

# THE DESERTER.

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*—premed.*

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## THE DESERTER.

### CHAPTER I.

HE had fought like a hero with blind unquestioning faith in the cause of his country until, finally, the conviction had seized him that his country was wrong, and turning his back upon the blood-soaked battle-fields of Virginia and his face to the southward, Oscar Maynard left behind him all that he had held sacred and took upon himself the role of a Deserter.

After three weeks of varied hardships and adventures, he reached the home of his aged parents, amid the dense forests of the extreme southern country. Here let us acquaint ourselves with the reunited family.

Oscar was tall and spare-built, his eyes black and sparkling, his forehead broad and protruding, his hair jet, wavy curls falling over his shoulders; his nose aquiline, his lips, that usually wore a smile, in times of danger were firmly set.

When a boy, he had become famous as the fleetest runner, the longest jumper and the superior in any sphere of agility to any boy in all the country round.

His father, Jacob Maynard, had been of medium height

in his young days, but now he was far advanced in years, and as each year had left its telling blow, we find him so bent and feeble that it seemed almost a miracle that the cane upon which he so heavily leaned could sustain him in an upright position. His long, thin white locks of hair were one of the most striking characteristics of his personage.

Uncle Jacob's wife, "Aunt Polly," was a garrulous old lady, who told wondrous tales of "Before the Indians left this country." Her poor old face was made up of layer upon layer of wrinkles and her hair was always bloused, as if a comb were a luxury unknown in her toilet preparations. She had but one tooth and that an eye-tooth. Being an inveterate smoker, many a time would that old tooth slightly lose its hold upon the cane stem, her old clay pipe would become inverted, the tobacco and ashes would fall out, while Aunt Polly, wholly unconscious of the woful mischief that had been done, would ramble incessantly onward with her yarns.

Such was Aunt Polly. Yet, with all her little frailties, everybody loved her, and children would come from far and near to hear her tell the wondrous stories which her vivid superstitious nature had conjured up during the long course of years—tales of Indians, haunts and witches—until the children would shudder and be prone to wonder if "Aunt Polly" HERSELF were not one of the uncanny creatures she described instead of being one of the common tribe of humanity; nor did her appearance tend in any way to convince them to the contrary, but rather carried with it a considerable degree of convincing power.

But, let us return to the family themselves.

When Oscar had fully related the circumstances and given his reasons for having deserted the army, Father Maynard spoke, in words of emotion:

"God knows my heart, Oscar. I love the South, and I love the cause for which she is struggling; and I would rather you would die in honorable battle than live a deserter. Besides this, I feel sure your life is in greater peril here from the 'Home Guards' than it would be in the army."

To which the son responded:

"If I shall shed my blood, it shall be for a cause I espouse, or for the protection of my life against those who would force me into the defense of a cause which I believe to be wrong. I should not hesitate to enter the Union army, but cannot wage war against my home and my people. Do not undertake to urge me further, for my mind is already fully made up."

"Then, if your mind is not at all to be changed," said the old man, "I shall do all in my power to insure your safety, for my own flesh and blood are nearer and dearer to me than my country. Now, tell us all about your travels and the battles you have fought in."

Then as Oscar proceeded to relate his experiences, that was a happy home. There no grim forecast of approaching perils marred its peace. What nice old-time dishes, filled to overflowing with all the best that household could furnish! How the tallow sent forth its rays of mellow light into every dark nook and corner of the room, and how the unruly spirits DID bluster and splutter and gambol over each other in the flames that issued from the great logs in the broad, old-fashioned fireplace, each trying to be

heard above all the others in welcoming home the wanderer. So lovely was everything that late bed-time came very quickly.

Oscar had bidden his parents good-night and entered his bed-room, thinking to retire, when suddenly the sound of horses' hoofs, rapidly becoming more distinct, fell upon his ears.

## CHAPTER II.

FROM the moment Oscar Maynard heard the sound of horses' hoofs, he felt sure that the HOME GUARDS were approaching; yet, he felt no apprehensions, as he had no idea that anyone within hundreds of miles, outside the family circle, either knew of his presence or of his having deserted the army. Still it was best, he reasoned, to use some precaution, so he walked to the back door and listened.

The horsemen were so rapidly approaching that only a few moments later they were in front of the house. To his astonishment they halted, and he heard them quickly dismount; then part of the company hurried to the back door, while a large number remained in front.

"Hello, old man! How far is it to the next graveyard?" cried a gruff voice on the outside; then, without waiting for a reply, the voice continued: "You and your old squaw hurry out, and tell us where your cowardly son is. The authorities want him, for having deserted the army."

For a moment Oscar Maynard was almost bewildered. That voice was as familiar to him as the voice of his mother. It was that of Phillip Lecrew, his deadly rival. What stunned him most was the fact that he had left

Lecrew far away in the Virginia army just three weeks before; now here Lecrew was turning up suddenly at the head of the Home Guard band.

"Well," thought Oscar Maynard, "such an unexpected foe at this critical moment adds greatly to the perils of my situation—since I have not the slightest doubt but that Lecrew having learned of my desertion has hastened home to revenge himself against me, and having mustered this body of Home Guards, has hurried here to anticipate my arrival."

As these thoughts flashed through his mind he could scarcely repress a shudder, as he realized what his fate would be should he fall into the hands of so relentless a foe.

"Hurry up, old man—we have waited on you long enough!" yelled Lecrew.

For answer, quick as a flash the door was thrown open. The next moment Lecrew received a blow that felled him to the earth with tremendous violence, a tall, gaunt form had sprung into a saddle, and a horse and rider plunged through the darkness at breakneck speed.

Fifty shots were fired at the impetuous rider, but none took effect.

The company quickly leaped upon the remaining horses and began a desperate chase. Up and down hill Oscar urged his horse, while the whole company thundered along only a short distance behind. Despite his efforts some half a-dozen of his pursuers drew nearer and nearer, until finally, as he passed over the brow of a hill, Maynard leaped off his horse and ran rapidly through the dense woods for some three hundred paces, where he struck a trail which he followed, at right angles to the direction he

had followed through the brush. Never breaking his rapid pace he followed the trail for about a mile and a-quarter, where he suddenly reached a large creek. The next moment he had seized a boat, and was rowing with all his might down stream. Half an hour he rowed thus rapidly, then threw down the oar and lay down in the stern of the boat, and in ten minutes was sleeping soundly. . . . .

He awoke with a start, and raising up in the boat found that he had stranded in shoals. "Great Jeremiah!" he soliloquized, "I have gone two miles too far, and it is now broad daylight. How I have slept!" and indeed he had, for the East was all aglow. "Well, there is nothing to do now but to get out and push this boat back into deep water and row up stream."

This he did. But soon great racks of clouds came flying past, the wind first moaned through the giant forests on either side of the stream, then howled as though fierce, angry spirits had torn loose from their station and were determined to shed desolation abroad.

Fortunately the wind blew up stream, and Oscar soon reached the point he desired, then securing the boat to a tree, he hastened up a deep hollow.

The trees were swaying fearfully, but suddenly there was a dead calm—not a leaf rustled on the trees. The dread silence of the tomb seemed to oppress him, and the atmosphere was like the scorching breath of a fiery furnace.

There was a flash of lightning, followed by the deep bellowing roar of thunder far away in the south-west. Another flash and another, followed by continuous peals of thunder blending into a hollow, terrible sound, like multitudes of locomotives rapidly approaching from far in the

distance; a lurid spot in the clouds of the south-west, whirling over and over and assuming every conceivable shape as it fast approached the zenith, and he knew a tornado was bursting upon him.

He had reached an open field. Far across that field was a house. Swiftly he sped across the field, but no human power could have reached that house before the tornado struck.

He had reached a spot where bushes had grown possibly fifteen feet high.

The roar of Niagara could not at that time have been heard. A mile away he sees the giant forest bend and fall; next he sees the house toward which he has been hastening scatter in every direction. Involuntarily he falls to the earth, seizes a bush and clings to it with all the power that can be inspired by the horrors of the moment. He feels himself beaten and twisted about for a short time as by an angry demon—then the storm had passed, leaving horror and dire desolation in its track.

Rising and starting in the direction of the dwelling he had seen demolished, he had not proceeded a hundred paces when suddenly he beheld a man, just to his right, armed to the teeth.

### CHAPTER III.

“WHO goes there—friend or foe?” cried Oscar, grasping his carbine, for he supposed he was about to come in contact with one of Lecrew’s men.

“At this time, when heaven is wreaking vengeance and the gods relentlessly pursue, then all humanity should realize the brotherly ties existing,” said the stranger. “For the present, let us be friends. Still, I shall be plain with you, even now. I am a deserter from the Confederate army—a refugee in my own country and grim terrors await me on every hand. My name is Richard Wagnon.”

“And my name,” said our hero, “is Oscar Maynard. I too am, as you say, a deserter. Right glad am I that we have met, for we may prove very helpful to each other. Still, as spies are more numerous in this blighted country than friends, I shall be on the alert, lest you should develop into such character. However, the privilege I take I freely grant to you—for you know not but that the words I speak are only a cleverly laid trap for you.”

“Good, most noble sir,” responded Maynard’s new acquaintance. “These are dark, bloody times, when a man may almost doubt but that he should become a traitor to himself. Still, I like your frank, open manner, and hope we shall be of advantage to each other in our struggle

to maintain our existence in a land where our convictions are not tolerated."

"Now, let us hasten to the ruins of that dwelling on the hill yonder—for one has dwelt inside its walls dearer to me than life itself, and she may even now be in deadly peril, or possibly the storm demon may have already driven her spirit into the regions of the blest."

"Strange," said Oscar Maynard, "I also go to seek a fair one at that house—to me not less dear than is the one whom you seek to you. May I inquire your fair one's name?"

"Elsie Newman—Major Newman's only daughter, and, by the way, his only child," said Richard. "It cannot be that we are rivals. So, how is this?"

"My fair one's name is Grace Duvant," said Oscar Maynard. "While I was in the army, her father, who was her surviving parent, died, and she became an inmate of the home of her aunt, Lydia Newman, Major Newman's wife. All this she informed me by letter, while I was in the army; and I was fast on my way to visit her, when the tornado struck."

They were now close upon the house, and would have been there much earlier had they not had to pick their way and scramble over the wreckage and debris and through torrents of rain.

At that moment the shriek of a woman came from the depths of the ruins, and hurrying forward they heard the heartrending words: "Oh, my God, spare my father!" Looking in the direction indicated by the sound, they saw a girl of about eighteen—tall, slender and graceful, looking the very embodiment of a tragedy queen, as her hair fell

in golden curls in loose dishevel over her shoulders and she wrung her dainty hands in helpless grief. At her feet, with his head crushed by the falling timbers, lay an old man. One glance showed them that the work of the storm-demon was complete.

As they gazed upon the stricken form there was a groan, a long gasp, and all was over. There, with long, thin, blood-drenched locks of hair falling over a clean-shaven, wrinkled old face, lay Major Newman—a corpse.

The daughter was so stupefied by the shock that she had not heeded their presence, so they proceeded further.

Soon they discovered an old lady, whom Oscar Maynard afterward learned to be Mrs. Newman. Near her were two negro servants. All three were imprisoned beneath the timbers. It was the work of only a few moments to extricate them. Then, after having proceeded a short distance further, they heard the low moan of a woman.

Looking in that direction they beheld a beautiful girl—the exact counterpart of a creation in Oscar Maynard's brain, which phantasm had possibly had something to do with luring him from the battlefields of Virginia and speeding him to almost certain, shameful death at home. There she lay, just recovering from a slight shock caused by the falling timbers—the very perfection of the blonde, with a profusion of golden curls, and what soft, winning blue eyes and long lashes, what tempting lips and dainty hands, what shapely arms and well-rounded bust. For one moment Oscar stood gazing upon the lovely form; then as she raised her great, tender blue eyes to his and a glad little girlish cry fell from her ruby lips, he felt that he well might incur the envy of the very gods themselves, since so plain a man as he should possess so great a treasure.

All the surrounding horrors for the moment left him, as he grasped the fair one in his arms and almost smothered her with kisses.

Richard Wagon with the natural instinct of a gentleman drew hastily away, and began watching the negroes who had arrived and found "Old Masser" dead. Dusky maidens wailed and tore their hair, while great tears trickled down the swarthy cheeks of the men—for he had been a good master. Still, there were those who had been punished for triflingness only a short while before, who were quietly rejoicing among themselves and saying it was a judgment sent upon him. Then there was "Old Tom," representing the superstitious element in negro nature:

"I tell yer," said "Old Tom," "I seed dat ar storm-cloud er comin' er rollin' like er ball uv fire ez big ez er barrel, en' it rolled en' rolled till it got clossa ter dis house, en' den dat ar cloud-shape changed till it got jess 'zactly in de shape uv 'Old Masser,' en' I seed de blood er drippin' from its head. Den de shape changed, en' got 'zactly like er coffin, en' I said, 'Old Masser he's done en' gone from dis here vain world, shore,' en' I comes up here, en' sho' 'nuff he is; en' I knows jess ez well ez I knows I's er stan'in' here, dat Ole Masser's sperit done went off in dat ar cloud."

At the end of Old Tom's harangue, Richard Wagon asked the negroes some questions, and gave certain orders. Then going back to his new acquaintance, he ushered him into the presence of Mrs. Newman AND HER DAUGHTER, where introductions and salutations went round; after which, Richard announced that he had concluded to have the family repair at once to the house of John Watson, the

overseer, for he had learned from the negroes that Watson's house had not been blown down by the storm.

"I am having part of the negroes clear a roadway," said Wagon, "while others are making a litter to bear the corpse."

Oscar of course consented to the plans, and in half an hour all were moving in solemn procession. The path of the storm did not reach more than one hundred and fifty yards beyond, so as the house of the overseer was just outside, they soon reached their destination. The sun had long since burst forth with an effulgence that caused the dark clouds to scatter and quickly lose themselves in the blue-vaulted heavens, while birds and bees, butterflies, flowers and murmuring brook all bespoke nature's most gladsome mood; but with that dear, familiar figure lying there all stark and stiff and cold, that was a dark and gloomy day for the bereaved family.

The day passed, night came and went, another day dawned. The remains of the dear one were tenderly borne away and placed in the grave on a hillside, there to remain until the resurrection, when the river of Time shall sweep into the ocean of Eternity.

There were no ceremonies, for in that last solemn hour Mrs. Newman would brook no human interference, preferring quiet meditation, in which through the window of her soul she beheld her husband's blessed spirit amid the blood-washed throng, soaring through the regions of eternal bliss.

From that ecstatic vision, she would not return to the sordid cares of this life by listening to the homely words which the minister would have uttered; and when the



grave had been filled it was with difficulty they induced her to quit the spot—while Elsie was little better.

Richard and Oscar did all they could to cheer the family in their dire distress, and had the temerity to remain with them for several days, although little squads of the Home Guard band were seen to pass almost every day. However, the deserters concealed themselves on such occasions, and supposed none of the band knew they were there.

As Elsie still remained in a lethargic state, Oscar suggested to Grace one morning that they take a stroll, and also insisted that Elsie should accompany them, with Richard for her escort.

At first Elsie firmly refused, but finally yielded to the importunities of the three; and, oh, how Oscar's heart thrilled, as with his fair betrothed by his side he walked beneath the tall pines, which moaned and throbbed and sobbed like waves breaking upon a storm-swept shore.

Far to the north was a blue line of mountains, whose bold crags could be plainly discerned, and there the deserters had already planned to seek refuge—there they were destined to be hunted like wild beasts.

After the little party had proceeded a few hundred yards they reached the very depths of the forest. There not a ray of the effulgent sunlight could force its way through the thick net-work of branches above them. Seating themselves upon a giant log, they sat for hours talking of the evils that had beset them in the past and planning to meet the perils of the future.

Finally, all strolled back toward the house—when, just as they reached the yard they heard the report of a gun. A bullet whistled by Oscar Maynard's ear and was buried

in the wall of the house. A wild yell set up and the woods on the east side of the house seemed suddenly filled with Home Guards.

#### CHAPTER IV.

INSTANTLY the young ladies retreated into the house, and as the deserters sprang behind the west side of the building a volley from the company whistled by them. That the Home Guards would not attack the inmates of the home if he and Wagnon should not enter the building, Oscar Maynard felt very sure; so, leaping the back-yard fence, his wonderful fleetness of foot stood him hard by, so that his disappearance was so nearly instantaneous that not another shot was fired.

Richard Wagnon followed closely in Oscar's trail. Three or four hundred yards the pair thus ran nimbly along, then they slowed down to a rapid stride. Further and further they advanced into the dense forest and swamps away from all traces of humanity, until they had reached the foothills of the mountains they had viewed that day while taking the stroll. At last they reached a large creek that went rushing and rumbling down between tall cliffs. At first it seemed an impossibility to descend the shelving cliff of almost solid perpendicular rock without a rope, but by infinite care they finally made their way down to within forty feet of the creek. Here they reached a small cavern, running back under the overhanging bluffs, and into this they entered.

"Well," said Wagnon, "we are safe here from the weather. No power of providence less than an earthquake can shake us from our retreat."

"No," said Maynard; "and if we can keep on the lookout, it will take all the Home Guards in this country to capture us, without a regular siege—that is, if we can keep plenty of ammunition—for when an attempt should be made to attack us in our den, we could shoot the enemy down as fast as they could advance."

"The greatest problem that presents itself now," said Wagnon, "is whether we can obtain sufficient food to prolong life through the long months to come. Whether Old Tom can always be relied on to bring meal and flour and such other things as I arranged for him to supply us with, that is the question."

"Another thing for us to consider is, will we be discovered by the smoke when we cook our meals?" said Maynard.

"No, I think not," replied the other, "as we can do our cooking far in the night, in the remote corner of this den, and the heavy growth of timber, with perhaps a thick blanket hung at the entrance of the cave, will effectually prevent the blaze being discerned by chance, and be a sufficient guaranty, I should think, of our retreat not being discovered from that cause."

"Yes," replied Oscar; "I think we shall be absolutely safe, so far as that part goes. Of course, the blanket can be removed after the rations shall have been cooked, and the last vestige of smoke will disappear long before dawn."

"Then, what a nice time we shall have fishing—for this is the best fishing ground in the entire country, and

we can sit twenty feet below here in perfect safety and catch enough fish every night to supply us for the next day."

"Yes," said Wagnon, "we are all right on that score; so that our greatest danger after all comes from the possibility of Old Tom being shadowed, as I intimated a while ago—and, mark my prediction, 'That is the one weak point that will first betray our presence.'"

Thus talking, they soon fell asleep.

The next morning, a long, low whistle at about an hour by sun was heard overhead, and the next moment a basket was seen slowly let down from the heights by means of a rope. In the basket were two blankets, two guns, plenty of ammunition, fishing tackle, flour, meal, and almost everything the heart of a deserter could wish for the next week or ten days.

Ten minutes later the two refugees had baited their hooks, cast out into the deep eddy water, and in a trice Oscar Maynard "got a nibble," then in about a minute another, then something of a combination nibble and a bite, and he jerked as if he were expecting a fifty-pounder—when up came a three-inch horny-head. Just then, without any preliminary proceedings whatever, something struck Wagnon's hook in such a manner as to plainly indicate that the monster, or whatever it might be, meant business. The hook was rapidly carried out toward the middle of the stream, the pole bent as if it were about to break, but cautiously Wagnon drew him forth with many a flutter, and displayed a three-pound trout. Just then, Maynard landed an Appalochee cat; and in a very short while the two had caught an immense amount of fish. They had no

trouble in cleaning them, for a spring of cool, limpid water bubbled up just to the right of the cave and trickled over the ledge of rock down to the creek.

The fish were carefully salted away. Then, having nothing else to do, for long hours the two deserters lay prone upon their backs and watched the light fleecy clouds floating through the heavens far above them.

Maynard fixed his gaze upon a CUMULATIVE cloud and began to watch its evolutions. Now as he gazes he describes a huge lion, with a mane that protrudes longer and longer, until as the cloud-scene shifts a man stands in a threatening attitude, while cringing at his feet, with hands uplifted as it were in tearful supplication, is the figure of a girl, feathery as the zephyrs that blow. As he gazes intently upon this strange scene, for a moment the face of the demon in the cloud is turned to earth, and Oscar Maynard beholds the cold, cynical features of Phillip Lecrew. As if by inspiration the significance of the cloud-scene seems to be revealed to him. He feels that the fates have ordained that Grace Duvant shall fall a victim to the fierce love and hate of Phillip Lecrew.

Now, as he thus ponders, vaguer and more indistinct the vision becomes, until it finally vanishes into the quiet space above and only the azure sky remains.

Maynard awakens with a start, and finds that his friend is sound asleep by his side.

Ten days later, filled with apprehensions, he determined to vary the monotony of his existence by visiting the Newman home, which he had learned had been repaired. So, leaving his partner at the cave, late in the afternoon he cautiously made his way back to where his fair one dwelt.

He reached his destination without incident—and oh, how happy Grace was to welcome him! While she was so glad, she yet cautioned him that he had risked too much, and plainly told him that the best thing he could do for himself would be to remain in the cave, “For,” said she, “Phillip Lecrew and his band are prowling around every day or two.”

What was that painful sensation that passed through his frame, as he heard her call the name of his deadly enemy and hitherto unsuccessful rival? Could he look upon that fair, frank, open face before him and allow the deadly venom of jealousy to enter his heart, after the many assurances that had fallen from those ruby lips?

He dismissed the thought as absurd, as soon as it had entered his brain, and felt ashamed to mention his momentary weakness to the fair one before him; but, somehow, try as he would to dispel it, that uneasy sensation remained.

The seeds of jealousy had been sown, not in very luxuriant soil, it is true; but they only lacked proper nourishment to cause them to spring up as rank thistles in the heart.

Still as Cupid nestled above them, hour after hour passed ere he could tear himself from the presence of the idol of his heart.

When he finally prepared for his departure, the night was so far spent that Grace prevailed on him to remain until morning.

A servant was called, who showed him to a room. Requesting the servant to awaken him an hour before light, and retiring at once, he was soon fast asleep.

He was aroused from a deep slumber by the yells of the servant. Quickly dressing, he unceremoniously departed.

When he reached the open air, he found he was starting later than he had intended. The first grey streaks of the coming dawn were already to be seen in the east.

“Well,” he soliloquized, “at the best speed I can make the sun will be an hour high before I can get back to my rendezvous. This is too bad;” and he hurried out into the dense forest.

Thus he hastened along until the first rays of sunlight could be seen on the tops of the tall pines.

He was moving cautiously and rapidly around the brow of a mountain, rather than risk the exposure of crossing the crest, when the sharp crack of a rifle and the yells of a hundred men warned him that he had unwittingly stumbled into the camp of the enemy.

## CHAPTER V.

LEAPING forward, he heard the leader cry out for him to halt. Looking backward, he saw a hundred muskets thrown into positions to fire. Falling flat to the earth, he heard a loud report, followed by bullets whistling over him. Springing to his feet, he sped down the mountain-side at break-neck speed, with the whole company in full pursuit. Bullet after bullet whistled by him, but he dashed heedlessly on, until he finally reached a dense bog at the foot of the mountain. Into it he plunged, with the company only a short distance behind. As he sprang from tuft to tuft, he noticed that the company had divided. Part of them had begun to quickly surround the swamp, while others began leaping from tuft to tuft in direct pursuit.

The pursuers endeavored to keep their eyes continually upon the fugitive, but that was a difficult thing to do there in the dense bog.

Finally, the object of pursuit disappeared, as if the very earth had swallowed him up.

That Oscar Maynard had escaped from the swamp seemed impossible, it being by that time completely surrounded. All the time the company kept a sharp lookout. Hour after hour they searched the swamp, but in vain. After a long time they were forced to give up the search, completely baffled.

In the meantime, what had become of our hero?

As he had leaped from tuft to tuft, his fertile brain was by no means idle in devising a means of escape. With a large portion of the company surrounding the swamp and the balance following him through the swamp, he knew he must resort to some extraordinary means of escape, or be captured. A bright idea suddenly flashed into his mind. Watching as he leaped, he finally found a moment when not an eye was upon him.

Leaping with all his might and keeping his feet well in front of him, he landed squarely in the mud, prone upon his back. He was completely buried in the bog except his head, which was near a tuft of grass.

With his hands all covered with mud, he rubbed his face over until he surmised that no one would discover him.

He had chosen an unpleasant position, but he soon learned that he had chosen wisely, for time after time the Home Guards leaped directly over him, intent upon the search.

Laying there with his eyes closed, he could imagine that some one of the party near him was gazing intently upon that particular spot of bog under which his inert body lay, and during those moments the suspense was terrible. After the company had withdrawn from the swamp, he waited a considerable time, thinking part of the company might be laying in ambush near by.

Finally, he reached out and grasped the tuft of grass, and then a bush that was growing upon the tuft. He found he was fixed better than he had known, and after five minutes' exertion, finding his position very little improved, he almost gave up in despair. At last, he suc-

ceeded in changing his position to face downwards, then drew up his feet, and by an almost superhuman effort drew himself far enough out of the bog to place one foot on terra firma.

The remainder was, of course, easy. Balancing himself, and leaping from tuft to tuft until he had reached the limits of the swamp, took only a short time; then he hurried cautiously along, until half an hour later he had reached his retreat in the shelving cliff. There he found his partner, burning with impatience. Oscar presented a ludicrous appearance, had Richard's mood fitted him for anything along that line. As it was, he merely inquired what had happened, and Oscar told him the story of his adventure.

When the story was finished, Wagnon said with the fullest determination:

"Well, Oscar, this decides one matter fully. From this time forth we must remain here, and be thankful to Allwise Providence if we may be permitted to exist. Let us hope to LIVE later, when this terrible struggle shall close."

Thus, for weeks that blended into long months, they eked out a monotonous existence, with only the weekly visits of Old Tom at the top of the cliff to connect them with the outer-world. They carried on a correspondence with their sweethearts, as if a thousand miles intervened.

One day, after Old Tom had brought his weekly supplies, Oscar Maynard broke the seal of a letter, the superscription of which he at once recognized as that of Grace. Richard noticed his friend's face pale as he glanced over the dainty little missive his hand clutched convulsively; and after he had carefully read it, he dashed it aside.

"What's the matter?" said Wagnon, picking up the letter as if to hand it back to his friend.

"Don't bring that any nearer to me, but read it," said Oscar Maynard, "and see what the cruelest, most fickle and brazen woman on top side of the globe has written to me."

Wagnon then carefully perused the letter, which ran as follows:

"MR. OSCAR MAYNARD: Curious as it may seem to you, I love my country, this fair Southland. I love the cause for which she is contending. I honor the brave soldier-boys in gray who are fighting under our blood-stained flag, as it flutters in the magnolia breezes of freedom as an emblem of Caucasian supremacy. I detest the coward or the villain who has not the courage or the convictions to fight under our Southern flag, while the Northern armies are devastating our homes and leaving desolation and starving families in their track. To that class, sir—which I detest—you belong; and while the time has been when I loved you better than life itself, and I was thus completely blinded to the depths of your infamy, still, intuitively my mind recoiled from the man who could not have the manhood to fight for his country. Slowly my heart went out after a gallant hero who is sacrificing his life for his country, fighting bravely every day around my home. Long his heart has been mine. So, how could I draw the contrast—in which you appear in such horrible deformities—and my heart not change?

"So, I gladly cast you from my heart, forever. The Home Guards know now all about your rendezvous, and if you wish to escape, you had better hurry away at once—

for in less than five hours your retreat will be completely cut off. Even if you could succeed in keeping the Home Guards out of your den, Old Tom will visit you no more. So, if you wish to escape alive, you will be compelled to hurry at once to another hiding place.

"GRACE DUVANT."

## CHAPTER VI.

"ONE thing is very evident," said Richard, thoughtfully, "and that is this: There is a mystery surrounding this letter. It is inconsistent, within itself. After the cold-blooded manner in which she disposes of you, the letter closes by earnestly warning you to flee from your hiding place. You may depend on one thing—the letter is a kindly warning that we are in imminent peril. We must leave here at once."

"Yes," assented Oscar Maynard, "there is a mystery; and that villain, Lecrew, is at the bottom of the whole business. However, as you say, we must get away from here now, and solve mysteries later. For my part, I shall go first to my father's, and may scout around there for some time."

"On the other hand," said Wagnon, "I shall go down the creek about ten miles, to where I have some friends who are safely hidden from the enemy. So, our ways part now, for awhile. Be very careful, Oscar; for it is my opinion that you place yourself at a very dangerous point anywhere near your father's home—as the Home Guards will expect you there when they find that you have deserted the cave."

A few minutes later they had abandoned the cave, and started up the narrow pass.

Whiz!—a bullet came by Maynard's ears, and looking up, the two fugitives beheld the summit of the cliff lined with Home Guards, who were viewing them with eager anticipation.

To undertake to force their way up that narrow passage would be madness. They must again take refuge in the cave. Leaping down over the shelving steps or ledges of rock, they soon regained the open space or platform in front of the cave, at a point where the projecting shoulder of the crag protected them from the enemy overhead.

"Well, they really have us trapped!" exclaimed Maynard. "But opening fire on us at that distance, when we should have run right into their own hands, was an absurd blunder on their part, for which we may be thankful."

"Yes," responded Wagnon, "had they remained in ambush, we should have been in their midst before suspecting their presence, when a fight to the death against overwhelming numbers would have followed. At best, however, we are in for a siege, and one of us will be compelled to do sentinel duty all the time."

The day wore slowly away. From the heights of the cliff could be heard the confused hum of many voices.

Late in the afternoon Wagnon went out of the cave for water, when, to his surprise, he heard the dipping of oars up the creek.

Looking in that direction, he beheld three men in a boat rowing down the stream. When they noted his presence, they quickly raised their guns in position to fire.

As they did so, Richard fell flat to the earth, and the discharge passed harmlessly over him. Rising to his feet, he rushed back into the cavern; then he and Oscar stepped

out with their guns and fired upon the boatmen, who in their turn fell flat in the boat, and the discharge produced no visible effect—for the three rose immediately and rowed rapidly up beneath the impending cliff, so as to secure perfect protection from the deserters and at the same time be within twenty yards of them.

"Well," said Oscar, "this last attack has surprised me more than the first. I had never thought of an attack from the creek."

"It was also a surprise to me," replied Richard. "Our situation now is indeed desperate. Every avenue of escape seems to be closed."

The shades of evening drew on apace. The cliffs grew darker and darker. A large fire blazed forth in the Home Guard camp above, and by contrast the outlines of objects where the camp-fire did not cast its glare were almost completely obscured.

Oscar did sentinel duty the first half of the night, but the hours passed on monotonously and he almost concluded it was nonsense to remain on guard. At one o'clock he aroused Wagnon, then lay down and was soon asleep.

Wagnon had been on duty for perhaps an hour when he heard a suspicious sound up the pass, but after listening intently for perhaps two minutes, he concluded he must be mistaken. Five minutes later he was startled by hearing the sound considerably nearer and so distinctly that he knew he could no longer be mistaken. He tried to pierce the gloom, but every outline was obscured by the density of the darkness.

"Who goes there?" said Wagnon.

There was no response.



A few minutes later that sound again recurred this time not over forty or fifty feet above him.

"Who goes there?" cried Maynard, in clear ringing tones.

Again there was no response; so, raising his musket he fired in the direction indicated by the sound.

There was a yell of pain, followed by the heavy rolling of a body down the cliff and a loud splash in the water. After the report of the gun there was an angry murmur upon the cliff, but within a short while everything became quiet, and there were no further demonstrations.

Daylight came, the forenoon wore idly away; but near the middle of the afternoon, Maynard and Wagnon heard a basket being let down from the summit of the cliff.

Rushing out to the open space in front of the cave, they saw two of the Home Guards in the basket being quickly lowered, and a half dozen more of the band not thirty yards above them, making their way down the pass. Just then there was a volley poured forth from the Home Guards in the boat, that narrowly missed the deserters.

One comprehensive glance showed Oscar and Richard that the Home Guards were irresistibly closing in upon them.

The horrors of the situation prompted an impulse so daring and fraught with danger, that calm reason had never suggested such a possibility.

Without a moment's hesitation, Maynard rushed to the edge of the bluff and made a wild leap into the creek, upsetting the enemy's boat, and then swimming rapidly down the stream, followed closely by Wagnon. Bullets were raining thick and fast around them, while the three

boatmen were swimming along in full pursuit and cursing loudly.

Maynard headed for the opposite shore a hundred and fifty yards below, where a narrow trail led along the creek bank beneath the overhanging cliff.

Reaching the shore intended some distance ahead of their pursuers, our two adventurers made their way rapidly down the stream until the cliff became less rugged, then climbed it, and were soon out of the locality of the Home Guards. Then the two friends parted.

Oscar made his way carefully along among the ledges of rock, then up and down the hills and over long lines of ridges, then into deep ravines and dense swamps.

Finally, he emerged from the wilderness into broad, open fields, and twenty minutes later, far ahead he descried his father's home. Hurrying forward, with that joyful anticipation which his surroundings could not entirely dispel, soon he has entered the home, and is in dear old mother "Aunt Polly's" arms, as she sobs over her son.

Poor old Uncle Jacob's eyes betray evidences of having become moistened by the deluge of long pent up emotions which at that moment struggled for a mastery over him, but he repressed them with the fortitude of the hero that he was.

But as Oscar well knew his perilous situation, he hastily explained the circumstances surrounding him, and told his father and mother to send him supplies to a secluded point—of which we shall learn later.

They of course gladly promised to comply with his request, and told him he might expect Negro John to be on hand, at the point Oscar had described to them, by sunset.

There was a lingering farewell, for the deserter expected to remain cooped up perhaps for months; then Oscar Maynard strode out to the gate, never looking to right nor left. Then, what impulse prompted him to look earnestly back upon the house, at the two old people? There they were, gazing after him as if their whole hearts and souls were concentrated upon their only son. What gloomy foreboding came over him! A shudder passed through his frame as he gazed at Uncle Aron, leaning upon his stick, and Aunt Polly, with her obstinate, inverted pipe.

Can it be that the gloomy shadow of the grim horrors soon to transpire, was even at that moment passing over that household?

Be that as it may, he was loathe to leave, and fain would have remained, had not the thought of the utter desperation of such an undertaking urged him onward in his course.

He had not proceeded more than a mile and had just entered the brush, when the sharp crack of a rifle was followed by the yells of a large body of Home Guards. Then, with his wonderful fleetness he sprang forward, and the order to fire came in vague, indistinct tones from the distance, and he paid not the slightest attention to the volley fired at him. In half a minute more he felt comparatively safe—when he was horrified by a new and terrible danger that he found suddenly to beset him, for he heard the deep baying of blood-hounds, which he realized had been placed upon his trail. Rushing along with reckless impetuosity, he heard the dogs coming nearer and nearer. Onward he sped, until his wind was fast giving

out and he had almost concluded to abandon himself to his fate, when he suddenly beheld the Oconee creek just ahead, and a large wash-pot near the creek.

Lifting the pot and placing it upside down over his head, he rushed into ten-foot water. There he breathed comfortably, as he had supposed he would, and there he remained for what seemed long hours. It was a horribly unpleasant position, but he solaced himself with the thought that this was at least a span of existence that connected life in the past with life in the future.

At last, feeling assured that he had by that time baffled the pursuers, he emerged from the water, and finding the coast clear, he moved cautiously for half a mile down the creek until he reached a wild, picturesque spot, and entered a cave, deeply hidden among jagged rocks. This cave had been well known to him in his boyhood days, and this was the hidden retreat where he had ordered supplies to be sent him by his parents.

In the meantime, let us return to the home of old Father and Mother Maynard.

Looking far out across the ruined fields where the Home Guards had been raiding, a tear rolled down Uncle Jacob's poor old wrinkled cheek. Aunt Polly sat by him, in her large old arm-chair. Between her eye-tooth and her lower gum she held the stem of her inverted clay pipe, as she talked incessantly. The old man sat there patiently, but it could have been plainly seen, had anyone been near to watch the two old people, that he heard not a word that she said, and that Aunt Polly was totally oblivious of the fact that he was not listening.

Finally, the old man looked toward his aged mate as he thus spoke in broken tones:

"It is very hard to endure our persecutions, this late in life. I don't know what we shall do to keep from starving next year. We are too poor to buy anything, if anything could be bought; and now all our corn in the fields is destroyed—and why? Not because they had to do so to sustain themselves, but because Oscar deserted the army. I would a hundred times rather the boy was in the service, yet, if he is wrong, that is no reason why they should inflict such a terrible punishment upon us; and to complete our awful condition, there is no telling how soon Oscar will be shot down—and when that shock falls upon us, I can stand it no longer."

"No, we can't stand it," said Aunt Polly. "I would a deal uv er sight rather we lived among the Indians. 'Taint no use ter plant anything, when these savages come along and destroy the crops, just to see old people starve. I wish Oscar could kill every Home Guard in this country."

"Don't, Polly—don't say such things as that!" said Uncle Jacob, softly, a far-away look in his dim old eyes. "Remember," said he, "Christ says 'Love your enemies and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.'"

Just at that moment a company of Home Guards was seen fast approaching.

Phillip Lecrew was their leader. They halted. Lecrew dismounted and went into the dwelling.

## CHAPTER VII.

THRUSTING himself inside the doorway and looking savagely at the two old people, Lecrew spoke as follows:

"My band has been eluded by your traitorous son, and having fully determined to make him our prisoner, and knowing that his retreat is known to you, I propose that you shall so inform us. Where is he?"

"I have not said that I know," said Uncle Jacob.

"But, *I* have said that you know," said Lecrew; "so, hurry up and let me know. My time is too precious for me to dally away with the father of a traitor."

"Look here, Lecrew!" said the old man, sternly, "if I were younger you would not repeat that insult, even if you are fifty men to one; and, as to whether I know Oscar's whereabouts or not, it would still be a small matter to you; for, although I differ with him in that it is one of the fondest hopes of my life that the South may succeed, yet, you do not realize the love and duty of a father to an only child—that duty which rises above duty to country or anything else earthly. So, consider me a traitor to my country, if you prefer; but, I shall never prove a traitor to my own son, to deliver him into the hands of his enemies."

"Look here, old man," said Lecrew, "you do not know the import of the words you speak. You shall tell

where Oscar Maynard may be found, or die the death of the miserable old traitor that you are!"

"Do you think," said the old man, firmly, "that I, who stand on the very threshold of death's portals, yet fear to enter? If my chances of prolonging my life for the few short days yet allotted me hangs on that slender cord, then hasten to sever it. My life may well lie behind me."

"I give you one minute to consider," said Lecrew, "and, if you do not yield, I swear by the eternal gods that you shall never see the light of another day! What do you say—will you tell?"

"Never!" said the old man, his eyes flashing fire as he spoke.

"What do you say?—you old squaw!" said Lecrew to Aunt Polly.

"Though you should burn me at the stake, I would not betray him to you!" said Aunt Polly.

"That settles the affair!" said Lecrew.

And at a given signal, two of the Home Guards went into the house and dragged the two old people out into the yard, to a broad oak, whose branches Uncle Jacob and Aunt Polly had watched spread and flourish for forty long years. Here they were led to the dear old spot where those two had sat in the halcyon days of yore and cooed to each other like doves; and here as the years rolled by they had sat, while Oscar gamboled and prattled beneath its spreading branches.

Here in this spot of most enchanting memories, that now came up and sped onward like a swiftly-passing panorama, a scene was about to be enacted which would not only make all civilization blush, but all nature as well;

and the hoary old oak, that had stood guard as the grim sentinel and had been fanned by the zephyrs and battled with the tenacity of animate nature against the storms that had come to wreak their vengeance upon the home, seemed destined to become an unwilling accomplice to the crime.

A noose was thrown round Uncle Jacob's neck, the other end of the rope was then thrown over a limb, and quickly the poor maimed veteran, of more than three-score winters, swung into midair.

Twice the muscles contracted, then the body became motionless, except as the fiends who stood by would give it a shove, causing it to swing to and fro in the air.

In a few minutes the body was cut down, and it took no second glance to show that Uncle Jacob's spirit had taken its flight.

Then Lecrew turned to Aunt Polly, who stood as if turned to stone:

"There is yet one more chance for you," said he. "Tell us where your son may be found, and you shall be set at liberty."

Then it was that Aunt Polly, raising her long, bony hand, turned her face heavenward, and spoke as if in a chant:

"The tide of war has turned, and the billows of blood are sweeping over this land. God's avenging angel has raised his sword and smites these people, and oh, hear their shrieks!—which are caught up by the spirits in the air. SEE the sword of vengeance, dripping with blood! See it as it first smites Lecrew! Then, not one of you is spared!"

Then, pointing her long, bony finger at them, she began speaking in a low, unearthly voice:

"Fiends, you are damned! My curse be upon you! Not one of you shall be spared! Justice, like a gaunt demon, shall ——"

"Hang the witch!" cried Lecrew.

And quickly the old, wrinkled form of a woman was swung out between heaven and earth, and old Aunt Polly—who had left countless traditions, and implanted her image in the minds and hearts of the mothers, fathers and children all over that country—lay a shriveled corpse, beside her husband.

Both had died as martyrs to that principle deeper and broader than sections or nations, to that principle which is the golden chain that binds together all humanity; that, when once broken, would spread universal confusion over earth, and war, which has only an occasional outbreak, would be waged until the whole human family would become extinct.

## CHAPTER VIII.

JUST as the party was leaving—after having buried the two old people in a shallow grave—they saw Negro John coming up from the field. He was captured after a sharp chase, and threatened with instant death if he should not reveal the hiding place of his young master.

The poor negro in agonized tones told them he knew nothing of "Mass" Oscar's whereabouts, and that if he did, 'fore God he would tell them; and the clan finally concluded he was speaking the truth. But, as a special precaution, Lecrew ordered that the negro be carried along to cook for them.

They were correct in their conclusion. The two old people had failed up to that time to tell John anything about where Oscar was to be found—which was very fortunate, as the poor negro would have been certain to have guided the party to his retreat.

But, let us return to Oscar Maynard, in the cave—where he lay all that day without anything to eat. Night passed, morning dawned, and another day wore away; again it is late in the afternoon. Something must be done. He was suffering the pangs of hunger, and had scarcely eaten anything since he and Wagnon had sepa-

rated. If he must meet the Home Guards, the sooner the better; for he felt that he would far prefer to fight the entire Home Guard band to the death, rather than starve.

An hour later found him standing upon a lofty eminence, gazing down upon his father's home, far away among the fields. Long he gazed, to see if he could discover anything that would in any way cast a light upon the mystery. Everything seemed as usual, viewed from his far station. Could it be that that quiet scene concealed a lurking foe? Let there be what might, he crept cautiously along, and had passed through the fields and entered a narrow strip of woods within a hundred yards of his father's house, when some one sprang out of the brush and a musket was pointed full into his face. He threw up his hands, as if to surrender—and the next moment had struck a blow that sent his assailant sprawling backward. Leaping on the enemy, Oscar soon reduced him to unconsciousness; then picking up the musket, that had fallen without discharge, he hurried along.

The man must have been a guard, placed at that point to capture him in the event he should undertake to reach the home of his parents, for he encountered no one else.

He found his father's house singularly deserted—but his hunger must be satisfied. He opened the door, and was surprised to find that the house seemed to have been ransacked through every room. He was so fortunate as to find what he wanted in the cupboard, and set about ravenously to appease his hunger. That done, he began an exploration to see if he could discover any traces of the old couple. He could gather nothing from what he saw in the house; so, searching the yard, he came to a newly thrown up mound of clay.

Through the dim uncertain twilight this appeared mysterious; so, striking a match, he discovered a sheet of paper, half covered with fresh dirt. By the aid of another match, he read the following notice:

“TO WHOM THIS MAY CONCERN: This is to inform the public that this is the grave of old Jacob Maynard and his wife—who met their death at the end of a rope, for harboring their traitorous son, thus themselves becoming traitors. So may end the lives of all traitors to their country.

“PHILLIP LECREW,  
“Captain Home Guards.”

When Oscar Maynard had finished reading the above, he uttered no exclamation, he shed no tear. All that was human passed out of his soul, and he stood transfixed into a demon.

Above that grave, a new impulse throbbed through his veins: Phillip Lecrew should die, though the whole Southern army should protect him; and not only Lecrew should die, but the entire band that had participated in the fiendish outrage.

Then a loud, harsh, maniacal laugh fell from his lips, as he thought of the man he had left prostrate only a few minutes before.

Hurrying back along the trail, he was surprised to find the bird had flown. He was sorely disappointed, for he would have taken a fiendish delight, at that moment, in beginning his career of vengeance with this man, whom he felt sure was one of the Lecrew party.

How long he roamed through the woods, he never knew. When he had reached that point where he could reason at all, another day was far advanced. He sat down, to try to think.

Suddenly an idea struck him: He would join a large company of deserters, fifteen miles away, who were hiding in a cave. There he would mass that company, and totally exterminate the Lecrew band.

To think, with him, was to act. Rushing along like the madman that he was, just as the shades of another night closed upon him he reached a locality which he supposed to be near the entrance of the cave.

That entrance he would have never reached had he not given a peculiar whistle, when he had proceeded as far as he could locate his bearings.

The signal was answered from the most silent depths of the dense pine thicket on the side of the Jet mountain, and by exchanging signals again, he suddenly stumbled almost into an underground passage. He entered, and after following it for two or three hundred feet, groping through dense darkness, he suddenly came in contact with a great rock, that filled the entire passage. Again he gave that low, cautious signal with a peculiar variation, when suddenly the rock flew back on a pivot, seemingly of its own accord, and behold, a yawning pit was before him—and he heard a deep, monotonous sound, like the far-away rumbling of a Niagara, deep down in the interior of the earth.

## CHAPTER IX.

AGAIN he signalled, and the great rock swung backward, closing the passage behind him. A candle light flashed up in the darkness, and Richard Wagon sprang toward him with outstretched hand—then almost recoiled, as he noted the stern expression on Maynard's face.

There they stood, while Maynard related his horrible story; and when he had finished, that stern expression on Maynard's face was reflected from the face of Richard Wagon, also.

But, Wagon—well thinking that perhaps Maynard's mind had become so wrought up as to be almost unhinged, as well it might—wisely said nothing; and then, although the passage was almost perpendicular, Maynard and Wagon soon found their way deep down into the grotto.

Suddenly, Richard Wagon gave a signal by a long, peculiar whistle, such as Maynard had not heard before; and the two were immediately ushered into a large apartment, where a dozen or more deserters were lounging about.

Greetings were exchanged between Maynard and the rude band, and there he remained for some time; then, Wagon showed him through several other rooms, in which

apartments the most casual observer could have scarcely failed to discover trinkets and old Indian relics.

After taking supper, the band of refugees held a long consultation.

It was finally decided to postpone the attack for a day or two, in order to divest the Home Guard band of any apprehensions; so that, falling in upon them unawares, the superior numbers of the Lecrew force would be taken at a disadvantage. Besides this, it would give the deserters time to concentrate their forces.

Although burning with impatience, Maynard finally yielded to the importunities of the company—so the plans were followed in detail.

An hour later, messengers had been dispatched in every direction, and by ten o'clock the next day the numbers of deserters began to increase. Larger and larger the company became, until a hundred deserters had assembled in the cave. Then, although the Home Guards company numbered perhaps a hundred and fifty, it was decided by the deserters to make an attack that afternoon.

And, as six o'clock was the hour planned for the attack, Oscar Maynard felt himself impelled by an uncontrollable desire to explore the cavity, during the interval. So, accompanied by some half a dozen of the boldest spirits, he passed through one apartment after another, then took the main downward passage, and after following it for some distance, they suddenly found themselves on the bank of a river, so wide that by the aid of their strong torch-lights they could scarcely discern the opposite shore. Thus, a great subterranean river rushed rumbling onward. Following the river channel some distance through intricate

windings, they finally reached a point where, with a deep hollow roar the mighty volume of water plunged into the very bowels of the earth below.

There the whole company, with the exception of one man, refused to follow Maynard further; but that person—a tall, long-bearded, sinister-looking man—stepped boldly apart from the remainder of the company, and, amid the deafening confusion, motioned for Maynard to go ahead and he would follow.

Moving cautiously round a shelving rock, the two bold explorers were soon lost to view.

Finally, as Maynard and his companion proceeded the way became rougher and more grandly picturesque as the lights of the torches each held shed a ghastly glimmer over the desert waste of the dark depths below. Leaping from a rock a perpendicular distance of about four feet, Maynard heard a mocking laugh behind, so satanic that it chilled the blood in his veins and seemed to set in motion the very vibrations of the grim darkness around him.

Whirling round, our hero saw his companion tear away a false beard—and the fiendish face of Phillip Lecrew was revealed.

The next moment Maynard received a blow that sent him tumbling over the precipice—down, down, into the surging, angry waters of the subterranean river.

He still retained consciousness, but would have given up all hope, had he not clung to the fatalistic conviction that he should live to avenge the outrage upon his parents. So, making no effort to escape—for indeed the shore was



lined with shelving cliff—he found himself hurled along down stream at a terrific rate.

There was a roar, a gush and a gurgle, then the dense darkness seemed to have tangibility, for shrieking demons to right and left seemed to assail him, and as the rude stream rushed him by, others started up. The last flickering spark of reason had passed away. The demons had become legion, shrieking over vast chaos, quickly advancing upon him from every side—when suddenly light shone far ahead. Struggling reason began to reassert itself, the uncanny spirits retreated and disappeared amid the regions of the vague unknown, and a few moments later he found himself shot out into the dazzling light of day and plunged into a broad, sluggish river.

He half swam, half drifted to the shore, and by a last mighty effort he reached the dense underbrush, where he fell to the earth and lay for hours.

## CHAPTER X.

WHEN Oscar Maynard awoke, he gazed around in bewilderment for a few moments; then, as he became fully conscious, he looked at the sun and then sprang to his feet.

The hour for the deserters to attack the Home Guard band had not arrived, but it was near at hand.

The next thing he did was to locate himself. He soon saw that the subterranean stream flowed into the Ohachee river, at the base of the Jet mountain.

Up the craggy mountain side he rapidly ascended, higher and yet higher, until finally the broad fields were left far below; still he ascended, until he had reached the Jet mountain heights.

Cautiously he moved along, until suddenly the entire body of deserters came into view.

He at once caused them to halt, until he could relate his perilous adventure; and as the story developed the fact that the company had been entertaining a spy in their midst, they realized that a change of tactics would be necessary, since a surprise under the then existing circumstances would be impossible. Yet, nothing daunted, they determined to attack the Home Guards boldly.

Moving forward, a short time later they reached a point in view of the camp of the enemy.

A hundred paces ahead of them, two bold cliffs gradually approached each other until they jutted together at the crest; yet, strange to say, beneath the convergence of the cliffs the pass broadened until it was fully seventy yards in diameter, then narrowed at the farther end, where the cliffs again separated.

This freak of nature was known as the "Devil's Pass," and the spacious apartment beneath the jutting cliffs as the "Devil's Den."

Here was located the Home Guard camp.

Rushing forward with headlong impetuosity, the band of deserters had reached a point within fifty yards of the enemy, when a broadside of musketry from the "Devil's Den" mowed down nearly half of the company. Then, with a yell like demons, the guerilla band rushed forward, and forcing themselves into the camp of the enemy, began an attack which knew no truce.

The Home Guards were so near that some of them could have been brained with the butt ends of the muskets, when the renegade band poured forth a volley, with such deadly aim that the whole front rank of the Home Guard company fell to the earth. Then a bloody hand-to-hand contest, fierce to the death, began.

When the eyes of Phillip Lecrew, the swarthy captain of the Home Guard band, pierced the dim, uncertain gloom of the place and fell upon the figure of the man whom he thought to have murdered several hours before, he turned ghastly pale and would have fled from the spot, had he not seen that a bullet from Maynard's musket would have stopped him.

From that moment, each of the two men knew that one or the other must die on the spot.

Maynard fired his musket, but Lecrew leaped to one side, and a man behind Lecrew received the discharge full in his breast. The next moment Lecrew had pulled the trigger of his own gun, aiming fairly at Maynard's breast; but a quick blow from Maynard's musket knocked Lecrew's gun to the earth, while the discharge embedded itself in the wall of the cave.

Disdaining to club an enemy who was not similarly armed with himself, Maynard dashed his own musket to the earth, and simultaneously both men drew long knives and made a rush at each other.

Lecrew struck a quick blow at Maynard, that narrowly missed him. Maynard countered with a fierce blow, but Lecrew leaped backward in time to entirely avoid it. Then for fully three minutes the two parried each others' blows and struggled desperately—when, with a yell, Lecrew made a fierce onslaught and struck straight for his enemy's heart; but, by a movement quick as lightning, Maynard leaped to one side, and as he did so, struck a blow that landed deep in the left breast of his enemy. There were a few gasps and groans, and Maynard's antagonist lay dead at his feet.

By this time the battle was over. The deserters had been victorious. The remnant of the Home Guard band that had not been killed or wounded, had beaten a retreat and escaped through the farther end of the gorge. Yet, although the deserters had driven the enemy from the camp, more than two-thirds of their band lay dead, or

mingling their groans with the groans of the wounded of the enemy.

As night closed in upon the mountain scene and the full moon shed forth its mellow light, a dozen men may have been seen on the mountain-side, busily digging a long trench. Then the dead were approached. There lay the deserters and Home Guards, still in the death-grapple that the avenging angel had left them, but their spirits had been borne away, and the ministering Angel of Peace now sat brooding over their bodies.

As the rude, uncouth band gazed upon the scene, their hearts melted—and they knew no deserters, no Home Guards. All were tenderly laid in the grave together; then everything was done that could be to alleviate the sufferings of the wounded, both of friends and foes.

Even Oscar Maynard's maddening thirst for revenge was slaked by the blood of his enemy—for he knew that the balance of the Home Guard company had only been instruments in Lecrew's hands; and although he had sworn that nothing but the blood of every man who had participated in the fiendish outrage against his father and mother would satisfy him, yet his heart told him he had been mistaken, and that their blood had been fully avenged.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE deserters now felt sure that there would be a cessation of hostilities for a number of days, as the Home Guards had been too crushingly defeated to attack them without re-enforcements, and the condition of the country was such that it would likely take some time to secure re-enforcements, since each community in that remote region had about all it could do to look after itself.

They were right in their conjectures, for they were not in any way disturbed while they remained in the captured Home Guard camp.

In about ten days all the wounded had become convalescent. Then the Home Guard prisoners were allowed to depart, after having sworn to never again unite with any Home Guard company; after which, the deserters moved back to their old quarters in the cave, on the opposite side of the mountain.

After the company had again become firmly established in their old resort, late that evening Maynard and Wagon stood at the entrance of the cave, overlooking the broad expanse of blue lines of hills across the river and the tortuous river channel, far away southward.

Suddenly, Wagon gazed into Maynard's eyes, then spoke as follows:

"Oscar, I have news for you, and I suppose it is about time I should tell it. I would have told you earlier, had it not been that you would have been very anxious to have left the camp, when your presence was imperatively necessary; but, now that the wounded have sufficiently recovered, I am proud to be able to impart the news to you. But, knowing how impetuous you are, even now I will not tell you, unless you promise to wait until morning to make the journey my news will naturally cause you to make, for the way is too rugged to make at night, and I wish to accompany you. Will you promise to wait?"

"Most certainly," said Maynard; "that seems the only way out. So, what is it you have to tell?—for the suspense is agonizing."

"It is this," said Wagnon: "I can tell you where Grace Duvant is to be found. Not only that, but—while I have failed to get the minutiae of the details—from what I have gathered, I am sure she has not been untrue to you at all."

"Well, please hasten to tell where she is—and we will find out about that later on," said Maynard.

"I will do so," said Wagnon. "She is a prisoner in the Lecrew mansion, fifteen miles south of here—at least that is the information I have gathered, and I think it is reliable. Now, let us retire to the cave, and get ready for an early start tomorrow morning."

This they accordingly did. They arose very early the following morning and made hasty preparations for their departure.

Quite a number of the company warmly volunteered

their services, but were told that it was thought best to have no one accompany them.

Faint streaks of the coming dawn appeared in the far east as the two adventurers hastened along, down the mountain-side.

When they approached the river, a boat being handily moored they appropriated it to their own use and rowed across.

The sun was about two hours high when the Lecrew mansion loomed up in the distance.

Quickly making their way across the fields, Maynard knocked boldly at the door. A few moments later it was cautiously opened for a few inches by a tall man of giant frame, who, after viewing them for a short time, would have immediately slammed it in their faces; but, having expected a reception something like this, both Maynard and Wagnon hurled themselves against the door, with such force that it immediately gave way. As they entered the room, Maynard received a blow that sent him sprawling backward to the floor, and a thousand stars flashed before his eyes; but, a mighty blow from Wagnon's fist sent the giant likewise to the floor—and Maynard quickly recovering, the two succeeded after a desperate struggle in binding the burly fellow hands and feet.

By this time, Mrs. Lecrew and all the servants came rushing into the room; and Maynard, looking sternly at the old lady, said:

"Madam, we have forcibly entered your house, because we have learned that there has been foul play allowed by you under your own roof; and knowing that you are associated with the crime of imprisoning a young lady in one

of your apartments, I have come here to forcibly accomplish her release."

"She is not here!" said the old lady, sharply. "When you say so, you tell an infamous falsehood. You are not hunting a young lady at all," she continued; "you are cowards, and traitors to your country, who have broken into my house to plunder and rob me. OH, THAT MY SON WERE HERE!—instead of being away hunting the very villains who are here imposing upon a defenseless woman."

At that moment there was a loud yell, and the big, burly fellow—who had been released by the servants—bounded toward them.

"I'll fix you, this time!" said Wagnon; and as his antagonist rushed toward him, he knocked him senseless with the butt of his revolver.

"Now, Mrs. Lecrew," said Maynard, "you need not try to deceive us in regard to your prisoner. Show me to her room, or I shall burst down every door in this house or find her."

Seeing there was no alternative, the poor old wretch moved slowly upstairs, followed closely by Oscar Maynard. She unlocked the door of a room, and there was the lissome figure of Grace—her golden hair falling over her shoulders in profusion, a pink muslin wrapper displaying her lithe figure so bewitchingly, that our hero almost held his breath as he gazed upon her.

She would have rushed into her lover's arms, had he not drawn haughtily backward, saying, "Not yet!"

"Oscar, I did not write that letter of my own will," she cried; "I was forced to do so!"

But she had no time to make further explanations, for

she was quickly led down stairs and hurried out of the house—followed by Wagnon, who in his turn left a dozen gaping servants looking after him.

The three walked a mile to another house, where they hired a hack and driver. Their destination was the Newman mansion.

## CHAPTER XII.

UNTIL Grace found herself ensconced in the hack, beside her lover—and bowling along across a country of long stretches of level road, that left huge boulders, beetling cliffs and blue lines of mountains behind—she had neither found time nor opportunity to explain her mysterious actions, which had caused a thick curtain of reserve to be drawn between the lovers. Her dreamy blue eyes were raised to his appealingly, as she said :

“Oscar, can it be possible that you really believe I have been untrue to you?”

“I neither believe you are true, nor untrue,” said Oscar. “It is all a mystery, that I am very impatiently waiting for you to explain.”

“Oscar,” said Grace, tears welling from her great, tender blue eyes, “you cannot be more anxious to hear the horrible details than I am to relate them to you. So, I will begin at once:

“One day Elsie and I were on the front porch at home, when we saw a large body of the Home Guard band riding along the road—but, as we were accustomed to seeing them every day or two, we apprehended no danger, so we remained standing on the porch. The company was soon in front of the gate, when one large fellow dismounted and

entered the yard. His actions were indeed peculiar, but we still felt no fears.

“When he had reached a point directly in front of us, he raised his hat and bowed with Chesterfieldean politeness, and said:

“‘Miss Grace Duvant, you are wanted at the Home Guard camp, for furnishing supplies to a notorious deserter, whose name is Oscar Maynard.’

“I thought it curious that he said nothing about Richard Wagnon, who was with you, neither about Elsie being as guilty of the charge brought against me as I myself; but, as I was in no mood to reply, I made a dash to escape—but was caught by the arm and dragged across the yard to the gate. There I struggled to free myself, but was rudely forced upon the bandit’s horse. Then, as I gazed back on Elsie, standing shrieking on the porch, I swooned—and knew no more until I opened my eyes in the midst of the Home Guard camp.

“My captor was not far off, and when he saw that I had recovered from my swoon, he moved forward with easy grace, and stationing himself near by, told me in low tones that my having supplied a deserter with provisions was treason, and the punishment death!

“A noose was thrown round my neck, from my rear: the other end of the rope was thrown over a limb directly above me—when, suddenly I heard some one cry from away out in the woods:

“‘Stop that hanging! I command you to hold up, or this camp will run red with blood!’

“At that moment, I saw Lecrew urging his horse through the dense underbrush at breakneck speed. He

held a revolver in each hand. Everything was stopped. Lecrew sprang from his saddle, and demanded an explanation. The man who had led the gang first cowered, then hesitatingly made his explanation—which, having been made, Lecrew told me that he was very sorry such a shameful affair had occurred; but, if I were anyone else, I could by no possible means escape death—but, if I would consent to become his wife, everything would be all right.

"Until he made me that proposition, I had sat dazed by the rapidly changing horrors; but this audacious proposition restored me to my equilibrium, except that I could scarce prevent words of disdain escaping my lips.

"However, I told him that if that was my only means of escape, I would suffer the penalty he would allow inflicted on others, were they in my stead.

"He paused for perhaps a minute, then said, that since considering, he would deal yet more leniently with me; that if I would write a letter that he should dictate, assuring you that I had proven false to you for him, that I should be immediately released—else he would not in any way interfere with the action the Home Guards should take.

"I refused to do so. But he told me he knew exactly where you were located; and I soon found that he was telling me the truth, for he related how Old Tom had been secretly followed to your rendezvous—and his description was so accurate that I knew he was correct.

"He then told me that not only would my life be taken, but by taking you and Richard by surprise, you would be placed in his power; but, if I would write the letter, you should both be spared.

"Not until then did I in any way relax; but, thinking any kind of a letter to you that would free me to send news, would be far better than the desperate condition of affairs then existing, I reluctantly consented—provided he would grant me the liberty to warn you in that letter that Lecrew knew your location.

"He agreed for you to be warned, but reserved the right to dictate that portion of your letter, also. He assured me that I need entertain no fears for your life, as your torture in believing I was false would be far sweeter revenge to him than the accomplishment of your death.

"Old Tom was sent for, and as you know delivered the letter safely.

"After the letter had been despatched, instead of releasing me as he had promised, Lecrew not only forcibly detained me, but had me carried to the Lecrew mansion and confined in the room from which you rescued me.

"Fortunately for me, Lecrew has been out with the Home Guard band nearly all the time since my imprisonment. Had he not been, I shudder to think what horrible tortures he may have caused me."

### CHAPTER XIII.

"I see," said Maynard, "you have been made the victim of a deep-laid plot. You were taken prisoner by Lecrew's secret orders. His arrival at the camp where the Home Guards were feigning to be almost in the act of hanging you, was but the successful accomplishment of a cleverly-laid plot.

"By simulating himself to be a chivalrous lover, he hoped to overcome your repugnance for him—and, finally, win your heart. Whether he should succeed in that undertaking or not, I feel sure that he planned from the very beginning that a letter from your own hand should be sent me, which should possess every element of mental torture; and in that plan he succeeded nicely. But, that is only a prelude to the fiendish work he has accomplished."

Then, Oscar proceeded to relate to her the fate of his father and mother, and how their deaths had been avenged.

Finally, the hack reached the river and they were all slowly ferried across.

They had not proceeded over two miles after crossing the river, when they saw some stragglers coming along down the road, meeting them.

"What does that mean?" said Wagon. "Can it be Home Guards?"

By that time the pedestrians were within fifty yards, and it could be plainly discerned that each man wore a tattered gray uniform; their hats were filled with holes—shoes, they had none.

"Confederate soldiers," said Maynard. "By George! what does this mean?"

One of the men hearing him—although Maynard had not asked the question expecting the pedestrians to reply—answered, and said:

"Lee has surrendered. The war is over, and we are going home."

Then, on came another squad, moving painfully over the stones.

For a few moments Maynard gazed at them, then his eyes filled with tears.

The Southern cause was indeed lost, and he would no longer be a hunted vagabond. He believed it was right for the South to lose; yet, as he gazed upon those battle-scarred veterans, who bore evidences of having passed through so many and such fearful hardships during the years of the war, he revered them as heroes and martyrs to the cause of sectional patriotism. They had been true amid shot and shell, starvation and hardships, in a struggle against overwhelming odds; true to the bitter end to what the South believed to be right.

Another hour's travelling carried them to their destination; and there was Elsie, standing on the front porch, looking for more soldiers—and rejoicing because the time was near at hand when Richard would come out of the woods; and oh, how glad she was!

There, too, was old Mrs. Newman—silently rejoicing



through her tears that war, with its horrors, was over. Then her mind came down from the ghastly generalities to specific cases, and she was just then thinking that Oscar and Richard would soon emerge from their wild life in the brush, and Grace would be rescued.

But, no one was gladder that the war was over, and especially to see Maynard and Wagnon, than Old Tom—who, after looking at Maynard for a full half minute, exclaimed:

“ ‘Fore God, massa, Lecrew’s game worked so well, dat I mos’ done begun to think young missus had goned back on yer, sho’ ’nuff. Now, I guess dere will be erbout two weddin’s here, ’fore long.”

“ Yes,” answered Oscar, “ Richard and I have made it up between ourselves to become the grooms in a double ceremony here, next Thursday night—if the balance are willing.”

And there is a tradition handed down through the years that they were willing.

THE END.