

ESCAPE OF THE CONFEDERATE SECRETARY OF WAR.

WITH PICTURES BY W. TABER, AFTER SKETCHES BY THE AUTHOR.



AS one of the aides of President Jefferson Davis, I left Richmond with him and his cabinet on April 2, 1865, the night of evacuation, and accompanied him through Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, until his capture.

Except Lieutenant Barnwell, I was the only one of the party who escaped. After our surprise, I was guarded by a trooper, a German, who had appropriated my horse and most of my belongings. I determined, if possible, to escape; but after witnessing Mr. Davis's unsuccessful attempt, I was doubtful of success. However, I consulted him, and he advised me to try. Taking my guard aside, I asked him, by signs (for he could speak little or no English), to accompany me outside the picket-line to the swamp, showing him at the same time a twenty-dollar gold piece. He took it, tried the weight of it in his hands, and put it between his teeth. Fully satisfied that it was not spurious, he escorted me with his carbine to the stream, the banks of which were lined with a few straggling alder-bushes and thick sawgrass. I motioned him to return to camp, only a few rods distant. He shook his head, saying, "*Nein, nein.*" I gave him another twenty-dollar gold piece; he chinked them together, and held up two fingers. I turned my pockets inside out, and then, satisfied that I had no more, he left me.

Creeping a little farther into the swamp, I lay concealed for about three hours in the most painful position, sometimes moving a few yards almost *ventre à terre* to escape notice; for I was within hearing of the camps on each side of the stream, and often when the soldiers came down for water, or to water their horses, I was within a few yards of them. Some two hours or more passed thus before the party moved. The wagons left first, then the bugles sounded, and the president started on one of his carriage-horses, followed by his staff and a squadron of the enemy. Shortly after their departure I saw some one leading two abandoned horses into the swamp, and

recognized Lieutenant Barnwell of our escort. Secreting the horses, we picked up from the debris of the camp parts of two saddles and bridles, and with some patching and tying fitted out our horses, as sad and war-worn animals as ever man bestrode. Though hungry and tired, we gave the remains of the camp provisions to a Mr. Fenn for dinner. He recommended us to Widow Paulk's, ten miles distant, an old lady rich in cattle alone.

The day after my escape, I met Judah P. Benjamin as M. Bonfals, a French gentleman traveling for information, in a light wagon, with Colonel Leovie, who acted as interpreter. With goggles on, his beard grown, a hat well over his face, and a large cloak hiding his figure, no one would have recognized him as the late secretary of state of the Confederacy. I told him of the capture of Mr. Davis and his party, and made an engagement to meet him near Madison, Florida, and there decide upon our future movements. He was anxious to push on, and left us to follow more leisurely, passing as paroled soldiers returning home. For the next three days we traveled as fast as our poor horses would permit, leading or driving them; for even if they had been strong enough, their backs were in such a condition that we could not ride. We held on to them simply in the hope that we might be able to dispose of them or exchange them to advantage; but we finally were forced to abandon one.

On the 13th we passed through Valdosta, the first place since leaving Washington, in upper Georgia, in which we were able to purchase anything. Here I secured two hickory shirts and a pair of socks, a most welcome addition to my outfit; for, except what I stood in, I had left all my baggage behind. Near Valdosta we found Mr. Osborne Barnwell, an uncle of my young friend, a refugee from the coast of South Carolina, where he had lost a beautiful estate, surrounded with all the comforts and elegances which wealth and a refined taste could offer. Here in the pine forests, as far as possible from the paths of war, and almost outside of civilization, he had brought his family of ladies and children, and with the aid of his servants, most of whom had followed him, had built with a few tools

a rough log cabin with six or eight rooms, but without nails, screws, bolts, or glass—almost as primitive a building as Robinson Crusoe's. But, in spite of all drawbacks, the ingenuity and deft hands of the ladies had given to the premises an air of comfort and refinement that was most refreshing. Here I rested two days, enjoying the company of this charming family, with whom Lieutenant Barnwell remained. On the 15th I crossed into Florida, and rode to General Finnegan's, near Madison. Here I met General Breckinridge, the late secretary of war of the Confederacy, alias Colonel Cabell, and his aide, Colonel Wilson—a pleasant encounter for both parties. Mr. Benjamin had been in the neighborhood, but, hearing that the enemy were in Madison, had gone off at a tangent. We were fully posted as to the different routes to the seaboard by General Finnegan, and discussed with him the most feasible way of leaving the country. I inclined to the eastern coast, and this was decided on. I exchanged my remaining horse with General Finnegan for a better, giving him fifty dollars to boot. Leaving Madison, we crossed the Suwanee River at Moody's Ferry, and took the old St. Augustine road, but seldom traveled in late years, as it leads through a pine wilderness, and there is one stretch of twenty miles with only water of bad quality, at the Diable Sinks. I rode out of my way some fifteen miles to Mr. Yulee's, formerly senator of the United States, and afterward Confederate senator, hoping to meet Mr. Benjamin; but he was too wily to be found at the house of a friend. Mr. Yulee was absent on my arrival, but Mrs. Yulee, a charming lady, and one of a noted family of beautiful women, welcomed me heartily. Mr. Yulee returned during the night from Jacksonville, and gave me the first news of what was going on in the world that I had had for nearly a month, including the information that Mr. Davis and party had reached Hilton Head on their way north.

Another day's ride brought us to the house of the brothers William and Samuel Owens, two wealthy and hospitable gentlemen, near Orange Lake. Here I rejoined General Breckinridge, and we were advised to secure the services and experience of Captain Dickinson. We sent to Waldo for him, and a most valuable friend he proved. During the war he had rendered notable services; among others he had surprised and captured the United States gunboat *Columbine* on the St. John's River, one of whose small boats he had retained, and kept concealed near the banks of the river. This boat with two of his best men he now put at our disposal, with orders to meet us on the upper St. John.

We now passed through a much more in-

teresting country than the two or three hundred miles of pines we had just traversed. It was better watered, the forests were more diversified with varied species, occasionally thickets or hummocks were met with, and later these gave place to swamps and everglades with a tropical vegetation. The road led by Silver Spring, the clear and crystal waters of which show at the depth of hundreds of feet almost as distinctly as though seen through air.

We traveled incognito, known only to good friends, who sent us stage by stage from one to another, and by all we were welcomed most kindly. Besides those mentioned, I recall with gratitude the names of Judge Dawkins, Mr. Mann, Colonel Summers, Major Stork, all of whom overwhelmed us with kindness, offering us of everything they had. Of money they were as bare as ourselves, for Confederate currency had disappeared as suddenly as snow before a warm sun, and greenbacks were as yet unknown. Before leaving our friends, we laid in a three weeks' supply of stores, for we could not depend upon obtaining any further south.

On May 25 we struck the St. John's River at Fort Butler, opposite Volusia, where we met Russell and O'Toole, two of Dickinson's command, in charge of the boat; and two most valuable and trustworthy comrades they proved to be, either in camp or in the boat, as hunters or fishermen. The boat was a man-of-war's small four-oared gig; her outfit was scanty, but what was necessary we rapidly improvised. Here General Breckinridge and I gave our horses to our companions, and thus ended my long ride of a thousand or more miles from Virginia.

Stowing our supplies away, we bade good-by to our friends, and started up the river with a fair wind. Our party consisted of General Breckinridge; his aide, Colonel Wilson of Kentucky; the general's servant, Tom, who had been with him all through the war; besides Russell, O'Toole, and I—six in all. With our stores, arms, etc., it was a tight fit to get into the boat; there was no room to lie down or to stretch. At night we landed, and, like old campaigners, were soon comfortable. But at midnight the rain came down in bucketfuls, and continued till nearly morning; and notwithstanding every effort, a large portion of our supplies were soaked and rendered worthless, and, what was worse, some of our powder shared the same fate.

Morning broke on a thoroughly drenched and unhappy company; but a little rum and water, with a corn-dodger and the rising sun, soon stirred us, and with a fair wind we made a good day's run, some thirty-five miles. Except the ruins of two huts, there was no sign that a

human being had ever visited these waters, for the war and the occasional visit of a gunboat had driven off the few settlers. The river gradually became narrower and more tortuous as we approached its head waters. The banks are generally low, with a few sandy elevations, thickly wooded or swampy. Occasionally we passed a small opening, or savanna, on which were sometimes feeding a herd of wild cattle and deer; at the latter we had several pot-shots, all wide. Alligators, as immovable as the logs on which they rested, could be counted by hundreds, and of all sizes up to twelve or fifteen feet. Occasionally, as we passed uncomfortably near, we could not resist, even with our scant supply of ammunition, giving them a little cold lead between the head and shoulders, the only vulnerable place. With a fair wind we sailed the twelve miles across Lake Monroe, a pretty sheet of water, the deserted huts of Enterprise and Mellonville on each side. Above the lake the river became still narrower and more tortuous, dividing sometimes into numerous branches, most of which proved to be mere *culs-de-sac*. The long moss, reaching from the overhanging branches to the water, gave to the surroundings a most weird and funereal aspect.

On May 29 we reached Lake Harney, whence we determined to make the portage to Indian River. O'Toole was sent to look for some means of moving our boat. He returned next day with two small black bulls yoked to a pair of wheels such as are used by lumbermen. Their owner was a compound of Caucasian, African, and Indian, with the shrewdness of the white, the good temper of the negro, and the indolence of the red man. He was at first exorbitant in his demands, but a little money, some tobacco, and a spare fowling-piece made him happy, and he was ready to let us drive his beasts to the end of the peninsula. It required some skill to mount the boat securely on the wheels and to guard against any upsets or collisions, for our escape depended upon carrying it safely across.

The next morning we made an early start. Our course was an easterly one, through a roadless, flat, sandy pine-barren, with occasional thicket and swamp. From the word "go" trouble with the bulls began. Their owner seemed to think that in furnishing them he had fulfilled his part of the contract. They would neither "gee" nor "haw"; if one started ahead, the other would go astern. If by accident they started ahead together, they would certainly bring up with their heads on each side of a tree. Occasionally they would lie down in a pool to get rid of the flies, and only by the most vigorous prodding could they be induced to move.

Paul, the owner, would loiter in the rear, but was always on hand when we halted for meals. Finally we told him, "No work, no grub; no drive bulls, no tobacco." This roused him to help us. Two days were thus occupied in covering eighteen miles. It would have been less labor to have tied the beasts, put them into the boat, and hauled it across the portage. The weather was intensely hot, and our time was made miserable by day with sand-flies, and by night with mosquitos.

The waters of Indian River were a most welcome sight, and we hoped that most of our troubles were over. Paul and his bulls of Bashan were gladly dismissed to the wilderness. Our first care was to make good any defects in our boat: some leaks were stopped by a little calking and pitching. Already our supply of provisions began to give us anxiety: only bacon and sweet potatoes remained. The meal was wet and worthless, and, what was worse, all our salt had dissolved. However, with the waters alive with fish, and some game on shore, we hoped to pull through.

We reached Indian River, or lagoon, opposite Cape Canaveral. It extends along nearly the entire eastern coast of Florida, varying in width from three to six miles, and is separated from the Atlantic by a narrow sand ridge, which is pierced at different points by shifting inlets. It is very shoal, so much so that we were obliged to haul our boat out nearly half a mile before she would float, and the water is teeming with stingarees, sword-fish, crabs, etc. But once afloat, we headed to the southward with a fair wind.

For four days we continued to make good progress, taking advantage of every fair wind by night as well as by day. Here, as on the St. John's River, the same scene of desolation as far as human beings were concerned was presented. We passed a few deserted cabins, around which we were able to obtain a few cocoanuts and watermelons, a most welcome addition to our slim commissariat. Unfortunately, oranges were not in season. Whenever the breeze left us, the heat was almost suffocating; there was no escape from it. If we landed, and sought any shade, the mosquitos would drive us at once to the glare of the sun. When sleeping on shore, the best protection was to bury ourselves in the sand, with cap drawn down over the head (my buckskin gauntlets proved invaluable); if in the boat, to wrap the sail or tarpaulin around us. Besides this plague, sand-flies, gnats, swamp-flies, ants, and other insects abounded. The little black ant is especially bold and warlike. If, in making our beds in the sand, we disturbed one of their hives, they would rally in thousands to the attack, and the only safety was in a hasty shake and change of resi-

dence. Passing Indian River inlet, the river broadens, and there is a thirty-mile straight-away course to Gilbert's Bar, or Old Inlet, now closed; then begin the Juniper Narrows, where the channel is crooked, narrow, and often almost closed by the dense growth of mangroves, juniper, saw-grass, etc., making a

we might be called upon to use at any time. Very fortunately for us, it was the time of the year when the green turtle deposits its eggs. Russell and O'Toole were old beach-combers, and had hunted eggs before. Sharpening a stick, they pressed it into the sand as they walked along, and wherever it entered easily



SAND AS A DEFENSE AGAINST MOSQUITOS.

jungle that only a water-snake could penetrate. Several times we lost our reckoning, and had to retreat, and take a fresh start; an entire day was lost in these everglades, which extend across the entire peninsula. Finally, by good luck, we stumbled on a short "haulover" to the sea, and determined at once to take advantage of it, and to run our boat across and launch her in the Atlantic. A short half-mile over the sand-dunes, and we were clear of the swamps and marshes of Indian River, and were reveling in the Atlantic, free, at least for a time, from mosquitos, which had punctured and bled us for the last three weeks.

On Sunday, June 4, we passed Jupiter Inlet, with nothing in sight. The lighthouse had been destroyed the first year of the war. From this point we had determined to cross Florida Channel to the Bahamas, about eighty miles; but the wind was ahead, and we could do nothing but work slowly to the southward, waiting for a slant. It was of course a desperate venture to cross this distance in a small open boat, which even a moderate sea would swamp. Our provisions now became a very serious question. As I have said, we had lost all the meal, and the sweet potatoes, our next mainstay, were sufficient only for two days more. We had but little more ammunition than was necessary for our revolvers, and these

they would dig. After some hours' search we were successful in finding a nest which had not been destroyed, and I do not think prospectors were ever more gladdened by the sight of "the yellow" than we were at our find. The green turtle's egg is about the size of a walnut, with a white skin like parchment that you can tear but not break. The yolk will cook hard, but the longer you boil the egg the softer the white becomes. The flavor is not unpleasant, and for the first two days we enjoyed them; but then we were glad to vary the fare with a few shell-fish and even with snails.

From Cape Carnaveral to Cape Florida the coast trends nearly north and south in a straight line, so that we could see at a long distance anything going up or down the shore. Some distance to the southward of Jupiter Inlet we saw a steamer coming down, running close to the beach to avoid the three- and four-knot current of the stream. From her yards and general appearance I soon made her out to be a cruiser, so we hauled our boat well up on the sands, turned it over on its side, and went back among the palmettos. When abreast of us and not more than a half-mile off, with colors flying, we could see the officer of the deck and others closely scanning the shore. We were in hopes they would look upon our boat as flotsam and jetsam, of which there was



SEARCHING FOR TURTLES' EGGS.

more or less strewn upon the beach. To our great relief, the cruiser passed us, and when she was two miles or more to the southward we ventured out and approached the boat, but the sharp lookout saw us, and, to our astonishment, the steamer came swinging about, and headed up the coast. The question at once arose, What was the best course to pursue? The general thought we had better take to the bush again, and leave the boat, hoping they would not disturb it. Colonel Wilson agreed with his chief. I told him that since we had been seen, the enemy would certainly destroy or carry off the boat, and the loss meant, if not starvation, at least privation, and no hope of escaping from the country. Besides, the mosquitos would suck us as dry as Egyptian mummies. I proposed that we should meet them half-way, in company with Russell and O'Toole, who were paroled men, and fortunately had their papers with them, and I offered to row off and see what was wanted. He agreed, and, launching our boat and throwing in two buckets of eggs, we pulled out. By this time the steamer was abreast of us, and had lowered a boat, which met us half-way. I had one oar, and O'Toole the other. To the usual hail I paid no attention except to stop rowing. A ten-oared cutter with a smart-looking crew dashed alongside. The sheen was not yet off the lace and buttons of the youngster in charge. With revolver in hand he asked us who we were, where we came from, and where we were going. "Cap'n," said I, "please put away that-ar pistol; I don't like the looks of it, and I'll tell you all about us. We've been rebs, and there ain't no use saying we were n't; but

it's all up now, and we got home too late to put in a crop, so we just made up our minds to come down shore and see if we could n't find something. It's all right, Cap'n; we've got our papers. Want to see 'em? Got 'em fixed up at Jacksonville." O'Toole and Russell handed him their paroles, which he said were all right. He asked for mine. I turned my pockets out, looked in my hat, and said: "I must er dropped mine in camp, but 't is just the same as theirs." He asked who was ashore. I told him, "There's more of we uns b'iling some turtle-eggs for dinner. Cap'n, I'd like to swap some eggs for tobacco or bread." His crew soon produced from the slack of their frocks pieces of plug, which they passed on board in exchange for our eggs. I told the youngster if he'd come to camp we'd give him as many as he could eat. Our hospitality was declined. Among other questions he asked if there were any batteries on shore—a battery on a beach where there was not a white man within a hundred miles! "Up oars—let go forward—let fall—give 'way!" were all familiar orders; but never before had they sounded so welcome. As they shoved off, the coxswain said to the youngster, "That looks like a man-of-war's gig, sir"; but he paid no attention to him. We pulled leisurely ashore, watching the cruiser. The boat went up to the davits at a run, and she started to the southward again. The general was very much relieved, for it was a narrow escape.

The wind still holding to the southward and eastward, we could work only slowly to the southward, against wind and current. At times we suffered greatly for want of water; our

usual resource was to dig for it, but often it was so brackish and warm that when extreme thirst forced its use the consequences were violent pains and retchings. One morning we saw a few wigwams ashore, and pulled in at once and landed. It was a party of Seminoles who had come out of the everglades like the bears to gather eggs. They received us kindly, and we devoured ravenously the remnants of their breakfast of fish and *kountee*. Only the old chief spoke a little English. Not more than two or three hundred of this once powerful and warlike tribe remain in Florida; they occupy some islands in this endless swamp to the southward of Lake Okeechobee. They have but little intercourse with the whites, and come out on the coast only at certain seasons to fish. We were very anxious to obtain some

to escape; but slowly we overhauled her, and finally a shot caused her mainsail to drop. As we pulled alongside I saw from the dress of the crew of three that they were man-of-war's men, and divined that they were deserters. They were thoroughly frightened at first, for our appearance was not calculated to impress them favorably. To our questions they returned evasive answers or were silent, and finally asked by what authority we had overhauled them. We told them that the war was not over so far as we were concerned; that they were our prisoners, and their boat our prize; that they were both deserters and pirates, the punishment of which was death; but that under the circumstances we would not surrender them to the first cruiser we met, but would take their paroles and exchange boats. To this they seriously objected. They



THROUGH A SHALLOW LAGOON.

provisions from them, but excepting *kountee* they had nothing to spare. This is an esculent resembling arrowroot, which they dig, pulverize, and use as flour. It makes a palatable but tough cake, cooked in the ashes, which we enjoyed after our long abstinence from bread. The old chief took advantage of our eagerness for supplies, and determined to replenish his powder-horn. Nothing else would do; not even an old coat, or fish-hooks, or a cavalry saber would tempt him. Powder only he would have for their long, heavy small-bore rifles with flintlocks, such as Davy Crockett used. We reluctantly divided with him our very scant supply in exchange for some of their flour. We parted good friends, after smoking the pipe of peace.

On the 7th, off New River inlet, we discovered a small sail standing to the northward. The breeze was very light, so we downed our sail, got out our oars, and gave chase. The stranger stood out to seaward, and endeavored

were well armed, and although we outnumbered them five to three (not counting Tom), still, if they could get the first bead on us the chances were about equal. They were desperate, and not disposed to surrender their boat without a tussle. The general and I stepped into their boat, and ordered the spokesman and leader to go forward. He hesitated a moment, and two revolvers looked him in the face. Sullenly he obeyed our orders. The general said, "Wilson, disarm that man." The colonel, with pistol in hand, told him to hold up his hands. He did so while the colonel drew from his belt a navy revolver and a sheath-knife. The other two made no further show of resistance, but handed us their arms. The crew disposed of, I made an examination of our capture. Unfortunately, her supply of provisions was very small—only some "salt-horse" and hardtack, with a breaker of fresh water; and we exchanged part of them for

some of our kountee and turtles' eggs. But it was in our new boat that we were particularly fortunate: sloop-rigged, not much longer than our gig, but with more beam and plenty of free-board, decked over to the mast, and well found in sails and rigging. After our experience in a boat the gunwale of which was not more than eighteen inches out of water, we felt that we had a craft able to cross the Atlantic. Our prisoners, submitting to the inevitable, soon made themselves at home in their new boat, became more communicative, and wanted some information as to the best course by which to reach Jacksonville or Savannah. We were glad to give them the benefit of our experience, and, on parting, handed them their knives and two revolvers, for which they were very thankful.

Later we were abreast of Green Turtle Key, with wind light and ahead; still, with all these drawbacks, we were able to make some progress. Our new craft worked and sailed well, after a little addition of ballast. Before leaving the coast, we found it would be necessary to call at Fort Dallas or some other point for supplies. It was running a great risk, for we did not know whom we should find there, whether friend or foe. But without at least four or five days' rations of some kind, it would not be safe to attempt the passage across the Gulf Stream. However, before venturing to do so, we determined to try to replenish our larder with eggs. Landing on the beach, we hunted industriously for some hours, literally scratching for a living; but the ground had evidently been most effectually gone over before, as the tracks of bears proved. A few onions, washed from some passing vessel, were eagerly devoured. We scanned the washings along the strand in vain for anything that would satisfy hunger. Nothing remained but to make the venture of stopping at the fort. This fort, like many others, was established during the Seminole war, and at its close was abandoned. It is near the mouth of the Miami River, a small stream which serves as an outlet to the overflow of the everglades. Its banks are crowded to the water's edge with tropical verdure, with many flowering plants and creepers, all the colors of which are reflected in its clear waters. The old barracks were in sight as we slowly worked our way against the current. Located in a small clearing, with cocoanut-trees in the foreground, the white buildings made, with a backing of deep green, a very pretty picture. We approached cautiously, not knowing with what reception we should meet. As we neared the small wharf, we found waiting some twenty or thirty men, of all colors, from the pale Yankee to the ebony Congo, all armed; a more motley and villainous-looking

crew never trod the deck of one of Captain Kidd's ships. We saw at once with whom we had to deal—deserters from the army and navy of both sides, with a mixture of Spaniards and Cubans, outlaws and renegades. A burly villain, towering head and shoulders above his companions, and whose shaggy black head scorned any covering, hailed us in broken English, and asked who we were. Wreckers, I replied; that we had left our vessel outside, and had come in for water and provisions. He asked where we had left our vessel, and her name, evidently suspicious, which was not surprising, for our appearance was certainly against us. Our head-gear was unique: the general wore a straw hat that flapped over his head like the ears of an elephant; Colonel Wilson, an old cavalry cap that had lost its visor; another, a turban made of some number 4 duck canvas; and all were in our shirt-sleeves, the colors of which were as varied as Joseph's coat. I told him we had left her to the northward a few miles, that a gunboat had spoken us a few hours before, and had overhauled our papers, and had found them all right. After a noisy powwow we were told to land, that our papers might be examined. I said no, but if a canoe were sent off, I would let one of our men go on shore and buy what we wanted. I was determined not to trust our boat within a hundred yards of the shore. Finally a canoe paddled by two negroes came off, and said no one but the captain would be permitted to land. O'Toole volunteered to go, but the boatmen would not take him, evidently having had their orders. I told them to tell their chief that we had intended to spend a few pieces of gold with them, but since he would not permit it, we would go elsewhere for supplies. We got out our sweeps, and moved slowly down the river, a light breeze helping us. The canoe returned to the shore, and soon some fifteen or twenty men crowded into four or five canoes and dug-outs, and started for us. We prepared for action, determined to give them a warm reception. Even Tom looked after his carbine, putting on a fresh cap.

Though outnumbered three to one, still we were well under cover in our boat, and could rake each canoe as it came up. We determined to take all the chances, and to open fire as soon as they came within range. I told Russell to try a shot at one some distance ahead of the others. He broke two paddles on one side and hit one man, not a bad beginning. This canoe dropped to the rear at once; the occupants of the others opened fire, but their shooting was wild from the motions of their small crafts. The general tried and missed; Tom thought he could do better than his master, and made a good line shot, but short. The general advised

husbanding our ammunition until they came within easy range. Waiting a little while, Russell and the colonel fired together, and the bowman in the nearest canoe rolled over, nearly upsetting her. They were now evidently convinced that we were in earnest, and, after giving us an ineffectual volley, paddled together to hold a council of war. Soon a single canoe with three men started for us with a white flag. We hove to, and waited for them

insisted that if O'Toole were not brought back in two hours, I would speak the first gunboat I met, and return with her and have their nest of freebooters broken up. Time was important, for we had noticed soon after we had started down the river a black column of smoke ascending from near the fort, undoubtedly a signal to some of their craft in the vicinity to return, for I felt convinced that they had other craft besides canoes at their disposal; hence their



EXCHANGING THE BOAT FOR THE SLOOP.

to approach. When within hail, I asked what was wanted. A white man, standing in the stern, with two negroes paddling, replied:

“What did you fire on us for? We are friends.”

“Friends do not give chase to friends.”

“We wanted to find out who you are.”

“I told you who we are, and if you are friends, sell us some provisions.”

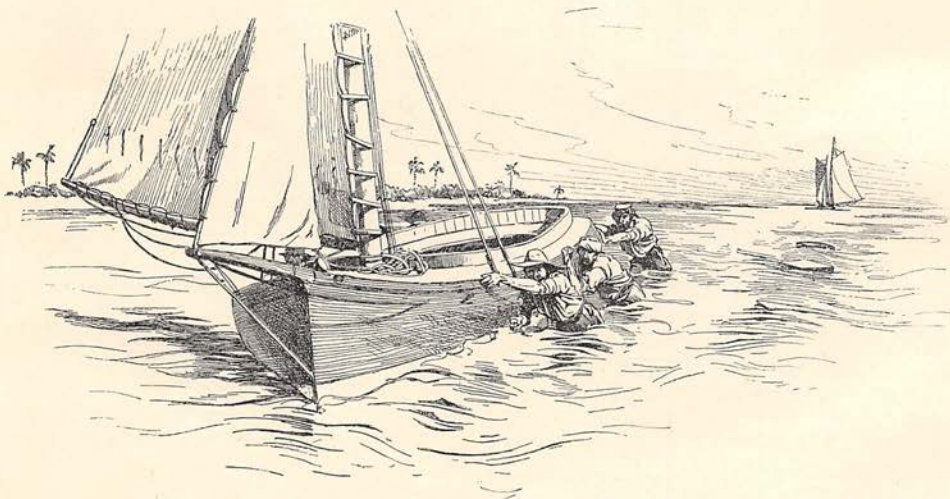
“Come on shore, and you can get what you want.”

Our wants were urgent, and it was necessary, if possible, to make some terms with them; but it would not be safe to venture near their lair again. We told them that if they would bring us some supplies we would wait, and pay them well in gold. The promise of gold served as a bait to secure some concession. After some parleying it was agreed that O'Toole should go on shore in their canoe, be allowed to purchase some provisions, and return in two hours. The buccanier thought the time too short, but I

anxiety to detain us. O'Toole was told to be as dumb as an oyster as to ourselves, but wide awake as to the designs of our dubious friends. The general gave him five eagles for his purchase, tribute-money. He jumped into the canoe, and all returned to the fort. We dropped anchor underfoot to await his return, keeping a sharp lookout for any strange sail. The two hours passed in pleasant surmises as to what he would bring off; another half-hour passed, and no sign of his return; and we began to despair of our anticipated feast, and of O'Toole, a bright young Irishman, whose good qualities had endeared him to us all. The anchor was up, and slowly with a light breeze we drew away from the river, debating what should be our next move. The fort was shut in by a projecting point, and three or four miles had passed when the welcome sight of a canoe astern made us heave to. It was O'Toole with two negroes, a bag of hard bread, two hams, some rusty salt pork, sweet potatoes, fruit,

and, most important of all, two breakers of water and a keg of New England rum. While O'Toole gave us his experience, a ham was cut, and a slice between two of hardtack, washed down with a jorum of rum and water, with a dessert of oranges and bananas, was a feast to us more enjoyable than any ever eaten at Delmonico's or the Café Riche. On his arrival on shore our ambassador had been taken to the quarters of Major Valdez, who claimed to be an officer of the Federals, and by him he was thoroughly cross-examined. He had heard of the breaking up of the Confederacy, but not of the capture of Mr. Davis, and was evidently skeptical of our story as to being wreckers, and connected us in some way with the losing party, either as persons of note or a party escaping with treasure. However, O'Toole baffled all

Darkness and shoal water warned us to anchor. We passed an unhappy night fighting mosquitos. As the sun rose, we saw to the eastward a schooner of thirty or forty tons standing down toward us with a light wind; no doubt it was one from the fort sent in pursuit. Up anchor, up sail, out sweeps, and we headed down Biscayne Bay, a shoal sheet of water between the reefs and mainland. The wind rose with the sun, and, being to windward, the schooner had the benefit of it first, and was fast overhauling us. The water was shoaling, which I was not sorry to see, for our draft must have been from two to three feet less than that of our pursuer, and we recognized that our best chance of escape was by drawing him into shoal water, while keeping afloat ourselves. By the color and break of the water I saw that we were ap-



OVER A CORAL-REEF.

his queries, and was proof against both blandishments and threats. He learned what he had expected, that they were looking for the return of a schooner; hence the smoke signal, and the anxiety to detain us as long as possible. It was only when he saw us leaving, after waiting over two hours, that the major permitted him to make a few purchases and rejoin us.

Night, coming on, found us inside of Key Biscayne, the beginning of the system of innumerable keys, or small islands, extending from this point to the Tortugas, nearly two hundred miles east and west, at the extremity of the peninsula. Of coral formation, as soon as it is built up to the surface of the water it crumbles under the action of the sea and sun. Sea-fowl rest upon it, dropping the seed of some marine plants, or the hard mangrove is washed ashore on it, and its all-embracing roots soon spread in every direction; so are formed these keys.

proaching a part of the bay where the shoals appeared to extend nearly across, with narrow channels between them like the furrows in a plowed field, with occasional openings from one channel into another. Some of the shoals were just awash, others bare. Ahead was a reef on which there appeared but very little water. I could see no opening into the channel beyond. To attempt to haul by the wind on either tack would bring us in a few minutes under fire of the schooner now coming up hand over hand. I ordered the ballast to be thrown overboard, and determined, as our only chance, to attempt to force her over the reef. She was headed for what looked like a little breakwater on our port bow. As the ballast went overboard we watched the bottom anxiously; the water shoaled rapidly, and the grating of the keel over the coral, with that peculiar tremor most unpleasant to a seaman under any circum-

stances, told us our danger. As the last of the ballast went overboard she forged ahead, and then brought up. Together we went overboard, and sank to our waists in the black, pasty mud, through which at intervals branches of rotten coral projected, which only served to make the bottom more treacherous and difficult to work on. Relieved of a half-ton of our weight, our sloop forged ahead three or four lengths, and then brought up again. We pushed her forward some distance, but as the water lessened, notwithstanding our efforts, she stopped.

Looking astern, we saw the schooner coming up wing and wing, not more than a mile distant. Certainly the prospect was blue; but one chance was left, to sacrifice everything in the boat. Without hesitation, overboard went the provisions except a few biscuits; the oars were made fast to the main-sheet alongside, and a breaker of water, the anchor and chain, all spare rope, indeed everything that weighed a pound, was dropped alongside, and then, three on each side, our shoulders under the boat's bilges, at the word we lifted together, and foot by foot moved her forward. Sometimes the water would deepen a little and relieve us; again it would shoal. Between the coral-branches we would sink at times to our necks in the slime and water, our limbs lacerated with the sharp projecting points. Fortunately, the wind helped us; keeping all sail on, thus for more than a hundred yards we toiled, until the water deepened and the reef was passed. Wet, foul, bleeding, with hardly strength enough to climb into the boat, we were safe at last for a time. As we cleared the shoal, the schooner hauled by the wind, and opened fire from a nine- or twelve-pounder; but we were at long range, and the firing was wild. With a fair wind we soon opened the distance between us.

General Breckinridge, thoroughly used up, threw himself down in the bottom of the boat; at which Tom, always on the lookout for his master's comfort, said, "Marse John, s'pose you take a little rum and water." This proposal stirred us all. The general rose, saying, "Yes, indeed, Tom, I will; but where is the rum?" supposing it had been sacrificed with everything else.

"I sees you pitchin' ebery'ting away; I jes put this jug in hyar, 'ca'se I 'lowed you 'd want some."

Opening a locker in the transom, he took out the jug. Never was a potion more grateful; we were faint and thirsty, and it acted like a charm, and, bringing up on another reef, we were ready for another tussle. Fortunately, this proved only a short lift. In the mean time the schooner had passed through the first reef by an opening, as her skipper was undoubtedly familiar with these waters. Still another shoal

was ahead; instead of again lifting our sloop over it, I hauled by the wind, and stood for what looked like an opening to the eastward. Our pursuers were on the opposite tack and fast approaching; a reef intervened, and when abeam, distant about half a mile, they opened fire both with their small arms and boat-gun. The second shot from the latter was well directed; it grazed our mast and carried away the luff of the mainsail. Several Minié balls struck on our sides without penetrating; we did not reply, and kept under cover. When abreast of a break in the reef, we up helm, and again went off before the wind. The schooner was now satisfied that she could not overhaul us, and stood off to the northward.

Free from our enemy, we were now able to take stock of our supplies and determine what to do. Our provisions consisted of about ten pounds of hard bread, a twenty-gallon breaker of water, two thirds full, and three gallons of rum. Really a fatality appeared to follow us as regards our commissariat. Beginning with our first drenching on the St. John's, every successive supply had been lost, and now what we had bought with so much trouble yesterday, the sellers compelled us to sacrifice to-day. But our first care was to ballast the sloop, for without it she was so crank as to be unseaworthy. This was not an easy task; the shore of all the keys, as well as that of the mainland in sight, was low and swampy, and covered to the water's edge with a dense growth of mangroves. What made matters worse, we were without any ground-tackle.

At night we were up to Elliott's Key, and anchored by making fast to a sweep shoved into the muddy bottom like a shad-pole. When the wind went down, the mosquitos came off in clouds. We wrapped ourselves in the sails from head to feet, with only our nostrils exposed. At daylight we started again to the westward, looking for a dry spot where we might land, get ballast, and possibly some supplies. A few palm-trees rising from the mangroves indicated a spot where we might find a little terra firma. Going in as near as was prudent, we waded ashore, and found a small patch of sand and coral elevated a few feet above the everlasting swamp. Some six or eight cocoa-palms rose to the height of forty or fifty feet, and under their umbrella-like tops we could see the bunches of green fruit. It was a question how to get at it. Without saying a word, Tom went on board the boat, brought off a piece of canvas, cut a strip a yard long, tied the ends together, and made two holes for his big toes. The canvas, stretched between his feet, embraced the rough bark so that he rapidly ascended. He threw down the green nuts, and, cutting through the thick shell, we



A ROUGH NIGHT IN THE GULF STREAM.

found about half a pint of milk. The general suggested a little milk-punch. All the trees were stripped, and what we did not use we saved for sea-stores.

To ballast our sloop was our next care. The jib was unbent, the sheet and head were brought together and made into a sack. This was filled with sand, and, slung on an oar, was shouldered by two and carried on board.

Leaving us so engaged, the general started to try to knock over some of the numerous water-fowl in sight. He returned in an hour thoroughly used up from his struggles in the swamp, but with two pelicans and a white crane. In the stomach of one of the first were a dozen or more mullet from six to nine inches in length, which had evidently just been swallowed. We cleaned them, and, wrapping them in palmetto-leaves, roasted them in the ashes, and they proved delicious. Tom took the birds in hand, and as he was an old campaigner, who had cooked everything from a stalled ox to a crow, we had faith in his ability to make them palatable. He tried to pick them, but soon abandoned it, and skinned them. We looked on anxiously, ready after our first course of fish for something more substantial. He broiled them, and with a flourish laid one before the general on a clean leaf, saying, "I 's 'feared, Marse John, it 's tough as an old muscovy drake."

"Let me try it, Tom."

After some exertion he cut off a mouthful, while we anxiously awaited the verdict. Without a word he rose and disappeared into the bushes. Returning in a few minutes, he told Tom to remove the game. His tone and expression satisfied us that pelican would not keep us from starving. The colonel thought the crane might be better, but a taste satisfied us that it was no improvement.

Hungry and tired, it was nearly night before we were ready to move, and warned by our sanguinary experience of the previous night we determined to haul off from the shore as far as possible, and get outside the range of the mosquitos. It was now necessary to determine upon our future course. We had abandoned all hope of reaching the Bahamas, and the nearest foreign shore was that of Cuba, distant across the Gulf Stream from our present position about two hundred miles, or three or four days' sail, with the winds we might expect at this season. With the strictest economy our provisions would not last so long. However, nearly a month in the swamps and among the keys of Florida, in the month of June, had prepared us to face almost any risk to escape from those shores, and it was determined to start in the morning for Cuba. Well out in the bay we hove to, and passed a fairly comfortable night; next day early we started for Caesar's

Canal, a passage between Elliott's Key and Key Largo. The channel was crooked and puzzling, leading through a labyrinth of mangrove islets, around which the current of the Gulf Stream was running like a sluice; we repeatedly got aground, when we would jump overboard and push off. So we worked all day before we were clear of the keys and outside among the reefs, which extend three or four miles beyond. Waiting again for daylight, we threaded our way through them, and with a light breeze from the eastward steered south, thankful to feel again the pulsating motion of the ocean.

Several sail and one steamer were in sight during the day, but all at a distance. Constant exposure had tanned us the color of mahogany, and our legs and feet were swollen and blistered from being so much in the salt water, and the action of the hot sun on them made them excessively painful. Fortunately, but little exertion was now necessary, and our only relief was in lying still, with an impromptu awning over us. General Breckinridge took charge of the water and rum, doling it out at regular intervals, a tot at a time, determined to make it last as long as possible.

Toward evening the wind was hardly strong enough to enable us to hold our own against the stream. At ten, Carysfort Light was abeam, and soon after a dark bank of clouds rising in the eastern sky betokened a change of wind and weather. Everything was made snug and lashed securely, with two reefs in the mainsail, and the bonnet taken off the jib. I knew from experience what we might expect from summer squalls in the straits of Florida. I took the helm, the general the sheet, Colonel Wilson was stationed by the halyards, Russell and O'Toole were prepared to bail. Tom, thoroughly demoralized, was already sitting in the bottom of the boat, between the general's knees. The sky was soon completely overcast with dark, lowering clouds; the darkness, which could almost be felt, was broken every few minutes by lurid streaks of lightning chasing one another through black abysses. Fitful gusts of wind were the heralds of the coming blast. Great drops of rain fell like the scattering fire of a skirmish line, and with a roar like a thousand trumpets we heard the blast coming, giving us only time to lower everything and get the stern of the boat to it, for our only chance was to run with the storm until the rough edge was taken off, and then heave to. I cried, "All hands down!" as the gale struck us with the force of a thunderbolt, carrying a wall of white water with it which burst over us like a cataract. I thought we were swamped as I clung desperately to the tiller, though thrown violently against the boom. But after the shock, our brave little boat, though half filled, rose

and shook herself like a spaniel. The mast bent like a whip-stick, and I expected to see it blown out of her, but, gathering way, we flew with the wind. The surface was lashed into foam as white as the driven snow. The lightning and artillery of the heavens were incessant, blinding, and deafening; involuntarily we bowed our heads, utterly helpless. Soon the heavens were opened, and the floods came down like a waterspout. I knew then that the worst of it had passed, and though one fierce squall succeeded another, each one was tamer. The deluge, too, helped to beat down the sea. To give an order was impossible, for I could not be heard; I could only, during the flashes, make signs to Russell and O'Toole to bail. Tying themselves and their buckets to the thwarts, they went to work, and soon relieved her of a heavy load.

From the general direction of the wind I knew without compass or any other guide that we were running to the westward, and, I feared, were gradually approaching the dreaded reefs, where in such a sea our boat would have been reduced to match-wood in a little while. Therefore, without waiting for the wind or sea to moderate, I determined to heave to, hazardous as it was to attempt anything of the kind. Giving the colonel the helm, I lashed the end of the gaff to the boom, and then loosed enough of the mainsail to goose-wing it, or make a leg-of-mutton sail of it. Then watching for a lull or a smooth time, I told him to put the helm a-starboard and let her come to on the port tack, head to the southward, and at the same time I hoisted the sail. She came by the wind quickly without shipping a drop of water, but as I was securing the halyards the colonel gave her too much helm, bringing the wind on the other bow, the boom flew round and knocked my feet from under me, and overboard I went. Fortunately, her way was deadened, and as I came up I seized the sheet, and with the general's assistance scrambled on board. For twelve hours or more I did not trust the helm to any one. The storm passed over to the westward with many a departing growl and threat. But the wind still blew hoarsely from the eastward with frequent gusts against the stream, making a heavy, sharp sea. In the trough of it the boat was becalmed, but as she rose on the crest of the waves even the little sail set was as much as she could stand up under, and she had to be nursed carefully; for if she had fallen off, one breaker would have swamped us, or any accident to sail or spar would have been fatal: but like a gull on the waters, our brave little craft rose and breasted every billow.

By noon the next day the weather had moderated sufficiently to make more sail, and the

sea went down at the same time. Then, hungry and thirsty, Tom was thought of. During the gale he had remained in the bottom of the boat as motionless as a log. As he was roused up, he asked :

"Marse John, whar is you, and whar is you goin' ? 'Fore de Lord, dis nigger never want to see a boat again."

"Come, Tom, get us something to drink, and see if there is anything left to eat," said the general. But Tom was helpless.

The general served out a small ration of water and rum, every drop of which was precious. Our small store of bread was found soaked, but, laid in the sun, it partly dried, and was, if not palatable, at least a relief to hungry men.

During the next two days the weather was moderate, and we stood to the southward; several sail were in sight, but at a distance. We were anxious to speak one even at some risk, for our supplies were down to a pint of rum in water each day under a tropical sun, with two water-soaked biscuits. On the afternoon of the second day a brig drifted slowly down toward us; we made signals that we wished to speak her, and, getting out our sweeps, pulled for her. As we neared her, the captain hailed and ordered us to keep off. I replied that we were shipwrecked men, and only wanted some provisions. As we rounded to under his stern, we could see that he had all his crew of seven or eight men at quarters. He stood on the taffrail with a revolver in hand, his two mates with muskets, the cook with a huge tormentor, and the crew with handspikes.

"I tell you again, keep off, or I 'll let fly."

"Captain, we won't go on board if you will give us some provisions; we are starving."

"Keep off, I tell you. Boys, make ready."

One of the mates drew a bead on me; our eyes met in a line over the sights on the barrel. I held up my right hand.

"Will you fire on an unarmed man? Captain, you are no sailor, or you would not refuse to help shipwrecked men."

"How do I know who you are? And I 've got no grub to spare."

"Here is a passenger who is able to pay you," said I, pointing to the general.

"Yes; I will pay you for anything you let us have."

The captain now held a consultation with his officers, and then said: "I 'll give you some water and bread. I 've got nothing else. But you must not come alongside."

A small keg, or breaker, was thrown overboard and picked up, with a bag of fifteen or twenty pounds of hardtack. This was the reception given us by the brig *Neptune* of Bangor. But when the time and place are considered, we cannot wonder at the captain's precautions,

for a more piratical-looking party than we never sailed the Spanish main. General Breckinridge, bronzed the color of mahogany, unshaven, with long mustache, wearing a blue flannel shirt open at the neck, exposing his broad chest, with an old slouch hat, was a typical bucaneer. Thankful for what we had received, we parted company. Doubtless the captain reported on his arrival home a blood-curdling story of his encounter with pirates off the coast of Cuba.

"Marse John, I thought the war was done. Why did n't you tell dem folks who you was?" queried Tom. The general told Tom they were Yankees, and would not believe us. "Is dar any Yankees whar you goin' ? — 'ca'se if dar is, we best go back to old Kentucky." He was made easy on this point, and, with an increase in our larder, became quite perky. A change in the color of the water showed us that we were on soundings, and had crossed the Stream, and soon after we came in sight of some rocky islets, which I recognized as Double-Headed Shot Keys, thus fixing our position; for our chart, with the rest of our belongings, had disappeared, or had been destroyed by water, and as the heavens, by day and night, were our only guide, our navigation was necessarily very uncertain. For the next thirty miles our course to the southward took us over Salt Key Bank, where the soundings varied from three to five fathoms, but so clear was the water that it was hard to believe that the coral, the shells, and the marine flowers were not within arm's reach. Fishes of all sizes and colors darted by us in every direction. The bottom of the bank was a constantly varying kaleidoscope of beauty. But to starving men, with not a mouthful in our grasp, this display of food was tantalizing. Russell, who was an expert swimmer, volunteered to dive for some conchs and shell-fish; oysters there were none. Asking us to keep a sharp lookout on the surface of the water for sharks, which generally swim with the dorsal fin exposed, he went down and brought up a couple of live conchs about the size of a man's fist. Breaking the shell, we drew the quivering body out. Without its coat it looked like a huge grub, and not more inviting. The general asked Tom to try it.

"Glory, Marse John, I 'm mighty hungry, nebber so hungry sense we been in de almy, and I 'm just ready for ole mule, pole-cat, or anyt'ing 'cept dis worm."

After repeated efforts to dissect it we agreed with Tom, and found it not more edible than a pickled football. However, Russell, diving again, brought up bivalves with a very thin shell and beautiful colors, in shape like a large peapod. These we found tolerable; they served to satisfy in some small degree our craving for

food. The only drawback was that eating them produced great thirst, which is much more difficult to bear than hunger. We found partial relief in keeping our heads and bodies wet with salt water.

On the sixth day from the Florida coast we crossed Nicholas Channel with fair wind. Soon after we made the Cuban coast, and stood to the westward, hoping to sight something which would determine our position. After a run of some hours just outside of the coral-reefs, we sighted in the distance some vessels at anchor. As we approached, a large town was visible at the head of the bay, which proved to be Cardenas. We offered prayerful thanks for our wonderful escape, and anchored just off the custom-house, and waited some time for the health officer to give us pratique. But as no one came off in answer to our signals, I went on shore to report at the custom-house. It was some time before I could make them comprehend that we were from Florida, and anxious to land. Their astonishment was great at the size of our boat, and they could hardly believe we had crossed in it. Our arrival produced as much sensation as would that of a liner. We might have been filibusters in disguise. The governor-general had to be telegraphed to; numerous papers were made out and signed; a register was made out for the sloop *No Name*; then we had

to make a visit to the governor before we were allowed to go to a hotel to get something to eat. After a cup of coffee and a light meal I had a warm bath, and donned some clean linen which our friends provided.

We were overwhelmed with attentions, and when the governor-general telegraphed that General Breckinridge was to be treated as one holding his position and rank, the officials became as obsequious as they had been overbearing and suspicious. The next day one of the governor-general's aides-de-camp arrived from Havana, with an invitation for the general and the party to visit him, which we accepted, and after two days' rest took the train for the capital. A special car was placed at our disposal, and on our arrival the general was received with all the honors. We were driven to the palace, had a long interview, and dined with Governor-General Concha. The transition from a small open boat at sea, naked and starving, to the luxuries and comforts of civilized life was as sudden as it was welcome and thoroughly appreciated.

At Havana our party separated. General Breckinridge and Colonel Wilson have since crossed the great river; Russell and O'Toole returned to Florida. I should be glad to know what has become of faithful Tom.

John Taylor Wood.



A PRAYER IN THESSALY.

A LOVER prayed to Eros on this wise:
 "Since my love loves me not, Eros, I pray
 That thou wilt take this torturing love away.
 But since she is so fair, still let mine eyes,
 Unloving, joy in her, her beauty prize;
 Still let her voice ring out as pure and gay
 To my calm heart as mating birds in May."
 These words went up the blue Thessalian skies.
 But e'er they reached the high god's golden seat,
 The lover to retract his prayer was fain:
 "Nay, let me keep the bitter with the sweet;
 Better than placid bliss is love's dear pain.
 My love I'll hold and cherish, though it prove
 More blighting than the frowning brows of Jove."

John Hay.