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H. S. PERRY, DEAN
MORRISTOWN NORMAL AND
INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE
DEPARTMENTS OF
LITERATURE, SCIENCES AND METHODS
MORRISTOWN, TENN.

Oct. 15, 1910.

Mr. Chas. E. Brown,
Madison, Wis.

Dear Mr. Brown:

I have neglected sending
manuscript longer than I intended,
hoping to get some pictures finished
to send at the same time. I have made
some exposures, but have not been able
to develop and print the pictures yet.

I have made some corrections in
the manuscript showing real names and
giving regiment and company to which father
belonged. I also had him look over
the story and he says it is correct
now as to facts. It is needless to say,
I should make many changes now were I
to rewrite it. Knowing the colored people better, I
can see that the old slave owner considered the

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disobedience as rank mutiny which must receive drastic treatment, and Old Steve's independence was ^{to him} the worst impudence.

For all that Old Steve exhibited all the symptoms of the human race awakening to a realization of its shackles, and rising in its strength to throw them off.

I should like to have that manuscript held subject to my call - as I think I shall reconstruct the story some day.

Yours truly

H. S. Perry.

P.S. I didn't get down into the mound country S. West of B.R. Falls the past summer. Hope to next spring.

Am looking for those bills tho I have little hope of locating any. Will keep a sharp look out for any of the things mentioned on slip you enclosed.

(No. of words 2870.)
(4th Miss. Cavalry.)

"Prize Story"

OLD STEVE.

During the Civil War, my father served as a volunteer in the --- Wisconsin Regiment; and, in his four years of service, he had many interesting experiences, and some very exciting ones, besides having gained quite a stock of incidents from the experiences of others, all of which he enjoys relating to any who wish to hear them.

One of the most interesting of these stories was that of two fugitive slaves who reached the Union camp on one of the first days of June, in 1862; one of whom told father the story of their escape soon after.

A day or two after the arrival of the Union troops, including the --- Wis. Regiment, at Baton Rouge, Miss., whither they had been sent by General Butler a few weeks after the capture of New Orleans, and while they were still encamped on the bank of the Mississippi River near that city, the "Laural Hill", a steamboat which had been owned by planters living along the river near Baton Rouge, but which had been captured by the Union Gunboats, was sent to the plantation of one of her former owners on the opposite side of the river a few miles above the city for a supply of fuel.

The owner of this plantation, John (Jay) was a strong secessionist, and cordially hated, as well as feared the "Vankees", as the Federal soldiers were called. So when the steamer, which he knew to be in their possession, was seen approaching his landing, he hurriedly ordered all his slaves to run to the cypress swamp in the rear of the plantation, and hide, he himself setting them a lively example. Most of the slaves, who had been told all kinds of stories about the "Yankees", in which they were described as terrible monsters, in fact, almost anything but human beings, readily obeyed his commands; but one old negro, known as Old Steve, was curious to see what "Vankees" really did look like.

(Bird)

So he remained behind, and another darkey, a friend of his, stayed with him.

Old Steve was a large, powerful man, over six feet tall, and broad shouldered and solidly built in proportion, — almost a perfect specimen of physical developement. He had passed his boyhood amid the wilds of Africa, and had been brought to America when a young man of about twenty years of age. Since then, for nearly, or quite, thirty years, he had been only a piece of property in the hands of his fellow man, and, for several years, had been owned by his present master, Jay, by whom he had been raised to the position of head plowman on the plantation. He was always faithful and prompt, and, during his long servitude, he had never been whipped. There was still, within him, a slumbering spark of manhood, which all those years of slavery had failed to quench. In spite of his advanced age and the hardships he had undergone, he seemed little beyond the prime of life. His muscles were still hard as iron, and he was active and energetic, not lazy and indolent as were so many of the southern negroes.

When the boat tied up at the landing, he and his friend, Charley, walked rapidly from the house down to the river, and went fearlessly aboard. They talked freely with the soldiers who were on the boat, and with some negroes they found there whom they happened to know. They found that the despised "Yankees" were not such hideous beings as they had been led to believe, but just ordinary mortals, such as they had been used to seeing.

After the fuel had been loaded, as the boat was preparing to leave the landing, the two slaves went ashore, and started back to their work as quietly and orderly as if nothing had happened. They had no misgivings about their disobedience to their master; thinking that, as long as the opportunity had presented itself, and they had not deserted him, he would overlook it,

or at least, let it pass with only a slight reprimand.

Their master, however, had no such thought. When they reached the house, they found him there waiting for them in anything but a pleasant mood.

"Why didn't you go to the swamp, as I told you to, and hide?" were almost his first words.

"I wanted to see what de Yankees looks like," said Old Steve, "an' I tho't dere wouldn't be no harm in it."

"I tho't ef Ol' Steve could stay, I dun stay too," said Charley.

"I'll show you there's harm in not minding me when I tell you to do a thing!" thundered their angry master. "I'll show you 'what the Yankees look like!' I'll whip every bit of the black hide from your backs!"

"Ef yo' does, Massa," answered Old Steve, speaking slowly and quietly, but very firmly, "et 'll be de fus' time an' de las' time yo' eber licks me, kase I'll go to de Yankees an' stay wid 'em!"

"What!" shouted Jay, "you dare defy me! 'Go to the Yankees,' will you? I'll teach you to talk that way to me! I'll take that notion out of you! I'll conquer you, or I'll kill you!"

One of Jay's slaves had been hung only a short time before for striking his master, and that to after the Courts of Justice had refused to sentence the offender. This all the darkeys knew, but if Jay expected to cow his slaves into abject submission by his threats, he was badly mistaken. The slumbering spark of manhood in Old Steve's soul was fanned into a flame, and he stood cool and collected through all this tirade of threatening and abuse, only the set look in his face showing his desperate determination; while Charley stood by in silence, ready to take the consequences with him, whatever they were.

The first "lesson" the poor fellows got was fifty lashes upon the bare back with the plantation whip. This consisted of a leather strap some three feet long and two and a half inches wide, fastened to a handle nine or ten inches

long. The strap was punched full of holes each about half an inch in diameter, instead of being slit into separate lashes as was usual with such whips. This was considered the harshest kind of a whip; as after each stroke, the position of every hole was marked by a blister, while the edges of the strap everywhere cut and tore the flesh. Fifty lashes on the bare flesh with such an instrument would literally flay the back of the unfortunate person receiving them.

The poor fellows stood like men, and received the blows without flinching, which only increased their master's rage.

"What! he yelled, "you won't give up yet? Well, you'll come to it before long! You'll want to keep away from the Yankees when I get through with you, if you're alive at all! I'll kill you before I'll ever let you get to them anyhow!"

They were then handcuffed, and Old Steve, being the leader, was distinguished by having an iron collar placed around his neck.

This collar was made of a half inch iron rod, and riveted on. On either side of the collar was riveted a spike about four inches long and ~~half an inch square~~, so arranged that one of the ~~spix~~ spikes stuck up behind each ear, and held the head as in a vice. Any attempt to turn the head ever so slightly resulted in a prod from one of these spikes.

They were then taken to the calaboose, and locked up there with their feet in the stocks.

The calaboose, or "nigger jail" as it was sometimes called, like those common in that part of the country at that time, was a solid brick structure, sixteen feet square, and eighteen feet high, having a heavy door and one small round window some eighteen inches in diameter, which was placed twelve feet from the ground.

This window was not barred, as its height was thought to be sufficient to prevent any attempt to escape that way.

The stocks were made of heavy timbers, and were placed about two feet from the ground; so that the unfortunate prisoner was compelled to lie flat on his back on the earth which formed the floor of the calaboose, while his ankles were held in a nearly horizontal position two feet above him. It can be readily seen that very little change of position was possible under the circumstances.

Imagine the suffering of those two poor fellows, lying there through all those long hours, with every attempt at the slightest change of position grinding the sand and dirt into their bruised and bleeding backs.

But instead of conquering them, this treatment only fixed the firmer, in the mind of Old Steve at least, the determination to escape. His manhood had never been degraded by the lash before, and he was determined it never should be again. He was certain that if he could only make his escape, and reach the Union lines, he would be protected, and allowed his freedom at least.

The truth is Jay was furious at the Federal soldiers for confiscating his boat, and his wood and coal; and, like many another angry man, he foolishly allowed himself to vent his rage upon the first ones who came in his way, who happened, unfortunately for them, to be his slaves. They felt that he had been needlessly and unusually cruel to them, and the nearness of the "Yankees", who were looked upon by all the slaves as their emancipators, made them resent it as they would otherwise never have dared to do.

Their master had no sooner turned the key in their prison door therefore, than Old Steve began to work for his freedom. The handcuffs which his companion wore were solid, but those upon his own wrists were connected by a single link, and he commenced twisting and grinding at that link with all his might. The little strain he was able to put upon it wore at the link, and he patiently set himself to work to wear it out.

What a task it was! But his only hope of escape lay in getting the use of his hands, and he worked away as only a man can work when life is prize, or death the forfeit.

Hour after hour dragged slowly by in silence, broken only by the ~~xxxxxxx~~ ceaseless grind, grind of the handcuffs, as they were patiently wrenched and twisted by those sturdy arms. The man's hands were swollen and stiffened by the continued strain, but he did not heed it, and at length discovered that his efforts were telling on his fetters. This gave him fresh courage, and he worked away with renewed energy till, at last, at about three o'clock in the morning, the link parted.

Groping around in the darkness, his hand soon touched a stout stick which, fortunately for him, was lying within his reach. This he managed to work into the padlock on the hasp that fastened the stocks so as to enable him to pry out the staple. It was then an easy matter to lift the upper timber enough to set himself and his comrade free.

They stood up, breathing a little more freely. But they were still in a desperate situation; for, as was said before, the window was twelve feet high, and a very small one at that, while the door was strongly locked and bolted. Besides, Jay, fearing that some of the slaves might attempt to set his prisoners free, had hired two ~~poor~~ white men, "pore white trash" they were called, to stand guard over them; and it seemed strange they had not already heard enough to induce them to investigate.

A few days before Old Steve might have looked upon any effort to escape as hopeless and submitted without a protest, ^{his comrade} Charley certainly would; but the last few hours had transformed him from a docile slave into every inch a man; one who was ready to play a man's part, and who would make a valiant fight to gain his liberty. Charley would now stand by him he knew; indeed they

had already gone too far to turn back. Discovery and recapture now meant death, and they both realized it.

With the help of one of the timbers which they pried loose from the stocks, they climbed up to the window and looked out. Every thing was quiet in the first gray light of the early dawn.

They somehow managed, in spite of being encumbered, the one with the handcuffs, the other with that horrible iron collar around his neck, to climb through the window and lower themselves safely to the ground.

A hasty glance around assured them of their safety, and explained why they had not before been interrupted in making their escape. Their guards were both fast asleep, and an empty whiskey bottle lying near them showed that they were not likely to awaken very soon. Jay had thought it necessary to fortify the courage of his guards, who were ignorant and superstitious fellows, with a bottle of whiskey, and it had had its legitimate effect.

Hurrying down to the bank of the river half a mile or so below the plantation buildings, they drew out an old canoe, in which the slaves of the plantation were in the habit of making stolen visits to the city, and cleared the mud and water out of it. Old Steve then knocked from the fence near by two cypress pickets, which would do very well for paddles, in the absence of anything better. He gave one of the pickets to Charley, and together they entered the canoe, and pushed off toward the city.

It was a long hard pull, but they had the help of the current, and made good time in spite of their ~~difficulties~~. They landed safely, and, just as the sun was peeping above the eastern horizon, they entered the camp of the Union troops at Baton Rouge.

Here they were at once taken in charge by the soldiers of the guard where they first reached the lines, who belonged to the -- Wis. Regiment.

(4th)

The news of their arrival spread rapidly through the regiment, and the fugitives became the center of an interested and sympathetic group. Old Steve, on account of the collar and the broken handcuffs he wore, was the chief object of their sympathy. Some of the soldiers hastened after tools with which to remove the shackles, and set the poor fellows free, while others took the fugitives at once to their good colonel, to show him just how they had been treated. Then the rivets which fastened Old Steve's collar were filed off, and he was freed from that, after which each of the men was relieved of his handcuffs.

As were many of the negroes who "came to the Yankees", Old Steve and Charley were at once set to cooking for the soldiers, and before long Old Steve found himself cooking for Company "I".

There was nothing about Charley to arouse special interest in him, and he was soon lost sight of among the hundreds of darkeys who now came flocking into the camp. But the same qualities that helped Old Steve out of the calaboose, strength and indomitable pluck and perseverance, kept him an object of interest to the soldiers.

Father was at that time commissary of Co. "I" and he saw much of Old Steve during the next few months. He found him naturally bright, capable, and very ambitious. He could not read a word, but, in spite of his advanced age, he somewhere obtained an old "Webster's spelling book", and went to work to learn. Every moment he could spare from his duties he spent in study, getting help from one and another of the soldiers as he could; and he was already making rapid progress, considering his opportunities, when General Butler's first enlistment of colored troops took place. Then he stopped cooking for soldiers in order to become one himself.

He had seen that the war was to bring freedom to the slaves if they ever got it at all, and there was that within him which compelled him to take an active part in the great conflict. He

could not rest contented, and leave what he felt were his battles to be fought entirely by others. He would at least offer his life for the liberty of his oppressed race as freely as did many who had less to gain or lose than had he.

Father lost all knowledge of Old Steve after he enlisted, and never learned what became of him; but the old iron collar, which he wore into the camp at Baton Rouge on that bright June morning, was carefully preserved among the war relics sent home by the regiment, and may now be seen in the Capitol Museum at Madison, Wis., where, especially to those who know its history, it is one of the most interesting relics.