

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

An Episode of the Rebellion

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AN EPISODE OF THE REBELLION.

On the day before Christmas, 1861, a deputation of loyal citizens from Gallatin county, Kentucky, called upon Brigadier-General Wade at Camp Dennison, near Cincinnati. They represented that the counties of Boone, Owin, Gallatin, Grant and Carroll, of which the village of Warsaw, on the Ohio river, was a central point, were in a condition of civil anarchy. On the question of secession the inhabitants, by a not very decided majority, were opposed to it, but the rebel element was much more active and better organized. There was one company of loyal home guards at Warsaw, which had for some months protected the citizens of that place, but could do it no longer. There had been three attacks upon the place by armed secessionists, in which citizens were killed, but the principal object was the capture of the state arms. They threatened to burn the town and murder its citizens. They were well organized, and in direct intercourse with Camp Boone, just over the line in Tennessee, in command of Humphrey Marshall. Colonel Marshall had, in October, held a barbecue near New Liberty, fifteen miles south of Warsaw, calling for volunteers. He was presented with a horse, which he rode to the rebel camp. Recruiting for that service went on openly, and the state arms generally furnished the equipments of the recruits. Neither the executive of Kentucky nor General Buell paid much attention to the representations of the Union men, a form of neutrality which was all the secessionists desired. If Kentucky seceded that legalized everything; if she did not, they could secede individually, and escape to the rebel camp.

I received an order from General Wade on the same evening to proceed to Warsaw, with as many companies of the twentieth Ohio volunteers, then at Camp King and Cincinnati, as seemed to be necessary. A steamer with four companies left the next day, having the Warsaw delegation on board. The order required me to protect union citizens against violence in their person or property, to prevent the enlistment of recruits for the rebel service, to secure and keep all arms in their hands, particularly those of the state, and to preserve order within the above named counties.

The civil government, in nearly all its branches, was either incompetent,

indifferent or hostile. To be of any practical value, it seemed to be necessary to apply the relentless arm of military despotism. A reign of terror had existed for some months, and loyal citizens of the United States were the victims. My intention was to reverse that condition of things to such an extent that marauders and murderers would be the terrorized parties. The transports reached Warsaw at about nine p. m. By eleven p. m. a number of the most active men who sustained the rebellion were arrested and on the road to Camp Chase. The people on the opposite shores of the Ohio river have peculiarities that are almost national. Those on the south side are accustomed to settle their personal differences by violence, often resulting in murder. Public opinion, the officers of the law, not excepting judges and jurors, look favorably upon that mode of settling disputes, which results in perjury and murder, crimes that are seldom punished. At the same time they are outspoken and courageous, with a decided contempt for those who are not bold, prompt and daring. To have acted with hesitancy or vacillation, would have led them to attribute my conduct to fear. Even when severe measures fell upon themselves, they respected the power which struck them. The practice of releasing persons on taking a fresh oath of allegiance had become a standing joke upon the government. Judges, clerks, sheriffs and attorneys held that so much as related to the United States was of no effect, since secession had destroyed the United States. I know of no instance where a secessionist was prevented from, or hesitated to join the confederacy, on account of his oath, or oaths of allegiance, not even officers of the army and navy. When my prisoners were not especially objectionable to union men, or had not committed acts of violence, the following paper was used in lieu of an oath, the breach of which brought certain retribution, but did not involve the crime of perjury:

I,..... a citizen of..... county, Kentucky, hereby admit and agree that in case I threaten, or injure the person or property of union men, on account of their adhesion to the United States government, or to any act for the overthrow of that government, or any act in aid of the present rebellion and the southern confederacy, I am to be held summarily responsible in my person and property.

At least one hundred and fifty persons signed this obligation, a large proportion of them with a cross. With a few exceptions, it was honorably kept. Where the parties were of bad reputation, and without property, securities were required and given by responsible men. It did not seem to offend their susceptibility. Quiet and respectable people of all parties, especially those of some pecuniary means, appeared

to be gratified by the results. Committees were organized of a mixed character, union and secession, who undertook to give notice where there were state arms concealed, and the whereabouts of characters likely to disturb the peace. Our intercourse was not unpleasant, and they performed their functions honestly. In one instance, at New Liberty, I had reason to suspect that a couple of prominent rebels were secreted, of whom I had not been advised. The village was surrounded by a line of pickets before daybreak, intending to hold the community responsible. Investigation showed that the men had not been there. The citizens did not appear to be offended, but, on the contrary, complimented us on the restoration of order. An ample dinner was given to the officers, and we parted, apparently on good terms. Privately and by letter I received numerous expressions of thanks for the peace and quiet they had not previously enjoyed. A public meeting was held at the court house in Warsaw, and a committee appointed, which addressed me the following paper:

WARSAW, GALLATIN COUNTY, KENTUCKY, December 29, 1871.

Colonel Whittlesey: The undersigned having been appointed a committee by the loyal men of Warsaw to confer with you in regard to the policy and all other appropriate matters that your mission here may appropriately demand of us, in regard to our town and county, for the ostensible purpose of establishing peace and order among our people, and if possible to secure every citizen in his legal, constitutional rights of life, liberty and property, and the pursuit of happiness, which have been so wantonly jeopardized and seriously endangered by the unholy rebellion and war against the most benigun and free government in the world, and to further and assist you in this laudable and patriotic purpose, we respectfully tender you our humble services, and would further state to your honor that the meeting we have the honor to represent was of the opinion, from the evidence they had before them from reliable gentlemen, that the town of Warsaw and surrounding country was in imminent peril, and that they are fearful that your present forces are insufficient, however brave and patriotic they may be, to accomplish those very desirable ends, from the fact that you are surrounded by four or five counties which have largely the preponderance in strength and numbers on the secession side. However, we merely make these suggestions for your very favorable consideration. We would suggest the propriety of your making known, by proclamation or otherwise, if it be not inconsistent with your duty and the public service, the aims and objects of your command here. All of which we, the committee, in the bonds of the union and the enforcement of the constitution and the laws, submit to your honor.

As those men had been for some months in constant peril, and the courts, partly from inability but more from unwillingness, gave them no protection, it was evident nothing short of the military arm could do it. Some, even among loyal men, regarded our measures as unnecessarily harsh, but later in the war they were regarded as very moderate. They developed the fact that any danger to property was more potent than danger to individuals in their persons. My reply informed them that unless my orders were modified union men would not only be protected, but as far as possible relieved from threats and fears of violence. The rebel

element was informed that the United States government was supreme, and that those who denied that should not invoke its protection. In only a very limited number of cases was it necessary to act with severity, by way of example, like the following:

THE EAGLE HOME GUARDS.

Whereas, Our state is threatened to be invaded by the fanatical hordes, and the base, cowardly myrmidons of that dastardly tyrant, Abe Lincoln, who disgraces the executive chair once filled by Washington, Jefferson and Jackson, and

"Whereas, It is the duty of all brave companions and true citizens to protect and defend their homes and repel an invasion of their soil by an armed force,

"Therefore, We, whose names are signed hereto, do organize ourselves into a military company, who shall be known as the Eagle Home Guards, for the purpose of protecting our homes and our state, and we do pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor to resist to the death an invasion of our state by the mercenary soldiers of the north."

To this terrible document, including the names of officers, were affixed the names of seventy-two (72) persons. With it was found an order from the adjutant general, of Kentucky authorizing the company and promising it state arms. Also a letter from a confederate captain at Camp Boone, calling for twelve men to fill his company there. The captain of the Eagle Guards was a man of wealth, whose house was the headquarters. He eluded us for about three weeks. In the meantime his farm and mill were occupied by one of our companies, and the grain and stock appropriated by the quartermaster. At length he came in and offered to sign the usual iron clad obligation, and to let secession alone in the future. He admitted that he had not been dealt with too severely. His promises were honorably kept, and more than once I received friendly messages from him.

Many letters were received from prisoners, or their attorneys, upon the unconstitutionality of their arrest. These legal arguments claimed for Kentucky rebels more rights than belong to the President of the United States, or the nation itself. All these were regarded as subordinates to Kentucky, or any other state, or its citizens. The seizure of their arms was regarded as equivalent to the seizure of their apparel, particularly those savage knives, made of saw plate, which many of them carried. They were not willing to admit that suspicion is a crime, while they claimed that the southern confederacy was a nation, and those who adhered to the United States within seceding states were guilty of treason. Some went so far as to claim that they had the right as individuals to punish treason to the south. For each arrest a brief record was kept and sent to the commissioner of prisoners at Camp Chase. Instead of an increase of force, the region became so quiet that two of the four companies were

returned to the regiment at Cincinnati. In their place, I received twenty-five cavalry under Lieutenant Nettleton, who acted as scouts and messengers.

Before General Buell their arguments and statements were received with consideration. His theory appeared to be that until a rebel became a member of the confederate forces he was not amenable to military arrest. After that he certainly was not, except as a prisoner in battle. His personal sympathy appeared to be more with seceders than with union men. His restraining orders left us little better than spectators. Literally executed, they deprived loyal men of protection, and gave the rebels all the opportunity they asked. On Arnold's creek, in Grant county, near Mount Zion, the union men appealed to us piteously for support. Some members of disloyal home guards had left them and joined the unionists. One of them acted as a guide to Lieutenant Nettleton, and was threatened with death. Another was informed not only that he would be killed, but his heart cut out, boiled and eaten.

Notwithstanding the implied censure of General Buell's orders, I stationed an officer and a number of men at Arnold's creek, whose reports of the conduct of the secession party there were such as to disgrace human nature. Without the military and the exercise of functions analogous to those of a provost marshal, Kentucky would have been swept beyond a *quasi* neutrality into open secession, like the other southern states. My position was becoming so ineffectual to protect union men, and uncomfortable to myself, that I applied to be relieved from that duty.

CHARLES WHITTLESEY.