

# The Home Reading Circle

## A WAR-TIME INCIDENT.

By WILL N. HARBEN.

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### PART I.

During the civil war, the mountains of northern Georgia were the refuge of men who, to avoid conscription, hid in caves, canyons and dense thickets. Here also were the hiding-places of lawless bands of "bushwhackers," who went about robbing the weak and the helpless and often committing murders.

Through having lost an eye in boyhood and having a slight lameness in one leg, old Coot Yarborough had managed to secure immunity from military duty, and, with his wife, lived in a cabin at the foot of the Chohattas, near the main road leading over the mountain.

"They are a-fightin' like rips over at Dalton," he said late one summer afternoon as he stood in the cabin door and looked eastward. His wife left the potatoes she was roasting in the hot ashes at the fireplace, came to his side, listened to the far-away artillery and sighed deeply.

"It's awful," she said. "Jest think of the pore men that's being piled up an' drug off the field dead 'n' dyin', an' half o' 'em starvin' fur somethin' to eat. The Lord only knows what they are a-fightin' fur anyway."

"Let 'em go it," Yarborough said, un sympathetically; "the balls hain't a-goin' to reach us over heer."

"The war has haint my life," she said, with another sigh. "I thought a-putt up with yore disposition in ordinary times, but that is too much temptation amongst all this outlawn' fur a weak, waverin' man like you. I hoped you was goin' to do better when the war first broke out, but I lost all heart when I discovered you was aidin' Seth Moore's gang o' he devils."

"You don't know what yore a-talkin' about," he replied, surlily; "mind yore own business."

"You can't deny it," the old woman went on, with the calmness of resignation in her tone. "Tother night Bill Long came by axin' fur information of his family, an' said he had got this fur without detection. You talked to 'im like a friend, and got 'im to set down to rest while you went an' told Seth Moore. Do you reckon I was much surprised when I heard they'd caught 'im a mile furder on and robbed 'im o' the last cent he had in the world?"

"You don't know what yore a-talkin' about," he repeated, but he kept his eyes upon the ground and moved uneasily.

"Before Mandy married and moved away from us, you was a different sort of a man, kase she always did have some influence over you fur good. Yore evil ways begun with yore gittin' mad at her fur marryin' the only man she ever did lay any store by, and you have gone down hill ever since. Mandy was the only child I ever had, but you separated her from me, and my life is jest ruined—that's all. She's got grown children by now, an' they'd 'a' been a comfort to us, ef you'd 'a' been more forgivin'."

"He was prevented from replyin' by the sound of horses' hoofs down the road.

"Git in the house," said the old woman, calmly; "that's 'er tellin' but it may be somebody lookin' for you."

"He don't belong to me," said the boy, as he led the horse to the stable behind the cabin, and with his uninjured hand opened his saddle-bags and emptied some shelled corn into the animal's trough.

"You got a mighty fine hoss," remarked Yarborough, as they were re-entering the cabin. "I haint seed as good a one in many a day."

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marked Mrs. Yarborough; "you don't look overly well fed."

"A smile came on the thin face of the boy. "I haint had a bite since five o'clock this mornin', except some parched corn with salt."

"The Lord knows you ain't in no condition to travel on an empty stomach," the woman said. "We haint got much, but we kin give you some hot corn bread an' bacon."

"That'll be mighty sweet-tasted to me," said the boy; "I haint had nothin' but canned meat an' hard tack for a month. Hungry as I am, I've sorter got over agin it."

After supper they drew their chairs back to the fireplace, for the night air was cool. Rising to help Mrs. Yarborough put a log of wood on the fire, the young soldier dropped his haversack from his arm to the floor. There was a jingle of gold and silver coin, as a little bag filled with money rolled into sight. As he hastily, and with some embarrassment, picked it up and restored it to the haversack, the boy caught Coot Yarborough's eye.

"I may as well up on that I've been tryin' to keep it hid all this time," he said, flushing. "I wasn't afeerd o' youns, but it belongs to a feller in the army, an' he axed me to take it to his folks high whar I live, an' made me promise not to let a soul know it was on me."

"It's mighty reeky in these mountain to be tottin' money about, ur to be astraddle of a fine hoss," put in Mrs. Yarborough, her dishpan on the table, just out of the firelight. "You never know when you are with honest people."

"That's so," agreed the boy; "an' I don't like to be responsible for anybody's property. I made shore I was goin' to be robbin' about an hour ago. I met two shabby-lookin' fellers on mules. I noticed that they liked the appearance of my hoss, an' that they turned and followed me after I passed. My hoss was purty fresh, and when I got to the rise of the hill I whipped up an' got away from 'em."

"How fur back was that?" asked Mrs. Yarborough, with stern anxiety. Her eyes rested on her husband's face.

"Four or five miles, I reckon."

"Was one of 'em a dark-complected man, an' 'other a little stunted feller with a gray goatee?"

"Exactly; you must know 'em. 'I do, ef anybody does. That ain't no blacker-hearted scoundrel unweary; they murdered a sick woman fur her quarter."

"The boy put his hand on the butt of his pistol, and his face was very serious. "I wouldn't a-run from them as I did, but I had this money an' lost my gun every night, and was swimmin' the river. I didn't think my pistol would do no good, unless I could use both hands to reload."

"The old woman dried her hands on her apron, came into the firelight, took his pistol and examined it.

"Is it loaded?"

"Yes'm; but the powder may be damp."

"They are a helpless kind of thing," she said, holding the weapon down near Yarborough's knee, as she fixed the hammer and cap, and carefully looked at the powder in the tube. "Looks damp to me; my eyes are bad; you'd better not take any chances." Then, as if actuated by a sudden impulse, and despite the glare of opposition in Yarborough's eyes, she took down a shining revolver from the mantelpiece, and gave it to the boy. "I think we'd better swap," she said. "Yours'll do fur me; besides we've got two guns, an' my husband has a Smith an' Weston that he always carries under his coat."

Yarborough's glare swept from her to the fireplace. He was afraid that she might go further in her insinuations.

"It's mine," she said to Yarborough. "I traded a good cow fur it, an' can dispose of it as I like."

"I am mighty much obliged," said the boy. "I wouldn't take it, but I've got a good deal of responsibility on me, an' may need it bad."

"I'd sleep with it cocked in my hand every night, on this road," she said, as much to her husband, as to her guest.

"This is a awful country fur a wounded boy like you to be in. You don't know who to trust."

"I know that, but speakin' about sleepin' reminds me that I need it bad. I kin hardly hold my eyes open, an' I want to get an early start in the mornin'."

"Yore bed is up in the loft," she said, rising. "You'll have to climb the ladder. Me an' Mr. Yarborough sleeps on a tallow dip and gave it to him."

"Well, I'll tell you both good night," said the soldier, and he went to the ladder, followed by Mrs. Yarborough.

"I don't believe I'd take the trouble to address ef you was here," she said, in a whisper, as she caught the ladder to steady it. "You see that's no tellin' when a body might be surprised."

"All right," he said; "good night."

When the boy had disappeared, Mrs. Yarborough took a musket from the wall over the head of her bed and sat down opposite her husband. She drew the ramrod and carefully took the measurement on the inside and outside of the barrel, to see if it were charged, and then, when she had satisfied herself that it was, she examined the cap carefully. Yarborough was watching her movements like a suspicious dog.

"What are you a-goin' to do with that gun?" he asked.

"Use it, ef necessary," she replied, without looking at him. "Looky' heer, Coot Yarborough," she went on, sternly; "do you reckon I don't know that Seth Moore and Budd Hardcastle are still on this boy's trail? They know in reason he'd have to stop somers to-night, an' this is the only place. Now, see heer, I can't help your conduct outside of the house along with that gang, but in this cabin I will have my rights. That pore boy is helpless, an' ef them dirty rascals put their heads in at that door tonight, an' the Lord is my stay and comfort, I'll do my best to blow their heads off."

"Puh!" he sneered. "You'd better mind yore own business, ef you know what's good fur you. You can't regulate the whole country; them fellers would make you sing a different kind of a song, ef they had a rope round yore neck, as they did me once."

"I ain't as rank a coward as you are," she answered, sternly. "You quiver at the very sound of Seth Moore's creaks. He orders you about like a dog, but ef they attempt any 'er tricks on this boy, I'll make 'em wish they was dead. He was wounded fightin' fur his country, while them that's afeerd to face powder an' ball is a-sinkin' about whar in the mountains, robbin' women an' children."

"I'm goin' to bed," Yarborough answered; and he went to the high-posted bed, undressed, and retired. Mrs. Yarborough sat for several minutes looking into the fire; then she got up, went to the door, and looked out down the road. Seeing no one, she closed the door and barred it. Then she put a stick of wood on the fire and lay down beside her husband.

The hours passed. Mrs. Yarborough was pretending to be deep in sleep. Her eyes were closed, and she drew her breath heavily. The fire had burnt so low that the light had ceased to flicker on the walls, and she felt as if she were alone.

Coot Yarborough was not asleep. He was expecting something. Toward morning it came, a soft whistle, the imitation of the whip-poor-will's call three repeated. He sat up stealthily, and looked at the clock. It was half past the semi-darkness. Not a muscle of it betrayed wakefulness; her breathing was that of a sound sleeper.

### PART II.

Dressing himself noiselessly, Yarborough unbarred the door, opened it and went down the hill in the moonlight. He had scarcely left the door-step when his wife rose, drew on her dress, crept to the door and looked after him. She heard him repeat the whip-poor-will's call, and saw eight or ten men ride out of the bushes to meet him.

"Lord have mercy!" she muttered. "The whole gang is heer; don't see how on arth I can save 'im. But out of her despair rose a plan for the boy's escape. Going to the stable, she quickly bridled and saddled his horse, and left him fastened to a bush in the edge of the woods back of the cabin. Then she crept round to the front door, bending near the earth, so as not to be seen, and took a hasty look down the road. The moonlight was dim, and she stood grouped around her husband. They were planning an attack.

Haunting into the cabin, and shuddering at the sound of the punchcoons creaking under her feet, she mounted the ladder to the loft. The moonlight shone through the window, and fell on the bed of the young soldier, who was sound asleep that he did not stir till she had touched him. But she had no sooner done so, than he sat up and laid hold of the revolver lying nearby at his hand.

"It's jest me," she said in a cautious whisper. "Git up as quick as you possibly can. That's a whole gang o' bush-whackers out that ready to rob you."

"I reckon not," he said, not yet fully awake, but she heard him hastily stretch to the next instant, and knew he had comprehended her warning.

"Hurry up," she said. "I've got yore hoss ready tied in the bushes."

"He was holding his revolver between his teeth, and grunted impatiently as he drew on his boot over his bandaged arm. "I'm ready," he said, as he followed her to the ladder. "But if I didn't have Tom Brantley's money and that horse to look after, I'd jest like to let 'em smell my powder—the dirty scoundrels!"

They reached the door breathlessly, and she held up her hand warningly, while she peered through the door.

"Thank goodness, they are down that yet, but—come on quick; they're a-comin'! Follow me round the house! Steep as low as you can, and be ready to mount. I'll show you a way through the woods. When they find you gone, they'll think you went the main road. I kin lead you to another big road, an' they will never keep you in the world."

"They had gone as far as they could, a mile, she keeping ahead, and parting the bushes and briars, when the young soldier said:

"Hold on thar! I kin git through the bushes an' snags better than you can with yore dress a-draggin', an' soakin' wet with dew. You git up heer an' let me walk."

"Sh! it ain't fur," and she raised her hand warningly, and continued on her way till they had reached a spot where the trees grew very densely; then she stopped and stepped back to him. She was panting heavily, and her hair was wet with dew.

"Listen," she said, with a grim smile. "They couldn't find us heer, but they are in the cabin now. That sound was the ladder a-fallin', I fixed it so it would slide to the minute they were furder on in thar! I hear 'em a-cussin'; they have discovered yore escape. Thank heaven!—as a clatter of horses' hoofs came to them on the still air."

"Thar they go up the big road like rips. They will try to overtake you, never imaginin' you went this way. Come on; 'other big road is right out thar. When you git on it, you'll be all right."

A moment later the long yellow roadway lay before them, stretching upwards in the moonlight.

"I reckon I'd better turn back," she said. "Keep straight ahead, and you'll get to Ellijay some time in the mornin'. But I was just a-thinkin'; you never told us yore name."

"And I've eat yore meat an' bread an' slept in yore house, 'thout so much as axin' yore name."

"Yarborough," she said.

"That's her name, as shore as preachin'!" he said, and the boy leaned down and studied the features of his rescuer. "I thought thar was something that made me feel at home with you the minute I heard you speak. I went to sleep up thar in the loft earlier than I have fur many a night in a long time. But what become o'—him—the old man? Somehow I couldn't quite trust him the same as a big bear."

A big tear came out of her eye and fell to the ground.

"I'm ashamed of the way he treated you," she said, almost sobbing. "I'm afeerd Mandy never would understand it."

"I never would mention it to her," replied the boy, slowly comprehending her drift. "Though I want to tell 'er about you, I'm mighty glad I see you. Ef the war's ever over I want to come out heer an' help you with yore crops. I wouldn't mind 'im."

"He said, 'as a awful deal, that the old woman, but since the war begun he has changed from what he used to be, an' he's more vital and



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DON'T DESTROY A ROMANCE BY MEETING HIM MORE THAN HALF WAY.

important. His famous letter to the Press of May 14, 1894, was the immediate occasion and the essential basis of the investigation ordered by the senate. The substance of that letter was that the Sugar trust had made heavy contributions in the campaign of 1892; that it made these contributions with the understanding that its interests should be protected by passing the sugar tariff; and that the sugar schedule presented by the senate in the construction of the Wilson-Gorman bill was framed explicitly in compliance with that understanding. These general propositions were fortified and illuminated with great fullness and minuteness of specific information. The central and commanding link in the chain of evidence was the striking and startling revelation that Secretary Carlisle, as the representative of the administration, and in the interest of the trust, had framed the sugar schedule and that it was actually presented and placed before the Finance committee in his own handwriting.

When Mr. Edwards was called to the stand and asked to name the source from which he obtained that information, he very properly declined to do so. Every other honorable and right-minded journalist in the United States would have done the same thing under the same circumstances. Mr. Edwards received the information in confidence and he manfully refused to violate that confidence. It was no rightful concern of the senate who the informant was. The only legitimate question for its inquiry was, is the statement true? As a matter of fact Mr. Edwards had himself seen the paper. He knew the secretary's handwriting. There could be no chance of mistake. Yet he was never asked if he had seen the paper and knew it to be what he said it was. The effect was not to get at the truth, but to get at the informant—not to punish the wrong but to punish the exposure of the wrongdoing. To know the source of the information was in no way needful to determine whether the information was true. The statement was susceptible of proof entirely independent of its origin. Every member of the committee knew it was true. As a matter of fact the paper was afterwards produced and the statement was absolutely verified in every particular. To insist on the name of the informant, therefore, was not prompted in the interest of truth or of justice, but simply to shield the informant from inquiry.

"I'll fry some bacon an' put on a pan o' bread," she said, gently. But he made no reply, and she looked at him with a sad smile. "I'm mighty anxious to have us move over thar," she went on. "He 'lowed he'd help us with our crops ef the war was ever stopped, an' that Mandy an' I would like to see us. Roberts ain't thar; he's off in the war; you wouldn't have to see him. I am mighty lonely, so fur from women folks, an' I do want to see Mandy and her other children. I'd think you would, too."

"After what happened last night!" the old man began, but he did not finish what he started to say, and to hide his embarrassment, he rose and stood in the door.

"He said he didn't intend to say one single word about it," said Mrs. Yarborough, argumentatively; "he ain't the unforagin' sort."

"What time had you rather start?" Yarborough asked, his eyes on the white mists that were climbing up the mountain side. "I kin get a wagon fur our things an' a hoss. I don't intend to meet them fellers agin. They are mad at us, kase he got away last night. I—I knowed you had led 'im out the back way, but I didn't let 'em know, an' I'm a-skin' you if they had caught you."

"We'll go today, then," said the old woman. "I want to see Mandy mighty bad."

Not since the birth of her only child had Mrs. Yarborough felt so happy as when she and her husband drove over the mountain to join those she loved in the peaceful valley beyond.

Prosecuted for Doing Their Duty

From the Philadelphia Press.

A point has been reached in the trial of the cases growing out of the Sugar trust investigation, which, unless we altogether misconceive it, involves in the highest degree the privileges and liberty of the press and the defence of public rights. Several witnesses were indicted for declining to answer questions of the committee. Messrs. Havemeyer and Scaries have gone free upon the decision of the jury. The next to be tried is that of the newspaper correspondents which is set down for Monday. Mr. Edwards, the "Holland" of the Philadelphia Press, and Mr. Shriver of the New York Mail and Express have been arraigned for declining to disclose the names of informants for statements they published in connection with the Sugar trust and its operations. The arrangement of Mr. Shriver is nothing less than grotesque. He very properly refused to give the name of the authority for his publication; but when a question arose from this refusal, the authority himself, who was a member of congress, promptly and voluntarily came forward and avowed that he was responsible for the statement. Mr. Shriver had protected his confidence and his honor, but all possible ground of complaint against him was removed and the proceedings should have been instantly dismissed. The case of Mr. Edwards is more vital and

as those of lawyers and priests. Many of the most important and valuable sources of wrong which have ever been made would never have been undertaken had they involved a betrayal of the source of information. Indeed, if such protection did not exist many of the doors would be closed. There is no editor who does not often base editorial discussion on knowledge which comes to him in a confidential way. He takes his own risk in the publication, and if he publishes what is false and indefensible he must answer for it. The vital question relates to the character of the publication. It is a useful end is served by undertaking to go behind what must itself pass the full scrutiny of the law. When the editor accepts the information and publishes it he himself takes the whole responsibility, and the unknown source that stands behind is nothing to anybody.

The senate committee itself should have made the clear and commanding distinction which exists in this case. It would have been far better for its own fame had it drawn the line between the accomplice and the accused. It should have seen that in the case of Mr. Edwards there was no real contumacy; that he was standing as a champion of the people against a nefarious conspiracy; that he was withholding information essential to the revelation of the truth; and that his honorable attitude of defending the confidence reposed in him alone made the truth accessible. It should have recognized that the question of journalistic and sacred privileges of journalism and public liberty. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge especially should have seen and seized the opportunity presented to him. He is the accomplished historical student. He is familiar with the great struggles for the freedom of printing from the malignant and impotent warfare on John Wilkes down to the present day. He is the one man of all others who, standing up in the committee or before the senate, should have said: "Let not the committee or the senate put itself in the attitude of a persecutor. Let it not array itself with those despots and marquis who have sought to stifle the liberty of the press. Mr. Edwards, if he has declined to answer a question, but he is not a contumacious witness. He is only acting the honorable part which every man of honor must respect. He is not withholding any legitimate information but opening the way to the complete establishment of the truth. He is not to be confounded with those witnesses who are seeking to taint the senate or to shield tainted senators. The question which Mr. Edwards declines to answer is in no way essential in this investigation, and I insist that the committee ought to withdraw it or that no proceedings should be taken against Mr. Edwards for declining to answer it."

Had Senator Lodge taken such an attitude as his antecedents and his attainments might have led us to expect, he would have made himself the foremost champion in this country of the liberty of the press and would have held a unique and enviable position. In failing to grasp the splendid chance, he missed one of the greatest opportunities which has come to any statesman or public leader in recent years. The question which he, with a clear vision and a pure aim, could have settled on the spot, remains now to be determined in another manner. We do not discuss the legal issues which will be presented on Monday. But this case, with its deep import and its far-reaching significance, cannot be investigated on a petty technicality. We do not exaggerate it when we say that in the largest sense it involves the freedom of the press and the ethics of journalism. If we do not mistake their spirit, the newspapers of the country will appreciate its character and make the true nature of the question clearly understood. It would be an extraordinary spectacle if the magnates of the trust should go free and the journalist, who made the exposure, should suffer punishment!

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