

Ballam Lyles

Interview with "Uncle" Ballam Lyles (74)

Carlisle, S.C.

—*Caldwell Sims, Union, S.C.*

"Likker puts de wrong ideas in people's haid. I see dat ever since de time I shed my shirt tail. When dey gits likker in dem, dey thinks dey is important as de president. All o' 'em wants to act like millionairs. And if de truth be known, ain't narry one uv 'em worth killing. Likker jes' brings 'em down to dat. It'll do anybody like dat. It don't make no difference how rich dey is nor how white dey is. It'll sho' ruin 'em. And de niggers, it does dem de same way, 'cept dey don't have as far down to come as de white folks does. And dat's de reason I ain't got no use fer no likker.

"When I was a lil shirt-tail boy, I recollects our soldiers gwine from house to house wid packs on dere backs. Dey was de awfulest looking white folks dat us had ever seed. Dat picture still stay right clear in my mind, even if I is a old man wid everything a growing dim. Dey sot up a camp at Marse's Bill Oxner's place—dat in Goshen Hill and ain't nothing much left dar fer you to see now. Dem soldiers never had nothing in dere packs but a few old rags and maybe a lil keepsake from de women folks back home what dey loved. Dere hair was dat long and stringy dat it was all matted around de face and neck. 'Cause in dem days, all de fine white mens wore beards, kaise dat was de fashion. But dem soldiers' beards looked wusser dan dere hair. Dere faces carried de awfulest look what you is ever seed on any man's face. Dere clothes looked wusser dan any darky's clothes had looked 'fo de war. None o' dem never had no garments a fittin 'em. Us'd look out and say, 'Yonder comes some mo' o' dem old lousy soldiers.'

"Wheeler's soldiers come to Mr. Oxner's place and burnt de crib and tuck all our corn and jes' wasted it. Den dey tuck our meat and carried on something scandalous. Dey stayed a day or two and when dey had 'stroyed everything and scared us all half to death, dey went on somewheres else