

THE LITERARY DIGEST

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STRANGE STORY OF A WAR-TIME MYSTERY

SCORES of tales have been told of the disappearance of the gold and silver taken away by President Jefferson Davis and his official family when the Confederate Government abandoned Richmond, but for half a century seekers after historical facts have been unable to clear up the mystery. Large sums of money were spent by the banks to which the cash belonged in vain efforts to find the guilty men. Probably the reason the secret was kept for so long is that the friends of the looters had no particular desire to expose them. Anyway, it seems that nobody cared to tell a lucid, detailed story of the incident until Judge Lewis Shepherd, a lawyer of Chattanooga, who served through the war in the Confederate Army, appeared in print the other day in an interview given Mrs. L. M. Cheshire, special correspondent of the *Nashville Banner*. Mrs. Cheshire says Judge Eakin, another prominent Chattanooga, vouches for Judge Shepherd's story. We have seen no denial of it, or further confirmation, and give it for what it may be worth. Here is the *Tennessean's* account of the affair:

When the Confederate Government abandoned Richmond as its capital all its archives and treasures were sent, under strong military escort, to Charlotte, N. C. The banks of Richmond sent away their treasure under protection of the same archives and treasures were sent, under strong military escort, to Charlotte, N. C. The banks of Richmond sent away their treasure under protection of the same escort; President Davis and his Cabinet also came to Charlotte and established temporary headquarters.

Before they reached Charlotte, Richmond and Petersburg had fallen and General Lee had surrendered, and in a very few days Sherman and Johnston had agreed upon an armistice by their celebrated paper under which it was proposed that peace should be made and that the seceding States should resume their relations to the Government. This treaty, if it had been carried out, would have obviated reconstruction, under what is known as the Reconstruction Acts of Congress, for it covered the entire subject of restoration of peace and return of the Southern States to the Union and of their Senators and Representatives to Congress. This armistice was repudiated by President Johnson and his Cabinet, on the ground that these military commanders had exceeded their powers in undertaking to settle the terms on which the erring States might resume their political functions with the general Government.

It may be admitted that these generals went a little further than they had the right to go, but it can not be denied that they displayed a profound statesmanship in their comprehensive yet terse settlement of a question which afterward so sorely disturbed Congress, so nearly caused the conviction upon impeachment of the President, and so completely bankrupted the Southern States.

Mr. Davis, being advised that President Johnson had brought an end to the armistice and repudiated the Sherman-Johnston treaty, immediately began efforts to pre-

A WAR-TIME MYSTERY

vent the capture of himself and the treasures of the Confederacy. The gold and silver of the Confederacy and that of the Richmond banks were loaded into wagons, and the President of the Confederate States, with his Cabinet Ministers, started South with it, guarded by three brigades of cavalry—Dibrell's, Vaughan's, and Dyke's. When we arrived at Washington, Ga., it became apparent to Mr. Davis that he could not with such a retinue escape the vigilance of the Federal cavalry, which was rapidly closing in on him from every direction, so the money kegs and boxes belonging to the Confederate Government were opened and the silver divided among the boys, each, without regard to rank, receiving \$26.50, and they were granted indefinite furloughs. Mr. Davis and his family pushed on further South, and was a few days afterward captured by the Federals.

Meanwhile the officers of the banks sought the aid of the Federal commander to return their specie to Richmond, and from them obtained a permit and also a guard of soldiers to protect it on its return trip. Some of the officers and men of Vaughan's brigade became apprized that a train of specie was being carried North under Federal escort, and they jumped to the conclusion that it was the property of the Confederate Government which the Federals had captured. They concluded that their four years of hard service for the Confederacy entitled them to a share of this gold and silver, provided they could succeed in securing it from the Federal guard. With them the war was not yet over, and they acted upon the idea that anything is fair in war. They organized an expedition with the view of capturing this money, and followed the train until a favorable opportunity of attack presented itself. They charged the train, captured and disarmed the guard, and proceeded at once to knock the heads out of the kegs and the lids off the boxes containing the coin and to fill their forage sacks with ten and twenty-dollar gold pieces. Several of them got away with as much as \$60,000; some were content with \$25,000, and still others with less amounts, depending upon the carrying capacity of their sacks and saddle-bags.

One man began to fill his sack out of the first keg he came to, which proved to be a keg of silver. He was happy when he lugged off his bag of silver dollars, but when he met his companions later in the rendezvous, where they stopt to count their money, he found that he had only about \$4,000, while his companions had secured several times that sum in gold, while his was in silver. He became greatly disturbed over his ill-luck and insisted that his more fortunate brothers divide their gold with him. This they refused to do, and he then determined to turn informer. He was as good as his word, and upon the information furnished by this silver king several of the gold-bugs were apprehended and forced to give up their booty. But a number of them were wise enough to keep going until they got safe away from the scene of their capture.

I personally know several of the men who got some of the swag. Two of these men went with their money, amounting to more than \$120,000, to Kansas City, Mo., where they engaged in business, becoming men of large wealth. Two others went to California, and with something more than \$100,000 they embarked in business. One of the wealthiest planters in Texas got his start with money secured from those kegs, and still another in the same State has made good as a stockman, being now a cattle king.