A Conscript's Chrstmas.

BY JOEL GHANDLER HARRIS.

From The Century:

On a Sunday afternoon in December, 1863, two horsemen were making their way across Big Corn valley in the direction of Sugar Mountain. They had started from the little town of Jasper early in the morning, and it was apparent at a glance that they had not enjoyed the journey. They sat listlessly in their saddles, with their carbines across their laps, and whatever conversation they carried on was disultory.

To tell the truth, the journey from Jasper to the top of Sugar Mountain was not a pleasant one even in the best of weather, and now, with the wind pushing before it a bitterly cold mist, its disagreeableness was irritating. And it was not by any means a short journey. Big Corn valley was fifteen miles across as the crow fles and the meanderings of the road added five more. Then there was the barrier of the foot-hills and finally Sugar Mountain itself, which when the weather was clear lifted itself above all the other mountains of that region.

Nor was this all. Occasionally, when the wind blew aside the oilskin overcoats of the riders, the grey uniform of the Confederacy showed beneath, and they wore cavalry boots, and there were tell-tale trimmings on their felt hats. With these accountrements to advertise them, they were not in a friendly region. There were bushwhackers in the mountains, and, for aught they knew, the fodder stacks in the valley, that rose like huge and ominous ghosts out of the mist on every side, might gonceal dozens of guerrillas. They had that day ridden past the house of the only member of the Georgia State convention who had refused to affix his signature to the ordinance of secession, and the woods, to use the provincial phrase, were full of Union men.

Suddenly, and with a fierce and ripping oath, one of the horsemen drew rein. "I wish I may die," he exclaimed, his voice trembling with long pent up irritation, "if I ain't a great mind to turn around in my tracks an' go back. Where does this cussed road lead to anyhow?"

"To the mountain—straight t[o] the mountain," grimly remarke[d] the other, who had stopped to se[e] what was the matter with his companion.

"Great Jerusalem! straight? D[o] you see that fodder stack yonde[r] with the hawk on the top of th[e] pole? Well, we've passed it four times, and we ain't no further a[w]ay from it now than we was at fust."

"Well we've no time to stand here. In an hour we'll be at the foot of the mountain, and a quarter of a mile further we'll find shelter We must attend to business and talk it over afterwards."

"An' it's a mighty nice business, too," said the man who had first spoken. He was slender in build, and his thin and straggling mustache failed to relieve his effeminate appearance. He had evidently never seen hard service. "I never have believed in this conscriptin' business," he went on in a complaining tone. "It won't pan out. It has turned more men agin the Confederacy than it has turned fer it, or else my daddy's name ain't Bill Chadwick, nor mine neither."

"Well," said the other curtly, "it's the law, Bill Chadwick, and it must be carried out. We've got our orders."

"Oh, yes! You are the commander, Cap'in Moseley, an' I'm the army. Ain't I the gayest army you ever had under you? I'll tell you what, Cap'in Moseley (I'd call you Dick, like I useter, if we wasn't in the ranks,) when I j'ined the army I thought I was goin' to fight the Yankees, but they slapped me in the camp of instruction over there at Adairsville, an' now here we are fightin' our own folks. If we ain't fightin' 'em' we are pursuin' after 'em, an' runnin' 'em into the woods an' up the mountains. Now what kind of a soldier will one of these conscripts make? You needn't tell me, Cap'in! The law won't pan out."

[To be Continued.]

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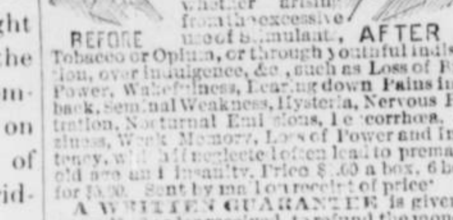

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