

OLD FATHER PETERS.

By ALFRED R. CALHOUN.

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"We were led into the cabin, and I supposed everything was so wet that it would be folly to think of a fire and impossible to start one; but in this I was mistaken. While mother and I sat on the saddles that had been carried in to furnish us with seats, Dick Bradley produced his flint and steel—every mountaineer carries these primitive appliances—and, tearing off some dry splinters and bark from the inner side of the logs, he soon had a blaze, and, following that, a fire. Except the four log walls and the roof, which must have been the better part, for it kept the clay floor dry, there was absolutely nothing to this cabin. The pile of ashes on the big hearth showed that the place had once been inhabited, but, miserable though I was, I did not wonder that the builders had abandoned such a wretched place."

Dick Bradley threw a circle of pickets around the cabin and, although he was entirely ignorant of military methods, he arranged to visit them every hour, gave them a countersign and detailed a relief. While this was being done, the men not on picket carried in logs to be used as fuel for the fire, and then sat down, and soon the cabin was filled with steam and the odor of roasting fannels. As soon as the saddle blankets were sufficiently dry, a bed was made for Mrs. Peters and her daughter.

"But," continued Miss Peters, "although thoroughly wearied, sleep was out of the question. The whistling of the wind through the surrounding trees, the ceaseless beating of the rain on the clapboards and the hoarse whispering of the men crouching beside the fire kept mother and myself awake, as the roar of a battle might not have done."

"When my father's watch told that daylight was due, the men about the fire began to eat of the cornbread and cooked pork they had brought with them, and Dick Bradley and father went out to visit the pickets. With the dawn of day the rain ceased and the wind died out. Mother and I left the cabin to look about us. We saw the horses standing with lowered heads and drooping hips at the chimney end of the cabin. We were in the midst of a forest, seemingly on the top of a considerable hill. Down through the trees and in a direction we took to be the north we saw the red ratted trail that looked like a fresh wound."

"While we stood looking about us, we saw father and Bradley coming hurriedly back and evidently much excited. Father did not appear to be weary, but there was an anxious, pained look in his eyes such as we had not noticed since the day the meeting house was burned. The pickets had reported suspicious men seen in the distance since daylight. These men were gathering along the line of the trail over which the fugitives must pass on their way to the north. They were in considerable force, and that they were not friends was manifest from their actions."

The cabin might afford some shelter from a storm, but it was worse than useless as a place of defense. On a spur of the hill to the north and about a quarter of a mile from the cabin, Bradley had either discovered that morning or knew in advance of a place that offered advantages for defense. Without any excitement, he told the men in and about the cabin that there were strangers in sight, and that a fight might be looked for before they could resume their journey."

The men seized their rifles, the horses were resaddled and, as Mrs. Peters and her daughter preferred to walk, the animals were led to the point indicated. This was a bare projection of the hill, where a mass of irregular rocks afforded a place of concealment for a larger force than required it now, but as it was some distance from wood and water it was not a desirable place in which to stand a protracted siege."

The fugitives were not kept long in doubt as to the character of the people who had aroused their suspicion. Bradley was disposing his men at the points where their rifles could best check an approach, when Ella Peters, who was looking down the slope, called out:

"There is a man approaching with a white flag!"

The white flag proved to be a handkerchief fastened to the end of a sword. This was responded to by fastening Ella's handkerchief to the end of a rifle, which Dick Bradley carried as he and Father Peters walked down to meet the two men in gray who were approaching. The fear that these people belonged to Het Magoo's gang was soon set at rest. They were dressed in gray uniforms, and the network of gold lace on the collar and sleeves of one of the men indicated that he was an officer. As Father Peters and Bradley went down to meet the truce, it was decided that the former should do the talking, so when the Confederate announced himself as belonging to General Zollicoffer's command, and peremptorily demanded to know who the people up the hill were, he was answered:

"We are Union men making our way to the north, but we do not want a fight unless it is forced on us."

"Why are you going north?" was the next question.

"We deny your right to ask," replied Father Peters.

"I am here to prevent recruits going through to the enemy, and if you do not surrender you must take the consequences," said the Confederate.

"We are quite ready for that," said the old clergyman.

"And if nothing but a fight will suit you, us," broke in Strong Dick Bradley, "come on, just as quick as you uns doggone please. Now go back and tell your rebils that."

The Confederate became gentler after this, but beyond learning the purpose of each other the truce resulted in no good. As soon as Father Peters and Bradley rejoined the party, two young men, who declared that they could reach Camp Dick Robinson without food or sleep, were detailed to make their way to the north and to inform the first Union troops they reached of the condition of the fugitives whom they had left behind. This precaution, as will presently

be seen, proved the salvation of the mountaineers.

The Confederates numbered about a hundred men, cavalry or mounted rifles, as could be seen when the clouds rolled away and the sun came out. The enemy were green and undrilled, as were most of the troops on both sides at that time, but the officer in command evidently understood his business. Leaving a guard with the horses grazing in the valley, he advanced his men in open order, and evidently with orders to protect themselves as best they could till they came within rifle reach.

"I recall," said Miss Peters, "that I saw all this without any increase of fear, nor was I at all shocked at seeing my father on his knees with his rifle protruding through an opening in the rocks. Indeed it appeared to me like an act of habitual devotion. I wanted to do something, and if there had been an unused rifle within reach I am sure I should have obeyed the impulse to use it."

"I never admired Strong Dick Bradley so much before. I expected that he would rave and swear, but instead he went softly from man to man, unceasing for the exposure, and whispering, 'Low and stiddy, boys; low and stiddy, and not too doggone high!'"

As the Confederates advanced without drawing the fire of the man on the hill, they began to feel that the task was easy, for they yelled in that peculiar Indianlike way that afterward distinguished them in battle. They became more reckless and began to expose themselves, when an irregular fire opened on them from the rocks.

It was not till a dozen men had fallen that the Confederates began to get a true estimate of the enemy. This was the first conflict in which any of them had ever participated, and so the courage of the bravest began to cool at the sight of blood. They threw themselves on the ground and opened a mild fusillade at the rocks on the hill.

"One of our men got a shot through the fleshy part of his left arm," said Miss Peters. "The sight of the blood made me shudder when I came to tie the wound up in a handkerchief that had been used as a flag of truce; but confidence and hope returned when the young fellow said, with a laugh, as if he rather enjoyed it, 'Lor bless you, Ella, that ain't nothin to what I did fo' one of them sinners ez was fo' climbin up this hill.'"

"The young man had just returned to his place, and I was about to rejoice, when I was startled by a low cry. Then I saw father reeling back, with an awful look in his eyes. I ran to him and reached out my arms to help him, but he fell—fell at my feet—dead. 'God forgive me but at that instant I did not fully feel our terrible loss. The impulse came to me to take the rifle that had fallen from his hands and to fill his place, and I am sure that I should have done so had not mother fainted."

"I recall that Dick Bradley quickly and tenderly lifted the body back to where the men could not see it, and he whispered, 'Don't take on loud; don't let the boys know our loss till we've licked them bounds down the hill.'"

And during that morning and well on into the afternoon the mountaineers fought without knowing that Father Peters was dead. It was evident to Bradley that the enemy had been re-enforced, and he began to fear for the coming night, when, to his great joy and surprise, he saw the Confederates hurrying down to their horses and galloping away. Soon after this a bugle sounded the advance up the valley, and two squadrons of the First Kentucky cavalry came into view. The young men sent out that morning had brought the re-enforcement."

Father Peters was buried on the hill where he fell, and there he lay till, through General Garfield, the body was taken to the western reserve after the war. The subsequent record of Bradley was entirely characteristic, and some day when my data are more full I will write them out. It is known that he killed Het Magoo's son after that desperado had offered to surrender. And it is also known that he tore the colors of the Third Middle Tennessee from the staff at Chickamauga and carried them in his breast till his escape from Andersonville, eighteen months afterward. THE END.

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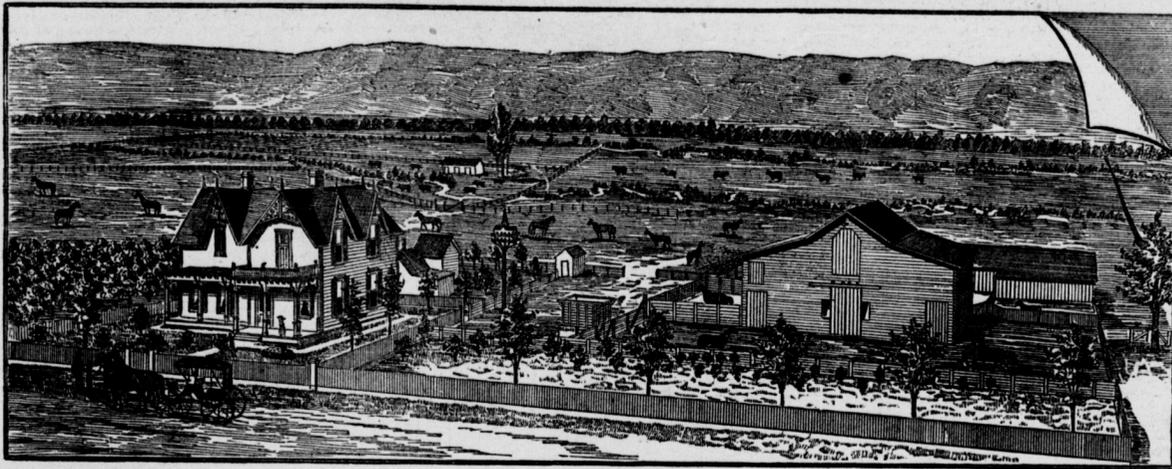
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