

Castlemon Harry

A Rebellion in Dixie



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CHAPTER I

IN REGARD TO THE REBELLION

“Now, Leon, you will take in everybody. Don’t leave a single man out, for we want them all there at this convention.”

“Secessionists, as well as Union men?”

“Yes, of course. I had a talk with Nathan Knight, last night, and he says everybody must be informed of the fact. We are going to secede from the State of Mississippi and get up a government of our own, and he declares that everybody must be told of it.”

“I tell you, dad, we’ve got a mighty poor show. I suppose there are at least two thousand fighting men here – ”

“Say fifteen hundred; and they are all good shots, too.”

“And Jeff Davis has called out a hundred thousand men. Where would we be if he would send that number of men after us?”

“He ain’t a-going to send no hundred thousand men after us. He has other work for them to do, and when the few he does send come here in search of us, he won’t find hide nor hair of a living man in the county.”

It was Mr. Sprague who spoke last, and his words were addressed to his son Leon. They, both of them, stood leaning on their horses, and were equipped for long rides in opposite directions. Just inside the gate was a woman leaning upon it; but, although she was a Southerner, she did not shed tears when she saw Leon and his father about to start on their perilous ride. For she knew that every step of the way would be harassed by danger, and if she saw either one of them after she bade them good-bye it would all be owing to fortunate manœuvres on their part rather than to any mismanagement on the part of the rebels. They were both known as strong Union men, and no doubt there were some of their neighbors who were determined that they should not fulfil their errand. It would be an easy matter to shoot them down and throw their bodies into the swamp, and no one would be the wiser for it.

Leon Sprague was sixteen years old, and had been a raftsman all his life. He had but little education but much common sense, for schools were something that did not hold a high place in Jones county. In fact there had been but one school in the county since he could remember, and some of the boys took charge of that, and conducted themselves in a manner that drove the teacher away. Leon was a fine specimen of a boy, as he stood there listening to his father’s instructions – tall beyond his years, and straight as one of the numerous pines that he had so often felled and rafted to Pascagoula bay. His countenance was frank and open – no one ever thought of doubting Leon’s word – but just now there was a scowl upon it as he listened to what his father had to say to him.

These people, the Spragues, were a little better off than most of those who followed their occupation, owning a nice little farm, four negroes, and a patch of timber-land from which they cut their logs and rafted them down to tide-water to furnish the masts for ocean-going vessels. His father and mother were simple-minded folks who thought they had everything that was worth living for, and they did not want to see the Government broken up on any pretext. The negro men worked the farm and their wives were busy in the house, which they kept as neat as a new pin. Just now the men had been butchering hogs in the woods, and were at work making hams and bacon of them. These negroes did not have an overseer – they did not know what it was. They went about their work bright and early, and when Saturday afternoon came they posted off to the nearest village to enjoy their

half-holiday. They loved their master and mistress, and if anybody had offered them their freedom they would not have taken it.

In order that you may understand this story, boy reader, it is necessary that you should know something of the character of the inhabitants, and be able to bear in mind the nature of the country in which this Rebellion in Dixie took place, for it was as much of a rebellion as that in Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina and Missouri, where men were shot and hanged for not believing as their neighbors did, and their houses were set on fire. They made up their minds at the start – as early as 1862 – that they would not furnish any men for the Southern army; and, furthermore, they took good care to see that there was no drafting done in their county.

If you will take your atlas and turn to the map of Mississippi you will find Jones county in the southeastern part of the State, and about seventy-five miles north of Mobile, a port that was one of the last to be captured by the United States army. It comprised nearly twenty townships, the white population being 1482, a small chance, one would think, for people to live as they did for almost two years. The land was not fertile, “the entire region being made up of pine barrens and swamps, traversed by winding creeks, bordered by almost impenetrable thickets.” It was bounded on four sides by Jasper, Wayne, Perry and Covington counties, which were all loyal to the Confederacy, and it would seem that the people had undertaken an immense job to carry on a rebellion here in the face of such surroundings. The inhabitants were, almost to a man, opposed to the war. They were lumbermen, who earned a precarious living by cutting the pine trees and rafting them to tide-water, which at that time was found on Pascagoula bay. They had everything that lumbermen could ask for, and they did not think that any effort to cut themselves loose from the North would result in any glory to them. They could not get any more for their timber than they were getting now, and why should they consent to go into the army and fight for principles that they knew nothing about?

Of course, this county was divided against itself, as every other county was that laid claim to some Union and some Confederate inhabitants. There were men among them who had their all invested there, and they did not think these earnest people were pursuing the right course. These were the secessionists, but they were very careful about what they said, although they afterward found opportunities to put their ideas into practice. When General Lowery was sent with a strong force to crush out this rebellion he was met by a stubborn resistance, and some of these Confederates, who were seen and recognized by their Union neighbors, were afterward shot to pay them for the part they had carried out in conducting the enemy to their place of retreat. Taken altogether, it was such a thing as nobody had ever heard of before, but the way these lumbermen went about it proclaimed what manner of men they were. It seemed as if the Confederacy could run enough men in there to wipe out the Jones County Republic before they could have time to organize their army; but for all that the inhabitants were determined to go through with it. They held many a long talk with one another when they met on the road or in convention at Ellisville, and there wasn't a man who was in favor of joining the Confederacy, the secessionists wisely keeping out of sight.

Things went on in this way for a year or more, during which the lumbermen talked amazingly, but did nothing. Finally Fort Sumter was fired upon, and afterward came the disastrous battle of Bull Run, and then the Confederates began to gain a little courage. They knew the South was going to whip, and these battles confirmed them in the belief; but the raftsmen did not believe it. In 1862, when the Confederate Congress passed the act of conscription, which compelled those liable to do military duty to serve in the army, the lumbermen grew in earnest, and a few of them got together in Ellisville and talked the matter over. The market for their logs had long ago been broken up, and some of them were beginning to feel the need of something to eat; and when one of their number proposed, more as a joke than anything else, that they should cast their fortunes with the Confederates, and so be able to go down to tide-water and get some provisions, the motion was hooted down in short order. There were not enough people there to hold a convention, and so the matter was postponed, some of the wealthy ones who owned horses being selected to ride about the county and inform every one that

the matter had gone far enough – that they were going to hold a meeting and see what the lumbermen thought of taking the county out of the State of Mississippi. Leon and his father were two of those chosen, and they were just getting ready to start on their journey.

“I don’t know as I ought to send that boy out at all, Mary,” said Mr. Sprague, when he arrived at home that night after the convention had been decided upon. “I have never seen Leon in trouble and I don’t know how he will act; but the boys down to Ellisville seemed determined to let him go, and I never said a word about it.”

“I think you have seen Leon in trouble a half a dozen times,” said his wife, who was prompt to side with her son. “The time that Tom Howe came so near being smashed up with those logs down there in the bend – I guess he was in trouble then, wasn’t he?”

“But that was with logs; it wasn’t with men,” said Mr. Sprague. “Yes, Leon was pretty plucky that day, and when all the boys cheered him I didn’t say a word, although I had an awkward feeling of pride around my heart, I tell you.”

Leon and three or four other fellows of light build were frequently called upon to start a jam of logs which had filled up the stream so full that the timber could not move. A hasty glance at the jam would show them the log that was to blame for it, and armed with an ax and bare-footed the boys would leap upon the raft and go out to it. A few hasty blows would start the jam, and the timber rushing by with the speed of a lightning express train, the boys would make their way back to the shore, jumping from one log to another. Sometimes they did not get back without a ducking. On the occasion referred to Tom went out alone, and after he had been there some minutes without starting the jam, Leon was sent out to assist him. Two axes were better than one, and in a few minutes the timber was started. It came with a rush, too, but Tom was just a moment too late. The log upon which he had been chopping shot up into the air fully twenty feet, and when it came down it struck the log on which Tom was standing and soused him head over heels in the water; but before he went he felt somebody’s around him. It was Leon Sprague’s arm, for the latter struck the water almost as soon as he did. Leon came up a moment afterward with Tom hanging limp and lifeless in his arms, and heard the cheers of the “boys” ringing in his ears, but had to go down again to escape the onward rush of the logs which were coming toward him with almost railroad speed. By going down in this way and swimming lustily whenever the logs were far enough away to admit of it, Leon succeeded in landing about half a mile below, and hauling his senseless burden out on the bank. Tom could swim – there were few boys on the stream that could beat him at that – but when that log came down on him it well nigh knocked it all out. Leon’s father never said a word. He walked up and gave the boy’s hand a hearty shake, and that was the last of it. Leon had the opportunity of knowing, as soon as Tom came to himself, that he had made a life-long friend by his last half-hour’s operations.

“Jeff Davis ain’t a going to send no hundred thousand men after us,” repeated Mr. Sprague, preparing to mount his horse. “He’ll send a few in here to break up this rebellion, and when they get here we’ll be in the woods out of sight. Kiss your mother, Leon, and let’s go. We have got a good ways to ride before night.”

“Now, Leon, be careful of yourself,” said his mother.

“You need have no fear of me,” said Leon, leaving his horse and going up to the gate. “I’ve got my revolver in my pocket all handy.”

“But remember that when you are riding along the road somebody can easily pick you off,” said Mrs. Sprague. “You know you are a Union boy.”

“Do you want me to make believe that I am-Confederate?”

“By no means. Stick to the Union. Good-bye.”

The farewells being said, father and son got upon their horses and rode away in opposite directions. Leon rode a high-stepping horse – he was fond of a good animal and he owned one of the very best in the county – but he allowed him to wander at his own gait, knowing that the horse would be tired enough when he returned home. As he rode along, thinking how foolish the people were to

consider seriously the proposal to withdraw from the Union, he ran against a boy about his own age who, like himself, was journeying on horseback. He was a boy he did not like to see. He was awfully “stuck up,” and, furthermore, he was a rebel and did not hesitate to have his opinions known.

“Hello, Leon,” exclaimed Carl Swayne, for that was the boy’s name. “Where are you going this morning?”

“I am going around to see every man in this side of the county,” said Leon. “We are going to get up a convention on the 13th, and we want everybody there. The convention is going to be held at Ellisville.”

“By George! Has it come to that?” cried Carl, flourishing his riding-whip in the air. “What do you think you are going to do after you get to that convention?”

“We are going to dissolve the Union existing between this county and the State of Mississippi.”

“Yes, I’ll bet you will. How long will it be before the Confederates will send men in here to whip you out? You must think you can stand against them.”

“I don’t think we can stand against anybody,” said Leon. “If the Confederates come in here we shall go into the woods.”

“Well, it won’t take me long to show them where you are,” said Carl, savagely. “I was talking with uncle about it last night, and he says you haven’t got but a few fighting men here, and that it is utterly preposterous for you to think of getting up a rebellion. I know one thing about it: you will all be hanged.”

“And I know another thing about it,” said Leon. “When it comes we’ll be in good company. Will you be down to our convention?”

“Not as anybody knows of,” replied Carl, with a laugh. “I’ll get somebody up here to put a stop to it.”

“Well, I wouldn’t be too hasty about it. You may get hanged yourself.”

“Yes? I’d like to see the man living that can put a rope around my neck,” exclaimed Carl, hotly. “I’ve got more friends in this county than one would suppose. I’ll bet you wouldn’t be one of the first to do it.”

Leon picked up his reins and went on without answering this question. He saw that Carl was in a fair way to pick a quarrel with him, and he had no desire to keep up his end of it. Carl was hot-headed, and when he got mad, was apt to do and say some things that any boy of his age ought to have been ashamed of. He kept on down the road for a mile further, and finally turned into a broad carriage-way that led up to a neat little cottage that was surrounded by shade trees on all sides. This was the house of Mr. Smith – a crusty old bachelor who had always taken a deep interest in Leon. He was Union to the backbone, and if he could have had his way he would have made short work with all such fellows as Carl Swayne. He was sitting out on the porch indulging in a smoke.

“Hallo, Leon,” he cried, as soon as he found out who the new-comer was. “Alight and hitch.”

“I can’t do it, Mr. Smith,” replied Leon. “I am bound to see every man in this part of the county, and that, you know, is a good long ride. We are going to hold a convention on the 13th, and we want you to come down to it.”

“Whew!” whistled Mr. Smith. “You bet I’ll be there. What are you going to do at that convention?”

Leon explained briefly, adding:

“I just now saw a fellow whom I asked to come down, and he positively declined. He says he will get somebody to put a stop to it.”

“That’s Carl Swayne,” said Mr. Smith, in a tone of disgust. “Say! I will give half my fortune if we can hang that fellow and his uncle to the nearest tree. They have been preaching up secessionists’ doctrines here till you can’t rest.”

“I think we can get the better of them after a while,” said Leon. “When did you get back?” he added, for Mr. Smith had been down to tide-water to see what was going on there. “Did you see or hear anything in Mobile?”

“I got back last night. There is nothing in Mobile except fortifications. I tell you it will require a big army to take that place. By the way, Leon, I want to see you some time all by yourself. Don’t let any one know you are coming here, but just come.”

“I’ll remember it, Mr. Smith. You won’t forget the convention? Good-by.”

“What in the world does the old fellow want to see me for?” soliloquized Leon. “And why couldn’t he have told me to-day as well as any other time? Well, it can’t be much, any way.”

Leon kept on his ride, and before night he was many miles from home. He took in every house he came to, Union as well as secessionist, and while the former greeted him cordially, the rebels had something to say to him that fairly took his breath away. If he hadn’t been the most even-tempered fellow in the world he would have got fighting mad. They all agreed as to one thing: They were going to see Leon hanged for carrying around the notice of that convention. His neighbors wouldn’t do it, but there would be plenty of Confederates in there after a while that would string the Union people up as fast as they could get to them. Leon had no idea that there were so many secessionists in the county as he found there when he came to ride through it, and he made up his mind to one thing, and that was, it was going to be pretty hard work to carry that county out of the State.

“But just wait until we get together and decide upon a constitution,” said Leon, as he rode along with his hands in his pockets and his eyes fastened upon the horn of his saddle. “Jeff Davis has long ago ordered all Union men out of the Confederacy, and what is there to hinder us from ordering all these rebels out? That’s an idea, and I will speak to father about it.”

Leon did not care to spend all night with such people as these, and so he kept on until he found a family whose sentiments agreed with his own, and there he laid by until morning. The head of this household had but recently come into the county, and Leon did not know him. When the latter rode up to the bars the man was chopping wood in front of a dilapidated shanty, but when he saw Leon approaching he dropped his axe, took long strides toward his door and turned around and faced him. The boy certainly thought he was acting in a very strange way, and for a moment didn’t know whether he was a Union man or a rebel.

“Good evening, sir,” said Leon, who thought he might as well settle the matter once for all. “Can I stay all night with you?”

“Who are you and where did you come from?” asked the man in reply.

“My name is Leon Sprague and I live in the other part of the county,” replied Leon. “I am a Union boy all over, and I came out to tell everybody – ”

“Course we can keep you all night if that is the kind of a boy you are,” replied the man coming up to the bars. “Get off and turn your horse loose. I haven’t seen a Union boy before in a long while. I came from Tennessee.”

“What are you doing down here?” asked Leon, as he led his horse over the bars.

“I came down here to get out of reach of the rebels, dog-gone ’em,” said the man in a passionate tone of voice. “You had just ought to see them up there. They have got their jails full, they are hanging men for burning bridges, and when I left home there was two or three thousand men going over the mountains into Kentucky. But I couldn’t go with them. The rebels cut me off, and as I was bound to go somewhere, I came on down here.”

Leon had by this time taken the saddle and bridle from his horse and turned him loose to get his own supper. Then he backed up against the fence and watched the man chopping his wood.

CHAPTER II

THE CONVENTION

“What made you start for the house when you saw me coming up?” said Leon, as the man sank his axe deep into the log on which he was chopping and paused to moisten his hands.

“Because I thought you was a rebel. I reckoned there was more coming behind you, and I wanted to be pretty close to my rifle. I didn’t know that I had got into a community of Union folks down here.”

Leon was astonished to hear the man converse. He talked like an intelligent person, and the boy was glad to have him express an opinion, for it was so much better than his own that he resolved to profit by it.

“I don’t know that you got in among Union people,” said Leon, “for I have seen more rebels to-day than I thought there was in the county; but all the same there are some Union folks here. You might have gone further and fared worse.”

“So I believe. When you came up you said you were out to tell everybody something. What were you going to say?”

It didn’t take Leon more than two minutes to explain himself. The man listened with genuine amazement, and when the boy got through he seated himself on the log and rested his elbows on his knees.

“How are you going to take this county out?” said he. “You haven’t got men enough to do any fighting.”

“No, sir; but we are going to do the best we can with what we have got.”

“That’s plucky at any rate. I suppose that if the rebels come in here to capture you, you will take to the swamp.”

“Yes, sir. That’s just what we intend to do.”

“Well, sir, you can put my name down for that convention,” said the man, getting upon his feet and going to work upon his wood-pile. “I’ve got so down on the rebels that I am willing to do anything I can to bother them. I’ve got two brothers in jail up there now.”

“You said something about bridge burning,” said Leon, and he didn’t know whether he made a mistake or not. “Perhaps you had a hand in it.”

“Perhaps I did,” answered the man with a laugh. “And I tell you I had to dig out as soon as I got home. So you see I dare not go back there.”

“What’s the punishment?”

“Death,” answered the man. “And they don’t give you any time to say good-bye to your friends. They don’t even court-martial you, but string you up at once.”

The man said this in much the same tone that he would have asked for a drink of water. Leon was surprised that one who had passed through so many dangers as that man had could speak of it so indifferently. But then he looked like a man who would have been picked out of a crowd to engage in business of that kind. He was large and bony, the ease with which he handled his axe was surprising, but his face was one to attract anybody’s attention. It was a determined face – a face that wouldn’t back down for any obstacles. If the Union men in Tennessee were all like him, it was a wonder how the rebels got the start of them.

“I can’t give you as good a place here as I could at home,” said the man, as his wife came to the door and told him that supper was ready. “At home I have a commodious house, and you could have a room in it all to yourself. Here I have nothing but this little tumble-down shanty to go into. It leaks, but I will soon get the better of that. Molly, this young man is Union all over, and he has come down here to tell of a convention that is to be held at Ellisville to take this county out of the State. Whoever heard of such a thing? I am going to that meeting, sure pop.”

His wife was greatly surprised to listen to this, but she accepted the introduction to Leon, and forthwith proceeded to make him feel at home. There were two children, but they had been taught to behave, and did not try to shove themselves forward at all. Taken altogether, it was a comfortable meal, and before it was over Leon learned some things regarding this man that he wouldn't have believed possible. He had come all the way through the rebel State of Mississippi by telling the people he met on the way that he was going to see some friends, and had, by chance, struck Jones county, the very place of all others he wanted to be.

"I must confess it was pretty pokerish, sometimes," said the man. "The rebels had sent on a description of me as the man who helped burn their bridges, and now and then I had to get under the bundles of clothing and cover myself up there, leaving my wife to guide the horses. But I had my rifle all right, and it would have gone hard with the men who discovered me."

The evening was passed in this way listening to the man's stories, and when Leon went to bed in a dark corner of the room he told himself that he had got into a desperate scrape, and that he had got something to do in order to get out of it. He had never dreamed that men could be down on their neighbors in that way, and here this man had all he could do to keep from being shot.

"By George! I tell you we are in for it," said Leon, pulling the blankets up over him, "and I don't know how we are going to come out. There are rebels all around us, and if they are as bad down here as they are up in Tennessee there won't one of us come through alive. But I am armed, and I'll see that some of them get as good as they send."

It was daylight when Leon awoke, and after washing his hands and face in a basin outside the door he stood in front of the fireplace, before which the woman was engaged in cooking the breakfast, and looked up at the man's rifle, which hung on some wooden pegs over the mantel. It was an ordinary muzzle-loading thing, and didn't look as though it had been the death of anybody.

"That rifle has been too much for half a dozen men," said the woman.

"Why, how did that happen?" asked Leon.

"It happened when they came to burn us out," answered the woman. "They came one night and tried to call Josiah to the door, but he would not go. He took his rifle down, but he wouldn't shoot until they did, and as he is a good shot, he hit every time. The next day we had to move, for they came with a larger body of men."

"There is one thing that makes me think you are in a bad place," said Leon. "You are right here close to the river which separates the two counties, and if anybody makes a raid over here they will strike you, sure. I think if that convention is held you had better come down to our place. We have room enough there to stow you away."

"Oh, thank you. Perhaps you had better speak to Josiah about it."

Josiah was out attending to his horses and cow, and Leon went out to him. He looked at him with more respect than he did the night before, for, in addition to burning the bridges, he had "got the better" of half a dozen men. He bade Leon a hearty good-morning, but the boy noticed that all the while he kept talking to him he kept his eyes fastened on the woods. Probably it was from the force of habit. He agreed with Leon that they were in a bad place to meet raids, and promised that after the convention came off he would see what he could do. He didn't want to trespass on anybody until he had to.

Breakfast over, Leon brought his horse to the door, put on his saddle and bridle and bid good-bye to the family from Tennessee, and rode off. He was two days more on his route, and on the third day he turned his horse toward home. He reached it without any mishap, and his mother was glad to see him, judging by the hug she gave him. His father had arrived the night before, but the stories he had to tell didn't compare with Leon's. Of course his mother was shocked when she learned that Josiah (Leon did not know what else to call him) had shot so many men before he left Tennessee, but she readily agreed to shelter his wife and children.

“I never thought to ask him his name,” said Leon, “but I will ask him down to the convention. He was dead in favor of it, and said he would be there. I tell you that man has passed through a heap. He couldn’t talk to me without running his eyes over the woods to see if there was anybody coming.”

On the next day but one was the time of the convention, and at an early hour Mr. Sprague and Leon mounted their horses and set out for Ellisville. On the way they picked up a good many more, both afoot and on horseback, and by the time they reached their destination they numbered fifty or more. They made their way at once to the church, and found themselves surrounded by a formidable body of men, all of whom were armed with rifles. There must have been a thousand men there, and there was not a secessionist to be seen in the party. Shortly afterward Nathan Knight arrived. He bid good-morning to the people right and left, and went into the church, whither he was followed by all the building would hold. Those who couldn’t get in raised the windows on the outside and settled themselves down to hear what was going to happen.

Nathan Knight was a large man, with gray whiskers and an eye that seemed to look right through you. But for all that his face was kindly, and if you got broken up in business and wanted help, Nathan Knight was the man to go to. He took his seat in the pulpit, just where he knew the folks would send him, took off his hat and drew his handkerchief across his forehead. His meeting was not conducted according to order, but those who were there understood it.

“Gentlemen will please come to order,” said he. “Are there any of us who are opposed to taking this county out of the State of Mississippi? If there is, let him now speak or hereafter hold his peace.”

Each man gazed into the face of his neighbor; but each one knew that the one he looked at was as much in favor of secession as he was himself. Finally, some one in the back part of the church called out:

“Nathan, there ain’t nary a rebel here.”

“I am glad to hear it,” said Mr. Knight. “But there are some around in the county, and you want to be careful how you deal with them. I will now appoint a committee of six to draw up a series of resolutions of secession. They will go over to the hotel and come back when they get done.”

Mr. Knight had evidently been thinking of this matter before for he appointed the committee without hesitation, and among them was the name of Mr. Sprague. They were all men who would not say a thing they did not mean, and as they were about to go out the president beckoned Mr. Sprague to his desk and placed a piece of paper in his hands.

“There’s some resolutions I drew up after thinking the matter over,” said he. “Perhaps it will serve as a model to you. You can amend them or leave them out entirely, as suits you best.”

When the committee had retired Mr. Knight got up, and for the next half-hour proceeded to arraign the Confederate States and praise the Union, his remarks calling forth loud and long-continued applause. He took the ground that it was a “geographical impossibility” to conquer Jones county, because, the inhabitants being lumbermen, it would be easy for them to slip into the woods, and when there nobody but a raftsmen could find them. He kept his speech going until the committee were seen coming back. Mr. Sprague made his way to the desk, and amid the most impressive silence read the resolutions of secession as follows:

Whereas, The State of Mississippi has seen fit to withdraw from the Federal Union for reasons which appear justifiable;

And whereas, We, the citizens of Jones county, claim the same right, thinking our grievances are sufficient by reason of an unjust law passed by Congress of the Confederate States of America, forcing us to go to distant parts, etc., etc.;

Therefore be it resolved, That we sever the union heretofore existing between Jones county and the State of Mississippi, and proclaim our independence of said State and the Confederate States of America; and we solemnly call upon Almighty God to witness and bless such act.

When Mr. Sprague ceased reading, the applause which shook the building was long and loud. Not satisfied with that, some of the raftsmen fired off their guns, and for the next five or ten minutes it was impossible to do anything inside the church. By that time the excitement had somewhat died out, and then the president asked if there was any debate on the matter, but no one had anything to say. Knowing that those six men had the good of the county at heart, there was not one who had anything to say against them. Mr. Knight expressed himself pleased, and was about to announce that the resolutions were passed, when somebody on the outside of the building called out:

“Nathan, here’s a couple of rebels out here.”

“What are they doing out there?” asked the president, in surprise.

“I don’t know. They have just come up here. It looks to me like they were going to recruit.”

“Well, fetch them in here. Now, boys, not a word out of you. I will do the talking, and if you have any questions to ask, you can ask them; but don’t all talk at once.”

Mr. Knight settled back in his chair and the most profound silence ensued. Finally the crowd about the door gave way as the rebels and their escort approached, and the Confederates, seeing so many men standing there with their hats all off, courteously took off their own. They kept on until they got up to the desk, and then Mr. Knight drew up chairs for them to be seated.

“Now, gentlemen, what brought you up here?” asked the president.

“We came up here to recruit,” replied the ranking officer. “I am glad to see so many of you here, for it will save us the trouble of hunting you up.”

“Will you be kind enough to read that?” said Mr. Knight, unfolding the paper on which the resolutions were written and passing it over to the officer.

The official took the paper, and as he read his eyes opened with surprise. When he had got through with it he passed it over to his subordinate, and then turned and looked at the men near him. He was satisfied that there was not a man there who did not believe every word of those resolutions. The officer had nothing to fear now – he was the first recruiting official that ever came there – but after he got away he would not come back at any price.

“These are not all your men?” said he.

“No, sir. We have not more than three hundred men, but these extra parties have come in with their families at odd times. And every man you see is a Union man.”

“My friend, you are making a great mistake,” began the officer.

“We are ready to stand by it, sir.”

“Do you suppose the Confederates will stand by and allow you to take this county out of the State, to be an odd sheep in the flock?” continued the officer. “The first thing you know you will be overrun with men, and you won’t have a house to go into.”

“What will we be doing all that time?”

“Oh, I suppose you will fight, but it won’t do you any good. The Confederates can send twenty thousand men in here.”

“We don’t care if they send forty thousand,” replied the president. “Whatever you send we’ll fight.”

The men who were crowded in the church and gathered about the windows couldn’t stand it any longer. They broke out into loud applause, which continued for some minutes. When they got through, the officer evidently thought they were in earnest.

“We have a thousand men here, and when we get into the swamp we are willing to meet five thousand,” continued Mr. Knight. “You can’t conquer us.”

“What will you do for grub?”

“We’ll steal it,” shouted one of the men; and the answer was so droll and corresponded so entirely with the thoughts of the men who were standing around, that the whole assembly burst into laughter. Even the enrolling officers joined in.

“I suppose you can do that, of course,” said he, “but supposing the escort is too strong to be successfully attacked?”

“We don’t borrow any trouble on that score,” said Mr. Knight. “We haven’t got all the men we are going to have. You see how they are coming in now. But you are interrupting us, and we shall have to bid you good-bye. You see very plainly that you can’t raise any men here for the Confederate army. Another thing we’ll tell you, you are the first to come in, and you will be the last to go out.”

“Do you mean to say that you will kill any enrolling officers who come here?”

“That’s just what I mean to say. We don’t want them here.”

“Well,” said the official, rising to his feet, “we’ll go, but we won’t be the last officers to come in here. I will tell you that very plainly. You mustn’t think that the Confederates are going to allow you to have your own way in this matter. It beats anything I ever heard of.”

“We are aware of that, and that’s what makes us think we are going to go through with it. I will bid you good-bye, gentlemen.”

The men divided right and left to allow the rebels a chance to get out, and when they had passed out beyond the door the president proceeded to call the meeting to order.

“I am pleased with the way you obeyed my commands,” said Mr. Knight. “If you will obey as promptly as that, we are going to be hard to whip. The next thing is to elect a president.”

“I nominate Nathan Knight as president of the Jones County Confederacy,” shouted a man near the door.

“We ought to have a ballot for that,” said Mr. Knight.

“We don’t need no ballot. It takes too much time. Can I get a second to that?”

He could and he did. It seemed as if every man in the house seconded the motion. Mr. Sprague put the vote before the house, and it was carried unanimously. Mr. Knight did not stop to make a speech, but said the next vote would be for vice-president, and Mr. Sprague was nominated.

“Hold on, there,” shouted a voice. “We don’t want Mr. Sprague for vice-president. We want him for secretary of war. If there is any man who can put us fellows where we can do the most good in a fight Mr. Sprague is the chap.”

And so it was all through the convention. There wasn’t a ballot taken for anything, and no man thought of declining an office. By four o’clock the work was all done, and then Mr. Knight thought of something else.

“There is one thing more that I want the convention to decide on,” said he. “It is a ticklish piece of business, but we have got to do it. Jeff Davis has been making things very uncomfortable for our fellows out there in the Confederacy by telling them that they have got to light out or go into the army; now, what’s to hinder us from doing the same thing? There are many rebels about here –”

“And I say let’s get rid of them,” said a voice. “I know one fellow who is going around all the time talking secession, and if the meeting says the word I’ll go to him and tell him he had better dig out. The county will be a heap happier if he ain’t in it.”

“Let’s all go in a body,” said another voice.

“That’s what I say,” said a chorus of half a dozen men.

“I think myself that would be the better way,” said the president. “If a lot of us get together and call upon a man, he will think we are in dead earnest. Give them time to take what they want, and then escort them out of the county. Don’t leave a rebel behind you. There being no further business, the convention stands adjourned, to meet again upon call.”

And where was Leon Sprague all this time? He was sitting in the front seat, where he could hear all that was going on. He felt proud when his father was elected secretary of war. He supposed, of course, that it was his business to post men in battle, but he learned better after a while. He was particularly anxious about escorting the rebels out of the county, and as soon as the convention adjourned he hurried out to find Tom Howe. As he was hurrying through the door, whom should he run against but Josiah – the “man who had seen a heap,” and who “got the best of half a dozen

men.” He stood with his rifle hugged up close to him as if it were an old friend and he did not want to part from it.

CHAPTER III

“A WORD IN YOUR EAR.”

“Why, Josiah, I am glad to see you,” said Leon, advancing and shaking hands with the man. “The rebels haven’t raided you yet? Look here, what is your name? I forgot to ask you when I was up to your house.”

“Giddings – Josiah Giddings,” answered the man. “No, the rebels have not raided me yet, but I am mighty dubious about them.”

“Well, I want to make you acquainted with my father,” said Leon. “He will give your wife protection at his house. We have a negro cabin there that is much more comfortable than the one you live in now, for it doesn’t leak. And there is plenty of pasturage there for your horse and cow.”

Leon drew up alongside of Giddings and in a few minutes his father came out. The introduction was given, and after a few commonplace remarks Mr. Sprague inquired how he liked the resolutions.

“They ain’t strong enough,” said Giddings. “If you had two brothers in jail waiting for their death-warrant, I reckon you would put in more language than you did.”

“Where is that?” inquired Mr. Knight, who came out just at that moment.

“Up in Tennessee mountains. My brothers were engaged in bridge burning, and now they have got to suffer death for it.”

Leon waited just long enough to see that Giddings was in a fair way to make the acquaintance of the principal men of the county, and then hastened out to find Tom Howe. After looking all about, he discovered him sitting under the shade of an oak eating a lunch.

“Hallo, Leon; have some,” was the way in which he greeted the new-comer. “It’s mighty good, I tell you – chicken and apple pie.”

“A person to look at your lunch wouldn’t think that we Union fellows would be so hard up for grub,” said Leon, seating himself on the ground by Tom’s side. “You heard what that man said, in reply to the enrolling officer, that if we got short of provisions we would steal them? But I want to talk to you about driving those rebels away from here.”

“I know one who will get out of the county with once telling,” said Tom.

“Who is it?”

“Carl Swayne.”

“That’s just the fellow I was thinking of,” said Leon, spitefully. “He told me the other day that if we ran into the swamp it would not take him long to show them where we were.”

“And he told me that he wished I had been smashed up in that jam while I was about it, for then there would be one Union man less in the world,” said Tom. “I’ll never forget him for that.”

“Well, you come around to the house early to-morrow morning, and we will go up and send him off. I see father is getting ready to go home, so I must go. So-long.”

Leon mounted his horse and started on a lope after his father, but when he came up with him he found him surrounded by a lot of men and boys who were talking loudly of the secession resolutions, finding no end of fault with the Confederate Government, and praising the Union.

“They won’t get me, no matter which way they turn,” said one of the men, who lived away off in the swamp. “I live two miles from everybody, and right there is where the fight is going to take place. The river in front of my house is so narrow that you can throw a stone across it anywhere, and for a mile above and below the house it spreads out into a swamp that they couldn’t get across to save their necks.”

“So you really think there is going to be a fight, do you?” inquired Mr. Sprague.

“Oh, sure. It’s just as that enrolling officer said. The Confederates ain’t a-going to leave us to be the black sheep in the flock. We are going to see some fun before we get through with this.”

That was the opinion of all the men, and they concluded, too, that the best place to hold the fight would be right there in front of this man's house. "But I'll tell you what's a fact," said Giddings, "you will have to look out for your wife and children. The rebels will make short work of them if they get hold of them."

"The swamp is big," said the man. "If they get out in there I will risk the rebels getting hold of them."

Then men and boys dropped off one after the other when they came to the cross-roads that led to their homes, and by the time Mr. Sprague reached his home there were but few men besides Giddings left. The latter got off his horse at the gate and went in to take a view of the cabin in which Mr. Sprague told him he could live until the trouble was all over, and he straightway came to the conclusion that it was a much better house than the one he now occupied.

"You see there was nobody there to tell me that I could go into that house or I could stay out of it," said Giddings. "It wasn't occupied, and so I went into it, and sometimes when it rains you might just as well be outside. If it suits you, I will come here to-morrow."

Mr. Sprague told him that the sooner he came the better; but Giddings declined an invitation to supper, because he knew his wife was waiting for him, so he got on his horse and rode off.

"It kinder runs in my mind that that man Giddings will be a good fellow to tie to," said Mr. Sprague, as he drew his chair up to the table. "There's no end to the way he hates the rebels, and it's my opinion that when he shoots at them he will shoot to kill."

"But do you really think there is going to be a fight?" inquired his wife. She asked this in a very indifferent manner, as if she did not care whether it came or not. She had got used to thinking of such things.

Mr. Sprague, by way of reply, told her all about the convention, and described to her the visit of the enrolling officers who had come up there to enlist men for the Confederate army.

"Did they get any?" inquired Mrs. Sprague.

"Not much. There were a thousand men there under arms, and that is rather more than two men want to handle. They know all about our plans, for Knight showed them the resolutions. Of course, they are going back to their headquarters, and are going to make a fuss about it."

"I tell you it won't be long now before we shall see some Confederate soldiers up here, and I wonder if I dare shoot at any of them?" said Leon. "If they will let me alone I believe I'll let them alone."

"How about those rebels that we are going to drive away from here to-morrow?" asked his father. "I think I have heard you say something pretty rough against Carl Swayne."

"Well, that's a different matter. Carl won't let me alone, and I am determined that hereafter I am going to live in peace. He told Tom Howe that he wished he had been jammed up in that log heap, and I don't like to have people talk that way."

Early the next morning Mr. Sprague's family were up and stirring. Leon was surprised when he looked at his father. There was a determined expression on his face, and the boy became aware that he was about to engage in an enterprise that promised at some future time to bring him no end of trouble. Leon took his cue from it, and from that time he was not so joyous as he had been. He took his revolver out, shot it at a mark, and then proceeded to load it very carefully. There was only a man and a boy and two women in the family he intended to send out of the county, and Leon could not understand that determined look on his father's face. When he sat down at the breakfast-table he asked him about it.

"Father, you seem to think you are going to have a handful in sending that Swayne family away from among their friends," said he. "What do you look for?"

"I don't look for anything now," said Mr. Sprague. "There will be a time when they will come back. Old man Swayne is a fighter, and it will stand us well in hand to get rid of him entirely."

The conversation was dropped there, and they ate breakfast in silence. Before it was fairly ended the five men on whom Mr. Sprague was depending to assist him stepped up on the porch and came into the house. They were all invited to sit down and take another breakfast, but all declined, having broken their fast several hours before.

“You see, Mrs. Sprague, we got an order from the Secretary of War, and we’ve got to be on hand,” said one of the men. “It would not do to go back on anything he tells us.”

“I don’t know what they put me in for that office for,” said Mr. Sprague. “I don’t see that I have got anything to do.”

“Well, wait until it comes to fighting, and then you will find plenty to do. Now if you are all ready we’ll go on,” said the man, forgetting that he was giving orders to his superior officer. “We can’t get rid of that Swayne family any too quick. They’re all the time boasting and bragging of what they intend to do, and now we will give them a chance.”

Leon found opportunity to kiss his mother good-bye, and when he went out on the porch, where Tom Howe was sitting and waiting for him, they fell in behind the men, who shouldered their rifles and marched at a brisk pace toward Mr. Swayne’s house. There was no attempt at military movement, for there was not one in the party who knew anything about it, but they went ahead just as if they were going hog-hunting in the woods. In due time they came to a cross-roads which led down to Swayne’s house, and here they stopped, for there was something that drew their attention and angered them not a little. Before they left Ellisville, on the day of the convention, Mr. Knight had given several copies of the resolutions to men living in different parts of the county, with the request that they should nail them up on trees (there was no printing-press in the county), in order to give those who were not there timely notice of what they had done. The man who served this notice performed his duty, for the tacks were in the tree plain enough, but it hadn’t been able to do much good. The notice had been torn down and the pieces scattered about on the ground.

“Well, I do think in my soul!” began one of the men, “he wasn’t going to let anybody see it, was he?”

“Look here,” exclaimed Leon, who had grown wonderfully sharp sighted of late; “I know who did it. It was that miserable Carl Swayne. Do you not see his footprints here in the dust?”

“That’s so. Now what shall we do with him? Sprague, you are Secretary of War, and you ought to be able to say what shall be done with him. Knight never thought yesterday, when he gave out those resolutions, that somebody would go to work and pull them down.”

Meanwhile Leon had been busy gathering up the torn fragments of the resolution that were scattered around. When he got them together he compared them and saw they were all there.

“I’ll fix him,” said he. “And I’ll make him so sorry that he ever tore this down that he’ll go by a resolution the next time he sees it.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I’ll make him write it over again and come here and put it up,” said Leon, savagely.

“That’s the idea,” said Tom Howe. “He pulled it down, and of course he must put it up. I’ll be close at your heels when you are doing it.”

Mr. Sprague said nothing, but Leon noticed that the look on his face got deeper than ever. He led the way at increased speed toward Swayne’s house, and in a few minutes turned through the carriageway and saw Mr. Swayne and his nephew, Carl, sitting on the front porch. They evidently grew alarmed at seeing them, for they arose from their chairs and held on to the backs of them.

“Good morning,” said Swayne, and his voice trembled and his hand shook as he hauled up some chairs for them to seat themselves. “I did not expect to see so many of you here this fine morning.”

“We have no time to sit down,” said Mr. Sprague, who was supposed to do all the talking. “You are a rebel, are you not?”

“Well – yes; that is it depends on what you call a rebel,” said Mr. Swayne, trying to laugh at his own wit. “I am opposed to your trying to take this county out of the State; because why – ”

“So I supposed. We have come here to tell you that you can pack up and leave this county as soon as you please. We don’t want to hear any argument about it.”

“Why – why, where shall I go to?” exclaimed Swayne, while the boy turned whiter than ever. “If I leave here, I leave everything I have got behind me.”

“We will give you an hour to pack up things. If you are in the house at the end of that time, we shall set fire to it.”

“Well, now, see here,” said Swayne, who grew more frightened than ever; “I can’t pack up in an hour – ”

“I have told you just what I intend to do,” said Mr. Sprague, consulting his watch. “It is now ten o’clock. If you are in here at eleven we shall set the house going. If you are out of it in that time, why, we’ll save it. You want to make up your mind in a hurry.”

“Of all the brazen-faced fellows I ever saw you are the beat,” said Swayne, his fear giving place to anger. “I wish I had half a dozen Confederate soldiers here to protect me.”

“By gum! We’ll set the house a-going before you get out of it,” said one of Mr. Sprague’s men. “You ain’t a-going to talk to us like that.”

“One moment, Bud. We’ll sit down here on the porch until he gets through being mad, and then maybe he’ll pack up. You had better go, Swayne, for as sure as we are sitting on this porch, so sure will we set fire to it.”

In the meantime Leon and Tom had stood close together, and as Carl flounced into the house after his uncle, the two bounded up the steps and went up to the frightened boy.

“A word in your ear,” said Leon.

“Well, I don’t want anything to do with you,” said Carl, almost ready to cry when he found himself driven away from his home. “A man who will do as you have done has no business with a white person.”

“One moment,” said Leon, while Tom cocked his gun and brought it to bear on Carl’s head. “That brings you to your senses, don’t it? Here’s a resolution of secession that my father got up yesterday, and which was left on a tree down here, and I found it torn up and strewn on the ground. Did you have a hand in it?”

“Say, Tom, I want you to turn that gun the other way,” said Carl, who dared not move for fear that the rifle would still be pointed at him.

“Did you have a hand in it?” repeated Leon.

“Yes, I did,” said Carl, who, remembering that his uncle had got off easy by showing some grit, now resolved to show a little himself. “I will tear up every one you put there.”

“Well, I want you to go into the house and bring out some writing materials, and sit down at this table here on the porch and draw up a full copy of this resolution,” said Leon; and Carl had never heard him speak so before. As he spoke he drew a revolver from his pocket.

“I can’t write as well as that,” stammered Carl, who saw that he had got to do something very soon. “I wish you would put that revolver away. You don’t know how it worries me to have those things in sight.”

“You can write well enough. Go and get the pen and ink. And mind you, you want to be out here in short order, or we will be in there after you.”

Carl hurried into the house, while Tom uncocked his gun and leaned upon it, and Leon put his revolver into his pocket. They didn’t think they would have any more use for them. Carl went at once to the room in which his aunt was busy packing up some of her clothes, and the face he brought with him was enough to attract anybody’s attention.

“Well, Carl, this is pretty rough, ain’t it?” said his uncle, who was engaged in getting some of his own things together.

“I should say it was,” whimpered Carl. “Are you not going to be revenged on these fellows?”

“We’ll be revenged on them so quick that they won’t know it,” said his aunt, in a husky voice. She didn’t cry, but her hands trembled and her face was very white.

“Where are your writing materials, aunt? That little Leon Sprague is going to make me write out those resolutions I tore down. I wish, with uncle, that we had some half a dozen Confederate soldiers here. Wouldn’t we make a scattering among them?”

“Carl, you can’t have those writing materials,” said his aunt, who was struck motionless with surprise. “Tell him that we haven’t got any in the house. The young jackanapes! Where’s your rifle, that you don’t use it? I wish I were a man for about twenty minutes. There wouldn’t be so many of them as there are now.”

“But, aunt, they have got fire-arms, and they pulled them on me,” said Carl. “If I don’t get them out there very soon they will come after me.”

“You will find them in the top bureau drawer,” said his aunt, who began to think it was necessary to show a little speed. “Wait until I get my things all together and get out there, I will give them a piece of my mind.”

“Now, Lydia, you want to be mighty careful what you say out there,” said her husband. “They have got weapons, and they had just as soon use them as not. It is a pretty piece of business, this allowing strangers to drive us away from our home, but I tell you we’ll have revenge for it sooner or later. Pack up all your things in a hurry, for we have an hour left us in which to save our home.”

Carl, seeing that his uncle had no way to propose for him to get out of making a copy of that secession resolution, hunted up the writing materials as soon as he could, and went out on the porch with them. He found Leon and Tom there, and they were getting impatient.

“Look here,” said the former, “if you want to help your uncle get his things together you will move a little spryer than that. Now, sit down at this table and make out a full copy of this paper, just as it was when you pulled it down.”

“I’ll bet you won’t always have things all your own way,” said Carl, as he seated himself and removed the stopper from the ink-bottle. “You don’t suppose we’ll come back, do you?”

“I suppose you will, and that you will have men with you,” said Leon. “But you must bring all of two thousand men to put this rebellion down. Don’t let’s have any more talk. Go on and write out that paper.”

“And remember, it’s got to be the same as it was there,” said Tom, when he saw Carl arrange the pieces without reference to what came after them. “If you don’t, you will have to write it over again.”

While Carl was busy with his copying his uncle and aunt came out on the porch. They didn’t say a word, but brought with them a large bundle of clothing that they wanted to save. Aunt Lydia showed that she would have annihilated Mr. Sprague if she could, for the glance she cast upon him was full of hate. Mr. Swayne then took a horn down from a nail under the porch and blew two long blasts upon it. That was a signal to let the field-hands know that they were wanted. Presently the field-hands came up, a half a dozen of them, and although they may have been very smart negroes, the clothing which they wore did not proclaim the fact. There was hardly a piece of cloth on them that wasn’t patched until it was almost ready to drop off their persons. They looked on in surprise when they saw so many Union men there (they used to say that the darkies were rather blunt in such matters, and that they didn’t know who the Union men were), and saw the piles of clothing that had been brought out, but the first words their master spoke to them cleared everything up.

“We’ve got to go away from home now, or these men are going to burn it,” said Mr. Swayne. “Hitch those mules to the lumber-wagons and bring them up here. Be in a hurry, now, for we have no time to waste.”

The darkies rolled their eyes in great astonishment, and then went about their work with alacrity. In a few minutes the wagons were driven up to the door, and the darkies began to pile in the clothes. While Mr. Sprague was watching them he became aware that somebody was trying to attract his attention. A pebble thrown by a friendly hand hit him on the shoulder. He faced about, and saw one

of the darkies behind the house. When he saw Mr. Sprague looking at him he beckoned to him to come where he was.

CHAPTER IV

CARL BRINGS NEWS

“Say, Marse Sprague, is you Union men going to burn dese houses ober deir heads?” began the darky, so excited that he could scarcely stand still.

“We have given them an hour to take their things out,” said Mr. Sprague. “If they don’t take them out in that time we’ll set the house a-going. If they get all their things out and loaded in the wagons we’ll save the house, so that they can have something to live in when these troubles are all over.”

“Whar do you reckon dey’ll go if dey get the things all tooken out?” asked the negro.

“I don’t know where they will go; over into the next county, probably. But what makes you so anxious?”

“Well, say, Marse Sprague, I don’t care to go ober into the next county wid ’em. Dey’s rebels ober dere.”

“So I have heard.”

“Well, I don’t want to go among dose rebels ’cause I won’t get no freedom. Dey say we’ll get it in a little while if we stays here among dese Union men.”

“Who told you that?”

“Your own Mose told me dat, sah.”

“Is Mose going to take his freedom when he can get it?”

“Sah? No, sah. He say he’s got a Marse who don’t stripe his jacket none, and he ain’t a-going to look at his freedom. I tell you, I don’t care to go ober into dat oder county wid dem people here.”

“What are you going to do about it?”

“We-uns didn’t know what to do about it. If we slip away from dem while dey are going ober dar can dey catch us?”

“I don’t know whether they can or not. There’s been an Emancipation Proclamation issued by Abraham Lincoln, saying that if they don’t quit their rebellion in six months he will declare their niggers all free.”

“Dat’s just what I want to get at, sah,” said the negro, pounding his knees and shaking his head as if he were overjoyed to hear it. “Dat’s just what I want, sah. De rebels ain’t a-going to go and get up such a ’bellion, and den go and give it up ’cause somebody tells ’em to. I ain’t a-going into dat oder county, and the first thing Marse Swayne knows my folks and me will be missing.”

“Well, you have got to depend on yourself,” said Mr. Sprague. “I cannot help you if you do run away from them.”

“I knows dat mighty well. But you just watch out and see if you hain’t got more black folks up to your plantation dan you ought to have. You is a Union man and I know it, and you ain’t a-going to give me up just ’cause Marse Swayne says so.”

The negro started one way because he heard somebody calling him, and Mr. Sprague joined the men on the porch feeling as if he had a big responsibility resting upon him. He didn’t agree to take all the darkies in the county who might make up their minds to run away from their masters, and how was he going to support them all and find work for them to do?

“I tell you, this thing is coming to a head,” said Mr. Sprague to the man who sat next to him. “You remember what Stephens said about having a Government whose cornerstone should be slavery?”

The man remembered it perfectly. They used to get Confederate papers when the war first broke out, but now that they were in rebellion, and the postmaster was a rebel, they didn’t get a sight

of one. The man who had charge of the office removed to Mobile as soon as he saw how things were going, and since then there had not been any post-office.

“Well, sir, old Cuff has just been talking to me, and he thinks of running away. He says that if he goes over into the other county he won’t get his freedom.”

“Good” said the man. “I am glad of it. We’ll see how their ‘corner-stone’ is going to hold out when they get their Confederacy. But they ain’t a-going to whip.”

“But this old Cuff thinks I am going to support him,” said Mr. Sprague. “I haven’t got any work for him to do.”

“Send him into the woods to cut logs for you,” said the man.

“I might do that, but I don’t see where I am going to find market for them. But I will get along somehow. Well, half an hour is gone, and they haven’t got many things out yet. Leon and Tom seem to be making it all right with Carl, don’t they?”

The two boys referred to stood patiently by until the resolutions were complete; then Tom took his copy and Leon fastened his eyes upon the torn manuscript and waited for him to read it. It was all correct; there wasn’t a mistake in it.

“You write a pretty good hand for a boy who hasn’t been to school more than you have,” said Leon.

“Keep your compliments for them that need them,” said Carl, snappishly. “I don’t care to hear them.”

“You haven’t got through with this business yet,” said Leon, in a voice which he meant should carry conviction with it. “You found this resolution on a tree, and you tore it down so that people couldn’t see it. I intend that you shall go back and post this thing up there.”

“But you told me I should have to help my uncle carry out his things,” said Carl, anxious to shirk all the responsibility he could.

“Oh, we’ll wait until you carry out your things,” said Leon, with a smile. “You are going right by the tree, and it won’t hurt you at all to stop and nail this thing up.”

Carl gathered up the pen and ink and disappeared in the house, and Leon and Tom went down the steps to join the men who were sitting there.

“I got it, but I had hard work in getting it, too,” said Leon. “How much longer time has he got?”

“Not quite fifteen minutes,” said Mr. Sprague.

“And I see he is hustling things more lively than he did. You won’t start the fire when the quarter of an hour is up, seeing that he is doing the best he can to get them out?”

“Oh, no. I wanted to see him get to work, that is all.”

At the end of half an hour the furniture and clothes they intended to take with them had been loaded on the wagons, and then the women began to slam the blinds and fasten them securely. When Mr. Swayne came out on the porch he locked that door and put the key into his pocket.

“We have got some things in there yet, but we don’t want these traitors to have them,” said his wife, in a tone which was intended very plainly for the ears of Mr. Sprague and his friends. “Let them go somewhere else and steal somebody else poor.”

Mr. Swayne did not pay any attention to it. He buttoned up the key in his pocket, and looked all around as if he were searching for someone. At last he called out:

“Cuff! Where is that lazy nigger Cuff? Come here this minute, or I will stripe your jacket till you can’t rest.”

Mr. Sprague was surprised. He thought it very likely that he could tell Mr. Swayne what had become of the negro Cuff. He had been sent with all his companions to the quarters to bring some clothes and other things they wanted to save, and he hadn’t showed up since. It would be very easy for them to slip through the cornfield, and so into the woods, and that was right where Cuff was when his master was calling him.

“Carl, suppose you run down to the quarters and hurry them up,” said his uncle. “We want to get away from here as soon as we can. There’s too many Union people here.”

The man who had threatened to burn the house before they got out of it was sitting on the steps a little way from Mr. Sprague. He wiggled and twisted and wanted to say something in return, but there was his superior officer who didn’t say anything, and he thought he would hold in for a better opportunity. Carl was away about fifteen minutes, and when he came back his face bore evidence that he was utterly confounded.

“There ain’t a nigger about the quarters,” said he. “Their clothes, both bedding and wearing apparel, are gone, and that proves that they have run away.”

“That’s the first time I ever had a nigger serve me that way,” said Mr. Swayne, pacing up and down the porch. “Run away, have they? If I ever get my hands on them I’ll make it awfully uneasy for them to lie down, now I tell you. Did you follow them into the woods to see where they went?”

“No, I didn’t. I saw their tracks leading through the cornfield, and then I came home to report the matter to you. Those niggers think they are going to get their freedom now.”

“Yes, and you might have expected it,” said his aunt, turning her flashing eyes upon Mr. Sprague. “What are these Union men here for if it isn’t to coax the niggers away from an honest Confederate?”

“Mrs. Swayne, we had no hand in inducing your negroes to run away from you,” said Mr. Sprague, who now began to get angry. “They said they were not going into the other county with you, and I told them that they must depend entirely upon themselves.”

“By gum! You want to see your house go before you get away from it,” said the man who had threatened to burn them out. “Any more such talk as that and I’ll set her a-going; by gum I will.”

“Carl, you will have to do some driving for us, for we can’t stop to hunt the niggers,” said Mr. Swayne.

“Oh, now, I didn’t agree to do driving,” whined Carl. “Let’s stop and go into the woods after them.”

“You have already got your things loaded on the wagons, and I must ask you to drive on,” said Mr. Sprague. “It is my duty to stay by you until you get beyond Ellisville.”

“Carl, jump on that wagon and drive after me,” said Mr. Swayne. “I don’t want to hear any more argument about it.”

“Tom, you haven’t got any horse, and I advise you to get into that wagon with Carl,” said Leon. “When you come to the tree on which the resolution was posted, make him get out and post this one in its place. He’ll object, but we can’t help it.”

While Carl was tying his riding-horse behind the wagon Tom climbed in and seated himself on the table which had been placed there for one of the negroes who had gone off with Cuff. Carl saw what he was doing, but didn’t make any fuss about it. He had arrived at his uncle’s conclusion that the best thing they could do was to take no notice of the Union men. By doing that they would irritate them, and they would not have so much to brag of when they talked about driving Confederate families out of the county. But they didn’t know Mr. Sprague and his friends. The task was one they did not like, but they did it because they had been ordered to. Carl kept his mouth resolutely closed until they came to the tree from which he had torn down the resolutions. He whipped up his mules when he came there, but Tom laid hold of the reins and stopped them.

“Now, Carl, this is the place,” said he. “Here’s the notice, and you want to get out and tack it up. The nails are all there.”

Carl didn’t know whether to refuse or not, but just then Leon came up on his side of the wagon. Leon had a revolver in his pocket, and Carl did not like to see that; so he grabbed the notice and sprang out of the wagon. In a few minutes it was tacked up just the same as it was before.

“There,” said Leon, “that will do. Now anybody who comes along here and who wasn’t at the convention can see what we did there.”

“Now I guess you had better get out,” said Carl, addressing himself to Tom Howe.

“No, I reckon not,” replied Tom. “I’ve got to go with you as long as you stay in the county, and I reckon I can get along here as well as I can afoot. Drive on.”

Carl at once closed his lips and had nothing more to say. As they were going by his own house, Leon noticed that there was nobody present, for his mother was too refined a woman to take such a paltry vengeance on those who did not believe as she did, but there was one little circumstance that attracted his attention. He was certain that he saw old Cuff’s cottonade coat disappear around the house. He did not have more than a glimpse of it, but he was sure it was there. When they arrived at the cross-roads they met ten more men on foot who were escorting four more wagon-loads of secessionists to Perry county, which was the nearest place they could get and be among friends. They never said a word, but fell in behind Mr. Sprague, and followed along after him. They were all armed with rifles, and some of them had revolvers stuck in their belts. The sight of these men made Carl open his eyes. He had not dreamed that there were so many Union men in the county.

“I believe you’ve got more Yankees here than Confederates,” said he.

“These men are not Yankees,” said Tom. “They are men born here in the South. But these ain’t a patching to what we’ve got. If you had been down to that convention you would have seen a thousand men under arms. There were so many of them that we couldn’t get them all in the church. Some of them had to stay outside and raise the windows.”

“Well, what did you do there besides pass the resolutions of secession?” asked Carl; for now that his uncle was out of hearing he seemed anxious to learn what had been going on at that meeting.

“We elected officers,” said Tom.

“Didn’t you do anything else?”

“Well, yes. There was a couple of enrolling officers came there to enlist men for the Confederate army, and we sent them back where they came from.”

“Then the rebels don’t allow that this county is out of the State, do they?” said Carl, who was overjoyed to hear it. “You have got your own way this time, but I tell you we are coming back. And I won’t forget the boys that drew fire-arms on me.”

“Well, that’s right. I suppose they won’t draw any more on you?”

“No, sir, they won’t,” said Carl, hotly. “I don’t mind talking this way to you, but I do hate the sight of that revolver that Leon Sprague has in his pocket. Where is he now?”

“He is back talking to those men that came up awhile ago,” said Tom. “He can’t hear you, but you must remember that we can fight tolerable sharp.”

Leon had gradually slackened his pace until the single man on horseback, who seemed to be the leader of the party, came up and rode beside him.

“Well, sir, you got ’em, didn’t you?” said the man. “You know, when your father said he would go up after that man yesterday I felt rather anxious about him. I thought he would fight, sure.”

“Well, he didn’t. He did not show any signs of it. He was mighty saucy, though, and so was that nephew of his.”

“One of our men was sassy, too. Do you see that man driving the next wagon? He’s got a big lump under his eye. Bob Lee hit him.”

“Now, what did he do that for? Bob had the right on his side, and there was no reason why he should get mad and strike the man. My father had just as good reason to hit Swayne, but he didn’t do it.”

“He had no business to be sassy. If Bob hadn’t a hit him I would. He said that he hoped to goodness that the rebels would come in and take the last scalp from our heads. When Bob asked him to take it back he said he wouldn’t do it, and so Bob upended him. That was the last sassy word given to us. It showed them that we were in earnest. Hello! There’s three more fellows come up and are talking to your father, and by gracious! one of them is a rebel. Let’s go there and see what they have got to say.”

Leon and his friend urged their horses forward, and in a few minutes drew up beside Mr. Sprague, who was listening to some words the rebel had to say to him. As he spoke he looked at the women and Mr. Swayne, and then sank his voice almost to a whisper.

“Colonel, are these some rebels that you are taking out of the county?” said he.

“We have got so far with them, and we expect to get the rest of the way,” answered Mr. Sprague.

“I want you to come off on one side so that I can talk to you without fear of being overheard,” said the rebel. “Now,” he added, as the men moved some distance down the road, “the rebels are going to move a big wagon-train along that road to-morrow. You see they have got to go around this county, for they don’t want to run the risk of being captured if they pass through here.”

“We stopped and saw President Knight about it, and he advised us to come on and see you,” said one of the men who had acted as guard to the rebel.

“Take his gun away from him,” said Mr. Sprague, and the rebel promptly gave it up, together with his ammunition-box and bayonet. “Have you any other weapons about you?”

“Nary one, sah,” said the rebel. “My family is down here a little ways from Ellisville, and you may know that I am all right when I bring them with me.”

“How did you say you escaped?”

“I wasn’t conscripted, as a great many were, but there was such a pressure brought to bear upon me that I thought I might as well go into the army instead of waiting until I was conscripted in reality. I have been in the service only six months, but I have been in three or four little engagements. I live in Perry county, and when I found out what you were doing here, how you had never sent any men into the army, and how there were a thousand men here who didn’t intend to go at all, I wrote to my wife, advising her to come here and I would join her after awhile; but she wrote back that she wouldn’t stir a step unless I came. On the night I escaped I was on guard, and the corporal hadn’t any more than got away from me when I was missing. I travelled all night, and at daylight reached my home. I packed up what few things I wanted to save and came here, and one of my mules dropped dead as soon as I got to Ellisville. I wanted the President to go on at once and capture that train, but he thought I had better come on and see you about it.”

“Well, you tell a pretty straight story, and I shall have to put some faith in it until I can prove the contrary,” said Mr. Sprague.

“You are at liberty to disprove my story in any way you can,” said the rebel, earnestly. “I am dead shot on this thing, and if this county is going to stay out of the Confederacy I am going to stay out, too.”

“I shall have to send you to my house,” said Mr. Sprague.

“Send me anywhere, sah, but stop and explain to my family why I don’t come home. She will appreciate the reason, for she is a soldier’s wife.”

“Father, come here a minute. I don’t see what’s the use of sending that rebel to our house,” said Leon, when his father had drawn off on one side. “He must have a camp down there in Ellisville, and, now he has given up his weapons, I don’t see how he is going to get away. There are fully five hundred men camped around Ellisville now.”

“Well, that is so,” said Mr. Sprague, after reflecting a moment. “I think I had better take him on to Ellisville and leave him there, with plenty of men to watch him.”

“That would be my way, certainly.”

“Forward, march!” shouted Mr. Sprague, as he placed himself at the head of his little train, and the cavalcade once more moved onward. The rebel kept close at his side, and Leon rode a little ways behind him. There was one thing that drew the boy’s attention, and that was the rebel’s horse. Although she was tired, her gait showed that she fretted and fumed at the bit as if she was anxious to go faster. She was a beautiful animal, with limbs so small that they did not look strong enough to support her weight.

“May I ask you where you got that horse?” said Leon, after he had watched her for some length of time.

“I stole her from the wagon-master,” said the rebel. “I should not have been able to get home if it hadn’t been for her. I did the rebels all the damage I could before leaving them.”

“There must be some escort with that wagon-train, isn’t there?” inquired Mr. Sprague.

“There are twenty-five men, including two officers,” replied the rebel. “But half of them you needn’t be afraid of, for they are all Union.”

“How many wagons are there in the train?”

“Forty;” whereat Leon opened his eyes in surprise.

“Will the teamsters fight?”

“Fight!” exclaimed the rebel, in disgust. “No, they won’t. Half of them are armed, but they don’t know what it is to fight. When they see you coming up with your guns all ready the majority of them will throw up their hands.”

If ever there was a happy man in that train it was the rebel. He joked and laughed because he said he was among friends once more and could say what he pleased, and all the way to Ellisville entertained his auditors with thrilling stories of his earliest battles. He told how frightened he was when he got into the first one, and how he looked around for a hollow log into which he could crawl and get out of sight; but there were his companions all standing up without being shot, and his pride made him stay right where he was. At three o’clock they reached Ellisville, where the President had located his office. As Leon had said, there were at least five hundred men camped around there, some with their families, some had no homes at all, but all wanted to be where they could feel that they were of some assistance to Mr. Knight. They knew that when a raid was made upon the county it would come from Perry, the county next on the south, and they calculated to be at hand to stop it. Here Mr. Sprague halted his train and went in to hold an interview with the President, taking the rebel’s gun with him. He was gone but a few minutes, and when he came out his countenance indicated that he had resolved upon something. He mounted his horse and rode in among the lean-tos and other shelters which the men had erected for themselves, and shouted “Attention!” at the top of his voice, and immediately every man who heard him came running up to see what was the matter. When he thought he had got a sufficient number about him, Mr. Sprague proceeded to unfold his plans. It wasn’t the way that a majority of leaders do, for they never let their men know what sort of dangers they are going to meet until they get fairly into them.

“We are going out to-morrow to attack that wagon-train,” said Mr. Sprague, “and I want all of you who can go to be on hand here bright and early.”

“Good!” exclaimed one. “Then we’ll have something to eat.”

Mr. Sprague then went on to tell them how many wagons there were in the train, how many teamsters, and how large an escort of soldiers; for he put implicit faith in the rebel’s word. He was certain that five hundred men, if he could secure that many, advancing with their guns at full cock, would take all the fight out of them. Mr. Sprague was careful not to talk so loud as to attract the attention of Mr. Swayne, for he knew that he would warn the Confederates. Having given his men something to think about, he rode back to place himself at the head of his train, which moved away toward the county line.

CHAPTER V

CAPTURING A WAGON-TRAIN

“Now,” said Mr. Sprague, when Leon rode up beside him, “you want to go and tell your mother the reason that I don’t come home to-night. I shall have to stay here with the men, to be ready to start out with them at an early hour.”

“Then after that I suppose I can stay at home,” said Leon.

“Yes; I think that would be the best place for you. Those twenty-five men, and all of them old soldiers, are not going to give up that wagon-train without some resistance.”

“Well, now, I’ll tell you what’s a fact, father,” said Leon, decidedly. “I just ain’t a-going to stay at home.”

“Why not?” said Mr. Sprague, in surprise.

“If you are going to meet those men, I am going, too. You needn’t think you are going into danger without my being close beside you. I wouldn’t dare look mother in the face again if I should be guilty of remaining at home.”

Mr. Sprague looked down at the horn of his saddle and thought about it. Leon had really more pluck than his father thought he had, and after awhile he thought it would be better to let the boy have his own way in the matter.

“I don’t see what is the use of sending any word at all home to mother,” said Leon, after pondering what his father had said. “She knows that we are in the service of the county, and she won’t care whether we come home or not. The best way would be to stay right down here and go home when we get the job done.”

This settled the matter, and Mr. Sprague never referred to it again. About eight o’clock they arrived at the little bridge which spanned the creek that flowed between Jones and Perry counties, and there Mr. Sprague halted his men and motioned to Mr. Swayne to go on. The man complied, and when he had got far enough across to let all the wagons that came after him get a footing on Confederate soil he stopped and jumped out.

“Thank goodness I’ve got a white man’s ground under my feet!” he exclaimed; and no one had ever seen him so mad before. He seemed to be holding in for just this occasion, and he was so angry that he could scarcely speak plainly. “I suppose that now I can talk to you as I have a mind to.”

“Draw yourselves in line across this bridge and hold your guns in readiness to shoot,” said Mr. Sprague in a low tone to his men. “He may open fire on us before we can get under cover. Oh, yes, you can say what you please, now,” he said, in his ordinary voice. “But I wouldn’t say too much till I get behind that bend.”

“Well, I want to say this much to you,” shouted Mr. Swayne; “you have had your own way this time, but we are coming back in less than a week to clean you all out.”

“And remember this,” exclaimed Carl from his place in the wagon. “I will bear in mind the boys who drew shooting-irons on me, you see if I don’t. I’ll tear down that notice, and every other one that I can find.”

“And you, Bob Lee, I’ll remember you,” said the man with a lump under his eye. “I’ll teach you that the next man who says anything about the Confederates – well, you had better let him alone, that’s all,” he added, when he saw Bob raise his gun to his shoulder.

“If you are all ready, go on,” said Mr. Sprague.

Mr. Swayne was a long time in getting into his wagon. He would place his foot upon the hub, and then one of the men would say something insulting in regard to the men they had just left, and Mr. Swayne would take his foot down and stand there until he heard what the man had to say. He was in earnest when he said they were coming back to clean the Union men all out, and that there

wouldn't be hide nor hair of them left when they did come, and finally he got into his wagon and drove on. When he looked behind to see what had become of Mr. Sprague and his party, he saw them just disappearing around the nearest bend in the road.

"I wish I dared shoot at them," said he.

"Well, I'll shoot at them, and welcome," said the man whom Bob Lee had struck, as he reached for his gun.

"Don't do it, Jim," expostulated Mr. Swayne.

"Dog-gone it, don't you see the bump under my eye?" said the man. "I can see the chap who did it, and I can pick him off just as easy as you would kill a squirrel."

"If you shoot at them they will come back here and arrest the whole of us, and take us back to their camp and make us stand a court-martial," said Mr. Swayne. "I am not a-going to stand punishment for your deeds and mine into the bargain."

This view of the matter rather arrested the man's hand, and he sat with his gun resting across his knees, muttering curses not loud but deep, until he saw the Union men disappear around a bend in the road. Mr. Sprague knew that he stood a chance of being fired upon, and that was what he intended to do; he would arrest the whole of them and take them to camp. But Mr. Swayne was a little too sharp for him. It was two o'clock when they arrived at the camp, and the men, to show that they knew what sort of respect ought to be paid to the Secretary of War, went off to hunt up some forage for his horse and Leon's before they went to bed.

"Well, Leon," said Mr. Sprague, after the horses had been picketed with plenty to eat and the men had all gone away, "we haven't got any blankets."

"No matter for that," said Leon. "It won't be the first time I have slept out with nothing to cover me. Get some leaves, and they will do just as well."

They walked along the road as they talked, and Mr. Sprague could not help thinking what a big army he was going to have to attack that wagon-train. Every step of the way he saw lean-tos, and he knew that there were stalwart men sleeping under them. Finally he drew up before a lean-to where there was a sentry sitting in front of the door. He did not carry his arms at a "support," nor did he bring his piece to "arms port" and call out, "Who comes there?" when he saw Mr. Sprague and Leon approaching. But he greeted him in regular backwoods style.

"Hallo, Sprague" said he. "Did you get your parties through all right?"

The Secretary of War replied that he did, adding —

"This must be the home of that rebel, isn't it?"

"Yes. But he has been perfectly peaceable all night. He didn't sleep at all the night before."

"No; but I am awake now," called out a voice from the inside; and there was a little fussing in the cabin and the rebel came to the door.

"Say, Colonel, are you going to stay here all night?"

"That is the intention. I want to get an early start, and it is too far for me to go home."

"Well, now, I know that you haven't got any quilts," said the rebel, disappearing under the roof of the lean-to. "Here's some that will add to your comfort to-night. Take them and welcome."

Mr. Sprague thanked the rebel for his gift and spread the quilts down where they intended to camp for the night, while Leon told himself that it was a good thing to have a father who was Secretary of War, after all. They slept soundly for a little while, but at half-past three Mr. Sprague was awake and busily engaged in arousing the men. In less time than it takes to tell it they were all up and cooking their breakfast, and in an hour more the grove was empty. Five hundred men were going out to attack that wagon-train, and, if possible, secure something to eat. We don't mean to say that they were hard up for provisions, for there was bacon and corn-meal enough in the county to last them for months; but we mean that they had lived so long on these things that they had grown tired of them. They had been used to something better than that before the war, and when their boats came back from tide-water, after their owners had succeeded in selling their logs, the housewife found pickles,

canned meat and condensed milk enough to last her family for six months. That was one thing that the men had in view; and another thing, some of them were in need of clothes; and they believed that this wagon-train had something of that kind stowed away for the boys in Mobile. And, better than all – and here was the thing that led the men to look with favor upon robbing the train – it would show the Confederates they were in earnest; – just what the Union people wanted to do.

It was a long march from the grove in Ellisville to the stream that separated the two counties, but the men went about it in earnest and determined to get there in time to stop that wagon-train. Of course, there was plenty of joking and laughing while they were on their own ground, but the moment they struck the bridge a deep silence fell upon the company. We ought by rights to say that the men had been divided into five companies, a hundred men in each, and that each one had three officers to direct them; but the Union men of Jones county had not got that far in military tactics. There was only one man at the head, Mr. Sprague, and he had the full management of them.

Mr. Sprague rode at the head of the line in company with all the men who had horses, and there must have been about fifty of them, and when he crossed the bridge he sent a dozen of them on ahead to travel at full speed, to see if the wagon-train had passed.

“I needn’t remind you that you want to go into every house you come to, and if there is a man in there take him in,” said he. “Don’t say a word to the women, but ketch the men. It won’t do to leave any rebels behind us, for they can easily warn the train, and so we must take them with us until we get the job done. Silas, I will appoint you captain of this squad.”

Silas raised his hand to his hat with something that was intended for a military salute, called all his men about him, and went down the road at a keen jump, while the rest of the company travelled on as before. An hour afterward they came up with their scouts, and Silas at once rode up to report.

“The wagon-train hain’t passed yet, and we’ve got five men, and two of them are rebels. We had to chase through a cornfield after one, and fired two shots at him.”

“Did you hit him?”

“No, we didn’t hit him, but he was mighty ready to throw up his hands when he heard the bullets whistling.”

“Did you get their guns?”

“Yes, we got them all safe.”

“Now the best thing we can do,” said Mr. Sprague, turning about to face his men, “is to go down the road and conceal ourselves in the bushes. When you see me move my arm this way,” here he raised his arm above his head and waved it toward the right and left of the road, “you will all divide and go into the timber on different sides; and when you hear me whistle this way,” he put his hand to his mouth and gave a whistle that could have been heard a mile, “then you may know that it is time for you to get down to business. But bear one thing in mind: Don’t shoot unless you have to.”

The company, or, more properly speaking, the battalion, moved on again, and in half an hour not one of them was in sight. They had divided right and left, as Mr. Sprague had directed, and taken up their positions on opposite sides of the road, and there was not the least noise or confusion about it. Two of the men had gone down the road to see if the train was coming, and they were impatiently waiting their return. The prisoners had all been turned over to Mr. Sprague, and he was having something of a time with one of them, who was determined that he would not hold his tongue. He had a very shrill voice, and when he spoke in his ordinary tone it could be heard a long distance.

“Now, Sprague, I don’t see the sense in your doing this,” said the shrill-voiced man, and he seemed to have pitched his tones so loud that they could have heard him at the end of the line. “You take me away from my home, who never did the Union any harm – ”

“You are a nice fellow, you are,” said one of the men who happened to be close around when the shrill-voiced person was talking. “I take notice of the fact that Ebenezer Hale wanted to come up here so as to be among Union men, and you heard his story, and when he was asleep that night you went off and got a lot of rebels to surround and carry him off. Where is he now? In jail, likely.

And you, dog-gone you, you never did the Union men any harm! You had oughter go to jail until this trouble is all over.”

“Well, now, Simeon, I did just what I thought was best for the community. I didn’t have nothing against Ebenezer Hale, but I knew that if he went into this fight – ”

“That’s enough,” said Mr. Sprague. “We have listened to you all we want to.”

“Now, Sprague, I shan’t quit talking until I have a mind to,” said the shrill-voiced man. “You have undertaken more than you can accomplish, and I say – ”

“Sim, cut a little piece of wood about four inches long, and tie a string to each end of it,” said Mr. Sprague. “If Kelley don’t shut up we’ll gag him.”

“Oh, now, Mr. Sprague, don’t gag me,” said the man, sinking his voice almost to a whisper this time. “I won’t say one word more. I won’t, upon my honor.”

The gag was duly cut and prepared, and nothing was wanting except another word from Mr. Kelley to induce Sim to put it where it belonged; but the man took just one look at it and concluded that the best thing he could do was to keep still. He never showed any disposition to open his head until the scouts were seen coming back with the information that the train was approaching. They came in a hurry, too, as if they were anxious to get something off their minds.

“Where’s Sprague?” were the words they shouted as they galloped along the road; whereupon Mr. Sprague showed himself. “The train is coming,” they said, as soon as they came within hearing of their leader. “Every blessed one of them is coming, and are acting as if they didn’t fear anything.”

“Did they see you?” inquired Mr. Sprague.

“No, they didn’t. We hid our horses in the bushes, and then went and lay down beside the road until we saw the train coming. Yes, sir, we’re going to get them all.”

Mr. Sprague and his scouts went into the bushes again out of sight, and then he noticed that Mr. Kelley wasn’t so anxious to keep in the background so much as he had been. He was even disposed to go out of the bushes, but he hadn’t made many steps in that direction when Simeon seized him by the collar and stretched him flat on his back.

“Oh, now, Simeon – ”

“Not another word out of you,” said his guard, savagely. “You will get the gag in your mouth as sure as you’re alive.”

“Take your stand close behind him,” said Mr. Sprague, who was getting angry now, “and with the very first words he utters shoot him down. We are not going to have our plans spoilt for the sake of him.”

Leon, who stood close at his father’s side and heard all this conversation, grew as pale as death when he found that the wagon-train was coming. He clutched his revolver nervously, and determined that whatever danger his father got into he would be there to help him. The leader glanced at his son’s pale face and said, in a low tone:

“Leon, I think you had better stay here as a guard to these prisoners.”

“Are you going out there to face that escort?” asked Leon.

“Of course I am. I shall be right in the thickest of it.”

“Then I’m going, too.”

“But you will be safe here. They can’t hit you, even if they shoot at you.”

But Leon only shook his head, and at that moment somebody whispered that the foremost wagons were in sight. That turned Mr. Sprague’s attention into a new channel, and Leon was left to himself. He glanced at Simeon and his captive, and was gratified to see that Mr. Kelley had been forced to sit down, and Simeon was standing there with his cocked gun ranged within two inches of his head. He wanted to speak, and made a motion to Simeon to turn the gun the other way, but as often as he did this the piece was raised to his guard’s shoulder, and the words froze on his lips.

The foremost wagon came along as rapidly as the mules could draw it, and after what seemed an age to Leon the wagons were all in view. When the leading wagon was almost opposite to him

Mr. Sprague raised his hand to his mouth and gave a shrill whistle. Never in his life had he given a better one. He wasn't excited at all. There was a moment's silence there in the brush, and out popped the cavalry and infantry, and in less time that it takes to tell it the wagon-train was surrounded. Not a shot was fired. To say that the rebels were astounded would not half express their feelings. Every teamster had three or four guns looking at him, and the cavalry, who occupied the advance of the train, were surrounded with horsemen that were two to their one.

"Well, by George! You have done this up in good shape," said the rebel captain, after he had taken time to get his wits together. "What are you – Union?"

"Yes, sir; Union to the backbone," replied Mr. Sprague. "May I trouble you for your sword and revolver?"

"That was as neat a surprise as I ever saw," said the captain, as he unbuckled his belt and handed it to Mr. Sprague. "You didn't give us time to fire a shot. What are you going to do with us? Put us in jail?"

"No, sir. We shall allow you to go where you please," said Mr. Sprague, accepting the belt and fastening it about his own waist. "We are not making war on your folks now, but on your provisions. We shall have to take your horses, too. Dismount."

"I guess father's all right, and now I'll get some weapons of my own," said Leon, as he turned his horse and rode along the line of the escort. "There must be some rebels in there that haven't given up all their fire-arms."

As he rode along he found a soldier on the inside of the third four who held his weapons in his hand and was looking around for somebody to give them to. When he saw Leon approaching he held his sword, revolver and carbine toward him over his companion's horse.

"Come out here," said Leon. "I shall have to take your horse as well as your weapons."

"Well, I can't help it, can I?" said the rebel, who was more inclined to laugh than he was to feel despondent over it. He came out and proceeded to give up his horse and weapons to Leon, and at the same time he took particular pains to place himself on the boy's side next to the woods. In this way he could talk to him without his rebel friends hearing it.

"Say," he added, "you won't take me to jail, will you?"

"Certainly not," said Leon.

"Don't talk so loud. I don't want my companions to know that I have found a friend among Union men. Let me go out in the woods a little while, and I will come back sure when you are all ready to start for home."

"You will only be giving yourself trouble if you do that," said Leon, who thought his rebel friend was taking a queer way to escape. "As soon as we get your weapons we intend to turn you all loose, to go where you please."

"But I don't want to go with those rebels," said the young soldier, earnestly. "I am a Union man, and I went into the army because I had to. I will come back, sure."

"Well, go ahead, but don't let anybody see you."

When Leon led the captured horse back to his father's side he found that the escort had all been dismounted and disarmed, and were now standing there and awaiting further orders. Some were disposed to be angry and sullen, while others were laughing over what they considered a first-class surprise. Mr. Sprague was highly elated over it. He did not show it, but there was something about him that made Leon feel happy, too. The goods that were captured that day must have been worth \$500,000.

"Now, Captain, you are all right, and I will bid you good-day," said Mr. Sprague. "You can go ahead, and as fast as the teamsters come up, we'll send them on after you. Silas, go back there and send up all the teamsters."

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