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BILL ARP'S CHAT

RUMINATING UPON "OLD HOCK"

The Gallant Quartermaster of the Eleventh Georgia - How He Used
to Provide for the Boys - His Midnight Dreams of Home - Back in
Old Hagland - An Unresolved Battle Referred to.

Written for The Constitution

Old Tige, old Hock, old Pat, old Joe, Uncle Bob Lee and Lemon Squeezer. The boys was mighty familiar with the generals and had nick-names for em all, but I don't remember em. My mind is runnin on old Hock to night, the commissary of the eleventh Georgy. I wish that everybody knew him. I wish the world was full of such men. Some girl in her teens has writ - "a thing of beauty is a boy forever," but I've thought a heap of times that a good man is a comfort every time we think about him. If Old Hock didnt die when Speer beat Billups, he still lives in the gold mines of Dawson, and never comes out tell they call him. When he was a numerous grandfather, with his head all crowned with silvery locks, he volunteered among the first to fight for his adopted land, but old Tige took him away from his company and put him to feedin his flock. And didnt he feed them well. When rations were plenty he stole a little from their allowance every day and put it away. When bacon was scarce and long marches to be made he always surprised em with more than any other regiment had, and, good sakes, what a fuss it made. How they did howl around and say old Hock got bacon for his boys buy there aint nary pound for us. How the eleventh did brag and swagger. "Bacon! Why, of course - we always have it, and sugar, and coffee, and rice. Old Hock knows how to get it." You see, the old man had managed in some way to get an extra wagon and team, and when he couldnt draw forage from Major Ayer, he stole it from him, and then persuaded him to haul it about. When marching orders came, he loaded his wagon with

supplies and slipped a little in the generals, and a little in the brigade wagons, and it all went along on the sly, for somehow nobody could ever refuse old Hock anything. He was so thoughtful, so kind, so amiable and such excellent company that everybody loved him. The best story-teller, the best card-player, and the most active man in the brigade, he didnt seem to know it, and was so modest and respectful that everybody was glad when he came about. One fine day we was all a talkin about size, and weight, and muscle, and Major Ayer, says he, "boys, heres muscle for you. Look at this arm of mine. I believe I could knock a bull down. Arp, I can whip you, and Cothran, and Bell, and Lewis and old Hock all at once." Well, it did look like he could, for he weighed about 250, with a chest like a bale of cotton, and his big, short arms, tapering down like a horses. But old Hock brightened up and seemed unwilling to let the banter go by default. Says he, "I don't know so well about that, major. Strength is a good thing if you know how to huse it, but slight is better. I hused to box a lettle when I was a boy, and maybe Ive forgot the lick, but I don't mind giving you a little turn on the clover just for hexercise." And so they squared themselves for action and after a few passes the major found himself lyin flat on the grass without knowin how he got there.

One cold stormy night when everybody was blue I went down to see old Hock and found him alone and half sick, while ruminating about his wife and children. "How come you jine the army my friend," said I. "I couldnt 'elp it" said he. "I

had a 'ard time of it in Hengland when I was a boy and hever since I got over 'ere Ive 'ad good luck and prospered and the laws hav protecdted me and the people been kind to me and I always felt like I 'ad ought to do something in return. Its just like you would feel if you 'ad been a horkhan and kind people took you in and brought you up - and so when my countrymen got into trouble and called for 'elp I felt sorter glad that I 'ad a chance to show my gratitude."

"But," said I, "what made you leave old Hengland as you call her. Aint that a good country?" "A good country for the rich, but an ard one for the poor," said he. "The very name is sweet and tender, and her 'istory is a grand and onerable one. I live to read about it and look at the pictures of her great houses and estates, but they were all shut out to me. I've seen paintings of her fox-unts, but the 'orn of the 'unter was never 'eard on the 'ill by boys down in the brewery. It's a 'ard country on boys who are happernticed, and I was one of em. You see my master was a brewer, and he was a good man and onest, but hafter I 'ad carried jars of malt up some stone steps all day and hevery day for two years and more it looked 'ard that I had four more years to do the same thing. But I did 'ave some comforts for my master let me get a little schooling and then I was hallowed to play with the hother boys in the hevening and at night and I learned all the mischief and devilment and bad thoughts they 'ad, and then agin I found a lassie that pleased me and was kind and we promised to wait for one another. But you see my master was always bemeaning me because I 'ad broken two or three jars as I went hup the stone steps, and almost every day when he was about hed say, ' now take ye up this jar, and as ye go fall down agin and break it.' And so everytime hed say it my choler would rise in my throat and I wanted to be free. But my lassie comforted me, and I kept on at work like an 'orse in a treadmill till one day he said it so cutting that before I thought I answered him, 'I will sir,' and with that I raised up the jar as high as I could and smashed it on the rock. Well, you see that sort of conduct in a happentice over in Hengland is mighty nigh death, and I took in my situation at once. I was up the stone-steps in a jiffy, but you cant run and 'ide over there, for the police will find you if you're on the hiland, and so I went to my lassie and kissed

'er, and cried, and told her I was off to Hamerica, for there was a ship in the hoffine, and I vowed to hearn some money and send for her, and she vowed to be true, and so I took a workin passage, and the cap'n was kind, and kep me hid away till we sailed, and I landed over here without a dollar. Then I 'eard of work on the State road, and I got up there and begun at the bottom with a pick and a spade, and I worked up pretty fast, and got to bossin the hands that was buildin culverts. I laid up money and sent after the lassie, and she came, and we were jined together at Chattanooga, and she lived along the road with me, and we were happy until she died - and then you see there was a good, kind 'oman that nursed her so long and so gently, and took such good care of her that a good while afterwards, when I felt so lonesome, I got to thinkin about her, and it occurred to me one day that she might fill the lassie's place if any one could, and so she did, bless God, and she's fillin it yet, and right now I would give my good 'orse Mary, to see her to-night and bebavins by her side. It's now seventeen months and I've never said furlow, but I've a mind to hask for one in the morning, for this 'ard life is tellin on me a little and I need rest."

Well, his application was approved, but it said to go to Farmville for thirty days. That was a little hospital town about thirty miles from Richmond. But old Hock said he sometimes called his farm in Dawson by that name, so I just writ "Ga." on the blank and he went as straight home as the cars could take him.

Major Hockenhull used to do right smart fighting, though he wasent obleeged to. He was in the big battle of Drainsville that was fout with 400 wagons and teams by a regiment of quartermasters and commissaries with Major Ayer Commanding. As that famous battle has never got into the regular proceedings, I've a mind to write it up that justice may be done and the truth of history vindicated. So mote it be.

Bill Arp.

One can't help but wonder about the accuracy of some of the details of a conversation between two old soldiers one night in a tent far from home, fifteen or so years after the fact. Nevertheless, I found it quite interesting.

Joe Hill, Oct. 2005