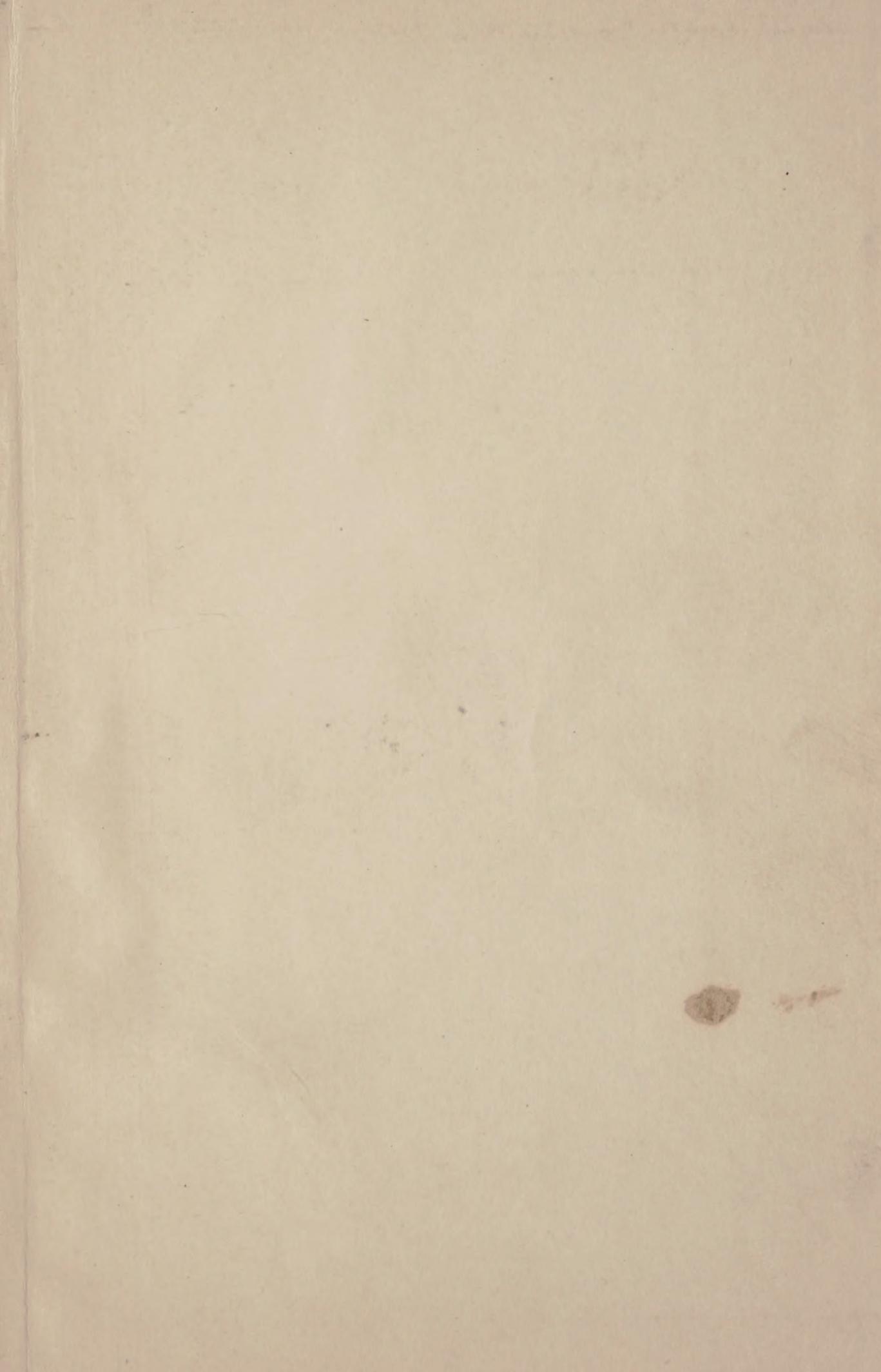




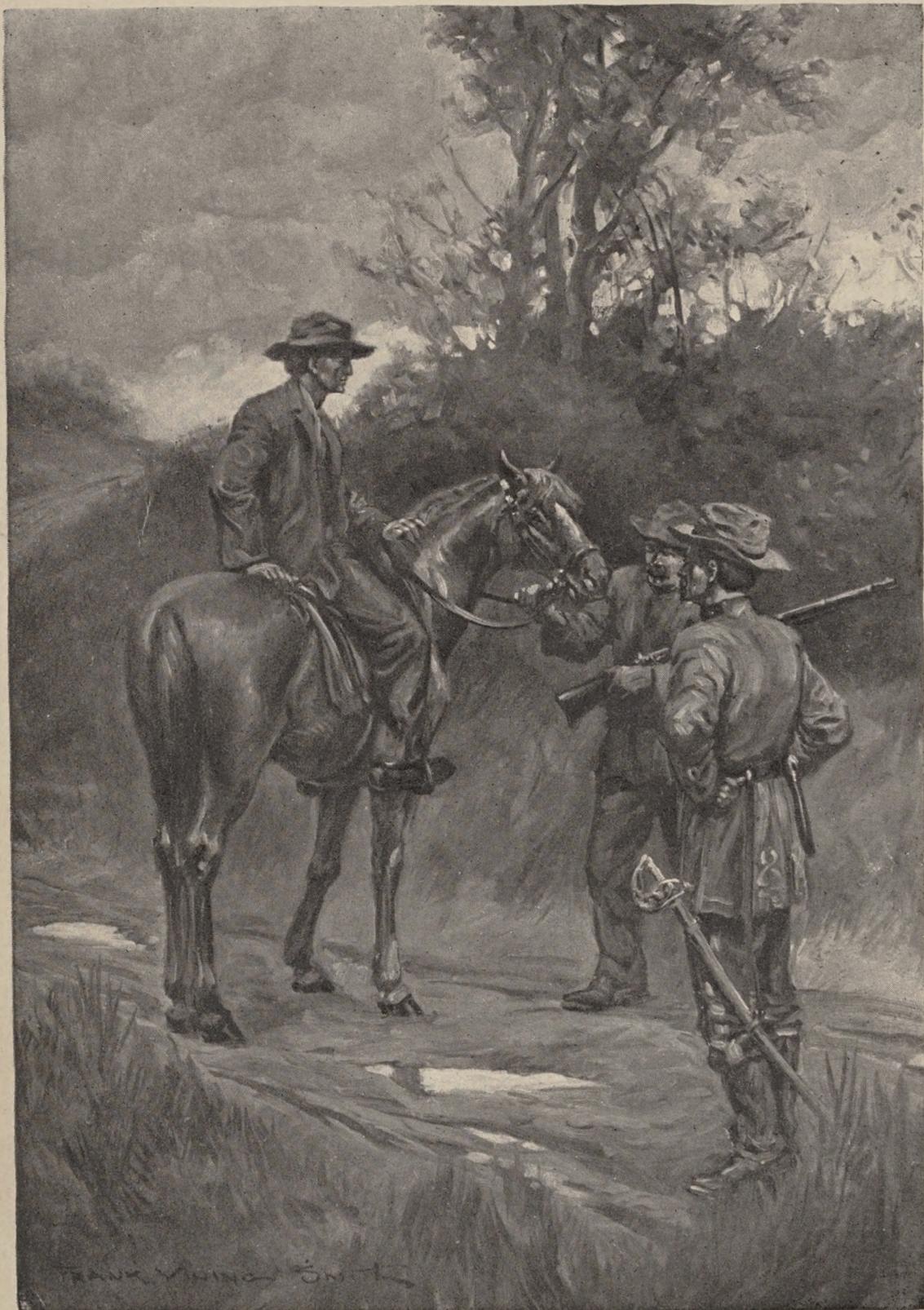
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“Yo’-ALL WILL HAVE TO STOP AND EXPLAIN.” — *Page 302.*

WAR FOR THE UNION SERIES

For the Stars and Stripes

BY

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON

Author of "The Boy Soldiers of 1812," "Camping on the St. Lawrence,"
"Four Boys in the Yellowstone," "The Campfire of Mad
Anthony," "Ward Hill at Weston," etc., etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK VINING SMITH



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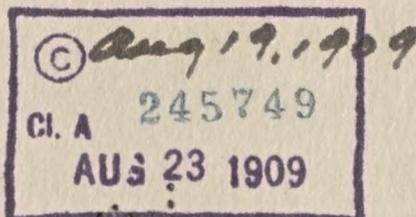
Published, August, 1909

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FOR THE STARS AND STRIPES



NORWOOD PRESS
BERWICK & SMITH CO.
NORWOOD, MASS.
U. S. A.

PREFACE

Many excellent stories and histories of the great Civil War in the United States have been written. To attempt to improve their plan or scope would be as pretentious as it would be well-nigh impossible. Merely to increase the number of such books is certainly undesirable.

In this little story a word of explanation is therefore in order from the writer. Not the study of the causes of the struggle, nor a chronological record of its great events has been his purpose, but rather to present one of the many phases of the long conflict. The life of the soldiers in camp, the deeds on the battlefield or on the sea, each has its own distinctive place. In this story the experiences of the prisoners in the "pens," or in their attempts to escape, have provided the theme. Every event or adventure incorporated in the tale is founded upon fact.

To glorify war or to revive the bitterness

of the struggle is not desired. The Civil War, however, is a matter of history, and as such cannot be ignored. To-day it is possible for each side to honor the bravery, patriotism, and devotion of the other. Out of such elements only can a united or reunited nation be permanently formed.

The writer expresses the hope that his boy readers may be led by their interest in the story to read the histories of the struggle itself. Then with all bitterness forgotten, with malice toward none and charity for all to realize the fundamental elements of character which alone can make any nation great—even that over which to-day the Stars and Stripes float. It is only the land of the brave which can be made the home of the free.

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON.

ELIZABETH, NEW JERSEY.

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FOR THE STARS AND STRIPES

CHAPTER I

EXCITEMENT IN CAMP

“Look! What’s the excitement? Come on! We must join the crowd!”

Erwin Smith quickly sat erect at the sharp call of his friend, Taylor Cooper, and gazed at a dozen or more men who, shouting and calling, were running across the field of the prison pen. The sun had risen only an hour before and the camp was covered with its glow. The warmth of its beams had been so tempting that the two young prisoners, neither of whom was twenty years of age, had stretched themselves upon the ground to obtain a little sleep. The night air had been so chilly that both boys had not attempted to obtain any rest and through the hours of the dreary night they had been pacing back and forth, keeping well within the dead line,

striving in this manner to keep themselves warm. Even in South Carolina the November nights were cold, at least for those whose clothing was worn and scant, and for whom there was no shelter from the biting winds.

Not many weeks before the time when our story opens, the two young soldiers had been brought to Camp Sorghum to share the experiences of hundreds of their unfortunate comrades who had been captured by the Confederate army. Taylor for many weeks had been a prisoner in Richmond in Libby Prison, as the dilapidated old building which before the war was known as a storehouse of Libby & Son, was termed. Of his sufferings there he had told Erwin so many tales that they seemed almost to be a part of the latter's own experiences. From Libby, Taylor had been taken by train with many of his fellow prisoners to Danville, which also is in Virginia, and then from that place had been sent on to Columbia, South Carolina, where in the prison pen he had met his friend and schoolmate, Erwin Smith, who already had been confined in Camp Sorghum for several weeks.

The meeting of the boys under such circumstances had at once revived the friendship of their school days, and day and night had found them drawn more closely together. Indeed, among their friends they were commonly referred to as the twins—so inseparable had they become.

Roused by the sharp call of Taylor, Erwin stood for a moment watching the band that was speeding across the field on which the camp was located. A moment only he delayed and then he hastily followed his friend, who now was running swiftly in the direction of the noisy group that had halted for a brief time not far away.

Before Erwin could join the assembly it had started on once more and the noisy shouts were redoubled. The guard by this time had been aroused. Men in uniforms of gray, holding in their hands rifles which were ready for use, were also speeding in the direction of the shouting band of prisoners, although as yet the cause of the excitement could not be seen.

When Erwin at last forced his way into the midst of the men he saw there a terrified

little brown pig. The little animal was squealing loudly and darting here and there in its frantic efforts to escape through the lines of its pursuers.

“Every man will have the part of the pig he can grab!” shouted one of the prisoners.

“I’ve got a ham!” loudly cried one, as his hand was placed on a leg of the frightened little animal. The pig, emitting another squeal of terror, eluded his captor and then redoubled its efforts to escape.

“You’ll have to be satisfied with the squeal, Tom,” laughed one of the band as he noticed the expression of dismay on his friend’s face at the loss of the prize.

Most of the men, however, were terribly in earnest and in no mood for light retorts. Hunger, weakness, homesickness, hope deferred—all the awful elements of the life of a prisoner in war time were to be seen in the faces of the struggling men. They were in deadly earnest now and the prospect of such food as the pig could provide had brought out all the selfish traits of human nature. The chase had become no laughing matter on their part, although the guard,

now aware of the cause of the commotion, were shouting their bantering words of approval, "Go it, Yank! Catch him, Blue Belly! Fresh pork!" and other similar cries greeted the ears of the pursuers, although few gave any heed even if they heard the mocking words.

At last, when the helpless victim had been seized, Erwin was holding fast to a leg, Taylor was grasping the pig's tail, while another held an ear or foot, and some even were clinging to the long bristles on the back or sides. The pig was lying helpless and breathless on the ground beneath the bodies of those who had flung themselves upon it.

"Let the lieutenant decide," called one of the men as all clung tenaciously to the part of the pig's body each had secured.

Lieutenant Brown advanced and good-naturedly agreed to the proposal, calling out each name and the part that belonged to him as he proceeded in his investigation. "Private Smith, a ham!" "Private Cooper, one pig's tail," he shouted. Those who were among the fortunate ones laughed as Taylor's portion was announced, but those who

had not succeeded in laying hands upon the pig listened glumly and made no response. To them it was not a laughing matter to fail in their attempt to secure a bit of the only fresh meat that had been seen in the camp.

Within a half hour after Lieutenant Brown had declared his awards a fire had been made and the little pig, cut into many portions, was boiling in one of the iron kettles that belonged to the camp. Few words were spoken by the men who gathered about the fire and waited—afraid to leave the place before the final distribution had been made. The odors from the kettle served to deepen the gloom of the luckless ones who lingered with the others about the fire. The only eager ones were those who had been named by the lieutenant when he had acted as arbiter in the dispute.

Before the meal had been thoroughly cooked the distribution was made and Erwin with his ham and Taylor with the tail, which, with due solemnity, had been given him, departed. The wistful eyes of some of his friends were more than Erwin could endure, and his invitations to join him in his repast

were many—so many, in fact, that there was but a bit of boiled ham for any one.

Just as the repast was begun by the hungry men, Samuel Carson, better known as Uncle Sam—a tall, thin, sour-visaged young man, whom Erwin had known in the village in New York from which he himself had come, approached the group.

“Where is my share, Erwin?” demanded Samuel.

“You’re too late, I’m afraid,” said Erwin, as he held forth to view the small piece which he was holding in his hand.

“There’s never anything for me when you have the say!”

Erwin’s face flushed slightly and he hesitated. The men about him were ravenously devouring the bits which had been given them. His own portion was pitifully small and he was intensely hungry.

“Why didn’t you get your hand on the pig?” demanded Taylor sharply.

“I tried hard, and I did, for that matter. I had hold of the foot before Erwin did. He pushed me off,” retorted Samuel gruffly.

“I didn’t know it,” laughed Erwin. “Per-

haps I did. It was such a scramble I didn't know just what I was doing. I'll give you a part of mine anyway," he added as he divided the tiny strip he was holding.

"Hold on a minute!" exclaimed Taylor as he arose from his seat on the ground and faced the newcomer. "Uncle Sam, haven't you had any of the pig? I saw you coming from the lieutenant's mess."

"Only a mouthful."

"If you had all your mouth could hold you had more than any of us had. Keep your meat and swallow it now before some one else tries to get it away from you," he added sharply as he turned to his friend.

Hungry and weak, Erwin hastily did as he was bidden. Samuel watched him, his anger apparent in the malignant expression of his face, and then turning abruptly on his heel he said as he departed—"That pig meat will cost you more than any you ever had or are ever likely to have! I shan't forget your generosity."

"Don't!" retorted Taylor as Erwin made no response. "And don't forget either how you had some of the pork at the lieutenant's

mess and then came over here and tried to get some of ours too. Don't forget that, please, and the next time a stray pig runs into camp we'll try to cook that and not you, though there's mighty little difference between you."

The derisive shout of laughter that rose from the men followed the departing Samuel, who looked behind, plainly showing his anger.

"I wish I'd divided with him," said Erwin.

"I'm glad you didn't. Sometimes I think Uncle Sam is not worth feeding at all. I've heard—"

"What have you heard?" inquired Erwin as Taylor stopped abruptly.

"Never mind, now. Perhaps I'll tell you later."

The two friends by this time had returned to the place where the one blanket which they shared in turn had been left. For several days they had been sleeping in the daytime as the nights were so cold that rest was well-nigh impossible. The clothing of the boys was in tatters, and even the shoes on their feet were in shreds. Only the preceding day

Erwin had secured an old felt hat which some one had cast away as useless, and from it had fashioned soles for his shoes, sewing the cloth to the worn leather by strings which one of the guard had generously given him. His "new shoes" were a source of envy to many of his comrades, who had not thought of his plan of repairing, but felt hats no longer were to be found and other means were not to be had.

Rice and salt pork had been the chief staples of food, and as these were cooked by the prisoners themselves the diet was not one upon which the men were likely to thrive. Not a word could be heard as to the actions of the army to which the boys belonged, and the uncertainty that resulted had intensified the feeling of homesickness, which more than any other one cause, was doing much to make the long confinement in the prison pen unbearable.

Erwin had keenly suffered from this cause, and, had it not been for his friend Taylor, would have been even worse than he now was. The spirits of the latter apparently never failed, and, though Erwin was not aware of

the fact, many of his efforts were directed toward the one purpose of preventing his friend from becoming entirely hopeless.

“This night makes me think of home,” said Erwin thoughtfully, as the boys seated themselves. “You know our farm is only a half mile out from the village and this time of the year the boys used to come there. There were bushels of apples and barrels of cider, and sparerib and—”

“That’s all right,” broke in Taylor cheerily. “You’ll be there again pretty soon. This war isn’t going to last forever. ‘When Johnny comes marching home again,’ why, all the boys and girls will turn out to see the brave soldier boy! There’ll be music and all the sparerib you can eat and twice as many barrels of cider as the old orchard ever saw, and more apples, too. You’ll be glad to see all the family and—”

“If I ever do see them,” interrupted Erwin.

“See them? Of course we’ll see them! We’ll be exchanged or—”

“Or what?” said Erwin as his friend paused.

“Or we’ll get away from this pen.”

“Doesn’t look much like it now,” murmured Erwin, as he glanced at the guards patrolling the camp.

“Of course it doesn’t just now. You don’t suppose we’ll walk out and find no one ready to stop us, do you? That isn’t the way it’s done.”

“How is it done?”

“Oh, there are a hundred ways.”

“Mention one.”

“Well, there was Tom Woods who was in Libby when I was there. He didn’t feel very well one day and the next day he was worse and he was taken to the hospital. He kept getting worse and worse and finally he was taken to the dead room—”

“Was he dead? That isn’t the way I mean.”

“I’ve had my doubts about Tom’s being so very dead. You see he’d told me his plans and just how he was going to go through what it was said he did go through. I’ve a notion that the darkies, when they took out the dead that day when Tom ‘died,’ got a scare that made their wool straighten out.”

“You don’t really think Tom was dead?”

“No, I don’t. At least I have my doubts. It won’t scare me any when I take his hand when I get home. I know that much anyway.”

“You always find something to cheer you up,” said Erwin, with more interest than as yet he had shown.

“Of course I do. That’s the only way. Listen, Erwin, I’ve got something to tell you,” Taylor added, as he cautiously glanced about him to make certain no one was within hearing.

CHAPTER II

TUNNELS

THE two friends were not near any of their comrades at the time and satisfied that his words could not be overheard, Taylor said abruptly, "We must try to get out of this camp."

For a moment Erwin's face brightened as he stared at his companion. The thought of escaping had often been in his own mind, but thus far an opportunity had not been found. Indeed, so well was the place guarded, that the possibility of a break for freedom had seemed hopeless. The recollection of his own experiences caused the young prisoner's face to darken once more, and he said in a low voice: "'Must' is a good word, Taylor. It is easy to say what ought to be done, but it isn't so easy to tell how to do it. Have you any plan?"

"Not one."

"How are you going to get away then?"

“Find a way. We must set our heads to working. If we can't find a way we must make one. I don't mean to stay here much longer.”

“I'm sure I don't want to, either; but what can be done?”

“That's something we must find out.”

“A good many have tried it,” suggested Erwin dubiously.

“And some have made it.”

“Some haven't.”

“That doesn't change the fact that some did.”

“You always find something good to see or say. Only yesterday when we found our salt pork spoiled and the little rice we had was not good you laughed and said, ‘If we're hungry we sha'n't have to suffer from eating too much.’”

“What's the matter with that?”

“Nothing. Only I don't seem to be able to make the plan work in my case. When I'm hungry—then I'm hungry, and that's all there is to it. If my tooth aches I don't find much comfort in thinking that I haven't ever had to have my foot cut off.”

“Yes, and that’s where you make your mistake. You’d feel better if you did.”

“It works all right with you.”

“It will with you, too. I knew an old Scotchman who was a very devout man. He used to thank the Lord when rheumatism came that it wasn’t gout, and when he had the gout, he was just as glad it wasn’t rheumatism.”

“What did he do when he had both?”

“Thanked the Lord he wasn’t blind.”

Erwin laughed as he said, “You’ve learned the lesson all right, but I’m afraid I haven’t. I can’t get away from what I see here,” he added, as he glanced about the prison pen. Hundreds of men as unfortunate as themselves were to be seen, some walking disconsolately about the field, some seated, and others lying upon the ground. All about the place the guard of Confederate soldiers were to be seen and the “dead line” was plainly marked. If any man dared to cross it, his fate was sealed.

“You’ll learn,” said Taylor. “You’re bound to learn. Now have you any scheme

to suggest? You must have an idea or two about you."

"I've thought of it, of course, but what good does thinking do? You can't even try to tunnel when you're in the open all the time."

"Tunneling is hard work. Let us be glad and rejoice that we haven't that to do. We'll save our strength for what comes after we get away."

"Sometimes I've had an idea that we might run for it some morning when we go for water. The guard that goes with us to the spring is made up of good shots, however, and I'm afraid we wouldn't go far."

"You're doing better. Breaking away from the guard is better than digging a tunnel. What else?"

"I haven't thought of anything more," replied Erwin gloomily.

"When I was in Libby," began Taylor, as if he had not heard his friend's reply, "Colonel Rose of the Seventy-seventh Pennsylvania got up a plan for tunneling out of the old trap. Just twenty-seven men were taken

into the plan and every one was to be a worker. You see, the colonel knew what he was about, for he'd been in the Mexican war, and when he was taken prisoner there he dug a tunnel out beyond the guard and got away from the 'greasers.' All the men in his plan at Libby knew of this and they were all ready to do anything he told them. The colonel had found in the basement a little room which wasn't used for anything, and after he'd been watching for a few days he found that no one went near it.

“One day the colonel went in there himself and discovered that one of the chimneys came down into that room. This chimney ran up through our cookroom and the first thing to be done was to make an opening in that. The slop barrels hid this opening, so there was little danger of its being discovered.

“One day the rebels were arranging for a flag raising at the prison and when they'd finished their work they left a short ladder behind them in our room. This ladder was taken and lowered in the chimney. Then at the bottom where the ladder rested work was

begun at once in digging a hole through the chimney wall.”

“Didn’t any one ask for the ladder? Was there any search for it?”

“Yes, but it didn’t amount to much for it was believed it had been broken up for kindling wood. An old broken trowel and half a tin canteen were the only tools our men had in their digging until one day some masons came to do some repairing and while they were busy somehow one of their trowels mysteriously disappeared. We all tried to help find it but naturally we didn’t succeed, because it was down in the tunnel where we had two men at work all the time. One man would dig and the other would scoop up the dirt with an old blanket and carry it to a corner of the room where the tunnel started.

“At last the work was all done and the end of the tunnel was in a vacant lot sixty-five feet from the walls of old Libby. It was just big enough for one man at a time to crawl through it. The funny part of it all was that the sentinels saw every man that came out and didn’t hail one.”

“Why not?”

“Took them for some of the ‘Johnnies’ going through the boxes that had been sent us from home. You see these boxes were all stacked right over the end of the tunnel.”

“How many of our men got away?”

“A hundred and fifteen.”

“You don’t mean it! Did the rebels catch any of them?”

“Yes. They got twelve the first day, sixteen the second and twenty the third. All the others—let me see, that left sixty-seven,—were never heard of. I’ve no doubt they reached our lines all right.”

“How did the men leave the prison—I mean how did they go out through the tunnel?”

“That’s where the break was made that almost spoiled the whole thing. Only the twenty-seven were supposed to know anything about the tunnel, but some of them of course told their friends and the first thing we knew there was a fighting mob—every man trying to be the first to get out. It was a fierce fight, too, for our men were like wild beasts. Two or three shrewd little chaps put up a game that let them get out ahead.

When the mob was wildest these young fellows went where the pots and pans were kept and began to rattle them at a great rate and in a minute the clatter made our men think the guard was coming. When the fellows ran from the tunnel these young fellows made a break for it and got out before the others got their eyes open. Then the wild rush began again."

"How was it that only a few got away?"

"It was slow work crawling through that long tunnel one at a time. Then Lieutenant Randolph, who is a big fellow, got caught in the middle of it and couldn't go ahead or back out. The man in front pulled on him and the man behind pushed and at last they got the lieutenant through, but he was almost dead and of course it made a long delay. When daylight came and the work had to stop we counted up and found that one hundred and fifteen had crawled out."

"How did the rebels find out?"

"The morning roll call showed who were missing. At first the guard couldn't understand what had become of the prisoners and the men were poking fun at one another for

the 'mistake.' Pretty soon the guard became a little more serious and then they made us all go into one room and come out by twos while they checked off every name. They tried the same thing twice, but got the same result—the roll call was one hundred and fifteen short. Then they began to look, and of course in a little while they found the tunnel and everything was plain.”

“What did they do to you?”

“Shortened up our rations for awhile, but they laughed and joked with us about it. They called the tunnel ‘The Great Yankee Wonder.’ For awhile there was a guard at each end of it and hundreds of people came to see the sight.”

“Why didn’t you get away, Taylor?”

“Somebody had to be left.”

“Didn’t you have a chance? Weren’t you near enough to crowd into it?”

“Yes, I believe I was once.”

“Why didn’t you go on?”

“Well, I don’t just remember unless it was that there was a young chap next to me who had a wife and two babies at home. He seemed to be a bit more anxious than I was

and I think he got my place away from me.”

“You mean you let him have your place!”

“Do I?” laughed Taylor.

“Yes, you do. It’s a good story, all right, but how can it help us here? We can’t dig a tunnel.”

“No more we can’t. But it has one or two good lessons for us.”

“What?”

“Well, one is that twenty-seven is too large a number to make a plan at one time. Two are all we want. You and I.”

“What are we going to try?”

“The rebels sent a lot of us on to Danville pretty soon,” began Taylor again as if he had not heard his friend’s question. “They sent us in box cars. The old train was pretty well guarded and bumped along so slowly that one time when we were going through a stretch of woods two of our boys jumped off the car and made for the trees.”

“Did they get away?” demanded Erwin eagerly.

“Of course! All the fellows struck up the Star Spangled Banner when we heard what had occurred, but the guard shut us in the

cars and locked the doors. It was quite warm enough then, thank you, without exerting ourselves any more. At Danville they sent us to a great tobacco warehouse and we hadn't been there but a little while before we began another tunnel."

"Did it work? Did anybody get away?"

"Probably. Unfortunately, however, I was sent on with some of our boys—"

"Sent where?"

"Macon."

"Did you try another tunnel there?"

"Not while I was on the spot. Two or three chaps got away by a slick trick. One night two climbed into a big tree and hid in the branches. They had been saving a little water and something to eat, and up in that tree the boys stayed two days. The guard looked everywhere, but not a trace of the missing prisoners could they find. After the search the boys slid down from their roosting place one dark night and departed."

"Did the guard find them?"

"Not a bit. What did you expect? Then two other fellows dug holes in the ground and stayed in them for a couple of days, and

then made for the lines of the boys in blue.”

“I don’t see how digging holes in the ground could help. They were still in the prison or prison pen, weren’t they?”

“Yes, but the whole camp was to be moved the next day and our boys were hoping they’d be left behind. After the guard was gone then it would be easy to dig their way out, you see.”

“Did all get away?”

“Pretty nearly. Now, Erwin, if those fellows could think of something, we can try it, too. I know there is some way out. I believe I’ve got it now!” Taylor suddenly exclaimed as he stood quickly erect.

CHAPTER III

THE NEEDLE

“WHAT is it?” inquired Erwin showing his first sign of interest in the words of his friend.

“See that?” demanded Taylor, as he showed Erwin a needle which he had drawn from the lapel of his tattered coat.

“Yes, I see it. What is it?”

“A needle.”

“What will you do with it?”

“Find our way out of Camp Sorghum.”

“I don’t see how.” Erwin’s first interest had departed as soon as he saw the tiny little implement in Taylor’s hand. Aware as he was of his friend’s imperturbable good nature, he looked upon the proposal as merely another of Taylor’s many nonsensical projects.

“Some people can’t see the point even when it’s right before them.”

“That’s all right, Taylor. The joke’s lost

on me. I'm afraid I'm not in the mood to enjoy it."

"You will when you see what I mean to do with this needle."

"What is that?"

"Find our way out of this prison pen, just as I told you."

"But you didn't tell me."

"If I didn't I will now. In what direction is my needle pointing?" inquired Taylor as he held up the needle which he was grasping between his thumb and forefinger.

"North."

"Correct. Erwin, you always were better than I in answering questions when we were in school. I'm glad you haven't forgotten the trick."

"I don't see what you mean."

"Don't sailors follow the 'needle'?"

"Yes, but their 'needle' isn't like yours."

"Mine is better. If sailors follow theirs, I don't see why we soldiers can't follow ours."

Erwin did not reply. The bantering words found no response in his troubled heart. Taylor might have his fun if he chose, but

as for himself, thought Erwin, there was nothing in them to appeal to him.

“I tell you,” continued Taylor, “that I have ‘found the way I long have sought and mourned because I found it not.’ That’s what your grandfather used to be singing all the time—”

“Don’t!” protested Erwin quickly. The reference of his friend had brought to his mind the recollection of his grandfather—a saintly, sweet-faced old man whose love of singing was well known. How many times in the little village church Sunday afternoons had Erwin as a little lad watched his grandfather singing that very song. The old man’s eyes would be closed, his head thrown slightly back, while in the absence of an organ in the room in which the assembly met, he pitched the tune.

“But I will. I tell you I’m full of my project!” persisted Taylor, aware of the wave of homesickness which had swept over his companion. “It is the greatest discovery since ‘befo’ th’ wa’,’ as the darkies say down here.”

“You haven’t told me what your project

is," said Erwin indifferently, not even glancing at Taylor as he spoke.

"That, I can't tell you—yet. Wait! It's coming though. This little needle is better than a mariner's compass is for sailors rocked on the bosom of the deep. Friends, countrymen, fellow-citizens, Johnnies, contraband, et ceteras," added Taylor, rising as he spoke, and in mock solemnity sweeping his arm toward the camp, "if you will all turn the entire length of your ears toward me, I'll give you something to make you wise. Columbus had trouble with his men because his needle was askew. This little implement of steel is worth more than a dozen needles of Columbus. His needle helped him to find a few savages clad chiefly in modesty and childlike simplicity. This needle will point the way to better things. Sparerib, cider, fried cakes, mince pies, all the comforts of home are at the end of the way it points. Back to the farm! Back to the orchards and lowing kine! Back—"

Taylor stopped abruptly, perceiving that Erwin was in no mood to listen to mock heroics. The sight of his dejected friend

aroused anew the spirit of determination in Taylor's mind. Something must be done and done soon or Erwin would never leave the dreary prison pen. Homesickness, hunger, despair, all had written their lessons plainly on the face of the young prisoner. The sight was more than pathetic, it was tragic. Something must be done.

"The needle is pointing the way now," said Taylor in a different tone of voice as he pretended to study the tip of the needle which he still held. "I must follow. I shall be back 'ere before long,' as good old Uncle Roswell Glass used to say. Don't go far away while I'm gone."

"Not much danger of that," responded Erwin dejectedly. "Hush! What's that?" he demanded quickly, sitting erect as the report of a rifle was heard. Across the field men already could be seen hastening toward the border of the camp whence the sound had come. Instantly Taylor and Erwin followed. When they arrived at the place where the crowd halted they, too, joined the excited throng. And deeply excited every man appeared to be. There were expressions of

rage to be seen in the flashing eyes of the prisoners. The glances were divided between the lifeless form of one of their own comrades stretched on the ground, and the guard who was patrolling the border of the camp, apparently indifferent to the anger of the assembled prisoners.

“Who is it?” inquired Taylor, as he and Erwin pushed their way to the front.

“Anthony Wood,” replied one.

“What happened to him?”

“Shot. Can’t you see for yourself?”

“Who shot him?”

“The guard.”

“Why?”

“Claimed he was across the dead line.”

“Was he?”

“Of course he wasn’t.”

“Why was he shot, then?”

“You tell. Oh, it’s more than we can stand much longer! Anthony isn’t the only one who’s been shot down in cold blood. Where’s Sherman? Where’s Hooker? Why doesn’t somebody wake up at Washington and do something? Here we are shut up like rats in a trap! And we’re left here to

starve, or worse! Look at Anthony! Look at him! Poor chap, he's out of this place anyway. I wish I was, too, even if I have to go the way poor Anthony did." The man, who was unknown to Taylor, ended in a dry sob. His haggard face was discolored by filth which apparently he had not removed for days. His tattered clothing and long, tangled hair increased the effect of his wretchedness.

At this moment the attention of the assembly was drawn to an officer who was giving directions as to what should be done with the body of the fallen man. Apparently the mutterings of the prisoners moved the young officer to stop and turn toward the group.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly. "The man," he added, nodding his head at the band which had departed with the victim of the guard, "knew where the dead line is. He knew what would happen to him if he tried to cross it. If he had kept himself where he belonged he wouldn't have had any trouble."

"He was inside the line," called someone in the assembly.

“The guard says he crossed it.”

“The guard lies!”

“We are compelled to accept his word,” said the young officer quietly. “The rules of a prison camp are not made for fun. You all know where the dead line is. You all know what it is there for. You all know, too, what the orders of the guard are if he sees a man crossing it. Take my word and keep away from the dead line. Don’t ever get too close to it. Every guard has his strict orders and he isn’t the one to blame if anything happens. That’s what he’s here for—to do just what he’s ordered.”

The mutterings of the prisoners did not cease when the young officer turned away. Glances of anger followed him as he returned to his quarters. The very helplessness of the men seemed to increase their childish expressions of rage.

“Talk about escaping,” said Erwin to Taylor as the two started back across the field. “That poor chap couldn’t even get across the dead line, much less get away from the camp. And yet you talk of getting away.”

“I don’t ‘talk’ very much about it,” replied Taylor, glancing quickly about him as he spoke.

“You believe it, though.”

“I do,” said Taylor quietly. “That man Anthony Wood, I think they said his name was, was a fool.”

“Hush!” cautioned Erwin as a Confederate officer drew near.

“He was a fool,” continued Taylor, his voice rising slightly. “He knew where the dead line was and he knew what it was for. If he’d kept away from it, he’d have kept himself in better health. If we were on guard in a camp in the North and we had a camp full of rebels, what do you think we’d do?”

The passing officer plainly overheard and understood what the young prisoner was saying. He glanced back as he passed on, laughed good-naturedly at the young prisoners, but did not speak.

“You find an excuse for the guard in shooting the man,” said Erwin indignantly.

“He does not need any excuse. He was obeying orders.”

“They say Anthony Wood wasn’t across the dead line.”

“If that’s true it’s a different matter.”

“Our men say it’s true.”

“Yes, they ‘say’ it, but there wasn’t a man near when Anthony Wood was shot. What’s the use, Erwin? We aren’t playing prisoner’s base. We understand what the rules of this game are. All I say is, that a man is a fool to get too near the dead line of the camp, that’s all.”

“And yet you say you’re—” began Erwin cautiously, and then sharply checked himself.

“I not only say it, but I’m going to do it.”

“How?”

“With my little needle.”

“When?”

“I’m going to begin now. You go back to our elegant abode and have a nap. You need sleep and you’ll need it more before long. I’ll be back soon.”

Abruptly turning away, Taylor left his friend staring at him. When next Taylor looked back he saw that Erwin was slowly walking in the direction of their quarters, if the open space of ground, sheltered by a torn

blanket and reserved by them, could be dignified by such a name.

Three hours later Taylor, too, returned and seated himself on the ground near his friend, who was sleeping heavily. Another hour passed and still Taylor had not changed his seat. In his hands was a coat upon which he had been working steadily since his return. The needle which he had promised Erwin would show them the way to liberty was doing duty now in drawing the thread which Taylor apparently had secured from some source.

At this moment Erwin moved, opened his eyes and for a brief time stared at his friend. Then sitting quickly erect he said:

“What are you doing, Taylor?”

“Following my needle.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just what I say. Can't you see?”

“You're sewing.”

“Am I?”

“What is that in your hands—a coat?”

“Yes.”

“Whose is it?”

“Lieutenant Evans—the officer we met on our way back here a little while ago.”

“What are you doing with his coat?”

“Mending it.”

“What are you doing that for?” demanded Erwin indignantly.

“I’ve told you already.”

“What?”

“Following my needle. If we follow it all right it’ll take us out of this forlorn place. I never wanted anything so much as I do that.”

“I wish you’d explain yourself,” said Erwin testily.

“I will, with pleasure,” responded Taylor, rejoiced that his friend at last had been even slightly aroused. “This needle which you see in my hands I found. This coat occasionally covers the elegant figure of Lieutenant Evans of the so-called C. S. A. To him I went and displayed my needle. Likewise my talent as a tailor.”

“Did you tell him you were a tailor?”

“Yes, I told him I was a Taylor. Instantly the proud Southerner responded. He gave

me this coat to mend, and eke also and additional his promise of more.”

Erwin leaped to his feet and his interest was now sufficient to satisfy even his friend.

CHAPTER IV

UNCLE SAM

“You intend to dress in that coat and try to pass the guard,” exclaimed Erwin in a low voice as he looked down upon his friend.

“You are beginning to find the trail,” replied Taylor.

“But what of me?” Erwin demanded after a moment of silence. “There’s only one coat and we can’t both of us walk out in that.”

“That’s true.”

The expression of Erwin’s face instantly changed. The young prisoner’s despondency returned. His blue eyes were moist and all the energy and interest he had displayed a moment before apparently were gone. Of medium size, ordinarily strong and quick in every bodily action, he now presented a picture of complete hopelessness. Erwin’s moods were many and the passage from one to another was sometimes so sudden as to be puzzling to those who were not well ac-

quainted with the impulsive young prisoner.

Taylor, taller almost by a head than his friend, dark of hair and eyes, wiry and muscular of body and much slower in his movements, except when prompt action was required, in many ways was the counterpart of his companion. In their country home each had been famed for his ability as a wrestler. Popular as the sport was among the country boys, for some reason there had never been a test of strength and skill between Taylor and Erwin. Perhaps each had a stronger feeling of respect for the other's prowess than either cared to acknowledge. The skill, as well as the strength of each was so different from that employed by the other that both had laughingly declared that a match would be no true test. The sincere regard of each for the other may have intensified this feeling, but whatever the cause may have been, the warm friendship between the two had never been broken, and despite the eager desires of the admirers of both a wrestling match between the two had never been successfully arranged.

Erwin, full of life and quick to see or play

a joke, had somehow grown in his feeling of respect for the more quiet and oftentimes droll ways of Taylor. Slower in speech, less energetic at least in appearance, the latter nevertheless was deeply respected for the reserve power which all his comrades knew he possessed. Never had the dissimilarities between the two friends been more manifest than in the afternoon of this November day, when both were prisoners in Camp Sorghum near the capital of South Carolina.

The silence which had followed Taylor's trite remark in responding to his friend's suggestion was unbroken for a time. Taylor, seated upon the ground, continued to wield his needle and thread so deftly that Erwin, watching him, was interested in his cleverness despite his own feeling of depression. And yet it was not surprising after all, Erwin thought, as he recalled many of the surprising things Taylor had done as a lad. He could take a watch to pieces, and what was more wonderful, he could put it together again. What marvelous pictures of prancing steeds Taylor had drawn on his slate when supposedly he had been busied in "do-

ing his sums." Not a boy in school could bat as he did. He knew where were the best "holes" in all the near-by streams. Well did Erwin recall the first day he had ever gone fishing with his friend. What exclamations of surprise had greeted them when they had returned with their catch. The willow stringers, which Taylor had cut and fashioned, were filled to their tops with the horned dace, pumpkin-seed, and rock bass they had taken. And yet, though Erwin had shared in the joy of the day as well as in the glory that had been won, he still was aware that Taylor had been the real, if not the apparent, power behind it all. Even when he had dropped his hook and line beside Taylor's in the "hole" which his friend pointed out, and to which the boys cautiously approached, somehow the very fish seemed to prefer Taylor's bait to his. It was true that his own catch had not been small except in comparison with his friend's, which was so much larger.

Something of the old feeling of admiration for the prowess and skill of his friend now returned to Erwin as he stood looking down

upon the "tailor" busily engaged in repairing the young lieutenant's coat.

"Do you intend to try to-night?" inquired Erwin at last.

"You never can tell."

"You'll get away. I'm sure you will."

"Let us hope so," responded Taylor without looking up from his task.

"Can't you think of some way for me to try too?"

"None better than this."

"I can't sew. I didn't know you could, but I'm not a bit surprised to see you do it. If you were ordered to lead the Army of the Potomac I think you would do it better than General McClellan."

"That's not much of a compliment—at least if what the people all say is true."

"What can I do? Black up as a darkey and go along as your body servant?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Do what I'm doing now."

"If getting out of Sorghum depends on my sewing I'm afraid I'll be here for five years if the war lasts that long. From what

we hear, it's likely to keep on till the day of judgment," Erwin added dejectedly.

"I tell you we are going to get out of this."

"*You* are, you mean. I don't see any chance for me to go. I am glad you'll try it. If you do break away and if you should get back to the old home—just tell my—" Erwin stopped abruptly and quickly turned away his face. The mere suggestion of going home was hard in the face of the conditions which surrounded him at the present moment.

"Here comes Uncle Sam. Look out!" cautioned Taylor, raising his head for a moment to speak to his friend. Near them was the lank form of their fellow townsman approaching the place.

"What are you doing, Taylor?" demanded Samuel Carson as he stopped before the boys.

"Embroidering a handkerchief," replied Taylor soberly.

"Whose coat is that?"

"It belongs to a distinguished officer of the C. S. A."

"What are you doing with it?"

“Fixing it over for Jeff Davis.”

“What *are* you doing anyway?” continued Samuel, bending low over the garment in Taylor’s hands.

“If I tell you, Uncle Sam, will you promise never to tell a living soul?” inquired Taylor, dropping the coat and rising before the newcomer.

The serious manner of the young tailor was so impressive that Samuel’s interest was instantly quickened. He readily gave his promise.

“‘Cross your heart?’ ‘Hope to die?’” demanded Taylor in a low, deep voice.

“Yes, yes.”

“Well, then, I’ll tell you. I am fixing over this coat to make it fit *a human being*.” Taylor’s voice dropped into a most impressive whisper. “Yes, Uncle Sam, this coat will cover a beating heart, the lungs and liver of a male man of the masculine gender. Now you’ve given me your word of honor never to tell and I shall trust you.”

Swinging the coat over his arm, Taylor at once departed, whistling as he went the tune: “When Johnnie comes marching home

again." His abrupt departure was as surprising to Erwin as it was to his visitor, and for a moment neither spoke as they both watched their departing friend.

"What was Taylor doing with that coat anyway, Erwin?" inquired Samuel as he seated himself upon the ground.

"He told you," replied Erwin shortly. The presence of Uncle Sam at the moment was as disconcerting as the unexpected departure of Taylor with the coat had been. What were Taylor's plans? thought Erwin. Had he abandoned the project of trying to pass the lines? Perhaps he had concluded that the venture was too full of peril to be attempted. The thought did not tend to reconcile Erwin to the presence of Samuel, for whom he did not cherish too warm a regard at best. Samuel's evident purpose, too, to remain for a time did not aid in soothing the young prisoner's feelings. He heartily wished Uncle Sam were somewhere else than where he then was.

"That was one of Taylor's jokes," said Samuel, soberly, at last.

"Was it?"

“Yes, it was. He was fixing that coat for Lieutenant Evans.”

“Was he?” inquired Erwin, startled as well as surprised by Samuel’s knowledge.

He was aware, too, that his visitor was shrewdly observing him.

“Yes, he was,” declared Samuel. “He’s a fool for his pains.”

“Who?”

“Taylor.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Because I know. Sometimes I’ve suspected Taylor of scheming to get out of the camp. He’d better not try it, that’s all.”

“What do you mean?”

“I know Taylor Cooper. I’ve known him ever since—he used to make flytraps for me on the way to the old swimming hole. Don’t you remember how he used to tie the long grass that grew each side of the path? I tripped and fell one day when I was coming home.”

“Did it hurt you?” inquired Erwin, smiling at the recollection of the sight of the ungainly Uncle Sam sprawling in the meadow.

“It hurt me, inside,” said Samuel with a scowl. “That wasn’t all he did, either. He used to make fun of me. He used to get me to stay after school and chase balls for him when you and he played two-old-cat. He promised to pay me for it, but he never did.”

“What made you stay, then?”

“I wanted the two cents a game he said he’d give me.”

“Probably he forgot all about it.”

“I didn’t forget it, let me tell you! You remember my father, Erwin?”

“Yes.” Who could ever forget Toby Carson, the father of Uncle Sam? A twisted, deformed body, one leg withered and much shorter than the other, the corpulent body, the face bloated and leery from too frequent visits to the bar-room of the local hotel—all these were still vivid in the mind of Erwin. The two canes by whose aid Toby crawled along the village street, much as a wounded crab might have done, were still clearly seen in his mind. Toby was the village harness maker, and his deformity would have aroused

the pity of the warm-hearted villagers had it not been known that after he returned home from his long visits in the bar-room it was reported that he was accustomed to use his two canes in beating his timid, little, over-worked wife, who took in washing and virtually supported her drunken, worthless husband, as well as her only child. Yes, Erwin could, indeed, remember the brutal father of the young man now seated before him.

“One winter day,” said Samuel, bitterly, “the little hill in front of the post office was a glare of ice. It had rained and then froze a half dozen times. My father came out of the office that morning and started down the street. He had to use two canes, you know. Well, he began to slip on the ice and the more he tried to stop or help himself the worse off he was. He called for help! He yelled for it. He shouted! His canes were beating the air like a windmill. By and by he fell—you know he was a heavy man, and he sat down hard. One of the canes flew out of his hands. He just slid all the way down that icy hill in front of the post office. He went all the

way to the bottom and not a soul came to help him. What do you think Taylor Cooper did?"

"What did he do?" inquired Erwin, striving to repress the smile which arose at the recollection of the scene which he well remembered. He was there himself.

"Taylor and another fellow—I think it was you," added Samuel malignantly, "were right there at the foot of the hill. There was my father coming right toward them sliding on his back. He was shouting and calling for help at the top of his lungs. Did Taylor or the other fellow help him? Not a bit! They just leaned over the fence there in front of Jake Witter's place and laughed. It wasn't any mild little laugh, either. They yelled, they screamed as if they enjoyed the sight."

"Yes, they did," assented Erwin with a laugh that plainly increased the rage of his visitor. "It was a funny sight. But we felt sorry for the poor man and just as soon as we got our breath we started to lift him from the ice. Just then your mother came running to help him and what do you suppose

your father did? He struck her with his cane because she hadn't come sooner! Taylor and I were so disgusted we left. I wouldn't help a brute like that to—"

"Never you mind. I haven't forgotten it," broke in Samuel savagely. "My turn will come some day. You won't laugh then, let me tell you!" Turning abruptly away Samuel at once departed.

His threat had not seriously disturbed Erwin, who had slight fear of Uncle Sam. The reference to the fall of Toby—"Uncle Toby" he was called in the village—had amused him. He would tell Taylor about the visit, he said to himself. Just then Erwin perceived his friend approaching and the strange expression of his face instantly drove away all these thoughts.

CHAPTER V

A SCHEME

“WHAT is it, Taylor?” inquired Erwin as his friend drew near and cast upon the ground two coats which he had brought.

“Can’t you see?”

“I can’t say that I can,” replied Erwin dubiously, glancing first at the garments and then at his friend.

“I’m going into the tailoring business.”

“Whose coats are they?”

“I don’t know. Lieutenant Evans told me to take them and fix them up.”

“He must think you are an expert.”

“I don’t care what he thinks if he only gives me the coats.”

“There are two of them. Is one of them for me?”

“No.”

“I don’t see—”

“You will,” interrupted Taylor. “I’m

getting a name in the business, as I told you. We'll fix these coats and then we'll have more."

"Don't you intend to use these?" inquired Erwin in a low voice.

"No."

"I thought you said you did."

"I'm going to use coats—but not these. It's too early in the game to try anything yet. Wait a day or two, or perhaps a little longer, and then we'll be ready. You see, I've got two coats here and my plan is to send them both back in such a state of perfection that others will want me to do the same thing for theirs. We'll have coats to fix all the time. Then when the right time comes we'll put them on and walk right out of the camp. We must find a coat that will be long enough for me, and one, too, that will not make you look more like a scarecrow than you do now. But we must find the right time as well as the right coats."

"What'll you do for caps? We can't walk out bareheaded."

"I've thought of that. I'm watching all the time. Perhaps I'll find what we want.

If we don't, we'll have to do the best we can without them."

"What will happen to us if we are caught?"

"We mustn't be."

"But if we are?"

"We'll have to take what comes. Don't you think it's worth trying?"

"Yes, I do," responded Erwin eagerly. "I'm ready to try almost anything. Still, Anthony Wood—"

"What of him?"

"He didn't get very far away, poor chap."

"No. But he didn't use his head. You and I would have the same thing happen to us if in broad daylight we walked straight across the dead line."

"You don't intend to try our plan except in the evening?"

"I don't intend to try it then."

"When?"

"At the right time, whether it's day or night."

"Uncle Sam has just gone away."

"What did he have to say for himself?"

“He told me how he intended to get even with you and me.”

“For what?”

Thus bidden, Erwin related the conversation he had had with Samuel, not omitting the references which had been made to the fall of Uncle Toby. “I didn’t think Uncle Sam would hold a grudge so long,” added Erwin. “And in Camp Sorghum, of all places! One naturally would think he’d be ready to let bygones be bygones when we are all in the trouble we’re all in here.”

“No,” said Taylor thoughtfully. “I know Uncle Sam too well. He hasn’t ‘all his buttons’ anyway. How could he, having such a father as Uncle Toby? I’m afraid he’ll make trouble for us.”

“How can he do that?”

“In a good many ways. He’s vindictive and not very bright at best. He ought not to have been allowed to enlist anyway.”

“Here he comes now,” exclaimed Erwin as the lanky Samuel was seen returning to the “quarters” of the young prisoners.

“What’s on your mind, Uncle Sam?” inquired Taylor as Samuel approached.

“I’ve been watching you, Taylor Cooper,” said Samuel abruptly.

“That’s the best thing you have been doing in a long time,” retorted Taylor, glancing warningly at Erwin as he spoke.

“Is it? That remains to be seen.”

“What have I been doing that invites the special interest of Uncle Sam?” inquired Taylor soothingly.

“You’ve been fixing coats for the rebels.”

“Yes. At least I’ve fixed one and have two more to fix.”

“I know what for.”

“Do you? Perhaps that’s more than I know. Kindly explain yourself, my learned friend.”

“You’ve got some trick in your mind. I know you too well not to understand what you’re doing. You’ve got some scheme to get away.”

“You’re a wise lad, Uncle Sam,” said Taylor, trying to laugh in a manner that would quiet his alarming visitor. He glanced at Erwin, who was gazing at Samuel in such a fierce manner that Taylor was more anxious lest his friend should reveal their secret than

he was because of the startling suspicion which Samuel had voiced.

“I may be wise or not,” retorted Samuel. “Anyway I’m not such a fool as you and Erwin think I am. Now, then, when you going to try it?”

“Try what?”

“To get out of the camp?”

“Uncle Sam, have you forgotten Anthony Wood?” demanded Taylor solemnly.

“No, I haven’t forgotten Anthony Wood!” snapped Samuel. “And I haven’t forgotten Taylor Cooper, either! And don’t you forget Samuel Carson!”

“We can’t forget you,” laughed Taylor. “You won’t let us.”

“That’s it. I shan’t let you. Now, what are you up to?”

“I thought you were going to tell me. You said you knew, and for my part I can’t think of anything I’d rather hear than a good scheme for getting out of this forlorn place. I’ve had all I want of Camp Sorghum, haven’t you?”

“A good deal more than I want.”

“What’s the plan for getting away?”

“I don’t know any plan, but you do.”

“Tell me what it is.”

“I can’t.”

“Then how can you expect me to tell you?”

“Because if you don’t tell me, I’ll go straight to Evans and tell him that you two fellows are working up a plan to get out of camp.”

“You don’t dare do that!” spoke up Erwin excitedly.

“Oh, yes, he does,” said Taylor quickly bestowing a glance of warning upon his friend as he spoke. “Everybody that knows Uncle Sam is perfectly aware that he dares do almost anything. He isn’t a coward, whatever else he may be.”

“You’re right, I’m not,” responded Samuel. “I’m not afraid to march right up to the lieutenant and tell him two of the prisoners here are making plans to break away.”

“But how do you know they are?” said Taylor quietly.

“I know *them*, and that’s enough. I’m perfectly sure that Taylor Cooper isn’t the kind of a chap to mend the Johnnies’ coats for them just for the fun of it.”

“You’re a wise lad, Uncle Sam. Now, then, suppose you do tell Lieutenant Evans that we’re doing what you say we are. What good will it do you?”

“It’ll fix me all right with him anyway.”

“And then if we tell our boys what you have done what do you think will happen to you? They won’t be very gentle if they hear that one of our men has gone to the officers here with such a story as that. Uncle Sam, I wouldn’t give a pinch of snuff for your chances in camp if you should be so foolish as to do such a thing as that.”

“I don’t care. I’d do it anyway,” declared Samuel menacingly.

“Suppose we do have a plan in mind? What then?”

“If you’ll tell me what it is and let me go with you I won’t say a word. I’m as anxious to get away as you are.”

“Do you really mean it?”

“Every word.”

“Sure you can keep a secret, Uncle Sam?”

“You just try me,” said Samuel eagerly.

“All right. Come back to-morrow morning and I’ll see what can be done for you.”

“Tell me now.”

“I can't. Haven't got the plan all fixed in my own mind yet.”

“What time to-morrow?”

“Any time after you've cooked your breakfast.”

“Sure you'll tell me then?”

“As sure as you find me sitting right here mending this coat,” replied Taylor holding the garment up to view as he spoke.

“I'll do it! I'll be here!” exclaimed Samuel as he turned away.

For a moment Erwin stared blankly at his friend when their visitor had departed. Why had Taylor acknowledged that he had some plan of escape in mind? Above all, how had the slow-witted Samuel suspected? “I'm afraid the game is up,” he said bitterly.

“You're too easily frightened, Erwin.”

“But if Uncle Sam does what he threatens—”

“He won't! He can't!”

“Why not?”

“Because we must try it before he has a chance.”

“When?”

“To-day. To-night. I wanted to wait a little longer until I had made certain no suspicions had been aroused by my tailoring. We can’t wait, though. The poor fool will keep quiet till to-morrow, but after that we can’t depend on him in the least.”

“If such a fellow as Uncle Sam has found us out already, what chance do we stand with the guard?” inquired Erwin gloomily.

“I don’t think you need fear. Uncle Sam used to beat us all when we were collecting birds’ eggs. Don’t you remember? We all knew he was the biggest fool in the village—that is, the biggest, except his father, Uncle Toby. And yet he’d find a nest that none of the rest of us would ever see. Maybe it’s the same way here. Erwin, you’d better take a needle and thread and pretend to be sewing on this coat while I’m gone.”

“Where are you going?” inquired Erwin hastily as his friend arose.

“I’ll be back in a few minutes,” replied Taylor, ignoring the question.

Erwin obediently did as he had been bidden. Seating himself upon the ground he drew the needle and thread through the cloth,

apparently so engrossed in his task that he did not even look up when some of his fellow prisoners occasionally passed the place where he was seated.

An hour later Taylor returned and cautiously displayed a cap he had secured.

“Where did you get it?” asked Erwin.
“Got more than one?”

“No, only one. I borrowed that.”

“Borrowed it? Where?”

“In Lieutenant Evans’s tent. I went back to get more thread, and when I saw the cap—why, I just borrowed it. Now, then, listen, Erwin. I may not have a chance to explain again, or at least to say all I want to say to you. I think to-night is the very time to try our scheme. It is cloudy, and yet I don’t believe it’s going to rain. If it does I’m afraid our chance is gone.”

“Why?”

“In the dark the guard will make sure who’s passing—that is, he will if it’s real dark. I want just light enough to let him see that we’re two men dressed in the Johnnies’ gray. Perhaps we would do better not to be together all the time this afternoon. I’ll go

to the other side of the pen for awhile. When it's dinner time I'll come back and help you cook our rice. If you have a chance put some of it, too, in your pocket. We may want it. When the sun has set, or pretty soon after that, we'll start. My plan is for each of us to roll up one of these coats and carry it under his arm. We'll go as near to the guard on the north side of the pen as we can, and then we'll slip on the coats. I'll take the long one and I'll take the cap, too. Then, we'll just saunter toward the guard and watch our chances. I think our coats will pass us. If they don't, why, they don't, that's all. In that case the guard'll probably stop us, and very likely we'll be shut up in the guardhouse to a diet of water and mouldy bread for awhile. We haven't much to lose and we have everything to gain. But we'll make it, Erwin, we'll make it!"

CHAPTER VI

NEAR THE FIRES

IN the long afternoon, which slowly passed, Erwin endeavored to regain control of himself. The bidding of Taylor for him to lie down and obtain the rest which would help him in the trying experiences that might soon come was ignored. Indeed, Erwin marveled at his friend when the latter stretched himself on the sole blanket the two prisoners possessed and instantly fell asleep.

It was almost time for the prisoners to prepare their rice for dinner when Taylor at last awoke. Even then he lay motionless for a time watching his friend, who was standing near him.

“Come on, Taylor,” called Erwin, unable to endure the suspense longer. “We must look after our rice or the mess will not leave a scrap for us.”

The young prisoner arose at the summons and in a brief time announced his readiness

to accompany his friend. When the mess assembled and the food had been prepared, each of the two boys stealthily hid a part of his portion in the pocket of his tattered coat.

“I’m coming to see you early to-morrow morning,” whispered Samuel, who also belonged to the same mess. Taylor and Erwin had turned away from the cooking place about to start for their own quarters, but both stopped when Uncle Sam approached.

“Do so. Don’t forget,” said Taylor lightly.

“I’m not likely to forget. Maybe I’ll go back with you now. Have you thought out your plan yet?”

“No. I must have solitude and reflection. You are aware of my meaning, are you not?” inquired Taylor soberly.

“I guess you mean you don’t want me around.”

“I have always said you were a wise chap, Uncle Sam.”

“I know a thing or two, and some things besides,” said Samuel. “I don’t intend to let you fellows fool me. I’m a partner or I’m an—”

“You are, you certainly are,” laughed Taylor, as Samuel hesitated.

“You’ll find out all right.”

Samuel was walking beside his companions, doubtless aware that his presence was not desired and all the more eager to remain because of that fact. When his two friends continued on their way without manifesting any intention of stopping at their own “quarters,” Samuel’s purpose faltered.

“Where you going?” he demanded sharply.

“We haven’t started for Yankeeland yet,” explained Erwin.

“I guess I know that. But where are you going?”

“Going with you.”

“I’m not going anywhere.”

“Same place we’re bound for.”

“You trying to get rid of me?”

“Who suggested such an idea as that to you, Uncle Sam?”

“I thought of it myself.”

“No! Did you?”

“I’m not going to tramp around this place all night,” declared Samuel abruptly as he

halted. "It'll be dark soon. I've got all I want to do without wandering around the pen. I'll see you in the morning."

"Look here, Uncle Sam," called Taylor sharply in a low voice, as Samuel turned away. "Suppose we haven't any scheme? Suppose I can't think of any plan? What are you going to do then?"

"Just what I told you. I know you, Taylor Cooper! I know you don't fix coats just for fun. You've got some scheme or other in your head. I want to know what it is. And you promised to tell me what it is, too."

"Nay, Uncle Sam. I promised to tell you if I could find one, to-morrow morning. You must help. You must find one, too. You know what happened to Anthony Wood. We must think of something that will be safe and sure. I want to get away from here as much as you do. But I don't want to leave camp the way poor Anthony did."

Samuel made no response and continued on his way. "There! He's gone at last," exclaimed Taylor. "I began to be afraid he'd spoil everything."

“So was I. Isn’t it dark enough now to try it?”

“Yes.”

“Let’s do it, then,” said Erwin, his voice trembling slightly.

“Very well. Erwin, do you realize what it means?”

“Yes.”

“We may not get through. You understand that—and what may happen to us if we don’t?”

“I do,” whispered Erwin.

“And you’re ready to take the chances?”

“I am. I want to try it. I can’t stand it here another day.”

“You can if you have to. Come on, we’ll go back to get our coats. I think we’d better keep together. I’ve been thinking of Uncle Sam’s finding the nests when we were little fellows at home. I believe his plan is best.”

“What plan? How is it best? I don’t understand.”

“Why, the simplest way will be the safest. We must walk straight to the guard and not act as if we were dodging. If there’s any

talking to be done you'd better let me do it. Our first point of danger will be when we cross the dead line. If we stop or act nervous there we are lost. Follow me right on. There!" Taylor suddenly exclaimed. "There go the fires!"

For a moment both boys stopped and gazed at the bonfires that had just been kindled at intervals in a circle about the prison pen. Figures of men could be seen moving about the fires or passing from one blaze to another. Scores of Confederates were plainly to be seen directing the work and looking to the means that were expected to prevent the escape of any of the prisoners from the great lot on which the pen was located.

"The boldest course is best," said Taylor quickly. "Come on. This is the time for us to be up and doing." Taylor spoke in low tones that thrilled his companion. Neither spoke as they hastened to the place where the coats and the cap had been left. Hastily securing them, the young prisoners looked cautiously about and then walked briskly toward the outer part of the camp.

Again they halted and when they were con-

vinced that their actions could not be seen by others, at Taylor's suggestion they both donned the coats of the officers, placing them over their own ragged garments. Taylor also placed his borrowed cap on his head and hesitating a moment he inquired, "How is it, Erwin? Do I look the part? Do I resemble Lieutenant Evans?"

"You'll find out in a minute," whispered Erwin. "Don't stop here any longer! Go ahead! I'll follow you."

In silence the two boys turned toward the line of guards. Before them the kindled fires were blazing. Fires, too, were to be seen inside the camp at occasional places where a few of the unfortunate prisoners were able by some means to obtain some pieces of wood.

Taylor's confident manner as he led the way did not deceive his friend. He was making a supreme effort to be calm and yet every nerve in his body seemed to be tingling in his excitement. He endeavored to keep his eyes fixed on the line of fires glowing before him, yet continually he was glancing on either side, fearful of the approach of a guard or

dreading to hear the shout of warning, or worse still, the report of a rifle discharged by unseen hands.

Suddenly Taylor stopped abruptly and clutched the arm of his friend. Directly before them Erwin could see a man approaching, and in the dim light he was convinced that it was Lieutenant Evans whose coat Taylor was wearing. Erwin's first impulse was to run from the place, but his friend's grasp prevented him, and in a moment the young prisoners were face to face with the lieutenant.

"We've brought your coats," called Taylor, as Lieutenant Evans stopped.

"That's kind of you," laughed the young officer as he recognized Taylor. "Who is that with you?" he added.

"My apprentice. He's learning how to sew, but I'm afraid he'll never amount to much as a tailor. I let him work on Lieutenant Kelber's coat. Yours I fixed myself."

"That's good of you," said the lieutenant, laughing again. "No, no. Don't take it off," he added kindly as Taylor began to di-

vest himself of the garment. "Keep it on. It's cold to-night, and you need it more than I do. Bring it to me in the morning. If it was in my power, sir, I'd be glad to let you keep it, though you-all might not enjoy wearing a Confederate officer's uniform in the daytime."

"It makes me hot, even now," replied Taylor dryly.

"That's good, sir."

"Where did you say Lieutenant Kelber is?" Taylor inquired.

"I don't think I said, sir. He's outside attending to the fires. He'll be back directly."

"Well, we'll give him his coat anyway. He may not feel about it as you do."

"No, sir. I'm afraid he won't. If he knew a Yank had had it on his back he'd want the garment fumigated."

"I shouldn't blame him if the Yank had been shut up in this prison pen very long. Any word of our being transferred?"

"Not a word, sir."

The good-natured lieutenant departed, apparently not a suspicion of the purpose

of the two prisoners having entered his mind.

“That was a close call, Taylor,” whispered Erwin, as the two boys continued on their way toward the border of the camp.

“Yes and no. I told you the boldest way was the safest.”

Erwin made no response. They were drawing near the guard now and had crossed the dead line. Apparently either their boldness or the dim light of the cloudy night sheltered them, for not a hail was given them. Erwin was bolder now in the face of the deepening peril. The supreme test was at hand. The picket guard was to be seen on his duty, marching back and forth on his beat before them.

“Guard, which way did Lieutenant Kelber go?” inquired Taylor, advancing a few steps until he could be seen but without being recognized, as he was trusting. The young prisoner was relying upon his “uniform” to protect him now.

The soldier on duty halted and peered at Taylor. Hesitating a moment he said, “He’s out yonder, suh. Who sent you?”

“Lieutenant Evans told us he was here.” Taylor was drawling his words in his attempt to appear indifferent as well as to imitate the dialect of the Southern soldiers. “We might wait heah till he returns,” he added

“You-all will find him somewhar in th’ fiah line,” suggested the guard, apparently satisfied with his inspection.

“I’m so doggone tired,” said Taylor with a yawn, “I believe I’ll go back an’ wait fo’ him. You reckon he’ll come back this heah way?”

“I dunno. Yo’ bettah stir yo’selves an’ find him.”

“I reckon we had,” admitted Taylor. “If he comes back this way, would yo’ mind tel- lin’ him Lieutenant Evans would be grati- fied if he would come to see him befo’ break- fast in th’ mawnin’?”

“Find him yo’self!” retorted the guard, who had now resumed his beat.

Slowly, as if the search was a task for which he had slight relish, Taylor spoke to Erwin and they passed the guard. Erwin’s face was wet with perspiration in spite of the chilliness of the night. His teeth had an un-

accountable tendency to chatter and it was only by exerting himself that he restrained his impulse to break into a mad flight. Slowly the boys advanced, turning slightly to their left as they proceeded, until the form of the guard could no longer be discerned behind them. Before them was the line of blazing fires which must be crossed. Both boys realized the peril of this venture—the most perilous of all their attempts of the night.

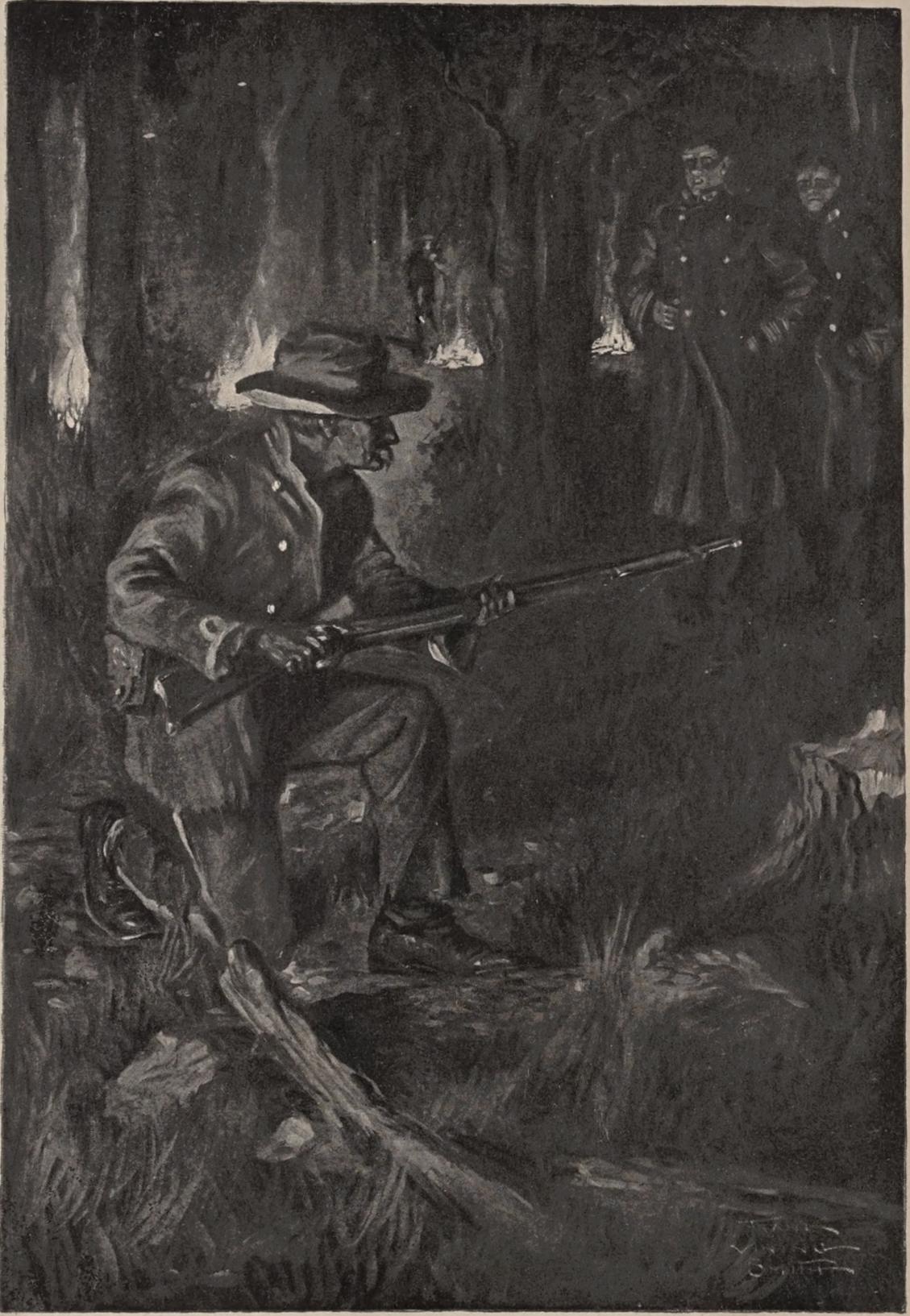
As the young soldiers approached, they were able to see that every man in the line was supposed to care for three of the fires and divided his time and attention among them. It was impossible for the boys to pass the line without being seen. Again Taylor decided that the bolder was likely to prove the safer way. Whispering a word of encouragement to Erwin, he led the way directly toward the nearest of the attendants, who was not more than fifty feet in front of them.

The man's rifle was on the ground near him while he was throwing some logs upon the blazing heap.

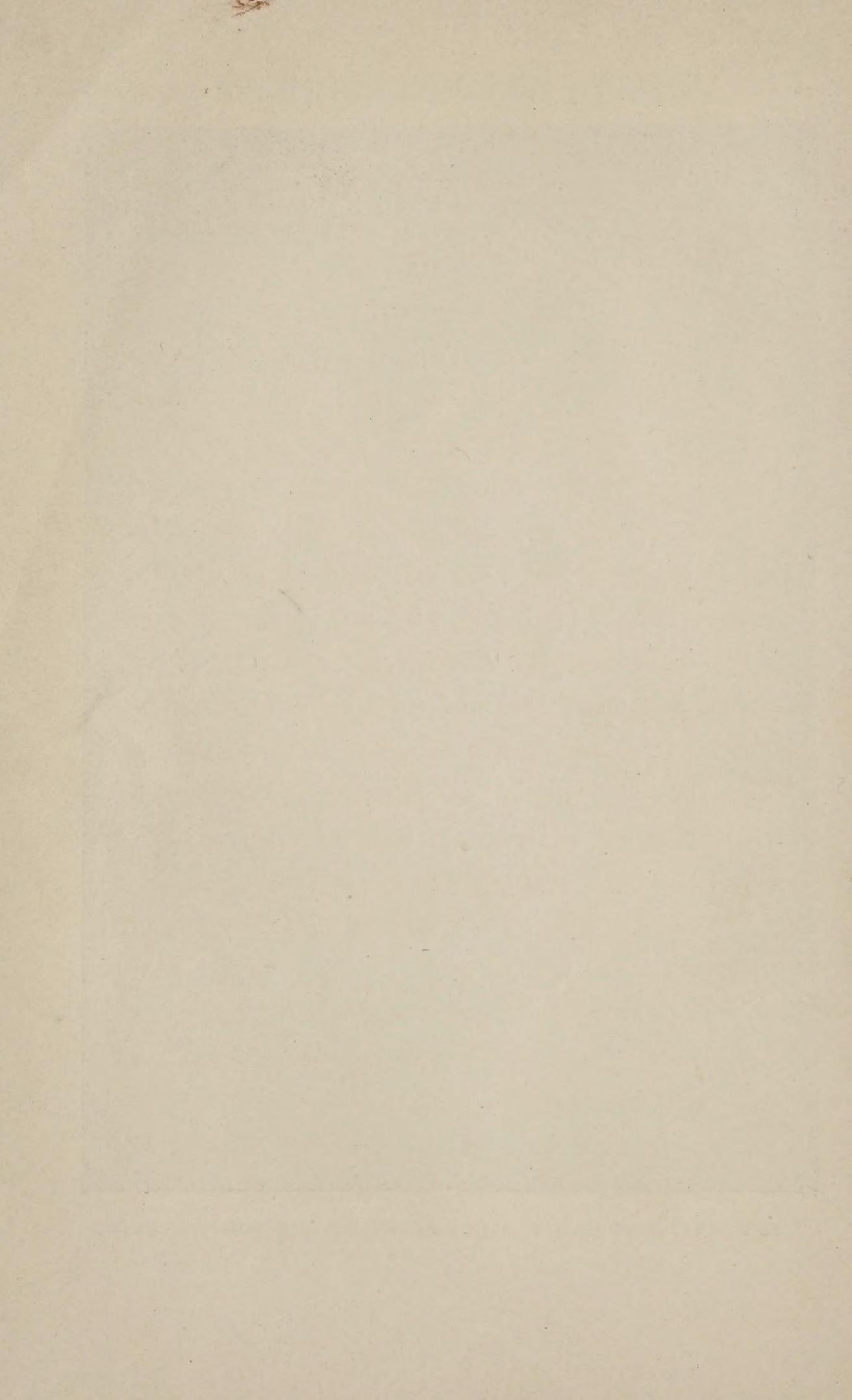
“Yo' all want some help, suh?” demanded

Taylor, as he and his comrade drew near.

The unexpected hail plainly startled the man, for he instantly dropped the log from his arms and hastily seizing his rifle, peered intently at the two men who had approached.



THE UNEXPECTED HAIL PLAINLY STARTLED THE MAN.—Page 86.



CHAPTER VII

FAILURE

“WE uns are a lookin’ for Lieutenant Kelber,” drawled Taylor.

Plainly relieved by the words, the guard turned quickly and called to some one not far away, though he could not be seen in the dim light of the fire.

In response to the guard’s hail a man quickly appeared and approached the place where the two young soldiers were standing. The consternation of the boys was great when they both recognized the approaching man as Lieutenant Kelber himself.

“What’s wanted?” demanded the officer sharply.

“These two men are a lookin’ fo’ you,” replied the guard. Taylor instantly removed his cap and the officer turned quickly to him for an explanation of the guard’s statement.

“Yes, sir. We are looking for you,” said Taylor, striving to speak indifferently. “We

have your coat ready. Lieutenant Evans told us you were here.”

“My coat? Lieutenant Evans? What do you mean?”

“Why, we are the prisoners who were fixing over your coats—yours and Lieutenant Evans’s.”

“What are you doing with them here outside the guard line? You’ve got the coats on, too!” exclaimed the officer sternly.

“Yes, sir. We have. That was the easiest way to carry them. Besides, it’s cold tonight, and we both thought we’d like to know how a warm coat made a man feel. It’s been a long time since we had such a thing.”

“You come back with me,” said the officer sternly. “I’ll look into this. I reckon the place for you uns is behind the stockade. You say you passed the guard?”

“Why, yes, sir,” responded Taylor in apparent surprise. “We met Lieutenant Evans back here. He told me to keep his coat till morning. He said, too, that you were here somewhere, and we might give your coat to you.”

“Did he come with you across the dead line?”

“I can’t just say as to that. It was so dark we couldn’t tell just where we were.”

“Did he pass the guard?”

“No, sir.”

“Come. I must look into this. You Yanks are all a bad lot. I wouldn’t trust you as far as I can throw a ’possum by the tail. Come on. We’ll have this matter straightened out directly.”

Obediently Taylor and Erwin followed the lieutenant as he led the way back into the camp. The night was too dark to enable either of the prisoners to see the face of his companion, but Taylor did not require any light to enable him to understand how depressed Erwin was by the outcome of their attempt to escape.

Not a word was spoken until the trio arrived at the quarters of Lieutenant Evans. When that officer came forth at the demand of the conductor of the returning prisoners, he gazed first at the disconsolate boys and then at Lieutenant Kelber.

“You know these men?” inquired Lieutenant Kelber.

“Yes, sir, I recognize them. One of them has on a coat of mine and the other is wearing one of yours.”

“Did you give the coats to them?”

“I did.”

“Did you send these men out to the fires?”

“No, sir.”

“Didn’t you tell us to find Lieutenant Kelber and give him his coat?” inquired Taylor eagerly.

For a moment Lieutenant Evans hesitated. Then, turning once more to his fellow officer, he said, “I reckon it’s all right, lieutenant. I recollect telling these prisoners to take your coat to you. I didn’t expect them to follow you all the way to Washington, though.”

“You made a mistake!” sternly said Lieutenant Kelber, who was an older man than his companion. “If I hadn’t found them when I did they would have been gone by now.”

“I reckon they wouldn’t have gone very far. The dogs would have had them before they’d gone a mile. They aren’t such fools

as to try that. You're making too much of the matter, lieutenant. I must say they were running a big risk in followin' yo' up as they did. They'll know better next time."

The dogs to which Lieutenant Evans referred were packs of bloodhounds that every night and morning patrolled the borders of the camp. In charge of them was the keeper of the hounds, a man almost as savage and brutal in his appearance as the fierce pack he commanded. Taylor and Erwin often had discussed the ability of the savage dogs to detect the footprint of a Yankee. Every day a multitude of white men and black as well as many horses and mules came to the prison pen. Their footprints in the soft mud near the borders of the prison pen were numerous and confusing. How it was that the great bloodhounds on their rounds would ignore the tracks of every one of these and then stop and with loud yelps suddenly swerve from their course when they detected the presence of a prisoner's footprint in the confused mass, had frequently been a source of wonder to both Taylor and Erwin. Neither was familiar with the ways of the huge brutes,

and both stood in fear of them—a fear greatly magnified by the current reports of the certainty with which the dogs ran down escaping “niggers” or fleeing prisoners. Indeed, one of the most perplexing of the problems in the event of escaping from the prison pen was the flight from the packs that doubtless would be sent in swift pursuit as soon as it was discovered that the prisoners were missing.

“It’s a good thing the fence is nearly done,” suggested Lieutenant Kelber. “It’s all up except on the west side, and the creek there, as well as the swamp, is almost as good as a fence. Fo’ my part, sir, I think these two men ought to be shut up in the stockade.” The “stockade,” as both boys well knew, was an enclosure in the center of the prison camp itself. The place was surrounded by a high fence having sharp pickets. To escape from the enclosure was impossible. All dangerous or offensive prisoners, as well as those who were paying the penalty for infringement of the rules of the camp, were confined there. The poor and insufficient food, the cramped and crowded

quarters in addition to the suspicion under which the man rested who had been once sentenced to the vile place, were already known by both boys.

“It can be easily arranged, sir, if yo’ desire it,” suggested Lieutenant Evans.

“I’ll leave the matter in yo’ hands. I reckon you are a bit easy though and the discipline of the camp must be kept up.”

When Lieutenant Kelber departed, Lieutenant Evans turned to the two boys and said quickly, “Why did yo’ all try it?”

“Try what?” inquired Taylor.

“Yo’ know what I mean.”

Neither of the boys replied to the question.

“I reckon you are not so very different from me, an’ I know what I’d have tried if I’d been in your places. I’m not sayin’ I blame yo’, except fo’ your foolishness. I reckon yo’ will have to go to the stockade.”

“For trying to do what you say you yourself would have tried if you had been in our places?” inquired Taylor.

“Yes, sir. That doesn’t make any difference. Yo’ know you were tryin’ to get away. There’s a report that an exchange is goin’

to be made in a day or two. I should like to have seen you-all in the lists and I reckon I might have helped a bit, too. But it can't be done now, sir."

Even Taylor's hopefulness was not proof against the suggestion of the warm-hearted young officer, who was different from all the other men in command of the prison camp. Indeed, frequently he had told Taylor in the conversations they had had, how bitterly he regretted the terrible war. He had a brother, too, who had remained North after he had completed his college course at one of the Northern colleges and at the breaking out of the war he had enlisted as a soldier of the Union. Keenly as Lieutenant Evans bewailed the disgrace that had befallen his family, because one of its members had been disloyal, as he believed, to his state, his sympathies were still sufficiently broad to enable him to appreciate and even honor the convictions of those who did not agree with him. He himself had followed the example of General Lee, the beloved commander, who had entered the Confederate service still loving the Union, but believing that the call of his

own state was superior to every other appeal. Frequently, too, the young officer had declared that the trouble could end at once if the Northern armies would leave the Southern States alone. To the suggestion of Taylor that the armies of the North were not where they were by choice, and that one word would send home every blue-coated soldier, the lieutenant did not respond.

That the young officer would not be swerved from his duty as he saw it, Taylor and Erwin both understood. Accordingly, neither was surprised when they were told that they must leave the coats that had been repaired and must be taken at once to the stockade.

The week during which the two young prisoners were confined within the narrow limits of the stockade was one of misery. Without shelter from the rains that steadily fell, having neither clothing that could warm nor any occupation to help them pass the dreary hours, the food which was provided became almost nauseating. Their sole relief was in the gift to each of them of two onions which Lieutenant Evans had made when he had

taken them to the prison within the prison, as the stockade virtually was. So many of their fellow prisoners were suffering from scurvy that the preventive diet was eagerly welcomed by both boys.

Taylor apparently kept up his spirits in spite of his dismal surroundings and the memory of the failure that had crowned their efforts to escape. He steadily endeavored to cheer his friend, appealing to him not to abandon hope. Their one purpose must not be forgotten he declared cheerily every morning, and that was to keep themselves in such condition that the prevailing sickness among the prisoners should not attack them. In a way, too, Taylor's efforts were not without a measure of success. When the week was gone and through the kindly efforts of Lieutenant Evans they were restored to the liberty of the larger prison pen, neither was in as bad a condition as both had feared.

Soon after their return to their former quarters they were visited by Samuel. "Y' got what y' deserved, didn't ye?" he inquired tauntingly, as he hailed the boys.

“There’s one comfort for you, Uncle Sam,” retorted Erwin. “You didn’t have to go to the stockade. It was a good thing for you that you didn’t try to get away with us.”

“There’s a lot more of our men here now in spite of the exchange,” said Samuel, apparently ignoring the remark of his fellow townsman.

“Yes, I see,” said Taylor, as he looked about the camp. “What was that you said about exchanging? Has there been an exchange?”

“You’re right there has. Two hundred and seventy-five got out on it. When the list was read, some of our men whose names were not in it played sharp.”

“What did they do?”

“There were about fifty dead men on the list. Some of our men answered to the call in place of those who had died in camp. They were lucky. A good many of them were taken out. I wish I’d been.”

“Why didn’t you try it?”

“My turn will come. I’m glad I didn’t go with you. You might have told me and given

me the chance, though. You're watched now and you won't dare try it again. If you do, you'll be shot."

"Who says so?"

"Lieutenant Evans. He told me himself."

"What did you tell him about us?" inquired Taylor sharply.

"Not much. He asked me some questions."

"Don't forget what I told you," said Taylor sternly.

"About what?"

"About talking about us."

"'Twon't do any good now for you to try to get away. The rebels have got the fence all finished, and have guards posted on platforms along the whole length of it. There is a line of guards, too, along the inside, and the outside of the fence. No chance now."

With this parting word of comfort, which Samuel apparently enjoyed, their visitor departed.

"Taylor," said Erwin, as soon as Uncle Sam was gone, "we must find some way out. I'd rather take my chances at being shot than at staying here much longer."

“We’ll keep quiet a few days, but we’ll keep our eyes open. There is a way if we can find it.”

“We must find it!”

“We will, then, if we must,” replied Taylor, rejoiced at the manifest interest of his friend.

Ten days, however, elapsed before either found a scheme that seemed in any way feasible. It was Erwin’s suggestion, too, and as he unfolded his plan, his friend exclaimed—
“It’s worth trying! We’ll do it.”

CHAPTER VIII

OUTSIDE

ALONG a part of one side of the prison pen a small stream sluggishly made its way. The water was filthy and ill-smelling. The banks of the little creek were carefully guarded and every guard was armed with a rifle. At first sight the place appeared to be one of the most impassable of the barriers surrounding the dreary camp.

To Erwin, however, the very morning of the day when his proposal to his friend was made a surprising discovery had come. He had been strolling near the foul stream watching the changing of the guards. One of the retiring guards, glad to be relieved of his post, had picked up two stones and thrown them into the stream directly under the fence that had been built twenty-five or more feet lengthwise of the muddy creek.

The act was simple, but Erwin was startled by the thought that the fence did not rest

upon the bottom of the stream, but was only a few inches below the surface. Instantly, he concluded that between the bottom of the fence and the bottom of the creek was an intervening body of water which the pickets or slabs did not touch. The thought was so suggestive that he decided to make further investigations. After a brief time had elapsed he took a strip of wood which some prisoner had secured for firewood, and with it he returned to the muddy stream. Striving to appear indifferent, he dropped his torn hat in the water when he was not observed and then while he was pretending to reach for his lost head-covering he at the same time thrust his stick into the bottom of the stream.

As he had believed, he found the bottom soft and muddy. Several inches of dark mud that remained on the measuring rod partly indicated how deep the soft bottom was. And he had not found solid ground in his attempt. What most interested him, however, was the discovery that the water itself had a depth of a foot and a half near the bank. If the depth was as great as that near the shore a fair inference might be drawn that the stream

was still deeper where the fence was. The bottom of the fence must be at least two feet above the muddy bottom of the stream itself—a space sufficiently large to permit a man to crawl under it.

The discovery was suggestive to the young prisoner. Several times in the morning hours he returned to the place, striving by his air of indifference to avoid arousing any suspicions of the thought which now was uppermost in his mind.

In his investigations he sought, too, to learn the exact location of the guards. He was relieved when the hour of changing came to find that the new guard took his stand at the same place where his predecessor had been. On the platforms which had been built out upon the massive fence, the sharpshooters had their station. One platform was on one side about thirty feet from the bank of the stream and at the same distance in the opposite direction was another on which a picked man was stationed. The locality was well guarded and at first sight escape by it was apparently impossible.

To Erwin's excited mind, however, the

project seemed to be more promising than any he had found in his search. Even the peril arising from the presence of the near-by guards and sharpshooters was not sufficient to deter him. Deeply aroused, he speedily returned to his quarters, where Taylor was working upon a coat which Lieutenant Evans had sent him to repair. Either the lieutenant had ceased to be suspicious or the luxury of a mended coat had been too strong to resist; Taylor was unable to determine which motive had been stronger in the young officer's mind, nor did he care if only some occupation was provided.

"What is it, Erwin?" inquired Taylor, as he became aware of the eager expression on his friend's face.

"I think I have found something," replied Erwin in a low voice.

"Go ahead with your tale," said Taylor, bending low over his sewing.

"You know that place where the fence around the camp follows the creek thirty feet or more?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've found that the fence doesn't

go clear down to the bottom of the stream.”

Taylor looked up quickly at the words, but in a moment he hastily resumed his task.

“How much space is free?” he inquired.

“Two feet or more.”

“What makes you think so?”

Erwin described his experiments and indicated the conclusions he had formed.

“That’s good,” said Taylor thoughtfully.

“There may be something in it. Go on.”

“We might go down there some dark night and crawl under the fence.”

“Under the water?”

“Yes.”

“Go on.”

“I think we might crawl along on the bottom, just keeping our noses out of the water, till we had passed the guards—”

“You know there are four men there—two guards and two sharpshooters? We’d have to dodge all four.”

“Yes, and the hounds, too.”

“How do you propose to get past the dogs?”

“Keep in the water till we have gone beyond them.”

“Gone where?”

“I don’t know. Somewhere, anywhere out of this!” said Erwin, shuddering as he spoke.

“We don’t know anything about the country around the camp.”

“The creek must go somewhere. If we follow it for awhile we shan’t lose our way.”

“That’s a good idea. When do you want to try?”

“The first dark night.”

“To-night?”

“If it’s dark.”

“I don’t believe it’ll be dark enough for our plan,” said Taylor, glancing at the sky.

“To-morrow night, then—or the first dark night.”

“You understand how filthy the creek is?”

“Yes. Yes.”

“We’ll have to keep our heads under the water part of the time.”

“I know that.”

“It’s worth trying. We’ll do it,” said Taylor warmly.

Two days passed and the plan of the young prisoners was still deferred. The nights were clear and cold and the darkness was not

sufficiently deep to warrant any attempt. On the afternoon of the third day, however, when Taylor rejoined his friend at their quarters, he said, "Erwin, have you kept away from the creek?"

"Yes. I haven't been near it but once since I spoke to you."

"That's good. Have you seen Uncle Sam?"

"He's been here twice."

"What did he have to say?"

"Not very much. He doesn't suspect anything."

"I wish I felt sure of that. You can't trust him. I'm of the opinion he's watching us all the time."

"Why?"

"I haven't any real reason, except that I'm afraid of him. He's a fellow you never can depend upon. He'd do anything to hurt us if he thought he'd be the gainer by it. Erwin," Taylor added abruptly, "I think we'd better try it to-night."

"It isn't going to rain. It won't be any darker than it was last night."

"That will be dark enough. I wish we'd

gone ahead then. I have thought it all over and I've come to the conclusion that a rainy night won't be as good for us as a still, dark one."

"They'll see us. The guard can fire at us," suggested Erwin.

"That's true, but it's just as true that we must be able to see a little of our way ourselves. These southern nights are dark anyway, and there won't be any moon to-night."

"I'm ready to try it if you are," responded Erwin quietly.

"Better be ready then. We'll wait till the camp is asleep, though we mustn't wait too long. If we get out we want to put a big distance between us and Camp Sorghum by sunrise. We'd better talk over a few of the details."

"What do you propose?"

"I think we'd better go together—at least to the creek. There, I'll slip into the water first and crawl under the fence. If I get along all right, you follow me in about five minutes. I'll keep on down the creek and that's what you must do, too."

"Where'll we meet?"

“Have to wait and see about that. When I find a good place I’ll stop and keep watch for you to come along. If you hear a—if you hear anything that may have happened to me—you make a break for it and look out for yourself. We may be separated any way.”

Erwin was quiet for a moment. He was aware that his friend was voicing what was not only possible but probable. The project was filled with peril. The chances of passing the guard were desperate, and yet Erwin was now in a frame of mind in which even the direst possibilities could not check him.

In a brief time the boys separated and were not together again until the hour arrived for “dinner.” Both ate all the food they received, having previously decided that the filthy stream would spoil any provisions they might try to carry with them. Where or when their next meal would be found was not even a matter of conjecture.

At nine o’clock both young prisoners were at their quarters. As they stretched themselves upon the ground Taylor whispered—
“We must not wait, Erwin. I’ve been think-

ing more about it and I believe we'll stand a better chance to go now before everything about the camp is quiet."

"I think you're right. I'm ready when you are. It's dark enough any time."

"You meet me at the creek, then," whispered Taylor, as he arose and departed in the darkness.

Excited as Erwin was, he still moved cautiously and carefully when a few minutes afterward he, too, started for the meeting place.

He was rejoiced when later he found Taylor lying on the ground near the stream and he, too, took his place beside his friend. Not a person had spoken to them, and apparently no one was near. The dim outline of the sharpshooter on the raised platform could be seen, but if he had discovered their presence he at least betrayed no sign.

When two minutes had passed Taylor pressed his friend's hand and slowly slid into the water.

Erwin, almost breathless, watched his departing friend, but in a brief time not even Taylor's head could be seen. The guard

was invisible, and when Erwin glanced again at the sharpshooter he, too, apparently was not suspicious. The young prisoner was listening intently. At any moment the call of the guard or the report of his gun might be heard. What the report would mean Erwin understood only too well. How slowly the time passed. Was it five minutes or an hour since his friend had entered the stream? Erwin could not decide. He worked his way a little nearer the water. What an evil odor it had! Had Taylor been caught and held by the mud? A half-dozen possible dire misfortunes might have been met by his friend. The suspense and uncertainty were harder to bear than action. Erwin slipped slowly and cautiously into the water.

Creeping upon his hands, his body submerged, he crawled steadily forward. The foul water almost choked him. The soft mud of the bottom was so yielding that it was only with the greatest difficulty he continued to keep his face above the water. Occasionally he stopped to listen. There was a roaring in his ears and the beatings of his heart sounded almost like a drum. Steadily, cau-

tiously he drew himself forward until at last he could see the high fence directly in front of him. The supreme moment had arrived.

Drawing a full breath and grasping the bottom of the fence, he drew himself underneath it. His body was on the muddy bottom, but he did not stop. Striving desperately to be quiet in his movements at last he gained the water on the further side. As he lifted his face above the stream it seemed to Erwin for a moment that he must cough. The filthy water was almost strangling him. By a great effort he controlled himself. He was still near the fence and when his eyes were partly cleared he eagerly looked about for the guard. At first he was unable to discover the man. Soon, however, he saw him seated on the ground, his back leaning against the trunk of a huge tree. Had the guard seen him? Was he watching even now? The uncertainty had not departed when once more Erwin began slowly to crawl forward.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE SWAMP

WHEN Erwin had advanced two yards he stopped and peered once more at the dim form of the guard. Apparently the man had not moved. He was not more than twenty feet from the place in the stream where the young prisoner was crouching. The silence of the night was suddenly broken when in response to the call of the adjoining guard, the man in front of Erwin slowly arose and sleepily called: "Post number foah! Half past nine o'clock. And a-l-l's w-e-l-l!"

In a turmoil of excitement Erwin was breathing rapidly. Exerting himself to the utmost he still endeavored to lie motionless. Much of his body was covered by the dark water, and his face, except the left side, was also submerged. Almost fascinated, he watched the guard, who yawned, stretched his arms, and then a moment later resumed his seat at the base of the tree against

which he before had been leaning. A feeling of exultation came to the young prisoner which for the moment almost enabled him to forget the filthy water that was well-nigh strangling him.

Waiting for what seemed to Erwin a sufficient time to ensure the sleep of the guard, if the man really was sleeping, he resumed his slow advance. The slightest noise would arouse the sentinel now. Not a ripple must be heard. The advance was by inches. Once Erwin felt his hands slip down into a hole in the bed of the stream. The vile water again filled his mouth and nose, and almost forced him to cough. By a great effort, he restrained the impulse. His face was turned toward the guard. The sharpshooter on the platform was hidden from his sight by the few trees that intervened. His sole danger, at least for the moment, lay with the guard.

Not a movement had the man made since Erwin had resumed his crawling. Fortunately the stream was as shallow as he and Taylor had thought it was. Only occasionally did the bed dip and so slow was the progress of the desperate boy that he was

already prepared when his fingers found the deeper places.

One yard, two yards, five yards had been successfully passed. As yet the guard had not betrayed any knowledge of the escape. The fear of the discovery in the camp that the two prisoners were gone now seized upon Erwin. The guard was at least thirty feet away, though his form still could be plainly seen by the desperate young soldier. It seemed to Erwin that the time had come when with safety he might increase the speed at which he was moving. Just before him, projecting a few inches above the water, was a long root. Reaching forward, Erwin grasped the root and strove to pull himself by its aid.

Suddenly the root snapped in his hands. It was not a root at all—only a dead branch of a tree projecting over the stream. Terrified by the sharp report of the snapping branch, it was only with difficulty that Erwin controlled his wild impulse to rise and flee from the place. His only hope seemed to lie in swift flight.

Instantly, however, realizing the peril of

any such action, he sank once more into the stream and lay still. In terror he glanced back at the guard. He could see that the man was sitting erect now, plainly startled by the sharp sound of the breaking branch. In a moment the guard sat erect and Erwin could see that he was holding his rifle in his hands. His face, too, was turned toward the place from which the sound had come. For a moment it seemed to Erwin that he himself was seen.

His alarm increased when the guard silently arose and advanced a few steps nearer the place where the soldier was lying in the stream. For an instant Erwin thought of Taylor, wondering where his friend was at that moment. His own escape apparently was hopeless now. The sole thought in his mind was, that by remaining quiet he might, perhaps, help Taylor. In his eagerness to secure one escaping prisoner the guard might not make any effort to ascertain whether or not there were others near him. Taylor might now have gone so far beyond the borders that he at least would be free.

Suddenly Erwin became aware that the

guard had stopped. He could see the man leaning forward, peering intently into the darkness in the direction whence the sound of the broken branch had come. Had he seen the face of the crouching prisoner? Breathless in his suspense, Erwin waited and watched the man on the shore not far away. How long a time elapsed Erwin never knew, but at last the guard, apparently satisfied that he had been mistaken, or that the sound, if he really had heard one, was innocent, slowly turned back toward the tree against which he had before been leaning.

What seemed to Erwin a long time passed before he dared move. This time the guard had not seated himself. He was watchful, and his face was toward the stream. Apparently his fears had not all departed, although he had not been able to discover any cause for alarm.

At last Erwin decided that the suspense could not be endured longer. His caution increased as he once more began to crawl forward. His progress was by inches now. His hands were not permitted to rise more than an inch or two above the muddy bot-

tom. With every action he turned his face to the place where the guard was watching. The darkness was sufficient to conceal him—of that Erwin now felt certain. Some low bushes were growing along the marshy shores and these aided in hiding him. His one great danger was in making some noise in his movements. If the guard should hear another suspicious sound there was no question in Erwin's mind as to what instantly would follow.

All conception of time was gone now. The one overmastering purpose was to go on. Distance between him and the guard was to Erwin's mind the sole measure of safety. On and still on he crawled. Whether minutes or hours had elapsed he could not determine. Whether he had gone yards or feet he did not know. One thing, however, was certain now, and that was, that the guard could not be seen.

The strain was beginning to be felt by this time by Erwin. The excitement as well as the efforts he had put forth were almost exhausting him. The foul odor of the water, its nauseating taste, in addition to the cold

he was suffering, were added perils. He felt sometimes as if his body did not belong to him. It was almost numb. His fingers were cramped and his eyes were so blurred that even his way was difficult to find. Still Erwin slowly pulled himself forward. He was aware that the stars were in the sky and that he was in a more open region than when he was passing the bushes where the snapping branch had so nearly proved his undoing. Lifting his head for a moment he saw not far before him what seemed to be the outlines of trees and more brush. Perhaps there he would find Taylor awaiting him.

The thought of his comrade served to revive Erwin's eagerness. With an increased determination he continued on his way. If the open space could be successfully passed then his hope of escaping would be stronger. If it were only possible for him to rise and walk, he thought, what a relief the change would be. The low marshy ground about him, through which the muddy stream had its course, was so level that anyone walking on it would be easily discovered by watching

or searching soldiers. His best way was to continue as he was doing, he concluded, though every movement was one of pain and his wearied body seemed as heavy as though it had been weighted with lead.

Slowly, frequently stopping for rest, Erwin crawled forward. He was no longer fearful of sounds of pursuit. Even discovery was comparatively a matter of indifference now. His efforts were almost mechanical. There was slight feeling in his arms and almost none in his hands. Still, the well-nigh exhausted young soldier pulled himself forward. It was, therefore, with a feeling of surprise that at last he found himself on the border of the dark spot he had seen before him. The stream was entering a region where trees and rank bushes were growing along its borders. It apparently was a huge swamp to which he had come.

He was more eager now as the thought of Taylor recurred. Had his friend escaped? If he had, then somewhere in the region before him he could be found. Erwin longed to shout, to call for his comrade, but he well knew that any such effort on his part would

be as foolish as it was impossible. His best course would be to go on, he concluded, and be on the lookout for his friend.

Once within the shelter of the brush Erwin staggered to his feet. He was scarcely able to stand. The soft mud into which his feet sank with every advancing step seemed to hold him almost as in a vise. The effort to walk in the stream was almost beyond his strength. Struggling forward he advanced a few yards and then in an attempt to recover himself he fell forward, a low cry escaping his lips as he struck the water.

Suddenly he felt someone grasp his arm and he was assisted to stand. He was not surprised when he heard the low voice of Taylor; indeed, he would not have cared very much, he thought, if it had been Uncle Sam or even Lieutenant Evans that had spoken to him. He was too exhausted to realize fully what the rescue meant.

“I’ve been waiting for you,” whispered Taylor encouragingly. “I’ve had a good rest here on the knee of this old cypress root. I knew you couldn’t pass me, but I’m glad you’ve come.”

As Erwin was unable to reply, Taylor assisted him to the place which he himself had recently occupied. For a time neither spoke, while Taylor waited for his friend to recover a little from his struggles.

“Erwin,” he whispered at last, “can you go on a little further now?”

“Can’t we try the bank? The mud in the bottom of the creek is deep.”

“I’ve been a little way down the stream,” said Taylor. “I came back to wait for you. There’s a clump of trees beyond the swamp. If you could wade till we came to them—”

“I’ll try it,” said Erwin.

“Good! We don’t want to leave any tracks if we can help it. Did any one see you?”

“I don’t think so. I broke a branch near the guard and that roused him a little. He took his gun and started toward me.”

“He didn’t see you, though?” demanded Taylor eagerly.

“I don’t think he did. He didn’t follow me anyway.”

“Good. Now if we can only dodge the master of the hounds and his dogs! We’ve

done well, but we'll have to use all the strength we've got to get away from the bloodhounds. They make the rounds of the pen every night, you know, and twice every day."

"Come on!" said Erwin quickly. The reference to the dogs had served to rouse him, just as Taylor had hoped it would do.

Together the two boys started. They had not gone far, however, before it became evident that for a time at least the stream was impassable. The mud was softer and deeper, and progress in it was soon so difficult that both decided to try the left bank. Time now was almost as important as distance.

The boys found the banks firm in places and both made more rapid progress. The moon had risen by this time and in its light they were enabled to see the way before them.

"What's that?" suddenly whispered Erwin when they had halted a moment for rest. "What's that? What's that?" he repeated hoarsely.

Taylor was silent for a moment before he responded. Far away could be heard the

baying of dogs. Whether the weird cry indicated that the escape of the two boys had been discovered and that men and dogs were in pursuit or whether it merely indicated the nightly rounds of the "master of the hounds," as the man in charge of the fierce pack was known, it was impossible to decide. The sound, however, was distinct, although it indicated that the bloodhounds were not near.

"We must take to the creek again, Erwin," whispered Taylor.

Breathlessly Erwin followed his friend into the stream. Difficult as the way was, it still was their sole hope if the dogs were searching for them. As the boys struggled forward they soon found the bed of the creek was becoming somewhat firmer. Broken branches from overhanging trees, gnarled roots in the mud, however, added to the difficulties and sufferings of the desperate young soldiers. Every step was one of pain. There was no protection from the pointed sticks upon which their feet frequently were placed.

For a time the boys bent all their energies

upon flight. They had not advanced very far, however, before the cry of the dogs was heard again. This time the terrifying sound plainly was nearer.

“I don’t see how they got the scent,” muttered Taylor. “But they’re after us, that’s plain. We must do something!”

“What?” inquired Erwin hopelessly.

“Hark!” whispered Taylor. “What’s that in the woods?”

A moment later there was no need of explanation, for both boys were able to perceive the cause of the startling sound among the neighboring trees.

CHAPTER X

THE MASTER OF THE HOUNDS

IN the dim light two huge dogs were bay-
ing and frantically running about the bank.
That the boys had been discovered both the
young prisoners were convinced.

“Crouch! Keep behind the tree! Don’t
speak,” whispered Taylor excitedly.

Clinging tightly to the long root, both boys
drew closer to the huge trunk of the cypress
tree. In spite of their fears both, however,
were peering at the frantic hounds which
were baying in tones that added to the ter-
ror of the desperate young soldiers. Ap-
parently the end of their efforts to escape
had come. The dogs must have gained their
scent along the bank upon which the boys
had made their way for a short distance.

As yet, neither of the two dogs had ven-
tured into the water. Both Taylor and Er-
win could see the huge brutes in their excite-
ment. Creeping close to the border the dogs

lifted their heads and howled in a manner that was terrifying to the trembling boys. Stories of prisoners in their attempts to escape being torn by the savage packs recurred to the crouching young soldiers. Perhaps their turn had now come. Not a word was spoken as the boys peered at the frantic hounds. Both were aware what was likely to befall within a few minutes.

In a brief time the master of the hounds was seen approaching the place where his dogs were baying. The man was mounted upon a mule which with difficulty was making its way over the soft and marshy ground. As the man leaped from the back of the animal he was riding the excitement of the two dogs was redoubled. They leaped upon the man and then turned frantically to the shore and their deep-mouthed baying was mingled with growls and yelps that seemed to Erwin and Taylor the most fearful sounds they had ever heard. Even the roar of cannon in battle or the reports of rifles were as nothing compared with the terrifying threats of the savage brutes. In their weakened condition

both boys had slight hope now of escaping the fangs of the dogs before them.

“What is it, Judy? Have yo’ found ’em, Judas?” exclaimed the master of the hounds as he approached his dogs.

For a moment the noise was even louder than it had been before. Whining, snarling, yelping, baying, the two dogs darted to the shore and it seemed as if both were about to leap into the stream. A low word from their master quieted them in a measure as the man stood peering into the darkness. He himself could be seen by the trembling boys, and there was still a faint hope in their minds that the great tree to whose roots they were clinging might conceal them from his sight.

“We-uns have got yo’ now!” called the man. “Come in ouden that!”

Whether or not the man really could see them neither of the boys knew. Both, however, remained where they were, drawing closer to the huge root and still peering around its border at the sight before them.

“Come in ouden that!” called the man

once more. "It's your last chance before I send the dogs in after yo'-all!"

Still neither of the boys moved from his position and both were silently watching the scene before them. The dogs had become more quiet while their master was speaking. Both were crouching at his feet and looking up into his face as if they were only awaiting his word to rush into the muddy stream and tear the men, whom they could see if their master could not, limb from limb.

Suddenly the man drew a revolver from his hip pocket and fired twice at the tree behind which the boys were crouching. The thud of the bullets as they struck was plainly heard by the desperate boys and both were startled by the sudden act of the man on the bank.

"Now will yo'-all come outen that?" called the man savagely. "That's warnin' number one. Come out an' I'll protect yo'-all. If you wait there I'll send in the dogs. Speak up so't I kin heah yo'-all! Are yo' a comin'? I'll give yo' till I count five an' after that I'll let loose the dawgs."

Taylor reached up and pressed the arm

of his companion to let him know that no response to the demand was to be made.

The silence of the night was unbroken save by the whimperings of the dogs. The figure of the waiting master of the hounds was clearly outlined in the moonlight. It was manifest that he had slight fear of being the target for the bullets of an unseen enemy. For a brief time the man was silent and motionless. Then turning to his dogs he exclaimed savagely, "Go get 'em! Drive 'em out! Tear th' Yanks to pieces, Judas! Bite 'em, Judy!"

With a growl so loud and fierce that it was startling to the watching boys, the two dogs darted again to the shore. One of them leaped into the stream but the other hesitated after several false starts. Plainly it did not desire any close contact with the dark and forbidding stream.

"What d'ye mean, Judas?" roared the master. "Afraid, be ye? I'll give yo' somethin' worth being scart by," he added, as he laid the whip, which he was holding in his right hand, many times upon the cowering brute. A growl, a scream of pain, a chal-

lenge followed and the dog turned and leaped into the water, following its companion, which now was nearing the place where the two boys were hiding.

Already at Taylor's whispered word Erwin had drawn himself farther up the twisted root and was well above the water. He was still sheltered by the trunk of the tree, however, and unless the man on the bank had seen him, he was in no great danger from the pistol. Taylor had climbed into the place which his friend had vacated, but as he looked down he was by no means convinced that he was far enough above the water to make him safe from the fangs of the dogs.

The noise of the approaching brutes was plainly heard. The dogs were splashing in the muddy stream, but they were not barking or growling now. Their every effort apparently was to gain the place where the boys were seated. One of the dogs was in advance of the other and in a brief time it gained the foot of the tree.

Without hesitating a moment, the savage brute clambered up the interlaced roots. The darkness could not hide its gleaming eyes.

Taylor almost believed that he could feel the hot breath of the savage Judy. He was holding in readiness the stout club which he had secured when he had first entered the swamp, and this was his sole defense. As the dog leaped Taylor thrust the end of his club into the open jaws. The dog instantly seized the weapon in its teeth, but at that moment its feet slipped upon the slippery roots and it fell, still clinging tenaciously to the club. The shock almost drew Taylor from his seat and to prevent himself from falling he was compelled to let go his grasp on the club. He was now without any protection from the assaults of the savage brute and in a moment the other dog would join in the attack. The splash of the dog, which had seized the club, as it slipped and fell into the water, was followed by the sounds that Judas made as he now rushed to the assistance of his mate.

The plight of the boys was terrible now. Erwin seated above his friend was powerless to assist him, although he leaned forward, striving to draw Taylor farther up on the twisted root. All thoughts of the man on the bank for the moment were ignored as

the boys awaited the next rush of the savage brutes below them.

Growling and snarling, the two dogs together attempted to gain a foothold on the tangled roots beneath the large root on which the boys were seated. The fierce rush of the dogs together sent both yelping once more into the muddy stream. Fortunately for the young soldiers there was but one place by which the dogs could climb. On every side of the tree except the one where the boys were seated, no exposed roots could be seen. Doubtless the tree had been partly torn from its hold in some storm and the upturned root was left exposed a few feet above the stream.

Once more the dogs rushed together in their efforts to seize the crouching boys and again the impact sent both brutes snarling into the water again. One of them yelped with pain, evidently in its fall having struck some sharp point of a projecting root or branch. There was no delay, however, in their onslaughts, and this time Judy managed to secure a foothold and in a moment seized the bottom of Taylor's trousers in her teeth.

The torn clothing parted and the dog fell back, carrying with her in her fall the piece of cloth which had not been strong enough to endure the strain.

Before the dog could regain her place, Judas had leaped upon the mass of roots and with wide open jaws was almost upon Taylor, who had drawn back as far as his seat on the root permitted.

“Hang on to me, Erwin!” whispered Taylor.

Erwin did not reply, but reaching forward, he thrust one arm under his friend’s left shoulder. With his right arm Erwin clung to the huge root above him.

Already Taylor had slipped his torn jacket from its place and was holding it in front of him. As the dog seized the garment in his teeth Taylor hastily threw the sleeves about the dog’s neck and drew them tight. At that very moment Judy leaped to aid her mate, but the force with which she struck him in her efforts to obtain a foothold threw her from the mass of roots and left Judas suspended in the air with the sleeves of Taylor’s coat wrapped tightly around his neck.

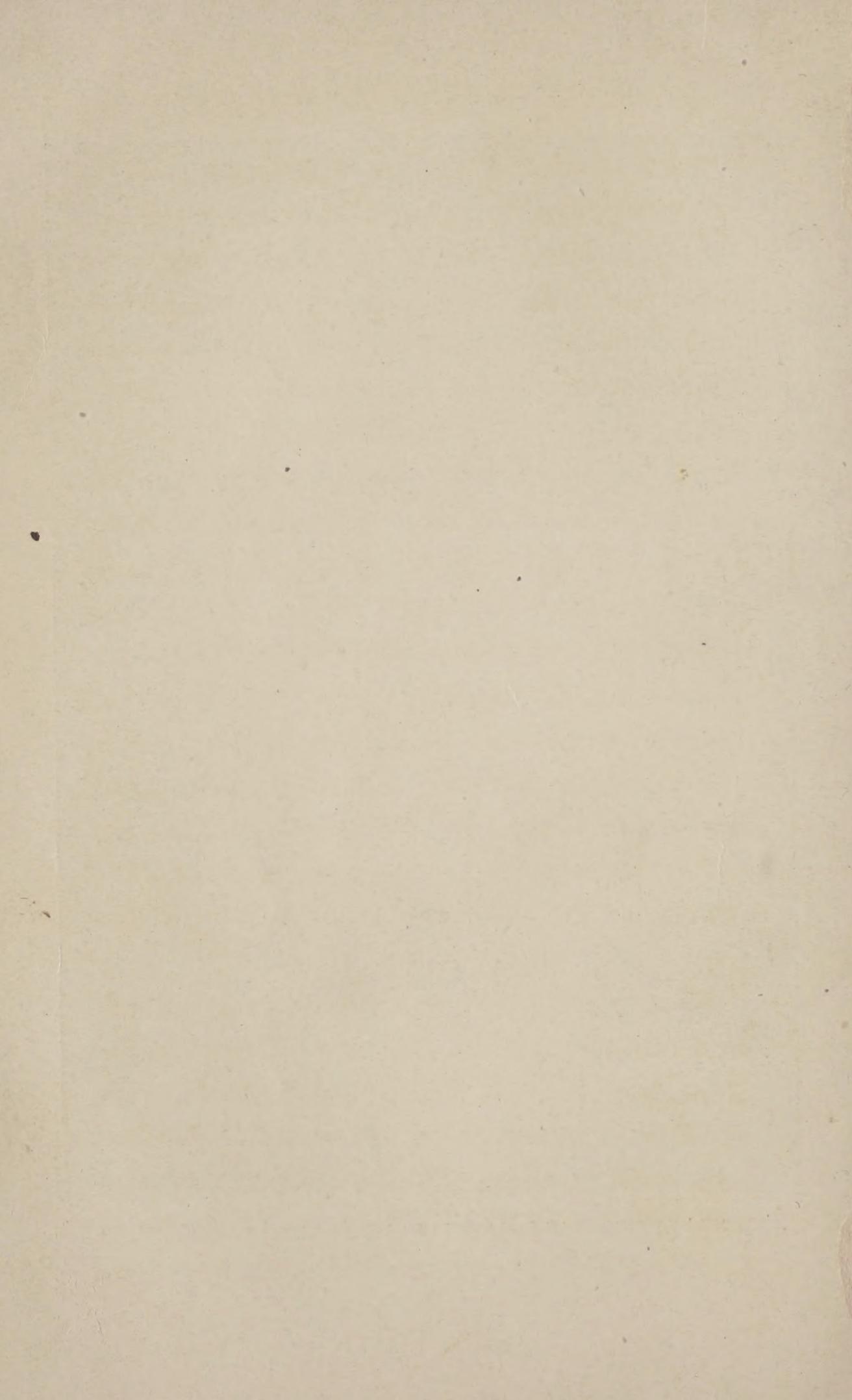
The fall of the heavy brute almost dragged Taylor from his place, but in some way he contrived to maintain his grasp on the sleeves, which he brought quickly together and held with both hands. The sound of wheezing which came from the throat of the suspended dog plainly showed that the brute was choking.

“Hold me, Erwin. Hold tight!” whispered Taylor savagely, as he braced his feet and threw one arm around the root in such a manner that he still held to the coat-sleeves with both hands. The heavy dog was scrambling desperately. The weight was so great that Taylor was almost compelled to let go his hold. The feet of the dog touched the tangled mass of roots and almost permitted him to gain a foothold. The noise of the struggle could be plainly heard. Realizing that something was wrong, or that a desperate conflict of some kind was being fought in the darkness of the stream, the man on shore shouted his words of encouragement to his dogs—“Get 'em, Judy! Tear 'em up! Bite 'em! Go on!”

Mindful of the call, Judy leaped again, but



THE HEAVY DOG WAS SCRAMBLING DESPERATELY. — *Page 134.*



her feet touched the mass of roots just as her mate had almost regained a foothold. Once more the force of the impact sent both dogs from the place, but by a desperate effort Taylor contrived to retain his hold and the huge brute still was hanging in the air.

Taylor's arms were trembling in his efforts. Perspiration was rolling in streams down his face. Erwin, too, was still clinging to his friend's shoulders. At times it almost seemed to Taylor that his arms were being pulled from their sockets by the heavy weight he was holding. The frantic struggles of the choking hound continued. Again and again Judy leaped to the aid of her mate, but every time her efforts resulted in her failure to secure a place on the roots and prevented the other dog from gaining even a foothold.

How long Taylor would have been able to continue the unequal struggle he never knew. Repeatedly he felt that he must let go. His strength was not equal to the task. He was almost in despair when he suddenly became aware that the dog's efforts were becoming less violent. The sound of its wheezing and

choking was less plainly heard. Encouraged by the indication that the end could not be far away, the desperate young soldier braced himself anew and still held on. The other dog, in nowise discouraged, leaped again and again upon the narrow roots, only to be thrown back herself with every attempt and to send the body of her mate away from his only help.

At last the struggles of the choking dog ceased. The heavy weight of the body pulled steadily but there were no longer any efforts to scramble upon the roots of the tree. Swinging the motionless body into such a position that it would be impossible for the other dog to leap upon the place, Taylor still held the coat-sleeves tightly drawn about the neck of the brute, relying to a certain extent upon the weight of the body itself to assist him.

Suddenly there was a whimper from Judy. Before either Taylor or Erwin was fully aware of what had occurred, the sounds of splashing heard in the stream indicated that the dog had turned away and was making her way to the bank.

CHAPTER XI

A HALT

THE relief that came with the retreat of the hound was so great that for a moment the two boys, almost exhausted by their struggles, gazed at each other as if they could not believe the contest really was ended. The splashing of the dog could be plainly heard as it made its way to the bank. A moment later its cries arose when its brutal master lashed the dog savagely, again and again ordering it back into the stream.

The bloodhound, however, despite blows and kicks, was not to be induced to enter the water again. It crouched and whimpered and whined on the shore. Once the boys thought it was about to plunge into the stream, but cowering, it turned and crawled back toward its master—its howls of pain showing plainly the treatment it was receiving.

Apparently convinced at last that all attempts to drive Judy again into the marsh were fruitless, the master of the hounds stopped and peering into the shadows whistled and called to the dog that had not returned. "Heah yo', Judas! Come back heah, yo' rascal! Come heah! Come heah!"

The call served to arouse Judy as no blows had done. The dog, growling and whimpering, stood beside her master and for an instant seemed to be on the point of going to the aid of her lost mate. She did not step into the water, however, not even when her master repeated his call, as he did several times, to Judas, who had failed to return.

Suddenly the man mounted his mule and departed from the place. The boys were able to see him as he rode across the open fields, beating his steed savagely as he urged it to its utmost speed. The departure was so unexpected that it was well-nigh startling to the watching boys, who were scarcely able to trust the evidences of their own eyes. And yet the man was in plain sight until he disappeared amidst the shadows of some tall pine trees far back from the stream.

“Come on,” whispered Taylor to his companion. “We must get away.”

“The dog is still on the bank,” suggested Erwin.

“Yes. That means the man is coming back. We must leave before he comes. We haven’t a minute to lose. Come! Come on!”

Taylor at once slid from his position on the root of the tree into the water. Slowly and painfully Erwin followed his friend’s example, but he was too weary to question him when Taylor led the way to the bank opposite that on which the hound was waiting.

The appearance of the boys was greeted by frantic yelps from the dog. For a time it seemed as if she were about to leap into the muddy stream in pursuit of them, but she kept carefully to the shore even when the boys gained the bank on the opposite side.

Taylor did not hesitate a moment. As soon as his companion joined him the tall young soldier turned to lead the way directly back toward the camp from which they had escaped. Even the strange action of Taylor was not questioned by Erwin, who followed

obediently, and as well as his exhausted condition permitted. The trees and banks were all confused before him as he stumbled forward. Every act seemed to be mechanical. His hands and feet were almost without feeling. A cloud seemed to rest upon the ground over which he was passing.

How far Taylor had led the way he did not know, when suddenly the direction of the flight was changed by the leader. Once more Taylor slipped into the stream and began to move back in the direction of the place from which they had come. Every step was torture. The sharp points of the fallen branches in the bed of the stream tore or lacerated Erwin's feet. He frequently stumbled and fell forward into the filthy water, but each time to be assisted to rise by Taylor, whose strength apparently was far from being gone. The entire experience was so like that of an evil dream that Erwin at times wondered if he really was awake.

In a brief time the boys passed the huge upturned cypress which had provided a shelter for them in the attack by the two hounds. Here Taylor paused a moment and listened

intently while he peered at the shore before him. Not even the dog could now be seen. Silence rested over the entire region.

The delay at the tree was brief and speedily the flight was resumed.

Following the course of the stream the boys made their way forward. Again and again Taylor was compelled to stop and lift his friend who had fallen. Almost savagely the young leader urged his comrade on. How far they had gone neither was aware, when at last it was painfully evident that Erwin's strength was exhausted. He was deaf now to pleadings or threats. Human nature could do no more.

Almost in despair, Taylor peered at the bushes along the banks. Motionless, silent, grim—they seemed to be conscious of the plight of the desperate boys. Was no help to be found anywhere? Were all the efforts to escape to be vain?

Suddenly Taylor uttered a low exclamation and leaving the side of his friend turned quickly toward some brush that was hanging over the water. Even then his actions failed to arouse Erwin, who was hardly able to

stand erect in the place where he had been left. He did not call, he scarcely glanced at Taylor as his friend darted toward the bushes.

A moment afterward when Taylor returned he was poling a small, flat-bottomed boat he had discovered concealed underneath the brush. For a moment the sight of his friend's discovery aroused a brief interest on Erwin's part. Obediently he did as he was told when Taylor lifting him by the arms assisted Erwin into the punt.

"Now lie down," whispered Taylor excitedly. "Lie flat on your back! That's right!" he added, as Erwin almost fell upon the bottom of the boat. "Keep quiet and I'll soon have us both well out of this."

The warning was scarcely needed, for Erwin was soon asleep. Not even the peril in which they still were or the brighter prospect of escape which the finding of the little punt had aroused was sufficient to keep open the eyes of the exhausted young soldier.

Instantly Taylor began to pole the ungainly craft. Progress was still slow because frequently the boat was aground in

the soft mud or held fast by the interlacing roots that abounded in the bed of the stream. Still, it was progress and the thought was inspiring. Best of all, too, was the knowledge that the boat left slight traces of its movements. Every foot now meant an added distance between the escaping prisoners and the prison pen from which they had fled.

The hours passed slowly and at times even the iron muscles of Taylor demanded rest. At such times he listened for sounds of pursuit. The distant baying of hounds was what he feared most of all. The moon indicated that the night was well gone. The coming of the morning would demand a change in their plans. Food, too, and water to drink must be secured. Already Taylor's lips were parched and his arms were trembling under the strain of the poling.

Still the determined boy pushed the crude boat forward. His progress in places was comparatively rapid. In others he was held back by roots and his utmost strength was required to free the boat from the tangled mass.

At last the first faint streaks of the dawn appeared. Taylor glanced down at Erwin, who still was sleeping on the bottom of the boat. The time had come when a change in their plans was imperative. Food and drink presented problems that no longer could be evaded.

For a moment Taylor hesitated. Should he send his boat ashore and arouse his sleeping companion? Their peril might be increased by any attempt to advance in the daytime and the coming day was not to be endured without food and drink of some kind. The light in the eastern sky was becoming brighter. Soon sunrise would be at hand and with its appearance new and perhaps more serious problems must be faced.

Taylor slowly guided the little boat to the shore where the rank bushes were growing far out over the water. There he pushed the punt beneath the overhanging branches, glanced again at his sleeping friend, placed the pole carefully on the bottom and then stepped ashore. If Erwin by any chance was awakened during his absence the sight of the pole as well as the position of the boat, he

thought, would at once inform him of the fact that his friend had departed but had not deserted. Unquestionably Erwin would await his return. Nor did Taylor plan to be gone long. His purpose now was to discover what might be near the little stream. Stepping cautiously ashore, the young soldier peered about him in the dawning light.

When Taylor had withdrawn from the bank he found himself on the borders of a great cornfield. Much of the crop had been cut, but the high stalks still standing gave almost the appearance of sentinels waving their arms in warning. Loose piles of stalks that had been cut were also to be seen here and there in the field. In the distance what looked like low huts suggested the presence of the quarters of negroes. He turned to look for the "big house" of the proprietors of the plantation—for such he judged the land to be. A mass of high trees in the distance might surround such a place, he thought. Glancing again at the low buildings he had already seen across the field and concluding that they were far enough from the residence, which perhaps was concealed

by the trees, to enable him to gain them without being discovered, he began to make his way across the cornfield.

He was proceeding cautiously across the field, for the fear of discovery was still strong upon him. Frequently he paused to peer all about him to make certain his movements were not observed. He darted from one pile of cornstalks to another, stopping at each to look over the ground before he advanced further.

Taylor had proceeded half the distance across the field, which he estimated covered at least fifteen acres, when he abruptly stopped. Approaching from the huts was a man. The young soldier stared excitedly at the moving figure and at once decided that he was not mistaken. There was another man besides himself in the cornfield and without question he was coming toward him. Had he himself been seen? The question was uppermost in the young soldier's thoughts as he fled to the shelter of a nearby pile of cornstalks. Crouching behind it he peered forth at the stranger. The light was not yet clear enough to enable Taylor to perceive who or

what the man was. If he himself had not been seen, then his safest course, Taylor decided, was to remain in hiding until he had ascertained who the other man was and what he was doing in the field at that early hour.

The approaching man certainly was acting strangely, Taylor observed. At intervals the man stopped and flung his arms about him or extended them in an attitude of prayer or as if he were beseeching some one. No other person was to be seen in the field, however, and Taylor's perplexity increased as the man approached the hiding place.

As the man drew nearer, Taylor became aware that the stranger was a young negro—apparently not much older than he. The negro's actions were strange, too, and different from those in which he had at first engaged. He was peering about him almost as if he was expecting to find someone.

The first thought in Taylor's mind as he excitedly watched the approaching negro was that he himself must have been seen. Still, the black man did not turn directly toward Taylor's place of concealment. He was not more than twenty feet away now. Suddenly

Taylor, acting upon an impulse that had seized upon him, stepped from behind the stalks and in a low voice hailed the young negro.

“Are you looking for me?” called Taylor.

The black man stopped abruptly and in terror gazed at the unexpected sight. His teeth were chattering in his fright and for an instant Taylor expected to see the negro turn and flee.

“Are you looking for me?” Taylor again called quietly.

“Who d-d-dat?” stammered the terrified black man.

“A friend.”

“Is y-y-o de man what mas’ Tom done sent?”

“Did he tell you to meet me here?”

“Y-yas, suh.”

“Well, here I am.’

“Y-y-yas, suh, Ah see yo’ is, suh.”

“Come up nearer. I can’t talk to you so far away,” suggested Taylor.

The negro reluctantly did as he was bidden, but a nearer view of the young soldier apparently increased instead of relieving his

alarm. He gazed at Taylor in manifest terror. The light of the dawn was stronger now and the young soldier could see that the negro's eyes were rolling and his body was trembling. The sight caused Taylor to laugh, but his feeling of amusement instantly departed when the negro with a scream turned and fled so swiftly across the cornfield that in a brief time he disappeared from sight.

CHAPTER XII

THE CABIN

BEFORE Taylor was able to discover the cause of the sudden departure of the negro, the black man had disappeared from sight and the young soldier was left alone in the cornfield. The feeling of amusement which the terror of his visitor at first had aroused now gave place to one of perplexity. What was to be done? The sun was even now creeping above the eastern horizon. In a brief time day would be at hand. The increasing light would render his position still more perilous and Taylor looked all about him, hoping to discover some solution to his perplexing problem.

Behind the clump of trees in the distance he could now see the outlines of the large rambling white house which doubtless was the mansion of the proprietor of the plantation. Not far from the house were straggling barns, and beyond them were the white-

washed cabins—the abodes of the negroes. As yet not a man was to be seen about the place.

The conditions soon would be different, Taylor thought. How far he was from the prison camp he had no means of knowing. If he were to judge by his feelings and the appearance of his blistered hands, he and Erwin might have come many miles in their flight. He was not sanguine, however, that they were beyond the possibility of pursuit. In the fear which the thought aroused, Taylor decided at once to make his way to the cabins, which were not more than a hundred yards away. He must find help, he must trust some one and the negroes certainly would be less likely to refuse him aid than would the people dwelling in the “mansion.”

Instantly deciding to adopt the suggestion, Taylor at once began to walk toward the low cabins. He was still fearful that his movements might be seen by his foes and accordingly ran from one pile of cornstalks to another, stopping a moment at each to make certain he had not been discovered. In spite

of his frequent stops, however, his progress was not slow, and in a brief time he arrived at the place he was seeking.

Boldly advancing to the open door of a cabin near him, he rapped loudly. He could hear some one moving in the rear of the building and in a brief time an old gray-headed negro man appeared in the doorway. As yet Taylor had not selected any plan of action, having decided to trust to circumstances to aid him. The expression of consternation or alarm on the face of the black man at once caused the desperate young soldier to step inside the hut even before he was invited to enter.

“Good morning, Uncle,” said Taylor, trying to speak calmly.

“Mo’nin’, suh,” replied the negro dubiously.

“Can you give me some breakfast?”

“Ah dunno, suh. Ah reck’n Ah—”

“That’s good of you,” broke in Taylor quickly. “You see I didn’t want to disturb the people in the big house. It’s too early to do that. I knew you would be stirring, so I stopped here. I’m almost starved and

if you can get me something to eat right away I'll be grateful."

The old colored man turned questioningly to the doorway in the rear of the room, and, glancing in the direction, Taylor saw a large black woman standing there apparently regarding him with not very friendly feelings.

"Good morning," exclaimed Taylor. "I was just explaining to your—your husband," he added after a slight hesitation, for the man apparently was much older than the big woman before him. "I was just explaining to him that I was hungry and wanted some breakfast. I don't want to disturb the family in the big house yet."

"Humph!" sniffed the black woman, her hands resting upon her hips and her eyes betraying no friendly interest. "Yo' don' look lak yo' disturb anybody 'ceptin' de crows. Whar yo'-all come fum?"

It was the question Taylor had expected and feared. "You don't want a man to keep on driving Yankee prisoners, do you?" he inquired. "I can't do it any more."

The woman sniffed and did not change her

attitude or position. "How cum yo'-all heah?"

"I told you. I couldn't stand it any longer."

"Yo' run away?"

"Why, yes, after a fashion."

"Wha' foh yo' wan' t' see de white folks den?"

"I haven't seen them yet. I have come to you. Will you help me?"

The negress sniffed disdainfully as she turned to her husband and said, "Dere, now, yo' wuffless, yo' see wha' yo' done! Dey's jes' 'nough co'n meal lef' foh t' mak one lit'l hoecake. Yo' tak' de bread ouden de moufs of de chilluns an' de sufferin' saints t' gib it to trash!"

"Chile! chile!" remonstrated the old negro—

"Do'n 'chile' me, yo' no-'count nigger! Co'se Ah'm goin' t' gib de man er bite. Ah'd gib de debbil wha' he done ask foh. Dis yere man he look lak he some relashun t' de old Sat'n hissself. Dere, now, yo' wuffless 'Rastus, yo' bettah tak' dis yere man ouden de ya'd an' tak' a hoe ter 'im."

The woman turned sharply away and Taylor at once concluded that her tongue was sharper than her feelings toward him and that she was about to prepare him something to eat. Rejoiced at the prospect, he requested the negro man to provide him with some water to drink and then to show him where he might wash.

As if to make partial amends for the scant welcome his wife had given their morning visitor, the old man brought Taylor a gourd filled with water. The young soldier did not return it until it was empty. Never before had water been so sweet to his taste.

Accompanying the black man to the rear of the little log cabin, Taylor found a bucket of water near the corner of the house and at once began his ablutions. His body was coated with mud. As he labored to remove it he understood why his appearance had repelled the wife of 'Rastus. Coatless, hatless, shoeless, his clothing torn and worn, his hair long and unkempt—his appearance of itself would have been sufficient to startle a stranger, but when a thick coating of mud covered even his hands and his face he real-

ized how difficult it would be for any one who saw him to believe that he was anything like what he had represented himself to be.

It was a long time before he re-entered the cabin. As he passed through the doorway the odor of the hoecake which the negress had been preparing seemed to him more tantalizing than any he had ever known. He was ravenously hungry. Perhaps the expression of suffering was more apparent in his face, now that its coating of mud had been removed. At all events, the black woman was less ungracious as she set her hoecake before her guest and watched him, a smile of satisfaction appearing on her face as he fell ravenously upon the food she had prepared.

Suddenly Taylor looked up and said: "I forgot. I don't want to eat everything you have and you told your husband this was all the food you had in your house."

"G'wan wid yo' hoecake, man. Nebber yo' min' wha' Ah done tole 'Rastus. Ah spec' Ah hab ter gib him 'structions er he nebber stop eatin' dis yere hoecake. Heah, come—"

The expression of alarm on Taylor's face

did not escape the woman when her visitor almost started from his seat as a young negro man entered the room. Instantly Taylor perceived that the newcomer was the man he had seen in the cornfield who had fled in terror from his presence. The young negro glanced questioningly at the woman and though Taylor was not able to see what she indicated, yet instantly the bearing and attitude of the man changed. He did not manifest any alarm as he passed through the room. Indeed, Taylor had no difficulty in concluding as he peered at him that the young negro was the son of the woman who was feeding him.

“Ah reck’n yo’-all might lak bacon?” suggested the negress to Taylor.

“I did once,” replied Taylor promptly. “It has been so long since I have tasted any that I am not sure now. I’d like to have a chance to try myself.”

The woman laughed and going to a corner of the room lifted a board in the floor and drew from its hiding place a side of bacon. In a brief time she had cut several slices which she broiled on the fire which was burn-

ing on the stone fireplace and then she placed the steaming viands before her visitor.

“You are good to me,” murmured Taylor, as he once more began to eat ravenously.

Again the woman laughed, as she stood watching her almost famished guest in his eagerness to dispose of the tempting viands which had been set before him.

Almost with remorse Taylor now thought of Erwin whom he had left sleeping the sleep of exhaustion in the punt. He must somehow secure food for his friend, whose plight was far worse than his own. How he was to accomplish this without betraying himself to the friendly negroes was a problem difficult of solution.

At this moment both the young negro and his father re-entered the room.

“How yo'-all lake Camp So'gum?” inquired the younger man.

“I don't like it. I told your mother I couldn't stand it any longer,” said Taylor hastily, striving to ascertain from the expression on the black man's face whether or no he suspected his visitor of being an escaping prisoner.

“Ah don’ reck’n many ob de Yankees lak it.”

“No.”

“Is yo’-all alone?”

“What makes you think I am not?”

“Co’se dey mos’ gen’ly dosen’t ’scape dat er way.”

“Do you think I am a—that I escaped?”

“Ah sho’ly does,” grinned the negro.

“Yo’-all is no sojer wif Mars’ Tom,” suggested the woman.

“What makes you think I am not?”

“Yo’ talks des lak a Yankee.”

“How do you know? Have you ever heard Yankees talk before?”

The young negro grinned, displaying his white teeth, but did not reply.

“Suppose I am a prisoner,” suggested Taylor. “You will help me get away, if I am, won’t you?”

“Yo’ is come ter de right place,” said the woman promptly. There was no question as to her interest and cordiality. In the feeling of relief that came with her words Taylor resolved to tell them more. In a vivid manner he described the life of the prisoners in the

camp. He also described the home from which he had come and told of the sorrow and anxiety there. He also related stories of suffering in other prisons than Camp Sorghum and gradually led up to the story of his own escape with Erwin. When he told of the attack made by the bloodhounds the eyes of his listeners almost gleamed in their excitement.

“Da’s de way wif de dawgs,” said the woman. “Dey is brave when dey is togedder. When dey is des’ one it seems lak dey is sholy de biggest cowards.”

“Then that was why after we killed one the other ran away, was it?” inquired Taylor.

“Yaas, suh. Da’s des’ de way wif ’em all. Dey is terr’ble when dey is in ’er pack, but when dey is des’ one, pears lak dey is pow’ful wuffless, mos’ lak’ Rastus yere.”

The old colored man nodded his head emphatically several times almost as if he received the words of his wife as a compliment.

“How far is Camp Sorghum from here?” asked Taylor.

“Hit’s a right sma’t way, suh,” answered the woman.

“How many miles?”

“Hits des 'bout 's fur as from yere to Mis' Sallie's, Ah reck'n.”

“Have you ever been there?”

“Mis' Sallie's? Bress yo' po' ha't, suh, 'pears lak Ah done—”

“No, to Columbia. To the prison pen,” interrupted Taylor.

“Ah is,” spoke up the young negro promptly. “Ah done went once wif Mas' Tom. Ah seed de sojer men an' de drums an' de guns—”

“Do you know how far it is from here?”

“Ah des' can't say 'dreckly, suh. Ah reck'n hit's a right sma't way.”

Hopeless of learning the distance he and his comrade had come in their escape, Taylor abandoned the effort. He felt reasonably certain that the negroes would not betray him. At once he decided that he must strive to secure some food for Erwin and return to the place where he had left his friend asleep.

“I am sorry I can't pay you for what you have done for me. I haven't a cent on my person. If you will let me have a little food

to take to my friend I'll try sometime to—”

Taylor ceased abruptly as the woman hastily arose and ran to the door. In a moment she returned, her eyes shining in her excitement, as she exclaimed in a fierce whisper, “Yere come Mas’ Tom an’ two sojer men is wif ’im!”

CHAPTER XIII

NEBO'S CUNNING

STARTLED by the words of the negress, Taylor leaped to his feet and looked through the open doorway. Not far away, plainly approaching the cabin, were three men, two of whom were clad in the Confederate uniform, as the woman had said.

The sight of his foes instantly caused Taylor to turn and start toward the rear of the house. Flight from the place would instantly be discovered, as he was well aware, but to remain and meet the three men was not to be thought of. In his excitement the young soldier was eager merely to avoid being discovered where he then was. The future must be met as circumstances might demand.

Before he crossed the room, however, the black woman quickly seizing him by the shoulder, excitedly whispered, "Don' do dat. In yere is de place foh yo'!"

Lifting the trapdoor in the floor she thrust Taylor into the place from which she had taken the bacon that she had prepared for his breakfast. In a brief time the young soldier crowded himself into the narrow space, and the door above him was closed just as the men entered the hut.

For an instant Taylor crouched tremblingly in his hiding place, fearful that he had been seen; but when the three men came into the room he was soon aware that his presence was unknown to the visitors. He could hear what was said and was listening intently.

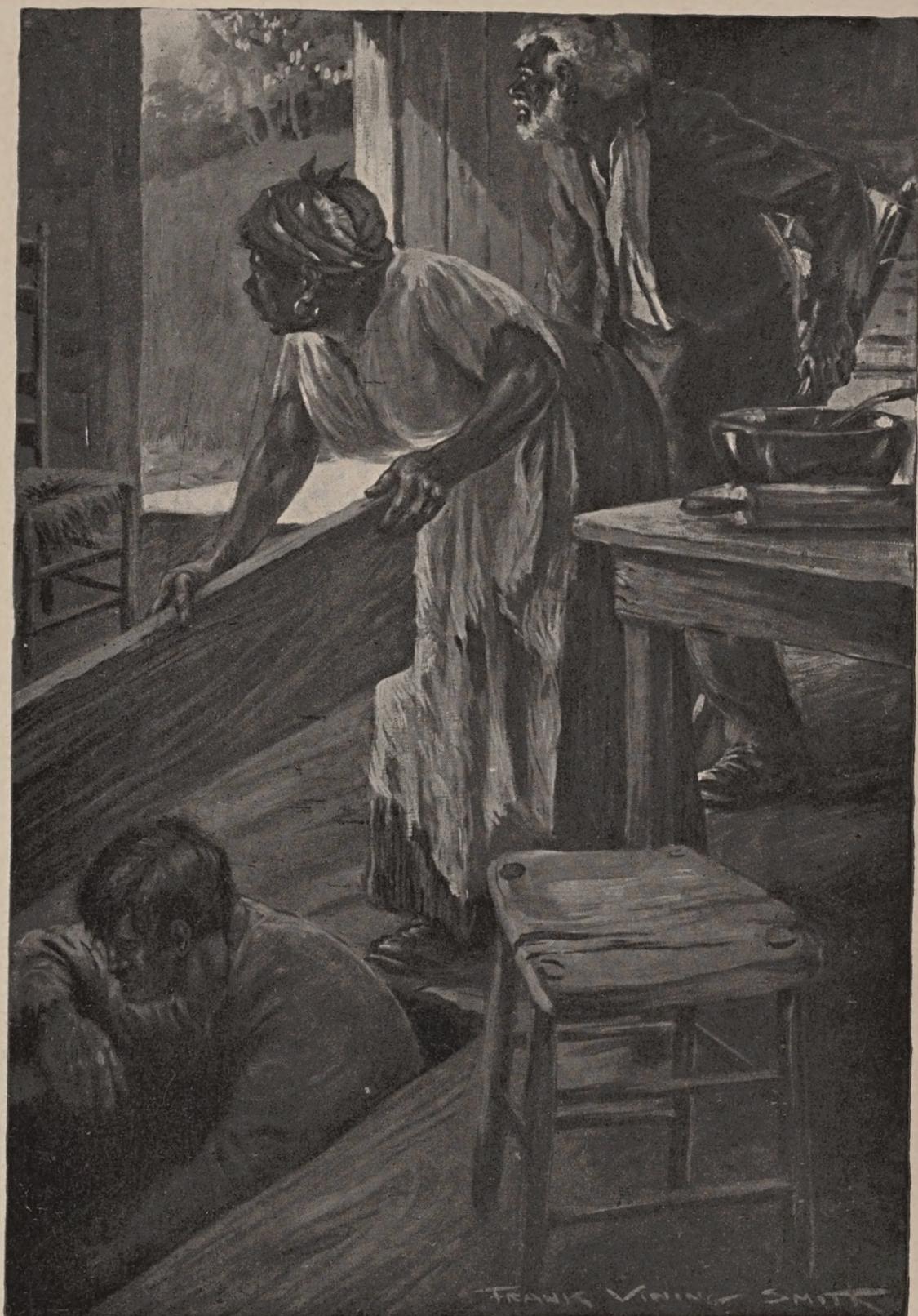
“Good mornin’, Aunt Dinah,” said the man whom the negroes had called “Mas’ Tom.”

“Mo’nin’, Mas’ Tom,” responded the black woman quietly.

“Haven’t seen any prowlin’ Yanks this mornin’, have you, Aunt Dinah?”

“Wha’ foh any dem Yanks come yere?” she demanded sharply.

“I don’t know,” laughed Tom. “Some have got away from the camp and the whole country is on the lookout for them.”



IN A BRIEF TIME THE YOUNG SOLDIER CROWDED HIMSELF INTO
THE NARROW SPACE. — *Page 164.*

“Wha’ foh yo’-all let ’em get away, suh?”

“I didn’t let them. They helped themselves. They’ll be found, though; they always are. My friends and I are looking about the plantation just to make sure there aren’t any hidin’ hereabout. I want to protect my people. Some of the Yanks have cloven feet and sharp ears. If they come yere they might take you right up the chimney with ’em.”

“Ah reck’n de Yanks ’d have er right sma’t load ter carry if dey tried ter take me,” sniffed Dinah.

“I reckon any one ’d have his hands full,” laughed the young man. “Now, Aunt Dinah, have you seen any Yanks about our place yere?”

“Dis mo’nin’?”

“Yes, or any time.”

“Does dey hab cloven feet?”

“Usually; but you-all can’t be sure, because their shoes might hide ’em.”

“Ah reck’n Ah ain’t seen no Yanks dis yere day. ’Pears lak Ah done see some ’nodder day, Mas’ Tom.”

“When was that?”

“Ah caint disremembah. 'Pears lak hit was las' week.”

“Where did you see them? What were they doing?”

“Dey was runnin', suh. Runnin' from de dawgs.”

“Did they stop yere?”

“'Deed dey didn't,” sniffed Aunt Dinah. “Wha' foh dey stop yere w'en Ah had de rollin'pin in m' han's?”

“You say you haven't seen any strange men this mornin'?” demanded Tom somewhat impatiently.

“No, suh. Is yo' heah enny, 'Rastus?” Dinah demanded of her husband, who had been silent throughout the interview.

“No, suh. No, suh,” mumbled the negro. “'Pears lak Ah don' see nothin' no mo'. Not eben er hoecake,” he added disconsolately.

“Where's Nebo?” inquired the young man suddenly, as he apparently for the first time became aware that Aunt Dinah's son was not in the cabin.

“Dat Nebo he's mos' wuffless es white

trash," said the black woman in apparent scorn. "Caint depen' on him no mo', Mas' Tom."

"Why not?"

"He's de mos' obsiquies nigger on de place. Jes' now he's so full ob de notion what he got dat Mas' Tom is 'pendin' on him ter pint de way fer de white fo'ks what Mas' Tom's done spectin', dat he caint do er 'nodder thing. His po' pap's all doubled hup wif de misery. 'Rastus nebber was so no count as he's been since dis yere las' 'tack wha's took him. Las' night Ah had ter get de rabbit's foot an' de conjure-weed—"

"Yes. Yes, Aunt Dinah. That's all right. But where is Nebo now?"

"Ah don' tole yo', Mas' Tom, hit's shore strange 'bout dat Nebo Macedonia Petrol'um. He's de mos' no-'count nigger in all de pahts yere 'bout. Wha' wif his new coon dawg—"

"But where is he now?"

"Ah dunno, Mas' Tom. Ah clar ter goodness ef yo'-all fin' him Ah wish yo'd gib him er whippin' or set de dawgs on 'im er do so'ffin wha'll mak dat sma't Ellick des sta't his lazy bones ter de woodpile. He des leab

his po' ma' ter cut de wood an' wait on 'Rastus an' try ter mak er hoecake w'en der des aint er speck er co'n meal ter be had, Mas' Tom. Howcome 'spectable woman lak me ter hab sech a good-fo'-nothing wuffless fo' a son beats me. 'Pears lak he mos' resemble-ful ob 'Rastus—"

"Have you seen any strangers this mornin'?" interrupted the young man sharply.

"No, suh. Ah ain' seen no w'ite folks."

"Sure?"

"Das de truf, Mas' Tom." Aunt Dinah spoke soberly now, realizing that her young master's growing impatience was no longer to be ignored.

"Have you seen any, 'Rastus?" Tom demanded of the old colored man.

"Ah ain' been outen de do' dis mawnin'."

"No one has come yere?"

"Ah ain' seen er soul, Mas' Tom. Wha' kin' er man was hit, Mas' Tom, wha' yo'-all was spectin' foh ter fin'?"

"Anybody. We'll take a look around the cabins," said Tom to his companions. In apparent indifference Aunt Dinah continued in

her tasks in the room, barely glancing at the three men, who she was aware were peering about them almost as if they expected to find some place of concealment in the room itself. 'Rastus was groaning with a fresh attack of his "misery" and Nebo was nowhere to be seen.

Apparently satisfied that no Yankee was hidden in the cabin, the three men speedily departed, the young white man first bidding Aunt Dinah to send her son to the "big house" as soon as he returned.

The indifference of 'Rastus and the tasks of his wife were speedily forgotten at the departure of the men as they both with shining eyes watched the trio as they went among the cabins. Once Aunt Dinah lifted the trap-door in the floor a few inches and leaning low, whispered, "Yo' is all right. Ah'll let yo' know ef de sojers come back ergain." The door was instantly restored to its place before Taylor could reply.

A half hour afterward Tom and his companions returned. For a moment they stood outside the cabin, talking earnestly together,

but in such low tones that even Aunt Dinah with all her efforts was not able to hear what was said.

Apparently one of the soldiers had his way, for all three men turned and started across the cornfield, walking toward the creek in the very direction of the place where Taylor had left his exhausted companion. The sight of the departing men at once aroused a keen excitement in the mind of Aunt Dinah. Rushing to the trapdoor she lifted it and called sharply to Taylor: "Dey's gone ter de creek."

Cramped in his narrow quarters, Taylor was obliged to grasp the extended hand of the negress before he could regain a place on the floor. The woman's words had been sufficiently disturbing to cause him to dart to the door. Peering cautiously from his shelter, Taylor could see the men as they apparently were moving toward the one place which above all others he was eager for them to avoid.

"They are going straight to the boat!" he said savagely.

"Wha' boat?"

“The punt. My friend is in it. It’s under the bushes on the bank.”

“Whar’s dat Nebo?” said Aunt Dinah, at once aroused by Taylor’s words. “He’s so full er his notion er makin’ er preacher outen hisself he des wuffless! Shoutin’ an’ rollin’ his eyes! Seem lak he’s too full er his words ter git ennything outen his mouf. Dey’s no trubble in puttin’ things inter hit. He’s de mos’ pow’fulest eater in de land! Here yo’ Nebo!” she called as she stepped hastily to the back door. “Come yere outen dat! Yo’ heah me? Come yere!”

Almost as if he had risen from the ground, Nebo suddenly appeared at the door. “Yo’-all see Mas’ Tom an’ his sojer men?” demanded the black woman. “Well, hit’s time foh yo’-all ter git erwake. Yo’ heah me? Yo’ follow wif Mas’ Tom an’ yo’ git ’im ter go somewhar else. Whar is de boat?” she suddenly demanded as she turned to Taylor.

“It’s just at the right of those three big cypress trees. It’s hidden under the bushes that grow out over the water. I don’t believe the men can find it unless Erwin does something to attract their attention. He

didn't know when I left him there. He was asleep."

Taylor was talking rapidly in his excitement, but the woman did not wait for him to say more. Turning to her son she said—"Dere, now, yo' Nebo! De boat's d'rec'ly under de bushes near de cypress trees. Yo' go an' yo' steer Mas' Tom 'way from dat er place. Yo' skeer him wif snakes or yo' begin to preach an' holler. Min'! Yo' git Mas' Tom 'way from dat place or hit'll be de mos' luxuriatinous 'sperience wha' eber come to a no-'count nigger!"

Nebo's air of indifference at once departed and abruptly leaving the house he started swiftly across the cornfield in pursuit of the departing men. His mother and father as well as Taylor were watching the young negro now. Taylor's quiet bearing did not conceal his alarm. He was fearful that some word must have been given the men of the presence of Erwin. They were walking swiftly in the direction of the cypress trees. To the excited young soldier the only explanation of their actions was to be found in the knowledge they must have somehow re-

ceived that a Yankee prisoner was in hiding near the bank of the shallow stream.

In a brief time the young negro overtook the men, who stopped as he approached. After a few hasty words, however, they resumed their way and Nebo accompanied them.

“Dere, now. Don’ yo’ be ’feared!” said Dinah consolingly to Taylor.

“Why not?”

“Bekase dey ain’ no sech pussun on dis yere plantation what caint make Mas’ Tom b’lieve dere ain’ no white man in de punt. Dat Nebo—he’s de mos’ persuadenest preacher in de lan’! He is de mos’ eloquentest dispenseres ob de bes’ words yo’-all ebber heer. Lan’! W’en he’s got der powah yo’ cain ’ear him mos’ hup ter de big house. Yaas, suh, dat Nebo—he’s de one what cain mak Mas’ Tom b’lieve dat de fattes’ chicken in de coop has des ’mitted suincide. Da’s so! Don’ yo’-all be skairt no mo’! Nebo’ll ’ten’ ter Mas’ Tom an’ his friends.”

Taylor was far from being convinced that the vocal powers of Nebo would prevail upon “Mas’ Tom,” or avail to protect Erwin. In

a keen state of anxiety he still watched the men until they were hidden from sight by the bushes on the distant bank of the stream. Apparently, too, they had gone to the very place where he himself had clambered from the mud to the dryer shore. His footprints could still be seen in the mud, Taylor was convinced. The sight of them would lead to further investigation and perhaps to the discovery of his friend whom he had left asleep in the punt beneath the bushes.

And yet it was worse than useless for him to go to Erwin's aid. To expose himself would be but to add to his friend's peril. Striving to restrain himself, Taylor waited, peering from the doorway at the place where the men had disappeared. Every moment he expected to see the men reappear with Erwin helpless in their midst. Dinah's confidence in the craftiness of Nebo failed to allay Taylor's fears. Even his own peril was forgotten as he watched and waited.

How long a time had elapsed when Taylor suddenly was recalled to his own position he never knew. It might have been an hour or three might have passed so far as his own

realization was concerned. Through the back doorway of the cabin Nebo suddenly entered, and as the young negro spoke, every one in the room turned sharply to him.

“Did they find him?” demanded Taylor eagerly.

“Yo’ see hit’s dis way—” began Nebo.

“Did they find him?” interrupted Taylor harshly.

“Das what Ah’m ’splainin’ to yo’-all,” began Nebo. “Hit’s lak dis yere—”

Nebo’s explanation was again interrupted, as his mother, manifestly in terror, now suddenly darted to the rear of the cabin.

CHAPTER XIV

AN IMPROVISED PEST-HOUSE

WHEN Taylor, startled by the unexpected action of Aunt Dinah, glanced hastily at the door he, too, was as alarmed as she. Standing in the doorway was the young white man whom she had called "Mas' Tom." How he had come there without being discovered or what he had in mind to do were both matters of conjecture. At all events he was entering the cabin now and Taylor instantly realized that any attempt to flee from the place was worse than useless.

"You seem to have visitors, Aunt Dinah," said the young man as he entered the room.

"Yaas, Mas' Tom. Yaas, suh. Dat's so. Dis yere white trash done come ter de do' er my house sho's yo' bohn. Whaffor he come, Ah dunno."

"Can't you send him away?"

"Da's jes' wha' foh Ah gwine foh ter sen' ter de big house."

“You want to be rid of him, do you?”

“Ah sholy does, Mas’ Tom.”

“And he won’t go?”

“No, suh. He jes’—”

“Can’t ’Rastus and Nebo drive him away?”

“Dat ’Rastus, he’s took wif de misery. He’s done been mo’nin’ right sma’t all de time. Nebo,” added the black woman, sniffing in apparent indignation, “he’s des no ’count since he’s done been er preachin’.”

“I’ll help you rid yourself of him,” laughed the young white man as he glanced at Taylor.

“Don’ yo’-all bother yo’self wif sich trash, Mas’ Tom. Ah’ll ’ten’ ter him when Ah gets ready.”

“Where did you come from?” demanded the man, suddenly turning to Taylor.

“Most any whar,” drawled Taylor striving to appear indifferent.

“Been in the army?”

“Not very far away from it, suh.”

“Whose army?”

The question was almost impossible for Taylor to answer. So many weeks had

passed since his capture that he knew but little of the whereabouts of the contending forces. The few reports that had filtered through the lines into the prisons he knew were grossly exaggerated. They had chiefly been rumors of overwhelming defeats for his fellow soldiers, but of the activities or of the real positions or moves of the armies themselves not a reliable word had been received. The young soldier was in almost complete ignorance of the present conditions of the great struggle.

“I can’t say as how I was exactly in the army,” drawled Taylor. “What I mean, suh, was that I wasn’t very far away.”

“A camp follower? A hanger-on?”

“Mos’ly, suh,” admitted Taylor humbly.

“Ever been in the Yankee camp?”

“Yo’ mean Camp So’ghum?”

“Yes. Ever been there?”

“I’ve seen it, suh.”

“Never been inside?”

“Not very recently, suh.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Jes’ goin’ to leave.”

“Where you going?”

“I reckon I’ll be goin’ to Columbia. It isn’t mo’ than seven miles to the town, is it?” Taylor arose as if he was about to depart. His heart was beating rapidly in his excitement, but he was doing his utmost to appear calm in his assumed character of a poor white. His general appearance, his torn clothing, his woe-begone face might possibly aid him in his attempt to pass as one of the worthless class, and he was doing his utmost to increase the effect by his drawling tones and his general attitude of indifference. What the young white man really thought of him had not been indicated.

“It’s too far away for you to try to make it now.”

“I reckon I mought try,” suggested Taylor, still moving toward the front door.

“You must come with me now.”

“I reckon I don’ need any help.” Taylor was keenly observing the man before him. He was aware that he could not rely upon any assistance from the negroes in a struggle with “Mas’ Tom.” Help him in other ways they might but not in an effort to overcome their young master. Then, too, the man

might be armed, while Taylor was defenseless. Besides, he was weak from the lack of sleep and the struggles of the preceding night.

“You must come with me,” repeated the young man.

“Where?”

“To the ‘big house’.”

“What for? I don’t want anything at the house.”

“You ask as many questions as if you were a Yankee. Come on.”

There was no escape and shrugging his shoulders Taylor turned to do as he was bidden. When he glanced at Aunt Dinah she appeared to be indifferent to his troubles and already apparently was busy in her household duties. As for the two black men, in her own language they were both “wuffless” and were not to be relied upon for help.

Silently Taylor followed his new leader as the latter turned into the lane that led to the big house. Not a word was spoken by either and in a brief time they mounted the steps of the old mansion. A wide veranda extended about three sides of the great square

house and high columns upheld the roof of the imposing porches. At a distance the building was quite impressive, but a nearer inspection revealed the dilapidated condition of the rambling frame structure.

As Taylor and his companion mounted the steps of the veranda they were met by a young girl whom Taylor at once concluded was a sister of his captor—for such he believed “Mas’ Tom” to be.

The girl’s eyes betrayed her curiosity concerning her brother’s companion and she lightly inquired, “Who’s your friend, Tom?”

“Where’s the lieutenant, sis?” asked Tom, ignoring her question.

“I reckon he’s in the dining-room. He was there a moment ago. It’s mostly ‘room’ and little ‘dining,’ though,” she added, her eyes flashing as she spoke.

Tom at once conducted Taylor to the room where his friend was found seated before the table at a repast of corn bread and bacon.

“Who’s that?” demanded the lieutenant, as he glanced quickly at Taylor.

“You tell me that and then I’ll tell you,” responded Tom. “I’m not certain who he

is. I found him at Aunt Dinah's. I thought I'd take another turn among the 'quarters' after I left you and Ben. Where is Ben now?"

Taylor was confident that Ben was the other young soldier whom he had seen with Tom and the lieutenant at Aunt Dinah's cabin.

"He's down by the creek," replied the lieutenant. "He thought he had found a trail and he wouldn't leave it. I had had enough to last me till breakfast time, so I came back. Who's your man, Tom?"

"You find out. I don't know. Dinah says he's just po' white trash and he says he's been a camp follower. Perhaps you can find out more than I could. I decided to bring him up and let you see him for yourself."

The young Confederate lieutenant at once turned sharply to Taylor and began to question him. To all his queries Taylor gave hesitating replies, striving to speak but little and when he did to use the drawling and clipped words such as he himself had heard from the ignorant hangers-on about the prisons. That he was successful in his efforts

he was not at all confident, for the lieutenant's curiosity apparently was increasing.

"You say you have been to the camp of Yankee prisoners at Columbia?" the young officer asked sharply.

"Yaas, suh."

"When?"

"I reckon I was there a day or two since, suh."

"What were you doing there?"

"Mos' anything. The las' thing I done, suh, was ter help bury a Yank. I reck'n nobody'd do it 'ceptin' me, suh."

"Do what?"

"Bury th' Yank, suh."

"Why not?"

"We-uns is mos'ly afeard o' the smallpox."

"What!" exclaimed Tom. "Had the man died of the smallpox?"

"That was th' repo't."

"Take him away! Don't leave him here a minute longer!" ordered Tom.

Taylor could see that the lieutenant, however, was not so badly frightened as his friend had been by the alarming statement.

Rising from his chair he said to Taylor, "Come with me." Leading the way to the rear of the house, the lieutenant stopped in the open air beneath a huge tree and renewed his questionings. In Taylor's garb and manner there was little to suspect, but the young officer still was not convinced. After a time he said, "You must stay here. I've a notion that you are not just what you are pretending to be. We have had word of some of the Yankees taking French leave from the camp and we're searching for them. You may be one of them for all I know. Tom!" he called suddenly, turning and shouting toward the house. "Tom! Come yere!"

In a moment Tom appeared, though he took pains not to approach very near the suspected prisoner and the lieutenant. "Tom, have you anybody on the plantation that ever had the smallpox?"

"Yes. 'Rastus had it three or four years ago."

"Then put this man in some place where he can be kept to himself and have 'Rastus look after him. Can you depend on 'Rastus?"

It was in his cabin where you found this fellow, wasn't it?"

"It was. But 'Rastus is true and Dinah is more trusty still."

"I'd like to keep this fellow till Lieutenant Evans can see him. He'll be yere right soon. I have my suspicions that this man is playing 'possum. If he is, Evans will know, and if he isn't, it won't do any harm to hold him yere a bit."

"What about the smallpox, Joe?"

"There won't be anything to fear. We'll keep him to himself, and 'Rastus has had it, you say?"

"Yes, 'Rastus has had it," answered Tom dubiously. "We don't want to take any chances, Joe. Don't you reckon we'd better send him on?"

"Not yet," said the lieutenant promptly. "He may be less of a fool than he looks, Tom."

"Tha's what my marm says," suggested Taylor, in his most drawling manner.

Both young men laughed at his words, but Tom at once led the way to a deserted cabin

beyond the negroes' quarters. The house was of logs and contained only one door. Boards had been nailed across the sole window to keep out the rain. Taylor took in all the details of the place by one quick glance and then resumed his former attitude of indifference.

In a brief time 'Rastus was summoned, the door of the cabin was securely nailed fast and the negro was left in charge of the prisoner.

"Now, 'Rastus, if you let that fellow get away," called Tom warningly, as he and his friend departed, "you'll be held responsible. He's coming down with the smallpox. If he gets loose you know what will happen."

"Yaas, suh. Yaas, suh! Ah sholy does, Mas' Tom. Dinah say he's only white trash. Whaffo' yo' keep 'im, Mas' Tom?"

"We shan't keep him very long. Likely he won't be yere more than three or four hours, 'Rastus. You must look out for him. If he tries to get out you call me."

"Ya-a-s, suh," said 'Rastus meekly, as the two young men departed.

Taylor waited impatiently until he was sat-

isfied that the two young men were gone before he inspected his place of confinement. His eyes were somewhat accustomed to the darkness now and he could see that the little building was strong. Escape by the closed window was impossible—it was securely nailed. The door, too, was barred and to break through it was not to be thought of unless 'Rastus would open it. The sole means of escape was by the chimney, but as Taylor peered up it he was by no means convinced that in his weakened condition he would be able to make the ascent.

Approaching the door, he called softly at first and then in louder tones to 'Rastus, "Aren't you going to open the door for me?"

"Caint do hit nohow," responded the negro. "Dey can see from de big house."

Here was a complication Taylor had not thought of and for a moment he was silent.

"'Rastus," he called at last.

"Yaas, suh."

"Did Nebo find my friend down by the creek?"

"No, suh. Nebo foun' de punt an' de pole sho' 'nough, but dey wasn't no man dere. Dey sho'ly wasn't."

CHAPTER XV

THE WORD ON THE BANK

THE statement of 'Rastus was sufficient of itself to increase the excitement under which Taylor already was laboring. He was convinced somehow that the negro had spoken truly and that Erwin had not been found in the punt. Whether Erwin had awakened and finding himself deserted and alone had himself gone ashore, or whether he had discovered the approach of the three men and had found some other place of hiding, Taylor had no means of knowing. In either case, Erwin, ignorant of the events which had occurred since Taylor had left the boat and, unaware, as he must be, of the dangers to be met in the vicinity, was in the midst of many perils. Then, too, Erwin's exhaustion was such that his friend was aware that it would be impossible for him to defend himself in case of attack or to proceed far from the place where the punt had been concealed.

It was now noontime. Taylor's anxiety was so great that he was becoming almost desperate. In case Lieutenant Evans should come, as Tom's friend had predicted, the young officer would at once recognize him, Taylor well knew. No subterfuge, not even the report of smallpox, would deter him from doing his duty. The kindness he had shown the young prisoners—so marked in its contrast with their other experiences, would not avail now. Lieutenant Evans would compel him and Erwin also, if the latter should be found, to return at once to the prison camp.

But how was release from the hut in which he was confined to be obtained? This was his first problem, as Taylor well knew. Help from the watching 'Rastus was not to be expected. To break down the door or remove the boards from the window was also impossible.

In his desperation Taylor looked again at the fireplace. It was loosely built of stones and as the young prisoner stooped and peered up the flue, he could see that it was not difficult to climb to the roof because the stones overlapped and had been loosely laid.

Manifestly the men who had ordered him there had not been planning to place him in close confinement or they would not have selected such a hut for his prison. Doubtless, Taylor thought, his words concerning small-pox had alarmed them to a degree and they had sent him where he was merely to hold him till the arrival of Lieutenant Evans, who would know best what ought to be done in the circumstances.

To meet the lieutenant, however, was just what Taylor was most eager to avoid. In his determination he at once began to climb the chimney. He was careful to avoid all noise as he grasped the projecting flat stones and slowly mounted. His greatest difficulty came when he arrived at the low top of the chimney, which was of brick and so smooth that there were no projecting points to be grasped.

However, by bracing his feet he managed at last to secure a grasp on the top and then cautiously drew himself upward. For a moment he peered at the mansion in the distance. Apparently no one was within sight. Hesitating no longer, he quickly climbed to

the top, then slid to the roof and withdrawing toward the rear dropped to the ground which was not more than eight feet below him.

Not even stopping to glance at the big house, Taylor at once started toward the quarters of the negroes. He was in the open now and exposed to the sight of anyone near. Boldness, however, had favored him before, and trusting again in its power, he walked rapidly in the direction of Aunt Dinah's cabin. Occasionally he glanced behind him, prepared to run if any pursuers were seen. Once he met a black woman who gazed curiously at him, but did not speak. A silence rested over the region that was almost as terrifying as the shouts or shots which Taylor half expected to hear.

He was not molested, however, and soon gained the rear of Aunt Dinah's humble abode. As he opened the door he found no one within. The silence extended even to the cabin. For a moment Taylor looked about him, hesitating what next to do. It was not likely that Tom and his companions would soon return to the creek where Erwin and the punt had been left. Not a word had either

of the white men spoken concerning Erwin. Taylor was hopeful that his friend had not been found. The words of 'Rastus were disquieting, however, and in his anxiety Taylor was determined to learn whether or not the negro had spoken truly.

Advancing to the front door of the hut, he peered at the long cornfield before him. If he were only safely across that he would know more concerning the fate of his friend. Apparently no one was in the field. The very silence was almost an invitation. Far away was the mansion hidden by trees. The prospect was tempting and Taylor decided to try to return to the bushes under which his recent comrade had been left.

Before he departed from the house Taylor lifted the trapdoor which concealed the storehouse of Aunt Dinah. It was evident that supplies were scant but equally evident that the big colored woman had in some way made provision for the future. Her private cellar contained food, as Taylor had become aware when she had concealed him in the place.

A part of a side of bacon and some corn

bread were taken by the young soldier before he restored the door to its place. Aunt Dinah would not begrudge the "offering," he assured himself, and the needs of his friend as well as his own were too great to be neglected.

Placing the food inside his shirt-front, Taylor at once departed from the hut. Walking briskly across the open part of the field, he stopped at the first heap of cornstalks to observe whether or not he had been seen. A flock of buzzards on the high branches of a dead cypress tree near the creek was the only sight of living objects he was able to obtain.

Assured that thus far he had not been observed, Taylor sought the nearest refuge in the field and again stopped and peered all about him. Still the buzzards were the sole animate objects to be seen.

Repeatedly darting from one hiding place to another, Taylor kept on his way until at last he arrived at the place he was seeking. Once within the shelter of the brush he knelt upon the ground and peered between the bushes. He could see all about the planta-

tion. Even the mansion in the distance was more easily seen here than from the hut of Aunt Dinah.

Suddenly five men came down the steps of the big house and started toward the deserted hut in which Taylor had been "guarded" by 'Rastus. So startled was Taylor by the sight that for the moment even the thought of his friend was ignored. Almost fascinated, he watched the five men. They were too far away for him to distinguish anyone, but to his excited imagination one of them appeared to be like the form of Lieutenant Evans. Another one, too, somehow reminded him of Uncle Sam, but as Taylor realized how impossible the presence in the vicinity, especially in such company, of Samuel was, he did not give the matter any serious thought at that time.

Plainly the men were going to the deserted hut. Taylor was unable to see 'Rastus anywhere near the little building. Doubtless the old negro would have an abundance of excitement soon, Taylor thought grimly. However, trouble was not wanting in the young soldier's vicinity, and at the recollection he

turned hastily into the bushes where the punt was hidden.

The little boat apparently was just as he had left it. Even the long pole had not been touched. But Erwin was not there. 'Rastus had spoken truly when he had given Nebo's report.

"Erwin! Erwin!" Taylor called in a low voice, hoping that his friend was concealed somewhere not far away. He waited a moment and then repeated his hail, not daring to call loudly. Still the silence was unbroken. Erwin apparently was gone.

Hurriedly Taylor examined the muddy bottom as well as the ground on the bank for traces of footprints. There were no signs to be found that his friend had departed by the bank. The mystery of it all was baffling and doubly tantalizing now in the plight of Taylor. Darting back to the shore, he once more concealed himself behind a tree and looked toward the hut from which he had climbed. Even the five men could not now be seen. The sun was shining, but the desolation of the scene was not relieved. Something like a heavy pall seemed to rest over

the entire region. Not a place on the plantation had been molested, but in spite of its security the influence of the prison camp and the things for which it stood seemed to cast a spell on field and house and men. Fear, calamity, desolation—these were in the very air and trembling people absorbed them in their breath.

Taylor remained a half-hour in his place of observation and then returned to the punt. His escape, he was aware, might increase the vigilance of the party with Tom. Quite likely it would. 'Rastus, however, might be suspected of having aided the prisoner he was supposed to guard and in that event the negro's troubles might be multiplied. It was too bad, Taylor acknowledged somewhat woefully, but it still was better so than to have remained in the cabin until he was recognized and all hope was abandoned forever.

Taylor seized the pole and pushed the punt into the stream. He was not planning to go far. He would watch for Erwin's return and be ready to welcome him. Somehow Taylor had persuaded himself that his friend had gone to some cabin in the vicinity and would

soon come back. His own experiences confirmed him in the belief which was strengthened by the words spoken by the lieutenant whom Tom had called Joe. No reference had been made to Erwin. Taylor assured himself that such would not have been the case if his friend had been found by the searching party.

The punt was poled across the muddy creek, and, almost on the opposite shore, was once more thrust under the thick bushes that there also overhung the bank. Once effectively concealed by the branches, he arranged several small open places through which he himself could peer without fear of discovery. He could hear sounds which any near-by parties might make, and, in a measure at least, Taylor was assured not only that he was quite effectively concealed, but also that he would be able to discover the approach of Erwin. He was planning to remain until dark and if his friend should not appear by that time, then Taylor would not remain longer but he would try to find some measures for a search for his missing companion, or so he assured himself.

Seating himself in the boat, Taylor first ate a small piece of the corn bread which he had "borrowed" from Aunt Dinah. His hunger had returned with increased force now and he looked longingly at the part that remained. Certain of Erwin's needs as well as being fully aware of the uncertainty as to when other supplies might be had, he resolutely restrained his impulse and restored the remaining food to its place. He might be compelled to flee suddenly and food was altogether too precious to be lost in the exigencies of a sudden flight.

Utterly wearied, Taylor soon was lying on the bottom of the punt, assuring himself that he could hear as well in that position as in any other if any men came to the creek. It was not long, however, before the young soldier was asleep, not even his anxiety for himself or his fears for Erwin availing to keep him longer awake.

Dusk had settled over the land when Taylor awoke. He was shivering in the cold. At first, it was impossible for him to realize where he was. He roused himself as the

sound of voices of men nearby was heard. In a moment his own plight was recalled and he was excitedly listening to the words he overheard.

“Yes, I’m a good friend,” some one was saying. “I missed ’em both on the way. You say they were both here?”

“Yaas, suh.”

“Did you see them both?”

“Ah reck’n Ah sholy did.”

“Were they here when you saw them?”

“One was yere.”

“Where was the other one?”

“He done stop a bit at we-all’s cabin, suh.”

“Yes. Yes. That was Taylor. How did he get away from the house when your father was on guard?”

“Ah caint ’xplain dat, suh. He des nach-ully lef’.”

“What was the one you saw here at the creek doing?”

“Nuffin, suh. He des look lak he was mos’ done foh. He sho’ly was de mos’ tremblein-list man what Ah—”

Taylor was unable to hear the conclusion

of the sentence, but he was fully awake now. He had recognized the voice of one of the men as that of Uncle Sam and beyond question his companion was Aunt Dinah's son, Nebo.

CHAPTER XVI

A SEARCH

HESITATING no longer, Taylor called softly from his hiding place, "Uncle Sam! Uncle Sam! Wait a minute and I'll be with you."

"Wha-a-a' dat?" stammered Nebo, his teeth chattering in his terror. Samuel, however, even if he was startled by the unexpected hail, did not betray his alarm, but remained on the bank, peering across the little stream whence the voice of the unseen man who had hailed him was heard.

Seizing his pole, Taylor pushed the punt from beneath the bushes. As he was seen by the negro and his companion, the former without waiting for further information turned and fled across the cornfield in the direction of the cabins of the slaves. Samuel, however, apparently unmoved, awaited the approach of the boat and when Taylor landed he said:

“I knew it was you.”

“Did you? What are you doing here, Uncle Sam?”

“Looking for you.”

“You’ve found me.”

“Yes, I knew I would.”

“How did you get out of the camp?”

“I came with Lieutenant Evans.”

“Is he here now?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

“I left him at the big house back there behind the trees.”

“What is he doing here?”

“Looking for you. Men have been sent from the camp till they have a circle all around it. They’re scouring the country. You see, some others got away besides you and Erwin.”

“Why did the lieutenant bring you?”

“He thought I’d help find you and Erwin.”

“What made him think you would?”

“He knew I was down on Erwin.”

“Well, you’ve found me anyway.”

“Yes.”

“What are you going to do next?”

“I’m going with you.”

“Where?”

“Wherever you go?”

“You mean you want to get to our lines?”

“Of course. What did you think I meant?”

“I didn’t know but you were going to take me to the lieutenant.”

“He’ll never see me again.”

“But he thinks he will.”

“That’s his own lookout. I fooled him good. He thought I was ready to go back on our men. I let him think so just as long as he wanted. I got into his good graces and now I’ve got more than I ever thought I’d have. He asked me if I’d like to go with him and if I’d help find the men that got away.”

“And you told him you would?”

“I did,” Samuel replied as simply as if he had no conception of what his words implied. Indeed, to his friend the knowledge of Uncle Sam’s treachery was not surprising—it was so thoroughly in keeping with all that Taylor had known of him since they were small boys. Uncle Sam’s propensity to take what did not

belong to him was understood by all his acquaintances and his word no one would trust. In the little village in which the boys dwelt the prevailing impression was that Samuel was not altogether responsible for his deeds. The kind-hearted country people referred to him as one who was slightly "lacking in his upper story," by which term some described the lad who was called by others "half-witted" or a fool. Shrewd in certain directions the boy certainly was, although in school he had not been able to do what others of his own age had done. Even now Taylor recalled the sight of Uncle Sam, a tall, awkward, ungainly boy of fourteen standing in a row with six or eight little fellows not more than half his age, trying vainly to read the lesson that had been assigned. Samuel himself had at last rebelled and refused longer to attend school to be the sport of boys so much younger than he was. The two chief causes of distrust on the part of others were Samuel's apparent failure to understand the difference between truth and falsehood, and his vindictiveness.

Taylor was thinking of these things while

Samuel was speaking. Had he told the truth? Could he be trusted?

“Where’s Erwin?” inquired Samuel.

“I don’t know. Do you? Have you heard anything about him?”

“Have I heard? No. I haven’t heard anything. Isn’t he with you?”

“No.”

“Where is he?”

“I wish I knew.”

“Where’d you lose him?”

“I haven’t seen him since last night.”

“Probably the rebs have got him again,” suggested Samuel complacently. “What you going to do now, Taylor?”

“I’m not sure. Yes. I am,” Taylor suddenly added. “You say you want to go with me?”

“That’s what I said.”

“Have you had anything to eat?”

“Yes, but they wouldn’t let me eat with ’em!” said Samuel angrily.

“Who wouldn’t?”

“The lieutenant and the men at the house. They thought I wasn’t good ’nough for them. I’ll show ’em whether I am or not!”

“Of course you will, Uncle Sam,” said Taylor encouragingly. “They don’t suspect you, though, do they?”

“Suspect me of what?”

“That you are not going to ‘find’ me or that you have decided to leave them.”

“Of course they don’t.”

“Good. Then I’ll tell you what you are to do, Uncle Sam. You go back to the house and do what I tell you. If you can find anything to eat, fill your pockets with it. It doesn’t make any difference what it is if it’s something that we can eat. Then if you can find an old coat, bring that. If you could get a pistol it would be just what we need. Do you think you can?”

“I didn’t intend to go back to the house at all.”

“That’s all right. You can go, though. If you can get these things I’m telling you about, we’ll be on our way home before you know it. I’d like to see the old place, wouldn’t you, Uncle Sam? Seems to me now I can almost see your mother sitting there in front of the little old wood-colored house

where you lived. I think she'll be glad to see you, Sam."

"Quit that!"

"And then when you start up the street the very next morning after you arrive in town how the people will praise you! The boys will say, 'There's Uncle Sam! The rebels couldn't keep him in their prisons. He was too slick for Lee or Stonewall Jackson.' The girls, too, Uncle Sam, will all be talking about you and when they see you they'll be proud to know you. Maybe they'll—"

"Maybe they'll what?" broke in Samuel.

"Oh, you know as well as I do what the girls will do. You know how they all act when they see the boys in their blue uniforms—"

"Come on, Taylor!" interrupted Samuel eagerly. "Let's start now."

"Come back here in two hours and I think we'll be ready. Don't let Lieutenant Evans or anyone else suspect that you've seen me."

"I won't. Where you going, Taylor?"

"Not very far away. I'll be here waiting

for you. Don't forget what I told you about something to eat—and the clothes and the pistol, too, if you can find one.”

“I'll do it,” said Samuel excitedly. “You really think, Taylor, the girls—”

“I know they will,” responded Taylor quickly. “You'd better start now, Sam.”

Taylor smiled at the eagerness with which Samuel started in the direction of the mansion. The poor half-witted fellow might have serious trouble if he tried to carry out the suggestions which had been given him, but Taylor's conscience at the time did not trouble him. He was persuaded, too, that Samuel really meant what he said when he had expressed his desire to accompany him. Uncle Sam had not been as foolish as Lieutenant Evans had believed him to be when he had brought him in the hope that he would assist in running down the prisoners who had escaped.

As soon as Samuel was gone, Taylor started briskly toward the cabin of Aunt Dinah. He had slight fear of discovery now, and was eager to satisfy himself concerning two perplexing questions. Somehow he was

convinced that Erwin must be somewhere about the plantation. The questions which Samuel had asked Nebo indicated more than appeared and Taylor had refrained from asking Uncle Sam until a later time. For the present he preferred to act upon his own impressions.

In a brief time Taylor approached the low cabin of Aunt Dinah. The little building was in darkness and not a sound could he hear from within it. First assuring himself that no one was near, Taylor approached the front door and rapped. His summons were twice repeated before the door was opened and the form of Aunt Dinah loomed large before him.

“Who dar?” demanded the negro woman.

“I’ll tell you,” said Taylor, as he stepped inside the building. “You know who I am now,” he added. “I’ve come back to have you help me again, Aunt Dinah.”

“’Pears lak dey all do,” grumbled the woman, recognizing who her visitor was.

“Yes, we all must come to you, Aunt Dinah. You are our friend. Where is Nebo?”

“Whaffur yo’-all want ter see ’im?”

“I must see him.”

“Nebo gwine away.”

“Has he gone?”

“He ain’ hyer.”

“Where is ’Rastus?”

“He ain’ yere neider. Howcome yo’ git away fo’m de house what ’Rastus done watch?”

“You knew I would not stay there, Aunt Dinah. So did ’Rastus know it, too.”

The black woman chuckled as she said, “Yo’ sho’ly did pester ’Rastus. Yo’ did’n come outen de do’, an’ de winder was fas’.”

“Did Tom do anything when he found I was gone?”

“Mas’ Tom clar ter goodness yo’-all is des lak de smallpox—yo’ caint fin’ de way how hit get inter de house or outen hit.”

“Never mind that now,” said Taylor hurriedly. “Has anything been heard of my friend? I mean the one I left in the boat when I first came here.”

“Ah reck’n he done gone, suh.”

“Gone where?”

“To de norf.”

“What do you mean?”

“Hit’s des lak Ah tell yo’. ’Pears lak two men was yere dis mo’nin’ an’ Nebo he done tak ’em bof on der way.”

By dint of persistent questioning Taylor at last learned that two men who had escaped from the prison pen had been conducted by one of the blacks on “Mas’ Tom’s” plantation to a plantation a few miles northward. There the friendly negroes were to hide and care for the men until they could be taken to another plantation still farther away. The plan was not new to Taylor, who had frequently heard of this “underground railway,” and, indeed, he had not been without hope that he and Erwin might secure the aid of faithful blacks if they were so fortunate as to escape from Camp Sorghum.

The one pressing problem now was whether or not Erwin had really been one of the two men who had been assisted forward by the black man whom Aunt Dinah had referred to as Moses. He was unable to obtain from her any detailed information because she had not seen either of the men.

“Why can’t Nebo or ’Rastus take me and

perhaps another man to the next plantation to-night?" Taylor asked.

"'Rastus? 'Rastus? He's sho'ly de mos' wuffless man wha' Mas' Tom own!" snorted Aunt Dinah.

"Then let Nebo take us."

"He's mos' wuffless 's 'Rastus."

"Let him try it," suggested Taylor eagerly.

Somewhat reluctantly, Aunt Dinah at last gave her consent. It was plain to Taylor that she knew more about her son's whereabouts than she had admitted, because she promised that within an hour he would be at the place where the punt had been left. When Taylor reported his theft of food from beneath the trapdoor in the floor, Aunt Dinah laughed and insisted upon his taking with him another large piece of corn bread. When the young soldier departed from the cabin his heart was warm in the recollection of the black woman's kindness. He was still deeply troubled about Erwin, however, when at last he approached the bank where the punt had been left.

CHAPTER XVII

A BLACK LEADER

PEERING cautiously before him, Taylor saw the tall form of Samuel approaching from the shore. The sight was not surprising, because the young soldier somehow had been confident that Uncle Sam would not desert him. Indeed, it was the fear rather than the hope that the unreliable Samuel, who had secured permission from Lieutenant Evans to accompany him in a search for the missing prisoners against whom he had doubtless expressed his hostility, would remain with the escaping prisoners instead of with the young Confederate officer. Perhaps, too, the lieutenant had not been unwilling for the ungainly Samuel to be "lost." His presence apparently, was not desired by either of the contending forces.

Taylor, however, was not afraid of Samuel's misdeeds—he understood the half-witted fellow too well for that. Undesirable his

company might be, but he was not likely to add to the peril and might even be of service at times. Accordingly, Taylor confidently drew near, and, in a low voice, inquired, "Anyone been seen since I went away?"

"No."

"Has Nebo—the young negro—been here?"

"Nobody has been here."

"Then we must wait."

"What are we waiting for?"

"Someone is coming."

"Who? Erwin?"

"I'm afraid not. I wish he was coming. Haven't you had any word about him, Uncle Sam? Did the lieutenant say anything about him?"

"No. I didn't hear a word except that he was sure that Erwin would be found. He couldn't get away."

"Why Erwin? Didn't Lieutenant Evans include me, too?"

"Yes. He said he'd have you both."

"And yet you are going to take your chances with us."

"Yes."

“Why is that?”

“I don’t know. I guess it’s because I want to.”

“Did you tell the lieutenant you’d help find us?”

“He thought I would.”

“Didn’t you promise you would help? Wasn’t that the real reason why he brought you?”

“Not exactly, Taylor,” replied Samuel unabashed. “There wasn’t any harm in letting him think what he wanted to, was there?”

“I don’t know,” said Taylor moodily. “Come on into the punt. We’ll have to wait awhile.”

Together the two boys made their way to the rude little craft which they thrust under the projecting branches. There the young soldiers waited while the moments slowly passed. The moon was up now and in its light Taylor could see across the cornfield to the low cabins of the negroes in the distance. A silence rested over the region that was so tense that it was almost oppressive. A branch snapped on the shore a few yards

away and Taylor, startled by the sound, gazed anxiously in the direction from which it had come. The sound was not repeated and the young soldier's vigil was unrelaxed.

The moon climbed higher into the heavens. It was eleven o'clock now, Taylor thought, and still Nebo did not come. Fear of his not coming at all began to trouble the anxious boy. The danger of proceeding without a guide was as great as that of remaining longer where they then were. The time for action of some kind had come. Delay was not to be thought of longer.

Slowly Taylor reached past his silent companion to grasp the long pole. He had decided not to wait any longer for the coming of Nebo. As Taylor thrust the pole silently into the muddy bottom of the stream he abruptly stopped when he became aware of someone on the bank. A hasty glimpse revealed the presence of Nebo. Calling softly, Taylor directed the young negro to the place where the boat was concealed.

"Here we are, Nebo," whispered Taylor.
"Everything all right?"

"Ah don' see nobody."

“Have any word about my friend?”

“No, suh.”

“Are you ready to start?”

“Ah spec’s Ah’m mos’ ’s ready ’s Ah will be.”

“Good. What’s the plan?”

“We’ll pole de punt er while.”

“All right. Get on board, Nebo.”

The young negro stepped into the boat and grasping the pole pushed the little craft into the stream. For a time no one spoke, while Nebo, manifestly skilled in his task, pushed the little boat forward. Occasionally he stopped and listened, but the stillness was unbroken.

“Whose punt is dis yere?” Nebo inquired at last.

“Your’s, Nebo, when we leave it.”

“Ah reck’n we mought bettah leabe it, now,” Nebo promptly responded.

“You’ll not leave us, though?”

“No, suh. No, suh. Not yet,” laughed the young negro. “Dis yere’s de place wha’ we leaves de punt, suh.”

“Where are we going?”

“To Hitt’s plantashun.”

“How far is it from here?”

“Hit’s a right sma’t way.”

“Five miles?”

“Yas, suh.”

“How do we go?”

“Erlong de road, suh, foh er piece. Den we leabs de road an’ Ah’ll tak’ yo’-all erlong de blin’ road.”

“The ‘blind road.’ What’s that?”

“Yo’-all will see. Ah caint des ’splain any mo’.”

“All right, Nebo. We’ll trust you.”

The punt was carefully concealed by its new and prospective owner and when the task was accomplished the three men made their way to the near-by road. Nebo’s air of timidity apparently was gone now. He was active, cautious and confident. Halting behind the rail fence, he turned to his companions and said in a low voice, “De bes’ way now is fer me t’ go ahaid. Yo’-all follow des a little way behind. If Ah see any signs er de whackers—”

“Of what?”

“Signs er de bushwhackers—de men wha’ runs der plantashuns in de daytime an’ den

in de night dey des nachully gets demselves t'gedder an' watches de roads."

"What do they watch the roads for?"

"Foh ter cotch de pris'ners which am escapin' outen de camp."

"What shall we do if we find any of these men?"

"Das des wha' Ah'm 'splainin' t' yo'-all. Ah'm goin' ter percede ahaid o' yo'-all an' yo' gemmens is ter follow. Does Ah mak' dat observation pertinaciously t' yo', suh?"

"Yes. Yes," said Taylor, impatiently.

"Den ef dat's des sasfficen'ly perlatatious, hit des nachully follows, suh, dat ef Ah goes ahaid Ah'm de one ter mederfy wif de 'nouncements of de whackers dere. If yo' gemmens follow, den yo'-all 's de ones wha' must signerfy de 'structions wha' come f'om de reah ob dis yere percession. Is dat all 'splicit?"

"It is as clear as moonlight. You are to go ahead, and if you find any danger you are to warn us. We are to follow you, and if we find any bad signs we are to warn you."

"Da's hit! Da's hit, suh, 's sho' 's yo' 're bo'n."

“What will you do—call to us?”

“No, suh. Ah’ll lif’ up my vocal voice an’ do dis—” Nebo suddenly emitted a weird, shrill cry like that of a night hawk. The cry was repeated three times and was agreed upon as the warning of danger.

“Co’se you gemmens isn’t ’spected ter try dat,” said Nebo, graciously. “Yo’-all is des ter shout an’ cry erloud an’ spare not. Ah’ll sho’ly understan’.”

The change from the glum, silent Nebo to the talkative and self-conscious leader was as amazing as it was puzzling. There was no opportunity for explanation, however, and in a few moments the three boys were walking along the rough roadway, the order of advance being that which Nebo already had suggested.

The young negro could not be seen as he led the way, but occasionally he stopped and waited for his companions to join him. Not a sign of danger had thus far been seen, and Taylor’s hopes were brighter than when the journey began. His greatest anxiety was concerning the fate of Erwin. The possibility that his friend had been one of the two

men to whom Aunt Dinah had referred as having been already conducted by faithful negroes to a plantation farther north was in Taylor's thoughts, and he tried to make much of the report. From Nebo Taylor had not been able to learn anything definite concerning the previous party he had led. Whether this was due to the negro's unwillingness to enter into any details, or was the result of stupidity, Taylor could not determine. He was positive that he had adopted his best plan in following Nebo. Further discoveries, he decided, must be left to the events of the coming day.

Three times Nebo had halted and reassured his followers that the way was clear. After a brief rest the journey each time had been eagerly resumed, and now Nebo declared that the end was not far distant.

The road now led through a long and somewhat dismal stretch of woods. The waving branches, weird and leafless, seemed almost like the arms of men extended in warning. The shadows of the trees were almost ghostly as they flickered or danced on the road. Neither Samuel nor Taylor spoke, though both

were looking forward to the cleared tract which Nebo had assured them lay not far beyond the borders of the woods.

Suddenly there was a shout heard by the boys. The sound came from a place not far in advance of them. Halting abruptly, Taylor listened intently for the warning call of Nebo. He could hear the voices of men and was able to distinguish that of the young negro, who was loudly protesting, although Taylor was unable to hear what was said. It was evident that Nebo had been abruptly halted, and it was plain that several men were in the band or party that had accosted him.

“Come! Come on!” whispered Taylor abruptly, as he turned and grasped Samuel by the arm.

Without a protest, Uncle Sam followed as his companion ran swiftly back over the road. They had gone a hundred yards or more when Taylor turned sharply into the woods and then ordered his companion to follow his example, as he stretched himself upon the ground behind the trunk of a large tree that at some time had been uprooted by a storm.

Breathlessly the boys waited. Taylor was peering above the trunk of the tree behind which he was hiding. "There!" he whispered excitedly a moment later to his companion. "It is just as I thought it would be. They're coming this way and they have Nebo with them! Keep out of sight! Don't move! Don't speak!"

In a brief time, Taylor, who still was peering over the fallen tree, saw the party approaching. He was trusting to the darkness to hide him. The moonlight enabled him to see into the road and in a brief time he counted eight men in the approaching band. In the midst he could discern the form of Nebo. Manifestly the men were all excited, and they were talking so loudly that as they drew near Taylor was able to hear what was said.

"Yo're Tom Raby's Nebo, aren't yo'?" one of the party noisily was demanding.

"Yaas, suh," replied the young negro.

"Does Tom know yo' are heah?"

"No, suh."

"What are yo' heah foh?"

"Ah'se des gwine ter see—"

“That’s a likely story,” interrupted another of the men with a loud laugh. “Do yo’ know what happens t’ niggers when they help the Yanks? They jest nachelly stretch hemp. Do yo’-all want t’ try that?”

“No, suh. No, suh,” stammered Nebo, his teeth chattering in his terror.

“Then tell us whar the Yanks are! Tell us, or we-all ’ll string yo’ up t’ th’ nearest tree. Heah, Ben,” the man added savagely, “try yer new rope on th’ nigger!”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BLIND ROAD

FOR a moment Taylor hesitated. The band of eight bushwackers were standing about the terrified young negro. By their actions the prospect of serious trouble for Nebo was more than threatening. Ought he to lie still and permit their leader to suffer, or was it better to give themselves up and thereby save his life, was the question now in Taylor's mind. The thought of the conditions in the prison camp, as well as of the escape and the troubles through which he had come, was also vivid. If, to save the frightened negro, he should now surrender, it would mean, as Taylor well knew, a condition for himself much worse than any he had previously known.

Hesitation departed quickly. Hard as it must be to give himself into the hands of these men, and to be returned to Camp Sorghum, there to be punished for his escape, as

well as to abandon all future hope of release, such conditions would not be so unbearable as the knowledge that the faithful young black had met his death while he was aiding the young prisoners in their attempts to escape. He decided that he would announce his presence if Nebo's plight should become desperate.

Taylor, the decision once made, waited while he watched the proceedings in the road. The man whom the leader addressed as Ben advanced, having a rope in his hands. All the men were armed. Crowding about the negro, they appeared to be all excited, and doubtless were a desperate band. They were all strong, too, as was manifest in their bearing.

"Slip the noose ovah his head, Ben," called the leader.

The man stepped forward and adjusted the rope about Nebo's neck.

"Now, suh, fling th' rope ovah the branch," called the leader.

The rope was adjusted in accordance with the command.

"Now, then, foah o' yo'-all get hold. When

I say th' word, stretch th' nigger. When yo'-all pull, pull ha'd."

Taylor moved as if he were about to rise from his position behind the log.

"Now, Nebo, yo' wan' ter say yo' prayers?" demanded the leader, as he turned to their trembling victim.

Taylor thought he could hear the chattering teeth of the terrified young negro. Apparently the privilege either was ignored or not understood, for not a word at first was spoken by Nebo. Suddenly, however, the victim seemed to realize more completely the peril that was threatening him. In a voice shrill and so loud that it could have been heard far away, Nebo screeched, "Ah'se Mas' Tom's nigger—Mas' Tom Raby's! Ef yo'-all doan look out, yo'-all 'll have Mas' Tom atter you'. Ah'se wuth mor'n a thousan' dollahs, Ah done heah Mas' Tom say so hisself. Yo'-all kin hang me ef yo' says so, but wha'll Mas' Tom have foh ter say 'bout hit? He'll—"

The men laughed loudly at the words of the negro, but it was manifest that what he had said had not been without its effect upon

them. If indeed, as Taylor shrewdly suspected, their sole purpose was to frighten their victim into telling what they thought he knew, and not to do him any bodily harm, Nebo's words certainly added to his suspicion.

“What 'll Tom Raby do ef he heahs yo'-all have been helpin' th' Yanks to git out?” demanded one of the band.

“Ah spec's he'll sen' foh Big Jim,” said Nebo, eagerly. As Big Jim was the overseer of the Raby plantation, every man within Nebo's hearing understood what was implied in the suggestion.

“If yo' tell us, Nebo, whar th' Yanks are, we'll let yo' go. Furthermo' we'll fo'get t' tell Tom Raby yo'-all was caught yere by we-uns,” suggested the leader of the little band. Taylor was convinced now that no real harm would be done the negro. His eagerness to hear what Nebo would say, however, was so keen that he lifted his head still higher above the log.

“Ah dunno whar they be,” moaned Nebo.

“How many were with yo'.”

“Foah, suh.”

“Where was yo’-all er takin’ ’em?”

“Des nowhar, suh. Ah’m tellin’ yo’-all de truf,” Nebo added eagerly, when the band laughed noisily. “Ah des wanted foh ter git ’em gone. Dey was sho’ly de mos’ disdelapdated trash what Ah eber see, suh.”

“Why didn’t yo’-all tell Tom Raby?”

“Ah did, suh! Ah sho’ did! Mas’ Tom done shet one ob ’em up’n ole Hagar’s house an’ he done set my fader foh ter watch out fo’ de place. But de Yank des didn’t stay. ’Pears lak yo’ des caint hol’ ’em in Camp Sorghum no mo’n yo’ can in old Hagar’s house.”

“Where mought th’ Yanks be now?”

“Ah dunno, suh. Ah specs dey done gone back ter Mas’ Tom’s place.”

“Wheah was yo’ a takin’ ’em, Nebo?”

“Ah wasn’t takin’ ’em nowhar, suh. Dey des nachelly makes me go. And Ah shore was glad foh ter get ’em outen de place dar.”

“Yes. Yes. But where are they now?”

“Ah caint des ’pear fo’ ter rec’lec’ at dis yere moment, suh. When day seed yo’-all, ’pears lak dey couldn’ des git away fas’ ’nough. Dey was makin’ tracks like dey

thought dey would rather tak dey chances back in Camp So'ghum dan wid yo'-all."

"Did they come back this way?" demanded the man quickly, as he glanced back over the road.

" 'Pears lak dey did."

"Are yo' shuah, Nebo? If we-uns fin' yo're lyin', we'll git two ropes. When we go ter Tom Raby fo' ter tell him 'bout yo' doin's, he'll give us two moah. An' we'll use 'em all on you, you black houn' dog, ef we-all fin' yo've been a deceivin' of us!"

"Hit's de truf," persisted Nebo, frantically. "Dey is come back dis yere way."

"Why didn't yo' say so?" retorted the leader, angrily. "We-all mus' get th' Yanks. Go back an' get yer dawgs, Sim," he ordered one of his men. "Two creep erlong th' road, one on each side, while Jeff an' I follow up. Th' rest of yo'-all go back ovah th' way we don' come an' see if the's any sign o' Yanks ahead."

"What'll we do with Nebo?" inquired one of the band.

"Take him erlong with us," replied the

leader, as he removed the rope from the negro's neck.

The directions were speedily followed and almost before Taylor was aware, the entire band had disappeared. The departure of the negro, the probability that dogs would be used in the search, the knowledge that three of the men were on the road in the direction in which the escaping prisoners had been proceeding, all added to the difficulties which now confronted Taylor.

"Uncle Sam," he whispered, "we must get out of this place."

"Where?"

"I don't know. Somewhere. Anywhere."

"Better stay right where we are."

"No, they'll have dogs. They'll all be back pretty soon. They'll find us, too, if we stay here till it is light."

"No, they won't. This is the best place. I'm tired, anyway."

"I'm going on," said Taylor quietly, as he arose.

"Well, I guess I'll have to go, too, then," replied Samuel, as he also arose. "But we'll lose our way."

“We haven’t found it.”

“Go ahead.”

Together the two boys stepped cautiously into the road. Not a person was in sight. The night was far advanced and silence rested over the region. Apparently Samuel was indifferent alike to his surroundings and to the peril in which he and his companion stood. He was complaining in a low voice of the cold and of his feeling of hunger.

Ignoring Samuel, Taylor delayed a few moments to satisfy himself that no one was in the immediate vicinity. As soon as he was convinced that they were alone he said sharply, “Come on, Uncle Sam.”

Making no protest, Samuel followed obediently, and together they started, walking briskly in the direction in which they had been going, when they had been halted by the coming of the bushwhackers.

In Taylor’s thoughts, now, that of the blind road to which Nebo had referred was prominent. What this road was, or how it was to be found, he did not know. The young negro had said it led to Hitt’s Plantation, what-

ever or where that might be. In a general way, Taylor understood that it was about five miles northward from that where he had been sheltered in the cabin of Aunt Dinah. As nearly as he was able to estimate the distance they had come, he did not think more than three miles at the utmost had been covered. Plainly there were friendly negroes on the Hitt Plantation, which was one of the "stations" on the underground railway that led to freedom.

Watching either side of the road as they advanced, Taylor at last halted abruptly. Pulling his companion with him, he turned into what appeared to be an opening in the brush by the roadside. A hasty examination revealed the presence of ruts which wagon wheels had worn in the ground. The entrance was almost hidden by the bushes, and yet a wagon easily could be driven through it.

Was this the blind road? There was no answer to the question. The pathway led among trees and could be seen for only a short distance. The main road was unsafe

at best. With the men searching it, as Taylor knew them to be, the peril of discovery was increased.

“Come on, Uncle Sam,” he said abruptly in a low voice. “I don’t know where this path leads, but we’ll try it awhile. It can’t be any worse for us than the main road anyway.”

Making no protest, Samuel followed his friend, who led the way slowly and cautiously. The road was not difficult, for the soil was soft, and not many rocks were in it. The darkness which the trees produced made the objects on either side dim. Men might be watching or following, but no one would be aware of their presence until they were close upon them.

As the boys advanced, Taylor became more convinced that they were following a pathway which was only occasionally used. Whether or not it was the blind road that led to the Hitt Plantation only their further progress would reveal. At all events, for the time it was safer for the boys to be there than on the open road. Taylor accordingly kept steadily on his way, still walking slowly and

frequently stopping to ascertain if buildings or men were near.

Already he had formed a vague plan and was now attempting to supplement it. The road must have an end, and there must also be a reason for its being where it was. Even if the plantation he was seeking was not near it, some people must be found, for a road without men was an absurdity. If these men chanced to be negroes he was confident of help. If, on the other hand, they were white, they still might be willing to give him food or shelter.

Just as the dawn appeared, the boys came to the border of the woods through which they had wearily made their way. They were now looking across open fields. On the border beyond them were rude buildings.

“This is a plantation of some kind,” suggested Taylor.

“Is it?” inquired Samuel, indifferently.

“Yes. Over there are cabins,” continued Taylor, pointing to the low buildings he had already seen. “One of us must go there. Will you go, or shall I?”

“You.”

“All right. There’s only one thing for you to do, Uncle Sam.”

“What’s that?”

“You stay right here till I come back.”

“Suppose you don’t come back?”

“Then wait till noon. Don’t move.”

“I’ll go to sleep, I guess.”

“Good. But don’t make much noise.”

“I shan’t,” said Samuel, solemnly. “I told you I was going to sleep.”

“That’s what I meant.”

Delaying no longer, Taylor started briskly across the open fields. The light steadily was becoming clearer and in the fear of being seen he began to proceed more rapidly. In a brief time he arrived at the nearest of the huts. No one was to be seen near it, and the place was still. Moving on to the nearest hut, the young soldier hesitatingly stopped before the door. Ought he to rap and seek an entrance?

The question was abruptly answered for him when the door suddenly was opened and a young white girl, apparently near his own age, appeared. Staring at Taylor, she hesitated a moment and then quickly approached.

CHAPTER XIX

A WARM DEFENDER

“WHO are you? What are you doing here at this time in the morning?” demanded the girl, gazing at Taylor in anger or alarm. The young soldier, coatless, hatless, his clothing torn, his feet almost bare, was aware that his appearance was far from being assuring. The girl before him plainly belonged to the class that dwelt in the big house. She was simply dressed and in her face the expression of sympathy which Taylor had noticed when she first appeared, had now given place to one in which pity apparently found no part. Nevertheless, Taylor abruptly decided to tell her who he was and to trust her for aid in his desperate plight.

“Just at present,” he said, “I am doing nothing. It’s an occupation I would like to keep up for a week, judging from my feelings.”

“Who are you?” repeated the girl sharply. She was almost staring at him in her manifest excitement, though she did not advance any nearer.

She was standing about fifteen feet in front of him, but there was no evidence of alarm now in her bearing.

“Do you mean my name?”

“Yes. Yes. Who are you?”

“My name is Cooper—Taylor Cooper.”

“What are you?”

“I was once a soldier. I belong to the —th New York.”

“You are a Yankee!” exclaimed the girl scornfully.

“I am.”

“Have you come here to rob us? You probably knew our men are not at home. You are as brave as the rest of them—when there are no men around! Now, what do you want?”

“I haven’t asked for anything, have I?”

“You look as if you might ask for our lives.”

“Perhaps you’ll understand when I tell you I have escaped from Camp Sorghum.”

“At Columbia?”

“Yes.”

“Why do you tell me this? I haven’t any pity for the Yankees shut up there. If I had my way I’d put every one of them behind bars along with other criminals.” The girl’s dark eyes flashed as she spoke.

Taylor looked at her a moment without speaking. Then he laughed as he said, “Your sentiments are not of your heart.”

“Yes, they are, too!” retorted the girl, sharply. “What are you but a lot of—of—men worse than cutthroats or thieves? Why are you here? What did you come down here for anyway? You have robbed our houses, shot our men, stolen our crops, burned our homes—Oh, I don’t know all you have done! And—and you have the audacity to stand before me and tell me you are a Yankee soldier just escaped from Camp Sorghum! Why—why, I never heard anything like it in all my bo’n days. How do you know I’ll not turn you over at once to some of our brave men?”

“You’ll not do it,” said Taylor, quietly. He could not explain why he was not afraid.

The girl manifestly was intense in her devotion to the Confederate cause. Her anger or indignation and her sharp words somehow seemed to interest greatly the young soldier, and his admiration for the glowing cheeks and shining eyes of the girl, loyal to her own, was not concealed. "No, you'll not do it," he added.

"Why won't I?"

"You can't."

"I can't! Lieutenant Evans will be here at ten o'clock. What will prevent me from telling him there is a poor, wretched creature on our plantation who says he is a Yankee prisoner—"

"Was, not 'is' a prisoner, if you please," interrupted Taylor.

"It's all the same!"

"Is it? If you were in Camp Sorghum for a day or two I think you'd change your mind. Here I am free. It's true my coat does not fit me, my shoes have not been blacked, my clothes are not in perfect condition, and I am almost starved. But what is all that compared with the misery and filth of the camp?"

“If you don’t like it, why did you come down here?”

“You know why I came,” said Taylor, quietly.

“No, I don’t know. I can’t think of any excuse. There isn’t a reason in all the world—but one,” she added, sharply.

“What’s that?”

“You just wanted to fill the heads of the negroes full of wrong ideas. You wanted to steal our silver. You hate us—”

“‘Hate’ you? You’re mistaken! I don’t hate you. On the contrary I—”

“Then tell me why you didn’t leave us alone. We never troubled you. We never went north and shot your men—” The girl stopped abruptly, her eyes filling with tears; but whether her emotion was due to sorrow or to anger, Taylor was unable to decide.

“Listen a minute, will you?” pleaded Taylor. The girl’s unconscious declaration that no men were on the plantation as well as the fact that it was early in the morning relieved him of part of his fear. Besides, the girl, in spite of the intensity of her feelings, was somehow most interesting. “Tell me who

began this war? Did we of the north?"

"Of course you did?"

"Please tell me how."

"You-all sent your armies down here."

"Why?"

"I've told you already. You just wanted to steal, burn—Oh, I can't tell you all the horrible things your men have done."

"Who began the war? Was it our men who fired on one of the government's forts?"

"You mean the fort at Charleston?"

"Yes. Fort Sumter."

"That was in our territory."

"Then why did you attack it?"

"Because—because—Oh, I hate the Yankees!"

"Me, too?"

"Of course! Most of all! You are a Yankee, and one of the few I ever saw."

"And you don't like the looks of me?" inquired Taylor quizzically, as he looked down at his dilapidated clothing.

"You're not to blame for everything," said the girl quickly, following his glance. "You're a Yankee. You're on my father's plantation—"

“Not because I want to be,” interrupted Taylor with a laugh. “If I had my wish I’d be a thousand miles from here this morning.”

“I wish you were,” said the girl not unkindly.

“Thank you. I knew you had a good heart.”

“You don’t know anything about me.”

“I think I know more than I did an hour ago.”

“And less, perhaps, than you will an hour from now.”

“I’m sure of that.”

“Sure of what?”

“That I shall never forget how good you were to me.”

“‘Good’ to you? Why should I be good to the worst enemy I have?”

“There’s something somewhere I have read,” said Taylor, drily, “that if even your enemy hungers you are to feed him.”

The girl looked at him for a moment as if her feelings at the time would more clearly find expression in other ways than “feeding” an enemy. “If I thought you’d leave our

country I might help you do that," she said, after a moment's silence.

"Whether I leave the country or not depends on you and your people more than it does on me."

"Why does it? How does it? I don't understand you, sir."

"I told you a moment ago that our men are not down here in the South because we want to be. We didn't begin the war. We'd be glad to stop it anytime. There's just one word and the whole thing is fixed."

"What word?"

"I don't think I'll say it for you. You know what it is as well as I."

"You mean 'surrender'?" she demanded with flashing eyes. "Never! We'll never say that as long—as long as there's one man left in the Southland. And if the last man falls then the girls and the women will take it up!"

"That all rests with you," said Taylor, soberly. "We didn't begin it. We don't like it. We'd be glad to have it stop to-day. But when a country is attacked what would you have it do? Smile? Say 'Thank you, a

little more, please,' or would you have the men stand up and fight?"

"You are not defending your country. You are attacking ours."

"Is that the way you talked when Old Hickory fought the Seminoles?"

"It's the way we talk now!" said the girl, defiantly. "Oh," she added in softer tones, "you don't know what it means! We're in fear of our lives every minute. When I first saw you I took you for a cutthroat Yankee."

"A Yankee, but no cutthroat."

"Either word will do. They both mean the same thing."

"You hate me so much you'll help me, though," suggested Taylor.

"I'll never help you! What do you want?"

"A little food, a place in which to hide, and a coat, if you please."

"We never yet have turned away a beggar."

Slowly the color spread over Taylor's face, so deep that even its coating of dirt could not hide it. He turned away as if there was nothing more to be said.

“Wait a minute! I did not mean that—at least, I did not mean what you thought I meant,” the girl exclaimed eagerly. “You see it’s this way. My father—” her voice broke a moment, but she quickly regained control of herself. “My father was shot at—at the second battle of Manassas. Both my brothers are in Johnston’s army. If I had two more brothers I’d have them both go, even if I had to lash them to do it—which I wouldn’t, for they’d be as brave as their father and his brothers. I know they would! If they weren’t I’d never own them! But—but, you see it does not make one very cordial in one’s feelings for the Yankees.”

“Did you ever think that we had feelings like that, too?” inquired Taylor, stopping because he was touched by the manifest earnestness of the girl.

“I don’t know that I ever did.”

“Well, do it now. Let me tell you that I have a sister, too. I don’t suppose she knows to-day whether I’m alive or not. My mother hasn’t had a word about her boy for a good many weeks. She knows I was taken prisoner, and so many of our boys have died in

the reb—in your prisons, that you can hardly expect she naturally would have much affection to waste on the men that took me. No, I tell you we're a good deal more alike than we think sometimes. I'm willing to give you credit for thinking you're right, but don't you think we're entitled in all fairness to a bit of consideration, too?"

"Yes, if you'd only go back home and stay there and not come down here shooting, stealing, burning our houses, and all the rest."

"How would you have us carry on the war? Bring our knitting work and sit down on your lawns and talk about the weather?"

The girl laughed for the first time since the strange interview began. "It's no use in trying to explain to you," she said. "You cannot see."

"Not as you see," replied Taylor lightly. "We use our eyes and you use yours. I'm willing to own up that your eyes are bright enough and are better than mine—"

"That will do, sir," laughed the girl interrupting him.

"But look for a minute through my eyes. Oh, I don't mean you're to look into them,"

Taylor said, banteringly. "But what do you think you would see if it was your brother who was a prisoner and he had escaped and was talking to my sister as you are to me?"

"If she was any good she'd say as much or more than I have."

"I know one thing," said Taylor, soberly.

"What's that?"

"She wouldn't call him a 'beggar' just because he'd dragged his way to where she was. I've a notion, too, she'd help him. If you knew my sister you'd understand what I mean."

"I haven't said I wouldn't help you. I hate Yankees, and you're one of the first I ever saw. Here! Here!" she added in a low, tense voice. "Go into Aunt Katy's cabin! Go right in!"

The excitement of the girl caused Taylor to glance quickly in the direction in which she was looking. On the borders of the woods he saw eight men. They were just emerging from amongst the trees. One glance was sufficient to convince the young soldier that the men were the bushwhackers whom he had seen the preceding night. Whether or

not they had discovered his presence, Taylor did not know, as he instantly followed the girl when she led the way into Aunt Katy's cabin.

CHAPTER XX

A PIECE OF PAPER

“AUNT KATY,” exclaimed the girl quickly, as she and her companion entered the little house. “Hide this man! Don’t let the men get him. You know how to do it, for I know you have done it before.”

“Lor’, Miss Sallie—” began the colored woman.

“Don’t stop! Don’t talk! Hide him! Be quick! The men will be here before you know it!”

The negress, in what seemed to Taylor a most deliberate manner, flung open the door to her pantry and then turning to her visitors, said, “Go in yere! I’ll stan’ in de do’. Ef dey gets pas’ me dey’ll sho’ly have ter move de mountains fust off.”

As Taylor slipped quickly past Aunt Katy, he laughed despite his alarm at the thought of the bushwhackers moving the huge woman from her position. She was larger

even than Aunt Dinah. Her red bandanna handkerchief twisted about her woolly head gave her a warlike appearance, which her great size and the expression of determination on her face made still more pronounced. In a moment, however, the door was closed upon him and he was left to himself. A small window in the outer side of the room was open and he could see what was going on outside the hut if he were to raise himself to the level of the rude sash. However, he had no desire at the time to expose himself needlessly, and he crouched low in a corner of the room. He was able to hear what was being said in the other room of the cabin and to his surprise the girl, who had led him into the place, was bidding the colored woman defend the visitor at all hazards.

In a brief time the sound of the voices of men was heard at the door, and Taylor was aware that the band, of which he was in fear, had come, and the critical moment was at hand.

“Hi, there,” called one of the men to some one outside the door whom Taylor had not seen. “Got any Yanks in yo’ place?”

“Ah aint done seen none, suh,” replied some one whom Taylor took to be a boy.

“We’ll take a look anyway.”

“Das all right, suh. Ah reck’n Ah’ll des keep ’way.”

“What’s the trouble?”

“Dem Yanks has horns, suh,” exclaimed the boy in apparent fear. “Mas’ George ’clar ter goodness dey all has horns right on dey haid. Dey don’ cotch dis chile!”

“You’re c’rect, Sambo,” laughed the man. “The Yanks has horns and a red-hot pitch fo’k too. They all like nothin’ bettah than to take little nigger boys an’ broil ’em over the fire. They turn ’em on the’ fo’ks like they was ’possums. You bettah keep ’way from ’em, Sambo.”

“Ah shore will, suh.”

The men now turned to the door of the hut, and from the sounds Taylor concluded that the girl was still standing there.

“Has yo’-all seen any stray Yanks?” demanded the man.

“What kind of Yanks?” responded the girl.

“Mos’ly prisoners, Mis’ Sallie,” said the

man, who apparently recognized the girl before him. "We all have a 'spicion that the niggers is helpin' some o' 'em to get away. A right sma't number has been breakin' away from Camp So'ghum lately."

"Do you think we're likely to hide any here?"

"No, no, Mis' Sallie, we-uns know yo' too well fo' that; Cap'in George is too big a fighter fo' any 'spicion like that. But we-all didn't know but you might 'a' seen some skulkin' Yanks somewhere 'bout the quarters. They mos' gen'ly makes fo' the quarters."

"Aunt Katy, have you seen any Yankee prisoners?" demanded the girl as she turned to the huge negro woman in the room.

"Humph!" snorted Aunty Katy.

The girl laughed as she faced the man and said, "I'm sorry, but I don't believe you'll find any escaping Yankee prisoners here. If I do find any what shall I do with them?"

"Shet 'em up an' send word ter Cap'in George or ter me."

"I don't know you. Where can I find you?"

“Yo’ might sen’ word ter the sto’ fo’ ’Lonius Shattuch. We’ll come and take the Yanks offen yo’ han’s. Bettah look out, Mis’ Sallie, an’ see that th’ Yanks don’ do yo’-all no harm befo’ yo’ shet ’em up.”

“I can take care of myself,” said the girl quietly.

“We-uns ’ll trest yo’ fo’ thet, Mis’ Sallie. I reck’n we-all had bettah take er look ’bout th’ place befo’ we go.”

“Why? Do you really think any of the escaping prisoners are here?”

“We-all tracked some in this yere direction, Mis’ Sallie.”

“Can I be of any assistance in seaching for them?”

“No, no. Bless yer kin’ heart, Mis’ Sallie I reck’n yo’ve got troubles enough of yer own without addin’ ter ’em.”

The conversation ended abruptly and for a time silence followed. Taylor in his hiding place tried to hear what was being said in the main room, but Aunt Katy and the girl were talking in such low tones that not a word was audible to him. He crept to the window and peering out was able to see the

men. They had scattered about the plantation and were manifestly making a thorough search of the place.

To Taylor they appeared to be a band with which he had no desire for further acquaintance. Every man had a gun in his hands and it was plain that the negroes were all in great fear of their visitors — a feeling which Taylor fully comprehended.

Suddenly the girl who had conducted him to his place of refuge appeared walking directly toward the men. For an instant Taylor's alarm returned in full force. Was she about to betray him? Had her loyalty triumphed over the momentary sympathy she had expressed for him? Anxiously he watched her as she stopped a moment to speak to one of the men and then passed on toward the mansion and soon disappeared from his sight.

An hour or more the men delayed about the plantation before they started together for the woods where they had first appeared.

Relieved by their departure, Taylor waited for the negro woman to open the door and bid him come forth from the pantry. At

last when his patience was nearly exhausted he opened the door and stepped into the room where the woman was preparing some hoecakes in the fireplace.

“It’s safe to come out now, isn’t it?” suggested the young soldier.

“Ah reck’n hit is,” said Aunt Katy coldly. “Who is yer?”

“I’m a prisoner escaping from the rebel camp.”

“Is yer a Yank?” demanded the huge colored woman, stopping in her occupation and staring almost incredulously at her visitor.

“I am. What did you think?”

“Whaffur Mis’ Sallie done hide yer yere fo’?”

“I don’t myself understand.”

“Mis’ Sallie done hate de Yankees wussen de pizin.”

“I know she does. Who is she?”

“Mis’ Sallie—das who she is. Ah reck’n everybody know dat.”

“Miss Sallie who?”

“She’s ole Mas’ Henry’s youngest gal. Mas’ Henry he done get shot in de wa’.

Eber since Mas' Henry he done get shot ole Mis' an' Miss Clara an' Miss Ma'g'ret an' Miss Sallie dey mos' crazy. Mis' Clara an' Miss Ma'g'ret dey bof gone to the hospit'ls fo' to nurse de po' sick sojers. Miss Sallie she des stay to home ter he'p her ma; but, honey, she suhtainly does hate de Yanks. Mas' George he gone to de wa' too an' dey ain' anybody lef' into de place but jes' old Mis' an' Mis' Sallie, 'ceptin' when Mas' George come home."

"When does he come? Is he here now?"

"Dey jes ain' no tellin w'en dat man come. 'Pears lak he come des when dey is leas' 'splectin' on 'im."

"Is he here now?" again Taylor inquired.

"Lan', honey, Mas' George may be yere an' den he moughn't. Dey is'n enny way fo' to fin' dat out, 'ceptin' when he come."

"What was Miss Sallie doing here in your house just before I came?"

"Howcome she come Ah dunno. She des come, da's all." Aunt Katy glanced shrewdly at Taylor as she spoke.

Suspecting there was more than at first appeared in her expression the young soldier

suggested, "Perhaps she suspected you, Aunt Katy."

"Ah reck'n she do."

"You help the Yankees, do you, Aunt Katy?"

"Ah shore does."

"And that's why you do for me?"

"Yaas suh. Mis' Sallie she hates de Yankees. Ah reck'n she 'specs Ah ain' doin' 'em enny ha'm. Leas'wise she done come down yere fo' to fin' out 'bout 'em."

"Aunt Katy, have you helped any lately—within a day or two?"

"Whaffur yo' ax me dat?"

"Did you have a young fellow here—not as tall as I am? He had light hair and blue eyes—"

"Did he hab de woe-begondest face, mos' 's begondest as you hab?"

"Very likely. When was he here? When did he go?"

"Wha' mought be his name?"

"Erwin—Erwin Smith."

"Ah don' des rec'lec' 'bout de name. Dey was a young man here day befo' las'. Was he somebody what yo'-all wan' to fin'?"

“Yes, yes. Did he leave any message? Any word for me? I understand some of the colored people have a regular line over which they send all of us who are fortunate enough to get away. Is that so?”

“Yo'-all mus'n axen me. Ah knows yo' is a Yankee.”

“How do you know?”

“By de soun' ob de words,” chuckled the huge negro woman. “Bettah take dis yere hoeecake an' see wha' yo' can do wif hit.”

The woman's task before the fire was now completed and when she handed the cake to the young prisoner, Taylor was positive that never before had food tasted so good. His cook watched him with evident satisfaction, her countenance beaming with sympathy and interest.

“Yo' sholy is pow'ful hongry,” she said at last; “des de same lak 'em all. De hoeecake don' las' long when de Yankees is come.”

“I don't wonder, Aunt Katy. It's the best I ever ate.”

“G'long wit yo', chile!”

“It surely is the best. Some day when

the negroes are all free and you come north, I'll send for you, Aunt Katy, and have you come to our house. If I ever get home, I'll send for you the very first thing."

"An me leab Miss Sallie, and old Mis' an' Mas' George?"

"Why, yes, of course."

"Ah reck'n yo'-all don' know some tings." The eyes of the black woman almost flashed as she glanced at her visitor.

"Don't you want to be free?"

"Ah don' leab Mis' Sallie."

"Why do you help the Yankees then?"

"Chile, yo' mus' be pow'ful tired. Don' yo'-all wan' ter go ter sleep?"

"I feel as if I could sleep two days."

The black woman laughed and started toward the back door. In a moment she returned with a small ladder, which she placed against a beam in the ceiling. "Dey is er doah 'treckly t' yo' right han'. Des open de do' an' clim' in, an' don' fo'get t' close de do' when yo' is inside. Dey's er bed dere an' yo'-all c'n sleep till 'Gabrel blow de trumpet in de mawnin',' if yo' desiahs."

Aware of the purpose of the woman, Tay-

lor speedily made his way into the small loft of the cabin, carefully closed the door behind him and then turned to a bed on the floor.

The room was not dark, because light came in through the chinks of the logs and a small open window at one end of the loft admitted light and air alike.

Thoroughly wearied, Taylor prepared to throw himself on the bed. As he drew near he saw on the floor a small folded piece of paper. Without expecting to find it anything of importance, he picked it up and held it in the light.

To his amazement he saw his own name on the outside of the paper. Before he could open the startling missive, he was aroused by a call from the room below. Hastily thrusting the paper into his pocket he turned at once to the door in the floor.

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE MANSION

It was the voice of the young girl—Miss Sallie—which Taylor heard in the room below. Startled by her unexpected return, Taylor listened a moment and then heard Aunt Katy summoning him.

Hastily raising the trapdoor, the young soldier peered down at the black woman and her companion. The girl laughed as she saw the face of the young Yankee and she called sharply, "Come down here, sir, I want to speak to you."

Puzzled by the strange summons, Taylor nevertheless speedily swung himself through the opening and dropped to the floor.

"Did you want to see me?" he inquired, as he turned to the girl.

"I did."

"Well, here I am." He spoke simply and as he gazed at his torn clothing and the rem-

nants of what once were shoes, he added, "I'm afraid the sight isn't one to interest you very much. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing."

"Why then do you want to see me?"

"Because I can do something for you."

"You are very kind — to beggars."

"That is very unkind of you. You know very well what I meant when I used that word."

"I beg your pardon."

"It's granted. I've been thinking of what you told me about your mother and your sister. I think I understand how they feel and I'm going to do for you what I would want them to do for my brother if he was a prisoner up north. Thank goodness, he will never be though! No Yankee can ever make a prisoner of my brother George."

"For your sake as well as for his own, I am sure I hope they never will," said Taylor quietly.

"That settles it! There may be occasionally a good man even among the Yankees. Perhaps you are the one—at least you are the only one I have ever seen. If they would

only go back where they belong and not come down here doing all they are doing!" The girl's dark eyes flashed, but the smile on her face belied the fierce tone she used.

"I told you why we were here and how glad we would all be to start for home tomorrow."

"I told you I was going to help you, and I am on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That if I help you to leave, you will never come back."

"What do you mean? That I am to leave the army?"

"Yes."

"I can't do that."

"Yes, you can do it, too!"

"Do you want me to desert?"

"I don't care what you call it or what you do if you only do what I tell you. I don't ever want to see or hear of you again."

"Thank you," said Taylor mockingly, bowing low as he spoke.

"Oh, you know what I mean. I hate the Yankees!"

"So I have heard you say."

“And you won’t promise me?”

“No.”

“Then I don’t believe you want to get away very badly.”

“Don’t I look the part?” inquired Taylor, once more glancing at his tattered clothing as he spoke.

“You Yankees are the vainest creatures,” laughed the girl.

“Yes, if you mean we are proud. We’re too proud to forget a promise.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“If we enlist and promise to serve our country we don’t go back on that promise and we don’t try to get any other one to do it either.”

“What do you mean?” demanded the girl angrily.

“Just what I say. What would you think of my sister or mother if either of them promised your brother he would be helped if he would agree to desert?”

“He couldn’t do it! You don’t know him.”

“And yet you want me to do that very thing and you promised to help me if I would

do what you would despise your own brother for doing.”

“I hadn’t thought of it in that way. Forgive me!” The expression of Miss Sallie’s face softened even as she said, “You know I hate the Yankees.”

“Are you afraid I’ll not understand that?” asked Taylor quizzically.

“But I do! I wish every one of them was where he deserved to be.”

“So do I,” Taylor said so fervently and seriously that the girl laughed as she looked at him.

“I’m going to help you.”

“Good! I am grateful.”

“I’m going to help you because I hate the Yankees.”

“I hope the feeling will increase.”

“You are to come with me.”

“Where?”

“To the house.”

“Did you ever hear of the spider who invited the fly to visit her?”

“You may do as you please, sir!” retorted Miss Sallie sharply, turning away as if she were about to depart.

“Don’t think I’m ungrateful,” said Taylor quickly, “but—”

“You’re afraid.”

“Naturally.”

“What are you afraid of?”

“Why even an invitation to visit the home of Captain George Hitt by his sister isn’t to be taken seriously by a Yankee prisoner when he’s dressed as I am.”

“You’re too proud.”

“No. I’m afraid.”

“There, I knew it.”

“Yes, I’m afraid Captain Hitt would give me a welcome that I should remember a long time.”

“He isn’t at home.”

“Think of the trouble you would have if I should be found.”

“I’m not afraid. I’m not going to give you a guest room. I’m going to put you in the attic.”

“A ragbag is where I belong just now.”

“That’s true. You think too much of your clothes. I thought that would be a good place for you to hide in for a day or two. No one would ever think of looking into our

attic for a Yankee prisoner." The girl laughed as she spoke and even Taylor smiled at the suggestion. "You will be fed and cared for and I think I can find some garments the scarecrows have discarded that will be an improvement over that suit of yours."

"Suppose I am seen going into the house with you?"

"You won't be. The men that came here this morning are gone. Aunt Katy will bring you to the house, won't you, Aunt Katy?"

"Ah sholy will, Mis' Sallie," said the negro woman. It was plain that she was puzzled by what she was hearing, but of her loyalty to her young mistress there was no question.

"Why do you think I'll be safer at the house than here?" asked Taylor of Miss Sallie. "I'm afraid—"

"There it is again!" laughed Miss Sallie. "Are you always afraid?"

"I'm afraid of trouble for you."

"You needn't have any fear for me. I can take care of myself, thank you!" re-

torted the girl. "I may be foolish, but I'm no coward."

"I'll do what you say," said Taylor quietly.

"Even a Yankee has a grain of sense—sometimes," said Miss Sallie lightly. "Listen then and I'll tell you what you are to do. In a few minutes—directly after I go back to the house—you are to come to the side door. Aunt Katy will come with you. Really, I'm afraid it is not safe for you here any longer. And Aunt Katy must not harbor any more Yankee prisoners. She's suspected of doing it now. I don't care much what she does in that line as far as I am concerned. I hate the Yankees and every one that Aunt Katy or any one else can get out of the country—why, it's 'a good riddance to bad rubbish'—that's the way I feel. I'm going now," the girl added abruptly as she at once departed from the cabin.

The huge negro woman looked keenly at the departing girl and then turned and glanced at Taylor. She made a sharp sound through her teeth—"K-l-u-ch"—but said

no more until her young mistress had entered the big house.

“Now, chile,” said Aunt Katy, “take de cheer an’ carry hit in yo’ han’s. We-uns mus’ do wha’ Mis’ Sallie done tole us.”

Perceiving the meaning of her suggestion that some apparent purpose in the visit must be shown, Taylor took the rush chair in his hands and at once followed Aunt Katy as she led the way to the mansion. No one was seen on their way and when they arrived at the entrance which Miss Sallie had indicated, they were met by the girl herself.

Apparently without fear she at once dismissed the negro woman and bidding her “guest” follow her she turned to the large hall in the center of the house. Up the broad stairway she quietly conducted Taylor until they came to the attic.

The young soldier was excited but quiet. In spite of the strangeness of his experience, he was aware how large the house was, how spacious its rooms and how wide the stairways. Manifestly it had been built for comfort. For a moment Taylor was aware as he never had been before of what the loss of



UP THE BROAD STAIRWAY SHE QUIETLY CONDUCTED TAYLOR.
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the home life, the life on the great plantation, must be to its owners. He had more sympathy for the people against whom he had been waging war than ever before. Perhaps he understood more clearly, for understanding, on either side in a quarrel, of the attitude and feelings of the other party is a sure path to less intense bitterness and more generous sympathies.

“Nobody comes here now,” said the girl when at last she and her companion arrived at the attic. “You’ll be safe here for a time. Don’t try to get out and don’t leave till I give you the word. I feel almost as if I were a traitor, but what you said about your mother and sister helping my brother made me do it. Besides, I hate Yankees,” she added irrelevantly. “I think you’ll find everything you need in there.”

Without waiting for a reply, Miss Sallie hastily closed the door as soon as Taylor entered the room, and at once departed.

The novel experience was so strange that for a moment the young soldier stared blankly about him. In one corner of the attic was an old-fashioned bedstead on which the

bed looked most inviting. Several pails of water were there too and on a small table was food—fried chicken and other viands that were tempting. On the back of a chair fresh clothing, including a partly worn suit, were displayed. On the coat a piece of paper was pinned which Taylor took and read the words written on it—“Food, clothing, water and a bed—what more can be done for ‘thine enemy’? Perhaps I might heap coals of fire on his head but I’m afraid they would be so hot they would burn his very soul. I hate Yankees.”

Taylor smiled as he read the note, his heart warming within him as he realized what all this had cost the high-spirited girl who had befriended him. He was no longer afraid. The one who had done so much would not now betray him.

Suddenly realizing that he had not fastened the attic door, he at once advanced and turned the button. A bath, clean clothing and food followed in order. The sight of the inviting bed was appealing now and in a brief time the young soldier was soundly sleeping.

It was noon of the following day when Taylor awoke, although he had no means of knowing or reckoning the passing of the hours. When his eyes were open at first he was unable to recall his surroundings. In a moment, however, he understood, and the first thought in his mind as he arose from the bed and dressed, was of the strange piece of paper he had found in the loft of Aunt Katy's cabin. In the excitement of going to the big house he had forgotten the discovery of his own name on the folded slip. Hastily he searched the pockets of his cast-off clothing. He found the paper, but before he could read it he turned to the door on which some one was rapping.

CHAPTER XXII

INTERCEPTED FLIGHT

CAUTIOUSLY opening the door, Taylor beheld before him the girl who had already befriended him in so many ways. Without speaking she indicated her desire for silence. Handing him the food she had brought, she remained outside the door and watched the young prisoner as he quickly received what she had brought and placed on a chair in the room.

Turning again to his visitor, Taylor inquired in a whisper, "What time is it?"

"Noon." She laughed lightly as an expression of incredulity crept over Taylor's face. "I have been here twice before this morning," she added. "As I could not get any response to my knocking I didn't know but you had gone."

"I wish I had," said Taylor fervently. "Is there anything new?"

"Nothing except that my brother and a

friend are coming to-day. I have heard too that the men found a Yankee yesterday in the woods and took him away."

"When is your brother coming?" inquired Taylor. He had no question in his mind concerning the man who had been taken. Uncle Sam was again in the hands of his enemies.

"I don't know. He sent word that he would be at home to-day. That is all I know."

"I ought to leave before he comes."

Miss Sallie did not reply and it was plain to the young soldier that she agreed with him in his suggestion.

"You have been good to me. I want to thank you for all you have done," Taylor said in a low voice.

"Don't thank me; thank your mother and sister; they are the ones who really did it. As for me, I hate all the Yankees."

"Every one?" asked Taylor quizzically.

"Yes, every one," replied the girl sharply, although the expression of her face in part belied her words as she looked at the young soldier. "Really," she added, "I don't

know that I should have recognized you in your new clothes and having a clean face. What are you going to do?"

"Leave as soon as I can."

"Perhaps you would do better to wait till night."

"And let your brother find me here?"

"I don't believe he'll find you, that is, if you keep quiet."

"It is almost too great a risk to run. Tell me," Taylor added quickly, "what road to take and where to go."

"That I cannot do. I have done my part, and a good deal more than I ought to have done, in hiding you as I have. I don't know what George would say if he should find out. Think of it — Sallie Hitt keeping a detested Yankee! It's too improbable for any one to believe. If it wasn't for your mother and sister you never would be here. I hate the Yankees."

"I'll tell them how good you were to them if I am ever so fortunate as to see them again."

"If you wait till night I'll see that the door on the side piazza is left unlocked. Go

down the same stairs up which you came, and if you are careful, perhaps no one will overhear you. I must go now."

"Will you shake hands with a Yankee?" asked Taylor, as he extended his hand as he spoke.

"No, sir!" replied the girl, drawing back with flashing eyes. "I told you I hate the Yankees."

"That's all right," laughed Taylor; "I don't blame you. When you first saw me I wouldn't have shaken hands with myself."

"You are just the same now—inside."

"What? And after you have fed me as you have?"

"Yes, sir. You are trying to drive us out of our homes."

"Do you mean me?" said Taylor, so solemnly that a smile appeared on the girl's face. "Why, I'm doing my best to get away."

"But you wouldn't promise not to come back."

"How could I make any such promise? Besides I shall *want* to come back because you—"

Taylor stopped abruptly as the sound of swiftly approaching horses was heard near the house. The look of alarm which Miss Sallie gave him was almost lost upon Taylor as he darted to the window in the attic and looked down upon the ground. Two young officers, each wearing the Confederate uniform, were riding rapidly up the long lane that led from the road to the house. Dismounting lightly as they stopped in front of the piazza, one of them called sharply, "Eben, you black rascal, come here and hold our horses."

"Yaas, Mas' Gorge," exclaimed a colored boy, as he came running in response to the call.

Miss Sallie's brother had returned then, Taylor thought, and with him was a friend. Perhaps they did not intend to remain long. The call to Eben to hold the horses indicated that the young officers might soon depart. The suggestion was helpful and the young prisoner turned quickly to the door of his room.

This he found had been closed. Opening it cautiously, he discovered, as he had ex-

pected, that the girl had gone. Cautiously closing the door once more, Taylor turned the button and then stepped carefully back to the window.

The horses were still where they had been left and the negro boy was holding both bridles. From within the house the sounds of laughter and of eager voices in conversation were heard. There was no question now in Taylor's mind that it was Miss Sallie's brother George who had come. The young soldier smiled as he thought of the anxiety of the girl. Certainly she had been kind to him and her kindness never would be forgotten, he assured himself. If he only knew just what the plans of the young officer were. How surprised he would be if he should discover a Yankee from Camp Sorghum hiding in his house. Again Taylor thought of the plight of the girl in such an event. He must leave the place as soon as such an attempt would be reasonably safe. His own case was bad and that of the girl who had befriended him was even worse. He must act soon, he decided, because of both.

Seating himself near the window from

which he could see all that occurred in the yard below, he ate the food which had been brought him. This he thought was the part of wisdom, for where his next meal was to be obtained was most uncertain.

When Taylor had eaten the food, he stepped to the door and opening it a few inches listened intently. The sound of the voices in the house had now ceased, although he could hear some negro woman singing in the hall below him.

When he closed the door and returned to the window he saw the colored boy leading one of the horses toward the barn, the other having been tied to the post near which the young officers had alighted. Plainly then, Taylor concluded, one of the young men was intending to remain for a while and the other might depart at any time. Looking out toward the barn, he discovered Miss Sallie and a young man walking side by side. The air was chilly and the young officer stopped and was adjusting a wrap about the girl's shoulders.

Where was her brother? The question suddenly presented itself to Taylor. In-

stantly returning to the door of the attic, he again opened it cautiously and stepped into the hall. Not a sound in the house was he able to hear. Stepping softly to the stairway, a sudden decision having been made by the young soldier, he began to descend. He had no means of defending himself in case he was attacked, but he was feeling stronger now after his long sleep and the food which had been given him.

He must move as swiftly as possible as well as silently, he thought. There had been no discovery of his presence when he gained the hallway on the second floor. The doors into the rooms here were open and all must be passed before he could gain the stairway at the further end. Trembling in his excitement, Taylor passed through a part of the distance and then beheld a young negro woman in the further room. Her back was toward him and he quickened his pace, stepping softly, and hoping to avoid discovery.

To his great relief he passed the open door without being seen and then began to descend the stairs. When he arrived at the platform half-way down he again stopped

and breathlessly peered all about him. The entire house seemed to be silent save for the sounds that came from what manifestly must be the dining-room and kitchen, he concluded. The door into the former was open and to pass it without being seen seemed well-nigh impossible. It was too late now to turn back. His sole hope rested upon gaining the side piazza.

When he passed the open doors he discovered a young man seated before a desk in the room at his left. For a moment it seemed to Taylor almost as if his heart had stopped beating, so great was his excitement. He had no difficulty even in his first hasty glimpse in concluding that it was "Mas' George" who was there. The young man was writing and was seated in such a manner, having his back to the window, that if he should look up he must of necessity see any one passing through the hall before him.

The heavy rug on the floor of the hall deadened the sound of footfalls and Taylor instantly decided to move quickly to the door. Success now depended upon escaping the at-

tention of the young man who was writing at the desk.

Dropping his head, almost as if he were striving to push his obstacles away, the young soldier stepped hastily forward. His eyes were turned toward the man in the room, who apparently was engrossed in his writing.

“Not quite ready yet,” suddenly said the young officer without looking up.

Taylor did not reply and quickly was beyond sight of the writer.

“That you, Tom?” called the voice again. “Come back in five minutes and I’ll have it ready for you.”

Naturally, Taylor did not reply, but was moving swiftly toward the door, which now was only a few feet away. He heard the young officer push back his chair and was confident the man was coming into the hall to discover why his question was not answered. There was a door in the hall near where Taylor was. He concluded that it would be impossible for him to escape to the piazza without being seen; in desperation he pulled the knob of this door. It readily yielded to

his frantic efforts and instantly he stepped inside. He did not even attempt to close the door after him, so great was his haste. He found himself in a small coat room and coats were hanging from the side walls. In a moment the desperate young soldier took his stand against the wall and drew one of the coats over him. Between its folds he could look out, and as he himself was in the dark he could not be seen, as he believed, by any one in the hall.

The light in the hallway, however, enabled him to see what was going on there. The young officer had come out of the room in which he had been writing and was peering above him.

“Eliza, was that Tom who was here?”

“Ah didn’ see ’im, Mas’ George,” replied a negro girl, who also was in the hall. How he had escaped her notice, Taylor could not understand. He was, however, too excited as he watched the young officer, to give any thought to what might have occurred. The present was too important to be ignored.

“Some one was in the hall. I reckoned it was Tom. If he comes, tell him I want to

see him. I told Eben to send him to me right away. Eliza," the young officer added, as he pointed to the door of the coat room in which Taylor was concealed, "what does your mistress say to you when you leave doors open like that?"

" 'Pears lak dat do' wo'n' stay shet, Mas' George, nohow."

"What's the trouble with it?"

"Ah dunno. Hit des wo'n' stay shet."

"Perhaps the catch is broken. Run along, Eliza, and tell Tom to come here directly. I'll have a look at the door while you are gone. Find Tom for me while I'm doing it."

"Ah spec's Tom is outen de kitch'n. He's mos' gen'ly is dere w'en dey is enny cookin' bein' done."

"Find him anyway, and be quick, too, Eliza. I have an important errand I want him to do."

As "Mas' George" started toward the coat room to discover what was wrong with the door, Taylor crouched more closely behind the coat that partly concealed him.

CHAPTER XXIII

A BORROWED HORSE

EVERY nerve in the young soldier's body was tense, as he watched the actions of the man before him. Apparently unsuspecting, the young officer bent over the knob of the door, testing it several times. His attempts to discover what was wrong did not meet with any success. The knob and key both turned readily in his hand.

Stepping inside the little room, "Mas' George" tried the knob in a different manner. His back was now turned toward Taylor, and the temptation at the sight presented was too great for the desperate young soldier to resist. Reaching forward without being discovered, Taylor suddenly seized the officer by his shoulders and with one supreme effort flung him back into the coat room.

Before the man could recover from his surprise, or regain an upright position, Taylor leaped forward, flung the door back into

its proper place, turned the key in the lock, and then thrust the key into his pocket. He had a confused vision of Eliza standing in the hallway, regarding him with open eyes, and uplifted hands. Ignoring the startling effect his presence had produced, Taylor darted through the door on his way to the side piazza.

The prolonged screech of terror which now came from the startled colored girl was mingled with the muffled sound of shouts and pounding from the coat room. Aware that the confusion would be vastly increased within a few moments, and that the danger of his own position was certain to be enlarged, Taylor rushed down the steps leading to the driveway. Before him, tied to a post, was the horse of "Mas' George." Taylor now instantly decided what he would do. Springing to the post, with one frantic pull on the strap he freed the horse, and then sprang upon the back of the startled animal.

At that moment Eben appeared on his way back from the barns.

For an instant the black boy stopped and in open-eyed astonishment gazed at the sight

before him. Then, realizing that evidently something was wrong, he darted swiftly forward, shouting in his loudest tones, "Hi! Mas' George! Mas' George!"

The sight of the approaching negro boy increased Taylor's excitement. At any moment the young Confederate officer might be freed from his place of confinement. As the man doubtless was armed, the peril of the escaping prisoner would be greatly increased. The appearance of Miss Sallie on the piazza added to Taylor's confusion. For a moment she gazed at the fleeing young soldier, and then her cry of alarm was added to that of the servants.

So sharply did Taylor pull on the rein that the horse reared and backed, and for a time it almost seemed to the rider that he would not be able to turn him about. The young soldier's hands were trembling, and the rein was shaking in his grasp.

At last, after what seemed to him in his desperation a long time, although in reality it was quickly done, the horse was headed down the lane, and in response to Taylor's urgent slapping of the bridle rein, leaped for-

ward. The rider's feet were not yet in the stirrups. He was, however, accustomed to horseback riding, and now, without delaying for further precautions, he darted swiftly away.

Leaning low on the neck of the horse, he glanced behind him. He could see the servants and Miss Sallie in the driveway in front of the great house, and even while he looked the young officer appeared in their midst. He, too, joined in the shouting, and then quickly raised his hand, in which he was holding a revolver, and fired at the fleeing man. Again he fired, but either his aim was poor in his excitement, or the swiftly running horse proved a deceptive target. At all events, neither horse nor rider was hit.

Resisting the temptation to mock his foes, Taylor still bent low upon the neck of the horse and urged the beast to increased speed. In a brief time he gained the road, and though he had no conception of the places where danger was most to be feared, he unhesitatingly turned to his right. That way at least led northward—the direction in which every hope of safety pointed.

For a mile or more Taylor did not permit his horse to slacken the speed at which he was running. Several times side roads were passed, and the young rider peered intently into them as he fled past, fearful of beholding pursuers more familiar than he with the region, who had taken advantage of their knowledge of short cuts or paths through the woods or across the country.

His horse now began to manifest signs of distress. The poor animal might already have had a long run before his master had returned to his home, Taylor thought; but pity had no place in his mind now. Flight from the region was his supreme purpose.

When another mile had been covered, Taylor was aware that he must check his speed. The poor horse was wet and almost covered with foam, and his breathing was agonized.

Turning into a path on his left that led into a tract of woods, Taylor soon permitted his horse to walk. He continued on his way until he was convinced that no one passing on the road could perceive him. He then dismounted and tied his panting steed to a sapling. He himself was almost in as dire

straits as his horse for, despite the cold, his face was dripping with perspiration, and he was shaking like a leaf in the wind.

Peering amongst the trees to make certain that no one was near, Taylor soon decided to leave the horse where he was tied, while he went back to the border of the woods near the road. Taking a stand behind a large tree, where it would be possible for him to see men approaching from either direction without being seen himself, he waited and watched the road.

Nor did he have long to wait before he saw some one approaching from the direction in which he himself had come. A man was riding furiously, and as he drew near Taylor at once recognized him as Miss Sallie's brother. The horse upon which he was mounted was large and apparently strong and fresh. The apparent confidence of the rider in his ability to overtake any fugitive was well placed, Taylor thought grimly, as he watched horse and rider until they disappeared beyond a bend in the road.

It was now nearly the middle of the afternoon. Glancing first at the sun and then at

the roadway, Taylor decided to remain where he was until darkness should come. Meanwhile, too, it was possible that the young Confederate officer, who was so keen in his pursuit, might return and abandon his attempt to regain his horse and secure the man who had stolen it. That the officer did not have any knowledge who the man he was pursuing really was, Taylor was confident. He was equally positive that Miss Sallie, despite her call, when he had taken flight, would not betray him.

The thought of the girl caused Taylor to look down at the clothing he was wearing. The suit was warm and not ill fitting. Shoes and stockings were on his feet, and a soft felt hat on his head. There was nothing in the garments to betray their wearer as belonging to either side in the great struggle which at the time was going on.

He thrust his hands into the pockets in the coat, and from one he drew forth a piece of paper on which there was roughly traced a map of the adjacent country. The rivers and larger towns even to the borders of Ten-

nessee and North Carolina were all indicated. The girl had done more than clothe and feed him; she had even given her enemy a clue to the entire region. Grateful, as he thought of what this meant for him, as well as how much it must have cost the girl who, as he was aware, was intense in her devotion to the cause of the Confederacy, the young soldier thrust the rude map back into his pocket and continued his investigations.

He did not find anything in the other pockets until at last he drew out the folded slip of paper which he had so strangely received at the cabin of Aunt Katy. For an instant he gazed at his name, which had been inscribed on the outside. Evidently the writer had used a small charred stick to do his writing, and yet the name—"Taylor Cooper"—was entirely legible.

Hastily opening the paper which in the confusion of his flight from Miss Sallie's house had been forgotten, he gazed a moment in astonishment at the one word it contained—"Winnisboro." What did the word mean? What was implied in the strange

missive? Was the name that of a place or of a man? Taylor had never before heard the word.

Again he drew forth the map which Miss Sallie had made and given him as he believed. There, not far from the Wateree river was a little place which had the name inscribed on the slip which he had received. But what was the relation between Winnisboro and Taylor Cooper? Had some one written him from there? If so, for what purpose? Or was it meant that he was to seek the place?

Consulting his map again, Taylor concluded that the little place was forty or more miles distant from Columbia. At all events it was north of Camp Sorghum, and the direction in which it was located of itself appealed to him.

For several minutes he studied the slip, striving to discover some clue as to its writer and his purpose. The scrawling writing was in a hand which he was unable to recognize. It was quite possible that Erwin might have been at Aunt Katy's cabin before he arrived there. The colored woman had acknowledged that other escaping prisoners had been

aided by her. Taylor had no difficulty in conjecturing that Aunt Katy was one of the faithful negroes who were aiding the soldiers of the North. Doubtless her cabin, too, was one in the long line where escaping prisoners were received and cared for, and then assisted on their way to the North.

But what of Winnisboro? Was that a link in the chain? Was he expected to find his way there? And if he succeeded in his attempt, whom was he to seek in the town? The mystery was by no means cleared when at last the young soldier thrust the note back into his pocket and resumed his watch.

The hours dragged on slowly, but only a few people passed the place. An aged negro had been one. He was seated in a rude little two-wheeled cart, which was drawn by a small and cadaverous black ox. At first Taylor had been tempted to hail the man, but thinking better of his purpose he had not done so. A white man having long yellow hair and a tobacco-stained, straggling beard as yellow as his hair, had walked down the road, but his appearance had been still less inviting than the negro's.

The afternoon crept slowly on and at last the dusk appeared. Not another sign had been seen of the young Confederate officer, who had been eager in his pursuit. If he had returned, he must have done so by another road, Taylor concluded. Even if it was not entirely safe for him to resume his flight, it would be less perilous than to remain longer where he then was. Accordingly Taylor returned to the place where his horse had been left. The time for further action had arrived.

A low whinny greeted him as he approached the horse. Unfastening him, Taylor led the animal, upon which his hopes now depended, to a brook and permitted him to drink his fill. Still not mounting, he led the horse by the bridle until the road was again before him.

First satisfying himself that no one was within sight, Taylor mounted and turned northward. For a time he proceeded slowly, maintaining a careful outlook as he advanced. Winnisboro, which he now had decided to seek, must lie somewhere to the north. This

was the sole idea of direction in his mind now.

He passed several huts or houses, but not one appeared inviting, and he dared not stop to make the inquiries he was eager to make. He must save the strength of his horse, too, for at any moment he might be compelled to flee for his life.

An hour had elapsed and the darkness had deepened. The sky was overcast and signs of an approaching storm were multiplying. Taylor had crossed two small streams, his horse's hoofs sounding noisily on the timbers of the rude bridges, and now not far before him he discovered another bridge. As he came nearer, his anxiety increased when he became aware that before him was a long covered bridge that spanned the stream. With every sense alert he slowly entered the dark structure. Not a sound was heard until he had come nearly to the exit. Then the silence was broken by the sharp call of a man.

CHAPTER XXIV

CAPTAIN HITT'S BAND

THE first impulse in Taylor's mind was to turn sharply about and flee back across the bridge. He could see the man before him in the dim light, and apparently he was alone. The gun in the hands of the man, however, was a deciding element, even if Taylor had not been aware that his horse was so nearly exhausted as to make flight well-nigh impossible.

"Who goes there?" again demanded the man.

"A friend," Taylor responded quietly. The sharp call implied that the stranger was a soldier, and also that a camp might be near. The fact, however, that no one else was to be seen was somewhat reassuring. Trusting to his ability to explain his presence on the bridge, or at least to avoid arousing the man's further suspicions, Taylor rode for-

ward in response to the call for him to advance.

As he passed out from the darkness of the bridge the man seized Taylor's horse by the bridle and peered intently into the young rider's face. The searching scrutiny was borne quietly by Taylor, who was doing his utmost to maintain an air of indifference.

"Whar' you'-all goin'?" inquired the guard sharply.

"Winnisboro."

"What fur?"

"I don't know that it concerns you."

"We've orders t' stop ev'ry man an' make him give an account of himself," said the soldier almost apologetically, as Taylor thought.

"That's right," responded Taylor. "Can't be too careful in these times."

"Yo'-all might be a stranger in these hyar pahts?"

"That's correct."

"Whar' did yo'-all come from?"

"Just now I came from Captain George Hitt's."

Apparently the man was interested at once, and Taylor regretted what he had said. It was too late to recall the words, however, and the young soldier was aware that now he must do his utmost to play well the part he had assumed.

“Is the cap’n comin’ shortly?”

“Yes, sir. He was in great haste the last time I saw him.”

“Yo’ had bettah stop an’ explain to the lieutenant.”

“That isn’t necessary,” said Taylor, hastily. “Just now I am needed at Winnisboro, and the captain himself will soon be here. He can explain to the lieutenant better than I can.”

“That may be so, suh,” said the guard, dubiously. “The lieutenant’s orders was fo’ me t’ bring ev’ry suspicious man t’ him.”

“You don’t think I’m suspicious, do you?” inquired Taylor, attempting to speak lightly.

“Yo’-all are a stranger.”

“To you, but not to the captain.”

“Thet may be so, stranger.”

“I’m in great haste now. I don’t think

Captain Hitt would take it kindly if you delayed me."

"Was you a goin' to Win'sboro fo' th' cap'n?"

"If it hadn't been for him I shouldn't even have thought of going there."

"What's wrong, Phoeb?" inquired a second man who now drew near out of the darkness.

If Taylor's horse had been only measurably fresh the young soldier would have attempted to dash past the men. The position was more perilous than it had been before, and Taylor's alarm increased. It was well-nigh impossible to escape two men who blocked his way. His wits must serve him now, Taylor decided.

"Nothin' wrong, I reck'n, Lieutenant," said the guard. "This yere man is just come from Cap'n Hitt's, an' is on his way to Win'boro."

"From Captain Hitt's!" exclaimed the lieutenant quickly. "That's good. Did he send any word to me?" he added, as he stepped forward, and in the dim light tried to look into Taylor's face.

“No, sir,” responded Taylor.

“That’s strange.”

Taylor did not feel called upon to explain what he himself did not know, and accordingly was silent.

“When did you leave the cap’n?” inquired the officer.

“This afternoon.”

The lieutenant appeared to be startled by the simple reply, although Taylor was unable to comprehend the cause.

“Yo’-all will have to stop and explain,” said the officer at last.

“I haven’t anything to explain.”

“Yo’-all will have to explain that, too,” the lieutenant suggested.

“I don’t understand.” The confusion of Taylor was as great as his fear, now that every way of escape seemingly was being blocked.

“Dismount and follow me,” said the officer, abruptly.

There was no help for it, and the young soldier dismounted. “You will not keep me very long, will you?” he inquired.

“That’s as may be,” replied the lieutenant.

ant, enigmatically. "That's Cap'n George's horse, Mag, all right enough," he suggested to the guard, as soon as he had inspected the animal as well as the insufficient light permitted.

"I reck'n th' man 's all right, sho' enough," responded the guard.

The officer did not refer to his own impressions, and turning to Taylor, he said briefly, "Come with me."

Turning sharply about, the officer led the way into a path which Taylor had not before seen. The way led through bushes, and was at right angles to the road. The young soldier's heart was filled with misgivings now, but apparently he made no objection, as he proceeded beside his guide.

The two men had not advanced more than fifty yards when Taylor beheld before him a camping place. A smouldering fire was burning in the center, about which a score of men were lying on the ground, and wrapped in blankets.

The scene was not comforting, and Taylor's alarm increased at the sight of the sleeping men before him. In some way, he

was confident, they were connected with Captain George Hitt, though why they were here was a problem for which he could not think of any solution.

The return of the lieutenant did not arouse his followers, although one or two men stirred at his approach.

“Sit down there!” said the lieutenant to Taylor, when they drew near the fire. As his suggestion was obeyed, he continued, “Now, then, stranger, th’ best thing fo’ yo’-all to do is t’ make a clean breast of it.”

“Of what?”

“Of the whole thing.”

“I don’t understand.”

“What are yo’ doin’?”

“‘Doing!’ Can’t you see? I’m not doing anything.”

“Perhaps yo’ll say yo’ aren’t a Yank?”

“Do I look like one?” inquired Taylor, striving to speak lightly, although his alarm was renewed by the startling and unexpected question.

“I can’t jest say about the ‘looks,’ stranger. I reck’n I can tell better ’bout that when it’s daylight. But from what I

heah, I s'pect yo' are a Yank, as sho' 's yo're born."

"What have you heard?"

"What did I heah you say was the time when yo'-all lef' Cap'n George Hitt's place, suh?"

"I don't think I mentioned the hour."

"Yo' sho'ly did not. But yo' made a reference toe th' time."

"This afternoon," suggested Taylor.

"That's it, stranger. Yanks say 'afternoon.' Down yere, we-uns all say 'evenin', suh."

It was true, Taylor had betrayed himself by his speech. He had endeavored to say as little as possible, but even the few words he had spoken had revealed him as he was to the keen-witted officer.

"I lived north when I was a small boy," began Taylor. "My grandfather lived in New York State, and I have spent many a summer with him."

The statement, of course, was not untrue in a way, but the eager young soldier was not confident his explanation would be well received.

“That may all be as you say, stranger,” said the officer. “I’m not denyin’ a word of it. Perhaps yo’ mought be willin’ toe inform me whar yo’ home mought be?”

“What good will that do? You think I am a Yank, and anything I can do or say won’t do any good now. I think I’ll—you are expecting Captain Hitt, soon?” he abruptly added.

“I reck’n Cap’n George mought turn up mos’ any time.”

“Then our best plan will be to wait until he comes.”

“Thet’s fo’ yo’ toe say, stranger.”

“If you are going to hold me here, I think I prefer to wait until Captain Hitt comes.”

“That’s agreeable to me.”

“It may not be to the captain,” Taylor suggested.

“I shan’t dispute yo’ as to thet.”

For a moment there was silence which was broken by the approach of the horse Taylor had been riding, now being led by one of the men whom the lieutenant had sent for it.

“This is the cap’n’s horse all right enough,” remarked the lieutenant, “and

everything may be just as yo'-all says it is, but yo'-all will have toe stay with us, stranger, till he himself comes an' says so."

"That's what I suggested, wasn't it?"

"I b'lieve yo' did refer toe it. Now, then, stranger, I reck'n we mought as well turn in. In the mo'nin' things may look different. Perhaps I'd better inform yo' thet the's a guyard about this yere camp, an' any man who tries fo' toe get away is likely toe heah a gun go off without much waitin' fo' toe find out whether he happens toe be a Yank or the first cousin o' Jefferson Davis. I reck'n yo' understan's toe what I'm referin'?"

"Yes. I think I take your meaning."

"Then we mought 's well turn in, suh. I regret that I am not able to set befo' a friend o' th' cap'n what is mo' becomin', but I reck'n yo' all won't object t' sharin' my tent with me?"

"That will suit me all right," responded Taylor. In a few minutes he and his captor were lying on blankets on the ground of the sole tent apparently in the possession of the band.

For a time schemes of escaping so filled the thoughts of the young soldier that all else was banished from his mind. Manifestly he was in the midst of a small force which in some way was connected with Miss Sallie's brother. He was not even positive that he would be able to recognize the young captain if he should see him.

The momentary glimpse he had obtained of the man seated at a table not far from the door which Taylor had swiftly passed in the hallway, had not been sufficient to fasten the recollection of the young officer's face in his memory. On the other hand, there was no question that the captain would recognize his own horse, and naturally conclude that the rider had been the man who had unceremoniously departed with it from the Hitt plantation.

Taylor's thoughts were far from pleasing. To attempt to escape now was not to be considered. His sole hope rested upon the failure of the young captain to return before he himself had found or made some way out of his present difficulties. The prospect of

either was not bright, but at last Taylor fell asleep.

It was daylight when he was awakened by the sound of voices near the entrance to the tent. "Bring him out!" Taylor heard someone say, sharply. Concluding that the captain had returned and was demanding that the unknown rider of his horse should be produced, Taylor at once arose and stepped outside, there to find himself face to face with a young Confederate officer whom he at once recognized by his striking resemblance to Miss Sallie.

"You are the man that stole my horse, are you?" demanded the young officer sharply, as he looked sternly at Taylor.

"That is too strong a word, Captain."

"It is, is it? And I sent you to Winnisboro, did I? And you wanted to wait until I came back, did you? Well, here I am! What have you to say?"

As Taylor did not reply, the angry captain turned to two men near him and said, "Search him! Search him from his head to his toes."

It was useless to resist, and in a moment the search began. The first discovery was of the map Miss Sallie had made. When the paper was handed to the captain, he glanced sharply at it, and then looking up, said quickly—"It is just as I thought. The man is a spy."

CHAPTER XXV

UNDER GUARD

“You are mistaken,” said Taylor quietly, although a great fear had arisen in his heart at the charge. He was well aware that there were many, many things to confirm the young captain in his belief. First of all, Taylor realized that his speech betrayed him, for it bore slight resemblance to that of the men about him. Then, too, the vest he wore was part of the uniform of a Confederate soldier. The map was also an added cause of suspicion, while the discovery of his horse in the possession of the prisoner did not tend to soothe the angry feelings of the captain, even if it did not of itself do more than imply a theft.

“That will be for you to explain to the court-martial,” replied Captain Hitt brusquely.

“Will you believe me if I tell you exactly who I am?” inquired Taylor.

“I’ll listen.”

“I am a Union soldier. I am perfectly willing to own that. I have been a prisoner in Libby, at Danville, and then at Camp Sorghum, near Columbia. I escaped from the camp—”

“When? How?” interrupted the young officer.

“A few days ago—I can’t tell you just how long ago it was. How I got away I shan’t explain. It might hurt some of the other poor fellows there who may be suffering as much as I did while I was in the horrible place.”

“Go on,” said the captain, quietly.

“Well, I managed to get away—”

“Were you alone?”

“No, sir.”

“How many were with you? Where are they now?”

“I wish I knew where they were,” said Taylor.

“You don’t know?”

“I don’t.”

“How many got away when you did?”

“I shall not tell you.”

“Go on with your story, sir.”

“There isn’t much more to tell. Somehow, I managed to keep out of the hands of the rebels until to-day. After I got your horse I thought I was sure to gain our lines. Now I wish I had never seen the animal.”

The young officer laughed for the first time in the interview. “Then you are the man who shut me in the cloak room of my own house, are you? If you don’t mind, I wish you would explain to me what you were doing in the house—how you happened to be there.”

“I was hiding.”

“In the house?”

“Yes, sir.”

“That sounds well, but it isn’t very likely, that’s all I have to say.”

“It is true.”

“You weren’t looking for papers or anything?”

“No, sir.”

“What made you go to the house?”

“I found the door on the side piazza open, and I went in. I knew that a search for Union men wouldn’t be made in Captain

Hitt's house. In one way the place was dangerous, but in another it was the safest place I could find."

"Where did you hide?"

"Upstairs—in the attic."

"And you did not meet anyone in the house?" inquired the captain, incredulously.

"That isn't very likely."

"It's more likely than that anyone in your house would help me."

"That may be so, sir. It's fortunate for you that Sallie—my sister—did not see you. She hates Yankees worse than any girl in the South does."

"So I heard—so I have heard," Taylor hastily corrected himself.

"Where did you get those clothes you are wearing?"

"I found them in the attic."

"And helped yourself to them?"

"I did," said Taylor, drily. "Wouldn't you?"

"No, sir. I wouldn't wear a Yankee rag to keep me from freezing! You have not told me about the map."

"It is just a rude little affair, as you can

see. There isn't a mark on it to show a thing about the rebel camps, or men. It's just a plain paper that I thought would help me to work north."

"Your men are south," said the captain bitterly. "That villain, Sherman—" The officer checked himself abruptly.

"I do not know where Sherman is," said Taylor. "We prisoners were not kept informed about the doings of the armies. I wanted to know, though. Has Richmond fallen?"

"Richmond fallen!" retorted the captain. "When the sun falls out of the sky, then you may look for the fall of Richmond, and not before."

"What is General Sherman doing so far south, then?"

"Doing? He's done everything a fiend incarnate ever did. He has robbed our houses, burned our barns, turned the negroes against us—"

"I have heard all that," interrupted Taylor, "but you aren't fair yourself."

"Not fair? What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. You wouldn't expect

General Sherman to come down South and have his men sit around in tents knitting stockings or doing fancy embroidery, would you? I never heard that war was a picnic—”

“Did you ever see my sister—Miss Sallie Hitt?” abruptly demanded the officer.

For a moment Taylor was well-nigh staggered by the question. He was not minded to betray the aid which the young girl had given him. He understood how intense her feeling of loyalty to the Confederacy was, but if it was even suspected that she had aided an escaping Union prisoner, even her devotion would be questioned, and her troubles would be greatly multiplied. His momentary hesitation was manifestly not pleasing to the young officer, whom Taylor, as he glanced up, found to be sternly regarding him.

“Is your sister the young lady with light hair and blue eyes that are very bright? Is she tall? Is she the one who was singing most of the time?”

“You seem to have a pretty full description.”

“Well, if she is the one I mean, then I did see her. She must have been the young lady who was so angry when I ‘borrowed’ your horse. She was shouting for some one to come and stop or shoot the horse thief. I saw her, and I heard her, too. If all the girls in the South are like her—”

“That was Sallie, all right,” said the young captain, plainly led into other thoughts by Taylor’s reference to Miss Sallie’s frantic calls for aid. “Your story may be a true one,” he added. “Indeed, I am inclined to believe it is true. But you will have to go with the detail—”

“Where?”

“South—to our men in the rear of Sherman. I am sorry I can’t go with you myself, but I’ll see to it that you don’t lose your way. I must stay up here and be on the lookout for Yankee spies and escaping prisoners, to say nothing of our deserters. The hills of Tennessee and North Carolina are too tempting for such fellows. We have to cut them off if we can—and we can. You can tell your story at the court-martial. Perhaps you will be believed. I am inclined to

think you are telling me the truth, but I have not found that I could just take the word of every man in these times—and I'm afraid it hasn't made very much difference whether he came from the North or South."

The young captain held a whispered conversation with one of his men, then mounting his horse, which had been rested and fed, rode away from the camp. After his departure, some plain food was brought Taylor, which he eagerly ate, but not a word was spoken to him by any of the men, nor were any plans for departure apparent. That Taylor was to be taken to the South, he did not doubt, though how he was to go he could not discover.

Indeed, the entire day passed and still not a word was spoken concerning the departure. At nightfall he begged for the privilege of a bath in the cold waters of the stream in the valley below the camping place. The privilege was granted, and two of the force accompanied him to the bank, although neither of them shared or apparently approved the project.

Greatly refreshed, Taylor returned to the

camp, and as soon as supper was served, he was ordered within a tent. There he stretched himself upon the ground and slept heavily until he was awakened in the morning.

Again food was served the prisoner, and despite the apparent hopelessness of his position, Taylor ate heartily, not knowing when a similar opportunity would be had. Soon after sunrise he was summoned by two of the men and told that he must accompany them. His questions as to their destination were not answered, but soon he was aware that they were proceeding over the road on which he had traveled the previous day. One of the two men who were with him was riding an old and stiffened horse. The other man was walking behind the young prisoner, who was compelled to advance in a position between the horse and the second man.

Somehow, the feeling in Taylor's heart was not entirely one of despair. To have been retaken, after his successful efforts in leaving Camp Sorghum, and the journey he had made for what he was positive must be twenty miles or more, was certainly not in-

spiring. And yet the information he had obtained from Captain Hitt that General Sherman's army was in Georgia, was in turn a source of hope. Exchanges of prisoners might be made, and as Taylor was confident that he would be successful in convincing the proper authorities that he really was what he claimed to be, and not a spy, there was hope that he might be among the fortunate number to be returned to the Union army. The determination to escape also, was by no means slumbering. He was watchful of every step the little party was taking, prepared to make the most of any opportunity that presented itself. As mile after mile was covered in the weary journey, and the attendants were keenly observant of him all the way, Taylor almost decided that for the present his wisest course would be to conform fully to the demands of his guard.

He several times attempted to draw them into conversation, but his efforts were unsuccessful. At intervals the men exchanged places, and the one who before had been serving as a rear guard, advanced and took his companion's place on the back of the horse,

and the former rider became the guard. If he had possessed any means of doing so, Taylor would have tried to bribe the men, but he had no money, even the few Confederate dollars which Aunt Katy had given him having been given up when the captain had searched his person.

Taylor enviously watched the two men when they exchanged places, and suddenly decided that he, too, was entitled to ride at least a part of the way. For a long time he had been walking in silence. Suddenly with a groan he seated himself upon the ground, and the little procession at once halted.

“What’s th’ trouble, Yank?” inquired one of the men.

“I’ve turned my ankle,” replied Taylor, groaning heavily.

“That’s too bad. I reck’n yo’-all ’ll hev ter keep on.”

“I can’t walk,” replied Taylor, attempting to rise as he spoke, and then sinking back to the ground with a heartrending groan. “If I only had some hot water!”

“Can’t be had. Yo’ll feel better after a bit.”

“Perhaps I will. It’s good of you to wait for me.”

“We haven’t said we’d wait. We jest got t’ be at th’ crossroads by two o’clock.”

Taylor’s groans became still more pronounced and agonizing.

“Let th’ Yank ride a bit,” suggested the man on horseback.

“Walkin’ is good enough for th’ blue-belly,” retorted the second man.

“Naw, Tom. We-uns ’ll lose time. Give him a lift.”

Groaning loudly, Taylor was helped to a seat on the back of the horse. The little procession resumed its advance, but any hope Taylor had cherished that his horse would be of assistance in escaping was lost when one of the men, drawing his pistol, an example which his companion followed, called, “Now, none o’ yer tricks, Yank! We-uns hev got yo’ all spotted, and th’ first sign o’ trouble makes th’ gun pop. Understand?”

Taylor was convinced that he did, and replied accordingly. He strove to console himself with the knowledge that, even if escape was impossible, riding was much more

easy than walking, an assurance that became more impressive when he glanced at the men toiling over the rough road.

The "lame" prisoner was not requested to give up his seat until two hours later, when the little party arrived at what evidently was a small camp. In the center of the band of twenty men Taylor beheld a half-dozen who evidently were prisoners like himself. His surprise was even greater than his interest when he beheld both Erwin and Samuel in the number.

CHAPTER XXVI

CARRYING A LOAD

THE arrival of the party apparently aroused but little interest in the assembly, even the prisoners scarcely glancing at the newcomers. Indeed, Taylor had as yet not been seen by either of his friends when he alighted from the horse, which his guard had permitted him to ride all the way to the camp.

Proceeding at once to the two boys, all signs of his lameness having disappeared, Taylor approached Erwin, who was seated upon the ground, and touched his friend's shoulder. The condition of Erwin was such as to startle the young soldier. He was so thin that his face appeared to be emaciated. His clothing was in tatters, and his complete dejection was manifest in his bearing. Taylor himself was thin and worn, but his friend's condition was evidently so much worse than his own that for the moment all

his thoughts were centered upon Erwin.

As Erwin slowly turned his head toward the one who had touched his shoulder, his eyes betrayed no expression of interest or even of surprise. He gazed stolidly at his recent companion and did not speak.

“How did you happen to come here?” inquired Taylor.

“The rebs brought me,” replied Erwin.

“Where did they get you?”

“I don’t know.”

“Don’t know? What do you mean?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care,” replied Erwin, dejectedly.

“How long have you been here?”

Erwin shook his head and was silent.

Taylor’s fears were aroused by the exhaustion of his comrade. Something must be done for him, and at once, he concluded, although what aid could be secured was not apparent. As Taylor looked helplessly about him, he saw Samuel approaching, and instantly he turned to the lank prisoner. “Uncle Sam, where were you and Erwin caught?”

“I don’t know anything about Erwin. I

hadn't seen him since you ran away from me."

"I didn't run away from you."

"Yes, you did!"

"Where?"

"I don't know the name of the place. It was in the road where we saw the bush-whackers."

If Taylor had not been so depressed by the sight of Erwin's sufferings, he would have laughed. Run away? Why, he had waited vainly for Samuel to follow him. The last glimpse he had had of his unfortunate fellow townsman had been as the latter was leaping frantically from the road for the shelter of the adjacent woods. And now Uncle Sam was aggrieved because his friend had not "waited" for him.

"Never mind that, now. What can we do for Erwin?"

"Nothing, I guess."

"But we must. He's in bad shape."

"So am I. I've got a blister on one of my feet. I'm hungry, and I hate the whole war! I wish I was at home or lived down here."

“Why don’t you join the rebels?”

“I’ve been thinking of it.”

“That’s right. A man with no more to him than there is to you belongs there. I’ll give you a couple of kicks to help you on.”

Taylor turned sharply away and at once sought one of the soldiers. “Can you tell me where you found this man?” he inquired, pointing to Erwin as he spoke.

“I picked him up myself. I found him sick about three miles from here in old Richard’s cabin.”

“Why didn’t you leave him there? He’s a sick man.”

“We-all will attend to his troubles pretty quick, suh.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“We’ll send him to the hospital.”

“When you reach camp?”

“Yaas, suh.”

“When will that be?”

“Right soon, I reckon.”

“But the man is sick. He can’t travel,” protested Taylor.

“He sho’ly does look lak he is feelin’ po’ly.”

“He’s starving.”

“I reckon the’ aint any o’ us troubled with high livin’. Yo’ wait right yere an’ I’ll see what I can do fo’ yo’.”

The soldier turned away and in a brief time returned with a piece of corn bread and a single roasted sweet potato in his hands. “This is th’ best I can do fo’ yo’, suh,” he said quietly, as he offered Taylor the food.

“Thank you. You are good to us. Did this come out of your own rations?”

The soldier laughed good-naturedly, as he replied, “Don’t yo’ trouble yourself about that. I reckon I shan’t have to give up my supper many times to that po’ fellow. He won’t be livin’ on co’n bread or anything else much longer.”

“What yo’-all doin’, Ed?” demanded an approaching soldier who had seen his fellow soldier’s generous act.

“Nothin’ much, I reckon. Jest helpin’ th’ Yank t’ a bit o’ forage.”

“You’re a fool, Ed! I wouldn’t give one of the bluebellies a crumb if it kep’ him from starvin’ t’ death.”

“I reckon no more yo’ wouldn’t, John,” said the first soldier, simply.

“Yo’re right, I wouldn’t! If th’ Yanks got what they deserved, they’d all be—”

“What you got there, Taylor?” interrupted Samuel, who at this moment approached and stood near, looking longingly at the food in the hands of his friend.

“Something for Erwin to eat. This man gave it to me,” Taylor added, as he looked at the Confederate guard. “I hope he’ll fare as well when he falls into our hands.”

“That’s all right, Yank. I’ll repo’t if I ever gits whar I need yore help.”

“Yo’-all bettah shet Ed up in an idiot ’sylum, if he ever is a prisoner,” said the second Confederate, scornfully.

Taylor laughed good-naturedly, and at once retraced his way to the place where he had left Erwin. By his side walked Samuel, silent, his eyes seldom turned away from the food his companion was carrying.

“You’re going to go snucks, aren’t you, Taylor?” he inquired at last.

For an instant Taylor’s eyes flashed om-

inously. Then, without replying to the query, he said, "Uncle Sam, how did the rebs get you?"

"I walked right into a camp of five bushwhackers."

"Without suspecting who or what they were?"

"I might 'a' suspected, but they had some chickens roasting over a fire—"

"I see," interrupted Taylor, dryly. "Uncle Sam, I'll give you a piece of this corn bread on one condition."

"What's that?"

"To-morrow morning, or whenever we are taken out of this place, you and I will take turns carrying Erwin on our backs when we have to wade a stream. Erwin is played out."

"So 'm I."

"You whine as if you were good for what I'm asking, anyway."

"I agree if you'll agree to what I propose, too."

"What is that?"

"That we draw cuts to see whether you or I'll be the first."

"I'll do that," said Taylor, quickly.

"Hold your horses! I'm not all done yet. What I propose is that the one that draws the cut to carry Erwin should come back and take the other one across. There's no use in both of us getting wet, is there?"

"Not a bit. I'll agree to it. Here's your corn bread, Uncle Sam," said Taylor, as he divided the bread and gave a piece to his companion.

When the two boys arrived at the place where Erwin was seated, Taylor said eagerly, "We've been lucky, Erwin. We found a reb who gave us some supper. Here's yours. You must eat every crumb of it."

As Erwin sat quickly erect and took and almost ravenously began to devour the food, his friend smiled and nodded his head approvingly. "You'll do. We'll get you back to York State yet," he said to himself. When the last crumb had been eaten by the famished prisoner, Taylor turned to Samuel and inquired, "Got your 'cuts' ready?"

"Yes," replied Samuel, extending his left hand, which was tightly closed, two blades

of grass appearing between his thumb and forefinger. "Which 'll you take?"

"Wait a minute. Is it the long or the short that is 'it'?"

"The long."

"All right. Then I'll take the short," said Taylor promptly, as he drew forth one of the straws. "Here! Hold on! We don't do that," he added hastily, as Samuel attempted to break the straw remaining in his hand.

"I was just fooling," said Samuel, blandly. "You've got me, all right."

"I intend to keep you, too!" retorted Taylor, sternly.

"Don't you be too sure o' that!"

Taylor did not reply, because at that moment word was passed that "supper" had been provided for the prisoners. It is true, sweet potatoes provided the sole article of food, but the men were weary and hungry, and all eagerly devoured their portions, even Erwin joining in the repast with as great an appearance of enjoyment as when his friend had brought him food a little while before.

It was soon learned that the party was to

remain for the night in the place where it then was. Taylor and Erwin, together with the other prisoners, were taken to the local jail, and the two boys, at their own request, were assigned to one cell. Strong as was Taylor's desire to talk to his friend, he said but little when night fell. To his delight Erwin was soon sleeping soundly. When morning came and roasted sweet potatoes once more were served, Erwin appeared like a different boy from the one of the preceding night. Food, even of such a quality as had been provided, sleep, and, more than all, the company of Taylor, had served to revive somewhat the drooping spirits of the young soldier.

As for Taylor, he was more firmly resolved than ever he had been to attempt to escape. The horrors of prison life were too vivid still for him to be reconciled to the thought of again being shut up in a pen. When at last preparations for the departure of the band were completed, he was rejoiced when he discovered that Erwin, Samuel and himself were assigned to two men. Apparently it had been deemed wise not to take the half-

dozen prisoners in a body to their destination, whatever that might prove to be, but to divide the party into two divisions, assign an armed guard of two soldiers to each, and leave the other men free to continue their search for escaped prisoners, and for deserters from the Confederate army.

Soon after sunrise the three boys departed. The guards both marched behind the prisoners, directing them in their course, but otherwise apparently in no fear of attempts to escape being made. Each guard was fully armed, carrying a carbine over his shoulder, and a brace of pistols showing threateningly from their belts.

“Here’s your place!” exclaimed Taylor to Samuel, as they approached the ford in a stream about twenty feet wide. “Carry Erwin first, and then come back for me.”

The guards laughed, as they heard the demand, but neither made any objection to the proposal.

“Wait till we come to the next,” suggested Samuel.

“This is the next. Take up your load!”

“That’s right, Yank,” laughed one of the

guard. "If yo'-all make it go, then we-uns 'll give yo' another load."

Apparently Samuel was about to refuse, but thinking better of his action, stooped morosely and Erwin placed himself on the back of the tall young soldier. Entering the stream, Samuel at once carried his burden to the opposite bank of the stream, and then called tauntingly to Taylor to follow. It was only when the laughing guards threatened to throw him into the water if he did not live up to his promise, that Uncle Sam re-entered the stream and crossed to the side where Taylor was awaiting him.

"Now, be careful, Uncle Sam," remarked Taylor, when he was on his companion's back in midstream. "Go slow! Hi there!" he added as his carrier stumbled and almost fell.

However, Samuel at last deposited his burden safely, and the advance was at once resumed. Taylor's chagrin was as great as Samuel's elation, when they soon approached a second ford.

"My turn now!" Samuel shouted, as he threw his arms about Taylor's neck.

“Not much, it isn’t!” retorted Taylor, as he flung his burden aside. “You will wait till I have taken Erwin across.”

In spite of Samuel’s rage, his companion was first taken. Then without a word, Taylor returned, took the long, lank Samuel on his back, advanced into the stream, and when he was half-way across, deliberately sat down, despite the angry shouts of protest from his passenger.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE JAIL

LETTING go his grasp on Taylor's neck, with a splash Samuel fell into the water. Instantly darting forward to the bank, Taylor halted there and called to his luckless comrade, "You dropped something, Uncle Sam!"

Sputtering, splashing, apparently unable to regain a foothold, the luckless victim bestowed a glance of anger upon his tormentor, but did not speak.

"Come here, Uncle Sam, and I'll pick you up," called Taylor, banteringly.

Both guards laughed loudly at the discomfiture of their lank prisoner, and even Erwin joined, the first time in many days that he had betrayed any signs of mirth.

At last Samuel came stumbling to the shore, and, almost beside himself with rage, rushed upon Taylor. The derisive calls of the guards increased the dripping prisoner's

anger. "I'll show you!" he shouted. "That was a mean trick. I'm wet—"

"I'm sorry," broke in Taylor. "I had no idea that water was wet. It isn't like—"

By this time Samuel was close upon him, and stepping hastily to one side, Taylor flung his arms about his angry comrade and held him tightly. "Now, Uncle Sam," he said, soothingly, "be reasonable. I didn't want to do what I did. In the language of our ancestors, 'It hurt me more than it did you.' I was thinking only of your good. You had not learned the lesson we all have to learn, and that is, that every one must bear his own burden. You did not seem to take kindly to the part you agreed to take. I feel it to be my duty to impress the needed lesson. Besides, Uncle Sam, it will be your turn next time, and if you want to, you can douse me then. Will you be good?"

As Samuel had ceased to struggle, and his resistance apparently was at an end, Taylor released him and turned at once to his guard.

"I think we are all ready now. Thank you for your kindness in waiting."

The laughter of the two soldiers was re-

newed, and a deeper scowl appeared on the face of the angry Samuel, but otherwise no results of the "discipline" were apparent.

When another hour had elapsed, Erwin's weariness became so marked that his friend begged their attendants to stop for the night. The request, however, was unheeded, and the little party proceeded on its way, Taylor frequently being compelled to assist his well-nigh exhausted companion. Uncle Sam had not spoken since his mishap. He was morose, and evidently still angry, and kept to himself all the way.

Taylor was still watchful of an opportunity to escape the vigilance of the soldiers. The men were not ill-disposed, but their vigilance was unrelaxed. The direction in which the little band was moving was still southward, and what their destination was to be Taylor was satisfied he well knew.

They were passing through a long stretch of woods now. Very few people had been met on the way, and the plantations apparently were for the greater part neglected or abandoned. Doubtless the nearness of the armies, Taylor concluded, had caused many

of the people that dwelt in the region, to seek safety in the nearest cities.

Suddenly one of the guards raised his carbine and fired. The shot was startling to the prisoners, not one of whom had discovered any danger on the way.

“I got him!” shouted the soldier. “Look out for the men, Jim,” he added, as he dashed into the woods.

Still the source of the man’s excitement could not be seen. Erwin was trembling in his weakness, and crept close to his friend’s side. In a brief time the soldier returned and, flinging a black squirrel upon the ground at the feet of his comrade, said, “I reckon we-all had better stop fo’ supper, Jim.”

The second soldier hesitated. “We-uns ought t’ be thar by midnight.”

“We’ll make it, suh. We’ll do better if we-uns first have a bite.”

The protests ceased and preparations for a fire were at once made. In this task Taylor assisted, and in a brief time the squirrel was being roasted. The savory odor was tempting and tantalizing. Taylor’s heart

was heavy, as he watched the hunger expressed in Erwin's eyes. He himself, however, was thinking of other things. The determination to escape was now so strong as to be almost overpowering. Had he been the only prisoner, he would have leaped upon the guard left in charge when his companion had darted into the woods in search of the squirrel he had shot. The desperate project appeared to be strongly attractive. The peril was not to be considered in comparison with the meaning of success. The project had been abandoned, however, because of Erwin's manifest weakness. He could not, he would not abandon his friend in such a time. The thoughts of possible means of escape, however, in all of which Erwin was included, were still foremost in Taylor's mind, as he assisted in the preparation of the squirrel. It was not probable that the prisoners would be given any share in the repast, although Taylor was not entirely without hope. If a bit of the meat should be given him, he was planning to give it all to Erwin. His friend's strength now was the most important of all the problems to be faced.

At last the browned and roasted squirrel was taken from the spit, and the two soldiers prepared to divide it. Some corn bread and roasted corn which they had brought with them were placed on a log nearby, and then one of the men took his knife and divided the squirrel into two portions.

“Jim, let’s share with th’ Yanks,” suggested the younger of the two soldiers.

“Co’n bread is good enough fo’ the bluebellies,” growled Jim.

“Yaas, suh. I reck’n that’s so; but I’m so doggoned tired o’ the whole wa’ I don’t keer much if I don’t live toe git back t’ camp. I reck’n we-uns mought as well be good.”

His companion hesitated a moment, and then said, sulkily, “We-uns will take half an’ let th’ Yanks have th’ other half.”

“That’s right,” said Samuel, at once advancing and seizing one of the halves before anyone could protest.

“Let me take your gun a minute,” said Taylor, hastily, to one of the guards.

“I was goin’ to divide it,” exclaimed Sam-

uel quickly, before the man could respond.

“I’ll do the dividing,” said Taylor quietly, as he held out his hand for the half portion of the squirrel.

Uncle Sam hesitated an instant, and then, without a word, gave the meat to Taylor. The latter at once cut off the tail, which he handed back to Samuel. “There! Your thoughtfulness and generosity shall be rewarded.”

“Give me my share,” shouted Samuel.

“Softly, my friend. I am not deaf. The voice is one of the surest methods of finding out the physical condition of a man. If I can judge from the sound of your’s, Uncle Sam, I think you will live to the age of eighty-nine years, ten months and thirty days. That being the case, I was about to suggest that you and I dine upon the bread and roasted corn, and give this meat to our friend Erwin, who is far from being in as good condition as you or I.”

“I want my share,” declared Samuel, though his voice was lower now.

“He is going to have it, as far as I am concerned,” said Erwin quickly. “And you

will take yours, too, Taylor, or I sha'n't have mine."

"Just as you say," laughed Taylor, who for reasons of his own did not care to prolong the conversation.

A half-hour later, when the march was resumed, it was evident that Erwin was greatly refreshed by the repast, and Taylor's hopes of being able to discover some means of escape returned. Samuel, still glum, had nothing to say to his companions, a course which met Taylor's warm commendation. He had already decided that Uncle Sam's company could not be endured. The plight of Erwin, the sight of whose emaciated body and colorless face strongly moved his friend, was so great that success must not be imperiled by the presence of Samuel, who was certain to make trouble wherever he was.

But the guards were both alert, and when, late in the evening, the party arrived at a small town and the three prisoners were confined within the walls of the jail there, not an opportunity to escape had even suggested itself.

Utterly wearied by the long march, the

boys ate the scanty food which was brought them, and then flinging themselves upon the brick floor, were soon asleep.

In the morning, when the boys were informed that they were to remain where they then were until further orders had been received, at first Taylor was disappointed. They were to be conducted, as he supposed, to the Confederate lines, and every day the difficulty of escaping would naturally be increased. However, when he thought what the rest would do for his friend, he was more content, and striving to meet the conditions with the best possible grace, he was thinking of the means he might employ to aid him.

In response to his request, permission was granted for the boys to spend a part of the day in the open court adjoining the jail. A high wall of brick had been built around three sides of this open place, the fourth side being protected by a fence of high palings.

Not long after the prisoners had been granted this freedom, the straggling people of the vicinity began to gather in front of the fence and gaze with manifest curiosity at the boys.

“I guess they thought all the Yanks had horns,” suggested Taylor demurely, as he watched the assembly. Children, old men and women were solemnly peering at the men before them, seldom speaking and as seldom turning away their eyes.

“Listen to me,” suggested Taylor a few moments later, as he arose and approached the fence—an action which caused some of the children to draw back in manifest alarm.

“Good morning,” called Taylor, pleasantly addressing an old man in the assembly.

“Mawnin’, suh,” replied the old man solemnly. The curiosity of the assembly increased and drew those who had retreated back to a place where the conversation might be heard.

“Any place near here where we might get a little milk?”

“I dunno.”

“Where is milk kept?”

“I reck’n mos’ly in the cows.”

“Surely. I wonder why I hadn’t thought of that before,” laughed Taylor. “Might I inquire where the cows are kept?”

“The’ aint kep’, stranger.”

“Why not?”

“They has mos’ly been taken. Th’ Yanks took some, an’ what they didn’t take, the Confed’rates took. They’re gone anyway.”

“Can we get anything to eat here?”

“I reck’n yo’ can.”

“Even if we can’t pay for it—now?”

The old man made no reply. Turning to a lad near him he said, “Run home, boy, an’ bring some o’ the co’n bread yo’ maw baked this mo’nin’.”

The boy departed, but without displaying any propensity to “run.”

Corn bread! Apparently it was the chief if not the sole article of food among the poor people of the region. Not alone the armies suffered in the struggle, thought Taylor. Privation was apparent in every face before him. And no young men and only a few boys to be seen in the curious assemblage! In spite of his own sufferings and disappointments, Taylor appreciated now, as he never had before, the meaning of the war.

In a brief time the “co’n” bread was brought, but instead of being able to add it to their supplies, as Taylor had hoped, he

soon learned that it was to take the place of the food which the guard might provide.

Striving to keep up the spirits of Erwin, who slept a part of the day, and ignoring Samuel, who still kept to himself, Taylor, as night drew nigh, when most of the curious people had departed, suddenly thought of a plan which he at once prepared to test.

At his request one of the girls in the assembly secured for him a sheet of paper and a yellow envelope. A lead pencil was more difficult to obtain, but at last that, too, was found. Provided with these, Taylor withdrew to a corner of the court and there, seating himself on the ground, at once began to write.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AN ENLARGED FORCE

IGNORING the curiosity of Samuel, who at once approached and gazed in manifest interest at his companion, Taylor soon wrote his letter and sealed it in the yellow envelope. What he had written was as follows:

SOMEWHERE IN THE LAND OF COTTON.

Sometime in the Winter.

“My dear Miss Sallie:

“Recalling your urgent request for me to drop you a line, I am availing myself of a few moments of leisure to fulfill my promise. I regret exceedingly that I was unable, when I departed from your house, to respond to your cordial invitation to remain longer. I fully appreciated your efforts to induce the negroes to persuade me to remain, but it was impossible, at the moment, to comply. The loan of your brother’s horse, I am sure, was very kind on your part. I returned the horse on the following morning. Your brother is a fine man. We had a very warm interview when we met. I was reluctant to proceed

without him, but he selected several of his best friends to go with me, so I have not been lonesome at any time. In fact, I am very much taken by the people of the South. How hospitable they are! They are so cordial that they are not willing to have me out of their sight. I have not changed my colors, but I think it is quite likely I shall go to the camp of General Wheeler, whose cavalrymen, I understand, are not far from this place.

“I hope you will appreciate my inability to depart from the Southland. I confess there are moments when I feel homesick, and long to see my family and friends of the North, but the ties that bind me here are even stronger. I simply can't tear myself away.

“What I want most of all, if this letter finally reaches you, is for you to tell Captain Hitt to look me up if he chances to be in Wheeler's camp—that is, if Sherman leaves any camp, and there is anything left of Wheeler. I have something very important to say to your brother, and I promise you I will treat him gently. Don't forget either that or the hated Yankee who was a guest in your delightful home.

“TAYLOR COOPER.”

When this letter had been written, and the envelope directed—though the young soldier

was by no means certain the directions were accurate—the promise of the guard was obtained that he would do his utmost to see that it was forwarded.

Two days the prisoners were held in the little jail, and then when a dozen more unfortunates were brought to the same place, the entire band, early the following morning, was ordered to proceed under a guard of four men.

From the conversation of the soldiers and the people, Taylor had become convinced that the Confederate General Wheeler was not far away. The affection for, and confidence in the daring, dashing little leader of the Confederate cavalry were so marked that even the young prisoners almost shared in the prevailing feeling. The thought, however, that the cavalry was in the rear of Sherman's army was what most cheered Taylor, who was determined to escape and find a way into the ranks of his near-by comrades, if escape was in anywise possible.

Repeatedly he had talked with Erwin during the two days, and to Taylor's delight his friend now apparently was almost as eager

as he to make the attempt. The rest had done great things for Erwin, who had slept much of the time, and the food, though coarse and uninviting, had been ample for the needs of the three prisoners.

Early in the morning, the fifteen men, most of whom were pale and emaciated, were formed in line, and, with four soldiers as a guard in command of a sergeant, the band started southward. Halts were occasionally made, but the prisoners had been informed at the start that twenty-five miles were to be covered that day.

When night fell it was not known whether or not the requisite number of miles had been covered, but the prisoners were so wearied by their long march that, with the exception of Taylor, every one was asleep as soon as the opportunity was granted. For a long time Taylor remained awake, more determined than ever to find some way out of his difficulties. His last hope was centered upon Captain Hitt, though the young soldier fully understood how remote were the chances, either of Miss Sallie receiving the letter he had written her, or of her brother paying

any attention to the request he had made in case he was carried into the Confederate camp.

The sergeant in charge of the band of prisoners was a dull-witted fellow, faithful in his efforts to follow the directions given him by his fellow officers, and plainly one who was not to be easily turned aside. Taylor had been observing him much of the time on the march, desirous of learning what his weak points were. Every one of the guard was heavily armed and plainly much reliance was placed upon this fact as well as upon the weakness of the prisoners themselves, as a prevention of escape.

The two days that followed were not unlike the first except that the weakened condition of the prisoners prevented as long a march. On the third day it was known that the Georgia line had been crossed, and Taylor was becoming almost desperate. The vigilance of the guard had not once been relaxed. To escape had been impossible.

As a method of aiding him in his ultimate plan Taylor had been among the most docile of the prisoners. Quick to heed every de-

mand, laughing when others were groaning or complaining, he had steadily endeavored to banish any suspicion that might have arisen concerning him. And in a measure he had been successful, or so he believed. The sergeant frequently had marched beside him, and on occasions even entered into conversation with him.

On the fourth day a brief stop had been made at a humble abode near one of the many swamps that were passed on the march. The sergeant had gone to the house in a vain attempt to secure food. When he had retaken his place beside Taylor, he said drawlingly, "We-uns are a hearin' erbout th' doin's of Sherman's men. This woman back yere 'pears t' be of th' 'pinion it doesn't make a heap o' dif'rence whether it's a Johnnie or a Yank that happens erlong. If the's anything on the place she says that it's gone when the men leave. This yere woman let on that 'Mr. Wheeler an' his critter company drove inter my back yard t'other day, tipped my ash-hopper over, an' drawed out two streaks of light half a mile long, with his wagon guns on the ends of 'em

—an' when he went away he never paid me nary cent. I allers thought yo'-uns was a decenter set o' men; but the Yanks their-selves is no wusser. Now ef yo'-uns don't go 'long an leave us what little we've got, we'll shorely perish.' I felt for the woman," added the guard.

"Of course you did," said Taylor cordially. "I guess either army doesn't always stop to apologize when it finds rations."

"I reck'n yo're right. We'll make Sylvany t'night."

"Is that so!" exclaimed Taylor quickly.

"Yaas, suh. The'll be a round-up thar, I reckon. I'll be 'mighty glad to turn yo'-uns over toe the proper authorities."

"We haven't given you any trouble," Taylor suggested.

"No mo' yo' haven't, suh. But I'll be glad toe be shet on you."

"How far is Sylvania from General Wheeler's army?"

"Caint say, suh."

"I suppose the army shifts often—to keep away from Sherman?"

“Mought be.”

“Have you heard how far away Sherman is?”

“No, suh.”

“He can’t be very far if Wheeler is hanging onto the rear of the army.”

“Like’ enough.”

“Have you ever been in Sylvania?”

“I have, suh.”

“How large a place is it?”

“It’s a right sma’t little town.”

“Thousand people there?”

“I caint say as ter thet.”

“Is it an important place?”

“I reck’n it is toe th’ people what live thar. Th’ armies haven’t stopped there much an’ the consequence is th’ isn’t a place in th’ whole o’ Georgia whar the’s less known about th’wa’. What yo’-all want ter know so much ’bout Sylvany fo’?”

“I don’t know,” laughed Taylor, at once reminded that perhaps he was displaying too much interest.

“Yo’-all is pow’ful fond o’ askin’ questions. I’ve seen a good many Yanks in my time, an’ they’re mos’ly all alike. They can

ask mo' questions than— Hi! I reckon we-uns are right close t' th' place we're seekin'. That's Sylvany!" indicated the sergeant as he at once departed from Taylor's side and advanced to the head of the line.

The arrival in the little straggling town was heralded after the same manner the approach to other villages had been. A motley assembly of children, women, old men and negroes solemnly watched the "Yankees" when the prisoners had been conducted to a large unoccupied house near the main street. The curiosity of the assembled people soon became more manifest than had been shown in other places. Remarks were made expressive of the impressions received and many began to ply the guard with questions—a proceeding that Taylor observed with increasing satisfaction. If the soldiers were busied with the people in the crowd, then there would naturally be less vigilance in guarding the prisoners. And Taylor was determined to make an attempt to get away that very night.

In front of the rambling old house a wide piazza extended the entire length of the

building. As darkness drew on, the prisoners all were assembled on this piazza, while in front, in the form of a semicircle, the sentinels were stationed. Apparently the numbers in the assembly of the natives increased, as did also their questions and the replies of the soldiers on guard. Taylor was mindful of all that was occurring before him, though as yet he had not spoken to Erwin, nor had he any definite plan in his own mind. He was simply waiting and watching for an opportunity.

At last he arose from the place where he had been seated and approaching Erwin, touched him quietly on his arm, and nodded his head toward the farther end of the piazza. Erwin quickly arose and followed his friend. As some of the prisoners were moving wearily about the place, the action of the boys did not arouse any suspicion on the part of the sentinels.

“We must try to-night, Erwin,” said Taylor, in a low voice.

“I’m afraid I’m not fit to try anything. I’m so weak I don’t believe I can walk a

mile. I haven't any shoes, and my feet—"

"The guard isn't very hilarious either, after our march to-day," interrupted Taylor.

"Don't forget that."

"You try it. Never mind me."

"I don't know yet what we'll do," continued Taylor, ignoring the suggestion.

"We are not far from the rebels, and that means we're not far from our men either, if what we hear is true—and I think it is. Keep watch of me and be ready when I—"

Taylor stopped abruptly, as the sergeant approached the place where the boys were standing. "My foragers have just come in," he said, "and I'm giving you a word in advance, suh. The co'n bread we all are agoin' toe keep fo' ourselves, but th' sweet potatoes yo' are free to help yo'selves toe."

"Where are they?"

"Right yere, suh," and the sergeant pointed to some baskets in the yard, part of which were filled with sweet potatoes, and part with the corn bread.

"Thank you, sergeant," replied Taylor.

"May I ask a question?"

“Yaas, suh. Suht’nly, suh.”

“Why can’t we have a fire in the yard and roast the potatoes there?”

“I reck’n yo’ c’n,” replied the sergeant hesitatingly. “It’s time yo’ all were shet in the house—”

“But we can’t roast our potatoes in the house,” said Taylor. “Your guard can watch us out here just as well.”

“Yaas, suh. I reck’n they can. I done tole yo’ first off so’t yo’ can be on hand when the rush is made. Stay right whar yo’ be, suh.”

“Thank you! Thank you!” responded Taylor, as the sergeant moved to the front of the house and made his announcement to the prisoners.

“This is our chance!” whispered Taylor to Erwin. “I know just what we’ll do! Come on. Follow me!”

CHAPTER XXIX

A FRIEND IN NEED

RUNNING swiftly to the end of the porch where the corn bread for the soldiers had been placed, Taylor hastily filled his pockets. The dim light and the eagerness with which the hungry prisoners were listening to the words of the sergeant greatly aided Taylor in his efforts to secure food.

Returning quickly to Erwin, who had not even attempted to follow his friend, Taylor again whispered, "Come now! You must come, Erwin! This is our chance."

Joining their fellow prisoners, some of whom already were pressing their way in the crowd toward the sweet potatoes, both boys soon secured what their dilapidated pockets would hold, and then Erwin followed as his friend, instead of returning to the front yard, at once darted toward the bushes in the rear. The main guard was stationed in front of the house, either in the yard or on

the sidewalk. For the most part the prisoners were kept within the house itself, or else granted the freedom of the yard in front. Because of this fact, Taylor, in his investigations, had not been able to discover any guard in the rear, and for this reason he was resolved to make his attempt to get away there. He was trusting also in the somewhat careless or easy-going ways of the sergeant, who had frequently entered into conversation with his prisoners and was disposed to be more lenient than any whom Taylor had as yet found.

The two boys had barely entered the bushes when they were startled by the voice of the sergeant: "Doggone! Those Yanks have taken th' co'n bread," he shouted. "Whar' be they?" A hasty search revealed the absence of both Taylor and Erwin, although both were still in the yard crouching behind the thick bushes.

"They've gone!" shouted the guard once more. "They've gone, o' course, by th' Springfield road. Heah, yo' Simon!" he called to someone whom neither of the boys could see, "Yo' go up t' the major's and

bring out th' dogs. We'll have th' Yanks back yere befo' yo' can wink yo' eye!"

The departure of Simon, though neither of the crouching boys knew whether the messenger was a black man or white, was the signal for confusion among the prisoners. So marked was the excitement that the sergeant speedily gave orders for all to be driven within the house and the guard was increased. What the sergeant's feelings would have been had he known that the two missing men were still within the yard the boys could only conjecture.

"Come on, Erwin," whispered Taylor to his companion. "It's time we made a start anyway. Be careful."

Without replying, Erwin at once arose and together the boys stealthily withdrew from the place. Ignorant of the region, not even aware of the location of any of the roads except the one over which they themselves had been brought, their very lack of information was likely to prove to be their greatest source of peril.

Undismayed, however, Taylor was determined to make the attempt, and Erwin fol-

lowed without comment or complaint. Either guards had not been stationed at all in the rear of the place they were leaving, or they successfully evaded them, for in a brief time the boys found themselves in a road. Taylor had a vague idea as to the general direction in which the army of General Sherman was likely to be found, but beyond that he had no information.

He hastily examined the road in the dim light, and though it was far from promising, yet he suspected that it was the Springfield road to which the sergeant referred when he had announced the disappearance of the two prisoners.

A woman was approaching and Erwin hastily drew back into the darkness. His friend, however, advanced and inquired, "Is this the road to Springfield?"

"I reck'n hit is, suh," she replied with a drawl.

"Thank you."

"Yo'-all 's goin' in th' wrong d'rection," cautioned the woman, as she stopped after she had passed. "Springfield is back yondah, suh."

“Yes. Yes. I know,” said Taylor hastily. “We’ll understand. We won’t have any trouble. I just wanted to make sure this was the Springfield road, that’s all. We’ll find our way there all right. Thank you. Thank you.”

In spite of the nearness to their prison house, Taylor had not dared to betray to the woman his eagerness to leave. Apparently her suspicions had not been aroused by what he did say, and as soon as she was gone, Taylor ran to the place where his comrade was hiding, and then the two boys resumed their flight.

How long it would be before the dogs would be in pursuit of them, Taylor could only conjecture, although he was convinced that it would not be long. Two things were evident now—one that the boys must go as far as possible before the inevitable chase was begun, and the second was that they must somehow leave the Springfield road and also without leaving behind them any evidence that they had done so.

Soon they came to a low-spreading tree whose branches reached across the road.

“Here!” whispered Taylor, instantly turning to his friend.

Without a word from Erwin, the boys turned to the tree, hastily climbed into the lowest branch, worked their way across to the opposite side of the road and then dropped into the sluggish waters of a small stream that was there.

Breathlessly the two boys followed the bed of the stream, Taylor leading the way, and frequently being compelled to slacken his speed to assist his comrade, who already was struggling hard. Taylor was even fearful that the labored breathing of his friend would betray them, and so, despite his own intense desire to proceed swiftly, he was compelled to favor the weakness of Erwin.

The boys had not gone far on their way before they arrived at a place where another stream entered the one through which they were wading. The water was much deeper now, and their progress more difficult. In a little while the boys found themselves in what apparently was a swamp or great marsh, and though he knew not what lay before him, Taylor helped his comrade on-

ward until at last it was apparent that Erwin could go no farther.

“You go on, Taylor, and leave me here,” gasped Erwin, as he seated himself on a log on the bank.

“Thank you,” replied Taylor. “I’ll do nothing of the kind.”

“I can’t go on.”

“We won’t try to, then.”

“But you must. Hark! What’s that?”

Taylor recognized only too well the startling sound to which Erwin had directed his attention. The dogs had been found and the chase was begun. The weakness of Erwin was now so apparent that Taylor bitterly regretted the attempt to escape. So eager had he himself been that he had suffered what was commonly called among the prisoners “the fever,” by which term the men referred to those of their number who were so filled with the determination to escape that they talked or thought of little else. Even the fact that they were now in Georgia, and probably at no great distance from their friends in Sherman’s army had served only to increase the strength of Taylor’s purpose.

To attempt and fail was better than not to make any attempt at all he had said to himself again and again. Indeed, that was his true feeling as far as himself was concerned; but Erwin's manifest weakness was now a new and serious problem to be met. And Taylor, with the sound of the pursuers now heard in the distance, heartily wished that he had not trusted to the easy-going ways of the sergeant who had brought them to Sylvania. The indifference of the man had been more apparent than real, and now it was quite probable that the efforts the boys had made to avoid leaving tracks behind them in their flight would be futile.

Something must be done and at once. Taylor, almost in desperation, darted into the woods behind him, but there was no prospect of aid to be found in that direction, and he speedily returned. He held a stout club in his hands and Erwin had another, although it had now fallen from his grasp. Erwin was apparently even more helpless than he had been a half-hour before.

All about the place where the boys were seated grew trees, some of which were ever-

greens. Taylor looked into the branches, but no refuge was promised there, and even if there had been, his companion was now too ill to climb. Almost in despair, Taylor stopped and listened. The appalling sound was much clearer now. Manifestly the dogs were coming nearer, and with the dogs were men! The thought was not consoling. And yet Taylor was not willing to abandon himself to the threatening fate.

He turned to his friend, who now was leaning against a tree. Taylor could see that his eyes were closed, and in the dim light his face was ghastly. Sick at heart, troubled as he had not been in all his experiences in the prison camps, the young soldier grasped his club more tightly and almost in despair turned for a moment to listen to the weird cry which plainly was much nearer than it had been.

As Taylor turned back almost in desperation to look again at his friend, a low exclamation escaped him, and lifting his club he drew back prepared to defend himself. There before him, standing beside Erwin, was a man so large that at first he seemed

to be like some shadow giant. How the man had approached, or where he had come from, Taylor could not understand. All he saw was that the giant was before him, though whether he was friend or enemy was not yet manifest.

“Yo’ come!” said the man in a low voice which was so deep that it almost seemed to remind Taylor of the mutterings of distant rumbling thunder.

“Where?” the young prisoner whispered, hope returning for a moment as he became aware that the man before him was a negro.

“Come,” repeated the black man, as he turned and listened intently to the sound of the dogs that now could not be far away.

“Come, Erwin. We’ve found a friend. Get up! You must try!” whispered Taylor encouragingly, as he bent low over his friend.

Apparently Erwin did not hear. His head had fallen forward and he sat motionless.

Almost sobbing, Taylor turned to the black man and said—“He’s sick. He’s abso-

lutely exhausted. I don't believe he can stand upon his feet."

The black man bent over the silent boy for a moment, then lifting Erwin in his arms he said to Taylor, simply, "Yo' follow me."

The negro's burden was not heavy, for Erwin at the time did not weigh more than eighty or ninety pounds, Taylor thought. It was speedily evident that the black man was not delayed, for as he sped forward into the woods Taylor had to exert himself to the utmost to follow him.

Leaping in the marshy places from one mound to another, the man sped forward, Taylor following as best he was able. On and still on, the man made his way until he halted at last on the border of a little pond.

"Dis yere's de place," said the negro with a deep chuckle.

As Taylor glanced eagerly about him he was unable to perceive any "place," but he did not speak as in surprise he watched the giant before him.

From some place of concealment the black man freed a rope which was hanging from

the oak tree beneath which the men were standing. Hastily adjusting this rope beneath Erwin's shoulders, the negro then grasped the rope above, and as soon as he had gained a foothold among the branches he drew Erwin, now apparently unconscious, up after him, while Taylor looked on in wonder.

In a moment the rope was lowered for him also, and quickly he, too, was drawn up into the tree by the powerful negro. Not a word was spoken, and the only sound that broke in upon the stillness of the night was the cry of the hounds that evidently now had entered the swamp. And yet, though Taylor could not have explained its cause, his feeling of hope had in a measure returned.

From a place in the branches the black man, still holding Erwin in his arms, produced a board which he extended to a limb of the nearest tree. Across this board he moved swiftly, and as soon as Taylor followed, the negro again placed his strange bridge in such a manner that he passed on to another tree, and Taylor again followed.

The process was repeated many times before the negro grasped a rope hanging from the tree where the final stop had been made, and slid to the ground. Taylor again followed, and as he alighted he saw that the negro, as soon as he had secured the rope, again produced his strange bridge, and the party in this manner advanced from one little mound to another until at last they stepped upon firm ground.

CHAPTER XXX

A STRANGE REFUGE

WITH every advance the board, which had served as a bridge, was withdrawn and used again with each forward movement. Even when at last a firmer foothold had been obtained, the huge negro insisted that his companions should stand upon the board instead of the ground. Taylor saw that the negro was not unmindful of the pursuit, for he had turned his head in the direction of the sounds every time he had reached the mound he was seeking, but he had not for a moment delayed the flight.

When at last the little party arrived at the place where apparently the ground was less broken than it had been elsewhere, the negro placed Erwin in the hands of his companion while he himself disappeared for a moment. As Taylor glanced about him he was aware that he was standing on what appeared to be a small island in the midst of

the surrounding swamp. Rank bushes grew all about the border, and from the center of the island, which Taylor concluded was not more than twenty-five feet in diameter, several tall trees rose, their branches hidden in part by the high brush, and, where they extended above the bushes they reached far out over the foul waters of the marsh.

Why the huge negro had brought them to the place, Taylor was not able to understand. The sudden appearance of the black man in their time of greatest need, who the man was, or why he should have befriended them as he did were also mysteries for which as yet the young soldier was unable to find any explanation.

Taylor had not long to wait for the reappearance of his strange friend. From a long limb of a near-by tree the negro suddenly hailed him in a low voice, and as Taylor looked up quickly he saw a ladder made of twisted vines suddenly let down almost directly in front of him. Down this ladder the negro came with an agility surprising in one of his immense size. Quickly taking Erwin in his arms, the negro rapidly climbed

the ladder again and disappeared with his burden among the thick branches of the nearby trees.

To Taylor, wearied and anxious as he was, it seemed as if the sounds of his pursuers indicated that they had not been led astray in spite of all the attempts of the negro to hide their tracks. The shouts of men also could be heard, and for a moment Taylor believed that he had been seen, when an unusually loud shout was followed by a prolonged cry from the dogs. The young soldier glanced fearfully about him. In his eagerness he placed his hands on the swaying ladder of vines, but as he was about to ascend, the negro suddenly reappeared on the branch directly above him.

“Bring up de bo’d,” whispered the black man.

Taylor instantly turned and seizing the improvised bridge at once began to ascend the swaying ladder. As soon as he gained the branch, the negro leaned forward, drew the ladder of vines up to him, unfastened it, and then taking the board from Taylor’s hands, without a word began to move from one

branch to another, stepping in this manner from tree to tree, supporting himself in part as he did so, by grasping other branches that almost interlaced those upon which he was moving.

Without waiting for any instructions Taylor at once followed. When he arrived at the third of the trees he saw before him what at first sight he thought was a cluster of tall evergreens that had grown up close to the trunk. When the negro bent low, however, and thrusting aside the covering crawled within, Taylor at once understood. On this tree in the midst of the swamp, a small hut, not unlike a wigwam in its shape, had been erected. As he entered the strange place, silently following the example of his guide, he was aware that a platform of boards had been laid upon the branches, and that a small room was there enclosed by canvas which, doubtless, at some time, had served as a tent for the soldiers in one of the contending armies. The top was open and sufficient light entered to enable Taylor to see all about him. The dark evergreens that were out-

side the room doubtless had been cut and then planted or arranged as a shelter for the hiding place.

The room itself was about eighteen feet from the ground. The approach to it by the pathway along the branches of the near-by trees was of a character that left no trail. The use of the board as a bridge, the care with which the board was withdrawn each time after it had been used, the final approach to the place by means of a ladder and the branches of the trees were all explained now. With a sigh of relief, for discovery seemed almost impossible, Taylor turned to Erwin, who was stretched upon the floor on one side of the room, which was about twelve feet square.

"He done tired out," said the negro, as he noted Taylor's glance.

"I'm afraid it's worse than that," said Taylor anxiously, as he stooped to examine his friend. Erwin was breathing regularly, but his emaciated face and ghastly appearance both served to increase his friend's anxiety. It was remarkable, he thought, how well he himself had endured the terrible

strain and suffering, both of the life in the prisons and the no less difficult hardships of the escape. With his companion, however, how different it was. He thought of Erwin as he was when the two boys had left home. How eager he had been. How strong and vigorous he was. And now—. The contrast was so marked, so horrible that as Taylor looked down upon the wasted frame before him, it did not seem possible that it really was Erwin.

There was no opportunity afforded for even such thoughts to be dwelt upon, and in a moment Taylor was recalled to the necessity of action by what the negro was doing. Around the sides of the room the young soldier saw four guns—two of which plainly were rifles, and one a musket, and one an old-fashioned shotgun. This last the negro took and loaded heavily with buckshot, crooning or moaning softly to himself as he did so. The two rifles next were loaded, and then the musket. Apparently not satisfied with what he had done, the negro next produced a half-dozen long knives. The blade of each had been ground to a point, and it was evident

that as a means of defense the knives in the hands of the giant negro were not to be despised. Next, the man produced three wire nooses which he placed carefully on the floor near him so that any of them might be readily seized in case of need.

All through his various tasks the negro had been crooning a weird, strange melody, though his voice could not have been heard outside the hut.

His eyes were lighted by a strange fire, and a smile occasionally appeared on his immense mouth. To Taylor the smile was even more suggestive than the weapons, which were almost fondled by the black man in his weird preparations.

“Wha’ dat?” suddenly the black man said in a whisper. Standing erect he peered from the place through an opening in the canvas. Not a sound could now be heard, even the baying of the dogs apparently having ceased.

As Taylor had not heard any alarming sound, he was at a loss to discover what the actions of the startled negro implied. For several minutes the black man remained at

the porthole, and when at last he turned again to Taylor he merely grinned and did not speak.

A half-hour afterward the negro said, "Yo' stay yere."

"Where are you going?" inquired Taylor quickly.

The negro grinned broadly, pointed to two of the nooses, which he slipped over his shoulder, thrust two of the knives into his belt, and without a word departed from the place.

Unable to decide whether the man had merely gone forth to investigate, or had heard something that had aroused his suspicions, Taylor at once approached the opening through which the negro had been peering. At first he was unable to see anything except the dismal swamp that extended all about him.

Suddenly, however, he saw a sight that was as alarming as it was startling. Sixty feet away, near the spot where the party had first entered the trees, he saw a huge dog. Not a man was in sight and the dog, in manifest confusion, apparently had lost

the scent. The fierce animal was sniffing, first on the ground, and then at the base of the tree. It was plain that the dog had followed a part of the way, even after the board had been used by the fugitives, but now he had become confused. Apparently the victims it had been seeking had not climbed the tree, for the animal circled the base and was unable to find any footprint. Wheeling about, the bloodhound again returned to the mound, sniffing quickly about him and still evidently at loss what next to do.

Again the hound approached the tree and then a strange thing happened. Suddenly, and without any cause that could be seen, the dog was jerked into mid air and hung there, pawing frantically, but apparently unable to emit a sound. Excitedly Taylor watched the struggling animal. He was unable to obtain a glimpse of the negro, whom he more than suspected to be the unseen actor in the strange scene. Several minutes elapsed before the dog ceased to struggle, and then, to Taylor's great surprise, the body was drawn swiftly upward until it disappeared among

the branches of the tree, which was beside some of the tall evergreens.

Suddenly from the direction from which the dog had come a man was seen approaching. He was crouching low and carried a rifle in his hands. When he arrived at the mounds he stooped and carefully examined them, and then, apparently convinced by what he saw that someone must have preceded him, he cautiously advanced. He was peering intently about him, but not once did he look up into the trees. To Taylor it seemed as if the man was following the footprints of the hound, and was looking about him for the animal itself.

The man at last arrived at the tree where the dog had so abruptly disappeared. He bent low to inspect the footprints, and as he did so, suddenly from the tree itself the body of the dog shot swiftly downward, striking the crouching man full in the back of the neck and driving him, face downward, into the soft mud. Not a sound could Taylor hear, and not even a smothered cry came from the man as he fell. The heavy body of the dog

rested upon the man's head and held it.

Fascinated by the sight, Taylor watched the woods in the rear, expecting other dogs or men now to appear. The man who had been struck down by the body of the bloodhound lay motionless. Not a sound broke in upon the stillness of the great swamp. The moments passed slowly and still the silence was unbroken. Neither man nor dog could be seen approaching, nor did the negro, whom Taylor believed to be the one who had flung the dead body of the hound upon the crouching soldier, appear.

At last, as Taylor was about to turn away to look to the condition of Erwin, the giant negro suddenly stepped upon the platform, and thrusting aside the protecting covering, quickly entered the hut.

Without a word, he replaced the knives and hung the wire nooses on the wall. Stooping beside Erwin, who was either unconscious or sleeping, Taylor could not determine which, the black man examined him carefully, and then rising, turned to Taylor.

“Wha’ yo’ do if old Richard had’n’ he’p yo’?”

“I don’t know. We would have been taken back to the other prisoners, I suppose.”

The negro laughed silently and nodded his head vigorously.

“How did you find us? How did you know we were there? Why did you help us?”

Again the huge negro grinned broadly, but he did not speak. Nor was Taylor able to learn at the time who the black man was, or why he had his strange place of refuge in the swamp.

“Some more men and dogs will be here soon, won’t they?” Taylor at last suggested anxiously.

“The’ cum no farder ’n th’ place whar de dawg is.”

“Why not?”

Once more the negro laughed and did not reply to the question. A half-hour afterward he again leaned over Erwin and listened intently to the young prisoner’s breathing. Apparently satisfied by his inspection, he stepped outside the hut, peered cautiously in every direction, and then swiftly de-

scended to the ground. Not a word of explanation did he give Taylor, and when, after an absence of another half-hour, he returned to the room, he was holding a wicker basket in his teeth.

Taylor could scarcely credit the evidence of his own eyes when he saw the negro open the basket and take from it some fried chicken, a part of which he handed the astonished boy. Boiled rice also was there, and some roasted sweet potatoes, and all was warm, showing that the unexpected provisions had recently been cooked.

The negro awakened Erwin, but only gave him some of the rice, while he and Taylor feasted upon the other food. The rain was falling now, and, as the black man declared, there was consequently no longer danger of pursuit or search. He became more talkative, and, as Taylor listened to the strange tale told him by his host, he almost forgot his peril in his interest until the negro suddenly arose, and with a whispered word of caution, stepped hastily to the opening in the canvas and looked out.

CHAPTER XXXI

FROM NIGHT TO NIGHT

THE negro remained at the opening a long time, and, as he did not speak, Taylor's alarm naturally increased. However, at last the black man resumed his seat, and as he did not betray any anxiety in his manner, the fears of the young soldier in a measure were relieved.

Calmly, as if there was no danger threatening, Richard, for such Taylor had already learned the name of his strange host to be, resumed his story. From his account, Taylor drew several conclusions. One was that the negro was almost unbalanced in his mind, though he was not insane. Then, too, evidently he was an object of fear and respect among the negroes of the region. From them he had drawn his support for more than a year—maintaining a shelter or home in the midst of the swamp. Either no thorough search for him had been made, or

in the multitude of troubles that threatened the country his hiding place had not been discovered. And Richard had become fearless, fully believing that he had a charmed life. Recklessly he had gone by night to the quarters of the negroes on the plantations for miles adjacent, levying his tax of food or ammunition, regardless of possibilities of betrayal or capture. Time and again he had been chased by white men and dogs, but he had been able to hide his tracks so cleverly that he had always succeeded in baffling his pursuers.

In the midst of all the peril and excitement of his life Richard had maintained one almost insane purpose—that of aiding the Yankees in their troubles in the South. He had even gone to their camps miles away and repeatedly had conducted escaping prisoners to their friends. In every event, however, he had returned to his improvised home among the trees on the little island in the swamp.

By chance he had been near the border of this swamp when Taylor and Erwin had been

fleeing. Instantly concluding that the two boys were what they really were, he had hastily brought his timely aid—an aid, as Taylor clearly understood, that had rescued them from the hands of their pursuers and the teeth of the dogs.

The condition of Erwin made all thoughts of fleeing, or even of attempts at departure from the place, not to be thought of for a time. Richard was positive in his declaration, and Taylor, although he was by no means so confident as the black man in the safety of the shelter, was also convinced that his friend was too weak to face the demands of a flight.

Four days passed, and Erwin slowly regained strength under the care of the faithful Richard. The negro every night left the place, and when he returned in the early light of the morning, he never failed to come laden with food. How he was able to secure it in the poverty-stricken condition of the adjacent country Taylor was unable to understand. However, he was glad to receive the food which both he and his comrade needed

so much, and asked few questions, though it could hardly be said his silence was "for conscience' sake."

Convinced that the improved condition of Erwin was such as to warrant a resumption of their efforts to make their way to Sherman's army, Taylor said to Richard, when the latter was about to leave the hiding place the evening of the fifth day—"If you are able to get us a little extra food I think we'd better go on to-morrow night."

The black giant laughed good-naturedly and did not reply, as he swung himself from the tree and vanished in the darkness. In the absence of the negro, Taylor had endeavored to keep guard, but after two nights and the positive assertion of Richard that such precautions were not necessary, he had in a measure abandoned the task and had slept almost as soundly as his friend.

For some reason which he was unable to explain, a feeling of uneasiness possessed Taylor this night after Richard departed. Perhaps, he thought, his alarm might be in part due to his own desire to escape. The confinement had been welcome for a time,

until he had recovered from the violence of his labors in their flight from Sylvania; but now, when both he and Erwin were in much better condition than they had been for a long time, the longing to be gone was too strong to be suppressed.

A half-hour after Richard's departure Taylor stepped forth upon the platform. About him were the trees festooned with creepers, the waters of the swamp, and the mounds across which he and the negro had moved in their successful flight from their pursuers. How weird and strange it all appeared in the dim light. How different it was from the country in which he had his home. The thought of the little New York State village added to the gloom of the young soldier. A feeling of restlessness swept over him. He was weary of the inactivity of the past few days.

Returning hastily to the hut, Taylor said to his friend, "Erwin, I think I'll take a little look about the swamp."

"Don't! Stay right here where we know we are safe."

"I think I'll be safe almost anywhere now.

The Johnnies are quick, but they don't seem to hang on very well."

"Hang on!" retorted Erwin. "Any other people on earth would have quit this war months—years ago!"

"That's all right, but it isn't what I meant. I was thinking of the sergeant. Really he was a good-hearted fellow, and he was more decent to us than any man we've met except Lieutenant Evans. He was too easy with us—that's what got him into his trouble. What I meant was, that when we got away and the Johnnies started after us, they gave us a hot chase for awhile, but they didn't hang on very long."

"You don't know whether they've given up or not."

"If they haven't given up they haven't shown themselves or found us anyway," laughed Taylor. It did the young soldier good just to hear his friend speak.

That very afternoon he had laughed when Erwin had declared he was almost, if not quite ready to leave the place. How much good food and rest had done for him!

“If we were sure of that, we’d be ready to leave to-morrow night.”

“I think we’ll leave anyway.”

“Where’ll we go?”

“We’ll just keep on,” said Taylor lightly.

“Let us hope so. I wonder if Richard will go with us part of the way.”

“I think he will, though I haven’t said anything to him about it.”

“Did you ever see a stronger man than he is?”

“No, I don’t think I ever did. Think of a man drawing that big hound up into the tree and then throwing the body down just as if it was a light stone! I never saw anything like it.”

“Richard said the man wasn’t killed, but that both the man and the dog were gone.”

“Yes, and I don’t know exactly what to make of that,” said Taylor thoughtfully.

“Why? What do you mean?”

“I think the man was dead. He may not have been killed by the force of the blow when the dog hit him, but it drove him face forward into the mud, and the body held him down.”

“Perhaps it didn’t. At all events, the man got up and went away.”

“Did he? I wish I was sure of that.”

“Don’t you believe he did?” demanded Erwin quickly.

“I have my fears. Of course we know both bodies are gone. The dog was dead, and I think the man was, too. Now, if he was dead, tell me how he got up and walked off and took the dead dog with him, too.”

“Of course he couldn’t and didn’t do any such thing.”

“Do you believe he would have taken a dead dog with him through all this swamp?”

“It doesn’t seem reasonable, does it?” said Erwin thoughtfully. “What do you think?”

“I don’t know what to think. I know what I’m afraid of, though?”

“That others found him?”

“Yes.”

“Why would they take a dead hound away?”

“That I don’t know.”

“Do you think we ought to keep watch?”

“I do. I’m going out a little way and look around.”

“Don’t go. Don’t leave the place. I’ll stand guard here,” protested Erwin eagerly. “You won’t gain anything by going into the swamp. Besides, you don’t know the way, and if you are lost—”

“I shan’t be lost. I’m not going far; but I must have a little look about the swamp. Besides, it will do me good—Hark!” Taylor sharply interrupted himself, and both boys listened intently.

In a brief time their fears were increased when it became manifest that someone was certainly approaching. Before either could act, the opening into the hut was darkened and Richard himself stepped within the room.

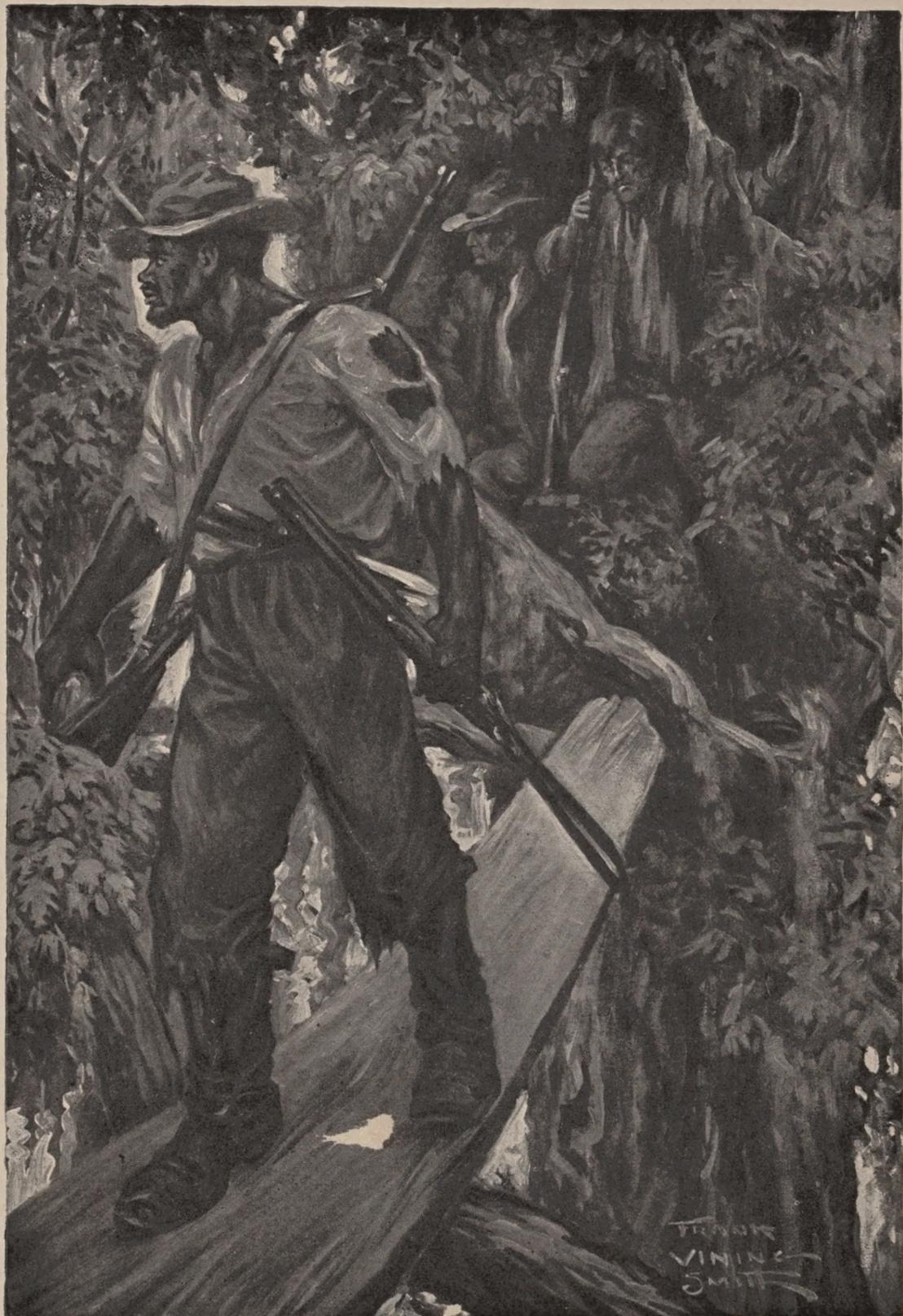
Instantly it became manifest that the giant negro was greatly excited. He did not speak at first, but he was busying himself in strapping two guns to his shoulders and thrusting several of the knives into his belt. He solemnly handed a gun to each of his companions and then said brusquely, “We-uns mus’ leab dis yere place right sma’t.”

“What’s wrong? Have they found us?” inquired Taylor.

“Yaas. Come on.”

Quickly the trio departed from the strange hut. The board was used as it had been when the boys had first approached the place, but this time even the negro was cautious. The little party had barely gained the firmer ground when they were startled by a fierce shout that rose behind them. Plainly the yell came from a band of men and was speedily followed by a volley of shots.

“Dey sho’ly done foun’ de place dis time,” muttered Richard savagely, as he urged forward the flight. Swiftly the boys followed their huge leader. Occasionally the black man insisted upon his companions remaining behind while he advanced alone to make sure of his ground. Every time when he rejoined the boys his demand for haste increased. Several times, too, he sharply changed the direction in which the little party was moving, the boys following obediently, aware that their sole hope consisted in implicitly obeying the directions they received.



QUICKLY THE TRIO DEPARTED FROM THE STRANGE HUT.
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At last the road was gained and here Richard insisted upon each one leaping across it. He did not explain what the purpose of his demand was, but each boy was confident that he understood and made no protest.

Across the fields, through another great stretch of woods, into still another road, where again the boys leaped at the negro's bidding, the little party fled. For an hour or more the flight was continued before the negro halted. When at last the boys stopped they were aware that they were in a worn path that apparently led the way among some hills.

After a brief rest the flight was resumed until Erwin declared he could go no further. He was dripping with perspiration and his body was trembling with weakness. Despite his recent improvement, his strength was not sufficient to meet the demands of the powerful Richard.

After another brief rest the black man brusquely ordered Erwin to place himself on his (Richard's) back and then the party again started. The load which the negro

carried apparently did not greatly impede him, and an hour elapsed before another halt was called.

They had stopped before a lonely cabin and there in response to Richard's hail the door was opened and a colored man approached. After a brief conversation between the two black men the boys were bidden to enter the building.

"Dis yere's safe now," said Richard. He further explained that the boys were to lie in hiding in the hut until the following night, when he promised to return and guide them to a place of safety farther on. His fear of pursuit apparently was gone. The two boys were so utterly wearied that neither asked any questions nor made any protest, glad of the opportunity of securing rest and food.

Throughout the day that followed Richard did not appear, but early in the evening he came and reported that his strange refuge in the swamp had been burned and that the white men, who at last had discovered his hiding place, believed that he and the two boys had escaped and that all further attempts to pursue them were useless.

The confidence of the negro was an inspiration to both boys, and more eagerly, because both were now more hopeful, they followed their strange guide as he led them through the darkness. Familiar with the places of refuge in the region, Richard halted each morning before sunrise, and in some secure or hidden place the boys slept each day. From unaccountable sources the negro obtained supplies of food, and as a consequence the privations and sufferings of the flight were less severe, although on several occasions Richard still insisted upon carrying Erwin upon his back. Indeed, the devotion and determination of the black man did not once flag.

Early in the morning of the sixth day of the flight, the boys were startled when in the dim light they discovered what plainly were the outposts of an army. It was still too dark to enable them to perceive what the uniform of the men was, but upon the earnest advice of Richard they all three advanced until they were halted by the sharp challenge of the sentinel before them.

CHAPTER XXXII

CONCLUSION

ONLY a few minutes were required to convince the guard that friends and not enemies were approaching. The little party of three was sent within the lines and explanations made and received. The fluttering flag of the camp roused even Erwin to a show of enthusiasm.

“For the Stars and Stripes!” shouted Taylor; and his words were followed by a cheer from the men in blue that quickly gathered about the newcomers. Richard insisted upon remaining in the camp and a place for Erwin was soon found by the hospital corps. The young soldier was so completely worn out by the terrible experiences through which he had passed that the care of nurses and physicians was required. Through Taylor’s representations a promise was secured that as soon as his friend was able to endure the strain of the long journey he should be sent

north on a furlough of at least three months.

As for Taylor himself—he declared that the return to the army and the escape from the horrors and sufferings of the prison pens were sufficient rewards for him, and that he now was able to take his part in the heroic struggle that still continued. Among his first duties, however, was that of writing two letters. One was sent to his mother in the little far-away village in New York State. In it he described only a part of his recent experiences, and assured the anxious ones at home that he was well and full of hope that the struggle was drawing near its close. The other letter was to a certain Miss Sallie Hitt, in which he begged for information concerning the conditions that surrounded her, and also gave minute instructions as to how a reply might be sent him. Knowing her loyalty to her own cause as he did, Taylor was not hopeful of receiving any response to his request; but for reasons which he did not fully explain to any one, he sent the letter and waited until the result should become apparent.

Meanwhile the young soldier, filled with in-

terest in his surroundings and doubly patriotic after his break for freedom, eagerly received the information which his comrades in arms were able to give him. From them he learned that, as early as the preceding May, Grant and Sherman had begun the advance which then had been planned. Grant, taking Sheridan with him, went to Virginia, there to meet Lee. The constant "hammering" which Grant had employed in the west had won him his victories there, and now he was the lieutenant-general, having command of all the Union forces.

Between Fredericksburg and Richmond was a region crossed from west to east by many rivers. Here Lee had erected many fortifications from behind which he fought Grant successfully for two weeks, repulsing the attempts of the Union men to take the places by storm. This region was known as the Wilderness, and here occurred the bloodiest fighting of the war. In the first three days of the Wilderness battles, Grant lost 38,000 men; in the next eleven, at Spottsylvania Court-house, 26,000 more were lost—a total of 64,000 in two weeks. Lee's loss in

the same time was only about one-third that of Grant, in part at least indicating something of the difference between attacking and defending a position.

Grant now resorted to skill rather than to mere force of numbers. At each of Lee's defenses he attacked lightly in front and at the same time pushed forward a part of his force to the left to attack Lee's army in the rear. In this manner Lee's army was "hammered" until it was inside the main defenses of Richmond, the center of which was at Cold Harbor.

The entire army under Grant was hurled against Cold Harbor, but the defense was wonderful. In twenty minutes the assault was repulsed. Cold Harbor cost the Union army 15,000 men; the Confederates losing only a little more than one-tenth that number.

Richmond had such strong defenses on the north that Grant now decided to move his army across the James river and attack the place from the south. By June (1864) the movement had been accomplished, but the problem of Grant was not less difficult than

before. Lee had moved his own army as his opponents moved. From Petersburg, about twenty miles south of Richmond, the Confederate fortifications ran in an irregular curve to the north of Richmond—a distance of about thirty miles.

Grant made one strong attempt to storm Petersburg. A mine was dug under one of the Confederate forts. This mine was filled with four tons of powder, and when it was exploded (July 30) the fort and its garrison were blown to pieces. But the assault which was to follow was badly managed, and the Union troops were driven back, suffering a heavy loss. Later, in September, the Union army in the Shenandoah Valley, was attacked at Cedar Creek, about twenty miles below Winchester. The Confederates at first drove the Union men before them, but in the afternoon of the same day, Sheridan, who was at Winchester, rejoined the army, rallied his men, and drove the Confederates far up the valley.

Meanwhile, General Sherman had been moving from Chattanooga with his army.

Opposed to Sherman was Johnston, and the two leaders were among the most skillful of the generals on either side in the great struggle. Johnston's plan was to draw Sherman away from Chattanooga and meet him in battle where the field might favor the Confederates. Sherman's plan was to avoid a battle as long as possible, and hold Johnston in the south so that he could not go north to aid his hardly beset comrade-in-arms, General Lee.

As Sherman advanced, all his supplies had to be brought by the single railroad behind him. This railroad had to be guarded or the Confederate cavalry would work into the region in the rear of Sherman's army, destroy this railroad, and so cut off all supplies. To leave a guard for the railway as Sherman advanced required many men, and, as a consequence, the army was steadily weakened by the withdrawal of every new force of guards. This was exactly what the skillful General Johnston had planned to bring to pass, and his plan to attack the diminished forces had already been made, when suddenly,

unexpectedly, the Confederate leader was removed from his position and Hood was appointed in his place.

Hood was a hard fighter, but not nearly so skillful a leader as Johnston. The change was fortunate for the Union army. Hood made three savage attacks on Sherman's army but was repulsed in every one; and on September 2 (1864) Sherman and his men entered and took possession of Atlanta.

Hood now led his army northwest. His hope was that Sherman would be compelled to follow him, and that the war thus would be carried north. Sherman had been hoping that Hood would do the very thing he did do, something that Johnston never would have done at all. Pretending to follow Hood's army until he was satisfied that it had really started for Tennessee, Sherman quickly returned to Atlanta, tearing up the railroads as he advanced,—in that manner preventing Hood from coming back, at least with any speed. General Sherman also had sent nearly half his army to Tennessee, under the command of General Thomas—one of the ablest of the Union generals.

Thomas defeated Hood's army both at Franklin and Nashville, and pursued it so vigorously that the troops were scattered in every direction. In this manner one of the two great armies of the Confederates had been put out of the conflict.

General Sherman had an army of 60,000 men when he returned to Atlanta, and between him and Virginia there was not an organized Confederate army to be met. In the middle of November, Sherman burned Atlanta, cut all the telegraph wires to the north, and then began his famous march to the sea. His real aim, after he should have reached the coast, was to turn northward and attack the rear of Lee's army in Virginia, while Grant was attacking it in front. Hood's mistake or incompetency had placed almost the entire Confederacy at the mercy of Sherman.

In four columns, covering a strip of country about sixty miles wide, Sherman's army advanced. Railways were destroyed, bridges and depots burned, and the army lived upon the supplies it took from the region through which it was moving.

Fort McAllister, which guarded Savannah, was stormed in a wild rush of fifteen minutes, about a month after Sherman set forth from Atlanta. Outside Savannah, a fleet of Union ships was blockading the town. Sherman opened communication with this fleet of blockaders, Savannah was besieged and after eight days, was taken. There Sherman and his men remained until February (1865). And with them was Taylor, restored fully to health now, and eager in his defense of the Stars and Stripes.

On the first day of February (1865) Sherman moved out of Savannah, marching directly north to Columbia, South Carolina. While his army held that place, the city was burned, each side accusing the other of having set it on fire. Again Sherman started northward, following almost the same route which the British general, Cornwallis, had taken in 1781. Thus far Sherman had met little armed opposition. There was no army to face him, the people were suffering from lack of food, and the Confederate money was now of so little value that a dollar was worth only two cents. Still the spirit displayed by

the people of the Confederate States was marvelous. Even the women and children, who were suffering most of all, were still determined and loyal to their cause.

When Sherman's army arrived at Fayetteville, their troubles were increased, for now General Johnston had been recalled and was facing them with an army of 40,000 men drawn from the various straggling bodies, and from the defenses of the coast cities. And Sherman well knew the spirit and the ability of his opponent and respected both alike.

At Goldsboro, Johnston furiously attacked the army under Sherman (March 19). For a time the issue of the battle was in doubt, but at last Sherman drove Johnston back and entered Goldsboro, where he was joined by fresh troops. Both armies now waited for the outcome of the work in Virginia, where it was Grant's purpose to compel Lee to lengthen his lines and so weaken his force.

Sheridan, with 10,000 picked cavalry, now scattered the Confederate troops in the Shenandoah Valley (under Early), and after

the railroads and bridges between Richmond and Lynchburg had been destroyed and by this means much of Lee's supplies had been cut off, he joined General Grant.

Soon Sheridan made another movement to the southwest and held his ground at Five Forks. To meet this new danger, Lee again extended his lines, which now were so long that his 40,000 men were not sufficient to guard them. Grant at once advanced his army of 100,000 and broke through Lee's entrenchments (April 2). In the night Lee retreated westward, and the Union troops entered Richmond and Petersburg.

General Lee was retreating between the James and Appomattox rivers, striving to reach Lynchburgh and make his way into North Carolina and have Johnston join him there. But Grant was in hot pursuit, and before Lee could reach Lynchburg, Sheridan passed him, and with his troops was between the Confederate army and the place it was seeking. Lee's retreat was cut off, he was caught between the two armies, his men were almost worn out, and supplies had failed. At Appomattox Court-house (April 9) Lee sur-

rendered. Grant was as brave and generous as his enemy. All he required was the promise of Lee that the Confederate troops would no longer bear arms against the United States. They were to give up public property, but every man was to keep his horse to help in the spring ploughing.

Sherman at once pushed forward from Goldsboro to Raleigh, where Johnston surrendered (April 26). Johnston's men, like Lee's, were dismissed on their promise not to do any further act of war. Early in May, the other Confederate forces east of the Mississippi, and later in the same month those west of the same river, also surrendered. The war was ended. The Confederate soldiers went back to their desolate homes as brave to begin the struggle for existence there as they had previously been on the field of battle.

The armies of Grant and Sherman, 200,000 strong, proceeded to Washington, where, near the end of May, they were reviewed by their leaders and the officers of the government. Two entire days were required for the lines of bronzed and brave soldiers to

pass through the streets. The music of the military bands, the great displays of flowers, the cheers and shining faces of the people, who had assembled from every part of the country, were not the least interesting.

The armies were paid and sent home at the rate of 300,000 a month until nearly every soldier had departed, though nearly 300,000 brave men on either side in the awful struggle had given up their lives. The loss of property in slaves, the purchase of war material, payment of soldiers, losses in business, pensions granted, and all the various costs of such a terrible war mounted up to sums beyond our comprehension. The sorrow and suffering, the dead and the maimed, the sickness and disease that followed cannot even be reckoned. The old enmity is gone or going, and the best we can cherish to-day is the memory of the many brave men who fought and died for the land they loved.

Among the first to return to their homes was Taylor—older, more bronzed, wiser than when, two years before, he had enlisted. Of his welcome we know little except that it was

tender and strong. Erwin had not recovered sufficiently to re-enter the army and he was on the platform of the little village station eagerly awaiting the coming of his friend, when Taylor stepped down from the train.

Another to greet Taylor warmly was the huge Richard, who had previously made his way to the little village and was living in Erwin's home. The coming of the black man was an event long remembered, for many had never before seen a negro. Richard's enthusiasm and interest in his new life long continued and he remained in the home of Erwin until his death, ten years after the close of the war.

Of Samuel—"Uncle Sam"—not a word came. Whether he ever escaped from the bushwhackers, or had cast in his lot with the Southern people, or met a fate which could only be surmised, no one ever knew. His worn little mother professed to believe, even to the day of her death, that her boy would return, but her hope was never fulfilled, and she died without seeing him.

Not many weeks after the close of the war a letter from South Carolina come to Tay-

lor, who already had written several which he had addressed to Miss Sallie Hitt. The note which Taylor received was brief, but no less interesting to him, at least, because of that fact.

“If you could see the desolation in my old home you would understand why I have no heart for writing. My father and brother both were shot—by whom I think you know. We are so poverty-stricken that we scarcely know where our next meal is to be secured. Some of our negroes have remained with us, but they are almost a burden because we do not know how they are to be fed. We have no one to help us, and yet neither my sisters nor myself have any thought of giving up. We shall do our best and I am sure we shall find some way out of our difficulties. My heart is full of bitterness at times when I think of our home as it was, and then as it is to-day. As a class—you know how I feel toward the Yankees. Perhaps you understand. Sometimes I think you do, better than some of your fellow soldiers. Of course there are exceptions. If good could come out of Nazareth it may be that a good man may still be found in the midst of bad company. I do not know what to say to you in reply to your kind offer to come to our aid. The little we

did for you was done, not because you were a Yankee soldier, but because of your sister and mother. You can't be altogether bad—to speak of them as you did to me. I have not forgotten your words. All I can say is, that we can and we will live on—somehow. We are not asking nor are we receiving aid. Of course, if by any chance you should ever happen to be in this vicinity, you will be an exception to the general feeling we have. *You* have a sister and mother, and for their sake, if for no other, you will be welcome. I cannot, I will not invite you, but if you come I will try to be generous and not unmindful of your kind words.”

The letter bore the signature of Sallie Hitt. The following day Taylor started for South Carolina.

THE END

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