

**HALF HOUR
CLASSICS:
SMITH'S BATTERY**

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Half Hour Classics: Smith's Battery by Robert W. Chambers

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ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

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SMITH'S BATTERY**

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Half Hour Classics

By
Modern Masters of Fiction

SMITH'S
BATTERY

By

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

Author of "Ashes of Empire," "The
Conspirators," etc.



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1920

C. E. RAY

SMITH'S BATTERY

Impotent Pieces of the Game He plays
Upon this Checker-board of Nights and Days ;
Hither and thither moves, and checks, and slays,
And one by one back in the Closet lays.

FITZGERALD.

ON the evening of the 15th the cavalry left by moonlight, riding along the railroad toward Slow-River Junction. The bulk of the infantry followed two days later, leaving behind them "The Dead Rabbits," — a New York regiment, — a squad of cavalry, and Smith's four-gun battery, to garrison a hamlet inhabited principally by mosquitoes.

The hamlet of Slow-River contained a red brick church, some houses, a water-tank, and a race-track.

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[1]

SMITH'S BATTERY

The "Dead Rabbits" established their warren in the race-track sheds, the cavalry guarded the railway and water-tank, and Smith's battery decorated the graveyard around the red brick church.

The inhabitants of Slow-River, barring the mosquitoes, had mostly disappeared toward Dixie before the arrival of Wilson's division. When Wilson moved on toward the Junction, leaving behind him the "Dead Rabbits," — and Smith's Battery to take care of them — the non-combatant population of Slow-River numbered two, — not including an Ethiopian of no account.

Smith, of Smith's Battery, had constituted himself an inquisition of one. The Reverend Laomi Smull, pastor of the brick church, took the oath of allegiance and smacked the Book with moist thick lips. Mrs. Ashley, the remaining inhabitant of

SMITH'S BATTERY

Slow-River, widow of a Union officer killed in the early days of the war, took the oath earnestly, then told Smith who she was and received his apologies with sensitive reserve.

"I wished to take the oath," she said: "I have not had my country brought so near for many months."

The Reverend Laomi Smull clasped his soft fingers together and surveyed the firmament while Mrs. Ashley brushed the tears from her blue eyes. When she thanked Smith for the privilege of publicly acknowledging her country, the Reverend Laomi nodded and closed his small eyes as though in ecstatic contemplation of a soul regenerated.

"Where's the nigger?" inquired Smith when Mrs. Ashley had gone back to her cottage below the church.

"Do you refer to our unfortunate coloured brother?" suggested the reverend gentleman.