

A Prophecy

By CAROL H. PIERCE

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When the civil war was coming on Enoch Armsby, a Connecticut Yankee, who had taken it into his head to run a plantation on the Mississippi river some twenty miles south of Vicksburg, found himself a northern man with southern interests. Despite the differences between him and his neighbors they didn't drive him out. His son, Zeke, who had lived in the south longer than in the north, enlisted in the Confederate army, and this disposed the southerners more than ever to let the father alone.

Enoch Armsby told his southern friends that there were reasons why the north would prevail.

"I guess," he said, "nothin' can stand against the south for fightin', but it isn't fightin' that's goin' to win. The northern people are full of resources. When they come down here you'll find that they will convert a ferryboat into a man-of-war, build bridges with cotton bales, and when they capture one o' your railroads they'll git out a time table and run it nearer the schedule than you fellers can do it in time of peace."

"I reckon one southerner can whip five Yankees," would be the reply.

"S'posin' they do, S'posin' they kill three out o' the five Yankees and make prisoners of the other two. The two they don't kill will invent some way o' gittin' out o' jail and go on fightin'. They will be joined by three more Yankees and be as strong as ever. That'll go right on."

The Federal forces slowly made their way down the river and in time the great event of the war in that region, the siege of Vicksburg, began. Zeke Armsby participated in the fighting that took place in the rear of that city, was captured and confined with a lot of Confederate prisoners of war in a manufactory of undertakers' supplies. When the news reached his father the neighbors said:

"Mr. Armsby, reckon yer son 'll have a chance to show that Yankee ingenuity yo' been braggin' about now. Reckon he'll find a way fo' gettin' out."

"I guess Zeke 'll git out if any one can."

"How's he goin' to do it? That factory is on a point o' land stickin' out into the river. There's a high wall on one side and water on the other. The Yanks haln't such fools as to give their prisoners boats, are they?"

"I guess not," the father admitted.

"Well, we'll see what Yankee ingenuity 'll do. There's several hundred southerners in that building, and if one northerner invents a way to git out we'll give up the point about the superiority of yo' people."

One morning one of Mr. Armsby's neighbors stood on the bank looking up the river, shading his eyes with his hands. Another person saw him, and, having nothing to do, walked slowly out to see what the first was looking at. Another and another joined the party, and finally Armsby himself appeared.

"Some'n quarr?" asked one of the party.

"Powerful quarr. I'd reckon it was driftwood, only fo' some'n shinin' on it. Thar—did yo' see the flash?"

Every one saw it and wondered. The driftwood or whatever it was came rapidly nearer, for the current of the Mississippi is by no means slow, and as the thing approached many were the comments made upon it. Some said it was a log that had been squared, some that it was an oblong box, while others noticed that it was smaller at each end than in the middle. As it rolled something, either glass or metal, occasionally caught the rays of the sun and sent out a flash.

"By gum, it's a coffin!" exclaimed one of the watchers.

"A coffin?" exclaimed the others.

"What can a coffin be doin' sailin' down the river?"

"It is a coffin, sho'."

While these remarks were being made the coffin—for such it was—was approaching the bank on which the party was standing.

"There must be a co'pse in it," remarked one, "or it would roll over."

"That thing that reflects the light is the plate."

The coffin floated by, and as it did so the upper part of the lid was lifted off by the said corpse, and a pale face rose and looked at the party with frightening effect.

"By Jing," exclaimed Armsby, "its my boy Zeke!"

"Reckon," said several others.

"Dad," cried the young man, "come out in a boat and git me. I haven't got no onra."

Armsby ran downstream to where a boat was tied, rowed out to the coffin and towed it ashore. Then Zeke told them that in the undertaker's supply manufactory (his prison) he had discovered a pile of coffins. He had launched himself in one of them before daylight.

"Feller citizens," spoke up one of the party, "we'll never conquer sich people as that as long as God Almighty lives."

A conference was held, and it was decided that the people of the county be recommended to have nothing to do with the war. They felt assured that a people who would use coffins for boats instead of burying corpses would be found invincible. Enoch Armsby simply said, "I told you so," and when the Confederacy collapsed became the most influential planter in those parts.

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