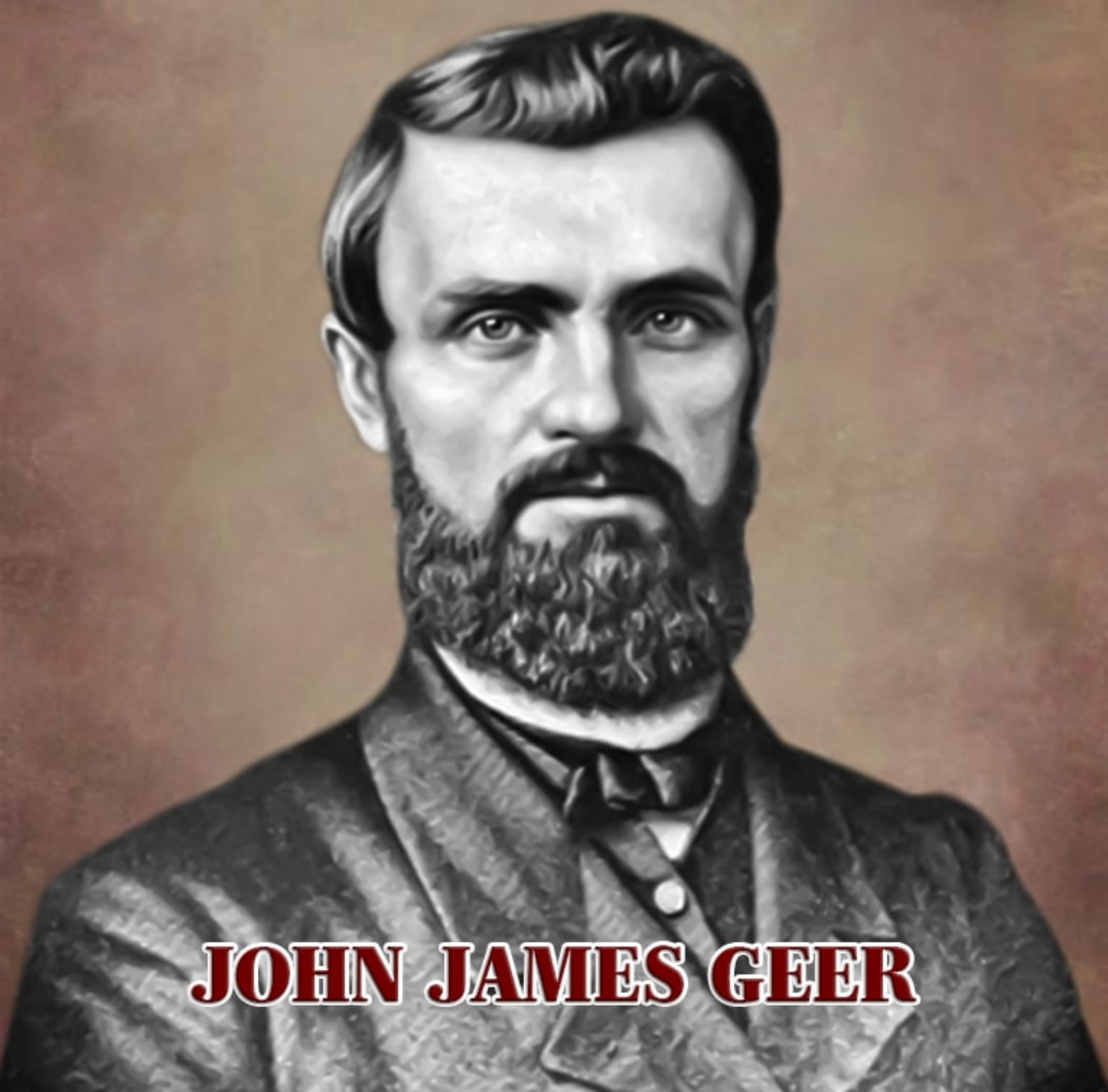


THE WORLD AT WAR
BEYOND THE LINES
A YANKEE PRISONER LOOSE IN DIXIE



JOHN JAMES GEER

Beyond the Lines

A Yankee Prisoner Loose in Dixie

John James Geer



John J. Leers

PREFACE.

In presenting the following narrative of suffering endured while a prisoner in the so-called Southern Confederacy, the principal object had in view by the author, is to place before those into whose hands this volume may come, a plain, straightforward, unvarnished account of *facts*.

In regard to the workings and results of that system of human bondage to which our country owes its present difficulties, there have been so many mistaken ideas, statements, and theories, that it has become the duty of every true and loyal man to expose the truth; or, speaking with more correctness, to strip from the hideous skeleton of Slavery all its gaily painted and deceptive cloaks and masks, and to exhibit it in all its ghastly repulsiveness.

It is my purpose in the succeeding pages to narrate simply how, after being captured at the battle of Shiloh, or Pittsburg Landing, I was, on the most frivolous charges, tried for my life before several prominent Rebel Generals, among whom were Bragg and Beauregard; how I was subsequently chained with negro chains and cast into military prisons and common jails; how, escaping from these, and in company with Lieutenant A. P. COLLINS, I made my way to the swamps; how we lived in these malarious marshes for three weeks; how we were hunted with bloodhounds; how we were assisted by the slaves in our flight, and lastly, how, being recaptured, we spent weary months in confinement, and were finally released on exchange from our dreadful captivity.

To all those friends who have cheered him since his return home with kind words and deeds, the author begs leave to extend his warmest thanks,—but more especially to Rev. ALEXANDER CLARK, Editor of *Clark's School Visitor*, who revised and arranged the Manuscripts for the press, and to whose scholarly abilities this volume owes so much. He desires also to testify to like kindness on the part of Rev. W. B. WATKINS, A. M., and MILO A. TOWNSEND, Esq., of New Brighton, Pennsylvania, whose friendship has laid him under a debt of grateful remembrance.

J. J. GEER.

SPRINGFIELD, OHIO, *June, 8, 1863.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

[CHAPTER I.](#)

Leave Camp Dennison—Up the Tennessee—Under the Enemy's Fire—Attacked in Force—A Struggle for Liberty—Captured. 21-29

[CHAPTER II.](#)

First Sight of a Rebel Camp—Arraigned before Generals Jackson, Bragg, Hardee, Beauregard, and Johnston—A Storm in Camp—Bayoneting a Sleeping Man (?)—Interior of a Rebel Prison—"Calico Bill"—An Escape—Rebel Exaggerations. 30-44

[CHAPTER III.](#)

Taken to Columbus, Mississippi—Visit from the Clergy—An Enthusiastic Mute—American Aristocracy—Secession Lies—Political and Ecclesiastical Prisoners—Reflections. 45-54

[CHAPTER IV.](#)

The Wounded from Shiloh—Inquisitive Negroes—An Abomination—A Striking Contrast—Tom—Attempted Escape—An Ingenious Darkey—Rebel Fare—The Irish Sergeant—Narrow Escape—Mending Clothes and Getting News—Horrible Scenes in Prison—A Discussion. 55-69

[CHAPTER V.](#)

Southern Inhumanity—A Prison Telegraph—Mobile—
Conversation with a Fire-Eater—Negro Sale Stables—A Bad
Sign—Mule-Beef—Montgomery—In the Penitentiary—Felon
Soldiers—Hanging for Theft—Visit to a Condemned
Prisoner—Who Shall Answer? 70-80

CHAPTER VI.

A New Prison—Murder of Lieutenant Bliss—In Irons—Yankee
Ingenuity—Rebel Ignorance—Parson Rogers—Faithful
Servants—Bold and Successful Escape of Prisoners—
Captain Troy—A Blindfold Journey—A Traitor. 81-90

CHAPTER VII.

Macon—A Southern Unionist in the Rebel Army—Beneath a
Georgia Sun—Secession Speech—Thoughts of Home—
Political Prisoners—Horrible Place—Offer of the Gospel—
Lieutenant A. P. Collins—Contemplated Escape—Robes of
Blood!—Pinning a Federal Soldier to the Ground. 91-
102

CHAPTER VIII.

Preparing the Way—Dave—Pepper, Matches, and Fish-hooks
—Exchange of Clothing—Passing the Guard-lines—
Frightened Horse—Halted—Passed—In the Woods—Hidden
in the Swamp—Pursued—A Night Journey in the Cane-
brake—Manna. 103-113

CHAPTER IX.

Seeking the Hills—Retreating to the Swamps—Pursued by Bloodhounds—Suffering from Hunger—A Dreary Night—An Answered Prayer—Singular Noise—Lost in the Cane-brake—A Dismal Journey—A Dream—A Surprise—Wanderings and Wearyings in the Wilderness—A Comforter Present—Hope and Cheer—A Cotton-field—A Friend in Need—Negro Music—A Feast in the Night—An Intelligent Slave—Advice to Fugitives. 114-130

CHAPTER X.

Pursued by Horses, Hounds, and Men—Another Night in the Cane-brake—An Alligator—A Pleasant Discovery—The Pass-word—Slaves at Work—A Negro Supper—Important Information—A Panther—A Chase to avoid a Chase—Bloodhounds Again—Fourth-of-July Dinner—Dismal Night in the Ruins of a Meeting-house. 131-142

CHAPTER XI.

Nearing the Coast—Dangerous Predicament—Suspicious Company—A Fugitive Conscript—Clay-eating Officials—The Squire—Arrested—Mess No. 44, *alias* Mr. Meeser—Acquitted—Placed under Guard—In Chains Again—A Forced March—Before the Court—A Union Speech in Dixie—Better Fare—Southern Superstition—A Slave at Prayer. 143-157

CHAPTER XII.

Christian Fellowship—Candid Conversation with a Slaveholder—Clay-eaters—A True Unionist—Secret

Organizations in the South—Washington and Randolph on Slavery—Aunt Katy—Religion and Republicanism—Pro-slavery Inexcusable in the North—A Distinguished Abolitionist. 158-169

CHAPTER XIII.

Classes in the Confederacy—Terror of a Name—Insurrection—Suppressing a Religious Meeting—The Safe Ground—A Sad Parting—Why Prisoners' Stories Differ—Effect of Church Division—The Darien Road—A Wealthy Planter. 170-181

CHAPTER XIV.

On the Cars—An Old Acquaintance—His Reasons for being in the Army—Meeting the Slave we Chased—Rebel Account of our Pursuit—Interesting Advertisement—In Jail Again—Captain Clay Crawford—Prison Fare—Rebel Barbarities—Taking Comfort. 182-193

CHAPTER XV.

An Earnest Prayer—What came of it—A Skeptic—Fiend's Stratagem—Reflections and Opinions on the "Peculiar Institution." 194-198

CHAPTER XVI.

The Rebel Reveille—A Horrid Dinner—A Reinforcement of Little Rebels—The Darkie's Explanation—An Exciting Trial—Hope of Release—Retribution—My Old Chains doing good Service. 199-209

CHAPTER XVII.

Sufferings of Captives—Shooting a Deaf Man—A Terrible Punishment—Arguments on Slavery—Opinions of Celebrated Men—A Sabbath-School in Prison—A Loyal Lady—Pennsylvania a Pioneer—Emancipation—Our Prayer-Meetings—Rays of Sunshine. 210-237

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Slave's Ruse—The Richmond Enquirer—President's Proclamation—A Negro Prayer—A "Big Bug"—A Casibianca—Death of Mr. Eckels—Thoughts and Plans of Escape—Lieutenant Pittenger. 238-251

CHAPTER XIX.

Just Judgment—General Prentiss in Close Confinement—Northern Peace Men—Bear Story—In the Hospital—Old Aunt Susie—Sold Children—Without Bread, and Satisfied—What our Fathers thought—An Untrammelled Pulpit—Clay-eaters—Commissioners to Washington—Homeward Bound—An Irate Southron—My Yellow Angel—Our Journey—An Accident—Jeff. Davis' Coffin—Don't Know Myself—Safe at Home—Conclusion. 252-285

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

John J. Geer [Frontispiece](#)

“I attempted to roll quietly away from the wretch, ...”
[facing_page 39](#)

“We beheld the glistening eyes of the hounds, ...” [facing
page 139](#)

“One end of the chain was twined round my neck, ...”
[facing_page 150](#)

“In an instant there was an uproar, ...” [facing_page 154](#)

“The prisoner is thrown to the ground ...” [facing_page
211](#)

INTRODUCTION.

John James Geer was born in Rockbridge county, Virginia, June 1st, 1833. He is next to the youngest of a family of nine children. The father emigrated to Ohio when John was quite young, and settled in Shelby county, where he lived and labored as an industrious farmer for a long lifetime. Being in moderate circumstances, he was unable to educate his children as he wished, as their young hands were an indispensable help in the clearing and tilling of the land; but the lads wrought for themselves a training and discipline in the fields and at the fireside, such as made honest-hearted heroes of them.

Though this tuition may not be the most fashionable, it is far from being the least useful or influential in a nation like ours. The only external polish that will never grow coarse is the out-shining of inward purity and kindness. The law of love is a sufficient code of politeness and etiquette. The rarest soul-furnishing, and the most radiant and reliable loyalty, are virtuous intelligence, an appreciation of the true and the beautiful in Nature, in mind and morals, the utterance of generous impulses, the self-respect that prefers its own calm approval to the world's admiration and flattery. Such a heroism is purely democratic, and sets the price of its integrity too high to offer itself as a prize for party bidding! It stands like a granite pillar, strong, and straight, and upright. We may build on this, and stand secure for solid years. It is this untrammelled life the nation needs at this very time in the hearts of all her citizens.

Mr. Geer never received any lessons in the school of pretences. He never learned the art of deceiving or being deceived. He studied something deeper of the world while his hands held the plough that furrowed its surface. He gained more instruction from the leaves on the forest trees than from the leaves of printed books. He cultivated at one and the same time his own mind, and the soil of his father's farm. His surroundings were the pictures and poetries of Nature. His eye saw no shams, his ear heard no complaints, his heart knew no hypocrisies. Trained in such a school, he became a thinker and a worker; his associations were altogether with plain and practical people; he was never flushed with feverish fancies, nor discouraged at any disappointments. Always cheerful, as only a busy doer and darer can be, he grew into manhood, full-built, tough-muscled, keen-nerved, and strong-minded. He acquired by hygienic habits a "constitution" that needed never an "amendment." He shaped, all unconsciously to himself, a moral character as honorable as it was humble; yet it was such as recognized in the minutest particular, and exacted to the fullest degree, the claims of a common brotherhood.

Pure democracy, like all living, blossoming, fruit-bearing growths, flourishes best in the country. A principle that strikes root in an hour in the hotbed of the city, is apt to wilt and die in the sunshine of the open world. Aristocracy may be plaited into politics; but it takes integrity and fellow-hood for web and woof of republicanism. Young Geer was a democrat, in the honest signification of the term. Though poor and sunburnt, hard-fisted and plain-worded, he learned

to feel that no man in the republic was his superior in rights—that no man in the republic was his inferior in privileges. The truth of Holy Writ, that declares “all nations to be of one blood,” was his confession of faith in conscience and Christianity. The spirit of the Declaration of Independence, that “all men are created free and equal,” was his political platform. These high authorities gave him early and earnest boldness as a friend of human liberty.

At the age of eighteen, he was called to the work of the Gospel ministry. He passed into this work, not as a mere *profession*, by the paths marked out by ecclesiastics,—not by college carpets and seminary shades,—but as the early preachers were called, so was he, from his daily avocation. His inherent firmness made him an unyielding, if not an aggressive Christian. He stemmed a strong current of opposition from the beginning of his ministry. His independent manner gave offence to rowdy transgressors, and frequently was he threatened and waylaid by the very doers of the deeds he made it a business to denounce in his sermons. But he wavered not from his sense of duty.

One of his first and truest friends was the Rev. R. M. DALBY, a well-known minister and Temperance reformer in South-western Ohio. These two men were acknowledged leaders in the war of annihilation against King Alcohol and his conscripted hosts. For years they were joined in word and work in the good cause of Temperance, and were separated only when, in the spring of 1861, Geer heard his wounded country’s cry for help, and quickly stepped to a place in the front rank of her brave defenders. His well-tried associate in

battling against wrong, Mr. Dalby, was left behind now, only because he was physically unable to march to the rescue.

Before entering the army of the Union, Mr. Geer had spent some ten years in the ministry, in and around the city of Cincinnati. During that time he received about eleven hundred members into the church. He was eminently successful as a revivalist. When Fort Sumpter was fired upon, he was stationed as pastor of the George Street Methodist Protestant Church, in Cincinnati. When the news of the outrage was received at the Queen City, the pastor of George Street Church vowed he was a United States soldier until either himself or the rebellion should be crushed. He began recruiting at once for the Army of Freedom, and was as successful as he had been in marshaling forces for the Army of Peace.

Until this time he had been unwilling to interfere with the "peculiar institution" of the South. But the moment the Stars and Stripes were insulted by the proud power, that moment a new resolve was made, to hate and to hurt the accursed thing henceforward, until the last vestige of it should be obliterated from American soil!

Captain Geer is an earnest man. He engaged in the war, not for position or popularity, but as a soldier. Although he started into the service as Chaplain, he was willing to resign that responsible office to the charge of another; and at once accepted a position that promised more excitement and adventure in days of battle. He was appointed Assistant-Adjutant General on the Staff of General Buckland, which

commission he held when he was wounded and captured at Shiloh.

In these days of adventure and sacrifice, when the noblest men in the nation are made to suffer for country's sake, it is shameful to see how certain northern people and papers, professing to be loyal, are in sympathy with the arch-treason of the Secessionists. However well-attested may be the statements of surviving sufferers,—and no matter how fair the reputation of the man who dares to denounce the Slaveholders' Rebellion,—there are lurking copperheads with viper tongues to hiss their venomous abuses on all the brave soldiers who have bled under the Federal banner! From the liberty to talk treason, slander the Administration, and abuse the soldiers—O God, deliver us! The nation cries for *liberty*—not license—a liberty that is always loyal to God and this Government—a liberty to love and bless the poor, the outcast, the suffering, and the oppressed!

It may not be amiss to append the following extracts from letters which will explain themselves:

“SPRINGFIELD, OHIO, MAY 3, 1863.

“*To all whom it may concern:—*

“The undersigned, ministers of the Gospel in the Methodist Protestant Church, take pleasure in certifying that Captain John J. Geer is also a minister in the same church—that he is in good standing, and that he is a man of moral probity and Christian character. Some of us have known him for many years as a reputable, useful, pious man. We are all

personally acquainted with him, and we have no hesitancy in recommending him to personal and public confidence."

REV. GEORGE BROWN, D. D.

REV. A. H. BASSETT,

Ag't M. P. Book Concern.

REV. A. H. TRUMBO,

Assistant Ag't M. P. Book Concern.

REV. D. B. DORSEY, M. D.,

Editor *Western Methodist Protestant*."

"OFFICE OF MILITARY COMMISSION,
Memphis, Tenn, May 11, 1863.

* * * * * "The large number of men he recruited for my regiment, and the hardships which he endured, to uphold the Flag of the Free, point out Captain Geer to the historian as a brave and true man. * * * But two days before the memorable battle of Shiloh, he was captured while making a bold and vigorous dash at the enemy, within two miles of our encampment. * * * * The tears are now filling my eyes as I look back upon that bloody battle-field, and remember the havoc and slaughter of my heroic boys of the Forty-Eighth!

"The brave men who, upon that occasion, maintained the fortunes of our bleeding country, have ever since been the subjects of persecution and calumny by those base cowards who ran from the battle-field and hid themselves in ravines and gulches at Shiloh, and the contemptible traitors whose tongues are as the tongues of serpents at home.

"Your sincere friend,

PETER J. SULLIVAN,

Colonel 48th Reg't Ohio Volunteers."

Since his return from Dixie, Captain Geer and Lieutenant William Pittenger (one of the survivors of that heroic scouting party sent into the heart of Georgia by General Mitchell), have been doing good service for the Union cause in the North by public lectures. Both are well-tried soldiers and effective speakers. Both are temporarily disabled, but expect soon to re-enter the army. Lieutenant Pittenger has prepared a volume of his experience, as a prisoner in the South, which will be a desirable companion to the book whose thrilling pages are now opened to *you*, reader. Turn forward, and read.

A. C.

CHAPTER I.

Leave Camp Dennison—Under the Enemy's Fire—Attacked in Force—A Struggle for Liberty—Captured.

On the 17th of February, 1862, the Forty-eighth Ohio regiment of volunteer infantry, under command of Colonel P. G. Sullivan, left Camp Dennison, landing at Paducah, Kentucky, and on the 4th of March, was ordered to Savannah, Tennessee. As our fleet made its way up the river, it was a sight at once grand and beautiful. It was composed of one hundred large steamers, laden to the guards with soldiers, cattle, and munitions of war. The river was at high water mark. Through its surging waters our noble vessels ploughed their way, sending forth vast volumes of smoke, which shadowed and sooted the atmosphere from hill to hill across the river valley. Over our heads waved proudly the old banner—emblem of the free. All hearts seemed anxious to meet the foe who had sought to strike down that flag, and the hopes and liberties of which it is representative.

A cry was heard on board that the enemy was near. A moment more, and he opened fire upon us, to which we very promptly replied, and with good effect, for he soon dispersed, while none of our men received injury.

Continuing our way onward we stopped at Hamburg on the 11th of March; but, owing to the great freshet, were unable to disembark, and the next day were obliged to fall back to Pittsburg, where we effected a landing on the 13th. In the mean time, I was appointed on the staff of Colonel

Ralph D. Buckland, then acting as Brigadier of the Fourth Brigade, under General Sherman, who commanded the First Division. Most of us landed by the 15th, and parties were sent out every day to reconnoitre, and many returned, reporting fights with the enemy, and the capture of prisoners, horses, and other valuables.

On the 28th, we had quite a bloody conflict in a cotton-field, belonging to Mr. Beach, who was the owner of a small lot of cotton. The rebels had robbed him of all his horses, pork, and wheat, leaving him nothing but the cotton and a small amount of corn, which the Government intended to purchase. But when we were dispatched for it, we found that the rebels, who were now in full retreat, had rolled the cotton against a corn-crib, and set both on fire. The next day we had a fight near the same spot. Again, the next day, a reconnaissance showed the enemy to be in full force. On the 3d of April, the Fourth Brigade was sent out, and the skirmishers who were deployed, were soon fired upon. Col. Buckland then sent me forward to order the two companies to retreat. One of these I found was already doing so, under the command of the Major, who was in advance. The company belonging to the Seventy-second regiment stood their ground, awaiting orders.

When I rode to the top of the hill, I could see the enemy about two hundred yards distant. The lieutenant of the Seventy-second was holding his men in readiness, and just as I reached them, they arose and opened fire, at which the rebels retreated to the right, evidently intending to flank us. But this was an unfortunate movement for them, as they

had not proceeded far when they encountered Major Crockett, of the Seventy-second, with two hundred men, by whom they were repulsed with heavy loss. By this time I had come up with the brigade. Buckland dispatched me immediately to order Crockett to fall back, but to continue fighting while retreating. As I proceeded on my way to Crockett—who, indeed, was a brave and daring officer—I met a lady of advanced age, in great distress. She was wringing her hands and crying:

“Oh, my son! Oh, my son! Save me and my poor son!”

I rode forward to Crockett, and found that he had repulsed the enemy, and was falling back in order.

Being alone, and in advance of the retreating companies, I again encountered the old lady on the same spot where I first saw her. Inquiring the cause of her grief, I learned that the rebels had been at her house, representing themselves as Union men, and that she had expressed herself to them, without disguise or reserve. They had thereupon seized her son, tied him on a horse, and bore him away, intending to press him into their service. My heart ached at the recital of this sad story, and at the thought of the suffering and agony to which so many families, between the two great armies, would be subjected. My sincere prayer to God, was that he would sustain the right, and send confusion amidst the foes of freedom and humanity. The old lady seemed very apprehensive they would learn that she had divulged to me the facts alluded to. Thus it is by *fear* that the loyal in heart are kept in submission. Thus, the tyrant's power rules and dominates in the South. Wherever oppression and tyranny

reign, they must have for their basis, violence and brute force—and these beget fear. It is as true that fear casts out love, as it is that “love casts out fear.”

We returned to camp, and that night we felt confident that our pickets were in danger. The dreary hours passed slowly away, bringing at last the light of another morning. Our pickets were then extended; and on returning from this duty, I remarked to Buckland that I believed we would be attacked before night. But he thought not, and requested me to retire to my tent, and seek repose. I went, but concluded to write to my wife. About two o'clock that afternoon, the rebels opened fire upon our picket. I instantly mounted my horse that I had left standing at the door, and rode with all speed to the picket line, where I discovered that the rebels had captured Lieutenant Herbert and seven privates. The Seventy-second, Forty-eighth, and Seventieth were soon rallied; and I thought if no fight now ensued, it would be no fault of mine, eager as I was for the fray. So I rode rapidly up the Tennessee river, in order to strike the Hamburg road, aware that I could see up that road about one mile, and thus discover what was going on.

As I was proceeding, I perceived, at a little distance, two rebels, who fled at my approach. I soon reached the road, and discovered, to my great surprise, that it was lined with rebels as far as I could see. I soon wheeled my horse, and, with accelerated speed, made my way back to General Buckland. He again dispatched me to inform Major Crockett to retreat in order.

On my way thither, these words greeted my ear: