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## "THEN AND NOW"

Reminiscences and Historic Romance, 1856 to 1865

BY JUDGE D. F. MORROW

Rutherfordton, N. C.

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### CHAPTER FOUR

Happenings At the Old Muster Ground, 1862.

In the life of every one there are certain incidents being written upon the mind each day, from childhood until the end of life. They never fade nor grow old.

Today as I think and try to live back in the sixties, the scenes and the faces of that day will not grow old. In July, 1862 as a boy of seven, I am again at the Muster Ground at Burnt Chimneys. And everybody for miles around are here too. Since the last gathering here, there has been great improvements, the old field pines have been trimmed up, the under brush cut out and a speaker's stand built out of pine poles under a big oak tree and seats for the crowd around the stand made out of poles; that is, there were a few poles lying on the ground and others thrown across and here the people were expected to sit while the speaker told all about the war. There was fighting going on now. The Battle of Big Bethel had been fought, and Wyatt killed; the first North Carolinian, or Rebel, to give his life in behalf of state rights and the Southern cause. There were other fightings in Virginia along the Potomac and further on toward Washington. Excitement was running high. Rumor had it that the Yankees were running and Rebels winning!

These reports from the front were being broadcasted both over the North and the South, not by radios or telephones for we had none of these things then, but the news spread from one to another and by special couriers on horseback, riding day and night, from the seat of war.

So at every gathering, at every muster ground, in all the states and in all the counties, both North and South, there were rumors of these things everywhere. And this day at Burnt Chimneys, we were to hear them straight from the great speaker, who would soon take the stand and tell us all about it, and such things were happening everywhere.

All at once there were yells and shouts from the crowds around the speaker's stand. Everybody rose to their feet, and was looking and many of them running west up the big road toward Rutherfordton, or as it was then called Rutherford Town. There was a might "huzzing" in that direction, for the speaker of the day, escorted by all the Rutherford Townites and a host of others from all upper Rutherford were coming. The procession met the runners from our place, Burnt Chimneys; the hurrahs increased and the "Rebel yells" were deafening. The dogs were barking for all the settlement dogs, hounds and curs, were there. The incoming procession was, for the most part on horse back, a few old time carriages and in one of these was the speaker of the day. In front of this carriage as it moved toward us was a man riding a large gray horse carrying a flag; not the stars and stripes, but the bars and stripes. The procession stopped in front of the speaker's stand. And into the air went one Rebel yell after another which floated out over the hills and dales around the old muster ground. That grand old band, composed of the Burnt Chimney Grays, with their old drum, a fife, a flute and a fiddle or two, touched the notes of that now famous old war song, "I'll take my stand in Dixie Land, Look a-way, Look a-way, I'll live and Die in Dixie Land, Look a-way, Look a-way, etc.

It died away and there was quiet, for the speaker of the hour was ascending the stand and as he made his bow, there were other Rebel yells heard and the speaking was on.

Now I did not care for the speaking, I wanted to look around. Boys do, you know, when they go to big gatherings and this was an exceptional one, for there were the most folks there, I had ever seen. Uncle Johnny Watkins and Aunt Julie and their children were there. They had two children, one boy, Thos. Jefferson and one girl, Mattie. Mattie was the oldest of the two and was most grown up. She was wearing long dresses. In the sixties it was the custom for the girls to go into long dresses at from twelve to fifteen, but now they go into short ones from two to forty. Mattie was fourteen. And it was said that she had a beau, but Aunt Julie and Tom, said it was not so. We had called Thos. Jefferson, (Tom) for short. And Tom said, "No Mat, ain't go no beau. Bill Sniffles does come to our house Sunday evenings, but he talks to Pa about calves, cows and planting corn and things, but I did see him last Sunday looking at Mat, for she was all dressed up and come right out on the porch where Bill and Pa were sitting and looked at Bill and sorter laughed, she did. Bill smiled and looked at Mat and took off his hat. I could see he swallowed kinder hard and tried to spit out on the ground, but it went on the porch floor; and he said "och-O!" and got up and rubbed it off with his foot." Now I guess this is so for Tom told it to me while we were walking over the muster ground and Tom never did lie to me. Tom was about five or six years old and boys know lots about courting, dogs, and things at this age. I did and so did Tom. We had stopped right in the road just below where the speaking was going on. That is, in the old Shelby road about where the square in Forest City, now ends. Tom, after he had told me about Mat's beau, or rather that she didn't have a beau, looked down this road and saw Dixie, that was Tom's old dog, trotting off down that road, head up and looking at something. Tom said, "what's that down 'yander'?" I looked, I did and right about a hundred yards down that road was a crowd of men and some women, horses, wagons, dogs and a few children. They were all huddled up together. Most of them were looking toward the speaker's stand, like they were trying to hear the speech but they did not come up close. Tom said, "Less go down there" and we did, Tom and I and Dixie. We had not reached them, when out came a big old yellow cur dog with his bristles up and tail curled and growling and "kinder" barking. Tom said "less go back," but we couldn't, for that old dog was almost on us. Old Dixie was standing right between us

and had his bristles up, wasn't barking but was growling like a mad hyena. Tom and I caught him by the collar, but Dixie was not trying to run at the other dog, but was standing by his guns, for he never moved, but the way he growled and looked at that old yellow dog, must have scared old yellow, for he stopped. All the crowd down on the east end was now watching the dogs and Tom and I.

Out stepped a big burly looking boy or man, in front of the crowd down the road and walked up the road toward us after his old yellow dog and called, "Yank, Yank", for that was the name of this old yellow dog and the dog belonged to that fellow. His name was Sid Gitsome. Now Sid Gitsome was about twenty-one years old, had some white looking fine beard all over his face about two or three inches long. It was not even for some places was longer than others and thin in spots and thick in spots and around his mouth it was reddish or yellow. Sid chewed tobacco and this fine "fuzz" or hair was tinged with the juice from the tobacco, making it about the same color as his dog's hair. As he and that old yellow dog of his looked at Dixie, Tom and I, he looked hideous to me and his picture would be the same to me. Now Tom and I could not move a peg as we had hold of Dixie's collar. Dixie would not move, only looked at them and continued to growl so hideously that I thought old "Yank" was scared, and do now, for he raised his head a little higher but didn't bark or growl much, but just yawned out some kind of lonesome sound like a yawn of a tired man behind the plow handles on a hot summer day in the late afternoon. I thought he was scared and Tom did for he said so. And then it was that Sid Gitsome flashed his eyes at Tom and said: "You little 'Rebel, my Yank dog can whip any old Rebel dog on Burnt Chimney's Muster Ground; and I can whip any rebel up yonder in that crowd, all by myself." I replied, "you can't, you old Union Scalawag, for me and Tom were up there just now and we saw William Buster and his dog up there and you can't whip him." Tom said, "No you can't." Tom said "My dog, Dixie, can whip your Yellow Yank, that's what he can do." I said "You can't whip nothing, for you are afraid, just like your old yellow Yank dog, he's scared now, don't you see him trembling?" He wasn't, but I wanted to make Sid think so. But that old yellow was not scared, but he just did not care to jump on old Dixie. There is something even in dogology that each understand. Old Yellow could tell from the steady look of old Dixie that if he jumped on him he would have a hard fight. Dixie was not a high dog, but was as the old folks used to say, "built from the ground up," short legs, heavy body, big head and the most powerful jaw I ever saw on any dog, and very square mouth but rather broad. If he ever got a good hold on anything he would never turn loose. Old Yank was of a different type. He was high, had long legs, slim body, active and very lithe. We liked to call him "Old Yellow" because it made Sid madder every time we called his dog yellow. Sid was a Union Scalawag and liked Yankees and had named his dog Yank for that very reason. Some one of the boys about the speaker's stand must have seen me and Tom down on the east road and saw that there was going to be a dog fight for all boys in those days loved to see dogs fight. It was but a short time till this news spread all round over Burnt Chimneys Muster ground, for there came a drove of Rebel boys from up toward the speaking and from the south end where there was an old pear tree, and the pears were ripe and good; another and bigger bunch than that crowd from the west of the speaker's stand came. They all circled around Tom and I and Dixie; except toward the Shelby road, where they left a space, making a half moon figure.

(Continued next Week)

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