The Secession of Dixie

A Story

The "Secession of Dixie" may be taken as story or as history—just as you choose about that. On this point I will merely say I have read some history that was further from fact—and in that I commit myself to nothing.

"Dixie," indeed, is no myth. From the well-tilled fields now occupying its site you may see the smoke of Indianapolis, and even, when that smoke permits, discern the great Soldiers' Monument which so majestically commemorates the Union that Dixie wanted to draw out of. I can remember when those fields (just a quarter-section in extent) were covered by a wilderness so dense that one who entered there was glad to avail himself of narrow winding paths that threaded the place, Indian trail fashion. These paths led to little log cabins here and there, surrounded by as many scant cleared spaces devoted in a rude way to garden truck, and occupied by uncouth, half-clad people.

This ground, so runs the tradition, had at an early day been entered by one John Pogue, a Virginian, who, for some reason, let it remain in its primitive condition while the country around was improved. Then when the Rebellion broke out he hied himself elsewhere; his land was promptly confiscated as the property of an enemy, and once more it became government territory. Then came the squatters—the poor folk who are looking for land to live on without money and without price. A Mr. Jabez Baughman took the initiative, and others promptly followed; the government was too much occupied with weightier affairs, just then, to care much about it, and ere long a score or so of families had established themselves here in as many little openings, making a small community, quite cut off from the rest of the world. Quite cut off, I say, because something other than mere walls of woodland isolated them. They were, without exception, Southerners, of the kind known as "poor white trash"—victims of the vicious labor system of the South, haters of "niggers," and yet with a warm, unreasoning loyalty for their native States that had done so little for them and their kind. Alienated from their neighbors thus by sentiment it is no wonder, then, that when so excellent an opportunity offered they should segregate into a neighborhood of their own, and it was be-
cause of the character of this settlement and the former "secesh" owner that the place came to be known as "Dixie". And by this opportunity the squatters found themselves very happily situated, for while the "butternuts" hereabout as a rule had to sing small and carry their sentiments up the sleeve, these could congregate and express themselves as often and freely as they chose with none to make afraid. Stray newspapers carried in like bones into a den to be feasted on at leisure, passed from hand to hand and so kept them apprised of the doings of the outside world. When, in the course of time, the fierce war tide lashed to and fro like the swing of an angry sea, and the rebellious murmurings of disaffected Northerners grew more pronounced, Dixie plucked up hope and began to dream of a day when the chivalry from the southland would sweep the country like a besom. Then suddenly, borne on the wings of excited rumor, came the report that the dashing John Morgan and his gallant battalions were actually bound hither like gay-hearted knights on a holiday jaunt. The secret order of the Sons of Liberty, rumor further hinted, would burst its chrysalis and come forth boldly to the light; the order of things would be all changed. There was excitement in the air. The whole State set to buzzing like a vast hornet's nest, there was a swift gathering of the clans, and on all sides was the busy notes of preparation for conflict. Something was going to happen.

And now one day Mr. Jabez Baughman "issued a call" for all Dixieites to convene at his cabin that evening to discuss questions of moment. Of the resultant meeting no minutes were preserved; you will find no mention of it in the Adjutant-General's reports, nor elsewhere, and the only authority I can claim for it is the oral account of Mr. Andrew Jackson Strickler, a "member of the convention," who afterward became reconstructed and reconciled to the Government. As faithfully as I can quote him here he is, Tennessean dialect and all:

"It was," said Mr. Strickler, "in July of '63. I disremember adzactly the date, but it was after the hayin' was done an' the wheat harvest about over. We heerd tell o' John Morgan crossin' the river an' headin' our way, an' was consid'ble intrusted like, an' so w'en Jabe Baughman's boys went eroun' the settlement tellin' all the men folks their pap wanted us to meet at their house late that night, we jest natchally fell in with it, kase we knowed from
the sly way it 'as done thar was somepin' up. None of us was to come till after ord'nary bed-time, an' none of us was to carry 'ary light, an' that putt ginger in it, y' see. Well, w'en night fell the weather got ugly, and I mind way about ten o'clock, as I felt my way through the thickets, how everlastin' black it was, an' how the wind rasied the trees erbout, roarin' like a hongry lion seekin' who he may devour. It made me feel kind 'o creepy, kase it 'peared like the elerments an' man an' everthing was erbout to do somepin'—kinder like the bottom was goin' to drap out 'o things, y' understand.

"Well, the fellers come steerin' into Jabes' one by one, an' by 'leven o' the clock ever' man in Dixie was thar. Jabe's young'uns an' womern folks hed been sent out in the stable to sleep, an' so ever'thing was clear fer business, but we all set eround talkin' hogs fer a spell, kase we felt a mite unsartin; but byme-by Baughman, says he: 'Gen'l'men, I call this yere meetin' to order.' Then my oldest boy, whose name was Andy, too, and who'd been to two or three public meetin's before an' felt kind 'o biggoty over it, he hol-lers out: 'I second the motion.' Then young Jerry Stimson says: 'I move that Mr. Baughman take the cheer,' an' my boy seconded that, too, an' it was so ordered. Then Baughman riz an' said he hadn't hardly expected that honor (w'ich was a lie), but sence they had putt it on him he'd try to discharge his duties to the meetin'.

"After that we made young Stimson secatary, seein' he was somepin' of a scholar, an' then Jabe he made us a speech sayin' as how we'd orto stick by the grand old South, w'at was even now sendin' her conquerin' hosts to our doors, an' how we'uns should be ready to receive her to our buzzums. It wa'nt all quite clear to me, an' I ast how we was goin' to take her to our buzzums. 'W'y, give her our moral s'port,' says Jabe. 'How'll we give our moral s'port, says I,' an' then says Jabe, slow an' solemn like: 'Gen'l'men,' says he, 'wen our sister States found it was time fer 'em to be up an' adoin'—wen they found the Union wa'nt the place fer 'em, w'at did they do?.' Here Jabe helt his fire, an' ever'thing was stock-still fer a spell, w'ile the wind howled outside. It 'peared like no one hadn't the grit to tackle the question, an' Jabe had to do it hisself. 'Gen'l'men,' says he, air we men enough to run risks for our kentry? W'en John Morgan's histed the flag of the grand ol' Confedercy over the Injeany State House who's goin' to come to their reward, them as helt back skeert, or them as give him their moral s'port?
Story---The Secession of Dixie

At this my boy Andy, who was gittin' all het up like with the idee o' doin' somepin', bellers out: 'Mr. Cheerman, I move at we air all men, an' at we ain't afeerd to give the South our moral s'port.' Then Jabe grabbed the cow by the tail an' w'ipped her up. 'Do I understand the gen'l'man to mean,' says he, that we'd orto do w'at our sister States hev done, an' draw out o' this yere Union, an' ef so, will he put a movement to that effeck before the house?.

"I make a move then," says Andy agen, as bold as Davy Crockett, 'that we don't w'ip the devil eround the stump no more, but that we git out o' the Union an' we git out a-flyin.' I was right proud o' the boy, not kase I thought he had a durn bit o' sense, but kase he went at it with his coat off like a man bound to make his mark. That got all of us spunky like, an' nigh ever one in the house seconded the move. Then says Jabe: 'Gen'l'men, the question is before you, whether we will lend the Southern Confeder'cy our moral s'port an' follow our sister States out'n the Union. All in favor of this yere motion signify the same by sayin' aye'. 'Aye!' says ever livin' soul with a whoop, fer by that time we shore was all runnin' in a flock. 'All contrarilywise say no,' says Jabe, an' we all waited quiet fer a minute, kase that 'as the proper way, y' know, w'en all of a sudden, above the roar o' the wind outside, ther was a screech an' a tremenjus racket; the ol' house shuck like it was comin' down; the daubin' flew from the chinks, an' overhead it 'peared like the ol' Scratch was clawin' his way through the clabboards. Next he come a-tearin' at the floor of the loft above us, an' a loose board swingin' down hit Jabe a whack an' knocked the candle off'n the table, an' the next thing it was black as yer hat. Jabe, I reckon, was consid'able flustered, kase he gathered hisself up an' yelled: 'The Devil's after us—git out o' here, fellers!' An' you bet we got.

"It tuck me a full hour to find my way home through the bresh, an' w'en I did git thar, at last, an' was tryin' to tell w'ich side o' the house the door was on, I bumped up agin Andy groopin' his way too. 'Andy,' says I, 'I move we git in jest as quick as the Lord'll let us,' an' says Andy, 'I second the motion'.

"The next day w'en we went back to Baughman's to see w'at we cud larn we found a good-sized ellum had keeled over agin the roof-poles an' poked a limb down through the clabboards. It 'as never settled among us jest w'at it meant. Some said it 'as the Lord's way of votin' no agin our goin' out o' the Union, an' others allowed it was the Lord's way o' savin' us from our brashness, kase, as ever one knows, John Morgan didn't git to Injunoplis after all, an' as things turned out it wa'n't jest best fer us to be seceded, y' know."

—G. S. C.