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SI KLEGG

The Deacon's Adventures At Chattanooga In Caring For The Boys

By John McElroy

Book Five

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THE SIX VOLUMES

SI KLEGG, Book I, Transformation From a Raw Recruit
SI KLEGG, Book II, Through the Stone River Campaign
SI KLEGG, Book III, Meets Mr. Rosenbaum, the Spy
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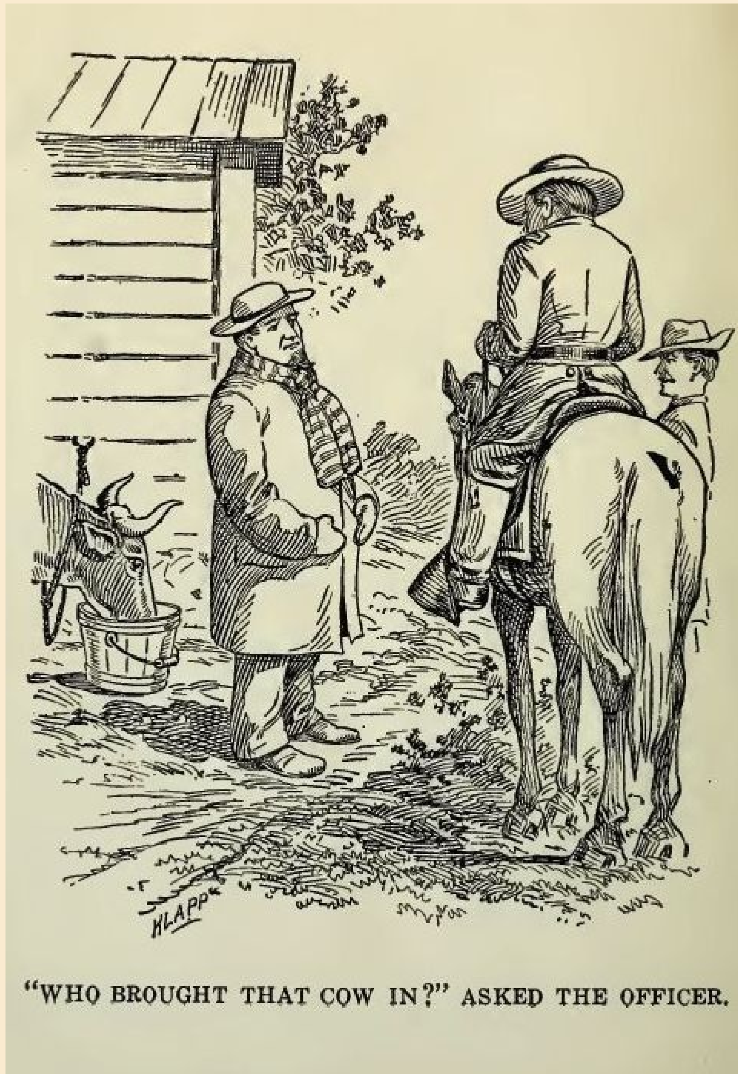

"WHO BROUGHT THAT COW IN?" ASKED THE OFFICER.

SI KLEGG

THE DEACON'S ADVENTURES AT CHATTANOOGA IN CARING FOR THE BOYS.

BY JOHN MCELROY.

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PREFACE

"Si Klegg, of the 200th Ind., and Shorty, his Partner," were born years ago in the brain of John McElroy, Editor of The National Tribune.

These sketches are the original ones published in The National Tribune, revised and enlarged somewhat by the author. How true they are to nature every veteran can abundantly testify from his own service. Really,

only the name of the regiment was invented. There is no doubt that there were several men of the name of Josiah Klegg in the Union Army, and who did valiant service for the Government. They had experiences akin to, if not identical with, those narrated here, and substantially every man who faithfully and bravely carried a musket in defense of the best Government on earth had sometimes, if not often, experiences of which those of Si Klegg are a strong reminder.'

The Publishers.

THIS BOOK IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO THE RANK AND FILE OF THE GRANDEST ARMY EVER MUSTERED FOR WAR.

SI KLEGG

CHAPTER I. THE DEACON PROVIDES

RESORTS TO HIGHWAY ROBBERY AND HORSE STEALING.

THE Deacon was repaid seventyfold by Si's and Shorty's enjoyment of the stew he had prepared for them, and the extraordinary good it had seemed to do them as they lay wounded in the hospital at Chattanooga, to which place the Deacon had gone as soon as he learned that Si was hurt in the battle.

"I won't go back on mother for a minute," said Si, with brightened eyes and stronger voice, after he had drained the last precious drop of the broth, and was sucking luxuriously on the bones; "she kin cook chickens better'n any woman that ever lived. All the same, I never knowed how good chicken could taste before."

"Jehosephat, the way that does take the wrinkles out down here," said Shorty, rubbing appreciatively the front of his pantaloons. "I feel as smooth as if I'd bin starched and ironed, and there's new life clear down to my toe-nails. If me and Si could only have a chicken a day for the next 10 days we'd feel like goin' up there on the Ridge and bootin' old Bragg off the hill. Wouldn't we, Si?"

"Guess so," acceded Si cheerily, "if every one made us feel as much better as this one has. How in the world did you git the chicken, Pap?"

"Little boys should eat what's set before 'em, and ask no questions," said the father, coloring. "It's bad manners to be pryin' around the kitchen to find out where the vittles come from."

"Well, I've got to take off my hat to you as a forager," said Shorty. "A man that kin find a chicken in Chattenoogy now, and hold on to it long enough to git it in the pot, kin give me lessons in the art. When I git strong enough to travel agin I want you to learn me the trick."

The Deacon did not reply to the raillery. He was pondering anxiously about the preservation of his four remaining chickens. The good results manifest from cooking the first only made him more solicitous about the others. Several half-famished dogs had come prowling around, from no one knew where. He dared not kill them in daylight. He knew that probably some, if not all, of them had masters, and the worse and more dangerous a dog is the more bitterly his owner resents any attack upon him. Then, even hungrier looking men with keen eyes and alert noses wandered near, with inquiry in every motion. He would have liked to take Shorty into his confidence, but he feared that the ravenous appetite of convalescence would prove too much for that gentleman's continence.

He kept thinking about it while engaged in what he called "doin' up the chores," that is, making Si and Shorty comfortable for the day, before he lay down to take a much-needed rest. He had never been so puzzled in all his life. He thought of burying them in the ground, but dismissed that because he would be seen digging the hole and putting them in, and if he should escape observation, the dogs would be pretty certain to nose them out and dig them up. Sinking them in the creek suggested itself, but had to be dismissed for various reasons, one being fear that the ravenous catfish would devour them.

"If I only had a balloon," he murmured to himself, "I might send 'em up in that. That's the only safe way I kin think of. Yes, there's another way. I've intended to put a stone foundation under that crib, and daub it well, so's to stop the drafts. It orter be done, but it's a hard day's work, even with help, and I'm mortal tired. But I s'pose it's the only way, and I've got to put in stones so big that a dog can't pull 'em out."

He secured a couple of negroes, at prices which would have paid for highly-skilled labor in Indiana, to roll up enough large stones to fill in the space under the crib, and then he filled all the crevices with smaller ones, and daubed over the whole with clay.

"There," he said, as he washed the clay from his hands, "I think them chickens are safe for to-night from the dogs, and probably from the men. Think of all that trouble for four footy chickens not worth more'n four bits

in Injianny. They're as much bother as a drove o' steer'd be. I think I kin now lay down and take a wink o' sleep."

He was soon sleeping as soundly as only a thoroughly-tired man can, and would have slept no one knows how long, had not Shorty succeeded in waking him towards morning, after a shaking which exhausted the latter's strength.

"Wake up, Mister Klegg," said Shorty; "it must 've bin rainin' dogs, and they're tryin' to tear the shanty down."

The Deacon rubbed his eyes and hastened a moment to the clamor outside. It seemed as if there were a thousand curs surrounding them, barking, howling, snarling, fighting, and scratching. He snatched up a club and sprang out, while Shorty tottered after. He ran into the midst of the pack, and began laying about with his strong arms. He broke the backs of some, brained others, and sent the others yelping with pain and fright, except two particularly vicious ones, who were so frenzied with hunger that they attacked him, and bit him pretty severely before he succeeded in killing them. Then he went around to the end of the crib nearest his precious hoard, and found that the hungry brutes had torn away his clay and even the larger of the stones, and nothing but their fighting among themselves had prevented the loss of his chickens. "What in tarnation set the beasts onto us," inquired Shorty wonderingly. "They were wuss'n cats around catnip, rats after aniseed, or cattle about a spot o' blood. I've felt that me and Si wuz in shape to bring the crows and buzzards around, but didn't expect to start the dogs up this way."

"I've got four chickens hid under the underpinnin' there for you and Si," confessed the Deacon. "The dogs seemed to 've smelled 'em out and wuz after 'em."

He went to the hiding place and pulled out the fowls one after another. "They are all here," he said; "but how in the world am I goin' to keep 'em through another night?"

"You ain't a-goin' to keep 'em through another night, are you?" asked Shorty anxiously, as he gloated over the sight. "Le's eat 'em to-day."

"And starve to-morrer?" said the thrifty Deacon rebukingly. "I don't know where any more is comin' from. It was hard enough work gittin' these. I had calculated on cookin' one a day for you and Si. That'd make 'em provide for four more days. After that only the Lord knows what we'll do."

"Inasmuch as we'll have to trust to the Lord at last, anyway," said Shorty, with a return of his old spirit, "why not go the whole gamut? A day or two more or less won't make no difference to Him. I feel as if I could eat 'em all myself without Si's help."

"I tell you what I'll do," said the Deacon, after a little consideration. "I feel as if both Si and you kin stand a little more'n you had yesterday. I'll cook two to-day. We'll send a big cupful over to Capt. McGillicuddy. That'll leave us two for to-morrer. After that we'll have to trust to Providence."

"If ever there was a time when He could use His ravens to advantage," said the irreverent Shorty, "it's about now. They carried bread and meat to that old prophet. There's a lot o' mighty good men down here in this valley now in terrible want of grub, and nothin' but birds kin git over the roads to the rear very well."

"Don't speak lightly o' the Lord and His ways, Shorty," said the Deacon severely.

"'Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace.
Behind a frowning Providence
He hides a smilin' face,'

as the hymn says. Here, take these chickens in one hand and this pistol in the other, and guard 'em while I go down to the branch and wash and git some water. Then I'll cook your breakfast."

Again the savory smell of the boiling chickens attracted sick boys, who begged for a little of the precious food. Having double the quantity, the Deacon was a little more liberal, but he had to restrain Shorty, who, despite his own great and gnawing hunger, would have given away the bigger part of the broth to those who so desperately needed it.

"No, Shorty," said the prudent Deacon. "Our first duty is to ourselves. We kin help them by gittin' you and Si on your feet. We can't feed the whole Army o' the Cumberland, though I'd like to."

A generous cupful was set aside for Capt. McGillicuddy, which his servant received with gratitude and glowing reports of the good the former supply had done him.

With the daylight came the usual shells from the rebel guns on Lookout Mountain. Even the Deacon was getting used to this noisy salutation to the morn, and he watched the shells strike harmlessly in the distance with little tremor of his nerves. As the firing ceased, amid the derisive yells of the army, he said quietly:

"GIT DOWN FROM THERE!" COMMANDED THE DEACON.

"That last shell's saved me a good deal o' work diggin'. It, tore out a hole that'll just do to bury the carcasses of these dogs."

Accordingly, he dragged the carcasses over after breakfast, and threw the dirt back in the hole upon them.

The two remaining chickens were stowed in a haversack, and during the day hung outside from the ridge-pole of the crib, where they were constantly under the eye of either the Deacon or Shorty, who took turns watching them. That night the Deacon slept with them under his head, though they were beginning to turn a little, and their increasing gameness brought a still larger herd of dogs about. But the Deacon had securely fastened the door, and he let them rage around as they pleased.

When they were cooked and eaten the next morning the Deacon became oppressed with anxious thought. Where were the next to come from? The boys had improved so remarkably that he was doubly anxious to continue the nourishing diet, which he felt was necessary to secure their speedy recovery. Without it they would probably relapse.

He could think of nothing but to go back again to the valley where he got the chickens, and this seemed a most desperate chance, for the moment that either of the old couple set eyes on him he or she would give the alarm. He went to sleep thinking about the matter, and when he rose up in the morning, and had nothing to offer his boys but the coarse and uninviting hardtack, pork and coffee, he made up his mind to take the chances, whatever they might be. He set out again immediately after breakfast, and by cutting across the mountain came to the entrance to the valley a little after noon. Keeping close under cover of the woods, he approached within sight of the house, and carefully scanned it. What to do he had scarcely planned. He was only determined to have some fresh meat to take back to camp. He was going to get it as honestly and fairly as he could, but fresh meat he must have.

He could see no other house anywhere in the distance, and probably if he went farther he would run into rebel bushwhackers and guerrillas, who were watching from the high ridges. So long as he kept under cover of the woods he would feel all right, for he was as skilled in woodcraft as any of them, and could take care of himself. But if he should come out into the open fields and road to cross the valley they would have him at an advantage. He was confirmed in this fear by seeing several little clouds of smoke rise up above the tops of the trees on the ridge.

"There's a gang of rebels in camp over there," said he to himself, with a woodman's quick reading of every sign. "That smoke's from their fires. 'Tain't enough of it to be clearin' ground; people ain't clearin' up at this time o' year; that ground over there ain't the kind they'd clear up for anything. 'Twouldn't raise white beans if it was cleared; and you don't hear nobody choppin'."

He looked again at the house. Everything was very quiet and peaceful around it. There was no stock in the barnyard or fields, and the only signs of life were the smoke rising from one of the great stone chimneys, the chickens picking and scratching in the garden, a couple of negresses, who occasionlly passed back and forth

between the main house and another cabin apparently used as a kitchen.

The Deacon had almost made up his mind to march boldly down to the house, snatch up a few of the chickens, and make his way back to the woods again, before the old couple could summon assistance. Suddenly his quick eyes caught a glimpse of something at a point where the road from the ridge came down out of the woods. Then that something developed into a man on horseback, who rode forward to a little rise, stopped, and surveyed the landscape cautiously, and then rode forward toward the house.

He dismounted and entered the house. In a few minutes there appeared unusual bustle and activity, during which the man rode back again, munching as he went at a piece of cornpone and one of meat, which he had gotten at the house, and held in either hand, while his reins lay on his horse's neck.

The old woman came out into the yard with some meat in her hand, and the shrill note of her orders to the negresses reached the Deacon's ears, though he could not make out the words. But he saw one of them go to the spring and bring water, which she poured in a wash-kettle set up in the yard, while the old woman prepared the beef and put it in, the other negress started a fire, and the old man chopped and split wood to put around the kettle and fill the stone oven near by.

"They're cookin' vittels for them rebels on the ridge." The Deacon correctly diagnosed the situation. "By-and-by they'll come for 'em, or take 'em to 'em. Mebbe I kin find some way to collar some of 'em. It's a slim chance, but no other seems to show up just now. If no more'n one man comes for that grub I'm goin' to jump him."

The Deacon looked at the caps on his revolver and began laying plans for a strategic advance under the cover of the sumachs to a point where he could command the road to the house.

His cheek paled for an instant as the thought obtruded that the man might resist and he have to really shoot him.

"I don't want to shoot nobody," he communed with himself, "and it won't 'be necessary if the other fellow is only sensible and sees, that I've got the drop on him, which I will have before I say a word. Anyway, I want that grub for a work of necessity and mercy, which justifies many things, and as a loyal man I ought to keep it from goin' to rebels. If I've got to put a bullet into another feller, why, the Lord'll hold me guiltless and blame the other feller. I ain't no Free Will Baptist. I believe things 've bin foreordained. Wisht I knowed that it was foreordained that I was to git that grub back to Si and Shorty."

Presently he saw the old man come out and take a path into the woods. He cautiously circled around to where he could follow and watch him. He saw him make his way to a secluded little cove, where there was a corn-crib partially filled and a rude shelter, under which were a buckboard and fairly-good young horse. The old man began putting the clumsy harness of ropes, chains and patched leather on the horse and hitching him to the buckboard.

"Good, the old man's goin' to take the grub out to 'em himself," thought the Deacon with relief. "He'll be easy to manage. No need o' shootin' him."

He hurried back to his covert, and then shpped unseen down to where he had selected for his ambush. The old man drove the buckboard around to the front of the house, and the negresses, obeying the shrill orders of the old woman, brought out pones of smoking cornbread, and buckets, tin pans and crocks containing the meat, potatoes, turnips and other food, and loaded them on to the buckboard. The fragrance of the food reached the Deacon's nostrils, and made his mouth water and fond anticipations rise as to the good it would do the boys.

"I'll have that grub, and the boys shall have it," he determined, "or there'll be an Injianny Deacon pretty badly used up."

The old man mounted into the seat, gathered up the rope lines, and chirruped to the horse to start.

When he came opposite, the Deacon jumped out, seized the reins, and pointing his revolver at him, commanded sternly:

"Git down from there, and git down quick."

The old man dropped the lines, and for an instant gazed at him with scared eyes.

"Why, yo' robber, what d'yo' mean?" he gasped.

"Git down from there, and git down quick!" repeated the Deacon.

"Why, this is highway robbery, threats, puttin' in bodily fear, attempted murder, hoss-stealin'."

"Hain't no time to argy law with you," said the Deacon impatiently. "This ain't no court-room. You ain't in session now. Git down, and git down quick!"

"Help! help! murder! robbery! thieves!" shouted the old man, at the top of his voice.

The negresses, who had been watching their master depart, set to screaming, and the old woman rushed back into the house and blew the horn. The Deacon thrust his revolver back into the holster, caught the old man with his sinewy hand, tore him from the seat, and flung him into the fence-corner. He sprang into the seat, turned the horse's head toward Chattanooga, and hit him a sharp cut with a switch that lay in the wagon.

"I've got about three miles the start," he said as he rattled off. "This horse's young and fresh, while their's probably run down. The road from here to the main road's tollably good, and I think I kin git there before they kin overtake me."

At the top of the hill he looked back, and saw the rebels coming out. Apparently they had not understood what had happened. They had seen no Yankees and could not have seen the Deacon's tussle with the old man. They supposed that the holler simply meant for them to come in and get their dinner, instead of having it taken out to them. All this passed through the Deacon's mind, and he chuckled over the additional start it would give him.

"They won't find out nothin' till they git clean to the house," he said. "By that time I'll be mighty nigh the main road. My, but wouldn't I like to have as many dollars as they'll be mad when they find the Yankee trick that's bin played on 'em, with their dinner hauled off into the Union camp."

He rattled ahead sharply for some time, looking back at each top of a hill for his pursuers. They did not come in sight, but the main road to Chattanooga did, and then a new trouble suggested itself.

"I won't never dare haul this load uncovered through camp," he said to himself. "The first gang o' roustabout teamsters that I meet'll take every spoonful of the vittles, and I'd be lucky if I have the horse and wagon left. I must hide it some way. How? That's a puzzler."

At length a happy idea occurred to him. He stopped by a cedar thicket, and with his jack-knife cut a big load of cedar boughs, which he piled on until every bit of food was thoroughly concealed. This took much time, and as he was finishing he heard a yell on the hill behind, and saw a squad of rebels riding down toward him. He sprang to the seat, whipped up his horse, and as he reached the main road was rejoiced to see a squad of Union cavalry approaching.

"Here, old man," said the Lieutenant in command; "who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"I'm a nurse in the hospital," answered the Deacon unhesitatingly. "I was sent out here to get some cedar boughs to make beds in the hospital. Say, there's some rebels out there, comin' down the hill. They saw me and tuk after me. You'll find 'em right over the hill."

"That's a pretty slick horse you're driving," said the Lieutenant. "Looks entirely too slick to belong to Chattanooga. It's a much better horse than mine. I've a notion—"

"Say, them rebels are just over the hill, I tell you," said the Deacon in a fever of apprehension of losing his steed. "They'll be on top of you in a minute if you don't look out."

"Right over the hill, did you say?" said the Lieutenant, forgetting for the moment the horse. "Attention, there, boys. Look out for the rebels. Advance carbines—Forward—trot! I'll come back directly and take another look at that horse."

The squad trotted up the hill in the direction the Deacon had pointed, and as he drove off as fast as he could he heard the spatter of exchanging shots.

Late in the evening, as he drove off the pontoon into Chattanooga and turned to the right toward his corn-crib he muttered over to himself:

"They say that when a man starts down the path of sin and crime the road seems greased for his swift progress. The other day I begun with petty larceny and chicken stealin'. To-day it's bin highway robbery, premeditated murder, horse stealin', grand larceny, and tellin' a deliberate lie. What'll I be doin' this time next week? I must git that old man's horse and buckboard back to him somehow, and pay him for his vittles. But how'm I goin' to do it? The army's terribly demoralizin'. I must git Si back home soon, or I won't be fit to associate with anybody outside the penitentiary. How kin I ever go to the communion table agin?"

CHAPTER II. THE DEACON ATTEMPTED RESTITUTION

TRIED TO RETURN THE HORSE TO HIS OWNER.

SI AND SHORTY were on the anxious lookout for the Deacon when he arrived, and not a little worried lest something might have befallen him.

Si's weakness made him peevish and fretful, and Shorty was not a great deal better.

"It's an awful risk to have an old man and a civilian come down here into camp," Si complained. "And he oughtn't to go about alone. He's always been used to mingling with the quiet, honest, respectable people. Up home the people are as honest as the day is long. They're religious and peaceable, and Pap's never knowed no other kind. He wouldn't harm nobody for the world, and none o' them'd harm him. He's only a child among these toughs down here. I wisht one of us was able to be with him all the time."

"That father o' yours is certainly quite an innocent old party," Shorty answered, consolingly, "and the things he don't know about army life'd make more'n a pamphlet. But he has a way of wakin' up to the situation that is sometimes very surprisin'. I wisht I was able to go about with him, but I think he's fully able to take care o' himself around in camp. There's always somebody about who won't see an old man and a citizen imposed on. But what I'm afraid of is that he's wandered out in the country, huntin' for somethin' for us to eat, and the guerrillas've got him."

And he and Si shuddered at the thought of that good old man in the hands of the merciless scoundrels who infested the mountains and woods beyond the camps.

"Yes," mourned Si, "Pap's likely to mosey out into the country, jest like he would on Bean Blossom Crick, and stop at the first house he come to, and set down with 'em on the porch, and talk about the weather, and the crops, and the measles in the neighborhood, and the revivals, and the price o' pork and corn, and whether they'd better hold their wheat till Spring, and who was comin' up for office, and all the time the bushwhackers'd be sneakin' up on him, an' him know no more 'bout it than where the blackbirds was roostin'. He's jest that innocent and unsuspiciouslike."

"If they've ketched him," said Shorty fiercely, "we'll find out about it, and when we git able, we'll go out there and kill and burn everything for five miles around. I'll do it, if I have to spend the rest o' my life at hard labor on the Dry Tortugas."

They heard the rattle of light wheels on the frozen ground outside, and the hoof-beats of a quickly-moving horse.

"Buggy or spring-wagon," muttered Si with a farmer boy's instinctive interpretation of such sounds. "What's it doin' in camp? Strange horse. In better condition than any around here."

The vehicle stopped in front of the corn-crib at the Deacon's command, "Whoa!"

"Gracious—there's Pap now," ejaculated Si, with whom memory went in a bound to the many times he had listened for his father's coming and heard that order.

"Hello, boys," called out the Deacon. "How are you? Shorty, come out here."

Shorty sprang up with something of his old-time alacrity, and Si made an effort to rise, but was too weak.

"Throw a piece o' that fat pine on the fire. Shorty," said the Deacon, "and let's see what I've got."

By the light of the blazing pine, the Deacon pulled off the cedar boughs and developed his store. The boughs had kept in the heat, so that the food was not yet quite cold, though it had a resinous flavor, from its covering. The Deacon broke one of the cornpones in two and gave half of it to Shorty, with as much as he thought he should have of the meat and vegetables. Then he fed Si, who relished the new diet almost as much as he had relished the chicken broth. The Deacon made a hearty supper himself, and then stored away the rest in his "cellar" under the crib, rolling up some more large stones as an additional precaution.

"Well, you beat me," said Shorty admiringly, as he studied over the Deacon's booty. "I used to think I was as slick a forager as there was in the army, but I simply ain't in the same class with a man that kin go out in this Sahara Desert o' starvation and bring in a four-year-old horse and a wagon-load o' cooked vittles. I'd never even see the distance pole runnin' with him. Gen. Rosecrans ought to know you. He'd appoint you Commissary-General o' the army at once. When I get a little stronger I want you to take me out and learn me the ABC's o' foragin'. To think that me and Si wuz grievin' about your being ketched by the guerrillas. What fools we wuz. It wuz lucky for the guerrillas that you didn't run acrost 'em, for you'd a ketched 'em, instid o' 'em you."

"That's what I come purty nigh doin'," chuckled the Deacon. "But what in the world 'm I goin' to do with that hoss and buckboard? I must hunt around and find that poor beast some corn for tonight. He's bin driven purty sharp, and he needs his supper jest as bad as I did mine, and I won't feel right unless he has it. Then I must try to git him back to his owner termorrer."

"If he's here to-morrer," said Shorty, looking at the animal carefully, "it'll be a miracle. That's too good a hoss to be kept in this camp by anybody lower'n a Brigadier-General. The boys'll steal him, the Captains take him, the Colonels seize him, and the Brigadier-Generals appropriate him for the Government's service. They'll call it by different names, but the horse goes all the same. I don't see how you're goin' to keep him till mornin'. You can't put him in your cellar. If they don't steal him, it's because it's too dark to see him. I'm sorry to say there's an awful lot o' thieves in the Army o' the Cumberland."

And Shorty looked very grieved over the deplorable lack of regard in the army for the rights of property. He seemed to mourn this way for several minutes, and then broke out with:

"Say, Mr. Klegg, I've an idee. That Quartermaster o' the Maumee Muskrats is a sport from way back. He'd give his vary eyes for a good hoss—one that kin beat everybody else's. The way the horses are run down now this one kin carry a heavy handicap, and beat any one in camp. I'll bet I kin take this hoss over to him and git $150 in greenbacks for him, for he kin win a bushel o' money with him the very first day."

"Shorty," said the Deacon, in a tone that made that worthy start, "necessity and the stress o' circumstances may force me to do many things which are agin my conscience, and for which I shall repent in sackcloth and ashes, if needs be, but I hain't yit bin reduced to sellin' stolen property. The Lord save me from that. That hoss and wagon's got to go back to the owner, if I risk my life in takin' 'em."

Shorty wisely kept his reply to himself, but he thought how absurd it was to have men about the army who were too old and set in their ideas to learn army ways. He muttered to himself:

"If he succeeds in gittin' that hoss outen camp agin, I'll expect to see the back o' my neck, or something else quite as wonderful."

The Deacon finally succeeded in getting a couple of ears of corn and a handful of fodder for the horse's supper, and it was decided that Shorty should watch him the first part of the night, and the Deacon from thence till morning.

As the Deacon pondered over the matter in the early morning hours, he saw that his only chance of getting the horse back was to start with him before daylight revealed him to the men in camp.

"WELL, I'LL BE DUMBED," MUTTERED THE DEACON.

"I'll drive him well outside our lines, and as near to the house as I think it prudent to go, and then turn him loose," he said to himself. "If he's got the sense o' the horses up North he'll go straight home, and then my conscience will be clear. If he don't, I'll have done all I could. The Lord don't ask unreasonable things of us, even in atonement."

So he cooked as good a breakfast for the boys as he could prepare from his materials, woke up Shorty and put him in charge, and an hour before daybreak turned the horse's head toward the pontoon bridge, and started him on a lively trot.

He had only fairly started when a stern voice called out to him from a large tent:

"Here, you, stop that trotting. What do you mean? Don't you know that it's strictly against orders to trot horses in their present condition?"

"Excuse me. Captain," said the Deacon. "I"

"Blank your Captain," roared the voice; "I'm no Captain."

"Major," said the Deacon deprecatingly.

"To thunder with your Majors, you ignorant fool. You"

"I beg your pardon, Colonel. I was"

"What's the matter with you, you ignoramus?" roared the voice, more indignantly than ever. "Don't you know Brigade Headquarters when you see them? Don't you know your own officers when you hear their voices?"

"Rayly, General," said the Deacon, much disturbed, "I didn't mean to insult you. I'm only a citizen, and a stranger in the camp, and—"

"A citizen and a stranger," echoed the voice. "What are you doing in here, anyway? Orderly, bring that man in here till I see him."

The Orderly started to obey, when a regiment which had been ordered to report at Headquarters came up at quick step, halted, and ordered arms with much clatter. The frightened horse bounded off down the road, with the Deacon sawing on the lines and trying to stop him.

He only slowed down when he came up near a corral of other horses, to which he turned for companionship and sympathy.

"Frosty mornin' makes that hoss purty frisky," said the Deacon, as he readjusted his hat, and got himself in shape after his jolting. "Lucky, though. I didn't like that old General's voice. I'm afraid he had it in for me, and would 've made me trouble for lowerin' his dignity by callin' him Captain. Big officers are awfully tetchy."

"Here, who are you? And what are you doin' out there?" came the stem inquiry from the dark depths of one of the sheds.

"Excuse me. General," answered the Deacon hastily, "I"

"General? Who are you callin' General, you fool? Don't try to be funny with me. You know I'm no General."

"I meant Colonel," the Deacon started to explain.

"The blazes you did. You expect Colonels to run hoss-corrals, and manage mule boarding-houses, do you? stop your blimmed nonsense and answer my questions."

"Major, I was tryin' to say"

"I'll Major you when I git my boots on and git out there. Don't think to shut my eye up callin' me big titles."

"But, Captain."

"I'm no Captain, neither. I'm plain Jim Crimmins, Quartermaster-Sergeant, in charge o' this corral, that you're stealin' around. I'm comin' out there to break every bone in your body. You infernal sneaks 've pestered the life out o' me stealin' my corn and my mules, even. I've bin watchin' you piroutin' around in the dark for a long time. I'm goin' to stop this business if I've got to kill every thievin' varmint in the Army o' the Cumberland. Don't you dare move till I come out, or I'll put a bullet through you. Do you hear?"

"I don't believe I've got any more time to waste on that bellerin' bull-calf," said the Deacon to himself. He gathered up the lines, turned the horse's head toward the road, and gave him a lick with a switch, and he dashed off, followed by a couple of shots from Mr. Crimmins, to give color and confirmation to the story that worthy related later in the day of a particularly audacious attempt on the part of sneak thieves to get away with his mules and corn, and which was frustrated by his vigilance and daring.

As the horse slowed down to a walk again a Sergeant of the Guard at the head of a squad stepped out and took him by the reins.

"Here, who are you, and where are you going so early in the morning?" he inquired.

"My name's Josiah Klegg, sir," said the Deacon, prudently ignoring titles. "I'm from Injianny, and am down here 'tendin' to my son, who belongs to Co. Q, 200th Injianny Volunteers, and who was shot at Chickamaugy. I borryed this hoss and wagon from a man out in the country to bring in some vittles for him and his pardner, and some boughs for 'em to sleep on, and I'm takin' 'em back to him."

"Well, that story may be true, and it mayn't. Probably it ain't. Men don't get up before daybreak to take back borrowed horses. You're up to some devilment; probably taking information or contraband out to the rebels. I haven't time now to investigate. I'll put you under guard until I have. As for the horse, we've got use for him. McCook's Cavalry needs about a thousand such as he. We're out lookin' for horses now. Unhitch him, boys."

The Deacon started to make an earnest protest, but at that moment the rebels on Lookout Mountain made their usual daylight salute to the camp. The size of the squad had attracted their attention, and a shell shrieked over and struck quite near. This was too much for the nervous horse. He made a convulsive leap, which scattered the guards around him and almost threw the Deacon out of the seat. When the latter recovered himself, and got the horse under control again the guards were far away, and he was at the approach to the pontoon bridge.

"I'll be plagued," mused the Deacon, as the horse moved over the bridge at a slow walk, and gave him time to think, "the army's a terrible place. I had no sort o' trouble when I was doin' something that mebbe I oughtn't to have done, but the minute I start out to do a right thing I meet no end o' difficulties. But these are the obstacles that Satan always puts in the way of the righteous. I'm goin' to git this boss 'back to its owner, or know the reason why. Git up, there."

He soon came to a piece of the road which was in full view of the rebels on Lookout Mountain. They had been preparing the day before to stop all travel by that route, and the Deacon's was the first vehicle that had appeared since they had got their guns planted. They waited until he was fairly out into the open, and sent a shell which struck a panel of the fence off to the left, burst with a crash, and sent rails, chunks, stones and pieces of brush flying through the air. The horse became frantic, and tore up the hill at such a rate the buckboard and harness speedily went to pieces, and the Deacon was flung in the ditch, while the horse galloped wildly over the hill.

The Union artillerymen on Moccasin Point had evidently anticipated just such an attempt on the part of the rebels. Instantly a score of guns which had been placed to cover that spot thundered out, and their shells could be seen striking and tearing up the ground all around where the shot came from. Other rebel guns came to the assistance of the first one; the Union batteries within reach started in to help their side, and in a minute the whole country was shaking with the uproar.

"Well, I'll be dumbed," muttered the Deacon, crawling out of the ditch, shaking himself together again, cleaning off the mud, and trying to comprehend what was happening. "Did anybody ever see sich a commotion kicked up over one four-year-old hoss, and not a particularly good hoss at that? 't'd take a mighty smart man to git as much as $100 for him up in Posey County. Nobody but a Methodist Elder could do it. I've sold a better hoss than that for $80, and got all he was worth."

He stood for a few minutes and looked at the grand display until the Union batteries, satisfied that they had finally quashed the impudent rebel, ceased firing, and then he looked around.

"Well, that buckboard's done for. I can't take it back. It's only good for kindlin' wood now. But I may ketch the hoss and take him back."

He went up on top of the hill, and saw the horse standing under a tree, apparently pondering over what had happened, and wondering whether he should run farther or remain where he was.

The horse gave him a glad whinney of recognition, as if congratulating him on escaping from the crash of matter.

"Yes, you beast," snorted the Deacon; "I'm safe, but no thanks to you. You done your best to kick my brains out. Twice your condemned heels jest grazed my eyebrows. All the thanks I git for tryin' to save you from being starved to death there in Chattanoogy, and git you back home. But you go back home all the same."

He led the horse to a rock, mounted him, and started up the road. He reached the point where the road to

the house turned off, and was debating whether he should go farther or turn the horse loose there, when he saw a company of cavalry coming up the main road from the other direction—that toward Bridgeport. Though they wore blue overcoats, he had learned enough about army life to not trust this implicitly, so he prudently rode into the woods to watch them until he could make sure. The company came up to where the roads parted, and he overheard a man who rode by the Captain at the head, and who wore a semi-soldier costume and seemed to be a scout or guide, tell the Captain:

"Their camp's right over there on that ridge (pointing to the crest on which the Deacon had seen the smoke). They're probably on the lookout for us, and we'll have to be very careful if we get near enough to jump them. I thought I saw one of their lookouts about here when we came up. Yes, there he is in there."

The Deacon had started to ride boldly toward them when he was sure they were Union troops, and a couple of the men, who in their dealings with bushwhackers had learned that it is best to shoot first and ask questions afterward, had promptly fired, and cut twigs uncomfortably near the Deacon's head. His horse plunged, but he kept him in hand and called out:

"Hold on! Hello! Don't do that. I'm a friend. I'm from Injianny."

"You're a devil of a way from home, and in a bad neighborhood," said one of the men who had fired, as he slipped another cartridge into his Sharpe's.

The Captain interrogated him as to who he was and what he was doing out there, while the scout fidgeted in his saddle over the time that was being wasted.

"Captain," said the scout finally, "we must hustle if we're going to strike those fellers before dark. We can't go down here, but' ll have to make a long circuit around, so they won't see us."

"That's so," said the Captain, adjusting himself to start.

"Captain," said one of the men, "my horse can't go any farther. He's been in bad shape, and he fell and broke his knee coming up the hill."

"Well, here, take that citizen's horse. Old man, get off, and let this man have that horse."

The Deacon started to protest, but the man was in a hurry, and almost pulled him off, and slapped his own saddle on in a flash.

"But what am I do to?" asked the Deacon bewildered.

"Do? Do as you please," laughed the Captain. "You are as well off here as anywhere. When a man's away from home one place's the same's another to him. Here, I'll tell you what you can do. See that cow back there? The boys have been trailing her along, in hopes to get her into Chattanooga and make beef of her. We've got to leave her now, for we are going on the jump. We'll make you a present of her and this broken-down horse. That'll start you in business. A horse and a cow's a big start for any man. Good-by. Attention, company! Forward, head of column right—March!"

"Well, I've done all I could," said the Deacon, going back and picking up the rope which was tied to the cow's horns. "The Lord knows I've tried hard enough to git that hoss back. The cow looks as if she's a good milker. A little milk'll do the boys good. Then, they kin have fresh beef. Come along, Bos."

Late at night he tied the cow to the corn-crib and went to his weary bed.

CHAPTER III. A COW IN CAMP

THE DEACON HAS SOME EXPERIENCES WITH THE QUADRUPED.

IT DID not seem that so many dangers beset the possession of a cow as of a horse, yet the Deacon prudently rose while it was yet dark to look after the animal.

He was none too soon, for there were getting to be thousands of very hungry men in Chattanooga who remembered the axiom about the early bird catching the worm, and thought the best time for "snatching" something was in the dark just before reveille. If they could find nothing better, and too often they did not, they would rob the mules of their scanty rations of corn, and soon a mule's feed-box had to be as carefully guarded as the commissary tent of the Headquarters mess.

These morning prowlers were as cunning as rats in finding their prey, and the only security that a man had of keeping his rations till morning was to eat them up before he went to bed. Their sharp eyes had not failed to notice the signs of unusual plenty about the Deacon's corn-crib, and they gave it earnest attention.

The Deacon had slipped out very quietly, and taken a little turn around the end of the crib, to see that his other provisions had not been disturbed, before he approached the cow. As he did so he saw a figure squatted beside her, and heard a low voice say:

"So, Bos! H'ist, Lady! H'ist up, you measly heifer!"

"Well, I declare to goodness," gasped the Deacon. "How could they've found her out so soon?"

He walked quietly up to the milker, and remarked:

"Purty early in the mornin' to do your milkin'. Didn't used to git up so early when you was at home, did you?"

"Sh—sh—sh!" whispered the other. "Don't speak so loud. You'll wake up that old galoot inside. Keep quiet till I fill my cup, and then I'll let you have a chance. There'll be plenty for you."

"Purty good milker, is she?" inquired the Deacon with interest.

"Naw!" whispered the other. "She's got her bag full, but she won't give down worth a cent."

"Better let me try my hand," said the Deacon. "You've bin away from the farm for so long you've probably lost the knack. I'm a famous milker."

"You'll play fair?" said the milker doubtfully.

"Yes; just hold her till I go inside and git my bucket, and I'll milk your cup clean full," answered the Deacon, starting inside the corn-crib.

"Well, you're a cool one," gasped the milker, realizing the situation. "But I'll hold you to your bargain, and I'll play fair with you."

The Deacon came back with his bucket, and after filling the man's cup as full as it would hold, handed it to him, and then began drawing the rest into his own bucket.

Careful milker that he was, he did not stop until he had stripped the last drop, and the cow, knowing at once that a master hand was at her udder, willingly yielded all her store.

"There," said the Deacon, "if anybody gits any more out o' her till evenin' he's welcome to it."

Two or three other men had come up in the meanwhile with their cups, and they started, without so much as asking, to dip their cups in.

"Hold on!" commanded the first-comer sternly. "Stop that! This old man's a friend o' mine, and I won't see him imposed on. Go somewhere else and git your milk."

A wordy war ensued, but the first-comer was stalwart and determined. The row waked up Shorty, who appeared with an ax.

"All right," said one of the men, looking at the ax; "keep your durned old milk, if you're so stingy toward hungry soldiers. It'll give you milk-sick, anyway. There's lots o' milk-sick 'round here. All the cows have it. That cow has it bad. I kin tell by her looks. We had lots o' milk-sick in our neighborhood, and I got real well-acquainted with it. I kin tell a milk-sick cow as fur as I kin see her, and if that cow hasn't it, no one ever had it."

He made a furtive attempt to kick the bucket over, which was frustrated by the Deacon's watchfulness.

"Better do something with that cow right off," advised the first-comer, as he walked off. "You can't keep her in camp all day. Somebody'll git her away from you if they have to take her by main force."

"Are you willin' to risk the milk-sick?" asked the Deacon, handing Shorty a cupful of the milk, together with a piece of cornpone.

"Yum—yum, I should say so," mumbled that longlegged gentleman. "I'll make the milk sicker'in it kin me, you bet. Jest bring along all the milk-sick you've got on hand, and I'll keep it from hurtin' anybody else. That's the kind of a philanthropist I am."

"I see you've got a cow here," said a large man wearing a dingy blue coat with a Captain's faded shoulder-straps. "I'm a Commissary, and it's my duty to take her."

He walked over and in a businesslike way began unfastening the rope. The Deacon shuddered, for he had too much respect for shoulder-straps to think of resisting. Shorty looked up from his breakfast, scanned the newcomer, and said:

"Look here. Bill Wiggins, you go back and take off that Captain's coat as quick as you kin, or I'll have you arrested for playin' officer. None o' you Maumee Muskrats kin play that little game on the 200th Injianny. We know you too well. And let me advise you, Mr. Wiggins, the next time you go out masqueradin' to make up clean through. That private's cap and pantaloons burned around the back, and them Government cow-hides give you dead away, if your mug didn't. If they wuz givin' commissions away you wouldn't be a brevet Corporal. Skip out, now, for here comes the Provost-Guard, and you'd better not let him catch you wearin' an officer's coat unless you want to put in some extra time on the breastworks."

Mr. Wiggins made off at once, but he had scarcely gotten out of sight when a mounted officer, attracted by the strange sight of a cow in camp, rode up and inquired whence she came and to whom she belonged.

The Deacon was inside the crib taking care of Si, and the burden of the conversation fell upon Shorty.

"Me any my pardner sent out into the country and bought that cow," he said, "with three $10 gold pieces we've bin savin' up ever since we've bin in the service. We wouldn't give 'em for anything else in the world. But we wuz jest starved for a drink o' fresh milk. Never felt so hungry for anything else in our lives. Felt that if we could jest git a fillin' o' fresh milk it'd make us well agin."

"Paid $30 in gold for her," said the officer, examining the cow critically. "Pretty high price for that kind of a cow."

"Well, I don't know about that," answered Shorty argumentatively, and scenting a possible purchaser. "Good fresh cows are mighty scarce anywhere at this time o' year, and particularly in this region. Next Spring they'll be much cheaper. But not this, one. That's no ordinary cow. If you'll look carefully at her you'll see that she's a thoroughbred. I'm a boss judge o' stock myself, and I know. Look at her horns, her bag, and her lines. She's full three-quarters Jersey."

"What's the other quarter," asked the officer, much amused.

"Jest—jest—jest—cow," answered Shorty, momentarily stumped for once in his volubility. And then he went on more garrulously than ever, to make amends. "She's as gentle as a lamb, will live on two ears o' corn and a kind word a day, and give two gallons o' milk, nearly all cream. Me and my pardner wouldn't take $10.0 in gold for that cow. We're goin' to send her up home as soon as the lines are open, to start our stock-farm with."

"Where did you say you got her?" said the officer, getting off his horse and going up closer to examine the animal.

"O, we bought her from a man named Wilson over in the Sequatchie Valley. You must've heard of him. We've knowed him a long time—before he moved down here from Injianny. Runs a fine stockfarm. Cried like a baby when he parted with his cow. Wouldn't have done it, but he had to have the money to buy provisions for his family."

"Let me see," said the officer, looking at him. "Seems to me I ought to know you. Where do you belong?"

"Co. Q, 200th Injianny Volunteers."

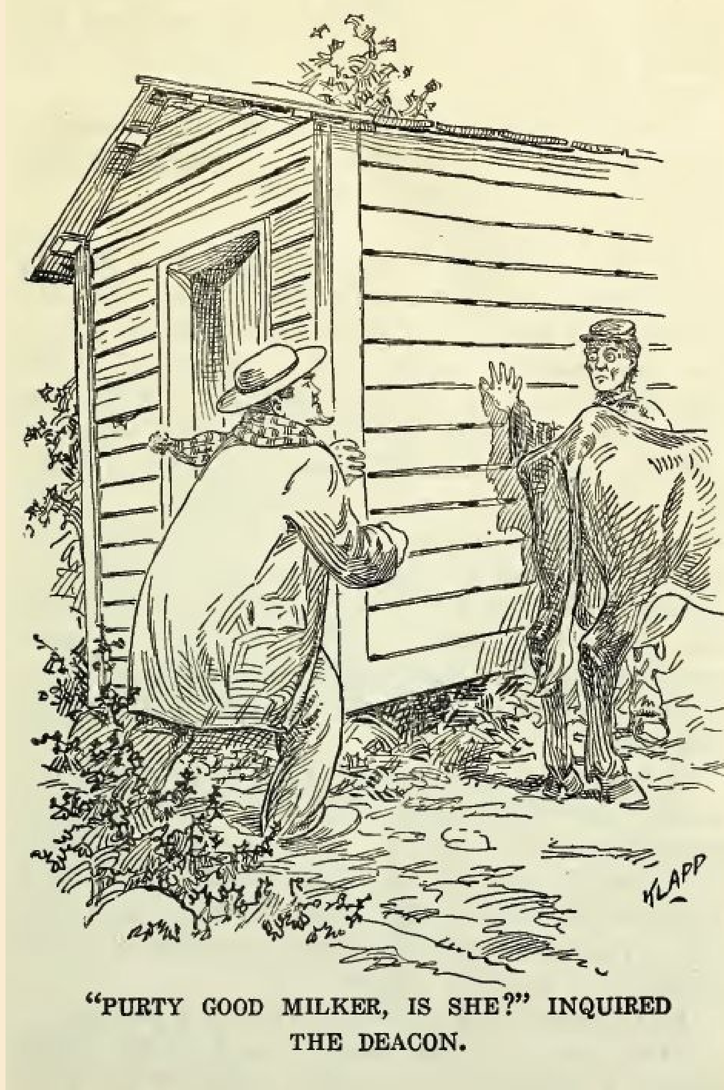
"I thought so. I do know you. You are Shorty. I don't want to say anything against your honesty or your veracity, but if Gen, Rosecrans was to order me to get him the smartest forager and smoothest liar in the Army of the Cumberland, I think I should order you to report at Headquarters."

"You do me proud," said Shorty with a grin, but an inward feeling that trouble was impending.

"Now, tell me the truth. Where did you get that cow?"

"I have bin tellin' you the truth," protested Shorty with an injured air. "Why should I tell you a lie about a little thing like a cow?"

"You are not within a mile of the truth. I know it. Look here: I believe that is Gen. Rosecrans's own cow. She's gone, and I got an order to look around for her. I've never seen her, but from the description given me I believe that's she. Who brought her here?"



"PURTY GOOD MILKER, IS SHE?" INQUIRED THE DEACON.

"Great Jehosephat, he's after the Deacon," thought Shorty with a shudder. "I mustn't let him git him." Then he spoke out boldly:

"I brung her here."

"Shorty," said the officer with a smile, "I admire your talents for prevarication more than I can express. As a good, off-hand, free-going, single-gaited liar you have few equals and no superiors. Your lies usually have so much probability in them that they seem better than the truth—for your purposes. But this has no probability whatever in it. I doubt if you are able to walk to Headquarters. If you were well and strong, I should believe you quite capable not only of stealing the cow from Army Headquarters, but President Lincoln's cow from his back-door of the White House. But you are good now because you haven't strength enough to be up to any devilment. Now, tell me, who brought that cow here?"

"I brung her here myself, I tell you. I felt unusually peart last night. Felt that I had to snatch something jest to keep my hand in, like. Couldn't find nothin' else on four legs worth takin', and couldn't take nothin' that couldn't walk. So I took her. You kin send me to the guard-house if you want to. I expect I deserve it."

And Shorty tried to look contrite and penitent.

"Yes; you're in nice shape to send to the guardhouse. I'd sent you there quick enough if you were well, for telling me such a preposterous lie. You've usually paid more respect to my intelligence by telling me stories that I could believe if I wanted to, as I usually wanted do; but this is too much."

As the conversation began the Deacon had passed out with a bucket to go to the creek for water for the cow. He now came back, set the bucket down in front of the cow, and began, from force of long habit in caring for his stock, to pick off some burs, and otherwise groom her.

"Say, my friend," said the officer, "who brought that cow in?"

Shorty had been frantically trying to catch the Deacon's eye, and was making all manner of winks and warning gestures without avail, for the Deacon answered frankly:

"I brung her in."

"You're just the man I'm looking for," returned the officer. Then turning to a Sergeant who had just come up at the end of a squad, he said:

"Here, Sergeant, take charge of this citizen and this cow, and bring them both up to Army Headquarters. Don't let that citizen get away from you. He's a slick one."

As they moved off. Shorty bolted into the crib and shouted:

"Great Jehosephat, Si, that dad of your'n 's a goner! He's got nerve that looms up like Lookout Mountain! He's a genius! He's got git-up and git to spare! What do you think he done last night? Walked up to Gen. Rosecrans's Headquarters, and stole the General's cow right from under the noses o' the Headquarters Guards, and brung her down here and milked her. Did you ever hear o' sich snap? I only wisht that me and you was half the man that he is, old as he is. The only trouble is that he isn't as good a hider as he is on the take. They've dropped on to him, and they're now takin' him up to Headquarters. But he'll find some way to git off. There's no end to that man. And to think that we've bin playin' him right along for a hayseed."

And Shorty groaned in derision of his own acumen.

"Pop stole Gen. Rosecrans's cow from Headquarters? They've arrested him and are taking him up there?" ejaculated Si in amazement. "I don't believe a word of it."

"Well, the cow was here. He brung her here last night, and owned up to it. He milked her, and you drunk some of the milk. The Provost-Guard's now walkin' the cow and him up to Headquarters. These are early mornin' facts. You kin believe what you dumbed please."

"Pap arrested and taken to Army Headquarters," groaned Si, in deepest anxiety. "What in the world will they do with him?"

"O, don't worry," said Shorty cheerfully.

"Your dad ain't as green as you are, if he has lived all his life on the Wabash. He's as fly as you make 'em. He's fixin' up some story as he goes along that'll git him out of the scrape slick as a whistle. Trust him."

"Shorty," said Si severely, "my father don't fix up stories. Understand that. He's got some explanation for this. Depend upon it."

"They call it explanation when it gits a feller out, and blamed lie when it don't," muttered Shorty to himself, as he went out again, to follow the squad as far as he could with his eyes. "Anyway, I'll bet on the Deacon."

The squad arrived before Headquarters, and the officer dismounted and went in. Early as it was he found the indefatigable Rosecrans at work with his staff and clerks.

"General, I've found your cow, and got the man who took her," said the officer.

"Good," said the General joyfully. "Now we'll have some fresh milk again. I can give up anything cheerfully, rather than fresh milk. Say you've got the thief, too?" continued the General, relapsing into one of his testy moods. "Put the rascal at the hardest labor you can find. I'll give him a lesson that stealing from Headquarters don't pay. The rascals in my army seem to think that I and everything I have belongs to them as much as it does to me. But I'll draw the line at my cow and my horses. They can steal everything else but them. Hold on a minute. I'll go out and see if it's really my cow."

"Yes, that is she; glad to see you back, Missy," said the General, patting the cow on the back. "Take her back and give her a good feed, if you can find it, for probably she's pretty hungry."

Then turning to the Deacon:

"You old rascal, you'll steal the General's cow, will you? Fond of thorobred stock, are you? And a citizen, too. Well, I'll see whether a month of hard work on the fortifications won't cure you of your fancy for blooded cattle."

"Look here, Gen. Rosecrans," said the Deacon firmly, "I didn't steal your cow, and I won't allow you nor no other man to say so. I'm an honest man, or at least I've always passed for one at home. I was out over the river yesterday, tryin' to git a hoss back to his owner, and a Captain of a cavalry company come along and took my hoss away, and give me this cow in exchange. He said his men'd got the cow down the road apiece, and that's all I know of her."

"A very likely story," sneered several of the staff.

"Let me see," said the General, who prided himself on remembering names and faces. "Haven't I met you before? Aren't you from Indiana?"

"Yes, sir; from Posey County."

"And you've got a son in one of the regiments?"

"Yes, sir. Corporal Si Klegg, Co. Q, 200th Injianny Volunteers. Him and his partner Shorty wuz badly wounded, and I come down here to take care of 'em. I've bin moseyin' around out in the country tryin' to find something for 'em to eat, and the other day I—borryed a hoss, which I was tryin' to take back, when this cavalry Captain come along, and tuk the hoss away from me and give me this cow instid. I hadn't no idee where he got her, and he didn't give me time to ask, for he started on the jump after some guerrillas."

"I shouldn't wonder if his story is true, General," said a member of the staff. "You see, your cow has been gone really two days. Day before yesterday we sent Blue Jim out into the country with her. She needed it awfully. We laid the law down to Blue Jim about being very careful with her and keep her near the road. It seems that he found a good piece of meadow, and turned her loose in it, but then, nigger like, he forgot all that we had told him about staying light alongside of her, and wandered off to gather persimmons, and afterward fell asleep in a fence-corner. When he woke up the cow was gone, and he was scared nearly to death. He hunted around for her all day, and came in last night nearly starved to death, and whimpering and blubbering. We told him that you would order him shot as soon as you found out. He has been to see the Chaplain twice, to prepare for death."

"So?" said the General, smiling. "Well, Mr.— Mr.— I did know your name once—"

"Klegg, Josiah Klegg," answered the Deacon promptly.

"Yes; how stupid of me to forget it. Well, Mr. Klegg, I'm very much obliged to you for finding my cow and bringing her home. You've got a very fine son—splendid soldier. How is he getting along?"

"Tollably well, General, thank you. Look here, General, please let me take those boys home. If you will, I'll send 'em back to you in a few weeks good as new. All they need is mother's cookin' and mother's nursin' to bring 'em right out. And I want to go home, too. The army is demoralizin' me. I guess I'm gittin' old, and 'm not as strong to resist sin and the suggestions of sin as I once was. I'm gittin' scared of myself down here."

"It's pretty hard work getting back now," said the General. "Do you think you can do it, if I give you leave?"

"O, yes. Jest give the order, and I'll get the boys and myself back home, sure's you're livin'."

"Very well," said the General; "you shall have the chance." He turned to one of his staff and said:

"Look into this matter. If the Surgeon thinks they can be moved, have furloughs and transportation made out for them and the father. Good-by, Mr. Klegg. Take good care of those boys, and send them back to me as soon as they are well."

CHAPTER IV. THE DEACON'S PLAN

DEALING WITH AN OBSTRUCTION TO THE HOMEWARD JOURNEY.

THE Surgeon, who had conceived quite a good opinion of the Deacon's ability, readily certified that the boys could be safely taken home, since they would have the benefit of his care and attention, and the necessary papers came down from Headquarters that day. The Deacon had the good luck to find his old friend, the Herd-Boss, who took a deep interest in the matter. He offered to have as good a team as he had at the crib the next morning, with the wagon-bed filled with cedar-boughs, to make as easy a couch as possible for the rough ride over the mountains.

With his heart full of hope and joy, the Deacon bustled around to make every possible preparation for the journey.

"It's a long way back home, I know," he said to himself, "and the road's rough and difficult as that to the New Jerusalem; but Faith and Hope, and the blessin' o' God'll accomplish wonders. If I kin only hold the souls in them boys' bodies till I kin git 'em back to Bean Blossom Crick, I'll trust Mother Klegg's nursin' to do the rest. If there ever was a woman who could stand off the Destroyin' Angel by good nursin' that woman's Mother Klegg, bless her soul."

The next morning he was up betimes, and cooked the boys as good a breakfast as he could out of the remainder of his store and what he could get from the hospital, and then gave what was left to whoever came. The comfortable crib, which had cost the Deacon so much labor, had been pre-empted by the Surgeon for some of his weakest patients.

The news had reached the 200th Ind. that the boys were going home, and they came over in a body to say "Good-by."

The sight of them pained the Deacon's good heart. Instead of the hundreds of well-fed, well-clothed, comfortable-looking young men he had seen at Murfreesboro a few months before, he now saw a shrunken band of gaunt, unkempt men, their clothing ragged and patched, many of them almost shoeless, many of them with pieces of blankets bound around their feet instead of shoes, many of them with bandages about their still unhealed wounds, but still keeping their places bravely with their comrades, and stubbornly refusing to count themselves among the sick and disabled, though it required all their will-power to do their share of the duty. But all of them were brimming over with unconquerable cheerfulness and pluck. They made light of their wounds and disabilities, jested at one another's ragged clothes, laughed at their hunger, teased one another about stealing corn from mules, jeered at the rebel shells from Lookout Mountain, yelled derisively at the rebel pickets across the creek, and promised them to soon come out and run Bragg's army off the face of the earth.

All were eager to do something toward the comfort of their departing comrades. They scanned the arrangement of the boughs in the wagon with critical eyes, and picked them over and rearranged them, so as to avoid every chance of uncomfortable knots and lumps. They contributed blankets from their own scanty supply, to make sure that there would be plenty, and so many were eager to help carry Si out and put him in the wagon, that the Orderly-Sergeant of Co. Q had to take charge of the matter and make a detail. The teamster was given strong admonitions as to careful driving, and fearful warning as to what would happen to him in case of an accident.

"Hain't anything to send back home with you, boys, this time, but our love," said one of them. "That's the only thing that's safe now-a-days from bein' stole, because no one kin eat or wear it. Tell the folks to pay no attention to what the paper says. No danger o' bein' run out o' Chattanoogy. Tell 'em that we're all fat, ragged and sassy, and only waitin' the word from Gen. Rosecrans to fall on old Bragg like a thousand o' brick and mash the lights outen him."

"Yes," joined another, "tell 'em we've got plenty to eat, sich as it is, and good enough, what there is of it. Don't worry about us. We're only blowin' up our muscle to git a good lick at old Bragg."

"Your muscle," said Shorty, satirically. "You've got about as much muscle now as a musketo. But you're good stuff all the same, and you're goin' to everlastingly lick the rebels when the time comes. I only wisht I was here to help you do it. I don't think I'll go any further than Nashville. I'll be well enough to come back by

that time. I'll see Si and his father off safely, and then gether up a crowd of other convalescents, and come back and clean the rebels off your cracker line."

"Good-by, boys," piped out Si. "I'll be back soon. Don't bring on the big battle till I do. I want to help. Just skirmish around and push the rebels back into the woods while I'm gone, and hive 'em up for a good lickin' by the time I git back."

As the wagon moved off the 200th Ind. gave three cheers, and the regimental soloist struck up the "Battle Cry of Freedom," in which they all joined with so much energy as to attract the attention of the rebel artillerist on Lookout Mountain, who favored them with a shell intended for their express benefit. It was no better directed than any of its many predecessors had been, and was greeted with yells of derision, in which all the camp joined.

Having done all possible for the boys' comfort, the Deacon had lighted his pipe and taken his seat on a board laid over the front, where he could oversee the road and the teamster, and take a parting look at the animated scenery. The wagon pulled into the line of those moving out toward Bridgeport, and jogged along slowly for some hours until it was nearing the top of one of the hills that jutted out close to the Tennessee River, at the base of Lookout Mountain. The Deacon saw, with a little nervousness, that they were approaching the open space in which he had had his experience with the horse and buckboard, and he anxiously scanned the Craven House slope for signs of a rebel cannon. He saw that his apprehensions were shared by the drivers of the three or four teams just ahead. They were whipping up, and yelling at their teams to get past the danger point as quick as possible.

THE DEACON RECONNOITERED THE SITUATION.

They had need of anxiety. A scattering volley of shots came from the bushes and the rocks on the opposite side of the Tennessee River and one of the leaders in the team just ahead of him dropped dead in his tracks. The teams in front were whipped up still harder, and succeeded in getting away. The shots were answered from a line of our own men on this side of the river, who fired at the smoke they saw rising.

The Deacon's own teamster sprang from his saddle, and prudently got in the shelter of the wagon until the affair would be over. The teamster next ahead ran forward, and began cutting the fallen mule loose, but while he was doing so another shot laid the other mule low. The teamster fell fiat on the ground, and lay there for a minute. Then he cautiously arose, and began cutting that mule loose, when a shot struck the near-swing mule in the head, and he dropped. The Deacon kept that solid old head of his throughout the commotion, and surveyed the scene with cool observance.

"There's one feller somewhere over there doin' all that devilment," he said to Shorty, who was pushing his head eagerly out of the front of the wagon to find out what was going on. "He's a sharpshooter from way back. You kin see he's droppin' them mules jest about as fast as he kin load his gun. Them other fellers over there are jest putterin' away, makin' a noise. You kin see their shots strikin' down the hill there, and everywhere, where they ain't doin' nothin'. But that feller's out for business. I've bin tryin' to locate him. He's somewhere closter than any o' the others. Their bullets don't quite reach, while his goes home every time. See there."

The off-swing mule dropped this time. "Land's sakes," ejaculated the Deacon, "he's costin' Uncle Sam $150 every time his gun cracks. It's jest sinful to be destroyin' property that way. Shorty, kin you reach me that gun o' Si's out o' the wagon? I believe I'll slip down toward the bank and see if I can't find that feller. I've bin

watchin' the willers along the aidge o' the water, and I believe he's in there."

"Don't go, Pap," pleaded Si. "Some of the boys on the skirmish-line 'll find him soon, and settle him. Don't expose yourself. Stay behind the wagon."

"Yes, stay back under cover, Deacon," joined in Shorty. "Let the boys down there 'tend to him. They're gittin' $16 a month for it, and don't want nobody else to interfere in their job." Just then the near wheel mule dropped. "Gi' me that gun at onct," said the Deacon sternly. Shorty handed him the Springfield and its cartridge-box without another word. The Deacon looked over the rifle, "hefted" it, and tried it at his shoulder to get its poise, critically examined its sights by aiming at various objects, and then wiped out its barrel, as he would that of his trusty hunting-rifle at home. All of his old deer-hunting instincts revived. He took out several cartridges, turned them over in his hand, and carefully selected one, tore open the paper, poured the powder in, removed the paper from the ball, and carefully rammed it home, struck the butt of the gun on the ground to make sure of its priming, and put on the cap.

"Hold her about a foot under. Pap, at 400 yards," said Si, who had rolled over to the side of the wagon, and was watching him from under the cover, which was raised up a little. "Put your sights up to the 400 mark, and then draw the top o' the bead down fine into that notch, and she'll put it right where you hold her."

By this time the sharpshooter had finished up the mules on the team ahead, and begun on that of the Deacon. The firing was furious all along both sides of the river, and the teamsters in the rear were showing signs of stampeding. The Wagonmaster was storming up and down to hold them in place, and the officers in command of the line along the river bank were raging at their men for not suppressing the fire from over the stream.

"Old man, you'd better not go down there," said a Captain as the Deacon came walking down, looking very grim and determined. "It's getting hotter down there every minute. The rebels seem determined to stick to their work, and I've had three men wounded already."

"Look out for your own men, my son," answered the Deacon, in whom the fire of battle was burning. "I'll look out for myself. If I'm hit the Gover'ment won't lose nothin'. I'm only a citizen."

He had kept his eye on the clump of willows, and was sure that his man was in there, though the smoke hung around so confusingly that he could not always make out where a fresh shot came from. He got down to where an occasional bullet struck in his neighborhood, but that did not disturb him. He began to feel that thrill of man-hunting which when it seizes a man is an overpowering passion.

"I'm goin' to stop him killin' mules," he said to himself. "I rayly hope I won't kill him, but that's a secondary matter. Providence'll settle that. It's my duty to stop him. That's clear. If his time's come Providence'll put the bullet where it'll kill him. If it ain't, it won't. That's all. Providence indicates my duty to me. The responsibility for the rest is with Providence, who doeth all things well."

He reached the firing-line, strung along the ragged bluffs, and hiding behind trees, stumps and stones.

"Lay down, there, old man; grab a root; keep under cover, or you'll git hit," some of them called out to him, noticing him as they turned to load. "The air is so full o' bullets you kin ketch your hat full if you only hold it up."

"All right, boys, I'll lay low. I've come down here to help you," answered the Deacon.

"Bully for you; we need it."

The Deacon took his position behind a big black walnut, while he reconnoitered the situation, and got his bearings on the clump of willows. He felt surer than ever of his man, for he actually saw a puff of smoke come from it, and saw that right behind the puff stood a willow that had grown to the proportions of a small tree, and had its bark rubbed off by the chafing of driftwood against it.

"He's right behind that peeled wilier," the Deacon said, "and takes a rest agin it. Three inches to the left o' that, and three foot from the ground'll take him square in the breast, as he is probably kneeling down."

Before him he noticed a deep gully cut in the bank, by which he could get down to the water's edge where there was a clump of paw-paws projecting out toward the willows. If he went down there it would make his shot surer, but there was much danger that he would be noticed and fired at on his way.

"I'm goin' down there," he said, after a moment's deliberation. "Providence has sent me on this job, and intends I shall do it right, which I kin by goin' down there. Providence'll take care o' me while I'm goin'. Same time, Providence expects me to show gumption, by not exposin' myself any more'n possible."

Therefore he cut a young, thick-branched cedar and held it in front of him as he crouched and made his way to the gully and down it.

He had nearly reached the cover of the paw-paws, and was beginning to congratulate himself that his cedar screen and the turmoil on the bank above had enabled him to escape attention, when a bullet struck a stone to his left, and threw it against him with such force as to almost knock all the breath out of his body. He fell to the ground, but retained coolness enough to understand that this was to his advantage, and he crawled slowly forward until he was safely behind the bushes.

"That come from that hound in the willers," said he to himself. "He's a sharp one. He got on to me somehow, and now it's me and him fur it. Anyhow, he didn't kill a mule worth $150 with that bullet. But it'll take as much as six bits' worth o' porous plaster to take the swellin' out o' my side where that rock welted me."

He hitched forward cautiously a little farther, to where he could peer through the bushes, being exceedingly wary not to repeat his opponent's mistake, and set their tops in motion. A rock protruding through the ground in front of him made an opening through which he could see, and also afforded a rest for his musket. He looked sharply, and at length was rewarded by seeing the gun-barrel come out by the side of the barked willow, rested on a bare limb, and apparently aimed at the hill beyond. He took a long breath to steady his nerves, stretched out his legs to make himself more at ease, pushed his musket forward until he got exactly the right poise, aimed about nine inches below the level of his opponent's gun-barrel, and a little to the left, drew his bead down to a hair's nicety in the hind sight, and pulled the trigger just as the rebel

sharpshooter did the same. Both muskets seemed to flash at the same moment. The rebel sprang up through the willows and fell forward on his face.

The Deacon picked up his gun and walked back up the bank. The Union skirmishers had seen the man fall and raised a yell, which they changed to cheers as they saw the Deacon coming up the bank.

The Captain in command came up and said:

"Sir, I congratulate you. That was splendidly done. I was just getting on to that fellow when you went down. I watched you through my glass, and saw you fetch him. You are entitled to all our thanks."

"No thanks to me, sir. I only done the dooty Providence marked out for me. I hope the man ain't killed. If he is, it's because Providence had fixed the number of his days. I only wanted to stop his killin' mules, and destroyin' Gover'ment property, and let us go on our journey in peace."

"Well, I wish you'd stay here and help us with some more of those fellows over there. I'm sure their time has come, but my men don't seem to be quite as good in carrying out the decrees of Providence as you are."

"Thankee, sir," said the Deacon. "But I must go back and 'tend to my boys. We've got a long ways to go yet to-day."

He went back to the road and reported to the Wagonmaster:

"Now you kin clear away them dead mules and go ahead. You won't scarcely be bothered any more for awhile at least."

CHAPTER V. TROUBLE ENCOUNTERED

THE BOYS MEET AN OLD FRIEND AND ARE TAKEN HOME IN A HURRY.

IT WAS not until late the next afternoon that the wagon-train finally reached Bridgeport, and the weak, wornout mules had at last a respite from straining through the mud, under the incessant nagging of the teamsters' whips and their volleyed blasphemy.

The Deacon's merciful heart had been moved by the sufferings of the poor beasts. He had done all that he could on the journey to lighten the labor of those attached to his own wagon. He had restrained as much as possible the St. Vitus Dance of the teamster's keen whip, uselessly remonstrated with him against his profanity, carried a rail to help pry the wheels out of the mudholes, and got behind and pushed going up the steep hills. At the journey's end when the exhausted brutes stood motionless, with their ears drooping and their eyes looking unutterable disgust at everything connected with the army and war, the Deacon helped the teamster take their harness off, and carry them as much corn and hay as the Forage-Master could be pursuaded to dole out to them.

The Deacon's next solicitude was to get the boys aboard a train that would start out soon. This was a sore perplexity. All was rush and bustle about the railroad yard. Trains were coming, being switched hither and yon, unloaded, and reloaded, and going, in a way that was simply bewildering to the plain farmer. Men in uniform and men in plain clothes were giving orders, and these were obeyed, and everybody seemed too busy to answer questions or give information.

"Naw; git out. Don't bother me with no questions, I tell you," impatiently said a man in citizen's clothes, who with arms outspread was signalling the switching engines. "'Tain't my business to give information to people. Got all I kin do to furnish brains for them bull-headed engineers. Go to that Quartermaster you see over there in uniform. The Government pays him for knowin' things. It don't me."

"I don't know anything about the different cars, my friend," said the Quartermaster haughtily. "That's the business of the railroad people. I simply order them to make up the trains for me, and they do the rest. There's a Yard-Master over there. Go ask him."

"Blazes and brimstone," exploded the Yard-Master; "how in the devil's name do you suppose I can tell anything about the trains going out? I'm just pestered to death by such fool questions, while the life's being worried out of me by these snoozers with sardine-labels on their shoulders, who strut around and give orders, and don't know enough about railroading to tell a baggage-check from a danger-signal. If they'd only let me alone I'd have all these trains running in and out like shuttles in a loom. But as soon's I get one arranged down comes a shoulderstrap and orders something different. Go off and ask somebody that wears brass buttons and a basswood head. Don't bother me. Get out of the way of that engine there."

In despair, the Deacon turned to a man who wore a Major's shoulder-straps.

"No," he answered; "I'm sorry to say that I cannot give you any information. I'm only in command of the guards here. I haven't anything to do with the trains. The Quartermasters run them, and they run them as they run everything they have anything to do with—like the old man and woman run their fulling mill on the Kankakee—that is, like—

"Dumb this mixin' o' military and civilian," said the irritated Deacon, "It's worse'n mixin' religion and politics, and preachin' and tavern-keepin'. Down there in camp everything was straight and systematic. Every feller what don't have nothin' in his shoulder-straps bosses all the fellers what hain't no shoulder-straps at all. The feller what has one bar in his shoulder-straps bosses all the fellers what hain't nothin in theirs, and the feller what has two bars bosses the fellers with but one; the feller with leaves gives orders to the fellers with bars; the feller with an eagle lays clear over him, and the man with a star jest makes everybody jump when he talks. Out at the depot on Bean Blossom Crick Sol Pringle has the say about everything. He knows when the trains come and when they go, and what goes into 'em. This seems to be a betwixt and between place, neither pork nor bacon, I don't like it at all, I always want things straight—either one thing or t'other—reg'ler close

communion, total-immersion Babtist, or free-for-all, shoutin' Methodist."

"I think I can help you, 'Squire," said a big, goodnatured-looking civilian railroad man, who had become interested in the Deacon's troubles. "I've bin around with the Assistant Yard-Boss pickin' out a lot o' empties to hustle back to Nashville for grub. That's one o' them over there, on the furthest switch—X634. See? It's got a chalk mark on it. I'll help you carry your boys into it, and fix 'em comfortable, and you'll go back with it all right."

The Deacon turned gladly to him. The man summoned some of his friends, who speedily transferred Si and Shorty, with their belongings, cedar boughs and all, to the car, and made them as comfortable as possible, and added some little offerings of their own to contribute to the ease of the journey. They bestired themselves to find something to eat that the boys would relish, and brought out from somewhere a can of peaches and one of tomatoes, which proved very acceptable. The Deacon was overwhelmed with gratitude.

"I want every one of you to come up to my house, whenever you git a chance," he said, "and make a long visit. You shall have the very best that there is on my farm, and if you don't live well it won't be Maria Klegg's fault. She'll jest lay herself out to be good to men who's bin good to her son, and when she lays herself out to git up a dinner the Burnett House in Cincinnati takes a back seat."

Feeling entirely at ease, he climbed into the car, with a copy of the Cincinnati Gazette, which he had bought of a newsboy, lighted his pipe, put on his spectacles, and settled down to a labored, but thorough perusal of the paper, beginning at the head-lines on the upper left-hand corner, and taking in every word, advertisements and all, as systematically as he would weed a garden-bed or milk a cow. The Deacon never did anything slip-shod, especially when he had to pay 10 cents for a copy of the Cincinnati Gazette. He was going to get his full money's worth, and if it was not in the news and editorials, he would take it out of the advertisements and patent medicine testimonials. He was just going through a convincing testimonial to the manifold virtues of Spalding's Prepared Glue, when there was a bump, the sound of coupling, and his car began to move off.

"Glory, we're goin' home!" shouted the Deacon, waving his paper exultingly to the railroad men who had been so helpful. But he exulted prematurely. The engine rattled ahead sharply for a few hundred yards, and then began backing to opposite the spot where it had started from.

"That's all right," said his railroads friends encouragingly. "She's just run back on the other switch to take up a couple more cars. She'll go ahead all right presently."

"I hope it is all right," said the Deacon, a little abashed; "but I never had any use for a hoss that went back more'n he did forrard."

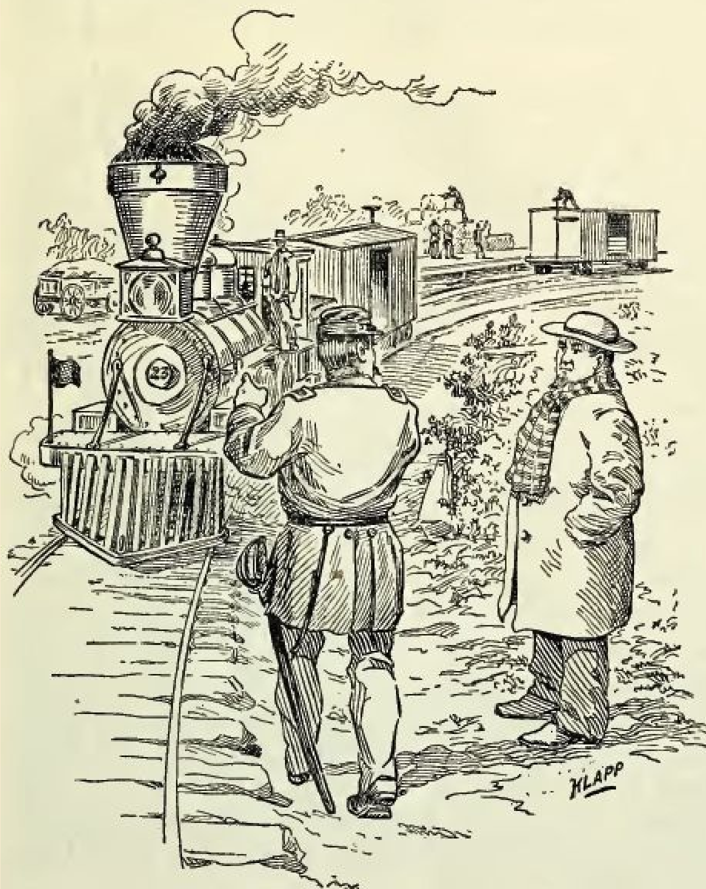
But this was only the first of many similar experiences, which occupied the rest of the day.

"Good gracious, do they want to wear the track and wheels and injines clean out?" grumbled the Deacon. "No wonder they're all out o' order. If I jammed my wagon back and forrard this way it wouldn't last a month. No wonder war-taxes are high, with everybody doin' all they kin to waste and destroy property. I've a great mind to write to Gen. Rosecrans or President Lincoln callin' attention to the way their hired men monkey around, and waste time, and don't accomplish nothin'."

Some time after dark, and after the Deacon's patience had become well-nigh exhausted, the railroad men came around with a lantern, and told him that at last it was settled, and the train would move out very soon. There had been conflicting orders during the day, but now the Chief Quartermaster at Nashville had ordered the train forward. Sure enough, the train pulled out presently, and went rattling up toward Shelbyville. Again the Deacon's heart bounded high, and after watching the phantom-like roadside for awhile, he grew very sleepy, and crawled in alongside of Si. He waked up at daylight, and went at once to the car-door hopefully expecting to recognize the outskirts of Nashville, or at least Murfreesboro. To his dismay, he saw the same sutler's shanty, mule-corral, pile of baled-hay, and the embalmer's sign on a tree which had been opposite them while standing on the track at Bridgeport.

Shorty swore volubly, and for once the Deacon did not check him, but was sinfully conscious in his heart of approving the profanity.

"Swearin's awful wicked and low," he said to himself. "A sensible man can get along without it ordinarily, by the grace o' God and hard tryin', though I've knowed a yoke o' dumbed steers in a stumpy field to purty nigh overcome me. But the army's no common experience, and I s'pose a man's justified in bustin' out in a time like this. Old Job was lucky that he didn't have to ride on an army railroad."



IN DESPAIR, THE DEACON TURNED TO A MAJOR.

His railroad friend again came up with some hot coffee and broiled meat, and explained that after the train had reached a station some miles out it got orders to run back and clear the track for some trains of troops from the Army of the Potomac which were being rushed through. The Deacon's heart almost sank in despair, but he took the coffee and meat, and helped the boys to it. As they were all eating they heard a voice outside which struck on the chords of their memories:

"Where is that Yard-Boss? Where is that Yard-Boss? Find him and send him to me, immediately."

"That sounds like Levi Rosenbaum," said Shorty.

Si nodded affirmatively.

The Deacon looked out,' and recognized Levi dressed in the hight of fashion. On his jetty curls sat a glossy silk hat, his clothes looked as if just taken from the tailor's shop, and they fitted him to perfection. A large diamond flashed from his scarfpin, and another gleamed in a ring on his right hand as he waved it in giving orders to the men around. Every eye was fixed on him, and when he spoke there was hastening to obey. The Yard-Boss was coming at a run.

"Why are those cotton-cars still standing there this morning, after the orders I gave you yesterday?" asked Levi, in tones of severest reprehension, as that official came up.

"Why, Mr. Rosenbaum," said that official apologetically—he was the same man who had so severely snubbed the Deacon the day before—"you see I had the train made up and all ready to start, when there came orders—"

"Whose orders?" demanded Levi. "Who dares give orders that over-ride mine? You go at once and have an engine—the best one you have—hitched on. Couple on my car, and be ready to start in 15 minutes. Fifteen minutes I give you," continued he, looking at his watch. "Tell the Train Dispatcher to clear everything into switches until we get to Murfreesboro, and have the operator at Murfreesboro lay by everything till we get to Nashville."

The Yard-Boss rushed off to execute the order.

"Great Jehosephat, what's come over Levi?" muttered Shorty. "Has he become the High-muk-a-muk of the whole army? Have they put him in Gen. Rosecrans's place?"

"Will I dare to speak to such a high-flyer?" said the Deacon, doubtfully.

Levi's eyes, flashed from one point to another, rested on the Deacon for a moment, and the latter wreathed his face with a grin of recognition. Then Levi's stern countenance relaxed with a still broader grin.

"Hello, 'Squire," he shouted joyously. "Is that you? Where are the boys?" And he rushed forward with outstretched hand.

"I've got 'em in here, badly hurt," answered the Deacon, jumping to the ground and grasping the outstretched hand in his own horny palm. "I'm very glad to see you, Mr. Rosenbaum."

"Glad ain't no name for it," said Levi. "Did you say you'd got the boys in there? Here, you men, bring me two

or three of those cracker-boxes."

By the aid of the cracker-boxes Levi climbed into the car, and shook the boys' hands, and cried and talked mingled gladness and sympathy in his broken English.

"What place have you got, and what are you doin' down here, Mr. Rosenbaum," the Deacon asked in the first lull.

"O, I'm Special Agent of the Treasury in charge of the cotton business. You see, these rascals have been stealing the Treasury blind, in cotton, and they had to have an honest man down here, who was up to all their tricks, and wouldn't stand no nonsense. They sent me, and gave me orders which make me boss of the whole outfit. None of them outrank me about these trains."

"So I see," said the Deacon. "Wisht I'd had a handful of your authority yesterday."

"Here, we're wasting time," said Levi suddenly. "You're tryin' to get these boys back home. I'll see that they get as far as the Ohio River as fast as the train'll go. Here, six or eight of you men pick up these boys and carry them over to my car there. Handle them as if they were eggs, for they're my friends."

There was no lack of willing hands to execute this order. That was long before the days of private cars, even for railway magnates, but Rosenbaum had impressed a caboose for himself, which he had had fitted up with as many of the comforts of a home as were available at that era of car-building. He had a good bed with a spring mattress for himself and another for his friends, table, chairs, washroom and a fairly-equipped kitchen, stored with provisions, for he was as fond of good living as of sumptuous raiment. All this and more he was only too glad to place at the disposal of the Deacon and the boys. The Deacon himself was not more solicitous about their comfort.

The train started as Levi had ordered, and sped along on a clear track to Nashville. Cotton was needed at the North almost as much as rations were needed at the front, and a train loaded with Treasury cotton had superior rights to the track which must not be disregarded. At Nashville a friend of Levi's, a Surgeon of generally recognized skill, and whom Levi had telegraphed for, came aboard with a couple of skilled nurses, who bathed the boys, dressed their wounds, and replaced their soiled, torn clothes with new, clean ones, including fine, soft underwear from Levi's own wardrobe.

"Say, Doc," said Shorty, after this was finished and he had devoured a supper cooked under Levi's special care, "I feel so much better that I don't believe there's any need o' my goin on any further. I'll jest lay by here, and go into Convalescent Camp for a few days, and then go back to the front with a squad, and help clean up our cracker line. I'd like awfully well to have a hand in runnin' them rebels offen Lookout Mountain. They've bin too infernally impudent and sassy for any earthly use."

"Indeed you won't," said the Surgeon decisively. "You'll go straight home, and stay there until you are well. You won't be fit for duty for at least a month yet, if then. If you went out into camp now you would have a relapse, and be dead inside of a week. The country between here and Chattanooga is dotted with the graves of men who have been sent back to the front too soon."

The journey to Louisville was delightful. At Louisville Levi tried hard to get his caboose taken across the river and attached to a train on the other side, so that the boys could go clear home in it. But a Special Treasury Agent had but little of the importance north of the Ohio River that he had south of it. Still, Levi managed to get the crew of an accommodation train interested in the boys, whom he had driven across the river on a light wagon, lying on his spring mattress. They were placed in a comfortable caboose, and soon were speeding on the last stretch of the journey.

The day was bright and sunny, and the boys were propped up, so that they could look out of the windows and enjoy the scenery. That they were nearing home made Si nervous and fidgety. It seemed to him that the train only crawled, and stopped interminably at every station and crossing. The Deacon became alarmed lest this should unfavorably affect him, and resorted to various devices to divert his mind. He bought a Cincinnati Gazette, and began reading it aloud. Si was deeply interested in all the war news, particularly that relating to the situation at Chattanooga, but he would not listen to the merits of Spalding's Prepared Glue.

The day wore away towards evening.

"Ain't we most there, Pap?" Si asked querulously.

"About 25 mile away, I think," answered his father. "I disremember just how fur that last stop is from the Crick, but I think it's betwixt 25 and 30 mile."

Just then the whistle blew for a stop.

"What'n the world are they stoppin' here for?" groaned Si. "Some woman's got a dozen aigs or a pound o' butter that she wants to send to town. I s'pose we'll stop here until she finishes churnin', or gits another aig to make up a dozen. I never did see sich putterin' along."

The Deacon was deeply absorbed in an editorial on "President Lincoln's duty in this Crisis," and paid no attention. Shorty craned his long neck out of the window.

"Some gal's stopped the train to git on," he reported to Si. "She's apparently been payin' a visit to a house up there a little ways, and they've brung her down in a buggy with her trunk. She's dressed up fit to kill, and she's purtier than a peach-blossom. Jehosephat, Si, I believe she's the very same gal that you was castin' sheep's eyes at when you was home. Yes, it is."

"Annabel?" gasped Si.

"What's that?" said the Deacon, rousing to interest, but carefully putting his thumb down to mark the place where he left off.

"Shorty thinks Annabel is out there gittin' on the train."

"Eh," said the Deacon, shoving up his spectacles and taking a good look. "It certainly is. She's been down here to see the Robinses, who live out here somewhere. I'll jest go out and bring her in here."

CHAPTER VI. THE BOYS IN THE OLD HOME ON BEAN BLOSSOM CREEK.

THE Deacon had been afraid to telegraph directly to his wife that he was bringing the boys home. He knew the deadly alarm that would seize mother and daughters at the very sight of the yellow telegraph envelope directed to them. They would interpret it to mean that Si was dead, and probably in their grief fail to open the envelope and read the message. So at Jeffersonville he sent a message to Sol Pringle, the agent and operator at the station. The Deacon remembered the strain the former message had been on the young operator's intelligence, besides he himself was not used to writing messages, and so, regardless of expense, he conveyed his thoughts to Sol in this wise:

> *Deer Sol: put yore thinkin' cap on, and understand just what Ime sayin'. I want you to send word out to the house at once that Ime comin' home this evenin' on the accommodation train, and bringing the boys. Be keerful and doant make a fool of yourself and skeer the wimmin fokes.*
>
> *Respectfully yores, Josiah Klegg.*

Sol had plenty of time to study that dispatch out, and he not only sent word as desired, but he communicated the news to all who came to the station. The result was there was quite a crowd of friends there to greet the home-comers.

The reception of the message had thrown the household into a flurry of joyful expectancy. It was far better news than the Deacon's last letter had led them to anticipate. After a few moments of tearful ejaculation and mutual kissing over it, mother and daughters began to get everything in readiness to give the returning ones the warmest, most cheerful welcome. Abraham Lincoln was summoned in from his rail-splitting, which he had been pursuing quite leisurely during the Deacon's absence, and stirred to spasmodic energy under Maria's driving to cut an additional supply of dry wood, and carry it into every room in the house, where little Sammy Woggles, the orphan whom the Deacon and Mrs. Klegg were bringing up, built cheer-shedding fires. Mrs. Klegg had her choicest young chickens killed, and after she and Amanda had robbed every other room of whatever they thought would add to the comfort of Si's, she set herself to work preparing a supper which would outdo all her previous efforts.

Hours before the train was due Maria had Abraham Lincoln bring out the spring-wagon and hitch the horses to it. Then he had to lay in a bed of clean straw, and upon this was placed a soft feather bed, blankets and pillows. Maria decided that she would drive to the station herself.

"Never do in the world," said she, "to trust them skittish young horses, what hain't done a lick o' work since Pap went away, to that stoopid darky. They'd surely run away and break his neck, which 'd be no great loss, and save lots o' provisions, but they'd smash that new wagon and break their own necks, which are worth more'n $200 apiece."

"Maria, how can you talk so?" said the gentle Mrs. Klegg reprovingly. "It's a sin to speak so lightly o' death o' a feller-creature."

"Well, if he's a feller-creature o' mine," returned the sprightly Maria, "the Lord made a slack-twisted job of him some dark night out o' remnants, and couldn't find no gumption to put in him. He gave him an alligator's appetite instid. And ain't I tryin' to save his life? Besides, I'm nearly dead to see Si. I want to be the first to see him."

This aroused Amanda, but Maria stood on her rights as the elder sister, had her way, as she usually did, and drove away triumphantly fully two hours before train-time.

Upon her arrival at the station she quickly recognized that she was the central figure in the gathering crowd, and she would have been more than a young woman if she had not made the most of her prominence.

Other girls were there with their fathers and mothers who had brothers who had been in the three months' service, or were now in three years regiments, or who had been discharged on account of disability, or who had been in this battle or that, but none of them a brother who had distinguished himself in the terrible battle about which everybody was now talking, who had helped capture a rebel flag, who had been wounded almost to death, who had been reported dead, and who was now coming home, a still living evidence of all this. No boy who had gone from Bean Blossom Creek neighborhood had made the figure in the public eye that Si had, and Maria was not the girl to hide the light of his achievements under a bushel. She was genially fraternal with those girls who had brothers still in the service, affable to those whose brothers had been in, but were now, for any reason, out, but only distantly civil to those whose brothers had not enlisted. Of these last was Arabella Widgeon, whose father had been one of the earliest immigrants to the Wabash, and was somewhat inclined to boast of his Old Virginia family. He owned a larger farm than the Deacon's, and Arabella, who was a large, showy girl, a year or two older than Maria, had been her schoolmate, and, Maria thought, disposed to "put on airs" over her. Arabella's brother Randolph was older than Si, but had chosen to continue his studies at Indianapolis rather than engage in "a war to free the niggers." But Arabella had developed an interest in the war since she had met some engaging young gentlemen who had come through the neighborhood on recruiting duty, and was keeping up a fitful correspondence with two or three of them.

"It must be very nice, Maria," said Arabella, with a show of cordiality, but which Maria interpreted as an attempt to patronize, "to have your brother back home with you again."

"It certainly will be. Miss Widgeon," answered Maria, with strictly "company manners." "One who has never had a brother exposed to the constant dangers of army life can hardly understand how glad we all feel to have Si snatched from the very jaws of death and brung back to us."

"That's a little love-tap that'll settle several scores with Miss Frills," Maria chuckled to herself. "Partickerly the airs she put on over all us girls when she was running around to singing-school and church with that

Second Lieutenant, who ain't got across the Ohio River yet, and I don't believe he intends to. Sol Pringle tells me all his letters to her are postmarked Jeffersonville."

Arabella took no seeming notice of the shot, but came back sweetly:

"I am awfully glad that your brother was not hurt so badly as at first reported. He couldn't be, and be able to come home now. These papers do magnify everything so, and make no end of fuss over little things as well as big ones, I was very much alarmed at first, for fear Si might be really badly hurt."

This was too much for Maria. Her company manners slid off like a drop of water from a cabbage leaf, and she answered hotly:

"I'd have you know. Miss Widgeon, the papers don't magnify the matter. They don't make a fuss over nothing. They don't begin to tell all the truth. None o' them can. My brother was nearer dead than any man who ever lived. Nothing but the favor of God and Klegg grit pulled him through. It'd killed a whole house full o' Randy Widgeons or that Second Lieutenant. I remember Randy Widgeon turning pale and a'most fainting when he run a fish-hook in his finger. If it ain't nothing, why don't Randy Widgeon go down there a little while, with the rest o' the boys, and do his share?"

"My brother disbelieves in the constitutionality of this war, and denies that we have any right to take away other people's slaves," said Arabella loftily. "I s'pose he's a right to his opinions."

"A poor excuse's better'n none," retorted Maria. "I noticed that he didn't turn out last Summer to keep John Morgan from stealing our people's horses, and robbing their stores and houses. S'pose he thought it unconstitutional to let a nasty rebel gorilla shoot at him. It's very convenient to have opinions to keep you from doin' things that you're afraid to do."

The dialog was approaching the volcanic stage, when a poorly-dressed, sad-faced woman, with a babe in her arms, edged through the crowd to Maria, and said timidly, for she had never been accounted by the Kleggs as in their set:

"Miss Maria, I don't s'pose you know me, but I do so want to git a chance to speak to your pap as soon as he gets here, and before all these people gits hold of him. Mebbe he's found out something about poor Jim. I can't believe that Jim was killed, and I keep hopin' that he got away somehow, and is in one o' them hospitals. Mebbe your pap knows. I know you think Jim was bad and rough, but he was mighty good to me, and he's all that I had. I'm nearly dead to hear about him, but I can't write, nor kin Jim. I've bin tryin' to make up my mind to come over to your house, and ax you to write for me."

"Of course, you can, you poor, dear woman," said Maria, her mood changing at once from fierceness to loving pity. "You shall be the first one to speak to Pap and Si after me. Why didn't you come over to see us long ago. We'd only bin too glad to see you, and do all we could for you. Yes, I know you.

"You're Polly Blagdon, and live down by the sawmill, where your husband used to work. You look tired and weak carrying that big baby. Let me hold him awhile and rest you. Sit down there on that box. I'll make Sol Pringle clear it off for you."

"ARABELLA CURLED HER LIP AT SEEING MARIA TAKE THE BABY."

Arabella curled her nose, at seeing Maria take the unwashed baby in her arms, to the imminent danger of her best gown, but Maria did not notice this, and was all loving attention to the baby and its mother.

It seemed an age until the whistle of the locomotive was heard. The engine had to stop to take water at the creek, several hundred yards from the station, and Maria's impatience to see Si and be the first to speak to him could not brook the delay.

"Come along, Mrs. Blagdon," she called, and with the baby still in her arms, she sped down the cinder track to the pumping station, and then along the line of freight cars until she recognized her father's face looking from the caboose, which was still beyond the bridge. She shouted joyously at him.

"Maria's out there, waitin' for us, and she's got a baby in her arms. What do you suppose she thinks we want a baby for?"

"'Spect she's been practicin' on it, so's to take care o' us, Si," said Shorty. "I believe we've been more trouble to your father than we wuz to our mothers when we wuz teethin'."

"I've bin repaid for all, more'n repaid for all," said the Deacon; "especially since I'm once more back home, and out o' the reach o' the Sheriffs o' Tennessee. I'll stay away from Chattanoogy till after the Grand Jury meets down there. If it does its dooty there'll be several bills with Josiah Klegg's name entirely too conspicuous."

"I want to be able to git out to the next covenant meetin', Pap," said Si with a grin, "and hear you confess to the brethren and sisters all that you've bin up to down at Chattanoogy."

"Well, you won't git there," said the Deacon decisively. "We don't allow nobody in there who hain't arrived at the years o' discreetion, which'll keep you out for a long time yit."

The train pulled over across the bridge, and handing the baby to its mother, Maria sprang in, to recoil in astonishment at the sight of Annabel's blushing face.

"You mean thing," said Maria, "to steal a march on me this way, when I wanted to be the first to see Si. Where in the world did you come from, and how did you find out he was comin' home on this train? Si, you didn't let her know before you did us, did you?"

She was rent by the first spasm of womanly jealousy that any other woman should come between her brother and his mother and sisters.

"Don't be cross, Maria," pleaded Annabel. "I didn't know nothin' of it. You know I've been down to see the Robinses, and intended to stay till tomorrer, but something moved me to come home today, and I just happened to take this train. I really didn't know. Yet," and the instinctive rights of her womanhood and her future relations with Si asserted themselves to her own wonderment, "I had what the preachers call an inward promptin', which I felt it my dooty to obey, and I now think it came from God. You know I ought to be with Si as soon as anybody," and she hid her face in her hands in maidenly confusion.

"Of course you ought, you dear thing," said Maria, her own womanhood overcoming her momentary pique. "It was hateful o' me to speak that way to you."

And she kissed Annabel effusively, though a little deadness still weighed at her heart over being supplanted, even by the girl she liked best in all the world after her own sister.

If the young folks had not been so engaged in their own affairs they would have seen the Deacon furtively undoing his leathern pocket-book and slipping a greenback into the weeping Mrs. Blagdon's hand, as the only consolation he was able to give her.

There were plenty of strong, willing hands to help carry Si from the caboose to the wagon. It was strange how tender and gentle those strong, rough farmers could be in handling a boy who had been stricken down in defense of his country. Annabel's face was as red as a hollyhock over the way that everybody assumed her right to be next to Si, and those who could not get a chance at helping him helped her to a seat in the wagon alongside of him, while the dethroned Maria took her place by her father, as he gathered the reins in his sure hands and started home. Maria had to expend some of the attentions she meant for Si upon Shorty, who received them with awkward confusion.

"Now, don't make no great shakes out o' me, Miss Maria," he pleaded. "I didn't do nothin' partickler, I tell you. I was only along o' Si when he snatched that rebel flag, and I got a little crack on the head, which wouldn't 've amounted to nothin', if I hadn't ketched the fever at Chattanoogy. I'm a'most well, and only come back home to please the Surgeon, who was tired seein' me around."

They found the house a blaze of light, shining kindly from the moment it came in sight, and there was a welcome in Towser's bark which touched Si's heart.

"Even the dogs bark differently up here. Shorty," he said. "It's full and honest, and don't mean no harm. You know that old Towser ain't barkin' to signal some bushwhackers that the Yankees 's comin'. It sounds like real music."

It was Mrs. Klegg's turn to receive a shock when she rushed out to greet her son, and found Annabel by his side. It went deeper to her heart than it had to Maria's; but, then, she had more philosophy, and had foreseen it longer.

After everything had been done, after she had fed them her carefully-prepared dishes, after the boys had been put to bed in the warmed room, and she knew they were sleeping the sound sleep of deep fatigue, she went to her own room to sit down and think it all over. There Maria found her, wiping away her tears, and took her in her arms, and kissed her.

"It's right. It's all right. It's God's ways," said the mother.

"A son's a son till he gets a wife;
But a daughter's a daughter all her life."

CHAPTER VII. WEEKS OF CONVALESCENCE

PLENTY OF NURSING FROM LOVING, TENDER HANDS.

WHAT days those were that followed the arrival of the boys home. In Shorty's hard, rough life he had never so much as dreamed of such immaculate housekeeping as Mrs. Klegg's. He had hardly been in speaking distance of such women as Si's mother and sisters. To see these bright, blithe, sweet-speeched women moving about the well-ordered house in busy performance of their duties was a boundless revelation to him. It opened up a world of which he had as little conception as of a fairy realm. For the first time he began to understand things that Si had told him of his home, yet it meant a hundredfold more to him than to Si, for Si had been brought up in that home. Shorty began to regard the Deacon and Si as superior beings, and to stand in such awe of Mrs. Klegg and the girls that he became as tongue-tied as a bashful school-boy in their presence. It amazed him to hear Si, when the girls would teaze him, speak to them as sharply as brothers sometimes will, and just as if they were ordinary mortals.

"Si, you orter to be more careful in talkin' to your sisters," he remonstrated when they were alone.

"You've bin among rough men so long that you don't know how to talk to real ladies."

"O, come off," said Si, petulantly. "What's a-eatin you. You don't know them girls as well as I do. Particularly Maria. She'll run right over you if you let her. She's one o' the best girls that ever breathed, but you've got to keep a tight rein on her. The feller that marries her's got to keep the whip-hand or she'll make him wish that he'd never bin born."

Shorty's heart bounded at the thought of any man having the unspeakable happiness of marrying that peerless creature, and then having the meanness not to let her do precisely as she wanted to.

Both the boys had been long enough in the field to make that plain farm home seem a luxurious palace of rest. The beds were wonders of softness and warmth, from which no unwelcome reveille or cross-grained Orderly-Sergeant aroused them with profane threats of extra duty.

Instead, after peeping cautiously through the door to see that they were awake, the girls would come in with merry greeting, bowls of warm water, and soft, white towels fragrant of the lawn. Maria would devote herself to helping Shorty get ready for breakfast, and Amanda to Si. Shorty trembled like a captured rabbit when Maria first began her ministrations. All his blood rushed to his face, and he tried to mumble something about being able to take care of himself, which that straightforward young woman paid not the slightest attention to. After his first fright was over there was a thrilling delight about the operation which electrified him.

When the boys were properly washed and combed, Mrs. Klegg, her kind, motherly face beaming with consciousness of good and acceptable service, would enter with a large tray, laden with fragrant coffee, delicious cream, golden butter, her own peerless bread and bits of daintily-broiled chicken.

"Si," said Shorty, one morning after he had finished the best breakfast he had ever known, the girls had gone away with the things, and he was leaning back thinking it all over in measureless content, "if the preachers'd preach that a feller'd go to such a place as this when he died if he was real good, how good we'd all be, and we'd be rather anxious to die. How in the world are we ever goin' to git up spunk enough to leave this and go back to the field?"

"You'll git tired o' this soon enough," said Si. "It's awful nice for a change, but I don't want it to last long. I want to be able to git up and git out. I hate awfully to have women-folks putterin' around me."

The boys could not help rapidly recovering under such favorable conditions, and soon they were able to sit up most of the day. In the evening, ensconced in the big Shaker rocking chairs, sitting on pillows, and carefully swathed in blankets, they would sit on either side of the bright fire, with the family and neighbors forming the semi-circle between, and talk over the war interminably. The neighbors all had sons and brothers in the army, either in the 200th Ind. or elsewhere, and were hungry for every detail of army news. They plied Si and Shorty with questions until the boys' heads ached. Then the Deacon would help out with his observations of camp-life.

"I'm not goin' to believe," said one good old brother, who was an exhorter in the Methodist Church, "that the army is sich a pitfall, sich a snare to the feet o' the unwary as many try to make out. There's no need of any man or boy who goes to serve his country and his God, fallin' from grace and servin' the devil. Don't you think so, too. Deacon? There's no reason why he shouldn't be jest as good a man there as he is at home. Don't you think so, too. Deacon Klegg?"

"Um—um-um," hemmed the Deacon, getting red in the face, and avoiding answering the question by a vigorous stirring of the fire, while Si slily winked at Shorty. "I impressed that on son Jed's mind when he enlisted," continued the brother. "Jed was always a good, straight up-and-down boy; never gave me or his mother a minute's uneasiness. I told him to have no more to do with cards than with smallpox; to avoid liquor as he would the bite of a rattlesnake; to take nothin' from other people that he didn't pay full value for; that swearin' was a pollution to the lips and the heart. I know that Jed hearkened to all that I said, and that it sank into his heart, and that he'll come back, if it's God's will that he shall come back, as good a boy as when he went away."

Si and Shorty did not trust themselves to look at one another before the trusting father's eyes, for Jedediah Bennett, who was one of the best soldiers in Co. Q, had developed a skill at poker that put all the other boys on their mettle; and as for foraging—well, neither Si nor Shorty ever looked for anything in a part where Jed Bennett had been.

"Deacon," persisted Mr. Bennett, "you saw a great deal o' the army. You didn't see the wickedness down there that these Copperheads 's chargin', did you? You only found men wicked that'd be wicked any place, and really good men jest as good there as at home?"

"It's jest as you say, Mr. Bennett," answered the Deacon, coughing to gain time for a diplomatic answer, and turning so that the boys could not see his face. "A wicked man's wicked anywhere, and he finds more chance for his wickedness in the army. A good man ought to be good wherever he's placed, but there are positions which are more tryin' than others. By the way, Maria, bring us some apples and hickory nuts. Bring

in a basketful o' them Rome Beauties for Mr. Bennett to take home with him. You recollect them trees that I budded with Rome Beauty scions that I got up the river, don't you, Bennett? Well, they bore this year, and I've bin calculatin' to send over some for you and Mrs. Bennett. I tell you, they're beauties indeed. Big as your fist, red as a hollyhock, fragrant as a rose, and firm and juicy. I have sent for scions enough to bud half my orchard. I won't raise nothin' hereafter but Rome Beauties and Russets."

The apples and nuts were brought in, together with some of Mrs. Klegg's famous crullers and a pitcher of sweet cider, and for awhile all were engaged in discussing the delicious apples. To paraphrase Dr. Johnson, God undoubtedly could make a better fruit than a Rome Beauty apple from a young tree, growing in the right kind of soil, but undoubtedly He never did. The very smell of the apple is a mild intoxication, and its firm, juicy flesh has a delicacy of taste that the choicest vintages of the Rhine cannot surpass.

But Mr. Bennett was persistent on the subject of morality in the army. He soon refused the offer of another apple, laid his knife back on the plate, put the plate on the table, wiped his mouth and hands, and said:

"Deacon, these brothers and sisters who have come here with me to-night are, like myself, deeply interested in the moral condition of the army, where we all have sons or kinsmen. Now, can't you sit right there and tell us of your observations and experiences, as a Christian man and father, from day to day, of every day that you were down there? Tell us everything, just as it happened each day, that we may be able to judge for ourselves."

Si trembled a httle, for fear that they had his father cornered. But the Deacon was equal to the emergency.

"It's a'most too late, now, Mr. Bennett," he said, looking at the clock, "for it's a long story. You know I was down there quite a spell. We can't keep these boys out o' bed late now, and by the time we have family worship it'll be high time for them to be tucked in. Won't you read us a chapter o' the Bible and lead us in prayer, Brother Bennett?"

While Shorty was rapidly gaining health and strength, his mind was ill at ease. He had more time than ever to think of Jerusha Briggs, of Bad Ax, Wis., and his surroundings accentuated those thoughts. He began by wondering what sort of a girl she really was, compared to Si's sisters, and whether she was used to such a home as this? Was she as handsome, as fine, as high-spirited as Maria? Then his loyal soul reproached him. If she would have him he would marry her, no matter who she she was. Why should he begin now making comparisons with other girls? Then, she might be far finer than Maria. How would he himself compare with her, when he dared not even raise his eyes to Maria?

He had not written her since the Tullahoma campaign. That seemed an age away, so many things had happened in the meanwhile.

He blamed himself for his neglect, and resolved to write at once, to tell her where he was, what had happened to him, and that he was going to try to visit her before returning to the field. But difficult as writing had always been, it was incomparably more so now. He found that where he thought of Jerusha once, he was thinking of Maria a hundred times. Not that he would admit to himself there was any likeness in his thoughts about the two girls. He did not recognize that there was anything sentimental in those about Maria. She was simply some infinitely bright, superior sort of a being, whose voice was sweeter than a bird's, and whose presence seemed to brighten the room. He found himself uncomfortable when she was out of sight. The company of Si or his father was not as all-sufficient and interesting as it used to be. When Maria went out of the room they became strangely dull and almost tiresome, unless they talked of her.

Worse yet. As he grew stronger and better able to take care of himself Maria dropped the familiarity of the nurse, and began putting him on the footing of a young gentleman and a guest of the house. She came no more into the room with the basin of warm water, and got him ready for his breakfast. She toned down carefully with every improvement in his strength. First, she merely brought him the basin and towel, and then as he grew able to go about she would rap on his door and tell him to come out and get ready for breakfast. Shorty began to feel that he was losing much by getting well, and that his convalescence had been entirely too rapid.

Then he would go off and try to compose his thoughts for a letter to Jerusha Briggs, but before he knew it he would find himself in the kitchen watching, with dumb admiration, Maria knead bread, with her sleeves rolled to her shoulders, and her white, plump arms and bright face streaked with flour. There would be little conversation, for Maria would sing with a lark's voice, as she worked, some of the sweet old hymns, chording with Amanda, busy in another part of the house. Shorty did not want to talk. It was enough for him to feast his eyes and ears.

They were sitting down to supper one evening when little Sammy Woggles came in from the station.

"There's your Cincinnati Gazette," he said, handing the paper to the Deacon, "and there's a letter for Si."

"Open it and read it, Maria," said Si, to whom reading of letters meant labor, and he was yet too weak for work.

"It's postmarked Chattanooga, Tenn.," said she, scanning the envelope carefully, "and addressed to Sergeant Josiah Klegg, 200th Indiana Volunteer Infantry, Bean Blossom Creek, Ind."

"Sergeant!" ejaculated Si, Shorty and the Deacon, in the same breath. "Are you sure it's Sergeant?"

"Yes, it's Sergeant," said Maria, spelling the title out. "Who in the world do you s'pose it's from, Si?"

"It don't seem to occur to you that you could find out by openin' it," said the Deacon, sarcastically.

"Open it and see who it's from," said Si.

"The man writes a mighty nice hand," said Maria, scanning the superscription. "Just like that man that taught writing-school here last Winter. It can't be from him, can it? Didn't s'pose there was anybody in your company that could write as well as that. Look, Si, and see if you can tell whose handwritin' it is."

"O, open it, Maria," groaned Si, "and you'll likely find his name writ somewhere inside."

"Don't be so impatient. Si," said Maria, feeling around for a hair-pin with which to rip open the envelope. "You're gittin' crosser'n two sticks since you're gittin' well."

"He certainly does write a nice hand," said Maria, scanning the inclosure deliberately. "Just see how he

makes his d's and s's. All his up-strokes are light, and all his down ones are heavy, just as the writing-master used to teach. And his curves are just lovely. And what a funny name he has signed. J. T. No; I. T. No; that's a J, because it comes down below the line. M-c-G-i-l-l—I can't make out the rest."

"McGillicuddy; ain't that it?" said Si eagerly. "It's from Capt. McGillicuddy. Read it, Maria."

"McGillicuddy. Well, of all the names!" said that deliberate young woman. "Do you really mean to say that any man has really such a name as that?"

"'Mandy, take that letter away from her and read it," commanded Si.

"Well, I'm goin' to read your old letter for you, if you'll just gi' me time," remonstrated Maria. "What are you in such a hurry for, old cross-patch? Le' me see:

"Headquarters, Co. Q, 200th Indiana Volunteer Infantry.
"Chattanooga, Tenn., Nov. 20, 1863.
"Sergeant Josiah Klegg.

"Dear Klegg: I have not heard from you since you left, but I am going to hope that you are getting well right along. All the boys think of you and Shorty, and send their love and their hopes that you will soon be back with us. We all miss you very much.

"I have some good news for you and Shorty. On my recommendation the Colonel has issued a special order promoting you Sergeant and Shorty Corporal, for gallant and meritorious services at the battle of Chickamauga, in which you captured a rebel flag. The order was read on parade this evening. So it is Sergeant Klegg and Corporal Elliott hereafter, and they will be obeyed and respected accordingly. You will take poor Pettibone's place, and Elliott will take Harney's.

"I do not know where Elliott is, but expect that he is with you. If so, give him the news, and also the inclosed letter, which came to me. If not, and you know where he is, write him.

"Write me as soon as you can. We are all getting along very well, especially since Grant came up and opened our cracker line. My little hurt is healing nicely, so that I can go about with a cane. We are all getting ready to jump old Bragg on Mission Ridge, and I am going to do my best to go along at the head of Co. Q, though I have been Acting Major and Lieutenant-Colonel since I got up.

"Regards to your father, and believe me, sincerely your friend,

"J. T. MCGILLICUDDY,

"Captain, Co. Q, 200th Ind. Inf. Vols."

Maria passed the letter over to Si to read again, and without more ado opened the inclosure. As she did so, a glance of recognition of the handwriting flashed upon Shorty, and he started to take the letter from her, but felt ashamed to do so.

"Why, this is from a woman," said Maria, "and she writes an awful bad, scratchy hand." Being a woman's letter she was bound to read it without loss of time, and she did so:

"Bad Ax, Wis., Nov. 10.

"Capt. McGillicuddy.

"Dear Sir: I believe you command the company, as they call it, in which there was a gentleman named Mr. Elliott. The papers reports that he was kild at thfe battle of Chickamaugy. I had some correspondence with him, and I sent him my picture.

Would you kindly write me the particklers of his death, and also what was done with sich letters and other things that he had? I would very much like to have you return me my letters and picture if you have them. Send them by express to Miss Jerusha Briggs, at this plais, and I will pay the charges. I will explain to you why I want them sent to a difrunt naim than that which I sign. Upon learnin' of Mr. Elliott's deth I excepted the addresses of Mr. Adams, whose wife passed away last summer. You may think I was in a hurry, but widowers always mene bizniss when they go a-courtin', as you will know if ever you was a widower, and he had two little girls who needed a mother's care. My husband is inclined to be jelous, as widowers usually are, and I don't want him to ever know nothin' about my letters to Mr. Elliott, and him havin' my picture. I am goin' to ask you to help me, as a gentleman and a Christian, and to keep this confidential.

"Very respectfully,

"Mrs. Benj. F. Adams."

They all listened eagerly to the reading of the letter, and when it was finished looked for Shorty. But he had gone outside, where there was more air.

SHORTY WENT OUTSIDE WHERE THERE WAS MORE AIR.

CHAPTER VIII. SI IS PROMOTED

ANNABEL APPRISED OF IT—SHORTY MEETS JERUSHA.

ANNABEL came in just as the reading of the letter was finished and her arrival caused a commotion in the family, as it always did, which momentarily distracted attention from the missive and Shorty's absence. She and the mother and daughters had to exchange kisses and news about the health of both families. Then she had to give a filial kiss to the Deacon, who had already begun to assume paternal airs toward her, and finally she got around to Si. Neither of them had yet got to the point of "kissing before folks," and had to be content with furtive squeezing of hands. Si's heart was aching to have Annabel read Capt. McGillicuddy's letter, yet such was his shame-faced modesty that not for the world would he have alluded to it before the family. If he had been alone with her, he might have slipped the letter unopened into her hand, with a shy request for her to read it, but so sternly was the Deacon and his family set against anything like "vainglory" and "self-praise" that he could not bring himself to mention that such a letter had been received. At last, when full particulars had been given about the spread of measles and whooping-cough, who was to preach and who to be baptized at the coming quarterly meeting, Maria's active mind turned to things nearer Si's heart, and she said:

"O, Si's got sich a nice letter from his officer-boss, his Corporal, or Colonel, or General, or whatever they call him—Mister—"

"My Captain—Capt. McGillicuddy, Maria," said Si, reddening at Maria's indifference to and ignorance of military titles.

"Yes, Mr. McMillifuddy. Did you ever hear of such a ridiculous name?"

"McGillicuddy—Capt. McGillicuddy, Maria. Why can't you get his name right?"

"Well, if I had sich a name as that I wouldn't expect people to git it right. There's no sense in havin' a Dutch name that makes your tongue crack like a whip. Well, this Mr. McFillemgoody is Si's boss, and he writes a nice letter, and says Si done so well at Chickamaugy that some other boss—a Colonel or Corporal—"

"The Colonel, Maria. The Colonel commands the whole regiment. Won't you never know the difference? A Colonel's much higher than a Corporal. You girls never will learn nothin'."

"Well, I never kin tell t'other from which," replied Maria, petulantly. "And I don't have to. I don't care a hill o' beans whether a Corporal bosses or a Colonel, or t'other way. Anyhow, Si's no longer a Corporal. He's a Sargint."

"O, Si," said Annabel, her big blue eyes filling with grief; "I'm so sorry."

"Why, Annabel," said Si, considerably abashed; "what's the matter? Don't you understand. I'm promoted. Sergeant's higher than a Corporal."

"Is it really?" said Annabel, whose tears were beginning to come. "It don't sound like it. Sargint don't sound near so big as Corporal. I always thought that Corporal was the very purtiest title in the whole army. None o' the rest o' them big names sounded half so nice. Whenever I saw Corporal in the papers I always thought of you."

"Well, you must learn to like Sergeant just as well," said Si, fondly squeezing her hand. "Maria, let her read the letter."

"Well, Mr. Gillmacfuddy does seem like a real nice, sociable sort of a man, in spite of his name," she commented, as she finished. "And I like him, because he seems to be such a good friend o' yours. I s'pose him and you board together, and eat at the same table when you are in the army, don't you?"

"O, no, we don't," said Si patiently, for her ignorance seemed beautifully feminine, where Maria's was provoking. "You see, dear, he's my Captain—commands about a hundred sich as me, and wears a sword and shoulder-straps and other fine clothes, and orders me and the rest around, and has his own tent, all by himself, and his servant to cook for him, and we have to salute him, and do jest what he says, and not talk back—at least, so he kin hear it, and jest lots o' things."

"Then I don't like him a bit," pouted Annabel. "He's a horrid, stuck-up thing, and puts on airs. And he hain't got no business to put on airs over you. Nobody's got any right to put on airs over you, for you're as good as anybody alive."

Si saw that this task of making Annabel under stand the reason for military rank was going to take some time, and could be better done when they were by themselves, and he took her out by the kitchen-fire to make the explanation.

For the very first time in his whole life Shorty had run away from a crisis. With his genuine love of fighting, he rather welcomed any awkward situation in which men were concerned. It was a challenge to him, and he would carry himself through with a mixture of brass, bravado and downright hard fighting. But he would have much more willingly faced the concentrated fire of all the batteries in Bragg's army than Maria's eyes as she raised them from that letter; and as for the comments of her sharp tongue—well, far rather give him Longstreet's demons charging out of the woods onto Snodgrass Hill. He walked out into the barn, and leaned against the fanning-mill to think it all over. His ears burned with the imagination of what Maria was saying. He was very uncomfortable over what the rest of the family were thinking and saying, particularly the view that dear old Mrs. Klegg might take. With the Deacon and Si it was wholly different. He knew that, manlike, they averaged him up, one day with another, and gave him the proper balance to his credit. But Maria—there everything turned to gall, and he hated the very name of Bad Ax, the whole State of Wisconsin and everybody in it. He would never dare go back into the house and face the family. What could he do? There was only one thing—get back to his own home, the army, as soon as possible.

Little Sammy Woggles came out presently to get some wood. Shorty called him to him. There was something fascinatingly mysterious in his tones and actions to that youth, who devoured dime novels on the sly.

"Sammy," said Shorty, "I'm goin' away, right off, and I don't want the people in the house to know nothin' of it. I want you to help me."

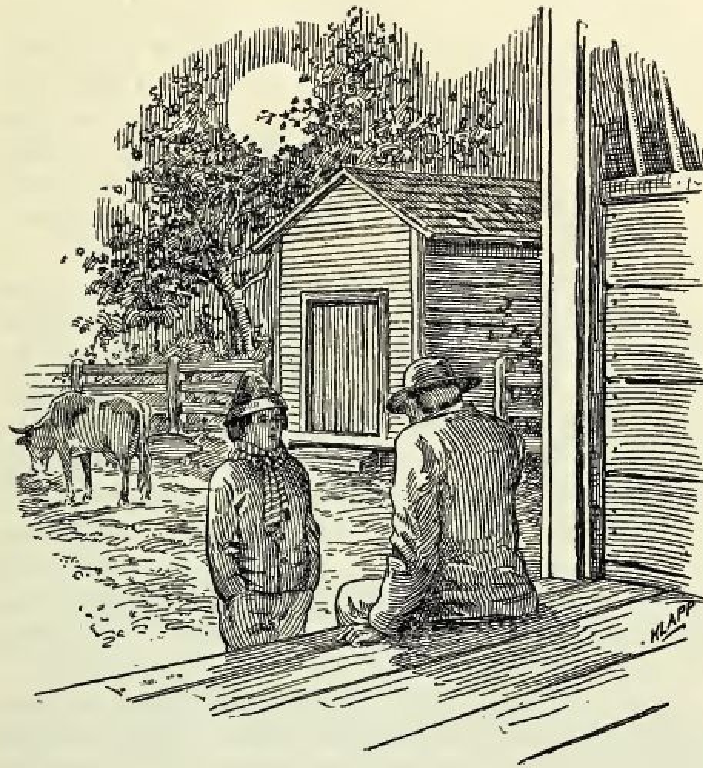
"You bet I will," responded the boy, with his eyes dancing. "Goin' to run away? I'm goin to run away myself some day. I'm awful tired o' havin' to git up in the mornin', wash my face and comb my hair, and do the chores, and kneel down at family prayers, and go to Sunday, school, and stay through church, and then have to spell out a chapter in the Bible in the afternoon. I'm goin' to run away, and be a soldier, or go out on the plains and kill Injuns. I'm layin' away things now for it. See here?"

And he conducted Shorty with much mystery to a place behind the haymow, where he had secreted an old single-barreled pistol and a falseface.

"You little brat," said Shorty, "git all them fool notions out o' your head. This 's the best home you'll ever see, and you stay here just as long as the Lord'll let you. You're playin' in high luck to be here. Don't you ever leave, on no account."

"Then why're you goin' to run away," asked the boy wonderingly.

"That's my business. Something you can't understand, nohow. Now, I want you to slip around there and git my overcoat and things and bring 'em out to me, without nobody seein' you. Do it at once."



"SAMMY," SAID SHORTY, "I'M GOIN' AWAY RIGHT OFF, AND I DON'T WANT THE PEOPLE TO KNOW NOTHIN' OF IT."

While Sammy was gone for the things Shorty laboriously wrote out a note to Si upon a sheet of brown paper. It read:

> *"Deer Si; ive jest red in the papers that the army's goin' 2 move rite off. i no tha need me bad in the kumpany, for tha are short on Korprils, & tha can't do nothin' without Korprils. ive jest time 2 ketch the nekst traine, & ime goin' thare ez fast ez steme kin carry me. Good-by & luv 2 all the folks.*
>
> *"Yours, Shorty."*

"There, Sammy," he said, as he folded it up and gave it to the boy; "keep that quiet until about bed time, when they begin to inquire about me. By that time I'll 've ketched the train goin' east, and be skippin' out for the army. By the way, Sammy, can't you sneak into Miss Maria's room, and steal a piece o' ribbon, or something that belongs to her?"

"I've got a big piece o' that new red Sunday dress o' her's," said Sammy, going to his storehouse and producing it. "I cribbed it once, to make me a flag or something, when I'd be out fightin' the Injuns. Will that do you?"

"Bully," said Shorty, with the first joyous emotion since the reception of the letter. "It's jest the thing. Here's a half-dollar for you. Now, Sammy, kin you write?"

"They're makin' me learn, and that's one reason why I want to run away," with a doleful remembrance of his own grievances. "What's the use of it, I'd like to know? It cramps my fingers and makes my head ache. Simon Kenton couldn't write his own name, but he killed more Injuns than ary other man in the country. I guess you'd want to run away, too, if they made you learn to write."

"You little brat," said Shorty reprovingly; "you don't know what's good for you. You do as they say, and learn to write as quick as you kin." Then, in a softer tone: "Now, Sammy, I want you to promise to write me a long letter—two sheets o' foolscap."

"Why, I never writ so much in all my life," protested the boy. "It'd take me a year."

"Well, you've got to, now, and it mustn't take you two weeks. Here's a dollar for you, and when I git the letter I'll send you home a real rebel gun. Now, you're to cross your heart and promise on your sacred word and honor that you'll keep this secret from everybody, not to tell a word to nobody. You must tell me all about what they say about me, and partickerlerly what Miss Maria says. Tell me everything you kin about Miss Maria, and who goes with her."

"What makes you like Maria better'n you do 'Mandy?" inquired the boy. "I like 'Mandy lots the best. She's heap purtier, and lots more fun, and don't boss me around like Maria does."

"That's all you know about it, you little skeezics. She don't boss you around half as much as she ought to." Then gentler: "Now, Sammy, do jest as I say, and I'll send you home a real rebel gun jest as soon as I get your letter."

"A real gun, that'll be all my own, and will shoot and kick, and crack loud?"

"Yes, a genuine rebel gun, that you kin shoot crows with and celebrate Christmas, and kill a dog."

"Well, I'll write you a letter if it twists my fingers off," said the boy joyously.

"And you hope to be struck dead if you tell a word to anybody?"

"Yes, indeedy," said the boy, crossing his heart earnestly. Shorty folded up the piece of dress goods tenderly, placed it securely in the breast-pocket of his blouse, and trudged over to the station, stopping on the summit of the hill to take a last look at the house. It was a long, hard walk for him, for he was yet far from strong, but he got their before train time.

It was the through train to St. Louis that he boarded, and the only vacant seat that he could find was one partially filled with the belongings of a couple sitting facing it, and very close together. They had hold of one another's hands, and quite clearly were dressed better than they were accustomed to. The man was approaching middle age, and wore a shiny silk hat, a suit of broadcloth, with a satin vest, and a heavy silver watch chain. His face was rather strong and hard, and showed exposure to rough weather. The woman was not so much younger, was tall and angular, rather uncomfortably conscious of her good clothes, and had a firm, settled look about her mouth and eyes, which only partially disappeared in response to the man's persistent endearments. Still, she seemed more annoyed than he did at the seating of another party in front of them, whose eyes would be upon them. The man lifted the things to make room for Shorty, who commented to himself:

"Should think they was bride and groom, if they wasn't so old."

There was a vague hint that he had seen the face somewhere, but he dismissed it, then settled himself, and, busy with his own thoughts, pressed his face against the window, and tried to recognize through the darkness the objects by which they were rushing. They were all deeply interesting to him, for they were part of Maria's home and surroundings. After awhile the man appeared temporarily tired of billing and cooing, and thought conversation with some one else would give variety to the trip. He opened their lunch-basket, took out something for himself and his companion to eat, nudged Shorty, and offered him a generous handful. Shorty promptly accepted, for he had the perennial hunger of convalescence, and his supper had been interrupted.

"Going back to the army?" inquired the man, with his mouth full of chicken, and by way of opening up the conversation.

"Um—huh," said Shorty, nodding assent.

"Where do you belong?"

"200th Injianny Volunteer Infantry."

If Shorty had been noticing the woman he would have seen her start, but would have attributed it to the lurching of the cars. She lost interest in the chicken leg she was picking, and listened to the continuance of the conversation.

"I mean, what army do you belong to?"

"Army o' the Cumberland, down at Chattanoogy."

"Indeed; I might say that I belong to that army myself. I'm going down that way, too. You see, my Congressman helped me get a contract for furnishing the Army o' the Cumberland with bridge timber, and I'm going down to Looeyville, and mebbe further, to see about it. We've just come from St. Louis, where I've bin deliverin' some timber in rafts."

"Where are you from?'

"Bad Ax, Wisconsin, a little ways from La Crosse."

It was Shorty's turn to start, and it flashed upon him just where he had seen that squarish face. It was in an ambrotype that he carried in his breastpocket. He almost choked on the merrythought of the chicken, but recovered himself, and said quickly:

"I have heard o' the place. Lived there long?"

"Always, you might say. Father took me there as a child during the mine excitement, growed up there, went into business, married, lost my wife, and married again. We're now on what you might call our bridal tower. I had to come down here on business, so I brung my wife along, and worked it off on her as our bridal tower. Purty cute, don't you think?"

And he reached over and tried to squeeze his wife's hand, but she repulsed it.

The bridegroom plied Shorty with questions as to the army for awhile after they had finished eating, and then arose and remarked:

"I'm goin' into the smokin'-car for a smoke. Won't you come along with me, soldier, and have a cigar?"

"No, thankee," answered Shorty. "I'd like to, awfully, but the doctor's shut down on my smokin' till I git well."

As soon as he was well on his way the woman leaned forward and asked Shorty in an earnest tone:

"Did you say that you belonged to the 200th Ind.?"

"Yes'm," said Shorty very meekly. "To Co. Q."

"The very same company," gasped the woman.

"Did you happen to know a Mr. Daniel Elliott in that company?"

"Very well, mum. Knowed him almost as well as if he was my own brother."

"What sort of a man was he?"

"Awful nice feller. I thought a heap of him. Thought more of him than any other man in the company. A nicer man you never knowed. Didn't drink, nor swear, nor play cards, nor chaw terbacker. Used to go to church every Sunday. Chaplain thought a heap of him. Used to call him his right bower—I mean his strong suit—I mean his two pair—ace high. No, neither o' them's just the word the Chaplain used, but it was something just as good, but more Bible-like."

"I'm so glad to hear it," murmured the woman.

"O, he was an ornament to the army," continued the unblushing Shorty, who hadn't had a good opportunity to lie in all the weeks that the Deacon had been with him, and wanted to exercise his old talent, to see whether he had lost it. "And the handsomest man! There wasn't a finer-looking man in the whole army. The Colonel used to get awfully jealous o' him, because everybody that'd come into camp 'd mistake him for the Colonel. He'd 'a' bin Colonel, too, if he'd only lived. But the poor fellow broke his heart. He fell in love with a girl somewhere up North—Pewter Hatchet, or some place like that. I never saw her, and don't know nothin' about her, but I heard that the boys from her place said that she was no match for him. She was only plain, ordinary-lookin'."

"That wasn't true," said the woman, under her breath.

"All the same, Elliott was dead-stuck on her. Bimeby he heard some way that some stay-at-home widower was settin' up to her, and she was encouragin' him, and finally married him. When Elliott heard that he was completely beside himself. He lost all appetite for everything but whisky and the blood of widowers. Whenever he found a man who was a widower he wanted to kill him. At Chickamauga, he'd pick out the men that looked old enough to be widowers, and shoot at them, and no others. In the last charge he got separated, and was by himself with a tall rebel with a gray beard. 'I surrender,' said the rebel. 'Are you a widower?' asked Elliott. 'I'm sorry to say that my wife's dead,' said the rebel. 'Then you can't surrender. I'm goin' to kill you,' said Elliott. But he'd bin throwed off his guard by too much talkin'. The rebel got the drop on him, and killed him."

"It ain't true that his girl went back on him before she heard he was killed," said the woman angrily, forgetting herself. "She only married after the report of his death in the papers."

"Jerusha," said Shorty, pulling out the letters and picture, rising to his feet, and assuming as well as he could in the rocking car the pose and manner of the indignant lovers he had seen in melodramas, "I'm Dan Elliott, and your own true love, whose heart you've broke. When I learned of your faithlessness I sought death, but death went back on me. I've come back from the grave to reproach you. You preferred the love of a second-hand husband, with a silver watch-chain and a raft o' logs, to that of an honest soldier who had no fortune but his patriotic heart and his Springfield rifle. But I'll not be cruel to you. There are the evidences of your faithlessness, that you was so anxious to git hold of. Your secret's safe in this true heart. Take 'em and be happy with your bridge-timber contractor. Be a lovin' wife to your warmed-over husband. Be proud of his speculations on the needs o' his country. As for me, I'll go agin to seek a soldier's grave, for I cannot forgit you."

As he handed her the letters and picture he was dismayed to notice that the piece of Maria's dress was mixed in with them. He snatched it away, shoved it back in his pocket, pulled his hat down over his eyes, and, with a melodramatic air, rushed forward into the smoking-car, where he seated himself and at once fell asleep.

He was awakened in the morning at Jeffersonville, by the provost-guard shaking him and demanding his pass.

CHAPTER IX. SHORTY IN TROUBLE

HAS AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE PROVOST-MARSHAL.

"I AINT got no pass," said Shorty, in response to the demand of the Provost-Guard. "Bin home on sick-furlough. Goin' back to the front now. Left my papers at home. Forgot 'em."

"Heard all about lost and missing papers before," said the Sergeant drily. "Fall in there, under guard." And he motioned Shorty to join the gang of stragglers and runaways which had already been gathered up.

"Look here. Sergeant," remonstrated Shorty, "I don't belong in that pack o' shell-fever invalids, and I won't fall in with 'em. There's no yaller or cotton in me. I'm straight goods, all wool, and indigodyed. I've bin promoted Corpril in my company for good conduct at Chickamauga. I'm goin' back to my regiment o' my own accord, before my time's up, and I propose to go my own way. I won't go under guard."

"You'll have to, if you can't show a pass," said the Sergeant decisively. "If you're a soldier you know what orders are. Our orders are to arrest every man that can't show a pass, and bring him up to Provost Headquarters. Fall in there without any more words."

"I tell you I'm not goin' back to the regiment under guard," said Shorty resolutely. "I've no business to go back at all, now. My furlough ain't up for two weeks more. I'm goin' back now of my own free will, and in my own way. Go along with your old guard, and pick up them deadbeats and sneaks, that don't want to go back at all. You'll have plenty o' work with them, without pesterin' me."

"And I tell you you must go," said the Sergeant, irritably, and turning away, as if to end the discussion. "Williams, you and Young bring him along."

"I'll not go a step under guard, and you can't make me," answered Shorty furiously, snatching up the heavy poker from the stove. "You lunkheaded, feather-bed soldiers jest keep your distance, if you know what's good for you. I didn't come back here from the front to be monkeyed with by a passel o' fellers that wear white gloves and dresscoats, and eat soft bread. Go off, and 'tend your own bizniss, and I'll 'tend to mine."

The Sergeant turned back and looked at him attentively.

"See here," he said, after a moment's pause.

"Don't you belong to the 200th Ind.?"

"You bet I do. Best regiment in the Army o' the Cumberland."

"You're the feller they call Shorty, of Co. Q?"

Shorty nodded assent.

"I thought I'd seen you somewhere, the moment I laid eyes on you," said the Sergeant in a friendly tone. "But I couldn't place you. You've changed a good deal. You're thinner'n a fishing-rod."

"Never had no meat to spare," acquiesced Shorty, "but I'm an Alderman now to what I was six weeks ago. Got a welt on my head at Chickamaugy, and then the camp fever at Chattanoogy, which run me down till I could've crawled through a greased flute."

"Well, I'm Jim Elkins. Used to belong to Co. A," replied the Sergeant. "I recollect your stealing the caboose door down there at Murfreesboro. Say, that was great. How that conductor ripped and swore when he found his door was gone. I got an ax from you. You never knew who took it, did you? Well, it was me. I wanted the ax, but I wanted still more to show you that there was somebody in the camp just as slick on the forage as you were. But I got paid for it. The blamed old ax glanced one day, while I was chopping, and whacked me on the knee."

"A thief always gits fetched up with," said Shorty, in a tone of profound moralizing. "But since it had to go I'm glad one o' our own boys got it. I snatched another and a better one that night from the Ohio boys. I'm awful sorry you got hurt. Was it bad?"

"Yes. The doctors thought I'd lose my leg, and discharged me. But I got well, and as soon as they'd take me I re-enlisted. Wish I was back in the old regiment, though. Say, you'll have to go to Headquarters with me, because that's orders, but you just walk alongside o' me. I want to talk to you about the boys."

As they walked along, the Sergeant found an opportunity to say in low tone, so that the rest could not hear:

"Old Billings, who used to be Lieutenant-Colonel, is Provost-Marshal. He's Lieutenant-Colonel of our regiment. He'll be likely to give you a great song and dance, especially if he finds out that you belonged to the old regiment. But don't let it sink too deep on you. I'll stand by you, if there's anything I can do."

"Much obliged," said Shorty, "but I'm all right, and I oughtn't to need any standing by from anybody. That old fly-up-the-crick ought to be ashamed to even speak to a man who's bin fightin' at the front, while he was playin' off around home."

"He'll have plenty to say all the same," returned the Sergeant. "He's got one o' these self-acting mouths, with a perpetual-motion attachment. He don't do anything but talk, and mostly bad. Blame him, it's his fault that we're kept here, instead of being sent to the front, as we ought to be. Wish somebody'd shoot him."

The Provost-Marshal was found in his office, dealing out sentences like a shoulder-strapped Rhadamanthes. It was a place that just suited Billings's tastes. There he could bully to his heart's content, with no chance for his victims getting back at him, and could make it very uncomfortable for those who were disposed to sneer at his military career. With a scowl on his brow, and a big chew of tobacco in his mouth, he sat in his chair, and disposed of the cases brought before him with abusive comments, and in the ways that he thought would give the men the most pain and trouble. It was a manifestation of his power that he gloated over.

"Take the position of soldiers, you slouching clodhoppers," he said, with an assortment of oaths, as the squad entered the office. "One'd think you a passel o' hawbucks half-drunk at a log-rollin', instead o' soldiers in the presence o' your superior officer. Shut them gapin' mouths, lift up them shock-heads, button up your blouses, put your hands down to your sides, and don't no man speak to me without salootin'. And mind what you say, or I'll give you a spell on bread and water, and send you back in irons. I want you to understand that I'll have no foolishness. You can't monkey with me as you can with some officers.

"Had your pocket picked, and your furlough as well as your money taken," he sneered to the first statement. "You expect me to believe that, you sickly-faced yallerhammer. I'll just give you five days' hard labor before sending you back, for lying to me. Go over there to the left, and take your place in that police squad."

"No," he said to the second, "that sick mother racket won't work. Every man we ketch now skulking home is goin' to see his sick and dying mother. There wouldn't be no army if we allowed every man who has a sick mother to go and visit her. None o' your back talk, or I'll put the irons on you."

"No," to a third, "you can't go back to your boarding place for your things, not even with a guard. I know you. You'd give the guard the slip before you went 10 rods. Let your things go. Probably you stole 'em, anyway."

Lieut.-Col. Billings's eye lighted on Shorty, with an expression of having seen him somewhere.

"Where do you belong?" he asked crossly.

"Co. Q, 200th Injianny Volunteer Infantry," replied Shorty proudly.

"Yes. I remember you now," said the Provost-Marshal savagely. "You're one o' them infernal nigger-thieves that brung disgrace on the regiment. You're one o' them that made it so notorious that decent men who had a respect for other people's property was glad to get out of it."

"You're a liar," said Shorty hotly. "You didn't git out o' the regiment because it stole niggers. That's only a pretend. The rear is full o' fellers like you who pretend to be sore on the nigger question, as an excuse for not going to the front. You sneaked out o' every fight the regiment went into. You got out of the regiment because it was too fond of doin' its duty."

"Shut up, you scoundrel! Buck-and-gag him, men," roared Billings, rising and shaking his fist at him.

"Stop that! You musn't talk that way," said the Sergeant, going over to Shorty, and shaking him roughly, while he whispered, "Don't make a blamed fool o' yourself. Keep quiet."

"I won't stop," said Shorty angrily; "I won't let no man talk that way about the 200th Ind., no matter if he wears as many leaves on his shoulders as there is on a beech tree. I'd tell the Major-General that he lied if he slandered the regiment, if I died for it the next minute."

"I order you to take him out and buck-and-gag him," shouted the Provost-Marshal.

The Sergeant caught Shorty by the shoulder, and pushed him out of the room, with much apparent

roughness, but really using no more force than would make a show, while muttering his adjurations to cool down.

"I s'pose I've got to obey orders, and buck-and-gag you," said the Sergeant ruefully, as they were alone together in the room. "It goes against my grain, like the toothache. I'd rather you'd buck-and-gag me. But you are to blame for it yourself. You ought to have more sense than lay it into a Lieutenant-Colonel and Provost-Marshal that way. But you did give it to him fine, the old blow-hard and whisky-sucker. He's no more fit for shoulderstraps than a hog is for a paper-collar. Haven't heard anything for a long time that tickled me so, even while I was mad enough to pound you for having no more sense. I've bin aching to talk that way to him myself."

"Go ahead and obey your orders," said Shorty. "Don't mind me. I'm willin' to take it. I've had my say, which was worth a whole week o' buckin'. It 'll be something to tell the boys when I git back, that I saw old Billings swellin' around, and told him right before his own men just what we think of him. Lord, how it 'll tickle 'em. I'll forgit all about the buckin', but they won't forgit that."

"Blamed if I'll do it," said the Sergeant. "He can take off my stripes, and be blest to him. You said just what I think, and what we all think, and I ought to stand by you. I've a notion to go right back in the room and tell him I won't do it, and pull off my stripes and hand 'em to him, and tell him to take 'em and go to Halifax."

"Now, don't be a fool, Jim," remonstrated Shorty. "You won't help me, and you'll git yourself into trouble. Somebody's got to do it, and I'd rather it'd be you than somebody else. Go ahead and obey your orders. Git your rope and your stick and your bayonet."

"They're all here," said the Sergeant, producing them, with a regretful air. "We've plenty of use for them as long as old Billings is on deck. Say," said he, stopping, as a brighter look came into his face, "I've got an idea."

"Hold on to it till you kin mark its ears, so's you'll know it again for your property," said Shorty sarcastically. "Good idees are skeerce and valuable."

"Jeff Wilson, the General's Chief Clerk, who belongs to my company," said the Sergeant, "told me yesterday that they wanted another Orderly, and to pick out one for him. I'll send a note for him to detail you right off."

He hastily scratched off the following note on a piece of wrapping paper, folded it up, and sent secretly one of his boys on a run with it:

> *"Dear Jeff: Found you a first-class Orderly. It's Shorty, of my old regiment. He's in Billings's clutches, and in trouble. Send down a detail at once for Shorty Elliott, Co. Q, 200th Ind. Rush. Yours, Jim."*

"Here, Sergeant," called out the Provost-Marshal from the other room, "what are you fooling around in there so long for?"

"Somebody's been monkeying with my things," called back the Sergeant. "If they don't let 'em alone I'll scalp somebody."

"Well, get through, and come out here, for there's some more work for you. Make a good job with that scoundrel. I'll be in presently and see it."

Shorty squatted down, and the Sergeant made as easy going an imitation as he could of the punishment.

The messenger encountered the young General near by, limping along on a conscientious morning inspection of things about his post. He had been but recently assigned to the position, to employ him while he was getting well of his wound received at Chickamauga, and was making a characteristic effort to know all about his command. He had sent his staff on various errands, but had his Chief Clerk with him to make notes.

"What's that?" he inquired, as the messenger handed the latter the note.

"Just a note from the Sergeant of the Guard about an Orderly," answered the clerk.

"Let me see it," said the General, who had an inveterate disposition for looking into the smallest details. "What's this? One of the 200th Ind.? Why, that was in my brigade. The 200th Ind. was cut all to pieces, but it stuck to that Snodgrass Hill tighter than a real-estate mortgage. One of the boys in trouble? We'll just go over to the Provost-Marshal's and see about him. It may be that I know him."

The sharp call of the Sergeant on duty outside to "Turn out the Guard for the General," the clatter of muskets, as he was obeyed, the sudden stiffening up of the men lounging about the entrance into the position of the soldier, and their respectful salutes as the General limped in, conveyed to Lieut.-Col. Billings intelligence as to his visitor, and his whole demeanor changed to one of obsequious welcome.

"Very unexpected, General, but very kind in you to visit me," he said, bowing, and washing his hands with invisible soap.

"No kindness at all. Colonel," said the General with official curtness. "Merely my duty, to personally acquaint myself with all portions of my command. I should have visited you before. By the way, I understand you have picked up here a man belonging to my brigade—to the 200th Ind. Where is he?"

Billings's face clouded.

"Yes, we have a man who claimed to belong to that regiment—a straggler, who hadn't any papers to show. I had no idea whether he was telling the truth. He was outrageously sassy, and I had to give him a lesson to keep a civil tongue in his head. Take a seat. I'll send for him."

"No; I'll go and see him," said the General. "Where is he?"

With a foreboding that the scene was going to be made unpleasant for him, Billings led the General into the guard-room.

"WHY, IT'S SHORTY!" SAID THE GENERAL, RECOGNIZING HIM AT ONCE.

"Why, it's Shorty," said the General, recognizing him at once, "who ran back at Stone River, in a heavy fire, and helped me from under my horse."

Shorty winked and nodded affirmatively.

"What was the matter, Colonel?" inquired the General.

"Well," said Billings, defensively, "the feller is a straggler, without papers to show where he belonged, and he was very sassy to me—called me a liar, and said other mean things, right before my men, and I had to order him bucked-and-gagged to shut him up."

"Strange," said General; "I always found him very respectful and obedient. I thought I hadn't a better soldier in my brigade."

Shorty winked appreciatively at Serg't Elkins.

"Take out the gag, let him up, and let me hear what he has to say," said the General.

Shorty was undone and helped to his feet, when he respectfully saluted. His weakness was so apparent that the General ordered him to sit down, and then asked him questions which brought out his story. "You were promoted Corporal, if I recollect," said he, "for gallantry in capturing one of the rebel flags taken by my brigade."

"Yes, sir," answered Shorty.

Billings was feeling very uncomfortable.

"He called me a liar, and a stay-at-home sneak, and other insultin' things," protested he.

"General, he slandered the 200 Ind., which I won't allow no man to do, no matter what he has on his shoulders. I told him that he'd bin fired out o' the regiment, and was a-bummin' in the rear, and hadn't no business abusin' men who was doin' and respectful."

"Hum—very insubordinate, very unsoldierly," said the General. "Very unlike you. Corporal. I'm surprised at you. You were always very obedient and respectful."

"Always to real officers," said Shorty; "but—"

"Silence," said the General, sternly. "Don't aggravate the offense. You were properly punished."

"I ain't kickin' about it," said Shorty stubbornly. "I've got the worth of it."

"I think," continued the General, after having properly vindicated discipline, "that that blow you received on your head may affect your brain at times, and make you unduly irritable. I think I'll have the Surgeon examine you. Put him in an ambulance, Wilson, and take him over to the Surgeon. Then bring him to Headquarters with the report."

Turning to the Lieutenant-Colonel the General said:

"I had another object in visiting you this morning. Colonel. I've got some good news for you. I've found your

officers and men very weary of their long tour of provost duty here, and anxious to go to the front. Of course, I know that you feel the same way."

Billings tried to look as if he did, but the attempt was not a success.

"I have represented to Headquarters, therefore," continued the General, "that it would be to the advantage of the service to have this fine full regiment sent to the front, and its place taken by one that has been run down by hard service, and so get a chance for it to rest and recruit. The General has accepted my views, and orders me to have you get ready to move at once."

"I have tried to do my dooty here, and I thought," murmured Billings, "that it was to the advantage of the Government to have as Provost-Marshal a man who knowed all these fellers and their tricks. It'd take a new man a long time to learn 'em."

"I appreciate that," said the General. "But it's not just to you or your men to make you do so much of this work. I'm expecting every minute notice of a regiment being sent to relieve yours, and therefore you will be ready to start as soon as it arrives. Good morning, sir."

The only relief that Billings could find to his feelings after the General's departure was to kick one of the men's dog out of his office with a great deal of vindictiveness.

CHAPTER X. SHORTY AS ORDERLY

HAS A TOUR OF DUTY AT THE GENERAL'S HEADQUARTERS.

"WELL," said the General, after he had listened to Shorty's story, and questioned him a little, "you are all right now. I'll take care of you. The Surgeon says that you are not fit to go back to the front, and will not be for some time. They have got more sick and convalescents down there now than they can take good care of. The army's gone into Winter quarters, and will probably stay there until Spring opens, so that they don't need either of us. I'll detail you as Orderly at these Headquarters, and you can go back with me when I do."

"I s'pose that's all right and satisfactory," said Shorty, saluting. "It's got to be, anyway. In the army a man with a star on his shoulder's got the last say, and kin move the previous question whenever he wants to. I never had no hankerin' for a job around Headquarters, and now that I'm a Korpril I ought to be with my company. But they need you worse'n they do me, and I've noticed that you was always as near the front as anybody, so I don't think I'll lose no chances by stayin' with you."

"I promise you that we shall both go as soon as there's any prospect of something worth going for," said the General, smiling. "Report there to Wilson. He will instruct you as to your duties."

Wilson's first instructions were as to Shorty's personal appearance. He must get a clean shave and a hair-cut, a necktie, box of paper collars, a pair of white gloves, have blouse neatly brushed and buttoned to his throat and his shoes polished.

"Dress parade every day?" asked Shorty, despairingly.

"Just the same as dress parade every day," answered the Chief Clerk. "Don't want any scarecrows around these Headquarters. We're on dress parade all the time before the people and other soldiers, and must show them how soldiers ought to appear. You'll find a barber-shop and a bootblack around the corner. Make for them at once, and get yourself in shape to represent Headquarters properly."

"Don't know but I'd ruther go to the front and dig rifle-pits than to wear paper collars and white gloves every day in the week," soliloquized Shorty, as he walked out on the street. "Don't mind 'em on Sunday, when you kin take 'em off agin when the company's dismissed from parade; but to put 'em on in the mornin' when you git up, and wear 'em till you go to bed at night—O, Jehosephat! Don't think I've got the constitution to stand that sort o' thing. But it's orders, and I'll do it, even if it gives me softenin' o' the brain. Here, you—(beckoning to a bootblack), put a 250-pounder Monitor coat o' polish on them Tennessee River gunboats. Fall in promptly, now."

The little darky gave an estimating glance at the capacious cowhides, which had not had a touch of the brush since being drawn from the Quarter master, and then yelled to a companion on the other side of the street:

"Hey, Taters, come lend me a spit. I'se got a' army contrack."

"Vhat golor off a gravat do you vant?" asked the Jewish vender of haberdashery, who was rapidly amassing a fortune from the soldiers. "Dere's plack, red, kreen, plue—all lofely golors, unt de vinest kint off silk. Yoost de same as Cheneral Krant vears. He puys lods off me. Von't puy off nopody else vhen he gan ket to me. Now, dere's vun dat'll yoost suit your light gomplexion. You gan vear dat on St. Batrick's day."

And he picked out one of bright green that would have made Shorty's throat seem in wild revolt against his hair.

"Well, I don't know," said Shorty meditatively, pulling over the lot. Then a thought struck him. Taking out the bit of Maria's dress, he said:

"Give me something as near as possible the color of that."

"Veil, I've kot rid off datt off-golored negdie, dat I fought I nefer vould sell," meditated the Jew, as Shorty left. "I'm ahet yoost a tollar-unt-a-haluf on aggount off dat vild Irishman's kirl. Veil, de kirls ket some fellers into sgrapes, unt helps udders oud."

With this philosophical observation the Jew resumed his pleasant work of marking up his prices to better accord with his enlarged views as to the profits he could get off the soldiers.

When Shorty returned to Headquarters, neatly shaven and brushed, and took the position of a soldier before the Chief Clerk, that functionary remarked approvingly:

"Very good, very good, indeed. You'll be an ornament to Headquarters."

And the General, entering the room at that time, added:

"Yes, you are as fine a looking soldier as one would wish to see, and an examaple to others. But you have not your Corporal's chevrons on. Allow me to present you with a pair. It gives me pleasure, for you have well earned them."

Stepping back into his office he returned with the chevrons in his hand.

"There, find a tailor outside somewhere to sew them on. You are now a non-commissioned officer on my staff, and I expect you to do all you can to maintain its character and dignity."

Shorty's face flushed with pride as he saluted, and thought, without saying:

"You jest bet I will. Any loafer that don't pay proper respect to this here staff'll git his blamed neck broke."

"Here," said the Chief Clerk, handing Shorty an official envelope, when the latter returned from having his chevrons sewed on. "Take this down to Col. Billings. Mind you do it in proper style. Don't get to sassing old Billings. Stick the envelope in your belt, walk into the office, take the position of a soldier, salute, and hand him the envelope, saying, 'With the compliments of the General,' salute again, about-face, and walk out."

"I'll want to punch his rotten old head off the minute I set eyes on him," remarked Shorty, sotto voce; "but the character and dignity of the staff must be maintained."

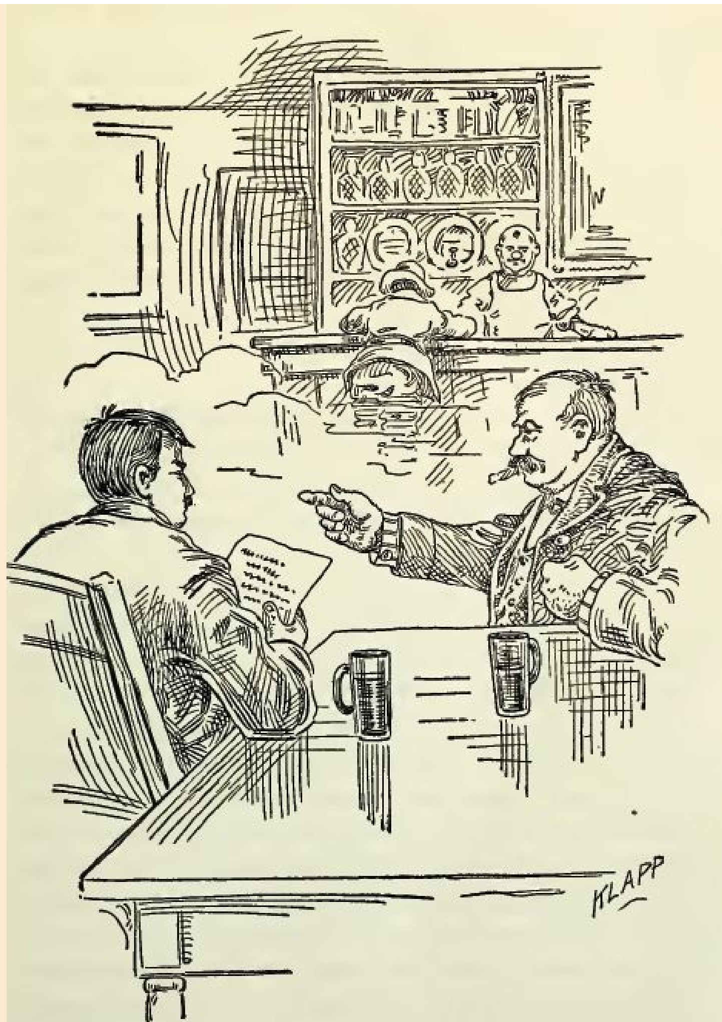
Lieut.-Col. Billings started, and his face flushed, when he saw Shorty stalk in, severely erect and soldierly. Billings was too little of a soldier to comprehend the situation. His first thought was that Shorty, having been taken under the General's wing, had come back to triumph over him, and he prepared himself with a volley of abuse to meet that of his visitor. But Shorty, with stern eyes straight to the front, marched up to him, saluted in one-two-three time, drew the envelope from his belt, and thrusting it at him as he would his gun to the inspecting officer on parade, announced in curtly official tones, "With General's compliments, sir," saluted again, about-faced as if touched with a spring, and marched stiffly toward the door.

Billings hurriedly glanced at the papers, and saw that instead of some unpleasant order from the General, which he had feared, they were merely some routine matters. His bullying instinct at once reasserted itself:

"Puttin' on a lot o' scollops, since, just because you're detailed at Headquarters," he called out after Shorty. "More style than a blue-ribbon horse at a county fair, just because the General took a little notice of you. But you'll not last long. I know you."

"Sir," said Shorty, facing about and stiffly saluting, "if you've got any message for the General, I'll deliver it. If you hain't, keep your head shet."

"O, go on; go on, now, you two-for-a-cent Corporal. Don't you give me any more o' your slack, or I'll report you for your impudence, and have them stripes jerked offen you."



"WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT?" SAID THE GAMBLER.

Hot words sprang to Shorty's lips, but he remembered the General's injunction about the character and dignity of the staff, and restrained himself to merely saying:

"Col. Billings, some day I won't belong to the staff, and you won't have no shoulder-straps. Then I'll invite you to a little discussion, without no moderator in the chair."

"Go on, now. Don't you dare threaten me," shouted Billings.

"How'd you get along with Billings?" inquired the Chief Clerk, when Shorty returned.

"About as well as the monkey and the parrot did," answered Shorty, and he described the interview, ending with:

"I never saw a man who was achin' for a good lickin' like that old bluffer. And he'll git it jest as soon as he's out o' the service, if I have to walk a hundred miles to give it to him."

"I'm afraid you'll have to wait a good while," answered Wilson. "He'll stay in the service as long as he can keep a good soft berth like this. He's now bombarding everybody that's got any influence with telegrams to use it to keep him here in the public interest. He claims that on account of his familiarity with things here he is much more valuable to the Government here than he would be in the field."

"No doubt o' that," said Shorty. "He ain't worth a groan in the infernal regions at the front. He only takes the place and eats the rations of some man that might be of value."

"See here," said Wilson, pointing to a pile of letters and telegrams on his desk. "These are protests against Billings being superseded and sent away. More are coming in all the time. They are worrying the General like everything, for he wants to do the right thing. But I know that they all come from a ring of fellows around here who sell whisky and slop-shop goods to the soldiers, and skin them alive, and are protected by Billings. They're whacking up with him, and they want him to stay. I'm sure of it, but I haven't any proof, and there's no use saying anything to the General unless I've got the proof to back it."

"Wonder if I couldn't help git the proof," suggested Shorty, with his sleuth instincts reviving.

"Just the man," said the Chief Clerk eagerly, "if you go about it right. You're a stranger here, and scarcely anybody knows that you belong to Headquarters. Get yourself back in the shape you were this morning, and go out and try your luck. It'll just be bully if we can down this old blowhard."

Shorty took off his belt and white gloves, unbuttoned his blouse, and lounged down the street to the quarter where the soldiers most congregated to be fleeced by the harpies gathered there as the best place to catch men going to or returning from the front. Shorty soon recognized running evil-looking shops, various kinds of games and drinking dens several men who had infested the camps about Nashville and Murfreesboro until the Provost-Marshal had driven them away.

"Billings has gathered all his old friends about him," said he to himself. "I guess I'll find somebody here that I kin use."

"Hello, Injianny; what are you doin' here?" inquired a man in civilian clothes, but unmistakably a gambler.

Shorty remembered him at once as the man with whom he had had the adventure with the loaded dice at Murfreesboro. With the fraternity of the class, neither remembered that little misadventure against the other. They had matched their wits for a wrestle, and when the grapple was over it was over.

Shorty therefore replied pleasantly:

"O, jest loafin' back here, gittin' well o' a crack on the head and the camp fever."

"Into anything to put in the time?"

"Naah," said Shorty weariedly. "Nearly dead for something. Awful stoopid layin' around up there among them hayseeds, doin' nothin'. Jest run down to Jeffersonville to see if I couldn't strike something that'd some life in it."

"Well, I kin let you into a good thing. I've bin runnin' that shebang over there, with another man, and doin' well, but he let his temper git away with him, and shpped a knife into a sucker, and they've got him in jail, where he'll stay awhile. I must have another partner. Got any money?"

"A hundred or so," answered Shorty.

"Well, that's enough. I don't want money so much as the right kind of a man. Put up your stuff, and I'll let you in cahoots with me, and we'll make a bar'l o' money out o' these new troops that'll begin coming down this week."

"I like the idee. But how do you know you kin run your game. This Provost-Marshall—"

"O, the Provost's all right. He's an old friend o' mine. I have him dead to rights. Only whack up fair with him, and you're all right. Only pinches them that want to hog on him and won't share. I've bin runnin' right along here for weeks, and 've had no trouble. I give up my little divvy whenever he asks for it."

"If I was only certain o' that," said Shorty meditatively, "I'd—"

"Certain? Come right over here to that ranch, and have a drink, and I'll show you, so's you can't be mistaken. I tell you, I'm solid as a rock with him."

When seated at a quiet table, with their glasses in front of them, the gambler pulled some papers from his breast pocket, and selecting one shoved it at Shorty with the inquiry: "There, what do you think o' that?"

Shorty read over laboriously:

"Deer Bat: Send me 50 please. I set behind two small pair last night, while the other feller had a full, & Ime strapt this morning. Yores,

"Billings."

"That seems convincing," said Shorty.

"Then look at this," said the gambler, producing another paper. It read:

"Deer Bat: Got yore $100 all right, but doant send by that man again. He's shaky, and talks too much. Bring it yourself, or put it in an envelope directed to me, & drop it in my box. Yores,

"Billings."

"That's enough," said Shorty, with his mind in a tumult, as to how he was to get these papers into his possession. "I'll go in with you, if you'll take me. Here's my fist."

He reached out and shook hands with Bat Meacham over the bargain, and called to the waiter, "Here, fill 'em up agin."

Shorty pulled some papers out of his pocket to search for his money, and fumbled them over. There were two pieces among them resembling the scraps on which Billings had written his notes. They contained some army doggerel which the poet of Co. Q had written and Shorty was carrying about as literary treasures.

The waiter wiped off the table as he replaced the glasses, and Shorty lifted up the gambler's papers to permit him to do so. He laid down his own papers instead, and with them a $10 bill.

"There," he said; "I find that's all the money I have with me, but it's enough to bind the bargain. I left a couple hundred with the clerk at the tavern. I'll go right up and git it, and we'll settle the thing right here."

"Very good," replied Bat Meacham; "git back as quick as you kin. You'll find me either here or hangin' around near. Let's fix the thing up and git ready. I think a new regiment'll be down here tomorrow, and all the men'll have their first installment o' bounty and a month's pay."

Shorty hurried back to Headquarters and laid his precious papers before the Chief Clerk, who could not contain his exultation.

"Won't there be a tornado when the General sees these in the morning," he exclaimed. "He's gone out to camp, now, or I'd take them right to him. But he shall have them first thing in the morning."

The next morning Shorty waited with eager impatience while the General was closeted with his Chief Clerk. Presently the General stepped to the door and said sternly:

"Corporal."

"Yes, sir," said Shorty, springing to his feet and saluting.

"Go down at once to the Provost-Marshal's office and tell Col. Billings to come to Headquarters at once. To come at once, without a moment's delay."

"Yes, sir," said Shorty saluting, with a furtive wink at the Chief Clerk, which said as plainly as words, "No presenting compliments this time."

He found Billings, all unconscious of the impending storm, dealing out wrath on those who were hauled before him.

"Col. Billings," said Shorty, standing stiff as a ramrod and curtly saluting, "the General wants you to come to Headquarters at once."

"Very well," replied Billings; "report to the General that I'll come as soon as I dispose of this business."

"That'll not do," said Shorty with stern imperiousness. "The General orders (with a gloating emphasis on 'orders') you to drop everything else, and come instantly. You're to go right back with me."

Shorty enjoyed the manifest consternation in Billings's face as he heard this summons. The men of the office pricked up their ears, and looked meaningly at one another. Shorty saw it all, and stood as straight and stern as if about to lead Billings to execution.

Billings, with scowling face, picked up his hat, buttoned his coat, and walked out.

"Do you know what the General wants with me. Shorty?" he asked in a conciliatory way, when they were alone together on the sidewalk.

"My name's Corporal Elliott. You will address me as such," answered Shorty.

"Go to the devil," said Billings.

Billings tried to assume a cheerfully-genial air as he entered the General's office, but the grin faded at the sight of the General's stern countenance.

"Col. Billings," said the General, handing him the two pieces of paper, "do you recognize these?"

"Can't say that I do," answered Billings, pretending to examine them while he could recover his wits sufficiently for a fine of defense.

"Don't attempt to lie to me," said the General wrathfully, "or I'll forget myself sufficiently to tear the straps from your disgraced shoulders. I have compared these with other specimens of your handwriting, until I have no doubt. I have sent for you not to hear your defense, or to listen to any words from you. I want you to merely sit down there and sign this resignation, and then get out of my office as quickly as you can. I don't want to breathe the same air with you. I ought to courtmartial you, and set you to hard work on the fortifications, but I hate the scandal. I have already telegraphed to Army Headquarters to accept your resignation by wire, and I shall send it by telegraph.

"I cannot get you out of the army too quickly. Sign this, and leave my office, and take off your person every sign of your connection with the army. I shall give orders that if you appear on the street with so much as a military button on, it shall be torn off you."

As the crushed Lieutenant-Colonel was leaving the office, Shorty lounged up, and said:

"See here. Mister Billings—you're Mister Billings now, and a mighty ornery Mister, too, I'm going to lay for you, and settle several little p'ints with you. You've bin breedin' a busted head, and I'm detailed to give it to you. Git out, you hound."

CHAPTER XI. SHORTY RUNS HEADQUARTERS

GETS ENTIRELY TOO BIG FOR HIS PLACE.

THE disturbance in the Deacon's family when Shorty's note was delivered by little Sammy Woggles quite came up to that romance-loving youth's fond anticipations. If he could only hope that his own disappearance would create a fraction of the sensation he would have run away the next day. It would be such a glorious retribution on those who subjected him to the daily tyranny of rising early in the morning, washing his face, combing his hair, and going to school. For the first time in his life the boy found himself the center of interest in the family. He knew something that all the rest were intensely eager to know, and they plied him with questions until his young brain whirled. He told them all that he knew, except that which Shorty had enjoined upon him not to tell, and repeated his story without variation when separately examined by different members of the family. All his leisure for the next few days was put in laboriously constructing, on large sheets of foolscap, the following letter, in which the thumb-marks and blots were more conspicuous than the "pot-hook" letters:

dEER shoRty:

doNt 4git thAt REblE guN u promist mE.

thAir wAs An oRful time wheN i giv um yorE lEttEr.

missis klEgg shE cride.

mAriAr shE sEd did u EvEr No Ennything so Ridiklus.

*si hE sed thAt shorty kood be morE Kinds ov fool in A minnit
thAn Ary uthEr boy hE Ever node, Not bArrin Tompsons colt.*

*thE deAcon hE wAntid 2 go 2 the tranE & stop u. When hE
found hE kooddEnt do that, hE wAntid 2 tElEgrAf 2 Arrest u &
bring u bAk.*

*But si hE sEd bEttEr let u run till u got tirEd. Ude fEtch
up sum whAir soon. Then thEy wood sHp a bridlE ovEr yore
hEAd & brink u bAk.*

i hAint told mAriA nothin but u hAd bEtEr sEnd thAt gun rite

off.

ile look 4 it EvEry dAy til i git it.

mi pen iz bAd, mi ink iz pAle, send thAt gun & NEVEr f ALE.

YorEs, SAM.

As soon as he saw that he was likely to remain at Headquarters for some time. Shorty became anxious about that letter from Sammy, and after much scheming and planning, he at last bethought himself of the expedient of having the Chief Clerk write an official letter to Sam Elkins, the postmaster and operator at Bean Blossom Creek Station, directing him to forward to Headquarters any communications addressed to Corp'l Elliott, 200th Ind. Vols., and keep this matter a military secret.

In spite of his prepossessions against it, Shorty took naturally to Headquarters duty, as he did to everything else in the army. He even took a pride in his personal appearance, and appeared every morning as spick and span as the barber-shop around the corner could make him. This was because the General saw and approved it, and—because of the influence Maria had projected into his life. The Deacon's well-ordered home had been a revelation to him of another world, of which he wanted to be a part. The gentle quiet and the constant consideration for others that reigned there smoothed off his rough corners and checked the rasping of his ready tongue.

"I'm goin' to try to be half-white," he mentally resolved; "at least, as long's I'm north o' the Ohio River. When I'm back agin at the front, I kin take a rest from being respectable."

He was alert, prompt, and observant, and before he was himself aware of it began running things about the ante-rooms to Headquarters. More and more the General and Chief Clerk kept putting the entire disposal of certain matters in his hands, and it was not surprising that he acted at times as if he were the Headquarters himself, and the General and others merely attaches. Shorty always had that way about him.

"No, you can't see the General today," he would say to a man as to whom he had heard the General or the Chief Clerk hint was a bore, and wasted their time. "The General's very busy. The President's layin' down on him for his advice about a campaign to take Richmond by a new way, and the General's got to think at the rate of a mile a minute in order to git it off by telegraph."

"DON'T YOU KNOW BETTER THAN TO COME TO HEADQUARTERS LIKE THAT?"

"Here," to a couple of soldiers who came up to get their furloughs extended, "don't you know better than to come to Headquarters looking as if your clothes had been blowed on to you? How long've you bin in the army? Hain't you learned yit that you must come to Headquarters in full dress? Go back and git your shoes blacked, put on collars, button up your coats, and come up here lookin' like soldiers, not teamsters on the Tullyhomy mud march."

"No," very decisively, to a big-waisted, dark-bearded man; "you can't git no permit here to open no shebang in camp or anywheres near. Too many like you out there now. We're goin' to root 'em all out soon. They're all sellin' whisky on the sly, and every last one of 'em orter be in jail."

"Certainly, madam," tenderly to a poor woman who had come to see if she could learn something of her son, last heard from as sick in hospital at Chattanooga. "Sit down. Take that chair—no, that one; it's more comfortable. Give me your son's name and regiment. I'll see if we kin find out anything about him. No use seein' the General. I'll do jest as well, and 'll tend to it quicker."

"No," to a raw Captain, who strolled in, smoking a cheap cheroot. "The General's not in to an officer who comes in here like as if Headquarters was a ward caucus. He'll be in to you when you put on your sword and button up your coat."

It amused and pleased the General to see Shorty take into his hands the administration of military etiquette; but one day, when he was accompanying the General on a tour of inspection, and walking stiffly at the regulation distance behind, a soldier drunk enough to be ugly lurched past, muttering some sneers about "big shoulder-straps."

Shorty instantly snatched him by the collar and straightened him up.

"Take the position of a soldier," he commanded.

The astonished man tried to obey.

"Throw your chest out," commanded Shorty, punching him in the ribs. "Little fingers down to the seams of your pants," with a cuff at his ears. "Put your heels together, and turn out your toes," kicking him on the shin. "Hold up your head," jabbing him under the chin. "'Now respectfully salute."

The cowed man clumsily obeyed.

"Now, take that to learn you how to behave after this in the presence of a General officer," concluded Shorty, giving him a blow in the face that sent him over.

The General had walked on, apparently without seeing what was going on. But after they had passed out of the sight of the group which the affair had gathered, he turned and said to Shorty:

"Corporal, discipline must be enforced in the army, but don't you think you were a little too summary and condign with that man?"

"Hardly know what you mean by summary and condign. General, But if you mean warm by summary, I'll say that he didn't git it half hot enough. If I'd had my strength back I'd a' condigned his head off. But he got his lesson jest when he needed it, and he'll be condigned sure to behave decently hereafter."

Just then ex-Lieut.-Col. Billings came by. He was dressed in citizen's clothes, and he glared at Shorty and the General, but there was something in the latter's face and carriage which dominated him in spite of himself, his camp associations asserted themselves, and instinctively his hand went to his hat in a salute.

This was enough excuse for Shorty. He fell back until the General was around the corner, out of sight, and then went up to Billings.

"Mister Billings," said he, sternly, "what was the General's orders about wearin' anything military?"

"Outrageously tyrannical and despotic," answered Billings hotly. "But jest what you might expect from these Abolition satraps, who're throttlin' our liberties. A white man's no longer got any rights in this country that these military upstarts is bound to respect. But I'm obeyin' the order till I kin git an appeal from it."

"You're a liar. You're not," said Shorty, savagely.

"Why, what in the world have I got on that's military?" asked Billings, looking himself over.

"You're wearin' a military saloot, which you have no business to. You've got no right to show that you ever was in the army, or so much as seen a regiment. You salooted the General jest now. Don't you ever let me see you do it to him agin, or to no other officer. You musn't do nothin' but take off your hat and bow. You hear me?"

Shorty was rubbing it in on his old tormentor in hopes to provoke him to a fight. But the cowed man was too fearful of publicity just then. He did not know what might be held in reserve to spring upon him. He shambled away, muttering:

"O, go on! Grind down upon me. You'll be wantin' to send me to a Lincoln bastile next. But a day will come when white men'll have their rights agin."

Unfortunately for Shorty, however, he was having things too much his own way. There were complaints that he was acting as if he owned Headquarters.

Even the General noticed it, and would occasionally say in tones of gentle remonstrance:

"See here, Corporal, you are carrying too big a load. Leave something for the rest of us to do. We are getting bigger pay than you are, and should have a chance to earn our money."

But Shorty would not take the hint. With his rapidly-returning strength there had come what Si termed "one of his bull-headed spells," which inevitably led to a cataclysm, unless it could be worked off legitimately, as it usually was at the front by a toilsome march, a tour of hard fatigue duty, or a battle or skirmish. But the routine of Headquarters duties left him too much chance to get "fat and sassy."

One day the General and his staff had to go over to Louisville to attend some great military function, and Shorty was left alone in charge of Headquarters. There was nothing for him to do but hold a chair down, and keep anybody from carrying off the Headquarters. This was a dangerous condition, in his frame of mind. He began meditating how he could put in the idle hours until the General should return in the evening. He thought of hunting up Billngs, and giving him that promised thrashing, but his recent experience did not promise hopefully that he could nag that worthy into a fight that would be sufficiently interesting.

"I'd probably hit him a welt and he'd go off bawlin' like a calf," he communed with himself. "No; Billings is too tame, now, until he finds out whether we've got anything on him to send him to the penitentiary, where he orter go."

Looking across the street he noticed Eph Click, whom he had known as a camp-follower down in Tennessee, and was now running a "place" in the unsavory part of the town. Shorty had the poorest opinion of Eph, but the latter was a cunning rascal, who kept on the windy side of the law, and had so far managed to escape the active notice of the Provost-Marshal. He was now accompanied by a couple of men in brand-new uniforms, so

fresh that they still had the folds of the Quartermaster's boxes.

"There goes that unhung rascal, Eph Glick," he said to himself, "that orter be wearin' a striped suit, and breakin' stone in the penitentiary. He's runnin' a reg'lar dead-fall down the street, there, and he's got a couple o' green recruits in tow, steerin' them to where he kin rob 'em of their pay and bounty. They won't have a cent left in two hours. I've bin achin' to bust him up for a long time, but I've never bin able to git the p'ints on him that'd satisfy the General or the Provo. I'll jest go down and clean out his shebang and run him out o' town, and finish the job up while the General and the Provo's over in Louisville. It'll all be cleaned up before they git back, and they needn't know a word of it. Eph's got no friends around here to complain. He's a yaller hound, that nobody cares what's done to him. It'll be good riddance o' bad rubbish."

He stalked out of the Headquarters, and beckoned imperiously to a squad that he saw coming down the street under the command of a Sergeant. Seeing him come out of Headquarters there was no question of his right to order, and the Sergeant and squad followed.

They arrived in front of Eph's place about the same time he did.

"Take that man," said Shorty, pointing to Eph, "and put him aboard the next train that goes out. Think yourself lucky, sir, that you git off so easily. If you ever show your face back here agin you'll be put at hard labor on the fortifications for the rest o' your natural life. Hustle him off to the depot, a couple of you, and see that he goes off when the train does. The rest o' you bring out all the liquor in that place, and pour it into the gutter. Sergeant, see that nobody's allowed to drink or carry any away."

Nothing more was needed for the crowd that had followed up the squad, anticipating a raid. Bottles, demijohns and kegs were smashed, the cigars and tobacco snatched up, and the place thoroughly wrecked in a few minutes.

Shorty contemplated the ruin from across the street, and strolled back to Headquarters, serenely conscious of having put in a part of the day to good advantage.

That evening the Provost-Marshal came into Headquarters, and said:

"I'm sorry, General, that you felt that Click place so bad that you were compelled to take personal action. I have known for some time that something ought to be done, but I've been trying to collect evidence that would hold Glick on a criminal charge, so that I could turn him over to the civil authorities."

"I do not understand what you mean, Colonel," answered the General.

"I mean that Glick place that was raided by your orders today."

"I gave no orders to raid any place. I have left all those matters in your hands, Colonel, with entire confidence that you would do the right thing."

"Why, one of my Sergeants reported that a Corporal came from your Headquarters, and directed the raid to be made."

"A Corporal from my Headquarters?" repeated the General, beginning to understand. "That's another development of that irrepressible Shorty." And he called:

"Corp'l Elliott."

"Yes, sir," responded Shorty, appearing at the door and saluting.

"Did you raid the establishment of a person named"

"Eph Glick," supplied the Provost-Marshal.

"Yes, Ephraim Glick. Did you direct it; and, if so, what authority had you for doing so?"

"Yes, sir," said Shorty promptly. "I done it on my own motion. It was a little matter that needed tending to, and I didn't think it worth while to trouble either you or the Provo about it. The feller's bin dead-ripe for killin' a long time. I hadn't nothin' else to do, so I thought I'd jest git that job offen my hands, and not to have to think about it any more."

"Corporal," said the General sternly, "I have not objected to your running my office, for I probably need all the help in brains and activity that I can get. But I must draw the line at your assuming the duties of the Provost-Marshal in addition. He is quite capable of taking care of his own office. You have too much talent for this narrow sphere. Gen. Thomas needs you to help him run the army. Tell Wilson to make out your transportation, so that you can start for your regiment tomorrow. The Provost-Marshal and I will have to try to run this town without your help. It will be hard work, I know; but, then, that is what we came into the service for."

Shorty grumbled to another Orderly as he returned to his place in the next room:

"There, you see all the thanks you git for bein' a hustler in the way of doin' your dooty. I done a job for 'em that they should've 'tended to long ago, and now they sit down on me for it."

CHAPTER XII. SHORTY ON A HUNT

GOES AFTER KNIGHTS OF THE GOLDEN CIRCLE.

THAT evening, as Shorty was gathering his things together, preparatory for starting to the front the next morning, Lieut. Bigelow, one of the General's young Aids, thrust his head through the doorway and said gleefully:

"Here, Corporal; I want you. I've got a great lark. Our Secret Service people report a bad lodge of the Knights of the Golden Circle out here in the country that threatens to make trouble. It is made up of local scalawags and runaway rebels from Kentucky and Tennessee. They have a regular lodge-room in a log house

out in the woods, which they have fixed up into a regular fort, and they hold their meetings at nights, with pickets thrown out, and no end of secrecy and mystery. The General thinks that they are some of the old counterfeiting, horse-stealing gang that infested the country, and are up to their old tricks. But it may be that they are planning wrecking a train, burning bridges and the like. They've got so bold that the Sheriff and civil officials are afraid of them, and don't dare go near them. I've persuaded the General to let me take out a squad and jump them. Want to go along?"

"I'm your huckleberry," said Shorty.

"I knew you'd be," answered the Lieutenant; "so I got the General to let me have you. We'll get some 10 or 12 other good boys. That will be enough. I understand that there are about 100 regular attendants at the lodge, but they'll not all be there at any time, and a dozen of us can easily handle what we find there at home."

"A dozen'll be a great plenty," assented Shorty. "More'd be in the way."

"Well, go out and pick up that many of the right kind of boys, bring them here, and have them all ready by 10 o'clock. You can find guns and ammunition for them in that room upstairs."

Shorty's first thought was of his old friend, Bob Ramsey, Sergeant of the Provost-Guard. He found him, and said:

"See here, Bob, I've got something on hand better'n roundin' up stragglers and squelchin' whisky rows. I've got to pick out some men for a little raid, where there'll be a chance for a red-hot shindy. Want to go along?"

"You bet," answered the Sergeant. "How many men do you want? I'll get 'em and go right along."

"No, you don't," answered Shorty. "I'm to be the non-commish of this crowd. A Lieutenant'll go along for style, but I'll run the thing."

"But you're only a Corporal, while I'm a Sergeant," protested Bob. "'Taint natural that you should go ahead of me. Why can't you and I run it together, you next to me? That's the correct thing."

"Well, then," said Shorty, turning away, "you stay and run your old Provo-Guard. This is my show, and I aint goin' to let nobody in it ahead o' me."

"Come, now, be reasonable," pleaded Bob. "Why can't you and I go along together and run the thing? We'll pull together all right. You know I've been a Sergeant for a long time, and know all about the handling of men."

"Well, stay here and handle 'em. I'll handle the men that I take, all right. You kin gamble on that. And what I say to them has to go. Won't have nobody along that outranks me."

"Well," answered Bob, with a gulp, "let me go along, then, as a Corporal—I'll change my blouse and borrow a Corporal's—"

"Rankin' after me?" inquired Shorty.

"Yes; we had a Corporal promoted day before yesterday. I'll borrow his blouse."

"Promoted day before yesterday," communed Shorty; "and you won't presume to boss or command no more'n he would?"

"Not a mite," asserted Bob.

"Well, then, you kin come along, and I'll be mighty glad to have you, for I know you're a standup feller and a good friend o' mine, and I always want to oblige a friend by lettin' him have a share in any good fight I have on hand."

Jeff Wilson, the Chief Clerk, got wind of the expedition, and he too begged to be taken along, to which Shorty consented.

When Lieut. Bigelow came in at 10 o'clock he found Shorty at the head of 12 good men, all armed and equipped, and eager for the service.

"In talking with the Secret Service men," explained the Lieutenant, "they suggested that it would be well to have one good man, a stranger, dressed in citizen's clothes—butternut jeans, if possible—to go ahead at times and reconnoiter. He ought to be able to play off refugee rebel, if possible."

"I'll do it. I'm just the man," said Shorty eagerly.

"Well, just come in here," said the Lieutenant. "Now, there's a lot of butternut jeans. I guess there's a pair of pantaloons long enough for you."

When Shorty emerged from the room again there was a complete transformation. Except that his hair was cut close, he was a perfect reproduction of the tall, gaunt, slouching Tennesseean.

"Perfect," said the Lieutenant, handing him a couple of heavy Remington revolvers. "Stow these somewhere about your clothes, and get that blacking off your shoes as soon as you can, and you'll do."

It was planned that they should sleep until near morning, when the spies of the Knights of the Golden Circle were not alert, enter a freight-car, which they would keep tightly shut, to escape observation, while the train ran all day toward a point within easy reach of their quarry. It would arrive there after dark, and so they hoped to catch the Knights entirely unawares, and in the full bloom of their audacity and pride.

The car which the squad entered was locked and sealed, and labeled, "Perishable freight. Do not delay." Their presence was kept secret from all the train hands but the conductor, a man of known loyalty and discretion.

Shorty being in disguise, it was decided that he should saunter down apart from the rest and take his place in the caboose. He lay down on the long seat, drew his slouch-hat over his eyes, and seemed to go to sleep. The train pulled out to the edge of the yard, went onto a switch and waited for the early morning accommodation to pass out and get the right-of-way.

A heavily-built, middle-aged man, whose coarse face had evidently been closely shaved a few days before, entered, carrying a large carpet-sack, which was well-filled and seemingly quite heavy. He set this carefully down on the seat, in the corner, walked up to the stove, warmed his hands, glanced sharply at Shorty, said

"Good morning," to which Shorty replied with a snore, took a plug of tobacco from his pocket, from which he cut a liberal chew with a long dirk that he opened by giving a skillful flip with his wrist, put the chew in his mouth, released the spring which held the blade in place, put both knife and tobacco in his pocket, and turning around spread the tails of his seedy black frock coat, and seemed lost in meditation as he warmed.

"Not a farmer, storekeeper or stock-buyer," Shorty mentally sized him up, "Looks more like a hickory lawyer, herb-doctor or tin-horn gambler. What's he doin' in this caboose? Up to some devilment, no doubt. He'll bear watchin'."

And Shorty gave another snore. The man, having completed his warming, sat down by his carpetsack, laid his arm across it to secure possession, pulled his battered silk hat down over his eyes, and tried to go to sleep.

The train rumbled out, and presently stopped at another station. Another man got on, also carrying a large, heavy carpet-sack. He was younger than the other, looked like a farm-hand, was dressed partly in homespun, partly in "store-clothes," wore a weather-stained wool hat, and his sullen face terminated in a goatee. The first-comer looked him over an instant, and then said:

"Were you out late last night?"

"I was," replied the second-comer, scanning his interrogator.

"Did you see a star?"

"I did."

"What star was it?"

"It was the Star of Bethlehem."

"Right, my brother," responded the other, putting out his hand in a peculiar way for the grip of the order.

Shorty, still feigning deep sleep, pricked up his ears and drank in every word. He had heard before of the greeting formula by which Knights of the Golden Circle recognized one another, and he tried, with only partial success, to see the grip.

He saw the two men whisper together and tap their carpet-sacks significantly. They seemed to come to a familiar understanding at once, but they talked so low that Shorty could not catch their words, except once when the first-comer raised his voice to penetrate the din as they crossed a bridge, and did not lower it quickly enough after passing, and Shorty heard;

"They'll all be certain to be there tonight."

And the other asked: "And the raid'll be made ter-morrer?"

The first-comer replied with a nod. At the next bridge the same thing occurred, and Shorty caught the words:

"They've no idee. We'll ketch 'em clean offen their guard."

"And the others'll come out?" asked the second-comer.

"Certainly," said the first, lowering his voice again, but the look on his face and the way he pointed indicated to Shorty that he was saying that other lodges scattered through the neighborhood were only waiting the striking of the first blow to rise in force and march on Indianapolis, release the rebel prisoners there and carry havoc generally.

"I see through it all," Shorty communed with himself. "They're goin' to the same place that we are, and've got them carpet-bags filled with revolvers and cartridges. Somebody's goin' to have a little surprise party before he's a day older."

The sun had now gotten so high that Shorty could hardly pretend to sleep longer. He gave a tremendous yawn and sat up. The older man regarded him attentively, the other sullenly.

"You must've bin out late last night, stranger," said the first.

"I was," answered Shorty, giving him a meaning look.

"Did you see a star?" inquired the older man.

"I did," answered Shorty.

"What star was it?"

"The Star of Bethlehem," answered Shorty boldly.

"'You're right, my brother," said the man, putting out his hand for the grip. Shorty did the same, trying to imitate what he had seen. The car was lurching, and the grasp was imperfect. The man seemed only half satisfied. Shorty saw this, and with his customary impudence determined to put the onus of recognition on the other side. He drew his hand back as if disappointed, and turned a severe look upon the other man.

"Where are you from?" asked the first-comer. Shorty curtly indicated the other side of the Ohio by a nod.

"Where are you goin'?"

Shorty's face put on a severe look, as if his questioner was too inquisitive. "Jest up here to 'tend to some bizness," he answered briefly, and turned away as if to close the conversation.

"Say, I've got a right to know something about you," said the first new-comer. "I'm Captain of this District, and have general charge o' things here, and men passin' through."

"All right," answered Shorty. "Have general charge. I don't know you, and I have bizness with men who roost a good deal higher'n you do."

He put his hands to his breast, as if assuring himself of the presence of important papers, and pulled out a little ways the official-looking envelope which contained his transportation and passes. This had its effect. The "Captain" weakened. "Are you from the Southern army?" he asked in a tone of respect.

"Before I answer any o' your questions," said Shorty authoritatively, "prove to me who you are." "O, I kin do that quick enough," said the "Captain" eagerly, displaying on his vest the silver star, which was the badge of his rank, and his floridly printed commission and a badly-thumb-marked copy of the ritual of the Knights of

the Golden Circle.

"So far, so good," said Shorty. "Now give me the grip."

Shorty, by watching the motions of the other's hand, was skillful enough to catch on to the grip this time, and get it exactly. He expressed himself satisfied, and as the car lay on the siding waiting for another train to arrive and pass he favored his two companions with one of his finest fictions about his home in Tennessee, his service in the rebel army, the number of Yankee Abolitionists he had slain with his own hand, and his present mission with important communications to those "friends of the South in Illinois" who were organizing a movement to stop the bloody and brutal war upon his beloved Southland.

His volubility excited that of the "Captain," who related how he had been doing a prosperous business running a bar on a Lower Mississippi River boat, until Abolition fanaticism brought on the war; that he had then started a "grocery" in Jeffersonville, which the Provost-Marshal had wickedly suppressed, and now he was joining with others of his oppressed and patriotic fellow-citizens to stop the cruel and unnatural struggle against their brethren of the South.

"And we shall do it," he said warmly, bringing out the savage-looking dirk, throwing it open with a deft movement of his wrist, and shaving off a huge chew of tobacco. "We have a hundred thousand drilled and armed men here in the State of Injianny, jest waitin' the word, to throw off the shackles of tyranny and destroy the tyrants.

"There's another hundred thousand in Illinois and like numbers in other States. And they'll fight, too. They'll fight to the death, and every one of them is good for' at least three of the usurper Lincoln's minions. I'd like nothing better than to get a good opportunity at three or four o' 'em, armed with nothin' more'n this knife. I'd like nothin' better than the chance to sock it into their black hearts. 'Twouldn't be the first time, nuther. The catfish around Jeffersonville could tell some stories if they could talk, about the Lincoln hounds I've fed to 'em. I only want a good chance at 'em agin. I may go, but I'll take several of 'em with me. I'll die in my tracks afore I'll stand this any longer. I hate everything that wears blue worse'n I do a mad-dog."

"And I promise you," said Shorty solemnly, "that you shall have all the chance you want sooner'n you think for. I know a great deal more'n I dare tell you now, but things is workin' to a head mighty fast, and you'll hear something drop before the next change o' the moon. You kin jest bet your shirt on that."

The day was passing, and as the evening approached the train was running through a wilder, heavily-wooded country. Shorty's companions took their seats on the opposite side of the car and peered anxiously out of the window to recognize features of the darkening landscape. They were evidently getting near their destination.

Shorty overheard the "Captain" say to his partner:

"The train'll stop for water in the middle of a big beech woods. We'll get off there and take a path that leads right to the lodge."

"How far'll we have to tote these heavy carpetbags?" grumbled the other.

Shorty slipped his hand into his pocket, grasped his revolvers and eased them around so that he could be certain to draw them when he wanted to. He was determined that those men should not leave the train before the stopping place arranged for his fellow-soldiers. He felt confident of being able to handle the two, but did not know how many confederates might be in waiting for them.

"I'll go it if there's a million of 'em," said he to himself. "I'll save these two fellers anyway, if there's any good in 45-caliber bullets in their carcasses. I'm jest achin' to put a half-ounce o' lead jest where that old scoundrel hatches his devilment."

The engine whistled long and shrilly.

"That's the pumpin'-station," said the "Captain," rising and laying hold of the handles of the carpetbag.

"Drop that. You can't leave this car till I give the word," said Shorty, rising as the train stopped, and putting himself in the door.

"Can't, eh?" said the "Captain," with a look of rage as he comprehended the situation. His dirk came out and opened with a wicked snap. "I'll cut your black heart out, you infernal spy."

"HOW DO YOU LIKE THE LOOKS OF THAT, OLD BUTTERNUT?"

"You will, eh?" sneered Shorty, covering him with a heavy Remington. "How'd you like the looks o' that, old butternut? Your murderin' dirk aint deuce high. Move a step, and you'll know how it feels to have daylight through you."

The "Captain" smashed the window with a backward blow of his fist, thrust his head out and yelled the rallying-cry of the Knights:

"Asa! Asa!"

The sound of rushing feet was heard, and a man armed with a shot-gun came into the plane of light from the open caboose door. Shorty was on the lookout for him, and as he appeared, shouted;

"Halt, there! Drop that gun. If you move I'll kill this whelp here and then you."

"Do as he says, Stallins," groaned the frightened "Captain." "He's got the drop on me. Drop your gun, but holler to the boys in the front car to come out."

To Shorty's amazement a score of men came rushing back from the car next ahead of the caboose. They had, by a preconcerted arrangement, been jumping on the train ever since it grew dark, and collected in that car. Some of them had guns, but the most appeared unarmed.

"Well, I have stirred up a yaller-jacket's nest for sure," thought Shorty, rather tickled at the odds which were arrayed against him. "But I believe I kin handle 'em until either the train pulls out or the boys hear the ruction and come to my help."

Then he called out sternly as he raised the revolver in his left hand:

"I'll shoot the first man that attempts to come on this car, and I'll kill your Captain, that I've got covered, dead. You man with that shot-gun, p'int it straight up in the air or I'll drop you in your tracks. Now fire off both barrels."

It seemed to every man in the gang that Shorty's left-hand revolver was pointing straight at him. The man with the shot-gun was more than certain of this, and he at once complied with the order.

There was a whistle, followed by a rush of men from a line further out, and every man of those around Shorty was either knocked down or rudely punched with a musket-barrel in the hands of Lieut. Bigelow's squad.

"What in the world made you so long comin'?" asked Shorty, after all the prisoners had been secured. "Was you asleep?"

"No," answered the Lieutenant. "This is the place where we intended to get off. We were quietly getting out so as to attract no notice when you started your circus. I saw you were doing well, hiving those fellows together, so I let you go ahead, while I slipped the boys around to gather them all in. Pretty neat job for a

starter, wasn't it?"

CHAPTER XIII. AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

BREAKING UP A DEN OF COPPERHEADS.

"COME, hustle these prisoners back into the car in which we were," commanded the Lieutenant. "We'll leave it on the switch with a guard. Lock it up carefully, and one man'll be enough to guard it until we get back. Make haste, for we've no time to lose. Shorty."

"Corpril Elliott," Shorty corrected him, mindful of the presence of Sergeant Bob Ramsey.

"Yes; excuse me. Corporal Elliott, while we are attending to the prisoners you go on ahead and reconnoiter. You need not stop unless you see fit until you are clear into the lodge. Give one low whistle if you want us to stop, two to come ahead and three to go back."

It was a moonless night, and the broom-like tops of the close-growing beeches made a dense darkness, into which Shorty plunged, but he could readily make out a well-beaten path, which he followed. Occasionally he could make out dark figures moving just ahead of him or crossing the path.

"Goin' to be a full attendance at the services this evenin'," he muttered to himself. "But the more the merrier. It'll insure a goodly number at the mourner's bench when we make the call for the unconverted."

Big and lumbering as Shorty sometimes seemed in his careless hours, no wildcat gliding through the brush was more noiseless-footed than he now. He kept on the darker side of the path, but not a twig seemed to crack or a leaf rustle under his heavy brogans. Twice he heard lumbering steps in his rear, and he slipped behind the big trunk of a tree, and saw the men pass almost within arm's length, but without a suspicion of his presence.

"Well, for men workin' a dark-lantern job this is about the logiest crowd I ever struck," he said rather disgustedly. "An elephant'd have to step on 'em before they'd know he was around. They ain't hardly good fun."

Presently he heard some rustling over to his right and caught the low murmur of a voice. He cautiously made his way in that direction until he made an opening, with a number of men sitting on a log, while others were standing, leaning on their guns.

"Probably a caucus outside to set up the pins before goin' into the full meetin'," he said to himself. "As I always like to be with the winnin' side, I guess I'll jest jine 'em."

He advanced boldly into the opening. At the sound of his approach the men looked up, and one of those leaning on his gun picked it up and came toward him.

"You are out late," he whispered, when within speaking distance.

"Yes," answered Shorty. "And I was out late last night."

"Did you see a star?"

"I did."

"What star was it?"

"It was the Star of Bethlehem."

The first speaker had seemed to start at the sound of Shorty's voice, but he recovered himself, and saying, "You're right, my brother," put out his hand for the grip.

"'Taint right, neither," hissed Shorty. "Si Klegg, what are you doin' here?"

"Shorty!" ejaculated Si, joyfully, but still in a whisper. "I thought I knowed your voice. Where in the world did you come from?"

"I'm here on business," answered Shorty. "I came up from Headquarters at Jeffersonville. What brung you here?"

"O," said Si, "we've bin hearin' about this Copperhead lodge for some time, and some of us boys who's home on furlough thought that we'd come down here with the Deputy Provo and bust it up. We've bin plannin' it a week or two. All these that you see, there are soldiers. I've 15, includin' myself."

The boys hastily conferred together as to the plan of operations, and one man was hurried back to inform Lieut. Bigelow of the presence of the other squad.

"You seem to know most about this affair. Shorty," said Si. "You take command and make arrangements."

"Not for a minute. Si," protested Shorty. "You rank me and you must command, and I want you to hold your own over Bob Ramsey, who will try to rank you. Bob's a good boy, but he's rather too much stuck on his stripes."

It was finally arranged that Si should move his squad out to near the edge of the path and wait for Lieut. Bigelow to come up, while Shorty should go forward and reconnoiter.

Shorty walked along the path toward the lodge. Suddenly the large figure of a man loomed up before him, standing motionless, on guard, in the road.

"You are out late, my friend," said he.

"Yes," answered Shorty.

"Did you see a star?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"The Star of Bethlehem."

"You are right, my brother," said the man, extending his hand for the grip.

"This rotten star-and-brother rigmarole's making me sick," muttered Shorty, with a hasty glance to see that the man was alone, and grasping his hand with a grip of iron, while with his left he clutched the sentry's throat. Before the man could utter a groan he wrenched him around and started him back for Si. Arriving there he flung him under the trees, saying in a loud whisper:

"First sucker o' this Spring's run. String him. Si."

Lieut. Bigelow had come up in the meanwhile with the other squad, and they all moved cautiously forward to where they could get a dim sight of the lodge through the intervals between the trees. For a log house it was quite a large building, and stood in the center of a small clearing which had been made to furnish logs for its erection. Faint gleams of light came through the badly-chinked walls, and the hum of voices showed that there was a large crowd gathered inside.

"There's likely to be from 100 to 150 in there," said the Lieutenant, after a moment's consideration. "We've got 27 or 28. We'll jump them, though, if they're a thousand. Corporal Elliott, you go forward and make your way inside, if you can, and see what they are doing. If you can get inside, stay 10 or 15 minutes, and come out and report. If you can't get out, or you think they are ripe for jumping, whistle, and we'll pile in. Sergeant Klegg, you hold your squad together and move down as near the door as you can without being seen and be ready for a rush. Find a rail or a log to smash the door in if they try to hold it against us. Sergeant Ramsey, deploy your men quietly around to the rear there to cut off retreat, but be ready to rally again and help Sergeant Klegg out if he strikes a big snag. You make the circuit of the house and post yourself where you can see what's going on, and signal your men. Everybody keep under the shadow of the trees and make no noise. Go on to the house, Corporal."

Shorty left the cover of the trees and walked directly toward the front door. No one appeared or halted him until he pushed the front door open. Then a man who seemed more intent on what was going on inside than the new arrival, bent his head over to catch the farrago about the star, and put out his hand for the grip.

"Come on in, but don't make a noise," he whispered. "They're givin' the obligation, and I want to hear it."

Shorty stood beside him for a moment, and then watched his opportunity, and pressed by him, to where he could see into the room. It was entirely dark except for the light of a single candle, shaded so that its rays fell upon a rude altar in the center of the room, draped with a rebel flag. Upon this lay a naked sword, skull and cross-bones. Behind the altar stood a masked man, draped in a long shroud, who was mouthing in a sepulchral tone the obligation to several men kneeling in front of the altar. The dim light faintly revealed other masked and shrouded figures stationed at various places about the room and looming above the seated audience.

"You solemnly swear," droned the chief actor, "to resist to the death every attempt to place the nigger above the white man and destroy the Government of our fathers."

"We do," responded those kneeling at the altar.

"Let it be so recorded," said a sepulchral voice from the other extremity of the room. A gong sounded dismally and a glare of lurid red light filled the room.

"Regler Sons o' Malty biziniss, like I seen in St. Looyey," commented Shorty to himself. "Masks, shrouds, red fire and gong, all the same. But where've I heard that croakin' voice before?"

"You solemnly promise and swear," resumed the sepulchral tones of the chief actor, "to do all in your power to restore the Constitution and laws of this country to what were established by the fathers and resist the efforts of nigger-loving Abolitionists and evil-minded fanatics to subvert them."

"We do," responded the kneeling men.

Again the grewsome gong sounded, the red fire glared forth and the hollow voice announced that it was so recorded.

"I'll bet six bits to a picayune," said Shorty to himself, "that I know the rooster who's doin' them high priest antics. Where'd I hear his voice before?"

"And, finally, brethren," resumed the chief actor, "do you solemnly promise and swear to cheerfully obey all orders given you by officers regularly appointed over you according to the rules and regulations of this great order and military discipline?"

There was a little hesitation about this, but the kneeling ones were nudged and whispered to, and finally responded:

"We do."

Again it was funereally announced to the accompaniment of flashes of red fire and the gong that it was duly recorded.

"Great Jehosephat, if it ain't old Billings himself that's doin' that heavy tragedy act," said Shorty, slapping himself on the thigh. "The old dregs o' the bottomless pit! Is there any deviltry that he won't git into?"

His decision was confirmed a minute or two later, when, after some more fanfarronade the initiation ended, the officers removed their masks and shrouds, and the candles in the sconces around the room were relighted. Billings took his seat on the platform at the end of the room farthest from the door, picked up the gavel and rapped for order.

"Now, brethren," said he, "having witnessed the solemn initiation of several brave, true men into our rapidly-swelling ranks and welcomed them as real patriots who have united with us to resist to the bitter end the cruel tyrannies of the Abolition despot at Washington—the vulgar railsplitter of the Sangamon, who is filling this once happy land with the graves of his victims, we will proceed to the regular business for which we have assembled. I regret that our gallant Captain has not yet arrived with the supply of arms and ammunition that he went to Jeffersonville to secure. I thought I heard the whistle of the train some time ago, and have been expecting him every minute. He may be here yet."

"Not if that guard at the switch 'tends to his little business, he won't," Shorty chuckled to himself.

"When he gets here," continued Billings, "we shall have enough weapons to finish our outfit, and give every member, including them initiated tonight, a good, serviceable arm, as effective as any in the hands of our enemies. We shall then be in shape to carry out the several projects which we have before discussed and planned. We shall be ready to strike at any moment. When we do strike success is sure. The Southern armies, which have so long bravely battled for the Constitution and the laws and white men's rights, are again advancing from every point. Every mail brings me glad good news of the organization of our brave friends throughout this State and Illinois. They're impatient to begin. The first shot fired will be the signal for an uprising that'll sweep over the land like a prairie fire and—"

He stopped abruptly, contracted his brows, and gazed fixedly at Shorty.

"Brother Walker," said Billings, "there's a tall man settin' close by the door that I seem to've seen before, and yit I don't exactly recognize. Please hold that candle nigh his face till I can see it more plainly."

Shorty happened to be looking at another man that minute, and did not at first catch the drift of Billings's remarks. When he did, he hesitated an instant whether to whistle or try to get out. Before he could decide, Eph Glick, whom he had raided at Jeffersonville, struck him a heavy blow on the side of his head and yelled:

"He's a traitor! He's a spy! Kill the infernal, egg-suckin' hound!"

There was a rush of infuriated men, which carried Shorty over and made him the object of a storm of blows and kicks. So many piled on him at once that they struck and kicked one another in their confusion. The door was torn out, and its pieces fell with the tumble of cursing, striking, kicking men that rolled outside.

Si rushed forward with his squad, and in an instant they were knocking right and left with their gun-barrels. So many fell on top of Shorty that he was unable to rise and extricate himself.

Not exactly comprehending what was going on, but thinking that the time for them to act had come, the four boys to whom Si had given the duty of making the rush with the log to break down the door, came bolting up, shouting to their comrades:

"Open out, there, for us."

"THE PRISONERS HAD TOO MUCH SOLICITUDE ABOUT THEIR GARMENTS TO THINK OF ANYTHING ELSE."

Their battering-ram cleaned off the rest of those still pommeling Shorty, and drove back those who were swarming in the door.

Shorty sprang up and gave a rib-breaking kick to the prostrate Eph Glick.

The crowd inside at first recoiled at the sight of the soldiers, but, frightened for his own safety, Billings shouted, as he sheltered himself behind the altar:

"Don't give way, men. There's only a few o' them. Draw your revolvers and shoot down the scum. Drive 'em away."

A score of shots were fired in obedience, but Si, making his voice ring above the noise, called out:

"Stop that firing, or I'll kill every man in the house. If there's another shot fired we'll open on you and keep

it up till you're every one dead. Surrender at once!"

"Go at 'em with the bayonet, Si," yelled Shorty. "I'm goin' around to ketch old Billings. He's in there, and'll try to sneak out the back way."

As Shorty ran around the corner he came face-to-face with a stalwart Irishman, one of the pluckiest of the squad brought from Jeffersonville. His face was drawn and white with fright, and he fumbled at his beads.

"O, Corpril," he said, with chattering teeth, "Oi've jist sane the very divil himself, so Oi have. Oi started to run up t' the house whin the ruction begun, when suddintly the ground opened up at me very fate, an' out kim a ghost, tin fate hoigh, wid oyes av foire, and brathing flames, an' he shtarted for me, an' oi—"

"What damned nonsense is this, O'Brien?" asked Shorty angrily. "Are you drunk, or jest naturally addled? Come along with me and we'll—"

"Not for a thousand loives," groaned the Irishman. "Howly saints, fwhat is old Clootie after me for? Is it for atin' that little taste o' ham last Friday? Holy Mary, save me; there he is again!"

"Where, you flannel-mouthed Mick?" asked Shorty savagely. "Where do you see the devil?"

"There! There! That white thing. Don't you say it yersilf?" groaned the Irishman, dropping on his knees, and calling on all the saints.

"That white thing. That's only a sycamore stump, you superstitious bog-trotter," said Shorty, with angry contempt, as he bent his eyes on the white object. Then he added in the next breath:

"But blamed if that stump ain't walkin' off. Funny stump."

He gave a leap forward for closer investigation. At the crash of his footsteps the stump actually turned around and gave a sepulchral groan. Then, seeing that it was not a soldier pursuing, a very natural human voice proceeded from it.

"Is that you, Brother Welch? I thought at first it was a soldier. I motioned you when the trouble first begun to follow me through the underground passage. There was enough others there to make the fight, and it'd never do for us to be taken by the Lincolnites. We're too valuable to the cause just now, and, then, if the Lincolnites get hold of me they'll certainly make me a martyr. Come right over this way. We kin strike a path near here that'll take us right out."

"Great Jehosephat," said Shorty, "if it ain't old Billings, masqueradin' in his Sons o' Malty rig."

He made another leap or two, clapped his hand on Billings's shoulder, and shoved the muzzle of his revolver against the mask and demanded:

"Halt and surrender, you barrel-headed, splayfooted son of a sardine. Come along with me, or I'll blow that whole earthquake rig offen you."

Shorty marched his prisoner back to the house, and as he neared it saw by the light of a fire O'Brien, who had apparently recovered from his fright, for he was having a lively bout with a large young fellow who was trying to make his escape. It seemed an even thing for a minute or two, but the Irishman finally downed his antagonist by a heavy blow with his massive fist.

"Here, O'Brien," said Shorty, "I've ketched your devil and brung him back to you. When a boss shies at anything the best way's to lead him square up to it and let him smell it. So I want you to take charge o' this prisoner and hold him safe till the scrimmage is over."

O'Brien looked at the figure with rage and disgust. He gave Billings a savage clout with his open hand, saying:

"Ye imp o' the divil—ye unblest scab of an odmahoun. Oi'll brake ivery bone av yer body for goin' around by noights in thim wake-duds, scaring daysint folks out av their siven sinses."

The fighting had been quite a severe tussle for the soldiers. There had not been much shooting, but a great deal of clubbing with gun-barrels and sticks, which left a good many bloody heads and aching arms and shoulders. About half of those in the meeting had succeeded in getting away, but this still left some 75 prisoners in the hands of Lieut. Bigelow, and he was delighted with his success.

It was decided to hold all the prisoners in the lodge until morning, and two of the boys who had gotten pretty badly banged about the head were sent back to the railroad to relieve and assist the guard left there.

"I find about 10 or 15 birds in the flock," said the Deputy Provost, who was also Deputy Sheriff, when they looked over the prisoners in the morning, "that we have warrants and complaints for, for everything from plain assault and battery to horse-stealing. It would save the military much trouble and serve the ends of justice better if we could send them over to the County seat and put them in jail, where the civil authorities could get a whack at them. I'd go there myself if I could walk, but this bullet in my shin disables me."

"I'd like to do it," answered Lieut. Bigelow, "but I haven't the guard to spare. So many of my men got disabled that I won't have more than enough to guard the cars on the way back and keep these whelps from jumping the train or being rescued by their friends when we stop at the stations. The news of this affair is all over the country by this time, and their friends will all be out."

"How fur is it to the County seat?" asked Shorty.

"About 15 miles," answered the Deputy Provost.

"Me and Si Klegg'll march 'em over there, and obligate ourselves not to lose a rooster of 'em," said Shorty.

"That'll be a pretty big contract," said the Lieutenant doubtfully.

"All right. We're big enough for it. We'll take every one of 'em in if we have to haul some of 'em feet foremost in a wagon."

"It'll be a great help in many ways," considered Lieut. Bigelow. "The crowd'll be looking for us at the stations and not think of these others. Those are two very solid men, and will do just what they promise. I think I'll let them try it. It would be well for you to tell those men that any monkey business with them will be unhealthy. They'd better trust to getting away from the grand jury than from them."

But as the Deputy Provost went over them more carefully he found more that were "wanted" by the civil

authorities, and presently had selected 25 very evil-looking fellows, whose arrest would have been justified on general appearances.

"Haint we bit off more'n we kin chaw. Shorty?" asked Si, as he looked over the increasing gang. "Hadn't we better ask for some help?"

"Not a bit of it," answered Shorty, confidently. "That'll look like weakenin' to the Lieutenant and the Provo. We kin manage this gang, or we'll leave 'em dead in the brush."

"All right," assented Si, who had as little taste as his partner for seeming to weaken. "Here goes for a fight or a foot-race."

While the Deputy was making out a list of the men and writing a note to the Sheriff, Shorty went through the gang and searched each man for arms. Then he took out his knife and carefully cut the suspender buttons from every one of their pantaloons.

"Now we've got 'em, Si," he said gleefully, as he returned to his partner's side, with his hand full of buttons. "They'll have to use both hands to hold their britches on, so they kin neither run nor fight. They'll be as peaceable as lambs."

"Shorty," said Si, in tones of fervent admiration, "I wuz afeared that crack you got on your head softened your brains. But now I see it made you brighter'n ever. You'll be wearin' a General's stars before this war is over."

"Bob Ramsey was a-blowin' about knowin' how to handle men," answered Shorty. "I'm just goin' to bring him over here and show him this trick that he never dreamed of."

After he had gloated over Sergeant Ramsey, Shorty got his men into the road ready to start. Si placed himself in front of the squad and deliberately loaded his musket in their sight. Shorty took his place in the rear, and gave out:

"Now, you roosters, you see I've two revolvers, and I'm a dead shot with either hand. I'm good for 12 of you at the first jump and my partner kin 'tend to the rest. Now, if I see a man so much as make a motion toward the side o' the road I'll drop him. Give the command. Sergeant Klegg."

"Forward—march!" ordered Si.

It was as Shorty predicted. The prisoners had entirely too much solicitude about their garments to think of anything else, and the march was made without incident. Late in the afternoon they reached the County seat, and marched directly for the public square, in which the jail was situated. There were a few people on the streets, who gathered on the sidewalks to watch the queer procession. Shorty, with both hands on his revolvers, had his eyes fixed on the squad, apprehensive of an attempt to bolt and mix with the crowd. He looked neither to the right nor the left, but was conscious that they were passing a corner on which stood some ladies. Then he heard a voice which set his heart to throbbing call out:

"Hello, Si Klegg! Si Klegg! Look this way. Where'd you come from?"

"Great Jehosephat! Maria!" said Shorty to himself. But he dared not take his eyes a moment from the squad to look toward her.

CHAPTER XIV. GUARDING THE KNIGHTS

SI AND SHORTY STAND OFF A MOB AT THE JAIL.

HAVING seen their prisoners safely behind the bars, Si and Shorty breathed more freely than they had since starting out in the morning, and Si remarked, as he folded up the receipt for them and placed it in his pocket-book:

"That drove's safely marketed, without the loss of a runaway or a played-out. Purty good job o' drovin', that. Pap couldn't do better'n that with his hogs. I'm hungrier'n a wolf. So must you be, Shorty. Le's hunt up Maria, and she'll take us where we kin git a square meal. Then we kin talk. I've got a hundred questions I want to ask you, but ain't goin' to do it on an empty gizzard. Come on."

Shorty had dropped on to a bench, and fixed his eyes on the stone wall opposite, as if desperately striving to read there some hint of extrication from his perplexities. The thought of encountering Maria's bright eyes, and seeing there even more than her sharp tongue would express, numbed his heart.

"Yit, how kin I git away from Si, now?" he murmured to himself. "And yit I'm so dead hungry to see her again that I'd be willin' to be a'most skinned alive to do it. Was ever anybody else so big a fool about a girl? I've plagued other fellers, and now I've got it worse'n anybody else. It's a judgment on me. But, then, nobody else ever seen such a girl as that. There's some sense in bein' a fool about her."

"Come on, Shorty," called Si from the door. "What are you dreamin' on? Are you too tired to move? Come on. We'll have a good wash, that'll take away some of the tiredness, then a big dinner, and a good bed tonight. Tomorrer mornin' we'll be as good as new."

"I think I'd better git right on the next train and go back to Jeffersonvillie," murmured Shorty, faintly struggling with himself. "They may need me there."

"Nonsense!" answered Si. "We've done enough for one day. I've bin up for two nights now, and am goin' to have a rest. Let some o' the other fellers have a show for their money. We haint got to fight this whole war all by ourselves."

"No, Si," said Shorty, summoning all his resolution; "I'm goin' back on the next train. I must git back to the company. They'll—"

"You'll do nothin' o' the kind," said Si impatiently. "What's eatin' you? What'd you skip out from our house

for? What'd you mean—"

He was broken in upon by Maria's voice as she came in at the head of a bevy of other girls:

"Si Klegg, ain't you ever comin' out? What's akeepin' you? We're tired waitin' for you, and w're comin' right in. What're you doin' to them ragamuffins that you've bin gatherin' up? Tryin' to patch 'em up into decent-lookin' men? Think it'll be like mendin' a brush-fence—makin' bad worse. Where on earth did you gather up sich a gang o' scare-crows? I wouldn't waste my days and nights pickin' up sich runts as them. When I go manhuntin' I'll gether something that's worth while."

Every bright sally of Maria was punctuated with shrieks of laughter from the girls accompanying her. Led by her, they swarmed into the dull, bare room, filling it with the brightness of their youthful presence, their laughter, and their chirruping comments on everything they saw. The jail was a place of deep mystery to them, and it was a daring lark for them to venture in even to the outside rooms.

"The girls dared me to bring 'em in," Maria explained to Si, "and I never won't take no dare from anyone. Si, ain't you goin' to kiss your sister? You don't act a bit glad to see me. Now, if it was Annabel—"

"Why, Maria," said Si, kissing her to stop her mouth, "I wasn't expectin' to see you. What in the world are you doin' over here?"

"Why, your Cousin Marthy, here, is goin' to be married Thursday to her beau, who's got 10 days' leave to come home for that purpose. The thing's bin hurried up, because he got afeared. He heard that Marthy was flyin' around to singin' school and sociables with some other fellers that's home on furlough. So he just brung things to a head, and I rushed over here to help Marthy git ready, and stand by her in the tryin' hour. Why, here's Mr. Corporil Elliott, that I hain't spoken to yit. Well, Mr. Skip-and-away, how d' you do? Girls, come up here and see a man who thought mother's cookin' was not good enough for him. He got homesick for army rations, and run off without so much as sayin' good-by, to git somethin' to eat that he'd really enjoy."

Her merry laugh filled the room, and rang even into the dark cells inside. Shorty shambled to his feet, pulled off his hat, and stood with downcast eyes and burning face. He had never encountered anything so beautiful and so terrifying.

Maria was certainly fair to look upon. A buxom, rosy-cheeked lass, something above the average hight of girls, and showing the Klegg blood in her broad chest and heavy, full curves. She was dressed in the hollyhock fashion of country girls of those days, with an exuberance of bright colors, but which Shorty thought the hight of refined fashion. He actually trembled at what the next words would be from those full, red lips, that never seemed to open except in raillery and mocking.

"Well, ain't you goin' to shake hands with me? What are you mad about?"

"Mad? Me mad? What in the world've I to be mad about?" thought Shorty, as he changed his hat to his left hand, and put forth shamedly a huge paw, garnished with red hair and the dust of the march. It seemed so unfit to be touched by her white, plump hand. She gave him a hearty grasp, which reassured him a little, for there was nothing in it, at least, of the derision which seemed to ring in every note of her voice and laughter.

"Girls," she called, "come up and be introduced. This is Mr. Corpril Elliott, Si's best friend and partner. I call him Mr. Fly-by-night, because he got his dander up about something or nothin', and skipped out one night without so much's sayin'—"

"O, Maria, come off. Cheese it. Dry up," said Si impatiently. "Take us somewhere where we kin git somethin' to eat. Your tongue's hung in the middle, and when you start to talkin' you forgit everything else. I'm hungrier'n a bear, and so's Shorty."

An impulse of anger flamed up in Shorty's heart. How dared Si speak that way to such a peerless creature? How could he talk to her as if she were some ordinary girl?

"O, of course, you're hungry," Maria answered. "Never knowed you when you wasn't. You're worse'n a Shanghai chicken—eat all day and be hungry at night. But I expect you are really hungry this time. Come on. We'll go right up to Cousin Marthy's. I sent word that you was in town, and they're gittin' ready for you. I seen a dray-load o' provisions start up that way. Come on, girls. Cousin Marthy, bein's you're engaged and Si's engaged, you kin walk with him. The rest o' you fall in behind, and I'll bring up the rear, as Si'd say, with Mr. Fly-by-night, and hold on to him so that he sha'n't skip again."

"Me run away," thought Shorty, as they walked along. "Hosses couldn't drag me away. I only hope that house is 10 miles off."

Unfortunately for his cause he could not say nor hint any such a thing, but walked along in dogged silence. The sky was overcast and cheerless, and a chill wind blew, but Shorty never knew such a radiant hour.

"Well, why don't you say something? What's become o' your tongue?" began Maria banteringly.

"Have you bit it off, or did some girl, that you bolted off in such a hurry to see, drain you so dry o' talk that you haint got a word left? Who is she? What does she look like? What made you in sich a dreadful hurry to see her? You didn't go clear up to Bad Ax, did you, and kill that old widower?"

"Maria," called out Si, "if you don't stop plaguin' Shorty I'll come back there and wring your neck. You kin make the worst nuisance o' yourself o' any girl that ever lived. Here, you go up there and walk with Cousin Marthy. I'll walk with Shorty. I've got something I want to say to him."

With that he crowded in between Maria and Shorty and gave his sister a shove to send her forward. Shorty flared up at the interference. Acute as his suffering was under Maria's tongue, he would rather endure it than not have her with him. Anyhow, it was a matter between him and her, with which Si had no business.

"You oughtn't to jaw your sister that way, Si," he remonstrated energetically. "I think it's shameful. I wouldn't talk that way to any woman, especially sich a one as your sister."

"Whose sister is she, anyway?" snapped Si, who was as irritable as a hungry and tired man gets. "You 'tend to your sisters and I'll 'tend to mine. I'm helpin' you. You don't know Maria. She's one o' the best girls in the world, but she's got a doublegeared, self-actin' tongue that's sharper'n a briar. She winds it up Sundays and lets it run all week. I've got to comb her down every little while. She's a filly you can't manage with a snaffle. Let her git the start and you'd better be dead. The boys in our neighborhood's afeared to say their soul's their

own when she gits a-goin'. You 'tend to the other girls and leave me to 'tend to her. She's my sister—nobody else's."

"I HAVE COME, SIR, IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE OF INDIANA TO DEMAND THE RELEASE OF THOSE MEN."

Shorty fell back a little and walked sullenly along. The people at the house were expecting them, and had a bountiful supper prepared. A good, sousing wash in the family lavatory in the entry, plentifully supplied with clear water, soap, tin basins and clean roller towels, helped much to restore the boys' self-respect and good humor. When they were seated at the table Maria, as the particular friend of the family, assisted as hostess, and paid especial attention to supplying Shorty's extensive wants, and by her assiduous thoughtfulness strengthened her chains upon him and soothed the hurts her tongue had made. Yet he could not see her whisper to one of the other girls, and hear the responsive giggle, but he thought with flushed face that it concerned the Bad Ax incident. But Maria was not doing any such covert work. She was, above everything, bold and outspoken.

"You girls that want a soldier-beau," she took opportunity to remark at a little pause in the feast, "kin jest set your caps for Mr. Corpril Elliott there. He's in the market. He had a girl up in Bad Ax, Wis., but she went back on him, and married a stay-at-home widower, who's in the lumber business."

There was a general giggle, and a chorus of exclamations at such unpatriotic and unwomanly perfidy. Shorty's appetite fled.

"Maria," thundered Si, "I'll make you pay for this when I git you alone."

"Yes," continued the incorrigible tease; "and they say the best time to ketch a widder is while her eyes is wet. Transplantin's best in wet weather, and the best time to ketch a feller's jest when he's bin jilted."

Si sprang from the table, as if he would catch Maria and slap her. She laughingly threatened him with a big fork in her hand. They happened to look toward Shorty. He had risen from the table, with the sweat pouring from his burning face. He fumbled in his breast for his silk handkerchief. As he pulled it out there came with it the piece of Maria's dress, which Shorty had carefully treasured. It fell to the floor. Shorty saw it, and forgetful of all else, stooped over, picked it up, carefully brushed the dust from it, refolded it and put if back in his pocket. Maria's face changed instantly from laughing raillery, and she made a quick movement to place herself where she would hide from the rest what he was doing.

There was a rap at the door and the Sheriff of the County entered.

"Sorry to disturb you at supper," he said. "But there's some hint of trouble, and I'd like to have you stand by to help me if it comes. The news has gone all over the country of the haul you brung into the' jail this afternoon, and they say their friends are gatherin' for a rescue. So many o' the right kind o' the boys is away in the army that I hardly know where to look for help. I'm sending word around to all I kin reach. There's several o' the boys that're home gittin' well o' wounds that'll be glad to help. I'm sendin' buggies for 'em. They can't walk, but they kin stand up and shoot. I'd like to have you come down to the jail as soon's you git through your supper. And, Serg't Klegg, will you take command? I ain't much on the military, but I'll stay with you and obey orders."

"All right. Sheriff; we'll be right down," responded Si with alacrity. "Git together a few of the boys, and we'll stand off the Knights. There won't be much trouble, I think."

The prospect of a fight transformed Shorty. His shamefacedness vanished instantly, and he straightened up to his full hight with his eyes shining.

"I don't think there's need o' disturbin' the other boys. Sheriff," he said. "I guess me and Si'll be able to stand off any crowd that they're likely to run up aginst us."

"Don't know about that," said the Sheriff doubtfully. "They've bin gittin' sassier and sassier lately, and've showed more willingness to fight. They've put up several very nasty little shindies at one place or another. Out at Charleston, Ill., they killed the Sheriff and a lot o' soldiers right in the Courthouse yard in broad daylight. I believe they've got rebels for officers. We mustn't take no chances."

"Let 'em come on," said Si. "We've run up aginst rebels before. We'll be down to the jail in a few minutes. Sheriff."

The Sheriff's words had banished the ready laughter from the girls' lips, and taken away their appetites, but seemed to have sharpened those of Si and Shorty.

"Here, Maria," called out Si, as he resumed his place at the table with Shorty, while the girls grouped together and whispered anxiously, "bring us in some more o' them slapjacks. We may have to be up all night, and want somethin' that'll stay by us."

"Yes," echoed Shorty, speaking for the first time since he had come into the house; "I feel as if I'd like to begin all over agin."

"I wish you could begin all over agin," said Maria in a tone very different from her former one. "I'd like to cook another supper for you. I wish I could do something to help. Can't I go with you and do something—load guns, or something? I've read about women doin' somethin' o' that kind in the Injun fightin'."

"If you could git 'em within range o' your tongue, Maria," said Si merrily, "you'd scatter, 'em in short order. No; you stay here, and say your prayers, and go to bed like a good girl, and don't worry about us. We'll come out all right. It's the other fellers' womenfolks that've cause to worry. Let them stay up and walk the floor."

As the boys walked down to the jail they saw in the darkness squads of men moving around in a portentious way. At the jail were the Sheriff, wearing an anxious look, two or three citizens, and several soldiers, some with their arms in slings, others on crutches.

"I'm so glad you've come," said the Sheriff. "Things is beginnin' to look very ugly outside. They've got the whole country stirred up, and men are coming in on every road. You take command, Sergeant Klegg. I've bin waitin' for you, so's I could drive over to the station and send a dispatch to the Governor. The station's about a mile from here, but I'll be back as soon as my horse'll bring me. I didn't want to send the dispatch till I was sure there was need of it, for I don't want to bring soldiers here for nothin'."

The wheels of the Sheriff's buggy rattled over the graveled road, and a minute later there was a knock at the outside door. Si opened it and saw there a young man with a smoothly-shaven face, a shock of rumpled hair and wearing a silk hat, a black frockcoat and seedy vest and pantaloons. Si at once recognized him as a lawyer of the place.

"Who's in charge here?" he asked.

"I am, for the present," said Si.

"There it is," said he, in a loud voice, that others might hear; "a military guard over citizens arrested without warrant of law. I have come, sir, in the name of the people of Indiana, to demand the immediate release of those men."

"You kin go, sir, and report to them people that it won't be did," answered Si firmly.

"But they've been arrested without due process of law. They've been arrested in violation of the Constitution and laws of the State of Indiana, which provide—"

"I ain't here to run no debatin' society," Si interrupted, "but to obey my orders, which is to hold these men safe and secure till otherwise ordered."

"I give you fair warning that you will save bloodshed by releasing the men peaceably. We don't want to shed blood, but—"

"We'll take care o' the bloodshed," said Si, nonchalantly. "We're in that business. We git $13 a month for it."

"Do you defy the sovereign people of Indiana, you military autocrat?" said the lawyer.

"Look here, mister," said Shorty, striding forward. "Don't you call my pardner no names, especially none like that. If you want a fight we're here to accommodate you till you git plum-full of it. But you musn't call no sich names as that, or I'll knock your head off."

"Whose head'll you knock off?" said a burly man, thrusting himself in front of the lawyer, with his fist doubled.

"Yours, for example," promptly responded Shorty, sending out his mighty right against the man's head.

"Don't be a fool, Markham," said the lawyer, catching the man and pushing him back into the crowd behind. "Now, sir, Sergeant, or Captain, or Colonel, whatever you may call yourself, for I despise military titles, and don't pretend to know them, I again demand the release of those men. You'll be foolish to attempt to resist, for we've men enough to tear you limb from limb, and jerk down the jail over your heads. Look out for yourself. You can see that the courtyard is full of men. They are determined—desperate, for they have groaned under the iron heel of tyranny."

"O, cheese that stump-speech," said Si, weariedly. "'Taint in our enlistment papers to have to listen to 'em. You've bin warnin', now I'll do a little. I'll shoot the first man that attempts to enter this jail till the Sheriff gits back. If you begin any shootin' we'll begin right into your crowd, and we'll make you sick. There's some warnin' that means somethin'."

"Your blood be on your own heads, then, you brass-button despots," said the lawyer, retiring into the darkness and the crowd. He seemed to give a signal, for a rocket shot up into the air, followed by wild yells

from the mob. The large wooden stable in the Courthouse yard burst into flames, and the prisoners inside yelled viciously in response. There was a fusillade of shots, apparently excited and aimless, for none of them struck near.

"Don't fire, boys," said Si, walking around among his guards, "until there is some reason for it. They'll probably try to make a rush and batter down the jail door. We'll watch for that."

The glare of the burning building showed them preparing for that move. A gang had torn off the heavy rail from the hitching-post on the outside of the square, and were going to use it as a battering-ram. Then came another kind of yell from farther away, and suddenly the mob began running in wild confusion, while into the glare swept a line of soldiers, charging with fixed bayonets.

"A train came in while I was at the depot," the Sheriff explained, as he entered the office. "It had on it a regiment going home on veteran furlough. I asked the Major in command to come over and help us. He and his boys was only too glad for a chance to have some fun and stretch their legs. They came off the cars with a whoop as soon's they knowed what was wanted. Now, you boys kin go home and git a good night's sleep. I'll take these prisoners along with the regiment over to the next County seat, and keep 'em there till things cool down here. I'm awfully obliged to you."

"Don't mention it. Glad to do a little thing like that for you any time," responded Si, as he and Shorty shook hands with the Sheriff.

At the next corner, after leaving the Courthouse square, they met Maria and Martha.

"I just couldn't stay in the house while this was goin' on," Maria explained. "I had to come out and see. O, I'm so glad it's all over and you're not hurt."

She caught Shorty's arm with a fervor that made him thrill all over.

CHAPTER XV. OFF FOR THE FRONT

SI AND SHORTY TAKE CHARGE OF A SQUAD OF RECRUITS.

WHEN the boys came to breakfast the next morning, they found Maria with the hollyhock effulgence of garb of the day before changed to the usual prim simplicity of her housedress. This meant admiration striking Shorty still dumber. He was in that state of mind when every change in the young woman's appearance seemed a marvelous transformation and made her more captivating than before. He had thought her queenly dazzling in her highly-colored "go-to-meeting" plumage of the day before. She was now simply overpowering in her plain, close-fitting calico, that outlined her superb bust and curves, with her hair combed smoothly back from her bright, animated face. Shorty devoured her with his eyes—that is, when she was not looking in his direction. He would rather watch her than eat his breakfast, but when her glance turned toward him he would drop his eyes to his plate. This became plain to everybody, even Maria, but did not prevent her beginning to tease.

"What's the matter with you? Where's your appetite?" asked she. "You're clean off your feed. You must be in love. Nothin' else'd make a man go back on these slapjacks that Cousin Marthy made with her own hands, and she kin beat the County on slapjacks. Mebbe you're thinkin' o' your Bad Ax girl and her widower. Perk up. He may fall offen a saw-log and git drowned, and you git her yit. Never kin tell. Life's mighty uncertain, especially around saw-mills. When I marry a man he's got to give bonds not to have anything to do, in no way or shape, with saw-mills. I don't want to be a widder, or take care o' half a man for the rest o' my days. You've got a chance to git your girl yit. Mebbe she'll git tired o' him after he's bin run through the mill two or three times, and there's more o' him in the graveyard than there is walkin' to church with her. Cheer up."

Shorty tried to disprove the charge as to the subject of his thoughts by falling to furiously and with such precipitation that he spilt his coffee, upset the molasses-jug, and then collapsed in dismay at his clumsiness.

Maria did not go free herself. The other girls had not been blind to Shorty's condition of mind, and rather suspected that Maria was not wholly indifferent to him. When she came into the kitchen for another supply. Cousin Susie, younger sister of Martha, remarked:

"Maria, I've a notion to take your advice, and set my cap for Corpril Shorty. Do you know, I think he's very good lookin'. He's a little rough and clumsy, but a girl could take that out o' him. I believe I'll begin right away. You stay in here and bake and I'll wait on the table."

"Don't be a little goose, Susie," said Maria severely. "You're too young yit to think about beaux. You hain't got used to long dresses yit. You go practice on boys in roundabouts awhile. This is a full-grown man and a soldier. He hain't got no time to waste on schoolgirls."

"Ha, how you talk, Miss Jealousy," responded Susie. "How scared you are lest I cut you out. I've a great mind to do it, just to show you I kin. I'd like awfully to have a sweetheart down at the front, just to crow over the rest o' the girls. Here, you take the turner and let me carry that plate in."

"I'll do nothin' o' the kind," said Maria, decisively. "You look out for your cakes there. They're burnin' while you're gossipin'. That's my brother and his friend, and I hain't got but a short time to be with 'em. I may never see 'em agin, and I want to do all I kin for 'em while they're with me."

"Too bad about your brother," laughed Susie. "How lovin' and attentive all at once. I remember how you used to wig him without mercy at school, and try to make him go off and take me home, instid o' taggin' along after you, when that big-eyed school teacher that sung tenor'd be makin' sheep's eyes at you in school, and wantin' to walk home with you in the evenin'. I remember your slappin' Si for tellin' the folks at home about the teacher and you takin' long walks at noon out to the honeysuckle patch. I've a great mind to go in and tell

it all to Si right before that feller. Then your cake'll all be dough. Don't git too uppish with me, young lady. Gi' me that plate and let me take it in."

The cakes on the griddles burned while Maria watched through the door what she mentally described as the "arts and manuvers o' that sassy little piece." She was gratified to see that Shorty's eyes kept glancing at the door for her own reappearance. She carried in the next plate of cakes herself, and though they were a little scorched, Shorty ate them with more zest than any of their predecessors.

Si announced, as he shoved back from the table:

"Well, we've got to go right off. We must ketch that accommodation and git back to Bean Blossom Crick. I want to say good-by to the folks, and then strike out for Jeffersonville. I've reported that I'm able for dooty agin, and there's orders at home for me and Shorty to go to Jeffersonville and git a gang o' recruits that's bin gethered there, and bring 'em to the rijimint."

Shorty had been in hopes that Si would dally for a day or so in these pleasant pastures, but then he reflected that where Annabel was was likely to be much more attractive to Si than where she was not.

"No need o' my goin' back with you," he ventured to suggest, speaking for the first time. "I might take the train goin' East, and git things in shape at Jeffersonville by the time you come."

Then his face grew hot with the thought that everyone saw through his transparent scheme to get an hour or two more with Maria.

"No," said Si, decisively. "You'll go back with me. Father and mother and 'Mandy are all anxious to see you, and they'll never forgive me if I don't bring you back with me. Le's start."

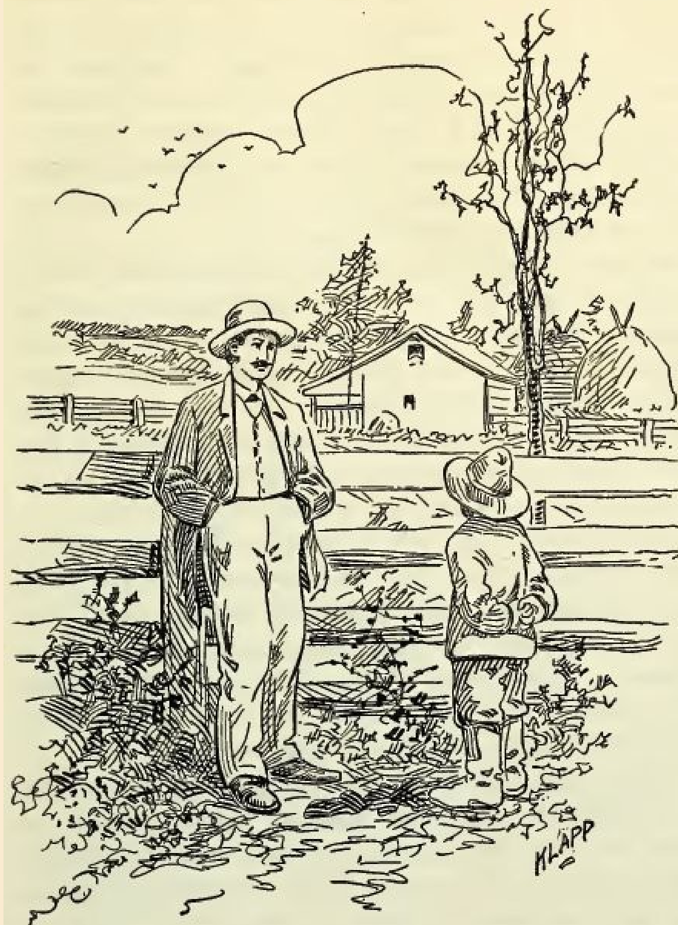
If, at parting. Shorty had mustered up courage enough to look Maria squarely in the eyes, he might have read something there to encourage him, but no deeply-smitten man ever can do this. There is where the "light o' loves" have the great advantage. He could only grip her hand convulsively for an instant, and then turn and follow Si.

At the Deacon's home Shorty found the same quiet, warm welcome, with too much tact on the part of anyone except little Sammy Woggles to make any comment on the circumstances of his disappearance. Sammy was clearly of the opinion that Si had run down Shorty and brought him back, and this had the beneficial effect of dampening Sammy's runaway schemes. He was also incensed at Shorty's perfidy in not sending him the rebel gun, and thought that his being brought back was righteous retribution.

"Served you right, you black-hearted promise-breaker," he hissed at Shorty when they found themselves momentarily alone. "I writ you that letter, and it nearly killed me—brung me down with the measles, and you never sent me that gun. But I'll foller yer trail till you do."

"Don't be a little fool, Sammy. You stay right here. You've got the best home in the world here. If you do I'll send you your gun inside of a month, with some real rebel catridges and a bayonet that's killed a man, and a catridge-box with a belt that you kin carry your ammunition in—that is, if you'll write me another letter, all about Maria."

"I won't write you a word about Maria," said the youth, seeing his advantage, "onless you promise to send me a whole lot o' catridges—a hatful. Powder and lead costs a heap o' money. And so do caps."



"I'LL SEND YOU A CATRIDGE AND CAP FOR EVERY WORD YOU WRITE ABOUT MARIA."

"You shall have 'em. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll send you a catridge and cap for every word you write about Maria."

"It's a go," said the delighted boy. "I'm goin' to learn someway to write without bitin' my tongue, an' I'll write you as many words every day as I want catridges to shoot off, so that I'll have enough for the next Fourth o' July, and kill all old Pete Walker's snappin' dogs besides."

The boys were to leave on the midnight train. The bigger part of Si's leave-taking seemed to be outside of his family, for he quit the house immediately after supper and did not leave Annabel's side until he had just barely time to get back home, take leave of his weeping mother and help store in the spring wagon more than he and Shorty could carry of the good things she had provided for them.

"What's this?" said Si to Shorty the next day at Jeffersonville, when they had reported to the Provost-Marshal, and had mustered before them the squad of recruits that they were to conduct to their regiment. "Have they bin roundin' up some country school-houses, and enlisted all the boys that was in the fourth reader and Ray's arithmetic?"

"Seems like it," said Shorty, looking down the line of bright, beardless, callow faces. "Some o' them don't look as if they'd got as fur as the fourth reader. Ain't old enough to spell words o' more than two syllables. What do they want with so many drummer-boys?"

"We aint no drummer-boys," said a bright-faced five-footer, who overhead the question. "Nary drum for us. We haint got no ear for music. We're regular soldiers, we are, and don't you forget it."

"But you ain't nigh 18," said Si, looking him over, pleased with the boy's spirit.

"You bet I'm over 18," answered the boy. "I told the Mustering Officer I was, and stuck to it in spite of him. There, you can see for yourself that I am," and he turned up his foot so as to show a large 18 marked on the sole of his shoe. "There, if that don't make me over 18, I'd like to know what does," he added triumphantly, to the chorus of laughter from his companions.

In the entire squad of 65 there were not more than half a dozen bearded men. The rest were boys, all clearly under their majority, and many seeming not over 15. There were tall, lathy boys, with tallowy faces; there were short, stocky boys, with big legs and arms and fat faces as red as ripe apples, and there were boys neither very fat nor very lean, but active and sprightly as cats. They were in the majority. Long and short, fat and lean, they were all bubbling over with animal spirits and activity, and eager to get where they could see "real war."

"Say, mister," said the irrepressible five-footer, who had first spoken to Si; "we've bin awful anxious for you to come and take us to our regiment. We want to begin to be real soldiers."

"Well, my boy," said Si, with as much paternalism as if he had been a grandfather, "you must begin right now, by actin' like a real soldier. First, you mustn't call me mister. Mustn't call nobody mister in the army. My name's Sergeant Klegg. This other man is Corporal Elliott, You must always call us by those names, When you

speak to either of us you must take the position of a soldier—stand up straight, put your heels together, turn your toes out, and salute, this way."

"Is this right?" asked the boy, carefully imitating Si.

"Yes, that's purty near right—very good for first attempt. Now, when I speak to you, you salute and answer me. What is your name?"

"Henry Joslyn, sir."

"Well, Henry, you are now Private Joslyn, of the 200th Injianny Volunteer Infantry. I can't tell what company you'll belong to till we git to the rigimint, but I'll try to have you in Co. Q, my company."

"But when are we going to get our guns and knapsacks and things, and start for the regiment?" persisted the eager boy, and the others joined in the impatient inquiry.

"You won't git your guns and accourterments till you git to the rigimint. As soon's I kin go over this roll and identify each one o' you, I'll see what the orders is for starting."

"There goes some men for the ferry now. Why can't we go with them?" persisted the boy.

"Private Joslyn," said Si, with some official sternness, "the first thing a soldier's got to learn is to keep quiet and wait for orders. You understand?"

"'Pears to me that there's a lot o' first things to learn," grumbled the boy to the others, "and it's nothin' but wait, wait forever. The army'll go off and leave us if we don't get down there purty soon."

"Don't worry, my boy, about the army goin' off and leavin' you," said Shorty in a kindly way. "It'll wait. It kin be depended on for that. Besides, it's got to wait for me and Sargint Klegg."

"That's so. Didn't think o' that," chorused the boys, to whose eyes the two veterans seemed as important as Gens. Grant or Thomas.

"That's purty light material for serious bizniss, I'm afeared," said Shorty to Si, as they stood a little apart for a moment and surveyed the coltish boys, frisking around in their new blouses and pantaloons, which fitted about like the traditional shirt on a bean-pole.

"I think they're just splendid," said Si, enthusiastically. "They'll fill in the holes o' the old rigimint in great shape. They're as tough as little wildcats; they'll obey orders and go wherever you send 'em, and four out o' every five o' them kin knock over a crow at a hundred yards with a squirrel rifle. But, Shorty," he added with a sudden assumption of paternal dignity, "me and you's got to be fathers to them. We've got a great responsibility for them. We must do the very best we kin by 'em."

"That's so," said Shorty, catching at once the fatherly feeling. "I'll punch the head off en the first sneezer that I ketch tryin' to impose on 'em."

CHAPTER XVI. THE TROUBLESOME BOYS

SI AND SHORTY'S RECRUITS ENTER KENTUCKY.

THE bright, active minds of the 65 boys that Si and Shorty were put in charge of were aflame with curiosity regarding everything connected with the war. For two years they had been fed on stories and incidents of the mighty conflict then convulsing the land. Every breath they had drawn had some taste of battle in it. Wherever they went or were they heard incessantly of the storm-swept "front"—of terrific battles, perilous adventures, heroic achievements, death, wounds and marvelous escapes. The older boys were all at the front, or going there, or coming back with heroic marks of shot and shell. The one burning aspiration in every well-constructed boy's heart was to get big enough to crowd past the recruiting officer, and go where he could see with his own eyes the thunderous drama. There was concentrated all that fills a healthy boy's imagination and stirs his blood—something greater than Indian-fighting, or hunting lions and tigers. They looked on Si and Shorty with little short of reverence. Here were two men who had captured a rebel flag in a hand-to-hand fight, both of whom had been left for dead, and both promoted for gallantry. What higher pinnacle of greatness could any boy hope to reach?

They began at once seriously imitating the walk and manners of their heroes. The tall, lank boys modeled themselves on Shorty, and the short, chubby ones on Si. And there at once rose contention between them as to which was the greater hero.

"I heard," said Henry Joslyn, "that Corpril Elliott was the first to reach the rebel flag, he havin' much the longest legs, but jest as he grabbed it a big rebel knocked him, and then they all piled on to him, and about had him finished when Serg't Klegg reached there at a charge bayonets, and he bayoneted everybody in sight, until a sharpshooter in a tree shot him with an explosive bullet that tore his breast all to pieces, but he kept right on bayonetin' 'em till he dropped from loss o' blood. Then they fired a cannon at the sharpshooter and blowed him to pieces just as you'd blow a chippy to pieces with a bullet from a bear-gun."

"'Twan't that way at all," said tall, lathy Gid Mackall. "A whole lot of 'em made for the flag together. A charge o' grapeshot come along and blowed the rest away, but Serg't Klegg and Corpril Elliott kep' right on. Then Corpril Elliott he lit into the crowd o' rebels and laid a swath right around him, while Sergint Klegg grabbed the flag. A rebel Colonel shot him, but they couldn't stop Corpril Elliott till they shot a brass six-pounder at him."

The boys stood on the banks of the Ohio River and gazed eagerly at the other side. There was the enemy's country—there the theater in which the great drama was being enacted. Everything there had a weird fascination for them, as a part of, or accessory to, the stupendous play. It was like peeping under the circus tent, when they were smaller, and catching glimpses of the flying horses' feet.

And the questions they asked. Si had in a manner repelled them by his curt treatment of Harry Joslyn, and his preoccupied air as he went back and forth getting his orders and making preparations for starting. But Shorty was in an affable mood, and by pleasantly answering a few of their inquiries brought the whole fire of their questioning upon him.

"Are any o' them men you see over there guerrillas?" they asked.

"Mebbe," Shorty answered. "Kentucky's full of 'em. Mebbe they're peaceable citizens, though."

"How kin you tell the guerrillas from the citizens?"

"By the way they shoot at you. The peaceable citizens don't shoot—at least, in day time and out in the open. They lay for you with sole-leather pies, and chuck-a-luck boards and 40-rod whisky, and aid. and abet the Southern Confedrisy that way. They get away with more Union soldiers than the guerrillas do. But you can never tell what an able-bodied man in Kentucky'll do. He may lay for you all day with wildcat whisky, at $5 a canteenful, to git money to buy ammunition to shoot at you at night. He's surer o' gittin' you with a canteen o' never-miss whisky, but there's more healthy excitement about shootin' at you from behind a bank. And his pies is deadlier'n his apple-jack. A man kin git over an apple-jack drunk, but Kentucky pies 's wuss'n nux vomica on fish."

"Mustn't we eat none o' their pies?" asked the boys, with longing remembrance of the fragrant products of their mothers' ovens.

"Nary a pie. If I ketch a boy eatin' a pie after we cross the river I'll buck-and-gag him. Stick to plain hardtack and pork. You'll git to like it better'n cake by and by. I eat it right along in preference to the finest cake ever baked."

Shorty did not think it necessary to mention that this preference was somewhat compulsory.

"Why don't you hunt down the guerrillas and kill 'em off and be done with 'em?"

"You can't, very well. You see, guerrilain' is peculiar. There's somethin' in the air and water down in Kentucky and Tennessee that brings it on a man. You'll see a plain farmer man, jest like them around your home, and he'll be all right, goin' about his place plowin' and grubbin' sprouts and tendin' to his stock, and tellin' you all the time how much he loves the Union and how he and his folks always bin for the Union. Next thing you know he'll be out behind a cedar bush with a shotgun loaded with slugs, waitin' to make a lead mine o' some feller wearin' blue clothes. You see him before he does you, and he'll swear that he was out after the crows that's bin pullin' up his corn. He'll take' the oath of allegiance like it was a dram of old apple-jack, and tears'll come into his eyes at the sight o' the Old Flag, which he and his'n has always loved. He'll go ahead plowin' and grubbin' sprouts and tendin' his cattle till the fit comes on him agin to go gunnin' for bluecoats, and off he is, to go through the whole performance agin. You kin never tell how long his loosid interval will last, nor when the fit's comin' on him. Mebbe the changes o' the moon's somethin' to do with it. Mebbe it's somethin' that they eat, like what the cattle eat out West that makes 'em go crazy."

"Will the guerrillas begin shootin' at us as soon's we cross the river?"

"Can't tell. Guerrillas's like the nose-bleed—likely to come on you at any time. They're jest where you find 'em—that's when they're jumpin' you.. When they aint jumpin' you, they're lawabiding Union citizens, entitled to the protection o' the laws and to draw rations from the Commissary. To make no mistake, you want to play every man in citizen's clothes south of the Ohio River for a rebel. And when you don't see him, you want to be surer than ever, for then he's layin' for you."

Si came up at this moment with orders for them to pick up and go down to the ferry, and the lively hustle shut off Shorty's stream of information for the time being. The boys swarmed on to the bow of the ferry-boat, where they could scrutinize and devour with eager eyes the fateful shore of Kentucky.

"Don't look so very different from the Indiana side," said Harry Joslyn, as they neared the wharf. "Same kind o' wharf-boats and same kind o' men on 'em."

"That's because we've taken 'em and have our own men there," replied Gid Mackall. "It'll all be different when we git ashore and further into the State."

"Wasn't expecting nothing else," said Albert Grimes. "I've been watchin' the Sargint and Corpril, and they're acting just as if it was every day bizniss. I'm not going to expect anything till I see them lookin' serious."

They landed and walked to the depot through the streets of Louisville, which were also disappointingly like those they had seen elsewhere, with the stores open and people going about their business, as if no shadow of war brooded over the land. There were some more soldiers on the streets, and a considerable portion of the vehicles were army wagons, but this was all.

"When'll we see some rebels?" the boys asked.

"Don't be impatient," said a soldier on the sidewalk; "you'll see 'em soon enough, and more'n you want to. You'll have to go a little further, but you'll find the woods full of 'em. You'll be wishin' you was back home in your little trundle-beds, where they ought've kept you."

"Shut up, you coffee-boiler," shouted Shorty, striding toward him. "These boys 's goin' to the front, where you ought to be, and I won't have you sayin' a word to discourage 'em."

"Too bad about discouraging 'em," laughed another, who had a juster appreciation of the situation. "You couldn't discourage that drove of kids with a hickory club."

After the train left Louisville it passed between two strong forts bristling with heavy guns. Here was a reality of war, and the boys' tide of questions became a torrent that for once overslaughed Shorty's fine talent for fiction and misinformation.

"How many battles had been fought there?"

"How many Union soldiers had been killed?"

"How many rebels?"

"Where were they buried?"

"How big a ball did the guns shoot?"

"How far would it carry?"

"How many men would it kill if they were put one behind another?"

"How near would the guns come to hitting a man a mile off?"

"Could the gunner knock a man's head off, or one of his legs, just as he pleased?"

"Were the guns rifled or smooth-bore?"

"How much powder did it take to load them?"

"How hard did they kick when they were fired?"

"Did they have flint-locks or caps?"

"Did they ever fire chain-shot, which would cut down trees and sweep away companies of men?"

"If all the rest of the men were killed wouldn't the powder-monkey get a chance to fire the gun?"

"Look here, boys," gasped Shorty, when he got a chance to answer, "I'd like to answer your questions and fill you so plumb full o' information that your hides'd crack to hold it. But I aint no complete history o' the war with heavy artillery tactics bound up in one volume. All I know is that the worst dose them forts ever give was to the fellers that had to build 'em. After you've dug and shoveled and wheeled on one of 'em for about a month you'll hate the very sight of 'em and never ask no questions about 'em. All you'll want'll be to find and kill the feller that invented them brick-red eruptions on the face o' the earth."

This was a prosaic side of the war that had not occurred to the boys.

"HERE, YOU YOUNG BRATS, WHAT ARE YOU UP TO?"

As the train ran out into the country there were plentiful signs of war to rivet the attention of the youngsters—hospitals, with the emaciated patients strolling feebly about; corrals of mules and horses, the waste and wreckage where camps had been, and bridges which had been burned and rebuilt.

"But we haint seen no guerrillas yit," said Harry Joslyn and Gid Mackall, whose minds seemed more fascinated with that species of an enemy than any other, and they apparently voiced the minds of the rest. "When're we likely to see some guerrillas?"

"O, the guerrillas are layin' purty low now, betwixt here and Nashville," Si carelessly explained. "After we pass Nashville you kin begin to look out for 'em."

"Why," Gid Mackall complained to the rest of them, "Corpril Elliott said that we could begin to look out for guerrillas jest as soon's we crossed the Ohio—that the whole o' Kentucky was full of 'em. I believe Corpril Elliott knows more about his business than Sargint Klegg. Sargint Klegg seems careless like. I see lots o' fellers along the road in butternut clothes that seemed savage and sneaky like. They looked at us in a way that made me certain they wuz spying us, and had their guns hid away somewhere, ready to jump us whenever there wuz a good chanst."

"So did I," chorused the others.

The train made a long stop on a switch and manuvered around a while, taking on some cars found there, and Si and Shorty seeing nothing to do went forward to another car, where they found some returning veterans, and were soon absorbed in a game of seven-up. Shorty had just successfully turned a jack from the bottom, and was snickering to himself that his fingers had not lost their cunning by long idleness, when the game was interrupted by a train-hand rushing up with the information:

"Here, you fellers, you want to git out there and 'tend to them kids o' your'n. They've got a couple o' citizens down there in the brush and I believe are goin' to hang 'em."

Si and Shorty ran down in the direction indicated. They found the boys, stern-eyed and resolute, surrounding two weak-eyed, trembling "crackers," who had apparently come to the train with baskets of leathery-crusted dried-apple pies for sale. The men were specimens of the weak-minded, weak-bodied, lank-haired "po' white trash," but the boys had sized them up on sight as dangerous spies and guerrillas, had laid hands on them and dragged them down into the brush, where Gid Mackall and Harry Joslyn were doing a fair reproduction of Williams, Paulding and Van Wert searching Maj. Andre's clothes for incriminating documents. They had the prisoners' hands tied behind them and their ankles bound. So far they had discovered a clumsy brass-barreled pistol and an ugly-looking spring dirk, which were sufficient to confirm the dangerous character of the men. Two of the boys had secured ropes from the train, which they were trying to fashion into hangman's nooses. Gid and Harry finished a painstaking examination of the men's ragged jeans vests, with a look of disappointment at finding nothing more inculpating that some fishhooks, chunks of twist tobacco and cob-pipes.

"They must have 'em in their boots, boys. Pull 'em off," said Harry. "There's where spies usually carry their most important papers."

"Here, you young brats, what are you up to?" demanded Si, striding in among them.

"Why, Sargint," said Harry Joslyn, speaking as if confident of being engaged in a praisworthy work, which should receive the commendation of his superiors, "these're two spies and guerrillas that we ketched right in the act, and we're searchin' 'em for evidence to hang 'em."

"Spies nothin'!" said Si. "Why, them fellers hain't brains enough to tell a battery from a regiment, nor pluck enough to take a settin' hen offen her nest. Let them go at once."

"Why, Corpril Elliott told us that every man in Kentucky, particularly them what sold pies, wuz dangerous, and liable to go guerrillying at any minute," said Harry in an aggrieved tone. "These fellers seemed to be sneakin' down to find that we hadn't no guns and then jump us."

"Well, what I said wuz true on jineral principles," laughed Shorty. "But there's occasionally exceptions to even what I tell you. These fellers are as harmless as garter-snakes. Why didn't you come and speak to us?"

"Why, you shoved our car out there into the brush and went off and left us. We thought we had to look out for ourselves," explained Harry. "Can't we hang 'em, anyway?" he added in an appealing tone, and the rest of the boys looked wistfully at Si for permission to proceed.

"No, you can't, I tell you. Turn 'em loose this minute, and give 'em back their things, and go yourselves to your car. We're goin' to start now. Here," he continued to the two men, "is a dollar. Take your pies and dig out. Don't attempt to sell any o' them pies to these boys, or I'll hang you myself, and there won't be no foolishness about it. Git back to your car, boys."

"There won't be no hangin', and we won't git none o' the pies," complained the boys among themselves. "Sargint Klegg's gittin' overbearin'. What'd he interfere for? Them fellers was guerrillas, as sure as you're born, just as Corpril Elliott described 'em before we crossed the river."

CHAPTER XVII. THE FRIGHTENED SURGEON

SI AND SHORTY HAVE A TIME WITH THEIR WILD, YOUNG SQUAD.

MUCH to their amazement, the boys waked up the next morning in Nashville, and found that they had passed through the "dark and bloody ground" of Kentucky absolutely without adventure.

"How in the world'd we ever git clean through the State without the least bit o' trouble?" asked Harry Joslyn, as they stood together on the platform awaiting the return of Si and Shorty, who had gone to see about their breakfast. "It was fight from the word go with the other men from the minute they struck Kentucky."

"Probably it was Corpril Elliott's good management," suggested Gid Mackall, whose hero-worship of Shorty grew apace. "I tell you there aint a trick o' soldierin' that he aint up to."

"Corpril Elliott's?" sneered Harry Joslyn. "You're just stuck on Corpril Elliott. If it was anybody's good management it was Sargint Klegg's. I tell you, he's the boss. He got shot through the breast, while Corpril Elliott only got a crack over the head. That settles it as to who's the best soldier. I'm kind o' sorry that we didn't have no trouble. Mebbe the folks at home'll git the idea that we skulked and dodged."

"That's so," accorded the others, with a troubled look.

"But we are now in Tennessee," chirped in Gid Mackall hopefully. "That's ever so much worse'n Kentucky. We must come to rebels purty soon now. They won't let so many reinforcements git to Gen. Thomas if they kin help it." And Gid looked around on his companions, as if he thought their arrival would turn the scale and settle the fate of the Confederacy. "They'll probably jump us just as soon as we leave town. Them big forts on

the hills mebbe keeps them outside now, but they're layin' for us just beyond. Wonder if we'll git our guns here? Mebbe that's what the Sargint and Corpril's gone for."

"They said they were going for our breakfast," said Harry. "And I hope it's true, for I'm hungrier'n a rip-saw. But I could put off breakfast for awhile, if they'd only bring us our guns. I hope they'll be nice Springfield rifles that'll kill a man at a mile."

"'Tention!" commanded Si. "Fall in single rank 'cordin' to your size. Tall boys on the right, short ones on the left, medium in the center. Gid Mackall, you're the tallest. You can go there to the corner o' the platform and let the others form on you."

Si stepped back into the shed to look after some matters.

Harry Joslyn whipped around and took his stand on the right of Gid Mackall.

"Here," protested Gid; "Sargint Klegg told me to stand on the right. You're smaller'n me. Git on the other side."

"I won't do it," answered Harry. "I've always stood ahead o' you in school, ever since we were in the primer class, and I aint goin' to stand behind you in the army. You needn't try to gouge me out o' my rights because you're half-a-head taller. I'm two months older'n you, and I can throw you in a wrastle every time."

"I tell you," said Gid, giving Harry an angry shove toward the left, "that this is my place, and I'm goin' to stand here. The Sargint told me to. Go down where you belong, you little rat."

The hot-headed Harry mixed up with him immediately, school-boy fashion. Shorty rushed up and separated the two, giving Harry a sharp shake. "Stop that, and go down to your place in the center," said he.

"Yes; you side with him," whimpered Harry, "because he praises you and says you're a better soldier'n Sargint Klegg. I'm goin' to tell Sargint Klegg that."

"Here," said Si, sternly, as he came back again. "What's all this row? Why don't you boys fall in 'cordin' to size, as I told you?"

"Sargint," protested Harry, "Gid Mackall wants to stand at the head o' the class. I'm older'n him, I can spell him down, and I can throw him in—"

Si interrupted the appeal by taking Harry by the ear and marching him to his place.

"Look here," he said, "when you git an order from anyone, don't give 'em no back talk. That's the first thing you've got to learn, and the earlier you learn it the less trouble you'll have. If you don't like it, take it out in swearin' under your breath, but obey."

"But, Sargint, he said that Corpril Elliott was a better soldier'n"

"Silence in ranks," said Si, giving him a shake. "Right dress. Come out in the center. Mackall, stand up straight there. Take that hump out o' your shoulders. Put your heels together, all of you. Turn your toes out. Put your little fingers down to the seams o' your pantaloons. Draw your stomachs in. Throw your chests out. Hold your heads up. Keep your faces straight to the front, and cast your eyes to the right until you kin see the buttons on the breast o' the third man to your right. Come forward until they're in line.

"Goodness," moaned some of the boys, as they were trying to obey what seemed a' hopeless mass of directions, "do we have to do this every mornin' before we kin have breakfast? We'll starve to death before we git anything to eat. No use tellin' us to draw our stomachs in. They're clean in to our backbones now."

"Mustn't talk in ranks, boys," Shorty kindly admonished. "It's strictly agin' regulations. Straighten up, there, like soldiers, all o' you, and git into a line. Looks like a ram's horn now. If the rebels'd shoot down that line they wouldn't hit one o' you."

Jim Humphries, one of the medium-sized boys, suddenly turned as white as a sheet and fell on the planks. One after another of those around him did the same, until a half-dozen were lying there in a heap.

"What in the world's the matter?" asked Si, rushing up to them in dismay.

"They're pizened, that's what they are," shouted Harry Joslyn. "That guerrilla goin' over there pizened 'em. I saw him a-givin' 'em something. He's tryin' to git away. Le's ketch him."

At the word the boys made a rush for the man who was quietly walking off. As they ran they threw stones, which went with astonishing precision and force. One of them struck the man on the head and felled him. Then the boys jumped on him and began pounding and kicking him. Si and Shorty came up, pushed off the boys and pulled the man to his feet. He was terrified at the onset which had been made upon him, and could not understand its reason.

"What've I done?" he gasped. "What're all yo'uns weltin' me for? I haint no rebel. I've done tuk the oath of allegiance long ago."

"Now there'll be a hangin' sure," said Harry, in eager expectancy.

"What'd you do to them boys back there?" demanded Si.

"Didn't do nothin' to 'em. Sw'ar to God A'mighty I didn't."

"That telegraph pole will be just the thing to hang him on," suggested Harry to Gid. "We could put him on a flat car and push the car out from under him. I'll look around for a rope, Gid, and you git ready to climb the pole."

"He did do something to 'em, Sargint," said Gid Mackall. "I seen him givin' 'em something."

"'Twas only a little mite o' terbacker," the man explained. "They'uns said they'uns was mouty hongry, and wanted t' know if I'd anything t' eat. I hadn't nothing, but I done had a little terbacker, which I tole 'em'd take away the hongry feelin', and I gin each o' they'uns a lettle chaw."

"I shouldn't wonder but he's tellin' the truth," Shorty whispered to Si. "Le's take him back there and see."

Coming back to the platform they found the boys there recovering but still very weak and pale. They confirmed the story about the tobacco. Shorty examined the rest of the tobacco in the man's possession with the practiced taste of a connoisseur, found it strong black plug, just the thing to upset a green boy who took it on an empty stomach, cut off a liberal chew for himself and dismissed the man with a kick.

"Now, le's form agin and march to breakfast. Great Scott, how hungry I am," said Si. "'Tention. Fall in 'cordin' to size. Single rank."

"What's size got to do with gittin' breakfast?" complained Harry Joslyn, who had another grievance, now that he had again been disappointed in hanging a guerrilla. "Biggest boys'll git there first and get the most to eat. The rest of us need just as much as they do."

"Silence in the ranks," commanded Shorty, snappishly. "Don't fool around. Git into your place and stay there. We want breakfast some time today."

Shorty lined up the boys in a hurry and Si commanded.

"Right dress! Come out a little there on the left! Steady! Without doublin', right face!"

A squad of Provost-Guards came up at a double-quick, deployed, surrounded the squad and began bunching the boys together rather roughly, using the butts of their muskets.

"What does this mean?" Si asked angrily of the Lieutenant in command.

"It means that you and your precious gang have to go down to Provo' Headquarters at once," answered the Lieutenant. "And no words about it. Forward, march, now."

"But you've got no business to interfere with me," protested Si. "I've got my orders to take this squad o' recruits to my regiment, and I'm doin' it. I'm goin' to put 'em on the cars as soon's I kin git breakfast for 'em, and start for Chattanoogy."

"Well, why didn't you get breakfast for them and put them on the cars peaceably and quietly, without letting them riot around and kill citizens and do all manner of devilment. You have a fine account to settle."

"But they haint killed no citizen. They haint bin riotin' around, and I ain't a-goin' with you. You've no right, I tell you, to interfere with me."

"Well, you just will go with me, and no more chinning."

A Major, attracted by the altercation, rode up and asked what was the matter.

"Word came to Headquarters," explained the Lieutenant, "that a squad of recruits were rioting, and had killed a citizen, and I was sent down here on the run to stop it and arrest the men. This Sergeant, who seems to be in command, refuses to go with me."

"I tell you, Major," said Si, who recognized the officer as belonging to his brigade, "there was nobody killed, or even badly hurt. These little roosters got up a school-yard scrap all about a mistake; it was all over in a minute. There's the man they say was killed, settin' over there on that pile o' lumber smokin' his pipe."

"You're Si Klegg, aren't you, of the 200th Ind.?" asked the Major.

"Yes, Major," answered Si, saluting. "And you're Maj. Tomlinson, of the 1st Oshkosh. This is my pardner. Shorty."

"Glad to see you with Sergeant's stripes on," said the Major, shaking hands with him. "I congratulate you on your promotion. You deserved it, I know."

"So did Shorty," added Si, determined that his partner should not lack full measure of recognition.

"Yes, I congratulate Shorty, too. Lieutenant, I know these men, and they are all right. There has been a mistake. You can take your men back to Headquarters."

"'Tention," commanded the Lieutenant. "Get into line! Right dress! Front! Right face! Forward, file left—march!"

"'Tention," commanded Si. "Fall in in single ranks, 'cordin' to size. Be mighty spry about it. Right dress! Count off in whole numbers."

Another Provost squad came double-quicking up, followed by some ambulances. Again the boys were hurriedly bunched up. The Provost squad, however, did not seem to want to come to as close quarters as the other had. They held back noticeably.

"Now, what in thunder does this mean?" asked Si with angry impatience. "What's up now?"

"Sergeant, are you in command of this squad?" asked a brisk little man with the green stripes of a Surgeon, who got out of one of the ambulances.

"Yes, I am," said Si, saluting as stiffly as he dared. "What's the matter?"

"Well, get those men of yours that are down into the ambulances as quickly as you can, and form those that are able to walk close behind. Be on the jump, because the consequences of your staying here may be serious to the army. How are you feeling yourself? Got any fever? Let me see your tongue."

"What in the world's the matter with you?" asked Si in bewilderment.

"Come, don't waste any time asking questions," answered the nervous little Surgeon. "There's more troops coming right along, and we mustn't take any chances of their catching it."

"Ketch what? Great grief, ketch what?" groaned Si. "They've already ketched everything in this mortal world that was ketchable. Now what are they goin' to ketch?"

"Why, the smallpox, you dumby," said the Surgeon irritably. "Don't you know that we are terribly afraid of a visitation of smallpox to the army? They've been having it very bad in some places up North, and we've been watching every squad of recruits from up there like hawks. A man came down to Hospital Headquarters just now and reported that a dozen of your boys had dropped right on the platform. He said that he knew you, and you came from a place in Indiana that's being swept by the smallpox."

"SMALLPOX, YOUR GRANNY," SAID SI.

"Smallpox, your granny," said Si wrathfully. "There haint bin no smallpox in our neighborhood since the battle o' Tippecanoe. The only man there who ever had it fit in the battle under Gen. Harrison. He had it when he was a child, and was so old that the pockmarks on him wuz wore so smooth you could scarcely see 'em. Our neighborhood's so healthy you can't even have a square case o' measles. Gosh darn it," Si exploded, "what glandered fool was it that couldn't tell 'backer-sick from smallpox? What locoed calves have you runnin' up to your Headquarters bawlin' reports?"

"Sir," said the Surgeon stiffly, "you forget that you are speaking to your superior officer."

"Excuse me. Doctor," said Si, recovering himself and saluting. "I'm very hungry, and worried to death with these frisky kids that I'm trying to git to my regiment. The only trouble is that some of the trundle-bed graduates took their first chaw o' terbacker this mornin' on empty stomachs and it keeled 'em over. Come here and look at 'em yourself. You'll see it in a minute."

"Certainly. I see it very plainly," said the Surgeon, after looking them over. "Very absurd to start such a report, but we are quite nervous on the subject of smallpox getting down to the army.

"Take your men in and give them their breakfast, Sergeant, and they'll be all right.

"That's what I've bin tryin' to do for the last two hours," said Si, as he saluted the Surgeon, departing with his ambulances and men. "'Tention. Confound you, fall in in single rank, 'cordin' to size, and do it in short meter, before anything else happens. Right dress! Front! Without doublin', right face! Great Scott, what's the matter with you roosters? Don't you know your right hands from your lefts? Turn around there, you moon-eyed goshngs! Forward—file right—march!"

"Here, Sergeant," said a large man with three chevrons on his arm. "I want to halt your men till I look 'em over. Somebody's gone through a sutler's car over there on the other track and I think it was your crowd. I want to find out."

"Halt nothin'," said Si, brushing him out of the way. "I'm goin' to git these youngsters their breakfast before there's a tornado or an earthquake. Go 'way, if you know what's good for you."

CHAPTER XVIII. NO PEACE FOR SI AND SHORTY

THE YOUNGSTERS KEEP THEM BUSY WHILE THE TRAIN MOVES SOUTH.

THE long fast had sharpened the zest the boys had for their first "soldier-breakfast." Until they got down to "real soldier-living" they could not feel that they were actually in the service. To have this formal initiation in the historic city of Nashville, far in the interior of the Southern Confederacy, was an exhiliarating event. The coarse fare became viands of rare appetency.

"Gracious, how good these beans taste," murmured Harry Joslyn, calling for a second plateful; "never knowed beans to taste so good before. Wonder how they cook 'em? We'll have to learn how, Gid, so's to cook 'em for ourselves, and when we git back home won't we astonish our mothers and sisters?"

"And sich coffee," echoed Gid. "I'll never drink cream in my coffee agin. I hadn't no idee cream spiled coffee so. Why, this coffee's the best stuff I ever drunk. Beats maple sap, or cider through a straw, all holler. That's good enough for boys. This 's what men and soldiers drink."

"You know those old gods and goddesses," put in Montmorency Scruggs, a pale, studious boy, for shortness called "Monty," and who had a great likeness for ancient history and expected to be a lawyer, "drunk what they called nectar. Maybe it was something like this."

"But we haven't had any hardtack yet," complained Albert Russell, a youth somewhat finicky as to dress, and who had ambitions of becoming a doctor. "They've only given us baker's bread, same as we got on the other side of the river, only better-tasting. Why don't they give us real soldier bread? I've heard Uncle Bob laugh at the 'soft-bread snoozers,' who never got near enough the front to know the taste of hardtack."

"Well, I'm going to eat all I can of it while I can get it," said little Pete Skidmore, the youngest and smallest of the lot, who had only passed the Mustering Officer by exhibiting such a vehement desire to enter the service as to make up for his probable lack of years and quite evident lack of inches. "I've heard Uncle Will say that he was always mighty glad to get back where he could get soft bread for a change, after he'd worn his grinders down to the quick chawing hardtack. It tastes awful good, anyway."

"The Government must pay big wages to the men it hires to do its cooking," philosophized Harry Joslyn, "same as it does to its lawyers and Congressmen and Generals. No common men could cook grub that way. Mebbe it took the cooks away from the Astor House and Delmonico's."

"The boys are certainly making up for lost time," complacently remarked Shorty, as, having taken off the edge of his own hunger with a plateful of pork-and-beans and a half loaf of bread, he stopped for a moment to survey the havoc that his young charges, ranged at a long, rough counter, were making in the Commissary stores. "They're eatin' as if this was the last square meal they expected to git till the rebellion's put down."

"Yes," laughed Si, emptying his second cup of coffee, "I used to think that we had appetites that'd browse a five-acre lot off clean every meal, but these kids kin distance us. If they live off the country its bones 'll be picked mighty white when they pass. That lean, lank Gid Mackall seems to be as holler as a sassidge-skin. Even that wouldn't give room for all that he's stowin' away."

"Harry Joslyn 's runnin' nose-and-nose with him. There ain't the width o' their forelocks difference. Harry's yelled for more beans at the same second that Gid has. In fact, not one of 'em has lagged. They're a great gang, I tell you, but I wouldn't want to board any one of 'em for six bits a week."

Maj. Oglesvie came up.

"Serg't Klegg," said he, "the Quartermaster says that he's got a train load of ammunition to send forward, but he's scarce of guards. I thought of your squad. Don't you think you could take charge of it? I don't imagine there is much need of a guard, for things have been pretty quiet down the road for some weeks. Still, it isn't right to send off so important a train without any protection."

"Only be too glad of the dooty, sir," answered Si, saluting. "It'll give the boys something to think of besides hanging guerrillas. Besides, they're just crazy to git hold o' guns. Where kin I git muskets for 'em?"

"March them right over to that shed there," said the Major, "and the Quartermaster will issue them muskets and equipments, which you can turn over again when you reach Chattanooga. Good-by. I hope you'll have a pleasant trip. Remember me to the boys of the old brigade and tell them I'll be with them before they start out for Atlanta."

"Purty slouchy bizniss that, givin' these kids guns before they've had any drill at all—don't know even the facin's, let alone the manual of arms," remarked Shorty doubtfully, as they marched over to the shed. "They'll be shooting holes through each others' heads and the tops o' the cars, and'll waste more ammynition than a six-mule team kin haul. They'll make a regler Fourth o' July from here to Chattynoogy."

"Don't be worried about them boys," Si reassured him. "Every one of 'em is used to handlin' guns. Then, we kin keep the catridges ourselves and not issue any till they're needed, which they mayn't be."

The boys were in a buzz of delight at getting the guns they had so longed for, and Si's first duty was to end an exuberant bayonet fencing match between Gid and Harry which was imitated all along the line.

"Stop that," he called. "Put your minds to learnin' to load and shoot first. It'll be some time before you git a chance to prod a rebel with a bayonet. Rebels are as wild as crows. You'll be lucky to git as close to 'em as the other side of a 40-acre field."

"But s'posin' a rebel runs at you with his bayonet," expostulated Harry Joslyn, "oughtn't you to know how to ward him off and settle him?"

"The best way's to settle him jest as he comes over the hill, half-a-mile away, with an ounce o' cold lead put where he lives. That'll take the pint offen his bayonet mighty certainly."

Si and Shorty showed the boys how to put on the belts carrying the cap- and cartridge-boxes, and gave them a little dumb-show instruction in loading and firing, ending with exhibiting to them a cartridge, and the method of tearing it with the teeth and putting it in the gun.

"Now give us some catridges," clamored the boys, "and let us do some real shooting."

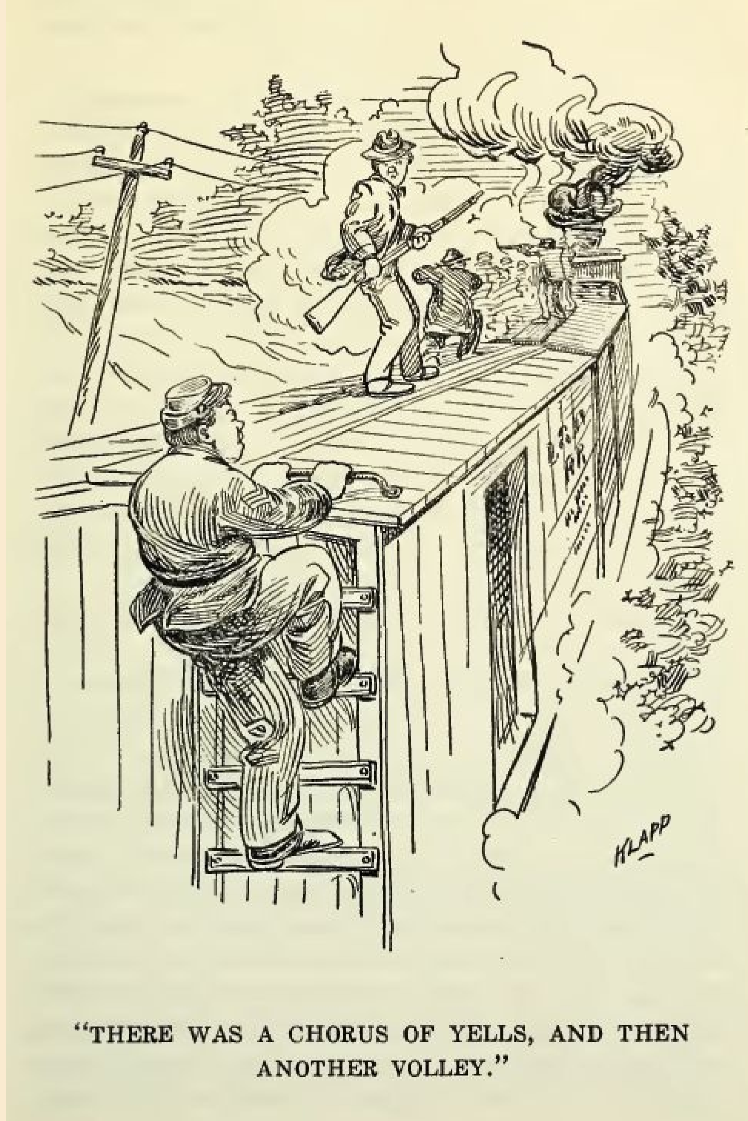
"No," said Si; "we'll keep the catridges ourselves, and issue them to you when the enemy comes in sight."

"Nice time to give out catridges then," grumbled Harry Joslyn. "When we see the rebels we want to begin shootin' instid o' botherin' you with questions. You wouldn't kill many coons if you had to run back to the house for your powder and lead after you saw the coon before you could shoot him."

"Well, you can't have no catridges now," said Si decisively. "We're not likely to see any coons before we git to Murfreesboro. Then we'll see how things look further down the road. Take off your bayonets, all o' you, and pile into them rear cars there. Stow yourselves around and be as comfortable as you kin."

The boys preferred the tops of the cars to the inside, and scattered themselves along the length of the train to view the war-worn country of which they had heard so much from their relatives who had campaigned there. Si settled himself down in the car to read the morning papers which he had gotten in Nashville, and Shorty, producing a pack of new cards, began a studious practice, with reference to future operations in Chattanooga.

The train was slowing down for the bridge near Lavergne, when there came a single shot, followed by a splutter of them and loud yells.



"THERE WAS A CHORUS OF YELLS, AND THEN ANOTHER VOLLEY."

Exceedingly startled, Si and Shorty sprang up, seized their guns, bounded to the door and looked out. They could see nothing to justify the alarm. There was not a rebel, mounted or unmounted, in sight. In the road below were two or three army teams dragging their slow way along, with their drivers yelling and laughing at a negro, whose mule was careering wildly across the fenceless field. The negro had been apparently jogging along, with a collection of plunder he had picked up in an abandoned camp strung upon his mule, when the latter had become alarmed at the firing and scattered his burden in every direction. The rider was succeeding in holding on by clinging desperately to the mule's neck.

Si set his gun down and clambered up the side of the car.

"What's all that shootin' about?" he demanded of Harry Joslyn.

"I didn't mean it, sir," Harry explained. "I was just aiming my gun at things I see along the road—just trying the sights like. A turkey-buzzard lighted on a stump out there, and I guess I must have forgot myself and cocked my gun, for it went off. Then Gid, seeing me miss, tried to show he was a better shot, and he banged away and missed, too, and then the other boys, they had to try their hands, and they belted away, one after another, and they all missed. I guess we didn't count as we ougther've done on the goin' forward o' the train, because we all struck much nearer than we expected to that nigger on a mule, and scared his mule nigh out o' his skin. We really didn't intend no harm."

"Where did you git catridges?" demanded Si.

"Why, that box that Alf Russell got was half full. He tried to keep 'em all hisself, and intended to shoot 'em off, one by one, to make the rest of us envious. Alf always was a pig in school, and never would divide his apples or doughnuts with the other boys. But we see them almost as quick as he did, an' Gid and me set down on him suddently, as he was lying on the roof, and took away all his catridges, and give 'em around to the rest o' the boys, one a-piece."

"Are they all gone now?"

"Yes, sir; every one shot away," answered Harry regretfully.

Si looked through several of the boxes and at some of the guns to assure himself of this. He gave those near him a lecture on their offense, and then climbed down into the car and resumed his paper, while Shorty was soon immersed again in the abstruse study of the relation of the cross-barred designs on the back of the cards to the numbers and suits of their faces.

They had passed Lavergne, and were approaching Stewart's Creek, when another startling rattle of musketry broke out, this time from the forepart of the train.

"Now, great Scott, what's up?" said Si angrily, as he quickly surveyed the surrounding country. He saw that they were not attacked, and then clambered to the top of the car, where he noticed little wreaths of powder-smoke lingering around the squad in which were Jim Humphreys, little Pete Skidmore and Wes. Brown.

"What're you young whelps shootin' for?" demanded Si. They were all so abashed at his sternness that they could not find their tongues for reply, until little Pete piped up:

"Why we've bin talkin' to the train men, and they said they wuz shot at wunst, about a year ago, from that swamp back there, and we got some catridges from them, and we thought we saw something moving in there, though Jim Humphreys said it wuz only burned stumps that we took for men, and them other boys back there had bin shootin' off their gunn and tryin' 'em, and we thought we could too—"

"You little brats," said Si; "didn't you hear my orders about firin' before we started? If another boy shoots without my orders I'll tie him up by the thumbs! Got any more catridges? Give me every one of 'em."

The boys all protested that every cartridge was gone. Si assured himself of this by examination, savagely scored the train men for giving them ammunition and threatened trouble if any more was, and having relieved his mind returned to his paper in the caboose-car.

The train ran on to a switch where there was another carrying a regiment going home on veteran furlough. Si and Shorty knew some of the men, and in the pleasure of meeting them and in hearing all the news from the front forgot that their boys were mingling with the others and being filled full of the preposterous stories with which veterans delight to stuff new recruits. Finally the whistles gave notice that the trains would move. Si got his boys back on the cars, and renewing his caution about taking care of themselves, holding on tightly and looking out for overhanging branches, returned with Shorty to their car and their occupations.

"We're comin' to Stewart's Crick, Shorty," said Si, looking up from his paper. "Recollect that hill ovyr there? That's where they had that battery that the Colonel thought we wuz goin' to git. Great Scott, the mud and briars in that old field!" "Yes," said Shorty, negligently, with his eyes fixed on the backs of the cards. "But that's ancient history. Say, I've got these marks down fine at last. They're just as plain as A, B, C. You see, when that corner o' the square comes out clear to the edge it's clubs, every time, and there's just as many spots as there is of lines—"

He was interrupted by a volley, apparently from every gun on the roofs of the cars. Then a chorus of shrill, treble, boyish yells, and next instant another volley. The two sprang to the door and looked out. Not a sign of a rebel anywhere. Si went up one side of the car, Shorty the other. They ran along the tops of the cars, storming at the boys, kicking them and bumping their heads against the boards to make them stop. When they succeeded Si sternly ordered every one of them to leave the roofs and come down into the cars. When he had gathered them there he demanded:

"Now, I want to know at once what this means?" Little Pete Skidmore again became the spokesman of the abashed crowd.

"Why, them men back there on the switch cautioned us above all things not to let the rebels git the drop on us when we come to that crick; that we wouldn't see nothin' of 'em—nothin' but a low bank, behind which they wuz hid, with their guns pokin' through the brush, but the moment we see the bank breastwork throwed up along the crick we must let into it. That's what it's for. The rebels throwed it up to hide behind. Them men said that the brush back there was as full o' rebels as a hound o' fleas, and that we must let into 'em the moment we see the bank, or they'd git the drop on us. They had an awful time there theirselves, and they gave us all the catridges they had left for us to use."

"You little numbskulls," said Si; "why didn't you come to use and tell us about this?"

"They told us to be partickeler and say nothin' to you. Your stayin' back there in the car showed that you didn't know nothin' about it; you hadn't bin down this way for a long time and wasn't up to the latest improvements, and you wuz jest as like as not to run us into a hornets' nest; that you wuzzent our real officers, anyway, and it didn't much matter to you what happened to us."

"Our own sins are comin' back on us. Shorty," remarked Si. "This is a judgment on you for the way you've filled up recruits at every chance you got."

"'Taint on me," said Shorty, shrugging his shoulders. "I'm not in command. You are."

"I shall be mighty glad when we git this outfit to Chattanoogy," sighed Si. "I'm gittin' older every minute that I have 'em on my hands."

CHAPTER XIX. THE FIRST SCRAPE

A LITTLE INITIATORY SKIRMISH WITH THE GUERRILLAS.

THE train passed Shelbyville in the course of the afternoon and halted on a switch. Tired of reading, Si was standing at the door of the car, looking out over the country and trying to identify places they had passed or

camped at during the campaign of the previous Summer. Suddenly his far-seeing eyes became fixed on the intervals in the trees on the farthest hill-top. Without turning his head he called Shorty in a tone which made that worthy lose all interest in his inevitable pack of cards and spring to his side. Without speaking, Si pointed to the sky-line of the eminence, against which moving figures sketched themselves.

"Guerrillas," said Shorty.

Si nodded affirmatively.

"Skeetin' acrost the country to jump this train or some other," continued Shorty.

"This one, most likely," answered Si.

"Yes," accorded Shorty, with an estimating glance at the direction of the range of hills, "and'll aim at strikin' us at some bridge or deep cut about 10 miles from here."

"Where we'll probably git sometime after dark," assented Si.

"Yes. Let's talk to the conductor and engineer."

The train had started in the meanwhile, but presently the conductor came back into the caboose. He had been a soldier, but so severely wounded as to necessitate his discharge as incapable of further field service.

"I hardly think there's any danger," said Conductor Madden. "Things 've been very quiet this side of the Tennessee River ever since last October, when Crook, Wilder and Minty belted the life out of old Joe Wheeler down there at Farmington and Rodgersville. Our cavalry gave theirs an awful mauling, and them that were lucky enough to escape acrost the river have seemed purty well satisfied to stay on that side. A hell's mint of 'em were drowned trying to get acrost the river. Our cavalry's been patrolling the country ever since, but hasn't seen anything of consequence. Still, it is possible that some gang has managed to sneak acrost a blind-ford somewhere, and in hopes to catch a train. Guerrillas are always where you find 'em."

"Well, I'll bet a hatful o' red apples," said Si, "that them was guerrillas that we saw, and they're makin' for this train. The rebels in Nashville somehow got information to 'em about it."

"Them's guerrillas," affirmed Shorty, "sure's the right bower takes the left. None o' our cavalry's stringin' around over the hill-tops. Then, I made out some white horses, which our cavalry don't have. It's just as Si says, them Nashville spies 's put the rebel cavalry onto us."

"Them cowardly, sneaking, death-deserving rebels in Nashville," broke out Conductor Madden, with a torrent of oaths. "Every man in Nashville that wears citizen's clothes ought to be hung on sight, and half the women. They don't do nothing but lay around and take the oath of allegiance, watch every move we make like a cat does a mouse, and send information through the lines. You can't draw a ration of hardtack but they know it, and they're looking down your throat while you're eating it. They haint got the gravel in their craws to go out and fight themselves, and yet they've cost us a hundred times as many lives as if they had. Why does the General allow them to stay there? He ought to order rocks tied to the necks of every blasted one of 'em and fling 'em into the Cumberland River and then pour turpentine on the infernal old town and touch a match to it. That's what I'd do if I had my way. There's more, brimstone trouble to the acre in Nashville than in any town on the footstool, not barring even Richmond."

"Nashville certainly is tough," sighed Shorty. "'Specially in gamblers. Worst tin-horn crowd that ever fumbled a deck or skinned a greeny out o' the last cent o' his bounty. Say, Si, do you remember that tin-horny that I cleaned out o' his whole pile down there at Murfreesboro, with them cards that I'd clipped with a pair o' scissors, so's I'd know 'em by the feel, and he never ketched on till his last shinplaster was gone, and then I throwed the pack in the fire? Well, I seen him down there at the depot smellin' around for suckers. I told him to let our boys alone or I'd snap his neck off short. Great Jehosephat, but I wanted a chance to git up town and give some o' them cold-deckers a whirl."

"Well," said Conductor Madden, after some deliberation, "I believe what you boys say. You're not the kind to get rattled and make rebels out of cedar-bushes. All the same, there's nothing to do but go ahead. My orders were to take this train through to Chattanooga as quick as I could. I can't stop on a suspicion."

"No, indeed," assented Si and Shorty.

"There's no place to telegraph from till we get to Bridgeport, on the Tennessee, and if we could telegraph they wouldn't pay any attention to mere reports of having seen rebels at a distance. They want something more substantial than that."

"Of course they do, and very properly," said Si. "Is your engineer all right?"

"Game as they make 'em, and loyal as Abraham Lincoln himself," responded the conductor.

"Well, I believe our boys 's all right. They're green, and they're friskier than colts in a clover field, but they're all good stuff, and I believe we kin stand off any ordinary gang o' guerrillas. I'll chance it, anyhow. This's a mighty valuable train to risk, but it ought to go through, for we don't know how badly they may need it. You tell your engineer to go ahead carefully and give two long whistles if he sees anything dangerous."

"I'll go and git onto the engine with him," said Shorty.

"Wait a little," said Si. "We'll get the boys together, issue 'em catridges and give 'em a little preparation for a light, if we're to have one."

The sun had gone down and the night was at hand. The train had stopped to take on a supply of wood from a pile by the roadside. Some of the boys were helping pitch the heavy sticks onto the engine, the rest ware skylarking along the tops of the cars in the irrepressible exuberance of animal spirits of boys who had had plenty to eat and were without a care in the world. Harry Joslyn had been giving exhibitions of standing on his head on the runningboard. Gid Mackall had converted a piece of rope he had picked up into a lasso, and was trying to imitate the feats he had seen performed at the last circus. Monty Scruggs, the incipient lawyer, who was proud of his elocutionary talents, had vociferated at the woods they were passing, "Rienzi's Address to the Romans," "The Last Sigh of the Moor," "Absalom," "The Battle of Waterloo," and similar staples of Friday afternoon recitations. Alf Russell, the embryonic doctor, who sang a fine tenor, was rendering "Lily Dale" with much impressment, and little Pete Skidmore was "skipping" the flat hill-stones over an adjacent pond.

"'Tention!" shouted Si.

There was something so different in the tone from that in which Si had before spoken, that it arrested the attention of every one of them instantly.

"Git your guns and fall in two ranks on that sod, there, at once," commanded Si, in quick, curt accents.

An impalpable something in the tones and words stilled everybody into seriousness. This was deepened by the look they saw on Si's face.

They snatched up their guns and hurried into line on the spot indicated, looking into each other's countenances and into that of Si's for an explanation of what was up.

"Mackall and Joslyn," called Shorty from the car, "come here and take this box of catridges."

"Now," said Si, as they did this, "Joslyn, you and Mackall issue those to the boys. One of you walk down in front and the other behind and give each man two packages of catridges. You boys open the packages and put the catridges in your catridgeboxes, bullet-end up, and the caps in your capboxes."

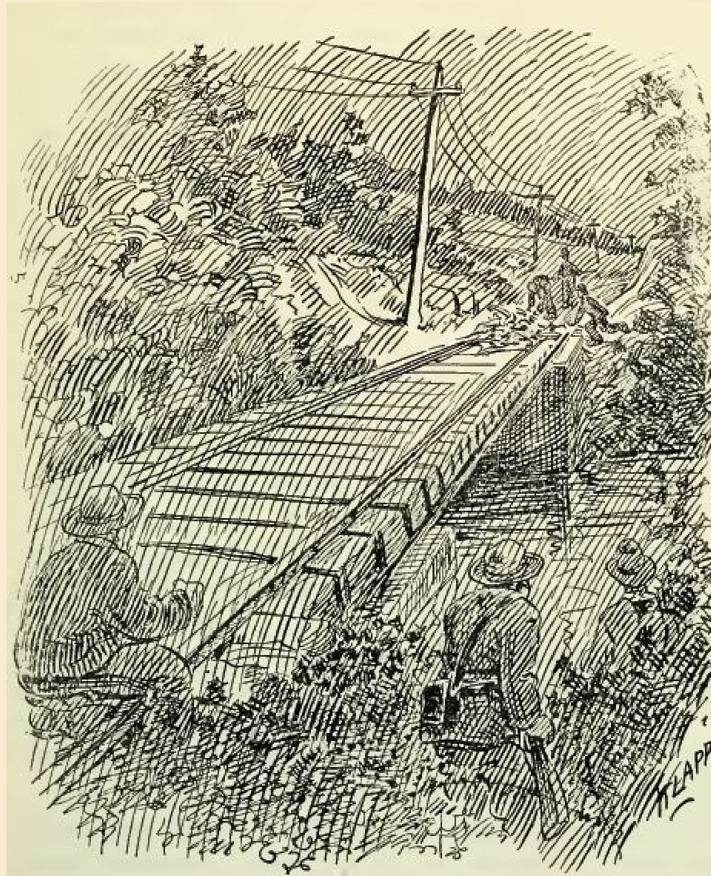
The boys followed his directions with nervous eagerness, inspired by his words and manner, and then fixed their anxious gaze upon him for further impartment.

Si walked down in front, in the rear of the line, superintending the operation.

"Now, boys," said Si, taking his place in front and facing them, "you've bin talkin' about guerrillas ever since we crossed the Ohio, but now there's a prospect o' meetin' some. I hadn't expected to see any till after we'd reached Chattanoogy, but guerrillas's never where you expect 'em."

"Knowin' you was so anxious to see 'em, they've come up the road to meet you," interjected Shorty.

"It looks," continued Si, "as if they'd got news of the train and slipped out here to take it away from us. They may attack it at any minute after we start agin. Now, we mustn't let 'em git it. It's too valuable to the Government to lose and too valuable to them to git. We mustn't let 'em have it, I tell you. Now, I want you to load your guns carefully, handle 'em very carefully after they are loaded, git back in the cars, stop skylarkin', keep very quiet, listen for orders, and when you git 'em, obey 'em to the letter—no more, no less."



WATCHING THE BRIDGE BURNERS AT WORK.

"Can't we go back on top o' the cars, where we kin watch for 'em, and git the first pop at 'em?" said Harry Joslyn, in a pleading tone.

"No; that's too dangerous, and you'll lose time in gittin' together," answered Si. "You must all come into the cars with me."

"Sergeant," said Shorty, "let me have a couple to go on the engine with me."

"Le' me go. Le' me go," they all seemed to shout at once, holding up their hands in eager school-boy fashion.

"I can't take but two o' you," said Shorty; "more'd be in the way."

They all pressed forward. "Count out. That's the only fair way," shouted the boys in the center.

"That's so," said Harry Joslyn. "Stand still till I count. Imry, Ory, Ickery, Ann, Quevy, Quavy, Irish Navy, Filleson, Folleson, Nicholas—Buck! That's me. I'm it!"

He rapidly repeated the magic formula, and pronounced Gid Mackall "it."

"He didn't count fair! He didn't count fair! He never counts fair," protested the others; but Si hustled them into the cars and the train started.

It had grown quite dark. The boys sat silent and anxiously expectant on their seats, clutching their loaded guns, held stiffly upright, and watching Si's face as well as they could by the dim light of the single oil lamp. Si leaned against the side of the door and watched intently.

Only little Pete Skidmore was unrepressed by the gravity of the situation. Rather, it seemed to spur his feet, his hands and his mouth to nimbler activity. He was everywhere—at one moment by Si's side in the door of the car, at the next climbing up to peer out of the window; and then clambering to the top of the car, seeing legions of guerrillas in the bushes, until sternly ordered back by Si. Then he would drop the butt of his musket on the floor with a crash which would start every one of the taut nerves to throbbing. And the questions that he asked:

"Say, Sergeant, will the guerrillas holler before they shoot, or shoot before they holler?"

"Sometimes one and sometimes the other," responded Si, absently. "Keep quiet, Pete."

Quiet for a minute, and then:

"Shall we holler before we shoot or shoot before we holler?"

"Neither. Keep perfectly quiet, and 'tend strictly to your little business."

"I think we ought to holler some. Makes it livelier. What sort o' guns has the guerrillas?"

"Every kind—shot-guns, pistols, rifles, flint-locks, cap-locks—every kind. Now, you mustn't ask me any more questions. Don't bother me."

"Yes, sir; I won't."

Quiet for at least five seconds. Then:

"Have the guerrillas guns that'll shoot through the sides of the cars?"

"Probably."

"Then I'd ruther be on top, where I kin see something. Kin they shoot through the sides o' the tender, and let all the water out and stop the engine?"

"Guess not."

"Haven't they any real big guns that will?"

"Mebbe."

"Kin we plug up the holes, anyway, then, and start agin?"

"Probably."

"Hain't the engineer got an iron shield that he kin git behind, so they can't shoot him?"

"Can't he turn the steam onto 'em, and scald 'em if they try to git at him?"

"What'll happen if they shoot the head-light out?"

"Why wouldn't it be a good idee to put a lot o' us on the cow-ketcher, with fixed bayonets, and then let the engineer crack on a full head o' steam and run us right into 'em?"

"Great Scott, Pete, you must stop askin' questions," said Si desperately. "Don't you see Pm busy?"

Pete was silent for another minute. Then he could hold in no longer:

"Sergeant, jest one question more, and then I'll keep quiet."

"Well, what is it?"

"If the rebels shoot the bell, won't it make a noise that they kin hear clear back at Nashville?"

The engine suddenly stopped, and gave two long whistles. Above the screech they heard shots from Shorty and the two boys with him.

"Here they are, boys," said Si, springing out and running up the bank. "All out, boys. Come up here and form."

As he reached the top of the bank a yell and a volley came from the other side of the creek. Shorty joined him at once, bringing the two boys on the engine with him.

"We've bin runnin' through this deep cut," he explained, "and jest come out onto the approach to the bridge, when we see a little fire away ahead, and the head-light showed some men runnin' down on to the bank on the other side o' the crick. We see in a moment what was up. They've jest got to the road and started a fire on the bridge that's about a mile ahead. Their game was to burn that bridge, and when this train stopped, burn this one behind us, ketch us, whip us, and take the train. We shot at the men we see on the bank, but probably didn't do 'em no harm. They're all pilin' down now to the other bank to whip us out and git the train. You'd better deploy the boys along the top o' the bank here and open on 'em. We can't save that bridge, but we kin this and the train, by keepin' 'em on the other side o' the crick. I'll take charge o' the p'int here with two or three boys, and drive off any o' them that tries to set fire to the bridge, and you kin look out for the rest o' the line. It's goin' to be longtaw work, for you see the crick's purty wide, but our guns 'll carry further'n theirs, and if we keep the boys well in hand I think we kin stand 'em off without much trouble."

"Sure," said Si confidently. "You watch the other side o' the bridge and I'll look out for the rest."

The eager boys had already begun firing, entering into the spirit of the thing with the zest of a Fame of town-ball. Shorty took Gid Mackall and Harry Joslyn down to the cover of some large stones, behind which they could lie and command the approach to the other end of the bridge with their rifles. Si took the other boys and placed them behind rocks and stumps along the crest and instructed them to fire with as good aim as possible at the flashes from the other side. In a minute or two he had a fine skirmish-line in operation, with the boys firing as deliberately and accurately as veterans. The engineer had backed the train under the cover of the cut, and presently he and the conductor came up with guns and joined the firing-line.

"I say, Shorty," said Si, coming down to where that worthy was stationed, "what d' you think o' the boys now? They take to this like a duck to water. They think it's more fun than squirrel-huntin'. Listen."

They heard Monty Scruggs's baritone call:

"Say, Alf, did you see me salt that feller that's bin yellin' and cussin' at me over there? He's cussin' now for something else. I think I got him right where he lived."

"I wasn't paying any attention to you," Alf's fine tenor replied, as his rammer rang in his barrel. "I've got business o' my own to 'tend to. There's a feller over there that's firing buckshot at me that I've got to settle, and here goes."

"The 200th Injianny Volunteers couldn't put up a purtier skirmish than this," murmured Si, in accents of pride, as he raised his gun and fired at a series of flashes on the farther bank.

"I say, tell that engineer to uncouple his engine and bring it back up here where the head-light'll cover the other side," said Shorty. "It'll make the other side as light as day and we kin see every move, while we'll be in the dark."

"Good idee," said Si, hastening to find the engineer.

He was none too soon. As the engine rolled up, flooding its advance with light, it brought a storm of bullets from the other side, but revealed three men creeping toward the other end of the bridge. Two were carrying pine knots, and the third, walking behind, had a stick of blazing pine, which he was trying to shield from observation with his hat.

"Take the front man, Harry. Take the second one, Gid. I'll take the man with the light," commanded Shorty.

The three rifles cracked in quick succession and the three men dropped.

"Bully, boys," ejaculated Shorty, as he reloaded. "You'll do. The 200th Injianny's proud o' you."

"I hit my man in the leg," said Harry, flushing with delight, as he bit off another cartridge. "Jerusalem, I wish they'd send another one down."

"I drawed on my man's bundle o' wood," said Gid, "and then dropped a little, so's to git him where he was biggest and make sure o' him."

"Well, my man's beauty's spiled forever," said Shorty. "The light flared up on his face and I let him have it there."

"But Linden saw another light.
When beat the drums at dead of night,
Commanding fires of death to hight
The darkness of her scenery,"

recited Monty Scruggs. "Gracious, I'm hit!"

"Where?" asked Si, running up to him.

"Through my leg," answered Monty.

"Kin you walk?"

"I guess so."

"Well, make your way back to the cars and git in and lay down."

"Not much," answered Monty determinedly. "It don't hurt much, and I'm going to stay and see this thing out. I can tie it up with my handkerchief."

"Scatter again, boys," Si warned several, who had rushed up; "don't make too big a mark for the fellers on the other side. Go back and 'tend to your bizniss. I'll help him tie up his wound. I'm afeared, though, that some o' the boys are runnin' out o' catridges, they have bin shootin' so rapidly. I want a couple o' you to run back to the cars and git another box."

"Let me and Sandy go," pleaded little Pete Skidmore. "The big boys went before."

"All right; skip out. Break the lid o' the box off before you take it out o' the car. We haven't anything here to do it with. Leave your guns here."

"No, we'll take 'em along," pleaded Pete, with a boyish love for his rifle. "We mightn't be able to find 'em agin."

The firing from the opposite bank became fitful, died down, and then ceased altogether. Then a couple of shots rang out from far in the rear in the direction of the train. This seemed to rouse the rebels to another volley, and then all became quiet. The shots in the rear disturbed Si, who started back to see what they meant, but met Pete Skidmore and Sandy Baker coming panting up, carrying a box of cartridges between them.

"We got back as quick as we could," Pete explained as he got his breath. "Just as we was coming to the train we see a rebel who was carrying a fat-pine torch, and making for the train to set it on fire. We shot him. Was that all right?"

"Perfectly," said Si. "Was there any more with him?"

"No. We looked around for others, but couldn't find none. That's what kept up so long."

"The Johnnies have given it up and gone," said Shorty, coming up. "I went over to a place where I could see 'em skippin' out by the light o' the burnin' o' the other bridge. We might as well put out guards here and go into camp till mornin'."

"All right," assented Si. "We've saved the train and bridge, and that's all we kin do."

CHAPTER XX. AFTER THE SKIRMISH

WILD SHOOTING WAS ALL THAT SAVED A SURPRISED

COLORED MAN.

THOUGH Si and Shorty were certain that the trouble was over and the rebels all gone, it was impossible to convince the boys of this. The sudden appearance of the guerrillas had been so mysterious that they could not rid themselves of the idea that the dark depths beyond the creek were yet filled with vicious foemen animated by dire intents.

Si and Shorty gathered the boys together on the bank above the railroad cut, had fires built, posted a few guards, and ordered the rest of the boys to lie down and go to sleep. They set the example by unrolling their own blankets at the foot of a little jack-oat, whose thickly-growing branches, still bearing a full burden of rusty-brown leaves, made an excellent substitute for a tent.

"Crawl in. Si, and git some sleep," said Shorty, filling his pipe. "I'll take a smoke and set up for an hour or two. If it looks worth while then, I'll wake you up and let you take a trick o' keepin' awake. But if everything looks all right I'll jest crawl in beside you and start a snorin'-match."

But neither orders nor example could calm down the nerves of boys who had just had their first experience under fire. There was as little rest for them as for a nest of hornets which had been rudely shaken. They lay down at Si's order, but the next minute they were buzzing together in groups about the fires, or out with their guns to vantage points on the bank, looking for more enemies. Their excited imaginations made the opposite bank of the creek alive with men, moving in masses, squads and singly, with the sounds of footsteps, harsh commands, and of portentous movements.

Two or three times Shorty repressed them and sharply ordered them to lie down and go to sleep. Then he decided to let them wear themselves out, braced his back against a sapling near the fire, pulled out from his pocket the piece of Maria's dress, and became lost in a swarm of thoughts that traveled north of the Ohio River.

He was recalled by Harry Joslyn and Gid Mackall appearing before him.

"Say, Corpril," inquired Harry, "what's to be done with them rebels over there at the end o' the bridge?"

"Them that we shot?" said Shorty carelessly, feeling around for his tobacco to refill his pipe. "Nothin'. I guess we've done enough for 'em already."

"Don't we do nothin' more?" repeated Harry.

"No," answered Shorty, as he rubbed the whittlings from his plug to powder in the hollow of his hand.

"Just plug at 'em as you would at a crow, and then go on your way whistlin'?" persisted Harry.

"Certainly," answered Shorty, filling his pipe and looking around for a sliver with which to light it. "What're you thinkin' about?"

"I don't hardly know," hesitated Harry. "It seems awful strange just to blaze away at men and then pay no more attention to 'em. They mayn't be knocked out at all—only 'possumin'."

"No 'possumin' about them fellers," said Shorty sententiously, as he lighted his pipe. "Feller that gits an ounce o' lead from a Springfield rifle anywhere in his carkiss don't play off nor purtend. He's got something real to occupy his attention, if he's got any attention left to occupy. You needn't bother any more about them fellers over there. Their names's mud. They're now only part o' the real estate on the other side o' the crick. They're suddently become no good for poll-tax; only to be assessed by the acre."

"So you're sure they can't do more harm to the bridge?"

"No more'n the dead leaves on the banks."

"But I thought," persisted Harry, "that when a man's killed something had to be done—coroner's inquest, corpse got ready, funeral, preacher, neighbors gather in, and so on."

"Well, you needn't bother about any obsequies to them fellers over there," said Shorty, sententiously, as he pulled away at his pipe. "You done your whole share when you done the heavy work o' providin' the corpses. Let anybody that wants to put on any frills about plantin' 'em. If we have time tomorrow mornin' and nothin' better to do, we may go over there and dig holes and put 'em in. But most likely we'll be needed to rebuild that bridge they burnt. I'd rather do that, so's we kin hurry on to Chattynoogy. Buzzards'll probably be their undertakers. They've got a contract from the Southern Confedrisy for all that work. You lay down and go to sleep. That's the first dooty of a soldier. You don't know what may be wanted o' you tomorrow, and you should git yourselves in shape for anything—fightin', marchin' or workin'."

"And sha'n't we do nothin' neither to that man that we shot when he was tryin' to set fire to the train?" asked little Pete Skidmore, who with Sandy Baker had come up and listened to Shorty's lecture. "He's still layin' out there where he dropped, awful still. Me and Sandy took a piece o' fat pine and went down and looked at him. We didn't go very close. We didn't like to. He seemed so awful quiet and still."

"No; you let him alone," snapped Shorty impatiently. "He'll keep. Lay down and git some sleep, I tell you. What need you bother about a dead rebel? He ain't makin' no trouble. It's the livin' ones that need lookin' out for."

The boys' looks showed that they were face to face with one of the incomprehensibilities of war. But they lay down and tried to go to sleep, and Shorty's thoughts returned to Indiana.

A shot rang out from the post on which he had stationed Jim Humphreys. He was on his feet in an instant, with his gun in hand, and in the next Si was beside him.

"What's up?" inquired Si, rubbing his eyes.

"Nothin', I believe," answered Shorty. "But hold the boys and I'll go out and see."

He strode forward to Jim's side and demanded what he had shot at.

"I saw some men tryin' to cross the crick there," replied Jim, pointing with his rammer in the direction of the opposite bank.

"There, you kin see 'em for yourself."

"I don't see no men," said Shorty, after a moment's scrutiny.

"There they are. Don't you see that white there?" said Jim, capping his musket for another shot.

"That white," said Shorty contemptously, "is some water-birches. They was there when you came on guard, for I noticed 'em, and they hain't moved since. You seen 'em then, lookin' just as they do now. You're a fool to think you kin see anything white in a rebel. 'Taint their color."

"I don't care," half whimpered Jim. "Gid Mackall, and Harry Joslyn, and Alf Russell, and Pete Skidmore, and even Sandy Baker, have all shot rebels, and I hain't hit none. I don't have half-a-show."

"Be patient," Shorty consoled him. "Your three years's only begun. You'll have lots o' chances yit. But if I ketch you shootin' at any more white birches I'll tie you up by the thumbs."

Shorty returned to the fire. Si bade the boys he down again, and took his own blanket. Shorty relighted his pipe, took out his never-failing deck of cards and began running them over.

WILD SHOOTING OF THE BOYS SAVES THE SURPRISED COLORED MAN.

Jim Humphreys's shot had given new restlessness to the boys. They did not at all believe in Shorty's diagnosis of the situation. There must be more men lurking over there whence all that murderous shooting had come only a little while ago. Jim Humphreys was more than probably right. One after another of them quietly slipped away from the fire with his gun and made his way down to Jim Humphreys's post, which commanded what seemed to be a crossing of the creek. They stood there and scanned the opposite bank of darkness with tense expectancy. They had their ears tuned up to respond to even the rustle of the brown, dry leaves on the trees and the murmur of the creek over the stones. They even saw the white birches move around from place to place and approach the water, but Shorty's dire threat prevented their firing until they got something more substantial.

"There's rebels over there, sure as you're born,"' murmured Jim to them, without turning his head to relax his fixed gaze nor taking his finger from the trigger of his cocked gun. "Wish they'd fire a gun first to convince that old terror of a Corpril, who thinks he kin tell where rebels is just by the smell. I'd—"

"Sh! Jim, I hear a hoss's hoofs," said Harry Joslyn.

"Sh! so do I," echoed Gid Mackall.

They all listened with painful eagerness.

"Hoss's hoofs and breakin' limbs, sure's you're a foot high," whispered Harry. "And they're comin' down the hill this way."

"That's right. They're a'most to the crick now," assented Gid. "I'm going to shoot."

"No; I've got the right to a first shot," said Jim. "You fellers hold off."

Bang went Jim's gun, followed almost instantly by the others.

"Hi, dere, boys; I's done found you at las'! Whoopee!" called out a cheery voice from across the creek, and a man rode boldly down to the water's edge, where the boys were nervously reloading.

"Now, Jim Humphreys, what in blazes are you bangin' away at now?" angrily demanded Si, striding up. "At a cotton-tailed rabbit or a sycamore stump?"

"The woods is full o' rebel cavalry comin' acrost the crick," gasped Jim, as he rammed down his cartridge.

"There, you kin see 'em for yourself."

"What foh you come dis-a-way, boys?" continued the voice of the man on horseback. "I done los' you! I fought we done agreed to go ober by Simpson's hill, an' I jine you dar. I went dat-a-way, an' den I hear you shootin' ober dis-a-way, an' seed yoh fiah, and I cut acrost to git to you. Whah'd you git so many guns, an' sich big ones? Sound like sojer guns. I done beared dem way ober dah, an' I—"

"Hold on, boys," sternly shouted Shorty, springing in front of them and throwing up their guns. "Don't one o' you dare shoot! Hold up, I say! Hello, you there! Who are you?"

"Who's me?" said the negro, astonished by the strange voice. "I's Majah Wilkinson's Sam, Massa Patrol. I's got a pass all right. De old Majah done tole me I could go out coon-huntin' wid Kunnel Oberly's boys tonight, but I done missed dem."

"Come ashore here, boy," commanded Shorty, "and be thankful that you're alive. You've had a mighty narrow squeak of it. Next time you go out coon huntin' be sure there's no Yankee and rebel soldiers huntin' one another in the neighborhood. Coons have a tough time then."

"Yankee sojers!" gasped the negro, as he was led back to the fire, and saw the blue uniforms. "Lawdy, massy, don't kill me. I pray, sah, don't. I hain't done nuffin. Sho' I hain't. Massa said you'd burn me alibe if you eber cotched me, but you won't, will you?"

"We ain't goin' to hurt you," said Shorty. "Sit down there by the fire and git the goose-flesh offen you." Then turning to the boys he remarked sarcastically:

"Fine lot o' marksmen you are, for a fact. Halfa dozen o' you bangin' away at a hundred yards, and not comin' close enough to a nigger to let him know you was shootin' at him. Now will you lay down and go to sleep? Here, Si, you take charge o' this gang and let me go to sleep. I've had enough o' them for one night."

During the night a train came up, carrying a regiment of entirely new troops. In the morning these scattered over the ground, scanning everything with the greatest interest and drinking in every detail of the thrilling events of the previous night.

"It's just killin'," said Si to Shorty, "to watch the veteran airs our boys are puttin' on over those new fellers. You'd think they'd fit in every battle since Bunker Hill, and learned Gen. Grant all he knows about tactics. Talk about the way the old fellers used to fill us up, why, these boys lay away over everything we ever knowed. I overheard Harry Joslyn laying it into about 40 of them. 'No man knows just what his feelin's will be under fire until he has the actual experience,' says he. 'Now, the first time I heard a rebel bullet whistle,' and his face took on a look as if he was trying to recollect something years ago."

"Yes," laughed Shorty, "and you should hear little Pete Skidmore and Sandy Baker lecturing them greenies as to the need o' lookin' carefully to their rear and beware o' rebels sneakin' 'round and attackin' their trains. Hold on. Look through this brush. There's Monty Scruggs explainin' the plan o' battle to a crowd of 'em. He don't know we're anywhere around. Listen and you'll hear something."

"The enemy had reached the ground in advance of us," Monty was elucidating, in language with which his school histories and the daily papers had familiarized him, "and had strongly posted himself along those hights, occupying a position of great natural strength, including their own natural cussedness. Their numbers was greatly superior to ours, and they had prepared a cunning trap for us, which we only escaped by the vigilance of Corpril Elliott and the generalship of Serg't Klegg. I tell you, those men are a dandy team when it comes to running a battle. They know their little biz, and don't you forget it for a minute. The enemy opened a galling fire, when Corpril Elliott gallantly advanced to that point there and responded, while Serg't Klegg rapidly arrayed his men along there, and the battle became terrific. It was like the poet says:

"'Then shook the hills with thunder riven,
Then rushed the steeds to battle driven,
And louder than the bolts of heaven,
Far flashed the red artillery.'"

"O, come off, Monty," called the more prosaic Gid Mackall; "you know we didn't have no artillery. If we'd had, we'd a blowed 'em clean offen the hill."

The whistle summoned them to get aboard and move on.

CHAPTER XXI. CHATTANOOGA AT LAST

LOST IN A MAZE OF RAILROAD TRAINS.

"WHAT'S the program?" Si inquired of the conductor, as the boys were being formed on the bank, preparatory to entering the cars. "I s'pose it's to go over there and put in a week o' hard work rebuildin' that bridge. Have you got any axes and saws on the train? How long is the blamed old bridge, anyway?"

"Not much it ain't," responded the conductor. "If you think the army's goin' to wait a week, or even a day, on a bridge, you're simply not up to date, that's all. The old Buell and Rosecrans way o' doin' things is played out since Sherman took command. Your Uncle Billy's a hustler, and don't let that escape your mind for a minute, or it'll likely lead you into trouble. You'll find when you get down to Chattynoogy that nobody's asleep in daylight, or for a good part o' the night. They're not only wide-awake, but on the keen jump. The old man kin see four ways at once, he's always where he ain't expected, and after everybody with a sharp stick. In Buell's time a burnt bridge 50 foot long 'd stopped us for two weeks. Now that bridge 'll likely be finished by the time we git there. I've just been over there, and they were layin' the stringers."

"Why, how in the world did they manage?" asked Si.

"O, Sherman's first move was to order down here duplicates for every bridge on the road. He's got 'em

piled up at Louisville, Nashville, Murfreesboro and Chattynoogy. The moment a bridge is reported burned a gang starts for the place with another bridge, and they're at work as soon's it's cool enough to let 'em get to the abutments. I've seen 'em pullin' away the burnin' timbers to lay new ones. They knowed at Chattynoogy as soon's we did that the bridge was burned. The operator at the next station must 've seen it and telegraphed the news, and they started a bridge-gang right out. I tell you, double-quick's the time around where old Cump Sherman is."

"Duplicate bridges," gasped Si. "Well, that is an idee."

"What does he mean by duplicate, Corpril?" asked Harry Joslyn to Shorty.

"O, duplicate's something that you ring in on a feller like a cold deck."

"I don't understand," said Harry.

"Why—hem—hem—duplicate's the new-fangled college word for anything that you have up your sleeve to flatten a feller when he thinks he's got you euchered. You want to deal the other feller only left bowers and keep the right bowers for yourself. Them's duplicates. If you give him aces, have the jokers handy for when you want 'em. Them's duplicates. Duplicates 's Sherman's great lay—learned it from his old side-partner, Unconditional Surrender Grant—just as strategy was old McClellan's. There's this difference: Sherman always stacks the deck to win himself, while McClellan used to shuffle the cards for the other feller to win."

"Still I don't understand about the duplicate bridges," persisted Harry.

"Why, old Sherman just plays doublets on the rebels. He leads a king at 'em and then plumps down an ace, and after that the left and right bowers. They burn one bridge and he plumps down a better one instead. They blow up a tunnel and he just hauls it out and sticks a bigger one in its place. Great head, that Sherman. Knows almost as much as old Abe Lincoln himself."

"Do you say that Sherman has extra tunnels, too, to put in whenever one is needed?" asked Harry, with opening eyes.

"O, cert," replied Shorty carelessly. "You seen that big iron buildin' we went into to git on the cars at Louisville? That was really a tunnel, all ready to be shoved out on the road when it was needed. If you hadn't bin so keen on the lookout for guerrillas as we come along you'd 'a' seen pieces o' tunnels layin' all along the road ready for use."

As the train dashed confidently over the newly-completed bridge the boys gazed with intense interest and astonishment at the still smoldering wreckage, which had been dragged out of the way to admit the erection of the new structure. It was one of the wonders of the new, strange life upon which they were entering.

The marvelous impressiveness and beauty of the scenery as they approached Chattanooga fascinated the boys, who had never seen anything more remarkable than the low, rounded hills of Southern Indiana.

The towering mountains, reaching up toward the clouds, or even above them, their summits crowned with castellated rocks looking like impregnable strongholds, the sheer, beetling cliffs, marking where the swift, clear current of the winding Tennessee River had cut its way through the granite walls, all had a deep fascination for them. Then, everywhere were strong intrenchments and frowning forts, guarding the crossings of the river or the passages through the mountains. There were populous villages of log huts, some with canvas roofs, some roofed with clapboards, some with boards purloined from the Quartermaster's stores. These were the Winter quarters of the garrisons of the fortifications. Everywhere men were marching to and fro, and long trains of army wagons struggling through the mud of the valleys and up the steep hillsides.

"My, what lots o' men," gasped Harry Joslyn. "We won't be once among sich a crowd. Wonder if Sergeant Klegg and Corpril Elliott kin keep us from bein' lost?"

"Trust Corpril Elliott," said Gid, returning to his old partisanship of the taller veteran. "He knows his business every time."

"Not any better'n Sergeant Klegg," responded Harry, taking up the gantlet for his favorite. "Long-legged men are very good in their way, but they don't have the brains that shorter men have. Nature don't give no man everything. What she gives to his legs she takes off his head, my dad says."

"That's just because you're a duck-legged snipe," answered Gid wrathfully. "Do you mean to?"

"Don't make any slurs at me, you spindle-legged sand-hill crane," retorted Harry.

This was enough. Blows came next. It was their way. Gid Mackall and Harry Joslyn had been inseparable companions since they had begun going to school, and they had scarcely ever let a day pass without a fight. The moment that Si and Shorty appeared within their horizon they had raised the issue of which was the best soldier, and made it a matter of lively partisanship.

Si and Shorty had been on the eager lookout for the indications of the position of the army, for places that they could recognize, and for regiments, brigades and divisions they were acquainted with, so they did not at first notice the squabble. Then they pulled the boys asunder, shook them and scolded them for their conduct.

New emotions filled Si's and Shorty's breasts. They had been away from their regiment so long that they were acutely homesick to be back to it. Such is the magic of military discipline and association that their regimental flag had become the center of their universe, and the real people of their world the men who gathered around it. Everything and everybody else was subsidiary to that thing of wonderful sacredness—"the regiment." They felt like wanderers who had been away for years, and were now returning to their proper home, friends, associations and vocation. Once more under the Flag life would become again what it should be, with proper objects of daily interest and the satisfactory performance of every-day duties. They really belonged in the regiment, and everywhere else were interlopers, sojourners, strangers in a strange land. They now sat together and talked of the regiment as they had formerly sat around the campfire with the other boys and talked of their far-away homes, their fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters and sweethearts.

They had last seen their regiment in the fierce charge from the crest of Snodgrass Hill. The burning questions were who had survived that terrible day? Who had been so badly wounded as to lose his place on the rolls? Who commanded the regiment and the companies? Who filled the non-commissioned offices? What

voices that once rang out in command on the drill-ground, in camp and battle, were now silent, and whose would be lifted instead? "I'm af eared the old rijimint will never fight agin as it did at Stone River and Chickamauga," said Si mournfully. "Too many good men gone what made the rijimint what it is."

"Well, I don't know about that," said Shorty more hopefully. "They got two mighty good non-commish when they promoted me and you. If they done as well in the rest o' the promotions, the rijimint is all right. Lord knows I'd willingly give up my stripes to poor Jim Sanders, if he could come back; but I guess I kin yank around a squad as well as he done. This infant class that we're takin' down there ain't up to some o' the boys that've turned up their toes, but they average mighty well, and after we git some o' the coltishness drilled out o' 'em they'll be a credit to the rijimint."

The train finally halted on a side-track in the outskirts of Chattanooga, under the gigantic shadow of Lookout Mountain, and in the midst of an ocean of turmoiling activity that made the eyes ache to look upon it, and awed every one, even Si and Shorty, with a sense of incomprehensible immensity. As far as they could see, in every direction, were camps, forts, intrenchments, flags, hordes of men, trains of wagons, herds of cattle, innumerable horses, countless mules, mountains of boxes, barrels and bales. Immediately around them was a wilderness of trains, with noisy locomotives and shouting men. Regiments returning from veteran furlough, or entirely new ones, were disembarking with loud cheering, which was answered from the camps on the hillsides. On the river front steamboats were whistling and clanging their bells.

The boys, too much awed for speech, clustered around Si and Shorty and cast anxious glances at their faces.

"Great Jehosephat," murmured Shorty. "They seem to be all here."

"No," answered Si, as the cheers of a newly-arrived regiment rang out, "the back townships are still comin' in."

Monty Scruggs found tongue enough to quote:

"And ships by thousands lay below,
And men by nations, all were his."

"Where in time do you s'pose the 200th Injianny is in all this freshet of men and mules and bosses?" said Si, with an anxious brow. The look made the boys almost terror-stricken. They huddled together and turned their glances toward Shorty for hope. But Shorty looked as puzzled as Si.

"Possibly," he suggested to Si, "the conductor will take us further up into the town, where we kin find somebody that we know, who'll tell us where the rijimint is."

"No," said the conductor, who came back at that moment; "I can't go no further with you. Just got my orders. You must pile right out here at once. They want the engine and empties in five minutes to take a load back to Nashville. Git your men out quick as you kin."

"Fall in," commanded Si. "Single rank. Foller me and Corpril Elliott. Keep well closed up, for if you git separated from us goodness knows what'll become o' you in this raft o' men."

The passage through the crowded, busy railroad yard was bewildering, toilsome, exciting and dangerous. The space between the tracks was scarcely more than wide enough for one man to pass, and the trains on either side would be moving in different directions. On the tracks that the boys crossed trains were going ahead or backing in entire regardlessness of them, and with many profane yells from the trainmen for them to get out of the way and keep out. Si only kept his direction by occasionally glancing over his shoulder and setting his face to walk in the direction away from Pulpit Rock, which juts out from the extremity of Lookout Mountain.

At last, after a series of hair-breadth dodges, Si drew up his squad in an open space where the tracks crossed, and proceeded to count them.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SI KLEGG, BOOK 5 ***

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