

## JOHNNY REB AT PLAY.



SNOW-BALLING.

Now that the party lines which have for so long indicated the political geography of the country are being wiped out by the operation of the presidential "policy," it is high time that certain misapprehensions—consequences, as they were also causes, of "the late unpleasantness"—should also be explained away. It is but an evidence of the human nature in which mankind so abounds, that some bitterness should tinge the after consideration of any issue which has been determined by force of arms, on the part of the losing side; it has naturally resulted, therefore, that the subject of this memoir has come to figure as a melodramatic, not to say tragic, character. There could be no greater mistake. In the easy intercourse of his more familiar relations, he was in the largest sense a humorist; but—following the time-honored usage of his section—he kept the best of his native product for home consumption; and being, moreover, a somewhat diffident fellow and reticent withal, his late antagonists can lay claim to little more than a business acquaintance with him. Now, so long as fighting was the order of the day, Johnny was remarkable for a studious application to the matter in

hand, for, as he himself would have put it, he "come for the purpose, and wa'n't arter no foolin'." Collectively, when charging a breastwork or a battery, with his characteristic yell, he was a formidable figure enough; though even here much of his ferocity of aspect was purely adventitious, and dependent in no slight degree upon his long hair and the physical effects of hard service and scanty rations. Off duty, not Lambro's self was a milder mannered man than he. "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*" was an article of his creed, certainly; but he also held it no breach of decorum and equally *dulce to desipere in loco*, and this faith he abundantly illustrated in his works.

There were three classes of men whom Johnny especially regarded as fair game when his frugal mind was on pleasure bent: civilians, the non-combatant staff and cavalry-men; for, despite that well-known foible of his character which consisted in the claim to Cavalier descent, the typical Johnny was essentially a man of his legs. To "devil" a "cit.," a trooper, or a quartermaster, was as the breath of his nostrils. Any solecism, as he considered, of dress or equipage, was fit subject for his diversion.

The investment of several hundred dollars of pay was perhaps the least of the pains or penalties attaching to the possession of a pair of jack-boots; the dandy wearer had need of moral courage of no mean order to withstand the reproach of having gone prematurely into winter quarters, coupled with vociferous invitations to "git r-i-t-e outen 'em." But a stove-pipe hat was a treasure-trove. Woe betide the heedless lord of the soil who ventured into Johnny's presence, crowned with well-saved *ante bellum* beaver! Queries as to its uses alternated with injunctions founded upon the theory that it might upon occasion serve for purposes of concealment, and the victim was warned of the futility of any attempt in the direction last indicated by the reminder that his legs were hanging out and plainly visible. Not uncommonly the obnoxious head-gear would be misconceived as a camp-kettle, and the wearer pathetically entreated to part with it, because the "ridgiment" was "powerful bad off fur cookin' tools." It was worse than useless to show temper under this rude *badinage*; that was the very cream of the joke to Johnny, who hastened to proffer such dubious comfort as might lie in the admonition: "Mister, *don't* you mind them boys; they

ar' all the time a-hollerin' arter some durned fool or nuther!"

But the fortune of war is varied, and an instance is recorded in which our facetious friend was hoist with his own petard. A dignified old gentleman, sporting a long-napped, black-bombazined, white tile of antique pattern, had been proof against all the stock pleasantries. Even the proposal to swap hats evoked no response. Johnny was almost at the end of his resources when he was seized with an inspiration.

"O, mister!" he inquired, "what made ye put the churn in mo'nin'? Is the cows all dead?"

"I should think they were, by the way the calves are bleating," was the ready retort.

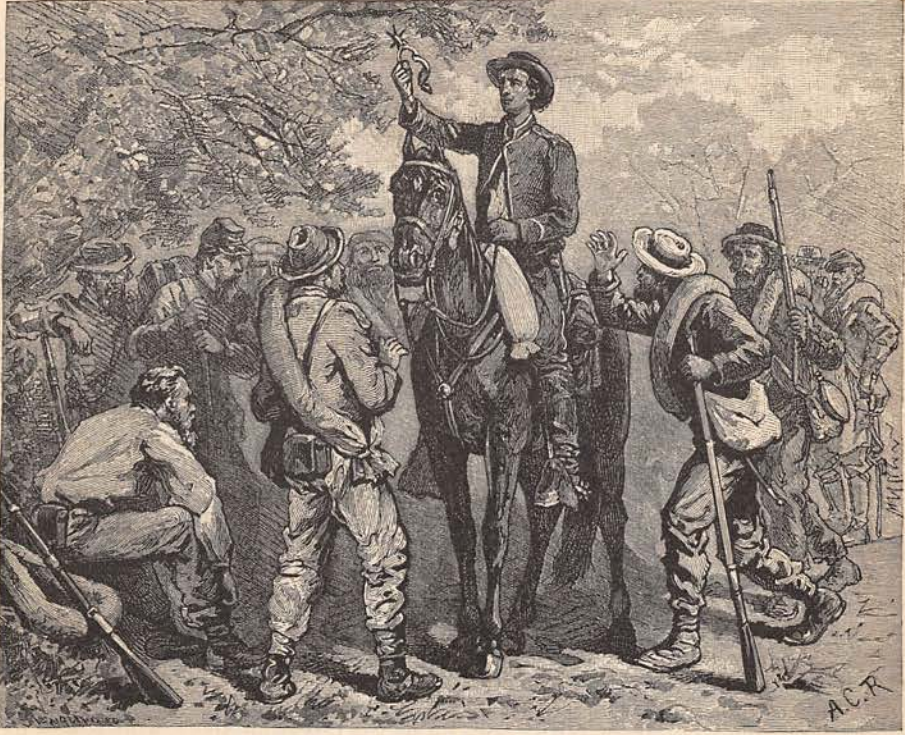
Johnny was too old a soldier not to know when he was beaten; but he retreated in good order, firing, as he went, this Parthian shot:

"Well, mister, you kin hev my hat, anyhow; but I reely *did* want that ar one o' yourn to w'ar this evenin' on dress-parade."

As serving to illustrate how Johnny "whilom was wont his leagues to cheer" with a stray trooper, a personal experience may be worth recounting. In this instance a pair of Mexican spurs, with rowels measuring several inches in diameter, were provocative of critical comment. Thus appointed, the writer happened to be detained one day upon the road by an infantry column at a halt, and immediately became the focal point of a cross-fire of remarks, called forth by his unlucky gaffs. The blocking of the road by the stacked muskets and recumbent men forbade all hope of escape, and there was nothing for it but to face the situation with as good a grace as might be. "Mister, how *old* does ye hev ter git afore they comes out that long on ye?" "Don't them things keep ye 'wake o' nights?" were among the observations vouchsafed. With an assumption of the gravest interest, one fellow—the self-constituted fogleman of the regiment for the nonce—inquired if they were "Yankee" spurs, and being answered in the negative, rejoined, "Well, ye've tuk a load off'n my mind, fur I *reely* wouldn't like ter fight nobody with sich things on 'em." Another exclaimed, "This hyar must be the hoss-artillery; don't ye see hit's got *wheels*?" At last, in the vain hope of ridding myself of an interest which had become oppressive, I unbuckled one spur and held it aloft, in full view of all. This proceeding called forth the remonstrance: "Mister, fur the Lord's sake, *don't* turn that thing loose;



WEARING A "KUNFEDRIT WATCH."



"DON'T TURN THAT THING LOOSE, HIT'S DANGEROUS."

thar's a chance o' people in this hyar road, an' hit's dangerous!"

The foregoing are specimens of Johnny's off-hand practice, and in this department he excelled; his best shots being invariably made "on the wing." There was no march so long or so toilsome, no occasion so serious, that it could quite dull the edge of his humor. The exceptionally hard service and many privations of his lot were one huge joke to him, upon which he was wont to ring changes without end. But,—like other people in their season of prosperity,—Johnny, when in winter quarters, was sometimes afflicted with *ennui*, and, in default of other antagonist, was forced into systematic devices for the killing of time. Snow-ball battles, between whole brigades, arrayed in line, and with colors flying, were frequent; occasionally too, he played "chermany," the Southern equivalent of base-ball, and when the weather barred his indulgence in these sports, he sometimes resorted to the distraction of amateur theatricals.

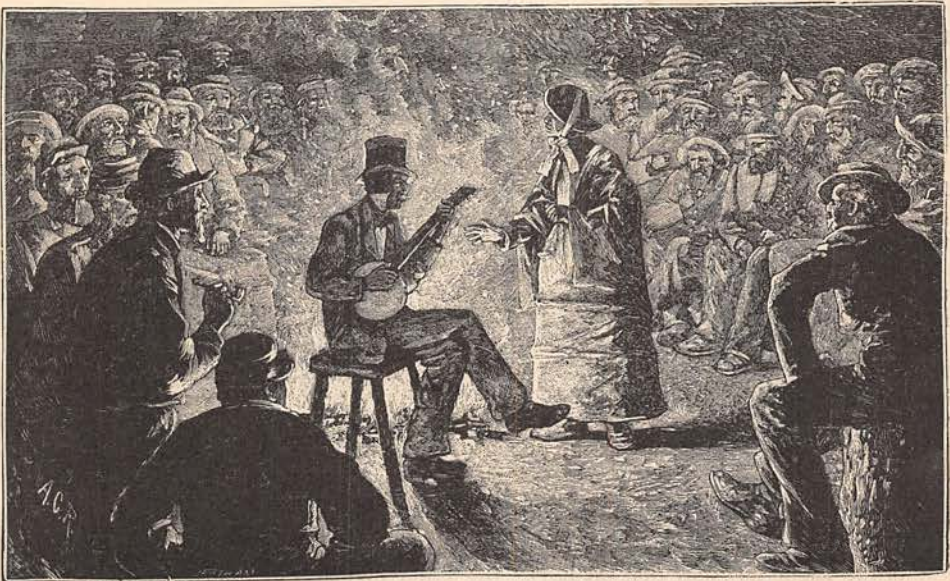
The survivors of Hill's Light Division, who wintered at "Camp Gregg" during that dreary mud-bound interval between Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, will recall to mind the "Kimbomikin." The

derivation of the above term has never transpired: possibly it may have been a corruption of *harmonicon*, as rendered by some veteran freshly returned from furlough, and the attractions of Richmond tasted on the way, which may also have suggested the features of the entertainment itself. The Kimbomikin was a circular pen, hedged all round with pine brush, sloped inward, as a winter shelter for cattle is usually constructed in the South. A "lightwood" fire in the center did duty as general illuminator, and in the arena surrounding this was the stage, the audience finding what accommodation they could about its circumference. Naturally there was no dressing-room for the performers, who vanished into the outer darkness whenever any change of attire became necessary—the "assistance" being kept in good humor meanwhile by a vocal solo with banjo accompaniment, or a little "light clog business." The most fastidious purist could not have excepted to the *mise en scène* as disturbing the emotion called forth by the music; the attendants of locality, etc., were announced with a frankness quite flattering to the imagination, and recalling forcibly to mind the old placards serving a similar purpose on the

primitive English stage. With a little indulgence from the house, the difficulty of compassing feminine attire was triumphantly solved. A number of barrel-hoops, strung together, made a sufficiently proper crinoline, which was draped with a shelter-tent and an army blanket, supported at the waist by a cartridge belt, and doing duty as petticoat and overskirt respectively; while a wide-brimmed slouch hat, tied on by a band passing over the crown, was the approved thing in bonnets. The broken angular folds of a silk mantilla were symbolized in an oil-cloth poncho,—quite as accurately, by the way, as are some of the fabrics offered to our credulity on more pretentious boards. The entertainment consisted mainly of what the variety theaters style “character delineations”—Irish and negro—with a good deal of extemporization worked in. The performance often included the bulk of the attendance, when some criticism would provoke a retort from the stage; and popular choruses would be taken up *con amore*, as is custom elsewhere among “the gods.” Refreshments were quite in order; a perpetual incense of pipe-smoke went up from the outer circle, while apples, ginger (?) cakes and “goobers” (peanuts), met with ready demand at figures which would have been significant of speedy wealth to the dealers in these dainties, had they but represented a *par* value in the circulating medium; for with the prodigality distinctive

of his section, Johnny never considered his pay as anything more than pocket-money.

But, as is too often the case with bright boys, Johnny, it must be avowed, was occasionally a naughty one, though his offenses seemed rather the outcome of error in judgment than of deliberate and conscious iniquity. As touching matters of subsistence, he leaned toward communism,—or it may be that his deficiency in Latin rendered the distinction between *meum* and *tuum* somewhat obscure to his sense. He was further addicted to truancy, which he facetiously styled “running the *block*,” and through his over confidence in the elastic properties of a furlough, he sometimes came to be reported “absent without leave.” When such escapades brought upon him their legitimate consequences in the shape of punishment, Johnny’s humor was as constant in this as in more honorable adversity. Mounted aloft upon a wooden horse, “very grievous to bestride,” he has been known to inquire of the men below if they “didn’t want to jine the cavalry;” the writer also once heard him when taunted with his ball-and-chain appendage, reply out of the hardness of his heart—“Haint you uns never seed the new Kurfedrit watches—which ye w’ars the chain around yer leg?” He would gamble too, and for every species of stake conceivable,—for rations when in camp, or even to decide upon whom should devolve the duty of



THE KIMBOMIKIN.

going upon a detail under fire when in line of battle.

The writer once assisted (in the Gallic sense) at a game of "seven-up," which was played under conditions somewhat peculiar. A canteen of "apple-jack" had been procured, and the stipulation entered into that the winners of each game should be entitled to a drink, the opposing pair being permitted the consolation of a *smell*. By some freak of fortune, it befell that the canteen was nearly empty, with two of the party as thirsty as when they sat down. But at this stage the victors relented, and the luckless ones were permitted to imbibe.

But Johnny's fertility of resource was by no means limited to such demands as would consist in the mere inventing of stakes; it



"IF YOU WANT TO HAVE A GOOD TIME, JUST JINE  
THE CAVALRY."

was sufficient also for the devising of novel and strange methods for the indulgence of his besetting propensity.

Shortly after a payment of the troops, some complaint came to the ears of General Archer, commanding the Tennessee Brigade of the Light Division, that his boys in homespun were wasting their substance

in the riotous ways of "old sledge" and "chuck-a-luck." A special order was accordingly promulgated, forbidding "all games of cards or dice for money," within the limits of the brigade camp. Johnny was equal to the occasion, and, for perhaps the first time, it was suggested to his mind that his entomological studies might be turned to some practical account. From personal observations of daily recurrence and of the most scrutinizing character, he had been led to remark the active habits of that form of insect life which Pope and Burns deemed worthy of their verse, and these investigations developed the game bearing the significant title of *scratch*. A rubber cloth was spread, wrong side up, upon the ground, and two concentric circles roughly traced in charcoal upon the linen surface. Around this the players seated themselves, and a pool was formed of the sum of their contributions to "come in." The *starters* were placed within the inner ring, and the one first clearing the line of the outside limit entitled its fortunate owner to the stakes. But it is to be deplored that a spirit of jockeying should have invaded the precincts of this noble sport; in course of time, as favorites arose, the system of handicapping was adopted, and odds were given and taken with a nicety of judgment which would not have disgraced the quarter-stretch at Long Branch or Saratoga.

The ultimate destiny of so versatile a genius would be difficult to predict; but it is safe to assume that, with increase of years, Johnny has become not only a sadder but a wiser man; for the propensities which characterized him when in the heyday of his youth, subdued and directed by his later experience, cannot fail to tell in the long run. As evidence that he has outgrown certain extravagant notions, it may be mentioned that more recent advices speak of his having accepted a "situation" involving multifarious duties of the most serious and practical kind, and that in the performance of these he is acquitting himself with credit. His incapacity for *work* has long ago been recognized as a delusion, even by those lately arrayed in arms against him, else small glory had been theirs. It is none the less gratifying, however, to the friends of his early years when they are thus assured of his application to work of a different sort. But as all work and no play would have made Johnny a dull boy, it is still lawful to express the hope that it may ever be recorded of him, as here—"a was a merry man."