NORTHERN KENTUCKY IN WAR TIME*

By JOHN URI LLOYD
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ABOUT one hundred feet back from the highway, as you approach the village from the south, you will observe a single house among the trees. No other building is in sight; excepting a church spire, there is no evidence of a village.

At any hour between sunrise and sundown in the summer, excepting at "meal time," you will probably behold a white-haired man seated on the front porch of the house. Stop, ask a question, and the reply will terminate with a cordial, "Alight, suh, alight and rest yoahself." Take the old man at his word, hitch your horse and seat yourself in a chair beside him, first, however, stopping at the well for a drink of water "from the northeast corner."

Your entertainer, if he be the man I have in mind, lives largely in the past. He may talk about Clay and Jackson, of Colonel Johnson who killed Tecumseh, as though they were of yesterday; or he may go into details concerning Lafayette, who, in his journey from Lexington to Cincinnati, ate his dinner in this very house. He may point to the grass-clad buffalo path, beaten into clay that holds yet the track of hoofs long since silenced, which, fronting the house and winding through the field beyond, still is plainly visible. And this thought of the spectral forms that in the flesh trouped by in the past may next lead to stories of bears and wolves, "varmints" familiar to the old gentleman's recollections of the backwoods of Northernmost Kentucky.

Should he chance to dwell on local affairs, he will give a graphic history of his state from the day of Daniel Boone to the present. As incident after incident rises before him from out the past, a panorama is pictured such as history book never did and never can impart. He may go back to colonial times, or to the war with England, and tell of his grandfather's service as a Virginia artilleryman in the Revolution; next, of his father's part as a settler of the canebrakes and grapevine tangles that originally covered the richest part of the Blue Grass region; then of his brother who fought in Mexico; and, finally, of his own part in more recent political affairs of his state. Fresh with him as if but a day back are these things, but to you a part of written book lore, not of living, moving men. He may even turn to the sad story of the scholarly Blennerhassett, who was arrested in Lexington and tried when the old gentleman's father was young. "A gentleman was he, suh, and defended by our own Henry Clay, suh!" Then, if he becomes very communicative, he may relate how, more recently, a Northern regiment, in the spring of one of the sixties, camped on his farm, burned his fences, plucked his chickens and butchered his sheep and hogs. Chuckling, he will tell you that, to crown it all, the "green" Northern soldiers found in the clearing his "plant-bed," where the young tobacco plants were about four inches high; and, "by Gad, suh! they ate it all! Thought it was lettuce, suh! Cut it up in vinegar and ate it for lettuce. Stole my old tobacco out of the barn to chew, and my young tobacco right

* An endeavor has been made to handle this fragment so as to avoid identifying individuals. With this aim I have ventured to touch more than one village. Yet, to persons familiar with Florence (Stringtown on the Pike), Boone County, forty years ago, many points both of location and of incident must be recognizable.—J. U. L.

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A Kentucky village scene.

out of my plant bed to eat, suh!"

Ask about himself, and he will say he is "no account" now; concerning his family, he will declare "they ain't worth shucks!" Let him alone when he strikes this theme and he will tell you he bought all the land in sight so as to leave each of his children "a farm, suh." That if you stand in the middle of the plantation you cannot see a foot of "anothah" man's land. That the first child, a boy, went to college, then studied medicine, located in a large city and is getting rich, but too lazy to work. That the second, a boy also, was educated in Lexington, studied law in the University of Virginia, settled in a northern city, and, lazier and more shrewd than the doctor, is getting richer. That the third, a girl, married a city chap, a business man, who never did work, a trifling sort of a fellow, but as energetic as city people usually are; seems to enjoy life, but too trifling to drive the cows out of a cornfield. And that the fourth, a girl of twenty, spends most of her time visiting the others.

A shadow comes over the face of the old man at this point. Abruptly he ceases to speak of his children and becomes intensely in earnest concerning the affairs of his country. "If you live to be my age, suh, you will learn that great distinction is to be drawn between a politician and a statesman, suh! We have politicians in plenty now, but by the shades of Henry Clay and Andrew Jackson, very few statesmen, suh!" He next belabors the politicians for misleading the youth of the land, scolding first the Republicans for squandering the treasures of the people, exciting the negroes to antagonism against their former masters, and building up monopolies, and then the Democrats, for departing from the ways of the fathers. "No bettah now than the Republicans, suh!" He will probably refer to the barbecues and political meetings of other days, and compare them with the dull picnics of the present, telling about the fights of this or that family of the olden time. He will interest you in general conversation as never man did before. Through every sentence runs the courteous style of the Kentucky gentleman of other days, with quaint sentences, words beautifully abbreviated and accented as no other people can modulate the English language, accents so charming that pen cannot convey their subtle melody.

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This roomy house of the old Kentucky gentleman is typical of hundreds.

At last you rise to depart, but, "Dinnah is ready, suh!" and the invitation is given in a tone that will admit of no refusal. When, finally, after your meal of corn bread, bacon and snap beans, buttermilk and corn on the cob, you "mount" your horse, hours may have elapsed.

This roomy house of the old Kentucky gentleman, with its windlass well midway between the front door and the pike; its oblong front building and long "L," the latter usually a dining-room; its low-roofed ice house just over the fence near the spring-fed pond, and its row of tumble-down negro cabins back of the kitchen, is typical of hundreds of similar houses that, destined ere long to become recollections only, still add to the beauties of Kentucky—this land of grass, woodlands, weeds and thicket tangles, of pikes and mud roads, of bottom land, highlands, sink holes, caverns, hills and mountains.

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But let us not neglect to touch on what the old man evaded, when, in speaking of his children, the shadow came over his face.

When the sun rises in the morning he is wont in pleasant weather to give his arm to his wife. Together they pass through the long L of the house, back along a grassy path, until in a secluded spot on a beautiful knoll they stand beside an iron railing that encircles a group of stones.

Conspicuous in that family burying ground rises a rough hewn marble shaft; two hillocks opposed to each other abut upon its base, one lying north, the other south of the stone. The mother drops to her knees and rests her head on that cold marble; the white-haired father, with bowed, uncovered head, stands erect.

The silent prayer on the lips of the kneeling woman ends; she rises, again twines her arm in that of the man, and in silence they wend their way to the house.

Step with me now to the spot where knelt the woman, and you may read the epitaph on the north side of that marble shaft:—

Sacred to the Memory of
Andrew J. Nordman, a Federal Soldier,
Son of Martha and George Nordman.
Died of Suffering and Privation in Libby
Prison, Virginia.
January 18th, 1863.

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Down the Knobland Pike.

The inscription upon the south face runs thus:—

Sacred to the Memory of
Joseph C. Nordman, a Confederate Soldier,
Son of Martha and George Nordman.
Died of Privation and Suffering on Johnson's Island, Ohio.
January 1st, 1863.

THE VILLAGE.

Having bade our genial host good-bye we soon reach the outskirt of the village, and directly a square brick church appears, before which a stile block by the sidewalk faces the roadway. The door and two windows, which diversify the front of the edifice, remind one of a nose between two glaring eyes of a great face. A steeple and belfry rise above the comb of the roof, indicating the transverse hall or vestibule below, where, depending through a square hole in the ceiling, the bell rope hangs. You need not enter the church—take my word that the rear partition of this cross hall is pierced by two doors directly back of the front windows, each door opening into an aisle flanked by pews extending to the back of the church. The door on the right is for the men, the other for women, and during church service the men and women, separated, sit on opposite sides of the central railing that runs from the "Amen" seat fronting the pulpit to the seats reserved for negroes in the rear. This meeting-house is one of four—belonging respectively to the Methodists, the Baptists, the Presbyterians and the Reformers, or Disciples—that you must pass before you get through "town."

We pass next a few residences, then a blacksmith shop and beyond this a grocery, which is a drygoods store as well; and along the street are to be found other "stores," and a few doctors' offices, after which dwelling houses again appear, another blacksmith shop, and two more of the four churches; finally the village disappears, giving place to meadows and cornfields which close in to the turnpike boundary. The hamlet, squatted on the borders of the field fronts, has almost thrust itself into the pike's right of way, many of the houses being in the floating dust, close to the edge; few of them having more than a small door yard, yet, strangely enough, limitless acres unused in the rear.

Have I overlooked or evaded any-

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The little Church of the Disciples.

thing of importance that should take part in this description of Northern Kentucky rural life in those days? Let me think. Ah! there is one omission. My village has an industry. Near the junction where the Stringtown and Knobland pikes meet stood a shop conducted by an old man, who lived near his workroom. The Christian, or Disciples' Church was on one side of this shop, and over in the fields beyond it spread the village churchyard. The odor of freshly-cut walnut wood always hovered about this isolated building; a few walnut shavings and fragments of thin boards mouldered undisturbed in front of the door, for children who frequented the wagon-maker's did not come thither for chips and blocks. The old man who worked within was not ill-natured; he spoke kindly and mistreated no one, yet in common with other boys, I avoided him. He neither whistled nor sang while plying his tools, and, strangely enough for a wood-worker, never was the sound of hammer heard in his shop. The products of his skill were artistically joined with glue, smoothly sand-papered, carefully varnished, and brass screws with secreted heads held the polished planks together. Yes, I neglected to mention this shop with its hollow wares, in whose neighborhood the children's voices were hushed in daylight, and past which, with scudding feet and beating hearts, the little ones slipped noiselessly if, in the night time, duty called them along the dust-bearing Pike. The home and shop of this man, whose parcels were always sold empty, should not be disregarded in a picture touching these times and scenes,—this solitary abode nestling snugly near a silent church and lonely graveyard, this dwelling place and storehouse of the village coffin-maker.

OUR PART IN WAR.

Within the borders of our village and in the country adjacent was to be found all that man really needed for life and comfort. Such necessary articles as coffee, sugar, "store tea," and "boughten" clothes came from abroad, but our people gave to outsiders in return from out our plentiful stores of hogs, corn and tobacco. Honors were easy, and, really, we were of greater concern to the world than the world to us. Whoever heard of one of our villagers going to Europe on a pleasure tour?

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The dust upon the Stringtown Pike lay quiet as before.

Yet every year travelers from abroad came to our contented village, and while the stage horses in front of the tavern were being changed, these journeyers even asked questions concerning the town and adjacent country, thus indicating our importance.

But now the war that divided the nation burst upon us, and from our village, true to the traditions of their fathers and grandfathers, men were traveling, traveling with set bayonets, to meet, not an outside foe, but, alas! their friends from boyhood. Unhappy Stringtown! Farther south the young men turned their faces all in one direction, and amid the plaudits of their countrymen enlisted in behalf of the cause that lost. To the north, the young men, not less enthusiastic, marched from homes not less precious, to engage side by side with their comrades in a victorious cause. United to a man, those from the South opposed those united in a body from the North. To the member of a stricken southern home, tidings of death to him in the field spoke of a blow dealt by a *foe* from the North; while the mourner in the broken family circle of the North, thought of an *enemy* in the distant South.

But to this highland village near the border of northernmost Kentucky friends were not necessarily comrades, nor were antagonists foes. The roll of the drum, the music of the fife, the flaunting of banners, did not cheer the ear of Stringtown's new-made soldier boy; no mirth, no thought of glory could come where each step fell on a loved one's heart. Life-long neighbors stood not shoulder to shoulder. Our soldier boys shook hands, turned their backs to one another, sadly, silently seeking, some the North, others the South. Having enlisted, they faced about, enemies in principle, though friends at heart. When came death's herald to a Stringtown home, came next the thought of a brother's hand possibly red with a brother's blood. Between the North and the South our pike stretched; in one direction it led toward the land of blue-coats, in the other, toward that of the men in gray, and men of Stringtown rode both ways. Let us illustrate by an incident.

One afternoon in 1862, a group of citizens sat in front of the village grocery, discussing the war news, which came by newspaper from the North and by "grapevine" from the South.

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The Knoblands, whence they came.

Among them were two young men, to be known herein as Joe and Bill. Next day the circle was smaller, for Bill was absent.

"Joe, where's Bill?" a companion asked.

"Gone."

"Which army?"

"Northern; went this morning. Bill and I couldn't jest see things alike," he continued. "Reckon I'll go South to-night." And that night the group lost another member. These young men had been sheltered by the same roof, caressed by the same loving hands, had knelt beside the same mother—they were brothers.

In these matters of principle not a hand was raised to prevent a free choice; no feeling of personal hatred stood between those who saw life's duty differently. A neighbor to the right of a little home called one evening on his neighbor to the left. He kissed the children and shook hands with the parents.

"I may not see you again; to-night I go to join Morgan," he said.

The host went to his little wardrobe, took therefrom his great-coat, thrust a pistol into the pocket, and threw it over the arm of his guest. Both were poor men, and winter approached; the recipient attempted to return it. "No," said the donor, "no, you take this coat. Your path is to be one of privation; besides, I won't need it. To-morrow morning I start North to enlist. My government has overcoats to spare, and pistols, too; you who go South may find neither. God bless you, friend; may we return to meet again."

Ah! I see that I misstated when I said that our people did not travel. Their journeyings, however, were not toward the attractions that entice pleasure seekers to strange lands. Forth they went when stern duty called. Then it was that men of Stringtown bade farewell to their homes and enrolled their names, not on hotel registers, but on enlistment books. Sleepy old Stringtown, she did her part well and has earned the right to rest!

And now I recall a time when, one hot autumn, divisions of these two armies surged alternately back and forth along that dusty pike. Morning might find our village in possession of men who followed the flag of two red bars, and the last rays of the declining sun might be reflected from the stars and

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stripes. For several days roving bands see-sawed back and forth, and often the Gray rested south, and the Blue north of our village. Then we were between the lines. But at last the southern infantry turned about and tramped away. The army of the North followed, and again the many-striped flag waved over Stringtown. But though the rebel army was miles to the south of us, it was not too far distant for a raiding troop of cavalry in gray to meet a squad of blue within the village limits, at the junction of the pike.

Well do I remember that September day in the autumn of 1862. Without other object than to walk and look and breathe, to feel the sunshine on my head and the lazy breeze on my cheek, I wandered alone to the village limits, near the place where, six days in the week, slept the Church of the Disciples. Across the pike, in a corner of the old rail fence, I threw myself upon the tangled blue grass, the limbs of a drooping beech close above me, the little church opposite my resting place. In the distance, down the Knobland pike, uprose now a cloud of dust, a mighty cloud that slowly lengthened, as if no other end it had than that which crept lazily toward me. Then I saw, as down the hill it came, that in the advance two men rode abreast, while behind them, unwinding from out the woodland wherein the pike disappeared, a troop of horsemen followed, rank after rank, two, three, four aside of each other. Closer to the fence did I creep, very close, and sank beneath the stake that held the rider, a little boy hid in the shadows near a great beech tree's trunk, peering through the rails at the strange men who rode toward the junction of the Stringtown pike. Covered with dust were the cavalrymen; no banner did they carry, no uniform did they wear, yet each man was armed with pistol-holstered belt, sabre and gun.

Slowly did the troop move up the hill; the two scouts far in the lead now threw themselves flat upon their horses' necks with heads close to the beasts' ears, and cautiously advanced into the edge of the Stringtown pike, the one looking North, the other South. And next, by a sudden whirl of their horses, back they drew and galloped to the column behind. A halt, a start, and before I could formulate a thought, the troop, close pressed together, clustered directly opposite the spot where crouched the child among the iron-weeds, and there, just at the junction of the pike, it formed a phalanx beside the white fence of the little Church of the Disciples, which hid the group from whomsoever might be down the Stringtown pike. Then uprose in the hands of one horseman a tattered flag, a mutilated remnant; torn and shredded had it been by battle charge, this faded bit of blue and gold and two red bars.

From where I stood I now saw leisurely advancing up the Stringtown pike a troop of cavalrymen dressed in blue, bearing proudly aloft a new bright flag of many stripes. This it was that had caught the eyé of those two alert foreriders. No scouts were in advance, no guard with watchful eyes crept to the junction and peered down the Knobland road; no thought had they of Morgan or of Morgan's men. In a body, four abreast, came these unconcerned, bright-buttoned men to the very junction; and then from out the troop of waiting rebels one man burst forward, one man only, the captain, pistol in hand. Alone he faced the troop and I heard him cry aloud, "Surrender!" I saw the leader of the men in blue spur his horse forward to meet the stranger, and then, as he caught a glimpse of the ambushing troop of Morgan's men and saw that tattered banner, came the answer. "Never!"

Two arms were raised, two pistol shots broke upon the air; then, before my eyes both men sank, first down upon their saddles, and then into the dust at the junction of the pike. But scarce had this thing come to pass, than the well-trained horses of the rebel band sprang forward as if but one were there; great was the din that from gun of both blue and gray now broke upon the air. A moment only did it last, this snapping of the many guns, for soon the surprised men in blue turned in confusion and retraced their steps, disappearing

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whence they came. But many horseless men lay now in the white dust of Stringtown pike, and many horses with empty saddles roamed at will. So suddenly had this thing come before my eyes and passed away that, possessed by a nameless spell, I gazed in charmed fascination, as if upon a pictured mind-play, scarce realizing what it was I saw. But when the gunshots ceased and silence fell upon the scene, I turned and fled into the beech-wood; thence I circled around the village and sought my home, the faces of those two captains yet before my eyes.

Later, when the noise of the conflict had died away and the dust upon the Stringtown pike lay quiet as before, and when my fears had somewhat given place to curiosity, together with others of our citizens, young and old, I ventured toward the place of the skirmish. Crossing the pike near the junction, I felt my bare foot slip. I turned and peered at the print; the track was red. I raised my foot; slimy red paste oozed up between my bare toes. I fled to the churchyard grass and vainly tried to wipe the stain away. Wounded and dead men were scattered in the shade of the churchyard locust trees, where rebel hands had hastily placed them. But the Confederates were raiders and could not remain to enjoy the fruits of their victory. Speedily remounting, they disappeared in the direction of Knobland whence they came.

Beneath the shadow of the church the two captains rested side by side. Timidly did I creep to him in gray, just beyond whom, with covered face, was laid the Union captain. The white dust of Stringtown's pike clung to the garments of both, and I thought, strangely enough, of a bluebird and a gray sparrow that I once saw flutter together in the dust,—but they left no red stain. The head of the rebel rested in a triangular space between three little briar stalks, and a blue cap was thrown over his face. Under one edge of its visor the untrimmed beard struggled to his chest; from beneath the opposite side bloody hair obtruded. A pool of blood sopped the short grass about the base of the briars and crept near the man in blue, where its edges mingled with the other crimson stain. I stood and looked down and wondered, wondered as childhood does when scenes such as these come into one's child-life. Red was the blood of the man in gray, but not less red was that of him in blue; this I saw, this I thought and wondered at it all.

I shuddered and raised my eyes; the silent church was before me. I turned my head; the home of the coffin-maker faced me. Into my soul crept a strange sensation indescribable to this day. Feeling that blood-paste still, I crept away, mopping my foot on the grass, crossed the pike, and hid myself in the shadows of the beech-wood.

Our citizens took the wounded men into their little homes and cared for them tenderly; Blue and Gray were alike dear to us. The undertaker and the churchyard were near, and it made no difference to the owner of the shop at the junction of the pike with what color his wares were filled. But soon the tidings spread that two of the men who fought and died were not strangers to Stringtown.

The two captains were of our people. One was the neighbor on the right; love had drawn the rebel for a last farewell back; nearly had he reached his village home. The other was his friend of the cottage to the left, who had been led by duty through the village, past his home.

When the double funeral sermon was preached in the little country church, close together sat two mourning women, and by the side of each was a group of little children. The captains of the hostile bands,—he who gave the pistol to his neighbor and he who received it —had returned to their native village "to meet again."

Such as this is what war brought to our quiet village of Northernmost Kentucky; to us, who had no part in making war; to us, to whom—as neither North nor South can fully comprehend —the flag forever furled and the flag that ever waves alike are honored and must be forever dear.

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