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Dance With Death



A TRUE STORY

By COL. D. A. DICKERT

Price Twenty-five Cents

Rachel,

This book was
written by Grandma
Dent's grandfather ...

Making him your great
great great grandfather.

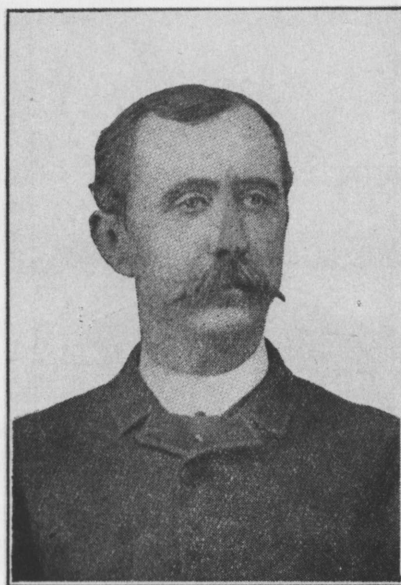
She tells about one
order given him ... to
tell of the Union soldier

(general) Sherman marching
through the south.

—A—
Dance With Death
A TRUE STORY



COL. D. A. DICKERT
From a Photograph taken in 1872



MR. SAM DIXON
From a Photograph taken in 1877

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Dance With Death

A TRUE STORY

By D. A. DICKERT

Author of Dickert's History of Kershaw's Brigade

1909
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A Dance With Death

CHAPTER I

Some time in March I enclosed a letter to one Mr. Sam Dixon, whom I had heard by chance lived near Florence, to the Postmaster of that place, and asked him the favor to see that it was delivered. In my letter to the Postmaster I stated my reasons for wishing it safely given to Mr. Dixon; that he had been my sole companion on a long and dangerous trip, as bearers of dispatches from the Army on the Santee, to the commander of Hood's army, that was supposed to be somewhere in Georgia or the western part of this State. Gen. Sherman's army was moving between and we had to pass twice through it, disguised as tramp Federal soldiers; that Dixon had been so loyal and true, that now, that he still lived, I wished to communicate with him, after having passed out of each other's lives for forty-five years. The Postmaster was kind enough to have it delivered, and Mr. Dixon was still sufficiently interested in me to come to see me at once. The editor of the Florence Times thought enough of my letter to the Postmaster to publish it in his paper. This was copied by other County papers in the State.

Since that time I have received many letters from over the State, asking me to write the story of our trip. I have never spoken or written of our experience, for two reasons; first, that for ten years after the war, such incidents of which I here write, were so common to all, that ours would not have been interesting. Thousands of Southern soldiers suffered far more than we, and thousands went through far more exciting and dangerous scenes than either of us. Second, that should Mr. Dixon be dead, his family might have taken umbrage at my writing of him, while not living to defend himself, or deny incidents that might be considered detrimental to his moral character. But now, that he is still living and gives his consent to the telling of the story, I do so, with truth, as I remember it. Mr. Dixon can deny such as he thinks is error, and be silent about what he knows to be true. So much for explanations. Now for the story.

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By D. A. DICKERT

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Gen. Hardee, of the Confederate Army, had evacuated Charleston, and all the coast defences in his military district. He had concentrated his little army on the North Eastern R. R. at a small hamlet, St. Stephens, on the south side of the Santee. The Confederates under Gen. Hood had been disastrously defeated at Franklin and Nashville, Tennessee, and were now making their way southeast, to join Gen. Hardee. Gen. Sherman, of the Union army, with 60,000 troops, was marching between, and nearing Columbia. It was imperative to Gen. Hardee that he should communicate with the commander of Hood's beaten army, now Lieut. Gen. Stewart. He made inquiries among his subordinate Generals for a good, reliable officer, who would undertake the doubtful mission of bearing orders to General Stewart. Maj. Gen. McLaws, for whom I had done much service, scouting down in the direction of Pocatigo and Savannah, recommended me to Gen. Hardee, and I was ordered to that General's headquarters.

When the old General saw me, he looked surprised, as well as disappointed. He was looking for a man, not a stripling, tow-headed boy, and intimated as much in his inquiries. I must confess, in all candor, there was nothing prepossessing in my looks, nothing that would inspire confidence. He asked me many questions, my age, experience, what service I had seen, etc. After a long silence, he said:

"I wish to communicate in all possible speed with the commander's army, and want a man who is willing to give his life, if necessary, not to me, but to our country. This will be a hard undertaking, full of hardship and fraught with many perils. I will not command you, but if you will undertake the mission and carry it out successfully, you will be rendering our cause a great service."

I agreed. He asked me if I knew my capture meant death, being disguised as the enemy. This caused me to brace up, and I told the General the story I had read when a boy about Gen. Harney, who had been sent to Florida to capture Billy Bowlegs, the Seminole chief, and his band. That Bowlegs, when informed of the fact, only said: "Harney ketch, Billy hang. Billy ketch, Harney hang."

The General caught the idea and with it a ray of confidence. He ordered his Adjutant General to write out the instructions; these I

was to thoroughly memorize and destroy, before entering the enemy's lines. He gave me other orders, which were to impress horses, engines, or any conveyance that would expedite the journey. These I was also to destroy when of no further use. That I was to carry nothing on my person, which would in any way incriminate me as being a Confederate. The old Commander gave me a hearty handshake, with well wishes for my safety, but I felt sure he thought never to see me again.

When I left, I began thinking of the long, lonely tramp. I, being of Irish descent and loving companionship, said as much to Gen. McLaws, when I reached his headquarters. I told him I did not dread the dangers, but the loneliness, I feared, would almost become unbearable. He ordered me to take whom I wished and who was willing to go.

Word soon spread in camp that I wished a companion, a fearless man, one willing to endure hardship and face danger. Capt. Richard O'Neill, of Columbia, introduced me to Sam Dixon, and said "he is your man." Dixon knew me, as being an officer of Kershaw's Brigade, but I had never seen him before to my knowledge. He seemed to be some older than myself, but, as a matter of fact, both were near the same age. We were furnished with much worn Federal uniforms, but did not don them until leaving our lines.

We left camp in the afternoon, intending to cross the Santee before night. At Kingstree we had to remain, as we were told, over night, in order to take the train to Florence, en route for Sumter. I left Dixon at the depot to watch the train and to hold it under our orders from Gen. Hardee, until I could get there. I took up quarters at a kind of boarding house on the extreme end of the street leading from the railroad, kept by an old couple, as I now remember Germans. The couple had a smashing fine daughter, a jolly good girl, as it was ever my fortune to meet.

A battery of artillery partly from my neighborhood were camped just out of town and many of the members came in to see me. They joked me about "leaving civilization and going among the Yankees." The young lady of the house took up the joke and proposed a dance for my benefit. I was agreeable. In a few minutes she had gathered in half a dozen young ladies, and I as many young

men. Then the dance began. It was fast and furious from the start, but by midnight the old house rocked, like a cyclone had struck it. Dixon came in, just in the middle of a stormy reel, with the information that the train was waiting for me.

We reached Florence, the yards and tracks filled with waiting engines and trains, but 'twas night before we could procure an engine to run us down to Sumter. An engine and a few box cars had just come in from that direction with the news that the depot and tracks around that town had been burned that day. We hunted up the manager of trains, showed our orders and demanded transportation to Sumter. That was all right, but the engineer swore he would not go, nor would the negro fireman. The negro was another man's property and should not be subject to capture. We begged, entreated and threatened, but no go. I told him to show me how to start the old engine, then we would run her as far as she held out. I began jerking away at levers and tried my best to start it. The engineer cursed and ripped, but when he saw we were going to take his engine anyway, he relented, jumped aboard, saying, "if you must go to—, why I'll go with you." We sped through the inky darkness like the wind.

Many who have read so far, will, no doubt, say, "Those two boys are out on a lark and don't you forget it." But if they knew the facts, they would sooner think those boys were having a "dance with death, with a fresh partner with the coming of every day."

We had changed our uniforms at Florence and we certainly did look rough in the faded old Yankee blouse and cap. We joked each other about our dress, each declaring he could scarcely keep from shooting the other, we looked so much like the hated Yank. The engineer was mad to kill, and shoved that old engine ahead for all she was worth, never blowing a whistle or slacking his pace, till the burning tracks ahead told that we were nearing Sumter. He stopped the engine and motioned us off. We tried to part friendly, but the old fellow would have none of it. As he backed away he called after us, "You say you are Southern soldiers, but you look more like a set of d— Yankee house-burners and chicken thieves, that's what you do." We couldn't get mad, for he certainly spoke the truth.

We flanked the town, leaving it to our left, blundering along

through the darkness, along fields and over fences, till we struck a railroad, which as Dixon said, would lead us to near the Wateree river. We lay down in some bushes near the track and slept till day, then counted cross-ties for some miles, till we came to a section master's house. The old man offered us his push car, which in those days were propelled by long poles. Just then a half dozen big, buck negroes came along, on their way to Sumter, in high good humor at their new found freedom. We told them to get poles and jump the car. Seeing our uniforms, they obeyed with alacrity, but when we drew our pistols and told them to shove for their lives back in the direction whence they came, their countenances fell, but they shoved the car all the same. We were both well armed, with each a pair of Colt's revolvers and Spencer rifles. These shot six times, loaded from the butt of the stock.

I left all course of direction to Dixon, so do not remember, at this day, time or distance. We left the car near Garner's Ferry, on the road to Columbia, near an old mill. The old miller put us across the Wateree in a canoe, and we struck out on the main road to Columbia. On the top of the first hill, we came to a farm house, the first house that side of the river, on the left hand side, going west. I left Dixon at the gate to watch, while I went inside to gather what information we needed, about the road and the distance of the enemy. As I walked inside the house, I noticed a knapsack at the door, a rifle standing near. In the room to my left there seemed some persons having a high old time, the door being shut. A soldier's accouterments at such a place looked suspicious, so I motioned Dixon a sign of caution, turned the knob and walked in, having in the meantime drawn my pistol, in case of emergency.

Had a comet struck the building, there could not have been greater consternation to the crowd within than to see this Yankee soldier walk in on their privacy. There were three young ladies and a young Confederate soldier within. He was petrified with fright and speechless. I began asking him questions, but he only answered with a stare. One of the young ladies recovered herself in time, and told me he was her sick brother, who had been hiding out for several days, was sick unto death and "you let him alone."

I knew he was some soldier on furlough the Yankee army had cooped in. The "sick racket" was all an inspiration of the moment. I

tried to explain that I was no enemy, only wanted information. But that wouldn't go with the young ladies and such a tongue-lashing I never had before. They were true rebel girls. The soldier told me the enemy was on that road, but how far, he did not know.

We trudged on some miles farther, when we heard a terrible racket coming down the road. We dodged in the thicket, but it proved to be only a wagon with four mules and a negro driver, going at a furious gait. The driver informed us the team belonged to Mr. Nat Heyward, and had been hiding out on the plantation, but now was seeking greater safety in the Wateree swamps. We took the two lead mules, mounted them and went trotting along in fine good humor at our good luck.

I will here state that before crossing the river, we memorized our instructions well, and tore up everything that would be incriminating. Now we had nothing to back us, but our own wits. After traveling some miles, one of the most unfathomable mysteries beset us that we came in contact with during our trip. We had passed Mr. Nat Hayward's house a mile or two, when turning a sudden bend in the road, we came upon a horse, all bridled and saddled, foaming and panting, as if he would fall. A carbine was slung to the saddle and all trapping marked with U.S. Dixon held the mules while I reconnoitered, making an entire circuit through some scrubby pines on the left of the road, going east, but no sign or track of the rider could be found. We turned the mules loose, starting them homeward, then mounted the horse, intending to take turns in the saddle. Whether it was a Confederate scout, who saw us in time to make his escape, thinking us Yankees, or whether a Yankee forager, shot by some crippled Confederate soldier from the thicket, and his horse then running away, will never be known. When this story was told in camp, the boys wagged their heads, laughed and said, "Of course, it was a Yankee and you just good naturedly turned him loose. Oh, no, you didn't kill him. Of course, not."

The story did look fishy on its face but the facts are just as I state them. We killed no one there. I will state further, at this point, we took no lives only to save our own, and only did unto others as they would have liked to do unto us. Furthermore, I will say it here, to the credit of Sam Dixon, no blood was on his hands, only that

brought about in a fair and open fight. If there was any rough work, I alone am responsible. That there was some blood spilled, some lives lost, I will not attempt to deny, but there were no useless butcheries, and Dixon's hands are clean.

It was nearing night, now, with a tremendous threatening cloud coming up, with long, heavy peals of thunder in the westward. We had determined to make Columbia that night, if possible. A great reflection of light ahead of us told plainly there were campfires and we were nearing the camp of the enemy. We came to a great pine barren and, as far as we could see, it was one vast blaze of camp fires. It was now raining in torrents, with vivid flashes of lightning. We debated a long time whether to give up the horse and flank the camp to the south, or to ride fearlessly through, and trust to luck. It would have been almost impossible to do the former, in that black, inky night, as neither of us knew a foot of the country. So we chose the latter, and rode boldly through Blair's corps, which had come up from Hopkins on its way to Camden and had camped here for several days. We could only see the road through indistinctly by the camp fires on either side, some not ten feet from the road, and by the flashes of the lightning. We were not molested, as what few soldiers who stood around the fires, no doubt, took us for belated marauders, coming into camp. But it gave our heads a quiver and hearts a jar to know we were right in the midst of the enemy's camp, where one idle question of a curious or suspicious soldier, a word from an inquisitive camp follower, and our lives were a forfeit. We knew none of their organizations and could not have answered the hail of "what command do you belong?" We kept our pistols in our hands and had agreed, if it came to the worst, we would give them a fight for their money, and try to lose ourselves among the thousands around us. Remember, we were boys, not men, and this venture would have shaken the nerves of the stoutest hearted. Through all the time we were passing through the Yankee camp, it was raining in torrents, with heavy thundering, and keen flashes of lightning. This accounted for there being so few soldiers astir. During Sherman's whole march he rarely kept pickets on his flanks, as no enemy was possible in that direction, thus making it easy to pass in and out.

CHAPTER II

After passing through the Yankee camp, we came to a cross road, and could see by the lightning a large country residence on our right facing the road, as I understood, leading from Hopkins to Camden, or in that direction, in which a light shone in the window. We stopped to get some directions, and, if possible, something to eat, for we were ravenously hungry.

I rode in the yard, leaving Dixon with the horse under the shelter of some trees. I began to reconnoiter. I saw that people were in the house, but could not tell whether they were women or children, as the window was so high the top of their heads only showed. I knew enough of camp life to know that it mattered not how far soldiers roamed during the day, they returned to quarters at night. Still, though, perhaps a lot of officers might have taken refuge there from the storm.

I went to the door and knocked, which caused a terrible commotion inside, scurrying of feet, upsetting chairs, etc. After a long delay a lady came to the door and asked from inside who I was, what I wanted. I answered that I was a soldier and wanted to get into the house, was cold, wet and hungry, also wished to get some directions. She told me there was no one in the house but women and children, and the soldiers had eaten up everything in the house. We parleyed a long time, but at last I told her I must come in the house, that I was a friend and meant no harm. She at last opened the door, and in the room to the right of the hall sat an old fashioned folding table, loaded down with everything that a hungry man could wish. The sight fairly took my breath away, and I asked the good lady to permit me to bring a friend. Dixon and I fell to. She explained that the troops had been there all day, one squad after another, and she and her little daughter had been cooking from morning till night and saw no reason to clear the table, as the soldiers would be coming next morning early.

Think of that, you sentimentalist, that is always harping the cant of forgiveness, or those who will condemn the acts of Dixon and myself, as they read further; think of these Southern women whose husbands or sons were in the army, and who had no necessity of ever doing a stroke of work in their lives, cooking for,

waiting on, and listening to the coarse and insulting language of the brutal enemy. It was that way wherever the Federal army passed.

We continued the conversation, the good lady and myself. There were in the room the old mother, a little deaf, and a half grown girl, besides the lady of the house. She told me her husband was away, the negroes all gone, and their horses, mules, cattle and every vestige of their provisions and provender gone. I did not intend to let ourselves be known so near the enemy's camp, but as I sat there, and listened to the woes of the little Southern woman, I could not deceive her. I told her we were not what we appeared, but Southern boys on a secret mission, and knew people in Columbia, or at least Dixon did, he having lived there once. Dixon spoke of many people she knew, but the little woman was suspicious. The little girl asked if I knew a certain young man, whom I will not name. I told her I did, the command he belonged to, and the name of his captain. The little girl slapped her hands and shouted:

"Yes, they are rebels, they are our people, they know ——. I must run and tell papa."

Then out and upstairs she ran, and brought in a fine looking middle aged man, who had been in the swamp hiding, and had just time to change his wet clothing, taking refuge in the garret, when the exciting knock was heard at the door. Their name, I think, was Edwards or Edmonds, but whatever became of them I never heard. All must be dead by this time, except, perhaps, the young girl. I would like to give her my blessing for the great good her mother unknowingly did us.

They were very intelligent people, and we talked confidentially while we dried our clothes by a blazing fire. We told them of our mission, that we had just come through the enemy's camp while they slept. The good lady began entreating us to turn back, while it was not too late, that the enemy lay asleep; tomorrow the world would be alive with them, all the way to Columbia and for miles on either side of us, and we could not escape them. They would detect us by our dialect, if not by our clothes. She begged us, for our mothers' sake, not to throw our young lives away, in this impossible and fruitless undertaking. She said we would be

hanged as spies, as dogs, to a tree. She told us of the swollen streams, with all boats destroyed or swept away. We laughed at her fears and told her the impossibility of the idea, of a soldier shirking his duty because danger was ahead. She followed us to the door, and there, lifting her little hand towards Heaven, she asked "God to protect, guard and watch over us."

Those few simple words, coming from the little strange lady, fell then upon deaf ears, to be made a joke of at first, but in time became our talisman.

We struck the trail again, the rain still falling, while a black and lowering cloud stretched from horizon to horizon and peal after peal of thunder rolled overhead. We kept the road with great difficulty. Traveling some miles after leaving the house, a great roaring, as the falling of mighty waters, was heard in our front, and became more distinct the nearer we approached. I inquired of Dixon what stream could possibly be between us and Columbia. None. Then where were we and what water could it be? I thought perhaps we had missed our road and were near Broad river. But this did not seem possible, yet it was evident we were nearing a raging water course of some sort. Else why this roaring?

As we approached, the great roar seemed to have shifted to our left. While we were deliberating about the matter the horse commenced to blunder down, it seemed to us, a precipice, then plunged into the water, and began floundering about. The water in the first plunge came to our armpits. The horse, I was sure, had gone clear beneath, but the faithful beast soon righted himself, and struck boldly out in the stream. Where we were or what stream it was, neither could imagine.

"I thought you told me you know all about this country," I said to Dixon.

He did, but had never heard of such a stream as this before, and intimated that its appearance was of recent date. It was certain the horse was swimming in a circle, for putting my hand in the water I could discern no current. No lightning flash came now, when we needed it so badly. I then asked Dixon, for the first time, could he swim. He gave the laconic reply, "to the bottom."

"Well, if you don't learn pretty soon how to swim in another direction there is not much chance of your getting out. The old

horse can't swim all night."

Dixon said: "Remember the little lady's prayer."

"Yes," I answered, "a prayer saves all right, but it will do you no good in this water, if you can't swim."

We joked about the lady's prayer while the old horse swam like a duck, and it seemed to us he had gone far enough to cross any river in America. Just then, two Heaven-sent flashes came, and we saw trees on our right and left, then going up stream. As I had expected, he was swimming in a circle. I guided him now with both hands, gently tapping his head on either side, to keep him straight.

We clambered out at last on land and found a road leading to a negro cabin. We roused up the old darkey and asked what stream this was.

"Hampton Mill pond, and if you are going yon way you must go below the mill and then turn up."

When we told him we had come straight across, the old negro must have laughed himself sick.

Dixon said the little lady's prayer had certainly done good, for if the horse had swam down stream instead of up we would have gone over the dam, which was only about fifty or seventy yards below, and in that case, this story would never have been written.

We came into Columbia under the railroad bridge, and at a cottage to our right we saw a dim light. I went in. Everything was dark but in one room. A knock brought an old gentleman to the door. He said he was a doctor and had but a moment ago witnessed one life go out and another come in. He could not see my uniform and no explanations were necessary. In answer to the query as to where we could conceal ourselves till morning, he directed us to a great camp of deserted log negro cabins that had been built by Governor Aiken's negroes, when they refugeeed from the coast. We tied the faithful, but shivering horse to a paling, crept in a dirty cabin, lay down just as we were, and slept the sleep of the just till day, which was only a few hours off. We had no way of starting a fire, our blankets and clothes were dripping wet, but we slept nevertheless.

Next morning Dixon remained in the cabin while I went out to see how the land lay. The horse we turned loose, as we had nothing

to feed it; furthermore we had to cross Broad river and there was no way of getting him over. Goodwin was mayor of Columbia, but for some cause or other Jim Gibbes held the reins of government. The city had been burned a day or two before, and strolling Yankee camp-followers were poking about everywhere.

I was directed, when inquiring for the mayor, to Dr. Gibbes' house, where both he and his son lived. The venerable doctor was out of bed, but had me ushered in his bed room to await the coming saw through me before I said a word. He knew I was no Yankee the moment he put his eyes upon me. I wanted the extent of the burnt district, the places where the people were sheltered, how they were living, etc. He gave me all the information I desired, and then we went out to look at the ruins and get the names of all the streets on which the houses had been swept away by the flames, as well as that part of the city which had escaped. He left me to wander about alone, as he said our being together too long might attract attention.

I passed a lady on the street that I had known since childhood, but I dared not make myself known. The pangs of hunger began to torture me, but where could I get a morsel in this city of desolation? A church loomed up in which were sheltered a hundred women and children under charge of a man named Dent, sheriff, I think, of Richland. He came to the door at my solicitation, opened the door just wide enough to see who I was and demanded in a fierce voice what was wanted. When I began spinning my yarn about being hungry, he started to slam the door, but I stuck my foot in the jam and told him he should hear me, that I was a Southern man on secret duty; but he would not listen to me. Oh, he gave me some awful talk, said if I was a Southern soldier, why wasn't I where soldiers belonged and to go on back to where such men belong, at the front, not coming around begging from perishing children. I told him very plainly he belonged in h—— and would get there in good time. I could have choked him to his knees. Then a good old motherly soul, hearing the discussion, came to the door and handed me a piece of corn bread, a pair of pork ribs, that was as clear of meat as a knife handle, and she took up the conversation.

"You say you are a Confederate soldier? Why then are you in the uniform of the Yankees?"

There were reasons, I told her, but I had no time to explain. Then she raised her spectacles, gave me a sinister look, then in an astonished whisper, "A spy!" Oh, how that epithet stung me, like the fangs of a rattler. "A spy!" The very thought!

"No," I shouted to her, "I am no spy, but a soldier who is risking his life for just such as you."

I felt for the moment like dashing the grudgingly given grub in her face, but I was too hungry to part with it. It is one of the human frailties, to dislike being called ill names, even when we know we deserve them. Dent and the old lady were both right from their standpoint.

Mayor Gibbes gave us a written account of all the burnings, and we made for Broad river, three miles above, but the bridge had been destroyed. Right here I wish to state what a versatile mind that erratic, wonderful and indomitable man, James G. Gibbes, had. I explained to him that it was too dangerous to take any writing upon our person that would be incriminating, in case of capture. He studied a while, then said, "The boys back in camp will want this, and they must have it. I can fix it." Reflecting a moment, he began writing rapidly, page after page, giving number and street of every house burned, and where the inmates at that time were gathered.

Handing me the paper he said: "The Devil himself couldn't read that. The d——n Yankees may decipher it, but you will either be hung or turned loose before they do it."

It was simply, in place of the vowels, the letter next to it, and vice versa. A for b and b for a, and so on, only the small words of two or three letters using them normally. Now, it is not difficult to write or read, once you know the key, but you write out ten lines in this way, omitting capitals, and see what a mess the first ten men you meet will make at reading it. We took Mr. Gibbes' word for it, the "devil couldn't read it," and risked our lives upon the Yankees deciphering it, in case we were caught.

At the river were hundreds and hundreds of women and children sheltered under blankets and quilts, that they had

snatched from the flames, awaiting the subsiding of the waters of the river.

The river was one raging torrent, twenty or thirty feet above the normal, with great rafts of drift wood, trees, logs and every conceivable debris, going down at a fearful speed. A boat twelve or fifteen feet long had been captured the day before, the front heading having been torn out as it was wrenched from some tree to which it had been fastened by a chain. In this frail craft we determined to risk ourselves, and, perhaps, the destinies of Hardee's and Hood's armies. The old men and many of the ladies camped near came to persuade us from this reckless under-taking, saying a negro had been drowned the day before trying to cross in the boat. But we assured them we could cross. I was an expert boatman, having been raised upon the river, as well as an expert swimmer. Dixon said all he had to rely on was the "little lady's prayer."

Divesting ourselves of our outer garments, securing our pistols and rifles, we both took the rear end of the craft, thus throwing the front end high out of the water. We made our way cautiously across, dodging the rafts and logs, and came out a half mile below our starting point, Dixon kept repeating, "I hope the little lady's prayer will save us," as we would sweep around a great raft that seemed destined to swamp us.

When we landed we had to look into the muzzles of a half dozen rifles, with the command to "surrender." Seeing at a glance they were Confederate soldiers, we took the situation good humoredly, giving up our arms without protest. Then we were marched ahead of the guards to the headquarters of Col. Roberts, commanding two regiments of western cavalry. These had been sent forward from Hood's army to learn, if possible, something of the movements of Sherman's army, and had been in camp for two days about a half mile from the old bridge, awaiting some news from beyond the river. As we knew nothing of the western army and they less of ours, their questions and our answers were all as if in a foreign tongue to each other. We had nothing to show that we were what we represented ourselves to be, only our word. Col. Roberts didn't take kindly to our story, rather thinking we were deserters. I told him at last to take me to an old citizen, a mile away, who

knew my father, also myself by reputation, and we would leave it all to him. Col. Roberts agreed. We were escorted to old Mr. Drury Nunnemaker, who declared I was what I represented myself to be, and the kind old gentleman went out of his way to send word to Col. Roberts that he would stake his life on the truth of what I said.

CHAPTER III

This satisfied the Colonel, and he asked many questions. I told him of our army, whither it was moving, where the western army was to make a junction with ours, and that there was no enemy in his front. He gave us passports to Gen. Stewart's army, to avoid the embarrassment of meeting scouting parties of his army, and declared that he would break camp at once and rejoin his command, on the faith of what we told him. He furnished us with two rickety old horses, and we commenced our tramp in the direction of Hood's army.

It was growing dark by this time, but we reached Spring Hill, fifteen miles above, before midnight, over one of the sloppiest, muddiest roads it was ever my ill fortune to travel. There we gave some pickets, who had been sent out from the army above Pomaria, the fright of their lives. Their growth was prematurely stopped. Apprehending no danger, these worthy videttes, violating all rules of war, had left their station in the road and taken up their quarters in a room of good old Mrs. Eleazer's house, and were having a tearing-down good time before a blazing fire, after have regaled themselves at the bountiful table of the good old Dutch Fork woman. We hitched our old steeds to the fence, near where the troopers had fastened theirs, and walked through the house and into the room where the five troopers were sitting around the fire. We continued our conversation about the river and roads as if we did not know there was a man in five hundred miles. We did not take seats, as there were none to offer us, but stood up with our backs to the fire, facing the men. For more than five full minutes these men sat like statues, staring at us as if we were wild animals from the jungles. I knew they thought when we first walked in that they were surrounded by Yankees, and that we were just toying with them; in fact, they told us so afterwards. We were just having our fun with them, wishing to give them a good fright for leaving their post. To have done them justice, we should have come in, pistols in hands, and made them prisoners, but Dixon said that would be carrying the joke too far. By some telepathic sign, all five arose and walked out to see what was up, and, incidentally, to have a look at our horses. In a few moments

they all came back, with cocked revolvers in their hands, demanding our surrender. We laughed and said all kinds of foolish things. I told them we would go out of the house as easily as we came in. Dixon would tell one tale, in answer to questions as to who we were and our business, and I would deny it. Then I would tell a tale, and Dixon would dispute it. We saw they were growing impatient, and we pulled Col. Roberts' orders on them. Then harmony prevailed. Mrs. Eleazer gave us a fine supper, and I told her all the news of Hardee's army, in which she had three sons.

At daylight the pickets and ourselves left for army headquarters together, reaching Gen. Bates' quarters, which were some miles above Pomaria, early in the day. He commanded the advance division, and to him we reported. He would not believe one word we said, and laughed at what he called our imposition upon Col. Roberts. He declared if those people around there knew me, as I professed, we were deserters and should be shot. He sent us under guard to Gen. Cheatham, the gallant Kentuckian, who commanded one wing of Hood's army. Gen. Stewart, commander-in-chief, was back on the Saluda, waiting to hear news from Hardee. They had heard nothing of him since Sherman began his march through this State. Gen. Cheatham treated us quite differently from the manner in which we were treated by the Tennessean. He listened to our story patiently. We knew little in common. He questioned me closely as to how our troops were commanded, how stationed at Chickamauga, and all about Longstreet in East Tennessee, to which I gave correct answers; for I was always "up in G." when it came to an army in which I had served. At last he slapped us on the back, and said:

"Bravo! my good boys; I find you all right. You have done us a great service. Sixteen thousand men you say Hardee has, and on the Santee? He wants us to join him at Cheraw and send a courier every twenty-four hours? That sounds good, and by—, we will do it. I will dispatch to Stewart at once, and before nightfall every tent shall be down. Then for Hardee, then for Sherman"—and a lot more of this jolly talk. He gave us high praise for so successfully carrying out the perilous undertaking.

The genial old Kentuckian gave us a lot of good advice. He charged us not to fall into the hands of their cavalry, saying we

could never make ourselves understood, and, as the cavalry could not bother with two prisoners, they would shoot us without ceremony. This sounded encouraging to a degree, to be told now that we would be shot it mattered not in whose hands we fell. He advised us, now that our mission had been accomplished, to discard the blue Yankee uniform and don the gray, saying there was less risk in being taken prisoners by the enemy than in being shot by our own men, and even offering to furnish us with a suit of gray each. We told him we had never intended to be taken prisoners by the enemy, and would trust to luck about his cavalry.

Our mission ended, we turned our faces east again, intending to join our command miles below Cheraw. Before the next day the whole army and ourselves were beyond Broad river.

After crossing Broad river Hood's army bore to the left, while we kept straight ahead, with the idea of falling in Sherman's rear. There was less danger of our capture among his unsuspecting "bummers" than on his flanks or in front. With his ever-ready scouting parties and pickets, Sherman always had his ear to the ground in front, but cared nothing for his flanks or even his rear, as no possible enemy could approach him there. Gen. Cheatham had cautioned us to fight shy of his cavalry, and this caution had, of necessity, forced us to risk our chances with the Federal soldiery.

For want of space I will pass over most of the very-day events—the minor escapades, our occasional brushes with the enemy, our many routs and races for our lives, and the abuse and scorn of the women we met—and confine myself to some of the most important happenings. Often we were nearly frozen to death, traveling by day in a drenching rain, hiding by night in thickets, with our clothes wet to the skin, and with no way of starting a fire. When we got farther along, nearing the armies, we were in greater danger of being shot by Gen. Wheeler's Confederate cavalry than from the Union forces. The former could not be burdened with prisoners, and we had no way of explaining our condition. It took less time to shoot a suspect than to listen to the unraveling of a doubtful story. Neither could we take prisoners. When the fortunes of war threw them in our power what would we do with them? Turn them loose to dog our foot-steps, catch us off guard, and then cut our throats? So it reduced itself to the old proposition that I mentioned to Gen.

Hardee at the outset, "Harney ketch, Billy hang. Billy ketch, Harney hang." After nearly fifty years of peace it would be wrong to harrow the sensitive feelings of this generation with details of episodes which they could not comprehend; nor could they understand the bitterness existing between the opposing armies, and especially the bitterness of the army of the South, which was fighting to the losing finish of a quarrel of a century's standing. The perpetrators of deeds done then, that would be applauded at the time, would now be execrated and branded as cold-blooded butchers and unconscionable murderers. So much for my reasons in not giving details. Those with morbid minds, or lovers of the sensational, can draw upon their imaginations for such conclusions as suit them best. The pure in mind and refined will pass it over with thanks for the omission.

We jogged along on foot at a rambling gait, having left our horses behind us for two reasons; the first was that the bridges and ferries were either burned or swept away, and the second was that we could not get anything to feed them on in the country of desolation through which we passed.

We kept the straight road, striking the wake of the enemy beyond Winnsboro and keeping it until we came to the Catawba river at Peas' ferry. The enemy had just crossed, and every boat of whatever description had been destroyed or washed away for miles above and below us. We must cross the stream, and there was only one course for us to take. We gathered some bottom poles, left from a fence that had been burned, lashed them together "cross and pile," and secured them with twisted muscadine vines, which made a very presentable raft. The river was still very high, presenting a wide muddy expanse of swiftly flowing water. We heaved the raft in, having fashioned out some rough paddles, and prepared to embark. It looked a little hazardous, but I concluded we would come out some miles below, provided, as Dixon suggested, "the little lady's prayer" held good. We tied our guns, slung our revolvers around our necks, and pushed off.

I was a splendid swimmer, but Dixon still insisted that he could swim in but one direction, and that was straight to the bottom. He was instructed, whatever happened to me, to hang for his life to the raft, and he would land somewhere short of the Atlantic ocean.

The raft sank to our waists when we first got on, but when we struck the current it began going round and round, like a spinning jenny. We got her righted at last, while Dixon brought up the joke about "the little lady's prayer," saying that he had grown to have faith in it. In fact, I began to be superstitious about it myself. We landed about three miles below the starting point and clambered out, wet, but with everything safe. In going up the river to regain the road we had left, we came upon an old, dilapidated artillery horse, and one of the most innocent and ungainly looking mules that was ever in Sherman's army.

For a mile or more, in a flat piece of bottom land, was one vast wilderness of wreckage—broken-down wagons, mired-up caissons, dismantled carriages and buggies—the whole resembling an overland armada come to grief. We lassoed the old horse, the mule following like its shadow, and made halters out of our gun straps and saddles of our blankets, and rode away. The fun we had for a day or two, riding that old horse and its shadow, was worth a "cycle of Cathay." I rode the horse, calling myself Don Quixote, while Dixon on the mule styled himself "your esquire, Sancho Panza." I must confess we looked exactly like the pictures, seen in my boyhood, of those two worthies, made famous by the genius of the immortal Cervantes.

Our pace was slow and torturous, and our blankets below us seemed to be growing more threadbare every step we took. Just before we came to a little hamlet, called Rich Hill, as I now remember, or Liberty Hill, we ran up on an old gentleman named Cunningham, who had been hiding out for several days and was something the worse for wear in temper and hunger. He was a great old Southerner, however, and when he had grown somewhat tame after his fright of running into the two Yanks, as he supposed, he insisted on our going to his house in town and spending the night with him. Dixon had relatives there; so explanations were easy.

Mrs. Cunningham, a fine lady, was in a most worried frame of mind over the conduct of her house maid the day before. She had danced with the Yankees all over the house, with the possible exception, I believe, of the top of the piano, and had given her mistress impudence almost intolerable, swearing she would never

do a stroke of work again for her or for any one else, for "they" had said she was free. The negroes always spoke of the Yankees as "they." She had left the house in great dudgeon and gone to the yard, as the negro quarters were called. Mrs. Cunningham was asked to keep quiet, we telling her that it was one of our special missions to take care of such cases as Nellie's, and we assured her that in the morning her maid would be with her again.

We slept in the piazza that night in order to keep a weather eye on the enemy's camp, the reflection of its camp fires being plainly visible in the distance.

After a hearty breakfast Dixon and I undertook the disciplining of the pugnacious Nellie. Back of the dwelling were two long rows of cabins, and the street between was filled with negro men belonging to Mr. Cunningham, and those from the neighborhood who had wives on the place. They were discussing future possibilities. Dixon was to keep the men (fifteen or twenty) off my back, while I attended to the misguided maid. We walked down the street between the men, inquiring for Nellie. She heard the inquiries and sniffed danger, running in a house and crawling under the bed. Dixon stood outside, with his revolver in his hand, and I pulled Nellie out by the feet, ripping and snorting and threatening instant destruction to her, while she prayed and "whooped for the landing." The "lady" and I "two-stepped" a time or two around in the cabin, Dixon holding the men off with his pistol, while I was pretending to murder the maid. She tore loose after a bit and made a streak for the "big house," on the back porch of which stood Mrs. and Mr. Cunningham. Nellie yelled for "missus, oh! missus," while I fired shot after shot over her head. She made the porch with one bund, and caught Mrs. Cunningham around the waist. I tried to tear her loose, and the more I tried the more she ripped Mrs. Cunningham's skirts from their moorings. The maid cut such antics, while Mrs. Cunningham's dress became more and more less a dress, that she begged me to desist, and the frightened negro fell into a faint.

As Dixon and I rode east I could not tell which we laughed at most, the negroes' fright and antics, or Mrs. Cunningham's plight. Poor, good Mrs. Cunningham, I know, in the nature of things, has long since passed over the river, but had she only known how those

two boys were laughing at her and her maid, she would have wished the fine breakfast she had given us had choked us both.

But we were out for a "dance with death," and could not ignore the sunny partners.

CHAPTER IV

I have lost all knowledge of direction, but we continued east for several days, meeting with little of consequence, intending to get between Gen. Slocum's corps, on the extreme left of Sherman's army, and that of Howard, of the centre. These corps, or wings of the army, often march eight or ten miles apart, and it would not be very hazardous to push our way between. We still called ourselves Don Quixote and Sancho, and joked about the little incidents of our travel.

As we were merrily riding along one day, a regiment of Yankee cavalry came out in the road behind us, from a cross road, laden with great stacks of fodder tied to their saddles behind, which showed they were a foraging party, and little likely to question us. The head of the column passed us, while we continued to talk and laugh loudly, to drive away suspicion. The commander smiled at us, while the men geyed us greatly, and they yelled with wild delight when Dixon's mule began to bray at the meeting with his new-found friends. When they were all past I told Dixon that now was our time to secure good mounts; that a troop of foragers never rode in close column long, and soon some would lag behind. Our old horse and old mule seemed to take on new life, and trotted along briskly. We had formed our plot, and only awaited an opportunity. Poor, unsuspecting devils; how little they dreamed that a Nemesis was upon some of their tracks!

We kept from fifty to one hundred yards behind the Federal troopers for several miles, until they came to a small stream, at which some of them stopped to water their horses, while the others ascended a steep hill beyond. We held up when within a hundred or so feet of the stream, and I dismounted, as if to arrange my blankets. One by one the horses left, as they drank their fill, and continued up the hill, all being perfectly indifferent to our presence, and fearfully unconscious of the danger that lurked in the rear. All had left now but two. The bridle reins of one of these had fallen over his horse's head while the animal was drinking, and the trooper was trying to throw it back with his foot, while the other sat watching with an amused look. I was on them before either had time to think, with a cocked pistol in either hand,

keeping their horses between me and the other troopers as much as possible.

I told them in a low tone that they were prisoners and not to move or make a noise, on pain of instant death. They looked as if petrified. While we were waiting for the others to pass over the crest of the hill they sat staring me in the face, their frightened eyes boring like red hot steel into my very soul. Dixon often laughed and said my eyes glittered like a snake's when I was under a great stress. They must have glittered then, if ever, for I lived an age while holding those men down. The moving of a hand, the changing of position of one of their horses, or the glance behind of one of their comrades, would have been the signal of instant death to the two, and to us a short while afterwards, for we never could have escaped. I seemed to live a dozen lives. One moment I relented of our hazardous act; then courage returned. My cheeks would burn for a moment; then the chill would come. One moment my breath would come as if I were suffocating, and my heart beat as if it were bursting. I dared not take my eyes off the two men; so I could not tell what the troopers in front were doing. It seemed to me that Dixon would never come to my relief.

No man, unless he has experienced such emotions, can ever realize the sensations it gives to be close upon the dividing line of life and death; his life hanging in the balance, where the breaking of a twig, the turning of a head, and the life of himself and his comrade would pay the forfeit. I realized that we had taken desperate chances, and must be prepared for desperate emergencies. If my feelings were such, what must have been the emotions of those two in front of me? They knew that such men as we lay for them at many places, only awaiting an opportunity. They have must felt as if they had been caught upon the crest of a great wave and swept seaward to the ocean of despair. The beating of their hearts must have seemed as the ticking of a death-watch. Their lives must have passed before them as a great panorama.

At last! At last! I heard the voice of faithful old Dixon speaking in my ear.

"We are safe," he said. The voice sounded as a voice afar off, and I reeled to my feet and felt as if I had awaked from a hideous nightmare. The whole time occupied could not have been more

than three minutes.

Charity to the feelings of those who have followed my story thus far forces me to pull the veil of darkness over the scenes that now took place. It is useless to speak of them. Each will form his own ideas, anyway, and it is best that it should be that way.

We were both now well mounted again, with new overcoats, and Dixon with a new pair of boots two numbers too large. We turned our course now to the west, intending to head off Gen. Slocum's corps of Union troops and connect with Hood's army, if possible, as we thought it to be somewhere near the line of North Carolina. After riding some miles across fields and pine barrens we had got in a great belt of pine forest, and I grew very faint and sick, so much so that we were compelled to halt so that I might lie down and recover myself. I was in no talkative mood, and neither was Dixon. Both seemed to wish to be alone. Our nerves were somewhat shattered. Not that either of us had any great doubt as to the success of our last undertaking; for each had thrown his life too often in the balance to be now worried about a little thing like that. The best of men, when under extreme excitement or great stress of feeling, are apt to have their nerves relax and to grow faint. No man ever took the life of another but that he regretted so doing, it matters not what the provocation or the circumstances—not so much the killing, but the necessity for it—even if a man knows that which he does unto others, others would do unto him eagerly and quickly. We gave and took the same chances.

I tried to sleep, but could not even doze. Dixon railed at me about my weakness. He was a better man than I in every respect, and he never knew despondency.

We drifted about for days, guided alone by the sun, for in all those days we saw not a single man. The women could not give us any information, and would not, if they could. We began to worry at their insolent talk and everlasting abuse. We could not have been any more censured had we alone been guilty of all the rascality in Sherman's army. Dixon, being a more patient man, took it good naturedly, but I had grown tired of being forever accused of and dogged at for doing that which others were guilty of, and I often fired back at the women. I felt at times about the women as Nero felt about the Romans—that if all the women had

but one neck I'd like the wringing of it.

In the pine forest it seemed as if there were a thousand roads and none led anywhere. After traveling and retracing our steps nearly one whole day in those accursed, deceitful piney woods roads, we came to a wood chopper's cabin, in which there were four great stalwart girls. After a lot of chaff and good-natured badgering, we got them gentle enough to talk, but they knew nothing but that Uncle Louis lived about five miles towards the clearing. Now, it is trying enough to get directions from the best of women, but these girls certainly were the limit. Some would tell us to turn to our right at certain points, and the others would say, "No, you don't—to the left," owing to the way they were standing while talking. We were forced to make a virtue of necessity, and we made two of the spinsters trudge along with us the five miles to Uncle Louis'. And when we reached that worthy—a great pot-bellied, pudding-headed gawk—he knew less than the girls. Those two girls jawed us unmercifully.

After leaving Uncle Louis' we traveled on and on. We came out at last—struck a clearing on one side, along which ran a settlement road, there being a fence between us and the clearing. We were in a good humor now, and we trotted along briskly to reach a habitation before nightfall. It was late in the evening then.

I neglected to state that we had not grown entirely uncivilized, as we were still gallant enough to dismount and lead our horses while these belles of the pine forest showed us the way to their much-honored kinsman. We were kind enough, too, to offer them our horses to ride, while we walked at their side. This they angrily refused.

While we were going along the road of the clearing, not dreaming there was a man nearer than Sherman's army, save possibly Uncle Louis, we were startled by the stern command, "Halt!" and found ourselves looking down the muzzles of a half dozen double-barrelled shot guns on either side of the road. These were in the hands of as many old citizens. With threatening looks and angry voices, they ordered us to dismount and surrender. Three kept us covered with their guns, while the others took our arms and hitched our horses.

We took the situation as a great joke at first, and laughed at

our untimely butting into the citizens' meeting, but the old gentlemen were highly wrought up. One of the men, a youngish looking old man, seemed to be leader. As we gathered from their talk, he lived some ten or fifteen miles below, and had been burned out a few days before, and his horses and cattle taken, and he now was in an ugly humor. He had nearly been caught himself, so he said, and he vowed if such had been the case his neck would have been broken. Oh! he was in a fearful mood, and he was right in for hanging us on the spot. I saw we were up against anything but a joke, and begged him to hear our story—that we could explain all; that we were Confederates, and not Union soldiers; had been on a secret mission, had accomplished it, and were now on our way to join our command. This seemed to make him, if anything more angry than before.

I will always believe these old citizens would have shot us down without warning, but none had the heart to be the first to pull the trigger on two unsuspecting boys. If they hanged us, all would be equally culpable. I had sense enough to know that it would not do to beg for our lives, for this would be a confession of guilt. Our only hope was to reason with them, to seek to convince them by argument, and this I did with the earnestness of a trained lawyer. I told them they were wrong in their suspicions, that we could convince them we were South Carolinians, and if they took our lives our blood would be forever on their hands. The other old gentlemen seemed to be disposed to listen to us, but the leader declared they were only losing time by parleying with us. The old gentlemen asked us many questions about the State government—who were our sheriffs, who were our representatives, etc. Dixon knew his county pretty well, but I could not answer one question, any more than if I had been brought up in Asia, having been away in the army for nearly five years, and caring nothing about the civil government.

When all argument seemed unavailing, and no chance left us, I hit upon another key. I said to the leader:

"If you are determined to have our blood, give us a chance for our lives. No Southern man worthy of the name will kill two innocent boys in the discharge of their duty without giving them a showing. Give us back our pistols, and we will fight you for our lives."

"By G—, boys, that talk rings like Southern talk; no d— Yankee would make any such offer as that. Say young man, do you know anything about Jenkins' brigade?" (They knew little of Kershaw's).

We knew the eastern army like an open book. I told him of Jenkins, where and how he was killed at the Wilderness, when Gen. Longstreet was wounded.

"By heaven, they are all right. My son told me just those same words. They are Southerners, just as certain as we are men."

Then they shook our hands, and even the youngish man had the manhood to shake and ask our pardon.

All that time, while I was pleading for our lives, Dixon sat as unconcerned, with a half smile on his countenance, as if listening to a moot court. Afterwards, when I twitted him about his indifference and asked him why he did not speak up and help me out, he replied, "Oh, I like to hear you argue with those old cits." Wasn't that cool, for a man whose life was trembling in the balance?

The old gentleman who "first discovered" us insisted on our accompanying him home, when it was dark enough to be safe, and we gladly accepted the invitation.

We enjoyed the hospitality of the jolly old citizen very much. But our hitherto good fortune seemed now about to abandon us. As Dixon said later, "the prayers of the little lady were no longer heard." The old gentleman was very intelligent, and gifted with a head full of common sense. He gave us each good and sensible advice, his talk coming to us as from one inspired.

That night the old gentleman caused us to change all our plans about going to Hood's army. He advised us to swim the Pee Dee, at a landing to which he promised to direct us, and which we could cross in safety, provided our horses were all they should be; then, with our Federal uniforms, to ride boldly through Slocum's corps, at that time just beyond the river, make our way to the out-post, and then dash for our lives even if we had to kill a picket or two. If we continued our course to the north-west, he said, we would be certain to encounter Gen. Wheeler's cavalry, which was greatly demoralized and demoralizing the whole country, and if we were caught by them we would be shot without parley or ceremony. The country was bitter then, he said, when parties of old men and

crippled Confederate soldiers were lying all over Sherman's flanks, waiting for just such outfits as we pretended to be, and should we run afoul of them our luck might not be as good as with his party. All this appeared to be sensible and good advice. The good wife urged us to return to our homes and wait till times settled!

Dixon and I discussed it all between ourselves that night, and he was strongly in favor of taking our chances right through the Yankee army. I suppose he had wearied of my "arguments with old citizens' meetings." We had no fears of passing through the Federal army, but we knew it would be hazardous in passing the pickets outward. But we agreed upon a plan, and, had not adverse circumstances intervened, there is no doubt there would have been "something doing" in the next day or two at some of Sherman's outposts, or two boys would never have lived to tell this story.

That night we slept the sleep of the innocent. By morning I had thrown off all despondent feelings and weariness of the life we were leading, and was fresh and eager to take the trail again. The good wife had prepared an excellent breakfast, and our horses were fresh and stood saddled at the gate. The old gentleman was to pilot us to the river afoot, his horses being hid out in the swamp miles away.

We were just preparing to sit down to breakfast when the old gentleman rushed in with the startling message:

"The Yankees are on you! Run for your lives to the woods in rear of the lot!"

We glanced towards the front gate, and there, sure enough, a squadron of Federal cavalry was coming in from out-post, or scouting duty, we took it, as they were not encumbered with forage.

The old gentleman was as true as steel, and he went out in the front yard, giving us time to escape to the thicket, saying he would try to save our horses. What yarn he told them we never knew, nor did he save our horses, for we could see the enemy, from our places of concealment, leading them away. Nor did we ever know how the old gentleman weathered the storm, as we did not go back.

Dixon was for tracking them and attempting to secure horses, as we had secured those, but I knew they were returning from out-

post and riding briskly, and we could never keep up with them on foot.

CHAPTER V

We lay a long time, forming and reforming new plans, and talking of what we might have done. We saw our mistake, when too late. Had we fired into the troopers and rushed on them, even if there were twenty-five or thirty, we could have thrown them in such confusion that we could have mounted our horses before they recovered themselves sufficiently to think. We had done that several time before. But, then, every one is not gifted with foresight.

Everything now looked dark. To cross the river was not impossible, Dixon still insisting that he could swim only in one direction—to the bottom—and every boat on the river gone. The Union army left none where they went along. So our entire plans had to be changed, and we must trust to luck again.

In that thicket we talked for hours, and in those hours we lived a life-time. I had been reared in a pious family, and I was growing tired of this double life we were leading. The superstitions of my early youth began to haunt me. I grew weary of the continual grind of danger, excitement and blood. I began to think of our end. When and how would it be? Would we, or could we ever hope to get through? I was fast growing despondent and cowardly. Dixon knew it, and he railed at me about it. While I never allowed him to do any rough work, he being only a companion and friend, still I had allowed him to be accessory. I became sick and tired of the whole undertaking. Not that I had any great remorse; for we had only taken chances with those who would have taken our lives, and been glad of the chance, except for the fact that we got our licks in first. This was right, under the theory of old David Harum, I believe it was: "Do unto others as they would like to do unto you, but get your blow in first."

At this point I will digress a moment to note a little incident that befell us in Lancaster or Chesterfield, I am not positive which, for we ignored all places, distance, and names. This to explain much that is not understood now of the condition and spirit of the women at the time, and of the feeling of the men who, by chance, were thrown in their way, powerless to protect them, still too chivalrous and with too much Southern blood in their veins to see them

abused and insulted with impunity.

Traveling along one day, tired and hungry, we came to a farm house, the inmates of which were a lady and some small children. The negroes on the place had taken French leave and gone to the Yankees, or else had refused to assist the lady. We asked politely for something to eat, stating to her that we would pay her in Confederate money or gold for her trouble, and we would wait. (We had been supplied with gold and green-backs). She told us very civilly that she did not want our money, in fact, that she would not have it, but that by waiting we could get such as she had. She had been robbed of nearly all the provisions on the place, she told us.

We lolled about on chairs, waiting for our meal and chatting in an undertone of the incidents of the day. The country for five or ten miles on either side of the main army was overrun with Yankee "bummers," pilfering, getting something to eat, and burning. While we were waiting, several of the most vicious, impudent, disreputable-looking scoundrels it has ever been my ill fortune to see, came in, and with little ceremony went plundering through the house. After taking such things of value as they wanted, they all left but two.

When the lady came into the house from the kitchen in the yard, one of the scoundrels said:

"Hey, my woman, get us something to eat, and be quick about it. No fuss and feathers now, but just fall to and cook us a good meal. We can wait a little while, but not long; so skip lively."

The little woman told them very frankly she would not do it.

"You won't, hey? Aren't you getting something for these chaps here? Why not for us?"

"Yes," cried the lady; "I would give food to a hungry dog if it behaved itself; but you cowardly ruffians, I'll see you dead first!"

I began to toy uneasily with the handle of my revolver, but Dixon shook his head, good monitor as he always was, for he knew to shoot these men in the house would be the ruin of the woman.

"Oh, my precious little rebel, what do you say to us burning your d— old house over your head?" And they laughed as if it was a great joke.

"Just give me time to get those other soldiers their dinner, as I

promised, and then I will take my children out and you can go to burning," said the lady, as she passed back into the kitchen.

The ruffians cracked jokes about the change of tune the lady would sing when the match was struck.

This is a true incident, given to show the metal the Southern women were made of, and also why so many dwellings were burned.

I thought surely I would choke with indignation. The soldiers were cutting up fearfully. We whispered to the lady that her house would not be burned that day, however, and that a time of reckoning was near at hand. I had thrown discretion to the wind, but Dixon put it out of my head to wreak vengeance there, telling me of the ruin it would entail upon the woman to have two dead soldiers in her house.

Now, let me ask the young men of this day and generation, when there is a lot of cant about "killing helpless prisoners," and such matters, and of "doing good for evil," etc.; what would you have done, had two such heartless scoundrels treated your mother with such indignities? Almost every woman in the South was the mother or sister of a soldier, and all soldiers were brothers; so we considered her our mother. Just what you think you would have done, we did, and would do it again under like provocation. Every soldier of the South would have done the same. But people now can't understand "the then."

Think of two men standing in a waste of smoking ruins; seeing the women gathering around them their innocent children, "as a hen doth her brood;" the land one vast camp of swarming hordes bent on plunder and ruin to the women, while every male citizen who was able to bear a rifle was at the front, battling for his country, with none to protect, none to comfort, their loved ones, but their companions in misery. What should these two men have done when the accidents of war threw such pillagers and brutal house-burners in their path?

Some people now may differ as to the ethics between foes in arms, but we had no time or opportunity for niceties.

But to my story, which has extended now far beyond what was first intended. We both decided to travel due north, making for Hood's army, change our uniforms, go higher up in North

Carolina, and then when out of danger strike east and join Hardee, who we supposed was near the coast. We would get horses somehow and somewhere.

Our progress was slow, as we quit the highways and took to the fields and woodlands. We came up with Hood's army near the State line, and exchanged our uniforms with some wagoners for a semblance of Confederate gray, much the worse for wear.

Just before this, however, I must relate an experience we had with Gen. Wheeler's cavalry. Gen. Wheeler himself, was, no doubt, a fine soldier, but his men, or, at least, some of them, were a rough set. They would rob friend and foe, with no regard for army regulations or rules of war. They were a law unto themselves—some of them, I say.

One morning early, before we thought anybody in either army was astir, we crossed a small rivulet, or large creek, as we were passing up a long incline, with a galloping fence on our left, with a ditch cut beyond, through which ran a spring branch. Beyond the branch was a piece of straggling pines, and just beyond the pines was a clearing, and another branch. We had nearly reached the crest of the hill. There was a farm house to our right, by which ran a road intersecting ours about one hundred yards in our front. Down this road came a regiment of Wheeler's cavalry at a gallop. They halted and began firing at us, without hailing or a summons to surrender. We threw up our hands in expostulation and cried, "Friend! Friends!" But the bullets kept singing around, and they were coming dangerously near us. It was either run, or stand and be shot down. We slid through the galloping fence, Dixon passing over the branch and making for the pines beyond, the bullets singing around us all the time. The troopers being on horseback, they could not shoot straight. I took down the stream, between the overhanging willows, and took refuge under an old bridge, against which driftwood had lodged. The retreat, I found, was safe enough, provided I had not been seen going under the bridge, and even then I could have stood off the whole force till nightfall. Dixon, I thought, had surely made his escape. Still, I could hear the firing and loud voices beyond the pines. A squadron of horsemen passed rapidly over the bridge and continued in the direction Dixon had taken. But what could I do to help him against

such odds? To go to his assistance was to throw two lives away, instead of one.

In about an hour all was still, with not an enemy in sight. I gave several signals which we had agreed upon, but none was answered. Then the thought came to me, Dixon is lost. Prowling around through the pines and fields, looking for some signs, I found nothing but horse tracks and empty shells. Thinking he might have been wounded, I went far back in the direction which I thought he would naturally have taken, repeating our signals by firing two shots in rapid succession. But nothing was seen of my friend. The only thing left me was to wait until night, as we had agreed, when we first set forth, that in case we were routed, or "flushed," as we called it, and became separated, to return at night to the place where we last saw each other.

I determined to wait, although it seemed hopeless—otherwise Dixon would have answered my signals. It was bitterly cold, so I coiled myself up in a fence joint to await the coming of night, and Dixon, if he still lived. But I became ravenously hungry, and I went to the farm house. I could not, however, get much information or grub. I dared not make myself known, for fear of foraging parties, who, learning one of my party had been shot, would have made short shift of me. The woman could not tell much, except, she said, she thought the troopers had killed a man that morning over in the field—she could not say whether he was a Confederate or Federal, and she didn't seem to care. From a partly torn down bank I got a few potatoes, and I got a few ears of corn, that the soldiers had left, from the crib. These I intended to roast for my supper. I tried to catch a chicken, but they had grown so wild they ran off at any overtures. The woman gave me a slice of old bacon.

Night at last came, and I waited anxiously for tidings of Dixon. It was very cold; so I sat up close to the fence and put my blanket over my head. I never felt so desolate and lonely at any other time in all my life. Then I thought of every incident in my whole life—all the good, and all the bad. What was all this suffering for? For pleasure? For gold? For honor? It was not for the last two. Honor could never come to me, for if caught I would only fill the grave of a supposed felon. I felt mean, that I should have let Dixon get killed,

while I was not doing a thing to help him, however useless it might have been. I felt at outs with the world and disgusted at the life we were leading. My only consolation was the thought that possibly I might be doing a slight service for my country.

Night wore on, and with thoughts of my ingratitude, to poor Dixon, I must have fallen asleep. How long I slept I have no idea, but in a half doze I fancied I heard a low whistle, our signal. I sprang to my feet, my heart beating a tattoo in my breast, ears alert and every nerve at extreme tension. The darkness was complete, and the slightest noise was easily heard.

While in this state of nerve-racking suspense, I heard the name, "Dick," spoken in a whisper at my very elbow. I cried, "Sam!" and we were in each other's arms. Oh, what a joyful meeting of friends in that cold, dark night!

It seemed so weird, yet so good, I did not want to release my hold upon him, for fear he would vanish. My heart leaped with joy, and I wished to yell at the top of my voice. Is there any wonder I wrote that letter to Florence, as soon as I heard Dixon lived and was somewhere near? Is it a wonder that he came to see me as soon as he received my letter? That night in a thicket, while we ate our parched corn, roasted potatoes and bacon, we told each other of our experience, Dixon, contrary to all reason, after being hid by the hill, ran in the direction the troopers were going, concealed himself in a straw pen to wait for night, and then, like myself, overcome by the cold, fell asleep.

When asked what all the firing was about, he said:

"I undertook to stand off the soldiers till you could reach the swamp beyond the creek!"

He said that he felt that unless he stood them off they would kill me before I reached the woodland. So he had risked his life to save mine. Was there ever more loyalty of one man to another? He only laughed about it, and said he had come with me for the sole purpose of helping me out when in trouble.

CHAPTER VI

Gen. Cheatham, who was leading the rear division of Hood's army, remembered us, spoke encouragingly to us of our pluck, grit and good luck, and gave us passports to carry us through the Confederate lines. These we safely concealed and began our long journey towards Raleigh, N. C., leaving Rockingham to our left. We were well entertained by the Tarheel people along the route, and we felt much better in our old faded, dilapidated Confederate uniforms than we ever did in the new Yankee garb obtained some weeks before. The Confederate uniforms, as I have before stated, we obtained from some wagoners in exchange for the new Federal clothes we were wearing.

After traveling for some days in North Carolina, we stopped one night at the house of an old citizen by the name of Howard. Just before retiring for the night a "hello" was heard at the gate. The old gentleman, on going out, found a negro, mounted and dressed in a Yankee uniform, who desired accommodation for himself and horse for the night. Mr. Howard hesitated for awhile, and then came in and asked us about it. We told him by all means to let the negro stay, as we wished to send some messages to Rockingham, whither the negro said he was making his way. The negro had no idea who were in the house, else he would have journeyed further. He told a cock and bull story about being carried off by the Yankees, and about a great fight that Kilpatrick had on that day with Hampton, saying that Kilpatrick was badly worsted, and that in the wind-up of the battle he (the negro), had caught a horse and was making his way to his home beyond Rockingham. As the enemy had come nowhere near that place, we took it for granted he had run away from his master.

He was out early next morning, before we had breakfasted. He had a new outfit, in the way of uniform and overcoat, and a fine looking old rip of a horse, on which he sat mounted for his journey. He was told to wait until our letters were ready, and in the meantime we ate our breakfast. Putting on our accoutrements, we went out to him—as impudent, villainous-looking scoundrel as ever donned a Federal uniform. We made him dismount, and I relieved him of his overcoat, while Dixon exchanged his "two-

numbers-too large" boots for a pair that fit him like a glove. We then started the negro down the road towards Rockingham, accelerating his gait by a few shots over his head. If he continued the move that we gave him, that city of refuge, fifty miles away, soon hove in sight.

We now had a good horse, saddle and bridle, new overcoat, and new boots, and were ready for further adventure. In riding the horse we took turns in the saddle, and we traveled thus for several days without incident, except that the horse had a disagreeable habit of going lame at times. At such times we would dismount and lead.

We came one day to a deep, sluggish stream, the water being as black as ink, called, as I remember, "Drowning Creek," one of the tributaries of the Great Pee Dee. The cavalry had torn up the bridge, to protect, I suppose, a picket post. The long plank were on our side of the stream. The rock abutments on either bank were about three feet high, with a wooden crosspiece in the middle. There was no way to cross the creek for miles either way except this bridge. We got two planks side by side, reaching from one bank to the middle, and then from the middle to the other bank, making a pretty fair foot bridge for about twenty-five feet, but a doubtful one for the horse, being only two feet wide. After a long struggle we got the animal up on the abutment, and then, placing a blanket over his head, I piloted him by the bridle, while Dixon seized his tail as a rudder, and in this way we steered the faithful beast across the stream.

We traveled for days through immense pine forests, and it was with great difficulty that we could get any information about the roads leading towards Raleigh. We must have inclined too far to the right, for in a few days we came upon the track of foraging parties of the enemy, hunting up horses and beef cattle.

One night we stopped at the house of a widow lady—a grass widow, we heard afterwards—with a piazza above and below running around three sides of the house. There as a crossing of the great thoroughfares here, one leading north and south—the one on which we were traveling—and the other running from west towards the coast. The house stood in the north-western angle of the road, and just beyond it stood a barn with a two-story shed

running around it, the upper story being filled with straw, and the lower with old wagons, plows, etc. On one side were cow stables. The barn faced the same road as the dwelling—the one running north and south—and was about seventy or eighty yards away. I am thus explicit in order that the reader may more fully understand the incidents which took place here.

The lady of the house was "a gay widow." Her half-grown son and two smaller children constituted the household. The enemy had taken several of her horses the day before; still, she was in a good, jovial humor. She gave us a drink of good old apple-jack that night, and she proposed next morning to buy our horse. The old "critter" had taken several lame spasms the day before, and had delayed us considerably. We proposed to sell for \$1,500, she offering us \$1,000. We took several drinks of her brandy while we were haggling over the price. From her florid complexion it appeared that she herself had been a too frequent visitor at the "wine skeins." She declared she had none to sell. We could not agree upon the horse trade, and so we mounted and rode away. We had not gone half a mile before the horse began to show signs of lameness. Telling Dixon to remain, I rode back, thinking if the widow would give us a canteen full of brandy we would give her horse, saddle and bridle. She was in high good humor at this proposition and gave me another pull at her bottle. Having filled my canteen, we sat down on the steps for a little talk, while the old horse stood innocently looking on not ten feet away.

While we were thus engaged, Dixon walked up. What ever caused his return, or gave him a suspicion of danger, he could never, even to himself, account for. He said he seemed to have an intuition that danger was ahead for me. He sat down beside us, and we began talking, in fine humor with ourselves, the lady, and all the world. The brandy had set my tongue wagging at a great speed, while the lady was in excellent spirits.

Before any of us had time even to think, several squadrons of Yankee horsemen rode around towards the house from the west. Momentarily we were thrown off our guard. The lady, recovering herself first, directed us:

"Run, boys; run for the straw shed!"

This was the only possible means of escape, for, with the

exception of a few outbuildings and an orchard, vast fields extended in every direction. So we took her advice and ran around the barn up in the shed, and then burrowed deep down in the straw. There was a big open gate towards the road, through which the troopers came and began getting fodder out of the barn loft. We could hear them talking all the while, but we could not catch the drift of their conversation. It was, however, about "the old saddled and bridled horse," minus a rider. What tale was told or explanations were made by the widow we never knew, but no doubt she was fertile in her reasonings. Sometimes we suspected they suspicioned some one was in the straw, for one of the soldiers spoke in a loud voice:

"Won't she make a blaze when we set her off! That woman is lying about that horse."

Dixon pulled my foot, and we were both thinking of "the little woman's prayer," as we told each other afterwards, wondering if it would get us out of this place as it had got us out of the others.

After they had tied up the fodder, I heard the troopers ride away, one calling out to another:

"When you are ready, touch her off."

To jump out and attempt to run was certain death. To lie still was to be consumed by the flames. We had to do something immediately and take the chances of death. We had foolishly got ourselves in this perilous position, when it could have been avoided, and from present appearances, little hope for our lives remained.

I thrust the straw off my head and peered through the planks, and there at the gate was a Yankee soldier arranging his saddle, while the others were turning in the road east, about fifty yards distant. This soldier at the gate I thought to be the one who was to "touch her off."

Shoving my rifle through the crack, I commanded the soldier to keep quiet and not to move, or I would send a bullet through him. In looking over, Dixon discovered another one right under us, so near we could almost touch him with our guns. Dixon held him with his gun until the others got far enough away not to notice or suspicion what was going on in the barn.

Dixon then climbed down and disarmed the two Yankees, who

were frightened almost to death at being in the hands of "bushwhackers," which they thought us to be. We took them a mile or two up the road. They, knowing we had heard every word said about burning the barn, began pleading for their lives.

Now, what would any sane man, who knows anything about the conditions of those times or the feelings existing between the two armies, think those same two Yankees would have done to us had they caught us in the straw? Taken us prisoners and crept along at a snail's gait, while we trudged along afoot? Or turned us loose, telling us to "run along home?" No, they would have shot us on the spot as Southern "bush-whackers," as they had done to others so many times before. So I leave the matter to the sober reflection of candid men and women.

I hasten to the end of my story, for nothing of importance happened to us after that. We lost our horses before reaching our destination, however. Mine was drowned in crossing some large river, and Dixon's broke loose next night and took the back track towards the South. We had no time to follow it, and even if we had had the time, there would have been little hope of catching it. We knew the horse would make haste to rejoin his lost companions.

We had a long tramp before us, but we were out of the wake of both armies, and we took it leisurely, apprehending no danger. We were once more out from under a continual watch and excitement. It had been one long, continual strain.

We reached the army near Bentonville, and we had the honor of participating in the last battle of the war. Both Gen. Hardee and Gen. McLaws were surprised to see us again, and they complimented us to the skies for so successfully running the perilous gauntlet of carrying the orders to Hood, or, rather to Gen. Stewart, commanding that army. We were the first to tell the true story of the burning of Columbia, and there were many sad hearts as I read the translation of Mr. James Gibbes' account.

With Dixon I parted, not to hear from him again in nearly forty-five years.

Now, my story is done. What I have written is truth—not invention or fiction—and it is written only to reply to many letters asking for an account of the events that bound Dixon and myself so closely together. As I stated in my letter asking information about

him that we had been strangers before undertaking the trip, and had not seen or heard of each other since we rejoined the army, people naturally thought we had gone through some stirring scenes together.

Those who may be disposed to doubt or to disbelieve what I have written are at liberty to do so. If there is any part that Mr. Sam Dixon wishes to correct or deny, he is living yet and is at liberty to make any corrections he sees fit.

I selected as a title to my story the last words spoken by Dixon to me as we parted:

"Well, old boy, we certainly have had a dance with death."

In closing my story I will say that, in looking back upon that trip after the lapse of so many years, and thinking of the many dangerous incidents and hazardous adventures through which we passed (and, withal, the jolly good time we had), it seems as an evil dream, leading through the dim regions of uncertainty into the shadows of death. Neither knew or thought of our danger at the time, and, as I realize it now, I wonder if it was really a guardian spirit that protected us, or was it, as the fatalist would say, "all due to luck and chance?"

(The End.)

Letter From Mr. Dixon.

After the conclusion of "A Dance With Death," which appeared in serial form in *The Herald and News*, the editor of *The Herald and News* received the following Letter from Mr. Dixon:

Editor *The Herald and News*: I have read Col. Dickert's account of our trip from Gen. Hardee's camp to that of Hood and I have no comment or criticism to make other than that Col. Dickert endeavors to make too much of a hero of me. He was the leader, I only his companion; and naturally I obeyed his orders. We both tried to do our duty as we saw it, and neither did more than thousands of other Confederates would have done under like circumstances.

Some may perhaps think the story had better been left untold, as the rehearsal of such scenes may have a bad tendency upon this generation—to make it discredit the high aims, the lofty

aspirations, or noble manhood of the Confederate soldier. But still ours were peculiar conditions—trying circumstances. The times were all out of joint, and the people of this day should understand the ordeals, especially through which the women of the South had to pass.

A word as to Col. Dickert. I only had the pleasure of knowing him for about forty-five days, but during that time I found him the most remarkable man in some respects I ever knew. He was a lovable companion, always full of life under the most trying circumstances. He was kindness itself, always willing to yield a helping hand, even at the risk of his own life. I soon learned to love him for his open, frank, jolly, good nature; then to respect and admire him for his undaunted courage. He was ever a boy by nature, but a man of judgment and sagacity by temperament and environment.

When we started out I was often amazed at his boyish prattle and wondered why it was that one of his mirth-loving nature had been selected to undertake this dangerous and important business. But the quick conception of determined courage he showed in daring to ride through the enemy's vast camp of thousands of sleeping soldiers and trust our fate to luck, convinced me that I had a man to follow and not a boy. His ear was always alert to detect danger, and he could concentrate every faculty in an instant, showing rare judgment and coolness under desperate circumstances. From a rollicksome boy, he could change to a man of age and experience at the least sign of danger, and could never be thrown off his guard. His thoughts were always more about my welfare than his own. A stranger to fear, I soon discovered he would never desert me or leave me to my fate, as long as he could lift an arm in my defense. Were these not enough to make me love him? His nerves were strong and steady—he could look death in the face without a tremor—he could take the life of a man without the bat of an eye, then lament over the incident as if he had lost a friend.

I know nothing of his life for the past 45 years, but from what I do know of him, I would judge that the man that once could call Gus Dickert his friend need never fear treachery or ill-treatment at his hands.

I shall ever feel proud that I had the honor of accompanying him on his trip, to share his trials and dangers and gain his confidence, and, above all, I shall ever be proud to know I could truly call him my friend. And now after these 45 long years of only communicating with one another through our thoughts, each has found the other in the flesh and by the fireside of his hospitable home we replighted our troth, and reviewed those harrowing experiences, which to some may present a gruesome picture—but truly to us as we look back the main points of this trip were a large factor in moulding the manhood in us for later years.

Respectfully,

Sam W. Dixon.