

At last there came a knocking at the front door. The host left the kitchen, went into the hallway, and opened the door. He had a brief parley with some one; then the door closed, and he reentered the room. Watson thought he could distinguish the sound of a horse's hoofs as an unseen person rode away.

"Who's coming to see you this kind of night?" asked the wife. It was a natural question. It had once more begun to rain; there were flashes of lightning and occasional rumbles of thunder.

"A note of some kind from Farmer Jason," explained the clergyman. "I hope his daughter is not sick again."

"Perhaps the horse has the colic," suggested one of the girls, who had gentle blue eyes like her father's, "and he wants some of your 'Equine Pills.'"

"Who brought the letter?" enquired the wife.

"Jason's hired man—he said he hadn't time to wait—had to be off with another letter to Farmer Lovejoy—said this letter would explain everything." 226

"Then why don't you open it, pa, instead of standing there looking at the outside; you act as if you were afraid of it," spoke up the dark-eyed girl, who was evidently a damsel of some spirit.

"Here, you may read it yourself, Cynthia," said her father, quite meekly, as if he had committed some grave offense. He handed the envelope to the dark-eyed girl. She tore it open, and glanced over the single sheet of paper inside. Then she gave a sharp cry of surprise, and darted a quick, penetrating glance at Watson. He felt uneasy, although he could not explain why he did.

"What's the matter?" asked the minister. "Anything wrong at the Jasons'?"

"Anything wrong at the Jasons'," Miss Cynthia repeated, contemptuously. "No; there's something wrong, but it isn't over at Jasons'. Listen to this!" She held out the paper at arm's length, as if she feared it, and read these lines: 227

"PASTOR BUCKLEY,

"Dear Sir:

"This is to notify you as how I just have had news that a party of Yankee spies is at large, right in our neighborhood. They stole a train to-day at Big Shanty, but they were obleeged to jump off only a few miles from here. So you must keep on the lookout—they are around—leastwise a boy and grown man have been seen, although most of the others seem to have gotten away. One of my sons—Esau—caught sight of this man and boy on the edge of the river late this afternoon. He says the boy had a dog.

"Yours,

"CHARLES JASON."

After Miss Cynthia finished the reading of this letter there was a silence in the room almost tragic in its intensity. Watson sprang to his feet, as he threw his pipe on the hearth. Waggie woke up with a whine. The Reverend Mr. Buckley looked at Watson, and then at the sleeping boy in a dazed way—not angrily, but simply like one who is grievously disappointed. So, too, did Mrs. Buckley and her blue-eyed daughter.

Finally Miss Cynthia broke the silence.

"So you are Northern spies, are you?" she hissed. "And you come here telling us a story about your being so fond of the South that you must travel all the way from Kentucky to fight for her." She threw the letter on the supper-table, while her eyes flashed. 228

Watson saw that the time of concealment had passed. His identity was apparent; he was in the very centre of the enemy's country; his life hung in the balance. He could not even defend himself save by his hands, for the pistol which he carried in his hip-pocket had been rendered temporarily useless by his passage across the river. Even if he had possessed a whole brace of pistols, he would not have harmed one hair of this kindly minister's head.

"I *am* a Northerner," said Watson, "and I *am* one of the men who stole a train at Big Shanty this morning. We got within a few miles of Chattanooga, and then had to abandon our engine, because we were trapped. We tried to burn bridges, but we failed. We did no more than any Southerners would have done in the North under the same circumstances."

It was at this point that George awoke. He saw at once that something was wrong but he prudently held his tongue, and listened. 229

"You are a spy," reiterated Miss Cynthia, "and you know what the punishment for that must be—North or South!"

"Of course I know the punishment," said Watson, with deliberation. "A scaffold—and a piece of rope."

The minister shuddered. "They wouldn't hang the boy, would they?" asked his wife anxiously.

Mr. Buckley was about to answer, when Miss Cynthia suddenly cried, "Listen!"

Her sharp ears had detected some noise outside the house. She left the room, ran to the front door, and was back again in a minute.

"Some of the neighbors are out with dogs and lanterns, looking, I'm sure, for the spies," she announced excitedly, "and they are coming up the lane!"

The first impulse of Watson was to seize George, and run from the house. But he realized, the next instant, how useless this would be; he could even picture the boy being shot down by an overwhelming force of pursuers.

"They are coming this way," said Mr. Buckley, almost mournfully, as the sound of voices could now be plainly heard from the cozy kitchen. 230

"We are in your hands," said Watson, calmly. He turned to the minister.

"You are fighting against my country, which I love more dearly than life itself," answered Mr. Buckley. "I can have no sympathy for you!" His face was very white; there was a troubled look in his kindly eyes.

"But they will be hung, father!" cried the blue-eyed daughter.

"I'm ashamed of you, Rachel," said Miss Cynthia. Mrs. Buckley said nothing. She seemed to be struggling with a hundred conflicting emotions. Waggie ran to her, as if he considered her a friend, and put his forepaws on her dress.

"Are you going to give us up?" asked Watson.

"I am a loyal Southerner," returned the minister, very slowly, "and I know what my duty is. Why should I shield you?"

Watson turned to George.

"It was bound to come," he said. "It might as well be to-night as to-morrow, or the next day." The pursuers were almost at the door. 231

"All right," said George, pluckily.

"Father," said Miss Cynthia, "the men are at the door! Shall I let them in?"

Mrs. Buckley turned away her head, for there were tears in her eyes.

CHAPTER IX

IN GREATEST PERIL

"Wait!" commanded the minister. There was a new look, one of decision, upon his face. "Heaven forgive me," he said, "if I am not doing right—but I cannot send a man to the gallows!"

He took a step towards the door leading to the entry.

"Not a word, Cynthia," he ordered. He opened a large closet, filled with groceries and preserving jars, quickly pushed George and Watson into it, and closed the door.

"Now, Rachel," he said, "let the men in." The girl departed. Within the space of a minute nearly a dozen neighbors, all of them carrying muskets, trooped into the kitchen. They were sturdy planters, and they looked wet and out of humor.

"Well, Dominie," exclaimed one of them, walking up to the fire and warming his hands, "you can thank your stars you're not out a mean night like this. Have you heard about the big engine steal?" 233

"Friend Jason has written me about it," replied Mr. Buckley.

"Why, it was the most daring thing I ever heard tell on," cried another of the party. "A lot of Yankees actually seized Fuller's train when he was eating his breakfast at Big Shanty, and ran it almost to Chattanooga. They had pluck, that's certain!"

"We're not here to praise their pluck," interrupted another man. "We are here to find out if any of 'em have been seen around your place. We've been scouring the country for two hours, but there's no trace of any of 'em so far—not even of the man with the boy and the dog, as Jason's son said he saw."

"Why didn't Jason's son tackle the fellows?" asked a voice.

"Pooh," said the man at the fireplace; "Jason's son ain't no 'count. All he's fit for is to dance with the girls. It's well our army doesn't depend on such milksops as him. He would run away from a mosquito—and cry about it afterwards!" 234

"You haven't seen any one suspicious about here, have you, parson?" asked a farmer.

The minister hesitated. He had never told a deliberate falsehood in his life. Was he to begin now?

"Seen no suspicious characters?" echoed the man at the fireplace. "No boy with a dog?"

The tongue of the good clergyman seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth. He could see the eagle glance of Miss Cynthia fixed upon him. Just then Waggie, who had been sniffing at the closet door, returned to the fireplace.

"Why, since when have you started to keep dogs, parson?" asked the last speaker.

The minister had an inspiration.

"That dog walked in here this evening," he said. "I believe him to be the dog of the boy you speak of." He spoke truth, but he had evaded answering the leading question.

"Great George!" cried the man at the fireplace. "Then some of the spies are in the neighborhood yet!" There were shouts of assent from his companions.

"When did the dog stray in?" was asked.

"More than an hour ago," said Mr. Buckley.

"Come, let's try another hunt!" called out a young planter. The men were out of the house the next minute, separating into groups of two and three to scour the countryside. The lights of their lanterns, which had shone out in the rain like will-o'-the-wisps, grew dimmer and dimmer, and finally disappeared.

As the front door closed the minister sat down near the table, and buried his face in his hands.

"I wonder if I did wrong," he said, almost to himself. "But I could not take a life—and that is what it would have been if I had given them up."

"Pa, you're too soft-hearted for this world," snapped Miss Cynthia.

Mrs. Buckley looked at her daughter reprovingly.

"Your father is a minister of the gospel," she said solemnly, "and he has shown that he can do good even to his enemies."

Mr. Buckley arose, and listened to the sound of the retreating neighbors. Then he opened the door of the closet. Watson and George jumped out joyfully, half smothered though they were, and began to overwhelm the old man with thanks for their deliverance.

He drew himself up, however, and refused their proffered hand shakes. There was a stern look on his usually gentle face.

"I may have saved your necks," he said, "because I would sacrifice no human life voluntarily, but I do not forget that you are enemies who have entered the South to do us all the harm you can."

"Come," said Watson, "it's a mere difference of opinion. I don't care what happens, George and I will never be anything else than your best friends!"

"That is true," cried George; "you can't call us enemies!"

The manner of the minister softened visibly; even Miss Cynthia looked less aggressive than before.

"Well, we won't discuss politics," answered Mr. Buckley. "You have as much right to your opinions as I have to mine. But I think I have done all I could be expected to do for you. Here, take this key, which unlocks the door of my barn, and crawl up into the hayloft where you can spend the night. If you are there, however, when I come to feed the horse, at seven o'clock tomorrow morning, I will not consider it necessary to keep silent to my neighbors."

"Never fear," said Watson, in genial tones; "we'll be away by daylight. Good-bye, and God bless you. You have done something to-night that will earn our everlasting gratitude, little as that means. Some day this wretched war will be over—and then I hope to have the honor of shaking you by the hand, and calling you my friend."

Watson and George were soon safely ensconced for the night in the minister's hayloft, with Waggie slumbering peacefully on top of a mound of straw.

"I think we are more comfortable than our pursuers who are running around the country," said George. He was stretched out next to Watson on the hay, and over him was an old horse-blanket.

"Thanks to dear old Buckley," answered Watson. "He is a real Southerner—generous and kind of heart. Ah, George, it's a shame that the Americans of one section can't be friends with the Americans of the other section."

Then they went to sleep, and passed as dreamless and refreshing a night as if there were no dangers for the morrow. At the break of day they were up again, and out of the barn, after leaving the key in the door.

"I feel like a general who has no plan of campaign whatever," observed Watson, as he gazed at the minister's residence, in the uncanny morning light, and saw that no one had as yet arisen.

"I guess the campaign will have to develop itself," answered George. The night's rest, and the good supper before it, had made a new boy of him. Twelve hours previously he had been exhausted; now he felt in the mood to undergo anything.

The two walked out of the garden, accompanied by Waggie, and so on until they reached an open field. Here they sat down, on the limb of a dead and stricken tree, and discussed what they were to do.

"We don't know," mused Watson, "whether any of our party have been caught or not. But one thing is as certain as sunrise. Just as soon as the morning is well advanced the pursuers will begin their work again, and they will have all the advantage—you and I all the disadvantage."

"The men will be on horseback, too," added George, "while we will be on foot. We must remember that."

"Jove," cried Watson, giving his knee a vigorous slap. "I've got an idea."

"Out with it," said George.

"Listen," went on his friend. "Here is the situation. If we try to push to the westward, to join Mitchell's forces, in broad daylight, or even at night, we are pretty sure to be captured if we try to palm ourselves off as Kentucky Southerners. If we hide in the woods, and keep away from

people, we will simply starve to death—and that won't be much of an improvement. That Kentucky story won't work now; it has been used too much as it is. Therefore, if we are to escape arrest, we must change our characters."

"Change our characters?" repeated George, in wonderment.

"Exactly. Suppose that we boldly move through the country as two professional beggars, and thus gradually edge our way to the westward, without appearing to do so. You can sing negro songs, can't you?"

"Yes; and other songs, too."

"That's good. And Waggie has some tricks, hasn't he?"

"He can play dead dog—and say his prayers—and howl when I sing—and do some other tricks."

"Then I've got the whole scheme in my mind," said Watson, with enthusiasm. "Let me play a blind man, with you as my leader. I think I can fix my eyes in the right way. We can go from farm to farm, from house to house, begging a meal, and you can sing, and put the dog through his tricks. People are not apt to ask the previous history of beggars—nor do I think any one will be likely to connect us with the train-robbers."

George clapped his hands.

"That's fine!" he said. There was a novelty about the proposed plan that strongly appealed to his spirit of adventure.

Watson's face suddenly clouded.

"Come to think of it," he observed, "the combination of a man, a boy and a dog will be rather suspicious, even under our new disguise. Remember Farmer Jason's letter last night."

"That's all very well," retorted George, who had fallen in love with the beggar scheme, "but if we get away from this particular neighborhood the people won't have heard anything about a dog or a boy. They will only know that some Northern spies are at large—and they won't be suspicious of a blind man and his friends."

"I reckon you're right," said Watson, after a little thought. "Let us get away from here, before it grows lighter, and put the neighbors behind us."

The man and boy, and the telltale dog, jumped to their feet.

"Good-bye, Mr. Buckley," murmured Watson, as he took a last look at the minister's house, "and heaven bless you for one of the best men that ever lived!"

They were hurrying on the next moment, nor did they stop until they had put six or seven miles between themselves and the Buckley home. The sun, directly away from which they had been moving, was now shining brightly in the heavens, as it looked down benevolently upon the well-soaked earth. They had now reached a plantation of some two hundred acres or more, in the centre of which was a low, long brick house with a white portico in front. They quickly passed from the roadway into the place, and moved up an avenue of magnolia trees. When they reached the portico a lazy looking negro came shuffling out of the front door. He gazed, in a supercilious fashion, at the two whites and the dog.

"Wha' foah you fellows gwine come heh foah?" he demanded, in a rich, pleasant voice, but with an unwelcome scowl upon his face.

"We just want a little breakfast," answered Watson. He was holding the boy's arm, and looked the picture of a blind mendicant.

The darky gave them a scornful glance. "Git away from heh, yoh white trash," he commanded. "We doan want no beggars 'round heh!"

Watson was about to flare up angrily, at the impudent tone of this order, but when he thought of the wretched appearance which he and George presented he was not surprised at the coolness of their reception. For not only were their clothes remarkable to look upon, but they were without hats. Even Waggie seemed a bedraggled little vagabond.

But George rose valiantly to the occasion. He began to sing "Old Folks at Home," in a clear sweet voice, and, when he had finished, he gave a spirited rendition of "Dixie." When "Dixie" was over he made a signal to Waggie, who walked up and down the pathway on his hind legs with a comical air of pride.

The expression of the pompous negro had undergone a great change. His black face was wreathed in smiles; his eyes glistened with delight; his large white teeth shone in the morning light like so many miniature tombstones.

"Ya! ya! ya!" he laughed. "Doan go way. Ya! ya! Look at de dog! Ho! ho!"

He reentered the house, but was soon back on the portico. With him came a handsome middle-aged man, evidently the master of the house, and a troop of children. They were seven in all, four girls and three boys, and they ranged in ages all the way from five to seventeen years.

No sooner did he see them than George began another song—"Nicodemus, the Slave." This he followed by "Massa's in the cold, cold ground." As he ended the second number the children clapped their hands, and the master of the house shouted "Bravo!" Then the boy proceeded to put Waggie through his tricks. The dog rolled over and lay flat on the ground, with his paws in the air as if he were quite dead; then at a signal from his master he sprang to his feet and began

to dance. He also performed many other clever tricks that sent the children into an ecstasy of delight. Watson nearly forgot his rôle of blind man, more than once, in his desire to see the accomplishments of the terrier. But he saved himself just in time, and contrived to impart to his usually keen eyes a dull, staring expression.

By the time Waggie had given his last trick the young people had left the portico and were crowding around him with many terms of endearment. One of them, seizing the tiny animal in her arms, ran with him into the house, where he must have been given a most generous meal, for he could eat nothing more for the next twenty-four hours.

The handsome man came off the portico and looked at the two supposed beggars with an expression of sympathy.

"You have a nice voice, my boy," he said, turning to George. "Can't you make better use of it than this? Why don't you join the army, and sing to the soldiers?"

George might have answered that he already belonged to one army, and did not feel like joining another, but he naturally thought he had better not mention this. He evaded the question, and asked if he and the "blind man" might have some breakfast.

"That you can!" said the master, very cordially. "Here, Pompey, take these fellows around to the kitchen and tell Black Dinah to give them a *good* meal. And when they are through bring them into my study. I want the boy to sing some more."

The black man with the white teeth escorted the strangers to the kitchen of the mansion, where an ebony cook treated them to a typical southern feast. It was well that Black Dinah had no unusual powers of reasoning or perception, for the beggars forgot, more than once, to keep up their assumed rôles. Watson found no difficulty in eating, despite his supposed infirmity, and George came within an inch of presenting a Confederate bill to Madame Dinah. But he suddenly reflected that paupers were not supposed to "tip" servants, and he stuffed the money back into his trousers pocket.

When they had finished Pompey escorted them to the study of the master of the house. It was a large room, filled with books and family portraits, and in it were assembled the host (Mr. Carter Peyton) and his children. The latter were still engaged in petting Waggie, who began to look a trifle bored. From the manner in which they ruled the house it was plain that their father was a widower. At the request of Mr. Peyton, George sang his whole repertoire of melodies, and the dog once more repeated his tricks. Watson was given a seat in one corner of the study. "It's time we were off," he thought.

As Waggie finished his performance Watson rose, and stretched out his hand towards George.

"Let's be going," he said.

"All right," answered George. He was about to say good-bye, and lead his companion to the door, when a turbaned negress entered the room.

"Massa Peyton, Massa Charles Jason done ride oveh heh ta see you."

"Is he here now?" asked Mr. Peyton. "Then show him in. I wonder what's the matter? It is not often that Jason gets this far away from home." The girl retired.

Charles Jason! Where had the two Northerners heard that name? Then it flashed upon them almost at the same instant. Charles Jason was the name of the farmer who had warned Mr. Buckley about them. If he saw them both, and in company with the dog, they would be under suspicion at once.

George drew nearer to Watson and whispered one word: "Danger!" He picked up Waggie and put him in his pocket.

"We must be going," reiterated Watson, moving towards the door with unusual celerity for a blind man who had found himself in an unfamiliar apartment.

"Don't go yet," urged Mr. Peyton, seeking to detain the supposed vagabonds; "I want Mr. Jason to hear some of these plantation songs. I'll pay you well for your trouble, my boy—and you can take away all the food you want."

"I'm sorry," began George, "but—"

As the last word was uttered Farmer Charles Jason was ushered into the study. He was a chubby little man of fifty or fifty-five, with red hair, red face and a body which suggested the figure of a plump sparrow—a kindly man, no doubt, in the ordinary course of events, but the last person on earth that the two fugitives wanted to see.

"Well, this *is* a surprise," said the master of the house, very cordially. "It's not often you favor us with a visit as far down the highway as this."

"When a fellow has gout as much as I have nowadays," returned Jason, "he doesn't get away from home a great deal. But something important made me come out to-day."

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" asked Mr. Peyton.

George took hold of Watson's left hand, and edged towards the open door. But Mr. Peyton, not waiting for Jason to answer his question, leaped forward and barred the way.

"You fellows must not go until Mr. Jason has heard those negro melodies."

Owing to the number of people in the room (for all the children were there), Jason had not

singled out the Northerners for any attention. But now he naturally looked at them. There was nothing suspicious in his glance; it was merely good-natured and patronizing.

"Yes, don't go," cried one of the children, a pretty little girl of ten or eleven. "Show Mr. Jason how the doggie can say his prayers." She hauled Waggie from George's coat, and held him in front of the farmer. George seized Waggie and returned him to his pocket. There was an angry flush on the boy's face. He had no kind feelings for pretty Miss Peyton.

Jason's expression underwent a complete transformation when he saw the dog. An idea seemed to strike him with an unexpected but irresistible force. The sight of the dog had changed the whole current of his thoughts. He stared first at Watson, and then at George, with a frown that grew deeper and deeper. Then he turned to Mr. Peyton.

"I came over to tell you about the Yankee spies who are loose in the county," he cried quickly, in excited tones. "One of them was a boy with a dog. My son saw them—and I believe this to be the lad. I——"

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The farmer got no further.

"Come, George!" suddenly shouted Watson.

At the back of the study there was a large glass door leading out to the rear porch of the house. He ran to this, found that it would not open, and so deliberately hit some of the panes a great blow with his foot.

Crash! The glass flew here and there in a hundred pieces. The next moment the ex-blind man had pushed through the ragged edges of the remaining glass, and was scurrying across a garden at the back of the house. After him tore George. In going through the door he had cut his cheek on one of the projecting splinters, but in the excitement he was quite unconscious of the fact. The children and their father stood looking at Jason in a dazed, enquiring way. They had not heard of the locomotive chase; they knew nothing of Northern spies; they did not understand that the farmer had suddenly jumped at a very correct but startling conclusion.

"After them!" shouted Jason. "They are spies!"

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By this time the whole house was in an uproar. Most of the children were in tears (being frightened out of their wits at the mention of terrible spies), and the servants were running to and fro wringing their hands helplessly, without understanding exactly what had happened. Jason tore to the broken door, broke off some more glass with the end of the riding whip he held in his hand, and was quickly past this bristling barrier and out on the back porch. Mr. Peyton was behind him.

At the end of the garden, nearly a hundred yards away, was an old-fashioned hedge of box, which had reached, in the course of many years, a height of twelve feet or more. A little distance beyond this box was a wood of pine-trees. As Jason reached the porch he could see the two Northerners fairly squeeze their way through the hedge, and disappear on the other side. He leaped from the porch, and started to run down the garden. But his enemy, the gout, gave him a warning twinge, and he was quickly outdistanced by Mr. Peyton, who sped onward, with several negroes at his heels.

The party continued down the garden until they reached the hedge; then they ran to the right for a short distance, scurried through an arched opening in the green box, and thus reached the outskirts of the pine woods. Next they began to search through the trees. But not a sight of the fugitives could they obtain. After they had tramped over the whole woods, which covered about forty acres, they emerged into open fields. Not a trace of the runaways! They went back and made a fresh search among the pines; they sent negroes in every direction; yet the result was the same. When Mr. Peyton returned, very hot and disgusted, to his usually quiet study he found Charles Jason lying on the sofa in an agony of gout. Several of the children were near him.

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"Oh, papa, I hope you did *not* catch them," cried one of the latter. She was the little girl who had pulled Waggie from George's pocket.

Mr. Peyton laughed, in spite of himself.

"Have you fallen in love with the boy who sang, Laura?" he asked, with a twinkle in his eye.

"No," said Miss Laura, indignantly, "but Mr. Jason says they were spies—and spies are always hung—and I wouldn't like to see that nice dog hung."

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The father burst into a peal of merriment.

"Don't worry," he said; "I reckon the dog would be pardoned—on the ground that he was led astray by others older than himself. Anyway, the rascals have gotten away as completely as if they had disappeared from the face of the earth."

Jason groaned. Whether the sound was caused by pain, or disappointment at the escape of the spies, or both, it would have been hard to tell. When he was taken to his home, not until the next day, he vowed he would never more chase anything, be it even a chicken.

And where were the missing man, boy, and dog? Much nearer to the Peyton house than any of its inmates fancied. When Watson and George ran down the garden their only idea was to get as far off from the house as possible, although they believed that they were pretty sure to be captured in the end. Their pistols were still useless; they did not know the geography of the neighborhood; there were enemies everywhere. But after they squeezed through the hedge, they found in front of them, between the box and the edge of the woods, a little patch of muddy, uncultivated land, devoted to the refuse of a farm. A trash heap, a broken plough, empty boxes,

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barrels, broken china, and other useless things betokened a sort of rustic junk-shop—a receptacle for objects which had seen their best days.

Among this collection, the quick eye of Watson caught sight of a large molasses hogshead, now empty and with its open end turned upwards. He pulled George by the sleeve, pointed to the hogshead, and then looked at the hedge, as he said, breathlessly: "This is big enough to hold us both; jump in—the hedge is so high they can't see us from the house!"

There was no chance to say more. In a twinkling the two had vaulted into the huge barrel, and were fairly squatting at the bottom. Above them was the open sky and the warm sun. Any pursuer who chose to stand on tiptoe and look in would have been rewarded for his pains. But Watson calculated that no one would think of the hogshead for the very reason that it stood out so prominently amid all the trash of this dumping ground. No one, in fact, gave a thought to the spot; it suggested nothing in the way of a hiding-place. Once a negro who had joined the hunt brushed by the hogshead, much to the terror of its occupants, but he gave it no heed. A few minutes later Mr. Peyton stopped within a few feet of it, to speak to his white overseer.

"We have searched the wood thoroughly," said the overseer, "but they are gone—that's sure."

"Well, they have gotten out of the place," observed the master. "But they won't get many miles away. I want you to take the sorrel mare and spread the alarm through the neighborhood."

"Yes, sir."

Hardly had Mr. Peyton and his overseer hurried away before Waggie indulged in a little yelp, to ease his own feelings. He found things rather cramped at the bottom of the hogshead, to which he had been transferred from George's pocket; he longed to have more leeway for his tiny legs.

"If you had given that bark a minute ago," muttered George, "you would have betrayed us, Master Waggie."

"Oh! oh! oh!" whispered Watson; "I am so cramped and stiff I don't know what will become of me. This is the most painful experience of the war."

There would have been something amusing in the position of the hidiers if it had seemed less dangerous. Watson was now sitting with legs crossed, in tailor fashion; on his lap was George; and upon George's knee jumped Waggie.

"You're getting tired too soon," said George. "We will be here some time yet."

He was quite right, for it was not until dusk that they dared leave their curious refuge. Sometimes they stood up, when they got absolutely desperate, and had it not been that the tall hedge protected him, the head of Watson would assuredly have been seen from the Peyton mansion. At last they cautiously abandoned the hogshead, and crept into the pines in front of them. When it was pitch dark the fugitives pushed forward in a northwestwardly direction, until they reached a log cabin, at a distance of about four miles from their point of departure. Within the place a light was cheerily burning.

"Shall we knock at the door?" asked Watson, in some doubt.

"I'm very hungry," laughed George. "I think I could risk knocking anywhere—if I could only get something to eat."

"Well, we might as well be hung for sheep as lambs," observed Watson. "Let us try it."

He had begun to think that it was only the question of a few hours before he and George would be in the hands of the enemy.

They knocked at the door. It was half opened by a long, lanky man, with a scraggy chin-beard, who looked like the customary pictures of "Uncle Sam."

"What is it?" he asked the travelers. There was a sound of voices within.

Was it prudent to play the blind man once again? Or had this fellow heard of the excitement at the Peyton mansion? Watson bethought himself of a method of finding out whether or not he should be endowed with sight.

"Are we anywhere near Squire Peyton's?" he demanded.

"'Bout four miles off, or five miles by the road along the creek," said this Southern "Uncle Sam."

"Do you know if he's living at his place now?"

"He was there three days ago, whan I driv over ta sell him some shotes," returned "Uncle Sam." "Reckon he must be there still."

"Humph!" thought Watson; "this fellow hasn't heard anything about the Peyton *fracas*. I'll lose my sight once again."

He clutched George's hand in a helpless fashion, and poured forth a tale of woe. He was blind and poor, he said; he and his nephew (meaning George) were in need of food and shelter.

"I'll sing for you," said George.

"Tarnation pumpkins," cried Uncle Sam; "I hate squalin'. But come in. I never shut my door on anybody."

He opened the door the whole way. The two Northerners and the dog walked into the dazzling light made by a great wood-fire—and confronted five Confederate soldiers and an officer who were toasting their feet at the hearth! They all glanced at the newcomers, who dearly regretted,

when too late, that they had entered. The officer stared first at Watson and then at George with the air of a man who is searching for some one. Uncle Sam introduced them to the party in a manner more vigorous than polite.

"Here's a couple o' beggars," he said. "Ma, get 'em somethin' to eat!"

"Ma," who was his wife, came bustling out of the second room, or kitchen, of the cabin. She was red in the face, and of generous proportions.

"Look here, pop," she cried, "do you expect me to cook for a hotel? I've just been feedin' these soldiers, and now you want me to get victuals for beggars."

When the plump hostess saw the blind man, the boy and the dog, her face softened. She went back to the kitchen, and soon returned with some coarse but highly acceptable food, which was gratefully eaten by George and Watson.

"Do you two tramp through the country together?" asked the officer. He was addressed by his men as Captain Harris. Every line and feature of his clean-shaven face denoted shrewdness.

"Yes," answered Watson. "My nephew sings—the dog has some tricks—we make a little money—even in war time." He would put the best face possible on this trying situation.

"You have no home?" went on the officer, in a sympathetic voice.

"None."

"Where did you come from before you took to begging?"

Watson hesitated for a second. Then he said: "Lynchburg, Virginia." It was the only place he could think of at that moment, and it seemed far enough off to be safe.

"I spent three weeks in Lynchburg last year," said Captain Harris. "What part of the town did you live in?"

This time George came to the rescue. "On Main Street," he answered. He had known a boy in Cincinnati whose mother had once resided in Lynchburg, and he had heard the lad speak of a Main Street in that town.

"On Main Street," repeated the Captain. Was the look that passed quickly across his face one of surprise or disappointment?

"Yes, on Main Street," asserted George. He felt very sure of himself now.

"How near were you to the Sorrel Horse Hotel?" asked the Captain, after a brief pause.

"About two streets away, eh George?" said Watson. He had, very naturally, never heard of the Sorrel Horse, and he knew nothing of Lynchburg, but it would be fatal to show any ignorance on the subject.

"Yes, just about two streets away," agreed the boy.

The men were all sitting near the blazing fire. Suddenly Captain Harris, without saying a word, lifted his right arm and sent his fist flying towards the face of Watson, who sat near him. With an exclamation of anger Watson jumped to his feet, just in time to avoid the blow.

"What do you mean?" he cried, as he glared at his antagonist.

The Captain smiled. He did not seem at all pugnacious now.

"I mean," he answered, "that I have proved my suspicions to be true. I thought you were not blind—and I find that you still have enough sight left to see a blow when it is coming to you!"

Watson could cheerfully have whipped himself for his blunder.

"Further," went on the officer, in a politely taunting tone that was very provoking, "I find that neither you nor the boy ever lived in Lynchburg, for the simple reason that there is no Sorrel Horse Hotel in that place, and there never was!"

How nicely had he planned this little trap! And how foolish the two fugitives felt.

"And now, my dear beggars," went on the Captain, in the same ironical vein, "allow me to say that I don't believe you are beggars at all. I strongly suspect that you are members of this engine-stealing expedition which has come to grief. This afternoon I was sent out from Chattanooga, among others, to scour the country, and it will be my duty to march you there tomorrow morning."

There was a pause painful in its intensity.

"Have either of you got anything to say?" demanded the Captain.

"We admit nothing!" said Watson.

"I'm not surprised," answered the Captain. "Your offense is a hanging one. But you were a plucky lot—that's certain."

The next morning Watson and George Knight, with the faithful Waggie (who was destined to remain with his master throughout all these adventures, in which he had played his own little part), were taken by the detachment of Confederates to Chattanooga. Here they were placed in the jail, and here also, in the course of a few days, were brought Andrews and the other members of the ill-fated expedition. For they were all captured, sooner or later, as might have been expected. The whole South rang with the story of the engine chase, and every effort was made to track and capture the courageous Northerners.

After a stay of several weeks in Chattanooga the party were taken by railroad to Madison, in Georgia, for it was feared that General Mitchell was about to take possession of the former place. In a few days, however, when the danger had passed, they were returned to Chattanooga. It was not until September of 1863 that this city fell into the hands of a Union force.

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Of the movements and separation of the prisoners after their return to Chattanooga, or of the experiences of some of them in Knoxville, it is not necessary to make detailed mention. Andrews, after a trial, was executed in Atlanta as a spy, dying like a brave man, and seven of his companions, condemned by a court-martial, shared the same fate. It was the fortune of war. George could never dance, as he had promised, at his leader's wedding.

Let us change the scene to the city prison of Atlanta, where the remaining fourteen members of the expedition were to be found in the following October. Among them were Watson, George Knight, Jenks and Macgreggor. Waggie, too, was still in evidence, but he would have found life rather dreary had not the kind-hearted jailer allowed one of his family to take the dog many a scamper around the city.

"Poor Andrews," said Watson, one afternoon, "it is hard to realize that he and seven others of us have gone."

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The party were occupying a well-barred room on the second floor of the prison. This second floor comprised four rooms for prisoners, two on each side of a hallway. In the hallway was a staircase which led to the first story, where the jailer and his family had their quarters. Outside the building was a yard surrounded by a fence about nine feet high, and here and there a soldier, fully armed, was on guard.

"I don't want to be doleful, boys," said Macgreggor, "but I think we will soon follow Andrews. As the days rolled on and we heard no more of any trial or execution I began to hope that the Confederate Government had forgotten the rest of us. I even thought it possible we might be exchanged for the same number of Confederates in Northern prisons, and thus allowed to go back to our army. But I've kept my eyes and ears open—and I have now become anxious."

"Why so?" asked George. The boy looked thin and very pale, after his long confinement.

"I heard some one—I think it was the Provost-Marshal—talking to the jailer this morning, at the front door of the prison. I was looking out of the window; you fellows were all playing games. 'Keep a very strict eye on those engine-stealers,' the marshal said; 'a court is going to try them—and you know what that means—death! A trial will be nothing more than a formality, for the whole fourteen of them are spies, under the rules of war. They were soldiers who entered the enemy's line in civilian disguise. So don't let them get away.'"

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Macgreggor's listeners stirred uneasily. This was not what might be called pleasant news.

"Why didn't you tell us before?" asked Jenks.

"I hadn't the heart to," returned Macgreggor. "You boys were all so cheerful."

Watson cleared his voice.

"I tell you what it is, boys," he whispered, as he gave Waggie a mournful pat; "if we don't want to be buried in an Atlanta graveyard we must escape!"

George's white face flushed at the thought. The idea of liberty was dazzling, after so many weary days.

"Well," said one of the men, in the same low tone, "it's better to escape, and run the risk of failing or of being re-captured, than to rot here until we are led out to be hanged."

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"Let's invent a plan that will enable us not only to get out, but to *stay* out," laughed Jenks.

There was dead silence for nearly ten minutes. The men, who had been sitting on the floor watching two of their number at a game of checkers, were deep in thought. At last Watson opened his lips.

"I have a plan," he whispered. "Tell me what you think of it. You know that about sunset the darkies come into the rooms to leave us our supper. The jailer stands outside. Then, later, the jailer comes and takes away the dishes. He is then alone. Suppose we seize him, gag him, take his keys, unlock all the doors on this floor, and release all the prisoners. As you know, there are a number besides our own party—whites and negroes. All this must be quietly done, however, if it is to prove successful. Then we can go down-stairs, without making any noise, overpower the seven sentinels, take their guns, and make off, after locking up these gentlemen."

Watson went further into details, to show the probable workings of his scheme. It was finally agreed that the dash was well worth the trial. As Jenks remarked: "It's either that or a few feet

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of cold rope, and a coffin!"

The late afternoon of the next day was fixed upon for the escape. In addition to the fourteen remaining adventurers, a Union captain from East Tennessee, who shared the room with them, was to be associated in this daring enterprise. It seemed to George as if the hour would never come; but as the sun began to sink gradually towards the horizon on the following afternoon he realized, from the feverish restlessness of the whole party, that there was not much longer to wait.

"Keep up your nerve, fellows," said Watson, who had become the leader of the party, "and remember that all depends upon the quietness with which we conduct things on this floor, so that the guard below won't take the alarm."

As he spoke there was a rattling of keys and a creaking of locks. The heavy door of the room opened, and in walked Waggie. He had been having a walk, with a daughter of the jailer, and one of the negro servants had taken him up-stairs and unlocked the door. The next moment the key was turned; the prisoners were again shut in from the world.

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"Poor little Waggie," said Macgreggor. "Is he going too?"

"I've taken him through too much to leave him behind now," said George fondly. "Look. This is as good as a kennel." He pointed to an overcoat, which the East Tennessee Captain had given him, and showed on one side a large pocket. The side of the latter was buttoned up closely to the coat.

The minutes dragged along. Finally Watson said, with a sort of mournful impressiveness: "Boys, let us all bid each other good-bye. For some of us may never meet again!"

The men clasped one another by the hand. In the eyes of most of them were tears—not timid tears, but the tears of soldiers who had become attached to one another through suffering and hoping together. It was a solemn scene which the rays of the dying sun illumined, and George would never forget it.

Watson brushed a drop from his cheek.

"I feel better, now," he said cheerfully; "I'm ready for anything. Remember one thing. Treat the jailer as gently as possible. He has been a kind fellow where some would have been the reverse."

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"Aye," murmured his companions. It was an order which had their hearty sympathy.

In a little while there was the long-expected creaking at the door. It was supper time! Two negroes entered and placed some pans containing food upon the table. Then they retired, and the door was locked.

"Eat, boys," whispered Watson; "we don't know when we may get our next square meal."

The men soon disposed of the food. Hardly had they finished before the door was thrown open, and the jailer, an elderly, bearded man, appeared.

"Good-evening, men," he said, in a pleasant, unsuspecting voice. He halted at the doorway with the keys in his right hand.

It was a terrible moment. George felt as if he were living ten years in that one instant.



WATSON PLACED HIS HAND OVER THE MAN'S MOUTH

"Good-evening, sir," said Watson, approaching the jailer. "It's such a very pleasant evening that

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we intend to take a little walk." He threw back the door as he spoke.

The jailer was unprepared for this move. He did not even divine what was intended.

"How—what do you mean——" he faltered.

"We've had enough of prison life," said Macgreggor, in a calm, even voice, "and we are going to leave you. Now give up the keys, and keep very quiet, or you'll find——"

"Keep off!" cried the jailer, as he tightened his hold on the bunch of keys. He was about to call for help, but Watson placed his left hand over the man's mouth, and with his right clutched the unfortunate's throat. Then Macgreggor seized the keys, after a sharp but decisive struggle, and hurried into the hallway, where he began to release the general prisoners. He quickly unlocked in succession the doors of the three other rooms on the second floor. The men thus freed did not understand the significance of it all, but they saw unexpected liberty staring them in the face, and they ran out of their quarters like so many sheep.

Meanwhile the members of the engine expedition, with the exception of Watson and Macgreggor, had run almost noiselessly down the staircase, through the jailer's quarters on the first floor, and thus out into the prison yard. Some of them threw themselves upon the three soldiers in the rear of the yard, wrenched from them their muskets, crying out at the same time: "Make a movement or a cry and we'll shoot you down!" The rest of the party, among whom were George Knight and Jenks, tore into the front part of the yard, where four guards were patrolling near the main door of the jail. Two of these guards were quickly disarmed. But the other two, seeing the oncoming of the prisoners, ran out of the gate of the picket fence, uttering loud cries as they went. Their escape was entirely unexpected.

The general prisoners now came tumbling into the yard, headed by Watson and Macgreggor. Watson, warned that there was no time to lose, had released his hold upon the astonished jailer. He did not know that two of the sentinels had escaped, but he arrived down-stairs just in time to see the result of their disappearance. A large reserve guard of Confederates, warned of the jail delivery by these two soldiers, came rushing madly into the yard.

"Look out, boys!" cried Watson. Other members of the engine party, seeing the arrival of the troops, released the five remaining sentinels, threw down their newly acquired muskets, and began to scale the prison fence. There came the sharp crack of rifles from the reserve guard. Whiz! The bullets rattled all around the heads of the fence-climbers, the whistling noise having for accompaniment the cries of the angry Confederates. Whiz! Another volley! Yet no one was hit. On the fugitives went, as they descended on the other side of the fence, and made for some woods at a distance of nearly a mile from the prison.

"After 'em, men," came the word of command to the Confederates. Soldiers were running hither and thither, while the general prisoners, who had been released by Macgreggor, were soon safely housed in their old rooms. The bullets were flying thick and fast within and without the prison yard; the scene was one of pandemonium. Ere long five of the engine party had been captured, three inside of the yard and two immediately outside. Among these were Jenks and Macgreggor who were both uninjured, but both very much disheartened. Soon there was the clatter of hoofs, and a troop of cavalry dashed up to the front of the jail.

"No more chance of escape!" said Jenks bitterly, as he looked out of the barred window. He could hear the cavalry colonel excitedly crying: "Hunt down the fellows till you have every one of them!"

"I hope some of the boys will get off," remarked Macgreggor. "Any one who is captured is sure to be hung now." Afterwards another prisoner was captured. There were now six of the party back in jail.

Where were Watson and George during this escapade? No sooner had the former cried out his warning, on the approach of the reserve guard, than he made directly for George, who was in the back part of the yard.

"Come on," he said, in tones of suppressed excitement, "over the fence with us. It's our only chance—now!"

Imitating the example of others the man and boy were soon balanced on top of the wooden fence. Whirr! George was conscious of a whistling sound, and a bullet flew by him as it just grazed the tip of one ear.

"Hurry up!" urged Watson. In another second the two had dropped from the fence and were running like mad over a large field.

"Halt!" cried some voices behind them. Looking back they could see that about a dozen soldiers were in hot pursuit. A ball sped by George, dangerously near the capacious pocket in which Waggie was ensconced; a second bullet would have ended the life of Watson had it come an inch nearer the crown of his head.

"Look here," said Watson. "These men are fresh—we are weakened by imprisonment—they will get up to us in the end. Let's try a trick. The next time the bullets come we'll drop as if we were dead."

At that moment another volley rattled around and over them. Watson threw up his arms, as if in agony, and sank on the grass. George uttered a loud cry, and went down within a few feet of his companion.

All but one of the Confederates halted, upon seeing the apparent success of their aim, and

turned to pursue in a new direction. The remaining soldier came running up to the two prisoners, and after taking one look which convinced him that they were either dead or dying he scurried back to rejoin his detachment. There was no use in wasting time over corpses when living enemies remained to be caught.

The "corpses" waited until all was quiet around them. Then they arose, and kept on towards the woods. These they reached when darkness had fallen upon the trees—a circumstance which aided them in one way, as it lessened the danger of pursuit. But in another way the night impeded their progress for they could not get their bearings. They groped from tree to tree, and from bush to bush, like blind men. Once they heard a great rustling, and were convinced that it was caused by some of their companions, but they dared not speak, for fear of a mistake. At last they stumbled out upon a deserted highroad.

"Where are we?" whispered George.

"I don't know," returned Watson. "Hark! Do you hear anything?"

A sound, at first very faint, became more and more distinct as they listened. Galloping horsemen and the rattle of sabres proclaimed the approach of cavalry. 277

"Back into the woods," urged Watson. "We may be putting ourselves in a trap—but for the life of me I don't know where else to go!"

They hurried into the wood, where they crawled under a scrubby pine bush, and anxiously awaited the outcome. On rushed the horsemen until they reached the outskirts of the wood. Here they halted. The hiders under the pine bush could hear one of the officers say: "The infantry will soon be here to relieve us."

"We've had a great time to-night," growled another officer. "These Yankees, not content with troubling us on the battle-field, must even stir things up when they are prisoners."

"I don't wonder those locomotive-stealers wanted to escape," laughed the first officer. "They know what the punishment of a spy always is."

In a few minutes a company of infantry marched to the scene. After a short conference between their officers and those of the cavalry the horsemen galloped away. The infantry were now formed into squads, and sent to keep guard in the woods. 278

"Things are getting rather warm!" whispered Watson. George murmured an assent. Well might he do so, for a sentry had soon been posted within fifty feet of the two fugitives. The situation was fraught with the greatest danger. Watson and George realized that the soldiers would patrol the woods until morning, when discovery would be inevitable.

Watson sank his voice so low that it could just be heard by his companion.

"We can't afford to stay here until daylight," he whispered. "We must wriggle out of here until we come to the edge of the road. Then we must make a break and run."

"Run where?" asked George.

"Providence alone knows," answered Watson. "We must trust to chance. But anything is better than remaining here, to be caught like rabbits by dogs."

"I'm ready," replied George. He already saw himself back in the Atlanta prison, and he even pictured himself with a rope around his neck; but he was prepared for any adventure, whatever might be the result. 279

"The sooner the better," whispered Watson. Without any more words the two began to wriggle along the ground and kept up this snake-like motion until they reached the edge of the wood. It was slow work and very tiresome, but it was their one chance of escape. Then they stood up, and bounded across the highroad.

"There they go!" shouted one of the soldiers in the wood. At once there was an uproar, as the sentries ran out into the road, and began to fire their guns in wild confusion. It was pitch dark, and they could see nothing. Over the road and into an open field tore the two fugitives. They felt like blind men, for they could hardly distinguish any object before them; moreover they were wholly ignorant of their surroundings. They ran on, however, and finally reached another field in which were several large trees. Watson made straight for one of them.

"Up we go," he said, and, suiting the action to the order, he had soon clambered up the tree, and seated himself across one of its branches. George was quick to follow; he climbed up with even more celerity than Watson, and settled himself on a neighboring branch. 280

They could hear the cries of the sentries, mingled with an occasional shot. Two of the soldiers passed directly under the tree occupied by the Northerners.

"They have gotten off," one of them was saying.

"I'm not surprised," rejoined the other sentry. "Any fellows who could do what they did at Big Shanty are not easy customers to deal with."

In a little while the two sentries returned, and, again passing under the tree, evidently went back to the woods. The uproar had ceased; there was no more firing; it was plain that the chase had been abandoned.

After the lapse of half an hour Watson and George descended from their uncomfortable perches. Once upon the ground the boy released Waggie from his pocket, and the little party pushed on in the darkness for about a mile. Here they found a hayrick in a field, alongside of which they

laid their weary bones and slept the sleep of exhaustion. When daylight came they had awakened, feeling much refreshed and ready for more adventures.

"I'll tell you what I think," said Watson. "There's a chance for us yet, provided we try a new means of getting away from the South."

"What do you mean?" asked George.

"If we try to move northward," continued Watson, "we are sure to be caught. Every countryman between Atlanta and Chattanooga will be on the lookout for us. Instead of that, let us strike out towards the Gulf of Mexico, where we should reach one of the ships of the Union blockading squadron. New Orleans is in the hands of the North, and many of our vessels must be patrolling the Gulf. Once we reach the coast we are practically free."

"The very thing!" cried the boy. "You're a genius!"

Watson smiled.

"Not a genius," he said, "but I have what they call horse-sense up our way—and I'm not anxious to return to the delights of the Atlanta prison."

Acting upon this new theory the wanderers began their long journey. This they pursued amid many hardships, not the least of which was hunger. Even poor Waggie grew emaciated. First they reached the banks of the Chattahoochee River, after which they secured a boat and rowed their way down via the Apalachicola River, to Apalachicola, Florida, on the Gulf of Mexico. Here they found, to their great delight, that a Federal blockading squadron was patrolling on the Gulf, near the mouth of Apalachicola Bay.

The two fugitives now pushed their little boat out into the open sea. They were a sorry looking couple, with their old clothes fairly dropping from them, and their thin, gaunt figures showing the consequences of many days of privation. Watson was feverish, with an unnatural glitter in his eyes, while George's face was a sickly white. Waggie reposed at the bottom of the rickety craft, as if he cared not whether he lived or died.

"Look!" cried Watson, who was at the oars. He pointed out towards the south, where were to be seen a collection of masts and smoke-stacks, rising above long black hulls.

"It's the Federal fleet," said George. He was glad to have a look at it—glad to know that deliverance was at hand—but he felt too exhausted to put any enthusiasm into his voice.

"Can you see any flag?" he asked, wearily. "Perhaps we have been fooled after all. The ships may belong to the Confederate navy."

Soon they could detect, as they drew nearer, a flutter of bunting from the vessel nearest to them.

"It's the old flag!" cried George, jumping from his seat in the stern with a precipitancy that threatened to upset the boat. "See the blue—and the red and white stripes! Hurrah!" But he was too weak for much enthusiasm even now and he soon had to sit down once more.

Watson uttered a cry which was meant to be triumphant, although it came like a hoarse croak from his parched throat. Then the tears gushed into his eyes as he gazed again upon the flag. It almost seemed as if he were home again.

Nearer and nearer they rowed to the squadron. There were four ships of war, and now they could see the sailors walking the decks and the guns in the portholes.

"We'll be there in ten minutes now," said Watson, "and I think I can eat a—" He gasped and failed to finish the sentence. He half rose from his seat, relinquished the oars, with a despairing cry, and then, losing all consciousness, pitched over the gunwale into the sunlit waters of the Gulf.

George jumped up from the stern and stretched out his arm to seize the inanimate body of his friend. But the movement was too much for the equilibrium of the frail boat and for the balance of the boy. Out into the water shot George, overturning the craft until its keel was in the air.

George struck out for Watson and succeeded in grabbing him by the hair of his head just as he was about to disappear beneath the waves. Then he changed his hold upon the man, and with his left hand clutching the neck of Watson's coat he pulled to the side of the upturned boat. To this he held with his right hand like grim death, as he put his left arm around Watson's waist. The boy was panting for breath, and as weak as if he had been swimming for miles. Not until now had he thoroughly realized how hunger, exposure and privation had done their work. The next instant he felt a gentle paddling near him; he looked down and there was Waggie's wet but plucky little face.

"Hello! old boy," said George. "I would rather drown myself than see you go under. So here goes!"

He released his hold of Watson and by a quick movement swung Waggie to the upturned bottom of the boat, near the keel. The tiny animal gave a bark that said "Thank you," as plainly as if he had spelled out every letter of the two words. George again seized Watson and clung to the boat more tightly than before. The soldier gradually came back to consciousness.

"What have I done?" he asked, staring wildly at the hot sun above him.

"Nothing!" answered George. "Only try to hold on to the boat. For I'm so worn out that it's all I can do to keep myself up."

Watson clawed frantically at the gunwale. At last he managed to grasp it with his tired, bony fingers.

"I can't hold on much longer!" suddenly said George, in a faint voice. His hands were numb; he felt as if he had not one particle of strength left in his emaciated body. His mind began to wander. He forgot that he was in the Gulf of Mexico; he thought he was holding on to a horse. By and by the horse began to move. Could he keep his grasp on the animal? No; not much longer. The horse started to canter, and the boy felt himself slipping backward. In reality he had let go his hold upon the boat. So, too, had Watson. The next moment was a blank. The sun came burning down on poor Waggie, perched on top of the craft, as he growled piteously at the sight of master and friend drifting helplessly away.

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When George recovered his senses he was lying on the deck of one of the war-vessels, and Waggie was barking in an effort to awaken him. Near him sat Watson, with a happy smile on his wan face. Around him was a group of officers.

"By Jove," one of the latter was saying. "Those poor fellows had a narrow escape. It was well we saw their plight and sent a boat after them. It got there just in time."

"Well, my boys," asked an older officer (who was evidently the captain of the vessel), in a gruff but not unkindly tone, "what on earth *are* you, and where did you come from? You don't appear to have been gorging yourselves lately."

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When George and Watson were a little stronger they told the story of their adventures, in brief but graphic terms, to the interested group of officers. When they had finished the Captain came up to them, and put a hand upon the shoulder of each.

"You fellows want a good round meal!" he said emphatically. "And after that some clothes will not come amiss, I guess."

To this they readily assented. How delicious the food tasted when it was served to them at the officers' mess; and how comfortable but strange they felt when, an hour later, they were arrayed in all the glory of clean underclothes, shoes, nice suits and naval caps. When they came on deck again, how the sailors did cheer. And Waggie! How fine and cheerful he looked, to be sure, all decked out in ribbons provided by the tars; and how pleased he felt with the whole world since he had eaten—but it would take too long to detail the *menu* with which the dog had been regaled. The wonder was that he survived the spoiling that he received during the next four days.

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At the end of that time he accompanied his master and Watson, who were sent on a government vessel to New York. From New York they traveled by rail to Washington, where they were to relate their experiences, and the result of the railroad chase, to President Lincoln.

First they saw Mr. Stanton, the Secretary of War, who made them dine and spend the night as his guests, and who the next morning took them to the White House. George trembled when he was ushered into the private office of Mr. Lincoln. He felt nervous at the thought of encountering the man who, more than any one else, held in his hand the destiny of the nation. But, when a tall, gaunt person, with wonderful, thoughtful eyes and a homely face, illumined by a melancholy but attractive smile, walked up to him and asked: "Is this George Knight?" all the boy's timidity vanished. As he answered, "Yes, I am George Knight," he felt as if he had known the President for years.

Mr. Lincoln listened to the narrative of the two fugitives—now fugitives no longer—and put to them many questions. When the recital was over the President asked: "Do you know that poor General Mitchell has died from yellow fever?"

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They answered in the affirmative, for Mr. Stanton had given them this unwelcome information upon their arrival in Washington.

Mr. Lincoln pulled a paper from one of the pockets of his ill-fitting black coat and handed it to Watson.

"Here is a commission for you as a Captain in the regular army," he explained. "I know of no one who could deserve it more than Captain Watson."

"How can I ever thank you, Mr. President?" cried Watson.

"The thanks are all on my side," answered the President, smiling. "That reminds me of a little story. When—"

Mr. Stanton, who was standing immediately behind his chief, began to cough in a curious, unnatural way.

A gleam of humor came into the unfathomable eyes of the President.

"Mr. Stanton never appreciates my stories," he said, quizzically, "and when he coughs that way I know what he means." Then, turning to George, he continued: "My lad, you are one of the heroes of the war! I had intended giving you, too, a commission, but I find you are too young. But I suppose you want to see more of the war?"

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"Indeed I do, Mr. Lincoln!" cried George.

"Well, since poor Mitchell is dead, how would you like to go as a volunteer aid on the staff of one of our generals?"

"The very thing!" said the boy, with ardor.

Mr. Lincoln faced his Secretary of War.

"You don't always let me have my own way, Mr. Secretary," he observed, dryly, "but I think you must oblige me in this."

"The boy's pretty young," answered the Secretary, "but I fancy it can be arranged."

"Very good," said the President. "And now, George, if you behave with half the pluck in the future that you have shown in the past, I'll have no fear for you. Do your duty, and some day you may live to see—as I may not live to see—a perfect reunion between North and South; for God surely does not intend that one great people shall divide into two separate nations."

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George left the White House in a perfect glow of enthusiasm. The very next day he was ordered to join the staff of General George H. Thomas, and he joyfully obeyed the summons to leave Washington. His only regret was in parting from Waggie, whom he was obliged to entrust to the care of a friend of Secretary Stanton's. The boy saw plenty of army life throughout the rest of the war. When the conflict was over he hurried back to Washington, found Waggie alive and well, and then went home with him to Cincinnati. Here he had a startling but delightful reunion with his father, whose mysterious disappearance had been due to his capture by the Confederates, and an incarceration for many months in an out-of-the-way Southern prison.

There were many things of interest which George did not learn until after the last gun of the war had been fired. One was that Watson had made a brilliant record for himself as a regular army officer, and had come out of the war with a sound skin and the rank of Colonel. Another piece of news concerned the fortunes of the soldiers who escaped from the Atlanta jail. Eight of the engine party and the East Tennessee Captain (this number including Watson and George), managed to escape, and finally reached the Northern lines in safety. The six prisoners who were recaptured, among them Macgreggor and Jenks, escaped hanging, and were exchanged for the same number of Southern prisoners. Jenks was killed at the battle of Gettysburg; Macgreggor served through the war, was honorably discharged as a Major of Volunteers, and finally developed into a successful physician in the growing city of Chicago.

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Waggie has been gathered to his canine forefathers these many years. But it is comforting to reflect that he lived to a fine old age, and died full of honors. He was known far and wide as the "Civil War Dog"—a title which caused him to receive much attention, and a good many dainty bits of food in addition to his regular meals. Let it be added, however, that his digestion and his bright disposition remained unimpaired until the end.

George Knight is now a prosperous merchant, happily married, and living in St. Louis. He is proud in the possession of a son who saw active service in the Spanish-American War as an officer in the navy. Before we say good-bye to our hero let us record that he never forgot the kindness of the Rev. Mr. Buckley, who had saved his life as a boy. Many a Christmas-time gift testified to the gratitude of the Northerner.

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In the desk in George Knight's office is a bundle of letters from the old clergyman. The last of these to be received reads as follows:

"DEAR FRIEND GEORGE:

"This is Christmas Day—the last, I am sure, that I will ever see. I am too feeble to write you more than my best wishes for the holiday season, and to say—Thank God, the war has been over these twenty years and we are once more a united nation. No North, no South, no East, no West—but simply America. I have been spared to see this—and I am grateful.

"Cordially yours,
"AMOS BUCKLEY."

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CHASING AN IRON HORSE; OR, A BOY'S ADVENTURES IN THE CIVIL WAR ***

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