

The Capture of Jefferson Davis
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Century Magazine
November 1883

ment for negotiations with General Sherman. General Breckinridge and Mr. Reagan (the Postmaster-General) were thereupon directed by the President to proceed immediately to General Johnston's head-quarters for consultation with that officer, and with large discretion as to what should be agreed to. They set off instantly.

In Lexington and in Salisbury we experienced the same cold indifference on the part of the people, first encountered at Greensboro', except that at Salisbury Mr. Davis was invited to the house of a clergyman, where he slept. Salisbury had been entered a few days before by a column of the enemy's cavalry (said to be Stoneman's), and the streets showed many evidences of the havoc they had wrought. With one or two others, I passed the night on the clergyman's front piazza as a guard for the President.

During all this march Mr. Davis was singularly equable and cheerful; he seemed to have had a great load taken from his mind, to feel relieved of responsibilities, and his conversation was bright and agreeable. He talked of men and of books, particularly of Walter Scott and Byron; of horses and dogs and sports; of the woods and the fields; of trees and many plants; of roads, and how to make them; of the habits of birds, and of a variety of other topics. His familiarity with, and correct taste in, the English literature of the last generation, his varied experiences in life, his habits of close observation, and his extraordinary memory, made him a charming companion when disposed to talk.

Indeed, like Mark Tapley, we were all in good spirits under adverse circumstances; and I particularly remember the entertaining conversation of Mr. Mallory, the Secretary of the Navy.

Not far from Charlotte, I sent forward a courier with a letter to Major Echols, the quartermaster of that post, asking him to inform Mrs. Davis of our approach, and to provide quarters for as many of us as possible. The major rode out to the outskirts of the town, and there met us with the information that Mrs. Davis and her family had hastily proceeded toward South Carolina several days before. He didn't know where she was to be found; but said she had fled when the railway south of Greensboro' had been cut by the enemy's cavalry. The major then took me aside and explained that, though quarters could be furnished for the rest of us, he had as yet been able to find only one person willing to receive Mr. Davis, saying the people generally were afraid that whoever entertained him would have his house burned by the enemy; that, indeed, it was understood threats to that effect

had been made everywhere by Stoneman's cavalry.

There seemed to be nothing to do but to go to the one domicile offered. It was on the main street of the town, and was occupied by Mr. Bates, a man said to be of northern birth, a bachelor of convivial habits, the local agent of the Southern Express Company, apparently living alone with his negro servants, and keeping a sort of "open house," where a broad, well equipped sideboard was the most conspicuous feature of the situation—not at all a seemly place for Mr. Davis.

Just as we had entered the house, Mr. Davis received by courier from General Breckinridge, at General Sherman's head-quarters, the intelligence that President Lincoln had been assassinated; and, when he communicated it to us, everybody's remark was that, in Lincoln, the Southern States had lost their only refuge in their then emergency. There was no expression other than of surprise and regret. As yet, we knew none of the particulars of the crime.

Presently, the street was filled by a column of cavalry (the command, I think, of General Basil Duke, of Kentucky) just entering the town. As they rode past the house, the men waved their flags and hurraed for "Jefferson Davis." Many of them halted before the door, and, in dust and uproar, called loudly for a speech from him. I was in the crowd, gathered thick about the steps, and not more than ten feet from the door. Mr. Davis stood on the threshold and made a very brief reply to their calls for a speech. I distinctly heard every word he said. He merely thanked the soldiers for their cordial greetings; paid a high compliment to the gallantry and efficiency of the cavalry from the State in which the regiment before him had been recruited; expressed his own determination not to despair of the Confederacy, but to remain with the last organized band upholding the flag; and then excused himself from further remarks, pleading the fatigue of travel. He said nothing more. Somebody else (Mr. Johnson, I think, a prominent resident there) read aloud the dispatch from General Breckinridge about the assassination of President Lincoln, but no reference was made to it in Mr. Davis's speech. There was no other speech, and the crowd soon dispersed.*

Colonel John Taylor Wood, Colonel Will-

* In pursuance of the scheme of Stanton and Holt to fasten upon Mr. Davis charges of a guilty foreknowledge of, if not participation in, the murder of Mr. Lincoln, Bates was afterward carried to Washington and made to testify (before the military tribunal, I believe, where the murderers were on trial) to something about that speech.

As I recollect the reports of the testimony, published

iam Preston Johnston, and Colonel Frank R. Lubbock, staff officers, remained in Bates's house with the President. There was no room for more. I was carried off by my Hebrew friend Weil and most kindly entertained, with Mr. Benjamin and St. Martin, at his residence.

On Sunday (the next day, I think), a number of us attended service at the Episcopal Church, and heard the rector preach vigorously about the sad condition of the country, and in reprobation of the folly and wickedness of the assassination of President Lincoln. As Mr. Davis walked away, after the sermon, with Colonel Johnston and me, he said, with a smile, "I think the preacher directed his remarks at me; and he really seems to fancy I had something to do with the assassination." The suggestion was absurd. No man ever participated in a great war of revolution with less of disturbance of the nicest sense of perfect rectitude in conduct or opinion; his every utterance, act, and sentiment was with the strictest regard for all the moralities, throughout that troubled time when the passions of many people made them reckless or defiant of the opinions of mankind.

His cheerfulness continued in Charlotte, and I remember his there saying to me, "I cannot feel like a beaten man!" The halt at Charlotte was to await information from the army of General Johnston. After a few days, the President became nervously anxious about his wife and family. He had as yet heard nothing of their whereabouts, but asked me to proceed into South Carolina in search of them, suggesting that I should probably find them at Abbeville. He told me I must rely on my own judgment as to what course to pursue from there; that, for himself, he should make his way as rapidly as possible to the Trans-Mississippi Department, to join the army under Kirby Smith.

I started at once, taking my horse on the railway train to Chester. On the train chanced to be Captain Lingan, an officer from New Orleans, recently serving at Richmond as an assistant to the commissioner for the exchange of prisoners. He had his horse with him, and from Chester we rode together

across the country to Newberry, there to take the train again for Abbeville. In Chester the night was spent in the car that brought us there. On the march to Newberry we bivouacked. The weather was fine, and the houses surrounded by jessamines and other flowers. The people were very hospitable, and we fain to rely upon them. Nothing could be bought, because we had no money. Our Confederate currency was of no value now, and there was no other. Riding through a street of Newberry in search of the quartermaster's stable, Lingan and I were saluted by a lady, inquiring eagerly whence we had come, what the news was, and whether we knew anything of Mr. Trenholm, adding she had heard he was ill. The town was lovely, and this the most attractive house we had seen there. It had a broad piazza, with posts beautifully overgrown by vines and rose-bushes, and the grounds around were full of flowers. I replied I had just left Mr. Trenholm in Charlotte; that he had somewhat recovered; and that, if she would allow us to do so, we should be happy to return, after providing for our horses, and tell her the latest news. As we rode off, Lingan laughingly said, "Well, that secures us 'hospitable entertainment.'" And, sure enough, when we went back and introduced ourselves, we were cordially received by the mistress of the house, who invited us to dine. The lady we had seen on the piazza was only a visitor there for the moment. It was the residence of Mr. Boyd, the president of a bank, and when that gentleman presently came in he courteously insisted upon our making his house our home. An excellent dinner was served, and I was given what seemed to me the most delightful bed ever slept in. After a delicious breakfast next morning, Mrs. Boyd dispatched us to the train with a haversack full of bounties for the rest of the journey.

At Abbeville, Mrs. Davis and her family were the guests of the President's esteemed friends, Colonel and Mrs. Burt; and there, too, were the daughters of Mr. Trenholm, at the house of their brother. Abbeville was a beautiful place, on high ground; and the

at the time, they made the witness say that Mr. Davis had approved of the assassination, either explicitly or by necessary implication; and that he had added, "If it was to be done, it is well it was done quickly," or words to that effect. If any such testimony was given, it is false and without foundation; no comment upon or reference to the assassination was made in that speech. I have been told the witness has always stoutly insisted he never testified to anything of the kind, but that what he said was altogether perverted in the publication made by rascals in Washington. Colonel William Preston Johnston tells me he has seen another version of the story, and thinks Bates is understood to have fathered it in a publication

made in some newspaper after his visit to Washington; it represents Bates as saying that the words above mentioned as imputed to Mr. Davis were used by him, not, indeed, in the speech I have described, but in a conversation with Johnston at Bates's house. Johnston assures me that, in that shape, too, the story is false — that Mr. Davis never used such words in his presence, or any words at all like them. He adds that Mr. Davis remarked to him, at Bates's house, with reference to the assassination, that Mr. Lincoln would have been much more useful to the Southern States than Andrew Johnson, the successor, was likely to be; and I myself heard Mr. Davis express the same opinion at that period.