

Gettysburg

By Percy MacKaye

SCENE: A woodshed, in the ell of a farm-house.

The shed is open on both sides, front and back, the apertures being slightly arched at the top. (*In bad weather, these presumably may be closed by big double doors, which stand open now--swung back outward beyond sight.*) Thus the nearer opening is the proscenium arch of the scene, under which the spectator looks through the shed to the background--a grassy yard, a road with great trunks of soaring elms, and the glimpse of a green hillside. The ceiling runs up into a gable with large beams.

On the right, at back, a door opens into the shed from the house kitchen. Opposite it, a door leads from the shed into the barn. In the foreground, against the right wall, is a work-bench. On this are tools, a long, narrow, wooden box, and a small oil-stove, with steaming kettle upon it.

Against the left wall, what remains of the year's wood supply is stacked, the uneven ridges sloping to a jumble of stovewood and kindlings mixed with small chips of the floor, which is piled deep with mounds of crumbling bark, chips and wood-dust.

Not far from this mounded pile, at right centre of the scene, stands a wooden armchair, in which LINK TADBOURNE, in his shirt-sleeves, sits drowsing. Silhouetted by the sunlight beyond, his sharp-drawn profile is that of an old man, with white hair cropped close, and gray moustache of a faded black hue at the outer edges. Between his knees is a stout thong of wood, whittled round by the drawshave which his

sleeping hand still holds in his lap. Against the side of his chair rests a thick wooden yoke and collar. Near him is a chopping-block.

In the woodshed there is no sound or motion except the hum and floating steam from the tea-kettle. Presently the old man murmurs in his sleep, clenching his hand. Slowly the hand relaxes again.

From the door, right, comes POLLY--a sweet-faced girl of seventeen, quietly mature for her age. She is dressed simply. In one hand she carries a man's wide-brimmed felt hat, over the other arm a blue coat. These she brings toward LINK. Seeing him asleep, she begins to tiptoe, lays the coat and hat on the chopping-block, goes to the bench, and trims the wick of the oil-stove, under the kettle. Then she returns and stands near LINK, surveying the shed.

On closer scrutiny, the jumbled woodpile has evidently a certain order in its chaos; some of the splittings have been piled in irregular ridges; in places, the deep layer of wood-dust and chips has been scooped, and the little mounds slope and rise like miniature valleys and hills.

Taking up a hoe, POLLY--with careful steps--moves among the hollows, placing and arranging sticks of kindling, scraping and smoothing the little mounds with the hoe. As she does so, from far away, a bugle sounds.

LINK (*snapping his eyes wide open, sits up*)

Hello! Cat-nappin' was I, Polly?

POLLY Just A kitten-nap, I guess.

(*Laying the hoe down, she approaches*)

The yoke done?

LINK (*giving a final whittle to the yoke-collar thong*)

Thar! When he's ben steamed a spell, and bended snug, I guess this feller'll sarve t' say "Gee" to-- (Lifting the other yoke-collar from beside his chair, he holds the whittled thong next to it, comparing the two with expert eye) and "Haw" to him. Beech every time, Sir; beech or walnut. Hang me if I'd shake a whip at birch, for ox-yokes.--Polly, are ye thar?

POLLY Yes, Uncle Link.

LINK What's that I used to sing ye?

"Polly, put the kittle on, Polly, put the kittle on, Polly, put the kittle on--"

(*Chuckling*)

We'll give this feller a dose of ox-yoke tea!

POLLY The kettle's boilin'.

LINK Wall, then, steep him good.

(*POLLY takes from LINK the collar-thong, carries it to the work-bench, shoves it into the narrow end of the box, which she then closes tight and connects--by a piece of hose--to the spout of the kettle. At the farther end of the box, steam then emerges through a small hole.*)

POLLY You're feelin' smart to-day.

LINK Smart!--Wall, if I could git a hull man to swap legs with me, mebbe I'd arn my keep. But this here settin' dead an' alive, without no legs, day in, day out, don't make an old hoss wuth his oats.

POLLY (*cheerfully*)

I guess you'll soon be walkin' round.

LINK Not if that doctor feller has his say: He says I can't never go agin this side o' Jordan; and looks like he's 'bout right.--Nine months to-morrer, Polly, gal, sence I had that stroke.

POLLY (pointing to the ox-yoke)

You're fitter sittin' than most folks standin'.

LINK (*briskly*)

Oh, they can't keep my two hands from makin' ox-yokes. That's my second natur' sence I was a boy.

(Again in the distance a bugle sounds. LINK *starts*.)

What's that?

POLLY Why, that's the army veterans down to the graveyard. This is Decoration mornin': you ain't forgot?

LINK So't is, so't is. Roger, your young man--ha! (*chuckling*) he come and axed me was I a-goin' to the cemetery. "Me? Don't I look it?" says I. Ha! "Don't I look it?"

POLLY He meant--to decorate the graves.

LINK O' course; but I must take my little laugh. I told him I guessed I wa'n't persent'ble anyhow, my mustache and my boots wa'n't blacked this mornin'. I don't jest like t' talk about my legs.-- Be you a-goin' to take your young school folks, Polly?

POLLY Dear no! I told my boys and girls to march up this way with the band. I said I'd be a-stayin' home and learnin' how to keep school in the woodpile here with you.

LINK (*looking up at her proudly*)

Schoolma'am at seventeen! Some smart, I tell ye!

POLLY (*caressing him*)

Schoolmaster, you, past seventy; that's smarter! I tell 'em I learn from you, so's I can teach my young folks what the study-books leave out.

LINK Sure ye don't want to jine the celebratin'?

POLLY No, *sir!* We're goin' to celebrate right here, and you're to teach me to keep school some more.

(*She holds ready for him the blue coat and hat.*)

LINK (*looking up*)

What's thar?

POLLY Your teachin' rig.

(*She helps him on with it.*)

LINK The old blue coat!-- My, but I'd like to see the boys--(*gazing at the hat*) the Grand Old Army Boys! (*dreamily*) Yes, we was boys: jest boys! Polly, you tell your young folks, when they study the books, that we was nothin' else but boys jest fallin' in love, with best gals left t' home-- the same as you; and when the shot was singin', we pulled their picters out, and prayed to them 'most morn'n the Almighty.

(LINK looks up suddenly--a strange light in his face. Again, to a far strain of music, the bugle sounds.)

Thar she blows Agin!

POLLY They're marchin' to the graves with flowers.

LINK My Godfrey!'t ain't so much thinkin' o' flowers and the young folks, their faces, and the blue line of old fellers marchin'--it's the music! that old brass voice a-callin'! Seems as though, legs or no legs, I'd have to up and foller to God-knows-whar, and holler--holler back to guns roarin' in the dark. No; durn it, no! I jest can't stan' the music.

POLLY (*goes to the work-bench, where the box is steaming*)

Uncle Link, you want that I should steam this longer?

LINK (*absently*)

Oh, A kittleful, a kittleful.

POLLY (*coming over to him*)

Now, then, I'm ready for school.--I hope I've drawed the map all right.

LINK Map? Oh, the map!

(*Surveying the woodpile reminiscently, he nods.*)

Yes, thar she be: old Gettysburg!

POLLY I know the places--most.

LINK So, *do* ye? Good, now: whar's your marker?

POLLY (*taking up the hoe*)

Here.

LINK Willoughby Run: whar's that?

POLLY (*pointing with the hoe toward the left of the woodpile*)

That's farthest over next the barn door.

LINK My, how we fit the Johnnies thar, the fust mornin'! Jest behind them willers, acrost the Run, that's whar we captur'd Archer. My, my!

POLLY Over there--that's Seminary Ridge.

(*She points to different heights and depressions, as LINK nods his approval.*)

Peach Orchard, Devil's Den, Round Top, the Wheatfield--

LINK Lord, Lord, the Wheatfield!

POLLY (*continuing*)

Cemetery Hill, Little Round Top, Death Valley, and this here is Cemetery Ridge.

LINK (*pointing to the little flag*)

And colors flyin'! We *kep* 'em flyin' thar, too, all three days, From start to finish.

POLLY Have I learned 'em right?

LINK A number One, chick! Wait a mite: Culp's Hill: I don't jest spy Culp's Hill.

POLLY There wa'n't enough kindlin's to spare for that. It ought to lay east there, towards the kitchen.

LINK Let it go! That's whar us Yanks left our back door ajar and Johnson stuck his foot in: kep' it thar, too, till he got it squeeze off by old Slocum. Let Culp's Hill lay for now.--Lend me your marker. (POLLY *hands him the hoe. From his chair, he reaches with it and digs in the chips.*) Death Valley needs some scoopin' deeper. So: smooth off them chips.

(POLLY *does so with her foot.*)

You better guess't was deep As hell, that second day, come sundown.-
-Here, (He hands back the hoe to her.) flat down the Wheatfield yonder.

(POLLY *does so.*)

God a'mighty! That Wheatfield: wall, we flatted it down flatter than any pancake what you ever cooked, Polly; and't wa'n't no maple syrup neither was runnin', slipp'ry hot and slimy black, all over it, that nightfall.

POLLY Here's the road to Emmetsburg.

LINK No,'t 'ain't: this here's the pike to Taneytown, where Sykes's boys come sweatin', after an all-night march, jest in the nick to save our second day. The Emmetsburg road's thar.--Whar was I, 'fore I fell cat-nappin'?

POLLY At sunset, July second, sixty-three.

LINK (*nodding, reminiscent*)

The Bloody Sundown! God, that crazy sun: she set a dozen times that afternoon, red-yeller as a punkin jack-o'-lantern, rairin' and pitchin' through the roarin' smoke till she clean busted, like the other bombs, behind the hills.

POLLY My! Wa'n't you never scart and wished you'd stayed t' home?

LINK Scart? Wall, I wonder! Chick, look a-thar: them little stripes and stars. I heerd a feller onct, down to the store,-- a dressy mister, span-new from the city-- layin' the law down: "All this stars and stripes," says he, "and red and white and blue is rubbish, mere sentimental rot, spread-eagleism!" "I wan't' know!" says I. "In sixty-three, I knowed a lad, named Link. Onct, after sundown I met him stumblin'--with two dead men's muskets for crutches--towards a bucket, full of ink--- water, they called it. When he'd drunk a spell, he tuk the rest to wash his bullet-holes.--- Wall, sir, he had a piece o' splintered stick, with red and white and blue, tore'most t' tatters, a-danglin' from it. 'Be you color sergeant?' says I. 'Not me,' says Link; 'the sergeant's dead; but when he fell, he handed me this bit o' rubbish--red and white and blue.' And Link he laughed. 'What be you laughin' for?' says I. 'Oh, nothin'. Ain't it lovely, though!'" says Link.

POLLY What did the span-new mister say to that?

LINK I didn't stop to listen. Them as never heerd dead men callin' for the colors don't guess what they be.

(*Sitting up and blinking hard*)

But this ain't keepin' school!

POLLY (*quietly*)

I guess I'm learnin' somethin', Uncle Link.

LINK The second day, 'fore sunset.

(He takes the hoe and points with it.)

Yon's the Wheatfield. Behind it thar lies Longstreet with his rebels. Here be the Yanks, and Cemetery Ridge behind 'em. Hancock--he's our general-- he's got to hold the Ridge, till reinforcements from Taneytown. But lose the Wheatfield, lose the Ridge, and lose the Ridge--lose God-and-all!-- Lee, the old fox, he'd nab up Washington, Abe Lincoln, and the White House in one bite!-- So the Union, Polly-- me and you and Roger, your Uncle Link, and Uncle Sam--is all thar--growin' in that Wheatfield.

POLLY (smiling proudly)

And they're growin' still!

LINK Not the wheat, though. Over them stone walls, thar comes the Johnnies, thick as grasshoppers: gray legs a-jumpin' through the tall wheat-tops, and now thar ain't no tops, thar ain't no wheat, thar ain't no lookin': jest blind feelin' round in the black mud, and trampin' on boys' faces, and grapplin' with hell-devils, and stink o' smoke, and stingin' smother, and--up thar through the dark-- that crazy punkin sun, like an old moon lopsided, crackin' her red shell with thunder!

(In the distance, a bugle sounds, and the low martial music of a brass band begins. Again LINK'S face twitches, and he pauses, listening. From this moment on, the sound and emotion of the brass music, slowly growing louder, permeates the scene.)

POLLY Oh! What was God a-thinkin' of, t' allow the created world to act that awful?

LINK Now, I wonder!--Cast your eye along this hoe:

(He stirs the chips and wood-dirt round with the hoe-iron.)

Thar in that poked up mess o' dirt, you see yon weeny chip of ox-yoke?--That's the boy I spoke on: Link, Link Tadbourne: "Chipmunk Link," they call him, 'cause his legs is spry's a squirrel's.-- Wall, mebbe some good angel, with bright eyes like yourn, stood lookin' down on him that day, keepin' the Devil's hoe from crackin' him.

(Patting her hand, which rests on his hoe)

If so, I reckon, Polly, it was you. But mebbe jest Old Nick, as he sat hoein' them hills, and haulin' in the little heaps o' squirmen' critters, kind o' reco'nized Link as his livin' image, and so kep' him to put in an airthly hell, whar thar ain't no legs, and worn-out devils sit froze in high-backed chairs, list'nin' to bugles--bugles--bugles, callin'.

(LINK clutches the sides of his chair, staring. The music draws nearer. POLLY touches him soothingly.)

POLLY Don't, dear; they'll soon quit playin'. Never mind'em.

LINK (relaxing under her touch)

No, never mind; that's right. It's jest that onct-- onct we was boys, onct we was boys--with legs. But never mind. An old boy ain't a bugle. *Onct*, though, he was: and all God's life a-snortin' outn his nostrils, and Hell's mischief laughin' outn his eyes, and all the mornin' winds a-blowin' *Glory Hallelujahs*, like brass music, from his mouth.--But never mind! 'T ain't nothin': boys in blue ain't bugles now. Old brass gits rusty, and old underpinnin' gits rotten, and trapped chipmunks lose their legs.

(With smouldering fire)

But jest the same--

(His face convulses and he cries out, terribly--straining in his chair to rise.)

--for holy God, that band! Why don't they stop that band!

POLLY (going)

I'll run and tell them. Sit quiet, dear. I'll be right back.

(Glancing back anxiously, POLLY disappears outside. The approaching band begins to play "John Brown's Body." LINK sits motionless, gripping his chair.)

LINK *Set quiet!* Dead folks don't set, and livin' folks kin stand, and Link--he kin set quiet.--God a'mighty, how kin he set, and them a-marchin' thar with old John Brown? Lord God, you ain't forgot the boys, have ye? the boys, how they come marchin' home to ye, live and dead, behind old Brown, a-singin' Glory to ye! Jest look down: thar's Gettysburg, thar's Cemetery Ridge: don't say ye disremember them! And thar's the colors. Look, he's picked 'em up--the sergeant's blood splotched 'em some--but thar they be, still flyin'! Link done that: Link--the s pry boy, what they call Chipmunk: you ain't forgot his double-step, have ye?

(Again he cries out, beseechingly)

My God, why do You keep on marchin' and leave him settin' here?
(To the music outside, the voices of children begin to sing the words of "John Brown's Body." At the sound, LINK'S face becomes transformed with emotion, his body shakes, and his shoulders heave and straighten.) No!--I--won't--set!

(Wresting himself mightily, he rises from his chair, and stands.)

Them are the boys that marched to Kingdom-Come ahead of us, but we keep fallin' in line. Them voices--Lord, I guess you've brought along Your Sunday choir of young angel folks to help the boys out.

(Following the music with swaying arms)

Glory!--Never mind me singin': you kin drown me out. But I'm goin' t' jine in, or bust!

(Joining with the children's voices, he moves unconsciously along the edge of the woodpile. With stiff steps--his one hand leaning on the hoe, his other reached as to unseen hands, that draw him--he totters toward the sunlight and the green lawn, at back. As he does so, his thin, cracked voice takes up the battle-hymn where the children's are singing it.)

"--a-mould'rin' in the grave, John Brown's body lies a-mould'rin' in the grave. John Brown's body lies a-mould'rin' in the grave, But his soul goes--"

(Suddenly he stops, aware that he is walking, and cries aloud, astounded) Lord, Lord, my legs! Whar did Ye git my legs?

(Shaking with delight, he drops his hoe, seizes up the little flag from the woodpile, and waves it joyously.)

I'm comin', boys! Link's loose agin: Chipmunk has sprung his trap.

(With tottering gait, he climbs the little mound in the woodpile.)

Now, boys, three cheers for Cemetery Ridge! Jine in, jine in!

(Swinging the flag)

Hooray!--Hooray!--Hooray!

(Outside, the music grows louder, and the voices of old men and children sing martially to the brass music.

With his final cheer, LINK *stumbles down from the mound, brandishes in one hand his hat, in the other the little flag, and stumps off toward the approaching procession into the sunlight, joining his old cracked voice, jubilant, with the singers:)*

"--ry hallelujah, Glory, glory hallelujah, His truth is marchin' on!"

[CURTAIN]