

one of the company "H" tents of the Sixth cavalry, and a voice inquired: "Is this John Gorman's tent, please?"

Seated on the ground inside, busy at his revolver with screw driver, oil can and a bit of a rag, was a man of 40, tanned and brown, his uniform showing a score of grease spots and dirt-stains. He looked up, suspended his work, and queried in answer:

"Well, what if it is?"

"I'm to stop with you, the captain says."

"Oh! the captain says so! Well, the captain may go to! He's h— on the fight, but what bizness has he to send a fresh fish around here without a word to me? You skate out-o' this!"

The boy drew back but did not walk away, and after three or four minutes, Gorman called out to him:

"What the devil are you standing there for? Why don't you come in and show yourself?"

"Don't—don't be mad at me," said the boy, in coaxing tones, as he entered the tent. "I just got down here an hour ago, and the captain said you had no chum. I wish—I wish—"

"Well, I'll be cussed!" growled the veteran, as he straightened up and gave the "fresh fish" a good looking over. "So they've sent me a baby to chum with—a baby just off the grass of his papa's northern meadow! Why, you pale-faced, lank-bodied young galoot, I hain't got no time to sing ye to sleep and feed ye on pap! You jest got down and wish you was home again, eh? I don't wonder. The recruiting officer who passed you along ought to hev sent yer baby clothes by express!"

As a matter of fact the boy was pale-faced and slender, but he had a flashing blue eye, a determined mouth, and the red blood of indignation crept into his cheeks as he calmly surveyed the man before him.

"Don't gimme any sass, young cub!" warned Gorman, as he held up a finger.

"I'm not going to," he answered, "but you ought to be willing to give me a show."

"Give ye a show—bah! Mebbe ye ain't to blame, but the idea of sendin' nursin' babies down here to lick such fighters as the Johnny Rebs! They must be robbin' the cradle and the grave in your country. Give ye a show! Why, a week in camp will send ye to the hospital to die, let alone any fightin'! Yer folks must have wanted to git rid of ye mighty bad."

"I have no mother or father," replied the boy.

"Oh, ye haven't? Did yer uncle coax ye to enlist and lie as to yer age?"

"My uncle used me like a dog, and I ran away and enlisted, and here I am. If you don't want me I'll go back to the captain."

"Say, bub," continued the veteran, as a smile crept over his face, "dump yer baggage down over thar. I didn't know ye was an orphan, an' I like the way ye speak up. Ye ain't as big and stout as ye oter be, but mebbe ye'll pull through all O.K. I never chummed with a fresh fish yet, and a boy at that, but will try it once. Wha's yer name?"

"Joseph Dixon."

"Then it's Joe, in coure, and ye kin call me Jack. I'll talk more with ye later on."

And one evening three days later, as the veteran came off picket duty, he said:

"We shall be movin' down to the front in a day or two more, and once we git thar' thar's sure to be some fightin'. I'm sorry ye haven't more time to put in here. Lands alive, sonny, but when the old Sixth lines up fur a charge, yer heart will go beatin' a thousand times a minit! I

was so skeert in my fust fight that I lost carbine, saber, revolver and all, and I didn't get over lookin' white for a month. I shan't expect ye to do much fightin', but ye mustn' flunk on me."

"I won't," was the quiet reply.

"I've seen fellers shet their eyes tight and their teeth hard and never strike a blow, but they didn't flunk. Bein' we are in the same net of fours, and ye are my number three man, I kin ride beside ye and help ye out. If ye don't git too skeert mebbe ye kin do a leetle shootin' with yer revolver, but I shan't look to see ye do much damage to anybody. Ye are only a boy, Joe, but ye ar' a trooper and belong to the Old Sixth, and nobody in our regiment ever flunked. D'ye think ye've got the sand to go through a fight?"

"I shall ride alongside of you," replied the boy in even tones.

"Because," continued Jack, insensibly dropping his voice almost to a whisper, "if ye felt any doubt about it thar's ways o' dodgin' a fight. Remember, I shan't expect much o' ye in yer fust, but don't flunk. If a chum of mine showed the white feather I think I'd kill him, even though he was only a boy."

Four days later they were at the front, and three days after their arrival the brigade was pushed forward to capture a ford on the river. As the column struck out on its march an old trooper noticed the white-faced boy and the many evidences of "fresh fish" about him, and a second glance told him that John Gorman was his mentor. In a spirit of devilment the trooper called out:

"Did ye git word that we was out on a raid after nursin' hotties?"

"Who ye gabbin' at?" growled Gorman.

"I see ye brought the baby along to try the hotties. Is it a gal or a boy?"

"How ye sellin' yawp today?"

"I'm tradin' even up for rattle boxes!"

"Don't mind the slab-sided son of a gun," said the veteran to his boy chum, as he crowded number two out of place to get alongside of him. "I'll bet he was in camp for six months before he even saw the footprint of a Johnny reb, while you hain't bin over two weeks from home. How's yer feelin's, Joe?"

"I'm all right," was the reply. "Do you think we'll have a fight?"

"Sartin to, my boy. Custer is leadin', and when he leads he's lookn' fur a row. Jest keep cool, however. No use worryin' before we've seen a reb."

At the ford the First and Seventh regiments were dismounted and pushed forward, and as they began to drive the enemy back the Second dashed in and put him on the run. It was a sudden and complete surprise, but the federal troops were not left long in the enjoyment of their victory. The pursuit turned at bay, re-enforcements came up, and an hour after the first gun was fired 8,000 men were facing each other on the broad fields beyond the river.

"It's goin' to be a damned purty leetle set to!" said the veteran to his boy chum, after taking in the situation. "It's all cavalry, and thar'll be some saber-work to be long remembered. I'm sorry ye can't use yer toad-sticker, but ye'll hev to do the best ye kin. Ar' ye feelin' a sort o' goneeness, Joe?"

"A little," answered the boy, as he shut his teeth hard to keep his chin quiet.

"Wall, that ain't nothin'. Look along the lines and ye'll see lots o' chins shakin' and lots o' faces growin' pale. That's how waitin' tries the nerves. Whew! The Second has dismounted to fight behind that fence and the Seventh is off by the right wheel to get

in behind that grove. I ain't much on tactics myself, but I'll bet 10 to 5 that it won't be ten minutes before the old Sixth gits the word to charge. The fields is clear o' fences and ditches, and after we git started we'll go dust-in' along like a hurricane. Ye won't flunk on me, Joe?"

"No, I won't flunk," replied the boy, though he caught his breath at every word.

"Silence, there!" called an officer, as he caught the deep growl of the veteran's voice.

"Silence be damned!" muttered Gorman, as he gave a brief look over his shoulder. "I guess this boy wants to learn about a cavalry charge, and I guess it's my bizness to talk to him. Now, Joe, we'll soon git the word. When we start get a good grip of the reins, brace yer feet well in the stirrups and don't pull yer revolver till we smashes into 'em. If ye kin ride over anybody that'll help a leetle, yell as hard as ye kin, and if yer hoss goes down, lie flat beside him. Thar's the bugle!"

The Sixth formed two ranks front the lines dressed, and then came a minute of waiting. The rebel cavalry was shifting out from behind a barn and an orchard, at the far end of the long meadow. In the blue ranks the men were cursing below their breaths and the horses champing at their bits. Gorman looked his boy chum over again and leaned over to whisper:

"Custer will ride at the head of the line, and it'll be hotter'n hell when he smashes into 'em! Give your hoss his head when we get the word to charge. Sit up a leetle straighter. That's it. Yer left hand will hold the reins—so. Gad, boy, but ye ar' takin' it as cool as most o' 'em! I'm feelin' proud of ye!"

"Forward!" called the bugle, and then "Trot!" "Gallop!" and "Charge!"

Nine hundred horses swept up the green meadow, and 900 troopers were cheered by those left behind. "Steady—dress to the right—steady!" cautioned the officers, as the pace grew faster. Men and horses were equally excited—the one ready to shout and slash and cut—the other pulling at the reins to get ahead of the line.

As the order to "Charge!" ran along the lines the spurs went in deep, a yell broke from every trooper's throat, and the living wall swept forward with a momentum which nothing but a solid wall could check. Hip! hip! hip! as 900 sabers cut the air, and hip! hip! hip! as the gray lines closed up solidly to meet the crisis.

"Now, Joe, straight at 'em, and may God keep ye!" shouted the veteran, as they were within twenty feet of the rebel lines.

Next instant there was a crash, followed by shots, shouts, screams and the ring of steel. Fifty horses in the front ranks of friend and foe were knocked down and their riders trampled under foot. Then the flanks swung in toward the center, all order and alignment was lost, and a mad and desperate mob of 2,000 men began circling about a common center and hacking, slashing and shooting as they circled.

"Keep clus, Joe—keep clus to me!" shouted the veteran above the din of battle; and next instant he rose in his stirrups and slashed at an enemy whose saber point was within a foot of the boy's throat, and split his head from crown to chin.

Round and round circled the mob, almost hidden from sight by the smoke and dust, the blue slashing at the gray, and the gray slashing back. So, with yell and curse and scream of pain for ten minutes, and then the body began to break up and dissolve, and presently only the dead and wounded were left on that acre or two.