

JEFF DAVIS' CAPTURE.

His Flight from Richmond as Remembered by His Body Servant.

SENSATIONAL STORIES CONTRADICTED.

(New York Herald Raleigh (N. C.) Letter.)
James H. Jones (colored), is at present jailer of the county jail in this city and also a member of the Board of Aldermen. During the war he was the body servant of Jefferson Davis, and drove the carriage of the President of the late Confederate States at the time of the latter's flight from Richmond. He was constantly with him thereafter up to the time of the capture in Wilcox county, Georgia, having driven the carriage through Virginia, North and South Carolina and a portion of Georgia; was made a prisoner with Davis and sent to Fortress Monroe, being subsequently released. Jones is a man of some intelligence, who wields considerable influence over his race, and, although a Republican, he is ever ready to say a kind word for his former employer. He is well thought of by the white people of this community, and has a good reputation for veracity and integrity. Being apprised of the facts above related, a Herald correspondent approached Mr. Jones with the hope of securing some facts connected with the memorable flight from Richmond and the subsequent capture of the President of the late Confederacy not heretofore made public. Nor was he disappointed. It would perhaps be well to preface the story with the statement that, although the servant of Jefferson Davis, the narrator of what follows was never his slave, Jones having been born free.

THE REMOVAL FROM RICHMOND.

That Mr. Davis was attending religious services at St. Paul's church, in Richmond, on Sunday, April 2, 1865, when the telegram of Gen. Lee, announcing his immediate withdrawal from Petersburg and the consequent necessity for evacuating Richmond, was delivered to him, is a matter of history. The sensational stories which have been published descriptive of the "panic" caused by Mr. Davis' abrupt withdrawal from the church, are characterized by Jones, who was the bearer of the dispatch, as well as by Mr. Davis, as having transpired in the fertile imagination of the authors only. Jones was well-known in the community as Mr. Davis' body servant, and consequently, when he handed that gentleman a telegram which caused him to hastily quit the building, every one who witnessed the affair was convinced that something unusual had happened; but this conviction did not produce a "panic" nor cause the display of any undue excitement. "The exercises were abridged and the congregation quietly dismissed—that is all." The next day, Monday, arrangements were perfected for the removal of Mrs. Davis and family from Richmond, and on the afternoon of that day Jones, with the carriage and horses and the Davis family, proceeded by rail to Charlotte, N. C. Arriving at the latter place, a house was rented, and the family settled down with the expectation of remaining in Charlotte for several months at least. After these arrangements were concluded, Jones proceeded to Danville, Va., where the Confederate President then was, to report to him. It was while Jones was in Danville that Lieut. Wise, a mere youth and son of Gen. Wise, came, after escaping through the Federal cavalry, and notified Mr. Davis of the speedy surrender of Gen. Lee. This was the first reliable information Mr. Davis received of the anticipated surrender of the army of Northern Virginia. Mr. Davis, after receiving this news, sent Jones back to Charlotte with orders to remove his family to Abbeville, S. C. This he did, and, after seeing Mrs. Davis comfortably domiciled at the residence of a lawyer of that place, a friend of Mr. Davis, he started on his way back to meet his employer. He arrived at Charlotte, N. C., on the 18th of April, a few minutes before the Confederate President and party rode up as they came from Greensboro, N. C.

ASSASSINATION OF LINCOLN.

Jones, among others, went up to welcome the party. Mr. Davis had traveled on horseback, and was in the act of dismounting when a telegram was handed to him. This was a dispatch from Gen. Breckinridge announcing the assassination of President Lincoln. "Mr. Davis broke the seal," said Mr. Jones, "and I saw a pained expression pass over his face as he proceeded to read the message. The crowd of troopers, which had collected to welcome the party, noting the agitation of Mr. Davis, called for the reading of the telegram. Mr. Davis thereupon handed the telegram to a gentleman standing near him, whose name, I think, was Mr. Bates, remarking, as he did so: 'This is sad news; read it to them.' Mr. Bates did as directed, and some of the crowd, upon the impulse of the moment, cheered—as was, perhaps, after all, only natural—at the news of the death of one they considered their most powerful enemy."

"Then there is no truth in the stories published stating that Mr. Davis read the telegram to the crowd collected about him in an exultant manner?" asked the Herald representative.

"Absolutely not a word of truth, sir," replied Mr. Jones. "In the first place, as I have just stated, Mr. Davis did not read the telegram to the crowd at all. Mr. Bates read it, and he did not read it with any show of exultation that I could perceive. I know that Mr. Davis was deeply grieved at the act of Booth, for I shortly afterward heard him express himself to that effect. And, aside from all human sympathy called into action by the act of the assassin, I have reason to know that Mr. Davis deplored the death of Mr. Lincoln, for I have heard him say that he infinitely preferred Lincoln to Andy Johnson. He entertained an extreme degree of disgust for the latter gentleman, whom he regarded as a traitor to his section."

TO THE RESCUE OF HIS FAMILY—A FALSE ALARM.

"After remaining in Charlotte about a week," continued Mr. Jones, "we left that city, and on the 4th of May crossed the Savannah river, with a company detailed to escort the President, and riding a few miles to a farm house we had breakfast and our horses were fed. It was here that Mr. Davis learned that a regiment of Federal troops were moving on Washington, Ga., one of the depots of supplies. Upon the reception of this news it was at once decided that we should push on for Washington, hoping to arrive there in time to notify the citizens of the expected event and summon all available forces to its defense. After sending word to the officer commanding the advance to join him at once, Mr. Davis (attended always by myself), with the escort of the company alluded to, moved on. After reaching there scouts were sent out without encountering any of the enemy, and it was concluded that the report was a false alarm. Two or three days after leaving Washington, Ga., Mr. Davis heard that a number of stragglers and deserters were in pursuit of his wife and family, who, with an escort of a half dozen or so men, were making their way to the Florida coast. The President had not seen his family since they left Richmond. Their route was in a different direction from the one we were pursuing, but we changed our course in consequence of this information and rode in pursuit of them. About day-break next morning we met a party of men who gave the information that they had passed an encampment of wagons containing women and children. We found in this encampment the ones sought, and Mr. Davis and our party traveled with them two or three days, when, believing them out of the reach of marauders, Mr. Davis decided to part with them to execute his original purpose."

"It was understood that our party were to leave at nightfall, but it having been reported to Mr. Davis that a marauding party intended to attack the camp that very night it was decided by that gentleman that we would defer the separation until the truth or falsity of the report was ascertained."

"It seems that a report had been given currency that this was a treasure train, which had induced stragglers to follow it, hoping to get an opportunity to rob it."

"I had Mr. Davis' horse saddled, in readiness to proceed on his way, and had thrown his holster of pistols across the saddle."

FIRING OVER THE BRANCH.

"Mr. Davis lay down without removing his clothes in the early part of the night to rest. Nothing occurred to indicate an attack until just before dawn, when I heard firing over the branch. I immediately hurried to the spot where Mr. Davis was sleeping, and, arousing him, told him of what I had heard. He came out of the tent, and we saw some cavalrymen whom we recognized as regular Federal troopers deploying around as they approached the camp. I had tied the horse to be used by Mr. Davis near the road some distance from the camp, and, as before stated, his holster of pistols was secured to the saddle on his horse. It was, then, an unfortunate discovery for us that we realized the fact that the troopers were approaching from that direction and were already near the spot where the horse was secured. It was therefore impossible for Mr. Davis to reach his horse, and he was in a predicament indeed. Mrs. Davis had implored her husband to leave immediately upon learning that the attacking party were regulars, but he hesitated, and so lost some precious moments. When he at last decided upon fight he was compelled to start in an opposite direction from that intended, on foot and without arms."

THE SO-CALLED "DISGUISE."

Here the Herald correspondent interrupted the narrative by asking him if he knew of his own knowledge how Mr. Davis was dressed, and if there was any truth in the stories which have been published stating that he was attired in a woman's clothes, wearing a hoop skirt at the time of his capture.

"Certainly, I know of my own knowledge," he replied. "I was by his side from the time I woke him in his tent to the moment of his capture. If any one ought to know I should."

He then continued as follows:

"Mr. Davis, at this season of the year, wore a sleeveless waterproof light overcoat. Mrs. Davis had one almost exactly like it—same material only the cut was a little different. After deciding to attempt an escape he returned to the tent for his overcoat, and in the hurry and confusion of the moment—it was very dark in the tent—picked up his wife's instead of his own coat, and, as he emerged from the tent, Mrs. Davis thoughtfully threw a shawl over his shoulders. He was wearing his wife's 'raglan' and the shawl over his shoulders when he was challenged by the trooper, as will be more fully explained further on."

"Then he didn't have on a bonnet and hoopskirt?"

Jones laughed and seemed very much amused at this question. "No, indeed," he replied; "that hoopskirt-bonnet story is the most thoroughly unadulterated piece of fiction I ever read."

THE CAPTURE.

"Mr. Davis," continued the narrator, "had not gone twenty-five yards when a cavalryman galloped up and commanded him to halt. Mr. Davis gave a defiant reply to this order as he advanced toward the horseman, throwing the shawl and 'raglan' from his shoulders as he did so. Mr. Davis did not have a weapon of defense of any description, and this action on his part looked a little foolhardy to me at first, but he had a motive for acting as he did, which he afterward explained."

"As he approached the cavalryman the latter leveled a pistol at the Confederate President. Mrs. Davis, who had been anxiously watching her husband, seeing this demonstration of the horseman, rushed up to Mr. Davis and threw her arms around him and pleaded for his life. By this act Mrs. Davis perhaps accomplished two results—she may have saved her husband's life; she certainly prevented his escape. Mr. Davis' intention, as he afterward stated, when he advanced upon the trooper who ordered him to halt, was to take the chance of escaping a death-wound from the hands of the cavalryman, and, after he had fired, to put his hand under the foot of the trooper, tumble him off his horse on the other side, mount the animal himself and attempt an escape. Had Mrs. Davis remained passive he might and he might not have accomplished his object. Instantaneous action was, however, necessary, and Mr. Davis quickly realized that the opportunity was lost the moment his wife impeded his movements, and, relinquishing the idea, he quietly turned back and passed on to the camp fire. I was up making coffee for breakfast when the firing over the branch occurred, and therefore heard the first shots, when I immediately awoke Mr. Davis as related."

"After Mr. Davis gave up the idea of attempting an escape, subsequent to the interference of his wife, I passed on to the tent and lit the candles that were in the candlesticks."

Here Mr. Jones showed the Herald representative a pair of massive candlesticks. "They were given to me by Mr. Davis," he explained, "and I also have a brace of fine pistols presented to me by the same gentleman."

A FIGHT BETWEEN FEDERALS.

"Then began the firing between the two approaching parties. It seems that our pursuers had taken different roads, and approached the camp from opposite directions. Of course they encountered each other, and then began the firing from each side of us. We 'laid low.' Both parties supposed they were firing into an armed band of Confederates, and did not discover their mistake until a number of men and horses were killed and wounded."

None of our party were hurt; on the contrary, Col. Wood and Lieut. Barwell during the *melee* walked off unobserved."

"All this occurred between 3 and 4 o'clock A. M. After the firing ceased Col. Pritchett, the Federal officer, came into camp and asked me which of our party was President Davis. I pointed him out, and he was at once put under arrest."

"This was in Wilcox county, Georgia, on the southeast road, about sixteen or seventeen miles, leading from the county-seat which we had passed."

"We were all made prisoners, and together with the wagons, teams, etc., sent to Macon, Georgia, thence to Augusta, Georgia, via Milledgeville, and transferred to a boat where we met Vice President Stephens, C. C. Clay, Gen. Wheeler, the cavalry officer, and his Adjutant, Gen. Bawls, also prisoners. From there we were sent to Fortress Monroe via Savannah to Port Royal, where we were transferred to a transport ship, which anchored at Hampton Roads. Mr. Davis and Mr. Clay were sent to Fortress Monroe and imprisoned; Mrs. Davis was sent back to Savannah on the same ship which brought us; I was released."

"This is a full, fair and impartial statement of the facts, is it?" asked the Herald's representative.

"It is a plain, unvarnished statement of the facts just as they occurred. There are no motives existing to actuate me to be partial in this statement one way or the other. I am a Republican of the first water; I have great respect for my former employer, Mr. Davis. I would not make a false statement in this connection to glorify or to condemn him."

Life.

The following stanza was written by Mrs. Barbauld in extreme old age. When it was repeated to Wordsworth, he said: "I am not in the habit of grudging people their things, but I wish I had written those lines."

Life! we've been so long together,
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather,

'Tis hard to part when friends are dear,
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear;
Then steal away, give no warning,
Choose thine own time;
Say not good-night, but in some brighter
clime

Bid me good-morning.

These answers came from Mrs. Davis's family back on the same large driven by a soldier.