

Crisis, the — Volume 08 eBook

Crisis, the — Volume 08 by Winston Churchill

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THE LAST CARD

Mr. Brinsmade and the Doctor were the first to leave the little room where Silas Whipple had lived and worked and died, Mr. Brinsmade bent upon one of those errands which claimed him at all times. He took Shadrach with him. Virginia sat on, a vague fear haunting her,—a fear for her father's safety. Where was Clarence? What had he seen? Was the place watched? These questions, at first intruding upon her sorrow, remained to torture her.

Softly she stirred from the chair where she had sat before the piano, and opened the door of the outer office. A clock in a steeple near by was striking twelve. The Colonel did not raise his head. Only Stephen saw her go; she felt his eyes following her, and as she slipped out lifted hers to meet them for a brief instant through the opening of the door. Then it closed behind her.

First of all she knew that the light in the outer office was burning dimly, and the discovery gave her a shock. Who had turned it down? Had Clarence? Was he here? Fearfully searching the room for him, her gaze was held by a figure in the recess of the window at the back of the room. A solid, bulky figure it was, and, though uncertainly outlined in the semi-darkness, she knew it. She took a step nearer, and a cry escaped her.

The man was Eliphalet Hopper. He got down from the sill with a motion at once sheepish and stealthy. Her breath caught, and instinctively she gave back toward the door, as if to open it again.

"Hold on!" he said. "I've got something I want to say to you, Miss Virginia."

His tones seemed strangely natural. They were not brutal. But she shivered and paused, horrified at the thought of what she was about to do. Her father was in that room—and Stephen. She must keep them there, and get this man away. She must not show fright before him, and yet she could not trust her voice to speak just then. She must not let him know that she was afraid of him—this she kept repeating to herself. But how to act? Suddenly an idea flashed upon her.

Virginia never knew how she gathered the courage to pass him, even swiftly, and turn up the gas. He started back, blinking as the jet flared. For a moment she stood beside it, with her head high; confronting him and striving to steady herself for speech.

"Why have you come here?" she said. "Judge Whipple—died—to-night."

The dominating note in his answer was a whine, as if, in spite of himself, he were awed.

"I ain't here to see the Judge."

She was pale, and quite motionless. And she faltered now. She felt her lips moving, but knew not whether the words had come.

“What do you mean?”

He gained confidence. The look in his little eyes was the filmy look of those of an animal feasting.

“I came here to see you,” he said, “—you.” She was staring at him now, in horror. “And if you don’t give me what I want, I cal’late to see some one else—in there,” said Mr. Hopper.

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He smiled, for she was swaying, her lids half closed. By a supreme effort she conquered her terror and looked at him. The look was in his eyes still, intensified now.

"How dare you speak to me after what has happened! she said. If Colonel Carvel were here, he would—kill you."

He flinched at the name and the word, involuntarily. He wiped his forehead, hot at the very thought.

"I want to know!" he exclaimed, in faint-hearted irony. Then, remembering his advantage, he stepped close to her.

"He is here," he said, intense now. "He is here, in that there room." He seized her wrists. Virginia struggled, and yet she refrained from crying out. "He never leaves this city without I choose. I can have him hung if I choose," he whispered, next to her.

"Oh!" she cried; "oh, if you choose!"

Still his body crept closer, and his face closer. And her strength was going.

"There's but one price to pay," he said hoarsely, "there's but one price to pay, and that's you—you. I cal'late you'll marry me now."

Delirious at the touch of her, he did not hear the door open. Her senses were strained for that very sound. She heard it close again, and a footstep across the room. She knew the step—she knew the voice, and her heart leaped at the sound of it in anger. An arm in a blue sleeve came between them, and Eliphalet Hopper staggered and fell across the books on the table, his hand to his face. Above him towered Stephen Brice. Towered was the impression that came to Virginia then, and so she thought of the scene ever afterward. Small bits, like points of tempered steel, glittered in Stephen's eyes, and his hands following up the mastery he had given them clutched Mr. Hopper's shoulders. Twice Stephen shook him so that his head beat upon the table.

"You—you beast!" he cried, but he kept his voice low. And then, as if he expected Hopper to reply: "Shall I kill you?"

Again he shook him violently. He felt Virginia's touch on his arm.

"Stephen!" she cried, "your wounds! Be careful! Oh, do be careful!"

She had called him Stephen. He turned slowly, and his hands fell from Mr. Hopper's cowering form as his eyes met hers. Even he could not fathom the appeal, the yearning, in their dark blue depths. And yet what he saw there made him tremble. She turned away, trembling too.

“Please sit down,” she entreated. “He—he won’t touch me again while you are here.”

Eliphalet Hopper raised himself from the desk, and one of the big books fell with a crash to the floor. Then they saw him shrink, his eyes fixed upon some one behind them. Before the Judge’s door stood Colonel Carvel, in calm, familiar posture, his feet apart, and his head bent forward as he pulled at his goatee.

“What is this man doing here, Virginia?” he asked. She did not answer him, nor did speech seem to come easily to Mr. Hopper in that instant. Perhaps the sight of Colonel Carvel had brought before him too, vividly the memory of that afternoon at Glencoe.

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All at once Virginia grasped the fulness of the power in this man's hands. At a word from him her father would be shot as a spy—and Stephen Brice, perhaps, as a traitor. But if Colonel Carvel should learn that he had seized her,—here was the terrible danger of the situation. Well she knew what the Colonel would do. Would. Stephen tell him? She trusted in his coolness that he would not.

Before a word of reply came from any of the three, a noise was heard on the stairway. Some one was coming up. There followed four seconds of suspense, and then Clarence came in. She saw that his face wore a worried, dejected look. It changed instantly when he glanced about him, and an oath broke from his lips as he singled out Eliphalet Hopper standing in sullen aggressiveness, beside the table.

"So you're the spy, are you?" he said in disgust. Then he turned his back and faced his uncle. "I saw, him in Williams's entry as we drove up. He got away from me."

A thought seemed to strike him. He strode to the open window at the back of the office, and looked out. There was a roof under it.

"The sneak got in here," he said. "He knew I was waiting for him in the street. So you're the spy, are you?"

Mr. Hopper passed a heavy hand across the cheek where Stephen had struck him.

"No, I ain't the spy," he said, with a meaning glance at the Colonel.

"Then what are you doing here?" demanded Clarence, fiercely.

"I cal'late that he knows," Eliphalet replied, jerking his head toward Colonel Carvel. "Where's his Confederate uniform? What's to prevent my calling up the provost's guard below?" he continued, with a smile that was hideous on his swelling face.

It was the Colonel who answered him, very quickly and very clearly.

"Nothing whatever, Mr. Hopper," he said. "This is the way out." He pointed at the door. Stephen, who was watching him, could not tell whether it were a grim smile that creased the corners of the Colonel's mouth as he added. "You might prefer the window."

Mr. Hopper did not move, but his eyes shifted to Virginia's form. Stephen deliberately thrust himself between them that he might not see her.

"What are you waiting for?" said the Colonel, in the mild voice that should have been an ominous warning. Still Mr. Hopper did not move. It was clear that he had not reckoned upon all of this; that he had waited in the window to deal with Virginia alone. But now the very force of a desire which had gathered strength in many years made him reckless. His voice took on the oily quality in which he was wont to bargain.

“Let’s be calm about this business, Colonel,” he said. “We won’t say anything about the past. But I ain’t set on having you shot. There’s a consideration that would stop me, and I cal’late you know what it is.”

Then the Colonel made a motion. But before he had taken a step Virginia had crossed the room swiftly, and flung herself upon him.

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"Oh, don't, Pa!" she cried. "Don't! Tell him that I will agree to it. Yes, I will. I can't have you—shot." The last word came falteringly, faintly.

"Let me go,—honey," whispered the Colonel, gently. His eyes did not leave Eliphalet. He tried to disengage himself, but her fingers were clasped about his neck in a passion of fear and love. And then, while she clung to him, her head was raised to listen. The sound of Stephen Brice's voice held her as in a spell. His words were coming coldly, deliberately, and yet so sharply that each seemed to fall like a lash.

"Mr. Hopper, if ever I hear of your repeating what you have seen or heard in this room, I will make this city and this state too hot for you to live in. I know you. I know how you hide in areas, how you talk sedition in private, how you have made money out of other men's misery. And, what is more, I can prove that you have had traitorous dealings with the Confederacy. General Sherman has been good enough to call himself a friend of mine, and if he prosecutes you for your dealings in Memphis, you will get a term in a Government prison, You ought to be hung. Colonel Carvel has shown you the door. Now go."

And Mr. Hopper went.

CHAPTER XIII

FROM THE LETTERS OF MAJOR STEPHEN BRICE

Of the Staff of General Sherman on the March to the Sea, and on the March from Savannah Northward.

Headquarters military Division of the Mississippi Goldsboro, N.C. March 24, 1865

Dear mother: The South Carolina Campaign is a thing of the past. I pause as I write these words—they seem so incredible to me. We have marched the four hundred and twenty-five miles in fifty days, and the General himself has said that it is the longest and most important march ever made by an organized army in a civilized country. I know that you will not be misled by the words "civilized country." Not until the history of this campaign is written will the public realize the wide rivers and all but impassable swamps we have crossed with our baggage trains and artillery. The roads (by courtesy so called) were a sea of molasses and every mile of them has had to be corduroyed. For fear of worrying you I did not write you from Savannah how they laughed at us for starting at that season of the year. They said we would not go ten miles, and I most solemnly believe that no one but "Uncle Billy" and an army organized and equipped by him could have gone ten miles. Nothing seems to stop him. You have probably remarked in the tone of my letters ever since we left Kingston for the sea, a growing admiration for "my General."

It seems very strange that this wonderful tactician can be the same man I met that day going to the Arsenal in the streetcar, and again at Camp Jackson. I am sure that history will give him a high place among the commanders of the world. Certainly none was ever more tireless than he. He never fights a battle when it can be avoided, and his march into Columbia while threatening Charleston and Augusta was certainly a master stroke of strategy.

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I think his simplicity his most remarkable trait. You should see him as he rides through the army, an erect figure, with his clothes all angular and awry, and an expanse of white sock showing above his low shoes. You can hear his name running from file to file; and some times the new regiments can't resist cheering. He generally says to the Colonel:—"Stop that noise, sir. Don't like it."

On our march to the sea, if the orders were ever given to turn northward, "the boys" would get very much depressed. One moonlight night I was walking my horse close to the General's over the pine needles, when we overheard this conversation between two soldiers:—"Say, John," said one, "I guess Uncle Billy don't know our corps is goin' north."

"I wonder if he does," said John. "If I could only get a sight of them white socks, I'd know it was all right."

The General rode past without a word, but I heard him telling the story to Mower the next day.

I can find little if any change in his manner since I knew him first. He is brusque, but kindly, and he has the same comradeship with officers and men—and even the negroes who flock to our army. But few dare to take advantage of it, and they never do so twice. I have been very near to him, and have tried not to worry him or ask many foolish questions. Sometimes on the march he will beckon me to close up to him, and we have a conversation something on this order:—"There's Kenesaw, Brice."

"Yes, sir."

Pointing with his arm.

"Went beyond lines there with small party. Rebel battery on summit. Had to git. Fired on. Next day I thought Rebels would leave in the night. Got up before daylight, fixed telescope on stand, and waited. Watched top of Kenesaw. No Rebel. Saw one blue man creep up, very cautious, looked around, waved his hat. Rebels gone. Thought so."

This gives you but a faint idea of the vividness of his talk. When we make a halt for any time, the general officers and their staffs flock to headquarters to listen to his stories. When anything goes wrong, his perception of it is like a lightning flash,—and he acts as quickly.

By the way, I have just found the letter he wrote me, offering this staff position. Please keep it carefully, as it is something I shall value all my life.

Gaylesville, Alabama, October 25, 1864.



Major Stephen A. Brice:

Dear Sir,—The world goes on, and wicked men sound asleep. Davis has sworn to destroy my army, and Beauregard has come to do the work,—so if you expect to share in our calamity, come down. I offer you this last chance for staff duty, and hope you have had enough in the field. I do not wish to hurry you, but you can't get aboard a ship at sea. So if you want to make the trip, come to Chattanooga and take your chances of meeting me.

Yours truly,

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W. T. *Sherman*, Major General.

One night—at Cheraw, I think it was—he sent for me to talk to him. I found him lying on a bed of Spanish moss they had made for him. He asked me a great many questions about St. Louis, and praised Mr. Brinsmade, especially his management of the Sanitary Commission.

“Brice,” he said, after a while, “you remember when Grant sent me to beat off Joe Johnston’s army from Vicksburg. You were wounded then, by the way, in that dash Lauman made. Grant thought he ought to warn me against Johnston.

“‘He’s wily, Sherman,’ said he. ‘He’s a dangerous man.’

“‘Grant,’ said I, ‘you give me men enough and time enough to look over the ground, and I’m not afraid of the devil.’”

Nothing could sum up the man better than that. And now what a trick of fate it is that he has Johnston before him again, in what we hope will prove the last gasp of the war! He likes Johnston, by the way, and has the greatest respect for him.

I wish you could have peeped into our camp once in a while. In the rare bursts of sunshine on this march our premises have been decorated with gay red blankets, and sombre gray ones brought from the quartermasters, and white Hudson’s Bay blankets (not so white now), all being between forked sticks. It is wonderful how the pitching of a few tents, and the busy crackle of a few fires, and the sound of voices—sometimes merry, sometimes sad, depending on the weather, will change the look of a lonely pine knoll. You ask me how we fare. I should be heartily ashamed if a word of complaint ever fell from my lips. But the men! Whenever I wake up at night with my feet in a puddle between the blankets, I think of the men. The corduroy roads which our horses stumble over through the mud, they make as well as march on. Our flies are carried in wagons, and our utensils and provisions. They must often bear on their backs the little dog-tents, under which, put up by their own labor, they crawl to sleep, wrapped in a blanket they have carried all day, perhaps waist deep in water. The food they eat has been in their haversacks for many a weary mile, and is cooked in the little skillet and pot which have also been a part of their burden. Then they have their musket and accoutrements, and the “forty rounds” at their backs. Patiently, cheerily tramping along, going they know not where, nor care much either, so it be not in retreat. Ready to make roads, throw up works, tear up railroads, or hew out and build wooden bridges; or, best of all, to go for the Johnnies under hot sun or heavy rain, through swamp and mire and quicksand. They marched ten miles to storm Fort McAllister. And how the cheers broke from them when the pop pop pop of the skirmish line began after we came in sight of Savannah! No man who has seen but not shared their life may talk of personal hardship.

We arrived at this pretty little town yesterday, so effecting a junction with Schofield, who got in with the 3d Corps the day before. I am writing at General Schofield's headquarters. There was a bit of a battle on Tuesday at Bentonville, and we have come hither in smoke, as usual. But this time we thank Heaven that it is not the smoke of burning homes, —only some resin the “Johnnies” set on fire before they left.

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I must close. General Sherman has just sent for me.

On Board despatch boat "Martin."
At sea, March 25, 1865.

Dear mother: A most curious thing has happened. But I may as well begin at the beginning. When I stopped writing last evening at the summons of the General, I was about to tell you something of the battle of Bentonville on Tuesday last. Mower charged through as bad a piece of wood and swamp as I ever saw, and got within one hundred yards of Johnston himself, who was at the bridge across Mill Creek. Of course we did not know this at the time, and learned it from prisoners.

As I have written you, I have been under fire very little since coming to the staff. When the battle opened, however, I saw that if I stayed with the General (who was then behind the reserves) I would see little or nothing; I went ahead "to get information" beyond the line of battle into the woods. I did not find these favorable to landscape views, and just as I was turning my horse back again I caught sight of a commotion some distance to my right. The Rebel skirmish line had fallen back just that instant, two of our skirmishers were grappling with a third man, who was fighting desperately. It struck me as singular that the fellow was not in gray, but had on some sort of dark clothes.

I could not reach them in the swamp on horseback, and was in the act of dismounting when the man fell, and then they set out to carry him to the rear, still farther to my right, beyond the swamp. I shouted, and one of the skirmishers came up. I asked him what the matter was.

"We've got a spy, sir," he said excitedly.

"A spy! Here?"

"Yes, Major. He was hid in the thicket yonder, lying flat on his face. He reckoned that our boys would run right over him and that he'd get into our lines that way. Tim Foley stumbled on him, and he put up as good a fight with his fists as any man I ever saw."

Just then a regiment swept past us. That night I told the General, who sent over to the headquarters of the 17th Corps to inquire. The word came back that the man's name was Addison, and he claimed to be a Union sympathizer who owned a plantation near by. He declared that he had been conscripted by the Rebels, wounded, sent back home, and was now about to be pressed in again. He had taken this method of escaping to our lines. It was a common story enough, but General Mower added in his message that he thought the story fishy. This was because the man's appearance was very striking, and he seemed the type of Confederate fighter who would do and dare anything. He had a wound, which had been a bad one, evidently got from a piece of shell. But they had been able to find nothing on him. Sherman sent back word to keep

the man until he could see him in person. It was about nine o'clock last night when I reached the house the General has taken. A prisoner's guard was resting outside, and the hall was full of officers. They said that the General was awaiting me, and pointed to the closed door of a room that had been the dining room. I opened it.

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Two candles were burning in pewter sticks on the bare mahogany table. There was the General sitting beside them, with his legs crossed, holding some crumpled tissue paper very near his eyes, and reading. He did not look up when I entered. I was aware of a man standing, tall and straight, just out of range of the candles' rays. He wore the easy dress of a Southern planter, with the broad felt hat. The head was flung back so that there was just a patch of light on the chin, and the lids of the eyes in the shadow were half closed.

My sensations are worth noting. For the moment I felt precisely as I had when I was hit by that bullet in Lauman's charge. I was aware of something very like pain, yet I could not place the cause of it. But this is what since has made me feel queer: you doubtless remember staying at Hollingdean, when I was a boy, and hearing the story of Lord Northwell's daredevil Royalist ancestor,—the one with the lace collar over the dull-gold velvet, and the pointed chin, and the lazy scorn in the eyes. Those eyes are painted with drooping lids. The first time I saw Clarence Colfax I thought of that picture—and now I thought of the picture first.

The General's voice startled me.

"Major Brice, do you know this gentleman?" he asked.

"Yes, General."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Colfax, sir—Colonel Colfax, I think"

"Thought so," said the General.

I have thought much of that scene since, as I am steaming northward over green seas and under cloudless skies, and it has seemed very unreal. I should almost say supernatural when I reflect how I have run across this man again and again, and always opposing him. I can recall just how he looked at the slave auction, which seem, so long ago: very handsome, very boyish, and yet with the air of one to be deferred to. It was sufficiently remarkable that I should have found him in Vicksburg. But now—to be brought face to face with him in this old dining room in Goldsboro! And he a prisoner. He had not moved. I did not know how he would act, but I went up to him and held out my hand, and said.—"How do you do, Colonel Colfax?"

I am sure that my voice was not very steady, for I cannot help liking him And then his face lighted up and he gave me his hand. And he smiled at me and again at the General, as much as to say that it was all over. He has a wonderful smile.

"We seem to run into each other, Major Brice," said he.

The pluck of the man was superb. I could see that the General, too, was moved, from the way he looked at him. And he speaks a little more abruptly at such times.

"Guess that settles it, Colonel," he said.

"I reckon it does, General," said Clarence, still smiling. The General turned from him to the table with a kind of jerk and clapped his hand on the tissue paper.

"These speak for themselves, sir," he said. "It is very plain that they would have reached the prominent citizens for whom they were intended if you had succeeded in your enterprise. You were captured out of uniform. You know enough of war to appreciate the risk you ran. Any statement to make?"

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"No, sir."

"Call Captain Vaughan, Brice, and ask him to conduct the prisoner back."

"May I speak to him, General?" I asked. The General nodded.

I asked him if I could write home for him or do anything else. That seemed to touch him. Some day I shall tell you what he said.

Then Vaughan took him out, and I heard the guard shoulder arms and tramp away in the night. The General and I were left alone with the mahogany table between us, and a family portrait of somebody looking down on us from the shadow on the wall. A moist spring air came in at the open windows, and the candles flickered. After a silence, I ventured to say:

"I hope he won't be shot, General."

"Don't know, Brice," he answered. "Can't tell now. Hate to shoot him, but war is war. Magnificent class he belongs to—pity we should have to fight those fellows."

He paused, and drummed on the table. "Brice," said he, "I'm going to send you to General Grant at City Point with despatches. I'm sorry Dunn went back yesterday, but it can't be helped. Can you start in half an hour?"

"Yes, sir."

"You'll have to ride to Kinston. The railroad won't be through until to-morrow: I'll telegraph there, and to General Easton at Morehead City. He'll have a boat for you. Tell Grant I expect to run up there in a day or two myself, when things are arranged here. You may wait until I come."

"Yes, sir."

I turned to go, but Clarence Colfax was on my mind "General?"

"Eh! what?"

"General, could you hold Colonel Colfax until I see you again?"

It was a bold thing to say, and I quaked. And he looked at me in his keen way, through and through "You saved his life once before, didn't you?"

"You allowed me to have him sent home from Vicksburg, sir."

He answered with one of his jokes—apropos of something he said on the Court House steps at Vicksburg. Perhaps I shall tell it to you sometime.

“Well, well,” he said, “I’ll see, I’ll see. Thank God this war is pretty near over. I’ll let you know, Brice, before I shoot him.”

I rode the thirty odd miles to Kinston in—little more than three hours. A locomotive was waiting for me, and I jumped into a cab with a friendly engineer. Soon we were roaring seaward through the vast pine forests. It was a lonely journey, and you were much in my mind. My greatest apprehension was that we might be derailed and the despatches captured; for as fast as our army had advanced, the track of it had closed again, like the wake of a ship at sea. Guerillas were roving about, tearing up ties and destroying bridges.

There was one five-minute interval of excitement when, far down the tunnel through the forest, we saw a light gleaming. The engineer said there was no house there, that it must be a fire. But we did not slacken our speed, and gradually the leaping flames grew larger and redder until we were upon them.

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Not one gaunt figure stood between them and us. Not one shot broke the stillness of the night. As dawn broke I beheld the flat, gray waters of the Sound stretching away to the eastward, and there was the boat at the desolate wharf beside the warehouse, her steam rising white in the chill morning air.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SAME, CONTINUED

*Headquarters armies of the United states,
city point, Virginia, March 28, 1865.*

Dear mother: I arrived here safely the day before yesterday, and I hope that you will soon receive some of the letters I forwarded on that day. It is an extraordinary place, this City Point; a military city sprung up like a mushroom in a winter. And my breath was quite taken away when I first caught sight of it on the high table-land. The great bay in front of it, which the Appomattox helps to make, is a maze of rigging and smoke-pipes, like the harbor of a prosperous seaport. There are gunboats and supply boats, schooners and square-riggers and steamers, all huddled together, and our captain pointed out to me the 'Malvern' flying Admiral Porter's flag. Barges were tied up at the long wharves, and these were piled high with wares and flanked by squat warehouses. Although it was Sunday, a locomotive was puffing and panting along the foot of the ragged bank.

High above, on the flat promontory between the two rivers, is the city of tents and wooden huts, the great trees in their fresh faint green towering above the low roofs. At the point of the bluff a large flag drooped against its staff, and I did not have to be told that this was General Grant's headquarters.

There was a fine steamboat lying at the wharf, and I had hardly stepped ashore before they told me she was President Lincoln's. I read the name on her—the 'River Queen'. Yes, the President is here, too, with his wife and family.

There are many fellows here with whom I was brought up in Boston. I am living with Jack Hancock, whom you will remember well. He is a captain now, and has a beard.

But I must go on with my story. I went straight to General Grant's headquarters,—just a plain, rough slat house such as a contractor might build for a temporary residence. Only the high flagstaff and the Stars and Stripes distinguish it from many others of the same kind. A group of officers stood chatting outside of it, and they told me that the General had walked over to get his mail. He is just as unassuming and democratic as "my general." General Rankin took me into the office, a rude room, and we sat down at the long table there. Presently the door opened, and a man came in with a slouch hat

on and his coat unbuttoned. He was smoking a cigar. We rose to our feet, and I saluted.

It was the general-in-chief. He stared at me, but said nothing.

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"General, this is Major Brice of General Sherman's staff. He has brought despatches from Goldsboro," said Rankin.

He nodded, took off his hat and laid it on the table, and reached out for the despatches. While reading them he did not move, except to light another cigar. I am getting hardened to unrealities,—perhaps I should say marvels, now. Our country abounds in them. It did not seem so strange that this silent General with the baggy trousers was the man who had risen by leaps and bounds in four years to be general-in-chief of our armies. His face looks older and more sunken than it did on that day in the street near the Arsenal, in St. Louis, when he was just a military carpet-bagger out of a job. He is not changed otherwise. But how different the impressions made by the man in authority and the same man out of authority!

He made a sufficient impression upon me then, as I told you at the time. That was because I overheard his well-merited rebuke to Hopper. But I little dreamed that I was looking on the man who was to come out of the West and save this country from disunion. And how quietly and simply he has done it, without parade or pomp or vainglory. Of all those who, with every means at their disposal, have tried to conquer Lee, he is the only one who has in any manner succeeded. He has been able to hold him fettered while Sherman has swept the Confederacy. And these are the two men who were unknown when the war began.

When the General had finished reading the despatches, he folded them quickly and put them in his pocket.

"Sit down and tell me about this last campaign of yours, Major," he said.

I talked with him for about half an hour. I should rather say talked to him. He is a marked contrast to Sherman in this respect. I believe that he only opened his lips to ask two questions. You may well believe that they were worth the asking, and they revealed an intimate knowledge of our march from Savannah. I was interrupted many times by the arrival of different generals, aides, *etc.* He sat there smoking, imperturbable. Sometimes he said "yes" or "no," but oftener he merely nodded his head. Once he astounded by a brief question an excitable young lieutenant, who floundered. The General seemed to know more than he about the matter he had in hand.

When I left him, he asked me where I was quartered, and said he hoped I would be comfortable.

Jack Hancock was waiting for me, and we walked around the city, which even has barber shops. Everywhere were signs of preparation, for the roads are getting dry, and the General preparing for a final campaign against Lee. Poor Lee! What a marvellous fight he has made with his material. I think that he will be reckoned among the greatest generals of our race.

Of course, I was very anxious to get a glimpse of the President, and so we went down to the wharf, where we heard that he had gone off for a horseback ride. They say that he rides nearly every day, over the corduroy roads and through the swamps, and wherever the boys see that tall hat they cheer. They know it as well as the lookout tower on the flats of Bermuda Hundred. He lingers at the campfires and swaps stories with the officers, and entertains the sick and wounded in the hospitals. Isn't it like him?

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He hasn't changed, either. I believe that the great men don't change. Away with your Napoleons and your Marlboroughs and your Stuarts. These are the days of simple men who command by force of character, as well as knowledge. Thank God for the American! I believe that he will change the world, and strip it of its vainglory and hypocrisy.

In the evening, as we were sitting around Hancock's fire, an officer came in.

"Is Major Brice here?" he asked. I jumped up.

"The President sends his compliments, Major, and wants to know if you would care to pay him a little visit."

If I would care to pay him a little visit! That officer had to hurry to keep up with the as I walked to the wharf. He led me aboard the River Queen, and stopped at the door of the after-cabin.

Mr. Lincoln was sitting under the lamp, slouched down in his chair, in the position I remembered so well. It was as if I had left him but yesterday. He was whittling, and he had made some little toy for his son Tad, who ran out as I entered.

When he saw me, the President rose to his great height, a sombre, towering figure in black. He wears a scraggly beard now. But the sad smile, the kindly eyes in their dark caverns, the voice—all were just the same. I stopped when I looked upon the face. It was sad and lined when I had known it, but now all the agony endured by the millions, North and South, seemed written on it.

"Don't you remember me, Major?" he asked.

The wonder was that he had remembered me! I took his big, bony hand, which reminded me of Judge Whipple's. Yes, it was just as if I had been with him always, and he were still the gaunt country lawyer.

"Yes, sir," I said, "indeed I do."

He looked at me with that queer expression of mirth he sometimes has.

"Are these Boston ways, Steve?" he asked. "They're tenacious. I didn't think that any man could travel so close to Sherman and keep 'em."

"They're unfortunate ways, sir," I said, "if they lead you to misjudge me."

He laid his hand on my shoulder, just as he had done at Freeport.

"I know you, Steve," he said. "I shuck an ear of corn before I buy it. I've kept tab on you a little the last five years, and when I heard Sherman had sent a Major Brice up here, I sent for you."

What I said was boyish. "I tried very hard to get a glimpse of you to-day, Mr. Lincoln. I wanted to see you again."

He was plainly pleased.

"I'm glad to hear it, Steve," he said. "Then you haven't joined the ranks of the grumblers? You haven't been one of those who would have liked to try running this country for a day or two, just to show me how to do it?"

"No, sir," I said, laughing.

"Good!" he cried, slapping his knee. "I didn't think you were that kind, Steve. Now sit down and tell me about this General of mine who wears seven-leagued boots. What was it—four hundred and twenty miles in fifty days? How many navigable rivers did he step across?" He began to count on those long fingers of his. "The Edisto, the Broad, the Catawba, the Pedee, and—?"

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"The Cape Fear," I said.

"Is—is the General a nice man?" asked Mr. Lincoln, his eyes twinkling.

"Yes, sir, he is that," I answered heartily. "And not a man in the army wants anything when he is around. You should see that Army of the Mississippi, sir. They arrived in Goldsboro' in splendid condition."

He got up and gathered his coat-tails under his arms, and began to walk up and down the cabin.

"What do the boys call the General?" he asked.

I told him "Uncle Billy." And, thinking the story of the white socks might amuse him, I told him that. It did amuse him.

"Well, now," he said, "any man that has a nickname like that is all right. That's the best recommendation you can give the General—just say 'Uncle Billy.'" He put one lip over the other. "You've given 'Uncle Billy' a good recommendation, Steve," he said. "Did you ever hear the story of Mr. Wallace's Irish gardener?"

"No, sir."

"Well, when Wallace was hiring his gardener he asked him whom he had been living with.

"'Misther Dalton, sorr.'"

"'Have you a recommendation, Terence?'"

"'A ricommindation is it, sorr? Sure I have nothing agin Misther Dalton, though he moightn't be knowing just the respict the likes of a first-class garthener is entitled to.'"

He did not laugh. He seldom does, it seems, at his own stories. But I could not help laughing over the "ricommindation" I had given the General. He knew that I was embarrassed, and said kindly:—"Now tell me something about 'Uncle Billy's Bummers.' I hear that they have a most effectual way of tearing up railroads."

I told him of Poe's contrivance of the hook and chain, and how the heaviest rails were easily overturned with it, and how the ties were piled and fired and the rails twisted out of shape. The President listened to every word with intense interest.

"By Jing!" he exclaimed, "we have got a general. Caesar burnt his bridges behind him, but Sherman burns his rails. Now tell me some more."

He helped me along by asking questions. Then I began to tell him how the negroes had flocked into our camps, and how simply and plainly the General had talked to them, advising them against violence of any kind, and explaining to them that "Freedom" meant only the liberty to earn their own living in their own way, and not freedom from work.

"We have got a general, sure enough," he cried. "He talks to them plainly, does he, so that they understand? I say to you, Brice," he went on earnestly, "the importance of plain talk can't be overestimated. Any thought, however abstruse, can be put in speech that a boy or a negro can grasp. Any book, however deep, can be written in terms that everybody can comprehend, if a man only tries hard enough. When I was a boy I used to hear the neighbors talking, and it bothered me so because I could not understand them that I used to sit up half the night thinking things out for myself. I remember that I did not know what the word demonstrate meant. So I stopped my studies then and there and got a volume of Euclid. Before I got through I could demonstrate everything in it, and I have never been bothered with demonstrate since."

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I thought of those wonderfully limpid speeches of his: of the Freeport debates, and of the contrast between his style and Douglas's. And I understood the reason for it at last. I understood the supreme mind that had conceived the Freeport Question. And as I stood before him then, at the close of this fearful war, the words of the Gospel were in my mind. 'So the last shall be first, and the first, last; for many be called, but few chosen.'

How I wished that all those who have maligned and tortured him could talk with him as I had talked with him. To know his great heart would disarm them of all antagonism. They would feel, as I feel, that his life is so much nobler than theirs, and his burdens so much heavier, that they would go away ashamed of their criticism.

He said to me once, "Brice, I hope we are in sight of the end, now. I hope that we may get through without any more fighting. I don't want to see any more of our countrymen killed. And then," he said, as if talking to himself, "and then we must show them mercy—mercy."

I thought it a good time to mention Colfax's case. He has been on my mind ever since. Mr. Lincoln listened attentively. Once he sighed, and he was winding his long fingers around each other while I talked.

"I saw the man captured, Mr. Lincoln," I concluded, "And if a technicality will help him out, he was actually within his own skirmish line at the time. The Rebel skirmishers had not fallen back on each side of him."

"Brice," he said, with that sorrowful smile, "a technicality might save Colfax, but it won't save me. Is this man a friend of yours?" he asked.

That was a poser.

"I think he is, Mr. Lincoln. I should like to call him so. I admire him." And I went on to tell of what he had done at Vicksburg, leaving out, however, my instrumentality in having him sent north. The President used almost Sherman's words.

"By Jing!" he exclaimed. (That seems to be a favorite expression of his.) "Those fellows were born to fight. If it wasn't for them, the South would have quit long ago." Then he looked at me in his funny way, and said, "See here, Steve, if this Colfax isn't exactly a friend of yours, there must be some reason why you are pleading for him in this way."

"Well, sir," I said, at length, "I should like to get him off on account of his cousin, Miss Virginia Carvel." And I told him something about Miss Carvel, and how she had helped you with the Union sergeant that day in the hot hospital. And how she had nursed Judge Whipple."

“She’s a fine woman,” he said. “Those women have helped those men to prolong this war about three years.

“And yet we must save them for the nation’s sake. They are to be the mothers of our patriots in days to come. Is she a friend of yours, too, Steve?”

What was I to say?

“Not especially, sir,” I answered finally. I have had to offend her rather often. But I know that she likes my mother.”

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"Why!" he cried, jumping up, "she's a daughter of Colonel Carvel. I always had an admiration for that man. An ideal Southern gentleman of the old school,—courteous, as honorable and open as the day, and as brave as a lion. You've heard the story of how he threw a man named Babcock out of his store, who tried to bribe him?"

"I heard you tell it in that tavern, sir. And I have heard it since." It did me good to hear the Colonel praised.

"I always liked that story," he said. "By the way, what's become of the Colonel?"

"He got away—South, sir," I answered. "He couldn't stand it. He hasn't been heard of since the summer of '63. They think he was killed in Texas. But they are not positive. They probably never will be," I added. He was silent awhile.

"Too bad!" he said. "Too bad. What stuff those men are made of! And so you want me to pardon this Colfax?"

"It would be presumptuous in me to go that far, sir," I replied. "But I hoped you might speak of it to the General when he comes. And I would be glad of the opportunity to testify."

He took a few strides up and down the room.

"Well, well," he said, "that's my vice—pardoning, saying yes. It's always one more drink with me. It—" he smiled—"it makes me sleep better. I've pardoned enough Rebels to populate New Orleans. Why," he continued, with his whimsical look, "just before I left Washington, in comes one of your Missouri senators with a list of Rebels who are shut up in McDowell's and Alton. I said:— "'Senator, you're not going to ask me to turn loose all those at once?'

"He said just what you said when you were speaking of Missouri a while ago, that he was afraid of guerilla warfare, and that the war was nearly over. I signed 'em. And then what does he do but pull out another batch longer than the first! And those were worse than the first.

"'What! you don't want me to turn these loose, too?'

"'Yes, I do, Mr. President. I think it will pay to be merciful.'

"'Then durned if I don't,' I said, and I signed 'em."

*Steamer "River Queen."
On the Potomac, April 9, 1865.*

Dear mother: I am glad that the telegrams I have been able to send reached you safely. I have not had time to write, and this will be but a short letter.

You will be surprised to see this heading. I am on the President's boat, in the President's party, bound with him for Washington. And this is how it happened: The very afternoon of the day I wrote you, General Sherman himself arrived at City Point on the steamer 'Russia'. I heard the salutes, and was on the wharf to meet him. That same afternoon he and General Grant and Admiral Porter went aboard the River Queen to see the President. How I should have liked to be present at that interview! After it was over

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they all came out of the cabin together General Grant silent, and smoking, as usual; General Sherman talking vivaciously; and Lincoln and the Admiral smiling and listening. That was historic! I shall never expect to see such a sight again in all my days. You can imagine my surprise when the President called me from where I was standing at some distance with the other officers. He put his hand on my shoulder then and there, and turned to General Sherman.

"Major Brice is a friend of mine, General," he said. "I knew him in Illinois."

"He never told me that," said the General.

"I guess he's got a great many important things shut up inside of him," said Mr. Lincoln, banteringly. "But he gave you a good recommendation, Sherman. He said that you wore white socks, and that the boys liked you and called you 'Uncle Billy.' And I told him that was the best recommendation he could give anybody."

I was frightened. But the General only looked at me with those eyes that go through everything, and then he laughed.

"Brice," he said, "You'll have my reputation ruined."

"Sherman," said Mr. Lincoln, "you don't want the Major right away, do you? Let him stay around here for a while with me. I think he'll find it interesting." He looked at the general-in-chief, who was smiling just a little bit. "I've got a sneaking notion that Grant's going to do something."

Then they all laughed.

"Certainly, Mr. Lincoln," said my General, "you may have Brice. Be careful he doesn't talk you to death—he's said too much already."

That is how I came to stay.

I have no time now to tell you all that I have seen and heard. I have ridden with the President, and have gone with him on errands of mercy and errands of cheer. I have been almost within sight of what we hope is the last struggle of this frightful war. I have listened to the guns of Five Forks, where Sheridan and Warren bore their own colors in the front of the charge, I was with Mr. Lincoln while the battle of Petersburg was raging, and there were tears in his eyes.

Then came the retreat of Lee and the instant pursuit of Grant, and —Richmond. The quiet General did not so much as turn aside to enter the smoking city he had besieged for so long. But I went there, with the President. And if I had one incident in my life to

live over again, I should choose this. As we were going up the river, a disabled steamer lay across the passage in the obstruction of piles the Confederates had built. Mr. Lincoln would not wait. There were but a few of us in his party, and we stepped into Admiral Porter's twelve-oared barge and were rowed to Richmond, the smoke of the fires still darkening the sky. We landed within a block of Libby Prison.

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With the little guard of ten sailors he marched the mile and a half to General Weitzel's headquarters,—the presidential mansion of the Confederacy. You can imagine our anxiety. I shall remember him always as I saw him that day, a tall, black figure of sorrow, with the high silk hat we have learned to love. Unafraid, his heart rent with pity, he walked unharmed amid such tumult as I have rarely seen. The windows filled, the streets ahead of us became choked, as the word that the President was coming ran on like quick-fire. The mob shouted and pushed. Drunken men reeled against him. The negroes wept aloud and cried hosannas. They pressed upon him that they might touch the hem of his coat, and one threw himself on his knees and kissed the President's feet.

Still he walked on unharmed, past the ashes and the ruins. Not as a conqueror was he come, to march in triumph. Not to destroy, but to heal. Though there were many times when we had to fight for a path through the crowds, he did not seem to feel the danger.

Was it because he knew that his hour was not yet come?

To-day, on the boat, as we were steaming between the green shores of the Potomac, I overheard him reading to Mr. Sumner:—

“Duncan is in his grave;
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well;
Treason has done his worst; nor steel, nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,
Can touch him further.”

WILLARD'S *hotel*, Washington, April 10, 1865.

I have looked up the passage, and have written it in above. It haunts me.

CHAPTER XV

MAN OF SORROW

The train was late—very late. It was Virginia who first caught sight of the new dome of the Capitol through the slanting rain, but she merely pressed her lips together and said nothing. In the dingy brick station of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad more than one person paused to look after them, and a kind-hearted lady who had been in the car kissed the girl good-by.

“You think that you can find your uncle's house, my dear?” she asked, glancing at Virginia with concern. Through all of that long journey she had worn a look apart. “Do you think you can find your uncle's house?”

Virginia started. And then she smiled as she looked at the honest, alert, and squarely built gentleman beside her.

“Captain Brent can, Mrs. Ware,” she said. “He can find anything.”

Whereupon the kind lady gave the Captain her hand. “You look as if you could, Captain,” said she. “Remember, if General Carvel is out of town, you promised to bring her to me.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Captain Lige, “and so I shall.”

“Kerridge, kerridge! Right dis-a-way! No sah, dat ain’t de kerridge you wants. Dat’s it, lady, you’s lookin at it. Kerridge, kerridge, kerridge!”

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Virginia tried bravely to smile, but she was very near to tears as she stood on the uneven pavement and looked at the scrawny horses standing patiently in the steady downpour. All sorts of people were coming and going, army officers and navy officers and citizens of states and territories, driving up and driving away.

And this was Washington!

She was thinking then of the multitude who came here with aching hearts, —with heavier hearts than was hers that day. How many of the throng hurrying by would not flee, if they could, back to the peaceful homes they had left? But perhaps those homes were gone now. Destroyed, like her own, by the war. Women with children at their breasts, and mothers bowed with sorrow, had sought this city in their agony. Young men and old had come hither, striving to keep back the thoughts of dear ones left behind, whom they might never see again. And by the thousands and tens of thousands they had passed from here to the places of blood beyond.

“Kerridge, sah! Kerridge!”

“Do you know where General Daniel Carvel lives?”

“Yes, sah, reckon I does. I Street, sah. Jump right in, sah.”

Virginia sank back on the stuffy cushions of the rattle-trap, and then sat upright again and stared out of the window at the dismal scene. They were splashing through a sea of mud. Ever since they had left St. Louis, Captain Lige had done his best to cheer her, and he did not intend to desist now.

“This beats all,” he cried. “So this is Washington, Why, it don’t compare to St. Louis, except we haven’t got the White House and the Capitol. Jinny, it would take a scow to get across the street, and we don’t have ramshackly stores and nigger cabins bang up against fine Houses like that. This is ragged. That’s what it is, ragged. We don’t have any dirty pickaninnies dodging among the horses in our residence streets. I declare, Jinny, if those aren’t pigs!”

Virginia laughed. She could not help it.

“Poor Lige!” she said. “I hope Uncle Daniel has some breakfast for you. You’ve had a good deal to put up with on this trip.”

“Lordy, Jinny,” said the Captain, “I’d put up with a good deal more than this for the sake of going anywhere with you.”

“Even to such a doleful place as this?” she sighed.

"This is all right, if the sun'll only come out and dry things up and let us see the green on those trees," he said, "Lordy, how I do love to see the spring green in the sunlight!"

She put out her hand over his.

"Lige," she said, "you know you're just trying to keep up my spirits. You've been doing that ever since we left home."

"No such thing," he replied with vehemence. "There's nothing for you to be cast down about."

"Oh, but there is!" she cried. "Suppose I can't make your Black Republican President pardon Clarence!"

"Pooh!" said the Captain, squeezing her hand and trying to appear unconcerned. "Your Uncle Daniel knows Mr. Lincoln. He'll have that arranged."

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Just then the rattletrap pulled up at the sidewalk, the wheels of the near side in four inches of mud, and the Captain leaped out and spread the umbrella. They were in front of a rather imposing house of brick, flanked on one side by a house just like it, and on the other by a series of dreary vacant lots where the rain had collected in pools. They climbed the steps and rang the bell. In due time the door was opened by a smiling yellow butler in black.

"Does General Carvel live here?"

"Yas, miss, But he ain't to home now. Done gone to New York."

"Oh," faltered Virginia. "Didn't he get my telegram day before yesterday? I sent it to the War Department."

"He's done gone since Saturday, miss." And then, evidently impressed by the young lady's looks, he added hospitably, "Kin I do anything fo' you, miss?"

"I'm his niece, Miss Virginia Carvel, and this is Captain Brent."

The yellow butler's face lighted up.

"Come right in, Miss Jinny, Done heerd de General speak of you often —yas'm. De General'll be to home dis a'ternoon, suah. 'Twill do him good ter see you, Miss Jinny. He's been mighty lonesome. Walk right in, Cap'n, and make yo'selves at home. Lizbeth—Lizbeth!"

A yellow maid came running down the stairs. "Heah's Miss Jinny."

"Lan' of goodness!" cried Lizbeth. "I knows Miss Jinny. Done seed her at Calve't House. How is you, Miss Jinny?"

"Very well, Lizbeth," said Virginia, listlessly sitting down on the hall sofa. "Can you give us some breakfast?"

"Yas'm," said Lizbeth, "jes' reckon we kin." She ushered them into a walnut dining room, big and high and sombre, with plush-bottomed chairs placed about—walnut also; for that was the fashion in those days. But the Captain had no sooner seated himself than he shot up again and started out.

"Where are you going, Lige?"

"To pay off the carriage driver," he said.

"Let him wait," said Virginia. "I'm going to the White House in a little while."

“What—what for?” he gasped.

“To see your Black Republican President,” she replied, with alarming calmness.

“Now, Jinny,” he cried, in excited appeal, “don’t go doin’ any such fool trick as that. Your Uncle Dan’l will be here this afternoon. He knows the President. And then the thing’ll be fixed all right, and no mistake.”

Her reply was in the same tone—almost a monotone—which she had used for three days. It made the Captain very uneasy, for he knew when she spoke in that way that her will was in it.

“And to lose that time,” she answered, “may be to have him shot.”

“But you can’t get to the President without credentials,” he objected.

“What,” she flashed, “hasn’t any one a right to see the President? You mean to say that he will not see a woman in trouble? Then all these pretty stories I hear of him are false. They are made up by the Yankees.”

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Poor Captain Lige! He had some notion of the multitude of calls upon Mr. Lincoln, especially at that time. But he could not, he dared not, remind her of the principal reason for this,—Lee's surrender and the approaching end of the war. And then the Captain had never seen Mr. Lincoln. In the distant valley of the Mississippi he had only heard of the President very conflicting things. He had heard him criticised and reviled and praised, just as is every man who goes to the White House, be he saint or sinner. And, during an administration, no man at a distance may come at a President's true character and worth. The Captain had seen Lincoln caricatured vilely. And again he had read and heard the pleasant anecdotes of which Virginia had spoken, until he did not know what to believe.

As for Virginia, he knew her partisanship to, and undying love for, the South; he knew the class prejudice which was bound to assert itself, and he had seen enough in the girl's demeanor to fear that she was going to demand rather than implore. She did not come of a race that was wont to bend the knee.

"Well, well," he said despairingly, "you must eat some breakfast first, Jinny."

She waited with an ominous calmness until it was brought in, and then she took a part of a roll and some coffee.

"This won't do," exclaimed the Captain. "Why, why, that won't get you halfway to Mr. Lincoln."

She shook her head, half smiling.

"You must eat enough, Lige," she said.

He was finished in an incredibly short time, and amid the protestations of Lizbeth and the yellow butler they got into the carriage again, and splashed and rattled toward the White House. Once Virginia glanced out, and catching sight of the bedraggled flags on the houses in honor of Lee's surrender, a look of pain crossed her face. The Captain could not repress a note of warning.

"Jinny," said he, "I have an idea that you'll find the President a good deal of a man. Now if you're allowed to see him, don't get him mad, Jinny, whatever you do."

Virginia stared straight ahead.

"If he is something of a man, Lige, he will not lose his temper with a woman."

Captain Lige subsided. And just then they came in sight of the house of the Presidents, with its beautiful portico and its broad wings. And they turned in under the dripping trees of the grounds. A carriage with a black coachman and footman was ahead of them, and they saw two stately gentlemen descend from it and pass the guard at the

door. Then their turn came. The Captain helped her out in his best manner, and gave some money to the driver.

“I reckon he needn’t wait for us this time, Jinny,” said he. She shook her head and went in, he following, and they were directed to the anteroom of the President’s office on the second floor. There were many people in the corridors, and one or two young officers in blue who stared at her. She passed them with her head high.

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But her spirits sank when they came to the anteroom. It was full of all sorts of people. Politicians, both prosperous and seedy, full faced and keen faced, seeking office; women, officers, and a one-armed soldier sitting in the corner. He was among the men who offered Virginia their seats, and the only one whom she thanked. But she walked directly to the doorkeeper at the end of the room. Captain Lige was beside her.

"Can we see the President?" he asked.

"Have you got an appointment?" said the old man.

"No."

"Then you'll have to wait your turn, sir," he said, shaking his head and looking at Virginia. And he added. "It's slow work waiting your turn, there's so many governors and generals and senators, although the session's over. It's a busy time, miss."

Virginia went very close to him.

"Oh, can't you do something?" she said. And added, with an inspiration, "I must see him. It's a matter of life and death."

She saw instantly, with a woman's instinct, that these words had had their effect. The old man glanced at her again, as if demurring.

"You're sure, miss, it's life and death?" he said.

"Oh, why should I say so if it were not?" she cried.

"The orders are very strict," he said. "But the President told me to give precedence to cases when a life is in question. Just you wait a minute, miss, until Governor Doddridge comes out, and I'll see what I can do for you. Give me your name, please, miss."

She remained standing where she was. In a little while the heavy door opened, and a portly, rubicund man came out with a smile on his face. He broke into a laugh, when halfway across the room, as if the memory of what he had heard were too much for his gravity. The doorkeeper slipped into the room, and there was a silent, anxious interval. Then he came out again.

"The President will see you, miss."

Captain Lige started forward with her, but she restrained him.

"Wait for me here, Lige," she said.

She swept in alone, and the door closed softly after her. The room was a big one, and there were maps on the table, with pins sticking in them. She saw that much, and then —!

Could this fantastically tall, stooping figure before her be that of the President of the United States? She stopped, as from the shock he gave her. The lean, yellow face with the mask-like lines all up and down, the unkempt, tousled hair, the beard—why, he was a hundred times more ridiculous than his caricatures. He might have stood for many of the poor white trash farmers she had seen in Kentucky—save for the long black coat.

“Is—is this Mr. Lincoln?” she asked, her breath taken away.

He bowed and smiled down at her. Somehow that smile changed his face a little.

“I guess I’ll have to own up,” he answered.

“My name is Virginia Carvel,” she said. “I have come all the way from St. Louis to see you.”

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"Miss Carvel," said the President, looking at her intently, "I have rarely been so flattered in my life. I—I hope I have not disappointed you."

Virginia was justly angry.

"Oh, you haven't," she cried, her eyes flashing, "because I am what you would call a Rebel."

The mirth in the dark corners of his eyes disturbed her more and more. And then she saw that the President was laughing.

"And have you a better name for it, Miss Carvel?" he asked. "Because I am searching for a better name—just now."

She was silent—sternly silent. And she tapped her foot on the carpet. What manner of man was this? "Won't you sit down?" said the President, kindly. "You must be tired after your journey." And he put forth a chair.

"No, thank you," said Virginia; "I think that I can say what I have come to say better standing."

"Well," said Mr. Lincoln, "that's not strange. I'm that way, too. The words seem to come out better. That reminds me of a story they tell about General Buck Tanner. Ever heard of Buck, Miss Carvel? No? Well, Buck was a character. He got his title in the Mormon war. One day the boys asked him over to the square to make a speech. The General was a little uneasy.

"'I'm all right when I get standing up, Liza,' he said to his wife. Then the words come right along. Only trouble is they come too cussed fast. How'm I going to stop 'em when I want to?'

"'Well, I du declare, Buck,' said she, 'I gave you credit for some sense. All you've got to do is to set down. That'll end it, I reckon.'

"So the General went over to the square and talked for about an hour and a half, and then a Chicago man shouted to him to dry up. The General looked pained.

"'Boys,' said he, 'it's jest every bit as bad for me as it is for you. You'll have to hand up a chair, boys, because I'm never going to get shet of this goldarned speech any anther way.'"

Mr. Lincoln had told this so comically that Virginia was forced to laugh, and she immediately hated herself. A man who could joke at such a time certainly could not feel the cares and responsibilities of his office. He should have been a comedian. And yet

this was the President who had conducted the war, whose generals had conquered the Confederacy. And she was come to ask him a favor. Virginia swallowed her pride.

"Mr. Lincoln," she began, "I have come to talk to you about my cousin, Colonel Clarence Colfax."

"I shall be happy to talk to you about your cousin, Colonel Colfax, Miss Carvel. Is he your third or fourth cousin?"

"He is my first cousin," she retorted.

"Is he in the city?" asked Mr. Lincoln, innocently. "Why didn't he come with you?"

"Oh, haven't you heard?" she cried. "He is Clarence Colfax, of St. Louis, now a Colonel in the army of the Confederate States."

"Which army?" asked Mr. Lincoln. Virginia tossed her head in exasperation.

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"In General Joseph Johnston's army," she replied, trying to be patient. "But now," she gulped, "now he has been arrested as a spy by General Sherman's army."

"That's too bad," answered Mr. Lincoln.

"And—and they are going to shoot him."

"That's worse," said Mr. Lincoln, gravely. "But I expect he deserves it."

"Oh, no, he doesn't," she cried. "You don't know how brave he is! He floated down the Mississippi on a log, out of Vicksburg, and brought back thousands and thousands of percussion caps. He rowed across the river when the Yankee fleet was going down, and set fire to De Soto so that they could see to shoot."

"Well," said Mr. Lincoln, "that's a good starter." Then he looked thoughtful.

"Miss Carvel," said he, "that argument reminds me of a story about a man I used to know in the old days in Illinois. His name was McNeil, and he was a lawyer.

"One day he was defending a prisoner for assault and battery before Judge Drake.

"Judge, says McNeil, 'you oughtn't to lock this man up. It was a fair fight, and he's the best man in the state in a fair fight. And, what's more, he's never been licked in a fair fight in his life.'

"And if your honor does lock me up,' the prisoner put in, 'I'll give your honor a thunderin' big lickin' when I get out.'

"The Judge took off his coat.

"Gentlemen,' said he, 'it's a powerful queer argument, but the Court will admit it on its merits. The prisoner will please to step out on the grass.'"

This time Virginia contrived merely to smile. She was striving against something, she knew not what. Her breath was coming deeply, and she was dangerously near to tears. Why? She could not tell. She had come into this man's presence despising herself for having to ask him a favor. The sight of his face she had ridiculed. Now she could not look into it without an odd sensation. What was in it? Sorrow? Yes, that was nearest it.

What had the man done? Told her a few funny stories—given quizzical answers to some of her questions. Quizzical, yes; but she could not be sure then there was not wisdom in them, and that humiliated her. She had never conceived of such a man. And, be it added gratuitously, Virginia deemed herself something of an adept in dealing with men.

“And now,” said Mr. Lincoln, “to continue for the defence, I believe that Colonel Colfax first distinguished himself at the time of Camp Jackson, when of all the prisoners he refused to accept a parole.”

Startled, she looked up at him swiftly, and then down again. “Yes,” she answered, “yes. But oh, Mr. Lincoln, please don’t hold that against him.”

If she could only have seen his face then. But her lashes were dropped.

“My dear young lady,” replied the President, “I honor him for it. I was merely elaborating the argument which you have begun. On the other hand, it is a pity that he should have taken off that uniform which he adorned and attempted to enter General Sherman’s lines as a civilian,—as a spy.”

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He had spoken these last words very gently, but she was too excited to heed his gentleness. She drew herself up, a gleam in her eyes like the crest of a blue wave in a storm.

“A spy!” she cried; “it takes more courage to be a spy than anything else in war. Then he will be shot. You are not content in, the North with what you have gained. You are not content with depriving us of our rights, and our fortunes, with forcing us back to an allegiance we despise. You are not content with humiliating our generals and putting innocent men in prisons. But now I suppose you will shoot us all. And all this mercy that I have heard about means nothing—nothing—”

Why did she falter and stop?

“Miss Carvel,” said the President, “I am afraid from what I have heard just now, that it means nothing.” Oh, the sadness of that voice,—the ineffable sadness,—the sadness and the woe of a great nation! And the sorrow in those eyes, the sorrow of a heavy cross borne meekly,—how heavy none will ever know. The pain of a crown of thorns worn for a world that did not understand. No wonder Virginia faltered and was silent. She looked at Abraham Lincoln standing there, bent and sorrowful, and it was as if a light had fallen upon him. But strangest of all in that strange moment was that she felt his strength. It was the same strength she had felt in Stephen Brice. This was the thought that came to her.

Slowly she walked to the window and looked out across the green grounds where the wind was shaking the wet trees, past the unfinished monument to the Father of her country, and across the broad Potomac to Alexandria in the hazy distance. The rain beat upon the panes, and then she knew that she was crying softly to herself. She had met a force that she could not conquer, she had looked upon a sorrow that she could not fathom, albeit she had known sorrow.

Presently she felt him near. She turned and looked through her tears at his face that was all compassion. And now she was unashamed. He had placed a chair behind her.

“Sit down, Virginia,” he said. Even the name fell from him naturally.

She obeyed him then like a child. He remained standing.

“Tell me about your cousin,” he said; “are you going to marry him?”

She hung an instant on her answer. Would that save Clarence? But in that moment she could not have spoken anything but the truth to save her soul.

“No, Mr. Lincoln,” she said; “I was—but I did not love him. I—I think that was one reason why he was so reckless.”

Mr. Lincoln smiled.

“The officer who happened to see Colonel Colfax captured is now in Washington. When your name was given to me, I sent for him. Perhaps he is in the anteroom now. I should like to tell you, first of all, that this officer defended your cousin and asked me to pardon him.”

“He defended him! He asked you to pardon him! Who is he?” she exclaimed.

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Again Mr. Lincoln smiled. He strode to the bell-cord, and spoke a few words to the usher who answered his ring.

The usher went out. Then the door opened, and a young officer, spare, erect, came quickly into the room, and bowed respectfully to the President. But Mr. Lincoln's eyes were not on him. They were on the girl. He saw her head lifted, timidly. He saw her lips part and the color come flooding into her face. But she did not rise.

The President sighed But the light in her eyes was reflected in his own. It has been truly said that Abraham Lincoln knew the human heart.

The officer still stood facing the President, the girl staring at his profile. The door closed behind him. "Major Brice," said Mr. Lincoln, when you asked me to pardon Colonel Colfax, I believe that you told me he was inside his own skirmish lines when he was captured."

"Yes, sir, he was."

Suddenly Stephen turned, as if impelled by the President's gaze, and so his eyes met Virginia's. He forgot time and place,—for the while even this man whom he revered above all men. He saw her hand tighten on the arm of her chair. He took a step toward her, and stopped. Mr. Lincoln was speaking again.

"He put in a plea, a lawyer's plea, wholly unworthy of him, Miss Virginia. He asked me to let your cousin off on a technicality. What do you think of that?"

"Oh!" said Virginia. Just the exclamation escaped her—nothing more. The crimson that had betrayed her deepened on her cheeks. Slowly the eyes she had yielded to Stephen came back again and rested on the President. And now her wonder was that an ugly man could be so beautiful.

"I wish it understood, Mr. Lawyer," the President continued, "that I am not letting off Colonel Colfax on a technicality. I am sparing his life," he said slowly, "because the time for which we have been waiting and longing for four years is now at hand—the time to be merciful. Let us all thank God for it."

Virginia had risen now. She crossed the room, her head lifted, her heart lifted, to where this man of sorrows stood smiling down at her.

"Mr. Lincoln," she faltered, "I did not know you when I came here. I should have known you, for I had heard him—I had heard Major Brice praise you. Oh," she cried, "how I wish that every man and woman and child in the South might come here and see you as I have seen you to-day. I think—I think that some of their bitterness might be taken away."

Abraham Lincoln laid his hands upon the girl. And Stephen, watching, knew that he was looking upon a benediction.

“Virginia,” said Mr. Lincoln, “I have not suffered by the South, I have suffered with the South Your sorrow has been my sorrow, and your pain has been my pain. What you have lost, I have lost. And what you have gained,” he added sublimely, “I have gained.”

He led her gently to the window. The clouds were flying before the wind, and a patch of blue sky shone above the Potomac. With his long arm he pointed across the river to the southeast, and as if by a miracle a shaft of sunlight fell on the white houses of Alexandria.

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"In the first days of the war," he said, "a flag flew there in sight of the place where George Washington lived and died. I used to watch that flag, and thank God that Washington had not lived to see it. And sometimes, sometimes I wondered if God had allowed it to be put in irony just there." His voice seemed to catch. "That was wrong," he continued. "I should have known that this was our punishment—that the sight of it was my punishment. Before we could become the great nation He has destined us to be, our sins must be wiped out in blood. You loved that flag, Virginia. You love it still.

"I say in all sincerity, may you always love it. May the day come when this Nation, North and South, may look back upon it with reverence. Thousands upon thousands of brave Americans have died under it for what they believed was right. But may the day come again when you will love that flag you see there now—Washington's flag—better still."

He stopped, and the tears were wet upon Virginia's lashes. She could not have spoken then.

Mr. Lincoln went over to his desk and sat down before it. Then he began to write, slouched forward, one knee resting on the floor, his lips moving at the same time. When he got up again he seemed taller than ever.

"There!" he said, "I guess that will fix it. I'll have that sent to Sherman. I have already spoken to him about the matter."

They did not thank him. It was beyond them both. He turned to Stephen with that quizzical look on his face he had so often seen him wear.

"Steve," he said, "I'll tell you a story. The other night Harlan was here making a speech to a crowd out of the window, and my boy Tad was sitting behind him.

"'What shall we do with the Rebels?' said Harlan to the crowd.

"'Hang 'em!' cried the people. "'No,' says Tad, 'hang on to 'em.'"

"And the boy was right. That is what we intend to do,—hang on to 'em. And, Steve," said Mr. Lincoln, putting his hand again on Virginia's shoulder, "if you have the sense I think you have, you'll hang on, too."

For an instant he stood smiling at their blushes,—he to whom the power was given to set apart his cares and his troubles and partake of the happiness of others. For of such was his happiness.

Then the President drew out his watch. "Bless me!" he said, "I am ten minutes behind my appointment at the Department. Miss Virginia, you may care to thank the Major for the little service he has done you. You can do so undisturbed here. Make yourselves at home."



As he opened the door he paused and looked back at them. The smile passed from his face, and an ineffable expression of longing—longing and tenderness—came upon it.

Then he was gone.

For a space, while his spell was upon them, they did not stir. Then Stephen sought her eyes that had been so long denied him. They were not denied him now. It was Virginia who first found her voice, and she called him by his name.

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"Oh, Stephen," she said, "how sad he looked!"

He was close to her, at her side. And he answered her in the earnest tone which she knew so well.

"Virginia, if I could have had what I most wished for in the world, I should have asked that you should know Abraham Lincoln."

Then she dropped her eyes, and her breath came quickly.

"I—I might have known," she answered, "I might have known what he was. I had heard you talk of him. I had seen him in you, and I did not know. Do you remember that day when we were in the summer-house together at Glencoe, long ago? When you had come back from seeing him?"

"As yesterday," he said.

"You were changed then," she said bravely. "I saw it. Now I understand. It was because you had seen Mr. Lincoln."

"When I saw him," said Stephen, reverently, "I knew how little and narrow I was."

Then, overcome by the incense of her presence, he drew her to him until her heart beat against his own. She did not resist, but lifted her face to him, and he kissed her.

"You love me, Virginia!" he cried.

"Yes, Stephen," she answered, low, more wonderful in her surrender than ever before. "Yes—dear." Then she hid her face against his blue coat. "I—I cannot help it. Oh, Stephen, how I have struggled against it! How I have tried to hate you, and couldn't. No, I couldn't. I tried to insult you, I did insult you. And when I saw how splendidly you bore it, I used to cry." He kissed her brown hair.

"I loved you through it all," he said.

"Virginia!"

"Yes, dearest."

"Virginia, did you dream of me?"

She raised her head quickly, and awe was in her eyes. "How did you know?"



"Because I dreamed of you," he answered. And those dreams used to linger with me half the day as I went about my work. I used to think of them as I sat in the saddle on the march."

"I, too, treasured them," she said. "And I hated myself for doing it."

"Virginia, will you marry me?"

"Yes."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes, dear, to-morrow." Faintly, "I have no one but you—now."

Once more he drew her to him, and she gloried in his strength.

"God help me to cherish you, dear," he said, "and guard you well."

She drew away from him, gently, and turned toward the window.

"See, Stephen," she cried, "the sun has come out at last."

For a while they were silent, looking out; the drops glistened on blade and leaf, and the joyous new green of the earth entered into their hearts.

CHAPTER XVI

ANNAPOLIS

It was Virginia's wish, and was therefore sacred. As for Stephen, he little cared whither they went. And so they found themselves on that bright afternoon in mid-April under the great trees that arch the unpaved streets of old Annapolis.

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They stopped by direction at a gate, and behind it was a green cluster of lilac bushes, which lined the walk to the big plum-colored house which Lionel Carvel had built. Virginia remembered that down this walk on a certain day in June, a hundred years ago, Richard Carvel had led Dorothy Manners.

They climbed the steps, tottering now with age and disuse, and Virginia playfully raised the big brass knocker, brown now, that Scipio had been wont to polish until it shone. Stephen took from his pocket the clumsy key that General Carvel had given him, and turned it in the rusty lock. The door swung open, and Virginia stood in the hall of her ancestors.

It was musty and damp this day as the day when Richard had come back from England and found it vacant and his grandfather dead. But there, at the parting of the stairs, was the triple-arched window which he had described. Through it the yellow afternoon light was flooding now, even as then, checkered by the branches in their first fringe of green. But the tall clock which Lionel Carvel used to wind was at Calvert House, with many another treasure.

They went up the stairs, and reverently they walked over the bare floors, their footfalls echoing through the silent house. A score of scenes in her great-grandfather's life came to Virginia. Here was the room—the corner one at the back of the main building, which looked out over the deserted garden—that had been Richard's mother's. She recalled how he had stolen into it on that summer's day after his return, and had flung open the shutters. They were open now, for their locks were off. The prie-dieu was gone, and the dresser. But the high bed was there, stripped of its poppy counterpane and white curtains; and the steps by which she had entered it.

And next they went into the great square room that had been Lionel Carvel's, and there, too, was the roomy bed on which the old gentleman had lain with the gout, while Richard read to him from the Spectator. One side of it looked out on the trees in Freshwater Lane; and the other across the roof of the low house opposite to where the sun danced on the blue and white waters of the Chesapeake.

"Honey," said Virginia, as they stood in the deep recess of the window, "wouldn't it be nice if we could live here always, away from the world? Just we two! But you would never be content to do that," she said, smiling reproachfully. "You are the kind of man who must be in the midst of things. In a little while you will have far more besides me to think about."

He was quick to catch the note of sadness in her voice. And he drew her to him.

"We all have our duty to perform in the world, dear," he answered. "It cannot be all pleasure."

“You—you Puritan!” she cried. “To think that I should have married a Puritan! What would my great-great-great-great-grandfather say, who was such a staunch Royalist? Why, I think I can see him frowning at me now, from the door, in his blue velvet goat and silverlaced waistcoat.”

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"He was well punished," retorted Stephen, "his own grandson was a Whig, and seems to have married a woman of spirit."

"She had spirit," said Virginia. "I am sure that she did not allow my great-grandfather to kiss her—unless she wanted to."

And she looked up at him, half smiling, half pouting; altogether bewitching.

"From what I hear of him, he was something of a man," said Stephen. "Perhaps he did it anyway."

"I am glad that Marlborough Street isn't a crowded thoroughfare," said Virginia.

When they had seen the dining room, with its carved mantel and silver door-knobs, and the ballroom in the wing, they came out, and Stephen locked the door again. They walked around the house, and stood looking down the terraces,—once stately, but crumbled now,—where Dorothy had danced on the green on Richard's birthday. Beyond and below was the spring-house, and there was the place where the brook dived under the ruined wall,—where Dorothy had wound into her hair the lilies of the valley before she sailed for London.

The remains of a wall that had once held a balustrade marked the outlines of the formal garden. The trim hedges, for seventy years neglected, had grown incontinent. The garden itself was full of wild green things coming up through the brown of last season's growth. But in the grass the blue violets nestled, and Virginia picked some of these and put them in Stephen's coat.

"You must keep them always," she said, "because we got them here."

They spied a seat beside a hoary trunk. There on many a spring day Lionel Carvel had sat reading his Gazette. And there they rested now. The sun hung low over the old-world gables in the street beyond the wall, and in the level rays was an apple tree dazzling white, like a bride. The sweet fragrance which the day draws from the earth lingered in the air.

It was Virginia who broke the silence.

"Stephen, do you remember that fearful afternoon of the panic, when you came over from Anne Brinsmade's to reassure me?"

"Yes, dear," he said. "But what made you think of it now?"

She did not answer him directly.

"I believed what you said, Stephen. But you were so strong, so calm, so sure of yourself. I think that made me angry when I thought how ridiculous I must have been."

He pressed her hand.

"You were not ridiculous, Jinny." She laughed.

"I was not as ridiculous as Mr. Cluyme with his bronze clock. But do you know what I had under my arm—what I was saving of all the things I owned?"

"No," he answered; "but I have often wondered." She blushed.

"This house—this place made me think of it. It was Dorothy Manners's gown, and her necklace. I could not leave them. They were all the remembrance I had of that night at Mr. Brinsmade's gate, when we came so near to each other."

"Virginia," he said, "some force that we cannot understand has brought us together, some force that we could not hinder. It is foolish for me to say so, but on that day of the slave auction, when I first saw you, I had a premonition about you that I have never admitted until now, even to myself."

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She started.

“Why, Stephen,” she cried, “I felt the same way!”

“And then,” he continued quickly, “it was strange that I should have gone to Judge Whipple, who was an intimate of your father’s—such a singular intimate. And then came your party, and Glencoe, and that curious incident at the Fair.”

“When I was talking to the Prince, and looked up and saw you among all those people.”

He laughed.

“That was the most uncomfortable of all, for me.”

“Stephen,” she said, stirring the leaves at her feet, “you might have taken me in your arms the night Judge Whipple died—if you had wanted to. But you were strong enough to resist. I love you all the more for that.”

Again she said:— “It was through your mother, dearest, that we were most strongly drawn together. I worshipped her from the day I saw her in the hospital. I believe that was the beginning of my charity toward the North.”

“My mother would have chosen you above all women, Virginia,” he answered.

In the morning came to them the news of Abraham Lincoln’s death. And the same thought was in both their hearts, who had known him as it was given to few to know him. How he had lived in sorrow; how he had died a martyr on the very day of Christ’s death upon the cross. And they believed that Abraham Lincoln gave his life for his country even as Christ gave his for the world.

And so must we believe that God has reserved for this Nation a destiny high upon the earth.

Many years afterward Stephen Brice read again to his wife those sublime closing words of the second inaugural:—

“With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his children—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

AFTERWORD

The author has chosen St. Louis for the principal scene of this story for many reasons. Grant and Sherman were living there before the Civil War, and Abraham Lincoln was an unknown lawyer in the neighboring state of Illinois. It has been one of the aims of this book to show the remarkable contrasts in the lives of these great men who came out of the West. This old city of St. Louis, which was founded by Laclede in 1765, likewise became the principal meeting-place of two great streams of emigration which had been separated, more or less, since Cromwell's day. To be sure, they were not all Cavaliers who settled in the tidewater Colonies. There were Puritan settlements in both Maryland and Virginia. But the life in the Southern states took on the more liberal tinge which had characterized that of the Royalists,

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even to the extent of affecting the Scotch Calvinists, while the asceticism of the Roundheads was the keynote of the Puritan character in New England. When this great country of ours began to develop, the streams moved westward; one over what became the plain states of Ohio and Indiana and Illinois, and the other across the Blue Ridge Mountains into Kentucky and Tennessee. They mixed along the line of the Ohio River. They met at St. Louis, and, farther west, in Kansas.

Nor can the German element in St. Louis be ignored. The part played by this people in the Civil War is a matter of history. The scope of this book has not permitted the author to introduce the peasantry and trading classes which formed the mass in this movement. But Richter, the type of the university-bred revolutionist which emigrated after '48, is drawn more or less from life. And the duel described actually took place in Berlin.

St. Louis is the author's birthplace, and his home, the home of those friends whom he has known from childhood and who have always treated him with unfaltering kindness. He begs that they will believe him when he says that only such characters as he loves are reminiscent of those he has known there. The city has a large population,—large enough to include all the types that are to be found in the middle West.

One word more. This book is written of a time when feeling ran high. It has been necessary to put strong speech into the mouths of the characters. The breach that threatened our country's existence is healed now. There is no side but Abraham Lincoln's side. And this side, with all reverence and patriotism, the author has tried to take.

Abraham Lincoln loved the South as well as the North.