

Chickamauga.

By Captain F. A. MITCHEL.

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(Continued from last week.)

CHAPTER XXI. A MILITARY PROBLEM.

The events attending the capture and escape of Caroline Fitz Hugh and the dismissal of Colonel Maynard from the service all happened in such quick succession that Jakey Slack was not aware of what was taking place until after it was all over.

Maynard had treated Jakey with mock deference, but had not thought of leaning upon him for advice or strength, much less comfort, and during the raging of the fire through which he had passed Jakey Slack had been as far from his mind as if he had not existed.

One evening as "retreat" was sounding—it was the evening of the colonel's deposition from his rank and command—Jakey walked into his tent. Maynard's head was bowed down on his camp cot.

"General Rosecrans, I learn, has ordered his scattered columns concentrated at Crawfish Springs, the center of his line. Perhaps this is as good a plan as any, at least if Bragg gives him time enough to close up.

Maynard held the boy against his breast while he gave way to convulsive sobs such as are unusual in a man and only come when some mental struggle under an intense grief is relaxed and suffering permitted to get control.

"General," he began. He had always called his chief "general," contending that he was a general since he commanded a brigade.

"No more of that, Jakey. I am only Maynard now—Mark Maynard. Mark is a good enough name for me."

"Waal, that don't make no differ. You uns got th' same body 'n arms 'n legs 'n all that. Hev y' done th' fust thing fo' ter do?"

"What's that, Jakey?"

"Tell Mrs. Maynard."

"Jakey, I can't."

"Reckon she'll hev ter know it some time."

"There's going to be a battle. No court can keep me from shouldering a musket or wielding a saber. I'll go into the fight that's coming and never come out of it. Then she'll not need to know it."

"What makes y' think ther's goin ter be a fight?"

"I would not have the intuitions of a soldier if I did not."

"Y' hain't General Rosey."

"Nor do I need to be General Rosey to divine what's coming. Do you suppose I knew any more about war with eagles on my shoulders than in a private's uniform? If there were some superior being to look into the heads of the men composing this army and read-just the rank in accordance with fitness, many a star would leave the shoulder where it now rests to alight on that of some obscure private."

"Waal, ef we fight 'em, won't we whip 'em?"

Jakey noticed that, with the change of his friend's mind from his grief to war, there was an immediate improvement from the terrible depression upon him. He asked the question for the purpose of keeping Maynard's attention fixed for a time on war rather than for information.

"Whip 'em? Why, Jakey, we're scattered all over creation." He dipped his finger in a tin cup full of water and began to draw a rude map on the top of an extemporized table, consisting of a square board nailed on a stake driven in the ground.

"Here's the Chickamauga flowing between these two ridges, Missionary and the Pigeon mountains, from south to north into the Tennessee. Crittenden's corps is here at Lee and Gordon's mill. Thomas' corps has just passed through Stevens' gap down here, ten or a dozen miles from Crittenden, while McCook is at Alpine, 20 miles away from Thomas. We are off here near Reed's bridge, the tip of the left wing, 40 miles from McCook, the left wing of the right wing.

just where we are located. I was up there myself the other day with a reconnoitering party and came upon one of his scouts, looking at us very much as one would survey a barnyard of fat turkeys before Christmas."

He paused and seemed lost in some attendant problem. Presently he added absently: "All I'd be afraid of would be delay."

"What d'y mean by thet?" asked Jakey.

Maynard started. "I was thinking that I was on the other side," he said. "You see, Jakey, in a military point of view the beauty of the situation is all with the Confederates."

"How?"

"They can cut us up in detail."

"Wha'd y' do ef y' wor him uns?"

"I'd drive a wedge right in here between Thomas' and Crittenden's corps. I'd destroy first one and then the other. After that I'd eat my rations and have plenty of time to take care of McCook's, which is too far away even to hear the guns."

"Thet'd be hunky," said Jakey, pretending to catch his friend's enthusiasm. "Pity 'twasn't t'other way 'n we had 'em as they got we uns. Mebbe ef y' uns wor in command of our army y' mought do somep'n fo' ter change th' situation."

"I?"

"Yes, what'd y' do?"

"That's a poser, Jakey."

Maynard studied his improvised map for awhile without speaking, as if it were a chessboard. At last he said:

"General Rosecrans, I learn, has ordered his scattered columns concentrated at Crawfish Springs, the center of his line. Perhaps this is as good a plan as any, at least if Bragg gives him time enough to close up. To me two plans seem to be open. One is to demonstrate along the Chickamauga, principally with cavalry, while—"

"What's demonstrate?" interrupted the listener.

"Make a feint, a fuss; pretend to have a big force and only have a little one. I would leave the campfires burning at night, to make them think I was still there, and draw my army away to Mission ridge. Moving backward on converging lines—"

"What's them?"

"Lines coming to a focus—"

"What's a focus?"

"Confound it, Jakey, we'll be attacked and whipped before I can make you understand. These roads you see come together at Chattanooga. From Chattanooga, if necessary, the army could be crossed—"

"I thought we uns was a-follerin them uns!" observed Jakey, surprised at the turn the campaign had taken.

"Jakey, did you ever hear of the man who held his adversary down by placing his nose between that adversary's teeth?"

"No."

"Well, that's the way we're holding our enemy, but your remark leads to the other side of the problem. Desperate diseases require desperate remedies. If I were a general, I'd never be on the defensive if I could help it, cost what it might. It sets a man to wondering what his enemy is going to do, instead of doing something himself. Now, our southernmost column might be pushed out here—putting his finger on the line denoting the Georgia Central railroad—"

"to out the Confederates' avenue for supplies. Bragg might turn and crush it, but he can do that now. The trouble is, Jakey, we need troops for quick marches; flying columns to move without camp equipage. Such a column down there could strike, retreat, strike at another point, and so confuse an enemy that he wouldn't know what was to happen next."

Jakey was too young to understand the phases of the war problem in which Maynard's mind had become engrossed to the obliteration of his trial, disgrace, wife, child, friends, comrades, everything but the game that charmed him. But Jakey's mind was as much on his friend as his friend's was on the problem.

Jakey considered himself bound in honor to report to Mrs. Maynard her husband's condition, not only on account of his promise made her on the evening of his departure for the front, but because he had a vague unformulated notion that there are certain exigencies where only women can "do somep'n," and he knew that "the general" required his wife's attention.

Mourning Tom, he set off toward Rossville, remembering by the water map that the right hand road led there.

It was about 11 o'clock at night when he reached Rossville. He determined to rest there a few hours, and making for a cavalry camp got on the "soft side" of a sergeant and turned in with his natural associates, the soldiers. Jakey asked the guard to waken him at 2 o'clock, at which time, after a bite furnished by his friend, the sergeant, and a feed for Tom, he set off toward Chattanooga. At daylight he crossed the Tennessee river and was soon on his way across the neck of Moccasin point toward his destination.

As Jakey approached the plantation it occurred to him for the first time that the information he bore was not pleasant for him to give to any one, especially a woman, and that woman "the general's" wife.

"Reckon she uns'll be skeered when she sees me," he muttered to himself. "I don't like this business now. Wonder I didn't think o' this befo'. Wish they wor some un ter tell her. Mebbe I'll see Souri first. Ef I do, I'll let her tell."

But Jakey was not so lucky. He reached the plantation just before breakfast time, and as Laura Maynard cast a glance from her chamber window she saw him rise up to the veranda. She remembered well the promise she had extracted from Jakey and knew in a moment that he was the bearer of some bad news. Putting her hand on her heart to stop its thumping, she ran down stairs and out on to the veranda. The boy dismounted and came up the steps.

"Oh, Jakey, what is it?"

Now, Jakey had his own methods of carrying his points, and whether or no they were original or ingenious he carried them. Sometimes his parrying was very clumsy. It was so now. He must gain time at all hazards.

"What air whet?"

"There's something happened to the colonel. I know it. Tell me the worst."

"Waal, now, Mrs. Maynard, 'the general' he hain't dead now."

"Thank heaven he lives! Is he ill or wounded? Is the wound mortal? Or is his illness dangerous? Will he recover? Oh, tell me, tell me!"

"Which un o' them air questions shall I answer fust?"

Souri came out on to the veranda,

Jakey was puzzled. He made a desperate effort to conjure up a reply.

"Waal," he said presently, "I reckon I'd just wait fo' you uns ter do somep'n."

"Your ground would be strong enough in itself, but weak on the flanks, especially your left, and in case of retreat you would have the creek to cross in face of an enemy, a hazardous undertaking. I would turn your left and get possession of the roads to Chattanooga. Perhaps I could defeat you and force you to recross the creek. While you were doing so I would knock you to pieces. If you succeeded in crossing, you would find my troops in your rear between you and Chattanooga."

Jakey neither understood nor even heard a word his opponent said, but he looked as seriously studious over the problem as if he were the general commanding.

"Are you whipped, general?" asked Maynard.

"Waal, mebbe ef I air whipped I don't know nothin' 'bout it, 'n I'll just go on fightin till I make you uns think thet you uns air whipped."

"Like Grant at Pittsburg Landing."

The reference was lost on Jakey, but it led him to think that he had made a point. He looked very wise and said nothing. He was thinking on a line which he feared might be of some practical importance to his individual self. He was not certain but that it would be necessary for him to make the connecting link in person between his friend and his friend's wife. So he turned the conversation on lines of retreat.

"Now, supposin," he said, "just supposin I war busted right hyar, how'd I git away?"

"That would depend on the condition of things. If I were the general opposing you, you'd never get away safely. I'd never stop till I had driven you into the Tennessee river."

"How could I get thar from hyar?"

"This part of your army where we are now could only fall back on Rossville. There the flanks would be better protected for a stand. You could go from Rossville to Chattanooga by this road" (pointing to it on the map). "If you should be successful in keeping your enemy far enough from you and long enough, you might cross the river there and save your army. You might perhaps stay there if not too reduced in numbers and if you could keep your line of supply open."

"This air th' bridge I'd cross th' creek on, I reckon," pointing to Reed's bridge on the map.

"That's the nearest from where we are."

"Waal, general," said Jakey in a tone to indicate that the discussion of the campaign was ended, "ef you uns bust me, I'll retreat thet a-way."

Nothing more was said about the imaginary campaign by either. Maynard's eye was fixed on his water map, and he was lost in study. Jakey let him alone till he saw that he was drifting back to his trouble. Then he endeavored to lead him into war again. At last, seizing a favorable opportunity, the boy suggested the propriety of sending some message to his wife.

"Time enough for that after the fight," was all Maynard would say. Jakey was discouraged. He knew that if his friend lived after the fight it would not be his own fault.

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Souri came out on to the veranda,

and seeing Jakey took him into her arms.

"What are you doing here, Jakey?" she asked.

"Reckon I air a-standin on ter th' gallery jest now."

"Mark is ill, wounded, heaven knows what!" exclaimed Laura. "He won't tell me." She clasped her hands and trembled.

"Jakey, don't give Mrs. Maynard pain by keeping her in suspense. Tell her."

But Souri dreaded to have her friend hear bad news as well as Jakey dreaded to give it.

"Waal," said Jakey, cornered, "th' general, he air d—d obstinate."

"Obstinate?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean, Jakey?" asked Souri encouragingly.

"Waal, th' general he reckons ther's goin ter be a big fight, 'n he's goin fo' ter git hisself killed."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Laura. "What does it all mean?"

"Means Miss Baggs."

"Miss Baggs?" cried the wife, bristling. "So it's something about her."

"It's all 'bout her."

"Tell me what you mean this instant," said Laura, with flashing eyes.

By this time Jakey had got to a point where he could begin to tell his story. He did so after the following fashion:

"Miss Baggs she wor ketchin takin th' telegraphs off 'n th' wires 'n turned over ter th' general. The general he wanted ter turn her over ter headquarters, but they was too smart for him. They told him ter try her 'n kill her."

"The cruel monsters!" cried Laura.

"Maybe Jakey's got it wrong. They'd not be likely to express it that way," said Souri.

"Reckon thet's 'bout it with a spy anyhow. Th' general he tried her, but when it come ter killin her he wasn't thar."

"The noble man! It is just like him," from Laura.

"Then he found out thet she was a sister of a old friend o' his'n."

"Who was that?" from Laura.

"Mr. Fitz Hugh."

"Caroline Fitz Hugh?"

"Reckon."

"Who is she?" asked Souri of Laura.

"I—I never saw her. I know who she is, though."

"Then th' general he dressed hisself like a private sojer, 'n he 'n Corporal Ratigan!"

"Corporal Ratigan!" exclaimed Souri.

"Yes, he 'n Corporal Ratigan they run her over th' lines."

"Well," from Laura, breathlessly.

"Th' general he confessed, 'n they tried him, 'n— Jakey hesitated.

"Sentenced him ter be— Oh, Souri, help me!"

And Laura tottered against her friend.

"Ter be cashiered."

"Do tell me what it is," gasped Laura, looking imploringly at Souri.

"I don't know. What is it, Jakey?"

"Bein dropped out'n th' service."

"And is that all?" cried Laura hysterically. "Only dropped out of the service, and for doing a noble act! Poor Mark! I know that he will consider this a terrible disgrace, but to me it is a blessing. Now I can show him how I love him," and dropping her head on Souri's shoulder she burst into a torrent of tears.

[To be Continued.]

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