

THE WORLD.

BY PERTINAX.

Who contemplates this world of ours,
And thinks of all its wondrous changes,
Its patent and its latent power
That through all nature's vista ranges.

The broadening plain, the rushing river,
The valley and the mountain top,
All things but man go on forever;
The natural forces never stop.

The ocean wide, the mountain lake,
The awe-inspiring summer storm
The varying changes that they make
As they their wondrous parts perform.

an is a puny stripling here,
The sport of every wind that blows;
The changes in each coming year
Are man's hereditary foes.

The mind that set this world in motion
And gave to every force its laws,
That set the boundaries to the ocean,
Is Herbert Spencer's "great first cause."

I view the sky so bright and clear,
I see the beauties of the sod;
The great first cause that I revere
Is king of heaven and earth, our "God."

A REMARKABLE ESCAPE.

Among the many gallant officers whom the State of New York gave to the Union army was Captain John F. Porter, of the Fourteenth Regiment New York Volunteer Cavalry. It was not my good fortune to meet him until April, 1864, although we were both serving in the Department of the Gulf, and on the same day, June 14, 1863, each of us had an experience before the Confederate citadel of Port Hudson, the memory of which will be life-long. Mine related to the sanguinary and unsuccessful assault, when the columns of Grover and Weitzel were hurled against those impregnable fortifications; his to a captivity there begun, which, with his subsequent experience in Richmond, and his daring and wonderful escape, will make a narrative which the whole unpublished records of individual heroism in the great struggle may be well challenged to excel. He bears the remarkable distinction of having been the first Union officer who escaped from Libby Prison. Captain Porter is as modest as daring; and, well knowing that the narrative would always remain unpublished if he were depended upon to write it, his old friend and comrade prays him to take no offense if he essays the task, putting the narrative in the first person, as its intense interest seems to demand:

Early on the morning of June 14 I was sent out with my company up the Jackson road, to watch for the appearance of the enemy's cavalry, it being expected that they would take advantage of our assault on the works to make a dash at our lines. About two miles up the road we were suddenly surrounded and taken prisoners by a battalion of gray-coats who dashed out of the woods on both sides of the road. I regret that the limits which are prescribed for this account will not permit me to relate the hundred interesting incidents of that day, when I was held a captive, with my confinement in the Libby; first mentioning that before we were searched there in the woods, near Port Hudson, I was fortunate enough to be able to secrete beneath the buttons of my coat three double eagles that were in my pocket. To these three gold pieces, and the forethought that suggested their concealment, I was finally indebted, in a great measure, for my escape.

At the time when the doors of the old tobacco warehouse closed upon me almost two hundred Union officers were inside it, of every grade, from Brigadier down. They had been captured in every part of the military situation, represented every loyal State, and all arms of the service, and had collectively fought in the greatest battles of the war, up to that time. Those of the number who are best known to fame were General Neal Dow, Colonel Streight, and Lieutenant Colonel Irvine. We were confined in large rooms up-stairs, with guards in the halls, guards outside, and a regular visit and roll-call twice a day by the commandant. What I saw and heard in that place would fill a book. That I suffered, I need not say; bad food, and little of it; bad air, filth, vermin, and the dreary, irksome confinement, need hardly be named in proof of that. Yet our captivity was somewhat lightened by the friendships that grew up within those dreary walls. Those of us who were confined in the same room could talk together, although subject to constant watch. Some of us worked very cautiously for a long time to remove several bricks from the partition-wall between us and the next room, when we could stealthily converse with its occupants. In this way I discovered some old friends, and cheered myself and them by giving and receiving information from home.

During the first few months of my imprisonment, there was very little whispering among us on the subject of escape. The season progressed; and when General Meade withdrew from Mine Run, we understood that there was to be an investment of Richmond that winter. Then our hopes and our talk turned to that will-o'-the-wisp, "exchange." Ah, how many poor hearts grew sick and weary, how many brave men have died, waiting for that hope deferred! Time passed; there was no exchange; we realized that we must not put great faith in the ability of our Government to liberate us. After this, over our miserable rations, or in the darkness of winter nights, as we lay shivering on the cold floor, sustaining our drooping spirits with what fortitude we could command, we began to consult together about the chances of escape, and to watch narrowly by day for some way to accomplish it. Our wits were sharpened by hunger and suffering, and still more by that yearning for liberty that is all in all to the poor prisoner; and every plan that offered the faintest gleam of hope was examined and discussed, before one was finally adopted.

One of the incidents of our imprisonment, which occurred before our plan of escape was matured, I can never recall without a quickened pulse. All the Captains among the prisoners were one day ordered into a room together—some fifty of us. There we were met by Major Turner, the commandant, who produced a cigar-box containing paper slips, each bearing the name of one of us. He informed us that two of us were to be selected by lot for immediate execution, in retaliation for the hanging of two Confederate Captains as alleged spies, by General Burnside. What our emotions were upon this announcement, I shall not attempt to describe; who could

describe them? The first name drawn was that of Captain John W. Sawyer. The brave fellow stepped aside, folded his arms, and looked at Turner with a defiant smile. The commandant looked at the next slip drawn, and hesitated.

"What the deuce is this name, anyway?" he said.

We stood waiting in sickening suspense.

"Let's see," he continued. Captain—

"Is that B?—No, J.; J. F.—,

and now what next?—P?—"

My exact initials! Had the halter been that instant put round my neck, and the trap sprung beneath my feet, my mental tortures could not have been greater. There was no other among the fifty with those initials; I knew it, for I had listened attentively to the roll-call that preceded the drawing. But I forbear to say more of my feelings in that moment; the agony of a lifetime was crowded into them.

Major Turner went on with his efforts to read the name.

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The corrected name was B. F. Flynn.

The two doomed Captains bade us farewell manfully as they were taken away by the guard; and we were returned to our confinement.

The names of Flynn and Sawyer ought to go into history; and if mental suffering, the dreadful anguish of soul endured for their country, can count anything in the making of heroes, they surely should be honored as such. Though they were never executed, they lived for weeks in the hourly expectation of the summons to go out to their death. Bravely did they endure it! On leaving the prison they were taken before General Winder, the commandant of the city, who ordered them confined in irons. This they suffered for several weeks, until the Richmond authorities were informed by our War Department that two Confederate officers of high rank, including one of the Lee family, who were then prisoners, were held as hostages for these men, and would certainly share their fate. Then the irons were removed, and the day of the execution was indefinitely deferred. They were at last returned to the Libby; and it was a joyful greeting that their old comrades gave them.

Another remarkable incident which happened before any attempt at escape was made, was the release of Lieutenant Colonel Irvine, of the Tenth N. Y. Cavalry. It was as unexpected to him as to any of us, and happened in a singular way. John Morgan's Adjutant General had been some time before this captured in Kentucky, and taken to Washington. His name I do not remember; but he was a Lieutenant Colonel, and was fortunate enough to discover old friends among high military authorities at Washington. On his word of honor that he would procure the exchange of an Union officer of like rank for himself, or failing in that, would himself return to captivity, he was released from the Old Capitol Prison, and sent by flag-of-truce to Richmond. The result was the release and exchange of Lieutenant Colonel Irvine. I shall not attempt to paint the scene when one of the prison officers entered one morning in January, and, calling for Colonel Irvine, communicated the good news, and bade him get ready to leave at once. We crowded around him; we wrung his hands, some with tears in their eyes, congratulating him on his good fortune, and bidding him not to forget us.

"You may be sure I will not," the good-hearted and brave man replied. "I'll not let them alone in Washington till they do something for you."

None of the inmates of the Libby at that time have ever doubted that the Colonel did all that man could do for us. Upon his urgent request Secretary Stanton made him a special agent of exchanges, and he traveled several times from Washington to City Point to effect our liberation. It was no fault of his that his negotiations failed. One day a letter was handed into our room from Colonel Irvine, written at City Point. He told us how he had labored for us, and that he saw no present hope. "But keep up your courage," he concluded, "and await the logic of accomplished events."

From that moment the thoughts of all of us were turned more ardently toward our plan of escape. It was a good plan, and met with a surprising degree of success, considering the difficulties under which it was prosecuted. But I soon discovered that the plan of my comrades could not be mine. Long before I saw the outside of the prison, the famous "underground tunnel" was commenced; in fact, I worked at it frequently myself by night, being willing to give my comrades the benefit of my labor while I was with them, though the work was not likely to be of any use to me. At the time of my capture I had received a wound from a carbine-ball in the leg which was so slight as to give me no trouble till some weeks after I reached the Libby. Something aggravated it—bad air, water, or the debility of the system under confinement—and it became sore and inflamed. This lasted for some time, and then the leg grew better; but my night-labors with the others on the tunnel developed its weakness, and I perfectly realized that I was not vigorous enough to take my chances with them in the wild and desperate fight, and that I should surely lag behind and be recaptured by the cavalry patrols. An effort "on my own hook," therefore, before the general break, was what I decided upon.

But what hope could I possibly have of getting outside the prison, past all these guards? And what hope of evading recapture, if I did? I suppose that, considering the condition of my leg, any of my comrades would have pronounced my chance of escape the very poorest of the lot. It so appeared to me; and, looking back now upon the wonderful combination of circumstances that helped me through, it seems as if it was an attempt that could not succeed once in ten thousand times.

I was standing by the grated window, one day, looking out into the yard, waiting till one of the sentinels below should see me and order me away, when a lady passed on the other side of the street, followed by a negro. She saw me at the window, and with a quick motion of her hand put aside her shawl, giving me a glimpse of a small Union flag in the bosom of her dress, instantly covering it again. It was a pleasant and unusual incident; but I did not dream of hearing more of it. Less than a week after, a negro was allowed to come in among us to sell fruit; and I recognized in him the same who was following the lady. We had many opportunities to exchange money with the guards, and I had long before broken one of my gold-pieces. I offered the negro purveyors a Confederate bill; he looked me in the face, and with a

significant grin handed me a large sweet potato. The guards were always watching us at such times; but this transaction, which was certainly a mystery to me, did not excite their suspicions. When both guard and negro were gone, I examined the potato. Contained in a cavity in the center of it was a small piece of writing paper, folded into the smallest possible compass. It was closely written, and without signature; stating that the writer was an Union woman who had tried to attract the attention of prisoners at the windows when the sentinels were not observing her. Minute directions were given for finding her house; and the writer stated that, although she could not help any of us out of the prison, if the officer to whom this note might be delivered could succeed in getting out and coming to her, she would promise him the safest concealment.

Major Turner went on with his efforts to read the name.

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"That's not my name, sir," I said; "but I'm on hand for duty."

"The deuce it isn't! and the deuce you are!" he exclaimed, snappishly. "You needn't deny the truth, sir; you are Captain Porter, of the Yankee army, who escaped from the Libby a few weeks ago."

"No, sir, I am not."

"Well, you're a Yankee out of the Libby, whatever your name is."

"No, sir; and I beg you won't accuse—"

"O, bosh! don