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JORDAN, THE SCOUT.

AMONG the many brave men who have taken part in this war—whose dying embers are now being trodden out by a "poor white man"—none, perhaps, have done more service to the country, or won less glory for themselves, than the "poor whites," who have acted as scouts for the Union armies. The issue of battles, the result of campaigns, and the possession of wide districts of country, have often depended on the sagacity, or been determined by the information they have gathered; and yet they have seldom been heard of in the newspapers, and may never be read of in history.

Romantic, thrilling, and sometimes laughable adventures have attended the operations of the scouts of both sections; but more difficulty and danger have unboubtedly been encountered by the partisans of the North than of the South. Operating mostly within the circle of their own acquaintance, the latter have usually been aided and harbored by the Southern people, who, generally friendly to secession, have themselves often acted as spies, and conveyed dispatches across districts occupied by our armies, and inaccessible to any but supposed loyal citizens.

The service rendered the South by these volunteer scouts has often been of the most important character. One stormy night, early in the war, a young woman set out from a garrisoned town to visit a sick uncle residing a short distance in the country. The sick uncle mounting his horse at midnight, rode twenty miles in the rain to Forrest's headquarters. The result was, the important town of Murfreesboro' and a promising major-general fell into the hands of the confederates; and all because the said major-general permitted a pretty woman to pass his lines on "a mission of mercy."

At another time, a rebel citizen, professing disgust with secession for having the weakness to be on "its last legs," took the oath of allegiance and assumed the Union uniform. Informing himself fully of the disposition of our forces along the Nashville railroad, he suddenly disappeared, to re-appear with Basil Duke and John Morgan in a midnight raid on our slumbering outposts.

Again, a column on the march came upon a wretched woman, with a child in her arms, seated by the dying embers of a burning homestead—burning, she said, because her sole and only friend, her uncle (these ladies seldom have any nearer kin) "stood up stret fur the kentry." No American soldier ever refused a "lift" to a woman in distress. This woman was soon lifted into an empty saddle by the side of a staff officer, who, with many wise winks and knowing nods, was discussing the intended route of the expedition with a brother simpleton. A little further on the woman suddenly remembered that another uncle, who did not stand up quite so "stret fur the kentry," and consequently, had a house still standing up for him, lived "plump up thet 'ar hill ter the right o' the high road." She was set down, the column moved on, and—Streight's well planned expedition miscarried. But no one wasted a thought on the forlorn woman and the sallow baby whose skinney faces were so long within earshot of the wooden-headed staff officer.

Means quite as ingenious and quite as curious were often adopted to conceal dispatches, when the messenger was in danger of capture by an enemy. A boot with a hollow heel, a fragment of corn pone too stale to tempt a starving man, a strip of adhesive plaster over a festering wound, or a ball of cotton-wool stuffed into the ear to keep out the west wind, often hid a message whose discovery would cost a life, and perhaps endanger an army. The writer has himself seen the hollow half eagle which bore to Burnside's beleagured force the welcome tidings that in thirty-six hours Sherman would relieve Knoxville.

The professional scout generally was a native of the South, some illiterate and simple-minded, but brave and self-devoted "poor white man," who, if he had worn shoulder-straps, and been able to write "interesting" dispatches, might now be known as a hero half the world over. Some of these men had they been born at the North, where free schools are open to all, would have led armies, and left a name to live after them. But they were born at the South, had their minds cramped and their souls stunted by a system which dwarfs every noble thing; and so their humble mission over, they have gone down unknown and unhonored, amid the silence and darkness of their native woods.

I hope to rescue the memory of one of these men—John Jordan, from the head of Baine—from utter oblivion by writing this article. He is now beyond the hearing of my words; but I would record one act in his short career, that his pure patriotism may lead some of us to know better and love more the much abused and misunderstood class to which he belonged.

Humphrey Marshall with five thousand men had invaded Kentucky. Entering it at Pound Gap, he had fortified a strong natural position near Paintville, and, with small bands, was overrunning the whole Piedmont region. This region, containing an area larger than the whole of Massachusetts, was occupied by about 4,000 blacks and 100,000 whites—a brave, hardy, rural population, with few schools, scarcely any churches, and only one newspaper, but with that sort of patriotism which grows among mountains and clings to its barren hillsides as if they were the greenest spots in the universe. Among this simple people Marshall was scattering firebrands.—Stump-orators were blazing away at every cross-road, lighting fires which threatened to sweep Kentucky from the Union. That done—so early in the war—dissolution might have followed. To the Ohio canal-boy was committed the task of extinguishing this conflagration. It was a difficult task, one which, with the means at command, would have appalled any man not made equal to it by early struggles with hardship and poverty, and entire trust in the Providence that guards his country.

The means at command were 2,500 men divided into two bodies, and separated by a hundred miles of mountain country. This country was infested with guerrillas and occupied by a disloyal people. The sending of dispatches across it was next to impossible; but communication being opened, and the two columns set in motion, there was danger that they would be fallen on and beaten in detail before they could form a junction. This was the great danger. What remained—the beating of 5,000 Rebels, posted behind intrenchments, by half their number of Yankees, operating in the open field—seemed to the young colonel less difficult of accomplishment.

Evidently the first thing to be done was to find a trustworthy messenger to carry dispatches between the two halves of the Union army. To this end, the Yankee commander applied to the colonel of the Fourteenth Kentucky.

"Have you a man," he asked, "who will die, rather than fail or betray us?"

The Kentuckian reflected a moment, then answered: "I think I have—John Jordan, from the head of Baine."

Jordan was sent for. He was a tall, gaunt, sallow man of about thirty, with small gray eyes, a fine, falsetto voice, pitched in the minor key, and his speech the rude dialect of the mountains. His face had as many expressions as could be found in a regiment, and he seemed a strange combination of cunning, simplicity, undaunted courage, and undoubted faith; yet, though he might pass for a simpleton, he talked a quaint sort of wisdom which ought to have given him to history.

The young colonel sounded him thoroughly; for the fact of the little army might depend on his fidelity. The man's soul was clear as crystal, and in ten minutes the Yankee saw through it. His history is stereotyped in that region. Born among the hills, where the crops are stones, and the sheeps' noses are sharpened before they can nibble the thin grass between them, his life had been one of the hardest toil and privation. He knew nothing but what nature, the Bible, the "course of Time," and two or three of Shakespeare's plays had taught him, but somehow in the mountain air he had grown to be a man—a man as civilized nations account manhood.

"Why did you come into the war?" at last asked the colonel.

"To do my sheer fur the kentry, Gin'ral," answered the man. "And I didn't druv no barg'in wi' th' Lord. I guv Him my life squar' out; and ef He's a mind to tuck it on this tramp why it's a His'n; I've nothin' ter say agin it."

"You mean that you've come into the war not expecting to get out of it?"

"That's so, Gin'ral."

"Will you die rather than let the dispatch be taken?"

"I wull."

The colonel recalled what had passed in his own mind when pouring over his mother's Bible that night at his home in Ohio; and it decided him. "Very well," he said; "I will trust you."

The dispatch was written on tissue paper, rolled into the form of a bullet, coated with warm lead, and put into the hand of the Kentuckian. He was given a carbine, a brace of revolvers, and the fleetest horse in his regiment, and, when the moon was down, started on his perilous journey. He was to ride at night, and hide in the woods or in the houses of loyal men in the daytime.

It was pitch-dark when he set out; but he knew every inch of the way, having traveled it often, driving mules to market. He had gone twenty miles by early dawn, and the house of a friend was only a few miles beyond him. The man himself was away, but his wife was at home, and she would harbor him till nightfall. He pushed on, and tethered his horse in the timber; but it was broad day when he rapped at the door, and was admitted. The good woman gave him breakfast, and showed him to the guest-chamber, where, lying down in his boots, he was soon in a deep slumber.

The house was a log cabin in the midst of a few acres of deadening—ground from which trees have been cleared by girdling. Dense woods were all about it; but the nearest forest was a quarter of a mile distant, and should the scout be tracked, it would be hard to get away over this open space, unless he had warning of the approach of his pursuers. The woman thought of this, and sent up the road on a mule, her whole worldly possessions, an old negro, dark as the night, but faithful as the sun in the heavens. It was high noon when the mule came back, his heels striking fire, and his rider's eyes flashing, as if ignited from the sparks the steel had emitted.

"Dey'm comin', missus!" he cried, "not half a mile away—twenty Secesh,—ridin' as ef de Debil was arter 'em!"

She barred the door, and hastened to the guest chamber.

"Go," she cried, "through the winder,—ter the woods! They'll be here in a minute."

"How many is thar?" asked the scout.

"Twenty,—go,—go at once, or you'll be taken!"

The scout did not move; but fixing his eyes on her face, he said:

"Yes, I yere 'em. Thar's a sorry chance fur my life a'ready. But Rachel, I've thet 'bout me thet's wuth more'n my life—thet, may-be'll save Kaintuck. If I'm killed, wull ye tuck it ter Cunnel Cranor, at Paris?"

"Yes, yes, I will. But go; you've not a minnit to lose, I tell you."

"I know; but wull ye swar it,—swar ter tuck this ter Cunnel Cranor 'fore th' Lord thet yeres us?"

"Yes, yes, I will," she said, taking the bullet. But horses' hoofs were already sounding in the door-yard. "Oh, why did you stop to parley?"

"Never mind, Rachel," answered the scout. "Don't tuck on. Tuck ye keer o' th' dispatch. Valu' it loike yer life,—loike Kaintuck. The Lord's callin' fur me, and I'm a'ready."

But the scout was mistaken. It was not the Lord, but a dozen devils at the door-way.

"What does ye want?" asked the woman, going to the door.

"The man as come from Garfield's camp at sun-up—John Jordan, from the head o' Baine," answered a voice from the outside.

"Ye karn't hev him fur th' axin'," said the scout. "Go away, or I'll send some o' ye war the weather is warm, I reckon."

"Pshaw!" said another voice—from his speech one of the chivalry. "There are twenty of us. We'll spare your life, if you give up the dispatch; if you don't, we'll hang you higher than Haman."

The reader will bear in mind that this was in the beginning of the war, when swarms of spies infested every Union camp, and treason was only a gentlemanly pastime, not the serious business it has grown to be since traitors are no longer dangerous.

"I've nothin' but my life thet I'll guv up," answered the scout; "and ef ye tuck thet ye'll hev ter pay the price, six o' yourn."

"Fire the house!" shouted one.

"No, don't do thet,," said another. "I know him—he's cl'ar grit,—he'll die in the ashes, and we won't git the dispatch."

This sort of talk went on for half an hour; then there was a dead silence, and the woman went to the loft, whence she could see all that was passing outside. About a dozen of the horsemen were posted around the house; but the remainder, dismounted, had gone to the woods, and were felling a well-grown sapling, with the evident intention of using it as a battering-ram to break down the front door.

The woman in a low tone explained the situation, and the scout said:

"It'r' my only chance. I must run fur it. Bring me yer red shawls, Rachel."

She had none, but she had a petticoat of flaming red and yellow. Handling it as if he knew how such articles can be made to spread, the scout softly unbarred the door, and grasping the hand of the woman, said:

"Good by, Rachel. It'r' a right sorry chance; but I may git through. Ef I do, I'll come ter night, ef I don't, git ye the dispatch ter the Cunnel. Good-bye."

To the right of the house, midway between it and the woods, stood the barn. That way led the route of the scout. If he could elude the two mounted men at the doorway, he might escape the other horsemen; for they would have to spring the barnyard fences, and their horses might refuse the leap. But it was foot of man against leg of horse, and "a right sorry chance."

Suddenly he opened the door, and dashed at the two horses with the petticoat. They reared, wheeled, and bounded away like lightning just let out of harness. In the time that it takes to tell it, the scout was over the first fence, and scaling the second; but a horse was making the leap with him. The scout's pistol went off, and the rider's earthly journey was over. Another followed, and his horse fell mortally wounded. The rest made the circuit of the barnyard, and were rods behind when the scout reached the edge of the forest. Once among those thick laurels, no horse nor rider can reach a man, if he lies low, and says his prayers in a whisper.

The Rebels bore the body of their comrade back to the house, and said to the woman:

"We'll be revenged for this. We know the route he'll take, and will have his life before to-morrow; and you—we'd burn your house over your head, if you were not the wife of Jack Brown."

Brown was a loyal man, who was serving his country in the ranks of Marshall. Thereby hangs a tale, but this is not the time to tell it. Soon the men rode away, taking the poor woman's only wagon as a hearse for their dead comrade.

Night came, and the owls cried in the woods in a way they had not cried for a fortnight. "T'whoot! t'whoot!" they went, as if they thought there was music in hooting. The woman listened, put on a dark mantle, and followed the sound of their voices. Entering the woods, she crept in among the bushes, and talked with the owls as if they had been human.

"They know the road ye'll take," she said; "ye must change yer route. Here ar' the bullet."

"God bless ye, Rachel," responded the owl, "ye'r' a true 'ooman"—and he hooted louder than before, to deceive pursuers, and keep up the music.

"Ar' yer nag safe?" she asked.

"Yes, and good fur forty miles afore sun-up."

"Well, here ar' suthin' ter eat; ye'll need it. Good-bye, and God be wi' ye."

"He'll go wi' ye, fur He loves noble wimmin."

Their hands clasped, and they parted; he to his long ride; she to the quiet sleep of those who, out of a true heart, serve their country.

The night was dark and drizzly; but before morning the clouds cleared away, leaving a thick mist hanging low on the meadows. The scout's mare was fleet, but the road was rough, and a slosh of snow impeded the travel. He had come by a strange way, and did not know how far he had traveled by sunrise; but lights were ahead, shivering in the haze of the cold, gray morning. Were they the early candles of some sleepy village, or the camp-fires of a band of guerrillas? He did not know, and it would not be safe to go on till he did know. The road was lined with trees, but they would give no shelter; for they were far apart, and the snow lay white between them. He was in the blue grass region. Tethering his horse in the timber, he climbed a tall oak by the roadside; but the mist was too thick to admit of his discerning anything distinctly. It seemed, however, to be breaking away, and he would wait until his way was clear; so he sat there, an hour, two hours, and ate his breakfast from the satchel John's wife had slung over his shoulder. At last the fog lifted a little, and he saw close at hand a small hamlet—a few rude huts gathered round a cross-road. No danger could lurk in such a place, and he was about to descend, and pursue his journey, when suddenly he heard, up the road by which he came, the rapid tramp of a body of horsemen.

The mist was thicker below; so half way down the tree he went, and awaited their coming. They moved at an irregular pace, carrying lanterns, and pausing every now and then to inspect the road, as if they had missed their way or lost something. Soon they came near, and were dimly outlined in the gray mist, so the scout could make out their number. There were thirty of them,—the original band, and a reinforcement. Again they halted when abreast of the tree, and searched the road narrowly.

"He must have come this way," said one—he of the chivalry. "The other road is sixteen miles longer, and he would take the shortest route. It's an awful pity we didn't head him on both roads."

"We kin come up with him yit, ef we turn plump round, and follow on t'other road—whar we lost the trail—back thar, three miles ter the deadenin'."

Now another spoke, and his voice the scout remembered. He belonged to his own company in the Fourteenth Kentucky. "It's so," he said; "he has tvck t'other road. I tell ye, I'd know thet mar's shoe 'mong a million. Nary one loike it was ever seed in all Kaintuck—only a d—d Yankee could ha' invented it."

"And yere it ar'," shouted a man with one of the lanterns, "plain as sun-up."

The Fourteenth Kentuckian clutched the light, and while a dozen dismounted and gatherod round, closely examined the track. The ground was bare on the spot, and the print of the horse's hoof was clearly cut in the half frozen mud. Narrowly the man looked, and life and death hung on his eyesight. The scout took out the bullet, and placed it in a crotch of the tree. If they took him, the Devil should not take the dispatch. Then he drew a revolver. The mist was breaking away, and he would surely be discovered if the men lingered much longer; but he would