

Secy Seward

BY GEO. MILLS JOY:

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LITTLE STARLIGHT.

It was soon after the first of those terrible Wilderness battles of last spring that Little Starlight made his first appearance among us.

Now have you any idea who Little Starlight was? Very probably, from his romantic name, you picture him to yourself as a pretty boy—a beautiful Young America, with clustering curls, and the relevant blooming precocity of face and form.

Where he came from, who he belonged to, how he came among us, we never exactly knew. He was a sort of masculine Topsy, and probably 'grewed' somewhere in the vicinity of our bivouac.

One could tell how the little fellow got into the camp, and he wouldn't tell himself. The pickets and sentries swore prodigiously that he had not passed them.

It was shortly after sunrise when the corporal of the guard brought him before me, with

I almost exploded with laughter at seeing the individual in question, but immediately sat down on a stump and proceeded to investigate. Capt. Allen came along at the same time, and presently the Major also dropped in.

"What is your name, my boy?" "Dun'no, mass'r. Spect I isn't got none," was the reply, accompanied by a sparkling grin of extraordinary breadth.

"Oh, you must have some name," I said. "What did they call you at home?" "I allers come w'out callin'.

Somewhat startled by the vehemence of this injunction, the little fellow remained silent, and, taking off his cap, commenced stroking his mat of a head

in a serious manner, which was more comical than his mirth.

"Well, my friend," I resumed, "where do you come from?" "No whar ob late, mass'r. I've been sleepin' out recenly. Yer see I've a awful cuss, I is. Yah! yah! I se—"

"Sile, ce!" exclaimed the judge. "Sartin, sartin, mass'r! Yah! yah!" "Who do you belong to?" I resumed. "Yah! yah! I ain't got none. Yer see he's gwine away, he is."

"But what was your master's name?" "Cunnel Billy." "Billy what?"

"Dun'no. Yer see dis chicken were left behin' wid ole missus an' de gals, wile Mass' Billy gwine to de war way up to Richmon'. An' yer see, de ole missus she dun gib dis nig a lickin', so I jis slips out in de night time, climbs inter de barn, steals all de pigeons, an' clars de track for Ole Virginny. Yah! yah! Is'e a awful cuss, I is!"

"Pigeons! What did you do with the pigeons?" I asked, my curiosity carrying me away from the subject in hand.

"Libs on 'em to be shore, mass'r! Dey'se bully fodder, nicer dan de hard tack. Yah! I've got jis one left."

And sure enough, as he spoke, he drew from one of the capacious pockets of his tattered coat a sorry looking pigeon, still alive, which, before we could guess his intention, he proceeded to put to death in a very summary manner.

"What are you doing that for?" I exclaimed, somewhat horrified at what I saw, as were the rest of the 'Court.'

"The little fellow, threw away the pigeon's head without answering, picked up the body, and laid it at my feet, with a 'Yah! yah!' from which I judged that it was meant as a present for my breakfast."

"Well, what is the decision of the Court?" said I laughing, and turning to the Major. "I really do not know," was the reply.

"What can you do?" I asked. The little fellow cast a comprehensive glance around him in every direction, as if he could do any and every thing under the sun, and was merely puzzled upon which to try his hand for an outset.

At length his eye caught sight of a kettle-drum which was taking an airing a short distance off, and with a guffaw of delight he ran toward it. Quick as thought the strap was over the shoulder, the sticks were in his hand, and throwing back his head with a gesture of pride, he rolled off the reveille with the flourish and accuracy of a master.

"Bravo!" cried Capt. Allen. "You're the man we want. Why not have him drum for our company?" he added, turning to me—"Johnny went into the hospital day before yesterday, and we have had, but little music since."

His name—by which he was altogether known among us—originated, at the suggestion of one of the officers, in the wonderfully stary aspect of the heavens on the night preceeding the early morning of his capture.

er excessively hungry, and his slender frame was of iron mould. He endured without murmur or any marks of fatigue, marches which tried to the utmost the stalwart frames of hardened veterans, and would, after the march, execute with gusto a dozen breakdowns, Jim Crows, and Bob Riddleys for the diversion of the weary regiment.

It is true he had his foibles, and grave ones. He was a natural born thief, and my most impressive sermonizing totally failed to convince him of the gravity of his fault.

There was one thing alone which almost redeemed him in my eyes; and that was his passionate desire for freedom—his enthusiastic devotion to the cause under whose banner he served. My duties as chaplain were in sad demand in those bloody battle days, when ministrations to the dying and prayers for the dead were so frequently required; but I found some time, nevertheless, to devote to Starlight.

"Yes, mass'r," he one day exclaimed, "I feels it in my bones. It'll come 'roun' one day or 'nother. I knows I'll be free!"

"You are so already," said I. "The President's Proclamation has made you so. You have nothing to fear."

"Jis' so, mass'r," he replied. "De Presiden' he am a nice man, he am. But I doesn't feel it in de bones; I neber will till I git on to him, yer know. Jis' lemme git on to him—once!"

"On to whom?" I asked. "On de Ole Man—Cunnel Billy. Jis' lemme git on to him, den I'll be free!"

"You surely would not kill your old master?" "Wouldn't I? Yah! yah!" And thereat Starlight began to fumble among the various knives and pistols which adorned his person in a manner anything but conciliatory.

Upon briefer acquaintance with Starlight I should have smiled at the serio-comic manner in which these sentiments were enunciated; but, as it was, I shuddered at the intensity of passion which lurked in his tones.

And through all those battles, and rapid marches and counter-marches, with which Gen. Grant terrified and confused the rebel foe, from the Rapidan to the walls of Richmond, Little Starlight conducted himself with sterling

credit, winning golden opinions from all, and, upon one occasion a hearty hand-shake from the General of our division.

It was, however, at the severe skirmish on our left, immediately following our general repulse from the rebel works, and shortly before the transfer of our army to the south bank of the James, that the part which Starlight played in the great drama was to assume a truly tragic phase.

The enemy's skirmishers and ours were hotly engaged, and the fight bid fair to be bloody, if brief. I was immediately in the rear of the regiment, which was in reserve, busy with the wounded; and Starlight was hopping about me, doing what he could to assist, but now and then looking up, and throwing curious glances toward the fight, which was not distant.

Suddenly an exclamation from him caused me to turn, when I saw him gazing intently with his hand pointing toward the ground where the skirmish was progressing.

"Hooray! hooray! Dere he is—dere he is!" he shouted. He succeeded in directing my attention to a fine looking rebel officer, who was cheering on his men in a charge they were making on our position.

"Dat's him! dat's him!" cried Starlight, at the same time freeing himself from his drum and casting it on one side, while his voice was wild and strange with a fierce joy.

And before I could arrest him, or exactly understand his intention, he snatched a musket and bayonet from the ground, and ran like a deer after our column, which was advancing to repel the threatened assault.

From my position I could see the whole affair. The smoke of the musketry fire was thick, but a western gale was blowing, and the opposing columns were pretty plainly discernable.

The ranks of the rebels were broken, and they scattered back towards their abatis and the thick woods on their right; but the officers retained their ground, endeavoring to inspire their men by their own examples, and fighting bravely.

Isaw Little Starlight rush headlong at the man whom he had directed my attention, and I could hear his shrill cheer come floating to me on the wind. He seemed to be but half the size of his antagonist, yet they met with a shock which seemed equal on both sides.

The officer evaded the bayonet of his puny foe, and struck out sharply with his sword, and I saw the blood spring up high from the negro's neck. But the next instant they closed, the rushing bayonet gored the breast of the officer and he rolled to the plain. Twice—thrice, I saw the flashing bayonet leap into the air, and then flash down again upon the prostrate man, and then, with a louder whoop than before, Starlight sprung on further into the fight, and the whole scene was shut from my view by the gathering smoke, for the breeze died away.

The fight was soon over. The rebels were driven far back into the woods, their abatis captured and held, and we in possession of the field. My interest in what I had witnessed was so intense that I immediately hastened to the ground.

Our loss had been inconsiderable, but that of the enemy was large. Their dead lay around in all directions. I found the officer with whom I had seen Starlight engaged. He wore the insignia of a rebel captain, and was stone dead, with his breast many times pierced by bayonet thrusts.

As I was standing beside the body, sergeant K—of Co. C, came up to me with a troubled look. "Little Starlight is dying, sir," was his greeting, "and he wishes to see you very much."

"Starlight dying! Impossible!" I ejaculated, at the same time hurrying to the point indicated. It was but two true. Little Starlight lay at the edge of the enemy's works, with a frightful gun-shot wound in the back part of his head, and as many as twenty brave fellows were clustering around him with sympathetic looks and tearful eyes.

"Yah! yah! Mass'r Chaplain," he cried, as I knelt by his side and took his hand, "dis nig's done for, he is. But did yer see me in de fight, mass'r? Did yer see me tackle dat ole coon, Cunnel Billy? Yah!"