

THE FEDERAL CHAMELEON.

One evening, about an hour after the sun had gone down, a couple of stout men dressed in soiled rebel uniforms, and each holding in his hand a good Austrian rifle, rapped at the door of a small frame building near the C— road in Virginia. The knock was answered by an old woman whose face was almost concealed by the tangled masses of her gray, uncombed hair.

"And what may ye want heah?" she exclaimed, as her deep-set eyes flashed upon the two men. "I haven't the smallest bit of Johnny-cake to offer ye, for it was all—"

"No, no," interrupted one of the soldiers, "we don't want anything to eat; but we want you to tell us, and that in quick time, too, whether or not you've seen a slight but strong looking slip of a man go by here of late."

"Dressed in blue and carrying a double-barrelled rifle," added the other.

"Hey! hey!" cried the hag, lifting her hands, and speaking in a sharp, angry voice, "If ye hadn't interrupted me I reckon you'd heard me speak of him before now, as that was the very man who came here and bought all my cakes. It was about two hours ago, and—"

"Which way did he go after he left you?" inquired both men, eagerly.

"Before I answer that question you must tell me who he is," said the old woman, with the curiosity natural to her sex.

"He's a celebrated Union scout whom we call the 'Federal Chameleon' because he changes his uniform so often. Sometimes it is blue, at other times gray, and he has even been seen wearing the disguise of an old farmer. He has shot more of our men than is at all pleasant, and we have a roving commission from our colonel to go on a hunt after him and capture him, if we can, either dead or alive. And now as we have replied to you," continued the speaker a little impatiently, "we demand that you answer our question, and—"

"Demand!" interrupted the hag in shrill, piercing tones. "Is that the proper way to speak to a woman, and an old woman at that?"

"Come, come, answer us if you please," cried the soldier in a milder tone. "I meant no harm—it is my way of speaking."

"Well, perhaps I may forgive you and perhaps not," said the old woman, shaking her head.

"How far is your camp from here?"

"What is that to you? What has that to do—"

"There you go again with your accursed incivility!" shrieked the hag, fiercely; "but you shall answer my question before you get a single word out of me. Now, then, how far is your camp from here, and how many men have you in and around it? I intend to carry your fellows some corn-cakes, d'ye see, and I want to know the number of mouths that I have to cook for."

"Oh, in that case," said the rebel, "I do not see any reason why I shouldn't satisfy you. Our camps, then, are about five miles from here, near the Cross roads, and our number may be about five thousand."

"That will do," cried the old woman with a grin of satisfaction—"yes, that will do. And now you are sure that the man who came here to buy a supper is the one you are after?"

"We are sure of it, for although we have never seen the man's face, we'd know him by his double-barrelled rifle, as nobody else in the Yankee army carries a weapon of that kind."

"Ay, ay, it's the right one, then," said the hag. "After he had finished and paid for his meal, he says to me, 'Friend, I should like to put up here for the night if you have no objection.' But as I did not like the idea of accommodating a Yankee any more than I could help, I told him there was no room for him, as I expected visitors before many hours—"

"Well, then," says he, 'can you tell me of any place where I can pass the night a little comfortably. You see,' he added, looking toward his big double-barrelled rifle, 'I don't like to camp out, as it looks like rain, and this piece might be hurt by it.' 'I know of no place,' I answered, 'short of four miles from here—an old barn which is tight enough, I think, to keep off the rain.' 'Four miles is a pretty long distance,' said he, 'and as

I have been tramping about considerably to-day, I don't feel much like carrying this heavy load so far,' pointing to his knapsack as he spoke. 'Will you be kind enough to let it remain till morning?' 'Well, yes,' said I, hesitating a little and throwing a significant glance at the well-filled pocket book in his hand. He understood the look and gave me a greenback dollar. 'All right,' said I, and he then departed, saying he'd call for his luggage in the morning, after he should waken from his sleep in the barn. 'Now then,' continued the speaker, 'which will ye do—go after him at once, or wait in ambush for him until morning?'

The two soldiers drew back a few paces and held a short consultation, after which they again advanced to the side of the old woman.

"We will go now," said the one who had spoken first, "that is if you can describe to us the exact position of the barn."

"I don't think I could describe it so that you could find it in the dark," replied the hag, "but as I am willin' to do everything in my power for the confederacy, I will go with you to show you the place."

"That is right," answered the rebel, and we'll see that you are rewarded for your zeal."

"I don't want any reward for helping my countrymen," replied the other. "I am always ready to help along the cause."

With these words she disappeared into an inner room, but came forth in a few minutes with a gray blanket thrown over her shoulders.

"I took this out of the Yank's knapsack," said she, with a short, dry laugh; "don't you think it becomes me?"

"Aye, aye, my good woman, very much. But lead on, if you please, for we have no time to lose."

The hag then closed the door of the house.

"Forward march!" she exclaimed, imitating the voice of a man with strong lungs. "Forward march! Close up! close up!" And she moved along the road at the slow tottering pace natural to a person of her age.

The night by this time had become very dark. The sky was obscured with thick driving clouds, and the wind screamed and roared among the tall pines that towered upon each side of the road. Occasionally a heavy branch wrenched from its native trunk, would fall into the road with a terrific crash, and more than once the rebels started back and cocked their pieces in the belief that the din was caused by the discharge of some Yankee rifle.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the old hag upon one of these occasions, "it seems to me that you are easily startled. Don't you think your commander might have picked out a pair of bolder hearts than yours for this expedition?"

"You'd better keep a silent tongue in your head, my good woman, until you have had an opportunity to witness as many battles as we have," answered one of the men; "a good soldier is always on his guard."

"Aye, aye!" replied the old woman; but he should know how to distinguish between the crashing of a lry branch and the ring of a rifled musket."

The rebel did not relish the noise made by the loud, sharp tones of the female guide, and, in order to put an end to the conversation, he controlled himself sufficiently not to reply to her last remark. The party then continued their way in silence—which was not broken by either of them until they had gone about three miles, and a loud, clear challenge suddenly startled the rebels.

"Halt! Who comes there?"

"Friend!" answered the old woman, in a ringing voice; "friend with prisoners!"

"We are betrayed!" yelled her companions, and, even as the words passed their lips they were surrounded by a dozen Federal soldiers, one of whom carried a lantern.

As the rays of the light flashed upon the hag, the rebels saw the gray hair, the blanket, and the female apparel drop to the ground, revealing the slight but iron-like frame of a Union soldier in the prime of life!

"It is he, by —!" exclaimed the prisoners, simultaneously, as their glances wandered to the long double-barrelled

rifle which he now held in hand: "it is he—the scout—the Federal Chameleon!"

"Aye, aye!" answered the latter, as he leaned upon his weapon, with a quiet smile. "You are trapped, sure enough, thanks to my disguise, which is only one of the many that I carry in my knapsack. Allow me to express my thanks to you for the information you gave me regarding the position of your camp and the number of your men. I have already sent a message to my colonel in relation to the matter, and I perceive that he has commenced to act upon it."

And as he spoke he pointed down the road where the dark outline of troops forming into line might be faintly distinguished.

They were soon in motion, and in the course of half an hour the booming of cannon, the rattling of musketry, and the cheers of the Federal troops proclaimed that the combat had commenced. The din continued for about an hour, when the prisoners learned from others who were brought to share their quarters, that the Southern troops had been surprised and totally routed.

JOSH BILLINGS has recently had his life insured. These are a few of the questions which he answered "like a man," in the "confirmatif":

1. Are you mail or femail? If so, state how long you have been so.
2. Are you subject to fits, and if so, du you have more than one at a time?
3. What is yure precise fiteing weight?
4. Did you ever hav enny ancestors, and if so, how much?
5. What iz yure legal opinion ov the constitutionality ov the 10 commandments?
6. Did you ever hav enny nite mares, if so what is their best time?
7. Are you married and single, or are you a Bachelor?
8. Do you belcav in a futur state, if you du, state it?
9. What are yure private centiments about a rush ov rats tu the head, can it be did successfully?
10. Hav you ever committed suicide, and if so, how di it seem tu affect you?

A LONDON CAPITALIST came to me not many months since, says a sculptor, and opened the conversation by saying:

"Sir, your name is Robson?"

"I admitted my name was Robson. 'And are you a statuary?' said he. I admitted this fact also, substituting sculptor.

"Sir," continued he, "I will give you a commission."

I bowed and begged him to be seated. "Robson," said he, drawing a paper from his pocket, "I am a remarkable man; I was born in the environs of London, and began life by selling matches at five boxes a penny; I am worth at this moment two hundred thousand pounds."

I bowed again, and said I was glad to hear it.

"Sir, he went on to say, 'how I earned that two hundred thousand—how from selling matches, I came to running errands; to taking care of a boss; to trading in dogs, tobaccos, cottons, corns and sugars; and how I came to be the man that I am; you'll find all that made out on this paper, dates and facts correct. Sir, it is a very remarkable statement.'

I replied that I had no doubt of it, but that I did not see what it had to do with the matter in hand.

"Sir," said my capitalist, "everything. I wish to perpetuate my name. You have a pretty thing, sir, here in Rome—a pillar with a procession twisting up all around it, and a figger at the top. I think you call it Trajan's Column. Now, Robson, sir, I wish you to make me one just like it—same height, same size, and money no object. You shall represent my career in all my various trades, a twisting around the column, beginning with the small chap selling matches at five boxes a penny, and ending with the full length figure of me on the summit, with one hand in my bosom, and the other under my coat-tails."

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