HEROIC DEEDS OF HEROIC MEN.

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III.—GRIERSON'S RAID.

The Organization of the Expedition.—Crossing the Tallahatchie.—The Alarm of the Rebels.—Captain Forbes's Heroic enterprise.—Saving the Bridge.—Difficulties and Hardships.—Exhausted Men.—Entrapping the Ferry-boats.—Terror in Brookhaven.—Weakness of the Confederacy.—The Ambush.—Entrance into Baton Rouge.—Results of the Raid.

Among all the thrilling stories of the war, there is not one which can surpass, in wild and perilous adventure, the tale of Colonel Grierson's cavalry raid into and through the State of Mississippi. Poetry in years to come will claim the chivalrous record as her own, and will sing to the children of future centuries of the bold raiders into the South, whose hearts were like the brave hearts of the three who "kept the bridge in the brave days of old."

Colonel B. H. Grierson was a native of Illinois. At the outbreak of the rebellion he entered the army as an aid of Major-General Pemberton. Subsequently he was appointed Colonel of the Sixth Illinois Cavalry, and soon after was assigned to the command of a brigade attached to General Grant's army. The force placed at his disposal for his celebrated raid consisted of the Sixth and Seventh Illinois and the Second Iowa Cavalry, in all about seventeen hundred men.

At ten o'clock in the morning of April 17, 1863, they set out from the inland town of La Grange, about fifty miles east from Memphis, on the southern border of the State of Tennessee. The Sixth Illinois led the advance, followed by the Seventh Illinois and the Second Iowa. At nightfall, having rode a distance of thirty miles, they encamped on the plantation of Dr. Ellis, about four miles north of Ripley, which was the first town after crossing the Mississippi line.

The next morning, Saturday 18th, they broke camp at eight o'clock, and, dividing their forces, the Second Iowa, under command of Colonel Hatch, swept off to the east, while the remainder took the direct road south, through Ripley to New Albany. As they approached the bridge, which crossed the Tallahatchie River, a small rebel force was seen on the opposite banks just commencing the work of destroying the bridge. Rising in their stirrups and shouting the battle-cry, Captain Thomas's battalion drove down upon the rebels with such force that they fled ignominiously, having done no more injury to the bridge than a few hours' work would repair. Our brave fellows dismounted, put the bridge in good order, and posted gayly into the town. The rest of the force crossed the river at another point, and having been rejoined by the bridge-builders again lit their camp-fires in the unfriendly cotton-fields of Mr. Sloan's plantation, four miles south of New Albany.

Colonel Hatch's command overtook them the next day, having made a successful detour and discovered the whereabouts of two small forces of rebels. This morning was one of adventurous diversions. Two companies under command of Captain Trafton dashed back toward the river and drove the rebel forces which had occupied New Albany out of the town, and came back to the camping-ground before ten o'clock in the forenoon. Two more companies plunged into the woods to the left of the plantation in search of horses, which they had been informed were concealed there. They returned bringing...
all they could lead. Two more companies galloped off in a direction whence a force of rebel cavalry was reported on the preceding evening. But the foe had wisely decamped, and the disappointed raiders retraced their steps, bringing a few prisoners and having destroyed a considerable quantity of camp and garrison equipage.

Before noon our adventurers had again taken up their line of march, still to the south—still into the heart of the hostile State. At night of this the third day they encamped on the plantation of Mr. Wetherall, eight miles south of the town of Pontotac, and sixty miles from their first night's encampment. On the next day, Monday, the 20th, Major Love, of the Second Iowa, was put in command of a sorrowful detachment of some sixty men from each regiment, with orders to return to La Grange. The captured horses must be taken back, and only the hardest soldiers and the best-trained steeds could be trusted for the next twelve days' service. But the gallant men chafed under the order, and turned back with lingering and rebel
dious looks until the column was out of sight. The raiders pressed vigorously on, and passing around Houston, camped that night at Clear Springs, having made a march of forty miles during the day.

At daylight the next morning they were again in the saddle. Colonel Hatch, with his brave townsmen, was again detailed to make a perilous approach to Columbus to attempt the breaking up of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. Near Okoola he unfortunately encountered a large force of rebels, who was seriously wounded himself, and his small command was scattered. Most of them probably returned to La Grange. The remainder of the party, the two Illinois regiments, pressed impetuously forward, and after a hard ride of forty-five miles encamped at a point about eight miles south of Starkville.

By this time the startling news of the presence of this body of fearless patriots, nearly in the centre of the State, sweeping down like a tornado, with no warning of their approach and no elew to their retreat, had spread like wild-fire. Rebel forces were scattered in greater or less numbers in all directions, and in much bewilderment were endeavoring to ascertain Colonel Grierson's whereabouts. The brave Colonel was surrounded with the most imminent peril, from which nothing but the most consummate skill, sagacity, and fearlessness could extricate him. But no thoughts of retracing his steps entered his mind. Baton Rouge was his goal, and to traverse the entire State of Mississippi was his invincible determination.

It was a matter of vital importance that the telegraph wires running north along the railroad from Macon should be cut. The hazardous project had been anxiously discussed, and two scouts, men who had already become familiar with danger in every shape, volunteered to undertake the perilous task. But in the midst of the first glow of admiration and sympathy with which the whole band heard the offer their courage faltered—died—and they refused the service, which, not to have offered, was no disgrace, but, once having proffered, to withdraw was cowardly. Every one looked with dismay upon a duty from which even these trained veterans recoiled. Still the work must be done.

As no one could be found to volunteer Colonel Prime was obliged to detail a company of the Seventh Illinois to make the attempt. The gallant Captain Forbes, of Company B, undertook the enterprise with hearty will. With his little band of thirty-five men he parted cheerily from the regiment to encounter a fifty miles' ride through a country swarming with rebels, and to approach the large town of Macon, which, it was not improbable, was strongly fortified. Colonel Prime gave him the order with many misgivings that its execution would be more than human skill and valor could accomplish, and that he would never rejoin his regiment.
Happily these misgivings were not realized. The brave troop in prospered safety appeared again to report to their Colonel on the banks of the Pearl River on the 27th, having completely outwitted and escaped one body of rebels three thousand strong. Macon, the first object of their expedition, they were unable to take. Pressing forward in a southwesterly direction, hoping to rejoin their regiment, they were deceived by false information, and rode in search of their companions to the town of Enterprise, on the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. As they came in full view of the place their eyes were greeted by the astounding and un-

welcome sight of three thousand rebel soldiers in the process of disembarking from a train of cars.

With the quick impulse of true genius Captain Forbes rode on in advance of his men, bearing a flag of truce, and demanding the instant surrender of the place to Colonel Grierson, whom the rebels supposed to be, of course, close in the rear with a formidable force. The ruse was perfect. The rebel commander, Colonel Goodwin, demanded one hour to consider the proposition, to which Captain Forbes graciously assented, and promised to communicate his reply to the reserve. The hour was well employed by him-
self and his thirty-five men in a hard gallop toward Pearl River; and the three thousand scared rebels in the town of Enterprise were not called upon for a more definite reply to the demand for surrender.

In the mean time the Sixth Illinois and the remainder of the Seventh had made, during the day of the 22d and the following night, the most extraordinary and difficult march of the whole raid. Having been delayed in the morning by detailing a battalion to destroy a large rebel shoe manufactory a little distance out from Starkville, where a large quantity of leather and several thousand pairs of shoes and hats, which had been provided for the rebel army, were committed to the flames, and having captured a rebel quartermaster, who was out from Port Hudson on a foraging expedition, they found themselves at sundown hemmed in by the treacherous swamps and creeks of the Okanoxabee River, about seven miles south of the village of Louisville.

The spring rains had swollen and overflowed every stream. The marshes were swamps, and swamps were ponds. The roads, of which they were utterly ignorant, were like rivers, the water being in many places three or four feet in depth. They had already marched this day fifty miles, and now jaded men and jaded beasts were
confronted by miles of these raging floods, unlit by a beam of day and unmarked by a beacon post or guide. Twenty horses were drowned, but not a man was lost. Steadily through the darkness they pressed on, until, at one o'clock in the morning of the 23d, they were absolutely forced to halt for a few hours of rest. At seven o'clock, however, each man was again in his saddle, hurrying forward for his life toward the Pearl River bridge. The river was too high to be forded. The bridge was their only means of crossing. Rebel scouts were known to have gone before them, and if they had succeeded in giving warning in time to secure the destruction of the bridge, the expedition was hopelessly cut off. It was a fearful moment as they neared the stream late in the afternoon. Colonel Prime, with the Illinois Seventh, was in the van. Every horse was urged to the top of his speed. They rode as if in a deadly charge on a battle front. The roar of swollen waters reached their ears, and with it other sounds of crashing timbers but too significant. They redoubled their speed, and dashed down the river bank. A small party of rebel pickets were working with superhuman energy, stripping up the planks of the bridge floor, and hurling them into the waters below.

Ten minutes later and all would have been lost. But for hours and days back minutes of grace had been, by God's care, accumulating for their rescue. It is a solemn thought, and one which those brave troops did not forget to hold in devout recognition, that at any time in the whole course of their six days' marchings, haltings, encampings, and startings, a few minutes' tardiness on the part of a commander, a few moments' delay with a restive horse, a few minutes' lingering on a tedious ascent, would have brought them too late to the Pearl River bridge, and have made to all of them the difference between life and death.

A short skirmish disposed of the rebel pickets, and the raiders rode on—on into the night, and through the night, and through the next day, without halting, except at the town of Decatur, where they captured and paroled seventy-five prisoners, destroyed two warehouses full of commissary stores, four car-loads of ammunition, burned the railroad bridges and trestlework, and captured two trains of cars and two locomotives. Eighty miles they had marched on the 23d and 24th, and this, too, after the tremendous exertions of the passage through the swamps on the 22d. On the 25th three men were found to be too much prostrated to go farther. With sad partings their comrades left the three, who were in fatality on the plantation of Mr. Dore, near Raleigh. Indeed the whole command were so utterly exhausted that, in spite of the imminence of their danger, they accomplished but twenty miles on the 25th. The next day, Sunday the 26th, they pushed on forty-one miles in a drenching rain. At one o'clock on the morning of Monday, through darkness and mud, they resumed their march, and reached the Pearl River again, now a more formidable barrier than when sixty miles nearer its source they had crossed it on a slender bridge. It was Colonel Grierson's plan to cross at the Georgetown ferry. Here again the river held in its silent grasp the fate of the entire command. Colonel Prime, as before, pressed forward in the advance, but this time with only two hundred picked men. He left camp, as we have above mentioned, at two o'clock in the morning, and riding thirteen miles before the early summer daylight, reached the river shore only to find the ferry-boat moored on the other side. Here was a dilemma of dangers. The river must be crossed. But to call upon a rebel ferry-man for the service was too hazardous. A powerful trooper spurred his horse into the rushing current and endeavored to swim toward the boat. But man and beast were swept quickly down the stream and barely escaped with life.

While the whole band were sitting silently upon their horses, dismayed and baffled, the lazy owner of the boat came strolling down to the shore, and in merciful ignorance of uniforms, supposed that he was addressing the First Regiment of Alabama Cavalry, just from Mobile. To his inquiry if they wished to cross, the Colonel replied, with admirably feigned nonchalance, in the genuine twang of Southern poor whites:

"We'll yes, some of us do want to cross. But it seems harder to wake you nigger ferry-man than to catch the cursed conscripts."

The galled proprietor was instantly alive with zeal to serve his friends. Heroused the sleeping ferry-man, placed his boat at the disposal of the regiment, and hospitably breakfasted the Colonel. Half an hour after, as the troops were hurrying toward Hazlehurst, they met and captured the rebel courier riding post-haste to the ferry, to give the warning which would have prevented their escape. At Hazlehurst they cut the telegraph wires, and captured and destroyed a large number of cars loaded with ammunition, shells, and army stores of all kinds. Here Captain Forbes, who, it will be remembered, had, with thirty-five men, undertaken the mission to Macon, from near Starkville, rejoined his regiment just after they had crossed Pearl River. They had successfully followed the trail of the raiders, and were all safe.

On the night of the 27th our heroes encamped at Gallatin. Here they captured a 32-pounder rifled Parrott gun and fourteen hundred pounds of powder, which were en route to Grand Gulf. They had traveled this day thirty-seven miles. The next day, Tuesday the 28th, they were again early on the march. Four companies were detailed, under Captain Trafton, to make a circuit through Bahula to destroy the railroad depot and the transportation there. This little band left the camp at sunrise, and having successfully performed their mission, rejoined their comrades at night, having performed during the day a journey of thirty miles more than the rest of the command. During the day they had several skirmishes, and, without any loss to them-
selves, captured and paroled about thirty prisoners.

After a short night of rest, at sunrise of Wednesday the 29th all were again in the saddle, directing their course toward Brookhaven, on the New Orleans and Jackson Railroad. The Seventh Illinois were in the advance, and charged, at full gallop, through the streets of the town, burned the depot, cars, and bridges, and paroled over two hundred prisoners. The people of Brookhaven were at first frantic with terror, imagining that the whole town was to be committed to the flames. But as soon as they discovered that private property and rights were sacredly regarded, the scales of prejudice and delusion fell from their eyes, and the citizens crowded around our troops, begging to be paroled. The same was the case in many other villages. As soon as the personal apprehensions of the inhabitants were allayed, they were profuse in their hospitalities and in their expressions of hope that the Union would be restored. Colonel Grierson himself writes:

"The strength of the rebels has been overestimated. They have neither the armies nor the resources we have given them credit for. Passing through their country I found thousands of good Union men, who were ready and anxious
to return to their allegiance the moment they could do so with safety to themselves and families. They will rally around the old flag by scores wherever our army advances. I could have brought away a thousand with me, who were anxious to come—men whom I found fugitives from their homes hid in the swamps and forests, where they were hunted like wild beasts by conscripting officers with blood-hounds."

This testimony, from officers who had ridden through eight hundred miles of rebel territory, is unanswerably strong, and proves that the rebellion neither originated among nor is supported by the masses of the people.

On the morning of the 30th sunrise found the column again under way, and still carrying devastation in its track. Running along the railroad at Bogue Chito they burned the depot cars and bridges, and following on as far as Summit burned all the bridges and trestle-work on the way. In the village of Summit they found several cars and a large amount of Government stores, which they destroyed. They then encamped a little beyond the village for the night, having marched during the day twenty-eight miles.

The next day, Friday, May 1, they broke camp at daylight, and plunging into the woods,
avoiding the main roads, which they well knew were by this time teeming with infuriate rebels, bore steadfastly on, by the compass, to their goal in the Southwest. When near the village of Osyka they were compelled to return to the main road to avail themselves of a bridge, by which only they could cross an important stream. Here they fell into an ambush. About eighty rebels were skulking in a thicket, where, unseen, they could take deliberate aim at any who should attempt to pass. The gallant Lieutenant-Colonel Blackburn, a little too reckless of danger, without sufficient scrutiny of the lurking-places around, at the head of his scouts, rode upon the bridge and was immediately struck down by a volley which wounded him severely in the thigh, and slightly on the head. This was the first serious disaster of the expedition. Colonel Prince immediately dismounted his men and charged into the thicket. The rebels were speedily put to flight, and the column marched on. They reached the Amity River at ten o’clock at night. Rebel pickets were posted along the banks. But the angel of safety, who had guarded the river passes for them hitherto, did not fail them here. A deep sleep was sent upon the eyes of the enemy, so that they forded the waters within gun-shot of
the picket lines and were undisturbed. Forty miles they had marched this day.

With the earliest dawn of the next morning, Saturday, May 2, they were again upon the move. They had marched but a few miles ere the Sixth Illinois, which was in the advance, surprised and destroyed a rebel camp at Sandy Creek. A few hours later the Illinois Seventh gave the grand, final glory to the expedition by capturing, within a short distance of Baton Rouge, forty-two of Stuart’s Mississippi cavalry, with their Colonel at their head.

Dusty, haggard, way-worn, and ragged, but with a wild fire of delight and pride in their eyes, these heroes, at mid-day of Saturday, May 2, galloped into the streets of Baton Rouge. The story of their arrival and of their incredible adventures ran with the echoes of their horses’ hoofs, and the fervor of wondering excitement was indescribable. Nothing like it had been known during the war. Seventeen hundred men had ridden through the entire State of Mississippi, from the northeast to the southwest corner, encountering every conceivable danger and enduring inconceivable hardships. Thousands of rebels had been trying to follow, to intercept, to find them. But with consummate skill and matchless bravery Colonel Grierson had escaped them by circuits, outwitted them by ruses, and attacked and routed them with far inferior numbers.

Skirmishing through the day and marching through the night, burning and destroying thousands of dollars’ worth of public rebel property in every town through which he passed, and paroling hundreds of captives, he still kept steadily on his southwestern line of march till the seventeenth day brought Baton Rouge in view. The exploits of Morgan, Stuart, and Wheeler, boasted as they have been, are as child’s play in comparison with such a raid as this. The endurance of the landed Southern cavalry has never been put to so severe a test as were the nerve and limb of Grierson’s men in this exploit.

During the last thirty hours they rode eighty miles, engaged in three skirmishes, destroyed large quantities of camp equipage and military stores, burned bridges, swam one river, took forty-two prisoners and a number of horses. This, too, without a halt and without food. Tightening their cavalry belts to stay the pangs of hunger, they slept sound sleep, sitting upright upon their horses, during the hours of that last terrible night. A near carbine shot would rouse them for an instant, to a sharp wheel of their steeds, and an alert readiness to repel the enemy. But the danger passed they were asleep again in a moment, and riding blindly forward till the next shock.

In this raid Colonel Grierson rode eight hundred miles through a country swarming with foes. He had no other guides than rude county maps and a pocket-compass. He was often entangled in swamps where many of his horses became inextricably mired. The men, thus dismounted, removed their saddles, placed them on other led beasts, and pushed vigorously on. All the way Colonel Grierson had to rely upon the country for forage and provisions. The necessity for rapid movement was such that they could rarely catch an hour for sleep. They cut three railroads, burned nine bridges, destroyed two locomotives and nearly two hundred cars; broke up three rebel camps, destroyed more than four millions’ worth of rebel governmental property; captured and paroled one thousand prisoners, and brought in with them twelve hundred captured horses.

Every where the negroes welcomed these heroic adventurers, and assisted them in every possible way. Five hundred of these dark-skinned patriots, men of bold heart and stalwart limb, followed them into Baton Rouge on horses which they had borrowed, like the children of Israel, from their old oppressors. General Grierson said that, in his opinion, he could have organized and brought with him two brigades of colored men if he had possessed the necessary arms.

The moral effect of this raid must have been very great, not only in teaching the rebels a respect for the cavalry arm of our service, but in enhancing its claims to the respect of our own Government, who, in the earlier months of the war, were totally obtuse in regard to it, and were slow to learn by the severest lessons of loss at the hands of Stuart and John Morgan.

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**PEACE.**

Oh that the bells in all these silent spires
Would clash their clangor on the sleeping air,
Ring their wild music out with throbbing chords,
Ring peace in every where!

Oh that this wave of sorrow surging o’er
The red, red land would wash away its stain—
Drown out the angry fire from shore to shore,
And give it peace again!