

**ALDRICH  
THOMAS  
BAILEY**

QUITE SO

Thomas Aldrich

**Quite So**

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# Thomas Bailey Aldrich

## Quite So

### I

Of course that was not his name. Even in the State of Maine, where it is still a custom to maim a child for life by christening him Arioeh or Shadrach or Ephraim, nobody would dream of calling a boy “Quite So.” It was merely a nickname which we gave him in camp; but it stuck to him with such bur-like tenacity, and is so inseparable from my memory of him, that I do not think I could write definitely of John Bladburn if I were to call him anything but “Quite So.”

It was one night shortly after the first battle of Bull Run. The Army of the Potomac, shattered, stunned, and forlorn, was back in its old quarters behind the earthworks. The melancholy line of ambulances bearing our wounded to Washington was not done creeping over Long Bridge; the blue smocks and the gray still lay in windrows on the field of Manassas; and the gloom that weighed down our hearts was like the fog that stretched along the bosom of the Potomac, and enfolded the valley of the Shenandoah. A drizzling rain had set in at twilight, and, growing bolder with the darkness, was beating a dismal tattoo on the tent—the tent of Mess 6, Company A, —th Regiment, N. Y. Volunteers. Our mess, consisting originally of eight men, was reduced to four. Little Billy, as one of the boys grimly remarked, had concluded to remain at Manassas; Corporal Steele we had to leave at Fairfax Court-House, shot through the hip; Hunter and Suydam we had said good-by to that afternoon. “Tell Johnny Reb,” says Hunter, lifting up the leather side-piece of the ambulance, “that I ‘ll be back again as soon as I get a new leg.” But Suydam said nothing; he only unclosed his eyes languidly and smiled farewell to us.

The four of us who were left alive and unhurt that shameful July day sat gloomily smoking our brier-wood pipes, thinking our thoughts, and listening to the rain pattering against the canvas. That, and the occasional whine of a hungry cur, foraging on the outskirts of the camp for a stray bone, alone broke the silence, save when a vicious drop of rain detached itself meditatively from the ridge-pole of the tent, and fell upon the wick of our tallow candle, making it “cuss,” as Ned Strong described it. The candle was in the midst of one of its most profane fits when Blakely, knocking the ashes from his pipe and addressing no one in particular, but giving breath, unconsciously as it were, to the result of his cogitations, observed that “it was considerable of a fizzle.”

“The ‘on to Richmond’ business?”

“Yes.”

“I wonder what they ‘ll do about it over yonder,” said Curtis, pointing over his right shoulder. By “over yonder” he meant the North in general and Massachusetts especially. Curtis was a Boston boy, and his sense of locality was so strong that, during all his wanderings in Virginia, I do not believe there was a moment, day or night, when he could not have made a bee-line for Faneuil Hall.

“Do about it?” cried Strong. “They ‘ll make about two hundred thousand blue flannel trousers and send them along, each pair with a man in it—all the short men in the long trousers, and all the tall men in the short ones,” he added, ruefully contemplating his own leg-gear, which scarcely reached to his ankles.

“That’s so,” said Blakely. “Just now, when I was tackling the commissary for an extra candle, I saw a crowd of new fellows drawing blankets.”

“I say there, drop that!” cried Strong. “All right, sir, didn’t know it was you,” he added hastily, seeing it was Lieutenant Haines who had thrown back the flap of the tent, and let in a gust of wind and rain that threatened the most serious bronchial consequences to our discontented tallow dip.

“You ‘re to bunk in here,” said the lieutenant, speaking to some one outside. The some one stepped in, and Haines vanished in the darkness.

When Strong had succeeded in restoring the candle to consciousness, the light fell upon a tall, shy-looking man of about thirty-five, with long, hay-colored beard and mustache, upon which the rain-drops stood in clusters, like the night-dew on patches of cobweb in a meadow. It was an honest face, with unworldly sort of blue eyes, that looked out from under the broad visor of the infantry cap. With a deferential glance towards us, the new-comer unstrapped his knapsack, spread his blanket over it, and sat down unobtrusively.

“Rather damp night out,” remarked Blakely, whose strong hand was supposed to be conversation.

“Quite so,” replied the stranger, not curtly, but pleasantly, and with an air as if he had said all there was to be said about it.

“Come from the North recently?” inquired Blakely, after a pause.

“Yes.”

“From any place in particular?”

“Maine.”

“People considerably stirred up down there?” continued Blakely, determined not to give up.

“Quite so.”

Blakely threw a puzzled look over the tent, and seeing Ned Strong on the broad grin, frowned severely. Strong instantly assumed an abstracted air, and began humming softly,

“I wish I was in Dixie.”

“The State of Maine,” observed Blakely, with a certain defiance of manner not at all necessary in discussing a geographical question, “is a pleasant State.”

“In summer,” suggested the stranger.

“In summer, I mean,” returned Blakely with animation, thinking he had broken the ice. “Cold as blazes in winter, though—Isn’t it?”

The new recruit merely nodded.

Blakely eyed the man homicidally for a moment, and then, smiling one of those smiles of simulated gayety which the novelists inform us are more tragic than tears, turned upon him with withering irony.

“Trust you left the old folks pretty comfortable?”

“Dead.”

“The old folks dead!”

“Quite so.”

Blakely made a sudden dive for his blanket, tucked it around him with painful precision, and was heard no more.

Just then the bugle sounded “lights out,”—bugle answering bugle in far-off camps. When our not elaborate night-toilets were complete, Strong threw somebody else’s old boot at the candle with infallible aim, and darkness took possession of the tent. Ned, who lay on my left, presently reached over to me, and whispered, “I say, our friend ‘quite so’ is a garrulous old boy! He’ll talk himself to death some of these odd times, if he is n’t careful. How he *did* run on!”

The next morning, when I opened my eyes, the new member of Mess 6 was sitting on his knapsack, combing his blonde beard with a horn comb. He nodded pleasantly to me, and to each of the boys as they woke up, one by one. Blakely did not appear disposed to renew the animated conversation of the previous night; but while he was gone to make a requisition for what was in pure sarcasm called coffee, Curtis ventured to ask the man his name.

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