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ESCAPE

FROM THE

CONFEDERACY

OVERPOWERING THE GUARDS—MIDNIGHT LEAP FROM
A MOVING TRAIN—THROUGH SWAMPS
AND FOREST—BLOOD HOUNDS—
THRILLING EVENTS.

B. F. HASSON,
Late Lieut. Ringgold Battalion (22d. Pa. Vol. Cav.)

Entered according to Act of Congress.

Sept 26, 1900

To the comrades of the Ringgold Cavalry and the relatives and friends of the boys who suffered and died at Richmond and Andersonville, this booklet is dedicated.

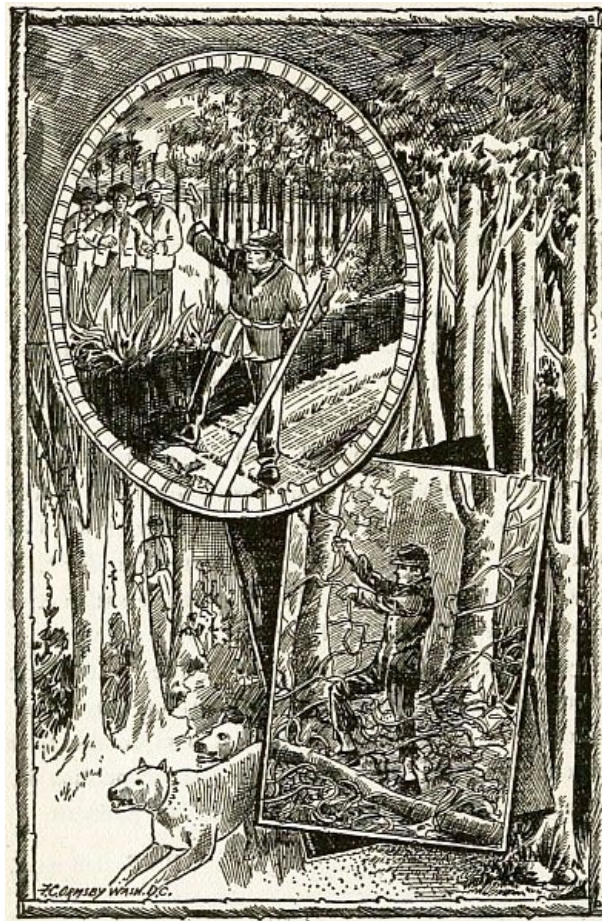
*"Across the years, full rounded to many score,
Since advancing peace, with her olive wand,
Returns the sunshine to our desolate land,
Come thronging back memories of the war.
Again the drum's beat and the cannon's roar,
And patriot fires by every breeze are fanned,
And pulses quicken with a purpose grand,
As manhood's forces swell to larger store.
Again the camp, the field, the march, the strife,
The joy of victory, the bitter pain
Of wounds or sore defeat; the anguish rife,
And tears that fall for the unnumbered slain,
And homes, where darkened is the light of life,
All these the echoing bugle brings again."*

INTRODUCTORY.

[7]

I have been so often urged by old army comrades, as well as other friends, to publish the facts contained in the following pages in a convenient shape for preservation, that I have concluded to comply with their wishes, and now present them in this form. Many of the less important details have been omitted, as well with a view of preventing the story from becoming tiresome as of getting it within the limits of space it was intended it should occupy. While the experience was attended with trials and suffering, I wish to assure the reader that it was nothing more than was endured by hundreds of other boys who saw service in the War of the Great Rebellion. I would not go through it again for all the world, and yet I would not like to lose the satisfaction I enjoy in the knowledge of my success in overcoming so many seemingly insurmountable difficulties. It is a plain narration of facts, and is written without any effort to overdraw or embellish. I hand it over to the friends and comrades who have been urging me to publish it, in the hope that it will help to fill up an idle moment.

B. F. HASSON.



War Memories

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"Flank out Frank, and go with us to-morrow."

We were squatted on the sandy ground—vermin-laden sand—inside the prison stockade on Belle Island, discussing the probable destination of the prisoners then being daily removed from that place. Joseph Morton and Peter Deems of my own regiment and myself were of the party and the above remark was made by Morton and addressed to me. It was early in the month of March, 1864, and just after that famous raid to the vicinity of Richmond by Gen. Kilpatrick and Col. Ulrich Dahlgren. The daring troopers had even penetrated the defences of the city and thoroughly alarmed the Rebel authorities. Immediately steps were taken to remove the prisoners from Richmond to Andersonville, Ga., and other remote points in the South out of the reach of rescue by Federal raiders.

The prisoners on the Island were divided off into hundreds. The first hundred was composed of those first put into the stockade; and then, as new or fresh prisoners arrived the second and other hundreds were added. One member of each hundred was chosen to see to the welfare of the men in securing rations, etc. The hundreds were subdivided into messes of twenty-five each, and a man was selected from among them whose duty it was to cut up the loaves of corn-bread into twenty-five equal sized pieces, and see that they were impartially issued to the men. This was done by placing a man with his back to the pieces of bread, and the sergeant pointing to one piece at a time and asking, "Whose is this?" The answer would be, "That goes to No. 1," and so on through the list of twenty-five. The men were called by number instead of name. This was made necessary by reason of frequent changes on account of deaths.

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This rather full explanation is given here because it answers questions often asked me. This stockade, or inclosure, within which prisoners were confined, comprised several acres on the lower end of the Island, around which piles were driven, close together, leaving perhaps four to six feet projecting above ground. A little below the top of these logs or piles a platform was erected, and on this platform the guards marched and countermarched. It is not my intention to enter into a description of the condition of the prison camps. Their histories have been written and all are doubtless more or less familiar with them.

At this time there were about 9500 (ninety-five hundreds) in the stockade. Up to and including the sixteenth hundred had already been taken away. Morton and Deems were in the eighteenth hundred, and I was in the twenty-second hundred. It was expected that the next day more would be taken, and fearful that my squad would not be reached I was asked by Morton to "flank out" and go along. It was a violation of the rules to go from one squad to another, but on account of the many deaths occurring every night it could be managed in an emergency like this.

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Having been on the Island for six months I was glad to make a change of residence. A change of any kind was desirable even if it was not an improvement. To walk around the stockade another day, over the same well-beaten path, looking into the same pale, haggard faces, listening to the groans of the dying and witnessing the miserable condition of the living, was no longer tolerable, so that, "rather than suffer the ills we had we were willing to flee to others we knew not of."

I did flank out that night and the next morning quietly slipped into the eighteenth hundred with Morton and Deems, and marched with them out of the inclosure and over the bridge to the city of Richmond. We were put into the building called "The Pemberton" and remained there until the following morning, when we crowded into freight cars, forty to sixty in a car, and started southward.

While crossing the bridge on our way from the Island to the city I was marching by the side of a prisoner whom I had not met before. He was yet in apparently vigorous condition—evidently not having been a prisoner very long. He asked me in a suppressed tone if I intended to try to escape in case we were taken further south. I replied that I did, and we there and then entered into a contract to go together. He was enthusiastic about the matter and gave me his hand as a pledge of his sincerity.

Studying means of escape, and efforts to rid themselves of the tormenting vermin, were the chief occupations of prisoners of war while awake. In their fitful and uneasy slumbers they were dreaming that they were at home sitting at the most abundantly supplied tables and enjoying all the comforts which the word home implies. [12]

Long continued exposure and lack of food had engendered diseases and reduced the poor creatures to the most pitiable condition. Of course some were worse off than others, but all looked miserable enough.

After passing through Petersburg we were satisfied that a longer term of imprisonment awaited us, for, had it been the purpose to exchange us, we should have stopped at Petersburg and from there been taken to City Point. When the fact was made known there were loud murmurings. The bronzed and starved faces were pictures of the most abject wretchedness and despair. Reaching Gaston, North Carolina, we were transferred to another train, taking the Gaston and Raleigh road from that point.

Morton was very sick when we started from Richmond, and the jolting received in the cars had tended to increase his trouble. I endeavored to keep as close to him as possible on the way, so as to render him all the assistance I could. When changing cars at Gaston he was quite feeble, and required assistance to get from one train to the other.

"Do you intend to escape, Lieutenant?" was whispered in my ear as we were getting off the train. On looking around I found Peter Deems at my elbow.

"To-night," I as quietly replied. [13]

"All right, I'm with you," said he. Those who will remember Mr. Deems, (and doubtless many of his old friends in Pike Run township, and all his surviving comrades in Co. F will) must be amused, as I was, at such a proposition coming from him. Although he was considerably reduced in flesh by his long confinement, he was yet large and clumsy, and to jump from a running train would, to my mind, have resulted disastrously. The whistle of the locomotive notified us that all was ready, and it was not long until we were speeding southward. On looking around for Deems I found he had in some way failed to get into that car. I never saw him after. His name, together with poor Morton's, appeared in a list of prisoners who answered the last great roll call at Andersonville, Georgia. Night came on as we approached Franklinton station, Franklin County, North Carolina. Here the train stopped for some time for the purpose of taking on wood and water, and while doing this the guards in the car were relieved. That is, those stationed there during the day were taken away and other men put in their places. I kept careful watch of everything going on and all the while keeping in view my purpose to get out of that car at the very earliest opportunity. While placing the guards the officer in charge renewed the instructions for the night. They were emphatically ordered not to allow a prisoner to get near the door. As is well known, the doors on a freight car slide along the side of the car. The door on one side of our car was securely fastened, while the one on the other side was partly open—perhaps two feet— [14] not more than enough for a man going out in a hurry to clear the sides. There were two guards in the car, one on each side of this partly open door. Armed Confederate soldiers were scattered all along the train—some on top of the cars. The rear car, an ordinary passenger coach, was occupied exclusively by them. They were held in readiness to answer a call from any part of the train in case of trouble. A lantern was hung up to the ceiling near the middle of the car.

It was a little after dark when the bell announced the time for starting. About the time the train was pulling out I asked the man who had agreed with me when we were crossing the bridge to make an effort to escape, what he thought about it. I found he had changed his mind. The boisterous and violent manner in which the officer had instructed the guard to shoot any man who came near the door, the sound of guns fired off for the purpose, no doubt, of overawing the prisoners, and the general gloom which night and darkness threw around the scene, had a depressing effect upon him. He said we would surely be killed. This was sufficient to convince me that he could not be relied upon and I bade him good-night and went in search of others who might be induced to consider the matter favorably.

Two stalwart men with guns in their hands, stood between us and liberty, and a sufficient force to render their defeat absolutely certain must be brought to bear. A failure to overpower them at the first attack would be sure to lead to the instant death of those engaged, if not others. The car [15]

was unspeakably filthy, and the thoughts of remaining in it would unstring the strongest nerves.

While leaning against the end of the car and peering through the dim light made by the candle in the lantern, and carefully scanning the scene before me, I discovered four young soldiers sitting on the floor near the other end, who seemed to be absorbed in the discussion of some important proposition. I felt so confident I knew what they were talking about that I made my way to them by carefully stepping over the forms of the prisoners as they lay huddled together on the floor, and getting down among them entered into conversation with them. It is sufficient to say we soon had our plans laid and a perfect understanding as to carrying them out.

There were now five of us. It was arranged that four should attack the guards. In other words, two of us to each guard, while the fifth should make his way to the lantern which hung suspended to the ceiling of the car, as before mentioned, and at the time offensive operations were to begin he was to extinguish the light. The guards were fully armed—guns in their hands and revolvers in their belts—while we were without weapons of any kind, and all more or less weakened by confinement, exposure and lack of sufficient food. We fully understood the part each was to play in the drama, or tragedy—whichever it might prove to be.

Before proceeding further I had to go back to the other end of the car and take leave of Morton. To see him lying in the corner of the car suffering the tortures of a lingering starvation was a sad sight indeed, and served to admonish me that his condition would soon be mine if I remained with him. Our separation was very sad and affecting. [16]

The first difficulty to overcome was to get near the guards without exciting suspicion. I had a finger ring made of bone which had been given to me by a friend on the Island. It was thought by careful manoeuvring I might be able to trade it to the guard for some crackers, which I noticed he carried in his haversack. Accordingly, I secured a position as close to him as I dared, and attracted his attention. I approached him by edging my way along, my right shoulder against the side of the car. He ordered me back, and several times threatened me. It was some time before I could get him to listen to me, but I handled him carefully, and after some parleying handed him the ring and told him he or some of his friends might value it as a memento, coming from a Yankee soldier. I pleaded for a few crackers and he eventually gave me two and a part of a third. By this time I had got sufficiently close to the door to be able to get an occasional glance outside as the train rumbled along and tossed me from side to side. I remember crossing a bridge, which I afterwards learned spanned Cedar Creek, a tributary of the Tar River. This bridge was probably eight miles or more from Franklinton station.

My companions had all gained their positions. The one who was to assist me was standing behind the shoulder of the guard, far enough away to avoid attracting attention and yet close enough to reach him. Two others had cautiously taken positions behind the other guard. [17]

The crackers were eagerly, ravenously devoured. We had consumed the rations issued to us early that morning, long before the middle of the day. Six months as a prisoner of war with a continual craving for food and with but one short ration that morning made this deal with the guard one of great importance. Now all were ready. With suppressed breath, swelling hearts and quickening pulses we anxiously awaited the momentous moment.

All at once, as if everything were working in concert with us, the cars slackened their speed. We were evidently on an ascending grade. On visiting the point since the war I found this to be true. Of course the difference was not very great but it was noticeable. We had agreed upon a signal but this change in the speed of the train took its place, and that this was the supreme moment flashed upon all of us at once. I was on the point of looking around to see if the thought had struck the other boys when crash went the lantern, and then—

"There rose so wild a yell,
Within that dark and narrow cell,
As all the fiends from Heaven that fell,
Were peeling the battle cry of hell."

The struggling guards were shouting to each other, calling down all sorts of maledictions upon the — — — Yankees. The light was out and in that car pandemonium had full swing. [18]

It is not necessary—hard as it is to avoid it—to go more fully into detail. Suffice it to say there was not a hitch in the whole proceeding. Our plans were carried out perfectly, and in less time, perhaps, than it takes now to write it out. When obstructions were removed we sprang out into the darkness. The boy who knocked out the light was the tallest member of the party and had been selected for that duty because of his ability to easily reach the lantern. He and his companion (who belonged to the same regiment) took advantage of the confusion and dodged out of the car at the outstart, leaving the three others engaged with the guard. It was well they did for they clung to the lantern which proved of great value to us afterward. It was perhaps about midnight when, full bruisers, we picked ourselves up out of the sand where we had fallen and in answer to suppressed whistling came together.

We were free! The reflection brought with it feelings far different from those which possessed us a few minutes previous, yet when we contemplated our situation the thought occurred that expressions of pleasure at that time might be premature. We were not yet "out of the woods;" were in the heart of the enemy's country. To the nearest point of territory held by the Union forces it was more than a hundred miles. The future looked gloomy enough. The most difficult part of the task was yet to be overcome.

The train had not yet stopped, and after congratulating ourselves, we proceeded to consider the [19]

course to be pursued as to subsequent movements. At this moment another matter attracted our attention. A strange clattering noise was heard in the distance, and as it grew more distinct we crouched upon the ground and with bated breath awaited results. Presently, three or four figures passed along the railroad track. The amount of noise made led us at first to believe there was quite a large force of troops coming, but it proved to be four negroes, who, we afterwards learned, were wearing wooden-soled shoes, which, owing to the scarcity of leather in the South, were worn almost entirely by this class of persons. These shoes were made by using rawhide for the uppers and nailing it to the soles made of wood, the latter being from one-half to perhaps an inch thick; at least this is my recollection. After this little interruption we crossed the railroad and traveled westward in the direction of Tennessee. After walking three or four miles and becoming well nigh exhausted we lay down in the forest and slept till daylight. On waking up in the morning and finding ourselves too close to the open country for safety, we moved further into the woods and selecting what we supposed to be a secluded spot concluded to stop and recruit our wasted strength. The pangs of hunger were tormenting us, and how to get relief must now engage our attention. One of the party started out on a reconnaissance and in a couple of hours returned with six ears of corn. We took the lantern which, as before mentioned, was thrown out of the car, and which was picked up and carried along, broke the top off, and used the tin bottom for parching our corn. We gathered a few sticks of wood and made a small fire, carefully guarding against making more smoke than could possibly be helped, we all fell to work parching and eating. Parched corn has not much tendency to allay hunger, consequently all we could get did not check the craving for more.

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I have heard a story which frequently occurs to me, and when it does I am invariably reminded of that parched corn experience. It is the story of an old darky who caught a 'possum, killed and dressed him, put it in the oven to bake, surrounding it with sweet potatoes, etc., and then the old man laid down to sleep while his 'possum baked. He was very hungry, and fondly anticipated a treat when he woke up. About the time the 'possum was done a mischievous acquaintance happened along, stole the 'possum and ate it all up. Then he took the bones, put them down in front of the old man, greased his lips with 'possum grease, and rubbed the grease over his fingers. When the old man woke up he missed his 'possum. He saw the bones lying in front of him. He saw 'possum grease on his fingers, and tasted 'possum grease on his lips, and finally said: "Well; am it possible dat I eat dat 'ar 'possum while I war asleep? It done look like I must hab eat him; but, fo' Gawd, dat 'ar 'possum had less effek on de stomach dan any 'possum dis chile eber eat." That was the way with the parched corn. It had a mighty poor effect on the stomach.

We remained at that place that and the day following, having nothing to eat but parched corn. The corn was procured from a slave whose owner lived a short distance from where we were hiding. Fearing our getting away might have been made known we kept very quiet, spending most our time deliberating as to the best route to the Union lines and the means to be adopted to gain them, and trying to exterminate the tormenting vermin which had started colonies upon every part of our clothing. It was an imperative duty, in order to keep the upper hand, to wage continual war upon these pests. On this occasion we had been prevented for one day from attending to this duty and in consequence they were in "shoals and nations," and we found it very difficult to reduce their numbers sufficiently to allow us any comfort. Having told our black friend to collect three or four of his most intelligent acquaintances and bring them to see us, they appeared in camp on the evening of the second day. Without their counsel we might have made a fatal mistake at the outset. The southern negroes are, or were while slavery was in existence, the most consummate strategists in the matter of escaping or eluding pursuit. Many of them had been runaways, and those who had not were thoroughly schooled in the art by able teachers. Stories of the most marvelous flights and long continued success in evading capture by the master and blood hounds, were told me. One very old woman, whom I afterwards met, told me she had spent nearly her whole life in the swamps and cane brakes. In order to throw the blood hounds off their tracks they would besmear their feet, hands and clothing with a mixture composed partly of brimstone. In crossing fences or going through the forests they were careful to allow no part of the body or dress to come in contact with the rails or trees but that which had been rubbed with the compound. We were advised to separate for the reason that if we remained together it would be difficult to find food for so many, and the chances for being discovered were much greater. When the pow-wow broke up it was well into the night, and taking leave of each other, we "folded our tents, like the Arab, and silently stole away" into the darkness.

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Two of the party resolved to continue westward in the direction of Tennessee. The distance to the Union lines was greater but the country to be traveled was mountainous, and thought to be safer. One chose to go northward towards Virginia. Another started for Roanoke River, intending to follow it to the coast. I started directly eastward, having determined to take the nearest and most direct route to the Union forces on the coast of North Carolina, and intending to make up by caution what I might lose by having the most dangerous route. After traveling some time I came suddenly upon a cabin situated in the edge of the forest, and being almost famished I figured around until I satisfied myself that it would probably be safe to arouse the dwellers within. In most cases the cabins stood in clusters in the vicinity of the residence of the proprietor of the plantation on which they are situated. But sometimes you would find one standing in some isolated spot far removed from any other. I had no means of knowing what time it was—perhaps about midnight. An old black man answered my summons, and when he appeared I asked him if it would be safe in the house for a Yankee. Without giving him time to reply I pushed in past him. We closed the door and I then explained to him who I was and what I wanted. I found myself in a room containing some crude articles of furniture and perhaps half a dozen little children lying

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promiscuously on the floor. The fireplace was the most conspicuous thing in view. It occupied nearly the whole of one side of the cabin. The man aroused his wife and told her to get up and see a Yankee. She had evidently never seen a Union soldier and, like all others of her class, entertained strange ideas of his appearance. From the stories they had been told of the crimes committed by the Yankees and the punishment inflicted upon the black people who fell into their hands, their fancies had painted some horrible looking creature which would more resemble "old Nick" than anything else.

After looking at me closely from head to foot, she exclaimed, "Is you a Yankee?" "Yes," I replied, "I'm a Union soldier and belong to the northern army." "The Lor' bress me," she said, turning to her husband; "Dey told us dey had horns, but he looks just like our folks," and she went on talking, sometimes addressing me, sometimes her husband, until I was compelled to interrupt her. I asked her if she could spare me a bite of bread. "Lor' yes, honey, ye look sta'ved," and she secured some meal, kneaded it into a ball as large as the fist, laid it on the hearth and covered it up with hot ashes. This is the way they make what is called an ash cake. [24]

While this was going on I felt somewhat anxious. During our hasty talk the old man said the Home Guards often visited the cabins of the black people in the night, in search of runaways and conscripts. These Home Guards were composed of those who were either too old or too young to go into service at the front. It seemed that all classes in the south had military duty of some kind to perform. As a precaution against discovery I went out some distance from the house and waited until the cake was brought out. In a short time my old friend came out with the cake. What a treat it was no one can form an idea.

Striking out again, I followed the directions given me by the old man as near as I could in the darkness, and daylight the next morning found me close to a town wearily trudging along, nibbling at the ash cake which I carried in my pocket. This town proved to be Franklinton, and, it will be remembered, was the same at which our train stopped, and where the guard was changed. Turning out of the road I went in search of a place to hide during the day. I soon ran into the brush, or timber, and in a little while came across a number of stacks of newly made rails and railroad ties. I crept under one of these and sat down on the leaves, shivering with cold. It was in March. The nights were extremely cold. I was thinly clad, and sometimes thought I would perish. [25]

It was not long until I heard persons approaching, and looking out between the rails, saw six or eight black men carrying axes. They had come to begin the day's work. We were soon engaged in conversation. They said some one might be there during the day, and to guard against my presence becoming known to them, and in order to make me as comfortable as possible, they gathered together more leaves and leaned more rails against the stack. They lingered at work until after dark, and then put me on the road to Louisburg, a town on the Tar River, about ten or twelve miles from Franklinton, one of them going some distance with me. Louisburg was the town I started for the night before, but, losing my way, had reached Franklinton, having made very little progress in the proper direction. I reached a point within a short distance of Louisburg about daylight. During the night I often felt very sick, and sometimes thought I could go no further.

Now, as the day began to dawn, I was utterly prostrated, and with great difficulty reached some corn fodder stacks standing in a field. Lying down between the stacks. I remained there throughout the day, suffering intensely. About dark I got up and staggered to a cabin which I noticed during the day, standing some distance away. Fortunately I found it occupied by black people. Giving them a brief account of myself, I asked for some hot tea of some kind. The woman went hastily to work to get it. I retired a short distance from the house, as a precaution, and waited until it was brought out. It was made of herbs of some kind, and revived me very much. Louisburg is situated on the north bank of the Tar River. I was at this time two or three miles south of the river. Getting what information I could here, I started straight down the south side of the river, leaving Louisburg to my left. I succeeded in making a point some five or six miles below, and east of the town, that night. The river runs eastward and empties into the Pamlico river at Greenville. [26]

Almost perishing from cold and exhaustion, I anxiously awaited for daylight. It was my rule to look for a black man—in case I needed to see one—between dark and bed-time or about daylight in the morning. When daylight appeared I fortunately found one without much trouble, and it happened he was one of more than the average intelligence. Explaining my situation, I told him it was necessary that I should conceal myself for several days until I could gain strength. Realizing that an over-indulgence in food of any kind was dangerous on account of the debilitated condition of my stomach, I was very careful, but with all my caution, I had taken too much of the ash cake, and it came near killing me. We were not far from the river, and the man thought it advisable for us to cross to the north side, as he thought he knew of a place over there which would be safe from intrusion. So we hurried to the river bank, got into a "dug-out" which he pulled from among the bushes, and paddled across. The river banks were lined with timber and thick underbrush, and often swampy ground. We pushed into the brush and soon came to the spot which he had fixed upon for my abode. The river was only a few rods wide, and in many places very difficult to approach on account of the heavy growth of brush of different kinds. The black people, however, knew every inch of the ground, and had secreted in many places all sorts of small boats—everything of the kind that would float and carry one across. A couple of small logs tied together would be sufficient, and even these, I afterwards learned, could be found in many places. The man, fearing his absence might be noticed, hurried away, telling me to remain there until night. That night he re-appeared, accompanied by another man. This second man proved to be my [27]

guardian angel, as I shall show further along. They had with them some herb tea and a part of a bed quilt, both of which were of great value at that time. For some days I was in the greatest distress.

During the stay at this place I would have more or less black people to see me every night. Curiosity to see a Northern man and a desire to render aid in any way, was the motive which brought them. While there were a few free negroes among the visitors, the greater number were slaves. The latter would give accounts of their troubles, and many woeful stories of cruelty were rehearsed.

At this place a black man gave me a dirk knife with a double-edged blade, for the purpose, he said, of protecting myself against dogs or other enemies. He had made it by grinding down a file, and had produced a very formidable weapon. I have always remembered these people with the greatest interest. There was that one before spoken of who won my fullest gratitude. His name was Ben—Ben Foster. Foster, of course, was the name of the man who owned him. When I was weakest this man would carry me from place to place, when he thought there was danger of discovery by remaining too long in one place. [28]

I went in search of him a few years after the war, and found him not far from the scene of our first acquaintance. The incident of meeting this man a few years after the war was one of the most pleasant experiences I ever met with. He, of course, did not know me when I first approached, but to witness the looks of surprise and hear his expressions of happiness at seeing me again, alive and well, was worth to me a great deal more than it cost to go South and hunt him up. I was accompanied on the trip by M. L. A. McCracken, Esq., an eminent attorney, of Washington, Pa., and he was both interested and amused at the scene when we met.

Many of these slaves were shrewd and observing and fairly intelligent, and in conversation about matters connected with the war gave evidence of a pretty good understanding of the condition of things. They knew they were a prominent factor in the issue. And what wonderful faith they had in the guiding hand of an over-ruling Providence—faith in God and Massa Lincoln. Their simplicity and earnestness in religious matters and their superstitions were prominent characteristics. An old aunty told me to look out for the owls. If one hooted in front of me it meant bad luck; if one to the right or left or rear, it meant something—good, bad or worse; I forget just how they had it arranged. A man named Dick, an interesting character, who had more than once, he told me, attempted to get away from bondage, but was as often overtaken and returned to his master, came often to see me. He was a laughing, rollicking sort of a fellow, and was usually engaged in humming a melody or dancing—always full of merriment and music. He told me one night he would go and get a fishing line, and next morning would go to the river and get us some fish. I fully endorsed the proposition, because it promised to secure a kind of food I was very much in need of. The corn bread had sickened me; my stomach revolted against accepting it, but it was very difficult to get anything else, and I was compelled to use it. Before daybreak the following morning I was startled from an uneasy slumber by hearing Dick's familiar voice breaking the stillness of the season by humming, in a tone somewhat suppressed: [29]

"Cold, frosty mo'nin', niggah very good,
Wid his axe on his shouldah, slippin' fro' de wood,
Old rusty hoe cake, not a bit of fat,
White folks grumble if you eat too much o' dat."

He was armed with fishing tackle, and we proceeded to the river bank, but a short distance away. He took a position in the branches of a fallen tree lying close to the water's edge, while I fell back into the brush to await results. It was not long until Dick called, excitedly, "Fo' de Lawd, massa, come quick." I hastened to where he was and found he had caught an eel. It was with some difficulty we got the thing off the hook, as everybody who has had the experience of taking an eel off a fishing hook will believe. We eventually secured it, and Dick slipped away to have it cooked. In due course of time he returned with it, nicely fried. My stomach, as before remarked, was out of shape, but I will remember that eel to my dying day as the sweetest morsel that ever went into my mouth. [30]

Time passed with me making a most miserable existence in the brush. One night I was suffering all that I could suffer and live, when uncle Ben reached me, and, seeming to realize the extent of my affliction, laid out some plans of his own as to what should be done. A mile or more away, standing alone in the solitude of the forest, was an old cabin occupied by a free negro family named Jones. While there was some risk in the proposition, Ben determined I should be under shelter from the cold and damp, for a time, at least; so he picked me up and "toted" me to this cabin, and arranged with the occupant, Mr. Jones, to take me back into the brush before daylight. This was repeated several nights. Soon after it was thought best to change my location to some point as distant from the present one as it was possible to get to in one night. Across the river and south of Louisburg, probably three or four miles, was a house belonging to the owner of a large plantation. It was located on a main road leading southward from the bridge spanning the river at Louisburg. The house had been abandoned by the owner at the outbreak of the war, and the plantation, house, and household furniture had been left in the care of the slaves. Such a house had always been exempt from search by the Home Guards. The overseer on this plantation was a slave. It is a fact that slaves were sometimes chosen as overseers on plantations, and it is also said to be a fact that the lash was not spared when used by one of these overseers on the body of a fellow slave. [31]

It was determined by uncle Ben and one or two of his faithful friends that I should be taken to the house spoken of and kept within it for a few days and nights. This was for the double purpose of

getting me away from the old neighborhood and of getting me under shelter. In going there we must either re-cross the river east of the town and make a long, circuitous journey, or go directly through it and cross the bridge. The latter route was chosen, and one night uncle Ben and a friend, and myself a few yards in the rear, entered the place. We had reached a point near the bridge, and I was waiting in the shadow of an old building standing in an alley for them to reconnoiter around the bridge and its approaches. They soon returned, showing considerable excitement and fright. They had discovered some one on the bridge, and, of course, fancied it was an enemy. We fell back in some disorder, it is true, but without meeting with any mishap. Not far from the town there lived a free negro family. The cabin stood in an obscure spot, and to this cabin we directed our steps. We laid our case before them and secured their friendship and co-operation. I was permitted to pass the night and the following day in the loft of their house. It is my recollection that that day was Sunday; at any rate, quite a number of young black girls and boys gathered under the shade of some trees surrounding the house and spent the greater part of the day in innocent amusement—singing and dancing. None but members of the household knew a Yankee was peeping under the eaves, looking at the performances. The scene was the most amusing and enjoyable of the kind I ever witnessed. The antics of the actors were "to the manor born," while the flirtations of the sable beaus and belles showed that at least some of the customs of the white folks had crept into plantation society. When the party broke up in the evening, they went off, making the country resound with the music of native songs.

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On that night we again started to make our way through the town and across the bridge. We reached the borders of the town, and cautiously joining the procession of people going to church, we mingled with them until we got in the neighborhood of the bridge. I might occupy a page or two describing our manoeuvres while getting to and over the bridge. It is sufficient to say that we successfully passed over, and some time after the middle of the night reached our destination, the mansion on the plantation above spoken of. The black overseer was not permitted to know of my presence. Uncle Ben was afraid to trust him. But his wife unlocked the gate of the fence which surrounded the house, and took me into the house and directed me to remain there until she called. A very ferocious dog was running loose within the enclosure surrounding the house, and it was with great difficulty the woman could keep him from springing on me while going from the gate to the house. This dog being there was probably one of the reasons why it was thought I would be free from discovery and could remain in the house undisturbed. I was kept in this house three days and nights, and being for that long sheltered from the cold and damp night atmosphere, my health was much benefitted. Fearing too long a stay there might prove disastrous, we again worked our way back to a point over the river a few miles east of Louisburg, and not very far from my former place of abode in the forest. At the expiration of a few days more, it being probably eighteen or twenty since first striking the district, I was called upon to get out in a hurry.

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During my stay in this neighborhood, I learned there was a northern man living at Louisburg, who had located there before the war, and who was anxious to communicate with me. He had remained true to the Union, and, through some disability, had escaped being conscripted into the southern army. He sent a letter directed to some friends in the north, and asked that I should carry it through for him. In a note accompanying the letter, he said he would be glad to have an interview, but realizing the danger connected with an attempt to visit me, he concluded to waive the desire. He held a position as a teacher in an educational institution of that place. I was compelled to destroy the letter some days later, when there was danger of my again falling into the hands of the rebels. Rumors which reached me that the people had learned there was a Yankee in the country, and that search with blood hounds might be made, had a tendency to hasten the start.

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Blood hounds! All who have a knowledge of the character of this savage brute will be able to form some idea of the horror which the very mention of them would create in the mind. To explain more fully, I will say that the night before I started, an old aunty, probably sixty years of age, came to my dwelling place and said that the day before she had been tied to a post and lashed on the bare back. For proof she insisted on my examining her shoulders. I found them cruelly bruised and lacerated. Having heard of my presence, she concluded to visit me, with the hope that I might suggest some means by which she would be relieved of such torture in the future. I was persuaded, partly by her pleading, and partly by a sincere desire to aid her, to write her a pass. I signed her master's name to it. She secured the materials for the purpose. Everybody in the South in those days had to have a pass. She evidently left her home early the following morning. Armed with her pass, she concluded she would be safe under its protection. She was arrested during the day while loitering around Louisburg; and in the investigation which followed the pass was proven fraudulent. I had friends who were watching the proceedings, and the news came to me with the speed of the wind. It was feared she might be compelled to betray me. At any rate, it was considered the part of wisdom for me to strike out, although I was yet quite feeble, at the earliest convenient moment. In order to prevent the possibility of being overtaken by blood hounds, we proceeded to the river bank as soon as darkness appeared, and, with as much haste as possible, constructed a rude boat from material found in the bushes, and which had doubtless been used for the same purpose before.

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Three of my faithful friends were there—Ben, and Dick and Ed. Dick wanted to go along with me and we had some difficulty to dissuade him. I knew if he went along and I was caught with him in my company I would in all probability be shot and he would be flogged severely. At last—probably near midnight—we were ready. I picked up the pole which we had secured for the purpose of managing my boat, and with their "God bless you, massa, wish you good luck," ringing in my ears, I pushed out into the stream. I spent the greater part of the balance of the night on

the water. Having worked to the opposite shore I shoved my frail and sometimes unruly craft along until near morning, when I abandoned it and took to the brush. I have no idea I made a very great distance by water, and yet, for reasons above stated, it was a wise thing to do.

It must be understood that I would always hunt a hiding place as soon as daylight appeared. As evening twilight came on I would sally forth, and if needing information, would first hunt up a black man. I never attempted to travel by day. The cabins of the black people were built of logs, having but a single room on the ground floor, and sometimes there was a loft made, boards being thrown over the ceiling joists, covering half the room, more or less. This upper apartment was used for the purpose of storing away articles which could not well be kept below. It was usually reached by a ladder.

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On this day I sat around, passing the time taking short naps, and in the interval nibbling at the corn bread which had been supplied by uncle Ben. I was beginning to feel strong again, and was thrilled by thoughts that I would now soon be at home among friends, and then back with the boys at the camp-fire, participating in their amusements and sharing in their triumphs.

That night, soon after starting out, I ran into the vicinity of a cluster of cabins, and loitered about watching for an opportunity to see what kind of people occupied them. In the course of time a man came out, and I was near enough to see by the moonlight that it was a black man. After some figuring I hailed him, and making myself known was invited into the house. I was in there but a moment when a noise was heard on the outside. The man pointed to the ladder, and I sprang onto it. I struck the rung heavily; it broke, and in a moment Yankee and ladder were tangled up on the floor. While in this situation, with the occupants of the house looking in consternation at the picture before them, the door opened, and in stepped a man and woman. Fortunately they were friends of the family, who came as visitors. To say that I was mortified at the awkward predicament, but poorly expresses it. Explanation made everything right, and I soon shook the dust of that cabin from my feet, and never again repeated the mistake of going into one. The tramp that night was uneventful. As usual, when time arrived to put up for the day I went around looking for a proper place to locate and go to bed.

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I soon struck the wet, oozy earth, which proved to be the beginning of a swamp. Swamps were numerous in that country, and I was glad they were. They afforded the best hiding places. I penetrated this one some distance and perched myself on a fallen tree trunk to doze and sleep away the day. The tree had been blown down, and large roots extending out in all directions, held it up out of the water. I was lying stretched out on this tree when, about the middle of the afternoon or later, the distant bay of hounds reached my ears. It, of course, occurred to me they were blood hounds, and were on my trail. It was two days since leaving the river bank below Louisiana, and I had begun to feel that the danger I had run into there had passed. But with the stories of the negroes regarding the hounds still well remembered, it was natural for me to conclude that it could not be otherwise than that these were the dreaded brutes, and they were after me. One thing is certain, the noise greatly alarmed me, and as it grew continually louder and nearer I grasped the limb of a tree within reach and swung myself into a position on it some eight or ten feet from the root of the fallen tree I had been sitting on. My position was surrounded by water from one to two feet deep for one to three hundred yards, and a dense forest. Taking my knife in my hand I waited results. I have heard it denied that a man's hair would "stand up" in case of fright, but if my head didn't resemble the "fretful porcupine" about now, I have ever since been laboring under a delusion.

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Nearer and still nearer sounded the cry of the dogs. They presently reached the water at the point about where I entered it, as I thought. What a thrilling moment! Instead of plunging in, however, they turned aside and ran around in a circle, as I understood blood hounds did when they lost a trail. I occasionally got a glimpse of one in the distance as a chance view is caught between the trees. The hoarse, foreboding howl created a terror hard to explain, and filled me with a dreadful apprehension that they might the next moment come rushing through the brush. How long this continued I could not know. It was certainly not long, although it seemed an age to me. At length a change in the situation seemed to take place. They were apparently going off. The cries were sounding further away. They became more prolonged, more mournful, as they gradually grew less distinct, and as I sat there and listened to the chorus dying away in the distance my heart quit its thumping, my nerves relaxed, and a feeling of relief, such as is seldom felt by man, came over me. For a while, however, things looked bad to "a man up a tree," I assure you. If they were blood hounds, as I thought they were, there was no one with them to direct them into the water, which they will not enter without being urged. When darkness came on I cautiously crept out and hurried away.

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The next morning I reached a shed standing in a field, which proved to be partly filled with corn fodder. Concluded it would be a snug place to spend the day. Inasmuch as it stood alone and out of sight of any dwelling I thought it would be safe as well as comfortable. Going in, I at once burrowed under the fodder, and after carefully pulling a covering of stalks and blades over my shivering body, was soon dozing away. How long I slept I had no means of knowing when a noise as of some one approaching aroused me. The dry husks and stalks lay all around the shed, and the trampling over them could be distinctly heard. Presently the steps reached the door, and as one fell within it an impulse to spring out and trust to the knife and circumstances to get away was allayed only by a hope that I would not be disturbed. How still and quiet I tried to keep. The effort to avoid making the least noise made the drawing of my breath, and the consequent rise and fall of the fodder with my respiration, sound to my ears like claps of thunder. I could accurately follow the intruder in and back to the door and hear the fodder dropped on the outside. Out and slowly back came the evil disturber of my slumbers, and right over me it

stopped. The prison pen, with all its horrors, seemed staring me in the face. Scratch came the hands diving into the fodder, and as my covering was taken away I cautiously rose up. To my agreeable surprise I discovered the intruder was a black woman. She threw the fodder on the outside and returning, as she stepped into the door, she discovered me standing, like an apparition, before her. Looking the very picture of fright and astonishment, she threw up her hands and exclaimed: "Fo' de Lo'd, massa, wha' you come from?" I held up my hand in token of silence, and hastily explained who I was and how I got there. I told her I was very tired, and would like to find a place where I could rest during the day undisturbed. She said there would be no one there again that day, and for me to stay there and she would send uncle somebody out in the evening to see me. Sure enough, just after dark, that evening, a dusky form came creeping up to the shed. I was on the lookout, and watched him closely for a while without allowing him to see me. This to guard against treachery. How thoughtful it was in him to have a good quantity of hoe-cake with him. He gave me necessary information as to roads, forest tracks, etc., and told me how to avoid dangerous points in my pathway.

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I wandered on and put in the time as usual plowing through forest and swamp through the night, and laying up during the day. The next evening I found myself somewhat at a loss to know what direction to take in order to get into the proper course. I started out a little before dark and soon struck a swamp—no unusual thing—but after quite a walk and no signs of solid ground appearing, but seemingly an interminable stretch of brush and tangled vines in front and on all sides, the fear crept over me that I had lost my bearings. The shadows under the trees were growing blacker and broader and darkness was gathering fast. At every step I sank almost knee deep into the wet, oozy earth. I climbed on a log and peering forward could see nothing but dense masses of underbrush and overhanging boughs. Wheeling about I made the best possible speed back over my tracks. With darkness increasing at every step it was difficult to find the way, and chance, more than sagacity on my part, brought me to firm ground. I afterwards learned from negroes the swamp covered a large extent of territory and had I gone farther would in all probability have become confused and eventually have perished. It was not long after emerging from the swamp and while I was leaning against a pine tree, when one of those severe southern rain storms burst through the clouds and I stood there in the drenching rain while the great pines moaned a chorus to the music of the storm. Strange as it may seem I felt glad that it had come. The darkness would hide me from the sight of man. Even blood hounds would not pursue a trail on such a night. Cold chilling March rain in North Carolina, and me nearly naked. I hugged up as close to the tree as possible hoping for shelter. Mercy! how it does rain down there when it rains. It was long after midnight when I made my way back from the region of the swamp until I stumbled on a cart track and taking a position in its neighborhood remained there until daylight.

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I then went in search of information. Getting sight of a black man I watched him until he entered the timber and then had an interview. I learned from him that not far away was a turpentine furnace, and black men were there engaged in making turpentine. I hid in the brush until night and then struck for the turpentine furnace. I reached it about the middle of the night. I remained in its vicinity the balance of the night and following day. I was then within a few miles of the town of Wilson, which is situated on the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad. I must pass this town and with the view of saving myself from the necessity of wandering around two or three nights in order to get beyond it I secured the services of two young men who were working at the furnace to go with me and show me the easiest and safest way around it. It was a rule always observed to turn aside when coming upon any habitation, whatever, and make a more or less wide circuit in order to avoid both men and dogs. Accordingly after nightfall, we started forward cautiously following the road, and reaching a point near the town we sat down on the roadside to discuss ways and means of getting to the other side. After fully canvassing the subject we at last concluded to go straight through the place. Mose, the most intelligent of the two, said he knew every street and by-way, and felt certain of his ability to get me through. The knife I always carried conveniently hanging to my side. Towards the middle of the night we entered the place, Mose and his friend, by pre-arrangement, some ten or fifteen paces in advance. They were walking in the middle of the street. I stumbled along the rough side walk until we got well into the town and then fell into their tracks in the street. It had been arranged they would give me warning in case there was any sign of danger ahead. A train of cars on the Gaston & Wilmington Railroad went whistling across the street in front of us. The arrival of that train at that time was, I afterwards felt, a happy circumstance, because I think it contributed somewhat to helping me out of a difficult situation before I got out of the town.

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Everything proceeded well until we were about to emerge from the town, perhaps passing the last houses, when two soldiers (Home Guards), with guns in their hands, put in an appearance, one coming from each side of the street. They walked rapidly towards my guides and called out: "Wha' ye all gwine?" Mose tried to give them the explanation which had been agreed upon in case just such an emergency should happen. He said he was going to Massa somebody's, to chop wood. The scheme would not work and they were turned back. When they were halted I stopped just a moment and revolved in my mind what I would do. It came to me like an inspiration. A retreat on my part would arouse suspicion. I dare not go back. I threw my heavy walking stick into my left hand, leaving my right free for emergencies, and marched straight forward. Meeting my guides and passing on I found the guards waiting for me to come up. The same question was put to me: "Wha' you all gwine?" as I walked stiffly past between them. I told them I was going home and indignantly denounced them for attempting to stop me. I swore "like a trooper," called them cowards, accompanying every word with the necessary adjective to make it as emphatic as possible. I told them I had a furlough, and gave the impression that I belonged to that neighborhood. While I was talking I was walking steadily away from them. I kept up the

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sulphurous fusilade until I was well out of their hearing. I have always felt that this was one of the very rare occasions when profanity was justified. They were completely thrown off their guard—utterly taken by surprise and confounded. They stood there without saying a word in reply, and before they recovered I was beyond sight and hearing. I have always thought they did not report the incident, fearing their course in allowing a stranger to pass them would be condemned and punished. It was one of those strange fortunate accidents that could happen only once in a lifetime.

The course I pursued was undoubtedly the right one. The audacity of the movement was in its favor, and the passage of the train through the town as we entered it probably helped me out. After going some distance, probably a mile or more, I heard a rapid tramp, tramp, behind me, and quickly dropping into the brush on the roadside, waited to see what was coming. Soon a form passed, running rapidly. I could see well enough to feel convinced it was one of my guides. Springing out into the road behind him I soon overhauled him. It proved to be Mose. He said when "de ga'ds" turned him back he took off on a side street and came out on the road outside of the town. His companion he had lost, and from the way he talked I thought he was glad of it. He was determined to go on with me and pleaded earnestly to be allowed to do so. His claim that he was well acquainted with the country and could take me through in a few nights, induced me to consent. We were yet fifty miles from the coast. That and the following night we spent in reaching Greenville, which we did near the middle of the night, without incident.

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It was too near daylight to attempt to get through or around Greenville that night so we "laid very close to the ground" during the day and anxiously awaited for the coming of another night. When it came Mose proposed to hunt up a black man who would be willing to "pilot" us around the town. Traveling around through the brush and across fields we ran against a cabin and after considerable manoeuvring found the occupants were the right color. Mose got the man out some distance from the house and asked him if he would take us to a point on the road beyond the town. He surprised us by asking pay for the service. It was the first instance of the kind I had met with. As he and Mose were making the negotiations I attributed the speculation part to the fact that the man was dealing with one of his own color. We had no money but I had an extra coat uncle Ben had procured for me while I was lying about Louisburg. The coat was made of cotton material and was considerably threadbare, but in the darkness Mose was able to make the fellow believe it was quite valuable. He consented to take it instead of the money, and he and his son agreed to go. They placed themselves a few rods in advance and led us a long journey around Greenville. They had reached the road leading from Greenville to Washington and Newburn, N. C., and Mose and I were coming up behind slowly and carefully picking our steps when in the suddenness of a moment the guides came rushing back, and passing us, without saying a word, fled with the speed of Tam O'Shanter's mare when she was trying to make the keystone of the bridge. We turned and followed of course. Mose overtook them and demanded an explanation. They said when they looked up the road they saw a man on horseback riding directly towards them. Instead of lying quiet they ran away from the supposed danger. I noticed it was their way always to at once take to flight on the occasion of any alarm. It was my rule at such times to drop to the ground and get into shelter of the brush as quietly as possible. We dismissed them and started forward again keeping off the road and going eastwardly on a line which we supposed was parallel with it. We were now about twenty-five miles from Washington, a town near the mouth of the Pamlico River, North Carolina, which was occupied by the Union forces.

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We found it necessary from this time forward to use great caution. We kept in the brush and slowly felt our way. After another night's travel we found ourselves at daylight fixing a nest under the trunk of a fallen tree. It had been blown down and was held up off the ground by its roots. Here we expected to spend the day. We were probably twelve or fifteen miles from Greenville and ten or twelve miles from Washington, N. C., where we hoped our pilgrimage would end. At this point I lost Mose. We crawled under the trunk of the tree and drew leaves and branches up on either side, completely hiding us from view. Near evening a noise was heard, and, peering out, we saw a white man and woman coming directly toward us. They were evidently absorbed in conversation. They could not see us. Our best plan was to lay still. But the sight of a white face was too much for Mose. He slipped out on the opposite side of the log, giving no heed to my warning to lie still, and, dodging from tree to tree, he was soon lost to sight and hearing. The old people passed close by the root of the tree. Giving them time to get away, I crawled out and went in search of Mose. I shouted as loud as I dared, and whistled around the neighborhood until near dark. I have never seen him since. His fear of falling into the hands of his master probably induced him to run and keep running. I gave up the search with great reluctance, because we were so near friends and I had a great desire to get the faithful fellow through. He was about as successful in leading his charge within view of the promised land as one of the same name aforetime, and failed as utterly to enter it himself, at least, so far as I know.

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I struck out in the direction the old folks had taken and soon came to an open field, across which, perhaps half a mile away, stood a house. It was getting toward dark and I concluded to pass near the house in the hope of getting near the road and locating myself. I crossed a field and was climbing a fence. I was about to jump to the ground when my eyes fell upon a man standing at a fence corner but a few steps away. We discovered each other about the same time and were both equally surprised at the meeting. It was the same old gentleman who had passed our hiding place in the forest. He was looking at some hogs which were running around in the field. I went toward him and extended my hand. He took it and greeted me in a cordial way. After passing some casual remarks I told him I belonged to the 25th North Carolina Regiment, and was on my return to rejoin the command after visiting my home, which I told him was in Franklin County. This was the county in which I had left the train. It will be here appropriate to mention that the

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Confederate forces, under General Hoke, was at that time investing Washington, situated at the mouth of the Pamlico River, North Carolina, the place I was aiming to reach. His troops had taken Plymouth and had moved on Washington a few days ahead of me. This fact aided me to deceive the old gentleman, but it unfortunately increased the difficulties which I had to encounter in my progress forward. He said the Confederate soldiers had been around for a day or two. Some of them had been at his house, the last ones but a few hours previous. I accepted his kind invitation to the house, but purposely loitered along and delayed reaching it until about dark. Here I met the old lady, the other member of the party which gave Mose the fright. I refused to go into the house on their kind invitation, and we stood talking on the outside near the door—my object being to take a position which would give me the best chance to get away in case an enemy should appear. During our talk the old lady denounced the war and its authors, including among the latter both Lincoln and Jeff Davis. I thought she was more severe on Davis. Three sons—all the children she had—had been compelled to go into the Confederate army. One had already been killed and one was wounded. This fact probably had a tendency to move her to direct her denunciations against Davis. However, as I endorsed her words and expressed sympathy, she leaned more and more toward Union sentiments. The old gentleman went some distance with me. We entered the forest and took a seat on a log. Here we remained talking until it was quite late. I was tempted to tell him the truth about myself, but realizing that it might embarrass him and would be of no service to myself I refrained. I got valuable information from him as to the location and sentiments of the people living on the way.

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As I neared Washington extreme care had to be observed, and it was necessary on account of the swamps which abounded here on all sides, to keep pretty close to the road. My feet and legs were always wet from wading in the swamps, and I had become so tired and weary of clambering through the brush and water, that I sometimes felt like running the risk and keeping the road. This I tried on one occasion, but was soon driven off by the approach of a force of Confederate troops. The town of Washington lay on the north side of the river. I was traveling down the south side. The main force of the enemy was on the north side, yet a sufficient force was on the south side to make demonstration against the Union troops guarding the approaches to the bridge. These forces I was obliged to pass, and it took fine figuring and careful manoeuvring indeed. But slow progress was made from this time forward. Groping along, peering ahead through the darkness, dodging off when anything in the shape of a soldier appeared in front—and nearly every object would assume such a shape in my excited imagination. Put to flight occasionally by a pesky stump, which in the darkness would suddenly grow into a giant sentinel armed cap-a-pie, I made slow headway.

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Finally, without dwelling upon details, I reached the house of a Mr. Caldwell, about the middle of the night, and knocked at his back door. I had learned from the gentleman above mentioned that this Mr. Caldwell was a Union man, and at his house I first struck an underground road which extended far up into the country, and was used for conveying information and necessaries to Union families living in the interior, and also for guiding refugees into the Union lines. Mr. Caldwell, being, no doubt, suspicious, and naturally fearful of falling into a trap set for him by the enemy, was exasperatingly cautious. He said the soldiers (meaning Confederates) had occupied his premises the night before and were all around there during the day. He also said he had been told they had taken possession of Washington. This alarmed me, because if they had, I was liable to fall into their hands unless I steered clear of the place. He, however, gave me directions how to reach the house of Mr. Archie Hill. From Mr. Hill's on to the residence of a Mr. Kennerly, which was not far from where the pickets usually stood. Mr. Kennerly was a Union man, and I have learned since that he was a Presbyterian clergyman. He lived at the forks of the roads which came from Newbern and Greenville, and forming a junction, ran on into Washington.

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It was just breaking day when I reached the back door of Mr. Kennerly's house. My summons was soon answered by the gentleman himself. I was anxious to make an end of my wanderings that morning. I inquired the way to the picket post. He looked at me suspiciously, and said I could follow the road. I told him I did not want to be seen; that I hoped the Union forces still occupied the town. At this he glanced me over and seemed to get a revelation. He took me by the arm and drew me inside the door and exclaimed: "Oh! you are a refugee. Come in. How in the world did you get through? They have been fighting around here for several days. We have not been in bed for three nights. Did you come through underground?" And so on, excitedly plying me with questions—sometimes answering himself, without allowing me opportunity to explain. By refugee is meant a native of the country who might be fleeing from home and endeavoring to get into the Union lines. After getting into the room in presence of his wife, she joined him in expressions of wonder at my success in evading the enemy and expressed sympathy for my distressed condition. The table, on which were some cold meat and a plate of biscuit, was standing in the middle of the room. I refused their kind invitation to sit down and contented myself by accepting a couple of biscuits which I pocketed and hurried away. He told me where the pickets would probably be found, and pointed out how I could get to the road near them by following a by-path through the forest, and cautioned me to be very careful because they had been fighting over on the other side for several days and it was possible the Confederates might have taken the town. If they had of course their pickets would be at the post.

[52]

I did not get a chance to explain to him who I was and left him in the belief that I was a North Carolina refugee. It was perhaps not more than a mile from his house to where the pickets ought to be found. Hurrying along the path through the brush as he directed I struck a fence which I had been told if followed would lead me to a point on the road not far from the outpost, and I would there be able to take observations and probably learn whether Union or Confederate soldiers were holding the post. Keeping close to the fence—cautiously creeping along, all the

while closely examining the territory in front of me I came to the road. It was not full daylight and the fog and mists obstructed the view. Dodging around fence corners and getting a position so that I could look down the road, I discovered a couple of hundred yards away, a blue-coated sentinel pacing back and forth across the road. Keeping trees and fence in range between us I stealthily crept nearer. Was that sentinel a Yankee was the first thing to be settled satisfactorily? I looked intently. His coat, his cap, his every movement was carefully noted. Yes, surely. The guards at the reserve post began to move about. They were back perhaps a couple of hundred yards beyond the picket or outpost. As it grew lighter a fair view of them was caught. The glorious blue. There can be no mistake. With difficulty I kept from shouting for the Union and the old flag.

[53]

Stepping out into the road I threw up my hands in token of surrender and marched towards the sentinel. When I arrived within a few steps of him he brought down his gun and commanded me to halt. I took the knife from my belt and threw it at his feet and told him I was otherwise unarmed and would be glad to come in. He called for the sergeant of the guard. When that officer came forward I was admitted within the lines. Of course an explanation was given. That I had been "through the mill" as well as the swamps, my external appearance bore testimony. Pantaloon in ribbons below the knees, partly barefooted, the little flesh left on my limbs scratched, poisoned and swollen from having been compelled so often to wade through water, I was a picture of the direst distress. But the haven was reached at last. The imagination must be left to picture my feelings. Any attempt to describe them would result in utter failure to do the subject justice. With gratitude to God and those kind and faithful people who were instrumental in making the journey a success, I felt the extremest sensations of joy.

[54]

The boys were making coffee, and I got a good share of it. I had not had any coffee for about seven months, and of course relished it now. From this picket post to the bridge it was perhaps two miles, more or less. Throughout this distance the ground was covered by water and a corduroy road was constructed. This is made by piling logs one upon another until they reach above the water. Midway between the post and the bridge there was a block house or fort. It was occupied by a detachment of a hundred men. I was taken over this road, past the block house, on over the bridge into Washington, and presented to General Palmer, who was in command of the forces on the North Carolina coast at the time. Two soldiers were detailed at the picket post to escort me to the headquarters of the commanding officer.

Washington was evacuated that same day, our forces falling back to Newbern. If I had been one day later—well, we need not speculate upon what might have been the result. I was forwarded under guard to Newbern, going around the Sound on the same vessel which carried the commanding officer. I was kept under guard by our own forces until I was identified. This was in accordance with military usage. At Newbern I was taken to the barracks, or building used for confining prisoners of war taken by our own forces. The commanding officer was a colonel of a Massachusetts regiment. I have lost his name. His wife was with him and they were living in the adjoining building. The good woman, happening to discover me as I was taken into the door, and being attracted by the clothes I wore, and my "lean and hungry look," asked her husband to bring me into the house. In response to her inquiries, I gave her a brief account of my adventures. She kindly directed that I should be supplied with soap and water and an opportunity to use them and also secured from the Government stores a new suit of clothing—all except a coat. The gray Confederate jacket I was wearing was "scalded out" and thoroughly cleaned. That jacket is now in the museum or relic room of the Court House at Washington, Pa., the only memento in existence—except myself—of that memorable trip. She also assigned me to a room and luxurious bed in her house while I remained at that place.

[55]

What a pleasing change! From the immediate presence "of most disastrous chances; of moving accidents by flood and field," to this shelter and delightful rest.

Two days after coming into Newbern I went around by ocean transport to Fort Monroe, and there I found Capt. W. H. Meyers, formerly from my own county in Pennsylvania, who was acting provost marshal at that point, who identified me and took me from under the charge of the guard. I can so well remember how the captain's big heart rejoiced when he discovered me and found he could render me so great a service.

Remaining over night with the captain, I was furnished transportation by him, and the following day, being May 1, 1864, proceeded to Pleasant Valley, near Harper's Ferry, where I found a part of my regiment, under command of Colonel A. J. Greenfield. The colonel kindly detailed a man to nurse me to health, and thanks to a rugged constitution it was not long until I was again on duty. Remained in active service with my regiment till the close of the war. With this exception I never spent a day in hospital or failed to answer daily roll call during my whole service in the army, which was three years and three months.

[56]

I have earnestly endeavored to learn the fate of the boys who left the car with me, but have failed. Two of them claimed to belong to the Harris Light Cavalry, a New York regiment. I have been down through North Carolina, over the tracks I made on that memorable march, and have advertised in all papers likely to reach the ex-soldiers. I have not much hope now, although stranger things have happened. The chances for getting through were perhaps one in a hundred, on account of the vigilance of the citizens of the so-called Confederacy. They were always on the lookout for deserters, conscripts and runaway slaves. The south was literally an armed camp. Every man, old and young, and, I might say, woman and child, was in the service in some capacity. So when a stranger was discovered they raised the alarm, and with shotgun in hand and blood hound on the trail, gave chase. A man had little chance against such odds.

As I approached the block house between the picket post and the bridge I got a glimpse of the starry emblem. It was attached to a staff on the top of the fort, and it appeared to me to embody everything that was beautiful and good. It could have been no more welcome to a luckless mariner afloat on a boundless sea without a compass than it was to me. As the mists lifted it came into view amidst all the splendor of a southern sunrise, and as its spotless colors rolled in merry and playful billows across the sky my heart swelled with joy unspeakable. [57]

Now peace hovers over the land.

"No more are hostile standards reared,
Nor bugle note nor trump is heard—
The war drums cease:
The blue-coats scatter through the land;
The erewhile soldiers, plough in hand,
Of their own hard won fields demand
The earth's increase;
Or ply their skill with sharper zest,
Where shafts nor wheels nor halt nor rest;
O'er North and South and East and West
Broods White-winged Peace."

And it is the earnest wish of us all that it may be perpetual.

APPENDIX [58]

HOW AND WHERE I WAS CAPTURED.

In September, 1863, Major Stevens, of the 1st W. Va. Vol. Infantry, was occupying a position near Moorefield, Va., having six companies of his own regiment, two pieces of artillery, and Capt. A. J. Barr's company of cavalry (afterwards Company F, 22d Pa. Vol. Cav.). The Major had received information that a force of the enemy was approaching his post, and in order to secure as full intelligence as possible of location, number, etc., scouting squads were sent out on the different roads. Early on the morning of the 4th I was directed to take command of a squad and go out on a road which wound its way for several miles along the south fork of the Potomac river and which led to and through Brock's Gap. My party consisted of William Jenkins, John W. Manning, Abel Moore, John Penny, Corporal Samuel P. Hallam, myself (at this time a sergeant) in command. Just as daylight was breaking we reached a ford on the river, and on the opposite bank discovered a mounted sentinel or picket belonging to the enemy's force. Corporal Hallam was immediately sent back to camp, to report the fact to the Major, and in the hope that we could capture this man on the outpost, or some of the reserve, which must be near at hand, we dashed across the river, and paying no heed to the shot he fired at us spurred forward in hot pursuit as he withdrew. The shooting warned his friends at the reserve post, and when we came upon their position they were mounted and in full retreat. They greeted us with a volley as they abandoned their post, but we kept up the pursuit until we drove them into camp. Here we found their whole force, having been alarmed at the firing, falling into line and in much confusion. We wheeled about and got back across the river, and then feeling pretty secure leisurely retired. A force of the enemy soon appeared at the ford, but as they did not rush us we fell back in good order. Just as we were beginning to feel that we would soon be near or in our own camp we met a company of Confederate cavalry coming from that direction. This proved to be McNeill's company of rangers under command of Lieut. Jesse McNeill. Now, being caught between this force in front and the one pursuing there was no possibility of escape. They closed up on us from both directions, and in the midst of such a demonstration as only such conditions could bring about they soon had the little squad unhorsed. Two horses shot and Jenkins and Moore wounded were the only casualties. This incident was one of the strange freaks of the fortunes of war. Instead of capturing one or two of the rebels, as we hoped, we, ourselves, fell into their hands. We were taken to Richmond, Va., and put into Libby Prison, where we remained for two or three weeks, then placed on Belle Island. In a stockade on this bare island we remained during that cold winter of 1863-64, scantily clothed and without other shelter from the chilling winds which swept over the island. Three of this party lived to get back to the North—Hallam, who got through with his message in the morning, but was captured later the same day; John W. Manning, who was fortunate enough to be included with a few hundred that were exchanged in April, 1864, and myself, escaped in March, 1864. Hallam had a long and terrible experience in different prison pens in the South. He was longest at Andersonville, and strange to relate, lived through more than a year of privation and suffering at that place. He was released by Gen. Sherman's army at the close of the war. [59]

ADDENDA.

A most remarkable coincidence connected with this sketch happened since it was first published. While I was engaged in the Civil Service of the Government, in 1901, at Washington, D. C., I was

rooming at the house of Mrs. Kiel, No. 12 Sixth St., N. E. and there met Capt. T. T. Westcott, a Confederate soldier, who held a position in the National Capital by the favor of Senator Daniel, of Virginia. Mr. Westcott lives in Accomac County, Va. While talking over our experiences in the war, it was discovered that he was the officer in command of the very train of cars from which I escaped. He well remembered the incident of the departure of myself and friends on the night of March 6, 1864, which he discovered the next morning when his train pulled into Raleigh, N. C. He said he continued on with his load of human freight to Andersonville, Ga.

LIST OF CAPTURED.

[60]

The following is a list of the members of the regiment captured during the war:

Company A.—Sample S. Bane, died in Andersonville, Ga., April 1, 1864; James Gray, died at Salisbury prison, N. C.; C. L. Kinder, exchanged; W. Laferty, died at Andersonville June 9, 1864; Joseph Morton, died at Andersonville March 20, 1864; J. K. Robinson, exchanged; A. M. Nicely, died at Salisbury, N. C., December 23, 1864; *Jas. Crouch; Wm. H. White, killed in Manassas Gap by Moseby's guerillas.

Company B.—Hardman Gantz, died in Annapolis, Md., soon after exchange; Raymond Gouse, died at Andersonville October 27, 1864; *And. K. Reed; Andrew Smith, died at Andersonville October 17, 1864; *J. S. Lindley, *L. K. Burncrots, *W. C. Wheeler.

Company C.—Milton L. Davis, died at Andersonville July 5, 1864; Jas. C. Smith, died at Andersonville October 1, 1864.

Company D.—*E. H. Miller; W. H. Hickman, exchanged.

Company E.—J. G. Byers, died in Andersonville.

Company F.—H. H. Eller, died on Belle Island December 16, 1864; William Vankirk, died at Andersonville September 21, 1864; James Bradley, died at Richmond; David Campbell, died at Andersonville April 6, 1864; Peter Deems, died at Andersonville April 26, 1864; And. Elliott, died at Richmond; W. P. Haynor, died at Richmond; Wm. Jenkins, died at Richmond; N. B. Marsh, died at Richmond; M. G. Moore, died at Andersonville July 29, 1864; Abel Moore, died at Richmond; A. J. Scott, died at Andersonville; H. C. Slusher, exchanged; John Manning, exchanged; John Fulton, exchanged; John Flowers, exchanged; B. F. Hasson, escaped.

Company G.—David Beatty, died at Andersonville, June 16, 1864; A. J. Stottlemeyer, exchanged; James Amous, died at Andersonville May 5, 1865; Thos. Bee, died at Andersonville June 14, 1864; J. Hardin, exchanged; *George W. Johnson; *G. Marcy; C. Phillips, died at Annapolis, Md.; O. P. States, exchanged; John Stiner, died at Andersonville August 9, 1864.

NOTE.—The fate of those marked with a star (*) is unknown to me.

Transcriber's Notes:

Obvious printing errors repaired

Alternate and idiosyncratic spellings retained

'Sept 26, 1900' on title page was handwritten in original. Left as found, since there was no date actually printed.

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