THE veteran of the Civil War best known to me was my father, James Henry Woodson. He was owned as a slave in Fluvanna County on the James River about sixty-five miles above Richmond, Virginia, in one of the infertile sections of worn-out hilly land and on that side of the stream which in its meandering aggravated the situation by leaving the alluvial soil on the opposite side of the river. In this infelicitous situation planters often had more slaves than could make a living on their own premises and hired out their surplus bondmen. Because of this misfortune, James Henry Woodson, although of a mechanical turn, like his father, Carter Woodson who was a cabinet maker, was debased to the level of a ditch-digger in the employ of one James Stratton. The son, making use of his mechanical knowledge, picked up mainly by contact and observation, was at this time hewing from the forest nearby some hard timber out of which he made at night rough furniture and fish traps which he sold for pocket change. Learning that the bondman was thus applying his leisure, Stratton came upon him in the ditch where he was working one morning and undertook to whip the employee for thus exploiting his opportunity. The employee, however, turned the scales, whipped Stratton, and rushed back to the plantation where he was owned by one Jack Toney.

Seeing James returning home, Toney indignantly inquired: "What are you doing here this time of day?"

"Stratton and I fell out," was the reply. "Fell out! That's the trouble now! All free! All free!"

"Yes, we are free," came the retort. "And if you bother me I'll kill you, another devil!"

The rebellious slave, realizing his danger, rushed to his cabin, grabbed his best suit of clothes and a clean white handkerchief, dashed toward the woods where he quickly dressed in this more becoming attire and made his way as rapidly as possible toward Richmond. He had heard that the Union Soldiers, or the Yankees, as they were called, were in that area. He hurried on and on, hoping to see some trace of the friends of freedom. Finally he began to hear the tramping of horses and on entering a wide field he saw in the distance a cavalry
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detachment dressed in blue. When the Captain Marks in charge saw the fugitive he yelled out, "Halt." The fugitive had learned that, if he waved something white that would mean no offense, and he would not be mistaken for an enemy. Thereupon he waved his white handkerchief to great effect, and the officer beckoned him to come hither. With a heart leaping for joy the fugitive rushed to the invading troops.

"Who are you?" inquired the officer. "A runaway slave!"

"Yes, Sir. I had to escape for my life because to prevent my employer from beating me I had to beat him.

"Mount that horse. Fall in line and come with us. Where is this man that treated you so cruelly?"

"His name is Stratton, and he lives only a few miles up the river. I'll show you."

And they rode on to the Stratton plantation, caught the owner, tied him up and whipped him. They even made him climb a tree backwards. Then, using the fugitive as a guide, the invaders directed their raid farther into the interior of the state.

"Do you know of any stores of provisions and other materials of war?" inquired the captain.

"I do," said the fugitive, giving in detail what he knew about the supplies at the mills near Fork Union in Fluvanna County.

The troops were soon on the very spot but found the place guarded by Confederate soldiers. The invaders called on the defenders to surrender, but they indignantly refused. The order was promptly given to fire, and after the exchange of a few shots resulting in the death of a disproportionate number of the defenders the remainder took flight to the neighboring woods. The invaders loaded on their horses all the provisions they could conveniently carry and burned all the rest. This act they repeated here and there on that raid and then returned to the Richmond-Petersburg area where under Philip H. Sheridan, after his dashes east and west they participated in the final maneuvers which forced the surrender of Robert E. Lee. James Henry Woodson served the rest of the war under Captain Marks and the famous Custer who years later made his last charge among the Indians in the Far West. After emancipation, however, the freedman settled in Buckingham County, Virginia, where he married Anne Eliza Riddle in 1867.

Another member of my family enlightened me considerably on the Civil War. He was my mother's brother, Robert D. Riddle, who was born in Buckingham County across the James River from Fluvanna County. As a small child he was sold with his mother to the planter near Buchanan in what is now the western part of Virginia. The poor and indebted slaveholders had tried to show compassion in trying not to sell the mother from her little children; and my mother, Anne Eliza Riddle, then a girl of only eleven years, persuaded the owners to sell her instead and thus keep the little children and their mother together. However, although they placed Anne Eliza twice on the slave block at Buckingham Court House and once in Richmond they could not secure for her such a price as would relieve the plantation of the pressing debt. As a last resort they placed the mother of the children on the block and sold her and the two youngest of her offspring for $2,300 which brought relief to the impoverished owners. Robert D. Riddle was the older of these two children.

Not many years thereafter came the Civil War, and Union Soldiers in one of their raids into the interior of Virginia, very much like the one mentioned above, reached the plantation where they saw this interesting little mulatto running around the cabin while his mother was toiling in the fields. He so impressed these men that they took him along as a mascot. His people, however, never learned what became of him and mourned him as one destroyed by some natural force, probably devoured by the wild beasts.

On reaching mountainous West Virginia these soldiers found that they could not properly care for such a young boy and gave him to a colored family at White Sulphur Springs. They could never find out exactly what his origin was because the boy was so young when taken from his parents that he remembered only his mother's name and his own—Robert D. Riddle. In 1873, however, a solution came when his oldest sister, Anne Eliza Woodson, at that time the wife of James Henry Woodson, had moved with her husband to West Virginia, where he was engaged in the construction of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad through West Virginia and later figured as a laborer in the development of Huntington. To that new settlement came persons from afar and among them a worker who had been brought up at White Sulphur Springs. Having heard Mrs. Woodson speak frequently of her lost brother, this worker recalled that a young man at his former home had the very name and resembled Mrs. Woodson. He addressed to his home town a detailed inquiry and thereby discovered this lost brother. Great rejoicing followed in Huntington when this young man came to visit his sister and likewise in Buckingham County, Virginia, to which his mother had returned immediately after the Civil War with the younger child, John Morton Riddle. Robert D. Riddle remained in West Virginia where he was educated and later taught school at Ronceverte. He finally distinguished himself by maintaining a family of five in cultivating exceptionally fine celery on a small parcel of only one acre.

One of the most interesting veterans of the Civil War with whom I came into contact and one of the best friends I have ever had I fortunately met at Nutalburg, Fayette County, West Virginia, where he became a coal miner. (I was not born in West Virginia. My parents moved in 1874 from Huntington, West Virginia, back to their old home near New Canton in

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Ship Union,” “God Save the Flag,” and “Brother Jonathan’s Lament for Sister Caroline,” which compares the secession of the South from the North to a quarrel between a brother and sister. James R. Lowell also wrote numerous poems dealing with the war. His “Jonathan to John” is a strong protest against England’s hostile attitude toward the North; “The Washers of the Shroud” is impregnated with the spirit of Unionism; his poem “A Message of Jeff Davis in Secret Session” ridicules the attempt of the Confederate President to raise funds to maintain the status of the South as a separate nation. Most famous of all Lowell’s poems is the “Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration,” July 21, 1865. In dignified and stately verses the poet commemorates the brave sons of Harvard (some being his relatives) who had fallen in the conflict. Among the many poems of the Quaker poet, John Greenleaf Whittier, may be mentioned “The Battle Autumn of 1862,” “The Proclamation,” and “Laus Deo,” in which the poet expresses joy as he hears bells announcing the ratification of the constitutional amendment to abolish slavery. Walt Whitman’s patriotic poems are well known to all students of American literature. His “The Wound-Dresser” is noteworthy because the egotism of the earlier poems has given way to the tenderness of the old poet, who, with loving hands, ministers to the sick and dying in the hospitals of the battlefield. Edmund C. Stedman, Bayard Taylor, Theodore Tilton, and two famous Southern poets, Henry Timrod and Sidney Lanier, also wrote of the Civil War. Lanier’s “The Raven Days” portrays the dark gloomy days which characterized the South during the Reconstruction period.

Colored poets were not negligent in writing of the war, being animated by the same patriotic spirit as inspired Phyllis Wheatley to write her tributes to Washington and Lee at the close of the Revolution-War. James Madison Bell wrote numerous poems among which are “Emancipation in the District of Columbia, April 16, 1862,” “Lincoln,” “The Dawn of Freedom.” “The Triumph of Liberty” reviews the conflict between the North and South and pays tribute to “Old Massachusetts Fifty-fourth.” The author rejoices particularly over the fact that the Senate has as one of its members, a Negro who twelve years ago would not have dared to tread its “sacred halls.” A. A. Whitman’s “Not a Man and Yet a Man” and “The End of the Whole Matter” deplore the prejudice against the Negro and the mockery of any “Freedom” which is not complete.

Frances E. W. Harper’s “President Lincoln’s Proclamation” and “Fifteenth Amendment” deserve consideration also, at this point. In Thomas W. Talley’s “Negro Folk Rhymes” are two in dialect: “Destitute Former Slave Owners” and “Negro Soldiers’ Civil War Chant.” The author of “The Black Brigade” humorously represents the shock of the enemy on meeting the black troops.

“*And when we meet do enemy I’ll bet we’ll make them stare, For I know dey’ll catch de very debil When dey meet our woolly hair.*”

The “black and unknown bards of long ago,” the makers of the beautiful spirituals, were not unaware of the Civil War. One spiritual, the “Year of Jubilee,” anticipates the freedom to come as Negro slaves flee from their masters. “Slavery Chain,” beginning “Slav’ry chain done broke at las’, goin’ to praise God ‘til I die,” is a paean of deliverance from the horrors of slavery. Another spiritual which S. C. Armstrong termed “The Negro Battle Hymn,” celebrates the Negro soldier who looks like a man of war. “Who’ll Jine de Union” is another spiritual in which the heavenly Union takes the place of the earthly “Union” of the Civil War.

Likewise today, when the whole world is engaged in a vast titanic struggle, the hearts of all freedom-loving peoples look eagerly forward to the time when there will be a union of men of all races, all climes, and all creeds.

**My Recollections of Veterans of the Civil War**

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Buckingham County, Virginia. There I was born the following year. At that time, however, Virginia, like most of the worn-out South, was passing through an age of poverty, and to escape the hardships which endured in that state younger Negroes went as workers to build railroads and open the coal mines of West Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio. My oldest brother, Robert H. Woodson, had gone in this migration, and on returning home on a visit in Virginia he gave such a glowing account of the prosperity to the west that all the children wanted to go with him to this land of promise. My mother was easily induced to go, but it was only with reluctance that my father agreed to go back to the Little Mountain State. After my brother and I spent a short time helping to build the railroad from Thurmond up Loup Creek in 1892 we found more desirable employment as coal miners at Nutallburg in Fayette County and moved the family back to Huntington in 1893.)

This veteran was Oliver Jones. He had had experience as a cook in his native Richmond before the Civil War, and in his new home in West Virginia he made himself useful as a restaurateur. After doing a day’s work in the coal mine he would throw his home open as a tearoom for the miners. This was a godsend for these men. The operators who owned all the land around would never allow the establishment of
any business to compete with their commissary where they sold the essentials of life at prices from sixty to one hundred per cent higher than they were offered elsewhere. There was, however, no objection to Oliver Jones' selling ice cream, fruits, and especially watermelons which he bought by the car loads. Inasmuch as I always enjoyed nice things to eat I frequented this commissary where they sold the things to eat I frequented this place, and there I made a great friend.

Jones was the very sort of man to have charge of a resort of this type. In the first place, he was a fine-looking man—a mulatto of dark-brown hair and chestnut eyes, with a well trained mustache and becoming goatee. He stood about five feet eight inches tall and was slightly bowlegged, a condition aggravated somewhat by an all but fatal accident in the mine. He looked the part of a Virginia gentleman. He never had much to say except in the case of matters of importance on which he could speak intelligently. He was a well educated man, but he could neither read nor write. He learned through others who had had opportunities for intellectual development. When I met him I had just come out of Virginia where I had had the good fortune of being well grounded in the fundamentals taught in the rural schools of my native home by my two uncles, John Morton Riddle and James Buchanan Riddle. When Oliver Jones learned that I could read he soon engaged me to inform him and his friends as to what was in the daily newspapers. My compensation was to have all the nice things I wanted to eat. Whenever a veteran of the Civil War came out as a candidate for office or achieved distinction, I had to look him up in the books, inform my friends as to what battles he had fought, victories he had won and principles which he thereupon sustained. Jones was especially anxious to hear about those veterans who, like himself, were in battle array to attack Lee's army the morning he surrendered at Appomattox Court House.

This service for a friend was decidedly educational for me. I learned so much myself because of the much more extensive reading required by him than I probably would have undertaken for my own benefit. This reading was not a new task for me, for in Virginia, as the youngest boy of the family, the last to be permitted to go into life to make an independent living, I had thus served my father. Yet, in Virginia newspapers did not circulate freely. Negroes and poor whites could not spare funds for such a purpose, and we had to depend upon stale news. In West Virginia, however, the situation was very different. Miners usually made more money than they knew what to do with, and thousands wasted their earnings in whiskey, gambling and playing the role of desperados. Oliver Jones and his circle represented the better type. He would take a social glass among friends, but never indulged himself to excess. He would never offer me anything to drink. To him it was a bad habit. Do not begin it, and you will not have to end it.

Oliver Jones' home was all but a reading room. He bought interesting books on the Negro—J. T. Wilson's *Black Phalanx*, W. J. Simons' *Men of Mark*, G. W. Williams' *Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion* and others giving the important achievements of the Negro. He subscribed to the Negro newspapers like *The Mountaineer* and *The Pioneer*, edited in the State by Christopher Payne; and *The Richmond Planet*, edited by John Mitchell at Richmond. When these and other distinguished Negroes came to town they visited Oliver Jones, and there I had the opportunity to learn something about the trials and battles of the Negro for freedom and equality. Jones had fought for those principles as a soldier in the Civil War, and he was still willing to do his part to further the cause. In this circle the history of the race was discussed frequently, and my interest in penetrating the past of my people was deepened and intensified.

This circle, however, was not narrowly confined to the discussion of the trials and afflictions of the race. Oliver Jones was a liberal-minded man seeking to broaden his vision by keeping up with whatever passed in this country and in remote parts of the universe. He subscribed to such papers as the *Pittsburgh Telegraph*, the *Toledo Blade*, the Cincinnati *Commercial Gazette*, the *Enquirer* and the *Louisville Courier Journal*. We knew about such outstanding editors as Murat Halstead, John R. McClean, and Henry Watterson. Occasionally we got inklings of Samuel Bowles of the *Springfield Republican*, of Charles A. Dana of the New York *Suns*, and of Whitelaw Reid of the New York *Tribune*. We learned much thereby about the issues before the American people and the measures offered to meet the demands of the times. In these newspapers which I read to Oliver Jones were speeches, lectures and essays dealing with civil service reform, reduction of taxes, tariff for protection, tariff for revenue only and free trade. We had the opportunity to learn through the press about the gold standard, bimetallism, the demonetization of silver, and the free and unlimited coinage of silver at the legal ration of 16 to 1. Along with these came the new leaders of Populist doctrines with such thoughts as those of 'Sockless' Jere Simpson of Kansas, Tom Watson of Georgia, and William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska in the wave of primary elections, the recall of judges, initiative and referendum, and the curbing of monopolies by government ownership. In seeking through the press information on these questions for Oliver Jones and his friends I was learning in an effective way most important phases of history and economics.

I had the opportunity to continue this education under another Civil War veteran in Huntington, to which I went in 1895 to attend the Douglass High School and of which I became principal in 1900. My father still required me to read for him just as I had done first for
him in Virginia and for Oliver Jones later in West Virginia. From this valuable experience my practical education continued.

Another veteran was a Confederate named Wysong. My father worked under him as a foreman at the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Shops in Huntington. On many occasions he and my father discussed the Civil War and other veterans joined the conversation. The discussion was especially profitable on Sunday morning when there was not much to do. Although I was a man of twenty-five and the principal of the local high school, my mother would order me to take my father a warm breakfast on Sunday morning that he might feast just as we did on the steaks, chops and fowl we usually had on Sunday morning. I was glad of the opportunity, for I soon found myself learning so much about the Civil War from the actual participants that I sought rather than neglected the opportunity to carry the dinner pail. These discussions were suddenly brought to a close when in one of the debates Wysong, the Confederate, played up unduly the Lost Cause or defended slavery too boldly. My father engaged him in a fracas in which the employer got the better of the boss. Wysong vehemently demanded the dismissal of the victor. The exception to which I refer is Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback whom I knew well and with whom I often talked about the past. When I first met the "Governor" as we were accustomed to call him, I did not know how to take him. I had heard much about him through his enemies and had some misgivings in approaching him. By becoming acquainted with the man I learned that he had been misrepresented by his antagonists whom he had outwitted in the game of politics in Louisiana during the Reconstruction. In spite of their methods of shady and questionable order Pinchback secured elected security to the Constitutional convention, contrived to be chosen for both branches of the State legislature, to be Lieutenant Governor.
to serve as the Acting Governor of the State, and to be elected to the United States Senate from which the politicians of both parties barred him, although his title thereafter was conceded as valid and he drew full pay. This rapid rise made him anathema to the agents of racial minority rule who branded him as a corrupt leader.

Investigation, however, shows that he was an honest man who deserved barred him, although his title to serve as the Acting Governor of the State, and to be elected to the United States Senate from which the politicians of both parties barred him, although his title thereafter was conceded as valid and he drew full pay. This rapid rise made him anathema to the agents of racial minority rule who branded him as a corrupt leader.

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With respect to the Civil War Pinchback's account was very enlightening. He used to relate with much feeling his experiences in Ohio where he contrived to attend Gilmore's High School but soon came to want when the heirs to his white father's estate deprived him and his mother of their share. His struggle to make a living and to assist his mother with an invalid assistant, in the form of a steamboat, which during those ante bellum days was considerably profitable. The turning point in his career was in 1861 when his work as a steward on the steamboat was interrupted by the Civil War. Pinchback felt that in the midst of the fight in his native New Orleans he could do something to help the advance of freedom. In Yazoo, Mississippi, on May 10, 1862, therefore, Pinchback abandoned the steamer on which he was serving, ran the Confederate blockade, and reached the Crescent City. There he soon became involved in trouble with his brother-in-law who had Pinchback imprisoned for assault. From this, however, he soon emerged. He was released to enlist in the First Louisiana Volunteer Infantry. Soon thereafter he was commissioned to assist in recruiting the Louisiana Second Infantry. Next came the call of General Benjamin Butler, the commander of the department of the Gulf, urging colored men to enlist and fight to save the Union.

Thereafter Pinchback was to continue the recruiting under more favorable circumstances, but there arose difficulties of mustering these Negro troops into the service. The Second Regiment Native Guards with Pinchback commanding Company A was recognized October 12, 1862. Yet difficulty lay in the fact that the Union soldiers were about as much prejudiced against the Negro soldiers as were the Confederates. Pinchback insisted on equal treatment and equal compensation for soldiers regardless of their color, but he became so discouraged in the rising tide of race hate that he and his fellow officers resigned before the end of the first year. Later, after another conference with General N. P. Banks, Pinchback took new courage and organized a company of Negro cavalry; but, although General Banks was glad to receive the Company, he would not accept Pinchback as the officer of the unit. His excuse was that no authority then existed for the employment of Negroes in any other capacity than that of privates. Rebuffed but not yet despairing, Pinchback accompanied by Captain H. C. Carter, came to Washington in 1865 to obtain permission from President Lincoln to raise a regiment of colored men in Ohio and Indiana, but the end of the war came before this plan could be considered by the administration.

The Fort Pillow Massacre

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military precedents that where the issue has been fairly presented, and the ability displayed, fearful results are expected to follow a refusal to surrender.'"

To General Lee this reply was sent by General Washburn:

"The record in the case is plainly made up, and I leave it. You justify and approve it, and appeal to history for precedent.

"As I have said, history furnishes no parallel. True, there are instances where, after a long and protracted resistance resulting in heavy loss to the assailant party, the garrison has been put to the sword, but I know of no such instance that did not bring dishonor upon the commander that ordered or suffered it.

"You will seek in vain for consultation in history, pursue the inquiry as far as you may. Your desire to shift the responsibility for the Fort Pillow Massacre, or to find excuses for it, is not strange. But the responsibility still remains where it belongs, and there it will remain.""

The report of the casualties of Fort Pillow is revealing. At the beginning of the battle there were 262 Negro soldiers in the garrison. The total number of men in the fort was 557. War Department records show that three-fourths of this total was wiped out. Of this number 238 were Negroes reported as "killed and missing." General Forrest's report listed 20 of his men killed and 60 wounded. He was unable to tell the number of Union losses but stated that "228 were buried on the evening of the battle," and "quite a number were buried the next day by a detail from the gunboat fleet." His report continues:

"We captured 164 Federals, 73 Negro troops, and about 40 Negro women and children." The arithmetic of these two reports shows slight discrepancies, but the fact that is most outstanding is that helpless and unarmed Negroes bore the brunt of the slaughter in numbers too sickening to remember.

We leave this bloody page of history without further comment, remembering only the final words of the historian as he ends the dreadful chapter:

"History records, and the record will remain as long as the English language endures, that at Fort Pillow General Forrest and General Chalmers violated the honor of a flag of truce, the laws of civilized warfare,—outraged every sentiment of humanity and dishonored the uniform of Lee and Jackson,

"Correspondence between General Lee and General Washburn: Records of the Rebellion, vol. x, pp. 721-730."