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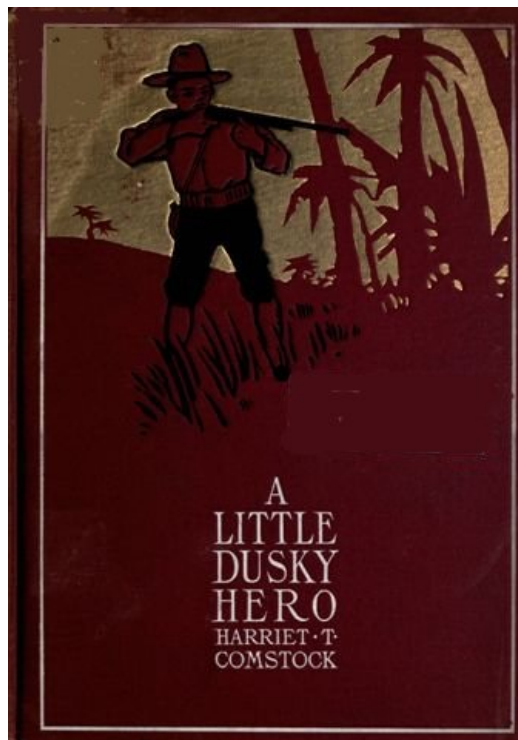
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A LITTLE DUSKY HERO ***



A LITTLE DUSKY HERO

BY HARRIET T. COMSTOCK

AUTHOR OF "CEDRIC THE SAXON," "TOWER OR THRONE," ETC.

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**THIS LITTLE BOOK
IS
LOVINGLY DEDICATED
TO
Philip and Albert
BY
THEIR MOTHER**



**COLONEL AUSTIN STAGGERED TO HIS FEET, LEANING UPON THE
LITTLE SHOULDER.**

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A LITTLE DUSKY HERO.

I.

GEORGE WASHINGTON MCKINLEY JONES.

Scratch! scratch! scratch! went Colonel Austin's pen over the smooth white sheets of paper, sheet after sheet.

The dead heat of Tampa hung heavy within the tent; the buzz of the flies was most distressing; but the reports must be got off, and after them there were letters to be written to "the Boy and his Mother" up North, telling them—especially the Boy—what a glorious thing it is to serve one's country under *any* circumstances. The present circumstances were extremely trying, to be sure, but the firm brown hand glided back and forth over the long pages in a determined manner that showed how Colonel Austin believed in doing his duty.

Scratch! scratch! scratch!

Buzz! buzz! buzz!

"Good-mornin', sah!"

It was a soft little voice, and it droned away into the buzz of the flies and the scratching of the pen so that the writer at the rough table took no heed.

"Good mornin', sah!"

This time Colonel Austin turned. He was a firm believer in discipline, and the unannounced arrival annoyed him. He swung around and gazed sternly about six feet from the ground. There was nothing there! His eyes dropped and finally rested upon the very smallest, dirtiest, raggedest black boy he had ever seen. But the beautiful great eyes of the forlorn mite looked trustingly up at the surprised officer, and Colonel Austin noticed that the grimy cheeks were tear-stained though the childish lips were smiling bravely.

"Good mornin', sah!" again piped the soft voice.

"Why, good morning to you!" the Colonel replied. He was always tender with sick soldiers, women, and children, and the pathetic little figure before him touched his sympathy. "Who are you, my small friend?"

"George Washington McKinley Jones, sah."

"Just so; and where are your folks?"

"No folks any more, sah. Daddy he done got put in prison fur life, sah, 'cos he killed a frien' of his, an' my mammy she done died yesterday. I jus' come from her buryin', sah." Two slow tears fell from the soft brown eyes and rolled over the stained cheeks.

Colonel Austin's throat grew dry, as it always did when he looked upon suffering things bearing pain and trouble bravely.

"And why do you come here, my child?" he asked kindly.

"I likes de look ob your face, sah, an' I'se hungry—I'se starved, I is—an' 'sides I want work!"

The boy certainly was not over nine, and was undersized and childish-looking even for that.

"Work!" smiled the grave Colonel, "what in the world can you do?"

"Why, sah, I'se de best shot you ebber saw; I reckon I'se what you call a real crack shot; dat's what I am, sah!"

The ring of pride in the piping voice reached the Colonel's heart. "Oh! I see," he nodded. "You wish to be a soldier boy, is that it?"

The grimy little applicant drew himself up to his extreme height, and replied with magnificent scorn. "No, sah! I does *not* wish to be a sojer boy. I wish ter be one ob dem heroes, sah!"

A joke was a rare thing in those dull, waiting days, and George Washington McKinley Jones was delicious. The Colonel smoothed the smiles from his mouth as best he could. But not a quiver of mirth ruffled the dirt-stained countenance of the child. His severe stare sobered the Colonel, and he asked in a gentle tone, "Do you know what a hero is, my boy?"

George Washington drew his ragged coat about him with a gesture of patient pity, then answered with a slow, pained dignity. "Co'se I knows what a hero is, sah. How could I know dat I wanted ter be one if I didn't? A hero is a pusson, sah, what ain't afraid to tackle a job too big fur other folks, an' goes right froo wid it or dies a-doin' it!"

Something in the quiet words drove all desire to laugh for good and all from the listening officer. "I have a character on my hands, evidently," he thought; aloud he said, "George Washington McKinley Jones, I presume you haven't any particular job in heroism in sight at present?"

"No, sah. I jes' wants to go 'long wid de boys, an' watch out fur my chance. Mammy done tole me heaps ob times dat if I jes' was wid sojers, I was boun'ter be a hero some day, shore. She 'lowed she had visions."

"You shall have your chance, comrade!" The Colonel got up and took the thin little hand in his. "If you have told me the truth, my boy, I will take you along with my regiment and give you a show." He called to an officer who was passing the tent. "Martin!"

The man stopped and touched his cap.

"Martin, we have a young volunteer here. He's no common soldier, please understand; he's enlisted as a hero. Feed him up, give him all that he can hold, and let him report to me later."

Lieutenant Martin's face never changed expression; he simply held out his hand gravely to George Washington McKinley Jones, saluted his superior officer, and led the volunteer out of the tent.

While George Washington ate, solemnly and long, investigations were made as to the truth of his story. Colonel Austin made them himself. He wished to make sure, for his sympathy was deeply enlisted, and he did not intend to be deceived. He found the little fellow had not departed from the facts in the least particular. He belonged to nobody; but every one who knew him had a kindly word for him. He was known as an honest, good-natured little waif, with a reputation for hitting the bull's-eye every time any one would lend him a gun at a rifle-match.

Upon the evidence gathered the boy was taken into the army as the "mascot of the Ninth," and before long he was the pet of the men in that city of white tents, and became known as "G. W.," for who in that hot, lazy place could waste time in calling him all of his various historical national names? It was "G. W." here and "G. W." there. He danced for them and sang for them, and was never weary, never ill-tempered.

When once he had had enough to eat—and for many days the men thought that he never could get enough—he became the healthiest and ruggedest of boys, and beyond doubt one of the happiest that ever breathed.

II.

THE BOX FROM UP NORTH.

One day a box came from the North. It was addressed to "George Washington McKinley Jones, care of Colonel Austin;" but as G. W. was incapable of reading he sharply questioned the messenger who delivered it.

"How you know dis 'blongs ter me?" asked he.

"There's your name," said the messenger.

"Whar?"

The patient messenger traced the boy's illustrious name.

"What's dar 'sides my name?"

"Care of Colonel Austin."

"Oh!" said G. W., understandingly, "dat means I'se got ter take care ob it fur my Colonel! I reckon dey needn't took all de trouble to write dat foolishness out! Co'se I'll take care of it."

G. W. ran straight to Colonel Austin's tent. The officer was sitting inside, and, as it happened, alone.

"Hello, G. W., what have you there?"

The boy held the big box out gravely. Colonel Austin read the address. "It's for you, my boy," he said. "Open it and let us see what is inside. Here, let us drop the tent-flap and keep the surprise to ourselves."

When the Colonel said the package was for him all doubt fled from G. W.'s heart. Others might step from truth's narrow way—but his Colonel? Oh, never! The exciting thought that the box was really for himself made the sturdy little form quiver. His hands shook, and the big brown eyes stood open, as round as full moons.

The heavy papers were off at last. Upon the box itself lay a square white envelope, breathing forth a fragrance of violets, and stating as plainly as could be, in delicate lettering, that the contents of the envelope were also for G. W.

"There's something for you in the letter—open that first," said the Colonel. He was eyeing the scene with a strange look upon his face. "Shall I read it for you, G. W.?" he added.

"Yes, sah! I guess you'll have to, sah, sump-in' seems de matter wid my eyes," said G. W. "You jes' read it, Colonel. Read it slow an' *exactly* what it done say, kase I doan't want any mistake, sah, 'bout dis sort ob thing."

"All right, old man,—just tell me if I go too fast."

Then the Colonel began:

"To GEORGE WASHINGTON MCKINLEY JONES,

private in the Ninth Infantry:

"DEAR SIR: The enclosed are for you. They were made in Uncle Sam's workshop, just where all the brave boys have theirs made"—

"You reads too fast, Colonel!" gasped G. W., tiny drops of perspiration standing out on his face.

The Colonel began again at the beginning, and then went on, reading slowly:

"I am sure they will fit, because a little messenger brought me the measurements. Accept them with our love, and wear them like the hero you will certainly be some day. There is just one way you can thank us; bring Colonel Austin home to us safe and sound, well and strong. See that he obeys you where this is concerned. We wish him to do his duty, but do not let anything happen to him.

"God bless you, little soldier! That is the daily wish of

"THE BOY AND HIS MOTHER."

There was silence in the tent.

Then said the Colonel, "Well, why don't you open the box, G. W.?"

The boy was kneeling before the box, but his eyes were fastened upon a photograph on the rude table. It was a photograph of "the Boy and his Mother," G. W. felt certain; and he was realizing that these two, far away in the unknown, had spoken to him.

"Open it, G. W.," again the Colonel said.

"You do it, sah! I clar I doan't dare!"

The officer laughed, and cut the string. Within the box, neatly folded, but in such a way as to hide none of their charms, lay trousers and jacket of army blue resplendent with flashing buttons.

Colonel Austin took the garments out, and held them up at arms' length. They were small, but perfect.

"Lawd!" gasped G. W.; "for de Lawd's sake!"

A moment of breathless silence followed; then Colonel Austin said, "They are yours, G. W., try them on! You are 'one of the boys' now for sure and certain, buttons and all! See, there is a '9' on every button!"

Slowly the surprise cleared away in G. W.'s brain. He gave a low whistle, like the note of a bird, and struggled to his feet, for he was still on his knees by the box.

"Colonel," he whispered, "you ain't never tole me a lie—but dis here 'sperience done tries my mind! Turn away yo' head, sah."

Colonel Austin turned away his head and waited.

Behind his back arose a rustling, with mutters of impatience, as buttons refused to comply with the nervous efforts of awkward and trembling fingers. Then came a long breath of content, as things began to run smoother, and presently a sigh of superhuman bliss; then a voice, new and deep, gasped forth:

"Look at me!"

The Colonel turned. There, his face and hands in a tremble, but all exultant, stood G. W. in the uniform of the Ninth. The coat was buttoned crooked, the cap, which G. W. had discovered at the bottom of the box, was hind part before—but what of that? In all the army of the great Republic was no manlier soldier than the little fellow who now faced his Colonel with a look of rapture on

his round, dusky face.

"Comrade, give us your hand!" There was a mistiness in the Colonel's eyes, a queer chokiness in his voice. "You'll never disgrace the uniform, my boy,—it isn't in you to do it!"

G. W. saluted, and then gravely placed his hand in Colonel Austin's.

"Dese clo'es," he said, "are jes' goin' to help make me a hero for sho! An', Colonel, I'se goin' ter take care ob you jis' like de Boy an' his Mother tole me. I is sho! Nothin' ain't goin' to happen 'long o' you while George Washington McKinley Jones knows what hisself am about! I'se goin' ter put dis letter in my breas'-pocket, an' it's goin' ter stay right plumb ober my heart, till I take yer back to dem two all right! Now, sah, let me show de boys. Lawd! I clar if my mammy"—the proud smile quivered—"should see me, I jes' reckon de visions she'd have would make her trimble!"

III.

THE LITTLE GAUNTLET AND SWORD.

The sunlight beat down upon Tampa until every man in camp shed his coat in despair, but not one button did G. W. unfasten!

He strutted and sweltered, and complained not. He gave daily exhibitions of his sharp-shooting—which, by the way, was an accomplishment truly remarkable. For the first time in his life he was absolutely and perfectly happy.

While all "the boys" felt a personal interest in the child, it was a well-understood fact that he belonged to Colonel Austin. To that officer alone did G. W. report, and from him alone did he accept orders as to his outgoings and incomings.

As the long languid weeks dragged on, G. W. became the life of the camp. His "break-downs," danced with wondrous grace and skill, set many a lazy foot shuffling in sympathy. He sang songs to a banjo accompaniment which made the listeners forget their pipes and cards, and set them to thinking of home—and other things. He appeared to be singularly innocent and child-like for such an uncared-for waif. He seemed to have gathered only good nature and a love for the brave and noble from his starved, cruel years. As Colonel Austin watched him from day to day he became more interested in him, and began to wonder what he should do with the odd little chap when the business with Spain was settled, and life assumed its ordinary aspect once more.

Perhaps the Colonel's hunger for the Boy up North made him glad of the companionship; perhaps it was only his noble heart always yearning over the needy. Be that as it may, the little black boy and the handsome young Colonel became daily closer comrades.

There was one regulation which Colonel Austin had insisted upon from the first. G. W., who was to sleep upon a mattress in his tent, was to go to bed early, as a child should. The men might bribe or coax him for a dance or a song during the day; but the little soldier had his orders to "turn in" at eight-thirty, and although G. W. often longed for an hour more, he obeyed like the hero he meant some day to be. Love and a strong sense of duty governed the heart beating faithfully under the hot, trimly-buttoned uniform. He might wish to stay where the fun was, but he never varied his obedience by an extra five minutes.

When it was possible the Colonel took a few moments from duty or pleasure at the twilight hour, and followed G. W. into the tent. When the flap fell to after the pair, not a soldier but knew that the Colonel was not to be disturbed except upon the most urgent business. When the Colonel came out of the tent the look in his eyes made more than one man remember it.

Old General Wallace was once known to have taken off his hat as he came face to face with G. W.'s Colonel at the tent door, after one of those mysterious twilight talks. When the older man realized what he had done he jammed his hat down over his eyes, and, with an impatient laugh, said, "What in thunder is the matter with you, Austin? You look like a Methodist camp-meeting!"

G. W.'s Colonel saluted and passed on.

One night when he went into the tent after G. W., he found the boy divested of his splendid regimentals, kneeling in a very scant and child-like costume before the table—which, by the way, was composed of two soap-boxes covered with a flag—and scanning the faces of "the Boy and his Mother." A strange yearning in G. W.'s eyes caused the officer to speak very gently.

"What is it, old fellow? Surely you are not envying the Boy up North? You, a full-fledged soldier of Uncle Sam!"

Envy! why G. W.'s heart just then was filled with pity for that boy nearly as old as he, who was obliged to wear humiliating garments. Actually there was lace on his collar. And the boy wore curls! not long ones, but curls nevertheless. G. W. had by this time acquired tact sufficient to forbid mention of these pitiful details, but he said slowly, "I'se right sorry fur de Boy, Colonel, kase he's 'bliged to stay away frum being wid you!"

G. W. was too sincere to be laughed at, and the Boy's father replied gently:

"Well, you see, comrade, it is this way: the Boy is serving his country as well as you. He'd like to be here first-rate,—a drum-call sets him prancing like a war horse,—but there's the Mother, you know. It would never do to leave her quite alone—he's taking my place by her side until the country needs me no longer and I may go home. There are a good many ways of serving, old man.

"G. W., once I was walking through a gallery of an ancient castle, and I noticed among the armor and weapons which lined the walls a little gauntlet and sword. So very small were they that I questioned the guide, and he told me this story:

'In the dark days of long ago, when a man's castle had to be defended from his foes, and every one was on guard against an attack, there was a knight who had four sons and one fair daughter. Three of the sons were great stalwart fellows, but the fourth was a crippled lad who lay upon his bed in the turret chamber week after week, dreaming his dreams and looking out across the wide parks over which he was never to ride to wage war against a cruel foe. The pretty sister sat much with him and wove wondrous stories from her busy brain to help while away the weary hours; and she got the father to have the slender gauntlet and sword made, so that the patient soldier upon the bed might the better believe himself like the strong, brave heroes of her tales.

'Now it came to pass that a very wicked lord of an adjoining country wished to marry the pretty sister, and take her to his gloomy castle. To that the father and brothers said, "No!" They vowed that they would fight to the end rather than that the wicked lord should have his way. And soon they saw that they must indeed fight if they would keep her, for rumor reached them that the lord had raised a mighty company and was nearing their castle. Then every man prepared himself for battle, and in the turret room the small warrior lay upon his bed with the gauntlet upon his hand, and the keen sword ready in case the foe should enter. Day by day the fair sister, white and full of fear, knelt beside him, and tried to be brave for his dear sake.

'At length the day of conflict came. The two in the high room saw the banners of the wicked lord advancing, and the little brother said valiantly, "I will defend you!"

'The struggle came on. Long and nobly did the knight and his men strive to keep back the terrible lord, and many fell in court-yard and hall. But at last the wicked lord and his followers triumphed, and with shouts of victory strode to the turret-room.

'There knelt the maid, her golden head bowed beside her brother. His left hand pressed her fair curls, but his right hand was ready for its task. The lord bent to grasp the prize for which he had fought, little heeding the crippled boy; but as his fingers were about to close upon the girl's arm the keen slender sword was raised in a hand made strong for the deed, and a desperate blow fell upon the wrist of the lord, and his hand was nearly severed from the arm. An awed silence followed the doughty deed. Then out spoke the lord: "Let no man touch the pair. Of all warriors this cripple is the greatest, because in his weakness he has dared all things for love!"

"So you see, G. W., the poor young stay-at-home was a soldier, too!" said the Colonel. "I have always loved to remember the story. And now I often think of the Boy up North defending his mother from loneliness and foreboding—he is doing his share, G. W."

G. W.'s soft, big, brown eyes were fixed upon his Colonel's face. The great hero-tales of legend and history were new to his empty childhood, and this one thrilled him to his heart's core.

"Dat's a mighty fine story!" he mused. "When you was telling me dat story, Colonel, it done seem as if nothing was mean in all de world; it seems like every one was brave!"

"Never reckon out any honest service, old man," the Colonel went on; "very little things count in this world, and oftentimes the weakest do the greatest deeds. That little hero of long ago stretches forth a hand to every child who tries to do his part!"

A gleam of admiration flashed into G. W.'s eyes. "Well, I 'low dat de Boy up North is a bigger soldier dan I 'magine. I knowed from de fust I done got to take care ob *you*, Colonel, but now I jis' feel like I 'd be glad to do something fur de Boy hisself!"

Colonel Austin seemed to understand. "Well," said he, "you and he are both taking care of me. You are helping him and he is helping you, and maybe some day you may tell each other all about it."

There was surely one thing the Colonel's two "boys" had in common: they both had the same devouring passion for hero-stories.

During almost every spring evening of that year, by a bedside in a cool Northern home, a pretty young mother had sat and told to an eager little lad thrilling tales of bravery and courage. Always she began with the one the Colonel had told to G. W.—the story of the crippled boy in the old castle turret. There was something in that legend that stirred Jack Austin in a wonderful manner.

It had been hard for Jack to be separated from his father from the first; but now, whenever he heard from his father's letters about G. W., and realized that among war's perils there could be a place for a small boy, his heart simply ached with longing. G. W., a boy little older than himself, was there beside Daddy! But at this point Jack always recalled the story of the gauntlet and the small sword, and stifled back the tears and looked lovingly at his pretty mother. No matter how

he envied G. W., he would stay, patient, in his "turret chamber." His place was beside his mother until Daddy came marching home. How many times his father had sent him that message! Jack dreamed almost every night of his father coming home, keeping step to the cheerful drum; so he had marched away, and so he would return, with G. W. at his side!

Near his bed, at night, always lay Jack's own splendid suit of make-believe soldier clothes. It was hard sometimes for him to think that they were make-believe clothes, while the suit of blue his mother had sent to G. W. were real, true ones, and worn by the dusky little soldier who lived in his dear father's tent. There often seemed to him an unendurable difference between G. W. and himself.

Poor little Jack! he was braver than he realized when he turned away from this feeling and smiled up into his mother's face.

But Jack's mother knew all about this feeling.

"And so you see, dear," the stories for Jack always ended, "that though you are but mother's obedient little boy now, your chance in the great world's work will come!"

And in the tent, beneath the glorious sunsets of Tampa, at about the same time "Daddy" would be sitting and smoking beside a small mattress bed, urging the same line of conduct upon another boy "hero" with a heart under the brown skin as pure and innocent as the one throbbing beneath the snowy night-gown so far away.

"Your chance will come, G. W.!"

And both boys generally fell asleep with the resolve that they would do the things and bear the things of the present, and "wait" without a murmur, because heroes had done the same since the world began.

IV.

WAITING IN THE TURRET CHAMBER.

It was never clear to G. W. why the "boys" were always anxious to be "going." For him the lazy, fun-loving life was never tedious or unpleasant. From all that he could gather by endless questioning, war was not half so agreeable, although he granted it must certainly be more exciting.

"When will the order come for us to move?" That was the daily question in camp.

At last it came! They were to sail at once. Of course the President of the United States, whose illustrious name G. W. bore himself, meant all the thousands who were encamped in Tampa; but to G. W. the order meant that *he* and "de Colonel" were to "pull up stakes" and sail away to that strange, mysterious Cuba, and face war!

The little dusky fellow in blue suddenly felt that his hands were pretty full.

He it was who packed all the Colonel's belongings, giving special care to the photograph. He polished up the guns and swords, and even his own buttons. He meant at least to command the respect of the foe. He often grew hot and tired, during those days, but never made a complaint. And when the hurried camp preparations were completed, it was G. W. and "de Colonel" who marched down the long pier to the waiting transports. To G. W.'s mind, it was for them the cheers rang out, and for them did the band play the inspiring music that set his feet dancing. Oh, it was the proudest moment of G. W.'s life so far. His buttons almost burst over his swelling chest. He was marching straight into the glorious future. He was going to be a hero without further delay. He saw "visions," like his mammy. Somewhere, off in the misty distance, his "chance" was waiting for him; he felt as certain of it as he was that under his beloved uniform he was surely melting.

The days in the crowded transport put little G. W.'s endurance to the test. But during the wretched hours one glance at the Colonel's face gave him courage to suffer and be—still!

His Colonel saw it all.

"Bear up, old chap! Heroes grin—and conquer things," said the officer, while his heart ached for the silent child; and in the end, through sea-sickness and a longing for old easy days, G. W. did grin and "conquer things."

Then they came to Cuba! Under the dark palms and cacti, once more the white tents were pitched; and facing the fact of approaching battles, the men made ready, but still lightened the heavy hours by song and joke, and boisterously welcomed the old comradeship of G. W.

G. W. revived when once his feet touched solid land. "I doan't like de water," he explained; "it's shaky an' onsartain an'—an'—wet! Dere's too much ob it too, an' when it gets wobbly, whar are yo?"

So the boy cheerfully took up again his dancing and singing. War grew again to seem to him a

matter of some other day. The regiment seemed merely to have shifted its pleasure-ground. To be sure, there were fewer hours alone with the Colonel, for he was very busy, but G. W. followed him about at a distance whenever and wherever he could. If love could shield the young officer from harm, surely never was he safer.

But presently G. W. began to form new and more personal ideas of war; his imagination, fed by the stories he had heard, sprang to life. Perhaps war wasn't anything they would know about beforehand. That might be the reason for the look of anxiety he had noticed upon the face of his Colonel. Possibly war was like a great cloud hurled along by the hurricane—G. W. knew how *that* looked. They might all be sitting by the camp-fire some night, when suddenly war would descend upon them and find them unprepared. With that thought G. W.'s face took on an expression of anxiety. He clung closer to his Colonel; he did not intend that war should find his Colonel unattended by body-guard.

Colonel Austin often took heed of the faithful little shadow, and began to fear anew for the time when he might be obliged to "go to the front" and leave the boy behind.

"G. W., you must never go beyond that point alone," he said one day, naming a hill a half mile or so distant. "These are not play-days, comrade; I want to feel that you are safe. I cannot afford to worry about you now. Obedience first, old man, you know, and then you are on the way to being a hero."

"Yes, sah!" The small black hand gave the salute gravely. G. W. never by any possible chance forgot his military training. "But, Colonel, you goes funder dan de hill right often."

"That's true, G. W., but my duty calls *me* beyond; *your* duty bids you stay this side of the hill—that's the difference, G. W."

"Yes, sah! but how is I goin' ter take care ob you, wid you trapesing off de Lawd knows whar?"

Colonel Austin smiled. "You must try to be willing to trust me out of your sight, my boy," he said, "just as I have to trust you when you stay behind."

"But, Colonel, jes' 'spose war should attack you, wid me fur off? How does yo' 'spec I 'se goin' ter report to de Boy an' his Mother?"

Colonel Austin saw trouble ahead unless he got G. W. into shape.

"Look here, old fellow," he replied, taking the young body-guard between his knees. "War isn't going to catch us napping. We'll know at what minute to point our guns at the enemy. We shall know and we shall obey our orders. And you'll know, and *you* must obey *your* orders, comrade. You must stay in your turret chamber, like the brave boy of old. You mustn't follow me past that point. If you do, G. W.,"—Colonel Austin had never threatened the boy before,—*"unless you promise me, G. W., I'll tie the flaps of the tent upon you every time I leave it."*

The childish lips quivered in an un-soldier-like way. "I'll promise, Colonel!"

"All right, then, and give us your hand. Comrade, you've taken a load from my mind."

The days following grew to be hard days for the boy, so long petted by the regiment. Food was scarce, and when there was plenty it was often of a kind that he turned from. The evenings in the tent were very long and lonely before he fell asleep. No stories now. His Colonel's absences grew more frequent and more prolonged. G. W.'s only solace was to gaze at the picture of the Boy and his Mother.

The half-mile hill became more and more every day a dread landmark. From that hated point of view he had to watch the Colonel's tall figure disappear only too often, while he stayed behind to return ingloriously to the tent. Where was the "chance" that was going to make him a hero if he must always stay behind in the place of safety? Did the Colonel think heroes were made on hill-tops a half mile from camp? G. W. grew sarcastic. He kept his buttons bright and his uniform brushed and trim; not because he loved it as when he expected to soon wear it as a hero, but because the Colonel kept himself in order—his faithful G. W. could at least follow him in that.

But at last came a thing that roused him from this mood. Fever broke out in camp, and G. W. developed into a nurse of no mean order. He carried water and bathed aching heads. Hot hands clung to him, forgetting how very small and weak he was. "Sing to us, G. W.," often those weary, suffering fellows said, "and don't give us the jig-tunes, old man, but something soft."

With his brown, childish face upraised G. W. would sing the old camp-meeting songs that his mother used to sing in the days of long ago before he had dreamed of being a hero.

Was it the religious thought in the quaint words, or the tender quality of the airs, or was it G. W.'s pathetic voice that had the power to quiet the delirium and make it possible for the tired sick men to rest? How can one tell? But as the boy sang stillness settled down over the rough hospital, and many a "God bless you, G. W.!" came from thankful lips.

Colonel Austin watched the little comforter bustling to and fro, and with a grim smile he thought that the hero-side of G. W. was developing fast.

The boy had grown thin, and an anxious, worn look made the small dusky face very touching; but weariness, disappointment, and bodily discomfort never dragged a complaint from the firm lips.

V.

THE BOY UP NORTH.

Just before the Colonel and G. W. had been ordered by President McKinley to "move on," Colonel Austin had had the dear dusky little attendant photographed, dazzling uniform and all and had sent it to little Jack who was playing his harder part away up in the Northern home. Underneath he had written, "My Body-Guard."

After Mrs. Austin had gazed long and searchingly at the radiant little soldier, she had surprised her son by suddenly bursting into tears.

"Why, Mamma-dear!" cried Jack, "don't you like his looks?"

"Oh! I do indeed, Jack; I like his looks so well that it almost breaks my heart—poor little fellow!"

"Poor little fellow?" Jack fell to pondering. He examined every detail of the fascinating photograph—the suit of "real" soldier clothes, the straight, proud wearer with that look of exultation upon his round face. Why "poor little fellow"? Jacky would have given anything in the world—except his mother—to have been in his place.

"Mamma-dear," he sighed at last, "I'd rather be G. W. than President of the United States!"

Mrs. Austin laughed and wiped away her tears.

"That's because you are Daddy's boy," she replied; "but poor G. W. has a hard way to travel through life, and your mother was wondering just where he will fit in when heroes are not required."

"Heroes are always required," Jack answered sagely, "and I bet G. W. will be brave anywhere. He's got brave eyes."

"I believe you are right, Jack," said his mother. "Put his photograph upon your table, and try to be the same kind of boy you think he is. He certainly is a dear little chap!"

So upon the table in Jack's room G. W.'s photograph was placed; and often and often when he was quite alone Colonel Austin's son visited with his father's small dusky body-guard until, on Jack's side at least, the two became intimate friends.

Then into the Northern home came Daddy's letters telling of the approach of battle and the change of scene. Nothing of G. W.'s doings was ever omitted by the Colonel; he knew Jack's hunger for hero-news.

The little mother was less gay during those early days of summer; a shadow rested upon her sweet face, and she clung to Jack with a sort of passion. Jack was full of comfort and cheer when he was with her, but he had his hours of unhappiness too, and then he used to go into his room and stay with G. W.

One day Mrs. Austin went to drive with a friend, and Jack took that opportunity for a private drill, with G. W. to look on. Up in his bright sunlit room he put on his soldier suit and marched to and fro with swelling chest and mighty stride.

Oh! if he were only to be with his father in the battles to come! He might keep danger away if he were with him. No one would hurt a little boy—he would go, in every battle, in front of his father!

At last he went to the table and kneeling down scanned the likeness of G. W.—the boy who was filling his place, Daddy's body-guard! He grew very unhappy as he looked at the small colored boy.

"I'm a toy boy," he faltered, "and G. W. is a live soldier!" Then he thought of Daddy's last letter, in which he had written of the hill which marked G. W.'s boundary.

"I bet that makes you turn hot and cold, G. W.," he mused. "Oh, I know just how you feel!" The blue eyes searched deep into the pictured ones of brown. "Oh! G. W., I wish you knew how to manage Daddy as Mamma-dear and I do! Daddy'll let you do what's necessary always, if you just know how, but he's awful particular about being obeyed. I wish you could make him change his mind about that hill. Of course they won't fight a battle *there*; if there was any danger of that Daddy'd set your limit at camp! But, G. W., if you should go ahead and do a brave thing, like saving a life, he'd forgive you; he'd punish you, I guess, but he'd forgive you—Mamma-dear and I'd make him, anyway. If *I* were in your place, in the very clothes of the Ninth, I'd dare a good sound punishing to be by Daddy's side. I'd just ask him what he called me a body-guard for."

The tears blinded Jack's eyes, and through their gleam G. W.'s face seemed to grow rigid with disapproval.

"I know," half sobbed Jack, wiping his tears upon the sleeve of his blue "make-believe" coat; "Daddy's trained you to think you *must* obey; but, oh, I wish that particular old hill wasn't in Cuba!

"I'm going to tell you something, G. W.," Jack went on. "Once, the summer before Daddy went away, I had a 'sperience with him. I was a year littler than I am now. He told me not on any account to go down to the river without him. I wanted to, for Daddy had taught me how to swim and I wanted to float about and practise. Every day I went near, to look at the water, and every night Daddy would say, 'Now remember, Jack, for no reason go to the river without me.' But I went nearer and nearer, until one day I could see the other boys in, and then—I pulled off my clothes and in I went, too! I hadn't been in long when Don Grover—he's my best friend, but a year littler—got out further than any one else, and suddenly he put his arms right up in the air and screamed that he was a-drowning. We were all scared, and the other boys swam to the shore to get help. I couldn't think of anything but Don, and I swam right out to him, and he didn't grab hold of me or anything, but let me kind of tow him in; and course it was awful far and we were nearly dead, and I kept thinking how I had disobeyed Daddy, and seeing Mamma-dear's mournful eyes. But Don and I didn't talk, only just swam. When we got to the shore we crawled out and lay down and went to sleep, but when the boys came back with some men I waked up and told them to take Don home and I could go alone. G. W., I was terribly fearful to go, for you know how particular Daddy is about obeying and waiting in your own place of duty.

"I ached, and my knees just fluttered. When I got there Daddy and Mamma-dear were sitting on the piazza, and the minute I looked at Daddy I was sure he knew I had disobeyed. 'Where have you been, Jack?' he said, solemn. I said, 'Swimming.' He got up, and Mamma-dear began to cry, but Daddy took me in the study and he—he whipped me, G. W., like anything, for disobedience. I wouldn't cry, because I *had* been disobedient.

"That evening Don's father came over and told Daddy how I tugged Don in, and I saw Daddy's eyes looking like two big steady stars, and the whipping was just nothing, and Mamma-dear cried the same as if Don and I were drowned dead. And, G. W., what do you think Daddy did? When Don's father finished, Daddy came and said, 'You deserved the thrashing, Jack, for not obeying, you know; but let me shake hands with you because you are a brave fellow,' and I almost choked. I said, 'Don't mention it!' but I shook his hand like anything. Oh, G. W., if only I could make you know just how to be a true body-guard to Daddy! If you should go over that hill he'd punish you for disobeying, sure, but if some time you just *had* to do it for a brave reason, he'd shake your hand, G. W."

The boy in the photograph seemed to be listening to Jack, and trying to understand him, and to be thinking about it, as if he knew that Jack's very heart was in what he said.

Presently a slow smile lit up the features of the make-believe boy in blue. "G. W.," he whispered, "I'm not going to worry any more about Daddy! You'll do the right thing by him, I'll bet! When you come home, G. W., you shall have half of everything I own. We're going to be brothers!"

Little Jack Austin ran down to meet his mother when she returned, with a cheery smile, because he had in his heart a sure trust that G. W. would save the day, no matter what the danger that threatened Daddy!

VI.

"WAR, G. W.!"

G. W.'s wanderings from camp became less and less frequent. He thought no longer of going anywhere but to the hill-top; and that detested limit became more hated as oftener and oftener the Colonel passed beyond the faithful little guardian's gaze.

"I'd jes' like to know whar de Colonel goes *all* de time!" sighed G. W.

Colonel Austin was not unmindful of the boy, but evidently he was deep in business and anxiety. An occasional pat upon the little woolly head, or a word of cheer, was all the devoted comrade received; yet, with only that to feed upon, the childish devotion continually grew.

He took to talking aloud to the Boy and his Mother, in the long silent hours of evening. They became as alive and intimate to him as he, all unknown to himself, had become to Jack. He made solemn promises regarding the Colonel which, had Jack heard, would have set to rest any doubt as to G. W.'s capabilities of "managing the Colonel."

"Doan you-uns be frettin'," he whispered one night when his own heart was like lead in his body; "you kin jes' keep on a-smilin' an' a-smilin'—I 'low I can take care ob de Colonel. Dat hill gets de best ob me, jes' fur de minute, but you min' I'm a-thinkin' 'bout dat ar hill! I'se goin' git de bes' ob dat der hill, yit!"

One hot day when G. W. had smothered as usual his loathing for his limit, and followed at a respectful distance the tall, well-beloved figure of his Colonel, he had a hard fit of sighing. "I reckon if de Colonel knew 'bout how I is feelin' dis minute," he said, wiping the perspiration from his face, "he'd jes' holler back 'howdy' ter me." But the Colonel not knowing of the faithful little henchman's nearness, sent back no word of loving cheer—did not once turn.

The two were plodding along the road called the Santiago Road at the time, and the long strides

of the officer presently put him beyond G. W.'s vision.

Suddenly G. W. sighed aloud. "He's gone!" There was a break in the soft voice. "I clar ter goodness, he's always gone! I'm bressed if I doan't wish de war would come an' be done wid! Dese days done w'ar me to frazzles!"

A low, deep, rumbling sound made G. W. start. By instinct, he crouched under some nearby bushes.

"What's dat?" he muttered, his eyes growing round and full of inquiry. "Dat ain't thunder!" The ominous, threatening sounds were drawing nearer, approaching over the road along which he had come, and along which he must return to camp.

"Lawd!" gasped G. W.; "jes' 'spose dat is war a-comin' an' a-ketchin' me alone by myself; good Lawd!" The small face became terror-stricken. He clutched his hands in the pockets of his trousers.

The rumble grew louder. Suddenly the sun flashed upon a strange object being drawn up the rough trail.

"Cannoneers, forward!" came a full loud cry that echoed and re-echoed in G. W.'s brain. Then the boy perceived, as far as his gaze could travel, soldiers and cannon filling the familiar road. He forgot his terror, and thrilled and palpitated as he gazed from his leaf-covered hiding-spot.

Then a new thought made him reel backward. Was the entire American army marching away from camp, leaving him behind who was bound to return there?

The Colonel had left no orders for him; and the hill stood, as ever, between him and any following of the soldiers. Then came a thought that relieved him—there would be the sick in camp; surely they could not join this rushing company and he would remain with them until the Colonel remembered him.

Back toward camp he sped, keeping within the tangle of bushes and out of sight of the oncoming men; pushing and tumbling, he made his way as fast as his uniformed legs would carry him.

When he reached camp, panting and heated, he found a scene of great excitement; and as far as he could judge, the men, both sick and well, were all there! The Ninth, at least, had not gone over the hill-top!

"What's goin' ter happen?" G. W. gasped.

A boyish soldier who was writing a letter home looked up and answered,

"War, G. W.! that's what's going to happen, and mighty quick, too."

"And is us all goin' to de war?" G. W. sat down beside the soldier; indeed, his legs could hold him up no longer.

"There are no orders yet, but I reckon we'll get our chance. Two more transports are in, and a lot of guns."

"I saw dem," said G. W., thrilling again. "Miles ob dem an' millions of men! Lawd, Corporal!" Then, after a pause, and very softly, he said, "Say, Corporal Jack, if—if my Colonel don't send orders back fur me to come ter him, an' if youse all get orders ter go on, will yer jes' fur my sake try ter find de Colonel an' tell him a message? Jes' tell him not ter fret 'bout me, cos I'se goin' ter remember de hill!" G. W. had never humiliated himself by allowing any one to suppose he cared to go beyond the hill-top. "An' jes' tell him I'll take care ob de picture!"

There were tears rolling down G. W.'s upturned face. Corporal Jack laid down his pen and pad. "Well!" he cried, "you're a brick, G. W. But the Colonel is not going to forget you, G. W. Brace up and hold on. And just give us your hand, comrade!"

The two clasped hands gravely; then Corporal Jack went on with his letter, and G. W. passed into Colonel Austin's tent, to have all things ready in case there came an order to march.

Late that night, as G. W. lay upon his camp-bed (for he had been promoted from the humble mattress) in the dismantled tent, Colonel Austin entered. He was very weary, very pale. The boy upon the bed watched him silently. The moonlight was streaming in the opening, and the tall figure was distinctly outlined as the Colonel paused within the doorway and glanced about the bare, disordered place. All at once he seemed to understand; a smile flitted across his worn face. He went over to the soapbox table, shorn of its gorgeous cover, the photograph alone adorning it. He took the picture, looked long and tenderly at the two faces, then slipping the card out of the frame he put it in his breast pocket.

A moment later he came over to G. W.'s bed. The boy looked up trustingly.

"I'se awake, Colonel."

"Good for you, comrade. I want to have a little talk with you."

A thin brown little hand slipped itself into the large firm one, and G. W. sat up.

"G. W.," said the Colonel, "I'm going to the front. You know what that means?"

"I 'low I does, Colonel. When does we start? I'se been a-workin' ter get ready."

"But, comrade, *you* are not to go!" The poor little body-guard had feared this. In his misery he looked up into the Colonel's face and gulped helplessly.

"Don't take it that way, my child," said the Colonel, smoothing the little woolly head burrowing back in the pillow; "it would be impossible for me to take a little fellow like you along. There's just a chance, you know, G. W., that I may not get back. I've thought lately that I did wrong to bring you from Tampa; but you had nothing there, and we have had each other here, comrade, and *that* ought to count for something."

A tightening of the little hand replied.

"If I shouldn't come back, my child," the Colonel continued, "I want you to know that I have made all arrangements for you to be sent up to the Boy and his Mother. They'll look out for you, comrade, for they know that you are my little body-guard, and they will adopt you in their home—for your own sake too, G. W.; there's the making of a man in you, G. W., and you will not ever disappoint anybody, no matter what happens to me. During the coming days here, keep within your limits, my boy. Obey orders, and you will be a hero indeed, for I know how much you want to go along to take care of me. By staying right here you are doing a harder thing."

G. W. was sobbing forlornly. The Colonel got up and paced the tent for a silent moment or two.

"You've been the best kind of a comrade, G. W.," he went on, as he came back, while the listener drew his legs up and down under the coarse gray blanket, in an agony of sorrow. "And you're not going to fail me now, old fellow."

"Yes, sah! No, sah!" The pillow half stifled the words.

Presently poor G. W. sat up in bed again. "Colonel," he said, "you jes' banish me out yo' mind! You do your work, an' be keerful to take keer ob yo'self. I'se goin' ter do what yo want an' keep in dem limits—but if yo' does *not* come back frum dat front, I doan' think I can face dem two up Norf! I'd jes' feel dat I hadn't done been no body-guard—fo de Lawd, Colonel Austin, doan't ask me ter face de Boy an' his Mother 'thout you! I ain't goin' ebber ter forget what you don teach me, an' I'se nebber goin' ter shame yer while I lib, but I can't go 'thout you to dem—de Lawd knows I can't."

"Under those circumstances I'll be obliged to come back, G. W." Something choked the soldier's voice. Then bending down he kissed the boy's dusky brow, as often he had kissed the white one of his own little son.

"God bless you, comrade!" he whispered. "You've lightened many a burden for us all since you came among us. I trust you and I may be spared to meet again."

Then G. W. saw the tall form of the best friend he had on earth pass out of the tent, and fade away into the confusion and unreality of the moonlit night.

VII.

THE BATTLE ON THE HILL-TOP.

A strange atmosphere hung over the camp, an air of expectant waiting. The sick men tossed upon their beds bewailing their inability to be up and doing, and calling feverishly for "news!" But no news came; nothing to break the dismal monotony.

Everybody utilized G. W. The cook taught him to cook, and the nurses made him useful. The sick men smiled up at him as their only diversion. It was well for the boy that his days were filled with labor, and that he was too utterly weary at night to stay awake long. His dreams were filled far oftener than his waking thoughts with visions of the Colonel. His dreams were always happy ones—then the Colonel appeared well and jolly as G. W. had first known him. The little fellow hailed bed-time as the release from wretchedness.

"Now, then!" he would say to himself, as his lids grew heavy, "now I'se goin' ter see my Colonel Austin!" Sometimes he would laugh aloud in his sleep, so very jolly was he, but there was no one to hear the sound in the empty tent. Little G. W. had no folks now. His only good-night was the bugle-call, "All lights out!"

But in the trenches at the front a brave man always included G. W. in his loving thoughts of home and dear ones; and up North the Mother and the Boy ended their evening prayer, "God bless Daddy and G. W. Keep them safe and bring them home to us very soon!"

No one questioned G. W.'s goings and comings. If any thought was given, it was that he was probably obeying orders which Colonel Austin had left, and that he was proving himself a blessing where most boys would have been an annoyance and burden.

So one day when he sauntered away from the cluster of tents, no one asked him where he was bound, or how soon he would be back. He passed along walking very straight as became a

uniformed soldier, whistling a march-tune, now and then interrupting himself to introduce a clear flute-like note.

Something had happened to G. W. The day was oppressively hot, but his languor and sadness had vanished. He felt strong and happy; everything was beautiful, life was full of keen interest.

"I 'low somethin' is goin' ter occur!" he said to himself; "I has feelin's like my mammy used ter have. Sure's I'se a-walkin' here, the front is off dere 'yond de hill! Dat's whar de Colonel always went, an' dat's why he fix de top like a stun wall fur me. I 'clar I'se goin' up ter jes' look. What's I worth if I doan't take some chances ter find out news 'bout my Colonel Austin? Lawd! it seems like forty-seben years since he done walk away like a dream!"

Now, strange to say, before G. W. had started on this tramp, besides donning his entire uniform, he had taken his gun, a small but perfect one that some of the officers had given him as a reward for excellent target-shooting; and also he had filled his canteen with water in true soldier fashion.

Under the blazing sun his hot coat and trousers became almost unendurable, and except for his new feeling of strength and joyousness, his precious gun would have become a burden.

Suddenly he stood still, and his face became rapt and eager. He gazed up to the tall trees under which he stood.

"I'se clean forgot 'bout dat 'chance' ob mine fur ages; but, Lawd! jes' s'pose it should come to-day!" he gasped. The remembrance that his mammy had said that if he wanted to be a hero he would have the "chance" filled him with a wild delight. For a moment he could not move, so great was his glad feeling—then with a cheery whistle he plodded on straight toward his hill-top. It was an unlikely spot for "chances." It was too near camp for the foe to be there; but irresistibly G. W.'s feet carried him forward.

Overcome at length by the heat, G. W. reached the summit, only to sink down at once in the tangle of bushes and pant and puff. But after a while he revived; and then peering through the undergrowth he gazed down upon the plain below that stretched beyond his limit.

What had happened since last he had seen the spot? Was he dreaming, or actually looking down upon something that was really taking place? G. W. stood up and steadying himself against a tree continued to gaze and gaze below.

There was a big rude tent, with all sides open. Within was a long table around which figures moved restlessly or stood strangely still. Wagons were rolling up to this tent bringing burdens which turned poor little G. W. ill as he realized what they were. They were men! Sick or wounded men! Ready hands lifted the limp forms from the carts and laid them in long rows upon the ground; then, over and over again, as the fear-filled little watcher on the hill strained his eyes, he saw a man singled out from the lines and borne to the table. G. W. grew chill under the blazing sun as he looked, not comprehending what it meant.

"I can't—think—what—dat—means!" he said aloud; "'pears like I am habin' a dream standin' up out-doors wid my clo'es on. Lawd! how—I—does—wish—I—knew—what—dat—dar—means!"

The poor little fellow rubbed his head in a hopeless, forlorn way, while his heart beat fast and chokingly. Suddenly it came to him; like a flash the meaning became clear.

There had been a battle! They were bringing in the dead and wounded from the front to that fearsome spot below. Then G. W. shuddered as a new thought broke upon his brain. Perhaps his Colonel was there! The sudden idea took the form of a frenzy. He flung his arms up with a wild gesture, and then, alone on the hill-top, there was a battle on for G. W.—an exceedingly hard battle.

"Obey!" cried Honor; "'tis the thing you are called to do! 'Tis the thing you have promised!"

"But the Colonel may lie in the long row," pleaded Love; "no one near him to tend just him; no one to give him a drink or hold his head or his hand; to follow him and stay by him. He is just one of a row!"

G. W.'s sad little face turned gray.

"You promised!" Honor admonished. "He trusted you, with no doubt of your obedience!"

"But they may have forgotten him. He may be lying out on the battle-field—and no one could find him as surely as you!" Love sobbed in his ears.

With a pitiful moan, the little body-guard gave up his promise! A disobedient, loving little black boy sped down from the hill-top, on the forbidden side, sobbing and crying. He flung all but his love for the Colonel to the hot winds. He might be shot, he might lose his way endlessly, but he must go.

With a bitter cry he flung off his coat and cap as he ran. The honor of a soldier's uniform was no longer for him. He paused only to take the precious up-North letter out of the pocket and crush it into his shirt front.

VIII.

THE COLONEL'S BODY-GUARD

Tossing his canteen across his shoulder, and seizing his gun, G. W. tore on down the hill straight toward the gruesome place below, and right into it. No one noticed him. The surgeons were too busy to look up as he ran around the table scanning the faces upon the boards. The men carrying the helpless burdens, or ministering to their wants, had no time to question why a little black boy should suddenly be in among them.

He made sure that he had looked into every face, and then, with a feeling of relief, was about to turn away from the sad scene, when a weak voice stopped him.

"G. W.! Thank God! Come here!"

G. W. turned; there upon a blanket under a tree waiting for his turn to be taken to the table was the boy who but a few days before in camp had told him that war was "mighty near." War had indeed drawn near in haste, and poor young Corporal Jack had gone down before the enemy's fire.

"The Colonel," gasped Corporal Jack, as G. W. came and bent over him; "he was shot, too. We fell side by side. We crawled back, but when the wagon came he made them take me; there was only room for one. He's a mile back on the roadside. G. W., get help and go for him, and tell him God bless him!"

The weak voice ceased, for the men had come to carry him to the table. He tried to wave cheerfully to G. W., but the effort caused him to faint, and G. W. started away, trying to comprehend what he had heard.

"My Colonel's a mile back on the roadside!" That was all little G. W. had for a guide. But had his Colonel been a hundred miles back, it would have made no difference to his body-guard. There was but one aim in G. W.'s heart: to reach his Colonel, and save him for the Boy and the Mother up North!

On he ran, grasping his little gun in a rigid clutch. He forgot to implore aid from those he met as he rushed. Over the rough trail he sped like a deer. The fearful, ugly, swarming land-crabs scurried away from before him. "Colonel!" he sobbed, "fore de Lawd, Colonel, where is you? I'se a-comin', Colonel!—jes' you hold on!"

A wagon bearing another pitiful load came by.

"Is Colonel Austin in dar?" he cried.

Some one knew him and called an answer: "No, G. W., your Colonel isn't here!"

On, on, again.

What was that? A roar of cannon! G. W. shuddered, but gripped his gun and kept on, making forward.

Presently he began to meet more wounded men, singly, or in groups of two or three, trying with what strength remained in them to reach the rear. Occasionally a man knew the boy, and gave him a friendly smile; once one asked him for a drink.

"Don't youse take much of it, Captain," G. W. pleaded, holding the canteen to the parched lips, "cose dis is fur my Colonel Austin."

Be it to the man's eternal credit that, almost dying of thirst as he was, he handed back all but a mouthful of the blessed water. "Thank you; that will help me to the camp. Colonel Austin is to the right of the road, a little further back, behind some bushes; he tried to come on with me, but fell. I'll send you help, for he cannot walk. God bless you, G. W."

On through awful scenes the little black boy went. No one looked upon him with surprise. The small, familiar figure was part of the camp-life and war.

Again the little rescuer dashed on. And oh, go quickly now, G. W.! Among the tangled bushes is a slinking, leaf-covered figure running as rapidly as you!

Hurry, tired feet! Steady, little dusky hand! there is a deed for you to do which will make your name blessed up North, if only you are in time!

Ah, hist! A crackling among the bushes made G. W. pause.

What was it? With a sudden impulse the boy crouched in the jungle and listened. After a moment a form, covered with leaves, half crawled, half ran, near where he was hidden.

G. W. held his breath, and got his gun in position. He understood. He had heard of the foes' trick of covering themselves with leaves to escape attention, and he knew at once what he had to deal with. Never was he calmer than he grew at that moment.

But oh, look! the crawling form, in the open now, stopped, raised his gun, and took deliberate aim at something beyond. G. W. was as quick; and before there was time for the leafy form to draw

the trigger, his own small sure hand had flashed forth a bullet! With a cry the wretched creature flung up his arms and fell back.

G. W. stood up and wiped the perspiration from his cold, drawn face. His eyes were blazing, but the strange new calmness still possessed him. He pushed forward to find the object at which the Spaniard's gun had been aimed.

That it was "one of our boys" little G. W. of course knew; but he was *not* prepared for the sight that presently rose before him.

A bit beyond, leaning against a tree, bloodstained, dirt-begrimed, and faint, sat his Colonel.

At the first glimpse of him something like the ice of winter gave way in G. W.'s breast. The blood began to flow through his veins; the past was but a bad dream—he was once more a glad and loving little fellow.

"Colonel!" he whispered, like one coming out of sleep. "Colonel, I'se here!"

But Colonel Austin took no heed of the tender voice.

IX.

"I'SE GOT DE COLONEL!"

G. W. stumbled onward and reached the tree, put his arm about the officer, and carefully held the canteen to his lips. A gurgle, the water was drained to the last drop; and then, oh, joy! the heavy eyes opened.

It did not seem strange to Colonel Austin to see G. W.'s dusky face. It was but part of the troubled dream that held his heated brain.

"Hello, comrade!" he said. "Just tell them I couldn't see the little Corporal die. There was only room for one. He was crying for his mother, and he had been brave all day. The Boy and his Mother will—understand—by and by."

"Now you see heah, Colonel," said poor little G. W. "You jes' stop dat kind ob talk. Your laigs ain't hurt—it's your chist, an' you'se got ter git up an' come along!"

G. W.'s voice was full of fright and determination combined.

"No use, G. W.," groaned the Colonel. "I tried it, and fell. Help will be sent back, but it will be too late, my boy."

"You get up, sah!" persisted G. W. "You'se got ter make a move fur de Boy an' his Mother! I'se goin' ter sabe yo' fur dem, sah, like I swar to. Now stan' up, sah!"

Colonel Austin staggered to his feet, leaning upon the little shoulder.

The water had revived him, and G. W.'s words had recalled him to a sacred duty.

The wound in his breast began to bleed again, and the crimson drops fell upon G. W. The man's weight, too, almost bowed the little boy down. But he set his teeth and smiled grimly. The undertaking seemed nearly big enough for a hero to tackle—and here he was just a disobedient, dishonored little black boy!

"You'se doin' fine!" G. W. said, whenever Colonel Austin's steps flagged; "you'se done a mile *mos'*, Colonel; dere ain't but a step or two funder. Lean heavy, Colonel,—yo' jes' ain't no heft at all!" And all the while the keen eyes were searching the underbrush for another leaf-clothed foe.

Once they stopped so that G. W. might tear his shirt in strips and bind it roughly over the bleeding wound. The blessed letter from up North fell out upon the ground. G. W. clutched it and put it in his trousers pocket; the sight of it gave him fresh strength.

Stumbling and swaying, the two went on again. No help came along the road. But dust-covered and near to death, the comrades at length reached the field hospital.

It was growing dark when they came into the open space. Lanterns were hanging around the great rough table, and the restless figures were still moving about. With rising hope little G. W. made a last rally. "Come on, Colonel," he panted; "you jes' hang on to me. We'se all right now. Only you jes' come faster, Colonel! You jes' *run* now, Colonel,—dere ain't no call ter act so back'ard here,—you'se on de road home!"

The fainting man heard the brave soft voice, and he braced up and struggled yet again.

They were nearing the tent opening, the lanterns flashed, and the moonlight fell full upon their faces. A soldier among the many who were lying out under the stars saw them and cried out:

"Look, boys! It's Colonel Austin and G. W."

"Yes, sah!" the boy said simply. "I'se got de Colonel! here's de Colonel!"

"Three cheers for G. W.!" cried a weak voice. "G. W.'s saved the Colonel!"

The crowd of sufferers took up the quivering cry, and all around the tent spread the story of G. W.'s bravery.

A surgeon glanced up—then with an exclamation rushed forward.

"Austin!" he shouted. "Austin, let go of him, the boy is fainting! Here, some one, lift G. W.! I've got the Colonel!"

That was all. For little G. W. the lights went out. The voices melted into silence. The Colonel was safe! All was right.

X.

IN THE TENT HOSPITAL.

There were long, troubled dreams for little G. W.—dreams that were unlike those which used to come and cheer him in camp before he had given up his hopes of being a hero. These were full of terror—a longing for water, and visions of his dear Colonel wounded and dying.

Sometimes a skulking figure, leaf-covered and terrible, stalked through those pain-filled visions. Then he would shout for his gun. But always when he cried aloud, a voice familiar but distant called upon him to be calm and trust some one, whose name he had forgotten.

At last there came a day when the dreams began to fade. Voices not so distant reached him. Then he tasted water, for the first time, he thought, in years!

"Thank you!" he said to some one holding the glass to his lips, but did not open his eyes. He was very tired.

"G. W. is coming around all right," said a grave, quiet voice. "Plenty of nourishment, nurse,—all that you can get for him. That boy mustn't slip through our fingers." The boy heard, but he did not stir.

A new voice broke in upon the strange calm. "Can't you speak to me, my child?"

The simple question sent a thrill through the faithful heart. G. W. faintly unclosed his eyes. He must see who was speaking in that dear, dear voice.

"Colonel!" he whispered. "Oh! my Colonel!"

Then G. W.'s eyes opened wide. On the pillow of the bed next his own—for they were both lying in the tent hospital—he saw the face of Colonel Austin. The one face in the world that G. W. longed to see, and the one that he had dreamed and dreamed and dreamed was gone forever!

Little G. W. opened his lips with a gasp and an effort to speak. But memory rushed upon him. In that glance of recognition he remembered what he had done.

"I done broke my word, Colonel!" was what he said. Two slow tears rolled down the dusky cheeks.

"Yes, G. W."

"An' I follered you, Colonel, like you tole me not to."

"I know it—thank God!"

If poor little G. W. had not been so weak he would have sprung up; he tried to, but fell limply back.

"G. W., my child," said the Colonel, moving a little nearer, "if you had not disobeyed and come after me I would not have been here. You took your orders from some one higher in command, G. W. We're going home soon, going home together. Do you know what I am saying, G. W.? Just as soon as we can travel we are going up North together to the Boy and his Mother!"

Things happened for dear little G. W. in snatches after that. Pain-filled pauses and unconscious lapses and short, sudden, sharp throbs of happiness, made up life.

The Colonel gained his strength far sooner than G. W. He could have travelled, but he would not leave his little comrade. "I'll stay by the little chap until the end, or I'll take him home with me," he said to the doctor who urged his departure. "I'll never desert him."

The "end" did not come to G. W., however. All at once he began to mend. White and weak, his eyes too large for his face, for fever had worn him to a shadow, Colonel Austin sat beside his bed retelling the old hero-stories, while G. W. smiled with closed eyes. Sometimes the boy roused and asked a series of questions.

"When is we goin' home, Colonel?"

"On the next transport, comrade."

"I s'pose we has ter live in jes a house when we goes home?" sighed the boy.

"Why, G. W., a house isn't a bad thing—do you think so?"

"I likes tents mighty well, I does!" said G. W.

"Well, old man, don't lose heart; you're not going to live in a house right away."

"I spect de uniform wasn't nebber found up on de hill-top, Colonel?"

"No, my boy. There was no time to hunt up lost uniforms; it was all the boys could do to hunt up lost men."

"Colonel, what is I goin' ter do when dat transport comes in? No cloes, no nothin'!"

Colonel Austin laughed, and many a sick man's face relaxed at the sound.

"The Colonel is laughing—G. W.'s better," murmured a weak voice, and the good news travelled around the hospital tent.

"The Boy and his Mother are having a new suit made for you, G. W.," the Colonel said. "The Boy thought of it the first thing."

When the transport came that was to carry the Colonel, G. W., and several hundred others home, it had among its stores the new suit of blue for the destitute little soldier. If anything, it was more splendid than the first one, but it was wofully large for the poor little body-guard. When he first appeared in it the men were about to laugh, then grew suddenly silent as they saw the gray little dusky face, and remembered *why* G. W. had so shrunk. But even G. W. smiled after a moment.

He stood up by his cot, and put his hands in the pockets and spread wide the almost empty trouser-legs of the fine uniform.

"I clar," said he, "if you'se all didn't see me a standin' on my feet, yo nebber would say dere were legs 'tached to my body!"

"Never mind, G. W.!" It was Corporal Jack who spoke. He, too, was going home on the transport, and the knowledge had put a pound or so of flesh on his bones. "Never you care, G. W.! Those shanks'll get you into God's country; and your rightful legs will grow again up there. Lordy, G. W., if you only knew what is a-waiting for you!"

G. W. smiled inquiringly. Something was going to happen, as every one seemed to know. It was evidently an army secret, and the gossip of all the men, until G. W. drew near!

Then, smiling silence.

XI.

"IT'S ALL YOURS, G. W.!"

The cool air was sweeping, like a breath of Paradise, over the face of little G. W. They had brought him up on deck, for the transport was nearing home. Colonel Austin stood by, anxious; he did not like the look upon the thin, drawn countenance.

"Take a brace, G. W.!" he said, while he laid his fingers upon the weak pulse in the tiny wrist.

Sea-sickness had reduced the child to a mere skeleton. It had been worse than the fever. Not even the thought that "up North" was within sight could arouse him now.

"I see a long stretch of land, my boy," Colonel Austin went on, "and a fine white light-house on the farthest point. G. W., I'll bet you don't know what this light-house looks like!"

"I bet I doesn't!" G. W. spoke in a whisper, his eyes shut.

"In a few hours, G. W., we will swing into the bay." G. W. shuddered. The idea of *swinging* into anything made him ill afresh. "And then they will put you on a litter, old man, and I will walk beside you up to—up to—are you listening, G. W.?"

"Yes, sah!" Then a quiver passed over G. W.'s face. "I thought," he whispered, "I done thought I smelled land!"

"And so you do, old fellow," said the Colonel, cheerily. "Here, let me lift you up. Now, G. W., open your eyes! See the light-house shining like a slim white finger? That's Montauk Point, comrade, stretching along in the sea. They are going to land us here to rest a bit before we go home. Are you understanding, my child?"

G. W. lay staring at the scene with his great, round, soft eyes. The smell of the land was in his nostrils and presently he smiled a beautiful, satisfied smile, and Colonel Austin whispered, "Thank God!" under breath.

"Colonel," G. W. said, low, "you jes' fetch my clo'es! I'se goin' ter land wid my soldier-clo'es all on. Dat smell done cure me for sure! Dat's a mighty fine smell, Colonel, dat is!"

Some hours later the transport cast anchor in the lovely bay. In the early morning, when the sunlight danced upon the shining waves, never was there a fairer sight to greet sick, home-longing eyes.

At last it was G. W.'s turn to be carried up the gang-plank. Very gently they placed him upon the litter, and his Colonel walked beside it and held the small, weak hand. G. W. closed his eyes, for the excitement made him tremble, and lately he had had trouble with growing tearful on every possible occasion, and had had to squeeze his eyelids together hard.

They were carrying him along up somewhere—G. W. felt the upward motion. And now they were walking on even ground. Presently the shouting he had noticed before began again. It came nearer and words became distinct. Comrade was greeting comrade. There were welcomes for his Colonel, a welcome to Corporal Jack—his mother was there, some one said; she was up in the general's tent.

Suddenly a few words startled G. W. They seemed to him to ring out of the confusion of greetings like an alarm:

"Oh, look! there are Colonel Austin and his little hero!"

It was a woman's voice.

The heavy brown eyes of the little fellow in blue on the litter opened.

The procession of sick men was passing between lines of sympathizing people, but to G. W. they faded like visions. He turned his head and fixed his solemn gaze upon the one face in all the world dear to him.

"Colonel!" he gasped, "did yo' hear dem words—dem hero-words? Yo' better tell dem dat it ain't so!"

"Why, my child, they know all about it. You are as big a hero as ever was brought home—didn't you know it?"

"No, sah!" Again the lids closed—the battle with tears was renewed.

The next stage of little G. W.'s journey was made in an army ambulance. Over the hills and down the sandy valleys the big wagon went softly until it stopped before the long hospital tent on the hill overlooking the merry waves. Then G. W. was carried in and placed upon a bed, and a woman with a wonderful face came and bent over him. She wore a blue gown and a snowy cap and apron and kerchief. G. W. had never seen anybody in the world in the least like her. She stood and smiled down at him, and he smiled weakly up at her.

"Well, my little hero," she laughed in the most cheerful manner, as if it were quite a joke to see heroes carried about like babies, "it isn't so very bad! I think I can get you on your feet in—let me see—well, three days at the farthest."

Three days! If she had said three years the boy would have felt doubtful, for his legs were but waving strings.

This smiling woman in blue and white fed him—about every two minutes, he thought; as soon as he had swallowed one thing she went away for another, and came back and fed him again; and he swallowed all the things down, and began soon to laugh as merrily as she.

Sure enough, upon the third day, and in the morning, too, she came walking up to G. W.'s cot with Colonel Austin, and over her arm hung the fine new uniform.

"My boy," she laughed,—she always laughed,—and drew a screen about the bed, "we're going to put your clothes on you, and if you lean upon both Colonel Austin and me, I think you can manage to take a bit of a walk. We have something very important to show you."

How he got into his dear blue clothes, G. W. never knew; but at length, and rather unsteadily, he was walking between the nurse and his Colonel down the aisle of the tent.

Weak cheers followed him from rows of cots. Thin hands waved him salutes. On the whole, it was rather jolly and inspiring.

By the time he reached the door G. W. was walking more steadily, and the strong salt air put life into him at the first breath as he came outside in the sunlight.

"Just up this hill, now, G. W.,—can you make it?" asked the Colonel. "Take breath, go slowly, lean heavily. The last time you and I took a walk, comrade, I nearly bent you double. We're going to my tent."

G. W. gazed about him. A city of snowy tents under a blue, blue sky. Water everywhere round about, dancing in the sunlight and making a great roar as if constantly saluting the brave soldier boys who had come home to rest. Down a hillside a troop of cavalry came galloping. The horses were to take a plunge in the ocean, and oh! how they loved the sport.

G. W. shouted out weakly in pure delight.

"Dat's fine! Dat's fine!" he gasped, waving his thin little brown hand as horses and riders tore past.

Then G. W. wearily asked, "Whar did you say yo' tent is, Colonel?"

"Right there, my boy."

G. W. looked.

"What's dat little tent fur, by de side ob it?"

"That's yours, G. W."

The nurse tightened her grasp of the trembling arm.

"Mine! dere's a flag a-flying on top, Colonel! An' dere's a little horse a-pawin' in de front ob de tent-do', Colonel!"

"All yours, G. W! Let's get on if you can, my boy!"

At last the tents were reached. They entered G. W.'s. It was perfect. Camp bed, soapbox table, flag-draped, a folding stool and all; and in the corner stood the little gun—the precious gun that had done such brave service for the Colonel.

"Lie down now, G. W.," said the nurse; and the child promptly obeyed. He could take in the great scene just as well from the bed, and there was less danger of falling all in a heap if it got too overpowering.

"My boy, there is some one waiting who wishes to see you," said Colonel Austin, presently; "may I bring the person in?"

Five minutes later two persons instead of one entered with G. W.'s Colonel. One glance—and G. W. knew that he was in the presence of the Boy and his Mother! He struggled to get upon his feet, but the nurse's hand held him back; he merely gave a wan smile, and saluted gravely.

"Oh, G. W.!" cried the Mother, holding her hands toward him from where she stood, the tears raining down from her bright eyes. "Oh, G. W., you brave child, I did not know you were so *very* small!"

G. W. had never seen such a vision of loveliness as the lady was; but he was afraid of her.

"How can I help kissing you, you blessed child!" she went on, coming close.

Kissing him! G. W. glanced about wildly.

The lady's eyes filled up with bright tears anew. "No, I will not kiss you, G. W. Of course not. You see I do not know very well just what it is safe to do with such small-sized heroes as you and Jack!"

She turned to the Boy, who had stood motionless, looking on. "Jack," she said, "it *is* our G. W., Daddy's body-guard."

Jack came forward. There was a suggestion of lace and curls about him perhaps, but his face gave G. W. a feeling of firm ground under his feet at last.

"Hello!" said Jack, and held out a plump white hand.

"Hello!" G. W. replied, and laid his thin brown fingers slowly in the other's grasp.

The moment while Jack stood by the little soldier's bed was long enough for the two boys to eye each other well.

Jack spoke first. "You saved my father, G. W.,—you are a brick! Whatever I've got, you can have half of it."

"Did you see dat hoss by de do'?" said G. W., after a moment. "Dat hoss is mine! You—can—take—de fust ride! An' dis is my tent, my Colonel give it to me, an' dis an' all dat I'se got b'longs ter you half!"

Then they smiled broadly into each other's faces, forgetting the onlookers.

"We're going to be just like brothers," whispered Jack Austin. That was the thought that floated through the dusky little bodyguard's dreams that night as he slept in the little tent beside the Colonel's.

And the Mother's words to the Colonel mingled with Jack's: "The boys'll have a good time!"

And the tall light-house on the Point blazed out its message to the sailors upon the sea, "All's well! All's well!" And to the brave soldier-boys sleeping within its shadow it sent down soft rays of light that breathed, "All's well! All's well!"

On his cot poor weak little G. W., waking in the moonlight, smiled and sighed with content, then smiled again.

XII.

A HISTORY-EVENING AT OAKWOOD.

"G. W., stand up in front of me, and answer!"

G. W. took position and looked unflinchingly into the eyes of his Colonel.

The rapturous life at Montauk was a thing of the past—the little body-guard never could think of it without his heart aching with happiness.

It was the most glorious experience a boy ever had. The Colonel wondered how G. W. had escaped being utterly ruined, for people had lost their heads over him, and even stern army men had shown a soft side toward the dusky little fellow. However, G. W. was a real hero, and such you simply cannot ruin.

Now the scene was changed. The Colonel and G. W. were in the library of the home "up North;" they wore citizen's clothes and looked well and hearty.

"G. W., do you remember what you once told me a hero was?"

"Yes, sah."

"Well, you proved yourself one, on a certain occasion, and I reckon you and I will never forget it."

"No, sah!"

"But, G. W., there are many kinds of heroes, as I have often told you. A fellow that can be a hero under *all* circumstances is a chap worth knowing."

"Yes, sah!" All this sounded ominous, and G. W. pulled himself together.

"Well, my boy, you've got to go into a conflict again, another sort of a conflict, and I wish to heaven I could prepare you; but you'll have to battle it out, according to what is in you, as you did before, on the hill-top in Cuba. I'm going to send you to school, my boy, with Jack. It's a military school and the head master knows all about you, and *wants* you there. The others don't know."

"Yes, sah!" The low voice had a tone that always unnerved the Colonel—a tone of complete obedience, of complete understanding, and complete resignation.

"You see, G. W., I want to fit you for life," the Colonel went on. "I'm going to give you your chance. It's going to be a hard pull. The odds will be against you. It isn't just that it should be so, but it is so. Your color, comrade, often will go against you, though your heart is the pure heart of a brave, honest child."

"Yes, sah."

"Of course," the deep voice went on, "I could buy favor for you at the school, by telling the story of your bravery—a sort of honor for you; but, G. W., I want you to win your own position there, just as you always have, so far. It will be a tussle, but I think you'd like to make the try?"

"Yes, sah."

"Because you'll have to tussle and try through life, you know, comrade."

"Yes, sah!"

The firm white hand took the little brown one in a warm hold. "And I shan't bind you with any promises this time, G. W.," the Colonel said.

A warm color stole over G. W.'s dusky cheeks. He looked up and spoke unexpectedly to the Colonel. "Dere was two promises, Colonel. I kep' de promise to de Boy and his Mother, sah. I kep' de promise to take care ob you, sah."

The poor little body-guard, so long sick and torn with shame over his disobedience and tarnished honor, had thought the whole matter out to the comfort of his soul. He looked up fearlessly into his Colonel's eyes.

"So you did, G. W.," said the officer, humbly, but with a lighted face. "And God bless you, comrade!"

The whole matter was clear to them both forever.

A week later the two boys went with Colonel Austin to enter the famous school where little G. W., as a private citizen of the Republic he had served according to his strength, was to begin to hew out his fortunes, with the odds, as his Colonel had said, against him.

The head master greeted him cordially, and the other teachers followed the example. At the very outset the pupils were divided among themselves and withheld their verdict. The open comradeship of Colonel Austin's son was the thing that counted in the matter for the time being.

The outcome of this school-life—not for their own boy, but for G. W.—was a grave matter with the Colonel and the Colonel's wife for those first weeks.

"No one can hold out against his merry sweetness," said Mrs. Austin again and again.

The question with the Colonel was whether the little fellow had the sort of heroism to endure what he could not help.

G. W. was undoubtedly "sweet," undoubtedly brave, but he was not "merry" those first months of school life. The work of lessons was bitter-hard for him, and the school routine most painful. Never in his life before had he given a thought to his color. In the Tampa days, before he had entered Colonel Austin's tent to "offer himself up on the altar of his country," there had never been a question as to his "position;" he had been just a "waif." His "army career" had placed him upon a pinnacle where his color had served but to add to his glory.

Here, on the playground, except for Jack and three or four others, G. W. was quietly ignored, and in a helpless way the little fellow felt it keenly, despite the Colonel's warning.

He tried to look ahead. He studied more and more diligently. He meant to be all the kinds of hero that Colonel Austin desired.

"Fo' de Lawd!" he said one day in his room, as he scanned his trim figure in the gray school uniform before the glass. "Fo' de Lawd! I can't understand it." (G. W. was beginning to put the "d's" and "g's" on words now.) "I don't lie, and I ain't afraid of nothing—and I wouldn't do a mean thing any sooner dan dey! It's jes' my skin, and my skin's only a different color on the *outside*, de inside is jes'—is just de same." Poor little G. W.

"An' I'se getting 'long fine in my classes." (So he was, and at the cost of terrific strain and study.) "An' I likes—I like the—boys first rate—but nawthing in dis education's going to git de black off dis skin!"

There was one hour in the school-day that George Jones—he was "G. W." only to Jack Austin, and that in private—enjoyed thoroughly.

This was an evening hour when one of the younger professors took the smaller pupils into a library and told them history stories; stories dealing with valiant deeds. There was a flavor of camp life and soldiering about many of the tales that George Jones understood far better than the other boys. In the glow of his interest he generally forgot to notice if any boy edged away from him when he chanced to forget his "color" and drew too near; but Colonel Austin's son always noticed it, and his loyal heart ached.

"Oh! if I were only sure that Daddy would think this was a good time to speak out!" Jack often muttered between his teeth. "I wish these fellows knew how awfully white G. W. is inside!"

But the Colonel had warned Jack against "speaking out" unless indignities to little G. W. should become unendurable.

During one of these story hours in the library, G. W. had remained in the study-room to conquer a particularly knotty problem in addition, while Jack, eager for the tale, which was to be an unusually splendid one, ran on ahead. It happened that when G. W. reached the room he was the last, and the others were clustered around Professor Catherwood.

G. W. paused a moment to look for Jack, but among those dark and light heads grouped close he could not distinguish him. Just then the story plunged into the thick of interest, and G. W. took the nearest empty chair. Unfortunately it was beside Tom Harding, a very quick-tempered but warm-hearted boy, who had, perhaps, more than any other pupil, made G. W.'s life at "Oakwood" a grim experience. He glanced around as G. W. sat down. "Please take another seat!" he said.

For a moment the silence vibrated. G. W. arose and stood rigid, with downcast eyes. The master, too much disturbed to speak, was silent. But Jack Austin arose.

"Tom Harding!" he said with flashing eyes, "George Jones has a white heart and he is the bravest boy in this room! If you knew"—

At this point G. W. went to Jack's side. "Don't you tell dat, Jack!" he said. "Don't yer! You know what de—the Colonel said. Don' yer displeas de Colonel!"

But Jack's blood was up. There was something in his young voice that quieted even G. W. He put his hand upon G. W.'s shoulder and kept it there while he spoke.

"George is my legally adopted brother, boys. He saved my father's life down in Cuba." Then came the whole brave, pathetic story, broken here and there by a shake in Jack's voice.

"And when G. W.—Jack had forgotten the more dignified name—"made up his mind on the hill-top to go down after my father, he plunged off where Spaniards were hidden thick and bullets flying. He went alone, and he was awful little. And he went on, and wounded soldiers met him and told him my father was off helpless on the ground in some bushes, and he got near there and he saw a Spaniard aiming his gun and G. W. aimed his and shot true, and the soldier the Spaniard was going to shoot—was my father! And G. W. got my own father back to the tent hospital all alone and no one else on earth did it. My father says G. W. had a glorious, glorious hero-strength. My father and my mother and myself are never, never going to forget what G. W. did! And G. W. is going to have the best life my father can help him get! Now isn't he brave and

fine enough to be respected? Is any one going to mind his brown color when his soul is as white—as white as snow? What would you have of a boy?" Jack's voice failed him. G. W., by his side, stood with his back to the boys, even yet as rigid as a statue.

For a second—stillness; then a stir in the group. Tom Harding came forward, his fine young face quivering with emotion.

"I beg your pardon, George," he said. "I will never make your life hard again!"

"Nor I! Nor I! Nor any of us!"

It came like a shout.

A smile beamed upon the face of little G. W. His simple, strong, sunny nature responded to the honest outburst. He turned to the boys.

"I'se sorry about my skin," he said slowly, "since you-all don't like de color; but I like de—the color of yours, and I'se goin'—going ter learn all that de Colonel wants me ter learn! I'se never going to disappoint de Colonel!"

Professor Catherwood raised his hand. "Three cheers for *our* hero!" said he.

"I think," he went on, when the hurraing had died down, "that two hero stories are almost too many for one evening; besides you've got a chance to know a live hero. I am sure no boy of Oakwood will ever again fail to recognize the real article in the hero line, when he sees it. Good-night!"

Since that evening G. W.'s only battles have been with his school-books. And but for the manly help of his honest school-mates, the far-off victory would seem even dimmer than it does to George Washington McKinley Jones.

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