Recollections of Morgan's Raid

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On the eleventh day of July, 1863, Gen. John H. Morgan and his army passed through Graham Township, Jefferson County, in the flight through southern Indiana from Kentucky to Ohio. Not being a trained soldier, Morgan did not rank in ability with a number of the generals in the Confederate Army but was recognized throughout the South as an able and valorous officer. In his military operations in Kentucky and Tennessee, he and his command constituted a destructive force with which the Union armies found it difficult to cope.

At the time of the Raid, I was not at our family home which was less than a mile from the line of march of the enemy army. I was away temporarily visiting an uncle, Dr. H. D. Gaddy, at Weston, in Jennings County, and so did not see any of the Confederates. There were no telephones or radios in those days, but we kept fairly well advised as to what was going on outside of our community. Hearing of a movement among the citizens to assemble at Vernon and engage the enemy in battle, my uncle joined them. I see him now through the eyes of memory as he rode away that Sunday morning in company with some of his neighbors, his rifle on his shoulder and enough bullets in his ammunition pouch, that I had helped him mould, to send the souls of scores of Morgan's men to purgatory. The day passed, but no sound of cannon came our way which led us to believe that there was no battle in progress. After hours of waiting for him, my uncle returned. He bore on his person no marks of carnage or strife, but did bring the glad tidings that Morgan had gone without unleashing his guns in the destruction of life or property.

Not many years prior to his death, G. W. Whitsett, who, for a long period was well known in this part of the country by reason of his musical talent, informed me that he was in Vernon at that critical period of its history and that a regiment of Union soldiers from Michigan was there and also a considerable number of citizen soldiers. Mr. Whitsett stated that he was present and overheard a conversation be-

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1 The author is now more than eighty-six years of age, and was more than eleven at the time of the Raid led by General Morgan.

tween General Lew Wallace, who was in command, and the colonel of the Michigan regiment. The latter begged permission to lead an attack against the enemy, but the general was firm in his opposition, alleging that in view of the superior strength of the foe, such a move would result in a useless waste of life.

The most vivid remembrance that I have of any experience in those troubled times relates to something that happened a few days after Morgan had gone out of the state. Some men came along, riding fast and furious past my Uncle's place, pausing just long enough to tell us that the Confederate leader, General Forrest, had destroyed Paris by fire and was coming our way, burning buildings and killing men. My uncle assigned me two tasks—one to assist in burying a box of silver coins, amounting in value, I suspect, to several hundred dollars, and the other to walk to the home of his father-in-law and give warning to the family of impending danger. The distance was about a mile, part of it through a dark woodland. I was younger than I am now, being in my twelfth year, and not over-stocked with that admiral quality of the spirit called courage. I discharged my trust, but not without realizing that the sense of fear was a part of my make-up.

The supreme moment was yet to come. It was not long after Morgan passed until a body of armed men on horseback came into view. Surely, we thought, this must be Forrest and his army and the end of the world. We were unduly alarmed, for, when the men came close, they told us they were not Confederates but Union men. It was they who had been at Paris, they declared, explaining that it was through the distorted imaginations of some parties who had seen them that the rumors of disaster and death had been spread. An imaginary danger, for the time being, is as nerve-racking as an actual one, for, while one thinks he is in danger, to him it is real and palpable. Learning that we had been deceived, whether intentionally or otherwise, the black cloud of fear lifted and passed away. From that day to this I have never felt any danger imminent to myself or country from armed rebellion or foreign foe.

About a fortnight after Morgan had come and gone, I returned to my home in Graham Township. The perspective was about the same. No marks of vandalism were observable
except the loss of three good horses. There had been a forcible transfer of the title to ownership from the family to the Confederacy. On the morning of July 11 (1863), my brother Philander, had gone to a mill about three miles east of our house. The mill was built on land now owned by Hiram Foster. The trip was made in a two-horse wagon and wheat had been exchanged for flour. The day was fair and no portents were in the sky of impending danger until on the return trip my brother reached a point in the road opposite Pisgah Church. Suddenly about fifty men appeared in view and soon demanded that he get out of the wagon and unharness the horses. Being slow to obey, they persuaded him to hurry by pointing their guns in his direction. The horses then taken were good ones. Philander was forced to walk in front of them to the creek about half a mile north of the Church, where the marauding band bade him go home. Before he reached the house, the band of riders had visited the premises and taken from the stable a fine young black mare, the idol of the family. My eldest sister, Nancy, though habitually of a mild and equable temper, became so angry when she saw her pet mare being taken away, that she told those sons of Dixie what she thought of them in the most abusive and bitter language at her command. She did not accomplish more than if she had given them her blessing instead, for they took the beautiful animal away and my sister newer saw her more. This was one of the great sorrows of her life.

Our home was not the only one visited by the raiders. Almost all the good horses near the line of march were taken. There was one marked exception. James Dowen Robertson, better known in this vicinity as "Uncle Doc", lost only one horse and saved four. His eldest son, Melville, was at home from college on his summer vacation. Looking towards the South, he saw a large body of horsemen at a high point in the road where John Stuart now lives headed in the direction of his home. Acting with quick presence of mind, he went to the barn and rushed off four good horses to a thicket at the back part of the farm where he tied them near together so they would not get loneome and break the quiet. These four horses escaped capture. Returning to the house, he found some Confederates ransacking it. Uncle Doc had recently become the owner of a new pair of fine boots, and one Confederate, evidently having some sense of humor, picked up the boots and said: "This fellow has some good boots, and I believe I will trade with him." By reason of some offensive remark, Melville was compelled to go with the rebels as far as Dupont where he was released. Later he joined the Union army, was captured in his first battle, and held for some months in a confederate prison. After his release, he contracted typhoid fever in the Union Camp at Vicksburg, from which he died. Uncle Aquilla Robertson, better known as "Uncle Quill," a brother to Uncle Doc, was less fortunate than his brother in saving his horses, as all of his were taken.

The youngest daughter of Uncle Quill, Mrs. Rebecca McClelland of Deputy, remembers well the leading events of Morgan's raid. She lived with her father, less than half a mile from the road over which Morgan and his army passed. They could see the cavalry and artillery as they passed along the highway. They first saw them at about 8:30 in the forenoon. They were nearly all day passing. The most exciting scene in the drama came when several Confederates came into the yard clamoring for something to eat. One insistent fellow attempted to go into the kitchen in spite of a refusal by Rebecca's step-mother to admit him. To stop him the step-mother flourished a butcher knife in his face saying: "I'll let you know I am one of the blue hen's chickens from the State of Virginia, and if you make any further attempt to enter here I'll cut your heart out." Eyeing her intently for an instant, the Confederate said: "I know them Virginians will fight like the devil and I have no doubt you mean what you say." He went away and left her, for the time being, mistress of the situation.

Next morning (July 12) at about 6:30, while the family were at devotions, the father leading in prayer, several armed men in federal uniform entered. They disregarded the usual civilities on entering a home, and in a rough and overbearing manner demanded something to eat. Being Union soldiers, the family were glad to feed them. The father ended his

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2 General Morgan and the main part of his troops passed northward on a road about one mile east of where Deputy is now located. This road was then, and is now, intersected by an east and west road that runs from Deputy to Madison, Indiana. The intersection of the two roads is about one hundred feet from the bridge on the Deputy and Madison road. The part of the road traveled by General Morgan which ran southward from the intersection long ago went into decay, but the part running northward from that point remains for about a mile very much the same as it was in 1861. The Paris mentioned was the town in Indiana, about three miles north of Deputy. The latter is on State Road 3 about ten miles north of Scottsburg and nearly west of Madison.

3 The "Diary of Melville Cox Robertson" was published in the Indiana Magazine of History (June, 1908), XXVIII, 116-137.
sick and wanted a drink, and he ordered the soldiers to stand back and let me fill my bucket. They had several carriages which in those days were known as rockaways. Whether General Morgan was riding in one of them or not, I cannot say. They took all of the horses within the radius of two or three miles on each side of the road. They told us there would be a larger army the next day and that they would burn houses and barns, but Generals Hobson and Shackelford of the Union army followed them.

There was an incident on the day of the Raid that gave a touch of comedy to the tragic side of the picture. A prominent woman of our community evinced considerable excitement when she learned that Morgan was near. She lived in a large house, well stored with valuable goods and furnishings. Wishing to salvage something of real worth from the coming destruction, in her confusion she selected a mirror and hastily took it to the garden and buried it. This seems ludicrous in view of the fact that she made no effort to save things more valuable, but perhaps there was method in her madness; for, after all, what is there about a home which a woman prizes more than a looking-glass?

If the searchlight of truth were applied to all the facts connected with the Morgan raid, it would awaken a memory not complimentary to the Federal Government. Morgan's men, about as fast as they captured and appropriated good horses, discarded those that they did not care to use longer, and quite a number of these were taken over by the farmers. They were fed, groomed, and taken care of until they were fit for farm work. My brother appropriated two of these horses but just when he, in common with his neighbors, felt that they had some amends for their losses, the Federal Government sent agents around and through might not right, took possession of these horses without any compensation to the farmers whatever. This was not only flagrantly unjust, but it was obviously unwise. Here was a government in a great war needing provisions to feed the armies and navies and depending in part on these very farmers to supply food-stuffs, but at the same time taking from them the means of production needful to help the cause along. Later a concerted effort was made to induce Congress to appropriate money to reimburse the farmers for their losses sustained by reason of the losses explained, but these claims were never allowed.

For more than three score and ten years, the body of John
Morgan has slept in the dust of the earth, but the government that he sought to destroy still lives at Washington, and the flag under which the Union armies fought still waves in undiminished splendor.