

DAY, JULY 16, 1875.

HOW IT WAS DONE.

The Story of Jefferson Davis' Capture as Told by a Member of His Wife's Traveling Party.

Many Facts Hitherto Unpublished.

[Clark County (Ky.) Democrat.]

We publish elsewhere in this issue of the Democrat a very interesting narrative of the capture of Jeff. Davis. It was written at our solicitation by a gallant friend, who was present and kept a memorandum of the circumstances. His veracity is beyond question, and the story will be read with interest wherever the Democrat may go.

The Communication.

To the Editor of the Democrat:

The spring of 1865 was an epoch in American history, bringing as it did, the close of the gigantic struggle between the sections, with triumph to one and defeat to the other.

Soldiers from North and South went marching home, the one with laurel wreaths, the other wearing the cypress crown. But out of the host who had bound their all upon the Moriah of the South, there were some in this day of disaster and of gloom who had not the poor privilege of returning to devastated homes—those who were fugitives in the land of their birth; such were the President of the Confederate States and his family.

As the object of this article is only to give the personal reminiscences of the writer in regard to the movements of these persons from the time of the surrender of General Lee till the capture and incarceration of the President, and as the writer was a member of Mrs. Davis' traveling party, and in no wise connected with the personal staff or escort of the President, I will take up the story at Abbeville, South Carolina, where, about the last of April, we found Mrs. Davis with her four children—Maggie, Jeff., Willie and Varina, and Miss Maggie Howell, a sister of Mrs. Davis. Col. Burton Harrison, private secretary to Mr. Davis, had accompanied the family to this place, and was with them till their capture. Two female servants, also, were faithful unto the end, and I regret that I can not recall their names, for they deserve to be remembered.

Winder Monroe, Jack Messick and myself were the guests of the Hon. Thomas Monroe, who had followed the fortunes of the South to this point, and we were in doubt in regard to the future and what we should do, when Col. Leovy, of New Orleans, suggested that we might be of service to Mrs. Davis; who was in town and desirous to move on. Of course we were ready for this service.

At our request, he saw Mrs. Davis and she gladly accepted our offer of service. She wanted wagons, ambulances and teams. It required but little time to make all needful preparations, and with two ambulances containing the family and light baggage, and wagons freighted with the household goods, and the household goods, too, of the quondam chief of a once mighty Confederacy, we left Abbeville early on the morning of the 30th of April, 1865, and took the road leading to Washington, Georgia, which place we reached on the morning of May 2, without incident. We remained here until the morning of the 3d, Mrs. Davis and family receiving from the citizens evidences of the kindest regard and the most distinguished consideration. It was here that the battered remnant of the Eleventh Texas regiment, with a devotion worthy of their fame, offered themselves as an escort to Mrs. Davis. She answered that she thought she would not need the protection of bayonets in her peaceful journey through her own country, but if she had such need there were none on whom she would sooner call, or in whom she would more implicitly trust.

We moved southward on the morning of the 3d, leaving Monroe behind to receive instructions from the President, who was expected to be in Washington during that day, in company with Duke's brigade. Monroe overtook us about midnight on the 3d, with directions to move as rapidly as convenient to the Florida coast, with ulterior intent, which it is not necessary now to mention, as our plans were forestalled by capture. After leaving Washington, our trip for several days was only a march of a score or more of miles during the day, and the incidents of camp-life during the night; Mrs. Davis, with characteristic delicacy, refusing the proffered hospitality of the noble-hearted people on the route, fearing that they might be made to suffer for their kindness to her and hers. She bore the fatigues of travel and the rude fare of the camp with a spirit that was contagious, and veterans learned a new lesson of heroism from this gentle woman.

We were occasionally interrupted by parties of disbanded troops, who mistook our train for quartermaster stores or the Confederate Treasury, and insisted on interviewing us. In all cases when they learned who we were, they were not only satisfied, but ready with offers of service.

These interruptions became more frequent and of course, somewhat annoying. On the night of the 6th of May, we were in camp and, of course, on the look-out, when about 12 o'clock we were aroused by the sound of horses' feet; the numbers we could not make out in the darkness. We thought this another party of soldiers bent on search; but to our great surprise, it was the President with his staff and escort. We supposed that he was many miles away. No one was more surprised than Mrs. Davis. He told us that he had heard of the annoyances to which we had been subjected, and was so anxious about his family, that he felt an irresistible impulse to come to us. He traveled with us until the evening of the next day, when he took leave of his family to go, as we supposed, in an opposite direction. On Monday, May 8, we continued our journey southward, and at night went into camp as usual.

After retiring, we were aroused by the tramp of horses passing through our camp. Nothing was said on either side, and we knew nothing of who the riders were until about 3 o'clock A. M. a courier came, saying that Mr. Davis desired us to move at once, which we did. He had learned that we were followed by a Federal regiment, and had again come to our relief. We traveled in company all day Tuesday, May 9, and at night, believing we had eluded pursuit, we went into camp about a mile from Irwinesville, Irwin county, Georgia; the President expecting to leave us after supper, and continue his journey. He was prevented from carrying out his design by the sudden illness of one of his staff. He then decided to spend the night with us, and leave the next morning. But the delay was fatal to his plans, and the illness of his friend gave the Federal authorities a prisoner upon whose head was set the fabulous price of \$100,000. We went to sleep without apprehension, the President occupying a tent with his wife and smaller children. The escorts and staff were scattered around under the waving pines, sleeping "the sleep of the just." About daylight we were rudely aroused by the thunder of horses' hoofs, and the exulting shout of charging troops, which we knew too well meant capture or a race.

To make the reader understand the situation, it is necessary to say that we were traveling on a road which led through the pine woods of Georgia, and were camped by the roadside and near a branch which crossed the road nearly at right angles. The branch was lined on both sides with an almost impenetrable chapparal, the only opening through it being the public road. Our camp was south of this road.

One regiment, the Fourth Michigan, I think, had made a circuit and got in front of us; another, the Wisconsin, as I remember, followed in our rear. The Michigan regiment came upon us first, and startled us with their shouts. Of course the first question on all lips was, "Where is the President? Has he escaped?" It was soon answered, for across the road, not thirty steps from where we were, he stood confronted by a Federal soldier, who seemed to recognize him, and demanded his surrender. Never in his eventful life in camps, or courts when a people's fate hung upon his fiat, or when an army with banners poised him in review, was he more worthy of his people's esteem, or of his own fame. The absurd story of his being in woman's clothing, has been so thoroughly contradicted and put to rest that it is not necessary to mention it further. A Federal soldier, signing his name Jas. H. Parker, has gallantly come to the support of truth and justice, in a communication to the Portland (Me.) Argus; and I have no doubt he was the man who, at the time of the capture, seemed to recognize Mr. Davis, and demanded his surrender, as his description of the affair is about as I remember it. The friends of our ex-President may rest assured that he did nothing unworthy of himself, or of the great cause whose representative he was.

After a glance, which satisfied us with his fate, our attention was arrested by rapid firing near us, the cause of which no one seemed to know. The Federal officers near asked, with quick, restless accents, what it meant. They thought it might be Duke's brigade, and we earnestly hoped it was; but the matter was soon explained. The two regiments, coming from opposite directions, had met near the chapparal, and in the gray dawn of morning had made a mutual mistake, and each fired at the other. This fiasco cost them twelve or thirteen men, as nearly as I remember, in killed and wounded. In the confusion occasioned by this skirmish among friends, several of the prisoners escaped. And when the hue was drawn around the camp, and the prisoners numbered, there were the President and his family, Colonels Lubbuck and William Preston Johnson, of the personal staff, Hon. J. H. Reagan, Postmaster General of the Confederacy, with Colonel Harris and a few members of Mr. Davis' escort, and three or four of those who were traveling with Mrs. Davis and family. All were placed under guard, particular attention being paid to Mr. Davis. After a hasty breakfast we took the road for Macon—a heavy guard always surrounding the President. I think it was on the morning of the second day after our capture, that the monotony of the sad march was broken by such a shout as only intense excitement can produce. It was taken up and prolonged until we were almost deafened by the uproar.

We were not long in suspense, for away off at the head of the column, we saw a herald with a broad, white streamer sailing above his head; he was urging his horse at full speed, and as he came down the line, it was no trouble to read the great startling proclamation, "One hundred thousand dollars reward for the capture of Jefferson Davis," in letters of a span's length. Of course all eyes were turned instinctively upon the subject of this excitement, but the Sphinx could not have been more impassive. If the cruel display stirred an emotion, his face did not betray him. With quiet dignity, he answered such questions as curiosity or interest prompted; and with gentle affection soothed his stricken family. They

needed his care then, for those words meant to them the dungeon and the gibbet. Mrs. Davis was the first to recover self-control, and she remained a heroine to the end. This incident did not delay us long, and after the captors had exchanged congratulations, we moved on towards Macon. We learned on the road of the death of Mr. Lincoln, which event Mr. Davis deeply deplored. We reached Macon after a tedious march of several days, the guards being strengthened from time to time as we advanced. The news of the President's capture preceded us, and the whole Federal force stationed there were out to see the distinguished captive.

Here ended the weary march by day and the bivouac at night. We were transferred from wagons and ambulances to the cars, and after about twenty-four hours' delay, were taken by rail to Augusta. At this point we found A. H. Stephens, Vice President of the Confederacy; Hon. C. C. Clay, Senator from Alabama in the Confederate Congress, with his accomplished wife, and General Joseph Wheeler, who were also prisoners. They were put under guard with us, and the whole party were placed on board of a boat, which immediately started for Savannah. An inventory of the captured band as they gathered in the cabin on that evening included the President and the Vice-President of the Confederate States, the Postmaster General, the Senator from Alabama, General Joseph Wheeler, Colonel Lubbuck, former Governor of Texas, and Colonel Wm. Preston Johnson. Also, Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Clay, always dames of high degree, the acknowledged leaders of a splendid circle in those golden days, when Washington City sparkled with wit and was radiant with beauty, and they were no less charming in this the time of their adversity. Full of all womanly beauty, they ministered with word and deed to their fellow-prisoners. Then there was Miss Howell, a worthy sister of Mrs. Davis, and the children bright and sparkling, with small appreciation of their surroundings; it was almost a holiday excursion to them. Besides these, were Col. Moody and Harrison, Maj. Morin, Winder Monroe, Jack Messick and the writer of this.

The trip to Savannah was not marked by any incident that I remember, and when we reached that city we were taken immediately to Hilton Head and put on board the Government vessel, William P. Clyde, which, without much delay, steamed away for—we did not know where; and after our toilsome march, how we did luxuriate in our sense of ease and want of responsibility. The uncertainty which vailed our fate could scarcely disturb our rest. One day passed like another. Each contributed his share to cheer and support the others. The President was never more entertaining, and as he drew on his storehouse of learning for fact and illustration, all wondered at the variety and extent of his information. He seemed equally at home on all subjects. The Vice President, on account of ill health, kept much in his room. The ladies, too, lent from their store to charm away the hours, and what would otherwise have been a weary voyage, passed like a dream, and we awoke one morning to see the casemates of Fortress Monroe frowning upon us. Mr. Davis was the first to recognize it. He was familiar with the coast defenses of the South, having paid them much attention while Secretary of War under Pierce's administration. He had superintended the repairs and added much to the strength of this particular structure. He at once predicted that this was to be his goal.

As soon as the anchor was dropped the vigilance of our guards awakened, and we were again under the strictest prison regimen, without an intimation of our destiny. This suspense lasted several days, and was intensified by the mysterious look and the whispered conference of the Federal officers, who came and went between the ship and the fort. It was finally announced that the President was to be confined in this fortress, and the others were to be scattered around in other prisons. His captivity here and the incidents connected with it are matters of history. No pen can do justice to the parting of the President from his family—their agonizing grief and his heroic endurance. They were sent back to Georgia and put under limits to wait through the weary days of his imprisonment.

GOLD AND PALE.

Cold and pale her proud form lies,
But not more pale nor yet more cold
Than I have seen her, when of old
She proudly pierced my aching heart,
And smiled to think her poisoned dart
Could strike so swift and sure.

The deathly dullness of her eye
Is not more dull than I have known
It to be in times agone
When I have craved one flash of light
To ease my heart and glid my night
And give me love for love.

RUEBNE ASHTON.