

## Thrilling Romance of War.

THE STORY OF A LETTER THAT SAVED A SOLDIER'S LIFE.

Charleston, S. C., News and Courier.

It was written by the light of burning homes and while the air resounded with the deafening curses of a frenzied mob of soldiery and the night wind whistled around the smoking ruins of a desolated city! Nearly twenty years have passed since the terrible atrocities of that awful night and the great red waves of the war settled down into a perfect calm. The swords have been beaten into ploughshares and the spears into pruning hooks and the memories of fratricidal strife are dying away in the distance like the discordant notes of inharmonious music. A bit of the driftwood of Revolution, it had floated down the quiet current of peaceful times and there it lay on the rector's table, a little stained and discolored by age, a simple sheet of paper of the kind used in the late Confederate States about the close of the war, and yet it contained within its creased folds a story of invincible courage, heroic fortitude, and Christian charity for which the world is all the better.

"This letter," said the Rev. A. Toomer Porter, D. D., to representative of the News and Courier, "was written by Lieut. John A. McQueen, of the Fifteenth Illinois cavalry, one of the finest men I have ever known, a brave soldier, a chivalrous enemy, a devoted friend, and a most devout and honest Christian gentleman. If you will sit down here I will tell you something about the man and about the wonderful history of that letter that was written by me many years ago." And this is about the way the story ran:

THE BURNING OF COLUMBIA by Sherman's army took place on February 17, 1865. It was during the night of that fearful conflagration that Dr. Porter then a chaplain in the Confederate army, with his wife and children were subjected to all the perils which beset the doomed city. They were staying at the house of Dr. Reynolds, but in order that they might be safer, accompanied by Dr. Reynolds's party they sought shelter in another house nearer to the headquarters of Gen. Sherman. After the ladies and children had been stowed away in their new quarters Dr. Reynolds declared that he would go back and see his house burned down, and as he and Dr. Porter came out on the pavement they were accosted by two Federal officers, one of them a young man of favorable appearance who said, "I advise you not to go on the streets." Dr. Reynolds declined to take his advice, saying that he would go, and started off attended by the young officer, who said that if he would go he should not go without an escort. In about three hours and a half the anxious watchers were relieved by the return of the officer, who introduced himself as Lieut. John A. McQueen, of the 15th Illinois cavalry, modestly saying, "we have saved the house, and if you will take the ladies back it will help us very much in preserving the property." When Dr. Reynolds and his gallant escort reached his house they found it filled with soldiers who had broken open all the trunks and closets and covered the floor with rosin preparatory to the application of the torch. With pistol in hand McQueen drove the men out and stationed a strong guard around the premises and on the roof of the house, and established

A CHAIN OF NEGROES with buckets as a fire brigade between the well and the house. And there the gallant Illinois cavalier remained from Friday night until Monday afternoon. On Monday, after Sherman's army had all gone, Dr. Porter went to Lieut. McQueen and told him that if he did not follow his army he would capture him, as it would be unsafe for him to fall into the hands of the Southern soldiers after the burning of the city. McQueen replied that his only reason for remaining was his fears lest his friend should be annoyed by hummers; but finally he was prevailed upon to leave. "When he got on his horse," said Dr. Porter, "I don't know what put it into my head, but I asked Mrs. Porter if she did not have some little piece of jewelry that I might give it to our faithful protector as a token of our gratitude to him. My wife only had a gold pencil, which she gladly offered to part with, but Lieut. McQueen refused to receive it, saying: 'Mr. Porter, I'm very much obliged, but I can't take that pencil; I couldn't persuade any one that I had not stolen it.' Ah, he was a splendid fellow! I then ran into the house and wrote this letter:

A HISTORIC LETTER. COLUMBIA, S. C., February 18, 1866. LIEUT. GEN. WADE HAMPTON—Dear General—Should Lieut. McQueen, 15th Illinois cavalry, one of General Howard's escort, U. S. A., ever fall into your hands or any of your command, let me entreat you to show him every kindness in your power. In the awful night of the 17th, I testify that but for him, my family and Dr. Reynolds would have suffered indeed. He

stuck to us all the night and all the day. He was a great part of the night on the shed and labored with all his might to save Dr. Reynolds's house, which by the good Providence of God, by his aid was saved. I beg you, by all the kind remembrances of the past, for my sake, as well as for him who has in the midst of the horrors of that night proved himself a man and a Christian, return to him in his extremity all the kindness he showed to us in ours. I am, General, yours faithfully,

A. TOOMER PORTER.

"On the second page of the letter, as you will see here, I wrote as follows: 'To any C. S. soldier into whose hands this may fall from the Rev. A. Toomer Porter, rector of the church of the Holy Communion, Columbia, S. C.'

"Then after folding the letter I wrote upon the back of it this superscription: 'To Lieut. Gen. Wade Hampton, C. S. Army, or to any one into whose hands Lt. J. McQueen may fall.'

WOUNDED AND CAPTURED.

"I took this letter out to our friend and said: 'Now, McQueen, put this in your breast-pocket, and if the emergency arises, use it. I am pretty well known in the Southern army, and if you should fall into the hands of our troops, it may be of some service to you.' Well, McQueen left us, followed by our blessings. It was about a month before we could get out of Columbia. We had received no word from any of our friends, and did not know where they were or how they had fared. Finally I secured a carriage and conveyed my family to Newberry where we took the cars. When I got to Hodget depot I met one of the Aikens, who told me that his brother Hugh had been killed in a skirmish ten days after the burning of Columbia, and that in the same skirmish, a young man named McQueen had been wounded, and that his life had been spared by our troops when he was captured on account of the letter I had written, which he drew out of his pocket and showed to them. I went on to Anderson with my family, and the next morning returned to Newberry. From that place I walked to Columbia, and there I got an old mule and a wagon, and with five other persons went to Camden, where I had heard there were a number of soldiers in the hospital. As soon as I reached Camden I went directly to the hospital, and after going through several wards, opened a door and started into another apartment of the building. As I opened the door, I saw a soldier clad in blue rise up from his pallet in the corner of the room, and as he rose threw up his hands and exclaimed: 'Thank God! Home! Springing over the beds of several of the wounded Confederate soldiers I caught the poor fellow in my arms, and with our heads upon each other's necks, from very excess of emotion we wept. It was a curious spectacle for the men in the hospital to see a Confederate chaplain and a Yankee lieutenant in each other's arms.

GOING THROUGH THE LINES.

"McQueen gave me an account of his movements since we had said good-by in Columbia. While on scouting party, and forty miles to the right of Sherman's right wing, McQueen and his party had a skirmish with some of Butler's cavalry. In this skirmish, which occurred in Darlington county, two Confederate and two Federal soldiers had been killed, and two soldiers had been wounded on each side. McQueen had been wounded and brought to the hospital in Camden, and here I found him overjoyed at the good Providence that had sent me to him. I went up to Bishop Davis's house and told the story of McQueen's services while in Columbia, and that he was now in the hospital in Camden. The good bishop was delighted to hear this. He, too, had been the object of the wounded soldier's kindly care. When the Yankee troops passed through Camden, McQueen had placed a guard around the bishop's house, and he had not lost even so much as a chicken, and the same kindness had been extended to the Reynoldses and the DeSaussures. The good bishop gave McQueen his apostolic benediction as I made ready to get him out of his trouble. I went to the quartermaster who gave me an old lame mule, Mrs. DeSaussure lent me a buggy, and Mr. W. C. Courtney gave me a suit of citizen's clothes for my charge, and Mrs. DeSaussure made up a lot of biscuits and provisions to last upon our journey, for I had determined to take McQueen to the front where I might secure his safe passage across the lines. I put McQueen in the buggy, and walking alongside of him, I carried him to Chester. Here I met General A. H. Colquitt, now Senator Colquitt, of Georgia, who gave me a safe passport with McQueen. All along our route from Camden to Chester and beyond I was afraid to let it be known who McQueen was, so deeply incensed were the people at the outrages they had suffered, and so adopting a little strategy, I made him appear to be deaf and dumb whenever we stopped until I had told his story and tested the temper of my audience. When I found out that there was no danger, McQueen suddenly recovered his power of speech and became as voluble as any

of us. When I got among our soldiers I did not know what they might do to us.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

"After we left Chester we journeyed on to Salisbury, N. C. and there we found something in the air, an indefinable something that we could neither feel nor see, but something that seemed to presage calamity. Here we had to stop. There was no telegraph and all communication had been pretty well cut off I was for pushing on to Richmond with the intention of getting G. A. Trenholm, then a member of the Confederate Cabinet, to send McQueen through the lines home. I turned off and went down to Smithville where Gen. Joseph E. Johnston had established his headquarters. There I met Gen. Hardee, who saw Gen. Johnston for me. I was told by him to take McQueen to Raleigh. Here we were taken care of by the Bev. Dr. Mason, and the next day I went to see Johnston, who told that Hardee had related the young man's story to him and asked me where he was. He sent one of his officers and gave McQueen a permit to go through the lines.

AT DINNER WITH JOE JOHNSTON.

"I dined with General Johnston that day and while seated at the table in Rufus Tucker's house with Johnston on one side and Hardee on the other, a telegram was handed to Johnston. We had just finished our soup, I think. Gen. Johnston read the dispatch and rising from the table left the room and going out on the piazza called Gen. Hardee. In a few moments Hardee called me out and said: 'Now, remember, you, Gen. Johnston and myself and the telegraph operator are the only persons who know the contents of this telegram.' The telegram was from President Davis from Salisbury, to this effect:

Gen. J. E. Johnston: I have not heard from Gen. Lee for three days, but from the stray soldiers I gather that he has met with a great disaster. Come to me.

A TELEGRAM FROM JEFF DAVIS.

"The telegram was signed 'Jefferson Davis.' Gen. Hardee then said: 'Johnston has gone on that train that you hear now, and I never saw Johnston for three years after that day. I then said to Hardee: 'Well, if this is true it's all over. Any man that is killed now is murdered. We will retreat rapidly and surrendered at Hillsboro,' for there are only 12,000 muskets in this army. This is in fact only a mob, the debris of all our armies. You had better leave. A disbanding army is dangerous.' After this interview with Gen. Hardee I went back to Dr. Mason's and bade McQueen good-by, never expecting that I should see or hear of him again.

"Rufus Tucker asked me to bring a pair of mules and a servant with me South for safekeeping, and I did so. I came right back over Sherman's track and was never molested for one minute. I drove through in five days to Columbia and from there I went to Anderson. The day after I got to Anderson the mules of Tucker were stolen by a company of raiders, who rode into that place. I tried to save the mules, and told the raiders that the war was over, but they would not believe it and so I lost my mules.

"When I returned to Charleston in June I found a letter awaiting my arrival, from Lieut. McQueen, and also one from Gen. O. O. Howard, saying that if he could be of any service I must call on him. The first service that I got from Gen. Howard was the pardon of George A. Trenholm.

WHAT RESULTED FROM THE LETTER.

"Years passed on, and nothing served to disturb the uneventful current of my life until October, 1867, I received the idea of establishing the great educational institution of which I am the rector—the Holy Communion Church Institute—which grew out of the calamities of the war and is a record of God's wonderful providence.

"On one of my visits to Washington I met Gen. Sherman, who asked me if there was nothing that could be done for me in return for what I have done for Lieut. McQueen. I replied that the Government did not have money enough to pay me for the risk of my life in serving McQueen; that I had done it as an act of gratitude and that it was not a thing that could be paid for in dollars and cents. When Charleston was given up as a military post, however, I visited Washington. I went to see Gen. Sherman and told him that the time had now come when he could do something—not for me, but for the country. He said that he knew all the work that I had been doing and that the Government ought to be thankful that it could give me possession of the arsenal in Charleston. Gen. Sherman exerted himself among the Republican members of Congress. When the matter came up in the Senate Senator Edmunds asked what Gen. Sherman said? Senator Butler read what Sherman had said, whereupon Edmunds declared that he had no objection and so the resolution was passed granting this valuable property for ed-

ucational purposes. It will be seen from what apparently insignificant circumstances the grandest results follow.

WADE HAMPTON BEFORE THE ILLINOIS FARMERS.

"Lieut. McQueen and myself have corresponded with each other all these years. When Senator Hampton went out to Illinois to deliver an address before the Winnebago Agricultural Society, in 1877, twelve years after the destruction of Columbia, he stopped in the middle of his speech to recite some of the episodes of the war, and mentioned the story of my letter to McQueen. When he had finished speaking a young man stepped out of the crowd, and going up to Senator Hampton said: 'I am Lieut. John A. McQueen, and this is the letter (producing the letter that you have in your hand) that saved my life! The effect of this declaration of the modest Illinois farmer can be imagined better than described. Senator Hampton took the letter and read it before the crowd of ten thousand people, and it created a tremendous sensation. He wanted to keep the letter, but Lieut. McQueen, of course would not part with it for anything in the world.

"Last year I was invited to go to Chicago, and while there I went over to Elgin to visit McQueen. I went to his house and spent the night with him. He introduced me to his four bright and lively children, telling them that I was their grandfather, and naively suggested that I must be their grandfather, for that if it had not been for me they would not have had him for their father. McQueen's wife is dead. He is bringing up his children in the right way. He is one of the finest men I have ever known. He is a staunch Presbyterian, and in one of his letters to me he said that Congressman Aiken had said that he (Aiken) was opposed to the lease of the Arsenal to me, because it would be a sectarian school, but that when he thought of the Presbyterian boy in the arms of the Episcopal minister he blessed, God for such sectarianism and wished that we had more of it.

"Several weeks ago I received the following letter from my Yankee friend enclosing the somewhat historic epistle which was written by me in Columbia a little more than nineteen years ago.

Elgin, February 17, 1884.

"DEAR FATHER PORTER—I must not let this day pass without sending a line to you. It is now 5.30 p. m. At 7 p. m. will be in the 'Edina' church, God willing, attending a prayer meeting. How different the surroundings from eighteen years ago. What a changeable life this is; but thank God for peace, and thank God that our Savior is the same yesterday, to-day and forever! [Hebrews 13. 8.] I enclose that now historic letter. If you think proper; say to the boys that I beg them to read the letter and to look beyond the letter to that mighty Savior, who is able to keep us (men of like passions with others) in these heart-rending scenes, from the hatred and brutality and passion so common in times of war. Please remember me kindly to them all and also to the teachers and directors of the institute. I may never be able to visit you or give you that financial aid that I could wish, but I can pray for you and commit you to the care of Him who owns the cattle upon a thousand hills and knows all your needs. Will not limit the time you may keep the letter, and I need not tell you how I value it. Will trust you with it. Gen. Hampton wished a copy and I sent one, but do not know if it reached him. My children join me in sending love to Mrs. P. and you. From your unworthy son, John A. McQueen."

During the recital of the stirring incidents contained in this narrative of the war, Dr. Porter was frequently interrupted. The day on which the story was told was as beautiful as a dream. Carriage after carriage loaded with Northern visitors drove through the splendid camps of the Holy Communion church institute, while numerous pedestrians sauntered through the grounds or paused for a moment at the wide-open gate to catch a glimpse of the great educational temple within which so much has been done for the cause of christian culture. A lady, heavily veiled and dressed in deep black, came into the rector's study with a small sum of money neatly wrapped in white paper—it was the widow's mite! A strong man stood up in the doorway to ask that his son might be taken into the school, and his soul looked out through only one window, for one of his eyes had been lost in battle; this was a cry for help. And so from day to day the touching history of this institution is written in human hearts and the work that it is doing is making its impression upon society and the world. Truth is stranger than fiction!

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