

LOOKING BACKWARD

Some Memories of Forgotten Heroes and Heroines Evolved by
Monuments and Old Plantations of the Sandhills

By BION BUTLER.

If you happen down the Aberdeen road and drift out on the hill toward the old Bethesda Presbyterian church you will come upon an historic spot. There a century ago was the old Solemn Grove Academy, one of the first spots in the state that undertook to set up a school which should start the boys on the road to learning. To Solemn Grove came boys from many places, among the number William Graham, Secretary of the Navy in the cabinet of President Fillmore. The Grahams were men of caliber. The father, Gen. Joseph Graham, came down into North Carolina from Pennsylvania, and at twenty-one years of age he was a general in the Revolutionary Army, and in one engagement had received six saber wounds and three bullets. In an encounter with the British down on Raft Swamp, not far from Fayetteville, the young fellow, with 136 men, defeated and scattered a detachment of the enemy of over six hundred. The old chaps were handy on the day when trouble came, and they stirred up a lot of it around here in the Sandhills country

JOSEPHUS DANIELS' PREDECESSORS

North Carolina has had five members of the cabinet, and all of them held the one office of Secretary of the Navy. John Branch was the first. He was in Jackson's cabinet. Like Graham he was also Governor of his state before going to the navy, and a senator of the United States. Branch, after holding nearly all the political offices from cabinet officer down to the legislature of his own state, was later governor of Florida, which had come over to the United States from Spain while he was governor of North Carolina. George E. Badger was Harrison's secretary of the Navy. He came from Raleigh, and was in the United States Senate, like his predecessors in the navy from North Carolina, James C. Dobbin, the fourth Secretary of the Navy from North Carolina, was a neighbor. He went to Washington from Cumberland County. He had been in Congress for one term, and declined a re-election. Then he was chosen by his county to be a representative in the legislature at Raleigh, and there he became speaker of the house. Afterward Pierce gave him a place in the cabinet, where he stayed four years. Josephus Daniels, appointed to the navy by Wilson, is the first North Carolina man to step into such prominent place without the preliminary experience of minor political office holding. It is interesting, too, that Secretary Daniels is the first of the North Carolina cabinet officers to have a real navy on his hands, and to have any real work to do with it, for all the rest of the Carolina men ruled a navy that was insignificant in its dimensions and inactive in its career.

A DISPATCH RIDER'S DUEL

Yet it is not always the man who figures in the prominent things that is

the great man. On farther out beyond Solemn Grove school is a farm that has a bit of history as indicative of human courage when its story is told, as anything around this corner of the Sandhills. Alex Blue was a young fellow in the confederate army. He is of the Blues that are numerous in Moore and Hoke Counties, and of that same blood that has been making its name known on various occasions in the United States. Alex Blue went out when he was a young fellow, and the fortunes of war made of him a dispatch bearer for his commander. One day he found himself carrying dispatches from one officer to another. In the course of his ride he found himself obliged to cross a bit of ground on which he suddenly saw a skirmishing party of federals flash into view. Alex Blue was a good rider, and he had a horse he was proud of. The federals rode after him, and he rode from them. His horse showed its breeding, and drew away from most of them, but one persistent fellow pressed the dispatch bearer mighty hard. Blue realized that he carried important documents, for the engagement that was going on was a severe one, and he wanted to get his message safe to the destination. He saw that the pursuing federal had a good horse and that the horse had a skillful rider. He recognized that it was a horse race and a duel, and that it must be completed in a very brief period. He turned in his saddle and brought up his carbine as the federal soldier prepared to shoot. The guns crackled almost simultaneously. Blue escaped, but the federal dropped from his mount. The race had narrowed to the two of them. At each end of the ground stood witnesses of the opposing armies. It was a dangerous place for the courier, and a dangerous place for the federal soldier if he happened to be living. Alex Blue wheeled his horse, turned, went to the help of the injured enemy, sat him up, gave him a drink from his own canteen, and then mounted and rode off to his own side. I do not recall how the affair terminated, but it is my opinion the federal soldier was rescued by his own troops who were permitted to take him away without molestation.

No matter about the detail. It is the magnanimity shown on the field of battle by one soldier to another. The humanity which recognizes that a wounded man is no longer an enemy but a fellow creature, and which takes the chances to succor an enemy when he is no longer dangerous, but in need of help. It is not the bigness of the thing a man does, but the sentiment he shows when he does it that counts, and I never get out into the Blue settlement but I think of that service shown his foeman by Alex Blue, the boy who carried the messages in the civil war. He died not very long ago, but he will be remembered in history un-



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