

THE DEAD PAST.

BY M. VICTOR STALEY.

Year not for the joys of thy once happy childhood.
Though dark be thy life, though clouded thy skies;
Not in the dead past with all its sad memories,
But in the bright future true happiness lies.
Why sigh for the past when the future will bring you?
To those whom you love and for whom you now grieve?
Sad heart, would you give all the blessings of heaven?
For one fleeting hour of thy childhood's return?
Those whom you now mourn with such sincere affection.
Who long since have passed to their dwelling above,
Now live in the bright, blessed radiance of heaven.
And wait for thy coming with tenderest love.
The joys of the past, if we try to recall them, will bring but a train of sad mem'ries to pain;
Twice better those dead years lay buried forever—
In the grave which now hides them, O, let them remain.

THE LIFE OF A SCOUT.

BY WARE.

But little time for refreshment and rest is given to scouts, especially on the eve of a great battle, or even while in the vicinity of an enemy well known to be largely superior in numbers and equipments.

Couriers ride hastily, night and day, from the commanding general to the quarters of generals of corps and divisions. Various changes of position were made by the infantry, under orders from General Bragg; so that an officer of division when asked for his opinion as to our chances for success in the impending battle, replied:

"Unless Generals Morgan and Forrest can arrive in time" (the former was in Kentucky and the latter in West Tennessee) "to strike General Rosecrans' rear, we are whipped!—for our men are already exhausted with marching and counter-marching, and are in bad form for meeting the superior force which General Rosecrans has at hand."

The results of the battle of Murfreesboro, or Stone River, are matters of history; and our failure to pursue the advantages won, and the slaughter of the Kentuckians, under the gallant Breckinridge, on the memorable Friday evening—Black Friday—are charged to the debit side of the proper account.

Therefore "scouts" had but little to answer for on this occasion, as they could only criticise movements, and wish that they had a commander who was not so ready to run the wrong way.

It was not the intention to hold position to the north of Murfreesboro till General Rosecrans retired within the sheltering works around Nashville, but to obey orders—no matter how counter to their judgment or wished a retrograde movement might be. So we submitted to the inevitable, and joined General Bragg in another "masterly retreat."

Heartsick and footsore, our troops fell back to Shelbyville, after having punished General Rosecrans too severely to permit of his pressing us while in retreat.

Here they found kind, sympathizing friends, and hands ready to minister to their hurts, as well as to soothe their mortification at being ordered to throw away the fruits of a victory so nearly and so dearly won.

After reaching Shelbyville our scouts passed several days having clothing washed and repaired, having horses shod, and in making general preparations for the road, as we well knew that Major Walker would soon have us in the saddle, for he was a man of wonderfully earnest energy.

On the evening of the second day after we reached Shelbyville the Major communicated his designs, and directed that the whole troop be in readiness for an early move.

But next morning we learned, with deep regret, that Major Walker would be transferred to another department. Officers and men were much attached to him for his uniform kindness and urbanity, and we had the highest estimate of his courage and soldierly qualities.

Several of the men preferred to go with him, but others had ties in old Kentucky which held them away from the sea-coast.

Before our complete reorganization we had ample opportunities for becoming acquainted with many of the citizens in and around Shelbyville, and we learned unmistakably that there were not a few of these good people whose ideas political did not accord with our own.

But the time for us to move had arrived, and, after taking leave of the Major and receiving from him an earnest "God bless you, boys" we dashed out of town by the road leading to Columbia.

About this time General Joseph Wheeler was promoted to rank as General of Division, and such officers as Forrest and Morgan were held subordinate to him!

Through this means we were near losing the services of General Forrest, who tendered his resignation. The War Department would not accept his resignation, but created a new department, and he took his brigade to their new field of operations.

General Van Dorn, after capturing the Federal stores at Grand Junction, Hunkboldt, etc., now arrived and took command of all our cavalry, with headquarters at Spring Hill, about twelve miles from Franklin, Tenn.

Our scouts were soon under his orders and proceeded to work toward Nashville, from the waters of South Harpeth.

The position thus occupied was some eighteen miles in advance of cavalry outposts; but we were subject to little interference, as the Federal cavalry then came no further west than Big Harpeth, seventeen miles from Nashville.

We soon became familiar with the country, and learned the by-paths so thoroughly that half a dozen regiments could not have hemmed us in, nor could they have so closely guarded the roads and Big Harpeth as to have prevented close correspondence with our friends in the "City of Rocks."

Within two weeks after entering upon this new field we had established nine regular, reliable channels through which information was received—to say nothing of many other means for obtaining "scuttle" intelligence, which we appeared to drink in greedily, but to which, in reality, but little heed was given.

One of the most serious obstacles with which we were forced to contend was the early appearance of detachments which were led by officers who were anxious to communicate more directly with friends in Nashville. These officers would obtain authority from superiors to "make a stand"; and, while many of them were indiscreet, others cared but little for the

extra amount of trouble, labor and hazard imposed upon those who were located in that section for regular scout duty.

The result of inroads made by these numerous "scouting parties" was to attract the enemy's attention toward the west, and lead them to guard, not only the turnpike roads leading out of Nashville and crossing Big Harpeth to the west, but to watch closely the dirt roads which ran parallel to these turnpikes and crossed the river at intermediate points.

So that, in order to reach the north bank of Big Harpeth, we were compelled to cross it at night by swimming, or by means of a ford which was hidden by dense underbrush, which not unfrequently was found lining the river banks, or by one which would lead to the rear of a field of corn.

At this early day, however, our superior knowledge of the topography of that region gave us a great advantage, despite the watchfulness and superior numbers of the enemy.

We could always manage to get across to the north bank of the river; but here our real, great danger began; for we were not only liable to encounter a force of the enemy, but quite apt to run athwart one of those self-constituted scouts who, ever ready and alert, were likely to act upon uncertainties, and greet any force not easily recognizable with a volley from shotguns loaded with buckshot, to be followed up with fusillades from six-shooters.

"Mistakes" were of frequent occurrence, and, while they developed many curious characteristics in the different individuals, and resulted in many a hearty laugh and much quizzing afterward, were at the time of the most serious nature, as they were attended by great personal peril.

Early in February, 1863, a "scout" was ordered to repair to "the vicinity of Nashville, Tenn., to strike a point on Hillsboro turnpike." Ten well-mounted men were selected—men who knew their duty, and who were not likely to "lose their heads."

We had reached the vicinity of Big Harpeth, near the mouth of Little Harpeth, just opposite Peter Cartwright's farm.

A long narrow field of corn lay to the west of Mr. Cartwright's, between his residence and the north bank of the stream.

Along the west side of this corn-field, for its whole length, was a deep pool of water known in the neighborhood as the Locust Hole.

At the foot of this pool was a ripple, upon which a fish-dam or trap had been built. Of course this dam served to render still deeper the water above it; while below the water was shallow, but swift in its course over small stones.

To cross the stream at this point was no great feat, and to reach the road running on the east of Mr. C. 's residence and between the Hillsboro and the Granny White turnpikes was easy of accomplishment, and attended by no real danger.

We had crossed the stream, passed through Mr. C. 's cornfield, and proceeded to a point within easy reach of our journey's end, when we were startled by—"Halt! Who comes?"

Before time was given for reply, Johnson Vaughn, one of the best scouts in the band, had dismounted, and began to throw down the fence on our left, between the command and the stream, which lay three-quarters of a mile to the west of our position.

"A friend," was replied.
"What command?" was asked.

"What do you mean by 'halting' people who are in search of a doctor?" was innocently asked.

"Yes; if you will advance and satisfy us that you are in search of a doctor, you may proceed on your way," was replied.

"Well, that's just what we didn't want to do; but we did wish Vaughn would hurry to down that fence!"

The order came, "Assist Vaughn, for they will not delay much longer."

"That's so, Lieutenant, for that's old Watkins (Colonel of the Sixth Kentucky Cavalry, Federal), and he ain't going to monkey around here much longer."

Federal Commander: "Well, will you advance, or shall I send a squad of men after you? Decide quickly, for I shall not give you much more time."

Reply: "Well, Colonel, I guess I won't go any furter after a 'doctor' to-night, but I'll turn back home and wait till morning. Good-night, Colonel."

Colonel: "No, you don't! Halt! Come back here! Fire, men, if he don't halt!"

From this it was thought that only one of our men (he in advance) had been seen, though we were well covered up.

But the fence was opened, and each man in the rear, dismounting and leading his horse through the gap (by dismounting, the men were less liable to be seen), and mounting in the cornfield, under cover of the stalks, were all ready for a prompt move before the command to fire was given.

As the last speaker turned and dashed into the field, a small shower of balls fell around us, cutting the corn stalks, on each side and in our front, with no other result than to make us feel our spurs a little more industriously, until we distanced our pursuers, who were evidently reluctant (as we learned afterward) to leave the Hillsboro turnpike.

Of course the firing had stirred up all the "boys" within its hearing, and produced upon their sensibilities the impression that it was "their move" toward Big Harpeth.

As we did not know what forces had been posted on the river below our crossing point, and, being unwilling to give any more chances against our escape, the men were directed to pass through Mrs. Fanny Hardings place, thence to the south of Mr. Cartwright's residence, and across the field, thus to reach the crossing at the foot of the Locust Hole."

Did any of my readers ever hear dry cornstems break before a bunch of frightened yearlings?

Those who have may form some idea of the racket produced as we dashed through Mr. Cartwright's cornfield, through which ran the Little Harpeth, and which lay between us and the crossing of Big Harpeth.

Approaching the first mentioned stream, we were compelled to "slow up," as its banks were rough and precipitous. And, during our slower progress, we took advantage of the comparative silence to listen and to learn, if possible, whether we were being pursued by the enemy which had stampeded us.

Our alarm was greatly heightened by hearing hoof strokes and the crackling of corn stalks on our right and below the ford on Big Harpeth!

Of course, we imagined that the enemy knew the location of the ford, and were trying to head us off; and we became forcibly impressed with the idea that we must get there first or be captured.

Then the pace, which had been a good round one, became earnest in the extreme! It was every man for himself and "Davy" catch the hindmost.

In order to cross with more facility Little Harpeth, we had deflected from the true course, so as to describe an arc; and it appeared to our heated imaginations that the enemy had taken the cord of the arc; and, as they were riding as recklessly as we were, our apprehensions were duly increased.

Vaughn, who was riding at the right of the column, exclaimed: "By gray, Lieutenant, they are outriding us, and the whole regiment is cutting us off from the ford! We will be forced out to the other side, and find at least a company on duty there. Now we're in a nice pocket, ain't we? We can't cut our way through and we can't turn back, but—darned if I'll surrender in here!"

The situation looked desperate, and only "heroic treatment" would meet the contingency.

The enemy was certainly outstripping us, and would lead us to the ford. No time was to be wasted in speculation, so with "Head of column follow leader," we turned to the right, so as to pass to rear of the enemy and strike the river at a point about two hundred yards below the ford.

At this point the river bank was some five feet above the surface of the water, which lay in a long, deep pool in our front, between us and the safer side of the river.

Even under this pressure, Ponier was, as usual, irrepressible, and exclaimed: "Now, boys, for bath! We all need it, and won't be any the worse for it, unless a Yankee's bullet perforates the skin and lets the water run in to drown us!"

With but little hesitation, for there was no delay in making the choice between a ducking and captivity, we plunged spurs into our horses and forced them to leap into the water—their heads held quartering up stream toward the other bank of the river.

While we were thus engaged the troops from the ford dashed across, and, to our further anxiety, seemed bent upon cutting us off on our approach to the higher ground to the west.

We notice, however, that not more than thirty-five of the enemy continue in the rear; and are encouraged to hope that we may distance some of these, thereby having a more equal show in the rapidly approaching struggle.

Here comes the enemy, approaching us diagonally and rapidly. With pistol in hand, we ply the spur to our steeds, already beginning to feel the strain upon their resources—but fire is withheld until we are at closer quarters, in the hope that we may still further decrease the number of our enemy, seemingly so entered upon intercepting our flight.

The race grows fast and furious, each party riding to the best advantage. Thus far the speed developed has been so nearly equal as to afford no material advantage in position to either party for the last five minutes.

Every rider watches to the front, striving to lift his horse at the leaps, and at the same time keeps a sharp eye on the movements of the enemy, that no one may bend too much out of his course to get a shot into our ranks from a shorter distance. One thousand yards in front are the hills, to reach which insures our safety. For they are heavily clad with underbrush, vines, etc., which will furnish us with a cover into which no enemy has yet penetrated. The question remaining unanswered is: Will our horses stand this pace for a thousand yards?

"The boys" are ordered to close up, and to be ready for a last desperate rush. If we can but "hold our own" for two hundred yards, we will pass in front of our pursuers, for the ground becomes more broken in their immediate front. If they are unacquainted with this fact, and do not swerve from their course, they will be compelled to check their speed, and have the supreme mortification to see the quarry ahead, and escape the toils, under cover of the friendly bushes, now but a short quarter in advance.

Ah! the enemy seems inclined to increase the pace, and to close the issue!

"Boys, look at that fellow pushing ahead. His horse has got the heels of ours, and the rider seems determined to close."

"Well, if he must have it, let him stop a load of buckshot!" "Let but one man fire."

"See how the fellow rides!" "Let him come close enough to make a sure shot."

"I would like to catch his horse, if it is not badly wounded."

"There, Spencer, he is almost close enough to let him pass that tree-top, then give him—!"

But the gallant fellow did not pass "that tree-top" with his horse; for the beast pulled for one side of a tree, and his rider pulled the rein to pass on the opposite side! And, "losing his head," the rider parted company with his horse, fearing that he would be dashed against the tree, and preparing to fall upon the ground!

Instantly, the dismounted trooper regained his feet, and, hiding behind a tree, exclaimed: "Gosh ding! Hemmies, please catch my mare!"

A roar of laughter greeted the luckless rider, and—the race was ended.

We had been running from one of those "imported scouting parties" for the last three miles, each party believing firmly that the whole Sixth Kentucky Cavalry had been detailed specially to run it to earth, and that the Southern Confederacy would certainly collapse if deprived of its valuable services!

Poor Randall, who would have outstripped us in the race but for dissolving partnership with his mare (a grand-daughter of Bonnie Scotland), has gone the long road, which we trust he has found paved with gold and shadowed by the wild rose. May he rest in peace.

From parties residing near the scene of our encounter with the Federals we learned that pursuit was kept up but a short distance.

And we learned from the "foreigners" that "we had crossed Big Harpeth and gone down through the field to near John Armstrong's, when we heard firing and thought it best to travel!" When we got almost to the ford we heard the enemy on our left flank, and strained every nerve to beat him out."

"But you can not well imagine our consternation on discovering that the enemy had passed to our rear—as we thought then—had divided his force, attempting to cut us off with one party and drive us to destruction with another!"

When this little incident was made known at headquarters we were twitted no little; nor did we hear the last, for many a long day, of our attempt to jump across Big Harpeth!

Of course, we imagined that the enemy knew the location of the ford, and were trying to head us off; and we became forcibly impressed with the idea that we must get there first or be captured.

Then the pace, which had been a good round one, became earnest in the extreme! It was every man for himself and "Davy" catch the hindmost!

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