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Author: Oliver Optic

Illustrator: A. B. Shute

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mass'r?"

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BY

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1895

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IN THE SADDLE

TO MY FRIEND

WILLIAM R. BEATTY

MY COMPANION IN MANY VERY AGREEABLE ASSOCIATIONS

THIS VOLUME

IS CORDIALLY DEDICATED

PREFACE

"In The Saddle" is the second of the "Blue and Gray—On Land." In the first volume a New Hampshire family was transplanted to the southern part of one of the Border States just before the breaking out of the Great Rebellion, now happily an event of the somewhat distant past. An attempt is made in that book to describe the condition of the region in the progress of the story; and the material for it was diligently looked up in the records of those stormy times, in those of official character in the archives of the State in which the events transpired, as well as in "The Record of the Rebellion," Congressional Reports, and the multitude of histories, narratives, biographies, and miscellaneous works on the shelves of public and private libraries. The writer believes his material statements are correct, and that the pictures he has given of the disorderly condition of the State of Kentucky, especially in the southern portion, are not overdrawn.

The story of the Lyon family introduces two branches of it, both from the same Northern locality, though, unhappily, not of the same way of thinking on the great question of loyalty to the national government and Secession with the South. Plantation life and manners are presented to some extent, as one of the brothers comes into possession of a large estate and half a hundred slaves by the will of a Kentucky member of the Lyon family. The first volume of the series is devoted to the "bringing out" of the loyal element in the county where the plantation is located, in opposition to the more demonstrative secession or neutral sentiment. A Union meeting in a schoolhouse, disturbed by the "ruffians," as they had come to be called, in which the loyal citizens vigorously defend themselves, and expel the intruders, brings the affairs of the neighborhood to a crisis. The planter is attacked by a mob, and with the assistance of a few of his friends, and by arming a portion of his negroes, successfully encounters the disturbers of the peace. Following these stirring events, two companies of cavalry are enlisted by an authorized officer, carefully drilled, and put in readiness to take the field.

In the present volume this battalion enters upon active service. The same characters are presented in the uniform of cavalymen, mounted on the fine equine stock of the plantation. Noah Lyon, the head of the family, obtains an actual military title, instead of the merely complimentary one given to him by his friends and neighbors. His two sons, Deck and Artie, appear in the front rank in the operations in which the squadron is engaged, though both of them enter the service as privates. The young men are of the loftiest moral character, actuated by the purest and most devoted patriotism. They are of good physique, in vigorous health, and do not seem to know the meaning of the word fear. If their individual exploits seem to any to be extravagant, they have been more than paralleled on the battle-field in hundreds of instances. Both of them are exceedingly fond of their steeds; and Deck, in the months devoted to drill, makes no insignificant figure as a horse-trainer. His steed, one of the blood stock of his deceased uncle, is so intelligent and so apt a scholar, that he enables his rider to achieve some rather wonderful feats in action. He is modest, and, when praised for his deeds, attributes them to "Ceph." This young soldier wins and obtains a promotion which will supply the title for the next volume.

In contrast with the progressive fortunes of the loyal brother and his two sons, the disloyal one, who had become, through the influence of his money rather than his ability, the leader of the

"ruffians," is again introduced, with his two boys, who follow in the footsteps of their father till they become disgusted with their lot.

The operations of the loyal battalion of cavalry are confined to the protection of the bridges on the railroads, and to repressing "partisan" onslaughts and outrages upon towns and villages largely inhabited by citizens who are faithful to the national government. But the officers and privates are faithful where loyalty meant vastly more than in the North; and their zeal and earnestness in the discharge of their duty left a stirring record behind them wherever they went.

WILLIAM T. ADAMS.

DORCHESTER, Dec. 12, 1894.

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IN THE SADDLE

CHAPTER I

COLLECTING A BILL BY FORCE OF ARMS

"Help! Help!"

[Pg 15]

This call for assistance came from a small house, poorly constructed by those who had little skill in the art of carpentry. It stood near the Spring Road, in a field of about ten acres of land, under cultivation, though the rank weeds among the useful plants indicated that it had been sorely neglected.

Those familiar with the locality would have recognized it as the abode of one of those small farmers found all over the country, who were struggling to improve their worldly condition on a very insufficient capital. The house was hardly finished, and the want of skill was apparent in its erection from sill to ridgepole.

Swinburne Pickford was the proprietor of the dwelling and land. He worked for farmers, planters, and mechanics, for any one who would give him employment, in addition to his labor in the cultivation of his land; and with the sum he had been able to save from his wages, he had bought the land, and started the small farm on his own account. He had a wife and two small children; and, as his time permitted, he had built the house with his own hands alone.

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The section of the State of Kentucky in which this little place was located had been sorely disturbed by the conflicts and outrages of the two parties at the beginning of the War of the Rebellion, one struggling to drag the State out of the Union, and the other to prevent its secession. As in the other States of the South, the advocates of disunion were more violent and demonstrative than the loyal people, and after the bombardment of Fort Sumter appeared to be in the ascendant for this reason.

The entire South had been in a state of excitement from the inception of the presidential campaign which resulted in the election of Abraham Lincoln, and the industries of this region suffered in consequence; and it looked as though Pickford's house would never be entirely finished. With the exception of the chimney, placed outside of the building, after the fashion of the South, he had done all the work himself. Titus Lyon, the mason of the village of Barcreek, had done this portion of the labor, and the bill for its erection was still unpaid.

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Inside of the house two young men, the older about eighteen and the younger sixteen, both armed with muskets, had dragged the proprietor of the house to the floor. One of them had his foot on the chest of the fallen farmer, and the other was pointing his gun at him. Pickford had evidently endeavored to protect himself from the assault of his two assailants, who had got the better of him, and had only given up the battle when pinned to the floor by the foot of one of them.

"Will you pay the bill I have brought to you?" demanded Sandy Lyon, who was the principal aggressor in the assault. "Dr. Falkirk paid you over fifty dollars to-day, and you have got the money to pay the bill, which has been standing two years."

Swin Pickford made no reply to this statement; but just at that moment he heard the clippety-clip of a galloping horse in the road in front of the house. With the foot of one of his assaulters on his chest, and the other with an old gun in his hand at his side, Pickford realized that nothing could be done but submit. Shooting in that locality and at that time was no uncommon occurrence; for there seemed to be no law in the land, and men generally settled their own grievances, or submitted to them.

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"Help! Help!" shouted the victim of the present outrage, with all the strength of his lungs, which gave him voice enough to make him heard a quarter of a mile distant.

"Shut up your head!" savagely yelled Sandy Lyon, as he pressed his foot down with all his might by throwing all his weight upon the breast of the prostrate farmer.

The sound of the horse's feet in the road seemed to give the victim a new hope, and he tried to shout again. But Sandy flew at his throat like a wolf, and choked him into silence.

"Find a couple of ropes or cords, Orly, and we will tie his hands behind him!" called Sandy to his brother.

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"'Help! Help!' shouted the victim."

The younger brother hastened to obey the order. Finding nothing of the description required, he rushed into the rear room of the house. The pressure of the assailant's hands upon his throat, and the hope of assistance from outside, stimulated the victim to further resistance, for the gun in the hands of Orly no longer threatened him. With a desperate struggle he threw Sandy over backwards, and sprang to his feet. His persecutor picked himself up, and was about to throw himself upon him again. Pickford, who was nearly exhausted by the struggle and the choking, rushed to the open door; and as he was about to pass out he encountered a young man in the uniform of a cavalryman, with a sabre dangling at his side, and a carbine slung on his back.

At the moment when the cry for help came from the house, the young man, mounted on a spirited horse, was riding along the Spring Road. He was a stout fellow, not more than eighteen years old, with a pleasant face, though a physiognomist would have observed upon it a look of determination, indicating that he could not be trifled with on a serious occasion. Neither the house nor the man who occupied it would have tempted the soldier to enter it for any other reason than the call that had just come from it.

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The cavalryman reined in his steed, and halted him with his head to a post in front of the dwelling. Dismounting in haste, he threw the reins over the hitching-hook and hurried to the front door, just in time to encounter Pickford as he was rushing out. The victim of the outrage was gasping for breath, and presented a really pitiable aspect to the young soldier, to whom he was not a stranger, though they had met as enemies and not as friends.

"What's the trouble?" asked Deck Lyon, the cavalryman, as he encountered the owner of the miniature plantation.

"I have been set upon, and nearly killed by your cousins, Sandy and Orly Lyon, and one of them has nearly choked me to death," gasped Pickford.

"By my cousins!" exclaimed Deck Lyon, astonished at the reply of the victim.

"Yes; both on 'em," groaned Swin, as he was generally called.

"I supposed you had gone to the county town with the Home Guards," added Deck.

"No; I never 'listed, 'cause I have a family to take care on."

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"Come in, and let me see what the trouble is," continued Deck, as he pushed Swin in ahead of him.

Sandy had been in the act of throwing himself upon his victim again, when he discovered his cousin in the person of the cavalryman. The sight of him caused the angry young man to fall back; and Deck entered the room just as Orly appeared at the rear door with a piece of bed-cord in his hand.

"Good-morning, Sandy," said Deck, as pleasantly as though nothing had called for his interference. "There seems to be some trouble here."

"Trouble enough," replied Sandy in a sulky tone.

"Swin Pickford calls for help as though you intended to murder him," continued Deck, as he looked from one to the other of the belligerents, and took in Orly with the cord at the same time. "You are all on the same side of the national fight, and you ought to be friends."

"We are not on the same side, for Pickford is a traitor," answered Sandy.

"I'm no traitor!" protested Swin. "But I should like to ask what you and Orly are, if I'm one. I was

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willing to join the Home Guards for home service; but when they started to go into the Confederate army, I took off my name, for I didn't join for no such work. But Sandy and Orly went off with the company, and then deserted and come home. What's the sense of them callin' me a traitor when I'm not one, and they be."

"If they deserted, they did a sensible thing," said Deck with a smile, as he glanced at his two cousins. "But I am not here to settle any such quarrel as this; for I don't care how much you ruffians fight among yourselves."

"The trouble here has nothing to do with politics or the Home Guards," replied Sandy.

"Nothing at all, Deck," added Orly.

"What is it all about, then?" inquired Deck. "I came in because a cry was heard from the house which made me think a murder was going on here."

"That's jest what was goin' on here!" exclaimed Pickford.

"Nothing of the sort," protested Sandy. "Not a word has been said here about the army or the Home Guards." [Pg 23]

"But your father has marched his company farther south, to join General Buckner's army."

"That had nothing to do with our business here. Swin Pickford owes father twenty-seven dollars for building the chimney of this house, and he has owed it for about two years, and it is time the bill was paid."

"That's all so, Deck Lyon; I don't deny none on't," added Pickford, who had recovered his breath and his temper by this time. "But I hain't had the money to pay the bill. I'm an honest man, and I allus pay my debts when I ken. Times have been hard with me for the last two years. Folks has been all over inter politics, and I couldn't hardly git money enough to pay for the bread and butter of my wife and children; for there wasn't next to no work at all."

"That's a poor excuse in your case, Swin," added Sandy.

"I went to Cap'n Titus more'n a year ago, and talked to him about that debt," continued Pickford, without heeding the remark of Sandy. "He got heaps of money out of his brother's property, and I didn't s'pose he needed the money. I offered him five dollars, and told him I'd try to pay him five every month. But he didn't want me to do it that way, and told me I could pay it all to once, when I had the money. Then he wanted me to help him git up the company, and I did; I hoofed it all over the county for him, sometimes when I might have worked." [Pg 24]

"But he has got money now!" Sandy broke in. "Dr. Falkirk paid him fifty dollars this morning at the grocery; for I saw him do it, and heard him say how much it was."

"I don't deny that, nuther," said the unfortunate debtor. "But I haven't got three dollars left of that money now. I paid Grunge the grocer nineteen dollars on't; for he knows I'm an honest man, and trusted me. Then I paid a man that's poorer'n I am for some work he done on my place, seven dollars and a half, and I had to pay my taxes or lose my farm."

"I saw Dr. Falkirk pay him that money, and Orly and I tramped all the way over here; for we have no horses at home now. He's got the money, and won't pay the bill. Mother wants the money very much," added Sandy.

"She hasn't got a dollar in the house," Orly put in, perhaps telling more than his brother wished to have revealed. [Pg 25]

"Then you came over here to collect the bill at the muzzle of your gun," suggested Deck, who had seen the younger brother pick up his weapon, which had fallen on the floor.

"We meant to make him pay," said Sandy. "I believe he has the money, and I meant to search the house till I found it."

"You would have s'arched till the last gun fires, and you wouldn't found it then," protested the victim, as he took an old wallet from his pocket, which was found to contain about three dollars in silver. "That's all I've got in this world, and none in the next."

"I don't believe he has got any more money, Sandy," said Deck to his cousin, as he stepped up to him, and spoke to him in a low tone.

"I'm willin' to give him two dollars outen the little I got, though he abused me wus'n any man ever did in this world, and sha'n't in the next," interposed Pickford.

"I will take what I can get," replied Sandy, as he took the bill from his pocket.

The debtor paid him two dollars in silver; and if his mother, as Orly affirmed, had not a single dollar in the house, this small sum would be gladly received by her. Deck led the way out of the house, and his two cousins followed, just as Mrs. Pickford and her two small children came into the room. The sight of them was enough to assure the visitors of the poverty of the husband and father. [Pg 26]

CHAPTER II

REVELATIONS OF A YOUNG GUARDSMAN

Dexter Lyon was very much perplexed by the situation of his uncle's family in Barcreek; for he owned his place, which had cost five thousand dollars, unencumbered; and about two years before he had received from the estate of his deceased brother twenty thousand dollars in cash and stocks.

"Of course the story that your mother had not a dollar in the house is a fiction, such as people who collect money, or don't want to pay it out, often tell," said the young cavalryman, as he went to the post where he had secured his horse.

"Fiction? What do you mean by that?" asked Sandy Lyon, the expression on whose face was very sad and discontented.

"You didn't mean that what you said was true?"

"What did I say that was not true?" inquired Sandy, looking at his cousin as though he was in doubt whether or not to conceal the correct answer to the question. [Pg 28]

"Everybody in Barcreek knows that your father has gone to Bowling Green, and you said that your mother had not a dollar in the house," replied Deck, studying the expression on the face of his cousin. "You didn't mean that, did you?"

Sandy looked at his cousin, and each seemed to be considering the meaning of the other's looks. They were own cousins, and their homes were not more than a mile apart; but they had not met for three months. Politics, as the people of this locality generally called the two great questions of the day, Unionism and Secession, had created a great gulf between the two families. Judging from the threadbare and semi-miserable condition of the two sons of Captain Titus, times had gone hardly with the family.

"I did not say that mother had not a dollar in the house," said Sandy, after a long silence.

"Orly said so, and you did not contradict him; so it is all the same thing," added Deck.

"I did say so; and I said it because it was just as true as Breckinridge's long letter," said Orly earnestly. [Pg 29]

"That is not saying much for the truth of it," answered Deck, with a smile on his handsome face; for he had the reputation of being a good-looking fellow, especially since he had donned his uniform.

"Well, it is true as that the sun shines in the sky," added Orly; and there was an expression of disgust on his face.

"But your father has plenty of money," suggested the young soldier.

"No, he hasn't," protested Orly.

"You are talking too fast, Orly," interposed Sandy reproachfully.

"We may as well let the cat out of the bag first as last, for she will scratch her way out very soon," replied Orly. "Mother will be glad enough to see that two dollars when Sandy offers it to her."

Just at that moment the blast of a bugle, or several of them, was heard in the direction of the Cross Roads, the way Deck was going when he was arrested by the cry for help from Pickford's house.

"What's that?" asked Sandy, as though he was glad to have the subject of the conversation changed, however it may have been with his more impulsive brother. [Pg 30]

"It must be my company, or the squadron to which it belongs," replied Deck rather indifferently.

"How many companies have you, Deck?" asked Orly.

"Only two yet, hardly enough for a battalion."

"Where are they going now?"

"Probably they are out for drill; and I must fall in as soon as the companies come up," said Deck, as he mounted his horse and straightened himself up in the saddle, as though he wished to present a proper appearance before his cousins.

But the battalion or squadron was still at a considerable distance from him, and the young cavalryman could not help looking at the pinched faces of his cousins; for though they had ostensibly embraced the cause of Secession, he was full of sympathy for them. They looked as though they had been poorly fed, if not half-starved; and when the time had come for them to have new suits of clothes, they had not obtained them. But if Captain Titus's family was without money, it could be only a temporary matter, for he could hardly have exhausted his twenty thousand dollars in stocks and cash, though it was well known that he had contributed five thousand dollars for the purchase of arms and ammunition to be used by his company of Home Guards, which had now moved south to join the Confederate army. [Pg 31]

"As I said before, your father had plenty of money," continued Deck, though he was not disposed to be over-inquisitive.

"He had at one time," Sandy admitted; and it was plain from his manner that he was not willing to tell all he knew about his father's financial affairs.

"I don't understand how your mother should be so short of money, Sandy; but it is none of my business, and I won't ask any more questions," added the cavalryman, as he whirled his restive horse about. "I thought you and Orly went with the company to Bowling Green, Sandy."

"We did; but we came back again," replied the elder brother. But there appeared to be something to conceal in regard to their return.

"There wasn't any fun in soldiering without any pay, and without even half enough to eat, with nothing to wear," added the plain-spoken younger brother. [Pg 32]

"You needn't tell all you know, Orly," interposed Sandy, with a frown at his brother.

"You needn't snap at me, Sandy; for I told you before I had had enough of this thing, and I shall never join the company again," returned Orly earnestly. "Do you suppose I can enlist in one of your companies, Deck?"

"Shut up, Orly!" exclaimed Sandy very sternly. "You don't know what you are talking about."

"I'll bet I know what I'm talking about, and my stomach knows too," retorted Orly.

"Don't make a fool of yourself! You don't mean to turn traitor to your father and the cause, Orly?" pleaded Sandy; but he appeared to be trying to keep up appearances.

"Hang the cause!" exclaimed Orly, as though he meant all he said. "My father got me into the scrape, and he will get enough of it before he is many months older."

"Use your reason and common-sense," counselled the elder brother.

"That's what we just haven't been using the last two years, and now I'm going to use my reason and common-sense on my own hook. If you like soldiering without pay or rations, Sandy, you can join the company again as soon as you like; but when you catch me there, you will find a Kentuckian without any eye-teeth," replied Orly, who was only two years younger than his brother, and was considered the brighter boy of the two; and his tones and his manner were vigorous enough to indicate that he meant all he said. [Pg 33]

"You are acting like a fool to talk like that before your cousin, who is an abolition soldier."

"Before my cousin! His father and himself have been sensible from the first; and I only wonder that Deck don't quote Scripture to us, and gently remind us that 'the way of transgressors is hard;' for he can't help seeing the truth of the proverb in both of us."

"I didn't know that things had become particularly hard with you," said Deck.

"Orly is as wild as a goat, Deck. Don't mind what he says," interposed Sandy.

"Or what Sandy says," interjected the younger of the two.

"Our company has not been mustered in yet, and of course we could not draw pay or rations," added Sandy, who felt called upon to defend his father and the "cause" from the implied censure of his brother. "Father spent all the ready money he had to pay for rations and tents, and some other things the Confederate government will furnish, and will pay him back for all he has expended. That is the reason why my mother is so short of money just now." [Pg 34]

"That's all very good as far as it goes; but I don't believe the Confederate government has got any more money than the Bank of England; and it will be a long day before father gets his money back. We were nearly starved when we left the company."

"But we did not desert, as some folks say we did," added Sandy, who was in favor of putting the best foot forward. "Father sent us home when we spoke of leaving, and he gave us a sort of furlough, in so many words. If he could hear you talk, Orly, he would be ashamed of you."

"As I have been of him more than once," said the younger in a low tone, as though he did not feel fully justified in speaking in that manner of his father, who had a gross failing, which had recently been gaining upon him. [Pg 35]

Sandy heard the remark; and he was disgusted, though he could not deny the justness of it. He had been ashamed of his father, but his inborn pride did not permit him to say so outside of the family. If he had been as plain-spoken as his brother, he might have informed Deck, who was the only listener to the conversation, that the furlough had grown out of a quarrel between Captain Titus and his older son.

The captain had always been what is known as a moderate drinker, but the habit had grown upon him after he went to Kentucky. Some of the Home Guard had been shot at while engaged in foraging among the farmers for food in the outskirts of the county-seat where the company was encamped, and it became a dangerous pursuit, as even the commander of the company would not authorize it; for in the status of the body it was nothing but plundering.

Sandy noticed that his father had his whiskey ration in increased proportions, and he knew that it cost money. He and Orly were not half fed, and the father lived on his favorite beverage. It provoked him to wrath, and in a fit of desperation he spoke out to him as plainly as Orly could have done it. The quarrel followed; and when Sandy declared that he and his brother would leave the company, he had driven them from his presence, and ordered them not to return. This was the furlough, "in so many words," as Sandy put it.

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Perhaps the approach of the squadron of cavalry was a relief to Sandy Lyon, for it put an end to the conversation of a disagreeable nature to him. He realized the truth of nearly all that Orly had said in regard to the desperate situation of the Home Guard, and the family of its commander; but his pride was still superior to the groans of his stomach.

"Mother and the girls are going back to Derry as soon as she can get money enough to pay the bills," said Orly in a low voice.

"I am ashamed of you, Orly!" protested Sandy, who had heard the remark; for the bugle of the battalion had ceased its blast at that moment. "You have no business to tell family secrets like that."

"Confound your family secrets!" exclaimed his brother. "I don't want to quarrel with you, my brother, as father has done with Uncle Noah; but I am not in favor of starving to death for the benefit of the Southern Confederacy. You have too much family pride when it don't pay, Sandy. You said that our sister Mabel should not go out to work in the family of Dr. Falkirk, when mother said she might."

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"Dr. Falkirk might have got a nigger woman to do his housework, instead of paying double wages to Mabel," replied Sandy.

"That is nothing to do with the question. Mabel's wages have been all we had to live on since we got home," returned Orly, letting out more of the secrets of the family without any compunction.

"I wish you would hold your tongue, Orly," added Sandy fretfully.

"I said what I did for a purpose; but I shall have to stop now, for the squadron is nearly here," replied Orly. "When can I see you again, Deck?"

"Almost any time when I am not at drill, or absent on an errand, as I have been to-day. You will find me at the camp or the house," replied Deck, as he rode forward to a point where he could fall into his position in his company.

"Why, there is Uncle Noah at the head of the column!" said Sandy, as the squadron came near enough for him to recognize the familiar face of his relative, even in the midst of his present unwonted surroundings. "He looks like an officer."

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"He is what people have been calling him since he came to Kentucky, and is now actually Major Lyon," replied Deck, whom the boys had followed.

"But are you not an officer, Deck?" asked Orly.

"Not at all; Artie and I are high privates. They wanted to make us both sergeants; but after we had talked with father, we declined all positions," replied Deck, as he fell into his place.

It is time to give something of the history of the two families who had emigrated to Kentucky, the family secrets of one of which had been so freely revealed to Deck by the young Home Guardsman with Union aspirations.

CHAPTER III

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SOMETHING ABOUT THE LYON FAMILIES

The town of Derry in New Hampshire had contributed fourteen persons to the population of Kentucky, all of them by the name of Lyon. Colonel Duncan Lyon had gone there as a young man, and had made a very handsome fortune. But he died at the age of fifty, and bequeathed his property, consisting of a large plantation, which he had named Riverlawn, because it had a delightful lawn, with great trees scattered over it, though after the English fashion with none immediately in front of the large mansion, to his two brothers and the children of one deceased ten years before his death.

The elder of the two living brothers was Titus Lyon. He had removed to his new home eight years before, and he appeared to be the black sheep of the fourteen who had departed from their native town. He was a mason by trade, and had done fairly well in his former home at his business. He was one of those men who believed that fate or circumstances had misused him, as he compared his worldly condition with that of his eldest brother, who had departed this life leaving a fortune behind him; or even of his other brother, who had always been a prosperous farmer.

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Titus had been informed by Colonel Lyon that there was an opening for a mason in the village of Barcreek, near which he resided, though he had not advised him to remove to that locality, and was really opposed to his coming. His discontent with his condition had induced him to change

his residence to this far-off section of the country, probably with a motive which he concealed from both of his brothers. He had a wife, who was an excellent woman, belonging to a very respectable family, and five children, three girls and two boys, the latter already introduced.

The mason did tolerably well at his trade in his new home for a few years, though it was not a business at which a fortune could be easily made in that rural section of the country. It was not a prohibition State, which seemed to make it all the worse for the head of this family; for he had contracted the habit of drinking moderately when, as a young man, he had been a stage-driver, and it had grown upon him in his new home.

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Titus had not become a sot, or even a very heavy drinker, before the death of his brother; but he regularly imbibed his whiskey, and to some extent his habit affected his manners and his morals. He had always appeared to be extremely devoted to the colonel, and even fawned upon him, during his residence in Barcreek; and he was always kindly treated and assisted financially when he needed help.

Colonel Lyon died suddenly at the age of fifty. He had never been married, and had no children to whom he could leave his property. About a year before his decease he paid a visit of a month to his brother Noah, the youngest of the three brothers, in his native town. The latter was a substantial man, who held a very respectable position in the town; he had been somewhat distinguished among his fellow-citizens, and had been the incumbent of several town officers.

Noah Lyon was forty years old at the time of his brother's death, with a good woman for a wife, who was in every sense a helpmate to her husband. They had two children of their own, a boy and a girl, Dexter and Hope. Cyrus, a fourth brother of the Lyons, had lost his life in a freshet in Vermont, where he had settled as a farmer; and his wife had perished with him, leaving two small children, Artemas and Dorcas. He had not left property enough to pay his debts; but Noah promptly adopted the little ones, and for ten years he had cared for and supported them as though they had been his own.

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Noah had suggested to Titus that he should take one of them to his home, while he received the other in his own family; but his brother pleaded the poor health of his wife for not doing so, and the little ones had reached the ages of seventeen and fifteen when they were removed to Kentucky. Noah and his wife treated them in every respect as their own children, and no one could have asked a better home for them. They called their uncle and aunt by the endearing names of father and mother.

At the death of Colonel Lyon, the telegraphic message announcing the sad event had been immediately followed by a letter from Colonel Cosgrove, summoning Noah to the late home of the deceased. To the intense disappointment of Titus, the Riverlawn plantation had been left to Noah, with the fifty-one slaves, and everything connected with the place. Titus had set his heart upon the possession of the estate; for it would give him a generous support without manual labor.

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He was one of those men who contrive to believe in and expect what they most desire. He had been his wealthy brother's neighbor for eight years, and knew something about the estate. For this reason, and because he was next in age to the deceased, he had come to believe that the place belonged to him. The colonel had other views; for he realized that Titus was not an entirely reliable person, was not much of a business man, and his drinking habit was continually growing upon him.

The eldest brother had, however, endeavored to make a fair division of his property among his nearest of kin. He had given some legacies to his personal friends, including his faithful overseer, who had served him for many years.

Then he had given Noah ten thousand dollars in consideration of the fact that he had supported the children of Cyrus for ten years. To him also he bequeathed twenty-five thousand dollars in trust for these children. He had left the same sum to Titus, less a mortgage note given at the time the mason had purchased his residence in the village. The will was accompanied by an inventory of the entire property, indicating that the colonel had figured up his resources, and endeavored to make an equitable division among his legal heirs.

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With the will also came into the possession of Noah two letters, one enclosing the other. The open one directed him not to sell any of the slaves on the plantation, and the other was not to be opened for five years. The sum of money left to his successor on the plantation, in payment for the support of the niece and nephew of the testator, and the disposition of the negroes, were the principal grievances of Titus, apparently, though the real one had been the giving of the plantation to Noah. In some of his moments, when he had rather overcharged himself with whiskey, he had furiously assailed his innocent brother for what the dead one had done in his will.

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Noah was a mild and peaceful man under ordinary circumstances, and he did his best to preserve intact his fraternal relations with his angry and discontented brother. Some discussion had taken place between them, and Titus was as unreasonable as a mule. The subject rendered him furious, aided by the whiskey, and the difference on this matter became a decided rupture.

Colonel Lyon had sometimes been charged with over-indulgence to his negroes; and it was true that he had treated them as kindly as though they had been hired servants instead of slaves, perhaps more so. The "people," as they were often called on the plantation, after the manner of a man-of-war, had not been valued in the inventory of the deceased planter, and had not been

mentioned in the document, any more than the horses, mules, and cows.

By this omission Titus believed that he had been cheated out of his share of about thirty thousand dollars. Noah exhibited the open letter of the colonel to him; but this only fanned his wrath. He appeared to believe that his deceased brother had no rights in his own property, all of which he had accumulated himself. He had nursed himself into the conviction that he was the victim of a gross injustice, and he had little patience, or even toleration, with his mild-mannered brother, who had never spoken to the colonel about his will, or the colonel to him.

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This family quarrel owed some of its bitterness, on the part of Titus, to other circumstances than the naked merits of the case, if there was a shadow of justice in the charges of his brother against him. Noah had not a particle of it in his composition; for he was a true Christian, and returned good for evil so far as he was permitted to do so. The political situation in Kentucky had complicated the relations of the brothers.

Titus had belonged to one party, while his brother was an earnest member of the other; though with a very wide difference of opinion, one had proved to be as patriotic as the other. Probably because Noah was emphatically devoted to the Union, Titus had taken the other side of the question in Kentucky, where all was excitement and turmoil from the nomination of the candidates for the presidency. The agitation became that of Loyalty and Secession.

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The governor had issued his proclamation in favor of the neutrality of the State, and Home Guards were organized to enforce it. But it never amounted to anything; for the majority were demonstrated to be Union men, and appealed to the traditions of the past as the first State to join the original thirteen. Captain Titus had become the commander of one of these companies, on his promise to uniform and equip his men. He had expended a considerable portion of the money he had inherited in the purchase of arms and ammunition for his command, though he had never been able to supply his soldiers with uniforms.

He had sent to New York for an abundant supply of weapons and cartridges, including two brass field-pieces, over a hundred breech-loading rifles, and nearly as many revolvers of several sizes. He intended that his company should be the best equipped in the region, and his newly acquired wealth made him very extravagant. But the Union forces had begun to show themselves in the State, and the loyal element exceeded in numbers the Secessionists; so that it was necessary for the commander of the Home Guards to take extraordinary precautions for the safety of the war material he had purchased.

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With some difficulty he had moved the cases from the train at Dripping Spring, carted them to a point on Bar Creek, from which he had conveyed them to one of the numerous sink-hole caverns which abound in this part of the State. He had carefully disposed of them, with the aid of his two sons and some trusted neighbors, intending to give them out to his men in a few days.

An indiscretion on the part of his wife had given a hint of the existence of the arms at Riverlawn, which an exploration of Artie Lyon, the adopted son, had worked into tangible evidence of the place where the munitions had been concealed. Noah believed it was a duty he owed to his country to obtain possession of these arms. He had already been warned by his brother that he was regarded as an abolitionist, and that a mob, consisting mainly of the Home Guards, were agitating the question of burning his mansion and driving him out of the county.

When the loss of the arms was discovered, Titus became absolutely furious, and, either with or without sufficient evidence, accused Noah of stealing the property. A very enthusiastic Union meeting was held at the Big Bend schoolhouse, and was attended by some of the most prominent citizens of the county. The action of Major Lyon, as he had come to be called very generally as a title of respect, in accordance with a prevailing custom, in securing the arms was heartily approved by the assembly.

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That very night the ruffians of the Home Guard, for such they were, which included most of the baser element of the locality, had made an attack on the plantation of Major Lyon, intending to burn and destroy it, if not, as was hinted, to hang the planter to one of the big trees on his lawn. But a few of his neighbors had rallied to his assistance, and his negroes were armed with the confiscated weapons, and the attack was an utter failure.

Colonel Belthorpe, who had been a soldier in his earlier years, commanded the defenders of the estate, and the mob marched to his plantation to wreak their vengeance upon him by the destruction of his property; but the same forces defeated them there, with many wounds, and the loss of a few lives.

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At the Union meeting Major Lyon had proposed to raise a company of cavalry. He had offered to contribute a considerable number of horses for the service, and his neighbors had followed his example; and over a hundred steeds were pledged. Letters had been written to the commander of the Union army in Kentucky, relating to this project, and Lieutenant Burke Gordan had been sent to organize the company; and he was followed later by several non-commissioned officers to assist in the drill. The ruffians had made an attempt to stop the enlistments at Riverlawn, where the camp was located; but they had been beaten off.

The recruiting had progressed very successfully; and instead of one company, two had been organized during the next three months. Major Lyon and his two sons had drilled and studied the military art in the most determined manner; for they were enthusiastic in the support of the government. The two companies, though hardly entitled to the name, were called a squadron.

The planter, in spite of his protest, was made the major of the command; and he had become competent for the position. This was the squadron which marched by the house of Swin Pickford while Deck was talking with the two sons of Titus about the strait of the captain's family in Barcreek village.

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CHAPTER IV

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THE DAY'S MARCH OF THE SQUADRON

It seemed to be almost a miracle that Noah Lyon had been transformed into a soldier; and those who had known him in the State of New Hampshire could hardly have recognized him. He had always been a dignified, peaceable, and quiet man—the very antipode of a fire-eater. At his former home he had been a justice of the peace, and was regarded as a person of eminent gravity.

His anger, if he was ever stirred by any such passion, was nothing more than indignation. But he was not a milk-and-water man; and, gentle as were his manners, he was an earnest man. He had never developed any military ambition in his earlier years, though he was sorry he had not done so when he found himself on the very border of the Rebellion. He was still of the military age, and was a hearty and vigorous man at forty-two, when he was called into the service.

He was an earnest and determined patriot; and nothing but the need of the nation could have induced him to put on a uniform, and drill laboriously for months in preparation for his new sphere. He belonged to the class who were said to make the best soldiers, because they went into the field as high-toned men, with whom a principle was at stake. Such soldiers had not been hurried into the camp by the excitement of the times, or by any motive but patriotic duty.

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Sandy and Orly Lyon stood in front of Pickford's house, and observed the approaching column of cavalry; but the most of their attention was given to Uncle Noah. It was a very strange sight for them to see him in the uniform of a soldier, riding at the head of the squadron. These boys had drilled and marched with the Home Guards, and their father had military aspirations, though he was a little past the military age. They could not help contrasting the appearance of Major Lyon's command with that of Captain Lyon's.

Not all the Home Guards in the State were of the character of the ruffians forming the company which had marched to Bowling Green, and who had been the principal participants in the outrages and the ruffianism in the vicinity of Barcreek. Some of the companies were composed and officered by Union men, who did some of the first fighting in the State when the Confederates fortified Cumberland Gap in the eastern section. Such as these wheeled into the Union army, while those of the Secession stripe promptly joined the forces on the other side.

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No doubt many of these Home Guards believed sincerely in the neutrality policy, which was advocated by some of the best men in the State; but it afforded thousands of ruffians the advantages of an organization for plunder and outrage. But its day had gone by. Major Lyon insisted from the beginning that it was a fraud; and, in spite of the action of the governor, Kentucky adhered to the Union. It cost something there to be true to the old flag, and the State deserves all honor for the struggle it made against the breaking up of the Union.

Major Lyon sat erect upon his horse, a valuable animal, which had been his favorite since his arrival. There was nothing like vanity in his expression, as might have been excusable at the head of such a fine body of men; but he looked as he always did, earnest and determined, his soldierly character resting more on his devotion to the cause than on any other motive. He wore a felt hat, ornamented with a black feather, which the mustering officer had prevailed upon him to adopt.

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The squadron was composed of rather young men as a rule, and they were the sons of farmers and others engaged in business. They were fine-looking men, and they had been diligently drilled by the officers sent to Riverlawn for the purpose. Perhaps the commander was the only real planter enlisted; for most of them in the vicinity were past the age for active service, though they had done their duty in repressing outrages and keeping the peace.

Captain Gordon, who had been charged with the organization of the first company, was in command of it, while Captain Truman, a young lawyer, whose eloquent voice had been raised for the Union in the important meeting at the Big Bend schoolhouse, was in command of the second; but he had proved in the Riverlawn battle that he was a brave man, and would make a good soldier. Tom Belthorpe, who had taken part in the defence of Lyndhall and of Riverlawn, was first lieutenant of the first company; while Major Gadbury, whose military title was one of courtesy, held the corresponding rank in the second company.

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It had required a great deal of persuasion to induce the proprietor of Riverlawn to accept the position of major. He was a man of character; and some of the planters in the neighborhood, especially Colonel Cosgrove and Colonel Belthorpe, convinced him that it was his duty to the cause to take the place. He had proved to them, in the engagements with the ruffians, that he had the material in his composition of which reliable commanders are made.

Deck Lyon had a tremendous reputation for courage and skill at Lyndhall; for he had rescued both of the daughters of its owner from the hands of the ruffians, who had captured them for the purpose of assisting in the recovery of the arms the major had secured. When it came to the

matter of electing officers for the second company, Tom had advocated the choice of Deck as captain, though he was only eighteen years old, to the position.

Of course the young man was elated at the idea of being elevated to such a position before he had been tried in the service; but it did not seem to be quite right to him, and he went to his father for advice. The major promptly advised him to accept no position in the company. He was too young to be the commander of a company, which might be ordered on duty by itself. As his father pointed out to him the difficulties in his way, Deck went to the other extreme, and declined to take a place even as a non-commissioned officer. Artie Lyon liked the stand he had taken so well, that he followed his example, and both remained privates.

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Deck and Artie did not forget the favorable mention of their names, and they electioneered very zealously for the choice of Tom Belthorpe as first lieutenant. In the case of the former, perhaps Deck was unconsciously influenced by the fact that he had a very pretty sister, who had manifested no little interest in him since he had attacked the ruffian who held her as a prisoner. In fact, Tom had two pretty sisters; but this fact affected Lieutenant Gadbury more than any other person.

When the squadron had advanced a short distance, Major Lyon wheeled his horse, and faced his command, who were marching as usual on the road by fours. He had learned his lesson well at the camp; for the squadron had been thoroughly drilled from the beginning, up to the point where the "school of the battalion" had been their practice.

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"Battalion, halt!" he commanded, with a voice loud enough and clear enough to be heard far back of the place where the order was given.

Captain Gordon declared that he had not caught the major in a single error or slip since he had begun to exercise the squadron. The command was repeated by the subordinate officers, and the force came to a full halt. Deck had stopped by the side of the road, to await the coming up of his section, and his father called him as soon as he had halted the battalion.

The young man had been on a military errand for the major, rather than for his father, who insisted that his two sons should fare precisely the same as other soldiers of the companies. There was to be no favoritism on account of relationship. Deck could not report the result of his errand while the commander was marching at the head of his column, for the new companies had not reached the free-and-easy stage which came later.

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Deck saluted the major as though they had never met before in their lives, and his father acknowledged it. Then the private reported the result of his mission.

"You have been making some stay at this house we are passing," continued Major Lyon, as he glanced back at the two boys who were still standing there.

"Found a fight going on in the house, and I went in on account of a call for help," replied Deck.

"But that is Pickford's house, and no ruffians would attack him," suggested the major. "Are these Titus's boys standing here?"

"They are. Uncle Titus has a bill against Pickford for twenty-seven dollars for building his chimney, and Sandy and Orly were trying to collect it by force of arms."

"I will hear more of that another time, Dexter," added Major Lyon, cutting short the story. "I declare, I hardly knew those boys!"

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"They have had a hard time of it; but I must fall in," said Deck, as he began to turn his horse. "I suppose you are out for a drill, father."

"We are not; we are going on duty this time. General Buckner is somewhere in this vicinity, and evidently intends to occupy Bowling Green. Colonel Cosgrove came over to see me this morning. He says Captain Titus's company have got into the Confederate army at last, and have been supplied with arms of a poor quality, though not with uniforms."

"His men have been about half-starved while waiting, and that is the reason why Sandy and Orly came home," added the young soldier.

"Another time for that, Dexter. Are you all ready to march with your company?" asked the major.

"I have my sabre, carbine, and pistols; but I have no blanket, as I see the rest of the men have."

"You can be supplied from the wagon in the rear. But fall in," said the major, as he prepared to resume the march.

Deck galloped back to the section in which he belonged, where he had only to take his place at the side of Artie, though inside of him, for he was a trifle taller than his cousin. In the infantry, the tallest men are placed on the right, which is always the head of the column, while in the cavalry the tallest are placed in the middle.

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"What does all this mean, Deck? Didn't I see Sandy and Orly Lyon by that house?" asked Artie.

"They are there, whether you saw them or not," replied Deck.

"Battalion, at ease, march!"

In the infantry, when the order for "route step!" is given, the men need not even keep step, and the formalities are relaxed in some other respects. In the cavalry, in which the horses take all the steps, the strain of precise position and movement is removed, and the soldiers may make the best of their journey. Artie wanted to know all about his two cousins he had seen at Pickford's, and Deck told him the whole story of what had occurred there.

"Is it possible that Uncle Titus's family are reduced to such a strait?" demanded Artie, his pity and sympathy apparent on his face.

"The boys say Aunt Meely and the girls are going back to Derry; and that looks as though the family were very hard up," replied Deck. "And Mabel has gone out to work in the family of Dr. Falkirk." [Pg 62]

"I think Sandy and Orly must be in a desperate situation when they try to collect a bill with a gun."

"I have no doubt of it; though Sandy tried to put the best face on the matter, and said the part of the Confederate army that was to come to Bowling Green had not got there yet, and that they will be all right as soon as the company is mustered in. Orly speaks out loud, and tells all he knows about the condition of the family. He wants to join one of our companies."

"Orly Lyon!" exclaimed Artie. "Why, he was one of the loudest Secessionists in the village!"

"He has got enough of it, working without pay or rations," added Deck. "But where are we going, Artie?"

"I'm sure I don't know; why didn't you ask your father, if you want to know?"

"Ask my father! You know better than that, Artie; for you are aware that commanding officers don't tell what they are going to do till they get ready to do it," returned Deck.

"We are provided with ammunition and rations, and very likely we have come out to-day in order to get used to carrying them on a march," suggested Artie. [Pg 63]

"Not at all; for father told me we were out on duty to-day, though he did not say what it was," replied Deck.

The march continued all day long, and it began to look as though it would extend into the night. About nine o'clock in the evening Major Lyon called a halt at a point where a railroad could be seen in the gloom of the night. The column had just crossed a bridge of considerable length over a creek, and the position of the railroad indicated that it must be bridged over the same stream.

While the commander and his officers were trying to make out the surroundings, half a dozen muskets were discharged from a covert of trees; but fortunately none of the cavalymen appeared to be struck by the bullets. But it was evident that the time for action had come.

CHAPTER V

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THE LEADER OF THE SCOUTING-PARTY

As the squadron came to a region where Major Lyon was no longer familiar with the country, scouts had been sent out ahead of the column to give information in regard to any possible enemy. Confederate troops had been reported from several different directions by those who had occasion to travel about the State. As indicated by some of their operations, their present policy was to destroy the railroad bridges, so as to prevent the government from forwarding troops by them.

General Buckner, or his forces, had destroyed one at Rolling Creek; but he was supposed to be falling back upon Bowling Green, as regiments from Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois began to reach this part of the State. It was possible that the squadron might come in contact with some of these forces; and the men were very anxious to find them.

Sergeant Knox was at the head of the scouts. He was a man of forty-two, a tall, raw-boned Kentuckian, whose enterprise and love of adventure had led him into the region beyond the Mississippi, where he had been a regular soldier, a hunter, a trapper, and *voyageur*. For some reason he had become a strong friend of Deck Lyon, who was never tired of listening to his stories of the regions beyond the pale of civilization. He was a bluff, good-natured man with those who pleased his fancy; and, though he was not bitter or revengeful, he was capable of being a terrible enemy. [Pg 65]

Firing at a target was part of the regular drill of the cavalymen in camp, and Life Knox always put his ball inside of every other. His name was Eliphalet, and he sometimes laughed at his parents for giving him such a long name. Captain Gordon had had no little difficulty in inducing him to sign his name in full on the enlistment papers. He had abbreviated it to "Life," and declared that he had never signed anything but that to any document in all his life.

He was born and "raised" in Warren County, though he had wandered far from it at an early age, after the death of his father and mother. He had a brother who was a prosperous planter, and with him he had lived the last two years of his life. When he came to Riverlawn to enlist, he [Pg 66]

brought with him a long rifle, which was a load for an ordinary man to carry. He was told that he could make no use of it in the army; but he asked Deck to take care of it for him, and he put it in his room.

It was occasionally brought out when the soldiers were firing at a target, and Life produced the most surprising results with it. He was pretty sure to hit the bull's-eye with it every time; for he had been trained where his daily existence depended upon the accuracy of his aim. He could bring down a squirrel as far as he could see him; and he always insisted that the rifle had as much to do with the result as himself. His shooting was observed with interest by the officers and men; and he was called, not simply a good, but a remarkable, shot. He was a dead shot to any living thing at which he aimed.

Life Knox was a good-hearted man; but there was a sort of inborn aristocracy in him which would not permit him to associate intimately with all his comrades in the ranks, though he treated them well, and spoke pleasantly to them. Deck was always respectful to him, and Life had taken a decided fancy to him. When the tall Kentuckian was ordered upon the scout, he took care that Deck should be one of the party. They had ridden together all the afternoon, and Life had made the time seem short to the young man by relating all the details of a fight with a party of Indians.

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As the darkness of the evening came on, Life ordered his men to keep a sharp lookout on all sides, and suspended his thrilling narratives that his own watchfulness might not be impaired. The scouts were passing through what appeared to be a plantation, though they could not yet see any buildings. Suddenly the light of a fire flashed up at a considerable distance to the right of the scouts in the road.

"A fire, Life!" shouted Deck, as he discovered the glare of the first flame that rose in the darkness.

"Hush, little one!" interposed Knox. "Don't tell the neighbors about it, for it might astonish them."

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"I don't believe there are any neighbors very near us," replied Deck in a low tone. "But there is something going on in this vicinity."

"We won't tell 'em, whoever's at work round here, that we are coming. By the light of the fire I can see a mansion or farmhouse over yonder."

As he spoke, the report of the half-a-dozen muskets, more or less, that had attracted the attention of the main body of the squadron, was heard, though the scouts were half a mile distant. The building of the fire was possibly a signal for the discharge which had so soon followed it; but no other connection could be suggested between them.

"One man can always do better in lookin' inter things than a dozen," said Life, as he was trying to connect the fire and the firing in a reasonable manner. "Ride over towards that fire, Deck, and see what you can see."

"Be you uns soldiers, Mars'r?" asked a negro, coming out of a cornfield at the side of the road, where the stalks had concealed his coming.

"Of course we are, Cato," replied Deck, who was nearest to him.

"Who done tole you my name, Mars'r?" asked the negro, whose surprise seemed to have driven everything else out of his head.

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"I guessed at it. But what do you want? I told you we were soldiers," added Deck. "Do you come from that house beyond the cornfield?"

"Yes, Mars'r; but if you uns is soldiers, which side was you on?" inquired Cato very cautiously.

"Not gone, Deck?" asked Knox, riding up to him.

"This contraband has just come out of the field, and belongs to the house we saw in the distance. I thought he could tell me better than I could see for myself what is going on here," replied Deck.

"You are right, Deck."

"But he wants to know which side we are on before he says anything," added Deck.

"Then he is a sensible nigger. Of course we uns belong on the Union side; and when you catch Life Knox on any other side, you'll catch a coon asleep," replied the sergeant, decidedly enough to satisfy any doubtful person. "What's gwine on at that fire, Minky?"

"Bress de Lod if you was Union sodgers! and my name is Cato!" exclaimed the visitor, earnestly enough for a camp-meeting. "Dey is a hull regiment of Sesh sodgers ober dar!" he added, pointing in the direction from which the report of the firing had come.

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Without waiting for any further information, Knox called Lane, one of the scouts, and sent him back to report what the negro said to Major Lyon. He was directed to move slowly after he had gone the eighth of a mile; for the enemy were at some point on the right of the road, and he would get a shot if he disturbed them.

"What are the Sesh soldiers here for, Cato?" asked Knox, as soon as his messenger had gone.

"Gwine to burn de bridge ober dar," replied the man, pointing in the direction in which the

structure had been made out in the gloom of the evening.

"Well, why don't they burn it, then?"

"Dey done got oder business at de mansion-house, sar."

"What other business have they got there?"

"I reckon de story's as long as Uncle Zeke's sarmints; but de fust thing is, dey's gwine to hang Mars'r Barkland to one ob dem trees, if he don't tell whar he hide his money," answered Cato, as he gave a hurried glance at the fire.

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"How many men are there at the house, or near it, Cato?" asked Knox with deep interest.

"I done count six on 'em."

"Then we won't allow a Union man to be hung to a tree. Scouts, attention, march!" called the sergeant hurriedly.

With this order, Life dashed into the cornfield, closely followed by Deck and the others. The harvest had been gathered in the field, and there was nothing but the stalks that remained to obstruct the passage of the squad. The fire was at the edge of a grove, on ground slightly elevated, and not far in the rear of the mansion, which could now be distinctly seen. In approaching it, the cavalymen came to a spot less elevated than the grove, where Knox halted to reconnoitre.

"There's a lot of the villains coming from the house!" exclaimed the sergeant, as he brought his horse to a full stop all at once.

"They have about finished hanging Union men in our county," said Deck, "and I don't believe they will hang this one here."

"You can bet your horse they won't," added Life. "They can't see us yet, and I think we had better fix things a little before we begin business."

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"We obey orders, Sergeant. There's a knoll over on the right covered over with trees."

"I was looking at that; and we will move over there, and take a position behind it, where they can't see us," replied Knox, as he led the way through a hollow, which brought the party to it.

The mansion-house was on the highest ground in the vicinity, though it was not on a hill. The fire seemed to be plentifully supplied with wood; for it burned brightly, and shed its light on the road leading from the house to the grove. A group of men could be seen approaching the elevation where the fire burned. They moved very slowly, and appeared to have considerable trouble in making any progress at all. There was a prisoner in the midst of the party, and he was very unwilling to move in the direction indicated by his oppressors.

While they were observing the spectacle, Cato joined them, for he had followed the cavalymen as rapidly as he could on foot. He evidently belonged on the plantation, and knew all about the nature of the affair in progress, though the sergeant was not disposed to listen to a story as "long as Uncle Zeke's sermons."

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"Do you know what those villains are doing there, Cato?" he asked, when the negro had recovered his breath.

"Dey drag ole Mars'r Barkland ober to de tree, whar dey will hang him," answered Cato promptly.

"Then your master has plenty of money?"

"I dunno, Mars'r; he neber tole me notin' about dat."

"I s'pose not. Are the men who came to the mansion in uniform, Cato?"

"No, sar; no uniform but de rags dey wear. Cap'n Tites is out at bof elbows, and a nigger'd be 'shamed to wear sich a coat."

"Did you hear what they said when they came to the house?"

"Hear ebery word dey say, Mars'r, 'cause I waits on de table when dey done took supper."

"Then they had supper at the mansion?"

"Yes, sar; dey was all half-starbed, and dey eat more'n twenty men, and done drink whiskey enough to float a canal-boat."

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"Did that captain you spoke of drink whiskey, Cato?" asked Deck.

"He done drink more as all de rest on 'em. Mars'r Barkland willin' to gib dem de supper and de whiskey, but he don't want to gib 'em any money. Cap'n Tites tell him he done got million money; but mars'r say he don't hab none. Den de cap'n say he hang 'im to a tree if he don't gib up de money."

"That will do, Cato; I think I understand the matter now," said Knox, as he changed his position so that he could get a better view of the scene of action. "They have got nearly to the tree. It is about time to make a move."

The sergeant questioned the negro in regard to the road which led to the rear of the house, and some other matters relating to the locality. Knox was a strategist in a small way, as he had been obliged to be in defending himself from Indians and wild beasts. In a moment he had his plan ready to put into operation.

"I count nine men there, taking in the planter," said he. "Cato says there is a whole regiment camped in here somewhar. I don't believe it, Deck; but we don't want to stir 'em up just yet. You will take Owens and Fox, and ride round to that road Cato tells about, and I will go in on this side. I'll do most of the job with my four; but I don't want 'em to git off to their main body. Major Lyon'll tend to them."

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Deck started at once with his two followers, directed by Cato again; and the negro went himself with all the speed of his legs. He came to the road, which was simply a driveway over the plantation, and soon reached the house. He was galloping his steed; but when he came to the house he reined him in at the plaintive supplication of an elderly woman and a young lady, whose face he could not see in the gloom of the evening.

CHAPTER VI

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A VERY OBSTINATE PRISONER CAPTURED

Deck Lyon's horse had been one of his father's best stock, and he had been selected by Levi Bedford, the overseer, for his use. He was a very spirited animal, and not every young fellow of eighteen would have felt at home in a saddle placed on his back. As the ladies from the house rushed forward to intercept him, Ceph, which was his abbreviated name, was startled, reared, and faced the music, as he had been taught to do.

"I didn't mean to scare your horse, sir," said the elder of the ladies; "but for the love of Heaven, can't you do something for my husband?" demanded Mrs. Barkland, as she proved to be.

"Oh, save my father, if you can!" added the younger woman. "Oh, my father! They are abusing him shamefully, and they have threatened to hang him."

"That is the business in which I am engaged; and, if you will excuse me, I will attend to it," replied Deck, as he gave Ceph the signal to go ahead again with his legs.

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"Do save him!" repeated the old lady, who wanted to talk some more about the matter.

But the young cavalryman waited to hear no more; and his horse went off at a dead run, the other two following him as rapidly as their steeds would permit, and he was several rods ahead of them. In a couple of minutes he had reached a point which commanded a view of the place chosen for the spectacle. The actors had evidently preferred to be at a distance from the mansion, where the women could not interfere with them, the better to carry their point with the owner of the plantation.

They had the intended victim with a rope around his neck, and there could be no doubt in regard to their purpose. One man had the other end of the line, and was climbing a tree with it, to pass it over a branch. Five men were on the ground, and their attention had already been attracted by the approach of the horsemen from the direction of the house; and they did not appear to have observed the others, with Knox at their head, for they had passed behind a thicket of young trees on a knoll.

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"Halt!" shouted one of the five men in a voice loud enough to be heard half a mile. "If you come any nearer we will fire!"

"Fire away!" yelled Deck with all the force of his lungs.

But he reined in his steed; and Ceph obediently came to a full stop, while he unslung his carbine, his companions doing the same without any suggestion from him. They came up to him, and ranged their horses at his side. The carbines were ready for use in a moment, and all three of them were aimed at the five men surrounding the planter. The actors in the tragedy very plainly did not like this demonstration; for they did not fire, though all of them had aimed at the intruders on this side of them. The distance was still considerable, and probably they had no great faith in the arms in their hands.

"Now we will go ahead, if you are ready, Fox and Owens," said Deck, though he had no authority whatever to direct their movements.

The speed and sagacity of Ceph appeared to have placed him in command of the little squad, for his horse always kept away ahead of every other when he was permitted to do so. Deck was a brave fellow; he seemed to have no idea of anything like fear when he was required to face an enemy; but his father, who thought his son was inclined to be reckless, had carefully instilled into his mind the necessity of prudence.

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Knox had said that he intended to do most of the work on the present occasion; but just now it looked as though the whole of it had fallen on Deck's party. It was possible that he and his men had been entangled in the bushes and young trees, or had come to some water they could not easily pass. Deck led the way, and his companions kept close to him. The man in the tree had passed the line over the branch, and thrown the end down to the others.

"Halt where you are!" shouted the man who had spoken before; and this time his voice gave Deck a thrill which caused him to stop his horse.

The two parties were not more than two hundred feet apart; and the leader believed the speaker was his uncle, Captain Titus Lyon. This gave him much to think of besides the identity of the commander of the expedition upon which the squadron had fallen. It was evident to him that the first work of the cavalry squadron raised at Riverlawn was to be fighting the Home Guards, or "ruffians" as they had hitherto been called. [Pg 80]

Deck was annoyed and disconcerted at the discovery he had made, and it checked his enthusiasm; for the quarrel with Uncle Titus, which he insisted upon carrying to extremes, was in the family. The forces at Riverlawn had defeated and driven off him and his command three times, and it was an old story. He had hoped and expected that the campaign would present the war in a new aspect.

It gave the young soldier his first lively impression of the results of civil war. He was not at all inclined to shoot his father's brother; though he was just as earnestly determined to do his whole duty to his country, without regard to his relationship with any of the combatants on the other side. They were there by their own choice, and were responsible for the consequences.

With his carbine ready for instant use, Deck rode forward very slowly; and, more than at any time before, he wished Knox would arrive upon the scene of action. Captain Titus could now be clearly identified; and he had evidently made up his mind to proceed with the business in hand, as only three men had appeared so far to interfere with the operation. He had turned his attention from the intruders, and was talking to the unfortunate planter he had captured in a brutal manner, and shaking his fist frequently in his face. [Pg 81]

"Stand by the rope!" called he to the other men. "The fellow is as obstinate as a mule, and we must make an end of him."

"Aim at the men who are holding the rope," said Deck to his companions, and the three carbines were promptly pointed at them. "This thing has gone far enough!" continued he, addressing the principal actor in the scene.

"Who are you?" demanded Captain Titus, stopping long enough in his operation to examine the intruders.

"I don't want to shoot you, but if you proceed any farther with this business we shall fire," replied Deck.

Captain Titus was plainly astonished, if not confounded, when he recognized his nephew in the uniform of the cavalry. He did not like the looks of the three carbines pointed at his men. But Deck felt somewhat ashamed of the delay he had made in relieving the terrified planter from the extremity to which he had been reduced, and he decided to bring matters to a head at once. Starting his horse, he dashed to the rope, and seized it with one hand. [Pg 82]

"Fire at him!" yelled Captain Titus furiously, to two of the ruffians with muskets in their hands.

One of them raised his weapon to aim at Deck, who instantly fired at him. He dropped his gun upon the ground, and grasped his right arm with the left hand. The other man then raised his musket; but both of the other horsemen fired at him at the same instant, and he dropped heavily on the sod.

The three cavalymen reloaded their weapons, and were immediately ready for the next move. The three men at the rope seemed to be appalled at the fate of their associates, and released their hold upon it. A moment later they began to skulk off in the direction of the grove.

"Don't let them escape, Owens!" said Deck, to the one nearest to him.

Both of them darted off at a gallop, and headed them off, driving them back to the tree from which the rope was hanging. Again Deck seized the line, and urged his horse up to the place where the planter was standing. Reaching down from his seat in the saddle, he cut the cords that bound the prisoner, and then directed him to remove the rope from his neck. [Pg 83]

"I owe my life to you, young man," said Mr. Barkland, panting with emotion and excitement.

"I suppose you are a Union man, sir?" added Deck.

"I am; and that is the reason why I am subjected to this outrage," replied the intended victim.

"What brought you here, Deck Lyon? Who sent you here to interfere with my business?" demanded Captain Titus, confronting his nephew with a savage frown.

"We shall not allow any such business as this," answered Deck, who was not at all inclined to parley with the captain of the late Home Guards, now in the service of the Confederacy. "You and those with you will consider yourselves as prisoners of war."

"Prisoners of war!" exclaimed Captain Titus. "I reckon we ain't nothin' of the sort. Do you mean to take six on us with only three?" [Pg 84]

"We shall not take the trouble to count your numbers. Mr. Barkland, you can return to your house, for your wife and daughter are very anxious about you. I hope you have not been injured,

sir."

"Only in my nerves," replied the planter, as he started for his mansion.

At this moment Knox and his three men dashed upon the scene, to the great astonishment of Captain Titus.

"Well, Deck, is the business finished?" asked the sergeant, as he reined up his steed. "We had to go about two miles to get here, and that is what made it so late."

Deck reported what had happened so far. The man who had dropped so heavily on the ground was not killed; but he was bleeding from a wound in the side of the head, and the ball had only stunned him. The other man, with a bullet through his arm, was worse off.

"This man who is in command of the company is my uncle, Captain Titus," said Deck in a low voice to the sergeant.

"What! Major Lyon's brother?" exclaimed Life. "I have heard all about him, and he is a pesky troublesome fellow." [Pg 85]

"I don't want anything more to do with him, Life, and I wish you would dispose of him," added Deck.

"Do you want me to kill him? I can't do that; for"—

"Nothing of the sort!" interposed the nephew warmly. "Of course I don't want you to do anything of the sort."

"We have six prisoners of war, and we will march them down to the main body," added Knox.

The sergeant proceeded to form his prisoners in a single rank; but Captain Titus appeared to have brought all his obstinacy and unreasonableness with him, and he refused to take the place assigned to him.

"Where are you going?" demanded the prisoner, as though he still ruled the roost, as he had doubtless done in his company.

"None of your business where we are going," replied the sergeant. "If you don't take your place I shall put you into it." [Pg 86]

"This thing won't last long, for my company will take a hand in the business in the morning, and a battalion of Texan cavalry will make it warm for you."

"We are not talking about your company or any Texan cavalry. Will you take your place in the line? That's the only question you have got to settle," returned Knox.

"I won't take any place!" replied the captain with a volley of oaths.

"Swear not at all, my man," continued Life, as he seized the rebellious prisoner by the back of his coat collar, lifted him clear of the ground, and then brought him down in the place assigned to him. "Stay there!"

"I won't stay there!" growled he, as he attempted to leave the spot.

But Knox seized hold of him again, lifted him up, and slapped him down across the pommel of his saddle, face down.

"Any way you like, my man; but you are going with this crowd. Forward, my men!" and he placed himself at the head of the squad, and started in the direction of the road, in spite of the struggles of the prisoner. But they had not reached the road where they had first seen Cato, when the head of a column appeared in the act of turning into the field, doubtless guided by Hart, the messenger who had been sent to report to the major in command. [Pg 87]

Knox halted his little force, and threw his prisoner on the ground without any ceremony, ordering Owens to take charge of him. The column consisted of only the first company, the other having been sent to take another position. Captain Truman had been ordered to hold himself in readiness to cut off the retreat to the westward of the force which Lane had reported upon.

"What have you here?" asked Major Lyon, as he saw the six prisoners in front of Knox's scouts.

"Prisoners, Major; and I am sorry to say that your brother is one of them," replied the sergeant. "They were about to hang the planter, Mr. Barkland, who lives in the mansion yonder; but we saved him, and sent him home."

"My brother a prisoner!" exclaimed the major very sadly.

He gave the order to march, and the first company proceeded towards the planter's mansion.

CHAPTER VII

PREPARING FOR ACTIVE OPERATIONS

The discipline which Knox had administered to Captain Titus had taken some of the obstinacy out

of him, and he was willing to march with the other prisoners. All of them had been engaged in the "Battle of Riverlawn," as it was called, when the mob had been driven away from the plantation. They were placed between a couple of ranks of troopers, and no further attention was given to them till the company halted, a short distance from the mansion.

It was the camp for the night; and the horses were picketed, the tents pitched, and a cordon of sentinels stationed around the whole. The prisoners were provided for as comfortably as the soldiers, and the major had an opportunity to inquire into the situation. He had reached the point to which he had been ordered. The region in the vicinity of the railroad bridge had been examined by a large body of scouts, and nothing like an enemy had been discovered. A trio of negroes had been seen, and they were always ready to tell all they knew to persons wearing the national uniform. [Pg 89]

There was no military force near the bridge. After Knox had sent back a messenger with the information obtained from Cato, that "a whole regiment" was encamped at the right of the road, Major Lyon had sent a couple of trusty men to examine the locality. These soldiers had crept cautiously into the woods, and found the force indicated; but it consisted of only a single company, as they could see by the light of the camp-fires. They had no tents, and most of the men were lying about on the ground.

It was now evident that this was Captain Titus's company. They were encamped near the railroad; but there were no bridges of any consequence near them, and they had doubtless postponed the work of the expedition till the next morning. Though the major had never even heard the name of Mr. Barkland, the planter, his brother must have had some information in regard to him, or he would hardly have visited his mansion and attempted to extort money from him. [Pg 90]

Major Lyon did not care to meet his brother, for his conduct had been explained to him, and he was in a bad frame of mind even for him; but he ordered Knox to bring another of the party engaged in the outrage to his tent. He had selected one who appeared to be a reasonable man, and his manner was quite different from that of the captain. The major had seen him before, but he knew nothing about him.

"Do you belong to the company encamped in the woods farther down the road?" asked the major.

"How do you know there is any company there?" demanded the fellow, who seemed to be somewhat surprised at the question.

"I ask questions, but I don't answer them," replied Major Lyon with a smile.

"That's jest my case," replied the Home Guardsman with a capacious grin. "I don't tell all I know every day 'n the week."

"You don't know so much that you couldn't tell it as often as that," added Captain Gordon, who was present at the interview, and thought the major was more pleasant than the occasion required. [Pg 91]

"But I know sunthin' you want to know," chuckled the man.

"Not at all; I know all about your company," said the major.

"Then what did you ask me if I belonged to it for?"

"Knox, this man thinks he knows too much, and you may take him away," called the major to the sergeant, who stood at the door of the tent.

"Oh, I'm willin' t' answer you," grinned the fellow. "I belong to that company."

"What were you doing up here, then?"

"Cap'n Titus thought the man that lives on this plantation had more money 'n he could manage, and he was willin' to help him take care on't."

"In other words, you intended to rob him."

"I didn't intend nothin' o' the sort. I obey the orders of the cap'n. If you want to know anything more about it, you'll have to ask him."

"Is your company the only body of troops about here?" asked the major, to whom Knox had reported what Captain Titus said about "Texan cavalry." [Pg 92]

"You'll have to ask the cap'n about that; for he didn't tell me all he know'd."

It was evident that the man knew nothing of any importance, and the sergeant was directed to send him back to his quarters. At the entrance to the tent a visitor was waiting, who proved to be Mr. Barkland, and he was promptly admitted. He expressed his obligations for the important service rendered to him, and commended the energy of the young man who had been foremost in saving him from the fatal rope.

"These ruffians must have known that you had your money concealed in the house," suggested the major.

"I haven't any great amount in the house," replied Mr. Barkland. "I have a bank account in

Louisville, and I had some money in the bank at Munfordville; but there are so many marauding parties about in this section of the State, that I took out the little I had in the latter, and had it in the house."

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"Hardly a safe place in these troublous times," added Major Lyon.

"Safer than that bank, I thought," said the planter, "I am a Union man before anything else just now; and I think some Secessionist connected with the bank spread the news about that I had withdrawn my money,—only about thirty-five hundred dollars,—and the captain of this Home Guard had heard it."

"That was unfortunate."

"It would have been for me if your company had not come along. About dark half a dozen of them came to the house, and wanted to get some supper, which I was willing to give them; for I never turn away any one who wants something to eat. The captain wanted whiskey, and I gave it to him; but it seemed to make him crazy, for he did not behave like a gentleman."

"That is apt to be the effect of whiskey," added the major, who was thinking of its results in the case of his brother.

"Then they told me I had money in the house, or the captain did; for none of the rest of them said anything. I replied that I had no money for them; and then the captain became abusive, and threatened me if I did not give it up," continued the planter. "As I said, I am a Union man, and I decided to let them hang me to a tree, as he threatened to do, rather than give up my money to a lot of traitors, who would use it to assist in pulling down the government I believe in. My wife and daughter begged me to give up the money; but I was firm to the end, and even when the rope was around my neck."

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"Your fate would not have been an uncommon one with Union men, unhappily," added the major.

"Could I see the young man that was foremost in saving me? I wish to express my personal gratitude to him for the service; for he was a brave fellow, and managed the affair well, or he would have failed. The ruffians were six to three; but the young man hit in the right place every time."

"Who was he, Knox?" asked the major of the sergeant, who had listened to the narrative while standing at the entrance of the tent.

"It was Deck, Major," replied Knox, with a smile on his wiry face.

"Send for him."

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Deck soon appeared in the tent; and the planter grasped his hand, pouring out his thanks for what he had done. He desired to take him to his mansion, that his wife and daughter might have an opportunity to express their obligations to him; but Deck declined to go.

"Now, Mr. Barkland, do you know of any other body of troops in this vicinity?" asked the major, changing the subject of the conversation.

"Nothing within my own knowledge, Major Lyon," replied the planter. "Captain Tites and his men"—

"Captain who?" interposed the major.

"Captain Tites; that is what the others called him, or, at least, the name sounded like that."

"Very well, Mr. Barkland, go on," replied the chief of the squadron.

"They did not speak out very plainly; but they alluded to a body of Texan Rangers, as they called them, as though they were somewhere in this vicinity," the planter proceeded.

"That captain spoke of them since we took him," said Knox.

"I was just coming up to headquarters to report some information obtained by Sergeant Decker at the road," interposed Deck. "He stopped a negro on horse-back, who was going for a doctor. He said there was a company of cavalry, or more of them, camped about three miles on the road to Greensburg. He knew nothing at all about them."

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"It looks as though there was a considerable force in this vicinity," added the major.

"I have given you all the information in my power, Major Lyon, and I will return to my house. If I can be of any service to you, call upon me," said Mr. Barkland, as he took the hand of the commander.

He left the tent, and Deck soon followed him, leaving the major and Captain Gordon alone. On the table in the centre of the tent was a map, which these two officers had been consulting when the guardsman was brought in. On it the major had made several crosses with a red pencil, indicating the location of the railroad bridge, which was believed to be the objective point of Captain Titus's company, the camp of this force, the mansion of the planter; and now he made another at the supposed location of the cavalry camp of the enemy.

"There is a prospect of some fighting in this vicinity by to-morrow," said Captain Gordon, as he

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looked at the crosses on the map.

"Colonel Cosgrove rode over to Riverlawn yesterday to inform me that Captain Titus's company had left the day before, at an early hour in the morning, marching on the railroad. He had just obtained some news, which he considered reliable, to the effect that an order had come up for the destruction of the railroad bridges," added Major Lyon, as he put his pencil point on the road. "It was understood in Bowling Green that General Buell was about to send troops to the southward, and this is an attempt to break up the means of transportation by rail."

"If there are any Texan Rangers about here, they must have been sent from some other point," said Captain Gordon. "But we know where the enemy are, and that is half the battle under present circumstances. The cavalry and the infantry of the enemy are at least five miles apart."

"Captain Truman has the infantry where he can put his hands on them in the morning. His orders are to send Lieutenant Gadbury to the farther side of the railroad, with half his company, and station the other half behind this knoll, so that neither of them can be seen from the main road, and to have both forces in position before daylight in the morning. Neither force is to attack till the enemy begin operations upon the railroad."

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"I wondered that you did not bag the whole of this company of Home Guards while they were in camp," added the captain.

"Under the name by which we know them, I am not quite sure of their status; and I prefer to have them make a beginning, which will prove them to be the enemies of the government," replied the major. "I gave Truman the most explicit orders, and I have no doubt he will do his whole duty. It is a part of my purpose to have the whole of Captain Titus's company captured."

The major put a good deal of stress on the name by which his brother had been called, for he evidently did not like to pronounce his real name.

"I think your plan of action will readily bring about such a result."

"I put a low estimate upon the fighting character of the enemy in front of Truman; but I have stood up before them, though I believe they are better armed now than when they attempted to capture Riverlawn and Lyndhall. Your company will be held in reserve for the Texans, if there prove to be any."

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"I have no doubt, after all I have heard, that the information in regard to them is correct," added the captain. "It appears from their locality that they are likely to come to the railroad by the road which passes Mr. Barkland's mansion."

The major and the captain arranged a plan for the reception of the Rangers, and then stretched themselves on their camp-bed, to obtain a little sleep before the exciting events which were expected the next day. At about midnight the sentinel awoke them, saying that the planter desired to see the commander. He was admitted, and reported that two men had just been to his house to inquire for "Captain Tites." One of them, he said, was Lieutenant Lager, in command of the company in the absence of the captain.

Major Lyon turned over and went to sleep again, satisfied that Buck Lager would begin operations in the morning.

CHAPTER VIII

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THE ACTION BY THE RAILROAD BRIDGE

It was hardly daylight the next morning when Major Lyon sprang from his camp-bed. The first thing he recalled was the visit to his tent in the night of Mr. Barkland. He thought it was rather strange that Captain Titus had not brought his lieutenant, as it now appeared that he was in reality, as he had been before only in appearance; for he was a ruffian of the rudest stripe.

Three months before he had attempted to shoot Levi Bedford, the major's faithful overseer, as he drove past his house; and he had been his brother's principal supporter in the attacks of the mob upon Riverlawn and Lyndhall. He was just the desperado for such work as that in which the commander of the Home Guards had engaged the evening before.

"Sentinel!" called the major to the guard at headquarters.

"Here, Major!" replied the soldier.

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"Send for Dexter and Artemas Lyon. Have them report at headquarters mounted," added the major, as he proceeded to complete his simple toilet.

The "assembly" was not sounded that morning, lest the noise should be heard in some other camp; but all the men had been called verbally, and were getting ready for the business of the day. The troopers assigned to that duty were watering the horses at a brook which flowed through the plantation, and others were striking the tents. A number of pickets on foot had patrolled the roads for a mile from the camp, but there had been no alarm during the night. Deck and Artie promptly reported at the major's tent as they had been ordered to do.

"Good-morning, boys," said their father. "Do you know where the railroad bridge over the creek

is?"

"I do," replied Deck.

"I have a message for Captain Truman. You will find his company in two divisions this morning, one on each side of the bridge, and both of them are in concealment by this time in the morning. The captain is behind the hill, just this side of the creek. Do you think you can find him?"

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"I know I can," replied Deck.

"You must remember that he is keeping his men out of sight. My message is for him alone. He is not aware that Captain Titus and his companions at the mansion were captured last night. Whether the work will be carried on by his first lieutenant or not, I don't know. This officer is Buck Lagger; and I know that he will be glad to get the command of the company, even for a short time. I believe he will begin the destruction of the bridge early this morning; for, according to Levi Bedford, Buck believes he is a bigger man and an abler captain than his superior officer."

"I have no doubt if there is any mischief to be done, Buck will do it as soon as possible," added Deck.

"But if he fails to do so, tell Captain Truman to move over to the camp they occupied last night, and to keep his eye on the company. You will also inform him that there is a company of Texan cavalry in camp about three miles to the south-east of us, and they will probably be on the move this morning," continued Major Lyon.

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"Texan cavalry!" exclaimed Deck.

"Music somewhere here to-day," added Artie with a smile.

"The first company will be between this enemy and the second company, and you will tell Captain Truman to give no attention to them. Now go as soon as possible," added the major; and the boys started on their mission.

The horses were in excellent condition, and the boys were pleased to have something to do that brought them out of the ranks for a time. The section of country which one could take in from the hill on which the mansion of the planter was located, included the railway and two common roads. South of the railroad, and extending in the same general direction, was the road by which the command had marched from Riverlawn.

The camp of the Home Guards was at the south of it, and half a mile from it; for it appeared to have been a part of the purpose of Captain Titus to conceal his force. The half-dozen shots which had been fired as the troopers passed came from a party of strollers, it afterwards appeared; and Buck Lagger, in charge of the camp, had not discovered the presence of the cavalry from Riverlawn.

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At the point where Cato had been first seen, and who had given the information in regard to the outrage at the mansion, the road to the south branched off, or rather crossed the other at right angles. On this one was the mansion of Mr. Barkland, and about three miles farther south was the reported camp of the Texans. Deck had had no opportunity to study the panorama of the region as it might be seen in the daytime from the hill by the planter's house, for the darkness shut off his view.

The camp of the first company was on the south road, and the boys rode in the direction of the railroad bridge. The day was breaking in the east, but it was not light enough to see distinctly the prominent object in the vicinity. They could make out the hill where they expected to find Captain Truman, but not the one on the other side of the railroad.

"Hold on, Deck!" said Artie, when they came to the crossing of the roads. "I hear a noise off towards the west."

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"It is the tramp of men's feet; but that is none of our affair," replied Deck.

"I have no doubt it is the Home Guards," added Artie.

"I know it is; didn't father say they were to come over here to do their work? We can report to Captain Truman that the enemy are approaching, and he will be glad to get the information."

Deck started his horse; but they had been directed to move with as little noise as possible, and they could not hurry. They took the cross-road, and the hill was on the right, and the railroad bridge on the left of it. Leaving the road, they struck into the field, and moved toward the station of the first half of the second company.

"Who comes there?" called a voice from the grove that surrounded the hill.

"Friends," replied Deck.

"Advance, friends, and give the countersign."

"Riverlawn," answered Deck, giving the word that had been selected the day before. "We have a message for Captain Truman from Major Lyon. Where is he?"

"Not far from here," replied Blenks, who was in charge of the picket line. "I will conduct you to him."

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They found the captain seated on his horse, apart from his command, eating his breakfast from his haversack. The men were all mounted, and in readiness for immediate service, though they were standing at ease, some of them taking their morning meal.

"Good-morning, Deck," said Captain Truman, as he recognized his early visitors. "You left your bunk in good time this morning."

"We are the bearers of orders from Major Lyon," replied Deck, who was in the habit of doing most of the talking, though Artie had a tongue of his own; and he repeated all the orders and all the information with which they had been charged.

"Captain Titus a prisoner!" exclaimed the captain, when he had finished. "Then it remains to be proved whether or not Lieutenant Buck Lager will execute the orders received by Captain Titus."

"We heard them down the road as we came along," said Artie.

"I have no doubt they will be at work within half an hour," added Deck. "But we must hurry back, for our company will move farther to the south, I think, judging from the message we brought to you." [Pg 107]

"But you can't go now, for you will meet the Home Guards by the time you get to the south road. The ruffians would be glad to get a couple of prisoners like you and Artie; for then Buck Lager could exchange you both for his captain."

"Such an arrangement would not suit Buck Lager at all," replied Deck. "When Levi Bedford brought Buck to the fort at Riverlawn, after he attempted to kill him on the road, the villain did not speak very handsomely of his captain, but said he should soon be in command of the company himself."

"Be that as it may, you ought not to throw yourselves into the midst of these ruffians," the captain insisted. "If they don't capture you, they would take great pleasure in abusing you."

"Mounted as we are, I think we could take care of ourselves against the whole of them," answered Deck.

The soldiers of the squadron had an utter contempt for the fighting qualities of this company, and Deck and Artie shared it with the others. But the captain protested so earnestly against their exposing themselves to a needless peril, that they agreed to wait behind some bushes near the south road till the company had passed. They would gladly have learned something more in regard to the plan of the captain; but he was as reticent as military men usually are, and kept his own counsel. The messengers rode to the knoll covered with bushes which they had observed near the road when they entered the field. [Pg 108]

"We shall have a chance to see something of this affair," said Deck, as he stopped his horse at a point where the bushes would conceal them from those passing in the road.

"Do you suppose the first company will remain where they are for any length of time?" asked Artie.

"Father didn't say anything about that; but I imagine he will put the company in a position to meet the Texans."

"There they come!" exclaimed Artie. "They are just turning into the south road. Buck Lager looks big enough to be a brigadier-general."

"But they are straggling along as though they were going to a picnic," added Deck. "There are some of them half a mile in the rear." [Pg 109]

Then the boys observed two wagons drawn by mules, and the stragglers appeared to be the guard for their protection. Buck Lager led the compact portion of his command, who were armed with axes as well as muskets. The south road ran under the railroad bridge, and the Guard halted there. The lieutenant lost no time in beginning his work. A portion of the men went to work at the abutment, trying to remove some of the stones in the wall, evidently with the intention of blowing up the end of the structure when the wagons arrived with the powder.

About one-half of the men were sent to the platform of the bridge, climbing up the embankment a short distance beyond the wall. As soon as they reached the wooden portion of the bridge, they began to pull up the planks of the platform, and toss them over into the creek, a work which would not at all interfere with the usefulness of the structure for the passage of trains. These men were in so elevated a position that the boys could distinctly see their operations.

Then they heard the crack of a rifle, and one of the soldiers dropped from the bridge into the creek. This single effective shot was followed by a volley; and, though they could not be seen, it was clear that Lieutenant Gadbury had led his command to the front, and they had opened fire on the destroyers of the bridge. His men were good marksmen; for not a few of them were hunters, and they had had abundant practice at the camp. [Pg 110]

"They can't stand much of that sort of thing," said Deck, much excited by what he saw.

"Not they; they are coming down from the bridge now," added Artie.

"Here come the rest of the company," exclaimed Deck, as Captain Truman, followed by his fifty men by fours, dashed through the field at full gallop. "I reckon I don't stay here any longer."

"But the baggage-train of the enemy has not come up yet," suggested Artie.

"But I want to see what is going on, and we can't see anything in the road from here, and that is where the fight is going to be," returned Deck, who was far more excited than his brother. "I suppose Lieutenant Gadbury is coming down to the bridge from the north, and now Captain Truman is approaching it from the south. They will have it out there."

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Both divisions of the company halted at some distance from the enemy, and began to pour a murderous fire into them, crushed as they were between the upper and nether millstones. The plan of Major Lyon had been carried out to the letter. The Guards returned the fire with all the energy they could muster; but it was very soon evident that their weapons were doing little harm to the cavalry.

"This is little better than wholesale murder!" exclaimed Captain Truman; and he sent the second lieutenant, with half his men, into the field, with orders to charge the enemy in concert with him.

This charge was made; and the enemy were ridden down by the horsemen, till they cried out for quarter. Buck Lagger lay dead upon the ground, with not less than a dozen others, while half the rest of them were wounded. The victory was complete, and the cavalrymen were only sorry they had not met a foe worthy of their steel. Eight of them were wounded, two of them severely.

CHAPTER IX

[Pg 112]

AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE ENEMY'S SCOUTS

The baggage-train of the Guards had seen from a distance that the battle had begun, and they had halted in the road. They still blocked the way for Deck and Artie; but they could no longer remain as spectators to the exciting scene which had just transpired, and had ridden down to the field of action; but the fighting had ceased. The cavalrymen were picking up their wounded; and Dr. Farnwright, the surgeon of the battalion, was attending to their needs.

"Well, boys, this affair seems to be finished; and we made very short work of it," said Captain Truman, as they rode up to the spot where he was observing the labors of the men.

"We have seen the whole of it, and now we are ready to return to our company," replied Deck.

"The road is clear now, and there is nothing to prevent your return."

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"The wagons of the enemy have halted in the road, and there seems to be half-a-dozen men or more in charge of them," said Deck.

"I will send a squad to bring them in," replied the captain, as he called a sergeant near him, and directed him to take ten men and perform this duty. "You will go with Sergeant Langford, boys, and I think you will be all right."

"Have you any message for the major, Captain?" asked Deck.

"You have seen the skirmish yourselves, and you can report it as it was. We were fired upon smartly for a time; but the muskets of the enemy were of all sorts and kinds, and most of them good for nothing. We have eight men wounded, two of them badly, and the rest slightly. Sergeant Langford has just reported to me that the enemy lost eight men killed, and fifteen wounded, some of them fatally. The rest of the command are prisoners."

Sergeant Langford appeared with his ten men, and the boys went with him on their return to their company. It was not yet sunrise, and the principal task of the morning had been accomplished; for the action had lasted hardly more than a quarter of an hour. Lieutenant Blenks was compelling the Guards to pick up and care for their own wounded, and to bury their dead. The men were sulky, and the cavalrymen were compelled to drive them to this duty.

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"It was sharp work for a few minutes," said Langford to the boys, after he had called them to his side.

"It was; but the thing was very handsomely done," replied Deck. "I think these ruffians have had quite enough of it."

"They are as sulky as a bear that has lost her cubs. They were not willing to pick up their own dead and wounded, and wanted our boys to do it for them; but a few slaps with the flat of the sabres brought them to the point," added the sergeant. "I suppose the work in this quarter is done now."

"I think not. I doubt whether we have finished," replied Deck; but he said nothing about the Texan Rangers, for he did not feel at liberty to use the information he had obtained as a messenger.

The wagons of the enemy had halted where the men in charge of them could see what had happened at the bridge; but when the sergeant's squad approached them, they brought their muskets to their shoulders, as though they intended to defend their property.

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"Unslung carbines!" called Langford to his men; and they promptly obeyed the order.

But the baggage guard did not fire; for some one among them seemed to have more sense than the others, and had interposed to prevent a useless sacrifice of life. A dispute followed among them, and the sergeant advanced upon them.

"No more jaw!" interposed Langford. "Start your mules, and go ahead!"

"Where are we going? We ain't no use over there now," said one of the men.

"You are no use anywhere! Start your teams!" added Langford, as he slapped the last speaker with the flat of his sabre. "Shove them along, boys!"

"We ain't goin' over there; we'll turn round and go back where we come from," added the spokesman of the party.

"Are you all idiots?" demanded Langford. "Your wagons are wanted over at the bridge, and that is where you are going."

The troopers soon started the teams with a vigorous use of the flat sides of their sabres. The guardsmen were disposed to resist; but they were vigorously pushed forward, and when a fellow hung back, he was gently pricked with the point of the sharp weapons. [Pg 116]

"I believe a good part of these ruffians are idiots, as Langford suggested," said Deck, as he and Artie rode forward. "They don't seem to understand that they are taking part in the war."

"That's so," replied Artie, laughing. "If they find they cannot destroy the bridge, all they have to do is to go back where they came from, and call it square. But Langford has brought them to their senses."

A smart gallop of a few minutes brought the messengers in sight of the mansion-house of the plantation. The first company was not where they had left it in the early morning; but they soon discovered a couple of the men, who seemed to be patrolling the south road.

"Where is the company, Yowell?" asked Deck, when they came within speaking distance.

"Behind the mansion. We were sent down to look for you," replied the soldier. "Major Lyon was afraid something had happened to you." [Pg 117]

"We are all right. Have you seen any of the enemy up this way?"

"Not a man of them. If you take this path it will bring you to the house, and you will find the major there."

The boys took the path indicated, and put their horses to their best speed. When they came to the house, they were greeted in the yard by the planter and his family, and the ladies poured forth their gratitude to Deck for the service he had rendered the evening before. But the young cavalryman could not stop to listen long to them.

"Where is Major Lyon?" he asked, looking about him.

"He is on the top of the house," replied Mr. Barkland.

"Come up here, both of you!" shouted the major from his elevated position.

Giving the reins of their bridles to the orderly, who was there with the commander's horse, Mr. Barkland showed them the way to a platform on the roof of the mansion, from which a full view of the surrounding country was obtained; only the railroad bridge was shut out by a hill.

"What makes you so late, boys?" asked the major, as they presented themselves before him. [Pg 118]

"The baggage-train of the enemy stopped in the road, with half-a-dozen men in charge of it, so that we could not pass it without a fight," replied Deck.

"Has anything been done at the bridge?" asked the commander anxiously.

"Yes, sir; the battle has been fought and won, and the whole company of Home Guards are prisoners," replied Deck, giving the entire story all in a heap.

"That is good news, though I expected no other result. What was our loss?"

"None killed; eight wounded, two of them seriously, the others slightly. The enemy's loss is eight killed and fifteen wounded, some of them fatally," replied Deck, who had studied over the report of the fight he was to make; and then he proceeded to give the details of the affair.

This was in the beginning of the war, and before any battle of magnitude had been fought, so that the action at the railroad bridge seemed to be a considerable affair. The major listened with deep interest to all the particulars. Doubtless he was pleased with the report of the result; but he frequently raised the field-glass in his hands to his eyes as he listened, and it was evident that he was more concerned in regard to the approach of the enemy from the south. [Pg 119]

He put several questions to the boys, which were answered by both of them, and fully informed himself in regard to the situation at the bridge, which was about three miles distant from the mansion.

"You will both return to the bridge; give my order to Captain Truman to leave a sufficient force on the ground to guard the prisoners, to dispose of the dead and wounded, and then to join me at this place with all the men that can be spared," said the major.

The boys saluted him, and hastened to obey the order. In a few minutes they were galloping over the road again. On their way down the stairs they met Captain Gordon on his way to the roof. He had been the recruiting officer sent by the commanding general of the department to organize the first company, and the major had used all his influence to elect him to the office he filled himself. He had declined the position, for he thought it better that the planter of Riverlawn should fill that place. He had an apartment at the major's mansion, and they had been on the most intimate terms from the beginning.

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"I have posted Lieutenant Belthorpe behind the hill," said Captain Gordon, as he saluted his superior officer. "I have given him full instructions."

"I have just sent for Captain Truman and as many of the second company as can be spared," replied Major Lyon. "They have beaten Captain Titus's command, and captured the whole of them."

"Can you make out any movement of the enemy to the south of us, Major Lyon?" asked the captain.

"Nothing yet. Everything is in readiness, I suppose, to carry out our plan."

"Everything; and the men are in fine spirits."

"The only thing I fear is that the Rangers will take the other road to the bridge," suggested the major.

"But that would make the distance at least two miles farther," replied Captain Gordon. "Can it be possible that the commander of the Rangers has obtained information of our presence here, and of the result of the affair at the bridge?"

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"I think not; and yet it is possible, for not many in command could be so neglectful of all reasonable precautions as Captain Titus was."

"If they come this way, we are all ready for them. I have scouts out to the eastward of our position, who will report to us the passage of any force by the east road, as they call it here," continued the captain. "The Texans are not early risers, or we should have seen them by this time. I will return to my company, and await further orders."

The boys understood the necessity of haste, and in less than fifteen minutes their foaming steeds brought them into the presence of Captain Truman, to whom they delivered their message. He had already reduced everything to a condition of order. The wounded had been removed to a deserted shanty, probably used by the railroad workmen, and the prisoners were surrounded by a guard of twenty men. All was quiet on the ground, and the captain was glad to receive the order brought by the messengers.

Lieutenant Blenks had already been placed in command of the camp, and the captain gave the order for Lieutenant Gadbury to have his men in marching order at once; and twenty men from the second platoon were added to their number. But Deck and Artie did not wait for this body to move, but started at once on their return; for they were anxious to be present in any engagement that might take place. They had little compassion for their horses, fond as they were of them, and dashed down the road at their best speed.

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"Hi!" exclaimed Artie, as they reached the cross-road.

"What is it, Artie?" asked Deck, who was looking to the right.

"Don't you see? There are a couple of mounted men wearing the gray!" exclaimed Artie with energy.

"What are they?" asked Deck.

"What are they? It is as plain as a stone wall to a blind man after he has stumbled over it, that they are the Texans who are expected over here."

"Are there only two of them?" asked Deck facetiously. "Your head is level, Artie, and they are a couple of scouts who are feeling the way for a bigger body further back."

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"One of the Texans tumbled from his horse."

Just at that moment a bullet whistled between the two boys; for the scouts could have no difficulty in making out the uniform of the two messengers. Both of them unslung their carbines; and, without considering what consequences might ensue, both of them fired, Artie delivering the first shot. One of the Texans tumbled from his horse, and Deck aimed at the other; but he was less fortunate in his discharge, for the remaining man still clung to his horse. Raising his carbine, he fired.

"I am hit," said Deck, as he held up his left arm.

The man who had delivered his fire wheeled his horse as soon as he had done so, and galloped back by the way he came.

CHAPTER X

[Pg 124]

THE BATTLE BEGUN AT THE CROSS-ROADS

Deck and Artie Lyon were not veterans in military service; but on several occasions during the preceding six months they had been within the reach of flying bullets. They had not become hardened to the whizzing, boring sound they make in their passage through the air, for they carried wounds and death in their train; but they had considered and talked about the chances of being hit, and fully realized the possible consequences.

"We are in the hands of the good Lord," Noah Lyon used to say; "and if it be his will that we suddenly pass the portals that divide the seen from the unseen, or that we languish for weeks or months upon the couch of pain, we can only submit to the divine will; and all we have to do is faithfully to discharge our duty to God and our country. God and our country! Let this be our watchword, boys; and with it on our tongues and in our hearts, we ought to fear no danger."

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Some appear to be brave in mere bravado, and the pride of many gives them courage; but the bravest men are those who are earnestly devoted to the discharge of their duty; for principle generates courage when it is founded upon religious faith. It was in this firm reliance that the father had schooled his sons. He was a faithful apostle, and they were loving disciples.

"Where are you hit, Deck?" asked Artie, full of anxiety in regard to his brother, though he could see that he was not very severely wounded.

"Right in the arm, half-way between the wrist and the elbow," replied Deck with a smile; for the time had come for him to feel something of what had only been talked about before. "It won't amount to much, though it doesn't feel good."

"Let me see it, and I will fix it up as well as I can," added Artie, as he wheeled his horse till he was at the side of his companion.

The noble steeds stood as quietly as though they understood what had occurred, while Artie rolled up the sleeve of the jacket, and disclosed the wound. The fond and devoted mother had provided each of them with a bandage and a handful of lint, and she had even practised them in doing up a leg and an arm. Artie wiped away the blood, and then applied the lint, around which he wound the bandage, as he had been instructed.

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"It is not a bad wound, as you say, Deck, and I hope you will never have a worse one," said Artie, as he pinned the end of the bandage.

"Thank you, Artie, and you are quite a surgeon," replied Deck, as he straightened out his arm.

"That feels better, though it is still rather warm. But we have business on our hands, and we can't fool away any more time. What do you suppose the presence of those two fellows here means?"

"There is only one thing that it can mean," replied Artie, as he strained his vision to take in whatever might be seen in the direction from which the two scouts had come. "There must be a body of cavalymen not far behind them."

"I don't understand this business," added Deck. "Let's ride up the slope, and then we can see the enemy if there is any there."

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"It won't take both of us to do that. We know, if everybody in the company does not, that there is a company of Texan Rangers camped about three miles from Mr. Barkland's plantation. From their odd uniform we have a right to believe these two scouts belonged to that company. Very likely the captain of it is up to some mischief; and if a part of the force should come over here after Captain Truman has departed to join our first company, they could undo all that has been done, burn the bridge, and recapture all the prisoners."

"That's so!" exclaimed Deck, taking in the argument of his brother, and fully agreeing with it.

"As you are wounded, I will ride up the slope, and see what is to be seen, while you hurry back as fast as Ceph will take you to Captain Truman, and tell him all about it," suggested Artie.

"All right; go ahead!" returned Deck, as he wheeled his horse, while Artie galloped up the slope, which was quite gentle for half a mile.

When the latter reached the spot where the Texan had fallen, he saw that he was not dead, though the blood was oozing from a wound in his breast. His horse was quietly feeding on the bushes at the side of the road; but Artie could not stop to do anything for his wounded enemy, though his heart was big enough to do everything in his power. He rode on at the highest speed of Dolly, as he called her, though she had had another name before he made her acquaintance. He reached the top of the hill, if it could be called such, and the spot commanded a view of the country for several miles.

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It was not a plain which opened to him, for the prospect was bounded by a range of hills several miles distant, the intervening space having a sort of rolling surface. The first object that attracted his attention was a horseman, riding at full gallop up a slope about a mile distant from him. He concluded that he was the scout whose companion had fallen from his horse when he fired his carbine. He must have stopped by the way, or ridden more slowly than at present, or he would have been out of sight in the time he had taken.

Artie had halted on the crown of the slope, for it was useless to go any farther. He could see the country for at least two miles; and it was not prudent for him to proceed alone. He sat upon his horse considering what he should do next. The only course left open to him was to return to the south road; but if an enemy was approaching by the east road, as the presence of the two scouts indicated, it was important that he should ascertain the fact.

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He kept his eyes busily engaged in wandering along the whole horizon to the east and south of him. If Captain Truman's command were not wanted, it would be an error to detain them. On the other hand, the result of the morning's work would be all undone if the enemy should advance after the larger portion of the second company had been withdrawn. It was a perplexing question for a boy of eighteen to settle; and he realized the responsibility that had accidentally, as it were, fallen upon him.

If he was not at the cross-road when Deck returned from his visit to the camp at the bridge, Captain Truman would march his men up the slope, when they might be needed in the vicinity of the planter's house. He decided to compromise with the circumstances, and wait a reasonable time for some evidence of an advance on the part of the Texans. The two scouts had come from beyond the elevation where he stood; and unless they were simply messengers or spies, there must be a force behind them. As spies, they would not have appeared in full uniform.

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When he had waited perhaps ten minutes, he discovered something moving over the top of one of the hills south-east of him. With the utmost eagerness he observed the spot. He could not make out anything that looked like a road. But presently the moving object became more definite to his gaze. He wished he had his father's field-glass; but all he could do was to watch and wait. In a few minutes more the moving object resolved itself into a body of mounted men. They were marching along the summit of an elevation, and he saw them begin the descent.

While still in sight the troop halted, and Artie concluded that the scout who had escaped had come up with them, and was making his report. But he could not leave yet; for it was important that he should report the strength of the enemy, as well as his actual presence in the vicinity. The young cavalryman had a full view of the valley into which the troop were descending; and as soon as they marched again he estimated, and even counted, the number of men.

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The Texans did not compel him to wait a great while, for they resumed the march at full gallop. They had been moving at a very moderate gait when Artie first saw them. The report of the scout doubtless assured the officer in command that a force of Union cavalry was located near the bridge, and he was hurrying his men forward to meet it. Artie had seen enough to assure him of the approach of an enemy, and he started on his return to the cross-road. He had seen the whole of the force, and had estimated its number at forty-four men in the ranks; for he had counted eleven sections of four in each.

Dolly had had quite a rest while he was observing the approach of the enemy; and, as soon as he had obtained the facts, he was in a hurry. He urged his steed forward at her best speed. He reached the cross-road just as Deck appeared there; for the information he brought perplexed the captain not a little in regard to his duty under the changed circumstances, and he had been detained to answer a great many questions.

"Where is Captain Truman?" shouted Artie, as soon as he was within speaking distance of his brother. [Pg 132]

"He will be here in a few minutes with his men," replied Deck, who had also remained, to have his wound properly dressed by the surgeon. "Have you seen the enemy, Artie?"

"I have; and they are within a mile and a half of here now," replied Artie. "They are advancing with all speed, and they will be here in a few minutes."

"Here is the captain," added Deck; and a minute later the troopers were halted.

"Here is Artie, Captain Truman; and he has big news for you," said Deck, who appeared to have forgotten that he was wounded.

"Your report, Artie," demanded the captain.

"The Texan Rangers—at least, that is what I suppose they are—will be here in ten or fifteen minutes, if they don't stop by the way."

"Is it a large force?" asked the captain, with some anxiety visible on his face.

"Forty-four men, as I estimated them, besides the officers."

"We outnumber them, then. But I am ordered to report at the planter's house," said the officer, who appeared to be musing upon the situation. [Pg 133]

He was not an experienced officer; and his mind was charged with the idea that the soldier must obey his superior officer, though his intellect was broad enough, and he had read in his military books that one in command of a force must use judgment and discretion. This was what he was thinking of when he alluded to his orders, which he would not have done if the boys had not been the sons of the major, and he was on very intimate terms with them.

"But, if you obey your orders, the bridge will be destroyed, and the"—

"I don't intend to obey them; I am not quite blind, my boy," interposed Captain Truman, with a smile on his face. "Less than fifty men, you say, Artie. I made up my mind, from what Deck said, that if there was a force approaching from that direction, the enemy were divided, and were coming to the bridge by the two roads."

"There must be more than forty-four men in the whole company, besides the officers," added Artie.

"No doubt of it," replied the captain, looking about him.

Then he called for Lieutenant Gadbury, and sent him, with thirty men, back to the field where they had been concealed to await the attack of the Home Guards on the bridge. Then he ordered the rest of the men, about forty in number, to unsling their carbines, and formed them across the south road. In a somewhat longer time than Artie had predicted, the head of the enemy's column, arrived at the top of the hill, where they halted. [Pg 134]

A couple of officers appeared in front of the troop, and seemed to be surveying the situation. They could see the railroad bridge, and that it had not been destroyed by another division of the Confederates. But they could not see the camp that had been established at the side of the structure, for it was on much lower ground. They could also see the cavalry of Captain Truman, stationed about six feet apart, so that they extended both ways on the crossing along the south road.

The Union cavalry doubtless looked like a small force to the officers who observed it. They had the reputation of being bold and brave men, and the order to attack was not long withheld. The officer in command led his men down the hill at full gallop, the men yelling like so many demons; for, at this early stage of the war, the troops of the enemy had acquired the notion that these hideous cries would intimidate their foes; but they did not in this instance. [Pg 135]

"Now, my boys, this will be no fool's play!" shouted Captain Truman at the top of his lungs. "These troopers are not Home Guards; and there will be fighting, and no child's play. Stand up to it like men—like Kentuckians, and, above all, like Union men!"

The soldiers responded with a hearty cheer; and they kept it up till the enemy were within gunshot range, where they halted. They were formed across the road, but with only half-a-dozen men in a rank, so that they were still clustered in a rather solid mass. In this condition they delivered their first volley. One of the Union men dropped from his saddle, and only one. If others were wounded, they said nothing. The fire was promptly returned; but, so far as could be seen, with no greater effect than that of the Rangers.

The Union men, as ordered, continued to fire at will; and it was soon evident that their carbines were superior to those in the hands of the enemy, for they discharged at least twice as many [Pg 136]

shots. The report of the muskets had brought the force of Lieutenant Gadbury into the rear of the enemy, and both divisions of the company were pouring bullets into them.

CHAPTER XI

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A DESPERATE CHARGE ON BOTH SIDES

The Texan Rangers were formed in a rather compact mass, while the Union line was considerably extended. Captain Truman had ideas of his own; and, though he was not a martinet, he was disposed to follow strictly the rules and precedents of military practice. His men could not very well fire into forty-five men huddled together in a small space without hitting some of them. On the other hand, the enemy might discharge a volley into his force, placed about six feet apart, with comparatively little effect.

He was surprised to observe how few of the Rangers fell from their horses at the first discharge of his men; but their practice immediately began to improve, and as soon as the detachment of Lieutenant Gadbury dashed into the road in the rear of the enemy, the fire became very destructive. Many of the enemy were killed and wounded, and it looked as though they would all be destroyed.

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The Texans were brave men; they were impulsive and reckless, and they seemed to be perfectly satisfied that they could overcome the Union cavalry, and carry everything before them. In a few minutes it was evident to the captain of the second company that the officer of the enemy had made a fearful blunder, led into it by his impulsive ardor. He had conducted his men into the fight without sufficiently understanding the situation, and without taking the trouble to feel of the enemy beforehand. He had rushed blindly into the engagement with a feeling of contempt for his foe, and with the belief that the Texan cavalry could carry everything before them.

In a few minutes he had discovered his mistake, as he saw his men drop before the fire in the front and rear of his force. He had been beyond the crown of the elevation in the road when Captain Truman stationed his flanking party behind the knoll, where they could not be seen by the enemy. He had recklessly regarded the force in front of him as the entire strength of his foe.

The Rangers were between the upper and the nether millstone, as the Home Guards had been early in the morning; and it was only a question of time when they would all be shot down. In the village of Barcreek, Captain Truman had won a reputation as a chess-player among the better class of citizens who were fond of the game. He had reached the conclusion that warfare was to be conducted on similar principles, and he was on the lookout for an opportunity to "checkmate" his antagonist. He had fought the battle in the morning on the plan laid down for him by Major Lyon.

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By dividing his detachment, and placing forty of them in front of the Texans, and spreading them out so that they appeared to be even a smaller force, he had tempted the attack in which the enemy were suffering so severely. It was not in the power or the nerve of any body of soldiers to stand up against such a deadly fire from their front and rear. They must either be shot down or surrender. It evidently had not occurred to the lieutenant in command of the Rangers to resort to the last expedient to save his men; but he was plainly making a movement to extricate them from the trap into which he had so inconsiderately led them.

"Attention, company!" shouted Captain Truman at the top of his lungs, as he interpreted the movement of the enemy. "Close order, march!"

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The file closed up in a more compact mass. The command was given to sling their carbines, and to draw their sabres; and it was given none too soon, for the captain had correctly divined the intention of the lieutenant on the other side of attempting to cut his way through the force in front of him.

"Can you make out what Lieutenant Gadbury is doing, Deck?" asked the captain, who was rather near-sighted.

Deck and Artie had both remained near the captain; and they had not been idle or indifferent, but acted as volunteers in the second company.

"His men are slinging their carbines, as the enemy have done," replied Deck.

"We are going to have some hot work, my boy. If you are ready to return to the first company"—

"I am not ready to return, Captain Truman!" exclaimed Deck. "I think you need all the men you can have, and I shall add one to the number. I have not heard any firing to the south of us, and I don't believe the first company has been engaged yet."

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"But I am somewhat concerned about our prisoners at the bridge. There are a hundred of them, or very nearly that number. They must have heard our firing, and Lieutenant Blenks may have his hands full. You can render better service by looking after this part of the field," added the captain.

"Of course I am ready to go wherever I can do the most good," replied Deck, who could not help wondering if the captain was not sending him out of the way because he was the major's son.

"You are wounded, and you can be spared better than some other man. Some of our poor fellows have bitten the dust. Ride over to the bridge; and, if Blenks is having no trouble with the prisoners, go over to the rear of the enemy, and direct Gadbury to follow up the charge of the Texans."

Deck saluted the captain, and dashed down the road towards the bridge with all the speed the willing Ceph could command. It was a few minutes that he required to reach the position of Lieutenant Blenks, who had heard the firing, and had drawn up his men for any duty that might be before them. No movement on the part of the prisoners was apparent to Deck, and they were surrounded by a guard, with their carbines in their hands; for the officer had ordered them to be on the lookout for any demonstration.

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"I am sent by Captain Truman to ascertain the condition of the prisoners," said Deck, as he saluted the lieutenant.

"The prisoners are all right," replied the officer with a smile. "As soon as I heard heavy firing I strengthened the guards around them; for I thought they might want to take a hand in the fight over yonder. I had a talk with the second lieutenant of the Guards, now in command, and he told me that a company of Texan cavalry were to have connected with his force here."

"But the force we have engaged cannot be more than half the company; and all of them must have known that at least one of our companies was in this vicinity," added Deck.

"The lieutenant, whose name is Condor, tried to induce Lagger to wait till they had joined their forces before he meddled with the bridge; but he refused to do so."

"Buck Lagger desired to win his spurs while the captain of the Guards was absent. But you need no assistance here," added Deck, as he wheeled his horse.

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"None at all; we could ride these fellows down in two minutes. But their arms are loaded into our baggage wagon, and they could do nothing if they tried," replied the officer.

The messenger galloped up the road and into the field by the side of the east road. It was not cultivated, though it had been years before, and was now overgrown in places by small trees and bushes. Behind these Deck made his way to a point abreast of the enemy. He was in time to hear the order to charge upon the Union cavalry at the foot of the hill. The lieutenant had evidently delayed this order for some time; for when his men ceased to fire, the Union troopers had followed their example, and prepared for the decisive event of the conflict. The messenger rode into the road and saluted the officer in command of the flanking party.

"Captain Truman's order is that you follow up the enemy in the rear as they charge down the hill," said Deck.

"I am all ready to do that," replied the officer, as he pointed to his men, who sat upon their horses with their drawn sabres in their hands.

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They were not more than two hundred feet from the Texans, and Lieutenant Gadbury had already addressed some inspiring words to them. The other division could be plainly seen at the foot of the hill, and both parties were observing the enemy with the most intense interest. Judging from the impetuous and reckless conduct of the Rangers, the conclusion had been reached on both sides to charge the foe; for any other movement would be turning their backs to the enemy.

During the tacit suspension of the conflict, both combatants had improved the opportunity to care for their wounded. Two of the men only had been killed so far, but half a dozen of them had been wounded; for the Texans had given most of their attention to those at the foot of the hill. Of these six, four kept in their saddles, and refused to take the rear. The wounds were dressed as far as possible, and Dr. Farnwright was a busy man at his post on the cross-roads.

Suddenly the officer in command of the Texans appeared in the rear of his force, and made a furious gesture with his sword, pointing in the direction of Gadbury's men. This was not what was expected of the Rangers; and for the moment all the advantage was in favor of the enemy, so far as numbers were concerned.

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"Fours, right about, march!" shouted the Confederate lieutenant. "Now charge with all the blood there is in you! Ride them down, and use your sabres like men!"

The order was promptly obeyed by the Texans, who appeared to be under excellent discipline; but they had hardly whirled around before the watchful eyes of Captain Truman discovered what they were doing, and his energetic shouts of orders could be heard by the force now in front of the Rangers. In another moment the main body of the company were spurring their steeds with all their might up the hill. Their sabres were in their hands, and they were using them in urging forward their horses. They came like a whirlwind, with the captain in advance; and there was not a man among them who would not have been ashamed to be a laggard under such leadership.

It was well known that there were two or more companies of cavalry from Texas in this part of the State, and they had excited an unwholesome dread among the citizens by their desperate bravery and their reported prowess. In the squadron of Riverlawn cavalry, as it was sometimes called, the troopers had talked about them a great deal, and an emulation had been created among them to measure sabres with them. They had the opportunity on this occasion, and the pride of every soldier had been roused to the highest pitch.

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Though the flanking division of the company was now outnumbered for the moment, all the Union men looked upon the change of front in the enemy as something like the appearance of the white feather, and they were encouraged by this phase of the combat. Lieutenant Gadbury, as soon as he saw the change of front on the part of the Rangers, was disposed to take the bull by the horns.

"Open order, march!" he shouted. "Sergeant Lingall, march half the column into the field on the left, and strike them on that side."

With the twenty men left to him, he gave the order to move forward at a gallop, imitating the example of the Texan lieutenant in taking his place in advance. No mercy was shown to the poor horses, which were goaded with sabre and spurs to their highest speed. The two divisions were rushing upon each other with a fury that promised a tremendous shock when they came together. Deck had placed himself in the front rank, and added one to the number reduced by death and wounds.

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He was not a full-grown man; but he was a stout fellow, and as brave as a lion, which he had proved on some former occasions. Ceph, his intelligent horse, fully seconded him. The rider selected the point where he was likely to hit. It looked to him just as though the two officers in command would meet each other, and have a pass with their sabres, for which they had exchanged their dress swords. But the Texan, before the onslaught came, had moved over nearer the left flank of his force, in order to obtain a better view of his men; but he had started to regain his former position just as the crash of the two bodies ensued. He was directly in front of Deck, when Captain Truman shouted to his men to stand up to the work before them, and not yield a hair while the breath of life was in them.

Ceph had been ridden a great deal by his master before he became his war-charger, and he had trained him to some tricks in which the other horses had not been drilled. One of these was to leap over a high bar. As the young cavalryman saw the lieutenant of the enemy directly in front of him, he drew his rein, as Ceph had been instructed; and the steed stood up on his hind-legs, Deck clinging with his wounded arm to his holsters.

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The gallant charger understood that he was to leap over the object in front of him; but it was more than he could do, and he came down with his fore-legs over the neck of the smaller horse of the lieutenant. The horse went down, the rider upon him, and Deck gave a sharp thrust with his sabre at the same moment. The officer was disabled at least, and Deck dashed over him into the thickest of the fight.

CHAPTER XII

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THE YOUNG HERO OF THE BATTLE

The steed of the officer of the Texans was a diminutive animal, and was, perhaps, a mustang from Mexico, a tough little beast with nearly the endurance of a mule. Ceph, in the exercise through which his young master put him when they were alone by themselves, had leaped quite as high as the backbone of the officer's steed; but it was under favorable circumstances. In the furious conflict both the rider and the steed were excited in the highest degree.

Ceph had failed to leap over the back of the mustang, but he had brought him to the ground, and the lieutenant upon him; for he could do nothing for himself, and Deck made a vigorous use of his sabre the moment the enemy was under him, as his gallant charger sprang from the wreck he had accomplished, and dashed forward into the *mêlée*.

If Deck had won no prize for his sabre drill, it was only because none was offered. He was as quick as a flash in his movements, and had a strong arm. The Ranger nearest to his officer when the latter went down aimed a tremendous blow at the head of the young soldier, which would have cleft it in twain if Deck had not parried it skilfully and powerfully. In return, he inflicted the same kind of a blow upon his assailant, whose horse carried him out of the affray when he ceased to direct him, and he fell to the ground at the side of the road.

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The ringing voice of the Texan officer was no longer heard in the furious strife, and the Rangers were fighting each on his own responsibility. Captain Truman had brought up his men, and they had made a tremendous onslaught. The ten men sent to the flank had done their whole duty, and Deck found not a single one of the enemy who was not engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter with a Ranger. The enemy were surrounded, hemmed in, and discouraged by the fall of their brave leader. They were also outnumbered, and one of them was often engaged with two of the Union cavalymen.

The Texans had assuredly done all that could be done, and it was soon evident that they were only defending themselves till they could work out of the desperate *mêlée*. On the flanks, as they could detach themselves from the struggling mass, they fled into the field on the south of the road. Such a conflict could last but a few moments, for there was not breath enough in the human body to keep up such a strain.

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An observer would have supposed that more than half on both sides had been killed; yet very few had fallen to the ground, and fewer still had come out of it without wounds of greater or less magnitude. The Texans fought to free themselves from the embrace of the Unionists, as it were; and as soon as they had worked out of the confusion, they fled at the best speed of their half-

exhausted animals. Some one among them had taken in the lay of the country; and they all fled in one direction, which was towards the road by which they had come from their camp.

The battle was fought, and the Union cavalymen remained in possession of the field. Most of the men were at least spotted with gore, and some of them looked as though they had been at work in a slaughter-house. Dr. Farnwright had already begun his work at the side of the road. Three of the company were silent and motionless, and the surgeon had pronounced them dead. The wagons were sent for, including those of the Guards, and the few who were severely wounded were sent to the hospital the surgeon had established.

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Deck had received no additional wound; and the bullet injury did not trouble him much, for he could handle his reins with the left hand nearly as well as ever. Artie had received three cuts upon his sword arm, but they happened to be all slight. In fact, the soldier who had not been damaged to some extent was hardly to be found. Only five men had been killed, nine wounded seriously enough to disable them.

"You seem to be all right, Deck," said Captain Truman, when they met at the camp.

"I am, Captain, and ready for another fight when you bring it along," replied the young soldier, laughing, and putting a bold face on the situation.

"Don't be too ambitious, my boy," replied the officer, shaking his head. "You have been reckless to-day."

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"But I have come out all right; and I don't think I was any more reckless than the rest of the fellows," added Deck.

"You have fought like a veteran; and I think we owe more to you for the result of the action than to any other single individual, though all the boys behaved like heroes, and proved that they were the equals of even the Texan desperadoes."

"I don't think I did anything more than the rest of our fellows," suggested Deck; and he was not in this matter indulging in mere bravado: he really believed he had done nothing except what came naturally to his hands, as others had done.

"Then I must differ in opinion from you; but while I commend your skill and bravery, I cannot wholly approve of the gymnastics in which you indulged at the beginning of the charge, for it was simply recklessness," said the captain very seriously. "It is your duty to fight courageously, my boy; but it is also a duty you owe to your country, as well as to your father and all the members of your family, to save your life and limbs with honor if you can."

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"Haven't I done so, Captain Truman?" asked Deck, with a very cheerful smile on his face. "I came out with hardly a wound after the bullet hit me in the arm at the beginning. I have nothing but half-a-dozen scratches to show for it."

"You were excited to the highest pitch in the affair, and you have not got over it yet. When you do, you will feel your scratches more. But I hope you will not be so reckless another time, my boy."

"I didn't know I was reckless. Lieutenant Gadbury fired our blood so that I could hardly hold in; and I went in for all I was worth, and only did the best I knew how," replied Deck, trying to cool off his heated blood.

"You didn't know you were reckless, my boy!" exclaimed the captain. "You were a volunteer in the second company, and you advanced ahead of the first rank with the lieutenant. That was a bold exposure; but what I particularly refer to as reckless was your attempt to leap your horse over that of the Texan leader."

"I did not intend to leap my horse over him; but I went for that officer. When I came up with him, and was going to use my sabre, Ceph thought I wanted him to leap over him, for he and I have practised together at that a great deal. He meant right; but I knew he couldn't clear the horse, small as he was, to say nothing of the rider. Ceph came down upon both of them, and I drove my weapon into the officer before he had a chance to stick me. That was the whole of it."

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"If you were not trying to make your steed leap over the horse and rider, I will acquit you of recklessness in that particular."

This conversation occurred as they were moving back to the camp. The wounded on both sides were put into the wagons, the lieutenant in command of the Rangers among the others. He was badly wounded, and his chance of recovery was small. Those the doctor pronounced dead were placed by the side of the road, to be disposed of later.

"How are you now, Artie?" asked Deck, as he rode up to his brother at the camp, and looked at him with anxiety, to ascertain the extent of his injuries, though he looked as rosy and vigorous as usual.

"I'm all right, Deck, though I have a lot of scratches, and a cut on the sword arm which is beginning to make itself felt," replied his brother, quite as cheerfully as the other.

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"I didn't see you till the affair was about over," added Deck. "But you were putting in the dry licks as though you felt that your time for work was very short."

"But I saw you just us soon as we started from the cross-roads, and I did not expect to see you come out of it alive, Deck," replied Artie; and he could not wholly conceal the admiration he felt for his brother since he saw him take his place in advance of his detachment, and vanquish the Texan lieutenant almost in the twinkling of an eye. "The captain said you were reckless at the time of it."

"He don't say so now."

"You tried to leap your horse over rider and steed."

"Ceph did that on his own hook; and I could not very well help following his lead, as I was on his back, though I had nearly slidden off when he mounted in the air. I am not badly damaged, and I am ready to return to the first company; I am only waiting for the captain to write a note to the major."

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"I am all ready to go back, though I should like to have Dr. Farnwright dress the cut on my arm before I go," added Artie. "But he is too busy with the men who are worse off than I am, and I will let it go as it is. But here comes the captain with a paper in his hand. I suppose father will wonder what has become of us."

"He must have heard the firing in this direction. Perhaps he has been fully occupied himself, or he would have sent more men over this way."

No effort had been used to make prisoners of any of the Texans, for the captain had his hands full. He was satisfied that Major Lyon expected warm work where he was, for he would not have sent for the additional force otherwise. The rest of the company with which he had been engaged might be at no great distance from him, and doubtless this was the force the first company was expected to encounter.

"Here is the letter, Deck, in which I have given a hasty statement of the action," said Captain Truman, as he handed him the paper, which could hardly be called a letter. "I believe we have met a portion of the enemy he expected to engage; and probably he is not in a hurry, for we have heard no firing at the south of us."

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"We are all ready to go; but Artie has a wound in his arm which troubles him, and there is no surgeon with the first company," interposed Deck.

"Farnwright!" shouted the captain, as he saw that he had just finished his attention to one patient and was hastening to another.

The surgeon came promptly at his call, and proceeded to dress the arm of the wounded soldier without his dismounting from his horse.

"I wish I had no worse cases than that, my boy," said the doctor.

"I am sorry you have, sir," replied Artie.

"You will be all right in a few days, my young friend; and I learn that you have both fought like Trojans, though I believe Artie did not try to leap his horse over any Texan's head," added Dr. Farnwright, with a look of admiration at Deck, who appeared to have won the laurel of the day on the field.

"Neither did I, Doctor. If any one tried to do a big thing, it was Ceph," protested the hero.

"Ceph? Who is he?"

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"My horse;" and Deck hastily gave his version of the daring deed, as it appeared to be to those who had observed it.

But the dressing of the wound was finished, and the young soldiers started on their return to the camp of the first company. The excitement of the morning had subsided, and they began to feel the wear and tear to which they had been subjected.

"We don't get such a morning's work as this every day in the week," said Artie as they crossed the east road.

"But I imagine we shall get some worse days than this has been," added Deck. "We haven't seen the end of this day yet, and we may be in another fight before noon. I suppose these Texan troopers have been sent over here to destroy the bridges on the railroad extending to Louisville."

"It isn't a great while since the Confederates were trying to keep the road open," added Artie.

"The situation has changed since that, and we are farther along into the war. Then they wanted to keep this road open, so that they could bring provisions down for the use of the armies of the enemy. Now they want to destroy them, to prevent the United States Government from sending troops for the invasion of the Southern States," replied Deck.

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The conversation the rest of the way was in regard to the events of the day, filled up with surmises as to what the first company was doing. When they left Major Lyon he was on the top of the planter's house, surveying the surrounding country, wishing to obtain the first intelligence of the approach of the enemy. Both of the messengers wondered that he had not seen the coming of the detachment with whom the second company had engaged; but they concluded that the road they had taken led them beyond certain hills in that direction.

When the boys reached the mansion of Mr. Barkland, Major Lyon was still on the house, and shouted to them to join him at once.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE PERPLEXING MOVEMENTS OF THE ENEMY

The commander of the squadron had not yet become familiar with the trials, doubts, and anxieties of military life in the midst of actual fighting; and though he was as calm and resolute as ever, he seemed to the boys to be greatly disturbed about something. Thus far all the fighting had been done by the second company; but before this time Major Lyon had confidently expected to be engaged with the cavalry which had encamped three miles from the mansion of the planter.

The reputation of the Texans had been spread over this portion of the State; and they were regarded as terrible soldiers, real fire-eaters, and he had by no means underrated them. He had made the most careful preparations to meet them, and had sent the two messengers to obtain a re-enforcement from the second company, which had successfully completed its work at the railroad bridge, and could spare a portion of their strength.

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Deck handed his father the letter from Captain Truman as soon as he came into his presence. The major opened it without saying a word, for he expected it to give him the information he had been so anxiously awaiting. The firing to which he had listened, though it was so faint that he could hardly make it out, had assured him that something not laid down in his programme had been in progress. While he was reading the hurriedly written communication, Deck and Artie busied themselves in examining the region lying to the eastward of the mansion.

"The road by which the Texans came must be just beyond that hill, a couple of miles from us," said Artie, as they went as far as they could from the major. "I know I saw them come out from behind it; for I sat on my horse, on the highest ground I crossed, watching them for some time."

"There's father's map," added Deck, pointing to the sheet which lay on the railing that surrounded the platform; and then he went for it. "I wondered father did not see this force from his high perch on this house."

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The young soldiers spread out the map, and examined it very closely. They readily found the planter's house, and then a road, nearly parallel to the east one, passing over several hills. The high ground, as they made out the locality with the aid of the map, was covered with forest, as marked and as they could see with their own eyes.

"They went behind that highest hill, and of course they could not be seen from the top of this house," said Deck, as he restored the map to the place where he had found it.

"I wonder he did not send more messengers down, to ascertain what had become of the force he sent for," added Artie in a low tone.

"He was expecting an engagement with the Texans all the time, and had prepared for it, so that he did not want to spare any of his men."

Major Lyon had finished the reading of the letter, which had evidently given him some trouble, for it was written on horse-back with a pencil. He had not heard the conversation of the sons, so deeply had he been absorbed in the perusal of the missive from the bridge.

"It appears that you have had a fight near the bridge," said he, as the boys approached him. "Both of you are very highly commended for your courage and steadiness, and I am glad to hear so good a report of you. And both of you have been wounded."

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"Only some scratches, father," replied Deck. "I got one in the beginning of the action; but it has hardly troubled me at all, and I was able to do my duty through the whole of it."

"Deck was the hero of the day, and the whole company are talking about him down at the bridge," said Artie.

"But I did no more than my brother. I think we both did our duty, if saying that is not vanity; and we had better let it go at that," replied Deck.

"We will let the matter rest till another time, at least," added the major; "for I have something else to think of just now."

Major Lyon took his field-glass, and directed it to the south, as he had done all the forenoon, looking for the approach of the main body of the Texans. He scanned the region in detail, but nothing was to be discovered. Then he proceeded to question his messengers respecting the action, especially in regard to the manner in which it had been brought about.

"There is something concerning the situation here which I cannot understand," said he, with the same perplexed look he had worn since the arrival of the messengers. "I expected your return about two hours ago."

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"We started to come back as long ago as that," replied Deck. "When we came to the cross-roads we discovered two mounted scouts on the east road approaching us. One of them fired, and I was wounded in the arm. We returned the fire, and Artie brought down one of them. The other went

back the way they had come. I returned to the camp to notify Captain Truman, and Artie followed the retreating trooper."

Artie related his experience in looking for the Texans, and the result of his search. Between them both they gave the details of the fight.

"Captain Truman stated that his orders were to join you here; but it was plain enough to him that the camp at the bridge would be captured if he took his force away," said Deck.

"He did quite right; and the approach of the Texan detachment in that roundabout way put an entirely new phase on the situation," added the major, looking down at the roof of the building, while his brow was wrinkled by his active reflection. "We have been waiting since daylight for the coming of the enemy down this south road." [Pg 166]

"Do they know the Riverlawn Cavalry is here, father?" asked Deck.

"Of course they know it; for it appears that they send out scouts a long way ahead, and they must have found out that we are here. I directed Captain Gordon to send scouts out till he discovered where the enemy were; and it is time we had a return from them."

"I have a return from my scouts," said Captain Gordon, springing to the roof out of the skylight at this moment.

"Where are the enemy now?" asked the major anxiously.

"They were breaking camp when my men left," replied the captain. "I sent six men, the most intelligent in the company, in charge of Sergeant Knox, who has performed his duty very faithfully."

"He always does. Have your six men returned?" asked Major Lyon.

"No, sir; Knox returned alone to report. He left Sergeant Sluder and the other four as pickets in the road a mile and a half from here, to report the approach of the enemy if they came this way." [Pg 167]

"But if they were breaking camp, why have we not heard from them before this time?" demanded the major.

"Some of the troopers that escaped from the fight on the east road must have reached the camp by this time," interposed Deck. "Of course they have informed the captain of the company what happened over there."

"What fight?" asked the captain sharply, as he turned to Deck.

The captain had to be informed of what the major had already learned.

"This puts an entirely different complexion on the situation," said Captain Gordon, when he had heard something about the fight with the Texan cavalry. "That detachment of forty-five men were sent over to the bridge. Now, the question is, What were they sent for?"

"I have no doubt the Texan captain is aware of the presence of the Riverlawn squadron in this vicinity. He has found the road here picketed by our men. It looks to me as though this detachment was sent round by that back road to take us in the flank and rear when the main body came down upon us in front. They have been waiting all this time for them to get a position," said the major, with less anxiety on his face than before. [Pg 168]

"But those who escaped from the fight have now given him full information that they were beaten off by our men," suggested Captain Gordon. "They were preparing for a move of some sort; for Knox left his horse in the road, and made his way through fields and groves, till he was in sight of their camp."

"Have you anything to advise, Captain Gordon?" asked Major Lyon.

"I think I should attack them where they are," he replied.

"I cannot agree with you, Captain," added the superior officer.

"But we are losing time whatever we do," said the captain.

"We will march immediately, and with all the haste we can, to the cross-roads. Give your orders to that effect without any delay. Send the prisoners first, with a proper guard," said Major Lyon very decidedly. [Pg 169]

By this time Captain Gordon had acquired a great deal of respect for the judgment of the commander, even in military matters; for he had proved himself equal to the position in which he had been placed; and, mild as he was ordinarily, he had shown that he had a will of his own. But the captain proceeded to obey his orders without offering any objection, and the major had not time to explain his plans in detail.

"Captain Truman and his detachment are coming," said Deck, who had been using his father's field-glass for his amusement, while he listened to the conversation at his side.

"Mount your horse, Artie, and give him my order to return to the cross-roads!" added Major Lyon sharply.

Artie departed on the instant, and Deck remained on the roof. He could see from his lofty position all that took place in the vicinity. He saw the six prisoners, including his uncle, Captain Titus, marched down the slope with an escort of half-a-dozen troopers. The baggage-wagons followed them; and the company was formed in the road by fours. Captain Gordon had hurried the preparations to the best of his ability.

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"The pickets are coming in, Dexter," said Major Lyon, as he returned the field-glass to the case slung at his side. "You can take your place in the ranks, my son. Whether the pickets have been sent for, or are driven in by the enemy, I don't know. We will see when we reach the ground."

The young man followed his father down the stairs. In the lower entry they met the family; and the planter expressed regret that they were about to leave the vicinity of his house.

"I have felt that I was protected from insult and depredation while your command was here, and I am sorry to have you go," said Mr. Barkland.

"I am afraid we should do you more harm than good if we remained," replied the major. "If we stayed here it might produce a fight, and that would imperil your family. I think the enemy will be too much in a hurry to stop to molest you if they march by this road, as they may or may not."

"I had hoped to see more of your son who rendered such a great service last night," said Mrs. Barkland.

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"And I wanted to see him very much," said the daughter.

"They have no time to meet you at present."

"But what is the matter with your arm, Mr. Lyon?" asked Miss Barkland, when she discovered the extra bandage which the doctor had put on outside of his coat.

"I got a scratch; but it wasn't the cat that did it," replied Deck, laughing.

"Both of my boys have been slightly wounded to-day in the action down by the cross-roads; but they are still able to do their duty, and I thank God it was no worse," added Major Lyon, as he took the hand of the planter.

They all took the hand of Deck, and repeated their thanks to him. He followed his father out of the house, in front of which they met Knox.

"The enemy are moving down this road, Major Lyon," said the Kentuckian as he saluted.

"All right; give the captain my order to march at a gallop," replied the commander, as he mounted his own horse.

The column moved; and the major soon reached the head of it, where he took his place by the side of the captain.

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"The enemy have started upon this road," said he. "Whether or not they have sent another detachment around by that back road can hardly be known till we find them there."

"The captain of the Texan Rangers does not seem to have any contempt for strategy, as was reported of him," replied Captain Gordon. "I have no doubt his scouts informed him that the Riverlawn Cavalry were in camp on the plantation."

"And I have no doubt now, from the way things have worked, that the detachment were sent round to take us in the flank. They don't seem to have made any connection with Captain Titus's company, and did not expect to find one of our companies at the bridge."

There was some confusion ahead, and the company were thrown back. The column had overtaken the prisoners and the baggage. The captain sent forward an order for both to take the side of the road. The major saw his brother drawn up with the others, and he shouted "Noah!" as he was passing; but the commander took no notice of him.

CHAPTER XIV

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A LONG WAIT FOR THE ENEMY

The only feeling Major Lyon had in regard to his unfortunate brother was that of sorrow. If he had been disposed to do so, he could not leave his soldiers to converse with him, as Titus evidently desired; for he was hurrying the first company forward in order to unite his forces and secure a favorable position before the enemy in his rear could overtake him. Doubtless Titus desired to make a request of some kind; perhaps to be set at liberty, perhaps only to demand a ration of whiskey.

The captain was so imprudent that he was as likely as otherwise to reproach him, call him a thief, or something of that kind, as he had done before, in the presence of his command. He had been captured in the act of committing a dastardly outrage, as well as being in the military service of the enemy. He was willing to extend to him every reasonable privilege; but he was a prisoner of war, to take the mildest view of his condition, and the major was not a man who could be conveniently blind to an obvious duty.

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The first company proceeded on its rapid march, and in a short time reached the cross-roads, where it was halted, with the head of the column near the camp at the railroad bridge. Captain Truman hastened to the major as soon as he halted, and the commander extended his hand to him.

"I commend you, Captain Truman, for the good work you have accomplished; and I thank you for the skill, courage, and devotion with which you have done your duty. But the enemy are in motion in this direction on the south road, and we have no time for anything but preparation for the immediate future. It is possible that a detachment of the enemy may approach by the east road."

"I have a picket stationed a mile up that road, and we shall have early notice of any force coming from that direction, Major Lyon," replied the captain of the second company, which had just been sent back by the order of which Artie had been the bearer.

"Very well. You have fought a severe fight, Captain; in what condition are your men?" inquired the commander. [Pg 175]

"They are in excellent condition; for they have found that they are fully the equals of the Texans on fighting ground, and they are ready and anxious to meet the enemy again. We have buried our dead, and our wounded are doing well."

Major Lyon had carefully studied the face of the country for several miles in the vicinity of the planter's mansion, from his elevated position on the building, and had observed it for the present situation as he rode down from the plantation. He had confidently expected an attack while he was near the house of Mr. Barkland. He had arranged his plan to receive the assault; and Lieutenant Belthorpe, with one-third of the company, had been sent around through the grove to a position behind a knoll, which would effectually conceal him from the enemy till the time came for him to assail the Texans in the flank and rear.

Captain Gordon had heartily approved this plan, and they had force enough to carry it out successfully. Major Lyon regretted very much that the issue had not come in the manner he had anticipated. The plan of the captain of the Rangers had evidently failed because he had not heard from the detachment sent by the hill road, as the natives called it. He must have had some means of knowing where this flanking party were, or he would have moved sooner. Probably a swift rider was to have been sent back when the force reached the cross-roads; but they had not got so far as that. His first news must have been the defeat of this portion of his command. [Pg 176]

"Captain Truman, have you noticed a considerable knoll on the left of the south road, just above the cross-roads?" asked the major.

"I have; and I thought of posting my reserve under Lieutenant Gadbury there; but I found it was too far off for the time at my command," replied the captain.

"Can it be reached without going by the south road?"

"Very easily; by riding through this field, where we were posted this morning, crossing the east road, and then through a valley, which will conceal the force till they reach the shelter of the knoll."

"How many men can you muster in your company?" [Pg 177]

"About eighty, if you are to remain in this vicinity; for ten or fifteen will be a sufficient guard for the prisoners."

"Then you will march your available force to the point indicated. I see that you have hoisted the American flag on the railroad bridge," added the major.

"It is the camp flag, and I wanted it in the most sightly place I could find," replied the captain.

"It will answer a double purpose, then. Could you see it from behind the knoll?"

"Perfectly; we did not get the flag-pole elevated till half an hour ago."

"I shall send Deck to lower that flag, and remain by the staff till I give him the signal to hoist it again. Then you will march to the south road with all speed, and attack the enemy in the rear or on the flank."

"I understand you perfectly, Major Lyon, and your order shall be carried out to the letter," replied Captain Truman, as he saluted, and hurried to his company, which had been formed in the field by the side of the road.

"Dexter!" called the commander, when he had found his son in the ranks.

Both of the boys had been used as messengers during the morning, and this service had led them into the most dangerous positions; and both of them had fought like heroes as volunteers while their company was at the plantation. [Pg 178]

Deck came out of his place in the ranks, saluted his father, and expected to be called upon for more messenger service, hoping it would lead him into the thickest of the action, as it had before.

"Do you see that flag on the railroad bridge, Dexter?" asked his father, pointing at the ensign.

"I do; and I take off my cap to it," replied Deck, suiting the action to the word.

"You will go to it and haul it down, my son."

"Haul down the American flag!" exclaimed Deck.

"As long as it is not for a surrender or the abandonment of the camp, you need have no scruples about it," replied the major, with a smile at the boy's objection. "You will obey the order, and you will remain at the staff. When you see me wave my handkerchief three times in the air, you may set your conscience at ease by hoisting the flag again."

The commander made the signal over his plumed hat, so that the messenger would be able to recognize it when it was given in the fight, if there should be one, of which he was not altogether sure after the disappointment of the morning.

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"I shall see that signal from the bridge if it is made three miles off."

"Keep your eyes wide open after the engagement begins; for it is a signal, really an order from me, of the utmost importance, and the result of the action may depend upon it," added the major very impressively. "I have called upon you for this service because I know I can depend upon you, Dexter."

"Of course I shall do my duty and obey my orders to the best of my ability," replied Deck; but judging from the expression on his face he was not pleased with the mission assigned to him.

"You can go to the bridge at once; but you will not haul the flag down till I make the signal agreed upon to you," added Major Lyon.

"But, father, do you expect to fight this battle without me?" asked Deck, with a very cheerful smile on his face; and he would not have said as much as that to any other person, even as a joke.

"You have made yourself the hero of the day, and perhaps you ought to have a little rest," replied his father, quite as cheerfully as the son, for he took the question as it was intended.

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"I don't exactly like the idea of squatting on that bridge, and looking on while there is any fighting going on," continued the young soldier.

"But the position to which I have assigned you is one of the most important on the field. I can trust you to be watchful, while another, interested in the action, might neglect his duty."

"I have nothing more to say, father," replied Deck, as he rode off in the direction of the bridge.

Major Lyon had made his dispositions and issued his orders before he spoke to his son. Captain Truman was galloping over the field towards the east road, with sixty men, which was the number finally designated for the service at the knoll. Captain Gordon had posted his men along the roads and the adjoining fields. The baggage-wagons and the prisoners had arrived from the plantations, and Captain Titus had an opportunity to rejoin his company; but the glory of his military life seemed to have passed away. He was treated the same as the rest of the prisoners, and no one took any notice of him. He was not in good odor even in his own company; for his men declared that he had deserted them the night before.

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The enemy had not yet appeared; and even the pickets that had been posted a mile down the south road had not been driven in, which would be the first indication that hostilities were at hand. Those from the second company who were scouting the east road had not been heard from; and they had been ordered to proceed as far as a certain hill, where Artie had first seen the detachment sent that way.

Noon came, and the soldiers ate their dinner from their haversacks, and the horses took their oats from the grass. It was a very quiet time, and the Riverlawn battalion would have been glad to receive an order to march upon the enemy wherever they could be found. They were impatient for something to do, especially the first company, which had not yet seen any fighting.

Major Lyon improved his time as he took his lunch with Captain Truman, in listening to a fuller report of the action on the east road. The commander asked particularly in regard to the lieutenant who had fallen under the onslaught of Deck Lyon. He had been wounded in the chest by a ball, and he had gone down from a cut of the young soldier's sabre. He had been stunned by the blow, and left on the field. But he had been conveyed to the camp in the wagon with other wounded men, and the surgeon had dressed his wounds. He believed he would recover.

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"I should like to see that man," said the major.

"I saw him walking about the shanty hospital not long ago. I spoke with him, and he is a very gentlemanly fellow. You can send for him if you wish, Major. But it is time for me to join my company, as I sent the men in charge of Lieutenant Gadbury; for I had to give some orders in regard to the prisoners."

"I will not send for him; but I will ride down to the hospital, which is only a few rods from the cross-roads. Captain Gordon, I wish to have some one near me to carry my orders, if need be," said the commander, as Captain Truman rode off.

"Your orderly?" asked the captain.

"I prefer Artie Lyon; I have already sent Dexter on duty upon the bridge. I am going down to the hospital; send me notice at once if any movement is apparent."

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Artie was sent to him at once; but Deck had told him where he was going, and he hoped he would not be sent to join him. He followed his father to the hospital, where Dr. Farnwright received him. He asked for the Texan lieutenant; and the surgeon pointed him out, seated on a log at the side of the road.

"This is Major Lyon, commanding the squadron," said the doctor, introducing him.

The officer rose from his seat, and saluted the major very politely.

"This gentleman is Lieutenant Makepeace, of the Texan Rangers," added the surgeon.

"That does not sound like a Southern name," replied Major Lyon, and he took the hand of the wounded officer.

"I am a Northern man; but my home has been in Texas for seven years, though I came from a New England State."

"I regret to see you on the wrong side in this war, though I am sorry that you have been wounded." [Pg 184]

"I don't know exactly how I came in this service; but I was very near being elected to the captaincy of this company, though I am not a Texan."

"Who is the commander of the company?"

"Captain Dingfield."

"There comes the picket down the hill!" exclaimed Artie, who had discovered half-a-dozen men running their horses down the descent.

"Then I must leave you; but I shall see you again," added the major, as he dashed up the road at full speed.

CHAPTER XV

THE AMERICAN FLAG ON THE BRIDGE

As Major Lyon rode out from the hospital he encountered Sergeant Sluder pressing his horse to the best of his speed; but it was hardly necessary for him to deliver the message of which he was the bearer, for there was movement enough among the men to assure him that the enemy were approaching, even if Artie had not seen the return of the pickets.

The major waved his handkerchief three times above his plumed hat, and the American flag came down at once on the bridge. Deck had not fallen asleep at his post, though he found the situation very monotonous. The sergeant reached the commander, and delivered a message from Captain Gordon. The major had never been in a regular battle, only in the affairs with the ruffians at Riverlawn and Lyndhall.

In fact, there had been nothing in the present campaign which could properly be called a battle. The second company had done all the fighting so far. At the bridge a few shots had demoralized the Home Guards; and though the action in the road had been severe, it was hardly more than a skirmish. But the commander had proved before that he had abundance of courage, though he had engaged in less actual fighting than his two sons. [Pg 186]

Major Lyon reached the position of Captain Gordon just as the pickets came in, headed by Life Knox. The men were all in position, and those of the first company were eager for the conflict; for they had done nothing, and rather envied their companions in the second company, who had fought and won a victory against a portion of the enemy. They were very much excited, and it would have suited them better if their captain had led them in a charge at once against the Texans; for the most trying position of the ordinary soldier is when he is in the presence of the enemy, and is permitted to do nothing but wait; and they had been doing that all day.

"You have been driven in, Knox," said Captain Gordon, as the sergeant saluted him.

"Not exactly driven in, Captain," replied the Kentuckian with a cheerful smile, as though events were not moving half fast enough for him. "The Texicans are marching as though they were going to a funeral, and they don't seem to be in no hurry to git here." [Pg 187]

"But you came down the slope as though you were not going to a funeral," added the captain.

"Where are the enemy now, Knox?" asked the major.

"They are about half-way betwixt here and the mansion-house of the planter. I didn't hurry up to tell you they were coming, but to let you know that I had seen a force over on the road in the hills. I thought I saw something moving; and I climbed to the top of the tallest tree I could find, on the highest ground 'twixt here and the planter's house."

"What did you see?" demanded the major.

"I got a look through a small notch between two hills, and I saw some cavalry pass along; but I reckon I saw only the tail end on 'em, for they was out o' sight in two seconds, and I couldn't find

nothin' more on 'em. I knew then why the company wasn't in no hurry."

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"Then, I suppose we are in no hurry," added the major. "I see that Captain Dingfield intends to carry out his plan as he laid it out for this forenoon."

"Who?" asked the captain.

"Captain Dingfield, who commands the Texans; I learned his name from the lieutenant who was wounded. I hardly supposed he would send another flanking party by that road," replied Major Lyon, "This news calls for some change in our plans."

"I reckon that captain on the south road hain't got over fifty men with him, if he has that," continued the sergeant.

"How could you estimate the number, Knox," asked the captain.

"When I am sent out scouting, I generally find out all I can," replied the sergeant, who looked as though he felt that the correctness of his information had been questioned.

"We know you do, Knox; and we only want to know your means of arriving at a conclusion, in order to judge of the accuracy of your report," the captain explained.

"I looked them over when I climbed the tree," continued the scout with energy. "The force was just coming round a bend in the road down a hill, and I counted in fours up to forty. I don't know how many scouts they had out ahead, but I added ten to what I had counted."

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"I have no doubt you are quite correct, Sergeant," added the captain. "I did not doubt your statement in the first place, and I was only curious to know how you were able to make up your estimate."

"I saw that six of you came down the hill together; have you left no pickets in front of the company?" inquired the major.

"The captain gave me nine men to scout the region over there, and six of 'em have come in, for I thought they might be wanted," answered Knox.

"You knew that we had nearly two hundred men at this point," suggested the major, who realized that the sergeant had something in his mind to which he was slow to give utterance.

"If this is a council of war, Major Lyon, I ain't in it, and I've told all I know," replied Knox. "I have reported that the Texicans is divided into two bodies, one on 'em comin' down the south road slower'n cold molasses runs, and the other's movin' over the hill road; and I reckon they ain't goin' to no funeral over yonder."

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"In other words, you think the two divisions of the enemy intend to attack at the same time," added the major.

"What be they goin' over that way for if that ain't what they mean?" asked the Kentuckian in answer to the question. "But I don't feel sartin that they mean to come down here by the east road."

"What else can they do?" inquired the major, much interested in drawing out the sergeant.

"I don't reckon I'd better say anything more. I obey orders, but I don't give none," answered Knox, who was evidently afraid of thrusting himself into the counsels of his superiors. "Captain Dingbat"—

"Dingfield," interposed the captain with a smile.

"Captain Dingfield sent them men over here to knock down and burn that bridge; and I reckon he's go'n' to do it if he can."

"And I am sent here to prevent him from doing it; and I shall do so if I can. You may speak out loud, Knox, just what you wish to say," said the major rather impatiently.

"If you look at that map you had on the housetop, you will see that the hill road crosses the east road, just as this south one does here. Ain't that so, Artie? You have been over there, they say," said the sergeant, appealing to the major's aid.

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"It does; I was up there some time this morning; but I don't know where it leads to," replied Artie.

"It stands to reason that it crosses this railroad somewhere within five miles of this cross-road. That's the way the Texicans are coming down here to destroy the bridge. I've said my say, and I hain't got nothin' more to say," added Knox, wheeling his horse out of the circle that surrounded the commander.

"Artie, do you know where Captain Truman is posted with his command?" asked the major in rather hurried tones.

"I do not," replied the aid, as he had now practically become, though the position was not regular for a private.

The commander pointed out the knoll behind which the captain's force had been sent.

"Follow the east road till you can see behind that hill. Captain Truman is there, and you can

readily find him," continued Major Lyon. "Give him my order to move his command out to the east road, and there await further orders." [Pg 192]

Artie's steed was well rested after his several forenoon jaunts, and he went up the slope of the road like the wind. Sergeant Knox had retired from the immediate presence of the superior officers, afraid that he was getting to be too forward for his rank. He believed that the force moving by the hill road had been ordered to the railroad. While the major was not disposed to accept his view in full, he intended to be prepared for a movement of the kind suggested by the Kentuckian.

"What do you think of the idea advanced by Knox, Captain Gordon?" asked the commander.

"Of course it is possible that he has correctly divined the intention of the enemy," replied the captain. "But it would not be wise to ignore the enemy in front of us."

"I have no intention of doing so; for I have ordered Truman to the east road, in readiness to act to the north of us, while we give our attention to the enemy in front of us. We have men enough to annihilate this force, if it is no larger than Knox states." [Pg 193]

"I believe he is entirely correct in his figures; and I am inclined to have considerable confidence in his theory of Captain Dingfield's plan."

"Probably we have double the force of the enemy in this vicinity; and it would be a crying shame if the bridge were destroyed because we were outmanœuvred," said the major, with more than usual vigor in his speech. "There is the structure within a quarter of a mile of us, and I wonder if they intend to destroy it under our very eyes. But where are the Texans in front of us? Even at a funeral march they ought to be near enough by this time to send in our pickets."

"It begins to look as though they were amusing us while they were making arrangements to burn the bridge elsewhere," replied Captain Gordon, quite as anxious about the situation as his superior. "Artie has made quick work of his orders, for Captain Truman is half-way to the road, just coming out from behind the hill."

Major Lyon thought of Deck on the bridge in this connection, and looked in that direction. The signal for Captain Truman's command to move into the rear of the force advancing by the south road would not be needed. If he deemed it advisable, he could send part of the first company to a point near the road he had already selected. He rode to a place where the ground was a little higher than where the conference had taken place, and there made the signal above his plume upon which he had agreed with Deck and the captain of the second company. He repeated it till he had made it three times; and he could not help thinking what a relief it would be to his son to be permitted to leave this solitary post. [Pg 194]

"A cheer for the American flag, which will be hoisted on the railroad again in a moment!" shouted Major Lyon to the soldiers near him; and the word was passed along through the column.

The cavalrymen were always ready to cheer the flag; and in a few moments the eyes of the entire company were fixed upon the flagstaff on the bridge. The major watched it with as much interest as any one present; and he was ready to join in the cheer, and to lead it off. He waited patiently for a couple of minutes, and then he wondered if his son had gone to sleep at his solitary vigil; for the flag did not mount to the proud position it had held before it was lowered. [Pg 195]

Major Lyon waited full five minutes, but no flag appeared. He could not understand it after the careful charge he had given Deck in regard to the importance of the position to which he had been assigned. It was fortunate that the plan of receiving the assault had been changed; for Captain Truman's command would have remained behind the hill, and out of sight of the conflict, if there had been one, while his men were needed in the road.

As the hoisting of the flag was no longer needed as a signal, the major was not inclined to say anything about his son's failure to do his duty; for all his men might be needed at any moment to repel an attack on the south road, and another on the east road. But he was very indignant, as well as very much grieved, at Deck's neglect of duty; for it did not occur to him that there could be any excuse for or justification of the boy's conduct.

Major Lyon used his field-glass diligently for some time, while he was waiting for the appearance of the first company's pickets, as he had not thought to do at first. With this aid he examined the top of the bridge very closely; but he could see nothing of the absent soldier. It did not enter his mind that anything could have happened to the young man, for the bridge was a high one, and in sight of all in the ranks, and in the camp on the shore of the creek; though the stream was large enough to be called a river in any Northern State. [Pg 196]

Close by the flagstaff, over the abutment of the bridge, was a high fence extending a short distance. Some thought it had been built where the snow was troublesome in winter; others, that it was the side of a shanty which had stood there, and only the roof and ends had been removed. If Deck was not behind this fence, he was not on the bridge, was the conclusion of his father. But a movement on the east road called his attention away from the subject.

The movement on the east road, where the fight of the morning with the Texans had taken place, was occasioned by the simultaneous arrival of the second company from behind the knoll, and the hasty return of the pickets from the hill region. The former was there in accordance with the order of which Artie was the bearer to Captain Truman; but the latter event was the more important, inasmuch as it promised to reveal the operations of the enemy, which had hitherto been concealed.

The sergeant in charge of the picket reported in hot haste to the captain of the second company, by whom he had been sent out; and a moment later Artie was flying down the hill to the major, with the substance, in a short sentence, of the intelligence brought in. The commander had noticed the rapid movement on the road, though Captain Truman had come out of the field half a mile from the cross-roads. The pickets came at a furious gallop; for the sergeant, though not admitted to the counsels of the officers, was intelligent enough to understand the importance of his report. [Pg 198]

Major Lyon, though he had begun to be alarmed at the non-appearance of Deck on the bridge, hastened back to the cross-roads, where Artie soon rode up to him. The delay of the enemy on the south road was generally understood to be caused by the non-arrival of an expected detachment from the hills. The major knew what the report of the pickets would be before it was brought to him; for his impression was that Life Knox was correct in his interpretation of the intention of the enemy. The disappearance of Deck confirmed his belief that operations had actually commenced on the bridge.

"The pickets report that a detachment of about fifty has marched north by the hill road!" shouted Artie, as soon as he came within speaking distance of his father.

"Ride back; give Captain Truman my order to march his command to the cross-roads!" added Major Lyon with more than usual energy, though he was still as cool and self-possessed as he had been all day. [Pg 199]

Artie wheeled his horse, and in a moment he was running Miss Dolly up the slope at a breakneck speed.

"Captain Gordon!" called the major as he rode toward him.

The captain dashed up to him on the instant.

"Send Knox and his scouts to me!" added the commander.

The Kentuckian and the men he had selected for the service in which he had been engaged were at hand; and Knox saluted the major, in readiness for any duty upon which he might be sent.

"Ride to the bridge! Leave your horses below! Get up to the track with all the haste you can make! Deck was stationed there to hoist the flag at a signal from me, which I have made several times; but he does not obey the order, and I begin to fear that something has happened to him," said the major in hurried tones.

"I'll find him if he is there!" exclaimed Knox, with an expression of determination on his face. [Pg 200]

"I think you will find a small force of the enemy near the bridge, Knox. Don't fall into any trap; I will have at least half a company up there in a few minutes."

"I will keep my eyes wide open, Major," replied the Kentuckian, as he rode off towards the bridge.

"Captain Gordon, send Lieutenant Belthorpe with half your company to the bridge. Just beyond the camp he will find a practicable road up the embankment. He will be in abundant season to receive the force approaching by the hill road."

The captain saluted his superior, and made no reply. It was evident enough to the commander that Captain Dingfield had been on the alert, and that he intended to destroy the bridge even in the face of, and under the very eyes of, the Riverlawn Cavalry, of double his own strength, though he might not be aware of its numbers. If Major Lyon did not manifest his chagrin and annoyance at the present situation, he felt it none the less.

He realized that Captain Dingfield had been amusing him all day with the prospect of a fight, while he was carrying out his plan for destroying the bridge. It was all plain enough to him now, and he wondered that he had not placed a guard on the bridge early in the morning. It looked now like a serious omission; but he hoped it was not too late to remedy the defect in his plan. What had become of Deck was a mystery he could not fathom. [Pg 201]

After the hauling down of the flag, the major had been too fully occupied elsewhere to think of the bridge, and he had not even glanced at it till he made the signal. It had not occurred to him that the structure could be in any danger while his squadron was in sight of it. He watched the force of Lieutenant Belthorpe as they hurried by the road to the point where they could ascend to the track, and he believed he had done all that was necessary to save the bridge from destruction.

Captain Truman was approaching the cross-roads with his company, and the attack of Captain Dingfield might be expected very soon. It was necessary to make a new arrangement of the

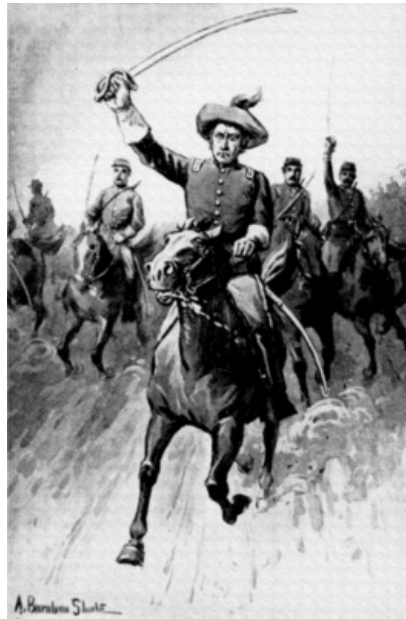
troops. The major had already formed his plan, and he wheeled his horse to join Captain Gordon and give his orders. At this moment an explosion rent the air, which made a great deal of noise, though it had not the volume of an earthquake.

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Major Lyon turned his head, expecting to see the bridge a wreck, with the fragments of it flying in the air. He looked for Knox and his companions, who had been ordered to climb upon the bridge without waiting to ride around to the embankment. They had not yet mounted the abutment, and were then securing their horses near the bank of the creek. But the bridge was not a wreck, though some timbers and planks had been elevated in the air; but most of the matter that was thrown up appeared to be earth and stones.

But where was Deck? Even with the pressure of duty upon him, he could be excused for thinking of his son, who had so strangely disappeared. He watched the movements of Knox and his men. If they had been a couple of minutes later they might have been hurled from the high structure by the force of the explosion. But he was greatly relieved when he saw that they were not harmed, or at least not disabled; for he saw the tall Kentuckian running with all his might to the abutment, followed by his five men. They were all there, and they began to climb up the wall.

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"Sling carbines! Charge them!"

Something like a shout from the direction of the cross-roads attracted the major's attention at this moment. Wheeling his horse again, he saw the pickets rushing down the hill beyond which they had been observing the enemy on their "funeral march." Their return could mean but one thing, which was that Captain Dingfield's command were advancing.

Lieutenant Belthorpe was hurrying his force to the embankment; and if there were any Rangers there, he would soon confront them. Knox and his companions had reached the top of the bridge, and all of them were busily engaged about something; but the observer could not tell what it was, though the appearance of several small volumes of smoke indicated that the Texans had started several fires on the wooden structure.

The head of the enemy's column had not yet appeared on the hill which shut off the view of the planter's mansion, and there was time enough for the major to make the dispositions of his force. Half of the first company were left, and the whole of the second, except the twenty men doing guard duty at the camp. The commander had in the neighborhood of a hundred and twenty-five men on the spot; and with this force he could soon annihilate the fifty troopers, more or less, who were marching to the attack, or were supposed to be doing so.

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"Captain Gordon, take what is left of the first company, and make a detour to that hill on the right of the road. It is nothing more than a knoll; and you will attack them on the flank as soon as Truman engages them in the road," said the major.

"I was thinking of suggesting that as soon as you sent for Captain Truman at the knoll on the other side of the road," replied the captain, when he had ordered Gilder, his second lieutenant, to march the platoon to the place indicated.

"I have no doubt that explosion was the signal for the advance of Captain Dingfield," added the major, as he looked back at the bridge, where the sergeant and his men were still at work.

"It looks so; and the Rangers must have had some men over near the bridge who got up that attempt to blow it up. But it looks as though it was a failure," replied Captain Gordon, as he rode off to join his command.

Captain Truman, with about seventy-five troopers, was at the cross-roads, waiting for orders. The major directed the head of the company to place the troopers in the road and at the side of it, with their carbines unslung. The commander had sent Artie for a sabre; and he had taken

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possession of it, indicating that he did not intend to be an idle spectator to the conflict if his personal service was needed.

"Can I take my place in the ranks where I belong, father?" asked Artie.

"No, my son; I may want you at any moment to carry an order," replied Major Lyon; and possibly he thought this might be the only son left to him since the disappearance of Deck.

"There comes the head of the column!" exclaimed Captain Truman.

"Have your men all ready to fire, Captain," added the major. "But don't be in a hurry to do so. I will give you the order."

It was no longer a funeral march on the part of the enemy, for they were forcing their steeds to the utmost. The captain was in front of his platoon, and that was all the men he had. He had lost one lieutenant at the first action, and probably he had been compelled to send the second with the detachment by the hill road. [Pg 206]

"It looks as though they intended to begin with a charge," said Captain Truman.

"Perhaps the captain will change his mind before he has gone much farther," replied the major very quietly.

The soldiers acted as though they were very impatient. The major thought the Texan captain was reckless, and was making use of fire-eating tactics instead of cool military judgment. Possibly he expected to be able to cut his way through the force in front of him, and join the one he had sent to the bridge by the hills.

Probably Captain Dingfield had not a little of the contempt for Northern soldiers which pervaded the ranks of the Confederate army at the beginning of the war. He was a brave and impulsive man, and doubtless believed that a vigorous charge would drive the Riverlawn Cavalry out of his way, as he would brush away the flies that annoyed him when he read his newspaper. The fact that one portion of his company had been soundly whipped and driven from the field appeared to have no influence over him.

"Now is your time, Captain Truman," said the major, who had waited till the enemy were more than half-way down the hill. "Have your men take good aim, and fire." [Pg 207]

The captain gave his orders with a vim which indicated his impatience to begin his work. The carbines were all discharged almost as one, and the road was filled with the smoke of the volley; but the breeze was fresh enough to drive it away in a moment. At least seventy-five balls had been sent into the midst of the fifty men, and the troopers had been trained to do good work with their carbines.

As the smoke cleared away, it was seen that a number of the Texans had fallen from their horses, while others were reeling in their saddles. A couple of minutes later another volley was heard at the right of the road, and more of the cavalymen went down. The major could not see the command of Captain Gordon, but he had been prompt in the discharge of the duty assigned to him.

"Sling carbines! charge them!" said the major.

The order was promptly obeyed, and the commander rode forward with the captain of the second company. But in a minute more there was nothing there to charge. What was left of the enemy suddenly wheeled their horses and began a retreat in hot haste. If they had not done so not one of them would have been left to contest the field in five minutes more. [Pg 208]

The first company were just breaking out of the field when the second came up, and Major Lyon ordered the captain of the second to halt. Riding forward, he directed Captain Gordon to pursue the discomfited troopers, and capture them if he could. The fight was ended practically; and it had been little better than a slaughter, all owing to the reckless course of Captain Dingfield.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CONFUSION OF THE DAY EXPLAINED

A single volley from each company of the Riverlawn Cavalry proved to be enough to settle the affairs of the enemy in front. Major Lyon looked about him in the road, and he was surprised to find but eight forms lying on the ground. How so many bullets could have been fired into fifty men with no greater loss of life seemed strange to him; but he was just beginning to obtain his experience. The result did not prove that only that number had been hit; for the number lying in the road did not fully indicate the enemy's loss.

Captain Gordon began a vigorous pursuit of the retreating enemy; but they had the start of him by at least a mile, for he had met with some obstructions in reaching the road after his men had delivered their fire. Both the pursuers and the pursued disappeared behind the hill, and there was nothing more that the second company could do. The major had looked over those left upon the field, to ascertain if the captain was among them; but he was not. [Pg 210]

"Captain Dingfield was a bold and reckless officer; and, as he rode at the head of his troop, I

wonder that he is not lying here with the others who dropped from their horses," said Major Lyon, as he surveyed what had not yet ceased to be a sad sight.

"He was exceedingly fortunate to escape, though he may have carried off with him half-a-dozen bullets in his body," replied Captain Truman.

"Either he had no idea of how many men we have, or he intended to make only a demonstration against us, to enable the force he had sent to the bridge to finish their work," added the major. "The explosion seems to have been the signal for him to advance; and I am inclined to believe he intended only to prevent me from using my force to interfere with the work of those he had sent for the destruction of the bridge. Fortunately that matter had been attended to, and Belthorpe has men enough to overcome that sent by the hill road."

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"I should say that Dingfield had been thoroughly and completely routed," replied Captain Truman with more enthusiasm than the major could feel; for the latter realized that the bridge had narrowly escaped destruction in the very face of his squadron, and under their very eyes.

"I don't know yet," he returned. "We can tell better about that when we have ascertained the condition of the bridge."

"We can still see it, and it does not appear to have suffered any very serious injury."

"March your company back to the cross-roads, Captain Truman. We shall soon learn what more we have to do. The bridge does not appear to have suffered much, as you suggest," added the commander as he rode down the hill, with Artie at his side.

"What do you suppose has become of Deck, father?" asked the young man; and there was a look of great anxiety on his face.

"I don't know, and I cannot conjecture," replied the father with a blank look at the inquirer. "I saw him lower the flag as I had ordered him to do. It did not occur to me that there could be any movement in progress there then. For the next hour or more I had enough to think of near the cross-roads, and I don't know that I looked at the bridge once in that time; certainly not with the expectation of seeing anything there."

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"I can't understand it at all, father," added Artie; and he looked as though the tears might easily come into his eyes, for they had been together from their childhood, and had always been greatly devoted to each other.

They had never been known to quarrel with each other, though each was rather tenacious of his own opinion. Deck was not his own brother, only his cousin, though the fraternal feeling had always been as warm and earnest as though they had been born of the same father and mother. Since the troubles in the vicinity of Riverlawn had begun, and they had served side by side in the fights with the ruffians, as well as in drilling together for three months, the tie that united them had become even more intimate. Artie was fearfully anxious in regard to the fate of his brother; and his father was not less so, though he was more successful in concealing his feeling.

"I cannot understand it any better than you can," replied the major. "If I had thought of his safety at all, I should have considered him as more secure on the bridge than at the cross-roads, where we were liable to confront the enemy at any moment. Dexter had been so forward in the action on the east road, that I felt rather relieved to think that he was in a safe place. I wished him to do his duty faithfully; but he rode into the front rank of the company, being a volunteer, and threw himself, horse and all, upon the lieutenant in command of the enemy."

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"I saw him do that myself, though Deck says Ceph tried to leap over the officer's horse of his own accord," added Artie. "There must have been some of the enemy's men on the bridge when we supposed there was no one there."

"For my part, I did not suppose anything at all about it, as I have said before; but I am confident now there must have been some of the Texans there, or men in their employ," continued the major. "It appears that the farther abutment of the bridge had been mined, though the work must have been done at the top. It seems to have been badly done, as though the workmen were laboring under great disadvantages."

The father and son could explain nothing; for they had nothing to base their opinions on, the explosion and the smoke of the fires being all the facts in their possession. Life Knox and his scouts had doubtless obtained some information by this time which would enable them to conjecture the fate of poor Deck. They continued on their way, with the second company just behind them. There was nothing to be done, unless it was to send a re-enforcement to Lieutenant Belthorpe, though it was doubtful if he had encountered the enemy.

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As soon as Major Lyon and Artie reached the hospital they heard a vigorous yell, which seemed to come from the guards in charge of the camp. It was immediately followed by a hearty cheer from the second company. Both father and son looked about them without being able to see anything to call forth these cheers.

"Up goes the flag, father!" shouted Artie, who had directed his gaze where others were looking, and saw that the American flag had just been hoisted on the pole upon the bridge.

"Always a welcome sight, but more so now than usual," added the major, as he raised his field-glass and directed it to the flagstaff. "I see the tall form of Sergeant Knox at the halcyards, and he

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has done this thing. I pray that it may be the herald of good news in regard to Dexter."

"Do you suppose the flag means that he has found Deck, father?" asked Artie, as a flood of hope flashed through his mind.

"It is impossible to tell what it means; but the sergeant seems to be climbing down the wall, and he will soon be here," replied the major.

Artie started his horse, with the evident intention of going to the bridge; but the major called him back, and directed him to wait where he was till Knox joined them.

"I may want you at any moment," said the father. "I have been using you and Dexter as my orderlies, and I appoint you to that position now."

"Is there any news from up above, Major Lyon?" asked the wounded lieutenant, who had walked to the spot where the commander stopped his horse. "I heard a volley a little while ago; has there been another engagement?"

"A very brief one," replied the major. "It was very soon decided, for Captain Dingfield retreated as soon as he had received our fire."

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"Captain Dingfield!" exclaimed the wounded lieutenant; "that is not at all like him."

"It was the only thing he could do. He left eight of his men in the road, where they dropped from their horses; and of course he led away many others with bullets in their bodies. I should say that Captain Dingfield had been a very reckless commander, and I was almost sure I should find his body among the killed; but it was not there, and I suppose he is still carrying it with him."

"We did not expect much of any difficulty in this expedition, and we were satisfied that we could ride over the Home Guards we heard had been sent here to protect the bridges," replied Lieutenant Makepeace rather languidly, for he had been severely wounded.

"I have a squadron of United States cavalry under my command," said the major proudly.

"So I discovered this forenoon; not that you had a squadron here, but that the troopers were regular cavalymen; and I must say that no men ever fought better, for my command were beaten and driven off in less time than it takes to tell of it," added the prisoner with an attempt to smile. "But two full companies were sent over here, though I have not yet been able to find the other."

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"But the other company is here," said Major Lyon.

"Where?"

"There they are," answered the commander, pointing to the camp. "They are prisoners of war now."

"That accounts for it."

"That company were Home Guards in the first of it, but now they have become regular Confederate soldiers."

"They have made a mess of this expedition."

"I suppose you have a force over at the north end of the railroad bridge, lieutenant," said the major very quietly, and not expecting the prisoner would answer the question.

"If there is, it has been sent there since I was wounded. Everything has worked very differently from what we expected; for Captain Dingfield talked the whole thing over with me. We have fought the battle, and lost it. I suppose there is no harm in comparing notes after the affair is finished."

"I should think not; for I don't believe you can give me any information that will be useful to me now," replied the major.

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"We ascertained that your company was camped near that plantation; and we had no idea that you had more than one. We believed the company sent from Bowling Green, which we have not seen yet, for we have not been there, was posted somewhere on what is called the east road. Dingfield's plan was to march down by the south road, use up your company near the plantation, and then effect a junction with the infantry company for the destruction of the bridge, which is said to be a matter of great importance to the South."

"I should say that it was; and my orders came from the general in command to prevent it," interposed the major.

"I was sent by Captain Dingfield round by the hill road, to attack you in the rear while he took you in front. As I said, we had no suspicion that you had another company of cavalry here. One of my scouts was shot, and is in this hospital with me. The other came back to me. But he had seen only two troopers; and I decided to push on, especially as I had four bridge-builders with me."

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"Four bridge-builders!" exclaimed the major, "And what became of them?"

"I was ordered to send them by the nearest road to the bridge; and I was told, when I inquired on the way, that the hill road was the shortest cut to it. They had a six-mule wagon with them, containing their tools, tents, blasting-powder, and provisions. I came down the east road with my

force, while they continued on their way by the hill road. My force was defeated as we approached the cross-roads, where I was to turn up."

"I waited all the forenoon and some of the afternoon for Captain Dingfield to attack me," said the major.

"The bridgemen made us late in starting, and the mules delayed us for hours on the road. Our surprise was in finding a whole company waiting for us at the cross-roads, where we had anticipated no obstacle."

The arrival of Knox prevented the major from obtaining any further information from the obliging lieutenant; but later in the day he explained his own operations to him. The capture of Captain Titus's company early in the morning, and the superior force of the loyal troops, had saved the bridge, though there was still an enemy to fight by the force of Lieutenant Belthorpe.

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The account of the bridge-builders threw some light on the disappearance of Deck Lyon. It was evident that they had attempted to destroy the bridge; but when Knox reported to the major, he was compelled to acknowledge that he had been unable to find him, or to obtain any intelligence of him. But Deck had had a lively experience, and it becomes necessary to return to him while engaged in his solitary vigil at the foot of the flagstaff.

CHAPTER XVIII

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INTRODUCING MR. BROWN KIPPS

Deck Lyon did not like the service to which he had been assigned on the bridge. The importance of the duty, as laid down to him by his father, did not make the situation any pleasanter.

Though his conscience approved his conduct in taking the place without attempting to avoid the service, it would have suited him better to remain in the ranks, and have a part in the action which was soon to take place, as officers and privates all believed.

He had nothing to do after he had hauled down the flag,—at least, nothing but watch his father, whose plumed hat was the only one of the kind on the field; and he had no difficulty in keeping it in sight all the time. He was not obliged to keep his eyes fixed on him every moment, for he knew when to expect the signal to hoist the flag; and it would not be given till the first company had engaged the enemy somewhere on the south road, between the top of the hill and the cross-roads.

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He was all alone, and he could speak to no one. He had rolled up the flag with the halyards still attached to it, and placed it at the foot of the pole. He had been sitting on his horse all day, and for a time he amused himself in walking up and down the bridge. It did not occur to him that there was a human being anywhere near him except those who were in the camp below, and they were some distance from him. He looked at the prisoners, and the cavalymen who were keeping guard over them. They were not an interesting sight to him, for the former consisted mostly of the ruffians whom he had fought in the field and in the schoolhouse.

"Nothing to do, and nobody to help me," said Deck to himself, as he seated himself at the foot of the flagstaff, with his legs dangling over the bank of the creek below. The pole had been set up where it was most convenient to fasten it, and the place was about ten feet from the abutment. The bridge spanned not only the stream of water, but the valley through which it flowed.

This valley was crossed by the embankment to within forty feet of the creek; and the south road passed under the bridge, close to the abutment. The high fence, or side of the shanty that had stood there, was on the solid ground, which had been filled in, and Deck was hardly more than a rod from it. He had walked about here, and he concluded that some kind of a building had stood there; for he found a temporary workbench, which had doubtless been used by the bridge-builders.

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The signalman at the flagstaff was fully armed, as when he dismounted; and when he seated himself on the plank of the bridge, his sabre had nearly tripped him over the side of it to the ground below; but he was very active, and he saved himself. In this position he observed the occupation of the prisoners, who appeared to have no interest whatever in the impending fight at the cross-roads. Some of them were playing cards, to which they were more accustomed than to the routine of the soldier; some were asleep; and a few were mending their ragged garments.

They were not an interesting sight to the watcher on the bridge. Among them was his Uncle Titus, who sat on a log in front of his tent. He wore a disgusted look, perhaps because he was deprived of his usual whiskey rations; for Major Lyon refused to allow liquor to be served to any prisoner. He had chosen for himself, and had joined the Confederate army. He considered himself a sort of family martyr, because his brother had chosen to give his plantation to Noah instead of to him; and this feeling largely influenced him in his political choice.

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Deck had only one wish, as he sat with his legs over the side of the bridge, and that was that the enemy would speedily appear on the south road; for then his father would give him the signal to hoist the flag. When he had done that his mission would be ended, and he could hasten back to his place in the ranks, in season, he hoped, to take part in the action. The more impatient he became, the more vigilant was his scrutiny of the plumed head of his father.

Several times he thought, when any movement was made by the soldiers, that the time had come. The minutes seemed to be longer to him than any he had ever known before. He looked at his watch, after he had refrained from doing so several times by the thought of his own impatience, and he found he had been on the bridge only half an hour; though it seemed to him that he had been there four times as long as that. But just at that moment, and before he had restored the watch to his pocket, he heard sounds which turned his attention in another direction.

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He heard footsteps near him. No one but himself had been sent to the bridge, and the sound gave him a decided sensation. They came from the north end of the bridge; and the high fence prevented him from seeing the person whose tramp he heard. He was not alarmed; and he listened to the footsteps, waiting for the individual to come out from behind the obstruction. Then the steps were accompanied by the whistling of a tune, as though the person was an idler, who had no other means of employing his time.

Deck Lyon was not a musician, though he had done some singing before his voice changed. The whistling began to have an interest to him, and he listened with all his might. The person was either a Union man or a Secessionist; and the young cavalryman thought the air he selected must give him some information on this delicate point. If he whistled "Dixie," either from choice or from the force of habit, it would not be difficult to determine on which side he had cast his political lot.

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On the other hand, if he piped "The Star Spangled Banner," "Hail, Columbia!" or "John Brown's Body," Deck thought he should be more rejoiced to meet him at this particular moment. Possibly the whistler had not kept up with the times in his musical education, for he piped none of the airs named; but presently the signalman recognized the notes of "Yankee Doodle," which answered his purpose even better than any of the melodies named. Secessionists had no taste for this ancient air at just this time.

The man appeared to have stopped behind the high fence, and did not immediately reward the expectant waiter with a sight of his person. He heard some blows with an axe or heavy hammer upon the planks underfoot; then he resumed his whistling, which became more vigorous than artistic. It was evident even to Deck that the performer had not been trained in the art he was practising, but he seemed to be plentifully supplied with wind, and he had just doubled the quantity of sound he produced; and the melody intended was unmistakably "Yankee Doodle," and this was the important point to the listener.

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Still, the whistler did not show himself; though he was hardly more than forty feet distant from his audience, and seemed to be unconscious that he had a listener. Deck wanted to see that man, but he persistently kept his body corporate behind the obstruction to his view. Arranging his sabre, so that it should not trip him up and tumble him off the bridge, he sprang lightly to his feet. He stepped back a couple of paces, and then obtained a full view of the piper, who certainly was not skilful enough to have "played before Moses."

He did not wear a uniform, and therefore he did not belong to the Texan Rangers; for Deck had fought them, and knew how they were clothed. This struck him as an important point; for he had made sure before he rose from his seat that his carbine, slung at his back, was in condition for instant service. His regulation pistols were in the holsters on his horse; but he had supplied himself with a small revolver at Fort Bedford, for there was a tendency with fresh recruits to overload themselves with weapons on entering active service, and thousands of dollars worth of such were thrown away when they became a burden.

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The stranger was dressed like a mechanic; and he seemed to be examining the planking of the bridge, which is not usually a matter of vital importance in such a structure for railroad purposes. The man stopped whistling, and began to use a middling-sized sledge-hammer, directing his blows at the heads of the spikes under his feet. Then he dropped the hammer, and picked up an adze, with which he trimmed off the projecting edge of a plank. Deck thought this was very strange work for a man to be doing at such a time, and in such a place.

But the mechanic was whistling a Union air; and this fact seemed to make it all right, and prevented him from having a suspicion that all was not right in the presence of the man on the bridge. The railroad in Kentucky was a loyal institution, as it was a disloyal one farther South. Deck therefore came to the conclusion that he was an employee of the company. He decided to interview the stranger, and ascertain more precisely who and what he was.

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In matters of military duty Deck was a close constructionist; and the first question he asked himself was whether or not he ought to leave his post, even to go a distance of forty feet. His sole occupation till he received the signal to hoist the flag, was to watch for it; and he kept his father's plumed hat in sight all the time. But he could see the handkerchief when it was waved as well from behind the fence as at the flagstaff; or, at most, he had only to step back a few paces to enable him to command a full view of the expected battle-ground, and of the hill behind which Captain Truman was posted with his command.

He did not for an instant lose sight of his sole duty; but he walked a few paces at a time towards the fence, and then looked back, to make sure that he could see the plume of the major. As it was in sight all the time, he continued to advance very slowly. When he reached the end of the fence the centre of his watch was still to be seen, and nothing seemed to be in progress in any of the roads visible from his position.

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Just at the moment when he was almost within speaking distance of the mechanic, who had

ceased to whistle, the latter picked up his tools and moved to the other end of the fence, where he began to hammer the spikes again. The man appeared to take no notice of him, or even to be aware of his presence. Assured that he could see the skirmishers who had been sent beyond the hill if they were driven in, he continued to advance still farther, though he went to the middle of the bridge, where the fence did not obstruct his view.

Deck wanted to know more about the man with the sledge and the adze. The flag was to be hoisted as a signal for the second company to attack the enemy in the flank or rear, while the first engaged them in front. The fight must begin before the signal could be required, and the signalman would have abundant notice when the firing began that his services would soon be required. The fence was less than a hundred feet in length, and he had not far to go to confront the mechanic.

Keeping the cross-roads in view till the fence shut it out, he made a quick movement to the immediate vicinity of the workman, who was hammering away with the sledge with all his might. He made so much noise that he could not hear the steps of the soldier. [Pg 231]

"What are you doing here?" shouted Deck.

The mechanic took no notice of him, and did not seem to have heard him. He repeated his inquiry, this time a great deal louder than before. The man stopped in his work, and looked at him with apparent astonishment, as though he had discovered his presence for the first time.

"I am fixing the bridge, don't you see?" replied the workman, as though he deemed it a foolish question. "What are you doing here?"

"I am on duty on the bridge," replied Deck.

But he could not see the soldiers near the cross-roads, where his father had been most of the time, and his conscience smote him as though he had stolen the brood in a chicken-coop. He did not wait to say any more, but he ran with all his speed till he reached a point where he could see the plume of the commander of the squadron.

"What's the matter? What you runnin' off fur?" shouted the mechanic. "You needn't run; I won't hurt you." [Pg 232]

Deck thought this was rather cool from a man apparently unarmed, to one with a carbine slung on his back, and a sabre at his side; but he judged that the fellow aspired to be a humorist, for he looked as good-natured as though he had just perpetrated a first-class witticism. But the cavalryman did not halt till he reached the end of the fence, where he made a careful survey on the field of the expected combat. He was too busy just then to notice the man.

"What is the matter, Mr.—? I reckon I don't know your name," said the man; and the sound indicated that he had followed the other nearly to the end of the fence.

"They call me Deck, those who know me best," replied the trooper, willing to humor the mechanic. "Now, who are you?"

"My name is Brown Kipps; but most folks don't take the trouble to call me anything but Kipps, Mr. Deck."

"My front name is Dexter; Deck for short," added the soldier.

"What is your back name?" [Pg 233]

"Lyon."

"You look like a lion," added Kipps. "Won't you take a seat on this old bench, and let us talk it over?"

Deck declined the invitation.

CHAPTER XIX

 [Pg 234]

THE CONSPIRACY ON THE BRIDGE

Kipps appeared to be a good-natured man, and Deck declined to take a seat on the bench with him simply because it would place him where he could not see the signal when his father made it. The man did not seem to be so intent upon driving in the heads of the spikes in the planks as he had been, and perhaps he thought he had worked hard enough to entitle him to a rest.

"Jest come and take a seat here, Deck Lyons; you look all worn out, and you need a little rest," said Kipps, as Deck placed himself at the end of the fence.

"I'm not all worn out, and I think I can stand it to keep on my feet a while longer," replied the signalman.

"Well, you must git tired luggin' them things round all day," persisted the mechanic.

"What things?" [Pg 235]

"Why, that shooter on your back, and that broadsword a-danglin' agin your shins."

"They are not very heavy, and not so much of a load as your sledge-hammer and adze."

"I'm used to kerryin' them; but I'll bet a day's pay that gun on your back is heavier'n my hammer."

"I don't bet, but my carbine is lighter than your sledge," replied Deck; and it seemed to him as though the workman was trying to accomplish some object, though he could not make out what it was. "Besides, I don't have to lug my arms without any help, for I am generally on horse-back."

"Have you seen Tom Lobkill about here in your travels on this bridge?" asked Kipps, suddenly changing the subject of the conversation.

"I don't happen to know Tom Lobkill, and I don't know whether I have seen him or not."

"Don't you know Tom Lobkill? I thought every man in Tennessee knew Tom."

"That may be; but as I never put foot in Tennessee yet, I never happened to meet him," replied Deck.

"I reckon this is Kentucky," added Kipps, with a mild horse-laugh. "You see, we fellers that work on the railroad don't allers mind jest what State we're in, for we keep shiftin' from one to another all the time." [Pg 236]

"But I think you don't have to do much shifting between Kentucky and Tennessee at the present time," suggested Deck.

"Not as much as we did a while ago. If you hain't seen Tom Lobkill, did you come across Lank Rablan in your travels on the road?" asked Kipps, as he rose from his seat, and walked to the end of the fence, though he still remained behind it.

"I don't know him any better than I do the other fellow, and I haven't seen him. You seem to have a good many friends about here, Brown Kipps."

"Not a great crowd; there ain't but four on us, and t'other is Sykes Wimble. I s'pose you hain't seen nothin' o' him, nuther?"

"I don't know him," replied Deck, more curious yet to know what the man was driving at. "What are you four doing about here?"

"We are on the railroad."

"So I supposed; and I suppose one of you is the president of the company, and perhaps the other three are the vice-presidents," said the cavalryman, quite as good-natured as his companion. [Pg 237]

"Well, no, not exactly; I ought to be the president of the company, but I ain't," answered Mr. Kipps. "If I was, some of us bridgemen would get better pay, and a chance to sleep nights some o' the time."

"Then you are bridgemen; and I saw you knocking in the heads of the spikes over there. I suppose you were sent down here to rebuild this bridge if the enemy destroyed it."

"That's jest what we are here for; but I don't reckon the enemy'll destroy it this time."

"I should say not."

"But I was lookin' for my gang-mates, and I don't see what's become on 'em;" and Kipps looked about him as though he really wished to find them. "I had to go down below to git a hunk o' t'backer out'n the wagon, and the t'other three went down this way;" and the bridgeman produced a great twist of the native weed, and bit off enough to load two pipes. "I reckon you hain't seen nothin' on 'em, hev yon, Deck Lyons? I reckoned they went over the creek." [Pg 238]

"I have not seen any of them, and no one has crossed the bridge since I came upon it," replied Deck.

"I rather think I can fetch 'em if they are anywhere round here," added Kipps, as he took a whistle from his pocket and applied it to his lips, producing three short blasts. "All on us carries one o' these, because we sometimes get scattered on the work."

The whistle seemed to be as potent as that of the boatswain on board of a man-of-war, for one after another three men mounted to the bridge just beyond the abutment on the farther side. Each of them had a pipe in his mouth, and they came upon the track as though they were in no hurry. They were dressed like Kipps, in workingmen's clothes, and one of them was about six feet and a half high. All of them had axes in their hands, but none of them seemed to be provided with firearms.

"They weren't fur off, and they kept awful still, or I should have hearn them," said Kipps, as they crossed the track and placed themselves behind the fence.

Deck wondered how they had secured a place down the embankment without being seen by him; but his attention had been directed the other way to the position of the squadron. But he realized that they could have crossed the track some distance farther up the road, and walked down from there under the shadow of the road-bed. [Pg 239]

"Well, boys, I reckoned you'd got lost, for I couldn't find nothin' on you," said Kipps, as the men

approached the end of the fence at which Deck stood. "What you been doin', Lank Rablan?"

"When you went down to the wagon, we uns dropped down the bank to have a smoke, and we got to talkin' about this business round here," replied the tallest of the three, who was about as lofty in his upper works as Life Knox, and about as spare in his filling up. "We consayted that this bridge was go'n' to get burnt up last night; but it's all here yet, and I reckon them so'diers down thar's done a big thing."

"We hain't got no job on our hands for to-day," said another of them.

"What was it that the nigger told you, Sykes Wimple?" asked Lank Rablan, who was the tall fellow.

"He told me the troopers had captured the whole company sent here to destroy the bridge; and there they be down there, guarded by the horse soldiers," replied Sykes, pointing in the direction of the camp. "I suppose this fellow is one of them," he added, pointing to Deck. [Pg 240]

"I am one of them," replied the signalman.

"What company do you belong to?" asked Lank.

"To the Riverlawn Cavalry."

"You hain't had no fightin', I reckon."

"Yes, we have; the second company defeated the force that came here at daylight this morning, and captured the whole of them. The same company had a brush with the Texan Rangers, and they all took to the woods, except those that were killed or badly wounded. The hospital over there is full of them. If you stay on this bridge long enough, you will see more fighting over on the south road."

The bridgemen looked at each other, and said nothing for a few moments. Deck began to feel as though he was neglecting his duty; for he had been giving his whole attention to the talk of the men, with only an occasional glance at the troopers below. He looked again, and for the moment he did not see the plume of his father. He had changed his position, though it was not likely that he had gone far, and he began a search for him with his eyes. He did not discover the major at once; for he had moved a short distance up the south road, to give his orders to Captain Gordon. [Pg 241]

While he was continuing his search, he was suddenly and violently drawn backwards behind the fence. If the bridgemen did not talk together in words they did by their looks. If any one had been regarding the scene described, it would have been sufficiently evident to him by this time that the bridgemen were engaged in a conspiracy, the first act of which was to secure the person of the Union soldier who had been posted at the flagstaff. But there was no one to observe what transpired on the bridge.

At a nod from Brown Kipps, Lank Rablan sprang lightly forward; and, seizing hold of the carbine which was slung on his back, he dragged him into the shadow of the fence in the twinkling of an eye. As soon as Lank had drawn him within reach of the others, they all laid hold of him. Deck struggled with all his might, and struck out right and left with his fists till his hands were secured, each by a man, while the other two held his body. The tussle was quickly finished, for the young soldier could do nothing against four full-grown mechanics. [Pg 242]

Of course Deck realized that he was the victim of a plot prepared while none of the operators were in sight. His first feeling was one of humiliation that he had allowed himself to be captured at his post, or so near it. He blamed himself for leaving the flagstaff; but probably the result would have been the same if he had not left it, for a distance of fifty feet would not have prevented the conspirators from securing him where he was.

The four ruffians who had carried out their plan appeared to be what they claimed; bridgemen, for they were all provided with the tools that are used in such work. But it was evident to him when the question came to his mind, that they were not Union men, and could not be in the employ of the railroad company, which was now a loyal institution, after a violent discussion with its Tennessee stockholders.

"Don't kick, my little man," said Kipps, who appeared to be the foreman of the gang, whatever they were. "It won't do no good." [Pg 243]

Deck was painfully conscious of what the leader said; for the others had taken his carbine and sabre away from him, and laid them on the bench. With the slings of his firearm they were securing his arms behind him, while Lank Rablan held him by the collar of his jacket. It occurred to him then that the ruffians had not taken his small revolver from him, and had not even discovered that he had one; but it might as well have been at the bottom of the creek so far as being of any service to him in that important moment, for his hands were both in possession of the enemy.

He had kicked with his long boots, and endeavored to bring his spurs to bear upon the shins of his antagonists; but Kipps had strapped his sabre belt around his ankles, thus depriving him of his only remaining natural means of defence. While they were securing his arms behind him, which their evidently intended to do with the greatest care, he was faced to the position of his company. Then it occurred to him that he had one resource left. His voice could not be tied up like his legs and arms, and he could use that if nothing else. [Pg 244]

"Help! Help! Help!" he shouted at the top of his lungs three times. "Below, there! Sentinels! I am"—

This was as far as he was permitted to proceed; for Kipps caught his handkerchief from the opening of his jacket, and stuffed it into his mouth. If any of the sentinels around the prisoners' camp heard him, they could make nothing of the cries. If they looked about them, they could see nothing on the surface of the bridge, even if the shouts had not come from behind the fence.

"No use, my little beauty!" exclaimed Kipps, as the two men completed the operation of strapping his arms behind him. "They can't hear you down below, and you only worry yourself, without doin' a bit of good. Now be a Christian, and keep quiet like a little lamb, as you are. We are going to be busy now for a little spell, and we shall have to fasten you to the bench. Be easy, and amuse yourself the best way you can. You can whistle 'Yankee Doodle' if you like, and I reckon you can do it better than I did."

It was no use to say anything, or to attempt to do anything. He was tied to the bench, facing the track; and Kipps was considerate enough to take the handkerchief from his mouth, and return it to the inside of his jacket. The other three men had already hastened over to the place where they had come upon the bridge, and disappeared. The foreman took his carbine from the bench, and started to follow the others.

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"It would break my heart, my pretty dove, to have to shoot you with your own piece; but if you make a row, I shall have to do it. If you keep quiet we won't hurt you."

Saying this, Kipps left him.

CHAPTER XX

[Pg 246]

THE OPERATIONS OF THE BRIDGE-BURNERS

Deck was alone, a prisoner, his ankles bound together, his wrists strapped behind him, and his body made fast to the old bench against the fence. He was not absolutely uncomfortable physically; for Brown Kipps had extended some consideration to him, so that he suffered no pain from the bonds which secured him. The fastenings were straps, taken from his accoutrements; and they did not cut into his flesh, as cords might have done if they had been tied too tight.

All his pain was in the soul, which manacles are dramatically and metaphorically said to pierce when the victim is a high-spirited person. Deck had been captured at his post; and this fact humiliated him, though a court-martial would have acquitted him of all blame. No one below could possibly know that anything had happened to him, or a file of troopers would have been sent to release him before this time. He was almost in sight of his father and Artie; but they were busy watching and waiting for the fight which all believed would certainly take place.

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But the prisoner was not left entirely without occupation other than his needless and undeserved self-reproaches; for if any one was to blame it was his father, who had placed him alone at such a distance from the rest of the force, though no one suspected the presence of an enemy in that direction. He had enough to do to observe the operations of the bridgemen. The moment they had secured the prisoner to the satisfaction of the foreman, the other three hastened to disappear over the embankment. They were out of sight but a few minutes, and then one of them returned, while the other two passed up to him several gallon cans. By this time Kipps joined them; and a lot of small bundles of light wood, such as is much used in the South in kindling fires, were tossed up, and caught by the foreman.

Deck understood that all these articles were combustibles, though he could not make out the nature of some of them. All of them were left where they had been received, on the platform of the bridge. It was evident enough to the manacled observer that the structure was doomed, and was to be burned in the very presence of the cavalry sent to protect it. Deck twisted, squirmed, and struggled when he realized the intentions of the bridgemen.

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It galled him to the inmost depths of the soul to think that the bridge was to be destroyed before his eyes, and he had not the power to do anything to save it. He did not believe he would be left to perish in the flames, if they reached the place where he was secured, and he had not a selfish fear. He was tempted to repeat the cries he had made before; but the threat of Kipps to shoot him if he "made a row" restrained him. It was folly to throw away his life; for he was vain enough to believe it might be of some service to his country in its hour of peril.

When the men had finished passing up the material, which had plainly been collected in this place for the destruction of the bridge, each of them took a tin case under his arm, and they moved over to the shelter of the fence where they had left their tools. They stopped there long enough to obtain a couple of shovels and as many pickaxes, and then went to the end of the fence next to the bridge.

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If the occasion had been less serious, Deck would have been amused at the bridgemen's attempts to conceal themselves from the force below. They worked like miners following a vein of ore deep down in the bowels of the earth, as the witness had seen them in pictures, lying on their backs, or curled up in a heap, using the pickaxe as they could. Between the wall and the embankment the earth had settled so that there was a considerable cavity. Two of the men worked in this hole for a while, the others lying prone upon the ground and watching them.

Then the four cans they had brought were deposited in the aperture, Kipps adjusting and preparing them with his own hands. Deck did not understand what they intended to accomplish by this operation, though he concluded that they meant to blow up the abutment, and that the cans contained powder or dynamite. Whatever the work was, it was soon completed; and then the movements of the men became more amusing than ever. They crawled about on their hands and knees, carrying the cans and bundles of light wood.

They unbound the packages of wood, arranged the little sticks in heaps, and poured what Deck supposed was spirits of turpentine or kerosene over them and on the planks of the structure. The work of preparation was soon completed; for the men seemed to be skilled in the operation, as though they had had experience in these details. They all crawled back to the shelter of the fence, and straightened their backs again.

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"Now, my little lily of the valley, I shall have to put you under marching orders," Kipps said, as he stopped before the prisoner.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Deck, though he hardly expected a definite answer to the question.

"I don't know, my butterfly; but I reckon you uns over there," he replied, pointing to the soldiers below, "would make mischief for we uns if we stay here a great while longer;" and he proceeded to release the victim from the bench.

"I judge that you intend to blow up and burn this bridge," added Deck.

"The whole Yankee army couldn't save it now!" exclaimed the chief bridgeman. "We uns, about two hundred so'diers along with us, was sent over here to make an opening between these two hills; and if you think we ain't go'n' to do it, why, you don't know Brown Kipps, that's all!"

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"I think I have been pretty well introduced to him," replied Deck, who had become somewhat accustomed to the situation; and he thought he should fare better with such a person as the foreman by being good-natured than by growling and annoying him. "When you whistled 'Yankee Doodle,' I made up my mind that you were a true Union man, and my heart went out to you."

"I ain't much on 'Yankee Doodle,' and I could done better with 'Dixie;' and I ain't none o' them carrion as whistles 'Yankee Doodle' for the fun on't. It did well enough to still your nerves," said Kipps, as he finished releasing the legs of his prisoner. "Now I want you to march up to that place where you see the wagon standin' down by the side of the railroad. You needn't keep step, nor nothin' o' that sort. I reckon the cheese-knife and the shooter are too heavy for a young feller like you to kerry, and I'll tote 'em for you," continued the bridge foreman, as he began to examine the lock of the carbine.

"You are very kind, Mr. Kipps," replied Deck.

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"That's me all over when you use me well; but, my little lion, if you should take into that small coon's head o' yourn to be ongrateful for my kindness to you, and make a row, or try to run away, I should have to shoot you jest the same as I should a 'possum if I wanted a Christmas dinner in the woods. Is this thing loaded with ball?"

"Of course it is; it wouldn't be any better than a broomstick if it were not," replied Deck.

"I don't know as I see through this thing edzactly," said Kipps, as he continued to study the mechanism of the lock. "I've got the cartridges, but I don't see any ramrod. Won't you just show me how to work it?"

"Teach you how to use a carbine to shoot me with!" exclaimed Deck, trying to laugh. "You must excuse me, for that would be giving information to the enemy in time of war, and I should be court-martialed for it."

"Jest as you like, Yank; but if there is one load in the pipestem, that will be enough to put you out of the way of any court-martial. I reckon I see into it now; you put the pill in here."

"I haven't anything to say on that subject, Mr. Kipps; but if you should happen to shoot yourself with it, that would save some Union soldier the trouble of doing the job," added Deck.

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"But we uns hain't got no time to fool," said the foreman briskly. "You'll let the cat out jest as soon as you see us by the wagon. You can start things now, and open up the cat-bag as soon as you git 'em started."

"What's all that gwine on down below?" asked Lank Rablan, as he looked cautiously by the end of the fence.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Kipps impatiently.

"They are all lookin' up hyer; and that feller with a squawrel's tail in his hat is shaking a white rag over his head as though he'd lost his senses, if he ever had any," Lank explained.

"No matter what it is! Go to work, and hurry up, Sykes!" said Kipps in vigorous tones. "Now, my little Yankee angel, jest move over to the other side of the track, and march lively!"

Sykes was already crawling along the bridge, lighting the fires he had prepared. There were not more than half a dozen of them, and they were soon blazing up, though in the bright sunshine

they did not make much show. Deck followed Lobkill and Rablan, as he was directed, while Kipps, with the carbine in his hand, brought up the rear. The foreman changed his plan when he found that the attention of the soldiers below was directed to the bridge; and, still sheltered by the fence, the two in advance left the level of the track, and made their way along the slope of the embankment.

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Deck was ordered to follow them; but as his arms were still bound behind him, he found it was a rather difficult matter to preserve his balance. Kipps spoke to him quite savagely, perhaps believing he was making a movement to slide down the slope to the field below.

"If you think it is an easy matter to walk along this steep bank with your hands tied behind you, just let Mr. Lobkill put you in the same condition that I am, and see how you will get along," replied Deck, as good-naturedly as before.

"There may be sunthin' in that. Jest hold still a moment," said Kipps.

Deck was glad enough to stop; for he was hardly able to keep on his feet, as the earth slipped away under him. The foreman unstrapped the fastening, and put the sling in his pocket, perhaps for the same use in the future.

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"Now, little lovely, trot again; but don't you forget that I have got the hang of this shooting-iron, and the ball can trot faster'n you can."

The prisoner obeyed the order, and he was beginning to think that the foreman was a tolerably good sort of a fellow, aside from his politics. He followed his leaders; and he had now no difficulty in keeping up with them, for he could retain his balance as well as any of them. In a short time they reached the vicinity of the wagon, which stood in the field, with the six mules that drew it there fastened to the pole. The mule-driver was a negro, who was asleep on the grass by the side of the vehicle.

"Now, my little Yankee saint, we are all right, and in about three minutes and three-quarters that bridge will go up the air; or some on't will, and the rest on't will go the same way in smoke," said Kipps, as he seated himself on a disused sleeper, and took a black pipe from his pocket. "Don't you think we uns are right smart down this way?"

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"I suppose you are;

'For Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do.'

"But Satan didn't find any for you uns in the ranks over yonder, fur they've been idle all day," retorted Kipps with an explosive horse-laugh.

"But we whipped out a force of Texan Rangers over yonder, and I don't believe they have done running yet," answered Deck.

"Them Texicans is gwine to wipe you uns out 'fore they git done with you," added Lank Rablan. "I consayt they see'd sunthin' on the bridge, fur they was all lookin' that way when we left."

"There comes Sykes, and I reckon he can tell us sunthin' about it," said Kipps. "If anything's the matter down below there, I reckon we four had better go down and lick the Yankees out of their boots."

"Don't you do it, Mr. Kipps," interposed Deck. "They might hang you for burning the bridge."

"Wait till we hear what Sykes has got to say, and then"—

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But the remark, brilliant as it might have proved to be, was interrupted by the explosion which was heard on the south road, and which had been the signal for Captain Dingfield to make the attack.

"There goes your bridge!" exclaimed Kipps, looking at his prisoner with a glow of exultation on his brown face. "Now I reckon you can see that your Yankee cavalry couldn't save it."

"I cannot see the bridge from here, and I don't know whether or not they have been able to save it. Wait till we get further news, Mr. Kipps."

"I reckon we don't stop here no longer, for we've done our work, and that bridge is burning lively before this time," added the foreman, as he shouted to the negro driver to hitch on his mules.

In ten minutes more the bridgemen had loaded themselves in the covered wagon, with all their tools and material. Deck was given a place under the canvas, while the four men were seated at the forward end. The negro started his team, and the prisoner had no idea where he was going.

CHAPTER XXI

[Pg 258]

A NEW DISPOSITION OF THE FORCES

Major Lyon listened with the most intense interest to Lieutenant Makepeace's statement in regard to the bridge-builders, as he called them, though bridge-burners proved to be a more appropriate designation. It was clear enough to him that his son had encountered these men; and

the disappearance of Deck appeared to be explained, though what had become of him was still the vital question.

Life Knox had returned alone, leaving his men to guard the bridge; and if it had been in order for the sergeant to express an opinion on the subject, he would have said that sentinels should have been placed on it as soon as the company of Captain Titus had been captured. The major had tardily arrived at this conclusion. As soon as he came to the vicinity of the hospital, Knox discovered the plumed hat of the commander, which Deck had watched all the time he was on the bridge.

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"I'm right sorry I don't bring you any good news of your son," said Life, riding up to the commander, and saluting him as soon as he turned away from the wounded prisoner. "The first thing we had to do was to put out the fires, and then I went about a mile up the track to look for Deck; but I could not find him."

"Did you see anybody over there?" asked the major.

"Not a solitary soul, Major Lyon."

"The prisoner in the hospital, with whom I have been talking, said that four bridge-builders, with a wagon and six mules, went over that way," suggested the major.

"I reckon they've been to the bridge, and set it afire; but none of them was there when I come to it. If they had a wagon and six mules, they left as soon as they'd done the job they come to do."

"What was the condition of the bridge when you reached it, Knox?" asked the major.

"It was all afire, but it hadn't burnt much. If we'd got there ten minutes later, nothin' could saved it; and we had to work lively as it was."

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"But there was an explosion there."

"That didn't amount to shucks. I reckon they stuck the cans of powder in between the 'butment and the bankin', and it only blowed out a lot of dirt, and knocked off a couple of stones from the top of the wall. They brought half-a-dozen bundles of light wood with them, pulled them to pieces, and then poured sperits turpentine over and all around 'em; for we found the cans on the platform. The fires were blazin' lively when we got there; but we poked the wood all off the bridge. We found some barrels o' water they kept on the platform to put out fires, and it didn't take long to make an end on't. That's all I know about it, major."

"But what do you suppose has become of Dexter, Knox?" asked the father, concealing his feelings as much as he could.

"The bridge-burners had gone when we got there, and I reckon they took Deck with 'em," replied the sergeant.

"I suppose there is no other way to account for his absence. Lieutenant Belthorpe has been sent with half the first company to look out for the enemy in that direction," added the major. "Return to the bridge, Knox, and make sure that no further attempt is made to destroy it. The flag is still there, and I see that you have hoisted it again. If you need any assistance, haul down the flag as a signal to that effect."

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The sergeant hastened back to his post; and the major rode up to the cross-roads, just in time to meet the scouts who had been sent up the east road, coming down the hill at full speed. There were only two of them; but they had left two others at the hill road.

The pair of riders who came in as the major reached the cross-roads were scouts; for they had been sent out with orders to go where they pleased in the hills to obtain all the information they could, especially in regard to the approach of any body of the enemy. They were not pickets nor skirmishers, who are sent out to act on fixed lines.

"We have just come from the hill road," said one of the scouts, as he saluted the major. "A detachment of the Texans has just come down from the hills, and all four of us retreated behind a knoll to see where they were going."

"And where were they going?" demanded the commander impatiently.

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"They kept on the hill road, going north."

"How many of them were there?"

"Forty-two, besides the officer in command, who had one arm in a sling, and his head bound up so that he could not wear his cap."

"That must have been the troop that we engaged on the south road," said the major. "But how could they have got around to the point where you saw them?"

The scouts could not answer this question, and the commander sent them back to the point from which they had come. The last he had seen of Captain Dingfield's command was on the south road, retreating at the best speed of their small horses. He had sent Captain Gordon in pursuit as soon as his men were available. So far as he knew, there was no highway by which the hill road could be reached short of six miles south of the cross-roads, near the place where the Texans had camped the night before.

In order to have reached the position where they were reported to be by the scouts, they must have found a way across the country. He opened his map, and began to study it very diligently, to ascertain if there was a road which he had failed to notice before.

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"More scouts coming in, father!" exclaimed Artie, who retained his position near the field-officer, the only one present with the squadron, for the regiment had not been fully organized.

Major Lyon turned his attention in the direction of the east road. He saw two riders galloping down the hill with all speed; and he folded up his map, restoring it to his pocket. The coming of these men meant something. The whole of the Texan company were accounted for, as half of them had been sent to the north by Captain Dingfield, and now the other half had been reported as having gone in hot haste in the same direction. Had any re-enforcement been sent to the Texan cavalry?

The major had no doubt the officer at the head of the troop reported was Captain Dingfield. He had expected to find his body in the road after the action, for he had been the most prominent person for the aim of the men. The same bullet could hardly have hit him in the head and in the arm, and it was plain that he had been wounded at least in two places.

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"Where is Major Lyon?" shouted the foremost of the two scouts.

"Here!" shouted Artie, though it was a needless question, for the plume of the commander distinguished him from all others.

"Messenger from Captain Gordon," said the foremost scout, as he reined in his foaming steed, and saluted the major.

"Where did you see him?" demanded the commander.

"On the hill road, where I rode half a mile at his side; for he was chasing the enemy that went along just before, and Styles and Brehan came down here to report them to you."

"What is your message from Captain Gordon?" asked the major sharply.

"He told me to tell you he had pursued the enemy without getting near enough to fire at them."

"But how came he on the hill road?" demanded the commander impatiently.

"He told me to say to you that they had taken to the fields near the planter's house, and, after a good deal of winding about, had come to the hill road. When I told him we had seen the enemy, he wanted to know how far they were ahead of him; and I told him as near as I could guess they were about half a mile from him. That is all I know about it, Major Lyon."

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"Where are Styles and Brehan now?"

"We passed them on our way down, and I suppose they will stay at the crossing till they get further orders."

"Very well; return to your places in the company," added the commander, as he proceeded to consider the information he had just received.

The situation was clearly defined in his mind. One-half of the first company, under Lieutenant Belthorpe, had been sent up the railroad; and the other half, under Captain Gordon, was pursuing the enemy. Captain Dingfield had sent half his force by the hill road to the north, and now he was retreating in the same direction with the other half. But the whole of the first company would come together somewhere in the vicinity of the railroad, and then there would be another fight.

The commander had with him at the cross-roads and at the camp the whole of the second company, where they were not likely to be needed; for it was evident that Captain Dingfield had left none of his force behind him, as by this time he had realized the pressing need of all his men farther north. It was plain enough to the commander that another action was to be fought very soon, if it was not already in progress, though no firing could be heard.

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"Artie, tell Captain Truman I wish to speak with him," said he, as he took his map from his pocket again. It seemed to him that the seat of the fighting had been transferred to the north a few miles. But the bridge was still safe, and so far he had accomplished his mission. Captain Truman had proved to be an excellent officer, though all in the two companies had had no previous service in actual warfare; but they had shown that the only thing they lacked was military experience, and in that respect they were like a very large proportion of all the officers in the field.

"I was just coming to you, Major Lyon, when you sent for me," said the captain, as he reined up his horse in front of the commander. "One of my men has just informed me that there is a train coming down the railroad from the north."

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"Artie," called the major, "hurry over to the bridge, and give Knox my order to detain the train that is approaching till he receives further orders from me."

Artie did not wait an instant, but ran his horse down the road, calling to the idlers and prisoners to get out of the way. He was fortunate enough to find the sergeant where he could hail him from his horse, and delivered the order.

By this time the train was moving very slowly towards the bridge, and Knox stopped it behind the fence which had done so much ill service in concealing the bridgemen. In front of the engine was a platform car, on which was a field-piece and half-a-dozen soldiers; but the messenger could not stay to examine the provisions for the protection of the train, which was doubtless a pioneer of another of more importance. He reported to his father what he had seen.

"The wounded and the prisoners have now become an incumbrance to me, and I have decided to send them all back to our camp at Riverlawn," the major began, as soon as Artie left him. "So far the enemy have failed to destroy this bridge; but I have no doubt they will continue to operate as they have begun, until they have disabled the railroad."

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"The one over the Green River in Hart County is likely to be the next one threatened," added the captain.

"That or some other. I have stopped this train because it affords me the means of transportation for the wounded and prisoners. I shall place the removal of them in your charge. You will have the train stopped where it crosses the swamp road beyond Dripping Spring, and march those who are able to walk to Riverlawn. Take the wagons of Captain Titus's company with you, mules and all, and convey the wounded in them. How many men do you require for this service?"

"Twenty will be enough," replied Captain Truman, who appeared not to be pleased with the service upon which he was ordered.

The commander directed him to proceed with his arrangements at once, communicating first with the officer of the troops on the train. In a few minutes Lieutenant Blenks, in charge of the camp, who was to go with the captain, had mustered the prisoners, while his superior was engaged with the officer on the train. This gentleman was a quartermaster, with the rank of lieutenant, who had been sent on a duty he did not explain; but he put a veto on the plan of the major at once. He had to make some observations near Bowling Green, and the train would return before night. He suggested that Riverlawn was not a proper place to send the prisoners or the wounded, and he proposed to convey them to Louisville.

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Captain Truman reported the result of his interview; and the major accepted the compromise, and was better pleased with it than with his own plan. The prisoners were marched to the railroad in charge of the guard selected, and at dark the train took them on board. It was not necessary for the captain to go with them, but the lieutenant was to return as soon as possible with the soldiers.

Not long after the train started, Major Lyon marched with all his remaining force to the hill road, to form a junction, if possible, with the two divisions of his first company.

CHAPTER XXII

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A DESPERATE DEED CONTEMPLATED

Deck Lyon was not at all satisfied with his situation in the wagon in which he had been loaded with the tools and materials of the bridge-burners; and from the bundles of light wood, cans of powder, turpentine, and kerosene in the vehicle, this appeared to be the proper name for the four men. With the men smoking their pipes on the front seat, it did not appear to him to be a very safe position.

The wagon would have been called a "prairie schooner" farther west; and was of the kind used in Tennessee and North Carolina, and perhaps elsewhere in the South. It had a high front and rear, with a sheer between them like an ancient galley. It was provided with a canvas cover; and the bows at either end carried it out about three feet beyond the body, like an awning in front of a window. The driver rode on the nigh wheel mule, with a long whip in his hand. He was a skilled teamster, and did not soar to the refinement of reins, but did his driving by word of mouth, and the application of the whip.

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Deck had no idea where he was, or where he was going, for he had not studied the map of the present locality. He did not know where these men had come from. Captain Truman was evidently unaware of their existence in this section, or he would have set a guard over the bridge, after he had captured it in the early morning. If the son had listened to his father's conversation with the wounded prisoner, he would have learned that the bridge-burners had been sent over with the flanking detachment that had been defeated and driven off by the second company. They had made their way to the vicinity of the bridge with their wagon, and had watched for an opportunity to do their work.

They had found the signalman in their way; and, doubtless, it had required some time to arrange their plan for getting him out of the way. Deck was alone, and was not a very dangerous opponent in himself; but he could give an alarm by firing his carbine or otherwise, which would bring an armed force to his assistance. It was necessary to resort to strategy; and the proceedings of Brown Kipps to get the troublesome signalman out of the way have already been detailed. If the young man had had more experience of the ways of the world in general, and of the methods of bridge-burners in particular, they would not have succeeded so well.

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The combustible goods and other articles in the wagon seemed to have been pitched into the vehicle at random; for they were not arranged in anything like order, and everything was in

confusion. It seemed to the prisoner a piece of remarkably good fortune that he had not had his legs and arms bound, as when he was first taken. He was only a boy, though a stout one, and they did not seem to set a high estimate on his prowess as a fighting character; for they had not seen him in the skirmish on the east road, when he had given Lieutenant Makepeace the wounds which had disabled him.

The sabre and carbine which had been taken from him had been carelessly thrown into the wagon, though they were within reach of the men. Deck was a young man of too much enterprise to be mentally inactive in the midst of his present misfortune, and the wagon had hardly started before he began to consider his chances of escaping from the custody of the four men. At the first glance he could see that the chances were all against him. If it came to a fight, there was no chance at all for him; and his inborn prudence did not permit him to think of such a thing as a physical contest with a threefold odds against him.

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But he was not discouraged at the mountain of difficulty in front of him, but proceeded to study the situation very carefully. It will be remembered that his captors had neglected to take from him the revolver he carried in one of his pockets; for, doubtless, it did not occur to Kipps that he was supplied with such a weapon. Deck set a very high value on the pistol in his present emergency. The trousers with which he had been supplied by the government were not made with hip pockets, a very serviceable improvement to the garment, not unknown even at the beginning of the war.

This kind of pocket was very useful to those who were in the habit of carrying revolvers; but Deck's ingenuity had enabled him to provide for the deficiency. He had arranged a sort of hook under one of the back suspender buttons, about where the pocket would have been if the garment had been supplied with one, so that he could readily produce the weapon on occasion. He had a box of cartridges in his pocket, and the revolver was fully loaded for instant service.

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His carbine and sabre lay on the merchandise behind the men, all of whom were seated on a front seat under the projecting cover, and the wagon was wide enough to provide close quarters for all of them. The canvas could be drawn down so as to protect the contents of the body from the weather; but now it was fastened up, so that the vehicle was open in front.

Deck thought he might work his way forward far enough to enable him to reach his regular weapons; and at first he thought he would take this step. If he succeeded in obtaining them, all the advantage he expected to gain was in preventing his custodians from using them on an emergency; for the revolver in his pocket was a more effective weapon in the wagon. He looked over the miscellaneous loading of the vehicle, and tried to find a place for each of his feet in his advance to the forward part of the wagon.

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His survey of the ground was not at all satisfactory; for there was no firm foundation for his feet. He must move noiselessly, or the attention of his captors would be called to him. He could not expect to go three feet without disturbing some of the articles; and his caution compelled him to abandon the attempt to recover his arms. They were not essential to his success in any plan he might adopt; and if Kipps discovered that he was trying to escape, he would certainly have his arms tied behind him again; and that might cut off all his chances. He was satisfied that it was not prudent for him to attempt to reach and obtain his carbine and sabre.

Then a more desperate scheme occurred to him, and it seemed to be more feasible than the other. He had his revolver; and, after a great deal of practice with it, he had become quite skilful in its use. He had seated himself on a box close to the rear curtains of the wagon when Kipps committed him to his canvas prison. Though it seemed to him like "fastening a door with a boiled carrot," he had seen the foreman adjust and fasten a padlock on the curtains after he had drawn one over the other.

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Doubtless this was done to prevent thieves from stealing any of the stores in the vehicle in the night; but any enterprising robber, with a sharp knife in his hand, could speedily make an opening in the canvas. These men were not soldiers, so far as the prisoner knew; though perhaps they were more effectively opposing the plans of the government than if they had been, by destroying its facilities for the transportation of troops and supplies for the suppression of the rebellion. They were enemies as much as though they had worn the gray uniform.

Deck sat on the box with his hand on his revolver. He could sit there, and with the six bullets in his pistol he could shoot every one of his captors, unless some of them fled before his fire. One of them might seize and use his carbine; but he would have a barrel in his weapon ready for him. This seemed to him to be the most promising scheme that suggested itself, so far as mere success was concerned. It would rid this vicinity of the State of four men who might do as much mischief to the loyal cause as a whole company of soldiers, even if they were Texan cavalry.

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Deck took the revolver from the hook inside his trousers, and assured himself that all the barrels were charged. Then he looked the wagon over again, and considered what he was about to do. Incidentally he asked himself what the mechanics intended to do with him. Doubtless they would hand him over to the military, and he would be sent to the South. It was not a pleasant prospect, and he prepared to use his weapon.

It was war in which his lot was cast; and the business of war was the killing of men, and the more the better. He raised the weapon; but, in spite of his reasoning, his soul revolted at the thought of the act he had been ready to commit a few moments before. Brown Kipps had used him as kindly as the circumstances would permit, and had not confined his arms behind him when in his

judgment it did not appear to require it. It looked like a cold-blooded murder, and a cowardly deed besides, to shoot these men in the back of the head.

He believed that, if he committed the deed, the remembrance of it would haunt him as long as he lived; and the Confederate prison was better than such a black memory. He put the revolver in his pocket; and he felt more like a Christian when he had decided not to be guilty of the outrage to which he had been tempted. He wondered what his father, who was a true Christian, would say when he related this incident to him, if he ever saw him again.

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"Mr. Kipps," said he on an impulse which suddenly seized him.

"Well, my little dandy, what now?" asked the foreman, as he turned his head as far as his crowded seat would permit.

"Don't you think you have carried me about far enough?" demanded Deck.

"I reckon not jest yet. You are a Yankee soldier, and you may be wuth sunthin' to us afore we get through with you," answered Kipps very good-naturedly. "I reckon you uns down below there got some prisoners out o' we uns."

"No doubt of that," added Deck.

"We know'd there had been a fight down there; but we don't know nothin' more about it."

Deck told him something more about it, including the fact that Lieutenant Makepeace was a prisoner in the hospital.

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"You don't say so!" exclaimed Kipps, deeply interested in the statement. "Makepeace brought us over here part of the way; and he's a right down good feller, and I liked him better'n Dingfield. I'm sorry for him. Is he in a bad way?"

"I can't say how bad; but he has a bullet in his chest, and a sabre-cut on the head," replied Deck. "Our surgeon is taking good care of him."

"I'm glad you uns took care on him; and if you get hurt, we uns will do as much for you," said the foreman.

"But I have already done a great deal more than that for you; and you may thank me that you four are not dead at this particular moment," added the prisoner boldly, as he decided to adopt another method of proceeding.

"How's that, little sonny? I don't edactly see it," answered Kipps, standing up on the platform in front of the wagon, so that the other three could turn round and see the prisoner.

"Not ten minutes ago I had made up my mind to shoot all four of you, and make my way back to my company," continued Deck, as he produced his revolver, and held it up so all four of them could see it.

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At this moment the wagon went over some obstacle like a large log; and, as the hind wheels descended from it with a heavy "jounce," Deck was thrown forward, and only saved himself from a fall among the assorted loading by grasping one of the bows.

"We done com'd to de road, Mars'r Kipps!" shouted the driver, as he stopped his team after a succession of yells at the mules.

"Stay where you are, Jube!" called the foreman. "I want to know how my life was saved, for one, afore we go any farther. What's the reason we uns ain't not all dead, little 'possum?"

"Because I didn't shoot you all," replied Deck, as he stood holding to the bow with one hand, and the revolver with the other.

"Do you expect, little po'k-eater, we uns should 'a' let you do such a wicked deed as that?"

"But I could have done it without asking your permission," replied Deck. "I was sitting on that box, and I could have taken you first through the back of your head; and if one of you had moved to resist, I could have finished him in the twinkling of an eye. I don't like to boast, Mr. Brown Kipps, but I am a dead shot with this particular revolver; and it would have been ready for business again the instant I had disposed of the second man. It fires six shots, and I had a chance to complete the job, even if I missed my aim twice. Don't you see it?"

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"Where did you get that little shooter, Lyons?"

"My name is Lyon; there is only one of us here. Of course I have had the revolver about me all the time, and you were so considerate as not to take it from me, simply because it did not come into your head to look for it."

"Why didn't you do the shootin' when you had the chance, little coon?"

"Because I concluded that it would be mean and cowardly to shoot four men in the back of the head, and that it would haunt me as long as I lived."

Kipps suddenly jumped over the seat, and began to make his way to the place where the prisoner stood; but Deck pointed the revolver at him, and commanded him to halt.

THE SKIRMISH ON THE HILL ROAD

Brown Kipps leaped over the seat, and acted as though he was in a hurry to reach Deck Lyon, after he had explained the desperate deed he had contemplated; and the latter thought the movement indicated violence on the part of the foreman.

"Halt where you are, Kipps! Don't come any nearer!" exclaimed Deck; and the revolver in his hand enforced his command.

"Don't shoot, sonny! I only wanted to catch you by the hand, and shake it with right good will," replied Kipps, as he halted where the carbine and sabre of the young cavalryman were lying between his two feet. "I b'lieve what you been tellin' on us; and I reckon it's right lucky some on us on this front seat ain't all ready to be put in the ground."



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"Halt where you are, Kipps!"

"I assure you that I have told you the exact truth," said Deck, as he dropped his revolver to his side.

The moment he did so Kipps stooped as quick as a flash and picked up the carbine.

"Don't shoot, little one!" he continued, as the prisoner raised his weapon again, ready to meet this new combination in front of him.

Deck realized that he must act quick, and he was in the very act of firing at the foreman when he spoke. He looked his opponent in the eye; but the bridge-burner did not bring the carbine to his shoulder. He had grasped it near the muzzle, and he held it with the stock hanging down; but he proceeded no farther than this, and the revolver pointed at the head of Kipps, ready to fire if he elevated the piece. He was in doubt. The words of the foreman did not indicate that he meant violence; he felt that he had chance enough to save himself by shooting his opponent before he could bring the carbine to bear upon him. But perhaps this was the most exciting moment in the lifetime of the young soldier.

"Don't shoot, sonny!" repeated Kipps, still holding the carbine in a position that rendered it entirely useless; and as he spoke he advanced towards his prisoner.

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"Don't come any nearer, Kipps, or there will be a breathless body in this wagon!" exclaimed Deck, with vim enough to convince the other that he was in dead earnest.

"I won't come no nearer, if you say so, Lyons. I was only go'n' to bring this shootin'-iron and give it back to you, jest to show you that I was right friendly-like to you; and I wanted to catch you by the hand, 'cause I believe you could 'a' killed some or all on us if you'd had a mind to. I reckon we won't quarrel after you've held up when you mou't have stuck some on us."

"Drop that carbine, Kipps, and then I can better understand what you mean," replied Deck.

"That's what's the matter, is it? I was only go'n' to give it back to you," protested the foreman, as he let go of the piece; and it dropped upon the loading of the wagon.

Deck lowered his revolver to his side; and Kipps climbed over the bundles, boxes, tools, and cans, till he was within reach of his late prisoner, for he seemed no longer to regard him as such. He extended his big hand to the cavalryman, whose right still firmly held his weapon, and he took the hand of the other with his left.

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"That's a right-down honest Tennessee fist, Lyons, and the gizzard always goes with it," said he, as he squeezed the hand of Deck till he was on the point of crying out with the pain of the

cracking bones. "There's that cheese-knife and shooter of yours, and you can take 'em as soon as you get ready. You're a Yankee; but you've sunthin' more'n a rock for a gizzard."

"There's my hand in yours, Kipps; it's the left, but that is nearest to the heart," replied Deck, now fully trusting the Tennessean, as he thrust the revolver into his pocket, satisfied that he should have no further use for it at present.

"You've got a rayle Tennessee gizzard in your bowels, Lyons, and I like you. If anybody wants to do you an ill turn, he's got to fight Brown Kipps, sure," added the foreman.

"And the rest on us," put in Tom Lobkill.

"That's so," chimed in Lank Rablan. "We ain't none on us gone dead yet; and if you hadn't got a gizzard tucked away somewhar in your bowels, some on us mou't 'a' been on t'other side o' Jordan's swellin' flood."

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"Here's your tools, Lyons," continued Kipps, as he brought the sabre and carbine to Deck. "Here's the trimmin's that goes along with 'em, and you can rig yourself out jest as you was when I fust laid eyes on you."

As he spoke he took from his pockets the belt, sling, and other articles belonging to his equipment. Deck seated himself on the box again, and, after he had adjusted them, he put them on. He turned his back to his companions in the wagon, and restored his revolver to the hook where he carried it; for he did not care to show them where it had been concealed.

"I suppose you don't intend to carry me any farther, Kipps," said Deck, when he had fully accoutred himself for a march; and he hoped to be in the ranks of his company within a couple of hours.

With his companions, he believed the bridge had been destroyed, and that his father had failed in the principal object of his mission, though he had defeated the enemy in every engagement in which he had met them.

"I reckon you can go jest where you like, and kerry that gizzard o' yours with you," replied Kipps. "I'm only sorry you're a Yankee, for you've behaved handsome enough to be a Tennessean."

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"I am equally sorry you are not all four Union soldiers, standing up like true men for your country and its government," replied Deck.

"I reckon we'd better not talk on that subject, for we can't agree, nohow," answered the foreman, as he went to the front of the wagon. "Now you can git out at this end, for t'other's locked."

This was a happy conclusion of the whole matter; and Deck realized that he had accomplished more by the course he had adopted than if he had carried out his cold-blooded intention to shoot his custodians. He went to the front, and Kipps assisted him to alight; for his weapons interfered with his movements in descent.

"Where are we now, my friends?" asked Deck, as he looked about him.

"I don't know, no more'n a goose in a poke," replied Kipps. "We've come some miles, more or less, from the railroad; and this is the road we come down on. Where are we, Jube?" he demanded of the negro driver.

"I reckon we's here, Mars'r Kipps," replied the driver with a grin from ear to ear.

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"I reckon so too; but whar's here, Jupiter?"

"Donno whar you be, Mars'r!" exclaimed the negro, who seemed to think the foreman was joking with him.

"I don't know whar I am, Jube; do you?" replied Kipps, looking about him to identify anything in the surroundings.

"I know for sartin; we done come dis way befo', Mars'r. Dis is jest de place whar we done struck in de field to find de roleraid," replied the driver confidently. "Dis wot de fo'kes here call de hill road."

"But we didn't come over that log before."

"No, sar; dis nigger runn'd ag'in it, and twis' it round."

"I reckon we'd better camp here for the night, and wait for orders," said Kipps, "You can go the way you come, Lyons."

"I don't know that I can find my way," replied Deck. "I have been shut up in your wagon all the way, so that I could see nothing."

"You can foller the wagon-track, and that will fotch you out all right," added Lank.

But Deck was in doubt about returning to the railroad. He knew that Lieutenant Belthorpe had been sent over to the railroad, and he had seen the troopers ride up the embankment. He thought it strange that he had not encountered his force; and he proceeded, Indian fashion, to examine the road for horse-tracks in the sand. The sod was so tough that it bore no indentation inside of the log; but in the road he found plenty of horseshoe marks, and he proceeded to study them.

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They all indicated that the riders were headed to the south, or in the direction of the east road, the latter of which led to the camp and cross-roads. Was it possible that Belthorpe had returned to the camp? This was what the marks suggested. Deck then walked by the log, and found the track extended towards the north. He followed them for about a quarter of a mile, and then he found where they began on the road.

At this point he found the fence had been thrown down, and there were plenty of horse-tracks in the cornfield which it surrounded. These led up from the direction of the railroad. In the soft ground he found, on the left of the great body of the marks, which indicated that the detachment had marched by fours, the print of a bar shoe, often called a round shoe. He was aware that Tom Belthorpe rode a horse shod in this manner, for the steed had belonged in the stable of the planter of Riverlawn.

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His investigation proved that not only a company of cavalry had come up from the railroad to the highway, but that it was the force under command of the first lieutenant of the first company. He returned to the highway, wondering what had become of this detachment. But Deck did not know that a portion of the Texan Rangers had come down the hill road, as reported by the scouts of the squadron. He hastened back to the place where he had left the wagon. As he approached it he saw two mounted Rangers talking with the bridge-burners, or rather with the foreman of them; and the other three were helping the driver to hitch on his mules, for they had begun their preparations to camp there for the night.

The two scouts turned their horses and rode away in the direction from which they had come. Deck had halted when he saw them, and put himself behind a big tree at the side of the road. But as soon as they rode off at a gallop, as though they were in a hurry, he advanced. The bridge-burners were all busy in getting the mules ready for a start.

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"You better make tracks with all your legs towards the railroad, sonny," said Kipps earnestly.

"What has turned up now?" asked Deck with interest.

"Them men was the scouts of our company, and we are ordered to move to the north with all the speed we can get out of the mules," continued Kipps. "Our company, or a part on't, will be here soon; and I don't want 'em to ketch you, Lyons, for I can't do nuthin' for you if they get hold on you."

"All right, Kipps; and I am very much obliged to you for your kind service. But where are you going?" asked Deck.

"I don't know no more'n the dead. I'm to foller this road, and I hain't the leastest idee whar it'll fetch out," replied the foreman, as he took his place on the front seat, and Jube started the unwilling team.

The driver plied his whip with cruel vigor, and the wagon soon disappeared. Deck was perplexed. Belthorpe had marched up the hill road, as indicated by the tracks of the horses, and the Rangers were marching down the same road. How did it happen that they had not met, and a fight had not ensued? He could not explain it. Just above him was a grove, or a field covered with sparsely scattered trees.

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Deck was very anxious to ascertain the situation of affairs in this section, and he hoped to be able to give his father some important information when he met him. He placed himself behind a tree in the grove. He had hardly secured his position before he heard the clatter of horses' hoofs and the clangor of sabres in the road above him. In a minute he obtained a view of them, and they were Rangers. They were hurrying their horses as though they were engaged in some important movement.

The troops had not come abreast of the observer before he heard a furious yell in the grove not far from him. The shout of "Riverlawn!" was heard, with other yells; and a body of the Union cavalry dashed into the road, and fired a volley from their carbines.

"Sling carbines! Draw sabres!" shouted an officer; and Deck recognized the well-known voice of Tom Belthorpe. Then they charged into the enemy with a fury that promised to annihilate them in a very short time.

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Deck belonged in this portion of the first company; but he had no horse, and he could not join in the charge; but he began to use his carbine. The Texans fought bravely and desperately, and the two forces seemed to be about equal. The interested observer saw one of his company topple over from his horse, and the excited animal dragged him, with one foot, in the stirrup, off the field. Deck caught the horse, and reduced him to subjection with a vigorous arm. He released the soldier, who was insensible, and placed him under a tree. Then he mounted the steed, and dashed into the fight.

He had hardly struck a blow with his sabre before he heard the clanging of sabres some distance in the rear. At the head of it was the officer in command, with one arm in a sling, and his head tied up with bandages. They were Texan cavalry, without a doubt; and Deck called the attention of the lieutenant to the fact.

The officer at the head of the approaching force, wounded in the head and arm, could be no other than Captain Dingfield; but there was no one present who knew anything about the brief action in which the commander of the Texan force had been defeated, and from which he had made a very hasty retreat. Major Lyon had sent Captain Gordon with half his company in pursuit of the fleeing enemy; the passage of both the pursuers and the pursued across the east road had been reported by the scouts at the cross-roads.

Deck had not been able to force his way into the thickest of the fight; and, being near the side of the road, he was the first to discover the approach of the second detachment of the enemy. The action was in progress in a broad, open space in the road, where the trees had been cut off from the land; and the ground occupied was partly in this field. He could readily determine that Belthorpe had chosen this place for the action because it presented more open space. [Pg 295]

Doubtless his scouts had reported to him the approach of the first section of the enemy, and he had concealed his force in the grove to which Deck had retreated to observe the movements of both parties in the conflict. But he thought the lieutenant had made a mistake in delaying his attack until the detachment of the enemy had advanced too far, and he had thrown his men upon the rear instead of the flank.

The lieutenant had less than fifty men, and the enemy fought with desperate courage and determination. But his men were fresh; for they had been moving leisurely about in quest of the foe, and had been resting a short time in the grove, while the Rangers had ridden a long distance. The arrival of the rest of their company would throw all the advantage, both in position and numbers, over to the side of the enemy; and Deck saw in an instant that the battle would be lost if it continued under these unfavorable circumstances.

"Lieutenant!" he shouted, flourishing his sabre to attract attention, when he had approached as near as he could to the officer. [Pg 296]

Tom Belthorpe was using his sabre vigorously, and he had just smote to the ground a trooper, when he heard the voice of Deck. He had not seen him before, and was not aware of his presence. He concluded on the instant that the son of the major was the bearer of an order from his father; and he knew the young man well enough to understand that he would not call him at such a time on an unimportant matter, and he rode towards him.

"What is it, Deck?" he demanded, full of the excitement of the conflict.

"You are flanked and outnumbered!" shouted Deck; though in the noise and fury of the action no one but the lieutenant heard or noticed his call. "There is another detachment of the Rangers coming up the road. You are beaten if you don't get out of it!"

"I don't understand you, Deck," replied the officer, glancing at his men still engaged in the furious strife.

"There is a force of the enemy of at least fifty men coming up the road, and in three minutes more they will fall upon your rear!" repeated Deck, speaking as clearly as though he had been reading his piece in school. [Pg 297]

"Where do they come from?" demanded Tom, as he looked back in the direction indicated by the sabre of his friend, and they were the best of friends.

"I don't know anything at all about it," answered Deck impatiently.

The fresh troopers of the lieutenant's command were driving the enemy before them by the vigorous fighting they had put into the attack, and they were somewhat superior in numbers. By the time Deck had given his warning the enemy had been forced back to the point where the wagon had emerged from the fields and woods. The lieutenant was obviously very unwilling to give an order to retreat when victory was almost within his grasp. It was the first action in which he had been engaged, and his pride as a soldier was implicated.

Tom looked again at the approaching re-enforcement of the enemy; and then very reluctantly he summoned the bugler, and ordered him to sound the call, "To the rear." It was given in the quickest of time; and the faces of the troopers indicated their astonishment and chagrin at the nature of the call, when victory was only a question of minutes. [Pg 298]

The men fell back; but the enemy were not disposed to follow them, and perhaps believed they had gained a victory. They were facing down the road, and they could not help seeing that a re-enforcement for their side was approaching. The lieutenant in command reformed his men, but he did not order them to charge upon their retiring foe.

"I don't understand this business, Deck," said Tom Belthorpe, when he realized that the officer in command of the enemy did not intend to pursue him.

"I don't understand anything beyond what I can see with my own eyes," replied Deck. "I have just come over this region in a wagon, and I advise you to retreat towards the railroad, if you will excuse me for saying so."

The lieutenant gave the order for his men to retire in the direction indicated, and the officer and Deck followed them.

"We were within two minutes of a victory, Deck," said Lieutenant Belthorpe, still panting with the exertion he had put forth in the combat. [Pg 299]

"But you would have lost it, and had the tables turned on you two minutes later," replied Deck.

"What next?" asked the officer, who, in his inability to understand the situation, was perplexed and baffled. "I don't feel like running away just as we were whipping those Texans."

"But it is easier to run away before you have been whipped yourself than it would be afterwards. I should judge that the force approaching is the other half of the Rangers' company. There they come," added Deck, as the furious riders seen in the distance halted in the road near where the bridge-burners had proposed to camp for the night.

Without consulting his friend and companion in regard to the expediency of doing so, the lieutenant gave the order for his platoon to halt at the moment when they had encircled one of the knolls so common in that region. He and Deck were in the rear; and though the men could not see the road, it was in full view from the position occupied by the officer.

"I am not feeling like doing any more running away just yet," said Tom, who was quite willing to forget that he was a lieutenant in the presence of Private Deck Lyon. [Pg 300]

"They have halted, and there is no occasion to run away just yet; but it is best to take the bull by the horns before he gores you," added the private. "I think we had better rest under that big tree, and keep out of sight till you get a better idea of this thing, Lieutenant."

The suggestion was adopted, and they rode to a position under the tree where they could see without being seen.

"They have come together, and they don't seem to know where they are any better than we do," said the lieutenant. "I should say they had had a hard ride by the looks of their horses;" and the officer had looked at the reunited company through a small opera-glass he carried in his pocket, though the distance was hardly more than five hundred feet.

"Hold on a minute, Tom!" exclaimed Deck, as he slid from his horse, and fastened him to a branch.

"What are you going to do now, Deck?" demanded the lieutenant.

"I am going up there to find out what is going on," replied the private, as he detached his sabre, and fastened it to his saddle. [Pg 301]

"But you will be picked up," suggested Tom.

"If I am I will let you know; but I am determined to get posted, so that I can give you reliable information," answered Deck. "But I obey your orders; and, if you tell me not to go, of course I shall not."

"Do as you think best, Deck," replied the lieutenant, who found it difficult to realize that he was the military superior of his friend.

Deck waited for nothing more. His carbine was still slung at his back; but he had provided that the clang of his sabre as he walked should not betray him. He had looked the ground over before that day, and knew where he was locally, though he was ignorant of the positions of the several bodies of troopers other than those before his eyes. He was on the border of the grove, consisting of large trees, rather far apart. He got behind the trunk of one of these, and then picked his way from one to another, till he was within thirty feet of the officers in command of the company.

The lieutenant of the platoon which had done the fighting had ridden away from his command a short distance; and when Deck first saw him he was peering into the region between the railroad and the road, doubtless anxious to ascertain what had become of the force with which he had just been engaged. The man with his head tied up and his arm in a sling called upon a sergeant to rearrange the bandage on his head; and he had just completed his task when Deck reached the shelter of the tree he had selected. The wounded officer, for such his uniform and shoulder-straps indicated that he was, appeared to be ready for business. [Pg 302]

"Where is Lieutenant Redway?" he demanded very impatiently.

"There he comes, Captain Dingfield," replied the sergeant at his side.

The lieutenant hurried up his jaded steed, and saluted his captain.

"I thought I saw a fight going on here," continued the commander of the company, though Deck had never heard his name before.

"So there was, Captain Dingfield; and a very sharp one at that," replied Lieutenant Redway. "But we defeated the enemy, whipped them out of their boots, and they fled like a flock of frightened sheep down that opening;" and the reporter of this information pointed in the direction in which Tom's command had retired. [Pg 303]

"If the Father of Lies, who is always swinging his caudal appendage over the world in search of the biggest liars, should come here for one, where could Captain Dingfield hide you, Lieutenant Redway?" said Deck to himself; for it would not have been prudent to say it out loud.

"Why didn't you follow them up?" demanded the captain, with some indignation in his tones and manner.

"Because you were in sight with the rest of the company; and I deemed it my duty to wait for orders, especially as you had sent me directions to hurry forward the bridge brigade," replied the lieutenant.

"But I am closely pursued by a force in the rear; and it cannot be far behind me by this time. How large was the detachment you fought, Redway?" asked the captain, looking behind him at the road, as though he believed his pursuers were close at hand.

"About the size of my command; fifty men, I should say."

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"You ought to have wiped them out; and you have made a mess of it by not doing so," added the captain.

The two officers had withdrawn from the immediate vicinity of their men, and chosen a place within twenty feet of Deck's tree, so that he could hear them very distinctly. The conversation was exceedingly interesting to him, especially the fact in regard to the pursuing force.

"I acted upon my best judgment."

"I had a rough fight in the road, on my way to the bridge, and I have hardly forty men left, while the Yankees will have a full company when the detachment behind me comes up," added the captain, who was evidently in a contemplative mood. "The force you whipped must be at no great distance from this road."

"I think they will keep on running for the next three miles," said Redway. "I went up the road to look for them, but I could see nothing of them."

"But we shall be outnumbered if we let the two parts of this company come together. I have found that they fight like Texans. If we meet the whole of them together, we shall be whipped, as Makepeace was. There is only one thing to do. Form the whole company in column by fours, and we must go back and beat our pursuers, before they get as far as this," said Captain Dingfield, suddenly becoming very animated and energetic.

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Deck concluded that the time had come for him to leave his retreat; and he felt that he had not lost his time in carrying out the plan he had suggested. But it would be safer for him to retreat in five minutes more than at that moment. He looked on while the Rangers formed, and saw them march on their present mission. He had not a very high opinion of the strategy of Captain Dingfield; and if his subordinate officer had given him correct information, perhaps he would have adopted a different course.

The Rangers could no longer see him, and he broke into a run as soon as they had gone. He found everything as he had left it, and he proceeded to report his intelligence to Lieutenant Belthorpe.

CHAPTER XXV

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SUNDRY FLANK MOVEMENTS ARRANGED

Captain Dingfield, with the portion of his company with which he had attacked Major Lyon near the cross-roads, where he had been badly beaten at the first assault, had fled across the country, and was continuing his flight along the hill road. Doubtless he did not intend to fight a battle at the point mentioned, but had made the attack immediately after the explosion on the bridge to occupy the attention of the force there until his men had completed the destruction of the structure.

He appeared to have discovered that the squadron of cavalry he had encountered was not so easily annihilated as he had believed they would be by his invincible Rangers. On the contrary, he found his troop in a difficult situation, with a superior force near him. Doubtless he had read in what manner Napoleon I. defeated an army of superior numbers by taking it when divided into two parts, delivering battle to each in turn.

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Captain Gordon, with half his company, had been sent in pursuit of him, but had been somewhat delayed in his movements. Captain Dingfield had united the two portions of his company after the skirmish of one of them with Lieutenant Belthorpe, who was believed to have retreated to the railroad.

Deck Lyon had listened to the interview between the captain and lieutenant of the Rangers, and fully understood their plan. As soon as the company had departed on their mission to annihilate the detachment of Captain Gordon, he hastened back to the big tree where he had left Lieutenant Belthorpe. Tom had just crossed swords with the enemy for the first time, and had fought like a lion; but he was nervous in regard to the situation. He had no superior officer near him, and he felt the responsibility of his position.

"Well, Deck, what next?" he asked, before the young soldier could get within talking distance of him.

"There is work for you," replied Deck; and though he knew precisely what ought to be done, he

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was very careful not to suggest anything. He did not wish to overstep the line of his duty as a private, though he and the lieutenant were on the most intimate and familiar terms of friendship. He hurried his steps; and in as few words as possible he related all he had seen and heard.

"Then, Captain Dingfield has gone out with his whole company to intercept Gordon?" said the officer.

"Precisely so; and I don't know what force Captain Gordon has with him," added Deck. "The Rangers believe your command has retreated to the railroad, and are well out of the way."

"We will convince them to the contrary very soon," said Tom with energy, and darted off at the best speed of his horse for the knoll where he had left his men.

Deck restored his sabre to its place, and mounted his horse. He was ready to return to the ranks; but Tom called him, and he took his place at the side of his friend. The lieutenant asked him a great many questions; for the troop could not move at their best speed on account of the trees and bushes.

"I suppose we have nothing to do but follow and pitch in when we find the enemy," said Tom, when they came out on the hill road. "We can't see anything of Dingfield's company yet." [Pg 309]

"He has not got over the top of that hill we see ahead, and is in the valley this side. Neither of us has been over this road, and we know nothing at all about it," replied Deck, careful not to wound the pride of his officer.

"Why don't you speak out, Deck, and tell me what you are thinking about?" said the lieutenant somewhat impatiently. "You keep in your shell as tight as a Baltimore oyster. You did not hesitate to tell me what you had in your scone when we were fighting that detachment in the road."

"I only intended to give you the information that Dingfield's company was coming, and would then outnumber you," replied Deck.

"You advised me to retreat, and I did so, for I saw that you were right."

"But you are my superior officer, and my business consists in obeying your orders," replied the private with becoming humility.

"None of that, Deck! We will keep up all the forms and ceremonies; but I want you to be Deck Lyon, while I am Tom Belthorpe, when we are side by side as we are at this moment. I say all we have to do is to ride ahead till we find the enemy, and then pitch in. Is that your idea, Deck?" [Pg 310]

"With all due deference, Tom, it is not," replied the private.

"Confound your deference!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "I asked your advice, and you mumble about forms."

"I will speak as plainly as I know how to speak. If you show yourself to Captain Dingfield, he will run away if he can. He has been badly punished to-day, and he can't stand much more of it. When he finds himself pinched between Captain Gordon and yourself, I don't believe he will feel like cutting his way out."

"But he outnumbers Gordon just now," Tom objected.

"Of course you will not let Captain Gordon suffer," continued Deck. "If you will allow me to say it, I will suggest what I should do if I were in your place."

"Allow you! Confound you, Deck! Didn't I ask you point-blank what you would do?" demanded Tom.

"We are moving at a dog-trot now, and that is just right. Before we get to the top of that hill yonder in the road, I should halt, and send a scout ahead to report on what there is to be seen," said Deck. [Pg 311]

"All right! I detail you as the scout," answered the lieutenant very promptly.

"Then I will leave you. If I raise my cap over my head, hurry up. If I make no sign, come along leisurely," added Deck, as he urged his steed to a gallop, and dashed ahead.

Just then he wished he had Ceph; but he had left him hitched near the bridge when he ascended it to take in the flag, though the horse he had was not a bad one. How far in the rear of Captain Dingfield's company Captain Gordon had been he had no means of judging. Deck reached the summit of the hill over which the road passed. He reined in his steed, and walked him till his own head was high enough to see over the crest in front of him.

Captain Dingfield's company was not in sight. Not more than half a mile ahead of him was another hill, beyond which the enemy had disappeared. He took off his cap and waved it in the air above his head. Tom could not help seeing it; and his command were immediately galloping towards him. Deck did not wait for them, but ran his own horse till he reached the summit of the second hill. Here he halted again. There was a third hill, and probably one every mile or half-mile; for this was the hill road. [Pg 312]

Captain Dingfield had not hurried his men, and Deck discovered his force on the lowest ground between the two hills. He had halted there, and the men appeared to be watering their horses.

Deck was sorry he had not a field-glass. He fell back a short distance, so that his horse should not be seen by the enemy, hitched him to a sapling, and returned to the top of the hill on foot. After examining the location of the enemy as well as he could, he concluded that a road crossed that upon which both forces were moving, though he was not sure.

Returning to his horse, he mounted again, and descended the hill a few rods. The lieutenant had reached the top of the first hill, and Deck waved his cap again. As soon as Tom reached the spot where the private was, he halted his command. He hastily informed his officer that the enemy were at the foot of the hill on the other side. [Pg 313]

"I must not lose sight of them for long," said Deck. "I will go ahead again, and make the same signal for you to advance."

"But you expect there will be a fight, don't you, Deck?" asked the lieutenant.

"There will be if Captain Dingfield don't run away by a road I believe extends through the valley. I think the captain of the Rangers is waiting for Captain Gordon to come upon him in this place. I will keep a lookout for our men," replied Deck, as he rode up the hill again.

The private was a very enthusiastic soldier; and he thought it would be a capital idea to bag the Rangers, and make prisoners of the whole company. It would be a feather in Tom Belthorpe's cap, and he would have been glad to place it there. He hitched his horse again, and then climbed a tree. Some of the hills in the vicinity were cultivated, and some were not. From his elevated perch he discovered a farmhouse on the road, of whose existence he had not before been confident. He had no doubt of the fact now.

There was a cornfield on the left of the road where he was, but at some distance from it. Between this tilled land and the hill road was a considerable extent of wild land, covered with hillocks, and the whole of it overgrown with small trees and bushes. Near the place where the platoon had halted, Deck perceived a practicable passage through the tanglewood; and he went down the tree in a desperate hurry, to the imminent peril of his limbs, though he reached the ground in safety. [Pg 314]

A glance at the summit of the third hill assured him that Captain Gordon was not yet in sight. Slinging his carbine, and buckling on his belt, he hastened to the lieutenant, and, without any unnecessary manifestations of deference, stated the plan he had brewed in the top of the tree.

"I should like to see the whole of that company bagged, Tom," said he, as he led the way to the opening he had seen. "I should like to see you do it, I am only afraid Dingfield will escape by that road, and I should like to have you block his way in that direction."

"But if we shut up that road against him, we shall leave the hill road open to him," replied Tom.



"What are you uns doing here!"

Deck bit his lip, for he had not thought of this; for he was not a full-fledged strategist any more than his officer. [Pg 315]

"You are right, Tom; and that is the end of my scheme," added Deck.

"Not a bit of it, Deck. Why not compromise on your idea; send half our force across the cornfield, and leave the other half to take care of this road? I like that idea," said Tom with enthusiasm.

"You would have but twenty-five men to hold this road against the whole of Dingfield's company," said Deck.

"But we don't intend to move till Captain Gordon is here to take a hand in the game," answered Tom. "You will go with Sergeant Fronklyn to the cross-road, and I will stay here. As soon as I see the rest of our company coming down the hill, I will strike the enemy in the rear, while the

captain goes in on the front. You will sail in from the by-road as soon as you hear the firing, Deck. That is fixed. Now have deference enough for your officer to hold your tongue, and obey your orders."

"I am as dumb as a dead horse," replied Deck.

Both of them were laughing; and Deck hastened to a place where he could see over the crest of the hill, while the lieutenant divided his force for the two undertakings. In a few moments all was ready, and Tom joined his friend.

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"It is time we were moving," said Deck.

"All is ready for you; and Fronklyn will take counsel of you when necessary," replied the lieutenant.

"Don't show yourself on the top of the hill, Tom; for that might let the cat out of the bag," added Deck.

The scout, as Deck considered himself for the present, joined the detachment detailed for the by-road, and led them into the wild region, Fronklyn remaining some distance behind him. The enemy were in a deep hollow, and the guide soon assured himself that the detachment could be neither seen nor heard by them. The sergeant advanced in response to his signals. A spur of the hill concealed them, and they galloped across the field, from which the crop had been harvested. He guided the force to a point beyond the farmer's house. Leaving the sergeant and his men where the buildings shut off the view of the hill road, Deck rode cautiously to the other side of the house.

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"What you uns doin' here?" asked the farmer, showing himself from behind his barn.

"We are attending to our own business, and it wouldn't be a bad idea for you to do the same," replied Deck, who did not like the looks of the man.

"I reckon you uns is Confedrits," he added.

"You are out of your reckoning."

"There's some more on 'em over to the brook. I reckon I'll go over, and let 'em know you're here," suggested the farmer.

"If you do, you will get a bit of lead through your upper story," replied Deck, as he rode on.

He had hardly started his horse before a volley was heard in the direction of the hill road.

CHAPTER XXVI

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THE ENEMY'S BATTLE WITH THE MUD

The sound of the volley did not come from the top of the hill, and Captain Gordon would not have been so simple as to waste the powder and balls in the carbines of his men at an impracticable distance from the object of his attack. Lieutenant Belthorpe must have seen his force as soon as he reached the top of the hill; and no doubt he had hurried to join in the attack at the right moment, so that it could be made in the front and rear at the same time.

But plans do not always work precisely as they are arranged beforehand. Deck turned his steed as soon as he heard the volley, and hastened back to notify the sergeant; but Fronklyn had heard the discharge, and marched on the instant. For a non-commissioned officer, he was decidedly a man of parts, though he had not been in a fight till that day.

"Hurry up, Sergeant! I think we shall have warm work over on the hill road as soon as we can reach it. They are firing lively now on both hills," said Deck, as he took his place by the side of the officer.

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"We are all ready for it; and the men were as mad as a bull in a swarm of hornets as the recall was sounded back there a while ago, when they were licking the enemy out of his boots," replied Fronklyn.

"They are likely to get enough of it now," added Deck, as they galloped forward at the best speed they could get out of the horses.

But the firing suddenly ceased, and there was a noise ahead other than the sounds of battle, which attracted the attention of Deck and the sergeant. It was the clang of sabres and the rattle of accoutrements, and the sounds came from a less distance than to the hill road.

"What does this mean?" asked Deck, as he reined in his horse. "Halt your men here!" he added, as he obtained a full view ahead.

Fronklyn promptly accepted the suggestion, and gave the order; but he did not understand the reason for making it. The cross-road extended through the wild region over which the detachment had passed farther up the hill. In this part of it the surface was more irregular than above; on the left was a meadow, through which flowed the brook that crossed the main road. Just ahead of the force the road wound through a narrow pass, between lofty pinnacles of rock.

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From a point in the road Deck had obtained a glance across the meadow at the cross-road near the main highway. There he saw the Rangers retreating vigorously, and coming directly towards him. He could not quite understand this change in the programme, as laid down by Lieutenant Belthorpe and himself. But it did not take him long to explain the situation to his own satisfaction, whether correctly or not.

Captain Gordon's men had made the attack with a volley from the carbines. As soon as Tom Belthorpe heard the report, he dashed down the hill to have a finger in the pie; for his men were eager for the affray. Captain Dingfield had seen them coming, and probably mistook the force for a much larger one, and ordered a retreat by the cross-road. Doubtless he had chosen to await the attack of Captain Gordon in this locality on account of this convenient outlet. The enemy had not waited for a charge, and neither of the detachments from the two hills had reached the brook.

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Deck hurriedly stated the situation to Sergeant Fronklyn. Then he pointed out the narrow pass in the road, which would conceal the men for a few moments. He advised him to advance to it, and then fall upon the head of the column as it entered the narrow passage. The officer gave the order to advance, and with it a few ringing words of encouragement. Fronklyn placed himself at the head of his men, with Deck near him, and they dashed into the pass at a breakneck speed. The enemy had not yet reached the narrow defile.

The troopers had their carbines all ready for use, and the sergeant halted them at a point where they could see the Rangers as they approached. At the right moment he gave the command to fire, and the report was the first intimation to Captain Dingfield that an enemy was in front of him. As soon as the Union soldiers had discharged their pieces, they were ordered to sling their carbines, and draw their sabres.

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"To the charge! March!" shouted Fronklyn.

The volley had been a surprise to the Rangers, and they were evidently staggered as some of their saddles were emptied. Captain Dingfield was not at the front of his company; for the danger was supposed to be in the rear, and he was as brave a man as ever sat on a horse. Of course he could form no idea of the strength of the force in front of him, and he must have realized that he had fallen into a trap. If he had not been prudent before, he was so now, for the bugler immediately sounded the recall.

Sergeant Fronklyn did not wait to see what Captain Dingfield would do, or where he would retreat. He led his men forward, and they charged furiously upon what had been the right of the column. The Rangers defended themselves with vigor and determination for a few minutes, and the accounts of three of them were closed for this world. The next thing that Deck saw, for he made a business of knowing all that was going on around him, was a column of cavalry fleeing across the meadow.

The captain of the Rangers, from his position near the rear, had evidently found a means of escape. Deck fought with his sabre as long as there was one of the enemy near him; but as fast as the Texans could get out of the *mêlée* they fled to the rear. The pass was so narrow that the Union troopers, few as there were of them on the by-road, had not room enough to do themselves justice. But Fronklyn urged them on, and drove them before him, till he heard the clashing of arms in front of him.

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Both Captain Gordon and Lieutenant Belthorpe dashed into the narrow road, and followed up the enemy, till the last of them had taken to the meadow. When the ground was examined later, it was found that there was only one narrow causeway by which the descent to the low ground could be made; and the Rangers covered and defended this pass till all of their number had left the road. It was in vain that the fresh troopers pressed forward from the hill road, for the way was blocked against them. In the inability of the captain and the lieutenant to bring their numbers to bear, the combat was on equal terms.

The Rangers defended themselves bravely and skilfully. There were a number of hand-to-hand struggles with which there was no space for the interference of others. But it looked as though the Texans had leaped from the frying-pan into the fire; for they had gone out but a short distance from the by-road before their horses began to mire; for the ground proved to be very soft. Several of the Texans were obliged to dismount, and pull their steeds out of the mud.

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Captain Gordon had pressed forward, and engaged the rear of the retreating column; and he was about to order a pursuit, when he discovered the enemy was sinking in the mire, and that the meadow was no place for horses. It was located all along the wild region; and, doubtless, some of those sink-holes and caverns which abound in this part of the State existed in this section of wild land. But the captain was not willing to permit the escape of the enemy.

Deck Lyon was reasonable enough to abandon the idea of "bagging the game;" for the Rangers could now hardly be regarded as an organized military company. The meadow proved to be nothing but a quagmire, though the farmer appeared to get the hay from it, as there were two stacks of it on the field; but he had to take the occasion when the ground was frozen to obtain his crop. By this time the Texans were scattered all over the meadow, wandering about in search of more solid ground.

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It would have been easy enough to shoot down the whole of them; but Captain Gordon was too chivalrous a man to murder the defenceless fellows. A few of them had crossed the brook, and were ascending the hill on the other side. A number of them were making a road of the bottom of

the little stream, which seemed to be composed of sand washed in from the hills.

The first company were at ease all along the by-road, watching the movements and the struggles of the enemy; and no doubt Captain Dingfield wished he had fought it out, or surrendered on the hard ground. The night was coming on; and even if the Texans extricated themselves from their pitiable condition, they must be so demoralized that they could do no further mischief till they had rested and recruited from the effects of their battle with the mud.

"What are them men doin' in there?" asked the farmer, who wandered as far as the causeway, when it was safe to do so, and there encountered Deck, whom he had met before. [Pg 326]

"They are trying to get out," replied Private Lyon.

"They can't do it!" exclaimed the native, who indulged in much profane speech. "They'll make a cemetery of the whole medder. It's nothin' but muck in there till you git to the bottom on't, and that's where them fellers will go. I had a colt git in there, and all on us couldn't git him out; and I reckon his carcass is lyin' on the bottom now. They've sp'ilt my medder," continued the farmer; and he heaped curses on the unfortunate troopers, who were tearing up the soft sod at a fearful rate.

The native had picked up the three horses of the troopers who had been killed in the affray, and they were some compensation for the damage done him in the meadow, which looked as though it had been ploughed up.

"Isn't there any way for those men to get out of that quagmire?" asked Captain Gordon, as he encountered the farmer.

"I don't know o' none," replied the man in a surly tone, "If they was only Yankees, I'd like it better." [Pg 327]

"I like it better as it is," replied the captain.

He knew of no way to extricate the troopers from their plight. It was the dry season of the year, and probably there was less water and less mud than in the wet season. The bodies of the horses seemed to be resting on the sod, with their legs wholly plunged in the soft soil. The riders had dismounted, and attacked two stacks of hay on the field, and were placing it in front of their animals. It afforded a better foundation for them than the oozy turf; and a couple of them were already standing on their legs.

The darkness was gathering rapidly, and Captain Gordon gave the order for his men to form in column; and then he marched them out to the hill road. He was satisfied that the Texans would escape from their miserable plight, though it might require many hours for them to accomplish it. They had already begun to build a sort of causeway of the hay, to connect with the solid one by which they had fled from the fight. The hay was of a coarse quality, abundantly mixed with weeds and bushes, and it appeared to be substantial enough to support the horses. [Pg 328]

It was evident to the captain that the entire force of the enemy could be easily captured as they came off the meadow; but it might require the whole night to secure them. The first company, now united, marched to the hill road, and halted in a field which had been selected before for the camping-ground. The men proceeded to feed themselves and their horses. A half-dozen scouts were left on the by-road to watch the mired Texans. They had built a great fire to afford them light, and continued their labors.

A portion of the field where they had encamped consisted of a grove of big trees, such as the company had frequently seen. The baggage-train had been left at the bridge, and the men had no tents, but they were provided with overcoats and blankets; and thus protected from the cold of the chill night, it was not accounted a hardship to sleep on the ground. Sentinels surrounded the camp, and two scouts had been sent out in each direction on the hill road.

"Scouts coming in from both ways!" shouted the sentinels in the road; and the word was carried to the guard quarters. [Pg 329]

The captain was immediately informed. As Deck happened to be in the detail for guard duty, he had been stationed in the road, and it was his voice which first announced the return of the scouts. Captain Gordon, who had stretched himself under a tree for a nap, hastened to the road to ascertain the cause of the alarm.

"Where are the scouts, Deck?" he asked, as he confronted the sentinel in the road.

"They have not got here yet," replied Deck, as he saluted the captain. "I saw them at the top of the hills, coming in at full speed."

"But there is no enemy in this vicinity, except the Texans in the quagmire," added the captain.

"I know of none, Captain."

The two scouts came in almost at the same moment, before the captain and the private could discuss the situation, and reported a detachment of cavalry approaching from either direction.

As Captain Gordon suggested, there was no enemy in the vicinity with the exception of the Texan Rangers, half buried in the mud. The approach of cavalry from both directions, and in the darkness, was rather an alarming announcement; and if the scouts had not been close by, he would have ordered the long roll, and prepared for defence. The camp-fires were blazing near the road, and a weird light was cast upon the scene.

"Well, Beck, what is your news?" demanded the captain, as the scout saluted him.

"A detachment of cavalry was coming up when I left the top of the hill," replied the trooper.

"What were they?" demanded the captain impatiently.

"I don't know, Captain; we could not make them out in the darkness," replied the scout; and he was the one who came from the south. [Pg 331]

"How many were there of them?"

"We looked at them as they came down the hill, and Wilder and I reckoned there were about fifty of them. They had a wagon train behind them."

"Very well, Beck. What have you to say, Layder?" asked Captain Gordon, turning to the scout from the north.

"My report is just about the same as Beck's; though the detachment comes from the other way. But they didn't have no baggage-train."

"Did you make out how many there were, Layder?"

"We made out about forty of 'em, Captain; we could not see very well, and there may have been more of 'em."

"Return to your mates, and ascertain, if you can, who and what they are," added Captain Gordon.

Deck Lyon had something to say, but he did not feel like saying it. He was perfectly satisfied that there would be no fighting with the approaching detachments. He had been reasoning over the situation, and he had formed a decided opinion. He had heard the train on the railroad, both when it went down and when it returned about dark; but he knew nothing about the events which had transpired at the camp by the bridge. The only fact that bothered him was that the detachment from the south had a baggage-train. [Pg 332]

"Well, Deck, what do you make of it?" asked Captain Gordon, as he halted in front of the sentinel.

"The two detachments are the second company of Riverlawn Cavalry," replied Deck without any hesitation; for this was the decided opinion he had reached.

"What makes you think so, Deck?" asked the captain with a smile.

"Except the Texans in the mud, there is no other cavalry in these parts. That's the first reason. The second is, that Major Lyon sent half the first company under Lieutenant Belthorpe up the railroad, and he can have heard nothing from this force since; and he would naturally get a little anxious about it. The third reason is, that he sent you and the rest of the first company in pursuit of the Texans. If you have not sent any messenger to him, I shouldn't wonder if the major had worried a little about you, Captain," said Deck. [Pg 333]

"I sent no messenger to him; I could not spare a single man, for I was liable to meet the whole company of Texans," added the captain. "But I think you are right, and the same suggestions came to my mind."

Half an hour later the same scouts returned to the camp, and reported that the captain and Deck were correct in their suppositions. In a quarter of an hour more the second company rode into the camp. Major Lyon was with the detachment from the south. The moment he saw Deck, he leaped from his horse as lightly as his son could have done it, and grasped both of the hands of the sentinel.

"I am glad to see you again. Dexter!" exclaimed the father. "I have had a deal of worry over your disappearance, and I was afraid I should have to send bad news to your mother and your sister."

"No use of worrying about me, father," replied Deck, still holding the hand of the major. "I have had considerable experience to-day, but I have worked through it all." [Pg 334]

"But what became of you?" asked the anxious father.

"I was captured by the bridge-burners, and I was only sorry that I could not prevent them from setting the bridge afire. I suppose it was all burnt up, and your business here is all a failure."

"Not at all, my son; the bridge was hardly damaged at all, and a train has been over it twice since they tried to burn it. But I will see you later," added the major, as he pressed the hand of his son again.

Captain Gordon was considerate enough to relieve the sentinel from duty, and he went with his father to the nearest camp-fire. The wagons were driven into the field, and a few minutes later the headquarters tent was pitched. Stools were placed before the fire, and all the commissioned

officers of both companies were sent for. It looked like a council of war, though the object of the meeting was to receive the reports of the officers. For the first time since the arrival of the squadron, the two companies were united.

Captain Gordon, as the senior, was called upon first for his report; and he recited it at length, ending with the skirmish at the cross-roads near the camp. Lieutenant Belthorpe described his wanderings with half the company, including his brief engagement with the Rangers. [Pg 335]

"I feel as though I should be mean if I failed to inform the officers of the squadron how much service Deck Lyon has rendered to me since I found him on the road," said Tom. "We are not on parade just now, and I suppose I may say it."

"Dry up, Tom!" exclaimed Deck, loud enough to be heard by the speaker, though hardly by the others.

"Not just yet, Lieutenant," interposed the major. "I don't understand how you happened to meet Dexter in the road; for the last he told me of himself was that he was taken prisoner by the enemy. I should like to hear his narrative first, for it may throw some light on other matters."

Deck was admonished by his father to tell the whole story, without any omissions; and he related his adventure from the time he had first seen Brown Kipps. He explained how he had been duped by that worthy Tennessean, and in what manner he had been tempted to shoot his four custodians through the back of the head. [Pg 336]

"I hope you didn't do it, Dexter," interposed his father, before he had come to the sequel of the affair.

"I did not, father; for I feared the deed would haunt me to the last day of my life, be it long or short," replied Deck. "It looked like cold-blooded murder to me."

The assembled officers applauded him vigorously with their hands; and the young soldier was glad to receive this testimonial of his officers, for to him it seemed to settle the moral question involved in his action.

"I do not believe in carrying on the war upon peace principles; but I do believe that soldiers should not become assassins," added the major.

The officers likewise applauded this sentiment of their commander.

"We are ready to hear you now, Lieutenant Belthorpe, as I know how Dexter came into your path. It is important to remember that the bridge-burners, with their wagon and supplies of combustibles, proceeded to the north by the hill road. Go on, Lieutenant." [Pg 337]

Tom Belthorpe described the action with half the Rangers under Lieutenant Redway, and the interposition of Deck when he discovered the approach of the other half of the Rangers. He had retreated rather against his will by Deck's advice.

"I think his advice was good, if he is my son," added the major.

"No doubt of it; you would have been pinched between the two portions of the Confederate force, and outnumbered nearly two to one," added Captain Gordon.

"I was quite satisfied in regard to the wisdom of the advice, badly as we desired to fight out the action, as soon as I had a chance to think of it," continued Tom. "Then Deck did a very neat piece of spy-work, which enabled us to follow the enemy without being seen or heard. The whole of the Rangers had come together, and they outnumbered Captain Gordon's command. It was Deck's suggestion to strike across lots, and reach the by-road; but I did not follow it in full, and divided my force, so that the Texans should not retreat by the way we came." [Pg 338]

"And when you came down the hill with hardly more than twenty men, the Texans took fright, and retreated up that by-road, where they were received by Sergeant Fronklyn," added Captain Gordon. "This caused them to seek a new avenue of escape; and they plunged into the quagmire, where they are now."

"What you say of Deck leads me to indorse his conduct in the action on the east road this morning," said Captain Truman, who had said nothing before; and he proceeded to describe what the young man had done in that affair.

"Pleasant as it is to hear such excellent reports of the behavior of my son, I must add that his brother has behaved equally well, though he has not had the opportunity to distinguish himself except in doing his simple duty," said the major. "But I have more important business than this, for I received new orders before I left the camp at the bridge. I am required to assure the safe passage of trains on the railroad first; but it appears that the State has been invaded in the south-east, or is liable to further invasion in that direction."

"The worst feature of this aspect of the situation is that hordes of guerillas have been turned loose upon us; and even now they are engaged in their work of plundering and destroying the property of Union men, not to speak of the outrages committed upon the citizens. These guerillas, or some of them, take the name of 'Partisan Rangers.' Indiana and Ohio troops are moving in the direction mentioned; but the enemy are still busy there. 'The Confederate cavalry,'" continued the commander, reading from a letter he had taken from his pocket, "'scoured the country in the vicinity of their camp, arrested prominent Union men, and destroyed their [Pg 339]

property.' This is the situation for a hundred miles east of us; and I am ordered to check these raids of the guerillas with all my available force.

"I am ordered to move without any unnecessary delay, and I shall march to-morrow morning. I expect a company of Union Home Guards here by to-morrow; and I shall be obliged to leave Captain Truman and half his company; but as soon as he is relieved by the infantry company, he will rejoin the squadron."

"We have been unable to make out that there is any Confederate force in this vicinity, with the exception of the Rangers who are just now struggling with the mud in the bog meadow near us," said Captain Gordon. [Pg 340]

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

"I am sure I don't know," replied the captain.

"I counted eighty-one of them, including Captain Dingfield; but some few of them had escaped through the mud to the hill on the other side of the bog," said Deck, who was always doing some useful work when he found a chance.

"As many as that; perhaps half a company is not force enough to leave with you, Captain Truman," suggested the major.

"Quite enough, Major Lyon; for we should have to act mainly on the defensive," replied the captain of the second company. "My men have fought the Texans once to-day; and though they are brave and daring fellows, they are not such terrible bugbears as they have been represented to be. But infantry can guard the bridge better than cavalry."

"The infantry will probably relieve you by to-morrow. If the Texans, with their bridge-burners, were out of the way, I need leave no force," added the major.

"But we can put them out of the way very easily," suggested Captain Gordon. [Pg 341]

"Do you mean to shoot them down as they stick in the mud there? We are not murderers, Captain," replied the major sternly.

"I meant nothing of the kind," returned the captain with a blush. "I could have ordered my men to do that before it appeared that the action was finished."

"Pardon me, Captain; I know you are not a murderer."

"They are stuck fast there, eighty-one of them, according to Deck's figures; and we can make prisoners of them as they get out of the bog, as I think they will before morning, for they have hit upon an effective plan."

"It would take one of our companies to capture them, and to dispose of them as prisoners, so that we should gain nothing," replied the major, vetoing the plan at once. "The Union Home Guards may be here early in the morning, for they have had time enough to make the march."

The meeting closed; and officers and privates were tired enough after the long day to wrap themselves in their blankets and sleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII

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A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

The night passed without any alarm. The sentinels were relieved at regular intervals, including the two who patrolled the by-road. The latter complained, when others were put in their places, that they might as well be asleep in the camp, for they could see nothing of the Texans. There was only one place where they could obtain a view of them when it was light enough for them to see anything.

The night was unusually dark, for a heavy mass of black clouds had rolled up from the west, promising a smart shower. The Rangers had extinguished their fires at an early hour in the evening, for what reason the guards were unable to determine; but the fact was suspicious, and they redoubled their vigilance. The last that had been seen of the bemired troopers, they were building the causeway of hay to unite with the one of solid rocks and earth built by the farmer to obtain access to his hay-field. [Pg 343]

This causeway was believed to be the only possible way to get on or off the meadow. Captain Gordon had made a survey of the locality in person, and had gone up the road as far as the house of the farmer, the only one in the vicinity. He had met the native in his walk, and had questioned him with all the skill he possessed in regard to the surroundings; for the fellow was not disposed to give any information. The only statement of any importance he could drag out of him was that the causeway was the only way by which the Texans could leave the meadow. The captain could see none himself, though he believed from his manner that the man was lying to him.

The place looked as though there had been an immense sink-hole there at some remote period in the past, which had been filled up by the wash from the hills around it. This flow had brought down quantities of dry leaves and other vegetable matter; and this, with the growth of rank grass

and weeds decaying on the spot, had formed what is called a bog in Ireland, and a peat meadow in the Northern States.

There was fuel enough in it to supply a village for a hundred years; but wood was so plentiful in this region that it would not pay to cut, dry, and carry it to more solid ground. Whether the captain was satisfied or not with his investigations, he could obtain no further information. The meadow seemed to be surrounded with rocky formations; though his knowledge of it, obtained in the darkness, was very imperfect. But he and his men had seen the troopers laying the causeway of hay to the one of earth, as though they believed this was the only avenue of escape.

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The two sentinels extended their beat as far as the farmer's house. After nine o'clock in the evening its windows were dark, and the people within appeared to have retired. But the big dog of the native did not retire with the rest of the family, and he made a rude attack upon the guards every time they approached the house. About midnight he had assailed one of the men so furiously that he was obliged to defend himself with his sabre; and the brute was so badly wounded that nothing more was seen of him. His dead body was found the next morning near the house; and the farmer was as furious as the canine had been, though he had a proper respect for carbines and sabres.

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When the guard was relieved after midnight, all was quiet on the meadow, and it was believed that the troopers had taken to their blankets. One of the sentinels declared that he could hear them snore; but this was doubtless a camp-fire exaggeration. They watched the causeway, as they had been instructed to do; and certainly none of the Texans came out that way. One of them proposed to explore the space between the by-road and the position of the troopers; but the other insisted that such an enterprise would result in certain death, for no doubt the enemy had sentinels whose carbines were loaded with ball cartridges.

So far as the guards could report, there was no change at the by-road during the night. The headquarters tent had been pitched, and Major Lyon had been up half the night studying his maps, and repeatedly reading the written orders he had received, as well as a mass of newspaper cuttings which had been sent with them. The latter were, for the most part, accounts of outrages committed by Confederate cavalry of companies of "Partisan Rangers," and of bands who were not provided with even the doubtful authority of the insurrectionary government.

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Before daylight in the morning Major Lyon was on his feet; for he felt that he was loaded with a heavy responsibility. He was charged with the protection of the railroad bridges in the vicinity, though he was to be immediately relieved from this duty to enable him to assist with the more vigor in suppressing the guerillas and other predatory bands. Artie, now his orderly, slept in the tent with him, and he was sent to have "The Assembly of Buglers" sounded; and this is the call for the troopers to appear on the parade.

There was a commotion at the guard quarters; and before Artie had roused the bugler from his slumbers, he was called by the officer of the day. Was Major Lyon awake? He was, for he had called his orderly.

"Inform him at once that the sentinel from the by-road reports the disappearance of the enemy in the bog," said the officer.

As soon as he received the information, the major hastened to the guard tent, where the sentinel who had brought the news was detained. The trooper repeated his information to the commander. It was hardly light enough in the bog to see anything, but he and his mate had satisfied themselves that the Rangers had all disappeared; but of how or where they had made their escape he had no knowledge.

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"Did you hear no noise of any kind?" asked the major.

"Nothing at all; it was as still as a tomb all the time I was on guard," replied the sentinel. "We were not sure they were gone till we walked out a piece on the meadow, and found the hay, of which they had made a road to solid ground; but it did not lead to the causeway."

"Where did it lead?" demanded the major.

"In the direction of the farmer's house; but we did not follow it, for it was decided that I should come up to the camp and report what we had found out."

"Who was with you, More?" asked the officer of the guard.

"Bunch; and he was to follow the hay-road after I left him," replied the sentinel.

Major Lyon was very prompt in deciding upon his action, and the first company was soon in line, and ready to march. Deck belonged in one of its ranks, and Artie was in close attendance upon the commander. As the former had conducted the detachment "across lots" the afternoon before, the major sent for him; and the two young soldiers rode side by side behind their father, who had Captain Gordon at his side.

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"It seems that we are to have a long tramp of it after this; and we are not likely to be at home Christmas or Thanksgiving this year," said Artie, as the column descended the hill to the by-road.

"Wherever we may be, it looks like a lively time ahead; for things seem to be very much mixed in the State," replied Deck.

"How do you suppose the Texans got out of the mud-hole, Deck?"

"I don't know; but I have no doubt the farmer who lives near it and owns the farm helped them out of it. He is a surly fellow, and I saw that he was a Secessionist when I met him."

"What do these two darkies want?" asked Artie, pointing to a couple of colored men, who were running down the hill from the northward as though their very lives depended upon their speed.

"Probably they are messengers who have come from the vicinity of the bridge by the same route I did," replied Deck, as he noticed that one of them was flourishing what looked like a letter in the air.

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The two men reached the brook before the column turned in at the by-road, and had a chance to catch their breath before the officers came up to them. They had probably seen the column come out from the camp, and had hurried to intercept it before it turned into the highway they saw ahead; and it was probable that they were familiar with the locality.

"Wich o' you uns is Mars'r Major Lyon?" asked the man with the letter of the first one he met, who happened to be Deck.

"The one with the plume in his hat," replied the private. "Where do you come from, Cæsar?"

"From de souf road; more'n a t'ousand so'diers dar. De man wid de feder in his hat," replied the negro, as he rushed forward to the major and delivered his letter, with a jumbled speech, of which the recipient took no notice.

Major Lyon drew up his horse at the side of the brook, his sons remaining with him, while the column continued on the march. He tore open the envelope, and read the epistle written with a pencil.

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"Be'n a-lookin' fo' you all night, Mars'r," said the bearer. "De gin'ral done gib me de letter 'fo' dark, an done tell me to find you. Done tramp seben miles on de roleraid; but we done couldn't found you."

"Where did you sleep?" asked the major, who was evidently pleased with the information contained in the letter.

"In a swotch-house," replied the messenger, who was very much confused, and his small stock of English was badly mixed. "In a swotch-house on de roleraid."

"He means a switch-house," laughed Deck, who could not see why the fellow upset his words so badly.

The major read the missive a second time, and then took a sort of portfolio from his pocket, and hastily wrote a reply to it, which he folded and pinned together in the absence of an envelope.

"How did you find us this morning?" asked the major.

"We done find de hoss-tracks an' de wagon-tracks, an' we follers dem."

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"Here's a dollar for your service; but don't spend it for apple-jack, my boy," said the major, as he handed a couple of half-dollars to the messengers. "You may go to the camp yonder, and get something to eat, if you like, before you return."

The men were grateful; and the one who received the money gave half of it to his companion. The major and his orderlies hurried forward, and found that Captain Gordon had halted the company at the causeway, where the inquiry must begin.

"The Home Guards arrived at the bridge last night, and the captain of the company reports to me as directed. I have written out what information I have to give him, and you will send a couple of your men to deliver the paper."

Two troopers were despatched at once as the bearers of the order. It was possible that the men might encounter some of the Rangers who had escaped from the other side of the meadow; and they were cautioned by the major to be on the lookout for them, and to return as soon as possible. They departed at a gallop, which promised a speedy return.

"One thing is plain enough: the Texans did not come out of the mire by this causeway," said the major, as he turned his attention to the question under consideration.

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"The sentinels were here all night," replied Captain Gordon.

"But we can easily discover where they did escape," added the commander as he dismounted, indicating that he intended to conduct the inquiry personally; and Deck and Artie followed his example. "Detail ten men to go with us, dismounted, and you will go with us, Captain."

Deck and Artie were directed to go ahead as guides. They descended the causeway, and came to the sod that covered and concealed the mud beneath. The turf was strong enough to support men on foot, as had been seen the afternoon before in the movements of the Rangers. But the hoofs of the horses cut through it, and they were mired as soon as they advanced, though some of them wallowed a considerable distance before they gave up the struggle.

The meadow was nearly round in form, and about half a mile in diameter. The orderlies, as both

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of them soon came to be called, advanced safely, though they were compelled to avoid the places where the Texans' horses had cut up the sod and brought the mud to the surface. The material of the hay causeway, which had at first been extended in the direction of the solid one, had been removed; but leading from the brook, towards a point above the farmer's house, they saw the one that must have been used by the Rangers.

The two haystacks seen the day before had been entirely removed, and the road built of it was about a foot deep of hay. The officers and the ten men followed the guides; and the hay causeway conducted them to an inclined plane built of old boards and planks, which the party mounted, and came to a field near the road. The mysterious disappearance of the Texans was fully explained.

CHAPTER XXIX

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THE RIVERLAWN CAVALRY CHANGES BASE

The first thing Major Lyon did when he reached the road, and the disappearance of the Texans was no longer mysterious, was to take from his pocket his map of the county. He found the hill road, and the one where they stood.

"If the sentinel who reported that he could hear the Rangers snore in the bog told the truth, the enemy got some rest last night," said the major, addressing Captain Gordon.

"But he did not hear them snore; that was absurd," replied the captain. "If they had been snoring, he could not have heard them; for they were at work too far from him. If he heard anything, it must have been the bubbling of the brook; but probably it was all in his imagination. But what is the point in regard to the snoring, Major Lyon?"

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"If the Rangers worked all night, and did not get any sleep, they are too tired and sleepy this morning to make a long march," replied the commander.

"Then you think they have camped at some place not far from us?" asked the captain.

"I only think it is possible they have done so. Captain Dingfield appeared to be badly wounded, from all reports; and I doubt if there is as much strategy in his brain to-day as he had yesterday. I shall not make a business of pursuing him."

"It would be a good thing for this part of the State if he could be cleaned out entirely, bagged, and his company sent to Louisville as prisoners," suggested Captain Gordon.

"No doubt of it; but it would be hardly consistent with the orders I have just received for me to delay in this section to carry out your idea. We are more needed elsewhere than here."

"Then we are to march on a sort of roving commission to the eastward, where the Confederates are breaking through from Tennessee, it appears."

"It amounts to that, though my orders are very explicit," replied the major, as he led the way back to the narrow pass where the company had been halted. "The situation here is not so bad as it was. We have saved the bridge; and the Home Guards which arrived there last night are described as consisting of good men, who will be mustered into a Kentucky regiment as soon as circumstances permit; and Captain Woodward, who commands it, is an old soldier, and likely to be made a colonel."

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"Then the bridge will be safe."

"It can be better defended by infantry than by cavalry alone; both would do better than either. Captain Dingfield and his bridge-burners have been sent to the north, and I have no doubt he intends to join them there. To follow him would keep me some days, if not a week, from the more pressing duty assigned to me," reasoned the commander.

"I understand it better now," added the captain.

"I have been informed that troops have been sent to the vicinity of Munfordville, in Hart County, where the railroad bridge has been partly destroyed, though a temporary structure has been built to replace it. I think Dingfield means to go there, and complete the work others failed to finish."

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"I hope we shall find the guerillas, or whatever they are; and I believe our boys will soon make an end of them," said the captain with enthusiasm. "Your orders permit you to go where you please, Major."

"They do; for it was not possible for those charged with the protection of the State to inform me definitely where the guerillas were to be found, as they are continually changing their locality, though I have some papers to aid me. I am not a little surprised at the confidence placed in me by my superiors, who send me on a mission with no definite instructions."

"All the details of the fights at Riverlawn and its vicinity are known to them; for I have taken care that they should not be ignorant in regard to you."

"But I have just become a soldier," added the major modestly.

"Then it runs in the blood, and it has got as far down as Deck," said Captain Gordon, laughing, as they came to the company.

The party mounted, and rode back at a gallop to the camp. The cooks of the company had prepared an unusually good breakfast, which was disposed of with a relish, stimulated by three days' feeding from the haversacks of the troopers. As soon as it was finished, the order was given to "break camp;" and, as it had been hardly more than a bivouac, the work was speedily accomplished, and the two companies were soon in line.

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While these preparations were in progress, the major was studying his county map. What little baggage had been taken from the wagons was soon loaded again. There was little for the officers to do, after the orders had been given.

"We are about ready to march," said Captain Gordon, approaching the commander, who had seated himself on a log near the road.

"I am all ready," replied the major, as he glanced at Artie, who was holding his horse near him. "Of course Dingfield followed this by-road, which will take him to another by which he can reach Munfordville, if he is going there. We will take the same road; and if the Rangers are resting themselves in camp after the fatigues of the day and night, we may have a chance to pay our respects to them."

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"I should like one more slap at them; for they ran away so rapidly that I did not get a fair hit at them," added the captain.

"But they are brave men, and we outnumber them two to one. Truman says they fought like tigers on the east road."

"That is true, and that is the reason I should like to meet them again; for I believe there is not a braver or more reliable body of men in the Union army than the Riverlawn Cavalry; and I am not a Kentuckian either."

"Neither am I by birth, though I am by adoption; and I am precisely of your opinion in regard to our men," added the major as he mounted his horse; and his orderlies did the same.

Deck was at home again in the saddle; for Ceph had come to the camp with the second company. After the prisoners at the bridge had been disposed of, the wounded had been cared for by sending them in one of the captured wagons to Riverlawn, consigned to the care of Levi Bedford; for a hospital had been established there for the wounded in the battles with the ruffians.

The column moved down the road, and turned into that which the Rangers had used in their escape. As the right of the line approached the house of the farmer, that worthy presented himself before the officers; and he appeared to be mad enough to swallow half-a-dozen Yankees. Possibly he thought the squadron had started in pursuit of the Texans.

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"I want to know who's ter pay me for that dog o' mine some o' you uns killed last night," he broke out, walking along by the side of the major and Captain Gordon. "That critter was wuth a hund'ed dollars, and that's what I want you uns to pay me before you go any furdur."

"Are you a loyal citizen of the United States?" asked Major Lyon.

"I'm nothin' o' that sort!" replied the native, who began to heap curses and maledictions on the government. "The' ain't no United States! She's done busted all to pieces!"

The major made no reply, and had not even stopped his horse. The fellow followed him; but he took no further notice of the irate Secessionist, rather to the amusement of Captain Gordon and others within hearing. But the farmer was soon tired of addressing one who treated him with silent contempt, and seated himself on a stump to observe the procession.

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Two skilful scouts, one of whom was Life Knox, had already been sent forward to search for any indications of the camp of the Texans. The squadron soon reached another road running through a valley. The major had learned from his map that it connected with the east road in one direction, and the hill-road in the other.

The column halted to wait for the return of the scouts. Knox and his companion soon appeared, and reported that he had followed this road to its junction with the hill-road, without seeing anything of the enemy.

"They ain't within ten miles of here," added the Kentuckian. "I got so I know the tracks o' them Texas hosses, and I follered 'em five miles. They don't want nothin' more o' the Riverlawn Cavalry."

This information settled the point so far as the Rangers were concerned, and nothing was seen of them, though they appeared in some skirmishes farther north. The Indian craft of Knox had proved to be very useful, and he was a great favorite with both officers and men. The march was resumed; but the events of the next two days on the road are not of interest enough to be reported. At the end of this time the squadron were in the territory described in the orders of the commander, and active work was expected.

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Just before sunset the battalion halted on the outskirts of a small village, and went into camp there. The American flag was hoisted on a pole planted for the purpose, in order that the inhabitants of the vicinity might make no mistake in regard to the character of the force. Not only the negroes and loungers to be found in every village flocked to the camp, but some of the influential citizens appeared on the ground. The guard kept them outside of the lines. A person

on horse-back, who had the air and manner of the genuine Kentucky gentleman, attracted the attention of Major Lyon, who was desirous of obtaining information on the spot in regard to the sentiments of the people.

"Who is the gentleman on horse-back?" he asked of a well-dressed negro, who looked like an intelligent man; for the commander suspected that he was a Secessionist, though he had no reason for supposing that he was such.

"That is Colonel Coffee, sir, the biggest man in these parts," replied the colored man.

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"How does he stand on the war question? Do you happen to know?" continued the major.

"Yes, sir," replied the man with a smile; "everybody within twenty miles of this village knows which side Colonel Coffee is on, sir."

"Well, which side is he on?" demanded the commander, who saw that the gentleman was approaching him.

"He's a Union man all over and all through; and the people are trying to get up a Home Guard to protect his place—that's the one you see on the side of the hill. We expect the gorillas down here."

"You have named them well, my friend," added the major with a laugh. "Do you know where there are any of them?"

"No, sir; they are like flies, and don't make nests anywhere. I reckon Colonel Coffee wants to speak to you, sir; for I suppose you are an officer of this company," added the man, who retired at the approach of the great man of the locality.

The magnate of the county rode up to the major, and saluted him with courtly grace; and though the latter was not brought up in a drawing-room, he was as polite as the occasion required.

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"I am exceedingly happy to see that flag hoisted over a body of military in this county," said the colonel, with a cheerful smile, as he pointed with his riding-whip at the emblem of the Union.

"I am very glad to be where there are those who appreciate the flag," added the major.

"I am only sorry that you will find so few of them in this neighborhood," returned the dignified Kentuckian. "We are threatened by roving bands of plunderers to the east and south of us, and for the last week I have expected to walk away from my place by the light of my burning house. I live in that one on the side of the hill."

"I hope we shall be able to put an end to this state of affairs at once, Colonel Coffee," replied the major.

"You know my name," said the magnate with a smile.

"I asked it of that negro."

"He is the village barber, and a very intelligent man. May I ask whom I have the honor to address?" inquired the colonel.

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"Major Lyon, in command of a squadron of United States cavalry," replied the officer.

"I am very glad to see you, Major, personally, and especially to see you at Greeltop; for we are greatly in need of efficient protection," returned the colonel. "I have heard all about you before."

"I am equally happy to meet you, Colonel Coffee; for I am at present in urgent need of full information in regard to the condition of affairs in this section."

"I shall be pleased to have you dine with me, and we can talk over matters at our leisure in my library."

Major Lyon excused himself from the dinner, and invited the colonel to his tent, which had been set up by this time.

CHAPTER XXX

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THE MAGNATE OF GREELTOP'S VISIT

The cavalymen had been duly drilled in all the details of forming a camp; and in a short time the tents were pitched, the pickets set up for the horses, and the cooks were busy in preparing supper. The headquarters tent was the first to be arranged, as soon as the major had indicated its location. Colonel Coffee was invited to take a camp-stool; for they do not have sofas and armchairs in a camp.

"I have been pleading with the officials for the last two weeks to attend to the security of this region," said the colonel, as he seated himself. "I have wondered every day during the last week that Greeltop has not been sacked, and all our houses burned down; for there is a great deal of Union sentiment in the place."

"Then the place must be particularly liable to an assault from the guerillas," suggested the major.

"We have tried to form a Home Guard here for the protection of the village, and we have a little band of about twenty men; but most of our young and middle-aged men have left the place to enlist in the loyal army, so that we have not much stock of which to form a company. But our little band keep a picket of five or ten of their number in the outskirts of the village, to warn us of the approach of an enemy."

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"We shall soon relieve them of that duty."

"Our men are not soldiers, for they have had no training; but they are made up of fighting material. Though I am sixty-five years old, I belong to the company; and I have just returned from patrolling the region to the eastward of us."

While he listened to the visitor, Major Lyon had spread out his map, which included the locality; and with the assistance of the colonel he obtained a clear idea of the surface of the country, the first requisite for a military commander. While they were still busy over the map, the sentinel at the entrance to the tent drew aside the curtain, and saluted the commander.

"A messenger in a great hurry to see Colonel Coffee," said he.

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"Admit him," replied the major promptly.

A gentleman dressed in a black coat with a standing collar to it, encircled with a belt, in which was secured a pair of navy revolvers, entered the tent, out of breath with excitement of running.

"The Rev. Mr. Elbrook, Major Lyon, one of our Home Guard," said the colonel as soon as the clergyman appeared at the entrance.

There was nothing clerical in his appearance except the standing collar of his coat; and the revolvers especially belied his profession.

"The Lord be praised for his great mercy!" exclaimed the minister, as soon as he could get breath for utterance.

"What is the matter, Joseph?" asked the magnate of Greeltop very familiarly.

"The guerillas are coming!" exclaimed the reverend gentleman.

"Where are they?" asked the colonel, as coolly as though he had been in command of a regiment for years.

"They are coming down by the mountain road back of your mansion!" gasped Mr. Elbrook, who was evidently very much alarmed, and could hardly speak in his fatigue and excitement.

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"Sentinel!" called the major sharply.

The man appeared at once.

"Where is Captain Gordon?"

"He is close by, Major."

"Ask him to come to my tent."

"Sit down, Joseph," said the colonel, giving his stool to his friend and his fellow-soldier, it appeared. "You don't gain anything by blowing yourself out."

"But this is no time to sit down," replied the excited minister, though he took the proffered seat.

Captain Gordon appeared immediately.

"A raid of guerillas on the place, Captain! Have the first company ready to march in three minutes!" said the commander in hurried tones.

The captain retired in haste, without asking any questions; and a moment later the bugles were heard sounding the assembly. The major buckled on his sword, and sent out an order for his horse.

"Thank the good Lord that the military have come at last!" exclaimed Mr. Elbrook, as he crossed his arms on his breast, and looked up to heaven in earnest prayer. "But we are wasting time, Colonel; and I am afraid we shall see your beautiful mansion in flames before we can get there."

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"If we do, it will go up in a good cause," replied the magnate, with a smile on his dignified face. "I can afford to lose it better than some of the poor people of the village could their houses. But cool off, Joseph; you are still all in a flutter."

"I will try to do so," replied the clerical soldier, "I saw them coming when I was on the top of the mountain. I hurried my poor horse till he broke down under me; and I had to run on foot the rest of the way."

"Rest yourself, Joseph. If you saw the guerillas from the top of the mountain, there is no hurry; for they will not reach my house this half-hour," added the colonel.

"You shall have another horse, my reverend friend," interposed the commander, as he ordered the sentinel to send for a spare steed.

"Now, Joseph, where were the guerillas when you saw them?" inquired the magnate.

"They were on the Cliff Road, just coming around the bend."

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"That is four miles from my house, and five from here," continued the colonel.

"But I have been a long time coming here," suggested Mr. Elbrook.

"Excuse me, Colonel Coffee; I should like a little more definite information in regard to the road by which these guerillas will approach the village," interposed the commander.

"I don't think they will approach the village at all, Major Lyon. I have not the remotest doubt that my mansion is their objective point; and they will first plunder that."

"We will take care that they don't do anything of the sort. Have you any idea how many there were in the company you saw, Mr. Elbrook?"

"I could see them marching along under the cliff; I should say there were not less than fifty of them," replied the clergyman. "I did not wait to count them, but hurried to the village, where I inquired of everybody for Colonel Coffee. The barber told me he was here."

"Company formed," reported the sentinel at the door.

"We are ready now, gentlemen," said the major, as he passed out of the tent, followed by the others.

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"The spare horse ordered, Major," said the sentinel, as he led him up.

The clerical gentleman was invited to mount this animal, which had been ridden by one of the men killed; and the colonel mounted his own steed. The commander took his horse, which was led by Deck, while Artie had brought up the spare steed. The animal was a higher-spirited beast than the parson had been in the habit of riding, and Artie had to take him by the head to prevent him from running away; for he was one of the colts of the Riverlawn planter's stock.

"My orderlies will ride with me," said the major; "I may want them. Captain Truman, you will have the second company in marching order, in case I send for them, though I don't know what this affair will amount to; and you will leave a guard at the camp if you are called away."

The order was given to Captain Gordon to march. The commander led the column at full gallop, with the colonel at his side, and the orderlies in the rear of them. In less than a minute they came to a road turning off at the left, leading in the direction of the magnate's mansion. It was situated on the side of a hill, and near the top of it. The elevation was elliptical in form, and the loftiest part was not more than sixty feet high, at the summit of which was a Chinese pagoda, painted in gaudy colors.

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There was a valley behind it; for the major could see the tops of some tall trees, whose roots must be far below the top of the elliptical hill. Beyond it were what the colonel called the mountains, though probably not one of them was more than five hundred feet high. The column followed the road into which it had turned till it came to another; and here the major ordered the captain to halt his company.

"Here is another road, Colonel Coffee; and it passes behind the hill which you call Greeltop," said the commander.

"Precisely so," replied the magnate, who thought the major had acquired a very good knowledge of the locality when he had been there hardly more than an hour.

"Captain Gordon, you will go that way with half your company, and Lieutenant Gilder will follow me," said Major Lyon. "The road through the valley unites with the one from the mountains, by which the guerillas must approach the village. You will move cautiously as you come near this road, and halt there till you hear firing on your right."

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"You can hardly call it a road through the valley, though the captain can get through without any difficulty," interposed the magnate. "It is all a grove, but the ground has been cleared off."

"Dexter, you will call Knox, and scout the road ahead of us. Don't let the enemy see you, and obey the orders of the sergeant," continued the major, as the first platoon rode off.

Life Knox was called from his place in the ranks, and the order of the commander given to him. It was the kind of duty the sergeant liked; for he was more at home there than in following military forms; though he was a faithful and obedient soldier, and his captain wished he had a hundred more like him.

"Here we go again, Deck," said the sergeant, as they galloped up the road, by the entrance to Colonel Coffee's estate. "Your pa does well to send me along with you this time, and not leave you alone as he did on that bridge."

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"But I can take care of myself, and I did that time; for I came back like a bad penny," replied Deck.

"You managed fust-rate, my boy; and if you live to be as old as the white-haired owner of this place, you will be a brigadier-general; and I hope I shall be an orderly sergeant under you."

"You are a good deal more likely to become a brigadier-general than I am, though I may get to be a corporal some time. You may be major-general; for you understand war much better than most of us."

"That can't never be, Deck. I hain't got the eddication to be anything more than a non-commissioned officer," said Knox, shaking his head, and hurrying on his horse.

"It wouldn't be just the thing for a brigadier-general to say 'eddication,'" replied Deck.

"What would you call it? I didn't pay much attention to my eddication when I was a young cub, and have been sorry for it ever sence. What do you call it, Deck?"

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"Ed-u-ca-tion."

"But I can't say it like that."

"Yes, you can. You have a brother named Edward, and you call him Ed when you speak of him. Now say this, Life, 'Ed, you can.'"

"'Ed, you can.'"

"Good! Now say, 'Ed, you, Kate,'" which was the name he had given the mare he rode.

"'Ed, you, Kate.'"

"Exactly; and it is just as easy to say 'educate' as 'eddicate.' Try it."

He did it as well as though he had been to college.

"You will be a brigadier-general if you keep on; for you know more now than half of them who pronounce their words correctly," added Deck, reining in his horse as they came to another road. "This is the one we are to follow, I think."

"I reckon 'tis; and we won't edicate—ed-u-cate—no more jest now."

"I don't see anything of any guerillas yet."

"They hain't got along," replied Knox, as he reined in his horse and looked about him.

There was something peculiar about the place which attracted the attention of the Kentuckian. The road passed through a round open space. On one side was a broad gateway that led by a winding driveway to the front door of the colonel's mansion.

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"This would be a nice place to meet them gorillas," said Knox, as he looked about him. "Now get in there, Deck," and he pointed to the open gateway, and led his mate into it. "You hold Kate while I look inter this thing afoot;" and he slid from his horse to the ground.

He followed the road, concealing himself as much as possible in the shadow of the trees.

CHAPTER XXXI

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LIFE KNOX ON THE MOUNTAIN ROAD

Life Knox contrived in one way or another to keep his tall form out of sight of any person who happened to be in the vicinity of his operations. Deck Lyon had told him the nature of the present enterprise, so that he understood perfectly the work in which he was engaged. When he reached the east end of the valley, behind the colonel's mansion, he was aware that Captain Gordon, with Lieutenant Belthorpe's platoon of the company, was posted here; but they were so well concealed, in accordance with the orders, that he could not see them, or even the pickets sent out by the officer.

It was nearly dark, and Knox thought it was time for the enemy to appear, if they intended to accomplish anything that day; but it occurred to the Kentuckian that they "chose darkness because their deeds were evil." He could neither see nor hear anything that indicated the approach of mounted men. He walked up the gentle declivity of the mountain road, and found a country better adapted to his work than nearer the village. He found one of the knolls which abound in this region, and he cut his way through the brambles and bushes to the top of it; for he saw that it commanded a view of what was called the Cliff Road, though he did not know it by this name.

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The marauders had passed the cliffs, and had halted on a little hill in the road, evidently to make their final preparations for the assault upon the village. He counted twenty-eight mounted men,—for the guerillas were not more than a hundred yards from him,—and there was a considerable number of men on foot, among whom the scout noted two or three negroes. He looked upon them with interest, and had an excellent opportunity to observe them. The mounted men seemed to be engaged in a discussion which became warm, judging from the gestures of some of those engaged in it.

Knox made up his mind that these ruffians were not regular troops, though they might be one of the "Partisan" bands, of which he had heard something from Deck. The men on foot appeared to be vagabonds and "bummers," eager to share in the spoils of the expedition. The colonel and the

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clergyman were perfectly confident that the mansion of the former was the objective point of the Partisans. They knew it would be rich in plunder, which was doubtless the sole purpose of the marauders; for they could do nothing in this manner to advance the cause of the Confederate States.

Knox had a distinct method of treating the present problem; and though he commanded nothing, he thought he could bring it about. If he had been in communication with one of the principal officers of the squadron, he would have stated his plan to him. He had observed a portion of the ground not seen by the others, and could easily divine the intended movements of the commander of the guerillas, if there was any such personage among them. They had begun to move; and Life thought it was time for him to do the same. He descended the knoll, and took a position by the side of the mountain road, in a clump of bushes.

He had hardly taken a favorable place to observe the approach of the brigands, when he discovered a couple of men approaching from the town, mounted and armed. They were hard-looking ruffians, and the sergeant did not like the appearance of them. He had but a moment to consider, and he did his thinking on the double-quick. The guerillas could not be aware that a squadron of United States cavalry had just arrived at Greeltop. If they had known this fact they would not have come; and if informed of it now, they would take to their heels, and make the dust fly till they reached a safe retreat.

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The two mounted men coming from the village looked ugly and reckless enough to be brigands; and Life promptly concluded that they had heard of the approach of the marauders, and were going out to warn them of the presence of the troops in the place. Each of them carried an old flintlock gun, which might have seen service in the time of Daniel Boone, and had a package strapped on behind his saddle. Possibly they belonged to the band of mounted men, and were going out to join them with the important news they had obtained.

"Where are you uns bound?" demanded Knox, breaking out of his covert, and planting himself in the road in front of them.

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The Kentuckian was as prudent as he was brave; but if these brigands were permitted to proceed, the business of the Riverlawn Cavalry would be ended in this immediate locality for the present. The enemy before him were two to his one; but he did not appear to take this fact into consideration.

"Who are you?" shouted the foremost of the pair in a ferocious tone, as though he expected to frighten the stalwart inquirer, and with a volley of oaths which startled the Kentuckian, who, maugre his varied experience, was a high-toned man morally, and never used any profane expletives.

"I am in command of this road jest now; and no one, not even Gov'nor McGoffin hisself, could pass out the way you uns is go'n'," replied Life.

"I reckon we uns is gwine out," replied the spokesman of the pair.

"I reckon not," added the sergeant, as he seized the bridle of the fellow's Rosinante, whisked him around, pointing him to the village, and giving him a slap to set him going.

If the brigand had any bad blood in his veins, this decided action was sufficient to make it boil; and he brought up his old flintlock, and began to point it at the "commander of that road just then," and would no doubt have put some of the contents of the rusty barrel through his head or chest, if Life had waited for him to do so. He did not; and he did not even take the trouble to unsling the loaded carbine at his back, but, reaching up, seized the brigand by the throat, and dragged him from his horse, planting him very solidly on the ground.

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The ruffian seemed to be as powerless as an infant in his grasp. Knox then snatched the gun from his hands; but the man, clinging to it, came up with it. The sergeant shook him off as he would a fly, and he fell all in a heap on the ground again. Life tossed the weapon over the fence into the bushes. The brigand sprang to his feet, and with a long knife in his hand rushed upon his herculean assailant.

Knox bestowed a blow on the arm with the blade at the end of it, which was heavy enough to break the bone; and the weapon dropped in the road. Then he seized the brigand by the throat again, and batted him over the head with his iron fist, causing him to drop limp and senseless on the ground. The other ruffian, who did not seem to be so desperate a character, looked as though he were paralyzed by the vigorous treatment of his companion; but he had by this time recovered enough of his self-possession to think of his own safety; and he attempted to run by the Kentuckian, in the direction of the guerillas.

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"You're go'n' the wrong way, Chopsticks," said Life, seizing the bridle of the horse, and bringing him up with a shock which nearly unseated the rider. "You're bound for the village, and that's the way your go'n'," continued Knox, as he unslung his carbine, standing in front of the horse.

"I want to go the other way; and I reckon you'll git hung to one o' these big trees for what you've jest did," said the second ruffian.

"I ain't go'n' to hang jest yet; and you're go'n' back to the village whether you want to or not," replied Knox. "If you move without leave from the commander of this road, a ball from his carbine will worry its way through that head o' yourn."



"The ruffian seemed to be as powerless as an infant in his grasp."

As he spoke, the sergeant wrenched the gun from the hand of the ruffian, and tossed it after the other. He seemed to be enjoying the little scene in which he was the principal actor, and he was as unmoved as though he had been taking his coffee and hard-tack at a camp-fire. The horse of the disabled brigand still stood within reach; and, picking up his first victim, he laid him, face down, across the saddle, as he would have done a bag of grain. Then he led the steed, with his load, to the side of the uninjured ruffian, and handed the rein to him.

"Now you can go back to the village where you kim from, and take this load of carri'n with you. If you feel as if you wanted to jine that band of ruffins as is comin' this way, the lead from this little piece will ketch you."

He hit the horse of the rider a slap with the breech of his carbine, and started him on his way. The sergeant was not a reckless man; though for the sake of the old flag he worshipped he would have attacked any six men that assailed it. He had time now to look out for the business of his mission, though the scene described had occupied but a few minutes of his time. Taking the side of the road, he walked a short distance in the direction of the mountains, when he heard the tramp of the horses of the ruffian band.

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A moment later he saw the head of the column appear at a bend in the road; and it was time for him to begin his retreat. Taking to the bushes in the field, he made his way back to the valley where Captain Gordon was posted; but he could see nothing of him. He was in no hurry, and he walked a short distance into the valley. One of the pickets showed himself then; and Knox sent word to the captain that the guerillas would arrive in about fifteen minutes.

Then he returned to the road, and followed it as long as he could see the column of brigands approaching. He came to a bend in the highway; and there he discovered the ruffian with the "load of carrion" on the led horse, with Deck interviewing him.

"You don't want nothin' o' that piece o' rot, Deck!" he shouted to his mate on the scout.

"But he says he and his friend have been nearly killed by the ruffians that are coming to take the village, and been robbed of their guns," replied Deck, when the sergeant came up to him.

"He is a liar, and so is the feller that is takin' a nap on the hoss. I did all the mischief that was done to them; for they was go'n' to tell the cutthroats yonder the last news from Greeltop, and I thought it wasn't best for them to go that way. Drive on, Be'lzebub!" said the sergeant, as he gave the horse a slap; and he went on, dragging the "load of carrion" along with him.

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"Have you seen anything of the guerillas, Life?" asked Deck.

"Seen the whole on 'em; and I wish we had a meal-bag big enough to hold the whole on 'em, and I'd put 'em into it; but I reckon we shall bag the whole on 'em, if we hain't got no sack."

"How many of them are there, Life?"

"I reckon them two swinktoms I sent back belonged to the gang; and if they had j'ined the rest of the crowd, it would 'a' made thirty mounted men," replied Knox. "But they've got as many more without hosses or mules. They're a jolly lot o' rag'muffins. You'll see 'em in a few minutes; but I'll ride back and tell the major about it. You stay here, and keep out o' sight; for we don't want any of the blocusses to see one of our uniforms, for that would sp'ile the stew all to onct."

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Knox arranged this matter with Deck while he was mounting his horse. He went off at full gallop down the slope, and turned into the road that led by the front of Colonel Coffee's house. He found the second platoon of his company posted a short distance from the corner. He saw the major and

his party, including Mr. Elbrook and some other citizens of the place, and dashed up to them with a grand flourish, saluting his commander as he did so. Life was in high feather, and thought it in order to make a proper impression upon the spectators, of whom not a few had gathered near the spot, perhaps expecting to see a battle.

The sergeant reported to the major, who had withdrawn himself from his friends, giving the number and present location of the advancing gang; but no one else was permitted to hear him.

"I reckon I oughtn't to say nothin' more, Major Lyon; but I'm afeerd some o' them blocusses will git off; and it would do the whole crowd good to hang 'em higher'n Haman."

"We will attend to the hanging, if there is to be any, after the fight; but if you have any suggestion to make, Knox, I will hear it," replied the commander. [Pg 389]

"I left Deck squarin' the great circle round the corner; and he'll let you know jest as soon as the gang comes in sight."

"We will attend to them as soon as we get the opportunity," added the major rather impatiently.

"I'm afeerd you won't hit 'em jest right; for I believe you can bag the whole on 'em. That circle's a holy good place for a fight, and"—

"Station yourself at the corner, Knox, and make a signal when it is the right time for the platoon to advance," interposed the commander, who thought the Kentuckian was making a long story of it.

"Good, Major!" exclaimed Life, who had the matter as he wanted it now; and he dashed off for the corner.

CHAPTER XXXII

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THE SKIRMISH IN THE GREAT CIRCLE

Probably the leader of the marauders hurried the march of his followers as the Falstaffian column approached the village, in order to prevent the news of their coming from being circulated too soon. At any rate, Deck came down the slope at the best speed Ceph could make some time before the sergeant expected to see him.

"Coming, be they, Deck?" inquired he when Deck reined in before him.

"They are hurrying up, pounding their horses with their heels and the butts of their guns," replied Deck. "I don't believe there is a nag in the procession that can make over six miles an hour."

"Have they left the blocusses on foot behind?"

"No; but I fancy they are about out of wind by this time, for they are running to keep up."

"All right, Deck. I have seen your pa, and you can go down and tell him all you know; for I am posted here to signal him when the right time for him to move has come." [Pg 391]

Deck obeyed the order; but he had nothing special to report, except the nearer approach of the ruffians. He fell back when he had said what he had to say, and watched eagerly for the signal from the sergeant. He was to keep near the major, to carry his orders if any were to be sent out; but this would not prevent him from taking part in the fight. Even his father had provided himself with a sabre, which he was ready to wield in the conflict if occasion required; not otherwise. The carbines of the platoon had been unslung, and the men were in readiness to fire a volley when the time came.

"There is Knox's signal, father!" exclaimed Deck, as the major had turned away to answer a question of the colonel.

The commander had seen the sergeant waving his cap very vigorously at the corner. The time had come. The colonel and the clergyman, with those surrounding them, were the only ones who were excited. The platoon was as steady as though it was to march to a prayer-meeting.

"Gallop—march!" said the major to Lieutenant Gilder, who was in command of the body. [Pg 392]

Both the magnate and the minister had provided themselves with rifles, and insisted upon doing their share of the fighting, though Major Lyon assured them that he had force enough to handle double that of the enemy. The lieutenant gave the orders in detail, and the command was off in a moment. The major rode on the flank of the platoon, and the citizens followed him. Deck kept at the side of his father. Artie was with the captain; and his office was to carry any report or information to the major, if the circumstances should require.

We prefer to look through the eyes of Deck at the scene that followed. As soon as he reached the corner, somewhat in advance of the body of the company, he discovered the enemy. The mounted men were riding at the best speed of the miserable animals on which they were mounted; and very soon they reached what Knox called "the great circle," which was laid out to set off the grand entrance to Greeltop, the name of the estate of the colonel; and the village had taken its designation from the stately mansion and grounds. Before they reached this arena, they set up a series of frightful yells, evidently intended to intimidate the people of the village, and make them [Pg 393]

believe that the imps of the infernal regions had all broken in upon them at once.

The avenue was very wide, and the platoon resolved itself into "company front" at the command of the lieutenant. This was the first view the enemy had of the Union force waiting for them. The body advanced at a gallop, till the officer reduced the speed, and then formed them in a double rank. Lieutenant Gilder gave the orders in detail, which resulted in a volley, before which half-a-dozen saddles were emptied.

"Sling—carbine!" shouted the lieutenant before the smoke enabled the men to see what execution they had executed. "Draw—sabre!"

As the smoke rolled away the enemy was seen to be badly broken up, and the leader was using his best efforts to rally his undisciplined soldiers. But his men had fired as soon as they saw the troopers in front of them, and two of the latter had been wounded. The volley had hardly been discharged by the portion of the company in front of the marauders, when Captain Gordon was seen at the head of his men. He drew them up in such a position as to avoid sending the bullets into the midst of the other portion of his company.

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Another volley followed from his men; and more of the wretches in front of them dropped from their saddles, or fell over if they were not mounted. A panic seized the enemy; and the major ordered his lieutenant not to charge upon the guerillas in accordance with the usual programme of the squadron.

"Dexter!" called the commander.

"Here, Major!" replied the orderly promptly, as he saluted the commander, with his drawn sabre ready for the charge.

"Ride around the flank of the enemy as quick as you can, and give Captain Gordon my order not to charge till I send him word," said the major. "Be careful of yourself, and return if you find the passage dangerous."

It did not look like a perilous undertaking to the father, or he would not have sent his son with the message. The action had come to look like a mere butchery to him, and he was not willing to engage in any inhuman slaughter. Deck dashed along the front of the company; for there was a space of at least a hundred feet between them and the enemy. The unmounted men were crushing in a mass to get behind the horses; for they expected another murderous volley.

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Deck forced his horse into the broad gutter; for Ceph was more inclined to leap into the crowd of guerillas, as he had been trained to do. He saw the captain several rods from him, and he urged his steed forward to reach him. His uniform seemed to be a hateful sight to the banditti; and a couple of them rushed in front of him to intercept his passage. One of them raised his musket to fire at him; but the intrepid trooper struck it down with his sabre. The other did not attempt to shoot him, and probably his gun was not loaded. Both of the men kept their places in front of him, and were trying to beat him down with their clubbed weapons.

This was just the sport for Ceph; and, at the right signal from his rider, he made a spring into the air, with the evident intention of leaping over the obstacle in front of him. At the same time Deck made a vigorous use of his sabre, and hit the foremost of the men in the head, which caused him to spread himself out on the ground. Ceph went clear over the other, and the rider gave him a blow with the weapon in his hand as he did so.

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Ceph went flying the rest of the way; and the guerillas did not attempt to stop him. The young horseman had a good chance to see the condition of the enemy at a glance. The footmen had hemmed in the horses in their efforts to escape the expected bullets; and there was no question in his mind that the horde had already been effectually defeated. If the sergeant's big bag had been ready, they were all ready to go into it.

"Good Heaven, Deck!" exclaimed Captain Gordon, rushing up to him with all the speed of his horse. "Did you cut through the enemy?"

"Not exactly, Captain," replied Deck. "I am here to deliver to you Major Lyon's order not to charge the enemy without a special order to that effect."

"I haven't given that order yet, for the enemy are about crushed already; but I intended to follow up the charge of the rest of the company on the other side. But I saw you, Deck, engaged against two men in front of you only a few minutes ago; and I was about to order the platoon to charge in order to rescue you. I thought the first company had lost one of its best soldiers then."

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"But I have come through all right, Captain," added Deck, laughing at the excitement of his officer. "Ceph always does me a good turn when I get into a tight place, and he did this time."

"There come some more of the men from the other side of the house," added the captain, as he pointed to the way the orderly had come.

Deck looked, and saw Life Knox, with a dozen troopers, rushing along the gutter through which he had come; but the guerillas did not attempt to molest them, for they were formidable enough to have beaten the whole squad of the enemy, even before they had lost a man.

"Major Lyon sent me after you, Deck," said the sergeant, as he stopped his horse in front of him. "You had a narrow squeak of it that time, my boy."

"No, I didn't, Life; what's the use of making such a to-do about nothing? I'm all right," replied Deck, who thought his father and the rest of them were treating him like an infant.

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"But your pa was tearing his hair like a mother that had lost her baby, to think he had sent you into such a tight place," added Knox. "He would 'a' sent the whole company after you in two minutes more. But you are safe, and I thought you'd gone to feed the worms sure."

"The worms will not dine on me just yet. I am going back now to my place on the other side of the enemy," said Deck. "You can come when you get ready, Life."

As he spoke he wheeled his trusty steed, and intimated to him that he was ready; whereupon Ceph made a spring, and darted off at a breakneck speed.

"Hold on, Baby!" shouted the sergeant, calling him by a name he had used before, to which Deck did not object as long as the Kentuckian did not treat him like an infant. "We uns kim over to escort you back!"

"Obey your orders, Life," returned the furious young rider, without even looking behind him.

Knox started after him with all the hurry there was in his steed; but there was hardly a horse in the squadron that could run as fast as Ceph, for he had been trained to this branch of his equine profession as a racer. But none of the guerillas were disposed to meddle with him again; and perhaps the two who had attacked him before had mistaken his intentions. He rode into the presence of the major, saluted him gracefully; and the cavalymen who had witnessed his encounter broke out in a cheer.

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"Captain Gordon replied that he did not give the order to charge, because he was waiting for you to begin on this side of the enemy," said Deck.

"Thank Heaven that you are safe, Dexter!" replied the father devoutly.

"Heaven and Ceph," added the young hero.

The father was busy just then, and he said no more. As soon as Deck had started with his message, Major Lyon realized that the action would become a slaughter, and he was anxious to stay the flow of blood. He was not willing to cut down the men in front of him with the sabres of his soldiers; for they appeared to be helpless, as much from panic as from the want of proper arms.

"Do you surrender?" he shouted at the top of his lungs, directing his voice to the mass of the wretches gathered in the centre of the great circle.

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No one answered him, and probably no one heard him. He ordered Lieutenant Gilder to move his men forward very slowly. This officer was in front of his troopers; and he led the way as directed, the major remaining on the flank.

The lieutenant raised his white handkerchief on his sabre, and waved it in the air to indicate his peaceful intentions. When he had gone half the distance to the enemy, he halted the platoon.

"Do you surrender?" he shouted at the top of his voice.

The answer was the discharge of half-a-dozen muskets by the mounted guerillas who held the front of the mass. Lieutenant Gilder dropped from his horse to the ground; and something like a confused cheer went up from the men who had fired the volley. Sergeant Knox was the next in command; and, pushing his horse to the front, he waved his sabre in the air.

"Draw—pistol!" he cried. "Ready—aim—fire!"

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The pistols were all ready for use, and the men fired them into the front rank of the enemy, which seemed to contain all the fighting ability there was left in the band. They were reloading their old guns; but some of them did not live to complete the operation. Dr. Farnwright, who had been near the major, rushed forward, and Knox sent two men to assist him. Regardless of the danger of the position, the surgeon rushed to the front to attend to the lieutenant.

"Platoon—charge!" shouted the sergeant, afraid that the work of the doctor would be impeded by the senseless operations of the mob.

The troopers, with the sergeant in front of them, darted at the mass of banditti in the circle; but they fell back only to precipitate themselves upon the command of Captain Gordon behind them. At this moment Major Lyon ordered his bugler to sound the recall. The soldiers fell back only a very short distance in obedience to the signal, and they had hardly struck a blow. They held the enemy where they were.

CHAPTER XXXIII

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CAPTAIN STINGER THE FIRE-EATER

As soon as Dr. Farnwright reached the prostrate form of Lieutenant Gilder, he shook his head as he glanced at the major; for the advance of the platoon had left them in the rear. He examined his patient, who had passed beyond human aid. The ball had struck him in the chest, and had doubtless penetrated his heart. His body was borne to the rear. Major Lyon was sad; but the loss

of the noble young man did not affect him as it did the sergeant, for there was nothing revengeful in his nature.

Knox was disposed to annihilate the rabble in front, of him; but he was an obedient soldier, though he had ordered the discharge of pistols without orders; for the firing of the ruffians, and especially the fall of the gallant lieutenant, seemed to render any commands unnecessary. The major directed him to move his platoon forward, and he kept on the flank himself as he did so.

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Half-a-dozen of the enemy attempted to run by the troopers on the side of the colonel's house, where Deck had passed the mob; and the sergeant ordered a file of his men to arrest them. Only two of them had a musket in their hands, and one of them had a sword at his side. Major Lyon observed the movement, and ordered the man with the side arm to be brought to him. Most of the soldiers thought the commander was too tender of such a horde of ruffians; but he regarded it as little better than murder to shoot or cut down the enemy, now entirely in his power.

The man wearing the sword appeared to be of a better class of citizens than the majority of the freebooters. He wore a neat business suit, and was rather small in stature. He held his head up with something like dignity in his bearing, and bestowed frequent glances upon his companions in arms whom he had deserted. The five others were put under guard where they were captured, and informed that they would be shot if they attempted to escape. A couple of soldiers drove the one called for over to the commander.

"Who and what are you?" demanded the major, without any savagery in his voice or manner.

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"I am Lieutenant Garbold; and I am second in command of the force in front of you," replied the prisoner civilly enough.

"And you have deserted your companions in arms?" added the commander.

"Yes, if you choose to call it by that name; but Captain Stinger and myself disagreed, and I was not willing to stand there and be shot down by about three times our own number," replied Garbold.

"Are you and the other man provided with commissions from any source?"

"Not yet; but we claim to be in the service of the Confederate States of America, waiting for our commissions, and for our men to be mustered in. We belong to the regular service."

"Hardly," added the major, with something as near like a sneer as he could gather about his mouth. "You will excuse me if I regard you simply as unorganized freebooters, land pirates. Your mission is to rob and outrage the citizens of this village; and the ringleaders ought not to object to being hung on the first convenient tree."

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"We don't rob nor injure any true citizens of Kentucky," replied Garbold rather sullenly. "As to hanging any of us, we are willing to die in the good cause; and two Yankee officers will swing for every one of us you serve in that way."

"That question can be settled later in the day, and our business is with the present moment," added Major Lyon with becoming dignity. "Who commands that rabble in front of us?"

"Captain Jeruel Stinger."

"Upon what did you disagree with him?"

"To explain my own action, and not to gratify your curiosity, I will answer the question," replied Garbold, who evidently intended to be as "gamy" as one who had run away from his command could be. "I was not in favor of standing there and allowing our men to be butchered after resistance was useless. I said as much to Stinger, and I told him I should step out."

"You were sensible," replied the major. "I am not disposed to sacrifice your men if it can be avoided. Is Captain Stinger still of the same mind?"

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"I presume he is. He is an out-and-out fire-eater; and there is no more reason in him than there is in a mule."

"The night is coming on, and we have no time to trifle with the question. If you will return to Captain Stinger with a squad of troopers under a flag of truce, I"—

"Me!" exclaimed Garbold. "Stinger would shoot me at sight. I will not go. I had rather be hanged by the enemy than shot by my friends," interposed Garbold.

"Then the loss of any more of your men must rest on your shoulders, and not on mine. Take him away," replied the commander.

Major Lyon was still unwilling to charge upon the rabble; for they had ceased to fire their rusty firelocks. It was getting dark, and something must be done. He called Deck, and gave him a mass of instructions, which the orderly took in without any repetitions, for Captain Gordon. Colonel Coffee volunteered to conduct the messenger through his grounds to a gate near the position of the other portion of the company; and Deck delivered his message. He was rather sorry he was not permitted to proceed as he had before; for he had abundant confidence in his ability to take care of himself.

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The commander rode up a bank at the side of the road, where he could see over the heads of the

enemy as soon as his son returned to him. A moment later he saw Captain Gordon deploy a line of skirmishers, which extended entirely across the broad avenue, with another rank behind them. Both advanced in slow time, with none of the fury of a regular charge; but it was soon evident that they "meant business."

Captain Stinger seemed to be confused, and failed to understand the slow movement of his foe, and gave no orders. At the same time, and in the same manner, Sergeant Knox led his men forward; and the "fire-eater" in command of the rabble could not help seeing that his command was to be pinched between the two approaching bodies of troopers. Life kept himself well in advance of his skirmishers; and possibly he felt more like a brigadier-general than ever before in his life. He watched the enemy with the eye of an eagle ready to swoop down upon his prey.

Captain Stinger evidently realized that if his men fired in either direction, the troopers would charge upon them, and it would be but the work of a minute or two to slaughter the whole of them. He was seen to make a gesture to a man who was preparing to fire without orders, and the ruffian refrained from doing so. He plainly knew not what to do, since there was nothing he could do. But when the front rank of Knox was within twenty feet of him, with the sergeant ahead of it, he seemed to be unable to "hold in" any longer, and unslung the rifle at his back. [Pg 408]

Knox saw that he was to be the first victim of the irate fire-eater; and he jammed his heels into the flanks of his spirited steed, the animal making a long spring, which brought him up with the front line of the enemy. Still pressing the steed forward, he upset two or three men, and brought up, when the horse could go no farther, alongside the captain.

The doughty sergeant did not wait to trifle with any weapons, but, leaning over, he seized the captain by the collar of his coat, dragged him from his horse, and placed him across his holsters. Bending over his victim, he held him in his place by the pressure of his body, while he wheeled his horse, and made his way out of the crowd.

"Take 'em that way!" he shouted to the men. [Pg 409]

But there was hardly one of them who had the physical strength to accomplish such a feat, though they soon grappled with the guerillas, and dragged them out of the *mêlée*. The men on the other side of the enemy resorted to the same sort of tactics, which was not laid down in the regular manual for the instruction of the cavalry.

Captain Stinger was not a model Kentuckian physically any more than his lieutenant; if he had been, Knox could hardly have handled him so conveniently. The pressure of the sergeant's chest upon his backbone had a tendency to tame him; but he was trying to get at some weapon concealed upon his person. Knox had his pockets under command, and took two revolvers from them, which he thrust into his breast. He had his sabre dangling by the tassel knot at his right wrist, while he held the reins with his left hand. His right was at liberty to seize the pistols.

He hurried his horse to the place where the guards had the six prisoners in charge. There he hurled his victim to the ground, and ordered the men to look out for him, and not let him escape, if they had to put a bullet through him. The sentinels were all mounted; and, as the last prisoner had been disarmed, there was no danger that he would run away. [Pg 410]

Knox returned to his command; but, as he expressed it, "the fun had all gone out of the guerillas," and it was hardly necessary to drag out any more of them, for they were all as tame as sick kittens. The men had secured about a dozen of them, taking them to the guard-house, as they called the locality of the captives. The major had followed up the movement, and he could not refrain from laughing at the novel tactics of the first sergeant.

He directed Knox to fall back with his men, and sent Deck to the captain to drive the remaining freebooters before him. The ruffians moved before them at the order of the officer. They were halted in the middle of the square, and there disarmed, those who had not thrown away their weapons. While the commander was observing this ceremony, a trooper rode up, and saluted him.

"A message from Captain Truman," said the cavalryman as he did so.

"What is it?" demanded the major, fearful that the second company had been attacked by a superior force, and needed a re-enforcement. [Pg 411]

"A messenger came from a place called Plain Hill, saying that a band of mounted men was approaching the village, and they feared the place would be plundered," replied the messenger. "Captain Truman has just marched for the place, leaving only a guard at the camp."

"All right; his action is approved, and I hope he will get there in season to capture the enemy, as we have done here," replied Major Lyon, as he looked about him for Colonel Coffee and Mr. Elbrook. "Where is the colonel, Dexter?"

"He is looking over the prisoners as they bring them in," replied Deck.

The major rode over to him. Most of the prisoners were tame and submissive; but the fire-eater and his lieutenant were figuratively at swords' points: and it was fortunate for one or both of them that they had been disarmed, for the former had pitched into the latter with his fists, and the guards had been obliged to pull them apart.

"That Captain Stinger wanted to be sent to Congress before the war; but the people wouldn't do [Pg 412]

it. He is a politician, and a mischievous cur," said the colonel, when he saw the major at his side.

"Put him in irons, or tie his arms behind him, Styles," said the commander, addressing the sergeant of the guard, "if he don't behave himself. I have a message from the camp, Colonel Coffee," continued he, turning to the magnate of Greeltop. "Where is Plain Hill, sir?"

"Five miles to the south of us, Major; a village about the size of Greeltop. Any news from there?" inquired the colonel with decided interest.

"Captain Truman, of our second company, whom I left at the camp, has had a message from the place, to the effect that a band of guerillas were approaching the place; and he marched at once with all his company but a camp-guard."

"Good!" exclaimed the magnate.

"Heaven be praised!" added the reverend gentleman with a gun in his hand. "It is a mercy that your company was at hand."

"Good! I say," almost shouted Captain Stinger. "Heaven be praised that Vinegold is getting there! Our prayers will all go the same way!"

The fire-eater was near enough to hear what the major said.

"I only hope he will burn every house in the place," added the captain. "There is not such another nest of traitors in Kentucky, unless Greeltop is the other." [Pg 413]

"Who is Vinegold, Captain Stinger?" asked the commander.

"Major Vinegold is a man after my own heart," answered the prisoner.

"If he is your friend, you will be likely to see him before morning," added the major, as he turned away.

The prisoners were placed in the centre of the united company, and marched to the camp just as the darkness was beginning to gather on the landscape. All the people in Greeltop were in the roads, and greeted the soldiers with applause and cheers as they marched by them. The officers and most of the privates were loaded with bouquets on the way.

Several times the magnate, who returned to the camp with the troopers, began to tell the commander something about Plain Hill; but the cheers he was obliged to acknowledge prevented him from giving attention, and the subject was delayed to another time.

CHAPTER XXXIV

[Pg 414]

THE RE-ENFORCEMENT FOR PLAIN HILL

It was not strange that the loyal people of Greeltop were grateful to their deliverers. Reports of similar occurrences within twenty or thirty miles of them had fully informed them of the nature of such raids, doubtless with many exaggerations; but they had every reason to expect more severe treatment than most other places, for the residents were Unionists to a greater extent than in other villages in that section. The magnate was an intensely loyal citizen, and he had largely built up the place.

Colonel Coffee was a Kentuckian, born in the county where he now lived; but he had not amassed his million there. His father had been a planter, and left a moderate fortune to his children at his death. With his share the colonel had gone to New York, and embarked in business. This had led him to China, where he had made his million when he was fifty. He retired, purchased the plantation which had been his father's, and another. He built the elegant mansion where he now resided. [Pg 415]

His partner, equally wealthy, had retired at the same time, and had purchased another, five miles from it. He had married the sister of the colonel, and they had always been strong friends. The China merchant had built up Greeltop, and his brother-in-law had done the same for Plain Hill. Both of them had lived on the other side of the globe a large portion of their lives; and when they saw the American flag at the port of Hong-Kong, it meant more to them than if they had seen it every day of their existence. One of the effects of foreign travel, or a foreign residence, is to make American citizens love their own country all the more.

The influence of these two men, with the liberal expenditure of their money, had built up the villages, and increased the population of the surrounding region, so that they were in condition to establish a city government, which is done on a small number of inhabitants in the South. This was the substance of what Colonel Coffee wished to tell the commander of the squadron of cavalry; especially that Mr. Hasbrook, the magnate of Plain Hill, was his brother-in-law. [Pg 416]

Both of them were loyal men; and their example, as well as their positive efforts, had kept alive the Union sentiment of the surroundings. This loyalty of the people had aroused the enmity of the Secessionists of the neighboring counties. They were in especial danger when the guerillas and partisan hordes began their work of pillage and outrage.

The people of each of these places had raised a small Home Guard. The magnates had provided

them with excellent arms, and they served rather as a police than as a military body. Most of the young men had gone into the army on one side or the other; and fifty men in both villages was the most they could organize. For two weeks the inhabitants had been dreading a raid; and day and night mounted patrolmen had surrounded both places. Probably the existence of the body of Home Guards had had some influence in preventing an assault.

The column of cavalymen reached the camp, and the prisoners were disposed of. Colonel Coffee was very anxious to obtain further information in regard to the raid upon Plain Hill. Lieutenant Blenks was in charge of the camp, with only ten men; for the first company was not far distant, and there was no considerable body of Confederate troops within twenty-five miles of the village, according to the best information to be obtained. [Pg 417]

"What do you know about this attack upon Plain Hill, Lieutenant?" demanded Major Lyon, as the officer saluted him on his arrival.

"Very little," replied the lieutenant, as he took a paper from his pocket, and handed it to the commander. "This note was brought here by a negro, who had run his horse all the way, I judged by the looks of the animal."

"The enemy are down upon us—within four miles of us.—HASBROOK," the major read from the paper, which was not a sealed letter. "It is addressed to you, Colonel Coffee," he added, as he turned it over and saw the name on the outside.

"It has come to the right place," replied the magnate.

"Who is Hasbrook?" asked the commander; for he had not yet heard the story of Plain Hill.

"He is my brother-in-law, standing in about the same relation to Plain Hill that I do to Greeltop." [Pg 418]

"The negro that brought the paper is still here," said the lieutenant.

The man was sent for at the request of the colonel. Major Lyon directed Captain Gordon to have all the horses fed, and to let the men have their suppers as soon as possible. Captain Truman had marched with nearly the whole of his company half an hour before, and must be near his destination by this time. The major and his companions had dismounted, and retired to the headquarters tent.

"It is you who have brought this message, is it, Clover?" asked Colonel Coffee, as the man was shown into the tent by a sentinel. "This man is Hasbrook's steward," he added, turning to the commander.

He was a mulatto of rather dark shade, was well-dressed, and looked like an intelligent person.

"I brought the paper, sir," replied Clover. "Mr. Hasbrook sent me over with it, and told me to carry it to your house; but when I came to this camp I asked the soldier in front about it, and he sent for the officer. When I found the camp was of a Union company, I asked the captain to read the note, and he did so." [Pg 419]

"You did well, Clover; to have gone to my house would have delayed the relief," added the magnate.

"The company started off at full gallop, and I stopped to see you," continued the steward.

"But what do you know about the approach of the guerillas, Clover?" asked the colonel impatiently.

"I don't know anything, sir. One of the Home Guards came to the mansion with the news that the guerillas were coming, and he sent me off with the best horse in the stable. I run him all the way, and I hope I have not hurt him."

"No matter if you have. If the second company is like the first, they will bag the whole of the villains," said the colonel.

"The Home Guard were all mounted and gathering in the square when I left. They said there was a hundred men coming down on the village," Clover concluded.

Major Lyon had ordered supper for his party to be brought to his tent. It was camp-fare, but he invited the colonel and the clergyman to join him. [Pg 420]

"Do you suppose there is any danger of another invasion of Greeltop to-night from the north, Colonel Coffee?" asked the major, as the party, including Deck, were hastily disposing of the meal.

"Certainly not. I am of the opinion that the two raids upon our villages were planned to take place at the same time, so that neither of them could send its Home Guard to the assistance of the other. Your coming, Major Lyon, was most opportune."

"It so happens. Dexter, tell Captain Gordon to detail ten men from his company to remain in the camp under command of Lieutenant Blenks, and have the rest of his men ready to march as soon as they have finished their supper," said Major Lyon.

"Then you propose to go to Plain Hill, Major?" asked the colonel.

"I have no doubt Captain Truman has force enough to protect the place; but I desire to capture as many of the ruffians as possible," replied the major. "Who is the captain of your Home Guard?"

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"I am," replied the colonel with a smile.

"Then I wish you would order them to this camp, and relieve my men of the duty of guarding our prisoners."

"It shall be done at once. Mr. Elbrook, will you attend to this matter?"

"Certainly. Do you go to Plain Hill, Colonel?" replied the clergyman.

"I desire to look after the safety of my sister and her children."

"And I need the assistance of the colonel to show me the way, and point out the localities in the town," added the major.

Mr. Elbrook mounted his horse, and hastened to the armory of the local force. The first company had formed in the parade. Colonel Coffee had taken a fresh horse while near his residence. The commander and his orderly mounted their horses.

"Lieutenant," said the major, addressing the officer of the camp, "it is remotely possible that this place may be attacked in my absence with the company. If such should be the case, you will make a bonfire on the knoll the other side of the road, and I think we shall be able to see it. Have it ready to light whether it is needed or not."

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The horses had been watered and fed, and they were in fair condition, though they had been on the march all day. The commander led off at a smart gallop, and the company kept up with him. Life Knox was in temporary command of the second platoon. The column moved too rapidly for any connected conversation, and in half an hour was approaching Plain Hill.

"What can that mean, Colonel?" asked the major, as they reached the top of a hill, where a brilliant light suddenly flashed upon them. "Can it be that the ruffians are burning the houses."

"Possibly; I don't know: but they have not yet fired Hasbrook's mansion, for I can see it on the top of Plain Hill," replied Colonel Coffee; and his tones indicated the anxiety he felt.

"You know the place, and perhaps you can tell from the direction where the fire is located," added the commander.

"It appears to be right in the square."

"And what and where is the square?"

"The village is just the counterpart of Greeltop; for Hasbrook and I laid it out together. You can see his mansion on the top of the hill. The square is on the level in front of it, with the houses all around it."

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"Then perhaps they are burning these houses," suggested the major.

"I think not. There is not volume enough in the blaze for a burning house, much less for several of them."

"And where is the road by which the guerillas will or have arrived at the place?"

"It comes in on the east end of Plain Hill, behind Hasbrook's house. I think they would burn his mansion first; but they cannot approach it in the rear with horses. There are about thirty men in the Home Guard here, and there will be a fight before any houses are burned," said the colonel very decidedly.

The column descended the hill from which the light of the fire had been seen, and dashed up another, which brought them into the village. Then it was ascertained that a bonfire was blazing in the square, and that the houses were all safe.

"Who comes there?" demanded a man with a musket in his hand, as the company reached a broad avenue which appeared to be the principal street of the village.

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"Friends!" returned the major.

"Who is it?" demanded the colonel.

"Walkall," replied the man, who evidently recognized the magnate of Greeltop.

"All right, Walkall; this is another company of United States cavalry. Where are the enemy?"

"Behind Mr. Hasbrook's mansion. They have halted there; but we are all ready for them."

"Where is the company of cavalry which must have arrived an hour or two since?" inquired the major.

"I don't know just where the troopers are now; we turned over everything to Captain Truman, and he is managing the matter," replied Walkall. "He stationed me here to report if an enemy came in on the Greeltop road."

Captain Gordon had been ordered to halt the company. Deck was sent with the sentinel to find

the captain of the second company, and the first was to remain at the corner. They followed the road leading to the home of the magnate, which crossed the principal avenue of the village, and came to another, parallel to it, along the rear of the square. At this point they were challenged; and it could be seen by the light of the fire that sentinels were stationed all along this street.

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"Who comes there?" demanded the sentinel.

"Messenger from the major of the squadron, directed to find Captain Truman."

"Can't pass here," added the sentinel decidedly.

"Where is Captain Truman?" asked Deck.

"I don't know no more'n the dead."

At this moment a trooper rode up, and recognized the messenger.

"All right, Deck; you can pass, but the other man cannot," said the cavalryman, when he had stated his business.

Deck thought the captain had adopted some singular strategy.

CHAPTER XXXV

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SURROUNDED AND TOTALLY DEFEATED

"What does all this mean, Withers?" asked Deck, as the trooper conducted him inside of the grounds of Mr. Hasbrook.

"I don't know anything at all about it; you must ask Captain Truman," replied Withers with a laugh. "He's got a big head, and I reckon he knows what he is about. But how come you over here, Deck?"

"I came over with the first company; and I have a message for Captain Truman from Major Lyon."

"All right; and he will be glad to see you. He will not let a single person come up the hill, or a single one go from the house. He's got some strategy on his brain."

"Have you seen the enemy, Withers?"

"I have not; but the cap'n appears to know jest where they are."

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They followed the handsome driveway up a hill; and the light of the bonfire enabled Deck to get a view of the surroundings. When they had reached an elevation of about fifty feet, the summit was a plain, very nearly level, in the middle of which stood the mansion. This was evidently where the name of "Plain Hill" came from. Before the door of the house was a mounted sentinel, and there were others on the hill.

The elevation was sprinkled over with large trees, and at the west end of the mansion was a considerable grove of them. In front of this shady place there were two sentinels.

"Advance, friends, and give the countersign."

"Barcreek," replied Withers. "This is Deck Lyon, with a message from the major."

One of the sentinels conducted them to the heart of the grove, where they found the whole of the second company. The arrival of the messenger was duly reported to the captain, and he was ushered into his presence. He was seated on his horse, ready to move at any moment.

"Is that you, Deck? I am glad to see you, though this visit is very unexpected," said he.

"The first company is down at the avenue in front of the square, with Major Lyon, who desires a report from you in regard to the condition of things in this village, and especially as to the locality of the enemy," continued the orderly, delivering the substance of his message.

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"Come with me, Deck, and I will give you my report verbally; for I cannot see to write," added the captain, as he led the orderly to the south side of the hill. "Do you see that little knoll not fifty rods from us?"

"I see it."

"It is covered with trees, and the enemy are concealed among them. One of my men has been over there, and reports about seventy-five guerillas, and I am very anxious to bag the whole of them."

"No doubt of it, as we did the other company of them."

"I supposed you would; but I haven't the news. Just now, Deck, this company in front of us are waiting for the one that swooped down on Greeltop. I suppose they were to clean out that village, and then come over here and finish up this one."

"It was not much of a swoop; and we have every one of them, from Captain Stinger down to the vagabonds who followed the mounted men on foot, under guard at the camp. But how do you

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know that they are waiting for the other gang, Captain?" asked Deck.

"I captured a messenger of the leader of this horde, scared him out of his wits, and he told me all about it," replied the captain with a smile. "The only thing that I am afraid of now, is that the leader of this gang will not bring on his men, so that I can bag them. Mr. Hasbrook, who lives in this house, has sent down for some one who will take the place of this messenger, and inform the captain of the ruffians that a force of mounted men has just come up the Greeltop road."

"I will do that myself," replied Deck promptly.

"You, Deck!" exclaimed the captain.

"I should like the fun of it; and I could not do my country any greater service than in helping out the capture of that gang of ruffians."

"But it would cost you your life if you were discovered. They would hang you like a dog. No, no, Deck! Your father would never forgive me if I sent you on such a perilous mission."

"My father believes that I ought to do my duty; and I believe so also. Where is the fellow you captured? I might borrow his clothes, and they wouldn't know me from Jeff Davis in the dark. Let me hear the fellow speak, and I can imitate his voice; and I will promise to come back all right," pleaded Deck, who was very anxious to undertake the mission. [Pg 430]

"No, no, Deck! I cannot send you on such an errand. I gave Mr. Hasbrook a pass to go down among the Home Guards, and he may find a man to do the business," said the captain very decidedly. "If he does not find some one who is better acquainted with this vicinity than you are, Deck, we will look the matter over again, if your father will consent that you should go."

"If the bagging of those ragamuffins depends upon your plan, I think he will consent," added Deck.

"But you must return to your father with my report, and I will explain to you my plan to capture the enemy."

When he had done so, Deck returned to the great road, and reported everything to the commander, informing him why the movement was delayed. He stated the plan of the captain to send a man disguised as the messenger or spy of Captain Vinegold. The major did not like the plan, and utterly refused to have his son undertake such an enterprise. [Pg 431]

The young soldier was disappointed; but he did not rebel against the decision of the commander, who was also his father. Later in his career, when he had a couple of gold bars on his shoulders, he rendered some important service of this kind; for he was even more fond of an adventure than the average boy.

"Colonel Coffee, is there any other road than the one by which we have come from Greeltop that leads to the south?" asked the major, after he had digested the report sent by his son.

"There is, and a better one than that by which the ruffians came," replied the magnate. "As nearly as I can make it out, the enemy are concealed not more than half a mile from this cross-road; but you could not get to them without going at least three miles."

"That is not a great distance for mounted men. Is the distance about three miles?" [Pg 432]

"It will not vary half a mile from it."

"Have you your watch with you, Dexter?" asked the major.

"I have, sir; I never leave it in the baggage-wagons," replied Deck.

"What time is it now?" continued the major, as he consulted his own time-keeper.

"Ten minutes past seven," answered Deck, after he had held his watch up so that he could see the face by the light of the fire in the square.

"About right. How long will it take you to reach the spot on the hill where the second company is posted?"

"Ten minutes."

The major had taken a piece of paper from his pocket, and by this time had written something on it to which he had signed his name.

"Is there any open place at the end of the hill where the captain is, to the right of the grove?"

"I don't know; I did not look about me much," replied Deck.

"The west end of the hill is a bare rock," interposed Colonel Coffee.

"On this paper I have written, 'Obey the verbal orders sent by Dexter Lyon.' That is all, except the captain's name and mine. Tell Captain Truman to prepare a fire, a large fire, on the rock at the west end of the hill, ready to light. Can the enemy see what he is doing, Colonel?" [Pg 433]

"Not at all; the fire in the square sends no light beyond the grove."

"In precisely thirty minutes from the time you reach the top of the hill, Dexter, tell him to march

upon the enemy, leaving a man to light the fire ten minutes later. Let him attack them vigorously," said the commander. "Do you understand it all, Dexter?"

"Understood."

"Then hasten to the hill."

The major had taken the colonel and his son one side for this conference, so that no other person should know anything about it. Deck ran his horse; and this time the sentinel did not stop him, for his character was known. As a last word, his father had directed him to remain with the captain.

Before the messenger reached the hill, the company was moving along the road to the west, with the magnate as a guide. By his advice the company marched slowly for the first half-mile, in order to avoid making any noise which the enemy could hear. Then they galloped at the best speed of the horses. At the end of twenty minutes they were near the knoll on which the guerillas were concealed. The major ordered the captain to halt here, and they waited for further events. [Pg 434]

They had not long to wait, for the fire on the rock flashed up with a brilliant light; and it was evident that Mr. Hasbrook had assisted in preparing the fuel, and that no little pitch and light wood had been used. Captain Truman, as the illumination indicated, was in the road, and marching to the south; while the first company had halted, facing to the north.

"Mr. Hasbrook must have robbed his woodshed of most of its contents," said the captain, who had taken Deck under his wing.

"All his house and stable servants were lugging wood to the rock; and they must have piled up about a cord of it, Captain," replied Deck.

"The fire not only serves as a signal, but it gives no little light on the subject before the house," replied the officer. [Pg 435]

Skirmishers had been sent out ahead. The place where the enemy was concealed was a wooded knoll, according to the description given of it by a scout; and by the light of the huge bonfire it was in plain sight. Twenty men had been sent out on this service under Sergeant Fronklyn. When he came near enough, he opened fire upon the knoll, the object being to draw the enemy from his covert.

"The fire sheds its light for the benefit of the enemy as well as for our side of the question. Like an impartial judge, it serves both parties alike," said the captain. "The skirmishers will bring them out, and that is all we want. So far as our operations are concerned, I think the enemy must be in perfect darkness; for I have not permitted a single one of the town's people to come this side of the square."

"They have waked up now," added Deck, as a volley of musketry came out of the grove on the knoll, which was quite near the road.

"I hope they will not recognize the uniforms of the skirmishers," continued the captain.

The main body of the company had slowly followed the advance all the time, and the crisis of the affair was at hand. The captain reasoned that the guerillas could not be aware of the combination made by the major, or they would have retired; and they were likely to mistake the skirmishers for the Home Guards, if they did not make out the uniform. After the volley from the knoll, the enemy made a sortie from his position, and rushed furiously upon the assailants, firing at will all the time. [Pg 436]

Captain Truman gave the order for his men to charge the foe; and the troopers darted ahead at full gallop. They could see the uniforms of the skirmishers, and for a moment there was a hot hand-to-hand fight, for the enemy were plucky enough for the occasion. But if the company could distinguish the uniforms of the skirmishers, so also could the enemy by this time; and they could see that the road between them and the village was full of troopers.

Major Vinegold could not help seeing that he was caught in a trap, and his bugle sounded the recall. Doubtless his guerillas saw the situation also; for they were not slow to obey the signal. They detached themselves from the conflict, and retreated. The voice of Captain Gordon could be heard above the din; and the enemy was headed to the south at a gallop. Doubtless the guerilla commander was astounded to find himself confronted by a company of cavalry in full uniform, instead of a band of Home Guards. [Pg 437]

The signal-fire on the rock of Plain Hill had done its perfect work, and the first company had moved forward slowly, with skirmishers in front, and soon came upon the retreating enemy. Captain Gordon charged upon them, and they fought bravely on both sides. Doubtless the commander of the guerillas was appalled when he discovered another company in front of him. Probably he was outnumbered three to one. He fought like a tiger himself, but his men began to break into the fields on either side. The officers soon stopped this means of escape by extending their lines entirely around their hapless foe.

"Do you surrender?" demanded Captain Truman.

"Never!" yelled Major Vinegold, in front of his company.

Deck dashed at him as he made this emphatic reply, and their sabres flashed fire. Ceph made one of his furious leaps, and the commander of the enemy sank to the ground as his rider struck a [Pg 438]

desperate blow.

"We surrender!" shouted the second in command.

CHAPTER XXXVI

[Pg 439]

MAJOR VINEGOLD OF THE GUERILLAS

The second in command of the guerillas was a more sensible man than Major Vinegold, who appeared to be a fire-eater, like Captain Stinger; and when resistance was utterly hopeless, he announced his surrender in a voice loud enough to be heard a long distance, and neither side struck a blow afterwards. Deck Lyon appeared to have delivered the last sabre-stroke; for as soon as his lieutenant saw his chief topple from his horse, he uttered the words that ended the conflict.

"You gave the finishing touch to the fight, Deck!" exclaimed Captain Truman in a loud voice, so that all the company could hear him.

"Three cheers for Deck Lyon!" shouted an enthusiastic trooper; and they were given.

Of course Deck blushed; for he was a reasonably modest young man. He had not made up his mind to do "a big thing," but simply to do his duty; and he was doing it like any other member of the company when his opportunity was presented to him. Major Vinegold was the bone and sinew of the fight on his own side; and when the young cavalryman saw him disengaged for the moment, he urged his horse forward to cross swords with the commander.

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Ceph's training seemed to be a part of his being; and when he was pressed up to him, he rose on his hind-legs for a spring. An indifferent rider could not have kept his seat in the saddle; but Deck had trained himself and his steed to the manœuvre, and each supplemented the action of the other. The rider leaned forward, grasping the forward horn of his saddle with the rein hand, while he kept his sabre in readiness for use in the right. In the present instance, while the animal was in this flying attitude, Deck struck at the head of his adversary; and the shock carried him from his saddle to the ground.

"Ceph deserves three cheers quite as much as or more than I do," said the young rider, while the company were waiting for further orders.

"He would not appreciate the compliment," replied the captain.

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"Halloo, Artie!" exclaimed Deck, as his brother dashed into the presence of the captain.

"Bully for you, Deck! We heard the company cheering you; what mighty deed have you done now?" demanded the messenger, for such he was, from the major, as he saluted Captain Truman. "It is Major Lyon's order that you proceed to disarm the prisoners, as they are doing on the other side."

"Order understood," replied the captain. "You can tell the major that Deck gave the finishing touch to the fight, Artie;" and he described the fall of Major Vinegold, and the immediate surrender that followed.

Artie hastened back to headquarters; and the captain formed the guerillas near him in line, and took from them all their arms. The major had ordered a large fire to be started at the side of the road, and the scene was already well lighted. The prisoners had been formed in line in the same manner on the south end of the battle-field, and their arms taken from them. On the road, and beside it, seven men lay silent and motionless; and perhaps there were others on the wooded knoll.

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The squadron had not had a man killed, though about a dozen had been wounded; and Dr. Farnwright and his assistants were attending to them. Among the prisoners the men were binding up the wounds of each other. The form of the fire-eater commander lay where he had fallen; and Deck saw him move as he was about to report to the major. He felt more interest in this man than in the others; and he dismounted from his horse.

Ceph was as fond of his master as a kitten of the child that pets it; and there was no need to secure him, for he would have stood there all night. Deck was even more devoted to him than he was to pretty Miss Kate Belthorpe, which is saying a great deal. He had fed him on dainties, and made him his constant associate in the months when he was drilling. Ceph was very intelligent, and seemed to understand his master's humor as though he had been human.

The rider went to the fallen guerilla. He was not dead. He had been stunned, and was just coming to his senses. By the light of the fire Deck could see that his head was covered with blood. Looking closer, he found that his left ear had been smitten entirely from the side of his head. The sabre appeared to have struck him sideways, giving the blow that stunned him, and then glancing off so as to take the ear with it. If the blade had struck him fairly, it would have split his head open; as it was, his brains were saved at the expense of his ear.

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"How do you feel, Major Vinegold?" asked Deck in sympathetic tones,—for a wounded or dying enemy was no longer a foe to him,—as he took the handkerchief of the sufferer from his pocket and bound it over his head, so as to cover the wound.

"I'm better, I think," replied the major, as Deck assisted him to sit up. "Have we licked that Home Guard?"

"There is no Home Guard here. You have been fighting with a squadron of United States cavalry, and your successor in command has surrendered."

"Strivers is a coward!"

"We were nearly three to your one; and your lieutenant was no coward, but a brave fellow, and a sensible man."

"Who's we?"

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"I am a loyal soldier, and the one that gave you your wound," replied Deck.

"You!" exclaimed the major. "Then what are you doing with me now?"

"I am trying to assist you, if I can. I have bound up your wound, and our surgeon will soon be able to attend to your case."

"Give me a drink of brandy out of your flask," added the wounded man faintly.

"I have no brandy; but here is some fresh water; for I filled my canteen at Plain Hill," answered Deck, as he presented it to his patient.

He drank freely; and perhaps it did as much good as the same quantity of brandy would have done.

"I feel better now," said the major, as Deck assisted him to his feet. "Where is my horse?"

"But you are a prisoner now. If you will give me your sword and pistols, it will save you from any further annoyance," replied Deck.

"A prisoner!" he exclaimed bitterly. "Strivers surrendered."

"To three times his own force; and he could not do otherwise," added the Union soldier very gently. "He would have murdered his own men if he had fought any longer."

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"I cannot help myself," continued the major, as he unbuckled his sword and gave it to his conqueror. "I did not do it. Strivers did it; and I am much obliged to you, young man, for striking me down before it was done."

Dr. Farnwright dressed his wound; Deck found his horse, then assisted him to mount, and placed him in the rank with the other prisoners. The dead were ranged in a field, with two more found on the wooded knoll.

"Well, Dexter, you have been playing the hero again, have you?" said the major, when he rode that way.

"Ceph and I have been doing our duty, and Major Vinegold is the sufferer, father. I couldn't help doing what I did," replied Deck.

"And he ended the fight!" exclaimed Captain Truman with enthusiasm. "If he had his proper reward he would be made a captain on the spot."

"A captain at eighteen!" exclaimed the major, who was somewhat conservative in his ideas. "There is no authority here to make him a captain, even if it were desirable, as I think it is not. Don't spoil the boy, Captain Truman."

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While they were waiting for the arrangements for the march to be completed, Deck told his father about his interview with the fallen leader of the guerillas; and it ended in introducing the major to him.

"I am sorry you are wounded, my friend," said the commander.

"Why do you call me your friend?" asked the prisoner, apparently astonished. "You are not just our idea of the Yankees."

"On the battle-field we are enemies, and we do our best to kill each other; but here we are friends, and we do what we can to save each other. I am glad my son assisted you."

"He is the one-eared man's friend for life, except on the battle-field, though he struck off that ear."

It was quite evident that he was not such a fire-eater as Captain Stinger. But the column was ready to move. It was but a short distance to the village; and when they arrived there, they found the fire in the square burning even more vigorously, and all the houses lighted. They were received with tremendous cheers, in which the ladies joined, while they flourished their handkerchiefs in the absence of so many of the male population.

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The news of the battle and victory had been brought to the village by Colonel Coffee; and the two magnates had provided a bountiful collation for the soldiers, though it was in the small hours of the night. The troopers were petted by the ladies, and Deck was a hero of the first magnitude. The work of the day and night was finished, and the people and the soldiers slept after their fatigues, while a portion of the Home Guards guarded the approaches to the place.

The prisoners were marched under a strong guard to a railroad town, and sent to Louisville. All was quiet at Greeltop and Plain Hill, and no further attempt was made to molest these places. The discipline administered to the guerillas was severe enough to put an end to their operations in that part of the State. The squadron remained three weeks in camp at Greeltop, occasionally sending out detachments where they were needed.

Later in the year it was ordered to Munfordville, where a sharp little battle was fought, in which the Riverlawn Cavalry had an opportunity to meet again the old enemies, the Texan Rangers. It was while at this place that a huge envelope came by special messenger, with other orders, directed to "Mr. Dexter Lyon, Care of Major Noah Lyon." His father gave it to him, and Deck opened it, wondering with all his might what it could contain. It was a lieutenant's commission, and the recipient would not have been more astonished if the sky had fallen upon him. [Pg 448]

The two captains in the squadron had been the principal movers in obtaining the commission. They had a paper recommending it signed by every member of the first company; but the business had been done while the command was waiting at Greeltop, fearful that Major Lyon would veto or discountenance the measure for family reasons, or because he thought his son was too young to be "A Lieutenant at Eighteen." With the commission came a furlough for two weeks, to enable him to prepare for his new duties.

Deck was astonished and confounded to find himself an officer; for he had never sought such a position, and honestly and sincerely believed that he had done only his duty, like every other private in the ranks. He was overwhelmed with congratulations by the members of both companies, and especially by the two captains. [Pg 449]

"It hasn't come any sooner than I expected it, Deck," said Life Knox, as he grasped the hand of the young cavalryman.

"I don't think I have deserved it," protested the recipient of the commission.

"Ask Miss Kate Belthorpe," chuckled the Kentuckian, *par excellence*.

"She is not a military character, and don't understand the matter," replied Deck with a very heavy blush.

"She stuck to't that you ought to been made cap'n o' the fust company. I didn't think so then, but I think you ought to be made a lieutenant as you have been."

"I don't see why I was selected for this place; for I am appointed second lieutenant of the first company, in place of poor Gilder."

"Everybody else can see it if you can't. Who brought Major Vinegold to the ground? Who served Lieutenant Makepeace in the same way? And"— [Pg 450]

"Ceph!" exclaimed Deck. "Don't say anything more about it, and we will call it square;" but the tall and wiry cavalry sergeant was as fond of Deck as though he had been his own son.

The young lieutenant procured his uniform at Munfordville; and when he put it on, the whole of both companies cheered him, and the ladies declared that he was the handsomest officer in the squadron, which was, perhaps, saying much, for Captain Gordon was a remarkably good-looking man.

Deck was going home for a part of his furlough; for his father wished him to do so. He talked with his son full two hours before his departure, giving him instructions about the plantation, and especially about the family of Captain Titus Lyon, then a prisoner somewhere.

Of course his mother and sisters were extremely glad to see him, and were prouder of his uniform than he was himself. Levi Bedford actually hugged him; and the fifty-one negroes treated him as though he had been an angel from the realms of bliss. Orly Lyon still desired to join the Riverlawn Cavalry; and even Sandy had been so far cured of his Secession tendencies as to be of the same mind. [Pg 451]

Mrs. Noah had provided for the family of her husband's brother. She consented, in the absence of her husband, that her boys should enlist on the right side. The major had sent money for her to return to her father in New Hampshire, if she still desired to go there. When Lieutenant Lyon returned to Munfordville, Sandy and Orly went with him, wearing the uniform of the squadron.

During his absence the command had been ordered to Somerset; and about a month later had their first experience in a considerable battle at Mill Spring. But our story for the present is told; and another volume will relate the experience of Deck as an officer. His service was not confined to his duty in command of a platoon, but an abundant opportunity was given him to gratify to some extent his inborn desire for stirring adventure in the service of his country, as will be found in "A LIEUTENANT AT EIGHTEEN."

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