

came to Nashville he asked his division and brigade commanders to go with him and make a call on the widow of ex-President Polk. Mrs. Polk was a rebel, and used the courtesy of her visitors to ventilate her opinions. She singled out Mitchel and fired at him the remark, "General, I trust this war will speedily terminate by the acknowledgment of Southern independence." Mitchel, without the shadow of discourtesy in his manner, replied, "Madame, the man whose name you bear was once President of the United States. He was an honest man and a true patriot. If the mute lips of the honored dead could speak they would express the hope that this war might never cease, if the cessation were purchased by the dissolution of the Union over which he once presided."

Mitchel was one of the most alert and aggressive soldiers. He was for pushing forward the army. He saw at the beginning, what other generals found out later, that in those early days the Southwest Confederacy could not have stood a determined advance with the forces we had. In this he was like Grant; but, unlike Grant, he was not permitted to go ahead. He once said to a member of his staff, "When a general has made up his mind to an undertaking, has formed his plans, has issued his orders to his troops to be in readiness, then, when there is but one word to say, 'Go,' it is the hardest thing in the world to say it." In that he struck his criticism into the weak spot of half our generals, and of half our business men, and reformers, and private people, too, who know the time has come but cannot bring their wills to the snap to discharge the sense of duty with which they are loaded to the muzzle. The generals above him knew Mitchel's opinion. There was something prophetic in it. The old star-gazer seemed to see destiny. Some of his superior officers on this account disliked him.

Whenever allowed to go ahead Mitchel did splendid service. The Confederates soon got to know and fear him. General E. K. Smith warned his men to be on the lookout when he was about. In one dispatch this astute hostile general said, "Mitchel has shown himself an energetic commander, and his past success may embolden him to daring and hazardous undertakings in the future. Be unceasingly on the alert." Once when his superiors allowed him to slip the leash of their timidity, he made that famous march across country, captured Huntsville, Decatur, Stevenson, and tapped one of the main railroads used by the Southern army. His alertness, shrewdness, courage shown in this enterprise brought the eyes of the country upon him. It sent one of those electric thrills throughout the North, equaled only by that which followed the news of Grant's capture of Fort Donaldson. It brought the thanks of the War Department, and promotion. It brought also jealousy. This man was clearly in the way of slower generals' ambition. Mitchel had been ordered to destroy certain bridges.

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