

My Cousin the Colonel

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Table of Contents

<u>My Cousin the Colonel</u>	1
<u>Thomas Bailey Aldrich</u>	2
<u>MY COUSIN THE COLONEL</u>	3
<u>I</u>	4
<u>II</u>	7
<u>III</u>	11
<u>IV</u>	13
<u>V</u>	18

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- I
- II
- III
- IV
- V

My Cousin the Colonel

MY COUSIN THE COLONEL

My Cousin the Colonel

I

Mrs. Wesley frequently embarrasses me by remarking in the presence of other persons—our intimate friends, of course—"Wesley, you are not brilliant, but you are good."

From Mrs. Wesley's outlook, which is that of a very high ideal, there is nothing uncomplimentary in the remark, nothing so intended, but I must confess that I have sometimes felt as if I were paying a rather large price for character. Yet when I reflect on my cousin the colonel, and my own action in the matter, I am ready with gratitude to accept Mrs. Wesley's estimate of me, for if I am not good, I am not anything. Perhaps it is an instance of my lack of brilliancy that I am willing to relate certain facts which strongly tend to substantiate this. My purpose, however, is not to prove either my goodness or my dulness, but to leave some record, even if slight and imperfect, of my only relative. When a family is reduced like ours to a single relative, it is well to make the most of him. One should celebrate him annually, as it were.

One morning in the latter part of May, a few weeks after the close of the war of the rebellion, as I was hurrying down Sixth Avenue in pursuit of a heedless horse-car, I ran against a young person whose shabbiness of aspect was all that impressed itself upon me in the instant of collision. At a second glance I saw that this person was clad in the uniform of a Confederate soldier—an officer's uniform originally, for there were signs that certain insignia of rank had been removed from the cuffs and collar of the threadbare coat. He wore a wide-brimmed felt hat of a military fashion, decorated with a tarnished gilt cord, the two ends of which, terminating in acorns, hung down over his nose. His butternut trousers were tucked into the tops of a pair of high cavalry boots, of such primitive workmanship as to suggest the possibility that the wearer had made them himself. In fact, his whole appearance had an impromptu air about it. The young man eyed me gloomily for half a minute; then a light came into his countenance.

"Wesley—Tom Wesley!" he exclaimed. "Dear old boy!"

To be sure I was Thomas Wesley, and, under conceivable circumstances, dear old boy; but who on earth was he?

"You don't know me?" he said, laying a hand on each of my shoulders, and leaning back as he contemplated me with a large smile in anticipatory enjoyment of my surprise and pleasure when I should come to know him. "I am George W. Flagg, and long may I wave!"

My cousin Flagg! It was no wonder that I did not recognize him.

When the Flagg family, consisting of father and son, removed to the South, George was ten years old and I was thirteen. It was twenty years since he and I had passed a few weeks together on grandfather Wesley's farm in New Jersey. Our intimacy began and ended there, for it had not ripened into letters; perhaps because we were too young when we parted. Later I had had a hundred intermittent impulses to write to him, but did not. Meanwhile separation and silence had clothed him in my mind with something of the mistiness of a half-remembered dream. Yet the instant Washington Flagg mentioned his name the boyish features began rapidly to define themselves behind the maturer mask, until he stood before me in the crude form in which my memory had slyly embalmed him.

Now my sense of kinship is particularly strong, for reasons which I shall presently touch upon, and I straightway grasped my cousin's hand with a warmth that would have seemed exaggerated to a bystander, if there had been a bystander; but it was early in the day, and the avenue had not yet awakened to life. As this bitter world goes, a sleek, prosperous, well-dressed man does not usually throw much heartiness into his manner when he is accosted on the street by so unpromising and dismal an object as my cousin Washington Flagg was that morning. Not at all in the way of sounding the trumpet of my own geniality, but simply as the statement of a fact, I will say that I threw a great deal of heartiness into my greeting. This man to me meant Family.

I stood curiously alone in the world. My father died before I was born, and my mother shortly afterwards. I had neither brother nor sister. Indeed, I never had any near relatives except a grandfather until my sons came along. Mrs. Wesley, when I married her, was not merely an only child, but an orphan. Fate denied me even a mother-in-law. I had one uncle and one cousin. The former I do not remember ever to have seen, and my association with the latter, as has been stated, was of a most limited order. Perhaps I should have had less

My Cousin the Colonel

sentiment about family ties if I had had more of them. As it was, Washington Flagg occupied the position of sole kinsman, always excepting the little Wesleys, and I was as glad to see him that May morning in his poverty as if he had come to me loaded with the title-deeds of those vast estates which our ancestors (I wonder that I was allowed any ancestors: why wasn't I created at once out of some stray scrap of protoplasm?) were supposed to have held in the colonial period. As I gazed upon Washington Flagg I thrilled with the sense that I was gazing upon the materialization in a concrete form of all the ghostly brothers and sisters and nephews and nieces which I had never had.

"Dear old boy!" I exclaimed, in my turn, holding on to his hand as if I were afraid that I was going to lose him again for another twenty years. "Bless my stars! where did you come from?"

"From Dixie's Land," he said, with a laugh. "Way down in Dixie."

In a few words, and with a picturesqueness of phrase in which I noted a rich Southern flavor, he explained the phenomenon of his presence in New York. After Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court-House, my cousin had managed to reach Washington, where he was fortunate enough to get a free pass to Baltimore. He had nearly starved to death in making his way out of Virginia. To quote his words, "The wind that is supposed to be tempered expressly for shorn lambs was not blowing very heavily about that time." At Baltimore he fell in with a former Mobile acquaintance, from whom he borrowed a sum sufficient to pay the fare to New York—a humiliating necessity, as my cousin remarked, for a man who had been a colonel in Stonewall Jackson's brigade. Flagg had reached the city before daybreak, and had wandered for hours along the water-front, waiting for some place to open, in order that he might look up my address in the Directory, if I were still in the land of the living. He had had what he described as an antediluvian sandwich the previous day at two o'clock, since which banquet no food had passed his lips.

"And I'll be hanged," he said, "if the first shop that took down its shutters wasn't a restaurant, with a cursed rib of roast beef, flanked with celery, and a ham in curl-papers staring at me through the window-pane. A little tin sign, with 'Meals at All Hours' painted on it—what did they want to go and do that for?—knocked the breath clean out of me. I gave one look, and ploughed up the street, for if I had stayed fifteen seconds longer in front of that plate-glass, I reckon I would have burst it in. Well, I put distance between me and temptation, and by and by I came to a newspaper office, where I cornered a Directory. I was on the way to your house when we collided; and now, Tom Wesley, for heaven's sake introduce me to something to eat. There is no false pride about me; I'd shake hands with a bone."

The moisture was ready to gather in my eyes, and for a second or two I was unable to manage my voice. Here was my only kinsman on the verge of collapse—one miserable sandwich, like a thin plank, between him and destruction. My own plenteous though hasty morning meal turned into reproachful lead within me.

"Dear old boy!" I cried again. "Come along! I can see that you are nearly famished."

"I've a right smart appetite, Thomas, there's no mistake about that. If appetite were assets, I could invite a whole regiment to rations."

I had thrust my hand under his arm, and was dragging him towards a small oyster shop, whose red balloon in a side street had caught my eye, when I suddenly remembered that it was imperative on me to be at the office at eight o'clock that morning, in order to prepare certain papers wanted by the president of the board, previous to a meeting of the directors. (I was at that time under-secretary of the Savonarola Fire Insurance Company.) The recollection of the business which had caused me to be on foot at this unusual hour brought me to a dead halt. I dropped my cousin's arm, and stood looking at him helplessly. It seemed so inhospitable, not to say cold-blooded, to send him off to get his breakfast alone. Flagg misinterpreted my embarrassment.

"Of course," he said, with a touch of dignity which pierced me through the bosom, "I do not wish to be taken to any place where I would disgrace you. I know how impossible I am. Yet this suit of clothes cost me twelve hundred dollars in Confederate scrip. These boots are not much to look at, but they were made by a scion of one of the first families of the South; I paid him two hundred dollars for them, and he was right glad to get it. To such miserable straits have Southern gentlemen been reduced by the vandals of the North. Perhaps you don't like the Confederate gray?"

"Bother your boots and your clothes!" I cried. "Nobody will notice them here." (Which was true enough, for in those days the land was strewn with shreds and patches of the war. The drivers and conductors of street cars wore overcoats made out of shoddy army blankets, and the dustmen went about in cast-off infantry caps.) "What

My Cousin the Colonel

troubles me is that I can't wait to start you on your breakfast."

"I reckon I don't need much starting."

I explained the situation to him, and suggested that instead of going to the restaurant, he should go directly to my house, and be served by Mrs. Wesley, to whom I would write a line on a leaf of my memorandum-book. I did not suggest this step in the first instance because the little oyster saloon, close at hand, had seemed to offer the shortest cut to my cousin's relief.

"So you're married?" said he.

"Yes—and you?"

"I haven't taken any matrimony in mine."

"I've been married six years, and have two boys."

"No! How far is your house?" he inquired. "Will I have to take a caar?"

"A 'caar'? Ah, yes—that is to say, no. A car isn't worth while. You see that bakery two blocks from here, at the right? That's on the corner of Clinton Place. You turn down there. You'll notice in looking over what I've written to Mrs. Wesley that she is to furnish you with some clothes, such as are worn by—by vandals of the North in comfortable circumstances."

"Tom Wesley, you are as good as a straight flush. If you ever come down South, when this cruel war is over, our people will treat you like one of the crowned heads—only a devilish sight better, for the crowned heads rather went back on us. If England had recognized the Southern Confederacy"—

"Never mind that; your tenderloin steak is cooling."

"Don't mention it! I go. But I say, Tom—Mrs. Wesley? Really, I am hardly presentable. Are there other ladies around?"

"There's no one but Mrs. Wesley."

"Do you think I can count on her being glad to see me at such short notice?"

"She will be a sister to you," I said warmly.

"Well, I reckon that you two are a pair of trumps. Au revoir! Be good to yourself."

With this, my cousin strode off, tucking my note to Mrs. Wesley inside the leather belt buckled tightly around his waist. I lingered a moment on the curbstone, and looked after him with a sensation of mingled pride, amusement, and curiosity. That was my Family; there it was, in that broad back and those not ungraceful legs, striding up Sixth Avenue, with its noble intellect intent on thoughts of breakfast. I was thankful that it had not been written in the book of fate that this limb of the closely pruned Wesley tree should be lopped off by the sword of war. But as Washington Flagg turned into Clinton Place, I had a misgiving. It was hardly to be expected that a person of his temperament, fresh from a four years' desperate struggle and a disastrous defeat, would refrain from expressing his views on the subject. That those views would be somewhat lurid, I was convinced by the phrases which he had dropped here and there in the course of our conversation. He was, to all intents and purposes, a Southerner. He had been a colonel in Stonewall Jackson's brigade. And Mrs. Wesley was such an uncompromising patriot! It was in the blood. Her great-grandfather, on the mother's side, had frozen to death at Valley Forge in the winter of 1778, and her grandfather, on the paternal side, had had his head taken off by a round-shot from his Majesty's sloop of war Porpoise in 1812. I believe that Mrs. Wesley would have applied for a divorce from me if I had not served a year in the army at the beginning of the war.

I began bitterly to regret that I had been obliged to present my cousin to her so abruptly. I wished it had occurred to me to give him a word or two of caution, or that I had had sense enough to adhere to my first plan of letting him feed himself at the little oyster establishment round the corner. But wishes and regrets could not now mend the matter; so I hailed an approaching horse-car, and comforted myself on the rear platform with the reflection that perhaps the colonel would not wave the palmetto leaf too vigorously, if he waved it at all, in the face of Mrs. Wesley.

My Cousin the Colonel

II

The awkwardness of the situation disturbed me more or less during the forenoon; but fortunately it was a half-holiday, and I was able to leave the office shortly after one o'clock.

I do not know how I came to work myself into such a state of mind on the way up town, but as I stepped from the horse-car and turned into Clinton Place I had a strong apprehension that I should find some unpleasant change in the facial aspect of the little red brick building I occupied— a scowl, for instance, on the brown-stone eyebrow over the front door. I actually had a feeling of relief when I saw that the facade presented its usual unaggressive appearance.

As I entered the hall, Mrs. Wesley, who had heard my pass-key grating in the lock, was coming down-stairs.

"Is my cousin here, Clara?" I asked, in the act of reaching up to hang my hat on the rack.

"No," said Mrs. Wesley. There was a tone in that monosyllable that struck me. "But he has been here?"

"He has been here," replied Mrs. Wesley. "May be you noticed the bell-knob hanging out one or two inches. Is Mr. Flagg in the habit of stretching the bell-wire of the houses he visits, when the door is not opened in a moment? Has he escaped from somewhere?"

"Escaped from somewhere!" I echoed. "I only asked; he behaved so strangely."

"Good heavens, Clara! what has the man done? I hope that nothing unpleasant has happened. Flagg is my only surviving relative—I may say our only surviving relative—and I should be pained to have any misunderstanding. I want you to like him."

"There was a slight misunderstanding at first," said Clara, and a smile flitted across her face, softening the features which had worn an air of unusual seriousness and preoccupation. "But it is all right now, dear. He has eaten everything in the house—that bit of spring lamb I saved expressly for you!—and has gone down town 'on a raid,' as he called it, in your second-best suit—the checked tweed. I did all I could for him."

"My dear, something has ruffled you. What is it?"

"Wesley," said my wife slowly, and in a perplexed way, "I have had so few relatives that perhaps I don't know what to do with them, or what to say to them."

"You always say and do what is just right."

"I began unfortunately with Mr. Flagg, then. Mary was washing the dishes when he rang, and I went to the door. If he IS our cousin, I must say that he cut a remarkable figure on the doorstep."

"I can imagine it, my dear, coming upon you so unexpectedly. There were peculiarities in his costume."

"For an instant," Clara went on, "I took him for the ashman, though the ashman always goes to the area door, and never comes on Tuesdays; and then, before the creature had a chance to speak, I said, 'We don't want any,' supposing he had something to sell. Instead of going away quietly, as I expected he would do, the man made a motion to come in, and I slammed the door on him."

"Dear! dear!"

"What else could I do, all alone in the hall? How was I to know that he was one of the family?"

"What happened next?"

"Well, I saw that I had shut the lapel of his coat in the door-jamb, and that the man couldn't go away if he wanted to ever so much. Wasn't it dreadful? Of course I didn't dare to open the door, and there he was! He began pounding on the panels and ringing the bell in a manner to curdle one's blood. He rang the bell at least a hundred times in succession. I stood there with my hand on the bolt, not daring to move or breathe. I called to Mary to put on her things, steal out the lower way, and bring the police. Suddenly everything was still outside, and presently I saw a piece of paper slowly slipping in over the threshold, oh, so slyly! I felt my hands and feet grow cold. I felt that the man himself was about to follow that narrow strip of paper; that he was bound to get in that way, or through the keyhole, or somehow. Then I recognized your handwriting. My first thought was that you had been killed in some horrible accident"—

"And had dropped you a line?"

"I didn't reason about it, Wesley; I was paralyzed. I picked up the paper, and read it, and opened the door, and Mr. Flagg rushed in as if he had been shot out of something. 'Don't want any?' he shouted. 'But I do! I want some

My Cousin the Colonel

breakfast! You should have heard him."

"He stated a fact, at any rate. To be sure he might have stated it less vivaciously." I was beginning to be amused.

"After that he was quieter, and tried to make himself agreeable, and we laughed a little together over my mistake—that is, HE laughed. Of course I got breakfast for him—and such a breakfast!"

"He had been without anything to eat since yesterday."

"I should have imagined," said Clara, "that he had eaten nothing since the war broke out."

"Did he say anything in particular about himself?" I asked, with a recurrent touch of anxiety.

"He wasn't particular what he said about himself. Without in the least seeing the horror of it, he positively boasted of having been in the rebel army."

"Yes—a colonel."

"That makes it all the worse," replied Clara.

"But they had to have colonels, you know."

"Is Mr. Flagg a Virginian, or a Mississippian, or a Georgian?"

"No, my dear; he was born in the State of Maine; but he has lived so long in the South that he's quite one of them for the present. We must make allowances for him, Clara. Did he say anything else?"

"Oh, yes."

"What did he say?"

"He said he'd come back to supper."

It was clear that Clara was not favorably impressed by my cousin, and, indeed, the circumstances attending his advent were not happy. It was likewise clear that I had him on my hands, temporarily at least. I almost reproach myself even now for saying "on my hands," in connection with my own flesh and blood. The responsibility did not so define itself at the time. It took the form of a novel and pleasing duty. Here was my only kinsman, in a strange city, without friends, money, or hopeful outlook. My course lay before me as straight as a turnpike. I had a great deal of family pride, even if I did not have any family to speak of, and I was resolved that what little I had should not perish for want of proper sustenance.

Shortly before six o'clock Washington Flagg again presented himself at our doorstep, and obtained admission to the house with fewer difficulties than he had encountered earlier in the day.

I do not think I ever saw a man in destitute circumstances so entirely cheerful as my cousin was. Neither the immediate past, which must have been full of hardships, nor the immediate future, which was not lavish of its promises, seemed to give him any but a momentary and impersonal concern. At the supper-table he talked much and well, exceedingly well, I thought, except when he touched on the war, which he was continually doing, and then I was on tenter-hooks. His point of view was so opposed to ours as to threaten in several instances to bring on an engagement all along the line. This calamity was averted by my passing something to him at the critical moment. Now I checked his advance by a slice of cold tongue, and now I turned his flank with another cup of tea; but I questioned my ability to preserve peace throughout the evening. Before the meal was at an end there had crept into Clara's manner a polite calmness which I never liked to see. What was I going to do with these two after supper, when my cousin Flagg, with his mind undistracted by relays of cream toast, could give his entire attention to the Lost Cause?

As we were pushing the chairs back from the table, I was inspired with the idea of taking our guest off to a cafe concert over in the Bowery—a volksgarten very popular in those days. While my whispered suggestion was meeting Clara's cordial approval, our friend Bleeker dropped in. So the colonel and Bleeker and I passed the evening with "lager-beer and Meyer-beer," as my lively kinsman put it; after which he spent the night on the sofa in our sitting-room, for we had no spare chamber to place at his disposal.

"I shall be very snug here," he said, smiling down my apologies. "I'm a 'possum for adapting myself to any odd hollow."

The next morning my cousin was early astir, possibly not having found that narrow springless lounge all a 'possum could wish, and joined us in discussing a plan which I had proposed overnight to Mrs. Wesley, namely, that he should hire an apartment in a quiet street near by, and take his meals—that was to say, his dinner—with us, until he could make such arrangements as would allow him to live more conveniently. To return South, where all the lines of his previous business connections were presumably broken, was at present out of the question.

My Cousin the Colonel

"The war has ruined our people," said the colonel. "I will have to put up for a while with a place in a bank or an insurance office, or something in that small way. The world owes me a living, North or South."

His remark nettled me a little, though he was, of course, unaware of my relations with the Savonarola Fire Insurance Company, and had meant no slight.

"I don't quite see that," I observed.

"Don't see what?"

"How the world contrived to get so deeply into your debt—how all the points of the compass managed it."

"Thomas, I didn't ask to be born, did I?"

"Probably not."

"But I was born, wasn't I?"

"To all appearances."

"Well, then!"

"But you cannot hold the world in general responsible for your birth. The responsibility narrows itself down to your parents."

"Then I am euchred. By one of those laws of nature which make this globe a sweet spot to live on, they were taken from me just when I needed them most—my mother in my infancy, and my father in my childhood."

"But your father left you something?"

"The old gentleman left me nothing, and I've been steadily increasing the legacy ever since."

"What did you do before the war?" inquired Clara sympathetically. His mention of his early losses had touched her.

"Oh, a number of things. I read law for a while. At one time I was interested in a large concern for the manufacture of patent metallic burial cases; but nobody seemed to die that year. Good health raged like an epidemic all over the South. Latterly I dabbled a little in stocks—and stocks dabbled in me."

"You were not successful, then?" I said.

"I was at first, but when the war fever broke out and the Southern heart was fired, everything that didn't go down went up."

"And you couldn't meet your obligations?"

"That wasn't the trouble—I couldn't get away from them," replied the colonel, with a winsome smile. "I met them at every corner."

The man had a fashion of turning his very misfortunes into pleasantries. Surely prosperity would be wasted on a person so gifted with optimism. I felt it to be kind and proper, however, to express the hope that he had reached the end of his adversity, and to assure him that I would do anything I could in the world to help him.

"Tom Wesley, I believe you would."

Before the close of that day Mrs. Wesley, who is a lady that does not allow any species of vegetation to accumulate under her feet, had secured a furnished room for our kinsman in a street branching off from Clinton Place, and at a moderate additional expense contracted to have him served with breakfast on the premises. Previous to this I had dined down town, returning home in the evening to a rather heavy tea, which was really my wife's dinner—Sheridan and Ulysses (such were the heroic names under which the two little Wesleys were staggering) had their principal meal at midday. It was, of course, not desirable that the colonel should share this meal with them and Mrs. Wesley in my absence. So we decided to have a six o'clock dinner; a temporary disarrangement of our domestic machinery, for my cousin Flagg would doubtless find some acceptable employment before long, and leave the household free to slip back into its regular grooves.

An outline of the physical aspects of the exotic kinsman who had so unexpectedly added himself to the figures at our happy fireside seems not out of place here. The portrait, being the result of many sittings, does not in some points convey the exact impression he made upon us in the earlier moments of our intimacy; but that is not important.

Though Washington Flagg had first opened his eyes on the banks of the Penobscot, he appeared to have been planned by nature to adorn the banks of the Rappahannock. There was nothing of the New Englander about him. The sallowness of his complexion and the blackness of his straight hair, which he wore long, were those of the typical Southerner. He was of medium height and loosely built, with a kind of elastic grace in his disjointedness. When he smiled he was positively handsome; in repose his features were nearly plain, the lips too indecisive, and

My Cousin the Colonel

the eyes lacking in lustre. A sparse tuft of beard at his chin—he was otherwise smoothly shaven—lengthened the face. There was, when he willed it, something very ingratiating in his manner—even Clara admitted that—a courteous and unconventional sort of ease. In all these surface characteristics he was a geographical anomaly. In the cast of his mind he was more Southern than the South, as a Northern convert is apt to be. Even his speech, like the dyer's arm, had taken tints from his environment. One might say that his pronunciation had literally been colored by his long association with the colored race. He invariably said flo' for floor, and djew for dew; but I do not anywhere attempt a phonetic reproduction of his dialect; in its finer qualities it was too elusive to be snared in a network of letters. In spite of his displacements, for my cousin had lived all over the South in his boyhood, he had contrived to pick up a very decent education. As to his other attributes, he shall be left to reveal them himself.

My Cousin the Colonel

III

Mrs. Wesley kindly assumed the charge of establishing Washington Flagg in his headquarters, as he termed the snug hall bedroom in Macdougall Street. There were numberless details to be looked to. His wardrobe, among the rest, needed replenishing down to the most unconsidered button, for Flagg had dropped into our little world with as few impedimenta as if he had been a newly born infant. Though my condition, like that desired by Agur, the son of Jakeh, was one of neither poverty nor riches, greenbacks in those days were greenbacks. I mention the fact in order to say that my satisfaction in coming to the rescue of my kinsman would have been greatly lessened if it had involved no self-denial whatever.

The day following his installation I was partly annoyed, partly amused, to find that Flagg had purchased a rather expensive meerschaum pipe and a pound or two of Latakia tobacco.

"I cannot afford to smoke cigars," he explained. "I must economize until I get on my feet."

Perhaps it would have been wiser if I had personally attended to his expenditures, minor as well as major, but it did not seem practicable to leave him without a cent in his pocket. His pilgrimage down town that forenoon had apparently had no purpose beyond this purchase, though on the previous evening I had directed his notice to two or three commercial advertisements which impressed me as worth looking into. I hesitated to ask him if he had looked into them. A collateral feeling of delicacy prevented me from breathing a word to Clara about the pipe.

Our reconstructed household, with its unreconstructed member, now moved forward on the lines laid down. Punctually at a quarter to six P. M. my cousin appeared at the front door, hung his hat on the rack, and passed into the sitting-room, sometimes humming in the hall a bar or two of The Bonny Blue Flag that bears a Single Star, to the infinite distaste of Mrs. Wesley, who was usually at that moment giving the finishing touches to the dinner-table. After dinner, during which I was in a state of unrelaxed anxiety lest the colonel should get himself on too delicate ground, I took him into my small snuggerly at the foot of the hall, where coffee was served to us, Mrs. Wesley being left to her own devices.

For several days matters went as smoothly as I could have hoped. I found it so easy, when desirable, to switch the colonel on to one of my carefully contrived side tracks that I began to be proud of my skill and to enjoy the exercise of it. But one evening, just as we were in the middle of the dessert, he suddenly broke out with, "We were conquered by mere brute force, you know!"

"That is very true," I replied. "It is brute force that tells in war. Wasn't it Napoleon who said that he had remarked that God was generally on the side which had the heaviest artillery?"

"The North had that, fast enough, and crushed a free people with it."

"A free people with four millions of slaves?" observed Mrs. Wesley quietly.

"Slavery was a patriarchal institution, my dear lady. But I reckon it is exploded now. The Emancipation Proclamation was a dastardly war measure."

"It did something more and better than free the blacks," said Mrs. Wesley; "it freed the whites. Dear me!" she added, glancing at Sheridan and Ulysses, who, in a brief reprieve from bed, were over in one corner of the room dissecting a small wooden camel, "I cannot be thankful enough that the children are too young to understand such sentiments."

The colonel, to my great relief, remained silent; but as soon as Clara had closed the dining-room door behind her, he said, "Tom Wesley, I reckon your wife doesn't wholly like me."

"She likes you immensely," I cried, inwardly begging to be forgiven. "But she is a firm believer in the justice of the Northern cause."

"May be she lost a brother, or something."

"No; she never had a brother. If she had had one, he would have been killed in the first battle of the war. She sent me to the front to be killed, and I went willingly; but I wasn't good enough; the enemy wouldn't have me at any price after a year's trial. Mrs. Wesley feels very strongly on this subject, and I wish you would try, like a good fellow, not to bring the question up at dinner-time. I am squarely opposed to your views myself, but I don't mind what you say as she does. So talk to me as much as you want to, but don't talk in Clara's presence. When persons disagree as you two do, argument is useless. Besides, the whole thing has been settled on the battlefield, and it

My Cousin the Colonel

isn't worth while to fight it all over again on a table-cloth."

"I suppose it isn't," he assented good-naturedly. "But you people up at the North here don't suspicion what we have been through. You caught only the edge of the hurricane. The most of you, I take it, weren't in it at all."

"Our dearest were in it."

"Well, we got whipped, Wesley, I acknowledge it; but we deserved to win, if ever bravery deserved it."

"The South was brave, nobody contests that; but 't is not enough to be brave'—

"The angry valor dashed

On the awful shield of God,'

as one of our poets says."

"Blast one of your poets! Our people were right, too."

"Come, now, Flagg, when you talk about your people, you ought to mean Northerners, for you were born in the North."

"That was just the kind of luck that has followed me all my life. My body belongs to Bangor, Maine, and my soul to Charleston, South Carolina."

"You've got a problem there that ought to bother you."

"It does," said the colonel, with a laugh.

"Meanwhile, my dear boy, don't distress Mrs. Wesley with it. She is ready to be very fond of you, if you will let her. It would be altogether sad and shameful if a family so contracted as ours couldn't get along without internal dissensions."

My cousin instantly professed the greatest regard for Mrs. Wesley, and declared that both of us were good enough to be Southrons. He promised that in future he would take all the care he could not to run against her prejudices, which merely grew out of her confused conception of State rights and the right of self-government. Women never understood anything about political economy and government, anyhow.

Having accomplished thus much with the colonel, I turned my attention, on his departure, to smoothing Clara. I reminded her that nearly everybody North and South had kinsmen or friends in both armies. To be sure, it was unfortunate that we, having only one kinsman, should have had him on the wrong side. That was better than having no kinsman at all. (Clara was inclined to demur at this.) It had not been practicable for him to divide himself; if it had been, he would probably have done it, and the two halves would doubtless have arrayed themselves against each other. They would, in a manner, have been bound to do so. However, the war was over, we were victorious, and could afford to be magnanimous.

"But he doesn't seem to have discovered that the war is over," returned Clara. "He 'still waves.'"

"It is likely that certain obstinate persons on both sides of Mason and Dixon's line will be a long time making the discovery. Some will never make it—so much the worse for them and the country."

Mrs. Wesley meditated and said nothing, but I saw that so far as she and the colonel were concerned the war was not over.

My Cousin the Colonel

IV

This slight breeze cleared the atmosphere for the time being. My cousin Flagg took pains to avoid all but the most indirect allusions to the war, except when we were alone, and in several small ways endeavored—with not too dazzling success—to be agreeable to Clara. The transparency of the effort was perhaps the partial cause of its failure. And then, too, the nature of his little attentions was not always carefully considered on his part. For example, Mrs. Wesley could hardly be expected to lend herself with any grace at all to the proposal he made one sultry June evening to "knock her up" a mint-julep, "the most refreshing beverage on earth, madam, in hot weather, I can assure you." Judge Ashburton Todhunter, of Fauquier County, had taught him to prepare this pungent elixir from a private receipt for which the judge had once refused the sum of fifty dollars, offered to him by Colonel Stanley Bluegrass, of Chattanooga, and this was at a moment, too, when the judge had been losing very heavily at draw poker.

"All quiet along the Potomac," whispered the colonel, with a momentary pride in the pacific relations he had established between himself and Mrs. Wesley.

As the mint and one or two other necessary ingredients were lacking to our family stores, the idea of julep was dismissed as a vain dream, and its place supplied by iced Congress water, a liquid which my cousin characterized, in a hasty aside to me, as being a drink fit only for imbecile infants of a tender age.

Washington Flagg's frequent and familiar mention of governors, judges, colonels, and majors clearly indicated that he had moved in aristocratic latitudes in the South, and threw light on his disinclination to consider any of the humbler employments which might have been open to him. He had so far conceded to the exigency of the case as to inquire if there were a possible chance for him in the Savonarola Fire Insurance Company. He had learned of my secretaryship. There was no vacancy in the office, and if there had been, I would have taken no steps to fill it with my cousin. He knew nothing of the business. Besides, however deeply I had his interests at heart, I should have hesitated to risk my own situation by becoming sponsor for so unmanageable an element as he appeared to be.

At odd times in my snuggery after dinner Flagg glanced over the "wants" columns of the evening journal, but never found anything he wanted. He found many amusing advertisements that served him as pegs on which to hang witty comment, but nothing to be taken seriously. I ventured to suggest that he should advertise. He received the idea with little warmth.

"No, my dear boy, I can't join the long procession of scullions, cooks, butlers, valets, and bottle-washers which seem to make up so large a part of your population. I couldn't keep step with them. It is altogether impossible for me to conduct myself in this matter like a menial-of-all-work out of place. 'Wanted, a situation, by a respectable young person of temperate habits; understands the care of horses; is willing to go into the country and milk the cow with the crumpled horn.' No; many thanks."

"State your own requirements, Flagg. I didn't propose that you should offer yourself as coachman."

"It would amount to the same thing, Wesley. I should at once be relegated to his level. Some large opportunity is dead sure to present itself to me if I wait. I believe the office should seek the man."

"I have noticed that a man has to meet his opportunities more than halfway, or he doesn't get acquainted with them. Mohammed was obliged to go to the mountain, after waiting for the mountain to come to him."

"Mohammed's mistake was that he didn't wait long enough. He was too impatient. But don't you fret. I have come to Yankeedom to make my fortune. The despot's heel is on your shore, and it means to remain there until he hears of something greatly to his advantage."

A few days following this conversation, Mr. Nelson, of Files Nelson, wholesale grocers on Front Street, mentioned to me casually that he was looking for a shipping-clerk. Before the war the firm had done an extensive Southern trade, which they purposed to build up again now that the ports of the South were thrown open. The place in question involved a great deal of outdoor work—the loading and unloading of spicy cargoes, a life among the piers—all which seemed to me just suited to my cousin's woodland nature. I could not picture him nailed to a desk in a counting-room. The salary was not bewildering, but the sum was to be elastic, if ability were shown. Here was an excellent chance, a stepping-stone, at all events; perhaps the large opportunity itself, artfully

My Cousin the Colonel

disguised as fifteen dollars a week. I spoke of Flagg to Mr. Nelson, and arranged a meeting between them for the next day.

I said nothing of the matter at the dinner-table that evening; but an encouraging thing always makes a lantern of me, and Clara saw the light in my face. As soon as dinner was over I drew my cousin into the little side room, and laid the affair before him.

"And I have made an appointment for you to meet Mr. Nelson to-morrow at one o'clock," I said, in conclusion.

"My dear Wesley"—he had listened to me in silence, and now spoke without enthusiasm—"I don't know what you were thinking of to do anything of the sort. I will not keep the appointment with that person. The only possible intercourse I could have with him would be to order groceries at his shop. The idea of a man who has moved in the best society of the South, who has been engaged in great if unsuccessful enterprises, who has led the picked chivalry of his oppressed land against the Northern hordes—the idea of a gentleman of this kidney meekly simmering down into a factotum to a Yankee dealer in canned goods! No, sir; I reckon I can do better than that."

The lantern went out.

I resolved that moment to let my cousin shape his own destiny—a task which in no way appeared to trouble him. And, indeed, now that I look back to it, why should he have troubled himself? He had a comfortable if not luxurious apartment in Macdougal Street; a daily dinner that asked only to be eaten; a wardrobe that was replenished when it needed replenishing; a weekly allowance that made up for its modesty by its punctuality. If ever a man was in a position patiently to await the obsequious approach of large opportunities that man was Washington Flagg. He was not insensible to the fact. He passed his time serenely. He walked the streets—Flagg was a great walker—sometimes wandering for hours in the Central Park. His Southern life, passed partly among plantations, had given him a relish for trees and rocks and waters. He was also a hungry reader of novels. When he had devoured our slender store of fiction, which was soon done, he took books from a small circulating library on Sixth Avenue. That he gave no thought whatever to the future was clear. He simply drifted down the gentle stream of the present. Sufficient to the day was the sunshine thereof.

In spite of his unforgivable inertia, and the egotism that enveloped him like an atmosphere, there was a charm to the man that put my impatience to sleep. I tried to think that this indifference and sunny idleness were perhaps the natural reaction of that larger life of emotion and activity from which he had just emerged. I reflected a great deal on that life, and, though I lamented the fact that he had drawn his sword on the wrong side, there was, down deep in my heart, an involuntary sympathetic throb for the valor that had not availed. I suppose the inexplicable ties of kinship had something to do with all this.

Washington Flagg had now been with us five weeks. He usually lingered awhile after dinner; sometimes spent the entire evening with the family, or, rather, with me, for Mrs. Wesley preferred the sitting-room to my den when I had company. Besides, there were Sheridan and Ulysses to be looked to. Toward the close of the sixth week I noticed that Flagg had fallen into a way of leaving immediately after dinner. He had also fallen into another way not so open to pleasant criticism.

By degrees—by degrees so subtle as almost to escape measurement—he had glided back to the forbidden and dangerous ground of the war. At first it was an intangible reference to something that occurred on such and such a date, the date in question being that of some sanguinary battle; then a swift sarcasm, veiled and softly shod; then a sarcasm that dropped its veil for an instant, and showed its sharp features. At last his thought wore no disguise. Possibly the man could not help it; possibly there was something in the atmosphere of the house that impelled him to say things which he would have been unlikely to say elsewhere. Whatever was the explanation, my cousin Flagg began to make himself disagreeable again at meal-times.

He had never much regarded my disapproval, and now his early ill-defined fear of Mrs. Wesley was evaporated. He no longer hesitated to indulge in his war reminiscences, which necessarily brought his personal exploits under a calcium-light. These exploits usually emphasized his intimacy with some of the more dashing Southern leaders, such as Stonewall Jackson and Jeb Stuart and Mosby. We found ourselves practically conscripted in the Confederate army. We were taken on long midnight rides through the passes of the Cumberland Mountains and hurled on some Federal outpost; we were made—a mere handful as we were—to assault and carry most formidable earthworks; we crossed dangerous fords, and bivouacked under boughs hung with weird gonfalons of gray moss, slit here and there by the edge of a star. Many a time we crawled stealthily through

My Cousin the Colonel

tangled vines and shrubs to the skirt of a wood, and across a fallen log sighted the Yankee picket whose bayonet point glimmered now and then far off in the moonlight. We spent a great many hours around the camp-fire counting our metaphorical scalps.

One evening the colonel was especially exasperating with anecdotes of Stonewall Jackson, and details of what he said to the general and what the general said to him.

"Stonewall Jackson often used to say to me, 'George'—he always called me George, in just that off-hand way—'George, when we get to New York, you shall have quarters in the Astor House, and pasture your mare Spitfire in the Park.'"

"That was very thoughtful of Stonewall Jackson," remarked Mrs. Wesley, with the faintest little whiteness gathering at the lips. "I am sorry that your late friend did not accompany you to the city, and personally superintend your settlement here. He would have been able to surround you with so many more comforts than you have in Macdougall Street."

The colonel smiled upon Clara, and made a deprecating gesture with his left hand. Nothing seemed to pierce his ironclad composure. A moment afterward he returned to the theme, and recited some verses called "Stonewall Jackson's Way." He recited them very well. One stanza lingers in my memory—

"We see him now—the old slouched hat
Cocked o'er his brow askew,
The shrewd, dry smile, the speech so pat,
So calm, so blunt, so true.
The Blue-light Elder knows 'em well.
Says he: 'That's Banks; he's fond of shell.
Lord save his soul! we'll give him'—Well,
That's Stonewall Jackson's way."

"His ways must have been far from agreeable," observed my wife, "if that is a sample of them."

After the colonel had taken himself off, Mrs. Wesley, sinking wearily upon the sofa, said, "I think I am getting rather tired of Stonewall Jackson."

"We both are, my dear; and some of our corps commanders used to find him rather tiresome now and then. He was really a great soldier, Clara; perhaps the greatest on the other side."

"I suppose he was; but Flagg comes next—according to his own report. Why, Tom, if your cousin had been in all the battles he says he has, the man would have been killed ten times over. He'd have had at least an arm or a leg shot off."

That Washington Flagg had all his limbs on was actually becoming a grievance to Mrs. Wesley.

The situation filled me with anxiety. Between my cousin's deplorable attitude and my wife's justifiable irritation, I was extremely perplexed. If I had had a dozen cousins, the solution of the difficulty would have been simple. But to close our door on our only kinsman was an intolerable alternative.

If any word of mine has caused the impression that Clara was not gentle and sympathetic and altogether feminine, I have wronged her. The reserve which strangers mistook for coldness was a shell that melted at the slightest kind touch, her masterful air the merest seeming. But whatever latent antagonism lay in her nature the colonel had the faculty of bringing to the surface. It must be conceded that the circumstances in which she was placed were trying, and Clara was without that strong, perhaps abnormal, sense of relationship which sustained me in the ordeal. Later on, when matters grew more complicated, I could but admire her resignation—if it were not helpless despair. Sometimes, indeed, she was unable to obliterate herself, and not only stood by her guns, but carried the war into the enemy's country. I very frequently found myself between two fires, and was glad to drag what small fragments were left of me from the scene of action. In brief, the little house in Clinton Place was rapidly transforming itself into a ghastly caricature of home.

Up to the present state of affairs the colonel had never once failed to appear at dinner-time. We had become so accustomed to his ring at the prescribed hour, and to hearing him outside in the hall softly humming *The Bonny Blue Flag*, or *I wish I was in Dixie's Land* (a wish which he did not wholly monopolize)—we had, I repeat, become so accustomed to these details that one night when he absented himself we experienced a kind of alarm. It was not until the clock struck ten that we gave over expecting him. Then, fearing that possibly he was ill, I put on my hat and stepped round to Macdougall Street. Mr. Flagg had gone out late in the afternoon, and had not

My Cousin the Colonel

returned. No, he had left no word in case any one called. What had happened? I smile to myself now, and I have smiled a great many times, at the remembrance of how worried I was that night as I walked slowly back to Clinton Place.

The next evening my cousin explained his absence. He had made the acquaintance of some distinguished literary gentlemen, who had invited him to dine with them at a certain German cafe, which at an earlier date had been rather famous as the rendezvous of a group of young journalists, wits, and unblossomed poets, known as "The Bohemians." The war had caused sad havoc with these light-hearted Knights of the Long Table, and it was only upon a scattered remnant of the goodly company that the colonel had fallen. How it came about, I do not know. I know that the acquaintance presently flowered into intimacy, and that at frequent intervals after this we had a vacant chair at table. My cousin did not give himself the pains to advise us of his engagements, so these absences were not as pleasant as they would have been if we had not expected him every minute.

Recently, too, our expectation of his coming was tinged with a dread which neither I nor Mrs. Wesley had named to each other. A change was gradually taking place in my cousin. Hitherto his amiability, even when he was most unendurable, had been a part of him. Obviously he was losing that lightness of spirit which we once disliked and now began to regret. He was inclined to be excitable and sullen by turns, and often of late I had been obliged to go to the bottom of my diplomacy in preventing some painful scene. As I have said, neither my wife nor I had spoken definitely of this alteration; but the cause and nature of it could not long be ignored between us.

"How patient you are with him, dear!" said Mrs. Wesley, as I was turning out the gas after one of our grim and grotesque little dinners: the colonel had not dined with us before for a week. "I don't see how you can be so patient with the man."

"Blood is thicker than water, Clara."

"But it isn't thicker than whiskey and water, is it?"

She had said it. The colonel was drinking. It was not a question of that light elixir the precious receipt for which had been confided to him by Judge Ashburton Todhunter, of Fauquier County; it was a question of a heavier and more immediate poison. The fact that Flagg might in some desperate state drop in on us at any moment stared us in the face. That was a very serious contingency, and it was one I could not guard against. I had no false ideas touching my influence over Washington Flagg. I did not dream of attempting to influence him; I was powerless. I could do nothing but wait, and wonder what would happen. There was nothing the man might not be capable of in some insane moment.

In the meanwhile I was afraid to go out of an evening and leave Clara alone. It was impossible for us to ask a friend to dinner, though, indeed, we had not done that since my cousin dropped down on us. It was no relief that his visits grew rarer and rarer; the apprehension remained. It was no relief when they ceased altogether, for it came to that at last.

A month had elapsed since he had called at the house. I had caught sight of him once on Broadway as I was riding up town in an omnibus. He was standing at the top of the steep flight of steps that led to Herr Pfaff's saloon in the basement. It was probably Flagg's dinner hour. Mrs. Morgan, the landlady in Macdougall Street, a melancholy little soul, was now the only link between me and my kinsman. I had a weekly interview with her. I learned that Mr. Flagg slept late, was seldom in during the day, and usually returned after midnight. A person with this eccentric scheme of life was not likely to be at home at such hours as I might find it convenient to call. Nevertheless, from time to time I knocked at the unresponsive door of his room. The two notes I had written to him he left unanswered.

All this was very grievous. He had been a trouble to me when I had him, and he was a trouble to me now I had lost him. My trouble had merely changed its color. On what downward way were his footsteps? What was to be the end of it? Sometimes I lay awake at night thinking of him. Of course, if he went to the dogs, he had nobody to blame but himself. I was not responsible for his wrong-going; nevertheless, I could not throw off my anxiety in the matter. That Flagg was leading a wild life in these days was presumable. Indeed, certain rumors to that effect were indirectly blown to me from the caves of Gambrinus. Not that I believe the bohemians demoralized him. He probably demoralized the bohemians. I began to reflect whether fate had not behaved rather handsomely, after all, in not giving me a great many relatives.

If I remember rightly, it was two months since I had laid eyes on my cousin, when, on returning home one evening, I noticed that the front door stood wide open, and had apparently been left to take care of itself. As I

My Cousin the Colonel

mounted the steps, a little annoyed at Mary's carelessness, I heard voices in the hall. Washington Flagg was standing at the foot of the staircase, with his hand on the newel-post, and Mrs. Wesley was halfway up the stairs, as if in the act of descending. I learned later that she had occupied this position for about three quarters of an hour. She was extremely pale and much agitated. Flagg's flushed face and tilted hat told his part of the story. He was not in one of his saturnine moods. He was amiably, and, if I may say it, gracefully drunk, and evidently had all his wits about him.

"I've been telling Mrs. Wesley," he began at once, as if I had been present all the while, and he was politely lifting me into the conversation—"I've been telling Mrs. Wesley that I'm a Lost Cause."

"A lost soul," was Mrs. Wesley's amendment from the staircase. "Oh, Tom, I am so glad you have come! I thought you never would! I let him in an hour or two ago, and he has kept me here ever since."

"You were so entertaining," said my cousin, with a courteous sweep of his disengaged hand, and speaking with that correctness of enunciation which sometimes survives everything.

"Flagg," I said, stepping to his side, "you will oblige me by returning to your lodgings."

"You think I'm not all right?"

"I am sure of it."

"And you don't want me here, dear old boy?"

"No, I don't want you here. The time has come for me to be frank with you, Flagg, and I see that your mind is clear enough to enable you to understand what I say."

"I reckon I can follow you, Thomas."

"My stock of romantic nonsense about kinship and family duties, and all that, has given out, and will not be renewed."

"Won't do business any more at the old stand?"

"Exactly so. I have done everything I could to help you, and you have done nothing whatever for yourself. You have not even done yourself the scant justice of treating Clara and me decently. In future you will be obliged to look after your own affairs, financial as well as social. Your best plan now is to go to work. I shall no longer concern myself with your comings and goings, except so far as to prevent you from coming here and disturbing Clara. Have you put that down?"

"Wesley, my boy, I'll pay you for this."

"If you do, it will be the first thing you have paid for since you came North."

My statement, however accurate, was not wholly delicate, and I subsequently regretted it, but when a patient man loses his patience he goes to extremes. Washington Flagg straightened himself for an instant, and then smiled upon me in an amused, patronizing way quite untranslatable.

"Thomas, that was neat, very neat—for you. When I see Judge Ashburton Todhunter I'll tell him about it. It's the sort of mild joke he likes."

"I should be proud to have Judge Ashburton Todhunter's approval of any remark of mine, but in the meanwhile it would be a greater pleasure to me to have you return at once to Macdougall Street, where, no doubt, Mrs. Morgan is delaying dinner for you."

"Say no more, Wesley. I'll never set foot in your house again, as sure as my name is Flagg—and long may I wave o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave."

"He is a kind of Flagg that I don't wish to have wave over MY home," said Mrs. Wesley, descending the stairs as my cousin with painful care closed the door softly behind him.

So the end was come. It had come with less unpleasantness than I should have predicted. The ties of kindred, too tightly stretched, had snapped; but they had snapped very gently, so to speak.

My Cousin the Colonel

V

Washington Flagg was as good as his word, which is perhaps not a strong indorsement. He never again set foot in my house. A week afterward I found that he had quitted Macdougall Street.

"He has gone South," said Mrs. Morgan.

"Did he leave no message for me?"

"He didn't leave a message for nobody."

"Did he happen to say to what part of the South he was bound?"

"He said he was going back to Dixie's Land, and didn't say no more."

That was all. His departure had been as abrupt and unlocked for as his arrival. I wondered if he would turn up again at the end of another twenty years, and I wondered how he had paid his travelling expenses to the land of the magnolia and the persimmon. That mystery was solved a few days subsequently when a draft (for so reasonable a sum as not to be worth mentioning to Clara) was presented to me for payment at my office.

Washington Flagg was gone, but his shadow was to linger for a while longer on our household. It was difficult to realize that the weight which had oppressed us had been removed. We were scarcely conscious of how heavy it had been until it was lifted. I was now and then forced to make an effort not to expect the colonel to dinner.

A month or two after his disappearance an incident occurred which brought him back very vividly and in a somewhat sinister shape to our imaginations. Quite late one night there was a sharp ring at the door. Mary having gone to bed, I answered the bell. On the doorstep stood a tall, pale girl, rather shabbily dressed, but with a kind of beauty about her; it seemed to flash from her eyelashes, which I noticed were very heavy. The hall light fell full upon this slight figure, standing there wrapped in an insufficient shawl, against a dense background of whirling snowflakes. She asked if I could give her Colonel Flagg's address. On receiving my reply, the girl swiftly descended the steps, and vanished into the darkness. There was a tantalizing point of romance and mystery to all this. As I slowly closed the front door I felt that perhaps I was closing it on a tragedy—one of those piteous, unwritten tragedies of the great city. I have wondered a thousand times who that girl was and what became of her.

Before the end of the year another incident—this time with a touch of comedy—lighted up the past of my kinsman. Among the travelling agents for the Savonarola Fire Insurance Company was a young man by the name of Brett, Charles Brett, a new employee. His family had been ruined by the war, and he had wandered North, as the son of many a Southern gentleman had been obliged to do, to earn his living. We became friends, and frequently lunched together when his business brought him to the city. Brett had been in the Confederate army, and it occurred to me one day to ask him if he had ever known my cousin the colonel. Brett was acquainted with a George W. Flagg; had known him somewhat intimately, in fact; but it was probably not the same man. We compared notes, and my Flagg was his Flagg.

"But he wasn't a colonel," said Brett. "Why, Flagg wasn't in the war at all. I don't fancy he heard a gun fired, unless it went off by accident in some training-camp for recruits. He got himself exempt from service in the field by working in the government saltworks. A heap of the boys escaped conscription that way."

In the saltworks! That connected my cousin with the navy rather than with the army!

I would have liked not to believe Brett's statement, but it was so circumstantial and precise as not to be doubted. Brett was far from suspecting how deeply his information had cut me. In spite of my loyalty, the discovery that my kinsman had not been a full-blown rebel was vastly humiliating. How that once curiously regarded flower of chivalry had withered! What about those reckless moonlight raids? What had become of Prince Rupert, at the head of his plumed cavaliers, sweeping through the valley of the Shenandoah, and dealing merited destruction to the boys in blue? In view of Brett's startling revelation, my kinsman's personal anecdotes of Stonewall Jackson took on an amusing quality which they had not possessed for us in the original telling.

I was disappointed that Clara's astonishment was much more moderate than mine.

"He was TOO brave, Tom, dear. He always seemed to be overdoing it just a grain, don't you think?"

I didn't think so at the time; I was afraid he was telling the truth. And now, by one of those contradictions inseparable from weak humanity, I regretted that he was not. A hero had tumbled from the family pedestal—a misguided hero, to be sure, but still a hero. My vanity, which in this case was of a complex kind, had received a

My Cousin the Colonel

shock.

I did not recover from it for nearly three months, when I received a second shock of a more serious nature. It came in the shape of a letter, dated at Pensacola, Florida, and written by one Sylvester K. Matthews, advising me that George Flagg had died of the yellow fever in that city the previous month. I gathered from the letter that the writer had been with my cousin through his illness, and was probably an intimate friend; at all events the details of the funeral had fallen to the charge of Mr. Matthews, who enclosed the receipted bills with the remark that he had paid them, but supposed that I would prefer to do so, leaving it, in a way, at my option.

The news of my cousin's death grieved me more than I should have imagined beforehand. He had not appreciated my kindness; he had not added to my happiness while I was endeavoring to secure his; he had been flagrantly ungrateful, and in one or two minor matters had deceived me. Yet, after all said and done, he was my cousin, my only cousin—and he was dead. Let us criticise the living, but spare the dead.

I put the memoranda back into the envelope; they consisted of a bill for medical attendance, a board bill, the nurse's account, and an undertaker's bill, with its pathetic and, to me, happily, unfamiliar items. For the rest of the day I was unable to fix my attention on my work, or to compose myself sufficiently to write to Mr. Matthews. I quitted the office that evening an hour earlier than was my habit.

Whether Clara was deeply affected by what had happened, or whether she disapproved of my taking upon myself expenses which, under the peculiar circumstances, might properly be borne by Flagg's intimate friend and comrade, was something I could not determine. She made no comments. If she considered that I had already done all that my duty demanded of me to do for my cousin, she was wise enough not to say so; for she must have seen that I took a different and unalterable view of it. Clara has her own way fifty-nine minutes out of the hour, but the sixtieth minute is mine.

She was plainly not disposed to talk on the subject; but I wanted to talk with some one on the subject; so, when dinner was through, I put the Matthews papers into my pocket and went up to my friend Bleeker's, in Seventeenth Street. Though a little cynical at times, he was a man whose judgment I thought well of.

After reading the letter and glancing over the memoranda, Bleeker turned to me and said, "You want to know how it strikes me—is that it?"

"Well—yes."

"The man is dead?"

"Yes."

"And buried?"

"Assuredly."

"And the bills are paid?"

"You see yourself they are receipted."

"Well, then," said Bleeker, "considering all things, I should let well enough alone."

"You mean you would do nothing in the matter?"

"I should 'let the dead past bury its dead,' as Longfellow says." Bleeker was always quoting Longfellow.

"But it isn't the dead past, it's the living present that has attended to the business; and he has sent in his account with all the items. I can't have this Matthews going about the country telling everybody that I allowed him to pay my cousin's funeral expenses."

"Then pay them. You have come to me for advice after making up your mind to follow your own course. That's just the way people do when they really want to be advised. I've done it myself, Wesley—I've done it myself."

The result was, I sent Mr. Matthews a check, after which I impulsively threw those dreadful bills into the office grate. I had no right to do it, for the vouchers really belonged to Mr. Matthews, and might be wanted some day; but they had haunted me like so many ghosts until I destroyed them. I fell asleep that night trying to recollect whether the items included a head-stone for my cousin's grave. I couldn't for the life of me remember, and it troubled me not a little. There were enough nameless graves in the South, without his being added to the number.

One day, a fortnight later, as Clara and I were finishing dinner, young Brett called at the house. I had supposed him to be in Omaha. He had, in effect, just come from there and elsewhere on one of his long business tours, and had arrived in the city too late in the afternoon to report himself at the office. He now dropped in merely for a moment, but we persuaded him to remain and share the dessert with us. I purposed to keep him until

My Cousin the Colonel

Clara left us to our cigars. I wished to tell him of my cousin's death, which I did not care to do, while she was at the table. We were talking of this and that, when Brett looked up, and said rather abruptly—

"By the way, I saw Flagg on the street the other day in Mobile. He was looking well."

The bit of melon I had in my mouth refused to be swallowed. I fancy that my face was a study. A dead silence followed; and then my wife reached across the table, and pressing my hand, said very gently—

"Wesley, you were not brilliant, but you were good."

All this was longer ago than I care to remember. I heard no more from Mr. Matthews. Last week, oddly enough, while glancing over a file of recent Southern newspapers, I came upon the announcement of the death of George W. Flagg. It was yellow fever this time also. If later on I receive any bills in connection with that event, I shall let my friend Bleeker audit them.