

THE STORY OF KEEDON BLUFFS

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The story of Keedon bluffs by Charles Egbert Craddock

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CHARLES EGBERT CRADDOCK

**THE STORY OF
KEEDON BLUFFS**

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THE
STORY OF KEEDON BLUFFS

BY

CHARLES EGBERT CRADDOCK

AUTHOR OF "IN THE CLOUDS," "DOWN THE RAVINE," "IN THE
TENNESSEE MOUNTAINS," "THE PROPHET OF THE
GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS," ETC.



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THE STORY OF KEEDON BLUFFS.

I.

TOWERING into the air, reflected deep in the river, the great height of Keedon Bluffs is doubled to the casual glance and augmented in popular rumor. Nevertheless a vast mass of rock it is, splintered and creviced, and with rugged, beetling ledges, all atilt, and here and there a niche which holds a hardy shrub, subsisting surely on the bounty of the air or the smile of the sun, for scant sustenance can be coaxed from the solid sandstone.

Here bats and lizards colonize, and amongst the trailing vines winged songsters find a home, and sometimes stealthy, four-footed, marauding shadows, famous climbers, creep in and out of the hollows of the rocks, for it is in the very heart of the wilderness on a slope of the Great Smoky Range. Naught

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There sat all day beside the wood-fire a man of middle age, but with a face strangely young. It was like the face of a faded painting, changing only in the loss of color. The hair, growing off a broad forehead, was bleaching fast; the tints had become dim on cheek and lip, but time and care had drawn no lines, and an expression of childlike tranquillity hovered about the downcast eyes, forever shielded by the drooping lids. Life seemed to have ended for him twenty years before, on a day surcharged with disaster, when the great gun, which had been a sort of Thor to him, and which he had served with an admiring affection and reverent care, was spiked by its own cannoneers that it might fall useless into the hands of the enemy. It was the last thing he ever saw — this great silenced god of thunder — as he stood beside it with the sponge-staff in his hand. For among the shells shrieking through the smoky air, one was laden with his doom. A hiss close at hand, the din of an abrupt explosion, and he fell unconscious under the carriage of the piece, and there he was captured.

And when the war was over and he came forth alike from the prison and the hospital, blinded and helpless, naught remained to him but to vaguely ponder on what had been in the days that had gone forever, for he hardly seemed to look to the future, and the present was empty-handed.

He had met his grief and the darkness with a stoicism difficult to comprehend. He spent his days in calm unimbittered meditation, not gentle, but with flashes of his old spirit to attest his unchanged identity. Acclimated to sorrow, without hope, or fear, or anxiety, or participation in life, time could but pass him by, and youth seemed to abide with him.

The old martial interest flared up when Ike told of his discovery on the ledge of Keedon Bluffs.

“What kind o’ ball, Ike?” he demanded.

But Ike had been born too late to be discerning as to warlike projectiles.

“I wisht I could lay my hand on it!” said the blind artillery-man. “I’ll be bound I’d know, ef I jes’ could heft it wunst! Whar

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did it lodge, Ike? Could I make out ter git a-nigh it? Could ye an' me git thar ter-gether?"

"Ye 'pear b'reft, Abner!" aunt Jemima cried out angrily. "Ye mus' hev los' more 'n yer sight. Hev ye furgot how Keedon Bluffs look? Thar ain't nobody sca'cely ez could keep foot-hold 'mongst them sheer-cliffs. An' ye ought n't ter be aggin' on Ike ter climb sech places — git his neck bruk. Ye hain't got no call, sure, ter set store on no mo' cannon-balls, an' artillery, an' sech. I 'low ez ye 'd hev hed enough o' guns, an' I wish ye 'd never hed nuthin' ter do with no rebels."

For this was one of the divided families so usual in East Tennessee, and while the elders had clung to the traditions of their fathers — the men fighting staunchly for the Union — the youngest had as a mere boy fled from his home to join the Confederate forces, and had stood by his gun through many a fiery hail of battle storms. But the bitterness of these differences was fast dying out.

"I hev gin the word," said Ike's father,