

Castlemon Harry

Rodney The Partisan



Harry Castlemon

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CHAPTER I RODNEY KEEPS HIS PROMISE

"So you are going to stick to your uniform, are you? I thought perhaps you would be glad to see yourself in citizen's clothes once more, and so I told Jane to put one of your old suits on the bed where you would be sure to see it."

It was Mrs. Gray who spoke, and her words were addressed to her son Rodney, who just then stepped out of the hall upon the wide gallery where his father and mother were sitting. Rodney had been at home about half an hour just long enough, in fact, to take a good wash and exchange his fatigue suit for a sergeant's full uniform.

In the first volume of this series of books we told of the attentions our Union hero, Marcy Gray, received while he was on the way to his home in North Carolina, and how very distasteful and annoying they were to him. We said that the passengers on his train took him for just what he wasn't – a rebel soldier fresh from the seat of war, or a recruit on his way to join some Southern regiment – and praised and petted him accordingly. Marcy didn't dare tell the excited men around him that he was strong for the Union, that he had refused to cheer the Stars and Bars when they were hoisted on the tower of the Barrington Military Academy, and that if a war came he hoped the secessionists would be thrashed until they were brought to their senses – Marcy did not dare give utterance to these sentiments, for fear that some of the half tipsy passengers in his car might use upon him the revolvers they flourished about so recklessly. He was obliged to sail under false colors until he reached Boydtown in his native State, where Morris, his mother's coachman, was waiting for him. Rodney Gray, the rebel, who you will remember left the academy a few weeks before Marcy did, received just as much attention during his homeward journey. Sumter had not yet been fired upon, but the passengers on the train were pretty certain it was going to be, and gave it as their opinion that if the "Lincolmites" attempted "subjugation" they would be neatly whipped for their pains. Being in full sympathy with the passengers Rodney was not afraid to tell who and what he was.

"I am neither a soldier nor a recruit," he said over and over again, when some enthusiastic rebel shook him by the hand and praised him for so promptly responding to the President's call for volunteers. "I am a Barrington cadet on my way home, and I am under promise to enlist inside of twenty-four hours after I get there. Do you see this gray suit? I shall not wear any other color until the independence of the Southern States has been acknowledged by the world."

Such sentiments as these never failed to "bring down the car," as Rodney afterward expressed it when describing some of the incidents of his journey from Barrington, and many of the passengers assured him that he would be at liberty to put on a citizen's suit in less than six months.

"The fighting won't amount to anything," said one, who talked as if he thought himself able to whip the whole Yankee nation alone and unaided. "It will be over in a good deal less than six months, but you gallant fellows will have to wear your uniforms a little longer in order to escort President Davis to Washington. He will dictate terms of peace in the enemy's capital."

"If our President will only do that, I will stay in the army ten years if it is necessary," declared Rodney, and he meant every word of it, for he was carried away by his enthusiasm.

A good many foolish notions of this sort were drummed into Rodney Gray's head during his two days' journey from Barrington to Mooreville. He afterward had occasion to recall some of them, and to wonder how he ever came to accept them as the truth. But he kept his word so far as his

uniform was concerned; that is to say, he returned to the closet the citizen's suit that had been laid out for him, and rigged himself up as if he were going on dress parade. His mother looked at him with fond and admiring eyes as he stepped upon the gallery and seated himself in the easy chair that one of the attentive darkies placed for him; for Rodney was an only child, and a very fine looking young soldier besides.

"Yes," he said, in reply to his mother's question. "I am going to stick to my uniform. It is the color that has been adopted by our government, and, as I told some of the passengers on the train, I'll not wear any other until we have secured our independence."

"Nobly said!" exclaimed Rodney's mother, who was as strong for secession as Marcy Gray's mother was for the Union. "I was sure you would not stay at home very long after your State called for your services. I don't think you will have to wear the gray for a very great while, but your father thinks he sees trouble in the near future."

"I don't think so my dear; I know so," replied Mr. Gray, in answer to an inquiring look from Rodney. "The North can raise more men than we can."

"That was what the colonel said when I asked him to let me come home," exclaimed Rodney. "He said, further, that the Northern people are not cowardly – they are only patient; and that there will come a time when their patience will all be gone, and then they will sweep over us like a cloud of locusts."

"And did you believe any such nonsense?" inquired Mrs. Gray. "What will our brave people be doing while the hated Yankees are sweeping over us?"

Don't you remember our President said the fighting must all be done on Northern soil?"

"It takes two to make a bargain," said Mr. Gray, quietly.

"That's just what Marcy said," exclaimed Rodney. "That boy is going to get himself into business before he gets through talking. He's Union to the back-bone, and while I was at the academy he didn't hesitate to speak his sentiments as often as he felt like it. If he keeps that up when he gets home his neighbors may take him in hand."

"I am sorry to hear that about Marcy," said Mr. Gray, thoughtfully. "He is a traitor and his mother must be another. I wonder where Sailor Jack stands. By the way, where is Jack?"

"He was at sea the last I heard, and I suppose Marcy and his mother are greatly worried about him. And well they may be; for of course we'll have a big fleet of privateers afloat within a month after war is declared. But, father, do you think there is going to be a war?"

"I am sure of it," answered Mr. Gray.

"And it will be fought on Southern soil?"

"It will."

"Well, how long do you think I shall have to wear this uniform?"

"If you don't take it off until the South gains her independence, you will have to wear it as long as you live."

"Why, father!" exclaimed Mrs. Gray, dropping her sewing into her lap and looking fixedly at her husband, who leaned back in his big chair watching the smoke from his cigar. "How can you bring yourself to utter such treasonable language in your son's hearing? You know you do not believe a word of it."

"Never fear for me, mother," said Rodney, with a laugh. "I know where you stand and I am with you."

"There was nothing treasonable in what I said, and I do believe every word of it," replied Mr. Gray. "I am as firm a friend to the South as any man in the state, and will make as many sacrifices as the next one to secure her independence. Why shouldn't I? Every thing I've got in the world is right here, and if the South doesn't succeed in her efforts to free herself, we'll be beggars, the last one of us. I wish from the bottom of my heart that when our armies get started they might sweep every

abolitionist in the country into Massachusetts Bay; but they'll not be able to do it. The Union has cost the Northern people so much blood and treasure that they will not permit it to be destroyed."

"I reckon the South had about as much to do with the war of the Revolution as the North did," declared Rodney.

"And another thing, the Northern people will not fight," Mrs. Gray hastened to add. "Wasn't it the South that did the most toward whipping Mexico?"

"And wasn't it the North that did the most toward whipping England?" retorted Mr. Gray. "Look here," he added, starting up in his chair when he saw Rodney and his mother look toward each other with a smile of disbelief on their faces. "You must have forgotten your history, you two. During the Revolutionary War the colonies raised two hundred and thirty-two thousand men to fight England, and of this number the North raised one hundred and seventy-five thousand, or more than three-fourths of the whole. Massachusetts gave sixty-eight thousand; Connecticut gave thirty-two thousand; Pennsylvania twenty-six thousand, and New York eighteen thousand; while that miserable little South Carolina gave only six thousand. And yet she has the impudence to talk and act as if she owned the country. It would have been money in her pocket and ours if she had been sunk out of sight in the Atlantic before she was made into a state."

There were three things that surprised Rodney so much that for a minute or two he could not speak – his father's sentiments, the earnest and emphatic manner in which he expressed them, and the items of history to which he had just listened and which were quite new to him, as they may be to more than one boy who reads this story. But Mr. Gray was like a good many other men in the South. He did not believe in disunion (although he did believe in State Rights), but now that the South was fully committed to it, he knew that he must do what he could to make the attempt at separation successful. If it failed, he and every other slave-holder in the South would be financially ruined.

"Then I suppose you don't want me to go into the army?" said Rodney, at length.

"I didn't say so; I didn't so much as hint at such a thing," replied his father, hastily.

"But what's the use of enlisting if I am going to get whipped? I don't see any fun in that."

"Oh, we've got to fight; we have gone too far to back out. We must hold out until England and France recognize our independence – and that will not be long, for England must have cotton – and then we can snap our fingers at the Yankees. You can take your choice of one of two things: Stay at home and look out for your mother and let me go, or go yourself."

"You stay and let me go," answered the boy promptly. "I gave my word to some of the fellows that I would enlist within twenty-four hours after I reached home, if I could get to a recruiting office, and they promised to do the same."

"Very well," said Mr. Gray, "I shall not say one word to turn you from your purpose, and neither will your mother," Mrs. Gray started when she heard these words. She had talked very bravely about "giving her boy his sword and shield and sending him forth to battle," and she had thought she could do it without a tremor; but now that the matter was brought right home to her, she found, as many another mother did, that it was going to be the hardest task she had ever set for herself. Rodney was safe at school, hundreds of miles away from her when she uttered those patriotic words; now he was within hearing of her voice, and all she had to do was to tell him to mount his horse and go. She could not do it; but her husband, who believed that the matter might as well be settled one time as another, continued —

"There is an independent company of cavalry camped about a mile the other side of Mooreville, and I know they would be glad to take you in. The company is made up of the very best men in the county, many of whom are your personal friends, and every member has to be balloted for."

"They are nearly all wealthy, and some of them are going to take their body servants to the front with them," added Mrs. Gray, trying to look cheerful although her eyes were filled with tears. "Your father and I spent an afternoon in their camp, and you don't know how nicely they are situated – all the luxuries the country affords on their tables, and then they are so full of martial ardor!"

"Yes," assented Mr. Gray. "We found it a regulation holiday camp – nothing to do and plenty of darkies to do it. They were having no end of fun, lying around in the shade abusing the Yankees. But wait until they meet those same Yankees in battle, and their blacks run away from them, and then they have to do their own cooking and forage for their bacon and hard-tack, and then they will know what soldiering means."

"Now, father," protested Mrs. Gray. "Why do you talk so when Rodney is on the eve of enlisting? You surely do not wish to discourage him?"

"By no means. I only want to make him see, before he swears away his liberty for the next twelve months, that he is not going on a Fourth of July picnic. If he knows what is before him, he will not be surprised or disheartened when the hard times come."

"I know a little something about soldiering, and you need have no fears that anything father can say will discourage me," Rodney said to his mother. "I have passed my word, and consider myself as good as enlisted already. Who commands that company of cavalry?"

"Bob Hubbard is the one who is getting it up, but there isn't any real commander yet. The boys do just about as they please, and will keep on doing so until the officers are elected, which will be when they have eighty men enrolled. Bob says that if they elect him captain, and I reckon he stands as good a chance as anybody, the boys will have to come down to Limerick and quit leaving camp and staying in town over night whenever the notion takes them."

"Have they seen any service at all?" asked Rodney.

"None except what some of them saw while they were members of the State militia," answered his father. "They helped capture the United States arsenal at Baton Rouge and hoist the Pelican flag over it, and you would have thought by the way they acted that they had done something grand. But the work was accomplished without the firing of a shot, the major in command offering to surrender if a force of six or eight hundred men was brought against him. By the way," added Mr. Gray getting upon his feet and tossing aside the stump of his cigar, "I expected you to do just what you have decided upon, and if you feel like taking a walk around to the stable before dinner, I will show you the horse I bought for you last week. Every 'Ranger' (that's what Hubbard calls his men), furnishes his own horse, the government allowing a small sum for the use of it; and if the horse dies or is killed in battle, the unlucky Ranger is expected to get another the best way he can."

"Where is this company going to serve?" inquired Rodney.

"I don't know, and neither does Hubbard. They have offered to join a regiment that is being raised in New Orleans, but the colonel commanding says he can't take them unless they will give up their independent organization."

"Oh, I hope they'll not think of doing that."

"You needn't worry. More than one Swamp Fox like General Marion will come to the front before this thing is over, and Bob's company will not be left out in the cold. I haven't said much to your mother about your going into the service," Mr. Gray went on, throwing open the door of a box stall and holding out an ear of corn to a glossy, well-conditioned steed which came up to take a bite at it. "While she is strong for secession and very patriotic where other folks are concerned, she don't want any of the members of her own family to go to war. She thinks they are sure to be killed."

"That isn't at all like the women and girls around Barrington," replied Rodney, stepping into the stall and beginning a critical inspection of his new horse. "They'll not have any thing to do with a fellow who isn't willing to prove his devotion to the Confederacy. Where would we get the men to fight our battles if everybody thought as mother does?"

"Of course she hasn't said so," Mr. Gray hastened to explain. "She is too good a Southerner for that, but I know it is the way she feels. What do you think of your horse? He is part Denmark, and that is what makes him so gentle; and his Copper-bottom blood shows in his color. Almost all Copper-bottom colts are roans."

"He's a beauty," Rodney declared, with enthusiasm. "And as long as I keep him I'll never fall into the clutches of the Yankees. He ought to have speed."

(And the new horse did have speed, too, as Rodney discovered when he rode him over to the camp of the Rangers that afternoon in company with his father. He moved as if he were set on springs and showed himself impatient of restraint; but his motions were so easy that his rider was scarcely stirred in his seat.)

"Good-by, my son," said Mrs. Gray, when Rodney's horse and his father's were brought to the door after dinner, and the two stood on the gallery drawing on their gloves. "You belong to me now, but I suppose that when you come back you will belong to your country."

"Oh no: I can't rush things through in that style," answered the boy.

"I've got to be voted for, you know. But I shall certainly tell Mr.

Hubbard that I am ready to go if he will take me."

During the ride through the village of Mooreville to the camp beyond, the only indications Rodney saw of the martial spirit that everywhere animated the people were the Confederate and State flags that floated over all the business houses, and the red, white and blue rosettes, which were worn principally by the women and girls. Rodney was the only one in uniform, the Rangers not having decided how they would equip themselves when the time came for them to go to the front. Rodney was kept busy returning the salutes he received as he rode along, and now and then some young fellow would rush into the street to shake his hand, and inquire if he was going up to the camp to give in his name. The camp was not such a one as the Barrington cadets used to make when they took to the fields every summer to reduce to practice the military instruction they had received during the year. There were tents in abundance, but they were put up without any attempt at order, there were no guards out, and the few recruits there were in camp seemed to have nothing to do but lounge around under the trees, reading the papers and talking over the situation. Rodney thought they might as well have been at home for all the good they were doing there.

"This is a pretty way to learn soldiering," said he to Mr. Hubbard, who promptly showed himself when he heard the sound of horses' hoofs in front of his tent. "How many men have you? Will you take in my name?"

"You are just the fellow we want and I wish we could get fifty more like you," replied Mr. Hubbard, returning the cordial grasp of Rodney's hand. "The boys will certainly put you in for something or other. We haven't got down to business yet, but will next week. I suppose that all the military knowledge we get will be by hard knocks, because, being an independent company, we cannot call upon any army officer to drill us. We are studying the tactics all the time, but are in no hurry to get our uniforms until we know whether or not our services are going to be needed."

"Say," exclaimed Rodney, recalling to mind something that had been said to him on the train a few hours before. "If I were in your place I'd lose no time in getting ready to march. President Davis is going to dictate terms of peace in Washington. Wouldn't you like to have your company escort him there?"

"Now, that's an idea," exclaimed Hubbard, while the recruits who were standing around listening to the conversation declared as one man that they would do and dare anything if they could only have a chance to present arms to the Confederate President when he walked into the White House. "The boys will all be here at roll-call to-night and I will speak to them about it. At the same time I will propose you for membership. You'll get in, of course, and perhaps you had better report tomorrow forenoon."

Although Rodney could not see the use of reporting, seeing that there was nothing to be done in camp, he promised to be on hand, and rode away to call upon some of his friends in the village. He found, somewhat to his relief, that there was not a single one among them who believed as his father did that the South was sure to fail in her efforts to dissolve the Union. They all thought as Rodney did – that the Northern people belonged to an inferior race, that there was no fight in them, and that

the States having made the nation could unmake it whenever they felt like it. He learned also, to his no small indignation, that his father did not stand as high in the estimation of his neighbors as he might have done if he had not expressed his opinions with so much freedom. As he was about to leave the village for home just before dark, he encountered an old acquaintance of his, Tom Randolph by name, who had just returned from the camp.

"You're in, Rodney," said he, after he had given the Barrington boy a very limp hand to shake. "To-morrow forenoon we're going to elect officers and get down to business. Will you be up?"

Rodney replied that he would, and at the same time he wondered why it was that Randolph treated him so coolly. They never had been friends. They took a dislike to each other the first time they met, and the oftener they were thrown together, the stronger that dislike seemed to grow. They had always tried to treat each other with civility, but now there was something in Randolph's way of talking and acting that Rodney did not like.

"While you were up to camp to-day did any of the boys tell you that I am a candidate for second lieutenant of the company?" continued Randolph.

"You?" exclaimed Rodney, in genuine astonishment.

"Yes, me," replied Randolph, mimicing Rodney's tone and look of surprise. "And why haven't I as good a right as anybody, I should be pleased to know?"

"I suppose there is no law to prevent you from running for office, but you don't know the first thing about military matters. If the company was in line this minute, and you were second lieutenant of it, you couldn't go to your position unless somebody showed you where it was."

"Well, I can learn, can't I?" snapped Randolph. "You didn't know trail arms from right-shoulder shift when you first joined the academy, did you? The company ought to give me that place, for my father has done a heap for it with money and influence. Some who are now recruits held back because they were not able to fit themselves out decently, but father told them that the want of money need not stand in their way. If they would go ahead and enlist, he would see that they had horses, weapons, uniforms and everything else they wanted. He did what he could to promote enlistments instead of preaching up the doctrine that the South is going to be whipped and the slaves all made free."

Rodney knew well enough that this was a slap at his father, but he didn't see how he could resent it, for it was nothing but the truth.

"That's why I say that the company ought to make me an officer," continued Randolph, after a short pause. "I know you are all right, for I heard how you stood up for the Confederacy while you were at school, and I'll tell you what I'll do with you: If you will give me your vote for second lieutenant, I'll do what I can to have you elected third sergeant. The other places are spoken for."

"I am very much obliged to you," replied Rodney.

"Is it a bargain?"

"Not much. I'll not vote for a man to be placed over me unless he knows more than I do."

"Perhaps you want a commission yourself," said Randolph, with something like a sneer.

"No, I don't. I never thought of such a thing."

"Because if you do, I want to tell you that you can't get it," continued Randolph. "Your father hasn't done half as much for the company as he might have done, and the boys don't like the way he talks."

"Then let's see the boys help themselves," answered Rodney, as he placed his foot in the stirrup and swung himself into the saddle. "Time will show who is willing to do the most for the success of the Confederacy, your father or mine."

So saying he put the roan colt into a gallop and set out for home.

CHAPTER II

THE RANGERS ELECT OFFICERS

When Rodney had left the village of Mooreville half a mile or so behind him, he threw the reins loose upon his horse's neck, thrust his hands deep into his pockets and thought over the conversation he had had with Tom Randolph. He had warned his cousin Marcy that the North Carolina people would be sure to turn the cold shoulder upon him on account of his Union principles, and now it seemed to Rodney that he was in pretty near the same predicament because his father believed and said that the seven seceding States, with two and a half millions of free persons, could not whip the loyal states and territories with twenty-five millions.

"It serves me just right," was Rodney's mental reflection. "I persecuted Marcy on account of his opinions, and now I am going to have a little of the same kind of treatment. No one but a red-hot secessionist has got any business in this part of the country."

When Rodney reached home he found his father there and supper waiting for him. He did not mention Tom Randolph's name, but he spent a good deal of time in thinking about him, and wondered how he would fare if Tom succeeded in winning the coveted commission. There were many ways in which a lieutenant could torment his subordinates, and Tom would be just mean enough to use all the power the law allowed him.

"I'll not take a thing to-morrow, even if it is offered to me," was the resolution Rodney made before he went to sleep that night. "I'll go out as a private and come back as a private, unless I can win promotion in the face of the enemy. Time makes all things right, and we'll see who will come out at the top of the heap – Tom Randolph or I."

The next morning about eight o'clock, Rodney seated himself in the carriage with his father and mother and was driven to the camp of the Rangers. It presented more of a holiday appearance now than it did the first time he saw it, for it had been cleaned up and decorated in honor of the occasion. The little grove in which the tents were pitched was thronged with visitors, the Rangers were out in full force and there was a good deal of "logrolling" going on. All the candidates had ballots prepared, and Rodney had scarcely set his foot on the ground before he was surrounded by a little group of recruits, all of whom were anxious to serve the Confederacy in the capacity of officers.

"We've got you down for third sergeant," said one. "We've arranged to push you for that position if you will vote for me for orderly and for Randolph for second lieutenant."

"Find out who the other candidates are before you make any promises," exclaimed another; and then, when no one was observing his movements, the speaker gave Rodney a wink and a nod which the latter could not fail to understand. He drew off on one side and the recruit, whose hands were full of ballots, went on to say:

"Randolph doesn't stand the ghost of a chance for the second lieutenancy, and he has good cheek to ask the boys to give it to him. He thinks he is going to run the company because his father has done so much for it."

"And he thinks he and his friends are going to keep me in the background because my father has done so little for it," added Rodney.

"Well, they can't do it, and they will find it out when the thing is put to the test. You have a military education and Randolph hasn't. That's one thing against him, and his overwhelming self-conceit is another. You are rather young to look for a commission in a company of men, but you will come in for the orderly sergeant's berth sure as shooting."

"I am obliged to those who suggested me for that place, but I'll not take it," said Rodney very decidedly. "I enlisted for a soldier."

"Well, what in the name of sense do you call the orderly?"

"I call him a clerk," answered Rodney.

"Why, I thought he was drill-master."

"Of awkward squads – yes."

"Then can't you see that that is another reason why we need you in that berth? We all belong to the awkward squad now. You'll have to take it. We need a drill-master, and must have some one who knows enough to keep the company's books; and that's more than that friend of Randolph's can do. I want nothing for myself, for I am not a military man. Hubbard will come in for captain without opposition. It's the place he ought to have, for he has done more for us than anybody else, and Odell and Percy will be the lieutenants. Put those in the box when the time comes."

Rodney took the ballots that were placed in his hand, and just then some one called out:

"Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes! All you Rangers fall in in single rank here in front of headquarters, and be ready to cast your votes for captain."

Rodney laughed heartily.

"That's the deputy sheriff," said the recruit with whom he had been conversing, as the two hastened toward the captain's tent. "There isn't much military about that order."

"It'll do," replied Rodney. "The boys seem to understand it, and what more do you want?"

"Now answer to your names," continued the deputy; whereupon Rodney laughed again.

"What ought he to have said?" inquired his friend.

"Listen to roll-call, would be the proper order," said the Barrington boy. "But it's all right. Guerillas are not supposed to be posted in such things."

"But we are not guerillas."

"Look in your dictionary and you will find that you can't make us out to be anything else," replied Rodney.

The two fell in side by side and answered to their names when they were called. The Barrington boy supposed that nominations would now be in order, but it seemed that they had already been made from captain down to fourth corporal. The Rangers were faced to the right and ordered to march up one at a time and deposit their votes for captain in the ballot-box (a cigar box with a slot in the cover), beside which stood the three "inspectors of election" who were to count the votes after they were all in, and who had been chosen before Rodney arrived on the ground. When the balloting was completed the company had countermarched twice, and stood on the same ground it occupied before the ceremony began. One of the inspectors emptied the contents of the cigar box on the table, another opened the first ballot that came to his hand and called out the name that was written upon it, and the third kept count. The result was just what Rodney's friend told him it would be.

"There were sixty-five votes cast, and they one and all bear the name of our popular friend Robert Hubbard," said the inspector and the announcement was received with cheers.

"Speech! Speech!" shouted the Rangers.

"No, no!" replied the newly elected captain. "There are two lieutenants, one orderly sergeant, five duty sergeants and four corporals yet to be elected, and we don't want to waste any time in foolishness."

"Have you got your ballots ready for first lieutenant?" inquired the deputy sheriff, who continued to act as master of ceremonies. "Then face to the right again and march yourselves around here and put 'em in the box. Laugh away, Rodney," he added, smiling good-naturedly and shaking his head at the Barrington boy. "We'll get the hang of these things after a while."

The voting was gone through with the same as before, and there was more cheering and clapping of hands when the inspector announced that Hiram Odell had been unanimously elected to the office of first lieutenant; but following the example of his superior he declined to waste time in speech-making.

And now Rodney Gray began to take a deeper interest in what was going on. The second lieutenant would be voted for next, and Tom Randolph, whose father had done so much for the

company, had had the impudence to bring himself forward as a candidate. It couldn't be possible, Rodney thought, that such an ignorant upstart stood any chance of election when his opponent was so popular a young man as Albert Percy. He stood where he could see Tom's face, and there was not a particle of color in it. If he could have looked into the ballot Tom held in his hand, he would have found that the name written upon it was that of Thomas Randolph himself. The candidate intended to vote in his own favor and he did; but it did not bring him the coveted office. When the result was announced he had just twelve votes. All the others were cast for Albert Percy. Then there was more cheering, but Tom didn't join in; and neither did he shout out a responsive "Aye" when it was proposed that the election be declared unanimous. On the contrary he looked daggers at every man in the ranks whose eye he could reach; and he could reach more than half of them, for the line was almost as crooked as a rail fence.

"That's a pretty way for them to treat me after all the exertions my father has made and the money he has promised to spend for the company," said Tom to the sympathizing friend who stood next on the right. "I believe I'll haul out."

"Don't do it," was the reply. "Stay in and help beat the rest of that ticket. It's all cut and dried."

"Of course it is and has been for some time. I could see it now if I had only half an eye; but they have been so sly about it that I never suspected it before. Slip out of the line and tell everybody who voted for me to vote against Gray, no matter what they put him up for. We'll show them that they don't run the company."

"Have you got your votes ready for orderly sergeant?" inquired the deputy.

"I'd like to say a word before the vote is taken," said Captain Hubbard, without giving any one time to answer the sheriff's question, "and that is, that the office of orderly sergeant is one of the most important in the company."

"I wonder how he happens to know so much," whispered Tom Randolph to the Ranger who touched elbows with him on the right; and in a minute more he found out.

"Ever since I began taking an active part in getting up this company," continued the captain, "I have been in correspondence with a military friend who has taken pains to post me on some matters that are not touched upon in the tactics. Among other things he warned me that if we intend to do business in military form, we must be careful whom we select for the office of orderly. He ought to be a thorough-going soldier –"

"Gray, Gray! Sergeant Rodney Gray!" yelled a score of voices.

"Very well, gentlemen," said the captain, who looked both surprised and pleased. "If he is your choice I have nothing to say beyond this: I shall be more than satisfied with his election."

"Randolph, Randolph!" shouted Tom's friends, believing that if he could not get one office he might be willing to take another; but it turned out that their candidate was not that sort of fellow.

"I don't want it, and what's more to the point, I won't accept it," said he, wrathfully. "If any one votes for me he will only be wasting his ballot, for I am going to leave the company. Do you suppose I am such a fool as to allow myself to be set up and bowled over by Rodney Gray?" he added in an undertone, in response to a mild protest from his friend on the right. "His supporters are in the majority and no one else need look for a show."

Everybody was surprised to hear this declaration from the lips of one who had thus far taken the deepest interest in the organization and done all in his power to help it along, and several of the Rangers leaned forward to get a glimpse of the speaker's face to see if he really meant what he said. Rodney glanced toward the captain to see how he took it, and learned what it was that induced the defeated candidate to take this stand. Leaning upon his cane just inside the door of the captain's tent was Mr. Randolph, whose face was fully as black as Tom's, and who nodded approvingly at every word the angry young man uttered.

"I haven't been sworn in yet, and am as free to go and come as I was a month ago," declared Tom.

"For the matter of that, so are we all," answered the captain, who had known a week beforehand that young Randolph was sure to be defeated, and that he would take it very much to heart. "But I considered myself bound from the time I put my name to this muster-roll. We can't be sworn in except by a State officer, for the minute we consent to that, that minute we give up our freedom and render ourselves liable to be ordered to the remotest point in the Confederacy. We are partisans, and never will surrender our right to do as we please."

Captain Hubbard and his company of Rangers were not the only dupes there were in the Confederacy at that moment. It was well known that the new government was in full sympathy with partisan organizations; and its agents industriously circulated the report that it would not only aid in the formation of such organizations, but would allow them full liberty of action after they were sworn into the service of their State. The government knew the temper of the Southern people, and was well aware that the desire to emulate the example of such heroes as Marion would draw into the service many a dashing youngster who might otherwise stay out of it. What could be more alluring to a hot-head like Rodney Gray than the wild, free, and glorious life which the simple word "partisan" conjured up? The ruse, for that's just what it was, proved successful. Partisan companies sprung into existence all over the South, but in less than twelve months after the war began there was not one of them in the service. Neither were there any such things as State troops.

When Morgan and Forrest were first heard of they were known and acknowledged as partisans; and the former carried his partisanship so far that when General Buckner declined to give him permission to act upon his own responsibility, he took possession of a deserted house, went into camp there, and supported his men out of his own pocket; but before the war closed both he and Forrest were Confederate generals, and their men were regularly sworn into the Confederate service.

We said that the State troops also had ceased to exist, and the following incident proves it: When the Governor of Arkansas called upon his troops, who were serving in the Army of the Center, to come home at once and save their State from threatened invasion, General Beauregard ought to have permitted them to obey the summons. He could not do otherwise and be consistent, for if the eleven rebellious States made the Confederacy, they surely had the right to unmake it. But did he live up to the principles for which he was fighting? On the contrary he surrounded those Arkansas troops with a wall of gleaming bayonets backed by frowning batteries, and gave them just five minutes to make up their minds whether or not they would return to duty. The government at Richmond was a despotism of the worst sort, as more than one poor, deluded rebel found to his sorrow; and yet Jefferson Davis and the rest of them stoutly maintained that they were fighting for the right of the States to do as they pleased.

"I don't consider myself bound to stay in the company for no other reason than because my name is on that muster-roll," said Randolph.

"Stick to it and we'll back you up," whispered the recruit on Tom's right.

"If I drop out of the ranks will you come too?" whispered Randolph, in reply.

"I will, and so will all the rest."

Being thus encouraged Randolph stepped out of the line and walked off toward his father's carriage, to which his indignant mother had already beat a dignified retreat. When he had gone a little distance he looked behind him and saw, with no little satisfaction, that he was followed by eleven others who were displeased by the way the election was going.

They were the ones who had been urged into the company by Mr. Randolph, who had promised to see them well fitted out with horses and weapons, and of course they felt bound to follow the example of his son. There were those who believed that Mr. Randolph would not have taken so much interest in the company if he had not believed that every recruit he brought into it would cast a vote for Tom.

Here was a pretty state of affairs, thought Captain Hubbard, who looked troubled rather than vexed. He did not care so much for the desertion of young Randolph and his friends (although the

unexpected withdrawal of twelve men from his command was no small matter), but he did care for the spirit that prompted their action. It was a rule or ruin policy he did not like to see manifested at that juncture. He was well enough acquainted with Randolph to know that he would not be satisfied with simply deserting the company, but would try in all ways to be revenged upon every member of it who had voted against him. While the captain was thinking about it, somebody tried to make matters worse by setting up a loud hiss, and in an instant the sound was carried along the whole length of the line. It wasn't stopped, either, until Rodney Gray stepped to the front.

"Mr. Commander," said he, raising his hand to his cap with a military flourish, "I don't want this position. The officers already chosen have been fairly elected, but I'll vote for Randolph for the next highest office in the gift of the company, if he can be induced to come back."

"Haven't you heard him say that he don't want it and won't take it?" replied the captain. "I think the Rangers know what they are doing. Proceed with the election."

"But, Captain, I don't want to be a clerk," protested Rodney. "I want to be a soldier. Aside from his writing, the orderly has little to do but loaf about camp all the while, keeping an eye on the company property, signing requisitions and drilling awkward squads, and that's a job I don't want. What's more, without any intention of being disrespectful, I'll not take it. There must be some here who want it, and who can do that sort of work as well, if not better than I can. If you think you must put me in for something, let me be a duty sergeant, so that I will have a chance to go on a scout now and then."

So saying the Barrington boy made another flourish with his hand and stepped back to his place in the ranks with military precision.

"Now, Rodney, take that back," said Lieutenant Percy, with most unbecoming familiarity. "You are the only military man in the company, and I don't see how we can get along without you."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Rodney," chimed in Captain Hubbard. "You take the position, and I will promise that you shall go out on a scout as often as you please."

The Barrington boy's face relaxed into a broad grin.

"Captain," said he, "what sort of an organization is this any way – a mob or a military company?"

"Now, what is the use of your asking such a question as that?" demanded the captain, rather sharply.

"Well, then, if it is a military company, I suppose you intend to be governed by military rules, do you not?"

"Of course we do, if we have brains enough to find out what those rules are."

"I have no fears on that score; and when you find out what those rules are, you will see that you have no business to let me go out on a scout as often as I please."

"What's the reason I haven't?" exclaimed the captain. "I command the company, don't I?"

"You certainly do."

"And haven't I a right to do as I please?"

"That depends upon circumstances. Do you intend to remain right here about home?"

"Not by a jugful. We're going to belong to some part of the army, if we have to go clear up to Missouri to find a commander who will take us."

"Then you will find that you can't do as you please. The minute that commander accepts you, he will swear you and all of us into the service."

"After we have been sworn into the service of the State?"

"Certainly."

"I don't believe it," said Captain Hubbard, bluntly. "He wouldn't have any right to do it."

The boy's words raised a chorus of dissent all along the line, and Lieutenant Odell said, as soon as he could make himself heard:

"You are way off the track, Rodney. What did we secede for if it wasn't to prove the doctrine of State Rights? If we are going to give our liberty up to a new government, we might as well have stayed under the old." And all the Rangers uttered a hearty "That's so."

"You'll see," replied Rodney, who was greatly amused by the look of astonishment his words had brought to the faces around him. "A general would look pretty accepting the services of a company he couldn't command, wouldn't he, now?"

"But he could command us," said everybody in the line; and Captain Hubbard added: "I'd promise that we would obey him as promptly and readily as any of his regular troops."

"But that wouldn't satisfy him. He'd want the power to make us obey him, or we might take it into our heads to leave him when things didn't go to suit, just as Randolph and his friends have left us. If we should try any little game like that in the face of the enemy, he might have the last one of us shot."

"What do you think of the prospect, boys?" said the captain, pulling out his handkerchief and mopping his face with it. He was all in the dark and wanted somebody to suggest something.

"Look here, Rodney," said Lieutenant Percy. "If you knew our company was to go up in smoke what did you join it for?"

"I don't believe it is going up in smoke," was the reply. "I certainly hope it isn't, for I am under promise to go into the service, and would rather go with my friends and neighbors than with strangers; but if we are going to bear arms, we've got to have authority from somebody to do it."

"Why, we'll get that from the State of Louisiana," exclaimed the Rangers, almost as one man. "The State is supreme, no one outside of it has a right to command our services, and State Rights will be our battle-cry, if we need one."

"All right," exclaimed Rodney. "I am here to share the fortunes of the company, whatever they may be, but I can't take the position you have so kindly offered me, and I beg you will not urge me further. Give it to some one who wants it, and I will do all I can to help him."

"Well, that's different," said the captain, who seemed to be much relieved. "Fall out and prepare your ballots; and you had better fix 'em all up while you are about it, so that there may be no further delay."

The order to "fall out" was quite unnecessary, for the ranks were pretty well broken before the captain gave it. He allowed them half an hour in which to write out their ballots, and then the line was reformed, after a fashion, and the voting went on; and although the results were in the main satisfactory, there were some long faces among the Rangers.

"Never mind," said Rodney, who had been elected first duty sergeant. "You outsiders may have a chance yet. I'll bet a picayune that if this company sees any service at all, it will not be mustered out with the same officers it has now. Bone your tactics night and day, and then if there is an examination, you will stand as good a chance as anybody. Captain, who is going to commission you?"

"I have been commissioned already; that is to say, I have been authorized by the governor to raise a company of independent cavalry to be mustered into the State service. That is all right, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is," replied the boy; and then he walked off to find his father, thoughtfully pulling his under lip as he went.

"What's the matter?" inquired Mr. Gray, as his son approached the place where he was standing. "Wasn't the election satisfactory? I thought the best men were chosen."

"I wasn't thinking about that," was the answer. "If we are mustered into the service of the State, we must of course be sworn in. This State is a part of the Confederacy; and if the Confederacy calls upon Louisiana for troops then what?"

"Why, then you would have to go. I reckon," replied one of the planters who was talking with his father.

"Yes, I reckon we would: and we'd have to take the oath to support the Confederacy, and that would take us out from under the control of the State and make us Confederate troops, wouldn't it?"

It's a sort of mixed-up mess and I don't see where our independence comes in. But the boys seem to think it is all right and I suppose it is."

But it wasn't all right, and the sequel proved it.

CHAPTER III

DRILL AND PARADES

When the Rangers had broken ranks, which they did without orders as soon as the fourth corporal had been elected, the captain and his lieutenants suddenly thought of something and posted off to find Rodney Gray.

"Look here," said the former, somewhat nervously. "What's the next thing on the programme?"

"Drill, guard-mount and all that sort of thing; but principally drill," answered Rodney. "If I were in your place I would send for a copy of the army regulations without loss of time."

"Where'll I get them?"

"Write to the commanding officer at New Orleans, and the minute they get here, turn this camp into a camp of instruction with written regulations, so that every member of the company may know what is required of him —*reveille* at five A.M., breakfast at six, sick-call at seven, inspection of company parade grounds at eight, squad drill at half past, and – "

"Hold on," exclaimed Lieutenant Percy. "You will have to put that in writing. I never could remember it in the world."

"You'll have to, and a good deal more like it," replied the Barrington boy. "It's nothing to what I had to keep constantly in mind while I was at school. I had to walk a chalk-mark, I tell you, or I'd have lost my *chevrons*."

"I suppose the hardest part of the work will be training our horses," observed Lieutenant Odell. "Mine is pretty wild."

"No matter for that if he is only intelligent. He'll learn the drill in less time than you will, I'll bet you. But we'll not need our horses for a month to come."

"What's the reason we won't? We're cavalry."

"I know it; but how are you going to teach your horses the movements unless you know them yourselves? Suppose we were in line in two ranks and the command was given "Without doubling, right face." The horses don't know where to go but their riders must, in order to rein the animals in their places. See? Oh, there's more work than fun in soldiering."

"Well now, look here," said the captain again. "I don't want to take the boys away from home and shut them up here for nothing, and yet I don't want to waste any valuable time, for we may be called upon before we know it. Will you drill a volunteer squad here every forenoon?"

"I will, and be glad to do it. I hope they will turn out strong, for you will find that the workers are the men that make the soldiers. I am glad we've got a drum and fife. You don't know how hard it would be for me to drill a large squad without some kind of music to help them keep step."

And so it was settled that Camp Randolph (it had been named after Tom's father when the Confederate flag was first run up to the masthead, and sorry enough the Rangers were for it now), was to become a camp of instruction, and that Sergeant Gray was to drill a volunteer squad every pleasant forenoon, and spend two hours every afternoon in teaching the company officers their duties.

The young soldier had undertaken a big contract, but he went about it as though he meant business, and in less than a week succeeded in convincing some of the members of his company that he was just a trifle too particular to be of any use. The strict discipline in vogue at Barrington was promptly introduced at Camp Randolph, and not the slightest departure from the tactics was tolerated for an instant. It made the spectators smile to see full-grown men ordered about by this imperious youngster who was not yet seventeen years of age, and the sight aroused the ire of Tom Randolph, who now and then rode out to the camp to watch the drill and criticise the drill-master. He wanted to learn something too, for Tom had an idea that he might one day have a company of his own. His father suggested it to him, and Tom lost no time in talking it up among his friends. To his great disgust

Tom had learned that some of these friends were getting "shaky." As time wore on and the Rangers began to show proficiency under the severe drilling to which they were daily subjected, these friends began to think and say that they were afraid they had been a little too hasty in withdrawing from the company just because Tom Randolph could not get the office he wanted, and the first mounted drill that was held confirmed them in the opinion. Due notice had been given of the drill, and the whole town and all the planters for miles around, turned out to see it. Of course the horses were green but their riders understood their business as well as could be expected, and the spectators, one and all, declared that it was a very creditable showing.

We do not, of course, mean to say that Randolph and his father and mother and a few other dissatisfied ones were pleased with the drill. They were rather disappointed to find that the Rangers could do so well without the aid of the twelve deserters. They came to witness it because their neighbors came, one of them, at least, being animated by the hope that the spirited horses would become so restive when they heard the rattle of the drum and the shrill scream of the fife, that their riders could not keep them in line. It was a matter of difficulty, that's a fact; but the Rangers were all good riders, and if Randolph hoped to see any of them thrown from his saddle, his amiable wish was not gratified. Another thing that disgusted Tom was the fact that Sergeant Gray commanded the drill, the commissioned officers riding in the ranks like so many privates. The file-closers, of course, occupied their proper places.

"If I could afford to buy a horse I would join the company within an hour, if they would take me," said one of the eleven who had seen fit to withdraw from the Rangers when Tom did. "I cut off my nose to spite my face, and so did all of us who got our backs up because we couldn't have things our own way. But I don't suppose they would take us back now."

"Would you be willing to have such a fellow as Rodney Gray order you around as he does the rest of them!" demanded Tom.

"Why, I don't see what's the matter with Rodney Gray. I never heard the first word said against him until you took it into your head that he was going to run against you for second lieutenant. Yes; I'd let him or anybody else boss me around if he would only teach me how to drill. He's a nobby soldier, aint he?"

"Nobby nothing," snarled Randolph. "I'll bet you our company will drill just as well as they do."

"Our company?"

"Yes. You don't imagine that the Rangers are the only ones who will go into the service from this place, do you? It would not be policy for the State to send all her best men into the Confederate army," said Tom, quoting from his father; for although he had been a voter for more than three years he seldom read the papers, and depended upon others to keep him posted in the events of the day. "Some of us can't go. Father says the Yankees will fight if they are crowded too hard, and if they should happen to come down the river from Cairo, or up the river from New Orleans, wouldn't the capital of our State be in a pretty fix if there were no troops here to defend it?"

"Aw! they aint a-going to come up or down," exclaimed the other, who was too good a rebel to believe that Union troops could by any possibility gain a foothold in the seceded States. "The fighting must all be done on Northern soil.' That's what our President said, and I reckon he knows what he was talking about."

"Perhaps he don't. Fortune of war, you know," said Randolph, who, ever since his father suggested the idea, had kept telling himself that nothing would suit him better than to be captain of a company of finely uniformed and mounted State Guards. "At any rate we are going to prepare for what may happen. We are going to get up a company, and my father will equip every one who joins it. If he has a family, my father will support them if we have to leave the neighborhood and go to some other part of the State. What do you say? Shall I put your name down?"

Tom's friend did not give a direct reply to this question. He evaded it; but when he had drawn away from Tom's side and reached another part of the grounds (the mounted drill was still going on), he said to himself:

"No, you need not put my name down. I'm going to be a regular soldier and not a Home Guard. There must be some patriotic rich man in this country who will do for me what Mr. Randolph promised to do, and I'm going to see if I can find him. By gracious? I believe I'll try Mr. Gray. They say he hasn't done much of anything for the company, but perhaps he will if he's asked."

No; Mr. Gray had not been buying votes for his son, for he did not believe in doing business that way. According to his ideas of right and wrong the company officers ought to go to those who were best qualified to fill them; and he didn't want Rodney to have any position unless the Rangers thought him worthy of it. But he was prompt to respond to all appeals for aid, and so it came about that in less than a week Tom Randolph's friends had all been received back into the company, and it was reported that six of them were to be mounted and armed at Mr. Gray's expense.

"That's to pay 'em for voting Rodney in for first duty sergeant," snapped Tom, when he heard the news. "I'd go without office before I would have my father do things in that barefaced way. And as for those who are willing to accept pay for their votes, they ought to be heartily ashamed of themselves."

"Never mind," said Mr. Randolph, soothingly. "There is no need that a young man in your circumstances should go into the army as private, and I don't mean that you shall do it. I'll make it my business to call on the governor and see if he can't find a berth for you."

"But remember that it must be a military appointment," said Tom. "No clerkship or anything of that sort for me."

While the Rangers were working hard to get themselves in shape for the field, Captain Hubbard and his lieutenants had received their commissions and been duly sworn into the State militia. Nothing was said, however, about swearing in the company, and when Captain Hubbard called the governor's attention to the omission the latter replied:

"General Lacey is the man to look after such matters as that. He's in New Orleans and you may be ordered to report to him there."

"How about our uniforms?" asked the captain.

"Do as you please about uniforms so long as you conform to the army regulations. Of course your arms and equipments will be furnished you, and the government will allow you sixty cents a day for the use of your horses."

The most of the Rangers thought this was all right, and Captain Hubbard at once called a business meeting of the company to decide upon the uniform they would wear when they went to New Orleans to be sworn in; but there was one among them who did not take much interest in the proceedings. He did not say a great deal during the meeting, but when he went home that night he remarked to his father:

"This partisan business is a humbug so far as this State is concerned."

"What makes you say that?" inquired Mr. Gray.

"Just this," answered Rodney. "Why didn't the governor swear us in himself instead of telling us that we must wait for General Lacey to do it? The General is a Confederate, not a State officer, and when he musters us in it will be into the Confederate service."

This was not a pleasing prospect for the restless, ambitious young fellow, who had confidently looked for something better, but he had gone too far to back out. He had told his comrades that he intended to share their fortunes, whatever they might be, and this was the time to make good his words. If he had worked his men hard before, he worked them harder now, devoting extra time and attention to the officers in order to get them in shape to command the grand drill and dress parade that was to come off as soon as their uniforms arrived.

In the meantime outside events were not overlooked. Everything pointed to war, and news from all parts of the Confederacy bore evidence to the fact that the seceded States were preparing for it,

while the people of the North stood with their hands in their pockets and looked on. Finally the long-delayed explosion came, and the country was in an uproar from one end to the other. Fort Sumter was fired upon and compelled to surrender – fifty-one men against five thousand – and the Rangers shook hands and patted one another on the back and declared that that was the way they would serve the Yankees every time they met them. Then came President Lincoln's War Proclamation, followed by the accession of four States to the Confederacy, the blockade of the Southern sea-ports and President Davis's offer to issue letters of marque and reprisal. All this while the mails were regularly received, and Rodney Gray heard from every one of the Barrington boys who had promised to enlist within twenty-four hours after they reached home. They had all kept that promise except Dixon, the tall Kentuckian, and he was getting ready as fast as he could.

"I have been between a hoot and a whistle ever since I have been home," was what he wrote to Rodney Gray. "The State was divided against itself, and I couldn't tell until the 15th, (April) which way she was going; but now I know. When the Yankee President called for those seventy-five thousand volunteers our Governor replied: 'I say emphatically that Kentucky will furnish no troops for the wicked purpose of subjugating her sister Southern States. As Dick Graham used to say, 'That's me.' I go with the government of my State. Now, then, what have you done? I shall write the rest of the fellows to-day."

Billings, the South Carolina boy, reached home too late to take part in the bombardment of Fort Sumter. and he told Rodney that he was very sorry for it. Every one of the gallant five thousand who had fought for thirty-four hours to compel a handful of tired and hungry men to haul down their flag was looked upon as a hero, and Billings said he might have been a hero too, if he had only had sense enough to leave school a month earlier. But he was all right now. He was a Confederate soldier and ready to do and dare with the best of them.

Dick Graham, whose home you will remember was in Missouri, wrote in much the same strain that Dixon did. His State was in such a turmoil and seemed to be so evenly divided between Union and disunion, that Dick could not tell which way she was going until he saw Governor Jackson's answer to Lincoln's call for volunteers. "There can be, I apprehend, no doubt that these men are intended to make war upon the seceded States," said the Governor. "Your requisition, in my judgment, is illegal, unconstitutional and revolutionary in its objects, inhuman and diabolical and cannot be complied with. Not one man will the State of Missouri furnish to carry on such an unholy crusade."

"When I read those burning words," Dick wrote, with enthusiasm, "my mind was made up and I knew where I stood. I expected some such move on the Governors part, for when he came into office in January, he declared that Missouri must stand by the other slave States whatever course they might pursue. I kept my promise and enlisted in a company of partisans raised under the terms of the Military Bill, which makes every able-bodied man in the State subject to military duty. Price is our immediate commander, but we were required to take the oath to obey the Governor alone."

"There, now," exclaimed Rodney, when he read this. "What's the reason our Governor can't swear the Rangers in as well as the Governor of Missouri can swear his troops in? I believe he could if there wasn't something back of it."

"What do you think there is back of it?" inquired his father.

"I can't imagine, unless there is some sort of an arrangement existing between him and the Confederate authorities at New Orleans," replied Rodney. "The Governor lets on that he is strongly in favor of independent organizations, but he don't act as if he was."

Rodney showed Dick's letter to Captain Hubbard, who posted off to Baton Rouge with, it; but he got no satisfaction there. There had been no such Military Bill passed in Louisiana, the Governor said, and there was no need of it, the situation there and in Missouri was so different. The latter State was exposed to "invasion" (by which he meant that Captain Lyon's small company of regulars was likely to be reinforced), but Louisiana was so protected on all sides that Lincoln's hirelings could not get at her if they tried.

"Then he wouldn't assume control of the company?" said Rodney.

"No, he wouldn't. I had a personal interview with him at his own house and did some of my best talking; but it was no use. He was non-committal – that was the worst of it, and I – Say," added the captain, in an undertone, "I have sorter suspected that he meant to turn us over to the Confederacy."

"That's what I have thought for a good while," said Rodney.

"Yes," continued the captain. "So I thought I might as well give him to understand that we were not going to allow ourselves to be turned over as long as we remained free men. I showed him your friend's letter, and hinted pretty strongly that if we could not swear obedience to the Governor of our own State, the Governor of another State might be willing to accept us, and you ought to have seen him open his eyes."

"What did he say?"

"He said he hoped that I wouldn't think of doing such a thing as that, but if I did, he would have to revoke my commission."

"Who cares if he does?" exclaimed Rodney. "Let him revoke it if he wants to, and you can get another from Governor Jackson."

"That's what I thought. Now, I'll tell you what we'll do – at least we'll hold a secret meeting after drill and propose it to the boys. Suppose you telegraph to your chum's father – you know where to find him and you don't know where to find Dick Graham and ask him if General Price will accept our services, leaving us our independent organization, provided we will take the oath to obey the Governor of Missouri."

"I'll do it," answered Rodney. "And if you will postpone the drill for half an hour I will ride into town and attend to it at once. It's the only thing we can do and keep out of the Confederate army. Dog-gone the Confederacy. The State is the one I want to serve."

Rodney rode into Mooreville at a gallop, wrote out the dispatch and stood at the desk while Drummond, the operator, sent it off. Although the latter looked surprised he did not say anything; but while Rodney was on his way back to camp, a copy of his dispatch was on its way to Baton Rouge.

In accordance with Captain Hubbard's programme a secret meeting of the company was held after the drill was over, but it turned out that the members were not so strongly in favor of the captain's plan as he and Rodney thought they were going to be. While the Rangers fully determined to preserve their independent organization, they were not willing to give their services to the governor of another State. There was a dead-lock developed at once; and it was finally decided that the best thing they could do would be to adjourn until Rodney had received a reply to his dispatch. Perhaps General Price would not take them, and that would end the matter. If he would, why then, they could call another meeting and decide what they would do about it.

The next day their uniforms came up from New Orleans, and on the afternoon of the day following there was a grand drill and dress parade commanded by Captain Hubbard in person. The spectators, if we except the Randolph family, were delighted with it, and Rodney told his father privately that he had seen many a worse one at the Barrington Academy. Rodney didn't want to say so out loud, of course, for he was the drill-master; but it was not long before he discovered that the Rangers knew whom to thank for their proficiency, and that they fully appreciated the patient and untiring efforts he had made to bring them into military form. When the ranks had been broken after dress parade, and the Rangers and their invited guests thronged into the grove behind the tents to make an assault upon the well-loaded tables they found there, the deputy sheriff, the man with the stentorian voice, who was a private in the company, sprang upon the band-stand, commanded attention, and afterward shouted for Sergeant Rodney Gray to come forward. As the boy wonderingly obeyed, the Rangers and their guests closed about the stand and hemmed it in on all sides. Captain Hubbard had taken up a position there, and when Rodney halted in front of him and took off his cap, the latter began a speech, thanking the young sergeant for what he had done for the company, and begging him to accept a small token of their respect and esteem.

"Take it, friend Rodney," said the captain, in conclusion. "Keep it to remind you of the pure gold of our friendship which shall never know alloy. And while we sincerely trust that it may never be drawn except upon peaceful occasions of ceremony, we are sure you will not permit it to remain idle in its scabbard while the flag of our Young Republic is in danger, or your good right arm retains the power to wield it."

The captain stepped back, and the thoroughly astonished Rodney stood holding in his hands an elegant cavalry sabre. He stared hard at it, and then he looked at the expectant crowd around the band-stand.

"Speech, speech!" yelled the Rangers.

But the usually self-possessed Barrington boy was past speech-making now. He managed to mumble a few words of thanks, got to the ground somehow and mingled with the crowd as quickly as possible.

"How very surprised he is," sneered Tom Randolph, who told himself regretfully that a sword like that might have been presented to him if he had only remained with the company. "I will bet my horse against his that he knew a week ago that he was going to get it."

Rodney waited four days before he received a reply to the dispatch he sent to Dick Graham's father, and seeing that the authorities had assumed control of the wires, and the operator at Mooreville was a government spy, it was rather singular that he got it at all. It ran as follows:

"Price will accept. Company officers and independent organization to remain the same."

"I tell you Missouri is the best State yet," said Rodney, handing the telegram over to Captain Hubbard. "This brings the matter squarely home to the boys, and they've got to decide upon something this very night."

And they did, but it was only after a stormy and even heated discussion. The captain and Rodney carried their point but it was by a very small majority of votes; and the former, believing it advisable to strike while the iron was hot, took one of his lieutenants and started for New Orleans to engage passage for his company to Little Rock. It was at this juncture that Rodney wrote that letter to his cousin Marcy Gray, a portion of which we gave to the reader in the first volume of this series. You will remember that he spoke with enthusiasm of the "high old times" he expected to have "running the Yankees out of Missouri." Well, he had all the opportunities he wanted, but they were not brought about just as he thought they were going to be.

The captain and his lieutenant were gone two days, and came back to report that the steamers were all so busy with government business that it would be a week or more before they could get transportation; but the captain had left instructions with his cotton-factor who would keep his eyes open, and telegraph him when to expect a boat at Baton Rouge landing. In the meantime the harder they worked the less they would have to learn when they reached the Army of the West. That very afternoon they had a great surprise. The Rangers were going through a mounted drill, acquitting themselves very creditably they thought, when some one in the ranks became aware that they had a distinguished visitor in the person of the Governor of the State, who sat in a carriage looking on. Beside him was a little, dried-up, cross-looking man in fatigue cap and soiled linen duster, who kept making loud and unfavorable comments upon the drill, although he did not look as though he knew anything about it. As soon as Captain Hubbard learned that the Governor was among the spectators, he brought the Rangers into line and rode up to the carriage and saluted.

"Well, captain," said the Governor, nodding in response to the salute. "I am glad to see that you are hard at work and that your men are rapidly improving. Have you a copy of your muster-roll handy?"

The captain replied that he had and the Governor continued —

"Then be good enough to produce it and hand it to this officer who will muster you in. I am not going to let such a body of men as you are go out of the State if I can help it."

"Shall I dismount the men, sir?" asked the captain, addressing the cross-looking little man, who arose to his feet and shook himself together as if he were getting ready for business.

"No," was the surly reply. "We'll drive up in front of the company and I can call the roll while standing in the carriage. It'll not take ten minutes and then you can go on with your drill. I see you need it bad enough."

Captain Hubbard, who was so angry that he forgot to salute, wheeled his horse and rode back to the company.

"Orderly," said he, in an undertone. "Get a copy of your muster-roll and give it to that old curmudgeon in the carriage. He's going to try to muster us in but I doubt if he knows enough. I am glad to see him, however, for when he gets through with us, we shall know right where we stand."

CHAPTER IV

A SCHEME THAT DIDN'T WORK

"Say," exclaimed Rodney Gray excitedly, as Captain Hubbard took his place on the right of the company and the orderly galloped off to his tent. "Who is that old party in the Governor's carriage?"

"You can't prove it by me," answered the captain. "I never saw him before, but I know he's a mighty cross-grained old chap."

"May I leave the ranks a minute?" continued Rodney.

"Of course not. What would the Governor think?"

"I don't care a picayune what he thinks," replied Rodney, his excitement increasing as the Governor's carriage began to circle around toward the front and center of the company. "If that man in the fatigue cap and duster isn't General Lacey, all the descriptions I have heard of him are very much at fault."

"And do you really believe," began the captain, who was profoundly astonished.

"I don't believe, I know that he means to muster us into the Confederate service," interrupted Rodney. "Hold on a minute before you do a thing or let a man answer to his name. My father knows him by sight."

Without again asking permission to leave his place, Rodney put his horse in motion and rode over to the tree under whose friendly shade Mr. Gray was sitting while he watched the drill.

"Father," said he, speaking rapidly and panting as if he had been running instead of riding, "who is that in the carriage with the Governor? Is it General Lacey?"

Mr. Gray nodded and looked up at his son as if to ask him what he was going to do about it.

"Well, he has come here to muster us in, and the orderly has gone after the roll-book," continued Rodney. "The general is a Confederate officer, and if we let him muster us in, he will make Confederate soldiers of us, won't he?"

"That's the way it looks from where I sit," answered Mr. Gray.

"It's the way it looks from where I sit too, and I just won't have any such trick played upon me," said Rodney, hotly. "I know what I want and what I want to do; and as long as I am a free man, nobody shall make me do anything else."

"Are you going to back out?"

"I am. I'll not answer to my name when it is called. I'll go back and put the other fellows on their guard, and then I'll fall out."

So saying Rodney wheeled his horse and returned to his company, which he found in a state of great excitement. The ranks were kept pretty well aligned (the horses knew enough to look out for that now), but the men were twisting about in their saddles, each one comparing notes with every one else whose ears he could reach. When Rodney rode up they all turned to look at him and listen to his report, regardless of the fact that the little man in the brown ulster was standing up in the Governor's carriage shouting "Attention!" at the top of his wheezy little voice.

"Mind what you are doing, boys," said Rodney, as he rode slowly along the line behind the rear rank. "That's General Lacey. Don't answer to your names unless you want to be sworn into the Confederate service."

"But what shall we do?" inquired one or two of the timid members, who thought they might be obliged to answer whether they wanted to or not.

"Keep mum and say nothing," replied Rodney. "Watch me and do as I do. My name is second on the roll."

"Are you ever going to come to attention so that I can get through with my business and go back where I belong?" yelled the general, as soon as he could make himself heard. "A pretty lot of

soldiers you are; but I warn you that you will have to mind better than this when you reach the camp of instruction, to which I shall immediately order you. Attention to roll-call! George Warren!"

"He – er – here!" replied the orderly, hesitatingly.

The Rangers were amazed, and Captain Hubbard glared at the frightened sergeant as though he had half a mind to knock him out of his saddle. The captain had told the man in the most emphatic language not to answer to his name, and yet he had gone and given away his liberty for the next twelve months. It served him right for being so stupid.

"You blockheads don't seem to understand what I want and what I am trying to do," shouted the general, wrathfully. "All you who volunteer for the Confederate service answer to your names, and speak up so that I can hear you. I hope that is sufficiently plain. *George Warren!*"

The Rangers, one and all, drew a long breath of relief and felt like giving a hearty cheer. Their comrade had most unexpectedly been allowed a chance for escape, and he was sharp enough to take advantage of it. He kept his eyes straight to the front and said nothing. The general looked surprised, but as he was in a great hurry he passed on to the next.

"Rodney Gray!"

This time there was no mistaking the answer. The sergeant moved from his place on the left of the line, rode to the center of the company, came to a front and saluted. The general opened his lips to tell him that he needn't come to the front and center in order to answer to his name, but the Barrington boy was too quick for him.

"General," said he, while all the Rangers strained their ears to catch his words. "I am ready at any time to be sworn into the service of my State, but I do not wish to join the Confederate army. I am a Partisan Ranger."

"A – a —*what?*" vociferated the general, now thoroughly aroused. He was a Mexican veteran, a thorough soldier as well as a martinet, and he had never learned to recognize any organizations outside of the regular service.

"A Partisan Ranger," repeated Rodney, who was neither embarrassed nor angered by the covert sneer contained in the general's words.

"A Ranger!" exclaimed the general, raising his hands in the air and turning his eyes toward the clouds. "Shade of the great and good Washington! what are we coming to? A partisan! And are you all partisans?"

"Yes sir, we are; and until very recently we have been encouraged to believe that we could preserve our independent organization."

"You were, eh? Then you had better organize yourselves into Home Guards at once and I will go back to New Orleans. Partisan Rangers!" said the general, who seemed unable to get the obnoxious words out of his mind. "There's your roll-book. Drive on, coachman."

The general flung the book on the ground at the feet of Rodney's horse, threw himself back in his seat and the carriage moved rapidly away. The Rangers sat motionless in their saddles until it passed through the gate and disappeared behind the trees in the grove, and then they turned and looked at one another.

"We know where we stand now at all events," said Captain Hubbard, riding up in front of the line, and throwing his right leg over the horn of his saddle in a position most unbecoming a commanding officer. "My commission will be taken from me, and you fellows will be reduced to plain, every-day citizens once more. We might as well quit this nonsense now, and I say, let's pack up and go home."

"I'll go, but I'll not promise to stay there," said Rodney.

"Where will you go?"

"Up to Missouri. I have set my heart on being a partisan, and if my own State won't take me, I have a perfect right to offer my valuable services to another. I shall start for Baton Rouge to-morrow, and I and my horse will take passage on the first St. Louis boat that comes along."

"Hear, hear!" shouted some of the Rangers.

"Let's go in a body," said one. "We have the assurance that our services will be accepted, that the officers we have elected will be retained, that our plan of organization will not be interfered with, and what more could we ask for?"

"That won't suit me," another declared. "I don't want to leave my State."

"How are you going to help yourself?" demanded Rodney. "If you join the Confederate army you are liable to be ordered up to Virginia or down to Florida. And you know as well as I do what the people around here will think of you if you make up your mind to stay at home."

"Let's take the sense of the company on it," suggested Lieutenant Percy.

"All right," answered the captain. "Put the thing in the form of a motion and I will."

This was quickly done, and to Rodney's great disappointment, though not much to his surprise, the proposition was defeated by a large majority. The Rangers were opposed to deserting their State in a body and going into another.

"I'll not stay at home, and that's all there is about it," said one of the Rangers who had voted with the minority. "Does anybody here know what course we *do* want to pursue? I have my doubts; and in order to test the matter I move you, Mr. Commander, that we offer ourselves as a company to the Confederate States."

The motion was received with such a howl of dissent that if there was a second to it the captain did not hear it. Some of the Rangers, to show what they thought of the proposition, backed their horses out of the ranks and rode away. Among them was Rodney, who returned to the tree under which his father was sitting.

"Isn't it rather unusual for a cavalry company to hold a business meeting on horseback?" inquired the latter, as the boy swung himself from his saddle. "There seems to be a big difference of opinion among the members, and you look as though things hadn't gone to suit you. What have you decided to do?"

"Nothing as a company," replied Rodney. "In fact we are not a company any longer. It is every one for himself now."

"What do you mean by that? Have you disbanded?"

Rodney explained the situation in a few words, adding that he thought he might as well be riding toward home so as to spend all the time he could with his mother, for he was going away bright and early on the following morning. Mr. Gray looked very sober and thoughtful when he heard these words.

"I'd rather you would stay at home," said he.

"And I would much prefer to stay, but I will not go into the service of the Confederacy. This State is an independent Commonwealth now, and is entitled to, and has a right to demand the best service I can give her; but who cares for the Confederacy? I think less of it than I did this morning, for one of its officers tried to rope us in without our consent."

That was Rodney's first experience with the duplicity and utter lack of fair dealing that characterized all the actions of the Confederate authorities, but it was by no means the last. We shall speak of this again when we see him coming down the Arkansas River, bound for the Army of the Center, a Confederate soldier in spite of himself.

Having given his comrades plenty of time to vote upon the last proposition submitted to them that they should offer themselves as a company to the Confederate States Rodney got upon his horse again and rode back to see if they had determined upon any particular course of action, but from all he could learn the matter was far from being settled. Some wanted to do one thing and some were in favor of doing another; but finding at last that they could not agree, they began drawing away by twos and threes, and finally Rodney Gray was left alone with the commissioned officers.

"I am at my wit's end," declared Captain Hubbard, whose face wore a most dejected look. "We don't want to remain at home, and neither do we desire to put ourselves under the control of such a

man as General Lacey; but there's nothing else we can do, unless we go up to Missouri. Were you really in earnest when you said you intended to start off tomorrow?" he added, addressing himself to Rodney. "Your decision was made on the spur of the moment, wasn't it?"

"Well, no. I made up my mind some time ago that there was going to be a hitch of some sort in our arrangements, and laid my plans accordingly."

"How are you going to work it to reach Price's army?" inquired Lieutenant Percy. "Don't you know that there have been rioting and bloodshed in St. Louis, and that the Dutchmen have got control of the city?"

"Of course; but that's all over now. I shall telegraph to Dick Graham's father that I am coming, and trust to luck when I reach St. Louis. Perhaps he can make it convenient to meet me there; if not, I have a tongue in my head and a good horse to ride, and I have no fears but that I shall get through."

"Well, I'll tell you what's a fact," said Lieutenant Odell. "You can go alone for all of me. There's altogether too much danger in the step. You'll never get through the lines without a pass, and how are you going to get it? The first thing you know you will be arrested and shoved into jail."

"I have thought of that," answered Rodney, calmly, "but I'll take my chances on it. It's go there or stay home, and I have decided to go. Good-by, if I don't see you again, and if you hear any of the boys say that they would like to go with me, send them up to the house."

This was said in the most matter of fact way, as if Rodney were going to ride to Baton Rouge one day and come back the next; but they all knew that the parting was for a longer time than that, and each officer thrust his hand into his pocket to find something that would do for a keepsake. Odell handed over a big jack-knife with the remark that the sergeant might find it useful in cutting bacon or breaking up his hard-tack, so that he could crumb it into his coffee. Percy gave him a ring which he drew from his own finger, and the captain presented him with a twenty-dollar gold piece. Then they shook hands with him once more and saw him ride away.

"It's like parting from a younger brother," said the captain, sorrowfully. "I don't see how his father can let him go. But he's got nerve enough to carry him through any scrape he is likely to get into, and besides he is going among friends."

"But he's got the enemy's lines to pass before he can get among friends, and that's one thing that worries me," observed the first lieutenant. "What a determined fellow he is. He ought to make a good soldier."

"Didn't I tell you that that company of Rangers would never amount to a row of pins?" exclaimed Tom Randolph, when the members rode straggling into town that afternoon, and reported that their organization had been knocked into a cocked hat by General Lacey's attempt to muster it into the service of the Confederacy. "I knew by the way the election went that it would bust up sooner or later, and I am heartily glad of it. Now they've got to go into the army, and if I get the second lieutenant's commission I am working for, perhaps I shall be placed over some of the fellows who voted against me. So Gray is going to Missouri, is he? Good riddance. He'll have to go in as private, and that will bring him down a peg or two."

Yes, Rodney calculated to go in as private if he got in at all, but the prospect did not in the least dampen his ardor. Contrary to his expectations his mother did not say one word to turn him from his purpose; but good Southerner that she was, she heartily condemned the circumstances which, according to her way of thinking, made the parting necessary.

"I wish the *Mayflower* had been sunk fathoms deep in the ocean before she ever touched Plymouth Rock," she said to her husband. "The spirit of intolerance those Puritans brought over here with them is what is taking our boy from us now. No punishment that I can think of would be too severe for them."

Rodney lived in hopes that some of the company would ride out to see him during the course of the evening, but midnight came without bringing any of them, and the disappointed Barrington boy, giving his mother the last good-night kiss he imprinted upon her lips for more than fifteen long

months, went to bed satisfied that he was to be left to work out his own destiny, with no Mooreville friend to encourage or advise him. He slept but little, but appeared at the breakfast table as fresh as a daisy and – dressed in citizen's clothing.

"This is a pill I don't like to swallow," said he, opening his coat and looking down at himself. "I said I wouldn't take off my gray uniform until the South had gained her independence; but I didn't know at the time that I would find it necessary to pass through the enemy's lines. Don't look so sober, mother. I just know I shall come out all right. I'll surely write when I reach St. Louis, and again the very day I find Dick Graham."

That was not a cheerful breakfast table, although every one tried to make it so. Before the meal was half over the family carriage, with Rodney's small trunk inside and his horse hitched behind, drew up at the door, and a crowd of weeping servants gathered about the foot of the wide stone steps to bid "young moster" good-by. Rodney saw it all through the window, and when he got ready to start stood not on the order of going, but cut short the parting and went at once. He arose from his chair before he had finished his second cup of coffee, put on his hat and light overcoat and turned toward his mother.

"Good-by, my dear boy," she said, in tones so firm and cheerful that Rodney was astonished. "Whatever fate may have in store for me, I hope I shall never hear that you failed to do your duty as a soldier."

There were no tears in her eyes – she was past that now – but didn't she suffer?

"The mother who conceals her grief
While to her breast her son she presses,
Then breathes a few brave words and brief
Kissing the patriot brow she blesses,
With no one but her secret God
To know the pain that weighs upon her —
Sheds holy blood as e'er the sod
Received on Freedom's field of honor!"

How many such partings there were all over this fair land of ours, brought about by the ambition of demagogues so few in number that we can count them on our fingers!

Rodney's heart was so full that he could not reply to his mother's brave words. Now that the test had come he found that he had less fortitude than she had. He gave her one kiss, gently disengaged himself from her clinging arms and bolted for the door.

"De good Lawd bless young moster an' bring him safe back," cried the tearful blacks, when he appeared at the top of the steps. "Dem babolitionists aint got no call to come down here an' take him away from us. We-uns never done nuffin' to dem."

"That's just what I say," answered Rodney. "And I am going to help lick them for bringing on this trouble when we wanted peace. Good-by, one and all. I'll be back as soon as we have run the Yankees out of Missouri, and that will not take more than two or three months."

Rodney tried to get into the carriage, but the black hands that were extended to him from every side barred his way, and much against his will he was obliged to linger long enough to give each of them a hasty grasp and shake. The only one who stood aloof was the black boy who had been Rodney's playmate when the two wore pinafores, and he leaned against the corner of the house and howled piteously. Rodney felt relieved when the coachman banged the door of the carriage and mounted to his seat and drove off. His only traveling companion was his father, who intended to remain in Baton Rouge until he had seen the boy start on his way up the river.

It was dark when they reached the city, and after Rodney's horse and his trappings had been left at a stable (civilian trappings they were too, for Rodney was afraid that a military saddle and bridle

would attract attention and lead to inquiries that he might not care to answer), the coachman drove them to the house of a friend where they were to find entertainment until a St. Louis boat appeared.

"I am glad you did not go to a hotel," said their host, when he had given them a cordial welcome. "I heard last night that your entire company was going up the river, and that the authorities were thinking strongly of putting the last one of you under arrest."

Rodney and his father were speechless with astonishment.

"What business would they have to put us in arrest?" exclaimed the former, as soon as he found his tongue.

"How did the authorities learn that the Rangers had any notion of going up the river?" asked Mr. Gray.

"I am sure I don't know," answered the host. "But it was currently reported on the street yesterday afternoon that the Mooreville company had mutinied, and that the Baton Rouge Rifles might have to go out there and bring them to a sense of their duty."

"Well, if that isn't the most outrageous falsehood that was ever circulated about a lot of honest men I wouldn't say so," exclaimed Rodney, who had never in his life been more amazed. "We didn't mutiny. We simply refused to be sworn into the service of the Confederate States, and that was something we had a right to do. I will tell you how that story got abroad," he added, suddenly. "There's some one in Mooreville who wants to get us into trouble, and I think I know who it is."

At this moment the door was softly opened and a darkey put his head into the room to announce:

"Da's a gentleman in de back pa'lor wants to see Moster Rodney."

CHAPTER V

A WARNING

"A gentleman to see me?" repeated Rodney, his surprise and indignation giving place to a feeling of uneasiness. "Who is he? What's his name?"

"I dunno, sah," replied the servant. "I never seen him round here afore."

Wondering who the visitor could be and how he knew where to find him, seeing that he and his father had not been in that house more than half an hour, the Harrington boy arose and followed the servant into the back parlor. Whom he expected to meet when he got there it is hard to tell, but it is certain that he felt greatly relieved when he found that the visitor was a Mooreville boy – a "student" in the telegraph office. His uneasy feelings vanished at once only to return with redoubled force when Griffin – that was the visitor's name – said in a loud, earnest whisper:

"Shut the door tight and come up close so that you can hear every word I say. I am liable to get myself into the worst kind of a scrape by trying to befriend you."

"The door is all right, and besides there are no eavesdroppers in this house," answered Rodney. "What in the world is the matter, and why are you likely to get yourself into trouble by coming here?"

"Have you heard anything since you have been in town?" asked Griffin, in reply. "I don't suppose any one will bother you, seeing that you are alone, but if your whole company had tried to go, you might have been stopped. If you hadn't, it wouldn't have been Randolph's fault."

"There now," thought Rodney. "I said there was some one in Mooreville who wanted to get us into trouble, and Tom Randolph was the very fellow who came into my mind."

But he said nothing aloud. How did he know that young Randolph was the only enemy he had in Mooreville? He looked hard at Griffin and dropped into the nearest chair.

"Randolph is down on everybody who voted against him for second lieutenant," continued Griffin, "and he declared when he came home after the election that he would break up that company of Rangers if he could find any way to do it."

"He laid out a pretty big job for himself," said Rodney, when his visitor paused. "How did he think he would go to work to accomplish it?"

"Any way and every way. He didn't care so long as he broke it up. You can't imagine how tickled he was when he heard that you had mutinied and refused to be sworn in."

"Did Randolph start that ridiculous story about the mutiny?" inquired Rodney.

"I don't know whether he set it going or not, but he helped it along all he could and had a good deal to say about it," answered Griffin. "Yesterday afternoon I was in the office when he came in and wrote a dispatch to the Governor; and as I have got so that I can read by sound, I had no trouble in spelling it out when Drummond the operator sent it off. I always do that for practice. Between you and me that Drummond is a fellow who ought to be booted out of that position. He's just too mean to be of any use."

"What was in the dispatch?" asked Rodney.

"It contained the information that the Rangers had mutinied and were about to leave the State in a body."

"That was a lie and Randolph knew it," said Rodney, hotly. "But even if we had decided to leave the State in a body, is there any law to prevent it? Such a thing was proposed, but it was voted down by a big majority, and that is why I am obliged to go alone."

"And that brings me to what I want to tell you," said the operator. "I didn't pay very much attention to that dispatch, although Drummond said that if you tried to go up the river you ought to be chucked into the calaboose, the last one of you; but when Randolph came in again that evening

and sent off another dispatch that was all about *you*, I began to open my ears and think it was time I was giving you a hint."

"What could he have to say about me? It wasn't I who defeated him for second lieutenant."

"No, but you voted against him, and the company gave you the position you wanted without making any fuss about it, and presented you with a splendid sword, and all those things made Randolph pretty middling mad, I can tell you."

"Did he tell the Governor in his second dispatch that I was getting ready to leave the State, and that he had better be on the lookout to stop me?"

"Eh? No. He didn't send the second dispatch to the Governor. He sent it to his father's cotton-factor in St. Louis, who is a Yank so blue that the blue will rub off."

"The – mischief – he – did!" exclaimed Rodney, who began to feel blue himself even if he didn't look so. "And what did he have to say to that Yankee about me?"

"He told him to watch the steamboats for a Confederate bearer of dispatches – a young fellow, dark complexioned, slight mustache, dressed in citizen's clothes and a roan colt for company."

"It is his intention to have me arrested the minute I get into St. Louis, is it?" cried Rodney, getting upon his feet and moving about the room with long, angry strides.

"It looked that way to me, and that's why I am here," replied Griffin.

"I appreciate your friendship, and assure you that I shall always bear it in mind," said Rodney, stopping long enough to give the operator's hand a cordial gripe and shake.

"That's all right," said the latter. "I haven't forgotten the winter when I was down with the chills and couldn't work, and that mortgage of ours liked to have worried my mother into a sick bed –"

"That's all right too," Rodney interposed. "I was at school and had nothing whatever to do with it."

"No, but your father had something to do with it, and it's all in the family. I know it is Randolph's intention to get you into trouble with the Yankees if he can, for I heard him tell Drummond so. And he couldn't have taken a better way or a better time to do it," continued Griffin. "If all reports are true, things are in a bad way in St. Louis. You know there are a good many Dutchmen there, and they are mostly strong for the Union. During one of the riots they fired into their own ranks instead of into the mob, and that made them so wild with rage that they are ready to hang every Confederate they can get their hands on, without judge or jury."

"A bearer of dispatches," repeated Rodney, once more seating himself in his chair. "And did Drummond send off that telegram when he knew there wasn't a word of truth in it?"

"Course. Don't I tell you that he's too mean for any use? He and Randolph are and always have been cronies, and I heard them talking and laughing over the dispatches as though they thought they were going to get a big joke on you."

"What other thing has Drummond done that's mean?" inquired Rodney.

"Let's talk about something else," replied Griffin, evasively.

"Just as you please," answered the Barrington boy. "But I shouldn't think you would take the trouble to come to Baton Rouge and run the risk of losing your position in the telegraph office, unless you are willing to trust me entirely. I asked for information and not out of curiosity. If Drummond attempts any foolishness with you, my father may be able to checkmate him."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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