Down in Tennessee and Back by Way of Richmond, by Edmund Kirke

Gilmore James Roberts
TO

SIDNEY HOWARD GAY,

THESE SKETCHES

ARE DEDICATED

WITH THE TRUE AND EARNEST REGARD

OF

HIS FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.
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DOWN IN TENNESSEE.

CHAPTER I.

AT LOUISVILLE.

A DESIRE to study the undercurrents of popular sentiment at the South, and to meet some of "my Southern friends," whom the fortunes of war had made our prisoners within sight of their homes, led me, early in the month of May, to visit the Southwest. While there I came in contact with many intelligent men, of all shades of political opinion; and from them gathered much that is illustrative of the real state of Southern feeling, and of the real purposes of the leaders of the Rebellion. In the hope that what I saw and heard may not be without interest to those who have not had the opportunity of personal observation, I propose to give in the following chapters some sketches of the men I met, and the scenes I witnessed, during a month's sojourn in a section which is being upheaved by the passions and desolated by the fires of our civil war.

Arriving at Louisville I at once sought out Colonel Mundy, the gentlemanly commandant of that post, to ascertain the whereabouts of my captive friends. He could give me no definite information, but presumed they were at Nashville. "However," he said, "prisoners are not kept there long. They
are sent to Vicksburg for exchange as quickly as possible. If you desire to see them, you had better push on immediately."

This put me in a dilemma. The railroad below Bowling Green was infested with guerillas, and on several recent occasions, they had assailed the trains, and robbed and maltreated passengers. The cars were insufficiently guarded, and travelling was therefore attended with considerable personal hazard. In these circumstances I had gladly listened to the suggestion of Parson Brownlow—whom I had met at Cincinnati—to lie over at Louisville and accompany him and Governor Johnson to Nashville. They would be attended by a guard strong enough to beat off any roving band that ventured to attack the train; but would, perhaps, not start for a week. In the mean time, my Secession friends might be sent to "parts unknown." Therefore, if I waited, I was likely to miss one of the main objects of my journey, and if I went forward I ran the risk of getting a bullet under my waistcoat, or such an "inside view" of Rebeldom as might not be agreeable. Either horn of the dilemma seemed objectionable. While uncertain which one to choose, the small clock in the office of the Louisville Hotel sounded twice, and I walked up to the dining-room.

On my right at the table sat a tall, squarely built man, wearing the uniform of a lieutenant-colonel of infantry. He had a broad, open, resolute face—ridged and sun-browned, and a stiff, military air, but there was something about him that seemed to invite conversation, and after a while I said to him:

"You are travelling, Sir?"

"Yes, Sir, I am returning to my regiment at Triune."

"Is it entirely safe going down the Nashville road?"

"Not entirely so. When I came up, a week ago Monday,
we were fired into by a band of forty-eight, but we beat them off."

"What were the circumstances?"

"It occurred just this side of Franklin. We heard there of a party being in the vicinity, and took on board a squad of thirty men. We had gone on about three miles, when the engineer discovered the track was torn up, where a wood lines the road, and at once reversed the engine. The guerrillas were posted behind the trees, and as the train halted, poured a volley into us, and, yelling like devils, made a rush for the cars. I got this in readiness"—taking from his belt a large army repeater, and tapping it rather affectionately—"the moment I heard the train slackening-up, and when the leader came within fifteen feet of the platform I fired through the window and killed him. My second shot brought the next devil to his knees, and made the rest halt for an instant. In that instant the soldiers in the forward car, who had waited to cap their muskets, gave them a volley, and they skedaddled, leaving four dead and three wounded on the ground. We had on board three paymasters with over four hundred thousand dollars in money, and the fellows might have made a rich haul."

"And they would have done so but for your prompt shots giving the soldiers time to fire. You saved the train?"

"No, Sir," replied the Colonel, pleasantly, as if not displeased with my compliment, "the General saved it."

"How so? Was Rosecrans on board?"

"No; but a little while ago he ordered all officers to wear side-arms when off duty. But for that my pistol would have been in my valise; for it's a nuisance to carry ten pounds of iron all the while dangling at your side. The General foresaw
just such emergencies. He thinks of every thing, Sir. I reckon he never sleeps."

"I suppose he is a vigilant officer."

"Yes, Sir; I was all through the Mexican war, and have seen something of generals. Rosecrans is the ablest one I ever knew."

"He certainly is successful."

"Always; never was defeated, and never will be. He planned and won McClellan's battles in Western Virginia; did the same for Grant in Mississippi, and at Stone River—why, Sir, when we were thoroughly whipped, and every man in the army knew it, he, singly, regained the battle. There is not another man living who could have done it."

This was said with an enthusiasm that provoked a smile; but I quietly remarked: "I am glad to hear such an account of him. I intend to visit him, but am undecided whether to go down at once, or to wait till the Governor arrives, and take advantage of his escort."

"It will be safer to go at once. The Governor will stay here a day or two, and as this place is full of rebels, every guerilla in Tennessee will know when he starts. If they can muster strong enough they'll surely attack him. I go down by the next train, and will be glad to have your company."

"Thank you. Your revolver has acquitted itself so well, that I am disposed to trust it. I'll go with you, Sir;" and rising, we left the table together.

The cars were not to start till the following morning, and the afternoon being on our hands, we seated ourselves in the smoking room, and resumed the conversation. I soon gleaned something of the Colonel's history. He had started in life with
only a clear head and a strong pair of hands, but was then the
owner of a well-stocked farm of three hundred and twenty
acres, and in affluent circumstances. His experience in Mexico
had given him a military education, and on the breaking out of
the war, Governor Morton tendered him a colonel's commission.
Having a young family growing up about him, and being past
the age when love of adventure lures men into danger, he de-
clined it. But when the new regiments were called for, and it
seemed doubtful that his county would furnish her quota, he
volunteered, to set, as he said, "the boys an example." His
regiment, the 82d Indians, at once filled up, and he was ap-
pointed its lieutenant-colonel. He had been in many small
engagements, and at Stone River was in command of the six
hundred skirmishers who, at the close of the last day's fight, in
the darkness of midnight, advanced two miles, and for three
hours "felt" a hostile force of five thousand. So long as the
West sends such men to the war, the friends of the Union may
be of good heart, for they cannot be beaten.

After a time the conversation turned upon politics, and my
new acquaintance said to me: "A large majority of Rosecrans's
men went into the war friendly to slavery; but not one of them
would now consent to any peace that did not destroy it root
and branch. Nine months ago I left home a Breckinridge
Democrat, and now, sir, I'm as black an Abolitionist as Wendell
Phillips."

"And what, pray, turned you about so suddenly?"

"Seeing slavery as it is. One little incident convinced me
that a negro is a man—just as much of one as I am—and
therefore not fit to be a slave. It occurred at Triune, where
I am now stationed. Just outside of our lines lives a
planter who professed strong Union sentiments. He used to mix freely with our officers, keep open house for them, and was, apparently, a whole-souled, hospitable fellow. He owned a good many negroes, and among them a quiet, respectable old darky of about sixty, who supplied my mess with eggs and poultry. Not long ago our pickets, stationed about one hundred yards from this planter's house, were fired upon several times from the woods near by. It was done regularly twice a week, and on each occasion occurred about two o'clock in the morning. At last one of our boys was hit, and, being in command of the pickets, I set about investigating the matter. There was nothing to point suspicion at the planter, except the fact of his being a slaveholder, but that convinced me he had a hand in it. I never knew one of them, however strong his professions of loyalty, who was not at heart a rebel.

"I sent for the old darky, to question him, and, learning of it, the planter came to my quarters, and insisted that he had a right to hear what his negro said. I was satisfied I couldn't get the truth out of the slave in the master's presence, but I consented to go on with the examination. I put some leading questions to the old man, and in a quiet, straightforward way he told me that an officer of Bragg's army had been in the habit of visiting the mansion every few nights for several weeks. He said he came about midnight, left his horse and orderly concealed in the woods, and went up to the mistress's room as soon as he entered the house. There the master would join him, and remain with him generally for an hour or two. And he added, with perfect coolness: 'D'rec'lly after de cap'n wud leab, Sar, I'd allers yere de shootin' 'mong de trees. I reckoned dat wus bery quar, till finarly, one day, I yered Massa a tellin'