

THE ROAD TO VIDALIA

3

Vidalia and proceed from Natchez to Vicksburg, found them so. In part the detail was from a regiment of A. P. Hill's, transferred the preceding month from Fredericksburg in Virginia to Vicksburg in Mississippi, sent immediately from Vicksburg toward Red River, it being rumoured that Farragut meant a great attack there, and almost immediately summoned back, Secret Service having determined that Grant at Oxford meant a descent upon Vicksburg. The detachment was making a forced march and making it through a Slough of Despond. The no-roads were bottomless; the two guns mired and mired; the straining horses could do little, however good their will. Infantry had to help, put a shoulder to wheel and caisson. Infantry was too tired to say much, but what it said was heartfelt, — "Got the right name for these States when they called them *Gulf States*! If we could only telegraph to China they might pull that gun out on that side!" — "O God! for the Valley Pike!" — "Don't say things like that! Homesickness would be the last straw. If anybody's homesick, don't, for the Lord's sake, let on! . . . Get up, Patsy! Get up, Pansy! Get up, Sorrel!" . . . "Look-a-here, Artillery! If it's just the same to you, we wish you'd call that horse something else! You see it kind of brings a picture up. . . . This identical minute 'Old Jack's' riding Little Sorrel up and down before Burnside at Fredericksburg, and we're not there to see! . . . Oh, it ain't your fault! You can't help being Mississippi and Louisiana and bringing us down to help! You are all right and you fight like hell, and you've got your own quality, and we like you first-rate! If we were n't Army of Northern Virginia, we surely would choose to be Army of Tennessee and the Southwest — so there's no need for you to get wrathful! . . . Only we would be obliged to you if you'd change the name of that horse!"

The clouds broke in a bitter downpour. "Ooooh-h! Country's turned over and river's on top! *Get up, Patsy! Get up, Pansy! Get up!* — This ain't a mud-hole, it's a bayou! God knows, if I lived in this country I'd tear all that long, waving, black moss out of the trees! It gives me the horrors." — "*Get on, men! get on!*" — "Captain, we can't!"

Pioneers came back. "It's a bayou — but there's a corduroy bridge, not more than a foot under water."

Infantry crossed, the two guns crossed. Beyond the arm of the