

Albany Register.

BLUE AND GREY;
A STORY OF THE LATE WAR.

BY A DETROIT REPORTER.

Were there a hundred veterans in the Army of the Potomac who never marched through Winchester, Virginia?

One doubts it when the records of war tell him that the town was captured twenty-three times during the war. It was "Yank" one month, "Johnny" the next, and the inhabitants got so at last that they dared not pronounce for either side, they claimed to be neutral, and only asked the soldiers in blue or the soldiers in gray to let their chickens alone.

If the last year of war didn't sweep it away, and fire has spared it yet, there stands an old brown farm-house on the north road, about a mile outside of the town. It's a quaint old house, with a front yard filled with cherry trees, and a lot of mulberry trees growing up and shading the south end of the house. It is a cosy place for two old white-haired parents to sit on the front veranda and rock and doze in the sunshine, while a strong-armed son whistles cheerily among the growing crops.

I saw it thus once, and I saw it afterwards when the storm of war swept over and around it, staining the green grass to a red, and when passionate men and fiery horses swept through the fields and dashed at each other as the black smoke lifted for a moment.

One day in the spring of 1862 the dispatches said that the Confederates had been driven out of Winchester and that the Union forces held possession. I was not with the victorious party; but a few days after, when the Confederates came back so close that they held half of the town and the Union forces the other half, I went down with half a regiment of cavalry and a few battalions of infantry to hold the ground.

Army operations had hardly commenced for the spring, and the Confederates were determined to hold the line of communication open as long as possible. I had a heavy tacking a few miles away, and knowing this, the Confederates only cared to keep me from advancing further than Winchester for the time being.

We had our pickets as thick as bees in the northern suburbs of the town, but the main force was back on the road, near the old farm house, where the ground offered better advantages in case of an attack. We had been in camp less than a day when I ascertained that the farmer's name was Hastings, and that he had one of the handsomest daughters in all Virginia. He asked for a property guard around his farm, and in seeing that the guard was properly posted, I had occasion to enter the house. There wasn't that bitterness then which came in after years, and we could all speak freely without fear of offense. The farmer was old and weak, and when I found out that he was a firm believer in secession and rebellion, I had no hot words to give in reply. Where should one look for southern feeling if not in the homes of Southerners?

The wife was old and feeble, the son away to Richmond, and it was natural enough that I should make up my mind to stand between beautiful Kate Hastings and the inconveniences of war as much as I could. I don't think I violated any of the rules and regulations when I promised the family that their property should be preserved from raiders and their personal liberties abridged only so far as the safety of my command required. Of course, I could not allow them to be passing back and forth between the lines, but they should be free to move in any other direction.

I tell you right here that I never saw a more charming, lovely woman than Kate Hastings. I lost my heart the moment I saw her, as any other man would. But I was not so idiotic as to believe that I had only to say the word to make her my wife; indeed, I doubted from the first that I could ever win her.

"I trust that we shall all be friends," she sweetly said, when I was about to leave the house. "It is a cruel war, deprecated by all for its wounds and griefs, and civilities from captives to captives will always be appreciated."

There was an invitation to call whenever I had opportunity, but there was that modesty and dignity in the lady's look and bearing which made her anything but a love-sick maiden to be easily won.

Well, we pitched our camp; had camp routine; changed pickets; skirmished with the Confederates, and things at length were so-so from one day to another. I sat on the veranda and smoked with the old man; I took tea with them; I read to Kate and once in awhile talked love, or was just going to when she would check me. She was thoroughly southern in sentiment. I knew it, and therefore we passed politics over for something more agreeable to both.

Finally the day came for Winchester to change hands again. A rein-

forcement of cavalry had come to the Confederates, and one day at noon they made the fact known to us. Our pickets came running in, fighting as they came, and closely followed by cavalry; and we had only time to form a battle line before the enemy was along our front. We had a sharp fight for half an hour, during which time many a good soldier bit the dust on either side, and then my command had to give way. We were hard pressed in front and being flanked when the order was given to fall back slowly to the next ridge, half a mile north of the farm house.

As we fell back I saw that the old house had been torn here and there by shots, and, fearing for the safety of the family, we carried them along with us. All were badly frightened, and made no objections to getting beyond the shots of their friends. Step by step, giving the enemy as good as he sent, we fell back to the ridge, and there we halted. The Confederates came as far as the farm-house, and there formed their line and rested, throwing up a breast-work and mounting a cannon to command the road. We threw up defenses, formed a new line, and by sundown everything was going along as if no battle had occurred and a hundred men in blue and gray had not been sent to their long sleep. There was half a mile of neutral ground between us, and the pickets thrown out were hardly a stone's throw from each other.

An hour after we fell back, the Hastings family came to me from a farm-house where they had taken refuge. I knew that they wanted to return home, and was therefore ready for the old man's question.

"Of course you can go," I replied, though it pained me to think that I should lose Kate's society. "I only ask that you repeat after me our oath that you will not give your Confederate friends any information concerning us."

They repeated the words, and we walked down to the picket. A hand-shake all round, and then they took their leave, and my air castles came toppling down. The chances were hardly one in a score that I should ever see either of the three again.

Having seemingly gained all they desired, the Confederates did not seek to drive us further. Several days passed without even a shot from the pickets, when one day, to shake off the rust, I rode with two companies of cavalry which were bound on a raid around to the east of Winchester to secure information concerning the strength of the enemy in that direction. We had a long ride of seven or eight miles, when, coming to a fork in the road, the major took one company and myself the other, and pushed on up the forks. We were riding along carelessly enough when all at once the bushes by the roadside shot out flame and smoke. Everything was confusion at the sudden attack. My horse leaped to one side and then ran up the road. The cavalymen, some of whom were wounded, wheeled about and galloped down the road, and they were out of sight and the battle was over in three minutes.

"Hold on! hold on! Surrender, colonel!" shouted a hundred voices at me, and directly my horse carried me into the midst of a hundred cavalymen, concealed in a bend of the road.

"Good afternoon," colonel, remarked a deep rich voice at my left. "I'm sorry for you, but then you could have fared worse."

I looked around and saw a colonel of cavalry—a handsome man with bright black eyes and long black beard. His face wore a good-natured smile, and he held out his hand to me.

"Yes, I might have been killed," I replied, accepting his hand. "I deserve this for my inexcusable carelessness in not sending scouts forward."

The cavalry camp was only half a mile up the road, and as the command moved along, the colonel and myself rode in the rear. He had introduced himself to me as Colonel Le Ville. We commented on my capture, the war, etc., and had sighted camp, when he suddenly inquired:

"Have you noticed, colonel, that the road bends three different times between here and the forks?"

"Yes, I think it does," I replied.

"Well, now," he resumed, "it will be an easy matter for you to escape. Turn your horse suddenly, give him the spurs, and you can reach the forks in five minutes, if my men chase you, and they will, the bend in the road will save you. I shall cry out the moment you get started, and may shoot at you, but shan't hurt you."

"You are rather given to dry jokes," I replied, endeavoring to laugh. "Such things are not down in army regulations."

"Nevertheless, I mean all I say," he replied. "We are now ten rods behind the men. Whirl your horse, and make him do his best. The firing will have caused the troops on the other road to fall back, and you can soon come up with them."

I looked hard at him, but his countenance stood the test. I believed he meant what he said. The thought came into my head that he meant to shoot me down, but I repudiated it when I had looked him over again.

"Well, colonel, God bless you," I said. "If the fortunes of war ever

make you a prisoner, I will do as much by you, if it costs me my sword."

I wheeled my horse, gave him the spurs, and was off like a rocket. The colonel called me to stop, and emptied his revolver in shooting over me. Just as I passed around the first bend, I heard the cavalry after me, but they might as well have saved their horses. In ten minutes I was again with the Union troops, and we were on the gallop back to Winchester.

I did not feel free to go into particulars in regard to my escape, and the men and officers therefore looked upon it as a great thing, inferring that I had fought my way out. It puzzled me more than I can tell to account for the generosity of the officer. I had never met him before; never rendered him or his any service, that I knew of; never knew of a similar instance, and all my pondering failed to bring a satisfactory solution.

But I was to secure a solution at last.

For a week or so we had a monotonous life at camp, without a movement on either side, and then we determined that Winchester should change hands again. In council we planned an attack. Part of the infantry were to advance by the road, part to attempt a flank movement on the enemy's left, assisted by cavalry, and I was to lead the balance of the cavalry, dismounted, in an attack on his right.

Everything was quietly arranged, and one noon we gave the Confederates a return surprise. Their first intimation of our programme was the driving in of the pickets, and our men came near leaping their breast-work. However, the enemy quickly rallied, and then we had it hot and heavy, carbines cracked, bugles sounded, the cannon roared, muskets rattled, men shouted like demons, and a pall of smoke covered all.

Having plenty to do to defend this point, the confederates left their camp exposed for us to dash at. We swept down upon them, and then it was a hand to hand fight. Some one dashed at me through the smoke, and I lunged back, feeling that my sword found flesh. They charged, and we were driven back; we charged and drove them. I caught sight of fluttering garments as we pressed forward, and next moment stopped close to a woman who was kneeling beside a wounded officer lying at full length on the ground.

Through the blue smoke I caught her eyes fixed on mine in terrible reproach, and above the clash of arms and the shrieks of the dying I heard her words: "You have killed him—now stop me to the heart!"

It was Kate!

I hardly knew what happened during the next five minutes, but at the end of that time, we had driven the enemy back into the village, and a few minutes later, clear out of the southern suburbs. Then I returned to the battle-field.

The dead were lying all about, and the wounded were crying out on every hand. The work of caring for the latter had already commenced, and I went straight to Kate, who was weeping and sobbing over the white face of a confederate officer.

"Go away—he is dead forever!" she wailed, as I came nearer. "War is but murder—he was murdered!"

Stooping down I found that the officer had a sword cut in the shoulder, and that a pistol ball had creased his skull, stunning him for a time. Even as I made the examination, he moved a little and groaned out, and in two or three minutes was fully conscious of his situation.

Kate was a fanatic. She laughed and cried until the powder-stained soldiers thought that the noise of the battle had driven her crazy. The old house had been wounded again and again, but the farmer and his wife were unhurt. It was only a little way off, and when we had carried the officer there a surgeon dressed his wounds.

The dead were buried, the wounded sheltered and dressed, and when night came our lines were advanced so as to put Winchester behind us. I did not go back to the farmhouse until the next day. The officer's face was stained with blood and powder when I saw it the day before that I had no idea who he was, merely noticing that he was a colonel of cavalry. What was my great surprise then to encounter the pliz of Colonel Le Ville as I entered a bed-room at the farm house.

"Good afternoon, colonel, I'm sorry for you, but then you could have fared worse!" I exclaimed, repeating the words he had used when addressing me as his prisoner.

He was bawled up and was still very weak, but he smiled cheerfully and held out his hand for a shake.

I saw in an instant how matters were. He was Kate's lover. I had only to notice her blushes and the tender look in her eyes to be sure of the fact. Then it came to me that Le Ville had been with those who drove us out of Winchester. He had heard from the Hastings family that all had been well used and courteously treated, and to show me that he was appreciative he had allowed me to escape.

It gave me many a bitter pang to feel that any further struggle on my part was hopeless, but I tried to shake off any sour feeling. I was in duty bound to take the colonel's word of honor, if no more, that he should not

attempt to escape. It may seem strange to you that I did not. The official report of the battle forwarded to my superior did not even mention the fact of his capture.

I saw the colonel almost every day. In a week he was able to walk around. I knew that he was somewhat anxious to know what disposition would be made of him, but I left him to work out the problem. One morning I missed him. No one seemed to know what had become of him, and I did not press them for particulars. The colonel and I were even.

Well, there came an order which took me to a post a hundred miles away, and in the hot campaign I came near forgetting the Hastings family and the colonel. One day, when a regiment of union cavalry was hurled against a thousand confederate horsemen, and when victory seemed about to perch on our flag, a battery of artillery played such havoc among us that the bugles blew a retreat. In the confusion, thirty or forty of us were cut off and made prisoners.

"Good afternoon, colonel, I'm sorry for you, but you could have fared worse!"

Close at my right was Colonel Le Ville, hearty and well, and his saber not yet sheathed after the fight. A hundred men wondered as we shook hands, but we understood ourselves.

"I can't let you ride off as you did before, remarked the colonel as he passed with me behind the line of battle. "But you shan't be long a prisoner. I'll have you exchanged within three days."

And he kept his word. While other officers went off to Richmond, I went off to Washington, and then to my regiment, duly exchanged. His influence was what affected it. He was not married yet, but he informed me that he should be in a few months, and in his joking way invited me to his wedding, which was to take place at the Hastings farm house.

"I think I'll come," I replied, "and in case I capture you again I shall clear off this debt; you are one ahead now."

Nothing was more frequent than to change the cavalry from left to center, from center to right, and back and forth until it might be said of them they did not belong to any one's division. So, I thought nothing strange of it when my regiment took a march of seventy miles and brought up one night on the road to Winchester, not half a mile from the old farm-house. There was to be an advance on that road, and we were to take the front. Infantry and artillery were in force at our backs, and we learned from a scout soon after dark, that the confederates were on the retreat, leaving not a soldier between us and the farm-house.

There was no one in the advance to order me to make an advance, and as we had selected a camping spot, no advance was made. Something kept telling me all the time that Colonel Le Ville was near. I could not shake off the voice, and so wandered down the road where the pickets were being stationed. The advance was within a dozen rods of the farm-house. As he had not been disturbed, I pushed down almost to the house, following with the reserve picket.

Everything was still around the place, but we saw shadows on the curtains, and finally entered the yard, and walked up the path. Nearing the door, I heard a deep, solemn voice reading or reciting a ceremony. Stepping boldly up, followed by the men, I opened the door upon a marriage ceremony. Colonel Le Ville, in full uniform, held the hand of Kate Hastings; a minister stood before them, the parents stood at either side, and one or two citizens were there as witnesses. The group were thunder-struck, and for a moment no one moved or spoke.

"Good evening, colonel," I remarked. "you invited me, you remember, and here I am!"

I had held the door so that none of my men had looked into the room. I now whispered to them to go back to the road and look sharp, and then I entered the room.

The clergyman had taken a seat, and was greatly frightened, but he was ordered to go on, and no explanations were made until Miss Kate Hastings was Mrs. Colonel Le Ville. Then we explained. There was laughing and crying and a "regular time," as the old ladies say.

The colonel did not know that the confederate rear guard had passed on, but was intending to wed Kate and move south an hour after. He looked at me to read my decision, and Kate leaned on his shoulder and wept that he was a prisoner again.

What happened?

Well, nothing to you. I don't want to hear anything about "army regulations," "conspiracies," "court-martials," and such talk. It is my opinion that Colonel Le Ville got away somehow.

I was down in the Shenandoah valley a few months ago, and whom do you suppose I took dinner with? The colonel looked as happy and as bright as a new silver dollar, and Kate was more charming than ever. The war had rested hard on both, but peace and love had made the farm-house a little paradise, and there was money in the crops growing on every foot of ground.

A curly-headed boy was racing about, and he was named after me. If they had not told me this, I should not have had the courage to reply that I had a handsome little daughter way up in Michigan named Kate.

Neither Uncle Sam nor Jefferson Davis ever knew how the customs of war were outraged, and it is too late to court martial either one of us now.

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