[Frontispiece: RODNEY BIDS HIS MOTHER FAREWELL.]

CASTLEMON'S WAR SERIES,

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RODNEY THE PARTISAN

BY

HARRY CASTLEMON,

AUTHOR OF "GUNBOAT SERIES," "ROCKY MOUNTAIN SERIES," "SPORTSMAN'S CLUB SERIES," ETC., ETC.

Four Illustrations by Geo. G. White.

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RODNEY, THE PARTISAN.

CHAPTER I.

RODNEY KEEPS HIS PROMISE.

"So you are going to stick to your uniform, are you? I thought perhaps you would be glad to see yourself in citizen's clothes once more, and so I told Jane to put one of your old suits on the bed where you would be sure to see it."

It was Mrs. Gray who spoke, and her words were addressed to her son Rodney, who just then stepped out of the hall upon the wide gallery where his father and mother were sitting. Rodney had been at home about half an hour just long enough, in fact, to take a good wash and exchange his fatigue suit for a sergeant's full uniform.

In the first volume of this series of books we told of the attentions our Union hero, Marcy Gray, received while he was on the way to his home in North Carolina, and how very distasteful and annoying they were to him. We said that the passengers on his train took him for just what he wasn't—a rebel soldier fresh from the seat of war, or a recruit on his way to join some Southern regiment—and praised and petted him accordingly. Marcy didn't dare tell the excited men around him that he was strong for the Union, that he had refused to cheer the Stars and Bars when they were hoisted on the tower of the Barrington Military Academy, and that if a war came he hoped the secessionists would be thrashed until they were brought to their senses—Marcy did not dare give utterance to these sentiments, for fear that some of the half tipsy passengers in his car might use upon him the revolvers they flourished about so recklessly. He was obliged to sail under false colors until he reached Boydtown in his native State, where Morris, his mother's coachman, was waiting for him. Rodney Gray, the rebel, who you will remember left the academy a few weeks before Marcy did, received just as much attention during his homeward journey. Sumter had not yet been fired upon, but the passengers on the train were pretty certain it was going to be, and gave it as their opinion that if the "Lincolnites" attempted "subjugation" they would be neatly whipped for their pains. Being in full sympathy with the passengers Rodney was not afraid to tell who and what he was.

"I am neither a soldier nor a recruit," he said over and over again, when some enthusiastic rebel shook him by the hand and praised him for so promptly responding to the President's call for volunteers. "I am a Barrington cadet on my way home, and I am under promise to enlist inside of twenty-four hours after I get there. Do you see this gray suit? I shall not wear any other color until the independence of the Southern States has been acknowledged by the world."

Such sentiments as these never failed to "bring down the car," as Rodney afterward expressed it when describing some of the incidents of his journey from Barrington, and many of the passengers assured him that he would be at liberty to put on a citizen's suit in less than six months.

"The fighting won't amount to anything," said one, who talked as if he thought himself able to whip the whole Yankee nation alone and unaided. "It will be over in a good deal less than six months, but you gallant fellows will have to wear your uniforms a little longer in order to escort President Davis to Washington. He will dictate terms of peace in the enemy's capital."

"If our President will only do that, I will stay in the army ten years if it is necessary," declared Rodney, and he meant every word of it, for he was carried away by his enthusiasm.

A good many foolish notions of this sort were drummed into Rodney Gray's head during his two days' journey from Barrington to Mooreville. He afterward had occasion to recall some of them, and to wonder how he ever came to accept them as the truth. But he kept his word so far as his uniform was concerned; that is to say, he returned to the closet the citizen's suit that had been laid out for him, and rigged himself up as if he were going on dress parade. His mother looked at him with fond and admiring eyes as he stepped upon the gallery and seated himself in the easy chair that one of the attentive darkies placed for him; for Rodney was an only child, and a very fine looking young soldier besides.

"Yes," he said, in reply to his mother's question. "I am going to stick to my uniform. It is the color that has been adopted by our government, and, as I told some of the passengers on the train, I'll not wear any other until we have secured our independence."

"Nobly said!" exclaimed Rodney's mother, who was as strong for secession as Marcy Gray's mother was for the Union. "I was sure you would not stay at home very long after your State called for your services. I don't think you will have to wear the gray for a very great while, but your father thinks he sees trouble in the near future."

"I don't think so my dear; I know so," replied Mr. Gray, in answer to an inquiring look from Rodney. "The North can raise more men than we can."

"That was what the colonel said when I asked him to let me come home," exclaimed Rodney. "He said, further, that the Northern people are not cowardly—they are only patient; and that there will come a time when their patience will all be gone, and then they will sweep over us like a cloud of locusts."

"And did you believe any such nonsense?" inquired Mrs. Gray. "What will
our brave people be doing while the hated Yankees are sweeping over us?

Don't you remember our President said the fighting must all be done on Northern soil?"

"It takes two to make a bargain," said Mr. Gray, quietly.

"That's just what Marcy said," exclaimed Rodney. "That boy is going to get himself into business before he gets through talking. He's Union to the back-bone, and while I was at the academy he didn't hesitate to speak his sentiments as often as he felt like it. If he keeps that up when he gets home his neighbors may take him in hand."

"I am sorry to hear that about Marcy," said Mr. Gray, thoughtfully. "He is a traitor and his mother must be another. I wonder where Sailor Jack stands. By the way, where is Jack?"

"He was at sea the last I heard, and I suppose Marcy and his mother are greatly worried about him. And well they may be; for of course we'll have a big fleet of privateers afloat within a month after war is declared. But, father, do you think there is going to be a war?"

"I am sure of it," answered Mr. Gray.

"And it will be fought on Southern soil?"

"It will."

"Well, how long do you think I shall have to wear this uniform?"

"If you don't take it off until the South gains her independence, you will have to wear it as long as you live."

"Why, father!" exclaimed Mrs. Gray, dropping her sewing into her lap and looking fixedly at her husband, who leaned back in his big chair watching the smoke from his cigar. "How can you bring yourself to utter such treasonable language in your son's hearing? You know you do not believe a word of it."

"Never fear for me, mother," said Rodney, with a laugh. "I know where you stand and I am with you."

"There was nothing treasonable in what I said, and I do believe every word of it," replied Mr. Gray. "I am as firm a friend to the South as any man in the state, and will make as many sacrifices as the next one to secure her independence. Why shouldn't I? Every thing I've got in the world is right here, and if the South doesn't succeed in her efforts to free herself, we'll be beggars, the last one of us. I wish from the bottom of my heart that when our armies get started they might sweep every abolitionist in the country into Massachusetts Bay; but they'll not be able to do it. The Union has cost the Northern people so much blood and treasure that they will not permit it to be destroyed."

"I reckon the South had about as much to do with the war of the Revolution as the North did," declared Rodney.

"And another thing, the Northern people will not fight," Mrs. Gray hastened to add. "Wasn't it the South that did the most toward whipping Mexico?"

"And wasn't it the North that did the most toward whipping England?" retorted Mr. Gray. "Look here," he added, starting up in his chair when he saw Rodney and his mother look toward each other with a smile of disbelief on their faces. "You must have forgotten your history, you two. During the Revolutionary War the colonies raised two hundred and thirty-two thousand men to fight England, and of this number the North raised one hundred and seventy-five thousand, or more than three-fourths of the whole. Massachusetts gave sixty-eight thousand; Connecticut gave thirty-two thousand; Pennsylvania twenty-six thousand, and New York eighteen thousand; while that miserable little South Carolina gave only six thousand. And yet she has the impudence to talk and act as if she owned the country. It would have been money in her pocket and ours if she had been sunk out of sight in the Atlantic before she was made into a state."

There were three things that surprised Rodney so much that for a minute or two he could not speak—his father's sentiments, the earnest and emphatic manner in which he expressed them, and the items of history to which he had just listened and which were quite new to him, as they may be to more than one boy who reads this story. But Mr. Gray was like a good many other men in the South. He did not believe in disunion (although he did believe in State Rights), but now that the South was fully committed to it, he knew that he must do what he could to make the attempt at separation successful. If it failed, he and every other slave-holder in the South would be financially ruined.

"Then I suppose you don't want me to go into the army?" said Rodney, at length.

"I didn't say so; I didn't so much as hint at such a thing," replied his father, hastily.

"But what's the use of enlisting if I am going to get whipped? I don't see any fun in that."

"Oh, we've got to fight; we have gone too far to back out. We must hold out until England and France recognize our independence—and that will not be long, for England must have cotton—and then we can snap our fingers at the Yankees. You can take your choice of one of two things: Stay at home and look out for your mother and let me go, or go yourself."

"You stay and let me go," answered the boy promptly. "I gave my word to some of the fellows that I would enlist within twenty-four hours after I reached home, if I could get to a recruiting office, and they promised to do the same."

"Very well," said Mr. Gray, "I shall not say one word to turn you from your purpose, and neither will your mother,"

Mrs. Gray started when she heard these words. She had talked very bravely about "giving her boy his sword and shield and sending him forth to battle," and she had thought she could do it without a tremor; but now that the matter was brought right home to her, she found, as many another mother did, that it was going to be the hardest task she had ever set for herself. Rodney was safe at school, hundreds of miles away from her when she uttered those patriotic words; now he was within hearing of her voice, and all she had to do was to tell him to mount his horse and go. She could not do it; but her husband, who believed that the matter might as well be settled one time as another, continued—

"There is an independent company of cavalry camped about a mile the other side of Mooreville, and I know they would be glad to take you in. The company is made up of the very best men in the county, many of whom are your personal friends, and every member has to be balloted for."

"They are nearly all wealthy, and some of them are going to take their body servants to the front with them," added Mrs. Gray, trying to look cheerful although her eyes were filled with tears. "Your father and I spent an afternoon in their camp, and you don't know how nicely they are situated—all the luxuries the country affords on their tables, and then they are so full of martial ardor!"

"Yes," assented Mr. Gray. "We found it a regulation holiday camp—nothing to do and plenty of darkies to do it. They were having no end of fun, lying around in the shade abusing the Yankees. But wait until they meet those same Yankees in battle, and their blacks run away from them, and then they have to do their own cooking and forage for their bacon and hard-tack, and then they will know what soldiering means."

"Now, father," protested Mrs. Gray. "Why do you talk so when Rodney is on the eve of enlisting? You surely do not wish to discourage him?"

"By no means. I only want to make him see, before he swears away his liberty for the next twelve months, that he is not going on a Fourth of July picnic. If he knows what is before him, he will not be surprised or disheartened when the hard times come."

"I know a little something about soldiering, and you need have no fears that anything father can say will discourage me," Rodney said to his mother. "I have passed my word, and consider myself as good as enlisted already. Who commands that company of cavalry?"

"Bob Hubbard is the one who is getting it up, but there isn't any real commander yet. The boys do just about as they please, and will keep on doing so until the officers are elected, which will be when they have eighty men enrolled. Bob says that if they elect him captain, and I reckon he stands as good a chance as anybody, the boys will have to come down to Limerick and quit leaving camp and staying in town over night whenever the notion takes them."

"Have they seen any service at all?" asked Rodney.

"None except what some of them saw while they were members of the State militia," answered his father. "They helped capture the United States arsenal at Baton Rouge and hoist the Pelican flag over it, and you would have thought by the way they acted that they had done something grand. But the work was accomplished without the firing of a shot, the major in command offering to surrender if a force of six or eight hundred men was brought against him. By the way," added Mr. Gray getting upon his feet and tossing aside the stump of his cigar, "I expected you to do just what you have decided upon, and if you feel like taking a walk around to the stable before dinner, I will show you the horse I bought for you last week. Every 'Ranger' (that's what Hubbard calls his men), furnishes his own horse, the government allowing a small sum for the use of it; and if the horse dies or is killed in battle, the unlucky Ranger is expected to get another the best way he can."

"Where is this company going to serve?" inquired Rodney.

"I don't know, and neither does Hubbard. They have offered to join a regiment that is being raised in New Orleans, but the colonel commanding says he can't take them unless they will give up their independent organization."

"Oh, I hope they'll not think of doing that."

"You needn't worry. More than one Swamp Fox like General Marion will come to the front before this thing is over, and Bob's company will not be left out in the cold. I haven't said much to your mother about your going into the service," Mr. Gray went on, throwing open the door of a box stall and holding out an ear of corn to a glossy, well-conditioned steed which came up to take a bite at it. "While she is strong for secession and very patriotic where other folks are concerned, she don't want any of the members of her own family to go to war. She thinks they are sure to be killed."

"That isn't at all like the women and girls around Barrington," replied Rodney, stepping into the stall and beginning a critical inspection of his new horse. "They'll not have any thing to do with a fellow who isn't willing to prove his devotion to the Confederacy. Where would we get the men to fight our battles if everybody thought as mother does?"

"Of course she hasn't said so," Mr. Gray hastened to explain. "She is too good a Southerner for that, but I know it is the way she feels. What do you think of your horse? He is part Denmark, and that is what makes him so gentle; and his Copper-bottom blood shows in his color. Almost all Copper-bottom colts are roans."

"He's a beauty," Rodney declared, with enthusiasm. "And as long as I keep him I'll never fall into the clutches of the Yankees. He ought to have speed."

(And the new horse did have speed, too, as Rodney discovered when he rode him over to the camp of the Rangers that afternoon in company with his father. He moved as if he were set on springs and showed himself impatient of restraint; but his motions were so easy that his rider was scarcely stirred in his seat.)

"Good-by, my son," said Mrs. Gray, when Rodney's horse and his father's were brought to the door after dinner, and the two stood on the gallery drawing on their gloves. "You belong to me now, but I suppose that when you come back you will belong to your country."

"Oh no: I can't rush things through in that style." answered the boy.
"I've got to be voted for, you know. But I shall certainly tell Mr.
Hubbard that I am ready to go if he will take me."

During the ride through the village of Mooreville to the camp beyond, the only indications Rodney saw of the martial spirit that everywhere animated the people were the Confederate and State flags that floated over all the business houses, and the red, white and blue rosettes, which were worn principally by the women and girls. Rodney was the only one in uniform, the Rangers not having decided how they would equip themselves when the time came for them to go to the front. Rodney was kept busy returning the salutes he received as he rode along, and now and then some young fellow would rush into the street to shake his hand, and inquire if he was going up to the camp to give in his name. The camp was not such a one as the Barrington cadets used to make when they took to the fields every summer to reduce to practice the military instruction they had received during the year. There were tents in abundance, but they were put up without any attempt at order, there were no guards out, and the few recruits there were in camp seemed to have nothing to do but lounge around under the trees, reading the papers and talking over the situation. Rodney thought they might as well have been at home for all the good they were doing there.

"This is a pretty way to learn soldiering," said he to Mr. Hubbard, who promptly showed himself when he heard the sound of horses' hoofs in front of his tent. "How many men have you? Will you take in my name?"

"You are just the fellow we want and I wish we could get fifty more like you," replied Mr. Hubbard, returning the cordial grasp of Rodney's hand. "The boys will certainly put you in for something or other. We haven't got down to business yet, but will next week. I suppose that all the military knowledge we get will be by hard knocks, because, being an independent company, we cannot call upon any army officer to drill us. We are studying the tactics all the time, but are in no hurry to get our uniforms until we know whether or not our services are going to be needed."

"Say," exclaimed Rodney, recalling to mind something that had been said to him on the train a few hours before. "If I were in your place I'd lose no time in getting ready to march. President Davis is

going to dictate terms of peace in Washington. Wouldn't you like to have your company escort him there?"

"Now, that's an idea," exclaimed Hubbard, while the recruits who were standing around listening to the conversation declared as one man that they would do and dare anything if they could only have a chance to present arms to the Confederate President when he walked into the White House. "The boys will all be here at roll-call to-night and I will speak to them about it. At the same time I will propose you for membership. You'll get in, of course, and perhaps you had better report tomorrow forenoon."

Although Rodney could not see the use of reporting, seeing that there was nothing to be done in camp, he promised to be on hand, and rode away to call upon some of his friends in the village. He found, somewhat to his relief, that there was not a single one among them who believed as his father did that the South was sure to fail in her efforts to dissolve the Union. They all thought as Rodney did—that the Northern people belonged to an inferior race, that there was no fight in them, and that the States having made the nation could unmake it whenever they felt like it. He learned also, to his no small indignation, that his father did not stand as high in the estimation of his neighbors as he might have done if he had not expressed his opinions with so much freedom. As he was about to leave the village for home just before dark, he encountered an old acquaintance of his, Tom Randolph by name, who had just returned from the camp.

"You're in, Rodney," said he, after he had given the Barrington boy a very limp hand to shake. "To-morrow forenoon we're going to elect officers and get down to business. Will you be up?"

Rodney replied that he would, and at the same time he wondered why it was that Randolph treated him so coolly. They never had been friends. They took a dislike to each other the first time they met, and the oftener they were thrown together, the stronger that dislike seemed to grow. They had always tried to treat each other with civility, but now there was something in Randolph's way of talking and acting that Rodney did not like.

"While you were up to camp to-day did any of the boys tell you that I am a candidate for second lieutenant of the company?" continued Randolph.

"You?" exclaimed Rodney, in genuine astonishment.

"Yes, me," replied Randolph, mimicing Rodney's tone and look of surprise. "And why haven't I as good a right as anybody, I should be pleased to know?"

"I suppose there is no law to prevent you from running for office, but you don't know the first thing about military matters. If the company was in line this minute, and you were second lieutenant of it, you couldn't go to your position unless somebody showed you where it was."

"Well, I can learn, can't I?" snapped Randolph. "You didn't know trail arms from right-shoulder shift when you first joined the academy, did you? The company ought to give me that place, for my father has done a heap for it with money and influence. Some who are now recruits held back because they were not able to fit themselves out decently, but father told them that the want of money need not stand in their way. If they would go ahead and enlist, he would see that they had horses, weapons, uniforms and everything else they wanted. He did what he could to promote enlistments instead of preaching up the doctrine that the South is going to be whipped and the slaves all made free."

Rodney knew well enough that this was a slap at his father, but he didn't see how he could resent it, for it was nothing but the truth.

"That's why I say that the company ought to make me an officer," continued Randolph, after a short pause. "I know you are all right, for I heard how you stood up for the Confederacy while you were at school, and I'll tell you what I'll do with you: If you will give me your vote for second lieutenant, I'll do what I can to have you elected third sergeant. The other places are spoken for."

"I am very much obliged to you," replied Rodney.

"Is it a bargain?"

"Not much. I'll not vote for a man to be placed over me unless he knows more than I do."

"Perhaps you want a commission yourself," said Randolph, with something like a sneer.

"No, I don't. I never thought of such a thing."

"Because if you do, I want to tell you that you can't get it," continued Randolph. "Your father hasn't done half as much for the company as he might have done, and the boy's don't like the way he talks."

"Then let's see the boys help themselves," answered Rodney, as he placed his foot in the stirrup and swung himself into the saddle. "Time will show who is willing to do the most for the success of the Confederacy, your father or mine."

So saying he put the roan colt into a gallop and set out for home.

CHAPTER II.

THE RANGERS ELECT OFFICERS.

When Rodney had left the village of Mooreville half a mile or so behind him, he threw the reins loose upon his horse's neck, thrust his hands deep into his pockets and thought over the conversation he had had with Tom Randolph. He had warned his cousin Marcy that the North Carolina people would be sure to turn the cold shoulder upon him on account of his Union principles, and now it seemed to Rodney that he was in pretty near the same predicament because his father believed and said that the seven seceding States, with two and a half millions of free persons, could not whip the loyal states and territories with twenty-five millions.

"It serves me just right," was Rodney's mental reflection. "I persecuted Marcy on account of his opinions, and now I am going to have a little of the same kind of treatment. No one but a red-hot secessionist has got any business in this part of the country."

When Rodney reached home he found his father there and supper waiting for him. He did not mention Tom Randolph's name, but he spent a good deal of time in thinking about him, and wondered how he would fare if Tom succeeded in winning the coveted commission. There were many ways in which a lieutenant could torment his subordinates, and Tom would be just mean enough to use all the power the law allowed him.

"I'll not take a thing to-morrow, even if it is offered to me," was the resolution Rodney made before he went to sleep that night. "I'll go out as a private and come back as a private, unless I can win promotion in the face of the enemy. Time makes all things right, and we'll see who will come out at the top of the heap—Tom Randolph or I."

The next morning about eight o'clock, Rodney seated himself in the carriage with his father and mother and was driven to the camp of the Rangers. It presented more of a holiday appearance now than it did the first time he saw it, for it had been cleaned up and decorated in honor of the occasion. The little grove in which the tents were pitched was thronged with visitors, the Rangers were out in full force and there was a good deal of "logrolling" going on. All the candidates had ballots prepared, and Rodney had scarcely set his foot on the ground before he was surrounded by a little group of recruits, all of whom were anxious to serve the Confederacy in the capacity of officers.

"We've got you down for third sergeant," said one. "We've arranged to push you for that position if you will vote for me for orderly and for Randolph for second lieutenant."

"Find out who the other candidates are before you make any promises," exclaimed another; and then, when no one was observing his movements, the speaker gave Rodney a wink and a nod which the latter could not fail to understand. He drew off on one side and the recruit, whose hands were full of ballots, went on to say:

"Randolph doesn't stand the ghost of a chance for the second lieutenancy, and he has good cheek to ask the boys to give it to him. He thinks he is going to run the company because his father has done so much for it."

"And he thinks he and his friends are going to keep me in the background because my father has done so little for it," added Rodney.

"Well, they can't do it, and they will find it out when the thing is put to the test. You have a military education and Randolph hasn't. That's one thing against him, and his overwhelming self-conceit is another. You are rather young to look for a commission in a company of men, but you will come in for the orderly sergeant's berth sure as shooting."

"I am obliged to those who suggested me for that place, but I'll not take it," said Rodney very decidedly. "I enlisted for a soldier."

"Well, what in the name of sense do you call the orderly?"

"I call him a clerk," answered Rodney.

"Why, I thought he was drill-master."

"Of awkward squads—yes,"

"Then can't you see that that is another reason why we need you in that berth? We all belong to the awkward squad now. You'll have to take it. We need a drill-master, and must have some one who knows enough to keep the company's books; and that's more than that friend of Randolph's can do. I want nothing for myself, for I am not a military man. Hubbard will come in for captain without opposition. It's the place he ought to have, for he has done more for us than anybody else, and Odell and Percy will be the lieutenants. Put those in the box when the time comes."

Rodney took the ballots that were placed in his hand, and just then some one called out:

"Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes! All you Rangers fall in in single rank here in front of headquarters, and be ready to cast your votes for captain."

Rodney laughed heartily.

"That's the deputy sheriff," said the recruit with whom he had been conversing, as the two hastened toward the captain's tent. "There isn't much military about that order."

"It'll do," replied Rodney. "The boys seem to understand it, and what more do you want?"

"Now answer to your names," continued the deputy; whereupon Rodney laughed again.

"What ought he to have said?" inquired his friend.

"Listen to roll-call, would be the proper order," said the Barrington boy. "But it's all right. Guerillas are not supposed to be posted in such things."

"But we are not guerillas."

"Look in your dictionary and you will find that you can't make us out to be anything else," replied Rodney.

The two fell in side by side and answered to their names when they were called. The Barrington boy supposed that nominations would now be in order, but it seemed that they had already been made from captain down to fourth corporal. The Rangers were faced to the right and ordered to march up one at a time and deposit their votes for captain in the ballot-box (a cigar box with a slot in the cover), beside which stood the three "inspectors of election" who were to count the votes after they were all in, and who had been chosen before Rodney arrived on the ground. When the balloting was completed the company had countermarched twice, and stood on the same ground it occupied before the ceremony began. One of the inspectors emptied the contents of the cigar box on the table, another opened the first ballot that came to his hand and called out the name that was written upon it, and the third kept count. The result was just what Rodney's friend told him it would be.

"There were sixty-five votes cast, and they one and all bear the name of our popular friend Robert Hubbard," said the inspector and the announcement was received with cheers.

"Speech! Speech!" shouted the Rangers.

"No, no!" replied the newly elected captain. "There are two lieutenants, one orderly sergeant, five duty sergeants and four corporals yet to be elected, and we don't want to waste any time in foolishness."

"Have you got your ballots ready for first lieutenant?" inquired the deputy sheriff, who continued to act as master of ceremonies. "Then face to the right again and march yourselves around here and put 'em in the box. Laugh away, Rodney," he added, smiling good-naturedly and shaking his head at the Barrington boy. "We'll get the hang of these things after a while."

The voting was gone through with the same as before, and there was more cheering and clapping of hands when the inspector announced that Hiram Odell had been unanimously elected to the office of first lieutenant; but following the example of his superior he declined to waste time in speech-making.

And now Rodney Gray began to take a deeper interest in what was going on. The second lieutenant would be voted for next, and Tom Randolph, whose father had done so much for the company, had had

the impudence to bring himself forward as a candidate. It couldn't be possible, Rodney thought, that such an ignorant upstart stood any chance of election when his opponent was so popular a young man as Albert Percy. He stood where he could see Tom's face, and there was not a particle of color in it. If he could have looked into the ballot Tom held in his hand, he would have found that the name written upon it was that of Thomas Randolph himself. The candidate intended to vote in his own favor and he did; but it did not bring him the coveted office. When the result was announced he had just twelve votes. All the others were cast for Albert Percy. Then there was more cheering, but Tom didn't join in; and neither did he shout out a responsive "Aye" when it was proposed that the election be declared unanimous. On the contrary he looked daggers at every man in the ranks whose eye he could reach; and he could reach more than half of them, for the line was almost as crooked as a rail fence.

"That's a pretty way for them to treat me after all the exertions my father has made and the money he has promised to spend for the company," said Tom to the sympathizing friend who stood next on the right. "I believe I'll haul out."

"Don't do it," was the reply. "Stay in and help beat the rest of that ticket. It's all cut and dried."

"Of course it is and has been for some time. I could see it now if I had only half an eye; but they have been so sly about it that I never suspected it before. Slip out of the line and tell everybody who voted for me to vote against Gray, no matter what they put him up for. We'll show them that they don't run the company."

"Have you got your votes ready for orderly sergeant?" inquired the deputy.

"I'd like to say a word before the vote is taken," said Captain Hubbard, without giving any one time to answer the sheriff's question, "and that is, that the office of orderly sergeant is one of the most important in the company."

"I wonder how he happens to know so much," whispered Tom Randolph to the Ranger who touched elbows with him on the right; and in a minute more he found out.

"Ever since I began taking an active part in getting up this company," continued the captain, "I have been in correspondence with a military friend who has taken pains to post me on some matters that are not touched upon in the tactics. Among other things he warned me that if we intend to do business in military form, we must be careful whom we select for the office of orderly. He ought to be a thorough-going soldier—"

"Gray, Gray! Sergeant Rodney Gray!" yelled a score of voices.

"Very well, gentlemen," said the captain, who looked both surprised and pleased. "If he is your choice I have nothing to say beyond this: I shall be more than satisfied with his election."

"Randolph, Randolph!" shouted Tom's friends, believing that if he could not get one office he might be willing to take another; but it turned out that their candidate was not that sort of fellow.

"I don't want it, and what's more to the point, I won't accept it," said he, wrathfully. "If any one votes for me he will only be wasting his ballot, for I am going to leave the company. Do you suppose I am such a fool as to allow myself to be set up and bowled over by Rodney Gray?" he added in an undertone, in response to a mild protest from his friend on the right. "His supporters are in the majority and no one else need look for a show."

Everybody was surprised to hear this declaration from the lips of one who had thus far taken the deepest interest in the organization and done all in his power to help it along, and several of the Rangers leaned forward to get a glimpse of the speaker's face to see if he really meant what he said. Rodney glanced toward the captain to see how he took it, and learned what it was that induced the defeated candidate to take this stand. Leaning upon his cane just inside the door of the captain's tent was Mr. Randolph, whose face was fully as black as Tom's, and who nodded approvingly at every word the angry young man uttered.

"I haven't been sworn in yet, and am as free to go and come as I was a month ago," declared Tom.

"For the matter of that, so are we all," answered the captain, who had known a week beforehand that young Randolph was sure to be defeated, and that he would take it very much to heart. "But I considered myself bound from the time I put my name to this muster-roll. We can't be sworn in except by a State officer, for the minute we consent to that, that minute we give up our freedom and render ourselves liable to be ordered to the remotest point in the Confederacy. We are partisans, and never will surrender our right to do as we please."

Captain Hubbard and his company of Rangers were not the only dupes there were in the Confederacy at that moment. It was well known that the new government was in full sympathy with partisan organizations; and its agents industriously circulated the report that it would not only aid in the formation of such organizations, but would allow them full liberty of action after they were sworn into the service of their State. The government knew the temper of the Southern people, and was well aware that the desire to emulate the example of such heroes as Marion would draw into the service many a dashing youngster who might otherwise stay out of it. What could be more alluring to a hot-head like Rodney Gray than the wild, free, and glorious life which the simple word "partisan" conjured up? The ruse, for that's just what it was, proved successful. Partisan companies sprung into existence all over the South, but in less than twelve months after the war began there was not one of them in the service. Neither were there any such things as State troops.

When Morgan and Forrest were first heard of they were known and acknowledged as partisans; and the former carried his partisanship so far that when General Buckner declined to give him permission to act upon his own responsibility, he took possession of a deserted house, went into camp there, and supported his men out of his own pocket; but before the war closed both he and Forrest were Confederate generals, and their men were regularly sworn into the Confederate service.

We said that the State troops also had ceased to exist, and the following incident proves it: When the Governor of Arkansas called upon his troops, who were serving in the Army of the Center, to come home at once and save their State from threatened invasion, General Beauregard ought to have permitted them to obey the summons. He could not do otherwise and be consistent, for if the eleven rebellious States made the Confederacy, they surely had the right to unmake it. But did he live up to the principles for which he was fighting? On the contrary he surrounded those Arkansas troops with a wall of gleaming bayonets backed by frowning batteries, and gave them just five minutes to make up their minds whether or not they would return to duty. The government at Richmond was a despotism of the worst sort, as more than one poor, deluded rebel found to his sorrow; and yet Jefferson Davis and the rest of them stoutly maintained that they were fighting for the right of the States to do as they pleased.

"I don't consider myself bound to stay in the company for no other reason than because my name is on that muster-roll," said Randolph.

"Stick to it and we'll back you up," whispered the recruit on Tom's right.

"If I drop out of the ranks will you come too?" whispered Randolph, in reply.

"I will, and so will all the rest."

Being thus encouraged Randolph stepped out of the line and walked off toward his father's carriage, to which his indignant mother had already beat a dignified retreat. When he had gone a little distance he looked behind him and saw, with no little satisfaction, that he was followed by eleven others who were displeased by the way the election was going.

They were the ones who had been urged into the company by Mr. Randolph, who had promised to see them well fitted out with horses and weapons, and of course they felt bound to follow the example of his son. There were those who believed that Mr. Randolph would not have taken so much interest in the company if he had not believed that every recruit he brought into it would cast a vote for Tom.

Here was a pretty state of affairs, thought Captain Hubbard, who looked troubled rather than vexed. He did not care so much for the desertion of young Randolph and his friends (although the unexpected withdrawal of twelve men from his command was no small matter), but he did care for the spirit that prompted their action. It was a rule or ruin policy he did not like to see manifested at that juncture. He was well enough acquainted with Randolph to know that he would not be satisfied with simply deserting the company, but would try in all ways to be revenged upon every member of it who had voted against him. While the captain was thinking about it, somebody tried to make matters worse by setting up a loud hiss, and in an instant the sound was carried along the whole length of the line. It wasn't stopped, either, until Rodney Gray stepped to the front.

"Mr. Commander," said he, raising his hand to his cap with a military flourish, "I don't want this position. The officers already chosen have been fairly elected, but I'll vote for Randolph for the next highest office in the gift of the company, if he can be induced to come back."

"Haven't you heard him say that he don't want it and won't take it?" replied the captain. "I think the Rangers know what they are doing. Proceed with the election."

"But, Captain, I don't want to be a clerk," protested Rodney. "I want to be a soldier. Aside from his writing, the orderly has little to do but loaf about camp all the while, keeping an eye on the company

property, signing requisitions and drilling awkward squads, and that's a job I don't want. What's more, without any intention of being disrespectful, I'll not take it. There must be some here who want it, and who can do that sort of work as well, if not better than I can. If you think you must put me in for something, let me be a duty sergeant, so that I will have a chance to go on a scout now and then."

So saying the Barrington boy made another flourish with his hand and stepped back to his place in the ranks with military precision.

"Now, Rodney, take that back," said Lieutenant Percy, with most unbecoming familiarity. "You are the only military man in the company, and I don't see how we can get along without you."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Rodney," chimed in Captain Hubbard. "You take the position, and I will promise that you shall go out on a scout as often as you please."

The Barrington boy's face relaxed into a broad grin.

"Captain," said he, "what sort of an organization is this any way—a mob or a military company?"

"Now, what is the use of your asking such a question as that?" demanded the captain, rather sharply.

"Well, then, if it is a military company, I suppose you intend to be governed by military rules, do you not?"

"Of course we do, if we have brains enough to find out what those rules are."

"I have no fears on that score; and when you find out what those rules are, you will see that you have no business to let me go out on a scout as often as I please."

"What's the reason I haven't?" exclaimed the captain. "I command the company, don't I?"

"You certainly do."

"And haven't I a right to do as I please?"

"That depends upon circumstances. Do you intend to remain right here about home?"

"Not by a jugful. We're going to belong to some part of the army, if we have to go clear up to Missouri to find a commander who will take us."

"Then you will find that you can't do as you please. The minute that commander accepts you, he will swear you and all of us into the service."

"After we have been sworn into the service of the State?"

"Certainly."

"I don't believe it," said Captain Hubbard, bluntly. "He wouldn't have any right to do it."

The boy's words raised a chorus of dissent all along the line, and
Lieutenant Odell said, as soon as he could make himself heard:

"You are way off the track, Rodney. What did we secede for if it wasn't to prove the doctrine of State Rights? If we are going to give our liberty up to a new government, we might as well have stayed under the old." And all the Rangers uttered a hearty "That's so."

"You'll see," replied Rodney, who was greatly amused by the look of astonishment his words had brought to the faces around him. "A general would look pretty accepting the services of a company he couldn't command, wouldn't he, now?"

"But he could command us," said everybody in the line; and Captain Hubbard added: "I'd promise that we would obey him as promptly and readily as any of his regular troops."

"But that wouldn't satisfy him. He'd want the power to make us obey him, or we might take it into our heads to leave him when things didn't go to suit, just as Randolph and his friends have left us. If we should try any little game like that in the face of the enemy, he might have the last one of us shot."

"What do you think of the prospect, boys?" said the captain, pulling out his handkerchief and mopping his face with it. He was all in the dark and wanted somebody to suggest something.

"Look here, Rodney," said Lieutenant Percy. "If you knew our company was to go up in smoke what did you join it for?"

"I don't believe it is going up in smoke," was the reply. "I certainly hope it isn't, for I am under promise to go into the service, and would rather go with my friends and neighbors than with strangers; but if we are going to bear arms, we've got to have authority from somebody to do it."

"Why, we'll get that from the State of Louisiana," exclaimed the Rangers, almost as one man. "The State is supreme, no one outside of it has a right to command our services, and State Rights will be our battle-cry, if we need one."

"All right," exclaimed Rodney. "I am here to share the fortunes of the company, whatever they may be, but I can't take the position you have so kindly offered me, and I beg you will not urge me further. Give it to some one who wants it, and I will do all I can to help him."

"Well, that's different," said the captain, who seemed to be much relieved. "Fall out and prepare your ballots; and you had better fix 'em all up while you are about it, so that there may be no further delay."

The order to "fall out" was quite unnecessary, for the ranks were pretty well broken before the captain gave it. He allowed them half an hour in which to write out their ballots, and then the line was reformed, after a fashion, and the voting went on; and although the results were in the main satisfactory, there were some long faces among the Rangers.

"Never mind," said Rodney, who had been elected first duty sergeant. "You outsiders may have a chance yet. I'll bet a picayune that if this company sees any service at all, it will not be mustered out with the same officers it has now. Bone your tactics night and day, and then if there is an examination, you will stand as good a chance as anybody. Captain, who is going to commission you?"

"I have been commissioned already; that is to say, I have been authorized by the governor to raise a company of independent cavalry to be mustered into the State service. That is all right, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is," replied the boy; and then he walked off to find his father, thoughtfully pulling his under lip as he went.

"What's the matter?" inquired Mr. Gray, as his son approached the place where he was standing. "Wasn't the election satisfactory? I thought the best men were chosen."

"I wasn't thinking about that," was the answer. "If we are mustered into the service of the State, we must of course be sworn in. This State is a part of the Confederacy; and if the Confederacy calls upon Louisiana for troops then what?"

"Why, then you would have to go. I reckon," replied one of the planters who was talking with his father.

"Yes, I reckon we would: and we'd have to take the oath to support the Confederacy, and that would take us out from under the control of the State and make us Confederate troops, wouldn't it? It's a sort of mixed-up mess and I don't see where our independence comes in. But the boys seem to think it is all right and I suppose it is."

But it wasn't all right, and the sequel proved it.

CHAPTER III.

DRILL AND PARADES.

When the Rangers had broken ranks, which they did without orders as soon as the fourth corporal had been elected, the captain and his lieutenants suddenly thought of something and posted off to find Rodney Gray.

"Look here," said the former, somewhat nervously. "What's the next thing on the programme?"

"Drill, guard-mount and all that sort of thing; but principally drill," answered Rodney. "If I were in your place I would send for a copy of the army regulations without loss of time."

"Where'll I get them?"

"Write to the commanding officer at New Orleans, and the minute they get here, turn this camp into a

camp of instruction with written regulations, so that every member of the company may know what is required of him—*reveille* at five A.M., breakfast at six, sick-call at seven, inspection of company parade grounds at eight, squad drill at half past, and—"

"Hold on," exclaimed Lieutenant Percy. "You will have to put that in writing. I never could remember it in the world."

"You'll have to, and a good deal more like it," replied the Barrington boy. "It's nothing to what I had to keep constantly in mind while I was at school. I had to walk a chalk-mark, I tell you, or I'd have lost my *chevrons.*"

"I suppose the hardest part of the work will be training our horses," observed Lieutenant Odell. "Mine is pretty wild."

"No matter for that if he is only intelligent. He'll learn the drill in less time than you will, I'll bet you. But we'll not need our horses for a month to come."

"What's the reason we won't? We're cavalry."

"I know it; but how are you going to teach your horses the movements unless you know them yourselves? Suppose we were in line in two ranks and the command was given "Without doubling, right face." The horses don't know where to go but their riders must, in order to rein the animals in their places. See? Oh, there's more work than fun in soldiering."

"Well now, look here," said the captain again. "I don't want to take the boys away from home and shut them up here for nothing, and yet I don't want to waste any valuable time, for we may be called upon before we know it. Will you drill a volunteer squad here every forenoon?"

"I will, and be glad to do it. I hope they will turn out strong, for you will find that the workers are the men that make the soldiers. I am glad we've got a drum and fife. You don't know how hard it would be for me to drill a large squad without some kind of music to help them keep step."

And so it was settled that Camp Randolph (it had been named after Tom's father when the Confederate flag was first run up to the masthead, and sorry enough the Rangers were for it now), was to become a camp of instruction, and that Sergeant Gray was to drill a volunteer squad every pleasant forenoon, and spend two hours every afternoon in teaching the company officers their duties.

The young soldier had undertaken a big contract, but he went about it as though he meant business, and in less than a week succeeded in convincing some of the members of his company that he was just a trifle too particular to be of any use. The strict discipline in vogue at Barrington was promptly introduced at Camp Randolph, and not the slightest departure from the tactics was tolerated for an instant. It made the spectators smile to see full-grown men ordered about by this imperious youngster who was not yet seventeen years of age, and the sight aroused the ire of Tom Randolph, who now and then rode out to the camp to watch the drill and criticise the drill-master. He wanted to learn something too, for Tom had an idea that he might one day have a company of his own. His father suggested it to him, and Tom lost no time in talking it up among his friends. To his great disgust Tom had learned that some of these friends were getting "shaky." As time wore on and the Rangers began to show proficiency under the severe drilling to which they were daily subjected, these friends began to think and say that they were afraid they had been a little too hasty in withdrawing from the company just because Tom Randolph could not get the office he wanted, and the first mounted drill that was held confirmed them in the opinion. Due notice had been given of the drill, and the whole town and all the planters for miles around, turned out to see it. Of course the horses were green but their riders understood their business as well as could be expected, and the spectators, one and all, declared that it was a very creditable showing.

We do not, of course, mean to say that Randolph and his father and mother and a few other dissatisfied ones were pleased with the drill. They were rather disappointed to find that the Rangers could do so well without the aid of the twelve deserters. They came to witness it because their neighbors came, one of them, at least, being animated by the hope that the spirited horses would become so restive when they heard the rattle of the drum and the shrill scream of the fife, that their riders could not keep them in line. It was a matter of difficulty, that's a fact; but the Rangers were all good riders, and if Randolph hoped to see any of them thrown from his saddle, his amiable wish was not gratified. Another thing that disgusted Tom was the fact that Sergeant Gray commanded the drill, the commissioned officers riding in the ranks like so many privates. The file-closers, of course, occupied their proper places.

"If I could afford to buy a horse I would join the company within an hour, if they would take me," said one of the eleven who had seen fit to withdraw from the Rangers when Tom did. "I cut off my nose to

spite my face, and so did all of us who got our backs up because we couldn't have things our own way. But I don't suppose they would take us back now."

"Would you be willing to have such a fellow as Rodney Gray order you around as he does the rest of them!" demanded Tom.

"Why, I don't see what's the matter with Rodney Gray. I never heard the first word said against him until you took it into your head that he was going to run against you for second lieutenant. Yes; I'd let him or anybody else boss me around if he would only teach me how to drill. He's a nobby soldier, aint he?"

"Nobby nothing," snarled Randolph. "I'll bet you our company will drill just as well as they do."

"Our company?"

"Yes. You don't imagine that the Rangers are the only ones who will go into the service from this place, do you? It would not be policy for the State to send all her best men into the Confederate army," said Tom, quoting from his father; for although he had been a voter for more than three years he seldom read the papers, and depended upon others to keep him posted in the events of the day. "Some of us can't go. Father says the Yankees will fight if they are crowded too hard, and if they should happen to come down the river from Cairo, or up the river from New Orleans, wouldn't the capital of our State be in a pretty fix if there were no troops here to defend it?"

"Aw! they aint a-going to come up or down," exclaimed the other, who was too good a rebel to believe that Union troops could by any possibility gain a foothold in the seceded States. 'The fighting must all be done on Northern soil.' That's what our President said, and I reckon he knows what he was talking about."

"Perhaps he don't. Fortune of war, you know," said Randolph, who, ever since his father suggested the idea, had kept telling himself that nothing would suit him better than to be captain of a company of finely uniformed and mounted State Guards. "At any rate we are going to prepare for what may happen. We are going to get up a company, and my father will equip every one who joins it. If he has a family, my father will support them if we have to leave the neighborhood and go to some other part of the State. What do you say? Shall I put your name down?"

Tom's friend did not give a direct reply to this question. He evaded it; but when he had drawn away from Tom's side and reached another part of the grounds (the mounted drill was still going on), he said to himself:

"No, you need not put my name down. I'm going to be a regular soldier and not a Home Guard. There must be some patriotic rich man in this country who will do for me what Mr. Randolph promised to do, and I'm going to see if I can find him. By gracious? I believe I'll try Mr. Gray. They say he hasn't done much of anything for the company, but perhaps he will if he's asked."

No; Mr. Gray had not been buying votes for his son, for he did not believe in doing business that way. According to his ideas of right and wrong the company officers ought to go to those who were best qualified to fill them; and he didn't want Rodney to have any position unless the Rangers thought him worthy of it. But he was prompt to respond to all appeals for aid, and so it came about that in less than a week Tom Randolph's friends had all been received back into the company, and it was reported that six of them were to be mounted and armed at Mr. Gray's expense.

"That's to pay 'em for voting Rodney in for first duty sergeant," snapped Tom, when he heard the news. "I'd go without office before I would have my father do things in that barefaced way. And as for those who are willing to accept pay for their votes, they ought to be heartily ashamed of themselves."

"Never mind," said Mr. Randolph, soothingly. "There is no need that a young man in your circumstances should go into the army as private, and I don't mean that you shall do it. I'll make it my business to call on the governor and see if he can't find a berth for you."

"But remember that it must be a military appointment," said Tom. "No clerkship or anything of that sort for me."

While the Rangers were working hard to get themselves in shape for the field, Captain Hubbard and his lieutenants had received their commissions and been duly sworn into the State militia. Nothing was said, however, about swearing in the company, and when Captain Hubbard called the governor's attention to the omission the latter replied:

"General Lacey is the man to look after such matters as that. He's in

New Orleans and you may be ordered to report to him there."

"How about our uniforms?" asked the captain.

"Do as you please about uniforms so long as you conform to the army regulations. Of course your arms and equipments will be furnished you, and the government will allow you sixty cents a day for the use of your horses."

The most of the Rangers thought this was all right, and Captain Hubbard at once called a business meeting of the company to decide upon the uniform they would wear when they went to New Orleans to be sworn in; but there was one among them who did not take much interest in the proceedings. He did not say a great deal during the meeting, but when he went home that night he remarked to his father:

"This partisan business is a humbug so far as this State is concerned."

"What makes you say that?" inquired Mr. Gray.

"Just this," answered Rodney. "Why didn't the governor swear us in himself instead of telling us that we must wait for General Lacey to do it? The General is a Confederate, not a State officer, and when he musters us in it will be into the Confederate service."

This was not a pleasing prospect for the restless, ambitious young fellow, who had confidently looked for something better, but he had gone too far to back out. He had told his comrades that he intended to share then fortunes, whatever they might be, and this was the time to make good his words. If he had worked his men hard before, he worked them harder now, devoting extra time and attention to the officers in order to get them in shape to command the grand drill and dress parade that was to come off as soon as their uniforms arrived.

In the meantime outside events were not overlooked. Everything pointed to war, and news from all parts of the Confederacy bore evidence to the fact that the seceded States were preparing for it, while the people of the North stood with their hands in their pockets and looked on. Finally the long-delayed explosion came, and the country was in an uproar from one end to the other. Fort Sumter was fired upon and compelled to surrender—fifty-one men against five thousand—and the Rangers shook hands and patted one another on the back and declared that that was the way they would serve the Yankees every time they met them. Then came President Lincoln's War Proclamation, followed by the accession of four States to the Confederacy, the blockade of the Southern sea-ports and President Davis's offer to issue letters of marque and reprisal. All this while the mails were regularly received, and Rodney Gray heard from every one of the Barrington boys who had promised to enlist within twenty-four hours after they reached home. They had all kept that promise except Dixon, the tall Kentuckian, and he was getting ready as fast as he could.

"I have been between a hoot and a whistle ever since I have been home," was what he wrote to Rodney Gray. "The State was divided against itself, and I couldn't tell until the 15th, (April) which way she was going; but now I know. When the Yankee President called for those seventy-five thousand volunteers our Governor replied: 'I say emphatically that Kentucky will furnish no troops for the wicked purpose of subjugating her sister Southern States. As Dick Graham used to say, 'That's me.' I go with the government of my State. Now, then, what have you done? I shall write the rest of the fellows to-day."

Billings, the South Carolina boy, reached home too late to take part in the bombardment of Fort Sumter. and he told Rodney that he was very sorry for it. Every one of the gallant five thousand who had fought for thirty-four hours to compel a handful of tired and hungry men to haul down their flag was looked upon as a hero, and Billings said he might have been a hero too, if he had only had sense enough to leave school a month earlier. But he was all right now. He was a Confederate soldier and ready to do and dare with the best of them.

Dick Graham, whose home you will remember was in Missouri, wrote in much the same strain that Dixon did. His State was in such a turmoil and seemed to be so evenly divided between Union and disunion, that Dick could not tell which way she was going until he saw Governor Jackson's answer to Lincoln's call for volunteers. "There can be, I apprehend, no doubt that these men are intended to make war upon the seceded States," said the Governor. "Your requisition, in my judgment, is illegal, unconstitutional and revolutionary in its objects, inhuman and diabolical and cannot be complied with. Not one man will the State of Missouri furnish to carry on such an unholy crusade."

"When I read those burning words," Dick wrote, with enthusiasm, "my mind was made up and I knew where I stood. I expected some such move on the Governors part, for when he came into office in January, he declared that Missouri must stand by the other slave States whatever course they might

pursue. I kept my promise and enlisted in a company of partisans raised under the terms of the Military Bill, which makes every able-bodied man in the State subject to military duty. Price is our immediate commander, but we were required to take the oath to obey the Governor alone."

"There, now," exclaimed Rodney, when he read this. "What's the reason our Governor can't swear the Rangers in as well as the Governor of Missouri can swear his troops in? I believe he could if there wasn't something back of it."

"What do you think there is back of it?" inquired his father.

"I can't imagine, unless there is some sort of an arrangement existing between him and the Confederate authorities at New Orleans," replied Rodney. "The Governor lets on that he is strongly in favor of independent organizations, but he don't act as if he was."

Rodney showed Dick's letter to Captain Hubbard, who posted off to Baton Rouge with, it; but he got no satisfaction there. There had been no such Military Bill passed in Louisiana, the Governor said, and there was no need of it, the situation there and in Missouri was so different. The latter State was exposed to "invasion" (by which he meant that Captain Lyon's small company of regulars was likely to be reinforced), but Louisiana was so protected on all sides that Lincoln's hirelings could not get at her if they tried.

"Then he wouldn't assume control of the company?" said Rodney.

"No, he wouldn't. I had a personal interview with him at his own house and did some of my best talking; but it was no use. He was non-committal—that was the worst of it, and I—Say," added the captain, in an undertone, "I have sorter suspected that he meant to turn us over to the Confederacy."

"That's what I have thought for a good while," said Rodney.

"Yes," continued the captain. "So I thought I might as well give him to understand that we were not going to allow ourselves to be turned over as long as we remained free men. I showed him your friend's letter, and hinted pretty strongly that if we could not swear obedience to the Governor of our own State, the Governor of another State might be willing to accept us, and you ought to have seen him open his eyes."

"What did he say?"

"He said he hoped that I wouldn't think of doing such a thing as that, but if I did, he would have to revoke my commission."

"Who cares if he does?" exclaimed Rodney. "Let him revoke it if he wants to, and you can get another from Governor Jackson."

"That's what I thought. Now, I'll tell you what we'll do—at least we'll hold a secret meeting after drill and propose it to the boys. Suppose you telegraph to your chum's father—you know where to find him and you don't know where to find Dick Graham and ask him if General Price will accept our services, leaving us our independent organization, provided we will take the oath to obey the Governor of Missouri."

"I'll do it," answered Rodney. "And if you will postpone the drill for half an hour I will ride into town and attend to it at once. It's the only thing we can do and keep out of the Confederate army. Dog-gone the Confederacy. The State is the one I want to serve."

Rodney rode into Mooreville at a gallop, wrote out the dispatch and stood at the desk while Drummond, the operator, sent it off. Although the latter looked surprised he did not say anything; but while Rodney was on his way back to camp, a copy of his dispatch was on its way to Baton Rouge.

In accordance with Captain Hubbard's programme a secret meeting of the company was held after the drill was over, but it turned out that the members were not so strongly in favor of the captain's plan as he and Rodney thought they were going to be. While the Rangers fully determined to preserve their independent organization, they were not willing to give their services to the governor of another State. There was a dead-lock developed at once; and it was finally decided that the best thing they could do would be to adjourn until Rodney had received a reply to his dispatch. Perhaps General Price would not take them, and that would end the matter. If he would, why then, they could call another meeting and decide what they would do about it.

The next day their uniforms came up from New Orleans, and on the afternoon of the day following there was a grand drill and dress parade commanded by Captain Hubbard in person. The spectators, if we except the Randolph family, were delighted with it, and Rodney told his father privately that he had

seen many a worse one at the Barrington Academy. Rodney didn't want to say so out loud, of course, for he was the drill-master; but it was not long before he discovered that the Rangers knew whom to thank for their proficiency, and that they fully appreciated the patient and untiring efforts he had made to bring them into military form. When the ranks had been broken after dress parade, and the Rangers and their invited guests thronged into the grove behind the tents to make an assault upon the well-loaded tables they found there, the deputy sheriff, the man with the stentorian voice, who was a private in the company, sprang upon the band-stand, commanded attention, and afterward shouted for Sergeant Rodney Gray to come forward. As the boy wonderingly obeyed, the Rangers and their guests closed about the stand and hemmed it in on all sides. Captain Hubbard had taken up a position there, and when Rodney halted in front of him and took off his cap, the latter began a speech, thanking the young sergeant for what he had done for the company, and begging him to accept a small token of their respect and esteem.

"Take it, friend Rodney," said the captain, in conclusion. "Keep it to remind you of the pure gold of our friendship which shall never know alloy. And while we sincerely trust that it may never be drawn except upon peaceful occasions of ceremony, we are sure you will not permit it to remain idle in its scabbard while the flag of our Young Republic is in danger, or your good right arm retains the power to wield it."

The captain stepped back, and the thoroughly astonished Rodney stood holding in his hands an elegant cavalry sabre. He stared hard at it, and then he looked at the expectant crowd around the band-stand.

"Speech, speech!" yelled the Rangers.

But the usually self-possessed Barrington boy was past speech-making now. He managed to mumble a few words of thanks, got to the ground somehow and mingled with the crowd as quickly as possible.

"How very surprised he is," sneered Tom Randolph, who told himself regretfully that a sword like that might have been presented to him if he had only remained with the company. "I will bet my horse against his that he knew a week ago that he was going to get it."

Rodney waited four days before he received a reply to the dispatch he sent to Dick Graham's father, and seeing that the authorities had assumed control of the wires, and the operator at Mooreville was a government spy, it was rather singular that he got it at all. It ran as follows:

"Price will accept. Company officers and independent organization to remain the same."

"I tell you Missouri is the best State yet," said Rodney, handing the telegram over to Captain Hubbard. "This brings the matter squarely home to the boys, and they've got to decide upon something this very night."

And they did, but it was only after a stormy and even heated discussion. The captain and Rodney carried their point but it was by a very small majority of votes; and the former, believing it advisable to strike while the iron was hot, took one of his lieutenants and started for New Orleans to engage passage for his company to Little Rock. It was at this juncture that Rodney wrote that letter to his cousin Marcy Gray, a portion of which we gave to the reader in the first volume of this series. You will remember that he spoke with enthusiasm of the "high old times" he expected to have "running the Yankees out of Missouri." Well, he had all the opportunities he wanted, but they were not brought about just as he thought they were going to be.

The captain and his lieutenant were gone two days, and came back to report that the steamers were all so busy with government business that it would be a week or more before they could get transportation; but the captain had left instructions with his cotton-factor who would keep his eyes open, and telegraph him when to expect a boat at Baton Rouge landing. In the meantime the harder they worked the less they would have to learn when they reached the Army of the West. That very afternoon they had a great surprise. The Rangers were going through a mounted drill, acquitting themselves very creditably they thought, when some one in the ranks became aware that they had a distinguished visitor in the person of the Governor of the State, who sat in a carriage looking on. Beside him was a little, dried-up, cross-looking man in fatigue cap and soiled linen duster, who kept making loud and unfavorable comments upon the drill, although he did not look as though he knew anything about it. As soon as Captain Hubbard learned that the Governor was among the spectators, he brought the Rangers into line and rode up to the carriage and saluted.

"Well, captain," said the Governor, nodding in response to the salute. "I am glad to see that you are hard at work and that your men are rapidly improving. Have you a copy of your muster-roll handy?"

The captain replied that he had and the Governor continued—

"Then be good enough to produce it and hand it to this officer who will muster you in. I am not going to let such a body of men as you are go out of the State if I can help it."

"Shall I dismount the men, sir?" asked the captain, addressing the cross-looking little man, who arose to his feet and shook himself together as if he were getting ready for business.

"No," was the surly reply. "We'll drive up in front of the company and I can call the roll while standing in the carriage. It'll not take ten minutes and then you can go on with your drill. I see you need it bad enough."

Captain Hubbard, who was so angry that he forgot to salute, wheeled his horse and rode back to the company.

"Orderly," said he, in an undertone. "Get a copy of your muster-roll and give it to that old curmudgeon in the carriage. He's going to try to muster us in but I doubt if he knows enough. I am glad to see him, however, for when he gets through with us, we shall know right where we stand."

CHAPTER IV.

A SCHEME THAT DIDN'T WORK.

"Say," exclaimed Rodney Gray excitedly, as Captain Hubbard took his place on the right of the company and the orderly galloped off to his tent. "Who is that old party in the Governor's carriage?"

"You can't prove it by me," answered the captain. "I never saw him before, but I know he's a mighty cross-grained old chap."

"May I leave the ranks a minute?" continued Rodney.

"Of course not. What would the Governor think?"

"I don't care a picayune what he thinks," replied Rodney, his excitement increasing as the Governor's carriage began to circle around toward the front and center of the company. "If that man in the fatigue cap and duster isn't General Lacey, all the descriptions I have heard of him are very much at fault."

"And do you really believe," began the captain, who was profoundly astonished.

"I don't believe, I know that he means to muster us into the Confederate service," interrupted Rodney. "Hold on a minute before you do a thing or let a man answer to his name. My father knows him by sight."

Without again asking permission to leave his place, Rodney put his horse in motion and rode over to the tree under whose friendly shade Mr. Gray was sitting while he watched the drill.

"Father," said he, speaking rapidly and panting as if he had been running instead of riding, "who is that in the carriage with the Governor? Is it General Lacey?"

Mr. Gray nodded and looked up at his son as if to ask him what he was going to do about it.

"Well, he has come here to muster us in, and the orderly has gone after the roll-book," continued Rodney. "The general is a Confederate officer, and if we let him muster us in, he will make Confederate soldiers of us, won't he?"

"That's the way it looks from where I sit," answered Mr. Gray.

"It's the way it looks from where I sit too, and I just won't have any such trick played upon me," said Rodney, hotly. "I know what I want and what I want to do; and as long as I am a free man, nobody shall make me do anything else."

"Are you going to back out?"

"I am. I'll not answer to my name when it is called. I'll go back and put the other fellows on their guard, and then I'll fall out."

So saying Rodney wheeled his horse and returned to his company, which he found in a state of great

excitement. The ranks were kept pretty well aligned (the horses knew enough to look out for that now), but the men were twisting about in their saddles, each one comparing notes with every one else whose ears he could reach. When Rodney rode up they all turned to look at him and listen to his report, regardless of the fact that the little man in the brown ulster was standing up in the Governor's carriage shouting "Attention!" at the top of his wheezy little voice.

"Mind what you are doing, boys," said Rodney, as he rode slowly along the line behind the rear rank. "That's General Lacey. Don't answer to your names unless you want to be sworn into the Confederate service."

"But what shall we do?" inquired one or two of the timid members, who thought they might be obliged to answer whether they wanted to or not.

"Keep mum and say nothing," replied Rodney. "Watch me and do as I do. My name is second on the roll."

"Are you ever going to come to attention so that I can get through with my business and go back where I belong?" yelled the general, as soon as he could make himself heard. "A pretty lot of soldiers you are; but I warn you that you will have to mind better than this when you reach the camp of instruction, to which I shall immediately order you. Attention to roll-call! George Warren!"

"He—er—here!" replied the orderly, hesitatingly.

The Rangers were amazed, and Captain Hubbard glared at the frightened sergeant as though he had half a mind to knock him out of his saddle. The captain had told the man in the most emphatic language not to answer to his name, and yet he had gone and given away his liberty for the next twelve months. It served him right for being so stupid.

"You blockheads don't seem to understand what I want and what I am trying to do," shouted the general, wrathfully. "All you who volunteer for the Confederate service answer to your names, and speak up so that I can hear you. I hope that is sufficiently plain. *George Warren!*"

The Rangers, one and all, drew a long breath of relief and felt like giving a hearty cheer. Their comrade had most unexpectedly been allowed a chance for escape, and he was sharp enough to take advantage of it. He kept his eyes straight to the front and said nothing. The general looked surprised, but as he was in a great hurry he passed on to the next.

"Rodney Gray!"

This time there was no mistaking the answer. The sergeant moved from his place on the left of the line, rode to the center of the company, came to a front and saluted. The general opened his lips to tell him that he needn't come to the front and center in order to answer to his name, but the Barrington boy was too quick for him.

"General," said he, while all the Rangers strained their ears to catch his words. "I am ready at any time to be sworn into the service of my State, but I do not wish to join the Confederate army. I am a Partisan Ranger."

"A—a—*what?*" vociferated the general, now thoroughly aroused. He was a Mexican veteran, a thorough soldier as well as a martinet, and he had never learned to recognize any organizations outside of the regular service.

"A Partisan Ranger," repeated Rodney, who was neither embarrassed nor angered by the covert sneer contained in the general's words.

"A Ranger!" exclaimed the general, raising his hands in the air and turning his eyes toward the clouds. "Shade of the great and good Washington! what are we coming to? A partisan! And are you all partisans?"

"Yes sir, we are; and until very recently we have been encouraged to believe that we could preserve our independent organization."

"You were, eh? Then you had better organize yourselves into Home Guards at once and I will go back to New Orleans. Partisan Rangers!" said the general, who seemed unable to get the obnoxious words out of his mind. "There's your roll-book. Drive on, coachman."

The general flung the book on the ground at the feet of Rodney's horse, threw himself back in his seat and the carriage moved rapidly away. The Rangers sat motionless in their saddles until it passed

through the gate and disappeared behind the trees in the grove, and then they turned and looked at one another.

"We know where we stand now at all events," said Captain Hubbard, riding up in front of the line, and throwing his right leg over the horn of his saddle in a position most unbecoming a commanding officer. "My commission will be taken from me, and you fellows will be reduced to plain, every-day citizens once more. We might as well quit this nonsense now, and I say, let's pack up and go home."

"I'll go, but I'll not promise to stay there," said Rodney.

"Where will you go?"

"Up to Missouri. I have set my heart on being a partisan, and if my own State won't take me, I have a perfect right to offer my valuable services to another. I shall start for Baton Rouge to-morrow, and I and my horse will take passage on the first St. Louis boat that comes along."

"Hear, hear!" shouted some of the. Rangers.

"Let's go in a body," said one. "We have the assurance that our services will be accepted, that the officers we have elected will be retained, that our plan of organization will not be interfered with, and what more could we ask for?"

"That won't suit me," another declared. "I don't want to leave my State."

"How are you going to help yourself?" demanded Rodney. "If you join the Confederate army you are liable to be ordered up to Virginia or down to Florida. And you know as well as I do what the people around here will think of you if you make up your mind to stay at home."

"Let's take the sense of the company on it," suggested Lieutenant Percy.

"All right," answered the captain. "Put the thing in the form of a motion and I will."

This was quickly done, and to Rodney's great disappointment, though not much to his surprise, the proposition was defeated by a large majority. The Rangers were opposed to deserting their State in a body and going into another.

"I'll not stay at home, and that's all there is about it," said one of the Rangers who had voted with the minority. "Does anybody here know what course we *do* want to pursue? I have my doubts; and in order to test the matter I move you, Mr. Commander, that we offer ourselves as a company to the Confederate States."

The motion was received with such a howl of dissent that if there was a second to it the captain did not hear it. Some of the Rangers, to show what they thought of the proposition, backed their horses out of the ranks and rode away. Among them was Rodney, who returned to the tree under which his father was sitting.

"Isn't it rather unusual for a cavalry company to hold a business meeting on horseback?" inquired the latter, as the boy swung himself from his saddle. "There seems to be a big difference of opinion among the members, and you look as though things hadn't gone to suit you. What have you decided to do?"

"Nothing as a company," replied Rodney. "In fact we are not a company any longer. It is every one for himself now."

"What do you mean by that? Have you disbanded?"

Rodney explained the situation in a few words, adding that he thought he might as well be riding toward home so as to spend all the time he could with his mother, for he was going away bright and early on the following morning. Mr. Gray looked very sober and thoughtful when he heard these words.

"I'd rather you would stay at home," said he.

"And I would much prefer to stay, but I will not go into the service of the Confederacy. This State is an independent Commonwealth now, and is entitled to, and has a right to demand the best service I can give her; but who cares for the Confederacy? I think less of it than I did this morning, for one of its officers tried to rope us in without our consent."

That was Rodney's first experience with the duplicity and utter lack of fair dealing that characterized

all the actions of the Confederate authorities, but it was by no means the last. We shall speak of this again when we see him coming down the Arkansas River, bound for the Army of the Center, a Confederate soldier in spite of himself.

Having given his comrades plenty of time to vote upon the last proposition submitted to them that they should offer themselves as a company to the Confederate States Rodney got upon his horse again and rode back to see if they had determined upon any particular course of action, but from all he could learn the matter was far from being settled. Some wanted to do one thing and some were in favor of doing another; but finding at last that they could not agree, they began drawing away by twos and threes, and finally Rodney Gray was left alone with the commissioned officers.

"I am at my wit's end," declared Captain Hubbard, whose face wore a most dejected look. "We don't want to remain at home, and neither do we desire to put ourselves under the control of such a man as General Lacey; but there's nothing else we can do, unless we go up to Missouri. Were you really in earnest when you said you intended to start oft tomorrow?" he added, addressing himself to Rodney. "Your decision was made on the spur of the moment, wasn't it?"

"Well, no. I made up my mind some time ago that there was going to be a hitch of some sort in our arrangements, and laid my plans accordingly."

"How are you going to work it to reach Price's army?" inquired Lieutenant Percy. "Don't you know that there have been rioting and bloodshed in St. Louis, and that the Dutchmen have got control of the city?"

"Of course; but that's all over now. I shall telegraph to Dick Graham's father that I am coming, and trust to luck when I reach St. Louis. Perhaps he can make it convenient to meet me there; if not, I have a tongue in my head and a good horse to ride, and I have no fears but that I shall get through."

"Well, I'll tell you what's a fact," said Lieutenant Odell. "You can go alone for all of me. There's altogether too much danger in the step. You'll never get through the lines without a pass, and how are you going to get it? The first thing you know you will be arrested and shoved into jail."

"I have thought of that," answered Rodney, calmly, "but I'll take my chances on it. It's go there or stay home, and I have decided to go. Good-by, if I don't see you again, and if you hear any of the boys say that they would like to go with me, send them up to the house."

This was said in the most matter of fact way, as if Rodney were going to ride to Baton Rouge one day and come back the next; but they all knew that the parting was for a longer time than that, and each officer thrust his hand into his pocket to find something that would do for a keepsake. Odell handed over a big jack-knife with the remark that the sergeant might find it useful in cutting bacon or breaking up his hard-tack, so that he could crumb it into his coffee. Percy gave him a ring which he drew from his own finger, and the captain presented him with a twenty-dollar gold piece. Then they shook hands with him once more and saw him ride away.

"It's like parting from a younger brother," said the captain, sorrowfully. "I don't see how his father can let him go. But he's got nerve enough to carry him through any scrape he is likely to get into, and besides he is going among friends."

"But he's got the enemy's lines to pass before he can get among friends, and that's one thing that worries me," observed the first lieutenant. "What a determined fellow he is. He ought to make a good soldier."

"Didn't I tell you that that company of Rangers would never amount to a row of pins?" exclaimed Tom Randolph, when the members rode straggling into town that afternoon, and reported that their organization had been knocked into a cocked hat by General Lacey's attempt to muster it into the service of the Confederacy. "I knew by the way the election went that it would bust up sooner or later, and I am heartily glad of it. Now they've got to go into the army, and if I get the second lieutenant's commission I am working for, perhaps I shall be placed over some of the fellows who voted against me. So Gray is going to Missouri, is he? Good riddance. He'll have to go in as private, and that will bring him down a peg or two."

Yes, Rodney calculated to go in as private if he got in at all, but the prospect did not in the least dampen his ardor. Contrary to his expectations his mother did not say one word to turn him from his purpose; but good Southerner that she was, she heartily condemned the circumstances which, according to her way of thinking, made the parting necessary.

"I wish the *Mayflower* had been sunk fathoms deep in the ocean before she ever touched Plymouth Rock," she said to her husband. "The spirit of intolerance those Puritans brought over here with them is

what is taking our boy from us now. No punishment that I can think of would be too severe for them."

Rodney lived in hopes that some of the company would ride out to see him during the course of the evening, but midnight came without bringing any of them, and the disappointed Barrington boy, giving his mother the last good-night kiss he imprinted upon her lips for more than fifteen long months, went to bed satisfied that he was to be left to work out his own destiny, with no Mooreville friend to encourage or advise him. He slept but little, but appeared at the breakfast table as fresh as a daisy and —dressed in citizen's clothing.

"This is a pill I don't like to swallow," said he, opening his coat and looking down at himself. "I said I wouldn't take off my gray uniform until the South had gained her independence; but I didn't know at the time that I would find it necessary to pass through the enemy's lines. Don't look so sober, mother. I just know I shall come out all right. I'll surely write when I reach St. Louis, and again the very day I find Dick Graham."

That was not a cheerful breakfast table, although every one tried to make it so. Before the meal was half over the family carriage, with Rodney's small trunk inside and his horse hitched behind, drew up at the door, and a crowd of weeping servants gathered about the foot of the wide stone steps to bid "young moster" good-by. Rodney saw it all through the window, and when he got ready to start stood not on the order of going, but cut short the parting and went at once. He arose from his chair before he had finished his second cup of coffee, put on his hat and light overcoat and turned toward his mother.

"Good-by, my dear boy," she said, in tones so firm and cheerful that Rodney was astonished. "Whatever fate may have in store for me, I hope I shall never hear that you failed to do your duty as a soldier."

There were no tears in her eyes—she was past that now—but didn't she suffer?

"The mother who conceals her grief
While to her breast her son she presses,
Then breathes a few brave words and brief
Kissing the patriot brow she blesses,
With no one but her secret God
To know the pain that weighs upon her—
Sheds holy blood as e'er the sod
Received on Freedom's field of honor!"

How many such partings there were all over this fair land of ours, brought about by the ambition of demagogues so few in number that we can count them on our fingers!

Rodney's heart was so full that he could not reply to his mother's brave words. Now that the test had come he found that he had less fortitude than she had. He gave her one kiss, gently disengaged himself from her clinging arms and bolted for the door.

"De good Lawd bless young moster an' bring him safe back," cried the tearful blacks, when he appeared at the top of the steps. "Dem babolitionists aint got no call to come down here an' take him away from us. We-uns never done nuffin' to dem."

"That's just what I say," answered Rodney. "And I am going to help lick them for bringing on this trouble when we wanted peace. Good-by, one and all. I'll be back as soon as we have run the Yankees out of Missouri, and that will not take more than two or three months."

Rodney tried to get into the carriage, but the black hands that were extended to him from every side barred his way, and much against his will he was obliged to linger long enough to give each of them a hasty grasp and shake. The only one who stood aloof was the black boy who had been Rodney's playmate when the two wore pinafores, and he leaned against the corner of the house and howled piteously. Rodney felt relieved when the coachman banged the door of the carriage and mounted to his seat and drove off. His only traveling companion was his father, who intended to remain in Baton Rouge until he had seen the boy start on his way up the river.

It was dark when they reached the city, and after Rodney's horse and his trappings had been left at a stable (civilian trappings they were too, for Rodney was afraid that a military saddle and bridle would attract attention and lead to inquiries that he might not care to answer), the coachman drove them to the house of a friend where they were to find entertainment until a St. Louis boat appeared.

"I am glad you did not go to a hotel," said their host, when he had given them a cordial welcome. "I heard last night that your entire company was going up the river, and that the authorities were thinking strongly of putting the last one of you under arrest."

Rodney and his father were speechless with astonishment.

"What business would they have to put us in arrest?" exclaimed the former, as soon as he found his tongue.

"How did the authorities learn that the Rangers had any notion of going up the river?" asked Mr. Gray.

"I am sure I don't know," answered the host. "But it was currently reported on the street yesterday afternoon that the Mooreville company had mutinied, and that the Baton Rouge Rifles might have to go out there and bring them to a sense of their duty."

"Well, if that isn't the most outrageous falsehood that was ever circulated about a lot of honest men I wouldn't say so," exclaimed Rodney, who had never in his life been more amazed. "We didn't mutiny. We simply refused to be sworn into the service of the Confederate States, and that was something we had a right to do. I will tell you how that story got abroad," he added, suddenly. "There's some one in Mooreville who wants to get us into trouble, and I think I know who it is."

At this moment the door was softly opened and a darkey put his head into the room to announce:

"Da's a gentleman in de back pa'lor wants to see Moster Rodney."

CHAPTER V.

A WARNING.

"A gentleman to see me?" repeated Rodney, his surprise and indignation giving place to a feeling of uneasiness. "Who is he? What's his name?"

"I dunno, sah," replied the servant. "I never seen him round here afore."

Wondering who the visitor could be and how he knew where to find him, seeing that he and his father had not been in that house more than half an hour, the Harrington boy arose and followed the servant into the back parlor. Whom he expected to meet when he got there it is hard to tell, but it is certain that he felt greatly relieved when he found that the visitor was a Mooreville boy—a "student" in the telegraph office. His uneasy feelings vanished at once only to return with redoubled force when Griffin —that was the visitor's name—said in a loud, earnest whisper:

"Shut the door tight and come up close so that you can hear every word I say. I am liable to get myself into the worst kind of a scrape by trying to befriend you."

"The door is all right, and besides there are no eavesdroppers in this house," answered Rodney. "What in the world is the matter, and why are you likely to get yourself into trouble by coming here?"

"Have you heard anything since you have been in town?" asked Griffin, in reply. "I don't suppose any one will bother you, seeing that you are alone, but if your whole company had tried to go, you might have been stopped. If you hadn't, it wouldn't have been Randolph's fault."

"There now," thought Rodney. "I said there was some one in Mooreville who wanted to get us into trouble, and Tom Randolph was the very fellow who came into my mind."

But he said nothing aloud. How did he know that young Randolph was the only enemy he had in Mooreville? He looked hard at Griffin and dropped into the nearest chair.

"Randolph is down on everybody who voted against him for second lieutenant," continued Griffin, "and he declared when he came home after the election that he would break up that company of Rangers if he could find any way to do it."

"He laid out a pretty big job for himself," said Rodney, when his visitor paused. "How did he think he would go to work to accomplish it?"

"Any way and every way. He didn't care so long as he broke it up. You can't imagine how tickled he was when he heard that you had mutinied and refused to be sworn in."

"Did Randolph start that ridiculous story about the mutiny?" inquired Rodney.

"I don't know whether he set it going or not, but he helped it along all he could and had a good deal to say about it," answered Griffin. "Yesterday afternoon I was in the office when he came in and wrote a dispatch to the Governor; and as I have got so that I can read by sound, I had no trouble in spelling it out when Drummond the operator sent it off. I always do that for practice. Between you and me that Drummond is a fellow who ought to be booted out of that position. He's just too mean to be of any use."

"What was in the dispatch?" asked Rodney.

"It contained the information that the Rangers had mutinied and were about to leave the State in a body."

"That was a lie and Randolph knew it," said Rodney, hotly. "But even if we had decided to leave the State in a body, is there any law to prevent it? Such a thing was proposed, but it was voted down by a big majority, and that is why I am obliged to go alone."

"And that brings me to what I want to tell you," said the operator. "I didn't pay very much attention to that dispatch, although Drummond said that if you tried to go up the river you ought to be chucked into the calaboose, the last one of you; but when Randolph came in again that evening and sent off another dispatch that was all about *you*, I began to open my ears and think it was time I was giving you a hint."

"What could he have to say about me? It wasn't I who defeated him for second lieutenant."

"No, but you voted against him, and the company gave you the position you wanted without making any fuss about it, and presented you with a splendid sword, and all those things made Randolph pretty middling mad, I can tell you."

"Did he tell the Governor in his second dispatch that I was getting ready to leave the State, and that he had better be on the lookout to stop me?"

"Eh? No. He didn't send the second dispatch to the Governor. He sent it to his father's cotton-factor in St. Louis, who is a Yank so blue that the blue will rub off."

"The—mischief—he—did!" exclaimed Rodney, who began to feel blue himself even if he didn't look so. "And what did he have to say to that Yankee about me?"

"He told him to watch the steamboats for a Confederate bearer of dispatches—a young fellow, dark complexioned, slight mustache, dressed in citizen's clothes and a roan colt for company."

"It is his intention to have me arrested the minute I get into St. Louis, is it?" cried Rodney, getting upon his feet and moving about the room with long, angry strides.

"It looked that way to me, and that's why I am here," replied Griffin.

"I appreciate your friendship, and assure you that I shall always bear it in mind," said Rodney, stopping long enough to give the operator's hand a cordial gripe and shake.

"That's all right," said the latter. "I haven't forgotten the winter when I was down with the chills and couldn't work, and that mortgage of ours liked to have worried my mother into a sick bed—"

"That's all right too," Rodney interposed. "I was at school and had nothing whatever to do with it."

"No, but your father had something to do with it, and it's all in the family. I know it is Randolph's intention to get you into trouble with the Yankees if he can, for I heard him tell Drummond so. And he couldn't have taken a better way or a better time to do it," continued Griffin. "If all reports are true, things are in a bad way in St. Louis. You know there are a good many Dutchmen there, and they are mostly strong for the Union. During one of the riots they fired into their own ranks instead of into the mob, and that made them so wild with rage that they are ready to hang every Confederate they can get their hands on, without judge or jury."

"A bearer of dispatches," repeated Rodney, once more seating himself in his chair. "And did Drummond send off that telegram when he knew there wasn't a word of truth in it?"

"Course. Don't I tell you that he's too mean for any use? He and Randolph are and always have been cronies, and I heard them talking and laughing over the dispatches as though they thought they were going to get a big joke on you."

"What other thing has Drummond done that's mean?" inquired Rodney.

"Let's talk about something else," replied Griffin, evasively.

"Just as you please," answered the Barrington boy. "But I shouldn't think you would take the trouble to come to Baton Rouge and run the risk of losing your position in the telegraph office, unless you are willing to trust me entirely. I asked for information and not out of curiosity. If Drummond attempts any foolishness with you, my father may be able to checkmate him."

"Well, then," said the operator, with some hesitation. "You musn't betray me. Drummond has sent the names of all the Union men in and around Mooreville to the Governor."

"Why, I didn't suppose there were any Union men there," exclaimed Rodney, who was greatly surprised.

"Of course you didn't. You wouldn't expect one of them to make himself known to as hot a Confederate as you are known to be, would you? There are plenty of people at home who don't suspect such a thing, but I don't mind telling you of it, for you are not mean enough to persecute a man who differs from you in opinion."

Rodney thrust both hands deep into his pockets, slid farther down in his chair, and fastened his eyes on the carpet without saying a word. What would his visitor think of him if he knew that he had been mean enough to do just that very thing that in order to punish his cousin for his Union sentiments and drive him away from the academy, he had written a letter to Budd Goble which came within an ace of bringing Marcy Gray a terrible beating? The matter came vividly to Rodney's recollection now, and he would have given everything he ever hoped to possess if he could have blotted out that one act.

"Yes, there are Union men in Mooreville," continued Griffin, getting upon his feet and buttoning up his coat, "and Randolph and his friend Drummond are laying their plans to bring sorrow of some sort to them. There was still another telegram which was sent to this place."

"Was there anything in it about me?" inquired Rodney.

"It was all about you. In it Drummond asked the operator here to keep an eye on you if he could conveniently, and send word to Mooreville when you went up the river and what boat you went on. Then he will send off another dispatch to that St. Louis Yankee, who will know just when to expect you."

"He means to be revenged on me for voting as I did, doesn't he?" mused Rodney. "I shall not have any dispatches about me, but I don't want to be arrested. It would delay me just that much, and might make it impossible for me to get out of the city."

"Really I must be going," exclaimed Griffin, "or my cousin, who thinks I came here on purpose to see him, will have his suspicions aroused. Can you show me the way out? Remember I musn't be seen by anybody."

The Barrington boy, who was as well acquainted in that house as he was in his father's, led the way to the front door, and after again thanking his visitor for the trouble he had taken and the friendship he had shown in warning him of his danger, he ran down the steps to the sidewalk and looked in both directions. There was no one in sight; and having made sure of it Rodney motioned to Griffin, who quickly disappeared in the darkness. Then Rodney went slowly back into the house and entered the room in which he had left his father. He told him and their host everything, even at the risk of hearing Mr. Gray declare that he should not stir one step toward St. Louis. That was just what the boy thought his father would say, and he was ready for it, having hit upon a plan which he was sure would throw his enemies off the scent.

Rodney's father was as angry at Randolph and Drummond as he was grateful to young Griffin for the service he had rendered his son, but all he had to say about it was that he would remember them all. And we may anticipate events a little by saying that he kept his word so far as Griffin was concerned. When the Confederate Congress passed that famous conscription law "robbing the cradle and the grave," that is to say, making every able-bodied man in the South between the ages of seventeen and fifty subject to military duty, it did not neglect to provide for the exemption of those who were able to pay for it, thus proving the truth of the assertion that the war of the rebellion was a rich man's war and a poor man's fight. The fact that young Griffin was the sole support of a widowed mother made not the slightest difference to the Confederate enrolling officers, who would have forced him into the army if Rodney's father had not come to his relief. According to the terms of the law there was one exempt on every plantation employing more than fifteen slaves. Mr. Gray owned four such plantations and he gave young Griffin charge of one of them, at the same time handing over the hundred pounds of bacon and beef that Griffin would have been obliged to pay as the price of his exemption. Of course this made

Randolph angry, and the burden of his complaint was:

"Griffin is Union and I know it; and old Gray has no business to shield him from the conscription in that fashion. My friend Drummond had to run when the Yankees came here, and now he is starving in the Confederate army; and is this Griffin any better than Drummond? *My* exemption is all right. My father is free by reason of his age, and I must look out for the plantation; but Griffin ought to be made to light. I'd give something handsome to know what made those Grays take such a shine to him all of a sudden."

The knowledge that he was watched, and that the telegraph was to be brought into operation against him, did not keep Rodney Gray awake five minutes after his head touched the pillow. He slept soundly, ate a hearty breakfast, and in company with his father took his way to the telegraph office and wrote a dispatch, addressing it to Dick Graham's father at St. Louis. Mr. Graham did not live in the city. His home was near Springfield; but Rodney knew from something Dick said in his letter that his father was sojourning in St. Louis watching the progress of events. His first telegram had reached Mr. Graham all right, and it was likely this one would also. He made a great show of writing it, and even read it to his father in a tone loud enough for the operator to hear it.

"'Will start for St. Louis by first steamer, and shall be glad to have you meet me at the wharf-boat,'" was what he wrote in the dispatch. "Of course Mr. Graham can easily find out what boats are due in the city, and will know about what time to expect me. How much?"

The operator, who seemed to take a deeper interest in this dispatch and the sender than operators usually take in such things, named the price and gazed curiously at Rodney as the latter brought out his purse and looked for the money.

"That's the fellow Drummond wants us to watch," said he to his assistant, when Rodney and his father were out of hearing. "I wonder what's up? Do you suppose he has been stealing anything? He's got a handful of gold—big pieces, too."

"So far so good," said Rodney, as he and his father went out upon the street. "Now let that Yankee cotton-factor watch the St. Louis wharf-boats if he wants to, and see how much he will make by it. I knew I could throw them off the scent."

"You may not have done it as completely as you think," replied Mr. Gray, "I shall not draw an easy breath until I hear that you are safe under Mr. Graham's roof. When you get aboard the steamer be careful what acquaintances you make. Take warning by what Griffin told you last night and take nobody into your confidence."

That afternoon their host learned, through business channels, that the steamer *Mollie Able* was in New Orleans loading for St. Louis, and might be expected to arrive at Baton Rouge bright and early on the following morning, provided she was not impressed by the Confederate quarter-master. She came on time, and Rodney afterward learned that he was fortunate in securing passage on her, far she was one of the last boats that went up the river. Navigation was closed soon after she reached St. Louis, and all communication between the North and South was cut off by the Confederate batteries that were erected along the Mississippi. The telegraph lines, which up to this time had been used by both Union men and rebels alike, were seized by the Government; and if Rodney had been a week later, he would not have been able to get that dispatch through to St. Louis. But that would not have interfered with his arrangements, for he did not now expect to meet Dick's father in St. Louis. He had used the telegram simply to deceive Tom Randolph and the Baton Rouge operators.

Rodney Gray and his father, as well as the roan colt and a goodly supply of hay and grain that had been provided for him, were on the levee waiting for the *Mollie Able* when she turned in for the landing, and Rodney did not fail to notice that in the crowd of lookers-on there was one young fellow who made it a point to keep pretty close to him, although he did not appear to do so intentionally.

"It's one of the operators Randolph set to watch me," he whispered to his father. "I hope he will follow us up to the clerk's office and stand around within earshot while I buy my ticket."

His wish was gratified, for that was just what the young operator had been sent there for—to find out whether or not Rodney secured passage to St. Louis. When the latter had seen his horse and forage disposed of on the main deck he ascended to the office, and there was the spy, standing with his hands behind his back and his gaze directed across the river. He stood close to the rail, but still he could hear every word that passed between Rodney and the clerk; and when the latter turned away with his ticket in his hand, the spy ran down the stairs and started for his office to tell Drummond the Moorville operator that he had seen Rodney Gray pay his passage to St. Louis.

"Good-by, my boy," said Mr. Gray, when the steamer's bell rang out the warning that the gang-plank

was about to be hauled in.

"Write to us as often as you can, and remember your mother's parting words. As often as I hear from you I shall expect to hear that you did your duty. Remember too, that you are fighting in a just cause. The North has forced this thing upon us, and we would be the veriest cowards in the world if we did not defend ourselves. Good-by."

A moment later Rodney Gray was standing alone on the boiler deck, waving his handkerchief to his father, and the *Mollie Able's* bow was swinging rapidly away from the landing. Young as he was the boy had traveled a good deal and was accustomed to being among strangers; but now he was homesick, and when it was too late he began to wonder at the step he had so hastily taken, and ask himself how he could possibly endure a whole year's separation from his father and mother.

"I've played a fool's part," thought he, bitterly, "and now I am going to reap a fool's reward. Why didn't I stay with the company and share its fortunes, as I said I was going to do, or why didn't father put his foot down and tell me I couldn't go to Missouri? Heigh-ho! This is what comes of being patriotic."

Then Rodney tilted his chair back on its hind legs, placed his feet on the top of the railing and fell to wondering what had become of the rest of the boys in his class, and whether or not all the Union fellows had been as true to their colors as his cousin Marcy Gray had tried to be. Some of the Barrington students who were strong for the Union were from Missouri, and they did not believe in neutrality as Dick Graham did. They believed in keeping the rebellious States in the Union by force of arms if they would not stay in peaceably. Had they joined Lyon's army, and would he and Dick have to meet them on the field of battle? He hoped not, but if he did, he would be careful to follow the advice Ed Billings gave his cousin Marcy and shoot high.

The journey up the river was an uneventful one. The tables were pretty well filled at meal time, but Rodney could not have been more alone if he had been stranded on some sandbar in the middle of the stream. His horse was the only companion he had, and the animal seemed to be as lonely and homesick as his master was. Rodney visited him a dozen times a day to make sure that he did not want for anything, and the colt always rubbed his head against the boy's shoulder and told him by other signs, as plainly as a horse could tell it, that he was glad to see him. There was an utter lack of that sociability and unrestrained intercourse among the passengers that Rodney had always noticed during his trips up and down the river. Some of them were solitary and alone like himself, while others, having formed themselves into little groups, had nothing to do with the rest of the passengers, but kept entirely on their own side of the boiler deck. Rodney thought they acted as though they were afraid of one another. This state of affairs continued until the *Mollie Able* reached Memphis, where the Confederates were building a fleet of gunboats, and then a remark made by one of the passengers broke down all reserve, and showed some of them, Rodney Gray among the rest, that they had been keeping aloof from their friends.

"When these boats are completed," Rodney heard the passenger say to one of his companions, "you will see fun on this river. The first point of assault will be Cairo, and then we'll go on up and take St. Louis away from Lyon's Dutchmen. Those Missourians are a pretty set of cowards to let a lot of ignorant foreigners take their city out of their hands."

Well, they couldn't help it, and besides, the loyal Germans were by no means as ignorant as some of the men who fought against them. They were good soldiers and hard to whip; and it was owing to their patriotism and courage that such fellows as Rodney Gray and Dick Graham did not succeed in their efforts to "run the Yankees out of Missouri." And as for the Confederate gunboats of which such great things were expected, they were, with a single exception, destroyed in a fight of less than an hour's duration by the Union fleet under the command of Flag Officer Davis. The *Van Dorn* alone escaped, and she was never heard of afterward.

When the *Mollie Able* resumed her journey Rodney waited and watched for an opportunity to question the outspoken Confederate, for he believed he could trust him. As he had often told himself, he was "going it blind," and a little information from some one who knew how things were going on up the river, might be of the greatest use to him. The opportunity he sought was presented the very next day. While he was feeding his horse the Confederate sauntered along and stopped and looked at the colt with the air of a man who knew a good thing when he saw it.

"There ought to be some 'go' in that fellow," said he.

"I think there is," replied Rodney. "But I have never tried him at his best, and don't expect to unless the Yankees get after me."

"Well, if you keep on up the river you will go right where the Yankees are," said the gentleman, who looked a little surprised. "If you are on our side what are you doing here?"

"Pardon me, but I might ask you the same question," answered the boy cautiously.

"My business is no secret," was the smiling reply. "I am going up into Ohio after my family. I want to get them home while I can. All our highways will be shut up after a while."

"Do you think there will be any fighting?"

"Lots of it, and I have promised to help"; and as the man said this he put his hand into his pocket and drew out an official envelope. He looked around the deck to make sure that there was no one within earshot, and then produced a printed document which he unfolded and handed over for Rodney's inspection. "I knew you were a Southerner the minute I saw you, and have several times been on the point of speaking to you, for you seemed lonesome and downhearted," he continued "But when one is about to beard the lion in his den as I am, it behooves him to be careful whom he addresses."

"That was the reason I kept to myself," answered Rodney, handing back the paper which proved that his new acquaintance was a captain in the Confederate army. "I should think you would be afraid to have that commission about you. I left all my soldier things at home."

"I reckon I am safe now, but I might not be a week hence," said the captain. "Who are you any way, if it is a fair question, and where are you going?"

Rodney explained in a few hasty words, and was sorry to hear the captain declare, as he shook his finger at him:

"You are making a great mistake. The place for a young man with a military education is in the regular army; not the volunteers, understand, but the regulars, who will be continued in the service after our independence has been acknowledged. I am surprised that your friends didn't point that out to you."

"I have gone too far along this road to back out now," replied Rodney.
"We'll get by Cairo all right, won't we?"

"I think so. There have been no restrictions placed upon travel yet that
I have heard of."

"How about Cape Girardeau?"

"That place is garrisoned. You mustn't think of getting off there. How would you get through the lines without a pass?"

"Well, I must get off somewhere along the Missouri shore, for it wouldn't be safe for me to go on to St. Louis."

"Of course it wouldn't. That Union cotton-factor would have you arrested the minute you put your foot on the levee. I'll tell you what I'll do," said the captain, after thinking a moment. "The first clerk, with whom I have a slight acquaintance, is solid, and I'll make it my business to ask him if we are going to land anywhere on the Missouri side between Cape Girardeau and St. Louis. If we are, I'll tip you the wink, and you can be ready to go ashore."

"Thank you, sir," said Rodney, gratefully.

"That young chap has no idea what he is going into," said the captain, after he had told Rodney's story to some of his friends on the boiler deck. "It's neighbor against neighbor all through the southern and western parts of Missouri, and for a week or two past there has been the worst kind of a partisan warfare going on. How he is going to get through I don't know, for if he meets an armed man on the way how is he going to tell whether he is Union or Confederate?"

There was but one opinion expressed when the captain finished his story, and that was that Rodney Gray was a foolhardy young fellow.

CHAPTER VI.

From that time forward Rodney Gray had no reason to complain of being lonely. Captain Howard—that was the name of his new acquaintance— introduced him to more than a dozen gentleman, all of whom were enthusiastic rebels and firm in their belief that if the South did not have a "walk over" she would have the next thing to it, for there was no fight to speak of in the Northern people. They told Rodney that while they gloried in his pluck, they were afraid he had undertaken more than he could accomplish.

It may seem strange to some of our readers that these enemies of the government should have the audacity to show their faces among loyal men, and that the authorities should permit them to go and come whenever they felt like it, but stranger things than this were being done in the East, and right under the noses of the President and his cabinet. Rebel agents in Washington kept their friends in the South posted in all that was said and done at the capital, and Commander (afterward Admiral) Semmes had made a business trip through the Northern States, purchasing large quantities of percussion caps which "were sent by express without any disguise to Montgomery," making contracts for artillery, powder and other munitions of war, as well as for a complete set of machinery for rifling cannon, and had searched the harbor of New York in the hope of finding a steamer or two that might be armed and used for coast defense. None of these people were molested, and that was one thing that led the Southerners to believe that the North would not fight.

Cairo was reached in due time, but there was little in or around the place to indicate that there was a war at hand except the outlines of a small fort which was being thrown up to command the river and Bird's Point on the Missouri shore. There were a few soldiers strolling about on the levee, and at that time the garrison numbered six hundred and fifty men. A few months later there was a much larger force in Cairo, and among the blue coats there was one who was often seen walking along the levee with his hands behind him and his eyes fastened thoughtfully upon the ground. He generally wore an old linen duster, a black slouch hat, and a pair of light blue pants thrust into the tops of heavy boots which were seldom blacked, but often splashed with Cairo mud. But everybody stepped respectfully aside to let him pass, and the spruce young staff officers never failed to salute. It was General Grant.

Once more the *Mollie Able* swung out into the stream, and at the end of half an hour rounded the point below the fort and resumed her journey up the Mississippi. Now Rodney Gray began to show signs of excitement. Every turn of the paddle wheels brought him nearer to the place where he must leave the boat, and the new-made friends who had done so much to cheer him up since they found out who and what he was, and set out alone on a journey of nearly two hundred and fifty miles.

"Being a born Southerner you are accustomed to the saddle, and the ride itself would be nothing but a pleasure trip; but there are the people you are likely to meet on the way," said Captain Howard, seating himself by Rodney's side as the *Mollie Able* rounded the point. "Are you armed?"

The boy replied that he had a revolver.

"You may need it," continued the captain. "You see the pro-slavery men and abolitionists are scattered all over the State, and I don't believe you can find a town or village in it that is not divided into two hostile camps. That's where I am afraid you are going to have trouble, and you must be all things to all men until you find out who you are talking to. Now here are two letters of introduction that one of my friends gave me for you this morning, and they are addressed to parties living near Springfield, one of whom is a Union man and the other a Confederate. You must use them—"

"Must I ask favors of a Union man and then turn about and fight him?" exclaimed Rodney.

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

"You want to get through, don't you?" said he. "All's fair in war times, and if I were in your place, and a reference to this Springfield Union man would take me in safety through a community of Yankee sympathizers, I should not hesitate to use his name. If you fall in with some of our own people and they suspect your loyalty, why then you can use the name of the Confederate. It's all right."

The captain was called away at that moment, and Rodney, glancing at the envelopes he held in his hand, was somewhat startled to find that one of them was addressed to Erastus Percival.

"I wonder if that can be Tom Percival's father," said he. "If I thought it was, I wouldn't present this letter to him for all the money there is in Missouri. He would turn me over to the Yankees at once."

We have had occasion to speak of Tom Percival just once, and that was during the sham fight which was started in the lower hall of the Barrington Academy to give Dick Graham a chance to steal the Union flag from the colonel's room. We then referred to the fact that Tom's father had cast his vote

against secession with one hand while holding a cocked revolver in the other. Rodney, of course, was not sure that this letter of introduction was addressed to this particular Percival, but still he had no desire to make the gentleman's acquaintance if he could help it. While he was turning the matter over in his mind, the captain of the *Mollie Able* stepped out of the clerk's office and tapped him on the shoulder.

"The very best thing I can do for you," said he, "is to set you ashore at Cedar Bluff landing."

Rodney was surprised, but it was clear to him that the captain knew who he was and where he wanted to go.

"There are only a few people who live there, and they are principally wood-cutters," continued the skipper. "But they are true as steel, and you can trust them with your life. I have bought wood of them for years and know them like a book. I will go ashore with you and give you a good send-off. We shall get there about ten o'clock to-night."

Rodney opened his lips to thank the captain for his kindness, but he was gone. The old steamboat-man sympathized with the South, and Captain Howard and his friends had found it out, and induced him to do what he could to help Rodney escape the expectant Yankee cotton-factor at St. Louis. The boy laughed aloud when he thought how astonished and angry Tom Randolph would be to learn that he had wasted time and telegrams to no purpose. He passed the rest of the day in company with Captain Howard and his friends, nearly all of whom held some position of trust under the new government, and at nine o'clock, in obedience to a significant wink and nod from the skipper, he went below and put the saddle and bridle on his horse. Just then the whistle sounded for Cedar Bluff landing, and some of the passengers came down to bid him good-by and see him safely ashore.

"A boy with your ability and pluck ought to make his mark in the service, and I wish I could keep track of you," said Captain Howard, giving Rodney's hand a cordial shake. "But I shall most likely be ordered East, hundreds of miles away from here, and possibly I may never hear of you again; but I shall often think of you. Good-by, and good luck."

This was the way in which all his new friends took leave of him, and if good wishes were all that were needed to bring him safely through, Rodney would have had no fears of the future. When the *Mollie Able's* bow touched the bank and a line had been thrown out, a gang-plank was shoved ashore, and the skipper came down from the hurricane deck to give his passenger a "send-off." The blazing torch, which one of the deck-hands had placed in the steamer's bow, threw a flickering light upon half a dozen long-haired, roughly dressed men who had been brought to the bank by the sound of the whistle, and who gazed in surprise when they saw a stout negro coming off with Rodney's trunk on his shoulder, followed by Rodney himself, who was leading the roan colt. It wasn't often that a passenger was landed in that out-of-the-way place.

"Set the trunk down anywhere, Sam, and go aboard. A word with you, Jeff," said the *Mollie Able's* captain, beckoning to the tallest and roughest looking man in the party. "Where's Price?"

"Dunno. Jeff Thompson has just been round behind the Cape pulling up the railroad, but some of the Yankee critter-fellers went out there and run him off," replied the long-haired Missourian. "Last I heared of Price he was down about the Arkansas line."

(The "Cape" referred to was the town of Cape Girardeau, and the "critter-fellers" were the Union cavalry which at that time garrisoned the place. The "Arkansas line" was the southwestern part of Missouri where Price raised his army, which grew in numbers the nearer he marched with it to the Missouri River).

"That's bad news for my young friend here," said the captain of the *Mollie Able*. "Springfield is off in that direction, and that's right where he wants to go. He is one of Price's men, and is anxious to find his commander. Say, Jeff, you take care of him and see him safely on his way, and I'll make it all right with you when I stop for my next load of wood."

"It's all right now, cap'n," answered Jeff. "He'll be safe as long as he stays here, seeing that he's a friend of your'n, but when he gets back in the country—I dunno; I dunno."

The steamboat captain didn't know either, but he couldn't stop to talk about it. He had done the best he could to keep Rodney out of the clutches of that Yankee cotton-factor in St. Louis, and now the boy must look out for himself. He gave the latter's hand a hasty shake, told him to keep a stiff upper lip and give a good account of himself when he met the Lincoln invaders in battle, and shouted to the deck-hands to "let go and haul in." The steamer gave him a parting salute from her whistle as she backed out into the river, Captain Howard and his friends on the boiler deck waved their hands to him, and Rodney was left alone with the wood-choppers. A Northern boy would not have been at all pleased with the

situation, for they were a rough looking set, and probably there was not one among them who did not plume himself upon his skill as a fighter; but Rodney was not afraid of them, for he had seen such men before.

"One of you fellers put that hoss under kiver, and stranger, you come with me," said Jeff, raising Rodney's trunk from the ground and placing it upon his shoulder. "It's little we've got to offer you, and you look as though you might be used to good living; but you're welcome to such as we've got, and we're glad to see you. Now we'd like to have you tell us, if you can, what all this here furse is about," he went on, when he had conducted his guest into a log cabin that stood at the top of the bank, and deposited the trunk beside the open fire-place. "What made them abolitionists come down here all of a sudden to take our niggers away from us?"

"Because they are envious—jealous of our prosperity," replied Rodney, drawing up a nail keg and seating himself upon it. "They have to work every day and we don't; and that's what's the matter with them. They don't care a cent for the negroes. They used to own slaves themselves."

All the wood-choppers, with the exception of the one who had taken it upon himself to "put the hoss under kiver," had followed Jeff and Rodney into the cabin, and they were profoundly astonished by the last words that fell from the boy's lips. It was a matter of history that was quite new to them.

"Where be them slaves now?" asked Jeff.

"They were given their freedom."

"Well, I always knowed them Yankees was fules, but I don't for the life of me see what they done that fur."

"Oh, it wasn't because they were sorry for the negro," exclaimed Rodney. "It was because they couldn't use him. They would have slaves to-day if they could make a dollar by it. You let the Yanks alone for that. Why, when these troubles began, we didn't have percussion caps enough to fight a battle with, and Captain Semmes went up North and bought a big supply; and the men of whom he bought them knew what he was going to do with them, and offered to make contracts with him to send him all he wanted and could pay for."

"What's the reason they couldn't use the niggers up there?" asked one of the woodchoppers.

"Because their land is mostly mountains and rocks, and they can't work it on as a big a scale as we do," replied Rodney, trying to use language that his ignorant auditors could readily understand. "They gain their living by catching codfish and herring, and by making things, such as shoes for the niggers, and cloth and axes and machinery and—Oh, everything. And the blacks couldn't do that sort of work so that their owners could make anything out of them, and that's the reason they let them go free."

"And because they can't use the niggers do they say that we-uns musn't use 'em nuther?" demanded Jeff, angrily.

"That's it exactly," said Rodney. "They are dogs in the manger. They can't eat the hay themselves and they won't let the critters eat it."

Although the wood-choppers didn't quite understand this, it was plain enough to the Barrington boy that they were impressed by his words.

"And what are we-uns going to do about it?" inquired Jeff, after a little pause.

"We're going to dissolve partnership with them—break up the firm and go into business for ourselves," replied Rodney, throwing so much enthusiasm into his words that he succeeded in creating some excitement among the wood-choppers. One, in particular, was so deeply interested that he pulled his nail keg close in front of the speaker; but whether he was listening to his words, or making a mental calculation of the value of his gold watch chain, Rodney did not think to inquire.

"And do they say that we-uns mustn't do it?" Jeff demanded.

"You've hit it again," was Rodney's reply. "That is just what they do say; and they say, further, that they won't give us our share of the goods. See how they hung on to that fort in Charleston Harbor until our gallant fellows made them give it up? That fort belonged to South Carolina; but when she broke up the firm, by which I mean the Union, the Yanks wouldn't give it up. Who ever heard of such impudence?"

"I never," answered Jeff. "We did lick 'em sure enough, didn't we?"

"Of course we did, and that isn't the worst of it. We're going to whip them as often as we get a chance at them. But what am I talking about. The Yankees won't fight."

"Didn't they have a sorter rucus up in St. Louis?"

"Those were not Yankees. They were Dutchmen—old country soldiers, who don't know enough about war to keep them from shooting into their own men. Who's afraid of such soldiers?"

"We're mighty glad you stopped off here, stranger," said Jeff, at length. "We didn't rightly know what all the furse was about, and there wasn't nobody who could tell us, because the steamboat cap'ns who come here for wood couldn't wait to talk about it. But we know now, and I do think that some on us had oughter have a hand in making them Yankees stay where they b'long. I'd go in a minute if it wasn't fur the ole woman and the young ones."

"I aint got none of them things to hold me back, and I'll go in your place, Jeff," said one of the wood-cutters. It was the man who had drawn his seat close in front of Rodney, and seemed to be so much interested in the boy's watch chain.

"Will you go with me and join Price?" asked the latter, eagerly.

"I reckon I might as well," replied the man.

"Do you know the country?"

"Well, no; I can't say that I do. But I know where to look to find the road that runs from Jackson to Hartsville, forty miles this side of Springfield, and when you get there, mebbe you'll know where you are."

"No, I won't," answered Rodney. "I have never been in this part of Missouri before. I have been in St. Louis two or three times, but when I got out of sight of the Planters' House I was lost completely."

"Why, didn't the cap'n of the *Mollie Able* tell Jeff that you was one of Price's men? How could you have jined him if you haven't been where he was?"

Rodney did not at all like the tone in which this question was asked, and it was right on the end of his tongue to tell the wood-cutter that it was none of his business; but on second thought he decided that that wouldn't do. The man talked and acted as if he suspected him of something; and if the others suspected him too, they might make trouble for him. The steamboat captain did say that he was one of Price's men, and Rodney wished now that he hadn't done it.

"I suppose I could arrange all that by letter or telegraph, couldn't I?" was the answer he made, as he produced his note book and took from it the dispatch he had received from Dick Graham's father, and one of the letters of introduction that had been given to him by Captain Howard. These he passed over to the suspicious wood-cutter, rightly believing that the latter could not read a word of them. "You will see that that telegram reads, 'Price will accept,'" continued Rodney. "I belong to a company of Rangers that was raised down the river, and at my captain's request I telegraphed to Price inquiring if he would take us and let us operate on our own hook, and he said he would. Read it for yourself. What are you afraid of?"

"Nothing much."

"You see," explained Jeff, who during this conversation had sat with his elbows resting on his knees and his eyes fastened upon the floor, "things is getting sorter ticklish down here in this neck of the woods already. Nobody don't know who he can trust."

"Don't you believe what the *Able's* captain said about me?" inquired Rodney, who had little dreamed that he would become an object of suspicion almost as soon as he set his foot on Missouri soil. "He told me you were true blue."

"And so we are, when we know the feller we're talking to." said the man who was sitting in front of him, and whom he afterward heard addressed as Nels. "Now I want you to answer me a few questions: where did you board the *Mollie Able?*"

Rodney, who was not at all used to this sort of thing, began to grow red in the face, but fortunately he did not hesitate an instant.

"I got on at Baton Rouge," he said.

"Is that place this side of Cairo?"

"No; it is the other side."

"Did you stop at Cairo on your way up?"

"The *Able* was there perhaps half an hour."

"Then I can see through some of it as plain as daylight," exclaimed Nels, straightening up on his nail keg and shaking his hand at Jeff. "He was at Cairo long enough to change his clothes, swap hosses and have his whiskers shaved off; but why he should have the cap'n of the *Able* set him ashore here at this landing, beats my time. Don't it your'n?" There were signs of excitement in the cabin, and Rodney felt the cold chills creeping over him. The wood-cutters were wofully ignorant, quite as open to reason as so many wooden men would have been, and if they suspected him of trying to play some trick upon them, Rodney could not imagine how he should go to work to set them right. He glanced at their scowling faces and told himself that he would not have been in greater danger if he had been a prisoner in the hands of the Yankees.

"I should like to know what you mean by this foolishness?" exclaimed
Rodney, growing excited in his turn.

"Mebbe you'll find that there aint no great foolishness about it before we've got through with you," answered Nels; and Rodney noticed that one of the wood-cutters moved his seat so as to get between him and the door.

"I shall know more about that after you have told me who and what you take me for," continued Rodney. "Do you think you ever saw me before?"

"Well, as to your face and clothes we might be mistook," replied Nels, slowly. "But you had oughter hid that watch chain before you come back amongst we-uns."

He reached out to lay hold of the article in question, but the angry boy pushed his hand away.

"This watch and chain were a birthday present from my mother four years ago," said he, taking the watch from his pocket and unhooking the chain, "and the fact is recorded on the inside of the case, if you have sense enough to read it, which I begin to doubt. You are at liberty to look at them, but you mustn't try to get out of the door with them."

Nels took the articles in question and looked fixedly at Rodney, as if he did not know whether to smile at him or get angry. He decided on the former course when one of his companions said, in an audible whisper:

"You sartingly be mistook, Nels. That abolition hoss-thief was a mighty palavering sort of chap, but he didn't have no such grit."

"Is that what you take me for," exclaimed Rodney,—"a horse-thief and an abolitionist besides? You certainly are mistaken, for I haven't got that low down in the world yet. Jeff, you are the only man in the party who seems to have a level head on his shoulders, and I wish you would explain this thing to me. Begin at the beginning so that I may know just how the case stands."

Before Jeff could reply to the request one of the small army of hunting dogs which found shelter in the wood-cutters' camp set up a yelp, the rest of the pack joined in, and for a minute or two there was a terrific hubbub. When it lulled a little the hail rang out sharp and clear from some place in the surrounding woods:

"Hallo the house! Don't let your dogs bite!"

The words brought all the wood-choppers to their feet and sent all except two of them—Nels and the man who had taken his seat near the door—out into the darkness. These remained behind in obedience to a sign from Jeff, and Rodney knew that they meant to keep an eye on him.

"Who's out there?" he inquired.

"Don't you recognize his voice?" asked Nels in reply. "There's more'n one of 'em, and they are the men who have been hunting for you for a week past."

"I am glad to hear it," said Rodney. "Perhaps they will be able to clear away some of the ridiculous suspicions you seem to have got into your heads concerning me."

"Get out, ye whelps," shouted Jeff, when he stepped out of the door; whereupon the dogs ceased their clamor and slunk away behind the cabin to escape the clubs he threw among them to enforce obedience to his order. "Come on, strangers. They won't pester you."

Then came a tramping of hoofs, as if a small body of cavalry was making its way through the bushes, and a minute afterward Rodney could look through the open door and see half a dozen men dismounting from their horses. He saw Jeff exchange a few hasty words with the tall, black-whiskered man who was the first to touch the ground, and heard the exclamations of surprise which the latter uttered as he listened to them. He could not understand what the man said, but the woodcutter near the door did, for he called out:

"He's come back sure's you live, and Nels has got his watch to prove it.
He knowed him the minute he seed the chain that's fast to it."

"Well, if that is the case, whom have we got here?" said the black-whiskered man; and this time Rodney heard the words very plainly. "Where is he? Let me have a look at him."

Jeff waved his hand toward the door and the man stepped in and faced Rodney, who arose to his feet and met his gaze without flinching. One glance brought from him a sigh of relief. He had an intelligent man to talk to now—one who could be reasoned with.

"There's the watch that has brought suspicion upon me in a way I cannot understand," said Rodney, nodding toward Nels, who promptly handed it over. "Will you be kind enough to open it and read the inscription you will find on the inside of the case."

The man took the watch, and while he was opening it kept his eyes fastened upon Rodney's face. He seemed both amused and angry.

"Jeff," he exclaimed at length. "I never knew before that you were such a blockhead. There is about as much resemblance between this young gentleman and that horse-thief outside as there is between you and me."

"But Mr. Westall, just look at the chain," protested Jeff.

"But, Mr. West-all, just look at the chain," protested Jeff.

"Well, look at the chain. You're a Jackson man, I suppose?" he added, nodding at Rodney.

"Every day in the week," replied the boy. "And that's what brought me up here from Louisiana. I belong to a company of partisans; but our Governor wouldn't take us the way we wanted to go, and here I am. I want to find Price as soon as I can. Run your eye over that telegram, if you please, and then read this letter."

While the man, who had been addressed as Mr. Westall, was reading the documents Rodney passed over to him, his four companions came into the cabin bringing with them a fifth, at the sight of whom Rodney Gray started as if he had been shot.

CHAPTER VII.

THE EMERGENCY MEN.

"Great Scott!" was Rodney Gray's mental ejaculation. "That is Tom
Percival if I ever saw him."

If his own father had suddenly been brought into the cabin a prisoner in the hands of armed men, the Barrington boy could not have been more amazed. He winked hard and looked again, but his eyes had not deceived him; and even if there had been the slightest doubt in his mind regarding the identity of the prisoner who had been denounced as "an abolition horse-thief," it would have vanished when he saw the expression that came upon Tom's face the moment their eyes met. Tom was one of Dick Graham's firm friends, but while a student at the Barrington Academy he had often declared that if Dick ever so far forgot himself as to enlist in the rebel army, he (Tom) would go into the Union service on purpose to whip him back into a proper frame of mind; and his being there a prisoner led Rodney to believe that he had kept his promise, so far as enlisting was concerned. But there was one thing about it: Tom might be a Union soldier, but he was neither an abolitionist nor a horse-thief.

"It is Percival, sure enough, but what in the name of sense and Tom Walker is he doing here?" was

the next question that came into Rodney's mind.

His first impulse was to seize his old schoolmate by the hand, proclaim his friendship for him and assure Mr. Westall and the rest that they had committed the worst kind of a blunder—that they had made as great a mistake in arresting this boy for a horse-thief, as Nels and his fellow wood-cutters had made in suspecting him of being Tom Percival, simply because he happened to have in his possession a watch chain that somewhat resembled Tom's. But two things restrained him; the first was the reflection that by following this course he would put it entirely out of his power to help Tom if the opportunity was offered, and the second was the way in which Tom himself looked and acted. He didn't appear to know Rodney at all. The expression of joy and surprise that first overspread his countenance vanished as if by magic, and from that time forward he gave as little attention to his old friend as he might have given to an utter stranger. Rodney was quick to take the hint and governed himself accordingly.

"Percival always did have a level head on his shoulders," said the latter, resuming his seat upon the nail keg and placing himself as far as possible out of reach of Tom's gaze, "and he's got more pluck than any other fellow I ever saw. He needs it, poor fellow, if Captain Howard told the truth when he said that every little community in the State is divided into two hostile camps. But his father owns slaves, and Tom never stole a horse."

It so happened that all the inmates of the cabin were too much interested in what Mr. Westall was doing to notice the swift glance of recognition that passed between the two boys when Tom Percival was brought in. They were waiting to hear what he had to say regarding the papers Rodney had given him to read.

"I suppose you are acting is a sort of advance agent for your company to see what arrangements you can make with General Price?" said Mr. Westall at length.

"No, sir. I am acting on my own hook, and without any regard to the course the company may see fit to take," replied Rodney. "The members don't want to be sworn into the service of the Confederate States, and the proposition to leave Louisiana in a body and offer ourselves to Price, was voted down. I do not know what the rest of the boys will do, but I am going to join the Missouri State militia if they will take me."

"Oh, they'll take you fast enough," said Mr. Westall, with a laugh. "They have already taken everybody they can get their hands on without stopping to inquire what State he is from. We five are some of Jeff Thompson's Emergency men."

"I don't think I ever heard of such men," said Rodney doubtfully.

"Probably not. You don't need them down in Louisiana, and we may not have much use for them here; though, to judge from the exploits of this young man Percival, we may be called out oftener than we expected to be."

Rodney hoped that Mr. Westall would go on to tell what his friend Tom had been guilty of to get himself into such a scrape, and what they intended doing with him now that they had got him into their power; but in this he was disappointed. The man handed back Mr. Graham's telegram with the remark that he had never heard of a person of that name, and then proceeded to read the letter of introduction, which was addressed to a well-known Confederate of the name of Perkins, who lived somewhere in the neighborhood of Springfield.

"I am acquainted with this man Perkins in a business way," said Mr. Westall, after he had run his eye over the letter, "and know him to be strong for Jeff Davis and the cause of Southern independence. He will treat you as though you were one of the royal blood if you can only get to him; but there's the trouble. He lives in the southwestern part of the State, and that's a right smart piece from here."

"I know it; but I have a good horse somewhere outside," answered Rodney.

"So I supposed; but you can't depend upon your horse to tell you whether you are talking to a Yankee sympathizer or an honest Confederate, can you? The ride won't amount to anything, but you have a tough bit of country to go through. Your short experience right here among friends will serve to show you how very suspicious everybody is. We don't trust our nearest neighbors any more, and so you can imagine what we think of a stranger, especially if he happens to own a watch chain that looks something like one that is worn by a horse-thief," said Mr. Westall, smiling at the boy as he handed his property back to him. "Now, Jeff, how could you have made such a mistake? Can't you see that they don't at all resemble each other?"

"Now that I see them together I can," was Jeff's answer. "But don't he look a trifle as that thief might look if his duds was changed and his whiskers took off?"

Rodney thought from the first that his old schoolmate did not look just as he did the last time he saw him, and now he knew the reason. To a very slight mustache Tom Percival, since leaving the Barrington Academy, had added a pair of what the students would have called "side-boards;" but they were so very scant that they could not by any possibility be looked upon as a disguise. Mr. Westall laughed at the idea.

"Jeff, you and your friends are too anxious to do something for the cause," said he. "Of course that is better than being lukewarm, but you don't want to be too brash or you may get yourselves into trouble. Can you give us some supper? But first we want to put this prisoner where he will be safe."

"Couldn't you postpone that part of the programme until *I* have had a bite to eat, or do you think there's nobody hungry but yourselves?" asked the prisoner, in the most unconcerned manner possible; and there was no mistaking his voice. It was Tom Percival's voice.

"I didn't think about you," answered Mr. Westall. "And perhaps if you had your dues, you would be left to go hungry. But we are not savages, even if we are down on your way of thinking and acting."

"Better give him a sup of coffee to keep the cold out and then chuck him in the old corncrib," suggested Jeff. "He can lay down on the shucks, and I will give him a blanket to keep himself warm."

"Will he be quite safe there?" asked the Emergency man. "No chance to get out, is there? Or will we have to put a guard over him?"

"There aint no call for nobody to lose sleep guarding on him," was Jeff's confident reply. "There aint no winder to the corncrib, and the door fastens with a bar outside. Some of the chinking has fell out atween the logs, but he can't crawl through the cracks less'n he can flatten himself out like a flying squirrel. Furthermore, there's the dogs that will be on to him if he gives a loud wink."

Rodney listened to every word of this conversation, and told himself that his friend's chances for escape were very slim indeed.

"Take a keg and sit down over there," said Mr. Westall, pointing to the farthest chimney corner and addressing himself to the prisoner, while Nels and one of the other wood-cutters began making preparations for supper. "Now, if you have no objections, Mr. Gray, we should like to hear the rest of your story. You must be set in your ways, or else you never would have come up here simply to carry out your idea of becoming a partisan. You will find plenty of them in these parts. Indeed, you will find more of them than anything else."

It did not take Rodney long to make Mr. Westall and his four companions understand just how matters stood with him, for there was really little to tell. He was careful not to let his auditors know that he had acted as drill-sergeant, for Captain Hubbard's company of Rangers, for if he touched upon that subject, Mr. Westall might ask him where he received his military education; and if he answered that he got it at the Barrington Academy, and Mr. Westall happened to know that his prisoner had been a student at that very school, then what would happen? The fat would all be in the fire at once, for the Emergency man would very naturally want to know why the two boys had not given each other some sign of recognition when they first met. That would never do; so Rodney steered clear of these dangerous points, and Tom Percival sat in the chimney corner with his elbows on his knees and listened to the story. When it was finished and Mr. Westall and his companions had asked him a few leading questions, Rodney ventured to inquire what an Emergency man was.

"He is a partisan in the truest sense of the word," was Mr. Westall's answer. "He is a soldier who is liable to be called into the ranks in an emergency, and at no other time; but that does not prevent him from getting a few friends together and going off on an expedition of his own as often as he feels like it."

"An expedition of his own?"

"Yes. If the Union men in one county get to make themselves too promiscuous, and their immediate neighbors haven't the strength or the inclination to deal with them themselves, the Emergency men in the next county can slip in some dark night and run the obnoxious characters out. See?"

"And what does the Emergency man do when his services are not needed?" inquired Rodney, who was profoundly astonished.

"Why, he can stay quietly at home, if he wants to, and cultivate his little crops while he watches the

Union men in the settlement or acts as spy for the troops, if there are any in the vicinity."

"But suppose the Union men find it out and pop him over from the nearest canebrake?" said Rodney.

"He must look out for that, and so conduct himself while he is at home that no one will suspect anything wrong of him," answered Mr. Westall indifferently. "His fate is in his own hands, and if he doesn't know how to take care of himself, he has no business to be an Emergency man. You might call us a reserve to the State Guard, and that is what we really are."

"I think you are really freebooters. That is just the way the European brigands act," were the words that sprang to the boy's lips.

Although he was as wild a rebel as he ever had been, Rodney had a higher sense of honor than when he wrote that mischievous letter to Bud Goble for the purpose of getting his cousin Marcy Gray into trouble, and his whole soul revolted at the idea of being such a soldier as Mr. Westall described. If that was the way a partisan was expected to act, Rodney wished he had not been so determined to become a partisan. Why didn't he stay in his own State and follow the fortunes of the Mooreville Rangers, as he had promised to do? Finally he said:

"Are the State Guards the same as the Home Guards?"

"Not much; any more than a good Confederate is the same as a sneaking Yankee," replied Mr. Westall. "The Home Guards are known to all honest men as Lyon's Dutchmen. There is hardly a native born citizen among them, and yet they have the impudence to tell us Americans what kind of a government we shall have over us."

"Have you Emergency men had much to do yet?"

"We haven't done any fighting, if that's what you mean, for there hasn't been any to speak of outside of St. Louis; but we have been tolerable busy making it hot for the Union men in and around the settlements where we live. However—"

Here Mr. Westall stopped and nodded in Tom Percival's direction, as if to intimate that he did not care to say more on that subject while the prisoner was within hearing.

The conversation ran on in this channel during the half hour or more that Nels and his helper spent in getting ready the corn-bread and bacon, but Rodney, although he appeared to be listening closely, did not hear much of it, or gain any great store of information regarding the course he ought to pursue during his prospective ride from Cedar Bluff landing to the city of Springfield. The thoughts that filled his mind to the exclusion of everything else were: What had Tom Percival done to bring upon him the wrath of the Emergency men, and how was he going to help him out of the scrape? For of course he was bound to help him if he could; that was a settled thing. Tom Percival was Union all through, and Rodney had seen the day when he would have been glad to thrash him soundly for the treasonable sentiments he had so often and fearlessly uttered while they were at Barrington together; but that was all past now. Tom was his schoolmate and he was in trouble. That was enough for Rodney Gray, who would have fought until he dropped before he would have seen a hair of Tom's head injured.

"Now then, gentlemen, retch out and help yourselves," exclaimed Nels, breaking in upon the boy's meditations. "We aint got much, but you're as welcome as the flowers in May."

The invitation was promptly accepted, the single room the cabin contained being so small that the most of the hungry guests could reach the viands that had been placed upon the table without moving their nail kegs an inch. Rodney had eaten one good supper aboard the *Mollie Able*, but that did not prevent him from falling to with the rest. Tom Percival kept his seat in the chimney corner and a well-filled plate was passed over to him, and his cup was replenished as often as he drained it. Whatever else his captors intended to do to him they were not going to starve him. Of course the talk was all about the war, which Mr. West-all declared wasn't coming, and the high-handed action taken by the Washington authorities in sending Captain Stokes across the river from Illinois to seize ten thousand stand of arms that were stored in the St. Louis Arsenal. Of course this was done to keep the weapons from falling into the hands of the Confederates, who were already laying their plans to capture them, but Mr. Westall looked upon it as an insult to his State, and grew red in the face when he spoke of it.

"That was what made the trouble here in Missouri," said he, with great indignation. "Up to that time we were strong for the Union, and took pains to say that the State had no call to sever her connection with it; but at the same time we recommended, as a sure means of avoiding civil war, that the Federal troops should be withdrawn from all points where they were likely to come into collision with the citizens. How was that recommendation received? With silent contempt, sir; with silent contempt, and that is something we will not stand."

Supper being over Mr. Westall, Nels and Jeff left the cabin, to shut Tom Percival up in the corn-crib, the latter carrying upon his arm a tattered blanket which the prisoner was to use "to keep himself warm." It was with a heavy heart that Rodney saw him go, and as Tom did not once look his way, the latter could not even give him a glance of encouragement. When the three men returned at the end of ten minutes Mr. Westall was saying:

"It's a slimpsy place to shut a prisoner up in and I should be afraid to trust it, if it were not for the dogs. He can't crawl out between the logs, that much is certain; but the door is almost ready to drop from its hinges, and has a good deal of play back and forth behind the bar. If he had a thin, stout stick he could slip it through the crack, lift the bar and take himself off."

"But I tell you again that there aint the first thing in the crib that he can stick through that there crack," exclaimed Jeff, earnestly. "There aint nothing but corn ever been in there."

"I reckon he's safe enough," said Mr, Westall. "At any rate we will take our chances on it and try to get a good night's sleep. It might be well for whoever gets up during the night to mend the fire, to step out arid take a look at him. Now, Jeff, what about sleeping arrangements? There are not bunks enough for all of us, and I reckon we'll have to tote this table of yours out doors to make room for us to lie down on the floor, won't we?"

"Now that your prisoner is out of hearing, would you have any objection to telling me what he has been doing?" inquired Rodney, as Jeff and Nels pushed back their nail kegs and got up to act upon Mr. Westall's suggestion.

"No objection whatever, and it will not take me long to do it," replied the latter. "He's Union."

"But he doesn't look like a horse-thief," added Rodney.

"Yes, he's Union the worst kind," repeated the Emergency man. "We've been hearing about his father's doings ever since the election. We don't know him personally for he doesn't live in our county; but we know of him, and we've been told that he is a dangerous man. He owns a lot of niggers, but last election he walked up to the polls, as brave as you please, and voted for Abe Lincoln; and there wasn't a man who dared say a word to him or lift a hand to stop him. What do you think of that?"

"I admire his courage," replied Rodney, who had heard the story before.

"So would I, if it had been shown in a good cause," said the Emergency man. "But that's altogether too much cheek for a traitor, and I don't see anything in it to admire. This son of his is more to be feared than the old man, for he has been off somewhere and got a military education; and the very first thing he did when he came home from school was to get up a company of Home Guards, and send word to Captain Lyon that if he wanted help all he had to do was to say so."

Mr. Westall proceeded to light his pipe, which he had previously filled, and during the operation he winked at Rodney and nodded as if to ask him what he thought of *that*. The latter felt a thrill ran through every nerve in him. He was glad to know that his old schoolmate was not wanting in courage, even if he did sympathize with the Yankee invaders, and we may add that this feeling was characteristic of the Barrington boys all through the war. If they heard, as they occasionally did, that some schoolfellow in the opposing ranks had done something that was thought to be worthy of praise, they felt an honest pride in it.

"I said that young Percival *sent* word to Captain Lyon that he was ready to help him, but that was not strictly correct," continued Mr. Westall, taking a few puffs at his pipe to make sure that it was well lighted. "He *took* word to him personally to be certain he got it, riding alone on horseback all the way from Springfield to St. Louis. What passed between him and Lyon we don't know yet, for he won't open his mouth; but we may find means to make him tell all we care to hear. When he got through with his business at St. Louis he didn't go directly home, and that is what got him into this difficulty. He came back by the way of Pilot Knob, where he has a Union uncle living; but that's where I and my friends live, too."

"And was it there he stole the horse?" asked Rodney.

"Well, between you and me and the gatepost, he never stole a horse," replied Mr. Westall slowly, as if he were reluctant to make the admission.

Rodney Gray crossed his legs, clasped his hands around one knee and settled back on his nail keg with an air that said, almost as plainly as words:

"I knew it all the time."

"No, he never stole a horse or anything else that we know of," repeated Mr. Westall. "But he rides a critter that is so near like one that was stolen from a Confederate by a Union man of the name of Morehouse a few days ago, that you could hardly tell them apart."

"And I don't much blame Morehouse for stealing that horse, either," said one of the Emergency men, who had not spoken before. "He had to get out of the country, he couldn't do it without a horse to carry him, and so he took the one that came first to his hand."

"I don't know as I blame him, either," assented Mr. Westall. "But I do blame him for holding the opinions he does."

"Well, if another man stole the horse why do you lay it on to Percival?" inquired Rodney, who could hardly keep from showing how angry he was.

"You see the matter is just this way," replied the Emergency man, as if he scarcely knew how to explain the situation! "If young Percival had called upon his uncle for a visit, and gone away again without taking so much interest in the affairs of the settlement, we wouldn't have done any more than to give him warning that he wasn't wanted there; but when we saw him and his uncle with their heads together, and learned from some of our spies that Union men had been caught going to and from old Percival's house at all hours of the day and night, we made up our minds that there was something wrong about this young fellow; so we telegraphed to Springfield, and found out that he was an officer in a company of Home Guards who had offered their services to Lyon. Well, you bet we were surprised to find that he was the son of the only man in his county who dared to vote for Abe Lincoln, and it made us afraid of him. too."

"A whole settlement afraid of one boy?" exclaimed Rodney.

"Exactly. We didn't know which way to turn for the Union men are in the majority in our county, as they are all through the northern and eastern parts of Missouri, and we didn't dare do anything openly for fear of being bushwhacked. As good luck would have it we succeeded in scaring Morehouse out of the country about that time, and when he went, he took one of the best horses in the settlement with him. That gave us something to work on, and we made it up among ourselves that we would lay the theft on to young Percival, take him out of his bed that night and serve him as the law directs."

"Does that mean that you would have hung him?" asked Rodney, with a shudder.

"That's generally the way we do with horse-thieves up here," replied Mr.
Westall. "How do you serve them in your part of the country?"

"We put them in jail when they have been proved guilty," answered Rodney. "But you have said, in so many words, that this boy didn't steal the horse—that he was stolen by a man who ran away with him."

Before replying the Emergency man paused to relight his pipe which he had allowed to go out.

CHAPTER VIII.

RODNEY PROVES HIS FRIENDSHIP.

It seemed to take Mr. Westall a long time to get his pipe going to his satisfaction, and when at last he spoke, it was easy to see that he was angry at Rodney for inquiring so particularly into matters that did not in any way concern him.

"It is very strange that you fail to understand me after I have taken such_ pains to go into details," said he, impatiently. "The fact that young Percival didn't steal the horse doesn't matter. We were bound to get rid of him before he could have time to raise and drill a company of Home Guards in our settlement, and the only way we could do it was to charge him with some crime that would make everybody, Union and Confederate, mad at him. See? But somehow he got wind of our plans (that shows how impossible it is to trust anybody these times), and dug out."

"On his own horse?" asked Rodney.

"Of course. We put after him, taking care to cut him off from the old post-road which he would have to follow to reach Springfield, and making him stay in the river counties among people who would do

all in their power to help us catch him. He's a sharp one, and there aint no better critter than the one that has kept him ahead of us for nearly ten days. He has ridden that one horse all the time, while we have had to change now and then. He spent one night with Jeff in this cabin—"

"And the way he did pull the wool over our eyes was a caution," Nels interposed. "Why, if you could a heard him talk you would a thought, as we did, that he had been gunning for Union men and living on 'em ever since the furse began. He let on that he was in a great hurry to get over the river to see about getting some guns for Price's men, and we swallered every word he said."

"Tom always could tell a slick story," was Rodney's mental comment.

"He had a watch chain that was adzactly like your'n, and the minute I seen it I said to myself that you was him," said Nels in conclusion.

"We were close upon his heels," continued Mr. Westall. "We arrived here the next morning, about four hours after he left, and when we told Jeff and his friends what a neat trick had been played upon them, they became not only angry but very suspicious."

"Unreasonably suspicious," added Rodney, in a tone of disgust. "Does Jeff or anybody else suppose for a moment that I would have come back to this camp if I had been in Percival's place?"

"That was what beat my time and I said so," answered Nels. "I never would have suspicioned you if it hadn't been for that watch chain of your'n, and the story you told about not knowing the country around Springfield. The captain of the *Mollie Able* said you was one of Price's men, and we took it for granted that you had been riding with him. But I am satisfied now."

"I am glad to hear it," answered Rodney "But, Mr. Westall, it can't be possible that you will stand by and see this young fellow punished, when you know him to be innocent of the crime with which you have charged him?"

"No; I don't reckon I'll stand by and see it because I have sorter taken a shine to him, even if he is a traitor," answered the Emergency man. "There'll be enough to attend to the business without any of my help."

"And he will be hung, I suppose?"

"He'll never stick his meddlesome Union nose into our settlement again, I'll bet you on that," replied Mr. Westall, knocking the ashes from his pipe and showing quite plainly by his manner that he did not care to answer any more questions. "I can't understand why the folks living down Springfield way didn't attend to his case long ago, and save us the trouble."

So saying the Emergency man arose to his feet and went after his blanket, which had been left outside the door with his saddle, and the movement was taken by the others as a signal that it was time to go to bed. Rodney's blankets were in his trunk, but he was not ready to take them out just then. He followed Mr. Westall out of the door, believing that the latter would be sure to visit Tom's prison before retiring for the night.

"I must find out where that corn-crib is, for I shall want to go to it before morning," said Rodney to himself. "And then there are the dogs, which I should like to have see and scent me before I go prowling around among them. Tom's got to have help this very night or he is just as good as a dead cadet."

Mr. Westall undid the blanket which was strapped behind his saddle, tossed it into the cabin and then stretched his arms and yawned as if he were very tired and sleepy.

"I am used to the saddle," said he, as Rodney came out of the cabin and approached the place where he was standing, "but I must say that that young fellow has given me a hard pull. He must be made of iron, for he doesn't seem to mind it at all. Let's go and see how he is getting on. I want to make sure that he is safe before I go to sleep."

"Don't you think this is a cold-blooded, heartless way to treat a boy who has never done you any harm?" inquired Rodney, stooping down to caress first one and then another of the large pack of dogs which came trooping up the minute the cabin door was opened. "Have you a son about the same age?"

"That's neither here nor there," replied Mr. Westall; and Rodney thought from the nervous, jerky manner in which he faced about and started for the corn-crib, that the words had touched him in a tender spot. "Suppose I have; what then? If he so far forgets the training he has received ever since he was old enough to know anything, let him take the consequences."

"You say that young Percival's father is strong for the Union," continued Rodney. "If that is the case, didn't he train up his son in the way he wanted him to go? No doubt he is just as honest in his opinions as we are."

"Honest!" repeated Mr. Westall, in a tone of contempt. "Can a man honestly hold opinions that make him a traitor to his State? Percival is on the wrong side, but that is no fault of ours. We can't and won't have traitors in our midst preaching up their doctrines and organizing military companies. Why, do you know that they have bushwhacked scores of our men all over the State—called them to the door of their homes and shot them down like dogs, or popped them over while they were riding quietly along the road? You are a partisan, are you? You don't know the meaning of the word; but if you will go home with me I will teach it to you in less than a week."

If Rodney had given utterance to his honest sentiments he would have told Mr. Westall, in pretty plain language, that he would face about and go to his own home again before he would be that kind of a partisan. Shaking his fist under a Union boy's nose and fighting him on the parade ground was one thing, and shooting him down in cold blood was another. But he did not have time to make any reply, for just as Mr. Westall ceased speaking they reached the corn-crib.

"All right in there?" said the Emergency man, laying hold of the door and giving it a shake; and as he did so, Rodney took note of the fact that it opened as much as an inch and a half, so that if the prisoner on the inside had anything with which he could reach through the crack and throw the bar out of its place, he need not stay there a moment longer than he wanted to. "Will one blanket be enough to keep you warm?"

"I don't call this fish-net a blanket," replied Tom's voice. "I suppose it will have to do, if you are so poor you can't give me anything better. But this is a cold, cheerless place to shove a fellow into without any fire or light."

"It's plenty good enough for a traitor," answered Mr. Westall, with a coarse laugh; and then he turned about and led the way back to the cabin.

Two of the Emergency men and all the wood-cutters had come out to "take a look at the weather," and make up their minds whether or not the steamer they heard coming up the river below the bend was going to stop at the landing for fuel, and while Rodney listened to their conversation he walked about with his hands in his pockets, and kicked listlessly at the chips and sticks that were scattered around the log on which Jeff and his men cut their fire-wood. Finally he picked up one of the sticks and began cutting it with his knife; and a little later, when he thought no one was observing his movements, he shoved the stick into the sleeve of his coat. This much being done he was ready to make a demonstration in Tom Percival's favor.

"By the way, Jeff," said he, suddenly. "While you are waiting for that steamer to make up her mind if she wants any wood or not, will you tell me where I can find my horse? I always make it a point to say goodnight to him before I go to bed."

Resting one hand on the boy's shoulder Jeff pointed with the other, and showed him the building in which the roan colt had been placed under cover.

"The dogs won't bother me, will they?" asked Rodney.

"Oh, no. You've been round amongst 'em and they know you."

Rodney posted off, and Jeff saw him disappear through the door of the cabin that had been pointed out to him; but he was not looking, that way when Rodney came out a moment later, and with noiseless steps and form half bent directed his course toward Tom Percival's prison. His face wore a determined look, and his right hand, which was thrust into the pocket of his sack coat, firmly clutched his revolver. He knew that he must succeed in what he was about to attempt or die in his tracks, for if he were detected, he would stand as good a chance of being hanged as Tom himself. But there were no signs of wavering or hesitation about him. He drew a bee-line for the back of the corn-crib, and began looking for the places where the chinking had fallen out. It did not take him many minutes to find one, and then he set about attracting Tom's attention by pulling the stick from his sleeve, and rubbing it back and forth through one of the cracks. The movement was successful. There was a slight rustling among the corn-husks inside the cabin, and a second later the prisoner laid hold of the stick.

"All right," whispered Tom. "I was looking for you, and I know what this stick is for, Shake."

The boys tried to bring their hands together, but the opening between the logs was so narrow that the best they could do was to interlock some of their fingers.

"Here," whispered Rodney, pushing his revolver through the crack butt first. '; Take this, you Yankee, and remember that you will surely be hung if you don't get out of here before daylight."

"I hope you are not disarming yourself," said Tom.

"That's all right. This is for Dick Graham's sake and Barrington's; but look out for me if I catch you outside, for I am one of Price's men."

Tom said something in reply, but Rodney did not hear what it was, nor did he think it safe to stop long enough to ask the prisoner to repeat the words. He hastened away from the corn-crib, and when Jeff and Mr. Westall next saw him, he was standing in the stable door pushing back his horse which was trying to follow him out. He was doing more. He was striving with all his will-power to subdue the feelings of excitement and exultation that surged upon him when he thought of what he had done, and what the consequences to him would be if anything happened to excite the suspicions of the hot-headed Confederates who had him completely in their power.

"If they do anything to me and Tom finds it out, he will make some of them suffer if he ever gets the chance," thought the Barrington boy, as he closed the door of the stable and walked back to the wood pile. "But what good will that do me when I am dead and gone? I declare I begin to feel as Dick Graham did: Dog-gone State Rights anyhow."

It was with no slight feelings of anxiety that Rodney Gray joined the group of men around the wood yard; but fortunately there was no light in the cabin other than that given out by the blaze in the fire-place, and if his face bore any trace of excitement, as he was certain it did, nobody noticed it. The steamer did not stop at the landing, and when she passed on up the river, the wood-cutters and their guests went into the cabin and closed the door. Then Rodney opened his trunk and brought out his blankets, taking care to spread them as far from the door as he could, so that when Tom's escape was discovered, no one could reasonably suspect him of having slipped out during the night and set him free.

"Good-night, everybody," said he cheerfully, as he laid himself upon his hard couch. "I have made two mistakes—two big mistakes," he added, as he drew his head under the blankets. "I forgot to warn Tom to look out for the dogs (but being a Southerner he ought to know enough for that without being told), and I ought not to have said so much in his favor to Mr. Westall. Now that I think of it, that was a fearful blunder, and it may be the means of bringing trouble to me. Well, I can't help it. I detest Tom's principles and would be glad to see them thrashed out of him; but when it comes to hanging him for something he didn't do—that's carrying things just a little too far. There's not a wink of sleep for me this night."

But, contrary to his expectations, Rodney fell asleep in less than half an hour and slumbered soundly until he was awakened by one of the Emergency men, who made considerable noise in punching up the fire. Mr. Westall was also aroused. Raising himself on his elbow he said, drowsily:

"That you, Harvey? Have you been out to look at that friend of ours in the corn-crib?"

"I have, and found him all right."

"Did you simply speak to him, or did you go in where he was?"

"I took a piece of fat wood from this fire and went in where he was," replied Harvey. "He was covered up head and ears, but I saw his boots sticking out from under the blanket."

"What time is it?"

"Two o'clock of a clear, starlight morning, and all's well," answered Harvey; and this made it plain that if he was not a soldier he was learning to be one, for he knew how to pass the sentry's call.

"*Well*; of all the dunderheads *I* ever heard of that Tom Percival is the biggest," thought Rodney, who had never in his life been more astounded. "Two o'clock in the morning and he lying fast asleep there in the corn-crib when he ought to be miles away! If I had known he was going to act like that, I would have seen him happy before I would have risked my neck trying to save his."

Rodney turned over on the other side with an angry flop and tried to go to sleep again; but that was quite out of the question. He could do nothing but rail at Tom for his stupidity, and wonder if the latter would have sense enough to hide the revolver before Mr. Westall or some other Emergency man went into his prison in the morning to bring him out. Two other men got up and left the cabin before day-light, and the Barrington boy knew they visited the corn-crib, for he heard their footsteps as they were going and returning; but as they both brought a few sticks of wood with them and mended the fire

without saying a word, Rodney was forced to the conclusion that Tom was still safe in his prison.

Jeff, who was an early riser, was stirring long before the first signs of coming dawn could be seen through the numerous cracks in the walls of the cabin, and when he got out of his bunk it was a signal to all his men, who were prompt to follow his example. The Emergency men and Rodney arose also, for of course it was useless to think of sleeping longer with so many pairs of heavy boots pounding the dirt floor on which their blankets were spread. One of the wood-cutters set off for the river with a bucket in each hand to bring water for cooking and washing purposes, others went to feed the stock, and Nels, at Mr. Westall's request, went to arouse Tom Percival.

"No doubt he will enjoy the fire after passing the night in that cold corn-crib," said the Emergency man, spreading his hands over the cheerful blaze upon the wide hearth. "But whether or not he will enjoy the society into which he will be thrown before he has another chance to sleep, is a different matter altogether."

"And I think I should enjoy a little exercise," chimed in Rodney. "I am not much of a chopper, but perhaps I can get up an appetite for breakfast."

So saying he went out into the wood yard and caught up an axe. His object was not to get up an appetite (being in the best of health he always had that), but to place himself where he could see his old schoolmate when he was brought out of his prison. He would have given something handsome if he could have had a chance to ask Tom what his object was in staying in that corn-crib after he had been provided with the means of getting out, and a revolver with which to defend himself, but was obliged to content himself with the reflection that he had done all he could, and that if Tom wanted help he would have to look for it somewhere else.

"I wonder if he thinks the Union men at Pilot Knob will rescue him when he is brought there?" thought Rodney, as he swung the axe in the air. "If he is depending upon them, why did he run away from the settlement in the first place? What was the reason he—"

Rodney, who had kept one eye on Nels, paused with his axe suspended in the air and looked at the corn-crib. He saw the man throw down the bar and open the door, and heard him when he shouted:

"Come out of that and pay your lodging. We can't afford to keep a free hotel when bacon is getting so scarce that we can't even steal it. Out you come."

[Illustration: AN ASTONISHING DISCOVERY.]

Rodney listened but did not hear any answer. Neither did Nels. The latter bent forward, stretched out his neck and seemed to be intently regarding something on the inside of the cabin. Then he straightened up and marched in with a vicious air, as if he was resolved that he would not stand any more fooling. He was gone not more than a minute, and then he came back with a jump and a whoop, holding Jeff's tattered blanket in one hand and a pair of well-worn boots in the other.

"Wake snakes!" yelled Nels, striking up a war-dance and frantically flourishing the captured articles over his head. "He's skipped, that hoss-thief has! He's lit out, I tell ye!"

Almost at the same moment the wood-cutter who had gone out to attend to the stock appeared at the door of the stable and called out to Rodney:

"Say, you Louisanner fellar, where's your critter?" And then he stopped and looked at Nels. "Do you say the prisoner has lit out?" he shouted. "Then he's done took another hoss to holp him on his way."

"If he has taken mine he has got the best horse in the State," exclaimed Rodney, dropping his axe and starting posthaste for the stable. "You might as well give up now, Mr. Westall, for the colt is Copper-bottom stock and can travel for twenty-four hours at a stretch."

Again Rodney told himself that he had never been more astonished. He was delighted, too, to find that his friend had not forgotten the tricks he had learned at the Barrington Military Academy. He had not only arranged a "dummy" in the dark—making so good a job of it, too, that the man Harvey, with the light of a pine knot to aid him, had not been able to discover the cheat but he had left his boots sticking out from under the blanket and gone off in his stocking feet. But why had he taken Rodney's horse instead of his own? It was all right, of course, for a fair exchange was no robbery, but Rodney would have liked to have had that question answered.

"It seems that Jeff's dogs are not worth the powder it would take to blow them up," said he to Mr. Westall, who had followed close at his heels. "Your man has gone off with my horse, and I don't believe you have a nag in your party that can catch him. Now what's to be done?"

"I was a plumb dunce for placing any dependence on those dogs," replied the Emergency man, as soon as his surprise and anger would permit him to speak. "I might have known that they would not pay the slightest attention to Percival after they had seen him with us about the camp. Nels, was there anything in or around the corn-crib to show how he got out?"

"Not the first that I could see," answered the wood-cutter. "The bar was in its place, and when I opened the door I was as certain as I could be that I saw him laying there on the shucks with his feet sticking out. When I called and he didn't say nothing, I thought I would go in and snatch him up off'n them shucks in a way that would learn him not to play 'possum on me ary 'nother time; but when I snatched I didn't get nothing but the blanket and empty boots."

"Harvey, he must have been gone when you went in there with your light," said Mr. Westall, reproachfully. "No doubt he threw the bar up with his hand, and his object in closing the door after him was to hide his escape as long as possible. If he went about midnight he has nearly six hours the start of us, on a swift horse and along a road he knows like a book. Let's go home, boys. We've done the best we could, but next time we'll try and be a little sharper."

While this conversation was going on Rodney had leisure to recover his composure, and was not a little relieved to see that there were no side-long glances cast toward himself. Mr. Westall seemed to think that he alone was to blame for the prisoner's escape, his four companions were quite willing that he should shoulder the responsibility, and no one thought of suspecting Rodney Gray.

"I am short a good horse by last night's work, and suppose I shall have to take Percival's to replace him, won't I?" said the latter. "It's that or go afoot, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is," replied the Emergency man.

"What sort of an animal is he and where is he?" continued Rodney. "I should like to have a look at him."

"He's out in the yard with the rest of the critters," said Nels. "I thought it best to keep yours in the shed because, being a stranger, the others might have fell to kicking him if they had all been turned in together."

"You did perfectly right," answered Rodney, who thought the man was trying to excuse himself for having put the roan colt where he could be so easily stolen. "And that's the reason Tom took him," he added, mentally. "If he had gone into the yard after his own nag, the others would have snorted and raised a fuss, and that would have started the dogs and prevented his escape. It's all right, but I would rather have my horse than that one."

The steed that was pointed out to him as the property of the escaped prisoner was a fine looking animal, and the fact that he had led his pursuers so long a chase, proved that he was not only a "goer" but a "stayer" as well; but for all that Rodney wished his friend Tom had thought it safe to take him and leave the roan colt.

"I have very serious objections to riding that horse through the counties back of here," said he at length. "He is too well known; and how do I know but that somebody will bounce me for a horse-thief?"

"That's a most disagreeable fact," said Mr. Westall, reflectively. "We gave a description of him to every man and boy we met along the road."

"That is just what I was afraid of. Can't you give me a trade for him?"

"I don't see how we can, for if we should take the horse back to the settlement with us, the folks there would be sure to ask how we came to get him without getting the thief, too; see?"

"Well, could you give me a bill of sale of him?" asked the boy, after thinking a moment.

"When I don't own a dollar's worth of interest in him?" exclaimed the Emergency man, opening his eyes. "Not much I couldn't. I tell you, young fellow, a horse is a mighty ticklish piece of property to have in these parts unless you can prove a clear claim to him."

"I want some sort of a paper to show to our friends along the road, don't I?" exclaimed Rodney, who began to think that his chances for seeing Price's army were getting smaller all the time.

"Oh, that's what you want, is it?" said Mr. Westall. "Well, I'll tell you what we'll do: You ride with us as far as the road where we turn off to go to Pilot Knob, and then I will give you a letter that will help you if you happen to fall in with any of our side; but you must be careful to know the men before you show the letter to them, for if you should pull it on a Union man, you would get yourself into trouble.

Now let's get a bite to eat and start for home."

This made it evident that the Emergency man had become discouraged with his ill-luck, and did not intend to follow Tom Percival any farther.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE ROAD.

The breakfast which Nels and his assistant placed upon the table in due time was eaten almost in silence, for those who sat down to it had so much thinking to do that they had no time for conversation. When Rodney Gray had satisfied his appetite he opened his trunk and took from it a pair of saddle-bags, which he proceeded to fill with a variety of useful articles. His thoughtful mother had packed the trunk as full as it could hold, and Rodney could not take a quarter of the things with him. He knew he couldn't when he started; but the trunk was necessary to aid him in the game of deception he played upon the Baton Rouge telegraph operators. By taking it aboard the *Mollie Able*, together with a liberal supply of hay and grain for his horse, he led them to believe that he was really going on to St. Louis. After filling the saddle-bags, he rolled his blankets into a compact bundle so that he could strap them behind him on his horse.

"I have left a good many things in there that I can't take with me," said he, as he locked the trunk and handed the key to Jeff. "And if I don't come back and claim them within a reasonable time, you are at liberty to take them for your own. How much damage have I done your commissary department since I have been here?"

"How much damage have you done which?" exclaimed Jeff.

"How much do you want for the fodder I and my horse and that Yankee's horse have eaten?" repeated Rodney.

"Oh; why didn't you say so? You and your horse are as welcome as the flowers in May; and as for that thief's critter, I wouldn't let you pay a cent for him any way. But I'm sorry you aint got your own boss to ride to Springfield."

"So am I. Mine is the better horse, and besides I don't at all like the idea of having every man I meet take me for a thief. Have you a revolver you would be willing to sell at your own price?"

"What kind of a fellow are you, anyhow?" exclaimed Mr. Westall, who stood by listening. "Do you mean to say that you have come up here, intending to ride through these turbulent settlements, without bringing along something to defend yourself with?"

"That is the most dangerous article I have about me," answered Rodney, putting his hand into his pocket and drawing out the big jack-knife Lieutenant Odell had given him the day before he left home. At the same time he wondered what the Emergency man would have said and done if he had been aware that the boy to whom he was talking had brought a revolver with him, and that he had given it to Tom Percival to defend himself in case he was attacked.

"I never heard of a more foolish piece of business," exclaimed Mr. Westall, with an air which said very plainly that he had no patience with such a fellow as Rodney Gray was. "What sort of people did you think you were going to meet, I should like to know. I suppose you have heard that there are Northern sympathizers in this State, and that they are about the meanest folks you will find on top of the earth?"

"I have heard all about it; but I supposed that I should find our own people in the majority. This is a Southern State, isn't it?"

"In some places they are in the majority and in some they are not," replied Mr. Westall. "Of course this is a Southern State; but don't you know that those Dutchmen in St. Louis have gone back on Governor Jackson, and that he and the members of the legislature have had to run for their lives? Why, boy, you may be called upon to defend yourself in less than an hour after we leave you. Got a revolver to spare, Jeff?"

"Aint got none of that sort," replied the wood-cutter. "There aint nothing but rifles in the shanty."

"Then I shall be obliged to let you have one of mine," said the Emergency man, taking a belt down from a peg beside the door, and drawing an ancient Colt from one of the holsters. "I may be able to replace it some time or other; but whether I am or not, you mustn't think of starting for Springfield without a weapon where you can put your hand on it. It is rather large and heavy for your pocket and you have no belt; so you will have to shove it into your boot leg. That's as handy a place to carry it as any I know of."

When both parties are willing to trade it does not take them long to come to an understanding, and in a very short time some of Rodney's gold went into Mr. Westall's pocket, and the revolver into the leg of the boy's boot. In ten minutes more the horses had been brought out of the yard and prepared for the journey, Rodney placing his own saddle and bridle on his new steed, and leaving Tom's for Jeff to dispose of in any way he saw proper.

"I reckon I'm just that much ahead of the hounds," said the wood-cutter, with a grin. "That hoss-thief won't never dare to come after his saddle, and mebbe it'll bring me in a few dollars for tobacker. Farewell, and be sure and drop in as often as you come this way. Look out for yourself, you Louisanner feller."

The path that ran through the woods to the big road leading from Cape Girardeau to Lesterville, the place where Rodney's companions would take leave of him and turn toward Ironton, was all of three miles long, and so narrow that they were obliged to ride in a single file. Mr. Westall remarked, with a careless laugh, that it was a good thing for them that the people living in the vicinity were mostly Confederates, for the woods on each side of the path were thick, and would afford the nicest kind of cover for a bushwhacking party.

"I suppose there are plenty of Union people between here and your settlement?" observed Rodney.

"Lots of 'em; and they are not only dead shots, but they know every hog path in the woods and are as sneaking and sly as so many Indians. They'll fight, too. We know that to be a fact, for we've got some of them for near neighbors."

"Then perhaps it is just as well that you have me instead of Percival with you," said Rodney. "If you had taken him a prisoner to Pilot Knob, what assurance have you that you would not have been bushwhacked on the way?"

"None whatever; but we would have been willing to take our chances on it."

The Emergency man spoke carelessly enough, but Rodney noticed that he had not neglected to make preparations for a fight. The single revolver his belt contained had been transferred to the night holster, and the strap that usually passed over the hammer to keep the weapon in place, had been unbuttoned so that the heavy Colt could be drawn in an instant. This made Rodney feel rather uneasy. Perhaps he would not have been so very frightened at the prospect of a fair stand-up fight, but the fear that somebody might cut loose on him or some member of his party with a double-barrel shotgun before any of them knew there was danger near, was more than his nerves could stand. He was glad when they left the woods behind and rode out into the highway; but it wasn't half an hour before he had occasion to tell himself that when the Emergency men took leave of him and turned off toward their own settlement, the woods would be the safest place for him. They were riding along two abreast, Mr. Westall and Rodney leading the way, when, as they came suddenly to a narrow cross-road, they found themselves face to face with a long-haired, unkempt native mounted on the leanest, hungriest mule Rodney had ever seen. He rode bare-back, his spine bent almost in the form of a half circle, his body swaying back and forth, and with every step his beast took he pounded its sides with the heels of his boots—not with the object of inducing the mule to quicken its pace, but because the motion had become a habit with him. He was surprised and startled when he found himself so close to the Emergency men, and partly raised the muzzle of the heavy double-barrel shotgun he carried in front of him; but a second glance seemed to relieve his fears, for he grinned broadly, and waited for the horsemen to come up.

"Wal, ye got him, didn't ye?" said he; and the words went far to confirm the fear that had haunted Rodney Gray ever since he found that Tom Percival had gone off with the roan colt, leaving his own well-advertised horse behind him. This ignorant backwoodsman, who didn't look as though he knew enough to go in when it rained, had recognized the horse the moment he put his eyes on him.

"Oh, this isn't the man at all, Mister—a—I declare I have disremembered your name," exclaimed Mr. Westall.

"I don't reckon ye ever knowed it, kase I never seed hide nor hair of none of ye afore this day," replied the native, with another grin. "But it's Swanson, if it will do ye any good to hear it. I live back

here in the bresh about a couple of milds."

"How does it come that you are so prompt to recognize us if you never saw us before?" inquired Rodney.

"Oh, I hearn tell that there was some of Jeff Thompson's men riding through the kentry looking for a hoss-thief, and I knowed the hoss when I seen him. But ye say this aint the thief," answered the native, with an inquiring glance at Mr. Westall.

"That was what I said," replied the Emergency man. "He is a friend of ours, belongs to Price, and you want to take a good look at him and the horse too, so that you will know them again if you happen to meet them anywhere on the road."

And then Mr. Westall went on to tell who Tom Percival was and where he lived, not forgetting to lay a good deal of stress on the statement that he was not only a strong Union man, but a horse-thief as well. This made Rodney angry, but of course he couldn't help himself.

"You want to keep a bright lookout for a young fellow in his stocking feet, riding a bareback roan colt," said the Emergency man, in conclusion. "If you fall in with such a chap, you will make something by bringing him to Pilot Knob settlement and asking for Mr. Westall."

"I'll keep them words in mind," replied the native, urging the mule forward by digging him in the ribs with his boot heels.

"You'll have to look in the woods for him," observed the man Harvey. "It isn't at all likely that he will keep the road in daylight when he hasn't a thing to defend himself with."

"I aint thinking about that any more'n I am about him having no boots on," said the Missourian, looking back over his shoulder. "There's plenty of mean folks in this kentry that'll give him we'pons and clothes for the asking. If I can't get the drop on to him, I won't say a word to him."

"This is just what I was afraid of," Rodney remarked, when the man had passed out of hearing. "Every one who meets me on the road will look upon me with suspicion, and perhaps I had better take to the woods myself."

"Don't think of it," answered Mr. Westall, hastily. "You would be sure to lose your way and stand a fine chance of being bushwhacked besides. You will find that the boldest course is the best; and that's dangerous enough, goodness knows," he added, in an undertone.

When the party halted for dinner the scene we have just described was re-enacted. Before any of them had a chance to say a word the planter at whose gate they stopped began abusing Rodney in the strongest language he could command; and he was such a rapid talker that he succeeded in saying a good many harsh things before Mr. Westall and his companions could stop him. When he was made to understand that he had committed a blunder, and that the boy was as good a Confederate as he was himself, the planter was profuse in his apologies.

"Alight," said he, giving Rodney his hand and almost pulling him out of his saddle. "I'm sorry for what I said, but that horse made me suspicion you. I wouldn't ride him through the country for all the money there is in Missoury. You'd best give up trying to find Price and jine in with Thompson's men. You won't have to go so far to find 'em."

Rodney had thought of that, but there was Dick Graham! He could not give up the hope of finding his old schoolmate and serving out his year with him.

After the planter had given the Emergency men a good dinner he brought out writing materials, and Mr. Westall proceeded to write the letter he had promised to give Rodney, and which he hoped would be the means of taking him safely through to Springfield. He and all his friends, the planter included, signed it, and the boy tucked it into his boot leg.

"You may be sure that I shall not show it to any Union man," said the latter, with a smile. "It would hang me."

When they passed through the little settlement of Lesterville about three o'clock that afternoon, Rodney and the horse he rode attracted attention on every hand. All the farmers in the country for miles around seemed to have flocked into town to discuss the latest news, and the streets were full of loungers, every one of whom stared at the party and had something to say regarding the boy, who was supposed to be a prisoner. On two or three occasions Mr. Westall thought it prudent to stop and explain the situation; and every time he did so, the loungers came running from all directions to hear about it. Some of them thought that Tom Percival had played a regular Yankee trick on Rodney in running off

with the roan colt and leaving him a stolen horse to ride, and advised him to look out for himself. The story that Mr. Westall and his friends had circulated about Tom seemed to have made every one his enemy.

"I suppose you think every man we have been talking to is a Jackson man, don't you?" said Mr. Westall, when they had left the settlement behind and reached the open country once more. "Well, they aint. I saw some Union men listening to what we said, and if they see a roan colt and a boy without any boots on, they'll halt them and give them aid and comfort."

"I am very glad to hear that," said Rodney to himself. "Tom needs help, if any one ever did, and I hope he will get it. It's going to be ticklish business steering clear of Union men, is it not!" he said, aloud.

Mr. Westall thought it was, but still he did not have very much to say about it, for since Rodney was resolved to go on, he did not want to discourage him. As his journey progressed he would learn all about the obstacles and dangers that lay in his course, and when they came, he would have to surmount or get around them the best way he could. A mile or so farther on they came to another crossroad, and there Mr. Westall drew rein and held out his hand to Rodney.

"Our course lies off that way," said he, "and we must bid you good-by. You've got money and letters, and know as much about the road ahead of you and the people who live on it as we know ourselves. Is there anything we can do for you that you think of?"

"Not a thing, thank you," replied the boy, as he shook hands with each of the Emergency men. "You have been very kind, and I believe the advice and information you have given me will take me safely through. Good-by; and whenever you hear that Price has whipped the Yankees, you may know that I was there to help him do it."

"That's the right spirit, anyway. I like your pluck, and if we see you again, we shall expect to see you wearing an officer's uniform."

The Emergency men lifted their hats and galloped off down the cross-road, and Rodney Gray was left alone in a strange country, and with letters on "his person that would compromise him with any party of men into whose company he chanced to fall. There was Tom's horse, too. The animal was bound to bring his rider into trouble of some sort, for of course a description of him had been carried through the country for miles in advance. He felt savage toward the innocent beast which was carrying him along in an easy foxtrot, and bitterly hostile toward Tom Percival who had blundered into his way when he was least expecting to see him.

"Why didn't he stay in his own part of the State where he belonged?" thought Rodney, spitefully. "I hope to goodness the Yankees—but after all it was my own fault, for didn't I hand him that stick and give him the only revolver I had? And he couldn't have got his own horse out of that yard without arousing the dogs. It's all right, and I won't quarrel with Tom Percival."

To Rodney's great relief he did not meet a man that afternoon (no doubt the farmers had all gone into town to talk politics with their neighbors), but there were plenty of womenfolks in the houses along the road, and they had their full share of curiosity. They flocked to the doors and windows and looked closely at him as he passed, and Rodney knew well enough that the men would hear all about him when they came home at night.

When darkness came on Rodney Gray began to realize the helplessness of his position. It was time he was looking for a place to stay all night, but what should he say to the farmer to whom he applied for supper and lodging? If he told the truth and declared himself to be a Confederate, and the farmer chanced to belong to the opposite side, or if he tried to pass himself off for a Unionist and the farmer proved to be a red-hot Jackson man:

"Ay, there's the rub," thought Rodney, looking down at the ground in deep perplexity. "There's where the difficulty comes in, and I don't know how to decide it."

He was not called upon to decide the matter that night, for while these thoughts were passing through his mind, a voice a short distance in advance of him began shouting:

"Pig-g-e-e! pig-g-i-i! pig-g-o-o!" And a chorus of squeals and grunts, followed by a rush in the bushes at the side of the road, told him that the call had been heard, and that the farmer's hogs were making haste to get their supper of corn. Before Rodney could make up his mind whether to stop or keep on, his horse brought him from behind the bushes which had covered his approach, and the boy found himself within less than twenty feet of a man in his shirt-sleeves, who stopped his shouting and stood with an ear of corn uplifted in his hand.

"Evening," said Rodney, who saw that it was useless to retreat.

"I'll be dog-gone!" said the man, throwing the ear of corn with unerring aim at the head of the nearest porker and beckoning to Rodney with both hands. "Come out of the road. Come up behind the bresh and be quick about it."

Rodney obeyed, lost in wonder; but as he rode across the shallow ditch that ran between the road and the fence behind which the farmer stood, he did not neglect to give his right leg a shake to loosen his revolver, which during his long ride had worked its way down into his boot. Of course the farmer had made a mistake of some kind, and Rodney was rather anxious to learn what he would do when he found it out.

"I have been a-hoping that you would come along and sorter looking for it," continued the man, as Rodney drew up beside the fence. "But I didn't dast to look for such a streak of luck as this. He's waiting for you."

"He? Who?" asked Rodney; and then he caught his breath and wondered if he had done wrong in speaking before the man had opportunity to explain his meaning.

"Tain't worth while for you to play off on me," replied the farmer, leading the way along the fence and motioning to Rodney to follow. "I know the whole story from beginning to end, but I can't take you where he is tonight. You'll have to stop with me till morning, but you and the critter'll have to be hid in the bresh, kase Thompson's men aint gone away yet."

Here was one point settled, and it wasn't settled to the boy's satisfaction, either. The man on the other side of the fence, who now stopped and let down a pair of bars so that he could ride through into the barnyard, was a Union man; and, to make matters worse he took Rodney for the same. But what was that story he had heard from beginning to end, and who was it that was waiting for him? Rodney dared not speak for fear of saying something he ought not to say, and so he held his peace. When he had followed his guide through the yard and into a small building that looked as though it might have been fitted up for a cow-stable, the latter continued, speaking now in his natural tone of voice as if he were no longer in fear of being overheard:

"He was looking for me all the time, and I knowed it the minute I set eyes on to him."

"Friend of yours?" said the boy, at a venture.

"In a sartin way he are a friend, but I never see him till this afternoon. I know his uncle up to Pilot Knob, and when I see him riding by the house and looking at it as though he'd like to say something if he wasn't afraid, I told him to 'light, and asked him wasn't he looking for Merrick. That's me, you know. He said he was, and you might have knocked me down with a straw when he told me he was kin to old Justus Percival. Why don't you 'light?"

The farmer might have knocked Rodney down with a straw too, if he had had one handy, for the boy was very much surprised. He got off his horse somehow and managed to inquire:

"What did he tell you about me that made you know me as quick as you saw me?"

"He told me everything about you—how you had run away from Louisianner kase your folks was all dead set agin the Union, and come up to Missoury thinking to get amongst people of your own way of thinking, and run plum into a nest of traitors before you knowed it."

"That was at Cedar Bluff landing, was it?" said Rodney.

"That's the place. And then he told me how you played off on them wood-cutters till you made 'em think you was hot agin the Union, same as they was, and so they give you a chance to holp him outen that corn-crib and shove him a revolver to take care of himself with."

"And how did he repay my kindness?" said Rodney. "By taking my colt and leaving me a stolen horse to ride."

"This critter wasn't stolen no more'n your'n was," replied the farmer, in tones so earnest that Rodney began to fear he had stepped upon dangerous ground. "That was a lie that man Westall and amongst 'em got up to drive him outen his uncle's settlement. This is his hoss and he's got your'n."

"Where is he now?"

Instead of answering the farmer gave Rodney's arm a severe gripe and shake, and then seized the horse by the nose. A second later they heard a body of men riding along the road in front of the cow-

stable.

"Don't give a loud wink," said the farmer, in a thrilling whisper. "Them's some of Thompson's critter-fellers."

CHAPTER X.

COMPARING NOTES.

Rodney Gray held his breath and listened, and then he stepped close to the side of the stable and looked through a crack between the logs. It was almost dark by this time, but still there was light enough for him to count the men who were riding by, and he made out that there were an even dozen of them. They knew enough to move two abreast but not enough to carry their guns, which were held over their shoulders at all angles, and pointed in almost every direction.

"Are they guerrillas?" he asked, at length.

"Ger—which?" whispered the farmer. "Them's Thompson's men, and I don't like to see 'em pointing t'wards the swamp the way they be."

"What's down there?" inquired Rodney.

"Why, he's down there," replied Merrick, in a surprised tone. "Tom Percival, I mean."

"Anybody with, him?" continued Rodney.

"Half a dozen or so Union men, who had to clear out or be hung by Thompson's men," replied the farmer. "If you knowed just how things stand here in Missoury, and how sot every man is agin his nearest neighbor, I don't reckon you'd ever tried to ride to Springfield."

"I am quite sure I wouldn't," answered Rodney. "How do Thompson's men happen to know that Percival is hiding down there in the swamp?"

"I reckon Swanson must a told 'em; and he's the meanest man that was ever let live, as you would say if you could have one look at his face."

"I met him to-day while I was riding in company with Mr. Westall and his friends," replied Rodney. "They made him believe I was a good rebel, and told him to look out for a boy in his stocking feet who was mounted on a roan colt."

"And that's just what he done. I reckon he must a ketched a glimpse of Percival just before I fetched him into the house, for I had barely time to hide the roan colt and get the boy into the kitchen before I seen Swanson riding by. He didn't once look toward the house but that didn't fool me, and I lost no time in taking Percival into the swamp where them Union friends of mine is hid. Swanson went right on past, leaving word at all the houses of the 'Mergency men that there was a Yankee horse-thief loose in the kentry, and they've went out to ketch him. They know where he is, and think to surround him and the rest of the Union fellers and take 'em in in a lump; but they'll get fooled. There's some sharp men in that party, and they won't allow themselves to be surrounded."

The farmer did not tell this story in a connected way as he would if there had been no danger near. He kept moving from one side of the stable to another, listening and peeping at all the cracks, and talked only when he stopped to take the horse by the nose to prevent him from calling to those that were passing along the road; but he said enough to make Rodney very uneasy. Tom Percival had done him a great favor by telling Merrick who he was, describing him and his horse so minutely that the man knew them the instant he saw them, and Rodney was very grateful to him for it; but that sort of thing must not on any account be repeated. It must be stopped then and there if there was any way in which it could be done. It would never do to let Tom keep ahead of him, spreading a description of himself and his horse among the farmers who lived along the old post-road, for he might, without knowing it, take a Confederate into his confidence; and suppose Rodney should afterward fall in with that same Confederate and show him the letter addressed to Mr. Percival, and which was intended for the eyes of Union men only? The Confederate would at once accuse him of sailing under false colors, and trying to pass himself off for one of Price's soldiers when he was in reality a Lincolnite. The boy shivered when

he thought of the consequences of such a mistake.

"I'll tell you what's a fact," he said, to himself, stamping about the stable with rather more noise than he ought to have made, seeing that the guerrillas had barely had time to get out of hearing. "The farther I go toward Springfield, the deeper I seem to get into trouble. I must either find Tom and ride the rest of the way with him, or else I must get ahead of him. If I don't do one or the other he will put me into a scrape that I can't work out of."

"Now you stay here and I will go out and snoop around a bit," said Merrick, when the sound of the hoof-beats could be no longer heard. "What I am afraid of is that they will leave some of their men to watch the house."

"Do your neighbors know that you are a Union man?" asked Rodney, as he stepped up and took the horse by the bits.

"They know I'm neutral, and that's just about as bad as though they knew I was Union," was the reply. "They aint done nothing to me yet but I know I'm watched, and so I have to mind what I am about. If the men who just went by knew how I feel, I wouldn't dast to lift a hand to help you. They'd have me hung to one of my shade trees before morning."

As Merrick spoke he glided out into the darkness, and Rodney was left alone to think over the situation; but Merrick had not been gone more than five minutes when the horse indicated by his actions that there was some one approaching the stable. Presently a twig snapped, a hand was passed along the wall outside and a figure appeared in the doorway. It wasn't tall enough for Merrick, and besides it had a coat on. Believing that it was one of Thompson's men who had been left behind to watch the house, Rodney drew his revolver from his boot leg and cocked it as he raised it to a level with his eyes and covered the figure's head.

"Don't shoot, Merrick," said the intruder, who had probably heard the click of the hammer. "What's the good of helping a fellow one hour if you are going to shoot him the next?"

"Tom Percival!" exclaimed Rodney, in guarded tones.

In an instant the figure sprang into the stable and seized Rodney in his arms.

"Did anybody ever hear of such luck?" said Tom, who was the first to recover his power of speech. "Where are you going and what business have you got up here in my State, you red-hot rebel?"

"I never expected to be on such terms with a Yankee horse-thief," answered Rodney, letting down the hammer of his revolver and putting the weapon back in its place.

"I knew just how much faith you would put in that outrageous story," said Tom. "It was got up against me on purpose to induce the planters in my uncle's settlement to run me out."

"To hang you, you mean," corrected Rodney. "That's what they would have done with you before to-morrow morning."

"If it hadn't been for you," added Tom; and he did not talk like a boy who had so narrowly escaped with his life. "I heard your story down there in Jeff's cabin, and knew that you kept your promise and enlisted within twenty-four hours after you reached home. And I know, too, that your company didn't want to join the Confederate army or leave the State. What did they want to do then? They're a pretty lot of soldiers. Well, it's a good thing for them that they stayed at home, for you rebels are going to get such a licking—"

"Have you licked Dick Graham back into a proper frame of mind yet?" interrupted Rodney.

"No. Haven't had the chance. He helped raise the first company of partisans that left the southwestern part of the Slate to join Price, and I have scarcely heard of him since. I had a lively time dodging Price's men when I went up to St. Louis to offer the services of my company to Lyon, and when I heard you tell Westall that you were going to undertake the same kind of a journey, I felt sorry for you. I am overjoyed to see and have a chance to speak to you, Rodney, but I don't know whether we ought to stick together or not. Of course Merrick took you for a Union man," added Tom, in a suppressed whisper.

"Certainly. I didn't have much to say to him until I found out who he thought I was. Did you go it blind when you addressed him as a Union man?"

"Oh, no. I know the name of every man it will do to trust for twenty miles ahead," replied Tom. "But

I've got his name in my head. I haven't a scrap of writing about me, and I am sorry to know that you have. Take my advice and stick everything in the shape of a letter you have in your pockets into the tire the first good chance you get."

"I have been thinking about that all the afternoon. What if I should fall in with a party strong enough to search me? I've got a letter addressed to Erastus Percival."

"Where in the world did you get it?" demanded Tom, who was greatly astonished. "Man alive, he's my father."

"So I supposed. It was given to me by Captain Howard whose acquaintance
I made aboard the *Mollie Able*, and he got it from a friend of his."

"My limited knowledge of the English language will not permit me to do this subject justice," declared Tom. He looked around for something to sit down on, and then leaned against the wall for support. "My father has heard of you and would have helped you at the risk of his life. He wouldn't go back on a Barrington boy any more than I would; but if you should be searched by rebels anywhere between here and Springfield, that letter would hang you. Burn it before you take the road to-morrow."

"If your father is so well known, I don't see why his neighbors haven't hung him before this time," said Rodney.

"It's safer to try the bushwhacking game, and he has been shot at three times already. He doesn't expect to live to see the end of these troubles, but he is like your cousin Marcy Gray—he doesn't haul in his shingle one inch. Burn that letter, I tell you."

"I didn't intend to present it unless I had to," replied Rodney. "Now, then, what brought you here? I thought you were hidden in the swamp along with some other refugees."

"So I was; but I came back on purpose to see if Merrick had heard anything from you. I was on my way to the house when I thought I would stop and look in here. I was hidden in the bushes when those Emergency men rode down the road. Of course they are going to the swamp, and I don't know whether I can get back there to-night or not. I wonder how they got on to my track so quick."

Rodney said that Merrick thought it was through old man Swanson. Tom replied that he had never heard of such a man, and Rodney went on to tell of his accidental meeting with him at the cross-roads, adding:

"Mr. Westall told him that I and my horse were all right, and not to be interfered with, and that he would make something by keeping a bright lookout for a boy without any boots on, and a roan colt. One of the party also told him that you were unarmed, but Swanson didn't take much stock in that. He declared that there were plenty of people in the country who would be mean enough to give you clothes and weapons for the asking, and I reckon he was about right. I gave you a revolver and I see some one else has furnished you with a pair of boots. Now, didn't you know, when you ran off with my horse, leaving yours for me to ride, that every man I met would take me for you?"

"That's a fact," replied Tom, "but I never thought of it before. But I couldn't get my horse out of the yard without scaring the others, and so I had to do the best I could. Now that I think of it, perhaps we had better let the trade stand a little while longer."

"Oh, do you?" exclaimed Rodney. "You have good cheek I must say."

"It isn't cheek at all, but a desire to keep you out of trouble as long as I can," answered Tom.

"Making me ride a horse that has been advertised all through the country as stolen property is a good way to keep me out of trouble, isn't it now?" said Rodney. "I never should have thought of it if you hadn't mentioned it."

"Hold on a bit," replied Tom. "No one in this section is looking for you now. You can take the road and keep it, and the horse you ride will not bring you into trouble; but if that roan colt shows his nose where anybody can see it, he'll be nabbed quicker'n a flash, and his rider too. See? As I am a little more experienced in dodging about in the bushes than you are, you had better let me take the risk."

"I never could look a white man in the face again if I should do that," answered Rodney. "Don't you know what will be done with you if you are caught?"

"I shan't run anymore risk than you did when you helped me get out of that corncrib," said Tom, reaching for his schoolmate's hand in the dark and giving it a hearty squeeze. "Don't you know what would be done to *you* if you were caught with that roan colt in your possession? You would be taken

back to Mr. Westall's settlement, and when he saw that you were riding the same horse you rode when you came to Cedar Bluff landing, wouldn't he want to know where you got him? Can you think of any answers you could give that would satisfy him? I'll trade revolvers, if you want yours back (I know you've got one, for I heard you cock it when I came to the door), but I really think you had better let me keep your horse a little while longer. I hear somebody coming," he added, stepping to the nearest crack and looking out. "It's Merrick. I can see his white shirt."

A moment later the owner of the stable came in, and was not a little surprised when he heard himself addressed by the boy whom he supposed to be snugly hidden in the deepest and darkest nook of the swamp. Tom told him why he had come back instead of keeping out of sight, and asked what had become of the squad of men he saw riding along the road a while before.

"They kept on as far as I could hear 'em," replied the farmer, "and if they left any one behind to watch the house, they were so sly about it that I never seen it."

"Of course it was broad daylight when Tom came to your house," said Rodney. "Well, how do you know but that man Swanson saw him when he went in?"

"I don't know it," replied Merrick. "But even if he did see Percival go in, these 'Mergency men won't never say a word to me about it, kase they know well enough that if they should hurt a hair of my head, some of my friends would bushwhack 'em to pay for it. They would send word over into the next county, and some fellers from there would ride over some dark night and set my buildings a-going, or pop me over as quick as they would a squirrel, if they could get a chance at me. That's the way we do business nowadays, and that's the reason we don't never go to the door when somebody rides up and hails the house after dark."

"Why, I wouldn't live in such a country," said Rodney.

"What would you do, if everything you had in the world was right here and you couldn't sell it and get out?" replied the farmer. "You'd stay and look out for it, I reckon, and make it as hot as you could for any one who tried to drive you away. But driving is a game two can play at," added Merrick, with a low chuckle; and Rodney noticed that he ceased speaking once in a while and turned his head on one side as if he were listening for suspicious sounds. "I don't say I have rode around of nights myself and I don't say I aint; but I do say for a fact that if you go over into the next county, you won't find so many men there who make a business of shooting Union folks as there used to be. Some parts of the kentry t'other side the ridge looks as though they had been struck by a harrycane that had blew away all the men and big boys."

This was what Captain Howard must have meant when he warned Rodney that every little community in the Southern part of the State was divided into two hostile camps. This was partisan warfare, and Rodney wanted to be a partisan.

"Is that the sort of partisan you are, Tom?" he inquired, when Merrick went out again to see if it would be safe for them to go into the kitchen and get supper. "I wish I had had sense enough to stay at home."

"I wish to goodness you had," said Tom honestly. "Not but that you've got as much sense as most boys of your age, but you know as well as I do that the Barrington fellows used to say you didn't always know what you were about. Why, when I heard you telling your story to Mr. Westall down there in Jeff's shanty, it was all I could do to keep from saying, right out loud, that such a piece of foolishness had never come under my notice before."

"Where would you be at this moment if I hadn't been in Jeff's cabin last night?" retorted Rodney.

"Well, that's a fact," said Tom thoughtfully. "About the time I felt that stick and revolver in my hands, I was mighty glad you were around; but as soon as I had used them, I wished from the bottom of my heart that you were safe back in your own State. But since you are here, I am going to do my level best for you; and that's the reason I am going to keep your horse a little longer. If I don't give him back to you some day, you can keep mine to remember me by."

"And every time I look at him, I shall be reminded that I have been taken for a horse-thief," added Rodney.

"You are no more of a horse-thief than I am. Let that thought comfort you. How is it, Merrick?" he went on, addressing himself to the farmer who at that moment glided into the stable with noiseless footstep. "Can we go in and get supper, or will it be safer for you to bring it out to us?"

"You are to come right in," was the farmer's welcome reply. "It'll be safe, for I have cleared the

kitchen of everybody except the old woman. She's Secesh the very worst kind, but that needn't bother you none. She knows how to get up a good supper."

"That is a matter that has a deeper interest for us just now than her politics," said Tom. "But what shall we do with the horse?"

"As soon as I have showed you the way to the table I'll come back and stay with him so't he won't whinny," answered Merrick. "If them 'Mergency men heard him calling they might think it was one of my own critters and then agin they mightn't; so it's best to be on the safe side."

That the farmer was very much afraid that the horse might betray his presence to the guerrillas was evident from the way he acted. He took long, quick steps when he started for the house, gave the two boys a hurried introduction to his wife, saw them seated at the table and then ran out again. Mrs. Merrick remained in the room to wait upon them, and that was an arrangement that Tom Percival did not like; for although she proved to be a pleasant and agreeable hostess and never said a word about politics, Tom did not think it safe to talk too freely in her presence, and took the first opportunity that was offered to give Rodney a friendly warning.

"After you have been in this country a while, you will find that the women are worse rebels than the men," said he, in an undertone. "I don't suppose she would lead the Emergency men on to us, for that would get Merrick into trouble; but such things have been done in the settlement where I live. We can't do any more talking at present. Have another piece of the toast?"

"If I had passed through as many dangers as you have and had as narrow an escape, I don't think I could eat as you do," said Rodney, who took note of the fact that his friend had not lost any of his appetite since he left Barrington.

"I've had three good meals to-day, and a hearty lunch in the swamp; but I don't know when I have been so hungry," replied Tom; and then seeing that Rodney cast occasional glances toward the kitchen stove in which a bright fire was burning, he continued, in an earnest whisper, "This is as good a chance as you will have. Chuck 'em in, and you'll not regret it; but if you have no objections, I should like to read them before you do it. I'll keep mum."

Rodney knew that, and forthwith produced the letters, which had been a source of anxiety to him ever since they came into his possession, and also Mr. Graham's last telegram. Tom said he did not know either of the men whose names were signed to the letters that came through Captain Howard, but he was better acquainted with Mr. Westall and his four companions than he cared to be.

"The man who wrote this letter to Erastus Percival, my father, must be some one down the river who has had business dealings with him; but I don't know the gentleman," said he, after he had run his eye over the various documents. "Put the whole business right into the stove. You don't want any such papers about you, for you don't know whom you are going to meet on the road. Trust to luck; stare Fate in the face, and your heart will be aisy if it's in the right place."

If Mrs. Merrick was surprised or suspected anything when Rodney put the letters into her stove and stood over them long enough to see them reduced to ashes, she made no remark. As he was about to return to his seat at the table there came a sound that arrested his steps, and brought Tom Percival out of his chair in a twinkling. The doors and windows were all closed (the curtains were pulled down as well, so that no one on the outside could see into the room), but the words, which were uttered in a muffled voice, came distinctly to their ears:

"Hallo, the house!"

"There they are," whispered Tom, thrusting his hand into his breast pocket and glancing toward Rodney as if to assure himself that the latter could be depended on in an emergency.

"Sit down and keep perfectly quiet," said Mrs. Merrick, in a calm tone. "They are ready to shoot, and you mustn't move about for fear of throwing your shadow upon one of the window curtains."

[Illustration: MRS. MERRICK STANDS GUARD.]

"Are they looking for your husband?" Rodney managed to ask.

"I suppose they are," answered the woman, who did not even change color.
"I will go to the door and find out."

"You mustn't," protested Rodney. "Mr. Merrick said he didn't take any notice of hails after dark."

"He doesn't, but I do," replied the wife. "Somebody must answer, or we couldn't live in this country a

day longer."

"Do you recognize the voice?"

"Of course not," said Tom Percival. "They are strangers from some other county."

"Why can't we go with her and return their fire," exclaimed Rodney, as Mrs. Merrick left the room and moved along the wide hall toward the front door. "I'll not stay here like a bump on a log and let her be shot at, now I—"

"Come back here. Sit down and behave yourself or you'll play smash," said Tom, earnestly. "They'll not harm her. It's her husband they are after. Now listen."

Rodney sat down in the nearest chair, rested the hand that held his revolver on the table, and waited and listened with as much patience as he could command.

CHAPTER XI.

RODNEY MAKES A TRADE.

"You are a pretty partisan, you are," whispered Tom Percival, while they were waiting for Mrs. Merrick to open the front-door. "Those men outside are friends of yours, and yet you stand ready to fight them."

"I don't claim friendship with any cowardly bushwhacker," answered
Rodney hotly. "I don't collogue [associate] with any such."

"Then you'll have to do one of two things," said Tom. "Go home and stay there, or else join the Confederate army. Nearly every man in Missouri is a bushwhacker. Now listen."

Tom did not follow his own suggestion, for when he heard the front door creak on its hinges, he laid down his revolver and covered his ears with his hands. This made Rodney turn as white as a sheet and get upon his feet again, fully expecting to hear the roar of a shotgun, followed by the clatter of buckshot in the hall; but instead of that, there came the calm, even tones of Mrs. Merrick's voice inquiring:

"What is it?"

"If I had that woman's pluck I'd be a general before this thing is over," said Rodney, "I've always heard that a woman had more courage than a man and now I know it."

"Listen," repeated Tom, who had by this time taken his hands down from his ears.

There was no immediate response, for the party at the gate had looked for somebody else to answer their hail. Presently the same muffled voice inquired:

"Is Mr. Merrick to home?"

"He was a few minutes ago, but he is not in now," said his wife. "Have you any word to leave for him?"

"No, I don't reckon we have. We'll ketch—we'll see him some other time."

"Who shall I say called?"

"It don't matter. We're friends of his'n who wanted to see him on business. Goodnight."

"Good-night," replied Mrs. Merrick, as if her suspicions had not been roused in the slightest degree; and then she shut the door and came back into the kitchen. She was pale now and trembling; and Rodney made haste to offer her a chair while Tom poured out a glass of water.

"I told you they wouldn't hurt her," he found opportunity to say to Rodney. "But if Merrick had gone to the door he would have been full of buckshot now."

"They might as well shoot her as to scare her to death," replied Rodney.

"This is a terrible state of affairs."

"I believe you. And we haven't seen the beginning of it yet. What have they got against your husband any way, Mrs. Merrick?"

The woman kept her eyes fastened upon Tom's face while she drank a portion of the water he had poured out for her, and then she handed back the glass with the remark:

"Mr. Merrick is Union and so are you."

"How do you know that?" demanded Tom. "Has he told you my story?"

"He hasn't said a word; but I have been over to a neighbor's this afternoon, and while I was there, I saw you and a roan horse go into our cow-lot. A little while afterward old Swanson rode up and told us about a Yankee horse-thief who was going through the country, trying to reach Springfield. That shows how fast news travels these times. And that isn't all I know," she added, nodding at Rodney. "You are as good a Confederate as I am."

"Then how does it come that I am colloguing with a Yankee horse-thief?" exclaimed Rodney, who wanted to learn how much the woman really knew about him and his friend.

"That is something I do not pretend to understand," was the answer. "But there must be some sort of an arrangement between you, for one is riding the other's horse. Now perhaps you had better go. I will put up a bite for you to eat during the night, and will try to get a breakfast to you in the morning. I shall have to let you out of a side door, for you would be seen if you went out of this well-lighted room; and if I were to put out the lamp, it would arouse the suspicious of any one who may happen to be on the watch."

"This reminds me of the days I have read of, when the women fought side by side with their husbands and sons in the block-houses," thought Rodney, as he shoved his revolver into his boot leg and waited for the lunch to be put up. "What a scout she would make."

Mrs. Merrick probably knew that the boys would not devote much time to sleeping that night, for the "bite" she put up for them was equal in quantity to the hearty supper they had just eaten. She was aware, too, that they would have to "lie out," and anxious to know if they had any blankets to keep them warm. It might not be quite safe for them to build a camp fire, and consequently they would need plenty of covering. There was the lunch, and Tom needn't be so profuse in his thanks, for while she believed in fighting the Lincoln government, since it was bound to force a war upon the South, she did not believe in starving Union boys on account of their principles. She hoped Tom would reach home in safety, and advised him when he got there to turn over a new leaf and go with his State.

"Do you remember what that British colonel said to his commanding officer, after he had visited General Marion in his camp and dined with him on sweet potatoes?" inquired Rodney, after the two had been let out at the side door and were stealing along the fence toward the cow-stable where Mr. Merrick was patiently waiting for them. "The colonel said, 'You can't conquer such people;' and he was so impressed with the fact that he threw up his commission and went home to England. That is what I say to you, Tom Percival. The North can't conquer the South while we have such women as Mrs. Merrick in it."

"Now listen at you," replied Tom. "The North doesn't want to conquer the South, and you don't show your usual common sense in hinting at such a thing. The people—and when I say that, I mean the Union men both North and South—say that you secessionists shall not break up this government; and if you persist in your efforts, you are going to get whipped, as you ought to be. Hallo, Mr. Merrick," he added, stopping in the door of the stable and trying to peer through the darkness. "Did you hear those gentlemen asking for you a while ago?"

"I was listening," replied the farmer, with a chuckle. "But I disremembered the voice. The feller talked as though he was holding a handkercher or something over his mouth. How many of them was there? I seen three."

"We didn't see any, for Mrs. Merrick wouldn't let us go to the door," replied Rodney. "She was the coolest one in the kitchen."

"She's got tol'able grit, Nance has," replied the farmer, and there was just a tinge of pride in his tones when he said it. "I may happen over t'other side the ridge some night, and then the tables will be turned t'other way. Now, if you are ready, we'll make tracks for the swamp. The way is clear. Thompson's men have give it up as a bad job and gone home."

"Did they pass along the road?" exclaimed Rodney. "We never heard them."

"I did, and seen 'em too. There was a right smart passel of 'em—more'n enough to have made pris'ners of all the Union fellers in the swamp, if they hadn't been afraid to face the rifles that them same Union men know how to shoot with tol'able sure aim."

"Why is it necessary for them to hide out?" asked Rodney. "What have they done?"

"I don't rightly know as I can tell you," replied the farmer, in a tone which led the boy to believe that he could tell all about it if he felt so disposed. "But it seems that some high-up Secesh has disappeared and nobody don't know what's went with 'em; and some folks do say that them fellers in the swamp had a hand in their taking off. I dunno, kase I wasn't thar."

So saying, Merrick led the horse from the stable and the boys followed without saying a word, for they were by no means sure that Thompson's men had all gone away. They went through a wide field that had once been planted to corn, and when they had passed a gap in the fence by which it was surrounded, they found themselves in the edge of a thick wood.

"I don't see how you ever found your way through here alone," said
Rodney to his friend. "It is as dark as pitch."

"Oh, I wasn't alone. One of those Union men came with me as far as this gap, and then I came on well enough," replied Tom. "It's a wonder those horsemen didn't discover me. I threw myself flat on the ground between the old corn-rows, and saw them quite distinctly. Mr. Hobson said he would wait here for me."

"And he has kept his word, although he began to think you were never coming back," replied a voice from the darkness. "Is this the friend who helped you last night? I can just make out that there are three of you."

If it had been daylight there is no telling how Rodney Gray would have passed through the ordeal of shaking hands with a Union man who was suspected of being concerned in the "taking off" of some prominent secessionists in his settlement. It was a large, muscular hand that grasped his own, and Rodney knew that there was a big man behind it. He knew, too, that Mr. Hobson (that was the name by which the stranger was introduced) had no reason for supposing that he was anything but what Tom Percival represented him to be—a Union boy who had run away from home and come up North because his relatives were all secessionists and opposed to his Union principles. That was about the story Tom Percival had told Merrick, and it was reasonable to suppose that he had told Mr. Hobson and his fellow fugitives the same. Indeed he became sure of it a moment later, for Mr. Hobson said, while he continued to hold fast to Rodney's hand and shake it:

"So it seems that we Missourians are not the only ones who have to stand persecution because we believe in upholding the Stars and Stripes. I have heard something of your history from our young friend Percival, and assure you that I sympathize with you deeply. I want to compliment you on the courage and skill you showed in helping him escape from those guerrillas last night."

"It is hardly worth speaking of," answered Rodney, as soon as he could collect his wits. "Tom would have done the same for me."

"I am sure he would, but it was none the less a brave act on your part. Now let us go to camp. If I don't get back pretty soon my friends will wonder what has become of me. By the way, didn't I hear a body of men riding along the road going west, a short time since?"

Merrick replied that they were some of Thompson's men, who probably thought it safer to keep to the big road than it would be to attempt to capture half a dozen well-armed Union men in a dark swamp. Hobson and his party were not likely to be molested, but still Merrick thought it would be best for them to remain concealed a while longer, and depend upon him for their provisions and news. Merrick did not forget to tell of the three men who had stopped at his gate and asked to see him "on business."

"I reckon I might as well leave you boys here," he added, placing the bridle in Rodney's hand.

"And what shall Tom and I do in the morning?" inquired the latter. "We ought to make an early start, and do you think it would be safe for us to keep together?"

"Not by no means it wouldn't," replied Merrick, quickly. "Unless you can induce somebody in Mr. Hobson's party to give you a trade for that roan colt. You mustn't try to ride him to Springfield. You ought to get rid of him as soon as you can."

"Let's go to camp," repeated Mr. Hobson. "We can talk the matter over after we get there. And in the

meantime, you boys had better make up your minds to stay with us until after Merrick brings us a breakfast. Perhaps he will know by that time whether or not it will be safe for you to continue your journey."

Going to camp and spending the night with half a dozen strangers who held opinions that were so very different from his own, and who might "catch him up" when he wasn't looking for it, was what Rodney Gray dreaded. He didn't like the idea of passing himself off for a Union boy when he wasn't, and was afraid he might let fall some expression that would betray him. That would be most unfortunate, for it would get Tom Percival into trouble as well as himself. But there was no help for it, and so he brought up the rear leading the horse, while Mr. Hobson and Tom led the way along a blind path toward the camp. Presently the former began whistling at intervals, and when at length an answer came from the depths of the forest, Rodney knew that the camp was close at hand. Ten minutes later he had been introduced to Mr. Hobson's companions, and was listening in a dazed sort of way to their words of greeting and sympathy. They knew just how he felt, they said, for they had been obliged to leave home themselves on account of their opinions, and an indorsement from Tom Percival, with whose uncle Justus they were well acquainted, they assured him would bring all the aid and comfort they could give him.

"Tom always could tell a slick story—he was noted for that at school," thought Rodney, as he motioned to his friend to set out the lunch that Mrs. Merrick had put up for them. "And if he hasn't shut up the eyes of these Union men I don't want a cent. If I hear this story many more times I shall begin to believe I am Union without knowing it, and that I left home because I had to."

As the refugees never once suspected that Rodney was acting a part, and that Tom Percival had deliberately deceived them, they asked no leading questions, and the visitor was very thankful for that. Of course they were anxious to know how matters stood in Louisiana, and Rodney could truthfully say that the Union men were so very careful to keep their opinions to themselves that they were known only to their most trusted friends. He had heard that there were a good many of them in and around Mooreville, but had never had the luck to meet any. If a man in his part of the State had dared to hint that he was opposed to secession, he would have stood a fine chance of being mobbed. Rodney was glad when the lunch had been eaten, the last pipe smoked and the refugees stretched themselves on their beds of boughs with their saddles for pillows, and drew their blankets over them. Then he was at liberty to think over the situation but denied the privilege of talking to Tom; and that was what he most desired. While he was wondering what his next adventure was going to be he fell asleep.

"That's Merrick's signal," were the next words he heard.

It didn't seem to Rodney that he had been asleep five minutes, but when he opened his eyes he found that it was just getting daylight, and that all the refugees were sitting up on their blankets stretching their arms and yawning; while, faint and far off but quite distinct, he heard a familiar voice shouting:

"Pig-gee! Pig-gii! Pig-goo!"

"That's breakfast," said Mr. Hobson. "Now, while we are waiting for it, I suggest that we take a look at that roan colt and make up our minds what we are going to do with him."

"That's business," said Rodney. "I don't like to let him go, for he was the last thing my father gave me."

"Then your father must be for the Union," remarked one of the refugees.

"He thinks just as I do," answered Rodney; and then he recollected that he had never expressed an opinion. He had not been asked, for Tom Percival had done it for him. He followed the men to the place where the horses had been picketed, and listened while they talked and tried to make up their minds whether it would be prudent to give him a trade. There was not the slightest difference of opinion regarding the good qualities of the roan colt, for they could be seen at a glance; but here was where the trouble came in: They hoped to return to their homes at no distant day, and what would their neighbors say to them when a horse that was said to have been stolen was seen in their possession? It was Mr. Westall's argument over again.

"I would just as soon take Percival's horse to the settlement as to go back there with this roan," said Mr. Hobson. "One is as dangerous to us as the other. You see, everybody, Union as well as Secesh, is down on a horse-thief, and the politics of the man who is caught with this horse in his keeping will not save him. After all I don't know that I can be in a much worse mess than I am now, and if you like, I will give you my horse for him. It's a one-sided trade I admit, the roan is worth two of mine, but see the risk I shall run?"

"I'll do it," said Rodney quickly. "I shall be glad to see the last of that colt, and hope he will not be the

means of getting you into difficulty. Now do you think Tom and I can ride together?"

"I don't see why you can't, and I think it would be a good thing for you, because Percival has a general knowledge of the roads ahead, and knows a few people who can be trusted."

This matter having been settled to the satisfaction of both the boys, one of the refugees set up a peculiar whistle to let Merrick know that the road to their camp was clear, and twenty minutes later he came into sight, followed by a darkey. The latter was mounted on a mule and carried a heavy basket on each arm. The first question that was asked, "Have you seen or heard anything more of Thompson's men?" was answered in the negative on both sides, and then the refugees and their guests were ready for breakfast. Merrick seemed relieved to know that the boys had succeeded in getting the roan colt off their hands, and told them that he had brought the darkey along to act as their guide until they were beyond the limits of his settlement.

"After you went away last night, Nance said that there are some folks about here who know I am harboring two chaps that I have took some pains to keep out of sight, and so I thought you had best keep to the bresh till you had got past them peoples' houses," said he; but there was one thing his wife did not tell him, and that was that one of the two boys he was harboring was as good a Confederate as any of the men who had ridden along the road. That was a matter she kept to herself.

Breakfast being over the only thing there was to detain the boys was to saddle their horses. That did not take many minutes, and then they were ready for the new dangers that lay along the road ahead of them. After thanking Mr. Merrick for his kindness, not forgetting to send their best regards to his wife, they shook hands with the refugees and told their sable guide to go on.

"I never saw things quite so badly mixed up as they are in this country," said Rodney, when the camp and its occupants had been left out of sight. "And neither did I dream that you were such an expert story-teller. Suppose I had said or done something to arouse the suspicions of the men we have just left; where would we be now?"

"What else could I do?" demanded Tom. "You didn't expect me to say out loud that you are a Confederate on your way to join a man who is getting ready to fight against the government of the United States. You knew I wouldn't do that, and so I had to put you in a false position. It isn't my fault. You ought to have had sense enough to stay at home."

"I can see it now," replied Rodney. "But what are we to do from this time on?"

"I am sure I don't know. We'll be Union all over for the next twenty miles or so, and then perhaps you can show yourself in your true colors while I do the deceiving; but you must be careful and not speak my name. I declare I had no idea that the Percivals were so well known through this neck of the woods. But I'll tell you what I honestly believe: Price's cavalry is scouting all through the central and southern parts of the State, shooting Union men and picking up recruits, and as soon as we begin to hear of them, I think you had better desert me and join them; that is, unless you have come to your senses, and made up your mind that you had better cast your lot with the loyal people of the nation."

"Don't you know any better than to talk to me in that style?" exclaimed Rodney. "Do you imagine that I have come up here just to have the fun of going back on my principles?"

"No; I don't suppose you have, but I think you ought to before it is too late. However, let politics go. Have you heard from any of the Harrington boys since we left school? Where is your cousin Marcy?"

This was a more agreeable topic than the one they had been discussing, but Rodney had little information to impart. He had written to Marcy but had received no reply, and the reader knows the reason why. It was because Marcy dare not write and tell Rodney how matters stood with him, for fear that the letter might be stopped by some of his Secession neighbors,—Captain Beardsley, for instance, —who would use it against him. He told of the letters he had received from Dixon, Billings and Dick Graham, and they were all in the army, or going as soon as they could get there. He hadn't heard from any other Barrington fellow, but he believed that Tom Percival was the one black sheep in the flock—that the others had gone with their States.

"I don't believe it," said Tom, with decided emphasis. "I am not the only Union fellow there was in the academy, by a long shot, and I know that those who opposed secession didn't do it to hear themselves talk. Your cousin Marcy didn't go with his State, and there are others like him scattered all over the country."

"Say," exclaimed Rodney, bending forward in his saddle and speaking just loud enough for Tom, who was riding in advance, to catch his words. "Do you believe Merrick's darkey can be depended on?"

"Of course," answered Tom. "Why not? What makes you ask the question?"

"I don't like the way he has of looking over his shoulder and listening to our conversation. You are all right, of course, but I am afraid I have said too much. I was so glad to get a chance to talk to you that I never thought of him."

"Didn't you once assure your cousin Marcy that all the blacks in the South would go with their masters against the abolitionists?" inquired Tom.

"Yes, I believe I did, and I think so yet. I don't think we have a darkey on our place who would accept his freedom to-day if it were offered to him."

"There may not be one who would dare say so, because they know better; but give the best of them the chance and see how quickly he would skip over the border into abolition territory. If you think the darkies are loyal to their masters, what are you afraid of? According to your idea, if that darkey ahead betrays anybody, he ought to betray me, for I am Union and he heard me tell his master so yesterday. But if you think he can't be trusted to keep his mouth shut, we'll turn him to the right-about in short order."

"And lose the benefit of his knowledge?" said Rodney. "I wouldn't do that. Let him stay as long as Merrick told him to, and in the mean time I will talk as though I knew he would repeat every word I say."

This thing of being obliged to place a curb upon their tongues when they wanted to speak freely was annoying in the extreme; but it might have saved them some trouble and anxiety if they had done it from the first.

CHAPTER XII.

TWICE SURPRISED.

During the whole of their journey through the woods, which did not come to an end until long after four o'clock that afternoon, the negro guide never once spoke to the boys unless he was first spoken to, nor did they see any living' thing except a drove of half-wild hogs, which fled precipitately at their approach. The plantation darkies, as a general thing, were talkative and full of life, and this unwonted silence on the part of their conductor finally produced an effect upon Tom Percival who, when the noon halt was called, took occasion to give the man a good looking over. He was not very well satisfied with the result of his examination.

"How much farther do you go with us, boy?" said he.

"Not furder'n Mr. Truman's house, an' dat aint above ten mile from hyar," was the answer.

"Truman," repeated Tom. "He's all right. I was told to stop on the way and call upon him for anything I might need. Hurry up and take us there; and when you do," he added in a whisper, to Rodney, "we'll say good-by to you. You were right; he's treacherous. He's a red-eyed nigger, and when you see a nigger of that sort you want to look out for him."

There was no need that they should "look out" for their guide now, because there was no way in which he could betray them secretly. The danger would arise when they stopped for the night or after they parted from him the next morning. Then he would be at liberty to go where he pleased, and as he was acquainted with every Union man for miles around, it would not take him long to spread among them the report that there was a Confederate stopping at Mr. Truman's house in company with a young Missourian who did not want his name spoken where other folks could hear it. If such a story as that should get wind, it would make trouble all around—for Mr. Truman as well as for themselves; for Truman's neighbors would want to know why he gave food and lodging to a Confederate when he claimed to be a Union man himself. The longer Rodney thought of these things, the more he wished himself safe back in Louisiana.

At half-past four by Tom Percival's watch the negro stopped his mule beside a rail fence running between the woods and an old field, on whose farther side was a snug plantation house, nestled among the trees. That was where Mr. Truman lived, and where Merrick had told them to stop for the night.

"And I suppose you will stay also, won't you?" said Tom, speaking to the darkey who bent down from his mule and threw a few of the top rails off the fence so that the boys could jump their horses over into the field.

"Who? Me? Oh no, sar," answered the guide, with rather more earnestness than the occasion seemed to demand. "Marse Merrick done tol' me to be sure an' come home dis very night, an' I 'bleeged to mind him, sar."

"I'll bet you don't mind him," thought Tom, as he and Rodney rode into the field and waited for the negro to build up the fence again. "There's a bug under that chip and I know it."

The appearance of three horsemen riding up to the back door in this unexpected way created something of a flutter among the female portion of Mr. Truman's family, and even the farmer himself, who presently came to the door of one of the outbuildings, seemed to be a little startled; but when a second look showed him that one of Mr. Merrick's negroes was of the number, he came up to the pump near which the boys had dismounted.

"This is Mr. Truman, I believe," said Tom.

"Well, yes; that's my name, but I don't reckon I ever saw you before," replied the man cautiously.

"Do you know this boy who has been acting as our guide?"

"Oh, yes. I know all of Merrick's boys, so it must be all right. But you see in times like these—"

"I understand," Tom interposed, for Mr. Truman talked so slowly that the boy was afraid he might never get through with what he had to say. "In times like these you don't know whom to trust. That's our fix, exactly; and we shouldn't have thought of stopping here if Merrick and Hobson had not told us who and what you are. Go on, boy, and tell Mr. Truman who and what we are, where we came from, where we want to go, and all about it."

The negro was talkative enough now, and the boys had no fault to find with the way in which he complied with Tom's request except in one particular—he had too much to say regarding Rodney Gray's loyalty to the Union, and his undying hostility toward everybody who was in favor of secession. He dwelt so long upon this subject that Tom Percival, fearing Mr. Truman's eyes would be opened to the real facts of the case, thought it best to interrupt him.

"Yes; we passed the night in company with Mr. Hobson and five of his friends who have been compelled to go into hiding," said he, "and while we were eating supper in Mr. Merrick's kitchen, some of Thompson's men came to the gate and asked for him."

"I reckon it's all right," said Mr. Truman, who did not believe that his friend Merrick would have taken these two young fellows into his house if he had not had the best of reasons for thinking that they could be trusted. "What did you say your names might be?" he added, beckoning to one of his darkies and indicating by a wave of his hand that the horses were to be housed and fed.

While the guide was telling his story he had not mentioned any names. He had simply referred to the boys as "dese yer gentlemen." designating the one of whom he happened to be speaking by a nod or a jerk of his thumb. Tom waited until the horses were led away and then said, in a low tone:

"My friend's name is Gray, and as you have already heard he is from Louisiana. The Secesh were too thick there to suit him and so he came up here, hoping to find everybody Union."

"Humph!" said Mr. Truman.

"He has found out his mistake," continued Tom. "Ever since he has been in the State he has been dodging rebels, and has traveled more miles in the woods than he has on the highway. Do you know Justus Percival?"

"Do you?" asked Truman in reply.

"I ought to. He's my uncle, and Percival is my name; but I wish you wouldn't address me by it unless you know who is listening."

"But when you left Cedar Bluff landing you were riding a roan colt and had no boots on," said Mr. Truman, first looking all around to make sure that there was no one near to catch his words. "I was sorter on the watch for such a fellow, for I thought maybe he'd need help."

"Great Scott!" said Rodney, who was very much surprised. "Has that man Swanson been through here? It can't be possible. His crowbait of a mule couldn't carry him so far."

"I don't know anybody of that name, but I know about the roan colt that wasn't stolen from Pilot Knob," replied the farmer. "Let's go in and see if the women folks can't scare up a bite to eat."

"One moment, please," Tom interposed. "Do you know anything about Merrick's boy? Is he Union or Secesh?"

"Union and nothing else. The niggers all are, but of course they are afraid to say so."

"That boy has got red eyes," said Tom. "And you know as well as I can tell you that a darkey of that sort is always treacherous. We don't like the way he has been listening to our talk ever since we left Hobson's camp. Couldn't you make some excuse to keep him here till morning?"

"Job!" yelled the farmer; and when he had succeeded in calling the attention of the darkey who was attending to the horses, he went on to say: "Tell Merrick's boy that he mustn't go off the place to-night. The patrols are picking up everybody who shows his nose on the road after dark, white as well as black, and Price's men burned two houses last night not more'n five miles from here."

"Is that a fact?" inquired Tom, who for the first time since Rodney met him began to show signs of uneasiness.

"It's the gospel truth, more's the pity, and we in this settlement don't know how soon we may be called upon to defend our lives and property. There are not many of us and we are not organized; but we're tolerable active and know how to shoot. Now let's go in."

As Rodney Gray afterward remarked, Mrs. Truman "seemed to know without any telling just how the thing stood," for the welcome she gave them was very cordial and friendly.

"We can give you plenty to eat," she said, extending a hand to each, "but I am not sure that you would be safe in accepting lodging if we were to offer it to you. Mr. Truman has no doubt told you that Price's men were quite close to us last night. We saw the fires they lighted shining upon the clouds, and wondered how long it would be before some of our friends would stand and watch our burning houses."

Mrs. Truman continued to talk in this strain while the supper was being made ready, and Tom Percival now and then glanced at his companion as if to ask him if he thought Mr. Merrick's Secession wife was the only brave woman there was in Missouri. The calmness with which she spoke of the troublous times she saw coming upon the people of the nation, was in direct contrast to the behavior of her excitable husband, who more than once flew into a rage and paced up and down the floor shaking his fists in the air. Rodney had often seen Confederates lash themselves into a fury while denouncing the "Northern mudsills," but he had never before seen a Union man act so while proclaiming against the demagogues who were bent on destroying the government. It showed that one could be as savage and vindictive as the other, and gave him a deeper insight into the nature of the coming struggle than he had ever had before. Good Confederate that he was, he began asking himself if it wouldn't be money in the pockets of the Southern people if they would rise in a body and hang Jefferson Davis and his advisers before they had time to do any more mischief. In the days that followed, Rodney Gray was not the only one who wished it had been done.

When darkness came on there were no lamps lighted to point out the position of the house to any roving band of marauders who might happen to be in the vicinity. The front door was thrown open, and Mrs. Truman sat just inside the room to which it gave entrance, so that she could see the road in both directions. She explained to the boys that there had once been shade trees in the yard and flowering shrubs growing along the fence, but they had been cut away for fear that they would afford concealment to some sneaking Secesh who might take it into his head to creep up and shoot through the window. Mr. Truman had gone out to see that everything was right about the place, and to shut up the boys' horses, which had been turned loose in the stable-yard. He wanted the animals where they could be easily caught when needed, for he did not think it prudent for Tom and his companion to remain under his roof during the night. They would have a better chance to take care of themselves if they were camped in the woods. This was the way he explained the situation when he came back to the house, and then he went on to say:

"There's something in the wind, and I wish I knew what it is. I don't like the way Merrick's boy has acted. I told him positively not to leave the place before morning, and now he's gone, mule and all."

"*By* gracious!" thought Rodney. "That means harm to me. I was afraid I said too much in his hearing, and when I found that he had red eyes I was sure of it. He is going to put some Union men on my trail before daylight, and I must get out of here. He knew that if he spoke to Truman he would have to face me, and that was something he was afraid to do."

"How long has he been gone?" inquired Tom, who was as impatient to leave the house and take to the woods as Rodney was.

Mr. Truman couldn't say as to that; probably two hours at least. That was long enough for him to tell a good many Union men that there was a Confederate in Truman's house, and the boys began to be really alarmed.

"This shows that there is no dependence whatever to be placed upon the darkies," declared Tom. "They are divided in sentiment the same as the whites. Some side with their masters and some don't. Of course I am not sure that this boy's absence means anything, but still I think we had better get out while we can."

But they had already delayed their departure too long, as they discovered a moment later. When Tom ceased speaking he got upon his feet, and just then there was a slight commotion outside the house, and Mrs. Truman uttered an ejaculation of surprise and alarm as a couple of dark figures bounded up the steps and stood upon the gallery. At the same instant a back door opened and heavy boots pounded the kitchen floor. The house had been quietly surrounded, but by whom? It was too dark to see.

"Don't be frightened, Mrs. Truman," said one of the men at the door. "You know us, and you know that we wouldn't harm you. We want a word or two with those young fellows who have come here trying to impose upon you and all of us."

"Then why couldn't you come to the door and say so like a man, instead of sneaking up like a cowardly Secession bushwhacker?" demanded Mr. Truman, angrily. "Get out of the house and come in in the proper way."

"Softly, softly," said one of the three men who had entered by the kitchen door. "Harsh words butter no parsnips, and in times like these one can't stand upon too much ceremony. We don't mean to intrude, but we do mean to get hold of that Secesh and the other chap, who for some reason of his own, is befriending him. Strike a light, please."

"You have certainly made a mistake," said Mrs. Truman, going across the room to a table to find a match. "Our guests are both Union."

"Then there's no harm done," replied the man at the door. "We understand that one of them claims to be some relation to old Justus Percival. If he is, he can't have any objections to riding over to Pilot Knob with some of us and proving his claim."

The boys trembled when they heard these ominous works. A ride to Pilot Knob meant death to Tom Percival at any rate, and perhaps to his friend Rodney also. This was the darkest prospect yet, and it looked still darker when the lamp had, been lighted, and its rays fell upon the set, determined faces of the armed men who, with heavy shot-guns, covered all the avenues of escape. Rodney thought they must be men who had suffered at the hands of their secession neighbors, for they looked as savage as Mr. Truman had acted a while before.

"Which is the traitor?" demanded the largest man in the party, who seemed to be the leader.

"Neither one," replied Tom, settling back in the chair from which he had arisen when the men first appeared.

"Which one is Union then, if that suits you better?" was the next question.

"I say we both are," answered Tom. "I am Captain Percival, and I am now on my way home after having offered the services of myself and company to General Lyon. Justus Percival, of whom you spoke a moment since, is my uncle."

"And who is this friend of yours?"

"He is a schoolmate who left his own State because things didn't go to suit him, and who intends to enlist the first chance he gets."

"On which side?" inquired the leader, squinting up both his eyes and nodding at Tom as if to say that he had him there.

"Do you imagine that he would make a journey of almost a thousand miles for the sake of enlisting in the Confederate army when he might have done that at home?" asked Tom, in reply. "You must be crazy."

"Not so crazy as you may think," said the leader, who seemed to be sure of his ground. "We have the

best of evidence that he is secesh."

"What sort of evidence?"

"His own word."

"Is the man who heard me say that outside?" asked Rodney, who thought by the way Mr. Truman and his wife looked at him that it was high time he was saying something for himself. "If he is, bring him in and let me face him. You have no right to condemn me until you let me see who my accuser is."

"That's the idea," said Tom. "Fetch him in."

The boys played their parts so well, in spite of the alarm they felt and the danger they knew they were in, and looked so honest and truthful that the leader was nonplussed, and Mr. Truman and his wife were firmly convinced that their visitors had made a mistake. There were reasons why the latter could not produce Rodney's accuser, and for a minute or two some of them acted as though they might be willing to let the matter drop right where it was. But there is always some "smart man" in every party who thinks he knows a little more than anybody else, and it was so in this case; and when he spoke, he "put his foot in it."

"Didn't you say to-day in the presence of—of—"

"Merrick's red-eyed nigger," Tom exclaimed, when the man paused and looked about as if afraid that he might have said more than he ought. "Why don't you speak it right out? What did I tell you, Mr. Truman? Didn't I say that boy would bear watching? Now, what I want to know of you is, are you going to take that darkey's word in preference to mine?"

This was bringing the matter right home to the visitors, every one of whom was a slaveholder, and would have taken it as an insult if any one had so much as hinted that their evidence was not as good as a black man's.

"Don't get huffy," said the smart man before alluded to. "We haven't played our best card yet. One of you two was riding a roan colt when you came to Merrick's, and there aint no such horse in Truman's stable."

"Did Merrick's nigger tell you that?" asked Tom.

His self-control was surprising. He sat up in his chair and boldly faced his questioner, while Rodney, wishing that the floor might open and let him down into the cellar, told himself more than once that he never would hear the last of that roan colt the longest day he lived.

"No matter who told us," was the reply. "We know it to be a fact. The roan was taken into Merrick's woods, and he wasn't brought out this morning. Did you make a trade with Merrick, or with some of Hobson's friends?"

"If you want to know you had better ask them," answered Tom.

"That's what we intend to do; and we intend, further, that you shall stay with us till we get to the bottom of this thing. There is something about you that isn't just right and we mean to find out what it is."

"I can tell you all about that horse," Rodney interposed.

"It isn't worth while for you to waste your breath, and besides this is a dangerous place to stay, with Price's men scouting around through the neighborhood," said the leader, who now showed a disposition to resume the management of affairs. "It won't take more than two or three days to ride back to Merrick's and from there to Pilot Knob, and straighten everything out in good shape."

"But we are in a hurry. We don't want to go back," exclaimed Tom; and it was plain to every one in the room that the bare proposition frightened him.

"I don't suppose you do want to go back," said the leader, in a significant tone, "but we can't help that. It's time you Secesh were taught that you can't go prowling about through the country imposing upon Union men whenever you feel like it. We have stood enough from such as you, and more than we ever will again, and I believe we should be justified in dealing with you here and now. As for you," he added, shaking his fist in Tom's face and fairly hissing out the words, "you are no more the man you claim to be than I am. You're traitors, the pair of you."

The man was working himself into a passion, and it behooved the boys to be careful what they said. He was in the right mood to do something desperate, for when he ceased speaking and stepped back,

breathing hard from the excess of his fury, he worked the hammer of his gun back and forth in a way that was enough to chill one's blood.

"You'll be sorry for this and quite willing to acknowledge it," was what Tom said in reply. "We don't want to go back for we have had trouble enough getting here; but since we must, I hope—"

Tom did not have time to say what, for while everybody's gaze was directed toward him, and no one thought of giving a look outside to see that all was right there, a couple of new actors appeared upon the scene, glided into the room off the porch as quickly and almost as silently as spirits. They were Confederate officers in full uniform, and each one carried a drawn sword in his hand. At the same moment two windows on opposite sides of the room were shivered into fragments, the curtains were jerked down and the black muzzles of a dozen carbines were thrust in. It was like a thunder-bolt from a clear sky, and it was all done so quickly that no one had a chance to move. The five Union men were as powerless for resistance as though they had held straws instead of loaded guns in their hands.

"Don't move an eye-lash," said the older of the two officers, lifting his cap and bowing to Mrs. Truman. "No explanation is necessary, for we understand the situation perfectly." And to the infinite amazement of the two boys, though not much to the surprise of the other occupants of the room, the speaker, when he put his cap on his head again, turned toward Rodney and Tom and gave them a military salute.

"What do you think of that, Mr. Truman?" said the leader of the Union men, whose courage did not desert him even if his face did change color. "Are you satisfied now that these are not the Union boys they pretended to be?"

"I am," answered Mr. Truman, while his wife looked daggers at them. "If they are not Secesh, how does it come that their friends recognize them so quickly? I suppose you are Price's men?" he added, turning to the officer.

"Lieutenant, send in two or three fellows to take these guns and sound the prisoners. Yes, sir, we belong to Price."

"And you came here expecting to find these two boys?"

"Right again," answered the officer. "If we hadn't known they were here we shouldn't have come."

Of all the occupants of the room there were none so thoroughly bewildered and dazed as Tom and Rodney were. Was the officer telling the truth or cooking up a story for reasons of his own? If he really expected to find them in that house, he was certainly mistaken in supposing, as he evidently did, that they were both Confederates. Tom had never set eyes on him before, and hoped from the bottom of his heart that the officer did not know anybody in or around Springfield. He hoped, too, and trembled while the thought flitted through his mind, that no one in the room would speak his name, for it was his turn to sail under false colors now.

Having sent his subordinate after some soldiers to disarm the men of whom he had spoken as prisoners, the officer dropped the point of his sword to the floor, came to "parade rest," and looked about the room

> "With such a face of Christian satisfaction
> As good men wear, who have done a virtuous action."

CHAPTER XIII.

WITH PRICE'S MEN.

In obedience to the order of his superior the lieutenant stepped upon the porch and beckoned to some of his men, who at once came in and began the work of disarming the citizens. Although the latter gave up their weapons without a show of resistance, they scowled when they did it in a way that impelled Tom to whisper to his friend:

"Their looks prove how desperate and savage they are, and we are lucky in getting out of their hands; but I don't know but I have jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire. Bear in mind that from this minute I go by my middle name—Barton. As you value my safety, don't say Percival once. I am not sure

that these Confederates ever heard the name, but I mustn't run the slightest risk."

"Of course not," replied Rodney. "But how in the world do you suppose they found out that we were here?"

"It will be your place to ask them about that. You must do the talking now. Do you want our guns, lieutenant?"

The latter stood by his men while they were disarming the citizens, and in moving about the room came within reach of the two boys, who produced their revolvers and held them so that he could see them; but when he smiled and waved his hand as if to say "I don't want them," they put the weapons back in their places.

If it hadn't been for two things, Rodney Gray would have been as happy as a boy ever gets to be. He was among friends, the very ones, too, he wanted to find, and from that time on he could appear in his true character; but he trembled for his friend and for the safety of Mr. Truman's property. The latter, remembering the lights he had seen on the clouds the night before, and knowing how deadly was the enmity that existed between Union men and Confederates in his State, could hope for nothing but the worst, and Rodney thought from the expression on his face and his wife's, that they were endeavoring to nerve themselves for a most trying ordeal. Would he have to stand by and see their buildings go up in smoke? He hoped not, and when the officer commanding the squad came up and shook hands with him and Tom, Rodney was ready to say something in Mr. Truman's favor.

"You have been insulted, boys," said the officer, in a tone which implied that now was the time for them to take any revenge they wanted. "When I was surrounding the house I heard one of these Yankee sympathizers using rather strong language, and denouncing you as Secessionists trying to impose upon Union men."

"I don't hold that against him, for to tell you the truth, that's just the way the thing stands," answered Rodney. "I have been playing Union man ever since I left Mr. Westall and his squad of Emergency men near Cedar Bluff landing. I had to, for somehow I didn't fall in with any but people of that stamp."

"That was all right," answered the officer. "You couldn't have got through any other way."

"So you see that Merrick's darkey told you nothing more than the plain truth," he added, addressing the citizen who had shaken a fist under his nose.

"I was sure of it, and I am not sorry for what I did or said," replied the Union man, boldly. "I am sorry that the thing happened in Truman's house, and I wish to assure you that he is in no way to blame for our being here. You've got the power on your side now, and I suppose you will use it; but whatever you do to us, I hope you will not harm Truman."

"I say that a man who can talk like that when he is in danger himself, has pluck," Rodney remarked, turning his back to the citizen and speaking so that no one but the officer and Tom could catch his words.

"Oh, they've all got pluck," replied the officer. "And they hang together like a lot of brothers."

"And I say further, that brave men ought not to be harmed when they are perfectly helpless, as these men are now," continued Rodney. "You haven't anything against them, have you, colonel?"

"Captain," corrected the latter, pointing to the insignia on his collar. "You'll soon learn how to tell one rank from another. N-o; I don't know that I have anything against them, except their principles; but some of their neighbors I saw to-night while I was coming here, declare that they are villains of the very worst sort."

"What else could you expect in a community like this where every man has turned against his best friend?" exclaimed Tom. "You are a Missourian and understand the situation as well as I do."

"I have been urged to burn their houses; and as I was sent out to harass the enemy as well as to pick up recruits, I don't know but I had better do it," replied the captain; and the boys saw plainly enough that having made up his mind to carry out his orders, he did not want to permit himself to be turned from his purpose.

"But Rodney and I have been well enough drilled in military law to know that an officer on detached service is allowed considerable latitude," chimed in Tom. "If you see any reason why you should not obey orders to the very letter, you are not expected to do it."

"And in this case I hope you won't do it," pleaded Rodney. "If those cowardly neighbors, who tried to

set out against these Union men, want their property destroyed, let them do the dirty work themselves. I don't believe in making war on people who don't think as I do."

"I don't reckon there are any half-wild Unionists in your settlement," said the captain, with a smile.

"I know it. I am from Louisiana where Union men have to keep their tongues to themselves," replied Rodney; and then seeing that the captain looked surprised he hastened to add: "I came to Missouri to enlist under Price because I couldn't join a partisan company where I lived; and I was encouraged to come by a telegram I received from Dick Graham's father. Dick is one of Price's men and perhaps you know him."

"Do you?" inquired the lieutenant, who stood by listening.

"I ought to, and so had Tom, for we went to school with him, and belonged to his class and company."

"Where was that?"

"At the Barrington Military Academy. I am Rodney Gray and my friend is Tom Barton."

Rodney said all this at a venture and was overjoyed to hear the lieutenant say, as he thrust out his hand:

"Shake. I ought to know Rodney Gray, for I have often heard the sergeant speak of him as the hottest rebel in school; but I don't remember that I ever heard him mention Barton's name."

"He wasn't as intimate with Tom as he was with me," Rodney explained. "There was a difference in their politics."

"That accounts for it. Graham was neutral until his State moved, and Barton here was an ardent Secessionist from the start. That's just the way my captain and I stand now. I began shouting for Southern rights as soon as Carolina went out, and he didn't."

"No, Dick held back," said Tom, "but Rodney did not. He was the first academy boy to hoist the Stars and Bars. But now, captain, say that you will not harm these folks. They haven't done anything, and as for the strong language they used toward us a while ago—we don't mind that."

"Who's your authority for saying that they haven't done anything?" demanded the captain. "You seem to think that they are the most innocent, inoffensive people in the world; but I know that is not characteristic of Unionists in this part of the country. How do you know but that they have ambushed scores of Confederates?"

"We don't know it; and seeing that you don't know it either, why not give them the benefit of the doubt and let their neighbors see that they get their deserts? Why not be satisfied with what you have already done? You burned two houses last night."

"I am aware of it. The men to whom they belonged are noted bushwhackers, and I went miles out of my way to teach them that they had better let our people alone—that burning and shooting are games that two can play at. But I have no heart for more work of that sort, and so I'll not trouble these men since you seem to be so tender-hearted toward them."

"Thank you, sir; thank you," replied Rodney, heartily. "Now will you pass us out, and send some men to the stable with us to get our horses?"

"I'll go with you myself," said the lieutenant; but as he was about to lead the way out of the house he stopped to hear what his captain had to say to Mr. and Mrs. Truman.

"We shall not touch your property, and you may thank these two 'traitors' for it," said the officer; and when he said "traitor," he waved his hand toward Rodney and Tom and paused to note the effect of his words.

The men, after the first shock of surprise had passed, seemed ready to drop, Mr. Truman leaned heavily against the nearest wall, and his wife, who had borne up as bravely as the best of them, behaved as women usually do under such circumstances. She buried her face in her handkerchief and sobbed violently.

"I hope you gentlemen will remember my forbearance and be equally lenient toward any Confederate who may chance to fall into your power," continued the captain, whose calm, steady voice had grown husky all on a sudden. "We are not a bad lot, but we are going to govern this State as we please, and you will save yourselves trouble if you will stop fighting against us. You'll have to do it sooner or later.

Of course I shall be obliged to deprive you of your guns, for you might be tempted to shoot them at some loyal Jackson man when we are not here to protect him. I have saved these young gentlemen from your clutches, and as that was what I came for, I will bid you good-evening."

Rodney Gray did not hear much of this polite address for a new fear had taken possession of him, and he took the opportunity to say to his friend Tom:

"You go with the lieutenant after the horses, and I will stay with the captain to say a word in your defense in case any of these Union people happen to speak your name, or let out anything else you would rather keep hidden."

Tom thought this a good suggestion. It would certainly be disagreeable, and perhaps dangerous, to have the captain tell him when he returned with the horses that he wasn't Tom Barton at all—that his real name was Percival, that he was the commander of a company of Union men who had offered to help Lyon at St. Louis, and all that. While Tom did not think the captain would believe such a story if it were told him, it might suggest to him some leading questions that the boys would find it hard to answer. So he left Rodney to act as a sort of rear guard, and went off to the stable with the lieutenant.

"Did you really know that we were in the house?" Tom asked, when he was alone with the officer. "If you did, it can't be that Merrick's boy told you."

"Of course he didn't. He would have kept it from us if he could, but all the same the information came from him in the first place. The blacks in these parts are all Union—no one need waste his breath telling me different—and that scamp of a boy lost no time in spreading it among the Union men in the neighborhood that there were a couple of 'disguised rebels,' as he called you and Gray, putting up at Truman's house. That was the way those five fellows came to get on your trail; but, as good luck would have it, the darkey told the story to too many. Not being as well acquainted in this settlement as he probably is in his own, he told it to a Jackson man, who rode to our camp and told us of it. If it hadn't been for that we should be miles away now; but of course we couldn't think of going off and leaving some of our own people in the hands of the enemy."

"You rendered us a most important service," replied Tom; and he told nothing but the truth when he said it. "It is necessary that I should go home on business, but Rodney Gray wants to enlist in an independent command as soon as he can get the chance. Didn't you speak of Dick Graham as a sergeant?"

"May be so. That's what he is."

"Does he belong to your company?"

"No; but he belongs to our regiment, and that's how I came to get acquainted with him. He's got more friends than any other fellow I know of, and he will be glad to see an old schoolmate once more. I have heard him tell of Rodney Gray and the scrapes he got into by speaking his mind so freely, and I am not the only one in the regiment who thinks that the Barrington Military Academy is a disgrace to the town and State in which it is located. The citizens ought to have turned out some night and torn it up root and branch."

"They would have had a good time trying it," said Tom. "The boys punched one another's head on the parade ground now and then, but it wasn't safe for an outsider to interfere with our private affairs."

"Why, the Confederates wouldn't fight for the Union boys, would they?" exclaimed the lieutenant. "That's a little the strangest thing I ever heard of. We don't do business that way in Missouri, and I could see that our boys didn't like it when you and Gray stuck up for those Yankee sympathizers back there in the house."

Perhaps they wouldn't have liked it either, if they had known how Tom and Rodney had "stuck up" for each other ever since they met at Cedar Bluff landing. But that was a piece of news that Tom did not touch upon. He intended to reserve it for Dick Graham's private ear.

"And in the meantime I mustn't neglect to ascertain just when and where the lieutenant expects to rejoin his regiment, so that I can take the first chance that offers to get away and strike out for home," thought Tom. "Dick wouldn't expect to see me in Rodney Gray's company, and might betray me before he knew what he was doing."

Having saddled and bridled the horses Tom and the lieutenant returned to the house, the former somewhat anxious to know if anything had been said during his absence that could be brought up against him. But a glance and a reassuring smile from Rodney were enough to show him that he had

nothing to fear on that score. The guards stood at the windows watching the party inside, the horses had been brought into the yard in readiness for the squad to mount, and Rodney and the captain were sitting on the front steps. The prisoners, if such they could be called, were too sullen to exchange a word with the Confederates, and the captain thought it beneath his dignity to talk to Union men; and Rodney was glad to have it so.

"Bring in the guards and get a-going," was the order the captain gave when his lieutenant came up; and this made it evident to the well-drilled Barrington boys that Captain Hubbard's company of Rangers were not the only Confederates who had a good deal to learn before they could call themselves soldiers. But his men understood the order, and it was the work of but a few minutes for them to get into their saddles and set off down the road, and they did it without paying any more attention to the men in the house. Rodney rode beside the captain at the head of the column, Tom and the lieutenant coming next in line. The former thought it was a good evening's work all around, and that Merrick's red-eyed darkey could not have done him a greater service if he had been a friend to him instead of an enemy. He had had a narrow escape from being taken into the presence of men he hoped he might never see again, but he was all right now. So was Tom, for if he wasn't already beyond the danger of betrayal, he certainly would be by the time daylight came.

"No; we shall not march all night," said the captain, in response to an inquiry from Rodney. "We have been in the saddle pretty steadily for the last week, and both men and horses are in need of rest. But I shall take good care to get out of this settlement before going into camp. I don't want to be ambushed."

"I don't think those men back there would do such a thing," replied Rodney. "They seemed very grateful to you for letting them off so easily."

"Ha!" exclaimed the captain. "They would do it in a minute if they thought they could escape the consequences. You don't know how bitter everybody is against everybody else who doesn't train with his crowd, and you'll have to live among us a while before you can understand it."

"When shall I have the pleasure of shaking Dick Graham by the hand?" inquired Rodney. "Does he stand up for State Rights as strongly as he used?"

"Yes; and I am with him. You see, when the election was held in '60, our people, by a vote of one hundred and thirty-five thousand to thirty thousand, decided against the extreme rule-or-ruin party of the South, and declared that Missouri ought to stay in the Union; but at the same time they didn't deny that she had a perfect right to go out if she wanted to. If she decided to go with South Carolina and the other cotton States, the government at Washington had no business to send soldiers here to stop her; neither had those troops from Illinois any business to come across the Mississippi and steal our guns out of the St. Louis arsenal. That was an act of invasion, and we had a right to get mad about it. We decided to remain neutral, and our General Price made an agreement with the Federal General Harney to that effect; but that did not suit the abolitionists who want war and nothing else. They took Harney's command away from him and gave it to Lyon, who at once proceeded to do everything he could to drive us to desperation. He drove us out of Jefferson City and Booneville, and now he has sent that Dutchman Siegel to Springfield to see what damage he can do there."

"But what was the reason Siegel was sent to Springfield?" inquired Tom, who, riding close behind the captain, heard every word he said. "Wasn't it to repel the *invasion* of McCulloch, who was coming from Arkansas with eight hundred bandits he called Texan Rangers? Has he any right to ride rough-shod through our State, when some of our own citizens are not permitted to stick their heads out of doors?"

"Hallo!" exclaimed the captain, turning about in his saddle to face Tom, while Rodney began to fear that his friend's tongue would get them both into trouble. "You are about the same kind of a Confederate I am, only I don't blurt out my opinions in that style, and you hadn't better do it, either. To be consistent I am obliged to say that those Texans had no business to come over the Missouri line, but circumstances alter cases. We are in trouble, we can't stand against the power of the abolition government, and I shall be glad to see that man McCulloch."

"I understand that there had been no fighting to speak of, and yet you say we have been driven out of two places," said Rodney.

"Oh, we were not ready and the Yankees were," answered the captain. "We had just lighting enough to give us a chance to learn how gunpowder smells. We are waiting for McCulloch now, and when he comes, we'll assume the offensive and drive Lyon out of the State."

"That's the very thing I came here for, and I am glad to know that I shall be in time to help," said Rodney gleefully. "But are you a partisan and is Dick Graham one, also?"

"Yes, to both your questions; but of course we are sworn into the service of the State."

"You couldn't be ordered out of the State, could you?"

"Not by a long shot, and we wouldn't go if we were ordered out. If other States desire independence, let them win it without calling upon their neighbors for help. That's what we intend to do."

"And that was another thing I wanted to know," said Rodney, with a sigh of relief. "I am satisfied now, and wish my company was here with me. Some of the members seemed willing and even anxious to come, but when the thing was brought before them in the form of a resolution, they voted against it."

And then he went on to tell the captain how it happened that he came to Missouri alone, not forgetting to mention how he had fooled the telegraph operators at Baton Rouge and Mooreville.

"Those operators told that St. Louis cotton-factor I was a Confederate bearer of dispatches," said he, in winding up his story. "But I haven't a scrap of writing about me."

"You are a great deal safer without any," replied the officer. "Suppose those Union men at Truman's house had searched you and found a letter of introduction to some well-known Confederate living in these parts! They might have strung you up before we had time to go to your relief. But how did you fall in with your old schoolmate, Barton? You couldn't have expected to meet him at the landing?"

This was a question that Rodney Gray had been dreading, for you will remember that he had had no opportunity to hold a private consultation with Tom and ask him what sort of a reply he should make when this inquiry was propounded, as it was sure to be sooner or later. He turned about in his saddle and rode sideway so that Tom could hear every word he said.

"He was the last person in the world I expected to see when I left the steamer at Cedar Bluff landing to get ahead of the Yankee cotton-factor in St. Louis," said Rodney. "Tom had been over Cape Girardeau way on business, and got a trifle out of his reckoning when Mr. Westall and his party of Emergency men picked him up and brought him to the wood-cutters' camp. We slept there that night and came out together in the morning."

This was a desperate story to tell, seeing that they were not yet out of reach of men who could easily prove that there was quite as much falsehood as truth in it, but Rodney did not know what else to say. He rested his hopes of safety upon the supposition that the Confederate captain had done all his scouting on interior lines, and that he had not been into the river counties until he came to Truman's house to rescue him and Tom from the power of the Union men; and there was where his good luck stood him in hand. More than that, Dick Graham was one of the best known members of his regiment, and it would have taken a pretty good talker to make the captain believe that there could be anything wrong with one of Dick's friends.

While this conversation was going on Rodney noticed that the captain was constantly on his guard, and that as often as they reached a place where the woods came down close to the road on each side, his men closed up the ranks without waiting for orders. Every house they passed was as dark as a dungeon, and no sounds of music and dancing came from the negro quarters. The people, white and black, had gone into their houses and barred their doors to wait until these unwelcome visitors in gray had taken themselves out of the neighborhood.

Before the captain went into camp, which he did about midnight, Tom Percival, as we shall continue to call him, had ample time to question the lieutenant and find out where his regiment was stationed and when he expected to join it. The last question, however, was one that the young officer could not answer with any degree of accuracy.

"You see we have some men with us who are not in uniform, do you not?" said he. "Well, they are the recruits we have picked up since we have been out on this scout. They have been terribly persecuted by the Union men in their settlement, and want us to stop on our way back long enough to burn those Union men out. If we do, it will delay us a day or two; if we don't, and keep lumbering right along, we shall be with the rest of the boys in less than forty-eight hours."

This was what Tom wanted to know; and he decided that when the squad reached the old post-rode and turned up toward the place at which the regiment was stationed, he would go south toward Springfield, and so avoid the risk of meeting Dick Graham.

"I suppose you know your own business best," said the lieutenant, when Tom announced his decision. "But I'll never go piking off through the country alone so long as I know what I am doing. There's too much danger in it. When you get ready to go into the service, remember that our regiment is one of the very best, and that we are ready to welcome all volunteers with open arms."

The two boys slept under the same blankets that night, but the talking they did was intended for the

benefit for those who were lying near them, rather than for each other. Tom sent numberless messages to Dick Graham, and wanted Rodney to be sure and tell him that he (Tom) would be a member of his company before its next battle with the Yankees; all of which Rodney promised to bear in mind. The squad broke their fast next morning on provisions which they had "foraged" from the Union men whose buildings they had destroyed two nights before, and at eight o'clock arrived at the old post-road where the Barrington boys were to take leave of each other, to meet again perhaps under hostile flags and with deadly weapons in their hands. But there was one thing about it: They might be enemies in name, but they never would in spirit.

"There goes one of the bravest and best fellows that ever lived," said Rodney, facing about in his saddle to take a last look at his friend who rode away with a heavy heart.

"Don't be so solemn over it," said the captain. "Didn't he say he would come back as soon as he could?"

Yes, that was what Tom said; but the trouble was, that when he came again he might come in such a way that Rodney could not shake hands with him.

CHAPTER XIV.

"HURRAH FOR BULL RUN!"

Having decided that he would waste too much time if he turned from his course to punish the Union men who had persecuted his recruits, the captain "kept lumbering right along," and on the afternoon of the next day came within sight of the town in which his regiment had been encamped when he left it to start on his scout; but there was not a tent, a wagon or a soldier to be seen about the place now, and a citizen who came out to meet him, brought the information that the regiment had moved South to join Rains and Jackson, who were marching toward Neosho, a short distance from Springfield: and at the same time he gave the captain a written order from his colonel to join his command with all haste.

"If we had known this before, we might have kept company with your friend Tom," said the captain, as he faced the squad about after a fashion of his own and started them on the back track. "Both sides seemed to be concentrating in the southwestern part of the State, and there's where the battle-ground is going to be."

"Not all the time, I hope," said Rodney.

"Of course not. We'll drive the enemy back on St. Louis, and wind up by taking that city. General Pillow will march up from New Madrid to co-operate with us, and perhaps he will stop on the way to take Cairo. I hope he will, to pay those Illinois chaps for robbing the St. Louis armory."

This was a very pretty programme but the captain thought it could be easily carried out, and the very next day he heard a piece of news which caused him to make several additions to it. As the squad was moving past a plantation house an excited man, who was in too great a hurry to get his hat, rushed down to the gate flourishing a paper over his head and shouted, at the top of his voice:

"Hurrah for Jeff Davis! Hurrah for Johnston! Hurrah for Bull Run and all the rest of 'em!"

"What's up?" inquired the captain, reining in his horse.

"Here's something that one of Price's men slung at me yesterday while he was riding along," replied the planter, opening the gate and placing the paper in the officer's eager palm. "Aint we walking over 'em roughshod though, and didn't I say all the while that we were bound to do it? A Northern mechanic has got no business alongside a Southern gentleman."

"Have we had a fight?" asked the captain. "I wonder if my regiment was in it."

"No, I don't reckon it was," answered the man, with a laugh. "You see it happened out in Virginny, a few miles from Washington. I wish I might get a later paper'n that, for I calculate to read in it that our boys are in Washington dictating—"

"Hey—youp!" yelled the captain, who began to understand the matter now.

"Price's men whooped and yelled worse'n that when they went by yesterday," said the man, jumping up and knocking his heels together like a boy who had just been turned loose from school. "That's Davis's dispatch right there. He went out from Richmond to watch the fight, and got there just in time to see the Yankees running."

The officer, who was worked up to such a pitch of excitement that the paper rustled in his trembling hands, glanced over the black headlines to which the planter directed his attention, and then read the dispatch aloud so that his men could hear it. It ran as follows:

"Night has closed upon a hard-fought field. Our forces were victorious. The battle was fought mainly on our left. Our forces were fifteen thousand; that of the enemy estimated at thirty-five thousand."

"And when the Yankees got a-going," chimed in the planter, clapping his hands and swaying his body back and forth after the manner of a negro who had been carried away by some sudden enthusiasm, "they never stopped. It was such a stampede that their officers couldn't do nothing with 'em. The soldiers who were running away from the battle met the civilians who were riding out from Washington to see it, and the two living streams of humanity, one going one way and t'other going t'other way, got all mixed up together; and all the while there were our batteries playing onto 'em and our cavalry riding through 'em and sabering first one and then another, till—Hey—youp! I'll be doggone if I can seem to get it through my head, although I have read it more'n a hundred times."

This astounding intelligence almost took away the breath of the men who listened to it. Of course they had known all the while that whipping the North was going to be as easy as falling off a log, but to have their opinions confirmed in this unexpected way almost overwhelmed them. They knew it was bound to come, but they hadn't looked for it so soon. They gazed at one another in silence for a moment or two, and then the shout they set up would have done credit to a larger squad than theirs. The planter, who really acted as though he had taken leave of his senses, joined in, laughing and shaking his head and slapping his knees in a way that set Rodney Gray in a roar. It was a long time before the captain could bring his squad to "attention."

"There's a good deal more in this paper," said he, "and if you will let me have it, I should like to read it to the boys when we go into camp. We belong to Price, and want to catch up with the men who went by here yesterday."

"Then you'll have to skip along right peart," replied the man. "That's the way they were going stopped long enough to drink my well 'most dry, and then went off in a lope. As for the paper, take it along. You don't reckon there's any chance for a mistake, do you?"

"Not the slightest. President Davis knew what he was doing when he sent that telegram to Richmond."

"But fifteen thousand against thirty-five thousand," said the planter, whose excitement had not driven all his common sense out of his head. "That's big odds, and it kinder sticks in my crop. Well, good-by, if you must be going, and good luck to you."

"It doesn't stick in my crop," replied the captain. "I knew we could do it, and we'll whip bigger odds than that, if they keep forcing war upon us. Don't you know that the man who looks for a fight generally gets more than he wants? Forward! Trot!"

Never before had Rodney Gray been thrown into the company of so wild a set of men. If such a thing were possible, they were wilder than those his Cousin Marcy found on his train when he boarded it at Barrington on his way home. The first rational thought that came into his mind was: What a lucky thing that Tom Percival was well out of the way when this news came! Tom would have betrayed himself sure, for he never could have pulled off his hat and shouted and whooped with any enthusiasm when he heard that the cause in which he believed, and for which he was willing to risk his life, had met with disaster. At length the captain, who appeared to have been awed into silence, said slowly:

"I, too, would like to see a later paper than this. If it is true that the Federals were utterly routed and thrown into such confusion that their officers could do nothing with them, our victorious troops must have followed them into Washington, and I shouldn't wonder if they were there at this moment, dictating terms of peace to the Lincoln government."

The paper that had been given him, proved to be a copy of the *Mobile Register*. As the captain talked he ran his eye rapidly over its columns, and finally found an editorial containing a piece of news that caused him to halt his squad and face his horse about.

"Here's something I want to read to you," said he. "Come up close on all sides so that you can hear every word of it. You know that our governor proposed that Missouri should remain neutral, and that a

conference was held at the Planter's House in St. Louis to talk the matter over. This is what General Lyon said in reply to the governor's proposition, Now listen, so that you may know who is to blame for the troubles that have come upon us:

"'Rather than concede to the State of Missouri the right to demand that government shall not enlist troops within her limits, or bring troops into the State whenever it please, or move its troops at its own will, I would see every man, woman and child in the State dead and buried. This means war.'

"What do you boys say to that?" continued the captain.

"I say that if the Yankees want war we'll give them more than they'll care to have," answered one of the squad; and all his comrades yelled their approval. "Now while you're reading, captain, suppose you read about that big battle. Let's hear just how bad our fifteen thousand whipped the Yankee thirty-five thousand."

The officer complied and read an account of the battle of Bull Run, which was so highly sensational and so utterly unreasonable, that Rodney Gray's common sense would not let him believe, more than half of it. He hoped and believed that the Southern soldiers had gained a glorious victory over the Lincoln hirelings; but that there could have been so great a difference in the size of the contending armies, did not look reasonable. But the captain put implicit faith in the story.

"It seems that the Federal success in the beginning of the fight was owing to their overwhelming numbers," said he. "But the men on our side were gentlemen who could not be driven by a rabble, and of course they were bound to win in the end. But here is an article that may be of more interest to us. It is entitled. 'The Situation in Missouri.' You know that Governor Jackson went to Jefferson City and issued a proclamation calling the people to arms, and that Lyon came up the river on steamboats and routed him from there and from Booneville, too. You know all about it, because you were there and so was I. Well, the Northern papers think that that was a blow that secured Missouri to the Union, and that thousands, who have been hesitating which side to take, will now enlist to put down the rebellion. *Rebellion!* Remember the word. That's what the Lincoln hirelings call the efforts of a free people to maintain their freedom. But listen to what the *Register* has to say on this point:

"The Northern soldiers prefer enlisting to starvation. But they are not soldiers, least of all to meet the hot-blooded, thorough-bred, impetuous men of the South. They are trencher-soldiers who enlisted to make war upon rations, not upon men. They are such as marched through Baltimore, squalid, wretched, ragged, half-naked, as the newspapers of that city report them; fellows who do not know the breech of a musket from its muzzle; white slaves, peddling watches; small-change knaves and vagrants. These are the levied forces which Lincoln arrays as candidates for the honor of being slaughtered by gentlemen such as Mobile sends to battle. Let them come South and we will put our negroes to the dirty work of killing them. But they will not come South. Not a wretch of them will live on this side of the border longer than it will take us to reach the ground and drive them off.'

"Can we at the front be whipped while our friends at home keep up such heart as that?" cried the excited captain, pulling off his cap and flourishing it over his head with one hand, while he shook the paper at his men with the other. "Three cheers for brave old Missouri, and confusion to everybody who wants to keep her down."

"Everybody except Tom Percival," thought Rodney, as he threw up his cap and joined in to help increase the almost deafening noise that arose when the officer ceased speaking. "Whatever happens to anybody else I want Tom to come out all right."

After this short delay the squad rode on again, and along every mile of the road they traversed they found people to cheer them and hurrah for the great victory at Bull Run. There were no signs of Union men anywhere along the route, but the blackened ruins they passed now and then pointed out the sites of the dwellings in which some of them had formerly lived. Those ruins had been left there by some of Price's men scouting parties like the one with which he was now riding. Rodney had always thought he should like to be a scout, but if that was the sort of work scouts were expected to do, he decided that he would rather be a regular soldier. He wouldn't mind facing men who had weapons in their hands, because that was what soldiers enlisted for; but the idea of turning women and children out into the weather, by burning their houses over their heads, was repugnant to him. There was one piece of news he and the captain did not get, although they asked everybody for it. No one could tell them for certain that the victorious Confederates had gone into Washington and dictated terms of peace to the Lincoln government. There were plenty who were sure it had been done, but they had received no positive information of it. The only news they heard on which they could place reliance was that Price had withdrawn from Neosho, and effected a junction with Jackson and Rains at Carthage. That was a point in the captain's favor, for instead of being obliged to make a wide detour to the east and south of Springfield, he turned squarely to the west toward Carthage, and saved more than a hundred miles of

travel, as well as the risk of being captured by a scouting party of Yankee cavalry.

The squad reached Carthage without seeing any signs of Siegel's troopers, who were supposed to be raiding through the country in all directions, and when Rodney rode into the camp, which was pitched upon a little rise of ground a short distance from the town, he remarked that he had never seen a stranger sight. The camp itself was all right. The tents were properly pitched, the wagons and artillery parked after the most approved military rules, and all this was to be expected, since the commanding general was a veteran of the Mexican war; but the men looked more like a mob than they did like soldiers. There were eight thousand of them, and not one in ten was provided with a uniform of any sort. The guard who challenged them carried a double-barrel shotgun, and the only thing military there was about him, was a rooster's feather stuck in the band of his hat.

"They're a good deal better than they look," said the captain, when Rodney called his attention to the fact that the sentry "slouched" rather than walked over his beat, and that he didn't know how to hold his gun. "They are not very well drilled yet, but they'll fight, and that is the main thing. Think of Washington and his ragamuffins at Valley Forge the next time you feel disposed to criticise the boys."

"Where is the enemy?" inquired Rodney.

"He is supposed to be concentrating twenty thousand men at Springfield, thirty-five miles east of here." replied the captain. "When McCulloch gets up from Arkansas we'll have a little more than fifteen thousand. But that's enough. We'll be in St. Louis in less than a month. That victory at Bull Run will nerve our boys to do good work when they get at it. Now where shall I go to find my regiment? The colonel is the man I want to report to."

While the captain was looking around to find an officer of whom he could make inquiries, there was a loud clatter of hoofs behind, and a moment afterward a spruce young fellow, handsomely mounted and wearing a uniform that Rodney Gray would have recognized anywhere, dashed by and held on his way without once looking in their direction.

"There he is now," exclaimed the captain, before Rodney had time to speak. "Oh, sergeant!"

The horseman drew up and turned about just as Rodney's hand was placed upon his shoulder. The greeting was just such a one as any two boys would extend to each other under similar circumstances, and so we need not say any more about it. Rodney and Dick Graham were shaking hands at last, and two brothers could not have been more delighted.

"How in the world did you get through St. Louis without being put in jail, and where did you pick him up, captain?" were the questions Dick asked when he recovered from his surprise. "Lyon is between us and St. Louis, but we manage to get our mail pretty regularly—Heard about Bull Run? Wasn't that a victory though? Fifteen thousand against thirty-five thousand! When we were at school, captain—"

"Where's the regiment?" interrupted the latter. "I am ordered to report to the colonel at once."

"Over there," replied Dick, sweeping his right arm around the horizon so as to include the whole camp on that side of the street. "Come on, and I will show you the way. When we were at school the Union boys made sport of us rebels because we shouted ourselves hoarse over the victory in Charleston Harbor, and declared that we ought to be ashamed of ourselves for it. Five thousand men against fifty-one was not a thing to be proud of. But they couldn't say that now if they were here. We won a fair fight on the field of Bull Run, although the enemy outnumbered us more than two to one. I say we are going to repeat the good work right here in Missouri."

"Are you Confederate?" inquired Rodney.

"Not much. I'm State Rights. That's me."

"And you'll not be ordered out of your State?"

"I may be ordered but I won't go. That's me. Seen Jeff Thompson's last proclamation? In it he calls Lyon's Dutchmen Hessians and Tories, and says our first hard work must be to drive them from the State. After that has been done, then we'll decide whether or not we want to join the Confederacy."

"If the Governor of Louisiana had talked that way I would not be here now," said Rodney. "He tried to swear us into the Confederate service against our will, and that broke up the company. I have as much to tell you as you have to tell me, and I propose that we postpone our talking until we can sit down somewhere and have it out with no fear of interruption. Do you suppose I can get into your company?"

"I suppose you can," replied Dick, with a laugh. "When the captain sees your writing he will make you orderly so quick you will never know it."

"Then he'll never see any of my writing," said Rodney, earnestly. "If you so much as hint to him that I know a pen-point from a pen-holder, I'll never forgive you. Captain Hubbard's men wanted to make me company clerk, but I couldn't see the beauty of it, and so they elected me sergeant. But I don't want any office now. I want to remain a private so that I will have a chance to go with you if you are sent out on a scout. But bear one thing in mind," he added, in a lower tone, "you needn't order me to burn any houses, for I'll not do it."

"I am down on all such lighting myself," replied Dick, with emphasis. "If we ever go out together I will show you as many as half-a-dozen houses that would be ashes now if it hadn't been for me, and one of them covers the head of one Thomas Percival—when he is at home."

Dick thought Rodney would be much surprised at this, but he wasn't. All he said was:

"Does Tom know it?"

"I don't suppose he does, or his father, either; but I have the satisfaction of knowing that I have done something to strengthen the friendship that existed between Tom and myself while we were at Barrington. You will know how hard a time I had in doing any thing for the Percivals when I tell you that Tom is suspected of belonging to a company of Home Guards."

"Suspected, is he?" said Rodney, with a knowing wink. "Is that all you know about him? He's captain of a company he raised himself, and rode all the way alone to St. Louis to ask Lyon if he could join him. He was afraid to trust the mails. He told me that the Vigilance Committees had a way of opening letters from suspected persons, and he didn't want to run any risks."

"Well now, I am beat," said Dick, who had listened to this revelation with a look of the profoundest astonishment on his face. "But how does it come that you know so much more about him than I do? Have you been corresponding with him?"

"I never heard a word from him from the time I left Barrington until I met him at Cedar Bluff landing in a nest of Confederates. Tom was a prisoner, was known to be Union, accused of being a horse-thief and in a fair way of being hung; but he got out of the scrape somehow, and I hope is safe at home by this time."

"Well, well," repeated Dick, growing more and more amazed. "So do I hope he is safe at home, and if he got within a hundred miles of Springfield I reckon he is. The country is full of Federal cavalry, and how your squad came through without being molested is more than I can understand. You will find the colonel in this tent, captain," said he, dismounting and drawing some papers from his pocket. "I must report too, for I have been on an errand for him. I'll be out in a minute, Rodney."

Dick followed, the captain into the colonel's tent, and Rodney sat on his horse and looked around while he awaited his return. He thought of what the captain had said regarding the Continentals at Valley Forge, but did not see that there could be any comparison drawn between the two armies. Price's men seemed to be well clothed, provisions were plenty, and as for their arms, they had an abundance of them such as they were, and a charging enemy would find their double-barrel shotguns bad things to face at close quarters. But a few months later the comparison was a good one. During the "little Moscow retreat," after the battle of Pea Ridge (which Van Dorn's ambition led him to fight contrary to orders), along a route where there were neither roads nor bridges, through a region from which the inhabitants had all fled, leaving the country "so poor that a turkey buzzard would not fly over it," with no train of wagons, or provisions to put in them if there had been, and no tents to shelter them from the cold, biting winds and sleet and snow—when Rodney Gray found himself and companions in this situation he thought of the Continentals, and wondered at the patriotism that kept them in the ranks. But it wasn't patriotism that kept Price's men together. It was *fear* and nothing else.

But this dark picture was hidden from Rodney's view as he sat there on his horse waiting for his friend Dick Graham to come out of the colonel's tent. The martial scenes around him, the military order that everywhere prevailed, the companies and regiments drilling in the fields close by, the inspiriting music that came to his ears—these sights and sounds filled him with enthusiasm; and if any one had told him that the time would come when he would think seriously of deserting the army and turning his back upon the cause he had espoused, Rodney Gray would have been thunder struck. But the time came.

CHAPTER XV.

Having transacted his business with the colonel, Dick Graham came out of the tent and mounted his horse.

"Of course I had to wait until the captain had made his report," said he, in a suppressed whisper, "and in that way I happened to hear a little about yourself and Tom Barton. I knew enough to keep still in the presence of my superiors, but I did want to ask the captain to say more about Tom Barton. Was it Percival?"

Rodney winked first one eye and then the other and Dick was answered.

"It's the strangest thing I ever heard of, and I am in a hurry to know all about it, Come on; our company is up at the end of the street. We occupy the post of honor on the right of the line, because we are the only company in the regiment that is fully uniformed. We'll leave our horses at the stable line, and Captain Jones will make a State Guard of you before you know it."

Not to dwell too long upon matters that have little bearing upon our story, it will be enough to say that Rodney was duly presented to Captain Jones, who was informed that he had come all the way from Louisiana to join a partisan company. He was a Barrington boy, well up in military matters, and desired to be sworn into the State service without the loss of time. Dick was careful not to say too much for fear that he should let out some secrets that Rodney had not yet had opportunity to tell him. Of course the captain was delighted to see the recruit from Louisiana, shook him by the hand as if he had been a younger brother, and sent for an officer to take his descriptive list. He was not required to pass the surgeon, and the oath he took was to the effect that he would obey Governor Jackson and nobody else. This being done Dick took him off to introduce him to the members of his mess.

"But before I do that," said Dick, halting just outside the captain's tent and drawing Rodney off on one side, "I want to know just where you stand, and whether or not you have had any reason to change your politics since I last saw you. Are you as good a rebel as you used to be?"

"I never was a rebel," exclaimed Rodney, with some heat. "I am ready to fight for my State at any time; but I deny the right of my Governor to compel me to obey such a man as General Lacey. I didn't want to be sworn into the Confederate army, and that was what sent me up here."

"That's all right," replied Dick. "I'm glad things turned out that way; otherwise you wouldn't be in my company now. But you don't seem to be as red-hot as you used to be. You say you don't believe in burning out Union men."

"I certainly do not. I believe in fighting the men, but not in abusing the women and children."

"The Union women are like our own—worse than the men," answered Dick. "That is what I was trying to get at, and I must warn you to be careful how you talk to anybody but me; and I, being an officer of the State Guard, can't stand too much treasonable nonsense," he added, drawing himself up to his full height and scowling fiercely at his friend.

"I suppose not; but I don't see that there is anything treasonable in my saying that I don't believe in making war upon those who cannot defend themselves."

"If some of those defenseless persons had been the means of getting you bushwhacked and your buildings destroyed, you might think differently. But come on, and I will make you acquainted with some of the best among the boys."

There were only two "boys" in the tent into which he was conducted, and they were almost old enough to be gray-headed; and as they were getting ready to go on post, Rodney had little more than time to say he was glad to know them. Then Dick said he had some writing to do for the captain that would keep him busy for half an hour, and in the meantime Rodney would have to look out for himself.

"Here's a late copy of the *Richmond Whig*, if you would like to see it," said one of his new messmates, who having thrown a powder horn and bullet pouch over his shoulder, stood holding a long squirrel rifle in one hand while he extended the paper with the other. "There's an editorial on the inside that may interest you. If the man who wrote it had been trying to express the sentiments of this mess he could not have come nearer to them. Good-by for a couple of hours."

When he was left alone in the tent Rodney hunted up the editorial in question and read as follows:

"We are not enough in the secrets of our authorities to specify the day on which Jeff Davis will dine at the White House, and Ben McCulloch take his siesta in General Siegel's gilded tent. We should dislike to produce any disappointment by naming too soon or too early a day; but it will save trouble if the

gentlemen will keep themselves in readiness to dislodge at a moment's notice. If they are not smitten, however, with more than judicial blindness, they do not need this warning at our hands. They must know that the measure of their iniquities is fall, and the patience of outraged freedom is exhausted. Among all the brave men from the Rio Grande to the Potomac, and stretching over into insulted, indignant and infuriated Maryland, there is but one word on every lip 'Washington'; and one sentiment in every heart vengeance on the tyrants who pollute the capital of the Republic!"

The paper was full of such idle vaporings as these, but they fired Rodney Gray's Southern heart to such an extent that he was almost ready to quarrel with Dick Graham when the latter came into the tent an hour later, and began discussing the situation in his cool, level-headed way.

"Yes; I have seen the article," said he, when Rodney asked him what he thought of it, "and it is nothing but the veriest bosh."

"Dick Graham, how dare you?" exclaimed Rodney.

"Oh, I have heard such talk as that before, and right here in this tent from boys who have known me ever since I was knee-high to a duck," replied Dick. "'The tyrants who pollute the capital of the Republic!' The men who are there, are there because they got the most votes; and in this country the majority rules. That's me. Now mark what I tell you: The majority of the people will say that this Union shall not be broken up."

"Then you believe that might makes right, do you?"

"I don't know whether I do or not. If we have the power, we have the right to rise up and shake off the existing form of government and form one that will suit us better. Abe Lincoln said so in one of his speeches, and that's his language almost word for word. But whether the Northern people, having the power, have the right to make us stay in the Union when we don't want to, is a question that is a little too deep for me."

"They have neither the power nor the right," said Rodney angrily. "But you always were as obstinate as a mule, and we can't agree if we talk till doomsday. Now listen while I tell you what I have been through since I said good-by to you in the Barrington depot."

To repeat what he said would be to write a good portion of this book over again. He told the story pretty nearly as we have tried to tell it, with this difference: He touched very lightly upon the courage he had displayed and the risk he had run in helping Tom Percival out of the corn-crib in the wood-cutters' camp, although he was loud in his praises of Tom's coolness and bravery. Dick Graham found it hard to believe some parts of the narrative.

"So Tom wasn't satisfied with risking his neck by going to St. Louis to see Lyon, but had to come back through Iron and St. Francois counties and try to raise another company of Home Guards there. He's either all pluck or else plum crazy."

"He's got a straight head on his shoulders; I'll bear witness to that," replied Rodney. "What do you suppose he will do at home? Where's his company?"

"When the hunter blows his horn his puppies will howl," answered Dick. "His men are scattered here and there and everywhere; but he knows where to find them, and if we ever meet those troops that are concentrating at Springfield, we'll meet Tom Percival. You did a neighborly act when you shoved him your revolver. I wouldn't have given much for you if that—man what's his name?—Westall had found it out. Those Emergency men are nothing but robbers and murderers."

"That was about the idea I formed of them, and I say they ought to be put down if this war is going to be conducted on civilized principles. Where were you when Lyon captured that camp at St. Louis?"

"I was getting ready to go to Booneville. I was in that scrimmage and have smelled powder on half-a-dozen occasions."

"Was that a Secession camp or not?"

"Not as anybody knows of," replied Dick. "It was composed of the State militia which the Governor had ordered out for drill. Under the law he had a right to call them out."

"Now what's the use of your trying any of your jokes on me?" demanded Rodney. "You don't believe a word you have said, and I know it. Be honest now, and have done with your nonsense."

"Well, General Frost, who commanded the camp, assured Captain Lyon that he was not hostile to the government," answered Dick. "But when Lyon got hold of it, he found that the two main streets were

named Davis and Beauregard; that a good portion of the men were in rebel uniform; and that they were mostly armed with government muskets which you Louisiana fellows stole out of the Baton Rouge arsenal. Lyon's action in that matter was what caused the riots. I'll say one thing in your private ear: The old flag floats over St. Louis and it's going to stay there."

"I'm not going to get into any argument with you, but you will see that you are wrong. We must have that city in order to command the Mississippi to the Gulf. Wasn't Jackson's proposition and Price's, that the State should remain neutral, a fair one?"

"That's a question that will be settled when this war is over, and not before."

"How do you make that out?"

"If there is such a thing as State Rights, it was a fair proposition; if there isn't, it wasn't. It implies the right of a State to make terms with the government; and that is the very point we are wrangling over. There's but one way to decide it, and that is by force of arms."

"Do you still think we are going to be whipped?"

"I am sure of it."

"And if we are, will you give up the doctrine of State Rights?"

"I'll have to. I can't do anything else. But such talk will lead us into argument, and you say you don't want to argue. I have been in a fever of suspense ever since you sent that second telegram to my father in St. Louis. In it you said, in effect, that you would start up the river on the first boat; and father wrote me that when he got it, he was ready to dance."

"With delight?" asked Rodney.

"Not much. With apprehension. He supposed you were coming up with your whole company. You asked him, for the company, if Price would accept you, and he met Price on the street and showed him the dispatch. Price said he would be glad to do it; and when you sent word that you were coming, father thought, of course, that you were all coming, and he knew that if you did, Lyon would make prisoners of the last one of you the moment you touched the levee."

"Your father didn't give us credit for much sense, did he?" said Rodney, with some disgust in his tones. "The boys wouldn't come and so I had to come alone. I hope that second dispatch did not put your father to any trouble, but I was obliged to send it to throw those telegraph operators off my track and blind them to my real intentions. I suppose that St. Louis cotton-factor was on the watch?"

"Of course; and the minute he put his eyes on that roan colt, he would have pointed you and him out to the soldiers. Your second dispatch frightened father, but it did not put him to any trouble. About that time he received a hint that he was being watched, that he was believed to be hanging about the city for the purpose of picking up information that would do us rebels some good, and so he dug out. He's at home now; and if we get a chance, we'll ride down there some dark night. I should like to have you acquainted."

"Thank you. I'll go any time you say the word; but why do you persist in speaking of our side as 'rebels'? I say we are not. We simply desire to resume the powers which our forefathers were foolish enough to delegate to the general government. Why, the great State of New York, in adopting the Federal Constitution, reserved the right to withdraw from the Union in case things were not run to suit her."

"Yes; but the great State of New York isn't foolish enough to try any such game as that. She'd be whipped so quick that it would make her head swim; and that's just what is going to happen to South Carolina. But you always was as obstinate as a mule, and. I don't care to get into any argument with you."

Rodney Gray was now a full-fledged partisan; but the company to which he was attached was more like mounted infantry than cavalry, for with the exception of the commissioned officers, there was scarcely one among the men who was provided with a saber. The most of Price's men were armed with shotguns and hunting rifles, and in some respects were superior to cavalry. They could move rapidly, fight as infantry, and if worsted in the engagement, jump on their horses and make a quick retreat. Their uniform was cadet gray with light blue slashings, and so nearly like the one that had been worn by the Barrington students, that all Dick Graham had to do to pass muster on dress parade was to add a sergeant's *chevrons* to the old uniform he had worn at school. Rodney Gray was an "odd sheep in the flock," but Dick had two suits of clothes, one of which his friend Rodney always wore when he was on

duty, for Captain Jones was somewhat particular, and wanted his men to appear well on post and when they were ordered out for drill. The mail-carrier who took Rodney's first letter to his father from the camp, took also an order for a full outfit which was addressed to a merchant tailor in Little Rock. Being shut off from St. Louis by Lyon's advancing troops, all the mail, with the exception of some secret correspondence which was kept up during the whole of the war, was sent by courier to Little Rock and New Madrid, and from these places forwarded to its destination in the South.

Rodney Gray arrived at Price's camp during the latter part of June; and almost immediately became aware that preparations were being made for an event of some importance. There was much scouting going on, although he and Dick took no part in it, much to their regret, and now and then there was a skirmish reported. The junction of Price's forces with those of Jackson and Rains, which Siegel hoped to prevent by a rapid march upon Neosho, took place at Carthage, as we have said; but in spite of this Siegel resolved to attack. He left Neosho on the 4th of July, and on the 6th, fought the battle of Carthage against a greatly superior force. Rodney's regiment was in the thickest of it. It tried to outflank Siegel in order to seize his wagon train, but could not stand against the terrible cross-fire of the Union artillery, which mowed them down like blades of grass. The first man killed in Rodney's company was the one who had given him that copy of the *Richmond Whig*. While charging at Rodney's side he was struck in the breast by a piece of shell, and in falling almost knocked the Barrington boy out of his saddle. There was no time to be frightened or to think of lending a helping hand to his injured comrade, for the line in the rear was coming on, yelling like mad, and anything that opposed its progress would have been run down; anything, perhaps, except that well-managed battery on their right, whose steady, merciless fire was more than living men could endure. They broke and fled, and were not called into action again that day; for when Siegel, finding that he could not take the town, withdrew from the field for the purpose of effecting a junction with another Union force stationed at Mount Vernon, midway between Carthage and Springfield, the road he followed led through thick woods in which mounted troops could not operate. Here the Union commander, aided by his superior artillery and long range rifles, held his own until darkness came on and the Confederates retreated. It was a drawn battle. The Confederates did not dare renew the attack, and Siegel was afraid to hold the field long enough to give his weary troops a chance to rest. He marched all night and reached his destination the next day.

[Illustration: THE CHARGE OF THE RANGERS.]

When the orderly sergeant of Rodney's company came to make out his report, he found that there were six men missing out of seventy-three. One out of twelve was not a severe loss for an hour's fight (when Picket's five thousand made their useless charge at Gettysburg they lost seven men out of every nine), but it was enough to show Rodney that there was a dread reality in war. He told Dick Graham that as long as he lived he would never forget the expression that came upon the face of the comrade who fell at his side, the first man he had ever seen killed. He did not want to go to sleep that night, for fear that he would see that face again in his dreams.

"They say a fellow gets over feeling so after a while," was the way in which Dick sought to comfort and encourage him. "But I'll tell you what's a fact: I don't believe that a man in full possession of his senses can ever go into action without being afraid."

General Lyon's advance troops having been forced to retreat, the boys began to wonder what was to be the next thing on the programme, and it was not long before they found out. Notwithstanding the confident prediction of the captain who commanded the scouting party that had rescued him from the power of the Union men at Truman's house (that fifteen thousand Confederates would be enough to meet and whip the twenty thousand Federals that Lyon was supposed to be concentrating at Springfield), Price began falling back toward Cassville, striving as he went to increase his force by fair means or foul. His mounted troopers carried things with a high hand. If a citizen, listening to their patriotic appeals, shouldered his gun, mounted his horse and went with them, he was a good fellow, a brave man, and his property was safe; but if he showed the least reluctance about "falling in," he was at once accused of being a Union man and treated accordingly. Price wanted fifty thousand men; but, as he afterward told the people of Missouri, less than five thousand, out of a male population of more than two hundred thousand, responded to his calls for help. It may or may not be a fact that that small number comprised all the men that were sworn into the State service; but it is a fact that he commanded more than eight thousand men at the battle of Carthage, and more than twenty thousand at the siege of Lexington. Price's object in falling back toward Cassville was to meet McCulloch with his seven thousand four hundred men who were coming up from Arkansas to reinforce him, and to draw Lyon as far as possible from his base of supplies. These forces met at Crane Creek, and almost immediately there began a conflict of authority between Price and McCulloch, the former urging and the latter opposing an attack upon the Union troops at Springfield. The dispute was finally settled by General Polk, who sent an order all the way from Columbus, Kentucky, commanding McCulloch to advance at once. Observe that he did not include Price in the order, for at this period of the war the

Confederate authorities respected State Rights after a fashion of their own (they did not even remove their capital from Montgomery to Richmond until Virginia had given them her gracious permission to do so), and gave no signs of a leaning toward the despotism which they established in less than twelve months.

Meanwhile General Lyon, whose position was one of the greatest danger, could not wait to be attacked. He had weakened his army by garrisoning all the places he seized during his advance and now he had only seven thousand troops left. Even this small force was rapidly growing less, for as fast as their terms of enlistment expired, they were permitted to return to their homes; provisions were getting scarce; and General Fremont, who had lately assumed command of the Western Department, could not send him any reinforcements from St. Louis. So the only thing the Union commander could do to stop the Confederate advance and extricate himself from the dangers with which he was surrounded, was to assume the offensive.

The historian tells us that there was something sublime in that bold march of Lyon on the night of the 9th of August, with a force of five thousand men, to Wilson's Creek, to meet in the morning an army numbering anywhere between fifteen and twenty thousand. His only hope of success lay in a surprise; but there was where he was disappointed, for it so happened that at the time he made his advance, the enemy was making preparations to attack him on four sides at once; but while they were thinking about it, they were assailed by two columns, one in front and the other on the flank. This brought about the battle of Wilson's Creek, which, next to Bull Run, was the severest engagement of the year. General Lyon was killed while leading a bayonet charge at the head of an Iowa regiment. Major Sturgis, on whom the command devolved, ordered a retreat after six hours of useless fighting, and the Confederates were too badly cut up to prevent his leisurely withdrawal. But, after all, that battle was a Union victory, for it "interposed a check against the combined armies of the Confederacy from which they could not readily recover." This one fight taught the "dashing Texan Ranger" McCulloch that there was a bit of difference between meeting a sterling Union soldier like Lyon, and a traitor like Twiggs who would surrender on demand, and a short time afterward he withdrew into Arkansas, leaving Price to continue the campaign, or disband his State troops and go home, just as he pleased. At least that is what history says about it; but when Rodney and Dick asked their captain why it was that the two armies separated after going to so much trouble to get together, the reason given was:

"We're waiting for orders from the War Department at Richmond. It will take a good while for them to get here, and in the meantime we don't want to impoverish the country. Price will stay here to watch the enemy, who have retreated toward Rolla, which is a hundred miles from here, and McCulloch will go into Arkansas to recruit his army. When the orders arrive we shall know what we are going to do next."

Of course it goes without saying that Rodney and Dick did soldiers' duty during the light at Wilson's Creek and in the subsequent movements of Price's troops, which resulted in the siege and capture of Lexington; but they did not see Tom Percival or hear of him, nor did they find opportunity to visit Dick Graham's home.

While General Fremont was fortifying St. Louis so that he could hold it with a small force, and use the greater portion of his army in the movements he was planning against Price, the latter heard a piece of news that sent him Northward by rapid marches.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CONSCRIPTION ACT.

Price's men had not been long on the march before Dick Graham, who seemed to have a way of finding out things that were hidden from almost everybody else, told Rodney, confidentially, that their objective point was Warrensburg, and that Price's motive in going there was to capture money to the amount of a hundred thousand dollars, which was being conveyed by a detachment of Federal troops to Lexington. The prospect of securing so valuable a prize was an incentive, and men who were so weary that the near approach of an enemy would not have kept them from falling out of the ranks, marched night and day without a murmur of complaint. Some of the way they moved at double-quick; but they might as well have spared themselves the pains, for when they reached Warrensburg they found the place deserted.

"This shows how impossible it is to trust anybody these times," said Rodney, in deep disgust.

Their regiment having gone into camp, the two friends were strolling about the town to see what they could find, and the first thing they discovered was not at all calculated to allay the indignation they felt at being outwitted by the vigilant Federals. It was a rough charcoal sketch on the wall of a building they passed during their walk. It represented a lean, long-haired, ragged rebel dancing in an ecstacy of rage over an empty money-box. The soldier who drew the sketch was an artist of no mean order, and the picture told its story as plainly as words.

"It proves that the Yankees knew we were coming and what we were coming for," continued Rodney. "It's an insult, and I hope we will not go back until we have thrashed them for it most soundly."

The army rested for two days at Warrensburg, and then moved upon Lexington, whither the money had been conveyed; but Rodney and Dick had no hopes of wearing the new uniforms and wrapping themselves in the warm blankets that their share of the hundred thousand would purchase for them, if they had it. They were afraid they wouldn't get any of it, and this fear was confirmed when their advance guard was severely repulsed by less than half a regiment of Home Guards who were found strongly entrenched at Lexington. The attack, which was renewed on the 12th of September, after Colonel Mulligan arrived with his Irish brigade, bringing the strength of the garrison up to twenty-five hundred men, was even more disastrous than the first, and Price retired to wait until his supplies of ammunition could be brought up. He waited six days, and during that time not a soldier was thrown into the garrison, while Price saw his own army growing daily. Every man in the country for miles around, and every boy, too, who was strong enough to handle a gun, "rushed to Lexington to take part in the victory to which Price invited them." The few Union men there were left in that part of the State came with the rest, because it was the only thing they could do to save themselves and their property from the vengeance of the rebels. The real battle began on the 18th, and on the afternoon of the 20th, after fifty-two hours of constant fighting, when his ammunition and provisions were almost exhausted and his supply of water entirely cut off, the brave colonel, who afterward died on the field of Winchester

"And dying—'Lay me down
And save the flag!' he cried,"

gave up the struggle, and surrendered a worn-out garrison of two thousand five hundred men to an army of more than twenty thousand. It was a grand victory—almost as grand as the one Beauregard won over Anderson at Fort Sumter. By it Price secured "a great number of stands of arms, a considerable quantity of ammunition, a vast amount of commissary stores, and nine hundred thousand dollars in hard cash." He did not abuse his power but paid tribute to the courage of the men who had so long resisted him by releasing the soldiers on parole, and keeping the officers only as prisoners.

Having accomplished his object and rallied to his standard all the scattered bands of partisans in Northern Missouri, and hearing that Fremont was advancing upon him, while Hardee, who was to support him by moving up the river from New Madrid, had been driven back, Price turned and ran, sending his mounted troopers to threaten several points at once, misleading the Federals who had hastily assembled to harass his rear, and thus securing an almost unobstructed road for his retreat. These advance troopers had a few engagements, and Rodney and Dick took part in the most of them, but Price could neither be overtaken nor stopped. The two friends were among the first to ride into Neosho, a little town in the southwestern part of the State, toward which the march had been directed, and the first man they met gave them some information that struck them dumb with surprise and indignation. He was a farmer who had just sold a load of provisions to the soldiers, and he drove his empty wagon out of the road to let the regiment pass.

"We're into the mud now as deep as the rest of 'em," said he, as Rodney's company rode by. "If Caroliny gets stretched up by the neck, we-uns will have to be stretched, too."

"What do you mean by that?" inquired Captain Jones.

"The Legislator is over there in that house," replied the farmer, "and they've just give out some kind of a paper saying that this State of Missoury don't belong to the old Union no more, but is one of the Confedrit States of Ameriky."

"Do you mean that the State has seceded?" cried the captain, while his men looked at him and at one another as if they could not understand what the farmer was trying to tell them. "There's cheek for you. Why, the whole of the State, except this part of it right around here, is over-run with Yankees."

"I don't know nothing about that," replied the farmer; and he was obliged to turn around on his seat and shout the words, for Rodney's company had been riding straight ahead all the time. "It's only what I heard. Mebbe you'll find somebody up the street that can tell you all about it."

The story was so improbable that the boys could not make up their minds to believe it. The Legislature, which had run almost as far as it could get without going over the line into Arkansas, had no authority over the State, three-fourths of whose territory was under the control of the Union forces, and level-headed Dick Graham did not hesitate to say, in the presence and hearing of his captain, that if the Legislature had passed an Act of Secession, they were idiots, the last one of them. But the Confederate authorities Were given to doing foolish things. Read the proclamation Jefferson Davis issued from Danville while he was running for his life!

"If that is true we are in a pretty fix," said Rodney, as soon as he could speak. "I came up here to keep out of the Confederate army, and now I am made a Confederate in spite of myself. And so are you. You are under control of the government at Richmond now, and next week you may be ordered to Virginia."

"But I'll not go," exclaimed Dick. "I'll serve right where I am until my time is out, and then I'll go home. But look here. The Richmond government can't order me out of Missouri without violating the very principle we are fighting for—State Rights. They can *ask* me to go, but just see how utterly inconsistent they will be if they try to compel me to go."

"I hope you are right, but I wouldn't be afraid to bet anything I've got that you are wrong," answered Rodney; and his friend's words did not in the least encourage him. "That would be the right way to do things, but you ought to see that it wouldn't be sensible. What's the use of having Confederate soldiers if they are not to obey the orders of the Confederate government? If it suits them to do it, those fellows in Richmond will ride rough-shod over State Rights."

"Oh, they won't do that," exclaimed Dick, waving his hands up and down in the air. "They can't do it. Their government will fall to pieces like a rope of sand if they try it."

The boys wondered what their general would think of the situation, and when the artillery came into town they found out. A few sections of it wheeled into line at a gallop, and celebrated the secession of the State by firing one hundred guns. Rodney and Dick were intensely disgusted. They listened in a half mutinous way when the adjutant read the act the next day on dress parade, and tossed up their caps and shouted with the rest; but they did these things for the same reasons that impelled hundreds of others in camp to do them—because they knew it would not be safe to show any lack of enthusiasm.

The fact that they were no longer State troops but full-fledged Confederates was not fully impressed upon Rodney and his fellow soldiers until some months later, when the Richmond government was all ready to put its despotic plans into execution. Probably the general commanding saw that there was much dissatisfaction among his men, and did not think it prudent to draw the reins too tight. He drilled his troops a little oftener and a little harder, and was rather more particular about granting furloughs, and this gave the boys no ground for complaint; but they were constantly harassed by the fear that the future had something ominous in store for them.

Price retreated as Fremont advanced, and a second battle was fought at Wilson's Creek, during which the commander of the Union forces made a cavalry charge that is still spoken of as one of the most brilliant episodes of the war. But when Fremont was displaced by Hunter, the latter fell back toward Rolla, thus allowing Price to recover the ground from which he had just been driven. He was prompt to take advantage of the opportunity, this time directing his columns toward Kansas, with the intention of getting supplies for his troops, and cutting the State off from all communication with St. Louis. But Halleck succeeded Hunter on the 18th of November, and before a month had passed away Price in turn was compelled to retreat, his men being captured by the thousand, together with large quantities of arms and supplies of ammunition and provisions. It began to look now, to quote from Dick Graham, as though the boot was on the other foot. Instead of running the Yankees out of Missouri, the Yankees had run them out, fairly and squarely, for when Price went into camp it was over the line in the State of Arkansas. Every one of the plans that the Confederates had made for keeping the State in their possession and capturing St. Louis, had been broken up by the strategy of the Union generals. The battle of Belmont, which took place in the month of November, has been called a Confederate victory, but it was not so in reality. General Grant didn't fight that engagement because he cared a cent for Belmont, for he knew he could not hold it if he got it. All he wanted was to keep the Confederates from sending troops from Columbus, Kentucky, to co-operate with Price in Missouri. He accomplished his object by keeping Polk busy at home, and Price was driven into Arkansas.

"And we are here with him," said Dick to his friend Rodney, as the two lay beside their camp-fire at Cove Creek, talking over the situation. "We said we never would go out of Missouri."

"That is what you said," replied Rodney. "After the farce those old women went through up there at Neosho, taking the State out of the Union when they had no authority over it, I knew we were going to see trouble. And mark my words: we have only seen the beginning of it."

Either General Halleck's army was not as strong as he would like to have had it, or else he overestimated the strength of the enemy, for he fell back and the Confederates went into winter quarters, Price at Springfield and McCulloch just over the line into Arkansas. Now the two friends had time and opportunity for visiting, but there was no one for them to visit. Dick showed Rodney where his father's house and Mr. Percival's had once stood, but there was nothing left of them but blackened ruins. The rebels had "done the business" for one, and Union men had "cleaned out" the other. Dick fully expected to find it so, for he had often seen such evidence of vandalism and hatred during his long marches through the State. The boys afterward learned that Dick's father and mother had taken refuge with friends in Little Rock, while Mr. Percival's family had, in some mysterious way, succeeded in reaching St. Louis. Rodney was depressed by the sight of the ruins, and thanked his lucky stars that his father and mother lived in a State in which such things never could be done. The few Union men there were in and around Mooreville would never dare trouble his folks, and the Yankees would not be able to penetrate so far into the Confederacy.

Garrison duty, as the boys called their life in winter quarters, was most distasteful to them, and it was with great delight that they listened to the rumors which early in February came up from McCulloch's camp, to the effect that the two armies were to take the field again at once, but that their campaign was to be in a different direction. These rumors did not say that the Richmond government had decided to give up the struggle in Missouri and turn its attention to more important points, but the men, who talked freely in the presence of their officers, declared that that was what the new move would amount to. They were to proceed to New Madrid to operate with the Army of the Center in checking the advance of the Federals, who were threatening Island No. 10.

For once rumor told the truth and the move was made, though not in the way Rodney and Dick thought it would be. One Sunday morning there was a terrible uproar made by a scouting party which came tearing into camp with the information that General Curtis's army, forty thousand strong, was close upon Springfield and more coming. This rumor was also true; and "Old Pap Price," as his men had learned to call him, who was not much of a fighter but a "master hand at running," made haste to get his wagon-train out of the way. To quote once more from Dick Graham, it was hardly worth the trouble, for the oxen were so lean and weak that they could scarcely walk, and the wagons, which were fit for nothing but fire-wood, were loaded with a lot of rubbish that was of little value. But "Old Pap" was bent on saving everything he had, and could not have worked harder to take this train to a place of security if it had been freighted with the money he captured at Lexington. The retreat soon became a rout. The whole country was thrown into a state of alarm, and people came flocking from all directions, bringing with them the few household effects that the different raiding parties had left them. Price kept up a running fight until some of McCulloch's troops came up, and then the Federal advance was checked.

If General Curtis intended this sudden movement for a surprise he could not have selected a better time for it, and if he had kept his two columns together, instead of sending Siegel off with thirteen thousand men to operate in another quarter, Price's army would have "been eliminated from the problem of war," and the battle of Pea Ridge would not have been fought. McCulloch's army was divided, and McCulloch himself was away in another direction surveying a route for the march to New Madrid; and Price, relying upon the inhabitants to keep him posted in regard to the movements of our forces, as well as upon the supposed impassable condition of the roads in his front, was whipped before he knew there was an enemy anywhere within reach of him. Then followed a disastrous retreat of an army without provisions or tents, along a muddy road, through a snow storm so blinding that one could scarcely see ten feet ahead of him, and it went on until it was stopped by a telegram from General Van Dorn, who had been appointed to command the Confederate Army of the West because Price and McCulloch could not agree. The new general, who declared that "all retrograde movements must be stopped at once," and that "henceforth the army must press on to victory," arrived on the 2d of March, drove Siegel out of Bentonville on the 5th, and on Friday and Saturday fought the battle of Pea Ridge—a thing that he might as well have let alone, for he did not do what he set out to do. He retreated one way, while General Curtis went another and settled down to await reinforcements. Van Dorn gave his men to understand that he was not beaten, but he couldn't stop to pursue Curtis, because his orders compelled him to at once proceed with all his available force to join the Army of the Center on the Mississippi.

Then came that dreary march to Van Buren of which we have spoken, and which was a little ahead of anything Rodney had ever dreamed of. The weary and hungry soldiers had long since ceased to expect anything from the commissary department, which had disappeared as completely as though it had never existed, and provisions of every sort were so scarce that the different regiments and companies were obliged to break into little squads and forage on their own account, the only instructions they

received being to the effect that they were to get to Van Buren as soon as they could. As Dick and Rodney had the reputation of being excellent foragers, and were known to be well supplied with gold, they had no difficulty in keeping the members of their mess together. The gold brought them corn bread, chickens and milk when Confederate scrip would have failed, and when they came to compare notes with the rest of the regiment at Van Buren, they found that they had fared very well. The bulk of Price's army had passed on ahead of them, going down into cellars and up into garrets, and poking about in hay-mows and stacks in search of provender that had been hastily concealed by the anxious citizens, and Rodney often wondered how McCulloch's men, who brought up the rear, managed to keep body and soul together.

It was a dreary time taken all around, but their troubles did not end when they arrived at Van Buren, as they hoped they would. It is true they again came within sight of a commissary department with an abundance of provisions, a quartermaster's department with a lot of mixed-up baggage and camp equipage, blankets and overcoats that had been thrown off and left at different places along the route, and here they were allowed to rest until the stragglers came up and reported; but their march was not ended. Their destination was Pocahontas, which was nearly two hundred miles farther on.

It was while they were enjoying a much needed rest in camp at Van Buren that they heard one piece of news that raised them to the highest pitch of excitement, and two others that brought their spirits down to zero. The first was brought to camp by a member of Dick's mess who had somehow managed to get hold of a paper containing a greatly exaggerated account of the first day's fight at Pittsburg Landing.

"Listen to this, boys," he shouted, as the mess gathered around him and the soldiers came running from all directions to see what the excitement was about. "'If we've been worsted here in the West, our friends in the East have made up for it by sweeping everything before them. Grant, the Yankee general, has been surprised at Shiloh, his army driven pell-mell through their camp and down under the bank of the river, where their gunboats saved them. Johnston lived long enough to see the Yankees in full flight and then he was killed; but Beauregard, who took his place, telegraphs that "certain destruction awaits the enemy on the morrow."' That would be—let me see. Why, this paper is two weeks old," he added, in a disappointed tone, glancing at the date.

"No matter; we whipped them," exclaimed Rodney; and when some one proposed three cheers for the Army of the Center, he pulled off his cap and joined in with a will.

Captain Jones, who brought with him a longer face than any of his company had ever seen him wear before, sauntered up while the cheering was going on, and asked what it was all about. When he learned that they were happy over the glorious news from Shiloh, he said, as he drew a couple of papers from his pocket:

"You fellows are away behind the times. That news is old, and Beauregard hollered before he was out of the woods. Read this later account," he continued, handing one of the papers to Dick, and placing a finger upon the column to which he wished to draw attention. "And after you have read that, take the other paper and see what it says about conscription."

The captain turned on his heel and walked away, but looked back with an expression of astonishment on his face when he heard one of his men exclaim:

"Has the Richmond government really passed a Conscription Act? Then I say bully for the Richmond government. There are lots of sneaks in our town who shouted 'sick 'em,' to us, but who were too cowardly to put on a uniform themselves. If they have got to come in whether they want to or not, I am a Confederate from this minute. Read about the battle first, sergeant, and then we'll hear about the conscription law."

Dick complied, and before he got through there were some angry and astonished men standing around him.

CHAPTER XVII.

RODNEY MEETS A FRIEND.

Sergeant Graham first read aloud the account of the second day's fighting at Pittsburg Landing; but

of course the fact that Beauregard had sustained a crushing defeat and been forced to retire from Corinth, was carefully concealed. It was to be expected, the paper said, that twenty-five thousand fresh men would turn the tide of battle in favor of the enemy, but even against these overwhelming odds the Confederates had held their own until noon, and then left the field in good order.

"I don't see anything to feel bad over in that account," said Rodney, whose war-like spirit arose every time he heard a glowing story of a fight. "We knew when we went into this thing that the Yankees could raise more men than we could, and we expected to fight against big odds. Now for the conscripts," and when Rodney said this, he thought of Tom Randolph, and hoped that he would be the first Mooreville citizen to "draw a prize."

He thought he could imagine how Tom would look and feel after he had made a campaign with a foot or more of mud under his feet, dripping storm-clouds over his head and not so much as a crumb of corn bread in his haversack, and laughed silently as he pictured him at a smoking camp-fire with a lot of veterans "poking fun" at him. His own term of service would soon expire, and he hoped he should reach home in time to see Tom march out with the first squad of conscripts that left Mooreville; but as Dick proceeded to read the abstract of the Act as it appeared in the paper, all the while pushing the sheet farther and farther from him as his amazement and anger increased, Rodney found that the situation was not quite so amusing as he thought, and that he, Rodney Gray, was in a worse box than his friend, Tom Randolph. It was the first general conscription law of the Confederacy, and "it withdrew every non-exempt citizen, between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, from State control, and placed him absolutely at the disposal of the President during the war." When Dick had read this far he looked at his comrades to see what they thought of it.

"Why, it's—it's—the Czar of Russia couldn't do worse," exclaimed the first one who recovered control of his tongue. "It's a fraud—a despotic act. Where are our State Rights now, I should like to know?"

"Go on," said Captain Jones, who stood on the outskirts of the group but within hearing distance. "There's worse to come."

Dick Graham, who did not see how anything could be worse, went on with his reading and found that the Act "annulled all contracts made with volunteers for short terms, holding them to service for two years additional, should the war continue so long; and all twelve months' recruits, below eighteen and over thirty-five years, who would otherwise have been exempted by this law, were to be retained in service for ninety days after their term expired."

"Hey—youp!" yelled Dick, dancing about like one demented. "Our own government is ten times worse than the one we are fighting against, and every one of us was a fool for ever putting on a gray jacket. Why didn't they tell us all this in the first place, so that we might know what there was before us? It's a fraud and a cheat and a swindle and a—and a—what are you about?" he added, turning almost fiercely upon his captain, who elbowed his way through the excited group and tried to take the paper from his hand. "I'll not obey the orders of the Richmond government, and that's all there is about it."

"I was going to direct your attention to something else," replied the captain, paying no heed to the sergeant's rudeness. "But since you are so nearly beside yourself I don't suppose you can read it, and so I had better tell you what it is. You say you will not obey the orders of the Richmond government?"

"That is what I said, and I will stick to it," exclaimed Dick. "They have no right—"

"Hold on a bit," the captain interposed.

"They may not have the right but they have the power, and you will have to give in. They offer you inducements to re-enlist for two years. You will be regarded as volunteers, and be allowed the privilege of changing your officers and electing new ones."

This was a big inducement indeed. The men laughed derisively when they heard it.

"If you don't volunteer, but insist on leaving the army when your term of service expires, you will never get out of the camp," continued the captain. "You will be conscripted."

"I don't care if I am," answered Dick, indignantly. "I'll not do duty."

"Then you will be treated as a mutineer and run the risk of being shot without the benefit of a drum-head court-martial," said the captain; whereupon the men backed off, thrust their hands into their pockets and looked at him and at one another. "I tell you, boys, this is no time for foolishness," the captain went on, earnestly. "Ever since Bull Run the Northern people have been showing the mettle that's in them. That defeat got their blood up and they mean business. They have more volunteers than they want. Their armies are growing stronger every day, while ours are growing weaker every hour. To

be honest, there isn't half the patriotism now there was among us when these troubles first begun. Desertions are alarmingly frequent, and voluntary enlistments are almost entirely suspended. We must have men to fight our battles, or else surrender our cherished liberties to such Hessians and Tories as Curtis brought against us at Pea Ridge."

"And whipped us with," added one of the men; and the captain couldn't contradict him, for it was the truth. He could only look at him reproachfully.

"'Is Sparta dead in your veins?'" exclaimed the captain, quoting from the speech of Spartacus to his fellow gladiators. "Are you willing to give up whipped and permit a lot of Regicides and Roundheads to put their feet on your necks?"

Taking this for his text the officer spoke earnestly for ten minutes, drawing largely from the fiery editorials of the Southern papers, which he had read so often that he had them by heart, and trying his best to infuse a little of his own spirit into the angry, scowling men who had crowded around him, but without any very flattering success. There was but one thought in their minds—they had been duped by the Richmond government, which had so suddenly developed into a despotism that it was plain the machinery for it had been prepared long before. They could not go home even for a short time to visit their friends after their term of service had expired, and it is no wonder that they felt sore over it. Seeing that he could not arouse their patriotism, the captain next tried to arouse their combativeness.

"On the same day that the battle of Shiloh was decided against us, there was another struggle settled a hundred miles nearer to us," said he. "That too went against us. Island No. 10, the stronghold that was to have kept the enemy from going down the Mississippi, has fallen, and the way is open to Memphis."

"But the Yankees will never get there," exclaimed Rodney. "When I came up the river on the *Mollie Able*, I heard a man say we had a fleet building there that would eventually take Cairo and St. Louis too."

"I certainly hope he was right, but things don't seem to point that way now," replied the captain.

"That is good news for us in one respect," Dick Graham remarked. "New Madrid must have fallen too, and if that is the case, we'll not be ordered there. It's too late. We'll stay in our own State."

The captain shook his head, and his men knew by the expression on his face that he had something yet to tell them.

"There's where you are wrong," said he. "We are going to Memphis as quick as we can get there, and from Memphis we shall go to Corinth to join the army under Beauregard. I am sorry you boys feel so about it, but I really don't see how you are going to help yourselves. Now brace up and do your duty like men, as you always have done it. I don't want to see any of you get into trouble, but you certainly will if you kick over the traces."

This last announcement was altogether too much for the men, who turned away in a body, muttering the heaviest kind of adjectives, "not loud but deep." When the two boys were left alone with the captain the latter inquired:

"How old are you?"

"Seventeen," growled Rodney.

"Well, you will have to stay in ninety days after your term expires.
Will that make you eighteen?"

"No, it wouldn't; and if it did they would be careful not to say so."

"Then I don't see what reason you have to get huffy over a thing that can't be helped," continued the officer. "We must have men, and if they will not come in willingly, they must be dragged in. We can't be subdued; we never will consent to be slaves. But you two will get out all right."

"We knew it all the while; at least I thought of it," replied Dick, "but I didn't want to mention it while the rest of the boys were around. They are mad already, and it might make them worse to know that we two are better off than they are."

"But I want to tell you that you will make a big mistake if you accept your discharges," the captain went on to say. "You ought by all means to stay in until this thing is settled and the invaders driven from our soil. You'll wish you had when you see the boys come home covered with glory. And then think of the possibilities before you! You are bound to be promoted, and that rapidly. If I had your military

education I would not be satisfied with anything short of a colonelcy."

"Well, you may have it, and since you want it, I hope you will get it; but I wouldn't accept it if it were offered to me," answered Dick, turning on his heel. "I'll not serve under such a fraud of a government as this has turned out to be a day longer than I can help. I'll take my discharge as soon as they will condescend to give it to me, and then they can hunt somebody to fill my place. I'll never volunteer again, and sooner than be conscripted I'll take to the woods."

"Now, sergeant, you know you wouldn't do any such thing," said the captain.

"Yes, I would," Dick insisted. "There is a principle at the bottom of this whole thing that is most contemptible; but what more could you expect of men who induced us to enlist by holding out the promise of an easy victory? 'The North won't fight!' This looks like it. We're whipped already."

These were the sentiments of thousands of men who wore gray jackets in the beginning of 1862, but it wasn't every one who dared express them as boldly as Dick Graham did, nor was it every officer who would have listened as quietly as did Captain Jones. Everything went to show that the officers had been drilled in the parts they were expected to perform long before the men dreamed that such a thing as a Conscription Act was thought of; for, as a rule, all discussion regarding the policy of the Richmond government was "choked off" with a strong hand. In some armies, Bragg's especially, the men were treated "worse than their niggers ever were." They dared not speak above a whisper for fear of being shoved into the guard-house; and "when some regiments hesitated to avail themselves of this permission (to volunteer) they were treated as seditious, and the most refractory soldiers, on the point of being shot, only saved their lives by the prompt signature of their comrades to the compact of a new enlistment." Things were not quite as bad as this in Price's army, but still Captain Jones thought it best to tell his men, especially the out-spoken Dick Graham, that they had better be a little more guarded in their language, unless they were well acquainted with those to whom they were talking. They went to Memphis, as the captain said they would, marching over a horrible road and leaving some of their artillery stuck in the mud at Desarc on White River, and from Memphis they went to Corinth forty miles farther on, packed in box cars like sheep, and on top like so much useless rubbish. Their train was rushed through at such a rate of speed that the men on top shouted to the engineer:

"Go it. Let out two or three more sections of that throttle. Run us off into the ditch and kill us if you want to. There are plenty more men where we came from."

Rodney Gray afterward declared that he had never seen a grander sight than Beauregard's camp presented when the troops from the West marched through it, greeted everywhere by the most vociferous cheering, to take their positions on the right. Their arrival brought the strength of the army up to more than a hundred thousand men, and, somewhat to their surprise, they were introduced to their new comrades as "Invincibles." At any rate that was what General Bragg called them in an address which he issued to his soldiers a few days afterward:

"The slight reverses we have met on the sea-board have worked us good as well as evil," was what he said in the vain hope of blinding his troops to the real magnitude of the disaster that had recently befallen the Confederacy. "The brave troops so long retained there have hastened to swell your numbers, while the gallant Van Dorn and invincible Price, with the ever-successful Army of the West, are now in your midst, with numbers almost equaling the Army of Shiloh."

The "slight reverses" to which the general so gingerly referred were the passage of Forts Jackson and St. Philip by Farragut's fleet, the annihilation of the Confederate gunboats and the capture of New Orleans; and these "slight reverses" were almost immediately followed by the defeat of the gunboats that had been building at Memphis, and of which the Confederates expected such great things. But the rank and file of the army were not so easily deceived. They knew well enough that the accounts that came to them through the papers were "doctored" on purpose for them, and were fully sensible of the fact that the loss of these important points, Memphis and New Orleans, were disasters most discouraging. When they were in the presence of those to whom they knew they could speak freely, they sneered at the efforts made by their superiors to belittle the Union victories, and laughed to scorn Mayor Monroe and the "city fathers" for the attitude they had seen fit to assume while Farragut's powerful fleet held the Crescent city under its guns. If the pompous little mayor, by folding his arms and standing in front of that loaded howitzer when the marines came ashore to hoist the Stars and Stripes over the Custom House, desired to show the people of New Orleans and the country at large what a brave man he was, he failed of his object, for the men who had faced cannon on the field of battle had nothing but contempt for him and his antics.

"He has made himself a laughing-stock for all time to come," was what Rodney Gray thought about it. "That was all done for effect, for there was not the slightest danger that the Yankees would fire that howitzer at him while he was going through his monkey-shines. If he is such an awful brave man, why

didn't he follow that naval officer to the roof of the Custom House and jerk the Union flag down the minute it was hauled up?"

"Or why doesn't he shoulder a musket and fall in with us?" chimed in Dick. "One short campaign through Missouri mud would take some of that nonsense out of him."

There were a good many in the army who thought that the constant maneuvering and skirmishing that followed during the next few weeks were not kept up because a great battle was expected, but for the purpose of giving the men so much to do that they could not get together and talk over the discouraging news they had recently heard. There was one engagement fought, that of Farmington, which resulted in a victory for the Confederates, and taught them at the same time that they were mistaken in supposing that our troops would not venture so far into the country that they would be out of the reach of help from the gunboats, which had rendered them such important service at the battle of Pittsburg Landing. Of course Rodney and Dick marched and skirmished and fought with the rest, but they didn't care much whether they whipped or got whipped, for the feelings that took them away from home and friends and into the army, had long since given place to others of an entirely different character. They didn't care as much for State Rights and Southern independence as they did once, and if they ever got home again the Richmond government might go to smash for all they could do to save it. Two questions engrossed their minds, and formed the principal subjects of their conversation: Would they be permitted to leave the service when the year for which they enlisted expired; and if so, how was Dick Graham going to get across the river into Missouri now that Memphis had fallen, and the Mississippi as far down as Vicksburg was in possession of the Federals?

In regard to the first question—there was one thing which the boys were afraid would work against them. While nearly all the line officers of the regiment remained with them, the field officers who had come with them from the West had disappeared, some being promoted, some discharged and others being sent to the hospital, new ones had taken their places and a new staff had been appointed.

"And a lovely staff it is," said Dick, expressing the sentiments of every man in his company. "I can see now why that Conscription Act was passed. It was to make room for a lot of government pets, who are too fine to go into the ranks, but who are allowed to come here and shove out veterans when they cannot tell the difference between 'countermarch by file right' and 'right by twos.' Our new colonel doesn't know who we are or what we have done, and cares less; and when we go to him for our discharges, he will throw so much red-tape in our way that we can't get out. That's what I am afraid of."

As to the other question—how Dick Graham was to get over the river—that was something that could be settled when they had their discharges in their pockets. First and foremost Dick would go home with Rodney; and after he had taken a good long rest, and learned all about the means of communication between the two shores (they were positive there must be some regular means of communication, because Dick had received two letters from home since he had joined the Army of the Center), Rodney would take his chances of seeing him safely across the river. But their discharges must be their first care, and they came much easier than they dared hope for. One day Rodney was detailed to act as guard at brigade headquarters, and the first officer to whom he presented arms was one whose face was strangely familiar to him. It was his new brigade commander, and a wild hope sprung up in Rodney's breast. The energetic, soldier-like manner in which he handled his piece attracted the notice of the general, who seemed to be in good humor, and who unbent from his dignity long enough to remark:

"You have been well drilled, sentry."

"Yes, sir; at Barrington Military Academy," replied Rodney, with a good deal of emphasis on the last words.

This had just the effect the boy meant it should have. The general stopped and looked curiously at him, and Rodney, instead of keeping his eyes "straight to the front and striking the ground at the distance of fifteen paces," returned his superior's gaze with interest.

"Haven't I seen you before?" the latter asked at length.

"Yes, sir; aboard the steamer *Mollie Able*, going up the river a year ago," answered Rodney. "You were Captain Howard then."

The boy had no business to say all this, and no one in the army knew it better than he did. It was his place to wait and be questioned; but he couldn't do it. There was too much at stake—his discharge and Dick's. The general did riot appear to notice this breach of military etiquette. On the contrary he smiled and said, pleasantly:

"I remember you perfectly. You were on your way to join Price, and your presence here proves that

you found him. When you are relieved I want to see you."

"Very good, sir," replied Rodney, bringing his piece to a shoulder and resuming his walk. "If that man's word is worth anything," he added, mentally, when the general disappeared in his tent, "Dick Graham and I will be free men when our year and three months are up, and you just say that much to your folks and tell 'em it's confidential. He as good as said that he would do something for me if he could, and now I will try him on; but there's one thing I'll not promise to do: I won't re-enlist until I get a good ready, and if I can help myself, that time will never come."

Rodney walked his beat as if he were treading on air, and wished his friend Dick would happen along about the time he was relieved, so that he might tell him that he believed he had found a powerful friend in their new brigade commander. At the end of two hours, having been relieved from post and obtained the necessary permission from the officer of the guard, Rodney presented himself at the door of General Howard's tent, and sent his name in by the orderly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

General Howard did not look or act like a man who was very badly overworked, nor did he seem to be at all anxious over the result of the heavy firing that was going on on the left of the line. He had pulled off his coat and riding boots, and when the orderly entered to tell him that Private Rodney Gray of the —th Missouri Cavalry had come there to see him by his orders, he was tilling his pipe preparatory to indulging in a smoke. He greeted Rodney pleasantly, and pointed with the stem of his pipe to an empty cracker box.

"Turn that up and sit down," said he; whereupon the orderly opened his eyes in wonder. There was a much wider gulf between the officers and privates in the rebel army than there was in our own, especially after the war had been going on for about a year. The sons of rich men, who had shouldered a musket at the beginning, began working their way out of the ranks, leaving behind them only those who were too poor or too low in the social scale to command the influence that was necessary to bring them a commission. As a rule rich people in the South did not think much of poor white trash. The latter were good enough to fight and obey orders, but scarcely good enough to be treated with civility; so when General Howard told his visitor to turn up the cracker box and sit down on it, the orderly straightway made up his mind that Rodney Gray was a little better than the common run of folks, even if he was a private soldier.

"I don't suppose you have thought of me once since I bid you good-by at that woodcutters' camp," said the general, throwing himself upon a rude couch and propping his head up with his hand. "But I have often thought of you, and a few months ago I was down Mooreville way on a scout. I passed right by your father's plantation, and finding out who he was, and being a trifle hungry besides, I dropped in and invited myself to dinner with him and your mother."

Rodney was delighted to hear this, but all he said was that he hoped the general had enjoyed his visit.

"I assure you I did, and the dinner too," was the smiling reply. "And during the hour I passed there I learned a good deal concerning your life in Missouri, and heard some portions of your letters read. Your parents were much surprised to know that I met you on your way up the river, and I renewed to them the promise I believe I made you on the steamer that if I could ever do you a fatherly kindness I would. I am glad to see you in my brigade, but I don't quite understand how it comes that you are still a private. Haven't you done your duty, or wouldn't your officers push you?"

"The fault is my own, sir," answered Rodney. "I might have gone higher but I didn't care to."

Then he went on to tell the general about Dick Graham. The latter was a Barrington boy too, he said, and they had made it up between them that it wouldn't be worth while for them to accept promotion, for they had only a year to serve, and besides they did not want to run the risk of being separated.

"Oh, as to that, you mustn't expect to stick together all the time," replied the general. "The exigencies of the service will not admit of it; you know that yourself. Still I will try to do something for your friend too, if I find upon inquiry of your regimental and company officers that he is worthy. I lost four of my staff at the battle of Farmington, and, if you like, will order you and Sergeant Graham to present

yourselves for examination."

Rodney fairly gasped for breath, and wished that the general had not taken quite so deep an interest in him. The crisis was coming now, and he nerved himself for it.

"I am very much obliged, general," he faltered. "But my time will be up in about two weeks, and I should like to go home and see my folks."'

Rodney expected that his superior would be surprised to hear this, and his actions showed that he certainly was, and a little angry, as well. He arose to a sitting posture on the couch, and jammed the tobacco down in his pipe with a spiteful motion as he said, rather curtly:

"You must give up all such nonsense. I am not going to deplete my brigade, at this most critical time, by letting everybody go home who takes a fool's notion into his head that he wants to. According to law I am obliged to discharge all one year's men when their term of service expires; but they shall never get out of my lines. I'll conscript them as fast as a provost guard can catch them."

The general settled back on his elbow again and looked at his visitor as if to inquire what he thought of the situation. Rodney thought it was dark enough, and showed what he thought by the gloomy expression that came upon his face. He gazed down at the cap he was twirling in his hands and said nothing. The general relented.

"I don't want to be hard on you, Rodney," said he, speaking in much the same tone that a kind and indulgent father might use in reproving an erring son, "but can't you see for yourself what would happen to us and our government if we should weaken our armies by discharging troops at this juncture? The enemy has a hundred and forty thousand men in our front at this minute, and more coming. Memphis is taken, New Orleans has fallen, the railroads, except those that run south of us, are in Halleck's possession, and if the enemy along the river moves quickly, the troops we have sent to fortify Vicksburg will not have time to lift a shovel full of dirt before the Mississippi clear to the Gulf will be lost to us. I tell you the situation is critical in the extreme, and if we don't look out, and fight as men never fought before, the Lincoln government will have us in the dust in less than two months. I'll not let a man of you go, and that's all there is about it."

The general puffed vigorously at his pipe and looked as though he meant every word he said. Was this the man who had promised on two different occasions that he would lend Rodney a helping hand if the opportunity was ever presented? Discouraged and perplexed as he was, the boy could still think clearly enough to draw a contrast between this arbitrary action of a so-called government, which claimed to be fighting for the rights of its people, to do as they pleased and the course pursued by the Union General Lyon at the battle of Wilson's Creek. Rodney learned through some prisoners his regiment captured (and history to-day confirms the story) that Lyon had seven thousand men when he reached Springfield; two thousand short-term men demanded their release and got it; and the Union commander went on and fought the battle with five thousand. Perhaps the old government was not quite so bad after all.

"But you see, sir," said Rodney, after a moment's reflection, "my comrade and I do not come under the terms of the Conscription Act. We are not yet eighteen years of age."

The surprised look that came over the general's face showed very plainly that that was a point that had slipped his mind entirely. The boy had him there, and he hardly knew whether to laugh or get angry over it.

"And do you intend to take advantage of that provision of the Act?" he inquired.

"We'd like to, sir," was all Rodney thought it prudent to say in reply. His superior was nettled, and the boy wanted to leave him in good humor and get out of his presence as soon as possible.

"That settles it," said the general, getting upon his feet and knocking the ashes from his pipe in a manner which seemed to say that the interview was at an end. "I'll take pains to see your colonel, but I do hope there are not many in my command whose ages are under eighteen or over thirty-five. However, I may be able to infuse a little patriotism into them, and shall have something to say about it in a general order."

"I thank you, sir, for the assurance," replied Rodney.

He made his best salute and retired, but during the rest of the day he was not as jubilant as he had been when he came off post; and when he went back that night to do duty at the general's tent, he took note of the fact that his commander paid no more attention to him than he would have paid to an entire stranger. Rodney felt hurt at that, and as soon as he could do so, after guard-mount the next morning,

he hunted up his friend Dick and told him the whole story. He wanted sympathy and encouragement and got both.

"You did perfectly right," said Dick, emphatically. "We could have passed the examination easy enough, and in a week or two might have been galloping around camp covered with gold lace, and looking as sweet as two government pets; but we don't care half as much for staff office as we do for our discharges. You made the general mad and I am sorry for that; but after all it's natural, for the commander who discharges the smallest number of men will stand highest in the good graces of his superiors. See? So long as he keeps his troops in the service, it doesn't make a particle of difference whether he keeps them in by promises or threats. He's a bully fellow, and the despots at Richmond will reward him."

Some of the sergeant's words were confirmed that very afternoon, and in a most startling manner. For days it had been whispered about among the men that there was trouble brewing in General Bragg's corps, and on this particular day it was brought to a head by the mutiny of a Tennessee regiment, who stacked arms and refused to do duty. The twelve months for which they volunteered had expired and they wanted to go home. Before entering the service they made provision for their families for just one year, and since that time their State had been over-ran with raiding parties from both armies, their crops had been destroyed, their stock killed, their buildings given to the flames, and their wives and children turned out into the weather. They wanted to see these helpless ones taken to places of security, and then they would return to a man, and stand by their comrades until the last Yankee invader had been driven into the Ohio river. But Bragg said they shouldn't go, and fixed things so they couldn't. He did just what Beauregard did when Hindman's Arkansas troops prepared to return to their State to repel the "invasion" of General Curtis. He told them that if they didn't pick up those guns in less than five minutes he would have the last one of them shot, and they picked them up; but in an hour's time it was whispered through the ramp that all the service old Daddy Bragg would get out of those Tennesseans wouldn't amount to much. We shall presently see how much truth there was in the report.

A few days after this the order of which General Howard had spoken was issued, and read to those regiments in the brigade whose term of service was about to expire. They were informed that they would now come under the Conscript Act, and that every man of them who was subject to service under that Act would be summarily conscripted unless he chose to re-enlist. The regiments to whom the order was addressed had all performed gallant service and gained imperishable honors, and the general hoped they would preserve both their name and organization by volunteering in a body to serve for two years, or until the end of the war. If they did, they would have the privilege of electing their own officers, and would be placed on the same footing as the other volunteer regiments; and those of their number who, by reason of age, were not subject to conscription, would serve until the 15th of July, when they would be discharged.

The order concluded with a fierce denunciation of General Butler's rule in New Orleans and a glowing appeal to their patriotism, all of which the men cheered lustily; but when the ranks were broken and the different "cliques" got together, they did not try to keep up any show of spirit. So far as Rodney Gray could learn, there was not a man in his regiment who would have volunteered if he had seen a fair chance to desert and get across the river. Desertion was a thing that had never been talked of before among Price's men. As volunteers, they would have died rather than think of such a cowardly way of getting out of the army, but it was different now. Even, if they re-enlisted under the provisions of the Conscript Act, how much better would they be than conscripts while bearing the name of volunteers? They would be forced into the army against their will, wouldn't they and wouldn't that make them conscripts? They appeared to submit because they could not help themselves; but desertions took place every day. Some got safely off, but those who were caught in the act were shot without any trial at all. The men were sullen, talked mutiny among themselves, and Rodney Gray looked for nothing else but to see them rise in a body, kill their tyrannical officers, and disperse to their homes. It was a terrible state of affairs, the nearest approach to anarchy there ever was or ever will be in this country, and during those troublous days and the subsequent retreat to Tupelo, General Halleck received into his lines no less than fifteen thousand deserters.

The farce of electing new officers and reorganizing the various companies and regiments in the brigade took place in due time, and once more Dick Graham found himself in the ranks. He was not a candidate for any office and neither was Rodney, although they might have had commissions if they had chosen to accept them. They did not so much as hint that they had been offered something better than the company or regiment could give them—a position on the general's staff—for they did not think it would be policy to do it. There were plenty of mean men in their regiment, as there were in every one in the service, and since they could not get discharges themselves, they would have been glad if they could have kept Rodney and Dick from getting them; and if they had suspected that Rodney had a friend in the general of the brigade, they would have reported him every chance they got, no matter

whether he had done anything wrong or not. After this the two friends waited with as much patience as they could for the time to come around when they would be free once more.

During this time almost constant fighting had been going on somewhere along the line, and although Rodney and Dick could not see the use of it, those in authority could, for they were quietly making preparations to withdraw from a place which was no longer of use to them. On the 26th, 27th, and 28th of the month, the fighting was very severe, and Rodney's regiment, which was at the front, was badly cut up. Although Dick Graham was now a private he was called upon at times to do duty as a sergeant, and on the afternoon of the 28th, he was sent with a small squad, one of whom was Rodney Gray, to take charge of an advanced post. It was much nearer our lines than were the trenches in which the regiment was fighting, but it was also much safer, for the shells from both sides went high over their heads. Here they remained in perfect security, talking, laughing and telling stories while the roar of battle was going on all around them, and waiting for their relief, which was to come at six o'clock. It did not come, however, until after nine, and by that time it had grown so dark that it was only after infinite trouble and bother that they succeeded in finding their way back to the main line, only to learn after they arrived there, that their regiment had been withdrawn three hours before, and nobody could tell where it was now. Dick Graham didn't care much where it was, for he had no intention of going to it that night. It was more than three miles to camp, and Dick saw, when he passed that way three days before, that the road was blocked with wagons, artillery trains and stable-lines, and to these obstructions were now added sleeping men, who would not be over civil to any one who chanced to stumble against them in the dark. So Dick drew his squad off into the woods out of the way and went into camp; that is to say, he ate the little piece of hard tack he found in his haversack, washed it down with a drink of warm water from his canteen, rolled himself up in his blanket and went to sleep.

"There goes reveille," exclaimed Rodney, hitting him a poke in the ribs the next morning about daylight. "But it's in the enemy's camp, and I don't think we'll pay much attention to it. I am going to sleep again."

"Say," said one of the men, "I reckon we'd best be toddling along, for if I didn't hear wagons and troops moving all night, I dreamed it. Let's get up and go as far as the diggings any way, and get a bite to eat."

The "diggings" referred to was a pile of hard-tack which, when Rodney first saw it, was almost as long and high as the railroad depot. There were several thousand boxes in the pile, and there they had been beside the road, exposed to all sorts of weather, ever since they arrived in Corinth. Why they were not served out to the men instead of lying there to waste no one knew or cared to ask; but every squad that passed that way made it a point to stop long enough to break open a few boxes and fill their haversacks. Toward these "diggings" Dick and his men bent their steps, and before they were fairly out of the woods in which they had slept, they became aware that they had been deserted. There was not a man in sight, and the guns which looked threateningly at them over the top of the nearest redoubt, they found on inspection to be logs of wood.

"Beauregard's whole army has fallen back, and done it so silently that they never awoke us," said Dick. "Let us hurry on and get into our lines before some of the enemy's cavalry come along and gobble us up. What do you see, Rodney?"

"I am afraid we are gobbled already," was the answer, "I saw some men dodging about in the woods over there. If they are not the enemy's pickets they must be our rear guard, and as we can't get away we had better go over and make ourselves square with them."

This proposition met with the approval of his comrades, but it did not seem to suit the men in the woods, for Dick's squad had not gone many steps in their direction when some one called out:

"By the right flank, march!" and the command was emphasized by the sudden appearance of half a dozen muskets which were pointed straight at them.

"Who are you, and what are you doing there?" demanded Dick.

"Who are you, and what do you want of us?" asked one of the men in reply. "Are you from Tennessee?"

"No; Missouri."

"By the right flank, then, and toddle right along. You want no truck with us; but if you meet old Daddy Bragg tell him to come and see us. We've got something for him."

"All right," answered Dick, as he and his squad faced to the right and marched away. "Good-by, and good luck to you. I don't think old Bragg will come out," he added, when the men had been left out of

hearing. "They'd shoot him as quick as they would any other varmint. There must be two or three hundred in that party, and they straggled out of the ranks last night in the dark. They'll stay there until the enemy's advance passes, and then they'll come out and give themselves up. Slick scheme, but I'd die before I would do it myself."

The squad halted at the "diggings" long enough to fill their haversacks, and then kept on after the army, marching with a quick step and keeping a good look-out for the Federal cavalry, which they knew would be sent out to pick up stragglers as soon as Beauregard's retreat became known to Halleck. They were in no hurry to overtake their comrades, for they were doing very well by themselves, and neither did they want to be picked up and treated as deserters by their own rear guard. But if there *was* any rear guard they never saw it, although they ran into another body of Tennesseans, more than a thousand of them this time, who told them that the army gone on toward Tupelo, thirty-five miles from Corinth. No one seemed to know why Corinth had been abandoned, and it turned out afterward that the Richmond government disapproved of it, for the command was taken from Beauregard and given to Bragg, the man whom all his soldiers feared and hated, and who, a few months later, said to the people of Kentucky, "I am here with an army which numbers not less than sixty thousand men. I bring you the olive-branch which you refuse at your peril." But proclamations and threats did not take Kentucky out of the Union.

It took the boys five days to cover the thirty-five miles that lay between Corinth and Tupelo, and they were by no means the last of the stragglers to come in. The men who had been left behind, and who had no intention of deserting, were nevertheless bound to enjoy their liberty while they had the chance, and some of them did not arrive for two weeks.

In process of time the descriptive list and discharges of those who came under the exemption clause of the Conscription Act were made out, but there was so much red tape to be gone through with before all the provisions of the Act could be carried out, that the two friends were in a fever of suspense for fear that something might happen at the last minute to blast their hopes. Their officers did not want to let them go, and the slightest hitch in the proceedings would have made conscripts of them. But in their case everything worked smoothly, and finally all they had to do was to go to the paymaster and get their Confederate scrip. Being provided with passes which would take them as far as the lines of the Confederacy extended, they took leave of their friends, not without a feeling of regret it must be confessed, and boarded the cars for Camp Pinckney, which was located a hundred miles from New Orleans. After they left the camp their passes would be of no use to them, for it was said that the country between there and Mooreville, forty miles east of Baton Rouge, was over-run with Federal cavalry. They reached the camp without any mishap, ran the guard in order to get out of it (but that was not a difficult thing to do, for nearly all the soldiers in camp were conscripts who had not had time to learn their business), and before they had gone ten miles on their way toward Mooreville, came plump upon a small squad of Union cavalry, who covered them with their carbines and told them to "come in out of the rain." It was hard to be "gobbled up" within two days' walk of home, but the boys put a bold face on the matter. The corporal and his three men seemed to be a jolly, good-natured lot, and the ex-Confederates knew they would be sure of kind treatment as long as they remained in their hands.

"You've got us easy enough," said Dick. "Now what are you going to do with us?"

"Take you down to Baton Rouge and put you where you'll not have a chance to shoot any more Yanks," replied the corporal. "Where's your regiment?"

"We don't know; and not wishing to give you a short answer, we don't care. We never shot any Yanks, and neither do we mean to go where they are again if we can help it. We've got our discharges in our pockets."

"Seeing is believing. Hand 'em out."

The boys complied, and as they did so Rodney remarked that if they had known that the corporal was as white a man as they had found him, they wouldn't have "come in out of the rain" so readily. They would have taken to their heels and trusted to his forbearance.

"I am glad you didn't try it," replied the corporal, reading the discharges one after the other and passing them over to his men. "A gray-back streaking it through the bushes would be a mighty tempting target, even to fellows like ourselves who don't shoot only when we have to. Have you got enough of the service?"

"More than we want," answered Dick.

"Well, you can't be forced into the army until you are of the right age, and in the meantime I don't

suppose you will do us any great damage. What do you say, boys?"

"I say let 'em go home and see their mammies," replied one of the squad; and the others nodding assent, the corporal jerked his thumb over his shoulder and told them to "git."

"It is no more than we expected of you, but we thank you all the same," said Rodney, gratefully. "I live down this way, three miles from Mooreville, and if you ever come along our road, drop in and we'll treat you right. The mouse did the lion a favor once, and who knows but that a boy who is not old enough to be conscripted, may be able to do something for one of Uncle Sam's men?"

"Good for you, Johnny. You're no reb. Any up this way?"

"None nearer than Camp Pinckney. If there are we did not see them."

With hearts full of thankfulness the boys resumed their journey, and on the afternoon of the second day following, came within sight of Rodney's home. It set his eyes to streaming, and gave such elasticity to his step that Dick could scarcely keep pace with him. As he led his friend up the wide front steps he recalled to mind the parting that had taken place there more than fifteen months before, and the confident words he had uttered about "driving the Yankees out of Missouri." He and his friends had been driven out instead, and there was no hope that Missouri would ever belong to the Confederacy.

"Alabama—here we rest," exclaimed Rodney, pushing Dick into an easy chair in the parlor, which they found to be unoccupied. "Stay there till I find somebody."

"I don't look fit," began Dick, glancing down at his dusty uniform; but just then a door opened, a lady came in, and the words "Mother!" and "Oh, my son, my son!" told Dick that "somebody" had found Rodney.

If ever a boy appreciated home and its comforts it was Rodney Gray, no longer a wild, unreasoning partisan, but sober and thoughtful beyond his years. Here we will leave him until the time comes for us to tell how Dick Graham got across the river, and take up the history of the adventures and exploits of our Union hero, Marcy Gray, whom we left in his home in North Carolina. Marcy's "*Secret Enemies*" and his determination to be "*True to his Colors*" brought him into difficulty more than once; and what those difficulties were, and how he came through them, shall be told in the third volume of this series, which will be entitled "MARCY, THE BLOCKADE-RUNNER."

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