

WHEN BOYS WERE MEN

By JOHN HABBERTON.

Author of "Helen's Babies," "George Washington," Etc.

COPYRIGHT, 1901, BY JOHN HABBERTON

CHAPTER XIII.

WHICH I HAD NOT COUNTED UPON.

NE day our company was sent out to rebuild a ruined bridge, several miles beyond the picket lines, which would give us the use of a road by which we might increase our capacity for threatening the enemy. All the material, even to the furling, was to be cut from the woods near the little river.

The first two days of this work would have been very happy ones to me but for a single circumstance. All day long there wandered among us the farmer who owned the young pine forest from which we were cutting our timber, and his face looked as if his family were dying one by one, with no doctor or medicine within reach. Had he lost his temper and sworn at us we could have got rid of him and our uncomfortable feelings, but he was a gentle, slow spoken, tired looking man, like the American farmer of almost any other state, and he told us how he had been saving that bit of woods from the time he married, so that the timber upon it should pay for educating his sons when they grew up and also to give himself and his wife a little money with which to see something of the world after the boys married and the farm was divided between them. Now it all was being swept away and without a word of warning or a cent of pay.

"Well, sir," said our captain kindly, "I'm awfully sorry for you, but it's one of the fortunes of war. A full half of my company are young men who ought to be in college or learning some business by which to live and perhaps provide for their parents' later years; but, so far as their own future is concerned, their time is being wasted about as thoroughly as your property."

"I suppose that's true," said the farmer, looking around at the men at work. "You've got some likely looking young fellows. But that don't give me back my trees."

"Very well," said the captain, "the government will pay you the full value of your trees if you will certify and prove that you are and always have been a true and loyal citizen of the United States and have never given aid or comfort to the enemy."

The farmer stopped looking gentle and tired as he replied:

"I've given the Confederacy my three sons, and I'm proud of it."

"That's square, honest talk," said the captain, "but it brings us back to the fortunes of war again."

"I didn't bring on the war," said the farmer.

"I believe you," said the captain.

"I only went with my state," continued the farmer. "God knows I never wanted any war; neither did any of my neighbors, except a loafer or two."

"That's the same way with me and my neighbors," said the captain. "I suppose if we on our side and you on your side had been more particular about the men we sent to congress and to the legislatures—if we had thought more of our country and less of our party, there wouldn't have been any war."

"There's a right smart lot of sense in that," said the farmer after a moment's reflection. Then he looked sad eyed and continued, "But it doesn't give me back my trees."

As the farmer wandered away I offered the captain an argument or two which seemed to me first class clinches of the rightfulness of his position, but he smiled sadly and replied:

"It's of no use, my boy, to fuss over a man's head when his heart's turned upside down."

"But"—I began.

"Oh, go back to your ax," interrupted the captain. "Any logic that I have I need for use upon myself. If you live through the war and have a farm and a family of your own some day and look back to this particular time, you'll probably believe that I'm about as unhappy over this work as the farmer is at his loss."

I was made so wretched for two days by this sad eyed farmer's manner that I tried to devise ways of escaping it. It wasn't long before I found one. Many of our logs had to be floated to the point where we were massing the timber preparatory for use, and it was not easy for men walking along the shore with long poles in their hands to prevent an occasional log from drifting out of reach and escaping us entirely. I suggested to the captain that a single rowboat or a skiff would help us greatly, and the captain agreed with me, but wanted to know if I had never heard that for military reasons all boats on streams in a fighting country were destroyed.

"If southern boys are as smart as northern boys," said I, "I guess a boat or two escaped and lie hidden away in the bushes somewhere along the shore."

I couldn't forget how many times I had stumbled over boats while roaming along the edge of creeks and ponds not far from our village up north.

"Very well," said the captain, with an odd smile, "if that is true and northern boys are as smart as southern boys, you may go and find one of those boats. Take two or three men with you. Don't go without carbines. And be in a hurry about it. We do need a boat."

Hurrah! Here was to be an outing that would bring back a taste of old times. I wasn't long in selecting my party. Brainard almost danced with joy when I asked him to come along, and two other fellows about as old as we begged to go with us. Just before we started the captain handed me a canteen of whiskey, telling me not to use any unless some one fell into the water, in which case I was to dose him frequently, a few swallows at a time. We were on the search within a quarter of an hour, and I felt a year younger in each successive five minutes. Blessed be nature! There isn't much difference 'twixt north and south as to the underbrush and dry leaves along the banks of small streams during winter. It was almost as jolly a trip as if we were out chestnutting in the woods about Summerton. Once in awhile we would startle a squirrel and long to fire at him. It was so hard to be bound by the rule to fire at nothing but the enemy when outside our own picket lines! What enemy could hear us, anyway? There was no road within three miles except that which was broken by the bridge. The temptation to shoot became still stronger when we saw the head of a deer on the other side of the stream, but Brainard reminded us that the deer would do us no good unless we could cross the stream to get him.

So on we tramped. It was as good as an excursion. We continued to be reminded of old times at home. In one place were the remains of a toy boat such as each of us had whittled from sticks in other days. Then we came upon a path which cattle and pigs had made in tramping to the river to drink. A little farther along was a little dock, such as northern farmers with water fronts generally have. All of these discoveries had no suggestion of war about them, and we all agreed with Brainard when he said:

"I feel as if I weren't down south at all."

Suddenly my heart bounded with joy, and I shouted "Hurrah!" for through a screen of bushes I saw the side of a boat. It was only a skiff, made of about four boards, but hadn't just such a boat often been as good as I wanted at home? We surrounded it in an instant and murmured a chorus of delight. The oars were in it instead of being hidden a little way off, as they would have been had the owner been a northerner, and it seemed in as good order as if recently used.

"The captain ought to make you a sergeant for this, Frost," said one of the boys.

Flat bottomed skiffs make up in weight what they lack in grace, so we laid our carbines in a heap and began to lift and drag. The boat was fully 50 feet from the water's edge, so we had a great lot of tugging and shouting of "Now!" "All together!" "Again!" etc., before we reached the water. At last, however, we got it where a single shore would place it afloat; then we straightened our backs and took another admiring look, while one of the boys became ecstatic enough to spring in, seat himself, snatch the oars and go through the motions of rowing.

"Don't forget to take yer guns with ye," said a voice which none of us recognized. We looked around quickly, and there, kneeling right by our carbines, were three Johnnies, each with his own gun at the position of aim. And two of those three awful guns were double barreled!

This was something that none of us had looked forward to. With one accord, however, we began to look forward to Libby prison.

"Don't ye know it's a sin to steal skiffs?" asked one of the Johnnies, still keeping his place at the aim. I never saw so unpleasant looking a weapon in my life—two great, yawning, dismal holes that ended in utter darkness and behind them two hammers within an inch or two of which glittered bright red percussion caps. I never again wanted to contemplate any kind of a gun from that point of view. And how everlastingly it seemed at least a thousand hours—that fellow held his gun in that one position!

"We were not stealing the skiff," said Brainard after the silence had become almost maddening; "we were merely appropriating it, according to the customs of war as recognized in all countries."

"Properly, eh?" replied the man, relaxing his aim, though his comrades neglected to follow his praiseworthy example. "Well, 'ordin' to the customs of nations we'll 'propriate you. Come up here—one at a time."

Nobody moved.

ry about it. We do need a boat."

Hurrah! Here was to be an outing that would bring back a taste of old times. I wasn't long in selecting my party. Brainard almost danced with joy when I asked him to come along, and two other fellows about as old as we begged to go with us. Just before we started the captain handed me a canteen of whiskey, telling me not to use any unless some one fell into the water, in which case I was to dose him frequently, a few swallows at a time. We were on the search within a quarter of an hour, and I felt a year younger in each successive five minutes. Blessed be nature! There isn't much difference 'twixt north and south as to the underbrush and dry leaves along the banks of small streams during winter. It was almost as jolly a trip as if we were out chestnutting in the woods about Summerton. Once in awhile we would startle a squirrel and long to fire at him. It was so hard to be bound by the rule to fire at nothing but the enemy when outside our own picket lines! What enemy could hear us, anyway? There was no road within three miles except that which was broken by the bridge. The temptation to shoot became still stronger when we saw the head of a deer on the other side of the stream, but Brainard reminded us that the deer would do us no good unless we could cross the stream to get him.

So on we tramped. It was as good as an excursion. We continued to be reminded of old times at home. In one place were the remains of a toy boat such as each of us had whittled from sticks in other days. Then we came upon a path which cattle and pigs had made in tramping to the river to drink. A little farther along was a little dock, such as northern farmers with water fronts generally have. All of these discoveries had no suggestion of war about them, and we all agreed with Brainard when he said:

"I feel as if I weren't down south at all."

Suddenly my heart bounded with joy, and I shouted "Hurrah!" for through a screen of bushes I saw the side of a boat. It was only a skiff, made of about four boards, but hadn't just such a boat often been as good as I wanted at home? We surrounded it in an instant and murmured a chorus of delight. The oars were in it instead of being hidden a little way off, as they would have been had the owner been a northerner, and it seemed in as good order as if recently used.

"The captain ought to make you a sergeant for this, Frost," said one of the boys.

Flat bottomed skiffs make up in weight what they lack in grace, so we laid our carbines in a heap and began to lift and drag. The boat was fully 50 feet from the water's edge, so we had a great lot of tugging and shouting of "Now!" "All together!" "Again!" etc., before we reached the water. At last, however, we got it where a single shore would place it afloat; then we straightened our backs and took another admiring look, while one of the boys became ecstatic enough to spring in, seat himself, snatch the oars and go through the motions of rowing.

"Don't forget to take yer guns with ye," said a voice which none of us recognized. We looked around quickly, and there, kneeling right by our carbines, were three Johnnies, each with his own gun at the position of aim. And two of those three awful guns were double barreled!

This was something that none of us had looked forward to. With one accord, however, we began to look forward to Libby prison.

"Don't ye know it's a sin to steal skiffs?" asked one of the Johnnies, still keeping his place at the aim. I never saw so unpleasant looking a weapon in my life—two great, yawning, dismal holes that ended in utter darkness and behind them two hammers within an inch or two of which glittered bright red percussion caps. I never again wanted to contemplate any kind of a gun from that point of view. And how everlastingly it seemed at least a thousand hours—that fellow held his gun in that one position!

"We were not stealing the skiff," said Brainard after the silence had become almost maddening; "we were merely appropriating it, according to the customs of war as recognized in all countries."

"Properly, eh?" replied the man, relaxing his aim, though his comrades neglected to follow his praiseworthy example. "Well, 'ordin' to the customs of nations we'll 'propriate you. Come up here—one at a time."

Nobody moved.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

"If you want to see me, you must come to me," said I politely as I stepped forward.

"Gimme yer belt," said he. I obeyed, and he bound my arms behind my back.

It was real kind of him to say this, and I told him so, but my heart grew heavier and heavier. What would father and mother think? Who would write them about my disappearance? What would the writer say? Could there be any possible way of getting word home from Richmond? I asked my old acquaintance this question and told him I was afraid my disappearance would kill my parents unless they knew what had happened.

"That's so, my friend," said he. "Just you write a scrap to some friend of yours in your camp, and I'll see it reaches him in a week. Nuthin' else though, mind, except that you're captured."

"How will you get it there?" I asked with natural curiosity.

"Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies," said he. "You give me coffee one time, don't you remember? Well, that's enough."

As it happened that just then was my turn to be unbound, I got some letters out of my breast pocket and found a blank half sheet of paper, on which I pencilled:

Dear Hamilton—We were captured by the enemy. Tell my father not to worry. Our captors say we'll be exchanged pretty soon.

Jack Frost.

My old acquaintance looked over my shoulder while I wrote. When I had finished, he said:

"Put in a little more. Say 'The man that I gave coffee to when he was ketchin' is the man that's got me, and he says I'll be well treated or his name ain't Clay Hillyard.' That ought to make 'em feel easier to home, oughtn't it?"

"I'm sure it would if they knew you," said I. "I wrote them a long letter after that scout in which you were captured, about how you fixed fried bacon and hockeys for us that night and how you showed me how to parch corn in bacon fat. I wrote how awfully hungry I was on that trip, too, and my mother wrote back that she'd pray for you every night of her life for being kind to her boy."

"Shol' you git out! Is that so, though?" said my particular Johnny, with a sheepish look. "Well, mothers is all alike, I s'pose." Then he and one of his party began to prepare a meal of bacon and hockeys, for it was now nearly dark.

The aroma of the cooking diverted my thoughts from the situation, for we had started near noon and in such haste that we had forgotten to bring our haversacks. The Johnnies evidently intended to feed us, for they were preparing an immense quantity of food.

"Say, sarge," remarked my friend to the large, quiet man who seemed to be the leader of the party, "these boys can't eat with their arms tied. S'pose we tie their legs instead. They'll be safe ag'in runnin' away, and they'll be more comfortable."

The sergeant muttered assent. The change was made, and then, as we sat on a long, low bench against one wall, we were bountifully fed. We chatted freely, our captors being quite willing to converse, and the conversation ran as entirely to farming methods as if

there was no war or other special subject of interest. Two or three hours after dark the sergeant said to us:

"Now, gentlemen, any of you that tries to get away 'll be shot like a dog, but if you behave yourselves you can sleep as comfortable as if you was at home. Just lie down on the floor where you are whenever you like, or sit up, but keep to that side of the room. We'll keep to this side. If you even put your hands to your feet you'll be shot, so don't do it."

I said something to the effect that we weren't fools. Meanwhile my friend and the third man dropped upon the floor, with their guns and our carbines, while the sergeant sat down upon a box in front of the fire, cocked a double barreled shotgun and kept his eyes upon us. Conversation languished after that. It is hard to talk to a man whom you know is ready to take your life on sufficient provocation. We exchanged remarks occasionally with one another, but they weren't at all hilarious. I was just dropping asleep, still sitting on the bench, when Brainard whispered:

"Any water in your canteen, Jack?"

I hadn't thought before of the captain's canteen of whiskey. Would it be safe to tell Charley in the hearing of the guard that the canteen across my shoulder was full of whiskey? Suppose the Johnnies should learn of it, drink it and get fighting mad and kill us? I answered Brainard, "No."

Then, remembering some jar inscriptions that he and I had spelled out together in our village drug store and persuaded the druggist to translate, I continued, trusting the sergeant did not understand Latin, "Spiritus frumenti."

The surprise that gleamed through Brainard's eyes would have startled

"All I want, you said?"

there was no war or other special subject of interest. Two or three hours after dark the sergeant said to us:

"Now, gentlemen, any of you that tries to get away 'll be shot like a dog, but if you behave yourselves you can sleep as comfortable as if you was at home. Just lie down on the floor where you are whenever you like, or sit up, but keep to that side of the room. We'll keep to this side. If you even put your hands to your feet you'll be shot, so don't do it."

I said something to the effect that we weren't fools. Meanwhile my friend and the third man dropped upon the floor, with their guns and our carbines, while the sergeant sat down upon a box in front of the fire, cocked a double barreled shotgun and kept his eyes upon us. Conversation languished after that. It is hard to talk to a man whom you know is ready to take your life on sufficient provocation. We exchanged remarks occasionally with one another, but they weren't at all hilarious. I was just dropping asleep, still sitting on the bench, when Brainard whispered:

"Any water in your canteen, Jack?"

I hadn't thought before of the captain's canteen of whiskey. Would it be safe to tell Charley in the hearing of the guard that the canteen across my shoulder was full of whiskey? Suppose the Johnnies should learn of it, drink it and get fighting mad and kill us? I answered Brainard, "No."

Then, remembering some jar inscriptions that he and I had spelled out together in our village drug store and persuaded the druggist to translate, I continued, trusting the sergeant did not understand Latin, "Spiritus frumenti."

The surprise that gleamed through Brainard's eyes would have startled

"All I want, you said?"

there was no war or other special subject of interest. Two or three hours after dark the sergeant said to us:

"Now, gentlemen, any of you that tries to get away 'll be shot like a dog, but if you behave yourselves you can sleep as comfortable as if you was at home. Just lie down on the floor where you are whenever you like, or sit up, but keep to that side of the room. We'll keep to this side. If you even put your hands to your feet you'll be shot, so don't do it."

I said something to the effect that we weren't fools. Meanwhile my friend and the third man dropped upon the floor, with their guns and our carbines, while the sergeant sat down upon a box in front of the fire, cocked a double barreled shotgun and kept his eyes upon us. Conversation languished after that. It is hard to talk to a man whom you know is ready to take your life on sufficient provocation. We exchanged remarks occasionally with one another, but they weren't at all hilarious. I was