

A BOY'S EXPERIENCE DURING THE CIVIL WAR

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A YOUNG friend, who is deeply interested in history, has urged me to write an account of my experience as a boy during the Civil War, especially of the time of the Southern army's invasion of Pennsylvania. I was seven years old at the outbreak of the war. Sometimes people tell me that I was too young at that time to remember what occurred, or to understand the conditions of the time. My reply is that of all the occurrences of my life, I most clearly and impressively remember the Civil War, and particularly when our neighborhood was within the Confederate lines. What I shall write is all true, and the incidents shall be related as they occurred.

The war began with the nomination of Abraham Lincoln, not with the armies and the battles, but with the excitement and the fear of sacrifice of lives and the sorrows of families. The campaign was more than exciting; it was terrifying throughout the country, and especially near the Mason and Dixon line, where we lived. Our county, Cumberland, was strongly partisan, with the Democrats largely in the majority. The Democrats, most of them, were opposed to the threatened secession of the South, but they could not commit themselves to a war meant to free the slaves. They all thought that Mr. Lincoln, if elected, would issue on the first day of his administration a decree that all slaves would be free. Some of the Democrats were open sympathizers with the South, perhaps to protect themselves in case of an invasion of Pennsylvania.

No matter where one found himself he would hear arguing and mean attacks upon Mr. Lincoln. He was the "ignorant rail-splitter." Seldom did one hear of his illustrious career as a lawyer, and more seldom of his kindness to people in need of help. My father and my uncles voted for Mr. Lincoln. In

my youth, and ever since, he has been my hero, the man destined to save our country, and to banish shameful slavery. No argument could turn me from the hero worship of Abraham Lincoln. I think that nearly all boys were with me, even some of the sons of Southern sympathizers. To us our calamity was not only the war, but the fact that we were born too late to become soldiers. Our idealism grew during the war as we read and heard the stories of Mr. Lincoln's visits to the hospitals, of his tenderness to the wounded and sick men in their intense suffering, and of his comfort to the homesick. The soldiers of the army were almost all boys of from eighteen to twenty. With their painful wounds, they longed to be at home with their families.

The dreaded war began with the attack upon Fort Sumter. When Uncle Aleck, a lawyer in Carlisle, came up one day in April to say good-bye to his relatives before going to the front, the war became a reality in our family. Our uncle of whom we were very fond, was to us a great man. He became an aide on General Orde's staff, and when that officer was wounded Uncle Aleck brought him to his home to care for him. I wrote letters to my uncle when he was at the front, and he had shown them to General Orde, who wished to see the little boy of the blotted letters. My father took me down to see him, and I was so embarrassed when they led me before this great man that I could not say a word at first, but he soon put me at my ease by asking questions about the things I had written in my letters.

The call for volunteers—for the nine months' men—was issued in the late summer of 1862 by the President and was responded to by the finest young men in our neighborhood. We boys appraised them all in character, and often chose others whom we would have liked to send in their places, but we satisfied ourselves in our belief that only the good and brave could be good soldiers.

Soon the evidence of war became more visible; soldiers in larger numbers were passing along the road every day, in companies, regiments, and divisions on their way to the South. There was not an hour in any day when we did not see "blue coats" on the road. We lived along the Harrisburg and Pittsburgh turnpike, which the soldiers followed from Harrisburg to Cham-

bersburg, from where they went on to the South. The soldiers, in the early part of the war, were not carried by railroad; the infantry marched on foot, the cavalry advanced on their horses. When I got older I wondered why the government did not use the railroads to transport them. I suppose the long march of a hundred miles was a method of training, for the volunteers were taken into the forefront without such training as the soldiers of the World War were given before being put into battle. When a company or regiment passed by, our teacher in the "little red brick school house" always excused us to go out to see the troops pass. Often some of the soldiers would stop to talk with us. I suppose the sight of children would make them homesick for their little brothers and sisters or children at home. Sometimes as they talked to us I could see tears on their faces. The bravery of these boys equaled their love for their families for whom they were offering their lives. Sometimes in my mature years I wondered how many of those devoted boys got back home. I did not think of that then. To us they were brave soldiers going to war.

Five of my cousins enlisted with the nine months' volunteers, and they were in the battle of Antietam in a few days. My father's cousin was a first lieutenant and as the troops marched into the battle, the captain of the company was shot down by a cannon ball. My cousin, Uncle Josh, as we called him, had to step into the captain's place, where he served until he was mustered out.

Not one of our cousins was even wounded in the many battles in which they fought. At the end of the nine months, they all returned home, to re-enlist for three years, except one who was taken prisoner by the enemy and was held in Libby prison for a long time, the hardships of which seemed to us unbelievable. When our cousin got out of prison his clothing was reduced to rags, which did not cover his body. When he got home he was skin and bones, but he soon recovered.

The battle of Antietam was to us most terrifying. We could hear the cannonading. Some people have told me that we were too far away from the battle to hear the cannon, but I know what I heard. We did not use the telegraph much then, and that was long before the telephone and radio. Our whole com-

munity heard the Antietam cannon and we knew our boys, just recently sent South, were in battle.

The war went on with many battles through the winter of '62 and '63. The soldiers still passed our house. For us, they were the great men of the world. Sometimes, three or four officers would come into our house. Mother always had the maid set the table and prepare for them a simple meal, such as then was common to all of us. My mother sat at the head of the table and served the tired, hungry boys. Their conversation began with the war but soon passed on to their homes. After the meal one or two would stay awhile to talk to my mother.

In the fall of '62 the members of the old militia were called out to serve; there were alarming reports that there was danger of a Rebel raid. My father, who had been some years before a member of the militia, went with them. The company met at Oakville, a village two miles from our house. The families of the men were all there to see them organize and march off—all cavalry-men. They were all heads of families, except one boy, my cousin, about three years older than I. He was mounted on a tall, spirited horse of his uncle with whom he lived. He was carrying a brass horn on which, I think, he could not play a tune, but he could make a noise for the signals. I wished that I were on a horse going with the company. My father was mounted on "Lion," our pet horse. I knew that my father could take care of himself, even in war, for he was armed with his saber and his big horse pistol, which I think he never shot while it was in his possession. But "Lion" had no protection. The alarm of the invasion was unfounded, and in two weeks they all returned. My father and his horse were at home, safe and sound.

In 1863 the war began for us in grim reality, for General Lee's army invaded Pennsylvania, and we were within the Southern army's lines for two weeks or longer. I never could read Civil War history, for it seems so dull compared with what I saw. I never knew clearly how General Lee's army evaded our army to get through. Sometime, perhaps, I shall let someone who knows tell me how Lee succeeded in getting into Pennsylvania unmolested.

Before the Confederates had come far from the Potomac, there were recurring, startling reports that the Southerners were coming. The turnpike near our house would be filled, often from side to side with "skedaddlers," as we called them—Negroes escaping from their Southern homes. They did not wish to get any farther from their old homes than was necessary and Chambersburg was as far as this love of home (even with its slavery) would let them go. The frightened Negroes impressed us, so that frequently we watched them all day as they passed by. Besides the Negroes, many white people were on the road with their horses and wagons and other things which the Confederates might take. Sometimes herds of cattle would be driven along the road.

Soon came the report that the Confederates were surely coming. About this time a circus was in flight, but it had to move slowly on account of the thousands of "skedaddlers" on the road. I knew that the circus—the greatest event of the year to us boys—would not come to our town that summer as advertised. One evening we heard on the hard turnpike a rumbling that we thought was the sound of horses' feet. Mother got the children to bed early that night and sat down to listen. About ten o'clock she heard a man ride past and call, "Halt, these horses must have a rest." He stopped at the gate. She went down through the yard and asked him if his men were the Rebels. He said, "No, this is Milroy's wagon train; the Rebels will not be here until tomorrow." Mother went back to the house and retired. I am sure she did not sleep much that night, for "the Rebels were coming tomorrow." They did not come as expected and the road was quiet, for the "skedaddlers" had all passed. Only a few Union soldiers were passing both ways.

The next day the soldiers told us that the Rebels were surely coming and that they would be there by afternoon. I was sent over to Uncle Sam's, about half a mile across the fields, to tell them to hide all their valuables. They moved a pile of rails and buried their silver and other valuables in the ground and replaced the rails.

After returning home, I saw some men at the barn. I went down. One of them asked me where our horses were. I told him that they had been taken away. He asked me where they had gone. Pointing up the road over which the men had come,

I said, "That way." He looked angrily at me but he was too much of a gentleman to call me a liar or a little fool. I was telling the truth, at least in part, for they had gone up the road a quarter of a mile and had turned to the right to go ten miles to the North Mountain, which they were to cross into Perry county.

Then shooting began, over our heads from the hills on both sides of us, by the retreating rear guard of the Union army and the advance guard of the Southern army. Even in my fright I thought, "Now, I am in the war." Just then my mother came running down toward me, calling me. I hurried and saw that she was terribly frightened—the only time, as far as I can remember, I ever saw fright on her face. She took me into the house and gave me a scolding for my foolishness for being outside, but soon calmed down and was my beloved, fearless mother again.

Soon, heavier marching began and by evening we were surrounded by the Confederate troops. We were wondering what they would do to us. Our family consisted of my mother, seven children and the maid. My father and practically all the men in the neighborhood had been sent away from home with their horses by the government, for it was believed that families were safer alone, with no men about. The evening was very quiet, but as bed time approached we were terribly frightened. Mother spent the evening telling us stories, reading the Bible, and hearing us say our prayers as we went to bed. We tried to be quiet, but at times we could not be, for we all had whooping-cough, except Rob, the little baby. My mother never spoke of that night, but I know it was a night of terror for her.

The following day was one of great activity, for the soldiers marched from morning till night. Soon, they began coming to our house. My father had put twelve barrels of flour and other necessities in the house before going away. My mother and the maid baked in the big oven every day. She gave food to the soldiers as they came to the door, and they generally paid her liberally in Southern money. It was reported that they had a printing press in the school house, about three miles up the road, where they printed Confederate money and gave it to their soldiers. The biggest price I ever received was for a glass of

milk. A soldier, stopping at our gate, told me that he was very tired and asked me to go up to the house and get him a glass of milk. He paid me generously—five dollars. When the Confederates were gone away I was a rich man, with my pockets full of Confederate money. I carried it in my pockets until it was worn out.

Soon our fear of the Rebels abated. I do not remember a coarse or an ungentlemanly word from a Southern soldier while they were with us. As evening approached I often heard mother say to the men who came to the door: "I have only a little food left for my children tonight." The reply always was, "Madam, we would not take your children's food."

The Southern sympathizers gave the Confederate army a great welcome. One man in a town near us hitched up his two fine, spirited horses to his shining buggy and drove out to give them a welcome. Two officers approached him, perhaps to take his horses. He began his prepared speech. After listening to him for a while, they told him that they were in a hurry, but thanked him for his courtesy. Would he please step down from his carriage? They called a man to look after their horses, stepped into the buggy and drove off, leaving the Southern sympathizer to walk back the three miles to his home. Judging from what I saw and heard, I believe that the real Northern loyalist was more respected by the Southern invaders than was the Southern sympathizer. Often, officers would stop at our house for a meal. Mother always invited them in and sat at the head of the table, serving them courteously.

The second day the Confederates were there was one of excitement for us. Our next door neighbor's son, Bill, spent the night before with his family. He had lived in Louisiana some time before the war and had enlisted in the Southern army. He became one of the valiant "Louisiana Tigers." He spent four years in the war and suffered only one slight wound.

Of course there were many outrages, but not on the main road, or by the Confederate soldiers. Every army has its "camp-followers." Those of the Southern army committed their outrages on the by-roads. My uncle James had a watch left him by his brother, who had died three years before. Some pretending soldiers rode into the yard and demanded the watch.

Doubtless some gossip by the wayside had told them of it. When he refused to give it to them, they caught hold of him and, putting a rope around his neck, dragged him to a tree. Aunt Jane, who happened to see them, ran out with her children to plead with the soldiers, but without effect. She and the children then pleaded with Uncle James to give them the watch. He could not withstand their tears and told Aunt Jane to get it and give it to them.

When the Southern army reached the Susquehanna River, opposite Harrisburg the bridges had been burned. Before they could cross the river, scouts brought the information that the Union army was coming behind them, but was still far away. The Southern army turned and went back to Gettysburg. The second night before the battle, a great army encamped opposite our house on the ground of a neighbor. A little after dark a colored man appeared at our home and told mother that his "Massa, de kunel," had sent him over to ask her if she would like to have a guard around the house that night. She told him she did not, but she would like to see the colonel. In a few minutes he appeared. Mother told him that his men were going through the barn with torches and she was afraid they would set the barn afire. He said he would clear the men out of the barn and in five minutes the torches had disappeared.

The soldiers were looking for chickens for their suppers. They had taken all except an old rooster. We were satisfied, for they were dying of chicken cholera. The campaign cleared our place of that disease. The old rooster was immune to cholera and too smart to let the Rebels catch him. We suffered a considerable loss that night when the Confederates took a full crib of corn to feed their horses.

After two or three days the Southern troops were gone. The last of them were five or six men who stopped at our house and in a rough way ordered dinner in a manner wholly unlike that of the soldiers who stopped during the raid. After dinner they lay down on the grass under a tree and seemed to be asleep. In a short time after these rough fellows left, our Union soldiers appeared, and the invasion was over. Perhaps these six men were camp-followers ready to join either army. The Confederate army was on its way to Gettysburg. The Union army was coming

back, first the advance guard, then company after company. The people were out along the road, not merely to see the soldiers, but to give them welcome, cheering at the top of their voices. When evening came I could cheer no more, I could only wave both hands, for I had used up my voice. The Confederates had gone and our brave soldiers were with us once more.

Two days later the battle began. We seemed to have no doubt of the result. Our soldiers were there, many of whom we knew. We could hear the cannonading distinctly and sometimes the massed muskets, for Gettysburg was only twelve miles away by a direct line over the South Mountain.

Soon the roads were all quiet for two or three days. The first movement after the battle that I can remember was that of a regiment of Confederate prisoners, 300 cavalymen of the Southern rear guard. They had taken the wrong course on the mountain road and had run into a heavy force of Union troops. They stopped to rest on a low hill just beyond our house. I had a chance to talk a little with some of our Union soldiers, and learned in general how the Confederates had been taken prisoners. They were the saddest, most depressed men I ever saw.

We were soon relieved about Gettysburg, for a soldier in the guard over the prisoners told me that our army had won the battle. We really believed that the victory at Gettysburg would end the war. Although we were mistaken, the victory was the beginning of the end. The excitement and joy of Armistice Day at the end of the World War was a day of rejoicing for all of us, but the Confederate retreat from Gettysburg meant much more to us who were then living in the Cumberland valley.

In September we had some friends at our house and my father took them over to Gettysburg. I was permitted to go with them. It has always seemed to me since those days that no one can know what a war is unless he has seen a battlefield soon after a battle—not Gettysburg as it is today, with all its noble monuments and fine roads. I shall refer only to one scene, the field over which General Pickett charged against our army on the hill. Although thousands of men were shot down, the survivors bravely marched on until they were nearly all mowed down. There they were lying, not buried—with only a little ground thrown over them which did not cover them.

The Confederate army had retreated, and except for some skirmishes, the battle was over. For some unexplainable reason General Meade did not charge upon the retreating enemy, a movement which would have closed the war and saved thousands of lives lost in battles afterwards.

After General Lee's raid the boys of the community, almost all of them, were determined to run away and join the army. I was only ten years old at the time, I wondered what I could do to serve my country. I finally decided that I could take care of an officer's horse; he could transfer his man to the ranks and thus add one more to the army. But I talked too much and mother heard about our plans. She very kindly showed me how foolish it was and how it would hurt her if I were to try to run away. She did not ask me to promise not to leave home, but I promised of my own accord; thus I was no longer a member of our company of little patriots.

A boy, about two years older than I, was missing one evening, and could not be found after an evening's search. In the morning his father started off on horseback to find him. He followed the course that a regiment had taken the day before, towards the South. Sixteen miles from home he found his son perched on a horse behind a soldier. He was transferred to the rear seat behind his father. He must have had a dreary time on his ride of four or five hours on the horse with his father, who was a very quiet man—perhaps he was thinking of what might happen after he reached home. Jake's dismal failure to join the army broke up our little band of childish would-be soldiers.

In a little over a year the war was over, and our soldier boys came back to their homes. But the great catastrophe was to come after the war was over. One morning in the spring of '65, I was in the village half a mile from home when Chris Reddick came riding on horseback from Newville and announced to all who could hear him, "Lincoln was shot last night!" Our beloved Abraham Lincoln, the impersonation of kindness to the wounded and suffering in the hospitals, our statesman who had guided our country in war, our Commander-in-Chief of the army and navy—Abraham Lincoln, the savior of our country, was betrayed and sacrificed.

At that moment was blotted from our language for all time the affectionate name we had used. Now he was to all of us not "Old Abe," but Abraham Lincoln. Our hero was now too sacred a personage to be spoken of otherwise than by his own dignified name.

His speech at Gettysburg in 1863 cannot be described by human adjectives. To me and, I suppose, to every intelligent person it is the most appealing speech ever read. In its brevity it contains the great principles of our government. Its words put into lasting form our true conceptions of our government and of loyal American lives:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this Continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. . . .

This nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.