

David and Isabella Elder  
*and*  
Those Who Came After Them

## PART VIII

### *James Elder*

And this is the story of the youngest son of David and Isabella Elder, a very brief story for I never saw Uncle "James"; never heard very much about him. He went away to war and never came back. That in itself is a story that needs few words. It tells itself. As a young man, probably about twenty-one years of age, Uncle James enlisted in the Civil War and saw active service from the very start.

I sometimes wonder why we didn't hear more about Uncle James. Maybe the older folks talked about him among themselves more. At any rate, to me and so far as I know to most of the other nieces and nephews, Uncle James was just the much loved, youngest son of "grandpa and grandma," who died "in the army."

Yes, there was one who spoke about Uncle James to me, too. That was Aunt "Jennie." On several different occasions, she told me about "her dream." Probably I was talking to her about dreams, and fortune telling, and mental telepathy. Aunt Jennie had a dream, during the war. For three nights in succession, she had the same dream. Uncle James who was then far away in the Southland under arms, appeared to Aunt Jennie in her troubled sleep, turned back his collar and showed her a ghastly wound. That dream disturbed Aunt Jennie and in a few days there came the word that Uncle James had been killed in action near Murfreesboro.

And then, too, there was another time when Uncle James was mentioned in awesome tones. That was after grandpa Elder had died. Grandpa lived to a fine old age. He was in his eighty-eighth year when he died. His sight had failed, his hearing was somewhat impaired. He walked unsteadily, with a cane. He remembered things of the



JAMES ELDER

Born 1840, died December 31st, 1862 while in active service in the Civil war. He was shot in an advance movement of his battalion near Murfreesboro, Tenn. He was buried near the scene of the battle with some thirty-six other comrades who fell in the same engagement. He was the youngest child of David and Isabella Elder.

present with difficulty. But, grandpa never forgot his youngest boy, "Jimmy," and just as the curtain of this life dropped for grandpa, he murmured: "Mother! Jimmy!" and he was gone. They met him at the brink of the river and bore him company, as he was ferried across to the new, strange land. They had prepared a place for him.

So that is about all that we can say about Uncle James. Few, if any, of his nieces and nephews ever saw him. He was gone before they came. He had turned away from fields, from the plow and the harrow, and he had shouldered a gun and marched away; away from home, from father and mother, from brothers and sisters; off to the battle fields of the South: off to help free the slaves; off to help save the Union. His physical body perished in the attempt, but his "soul went marching on" and the end was victory for the cause to which he gave himself.

We have just one message from Uncle James. It is one of his letters from the battle field. The letter carries the date of March the 12th, but he left the year off. It was probably written in 1862, sixty-five years ago, at this writing. The writing is faded; it is hard to decipher; it may be possible that the transcript here given will be in error slightly from the original, but it is a direct message from Uncle James, written by his own hand. The stationery used was "soldier's stationery." The sheet has a picture in red in the upper left hand corner showing a soldier sleeping on a battlefield, his arms at his side. Above him is the imaginary representation of "his dream." That dream is of his home, and a reunion with his loved ones. The printed caption to this is:

**"THE SOLDIER'S DREAM OF HOME."**

"At the dead of the night a sweet vision I saw,  
And thrice e'er the morning I dreamt it again,  
But sorrow return'd with the dawning of morn,  
And the voice in my dreaming ear melted away."

The following is the letter:

Camped near the Battlefield  
March the 12

Father and all the rest:—

I thot I would write you another letter. I wrote you one that went yesterday morning but it is so uncertain about a

letter going I thot I would write you again. Well father there have been three days hard fighting at this place, yet I with the company and regiment got along fine. There was only 8 killed in the regiment and 20 or 30 wounded, one killed and two wounded in this company. This regiment supported General Siegel's batteries. They did great work. They did the work on the rebels. They call him the flying Dutchman. Well old Custer is the Commander of the forces, but I don't like him near as well as Siegel. Company B had the first day between 20 and 30 prisoners taken. None that you know except Thomas Donnell and Than McCutcheon. Well I can not give you a discription of the fight. When I see you if ever I do I can tell you all about it so that it will be interesting I think. I would say that our division fought the enemy on their right. Well I have done what I don't want to do again. That is, to march over dead bodies, but we were after our enemy. They were running and we had to follow them. We have taken about 1,800 prisoners. I don't know how many we have lost, not a great many, compared with theirs. Well we move in the morning. I don't know where we will go. We are bound to whip old Price and his followers. They say that he is at the Boston Mountains about 50 miles from here. I suppose we will follow them and then in a few days to Fort Smith. Well Price had some 1,300 Indians with them. We fought them on Friday; the second day the Indians ran as soon as the grape and shell came amongst them, and the artillery did most of the fighting, yet some of the infantry regiments got cut up pretty badly. Oh, I wish I could write you a full account of the battle but I can't for want of time, as it is getting dark and I will have to quit. Well we have lighted a candle and I will write some more if I can think of anything to write. Well I got a letter from Lon and one from you the day after the fighting. I was glad to hear from you all but it was almost a month old, yet new to me. I have written a letter almost every week since I left Springfield. But I know that they didnt all get to you, especially those written the last of February for they detoured our mail for about three weeks but the road is clear now. Well orders have just come for us to be ready to march at seven in the morning and I would rather march than to stay in camp, for it looks like doing something for our country and winning of the war and that will be done inside of three months, I think.

No doubt grandpa, grandma, the brothers and sisters received several letters from Uncle James while he was in the service, but this is the only one that has been saved, so far as we know. Just how it came into my hands I don't know, but I am of the opinion that it was given to me by my father, who had inherited it from grandpa Elder as a much prized remembrance of "Jimmy." With that

letter I inherited another. It is the letter that conveyed to grandpa and grandma Elder, and the brothers and sisters the news of the death of Uncle James, written by the captain of the company in which Uncle James served. This is the letter:

Camp near Murfreesboro, Tenn.  
January 17th, 1863

Mr. David Elder:  
Dear Sir:

It becomes my painful duty to announce to you the death of your son James. You will doubtless ere this have heard of his death, thru the public prints, and I will not particularize more than to say that he was killed on the morning of the 31st of December '62, in the terrific fight in which our regiment was engaged that day. He was shot early in the engagement and lived but a few moments. We were so closely pressed by our enemies that we were obliged to leave the field, leaving our dead and wounded in their possession and it was two or three days before we retook the ground. As soon as this was done details were made to bury our dead. Being the only officer then with the company I could not go myself to assist, but some of our best men were sent—and our thirty-six dead were all buried with all the tenderness and care that could under the circumstances be given.

James had four months pay due him at the time of his death. Also one hundred dollars bounty. Statements of his accounts with Government have been forwarded to Washington City and any attorney can tell you how to proceed better than I can. His clothing and personal effects were lost on the field.

I cannot close without bearing testimony with regard to James as a soldier and a man beloved by his tentmates, esteemed by his Co. Commander, and respected by the whole Company.

His loss is deeply felt here and in closing I would desire to extend my sympathies to you his bereaved parents—expressing the hope that our loss is HIS eternal gain.

Respectfully yours,

Jno. M. Turnbull

P. S. Anything that I have omitted I will gladly state to you upon inquiry by letter.

I have referred to the writer of the above letter as Captain, and yet I am not sure whether he was a captain, or not. There was a captain William Turnbull who was in command of a company at Ft. Donaldson—the company to which my father belonged, Co. B the 83rd Ill. Captain William Turnbull and the Elders were very intimate and my father told me that he had been a very frequent com-

panion of his captain in reconnoitering expeditions in the vicinity of Ft. Donaldson.

There came a morning when Captain Turnbull with a few men rode out from Ft. Donaldson on a short expedition prompted by the word that there were signs of the enemy about. Father happened to be on guard duty, or was occupied in some such capacity, and on this occasion did not accompany the captain. Captain Turnbull and his squad of men were ambushed by the enemy and refusing to surrender were all killed, as I remember the story. It was while on duty at Ft. Donaldson later that father, himself, fell into the hands of the confederates on one occasion, but he was exchanged in a short while and never saw the inside of a Confederate prison.

The letter from John M. Turnbull above copied explains that Uncle James Elder was buried on the battle field. We had always understood that some forty of the soldiers had all been buried in one long grave. The above seems to confirm that story. At any rate, somewhere in the vicinity of Murfreesboro, is the grave of Uncle James and the other comrades who fell in that battle. It was destined that grandpa and grandma Elder were not to escape the tragic contribution of a son's life to the Union cause. I remember of hearing some one state, too, that grandpa Elder was in Monmouth when the news of Lee's surrender reached that city, and it was he who carried that news from house to house all the way out from Monmouth to the Elder homestead some twelve to fifteen miles north.