

# The Last of the Cavaliers



THE BOY GENERAL

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

**J**UNE 25 is the anniversary of a battle which will be forever famous in American history. It was not a battle upon which great issues, so far as the fate of the nation, hung. In point of the number of combatants engaged it was almost insignificant. It was not a battle to which the student of military science will turn for lessons in tactics. It was an affair of a handful of United States cavalrymen pitted against an overwhelming force of Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians, and if it has any particular importance in American history, it is only because it marked the last outstanding success scored by the red man against the white.

For this was the engagement officially known as the battle of the Little Horn River, Mont., June 25, 1876, but familiar to most of us under the name of "Custer's Last Fight." Thereby is revealed the reason why this battle seems destined to be remembered when greater and more important military conflicts are long since forgotten. The reason centers around the flaming personality of Gen. George Armstrong Custer.

"A brigadier general at twenty-three, a major general at twenty-five, a great Indian fighter at twenty-seven, he went to his death at thirty-seven, the immortal hero of American youth, and the mystery and gallantry of his death will keep his name shining when all but a scant dozen of the great figures of American military history will be forgotten forever." So writes his latest biographer, Frazier Hunt, in the book "Custer," published by the Cosmopolitan Book corporation, and Hunt happily and aptly characterized this soldier as no other biographer has yet done when he uses as a sub-title for his book the phrase "The Last of the Cavaliers."

For George Armstrong Custer was truly the last of the Cavaliers. He was born in 1839 and died in 1876. There are men still living who saw him often and knew him well. But he does not belong in this period of recent American history. Among the bearded, black-hatted blue-uniformed generals of the Union army, this boy general with his coat of black velvet, his wire-brimmed hat, his navy blue shirt with a broad collar adorned with gold stars and held together at the throat with a wide flowing scarlet necktie, his trousers stuck in great cavalry boots, and with his golden curls reaching to his shoulders, is sadly out of place. More appropriately should he have led a charge against Cromwell's Roundheads and after routing them received the thanks of that gay monarch, King Charles the Second, or he should have been a follower of the fortunes of Bonnie Prince Charlie and ended his short career amid the flashing claymores at Cullodenmoor.

"A fighter of fighters and a soldier of soldiers, he was the beau sabreur of the American army," one historian has called him. He was born of soldier ancestry; he grew up surrounded by soldier traditions; he became a soldier by choice and he died as a soldier would choose to die. The Custers were a fighting stock. His great-grandfather had been a Hessian mercenary in the Revolutionary war. "He was a curly-haired blond giant who was fighting for the fun of it," writes Hunt. When the war was over and he, with his fellow Hessians, was paroled, he decided to settle down and grow up with the country. The family name of Kuster was changed about the time this good-natured Saxon fighter moved from Pennsylvania to Maryland. His grandson, the blacksmith and farmer, Emmanuel Custer, felt the call of the frontier and migrated to Ohio, and here it was that the sturdy tow-headed boy was born in 1839.

"War was in the air again. The fall of the Alamo down in San Antonio and the great stretch of country north of the Rio Grande owned by Mexico had burned its way into the hearts of the country. A bitter hatred was flar-



CUSTER MONUMENT AT MONROE, MICH.



CUSTER THE CADET

ing up against Mexico. Peaceful America was getting ready to have her regular one-war-per-generation conflict. Even the backwoods settlements in Ohio were thrilled by the righteousness of one-sided patriotism. Silver-tongued orators were making the little red brick schoolhouses and the white-framed churches fairly ring with "Remember the Alamo!"

"Emmanuel Custer joined the local militia, the 'New Rumble Invincibles'—and so our future general, 'Little Autie'—which was the home-manufactured nickname for Armstrong—teased and teased, until his mother made him a uniform out of one of paw's suits and paw whittled out a gun for him. By the time the Mexican war came along in earnest, Autie was seven and could go through the old Scott manual of arms along with the best of them.

"So it was that even in a backwater of pioneer life this farmer boy grew up in a warm reflection of the thrilling atmosphere of war. He dreamed of being a drummer boy and marching with heroic old General Scott or General Taylor in the Mexican campaign. Farming was not for him—the sabre and the musket were to be his tools."

But his opportunity did not come for several years. A visit with relatives in Monroe, Mich., resulted in two years of schooling at an academy there, two years at a seminary, followed by a school teaching job back home in Ohio. Then came a chance to go to the United States Military academy at West Point and when he was enrolled there in the spring of 1857 he was at last started toward realizing his life's ambition.

Custer's career at the academy was not an impressive one. From the beginning he was among the "immortals," the ten lowest in scholarship (today they call them goats). The first year he stood 58 in a class of 68. His second year he ranked 58 in a class of 60. In his third year he was No. 57 in a class of 57 and he was graduated No. 35 in a class of 35. But if Custer did not distinguish himself in his academic work and was constantly acquiring demerits which more than once brought him to the brink of dismissal from the academy, he was absorbing something of greater value than mere classroom knowledge, for, writes Hunt: "It would be almost impossible to overestimate what the four years at West Point had done for this blond-haired, smiling, six-foot farmer boy from eastern Ohio. His fine traditions had sunk deep into his heart and mind. Without his being in the least aware of it, the magnificent spirit of the place—reflected in the three words of its motto—Duty—Honor—Country—had given for him a tone, a resonance to the ancient business of arms. It was as if some one had taken him by the hand to a hilltop and shown him the glory of mounted knights in armor, going forth to war, for honor, for renown, and for the battle's sake. In the very air of West Point he breathed the very greatness of the sword. . . . If it would not have been surprising if Custer had chosen to follow the fortunes of the Confederacy, and to have added the color of his personality to the roll of its cavalier leaders such as Jeb Stuart and John Morgan. Instead he chose to stick with the Union and although he failed to graduate with his class because at almost the last moment he had committed a grave breach of rules which led to his court-martial and his retention at the academy, finally he was ordered to Washington for duty in the summer of 1861.

As a lieutenant in the Second cavalry he saw action almost immediately from examinations." This was failure. She defied them, however, and wore a green necktie, but waited with trepidation the arrival of the Don! Presently he approached her desk from the rear and laid the papers on her table. Catching sight of the green tie, he scowled, hesitated a moment, then the frown gradually melting into a smile, he said: "So you are still rebels!"—Exchange.

Gossip is the tool of cowards.

ately at the battle of Bull Run. And the next year as an officer in the Fifth cavalry, to which he had been transferred, he so distinguished himself on several occasions as to win a position on the staff of General McClellan. Custer's career in the Civil war has been described as "meteoric" and a casual survey of it will show how apt the word is. McClellan at once promoted him to a captaincy. When McClellan failed as commander of the Army of the Potomac and was removed, Custer suffered his only eclipse of the war. But within a year he was on General Pleasonton's staff, distinguished himself in a charge during a cavalry fight with Jeb Stuart and his gray horsemen, which resulted in the capture of a battle flag and a hundred prisoners. The next day he was recommended for promotion to the rank of brigadier general—a brigadier general at twenty-three, the youngest in the Union army!

He was placed in command of the Michigan cavalry brigade of four regiments, much to the disgust of volunteer colonels old enough to be his father—veterans who raved and stormed at having placed over them that "Custer brat from Monroe, that kid general," that "d—d whip-snapper from West Point." But on the third day on that terrible field at Gettysburg, this boy general not only welded his brigade of Wolverines to him with bonds of steel but in a furious cavalry battle defeated Jeb Stuart and his Confederates, who had hitherto been considered invincible. He became the idol of his men. They bought bolts of red cloth and made flowing ties for themselves. They let their hair grow long in imitation of his. "A wild boy named Custer" became famous throughout the Union army. A year later with more brilliant victories to his credit, Sheridan made him a major general and gave him command of the Third cavalry division. George Armstrong Custer, age twenty-five, was a major general with twelve regiments under his command, twelve regiments which idolized him as had the three regiments of Wolverines.

The story of Custer, the Indian fighter, is too well known to need repetition here. It is the story of one success after another as leader of the Seventh cavalry, which still and for all time seems destined to be known as "Custer's regiment," until that June day in 1876 when, in sight of the great Indian village strung along the Little Big Horn, he made the fatal division of his forces and, trusting to the "Custer luck," which had carried him safely through a decade of warfare, he rode into battle for the last time. A fitting epitaph to this last of the Cavaliers may be found in these words of Hunt:

To the millions of plain Americans he is remembered not as a commander of a dashing and victorious division of cavalry that captured 10,000 prisoners and 65 battle flags from a gallant and stubborn foe, but as an Indian fighter, who with a handful of troopers eleven years later galloped to a tragic death. He had fought Lee and Stonewall Jackson, Jeb Stuart, and the gallant Pelham—great and remembered warriors—but it was the naked Sioux warriors of the plains who sent him to a deathless fame. The gods of battle have their own inscrutable way of making heroes.

**Facial Judgments**  
If you would measure the quality of a man, look first into his eyes. But if you would gauge the character of a woman, study her lips first and then try to find out whether her eyes confirm their message. The mouth, lips and chin form the emotional area of the face.—Exchange.

**Some Distance**  
A parsec, astronomical measuring term, is equal to 3.25 "light years," or about 20,000,000,000,000 miles.

## Community Building

### Ideas for Revamping

**Houses Marred by Time**  
Modernizing the home need have no terrors for the home owner. L. T. Henderson, secretary of the Louisville Building Trade bureau, said in a bulletin to contractors calling attention to safeguards that must be observed. He said:

"The owner must be assisted in choosing a reputable contractor and a financing agency. This should be done before the work is begun. Regardless of the size of the job, whether it be a small repair job, or the making of an old house throughout into a new one, a sketch should be made by a reliable architect, which should be agreed upon by the family desiring the improvement. Once this sketch is made and accepted, then specifications should be drawn, together with a legal contract. After this has been done, two or three reliable contractors should be called upon and asked to bid. "With the financing arranged for and definite plans and specifications to bid on, the contractor will give the lowest cash price that the work can be done for. "The owner can save considerably more on the contract price by having a definite program to begin with more than all his supervision fees and financing costs. "By handling a job in this manner, the owner is relieved of worry and unexpected costs and, in many cases, liens being filed on account of unpaid bills."

### Movement for General

**Roadside Beauty Grows**  
Roadside beautification has become general throughout the United States. In this new era a road becomes a work of art. There is a "Statewide beautification club" in Florida; an association, "Friends of Our Native Landscape," in Wisconsin; the "Colorado Historical society" in Colorado, and various organizations from garden clubs to chambers of commerce in Arkansas, Alabama, West Virginia, Kentucky, North and South Carolina, and Virginia. California now has 600 miles of trees planted along highways; Oklahoma is planting highway trees steadily; Delaware has many of its highways landscaped; Arkansas calls systematic beautification "a worthwhile investment of public funds"; Michigan planted 100,000 pine seedlings along highways in 1928; Indiana 10,000 small evergreen trees, and Massachusetts more than 50,000 trees planted on highways in the past 22 years. State after state may be cited, with mention of Missouri's new landscape architect for its roadsides, Pennsylvania's forestry unit, and Connecticut's landscape division.

### State Makes Beauty Spots

In Connecticut, where rivers and lakes are near by, shrubbery and trees have been removed to open a view. Several fine vistas which have hitherto been lost are now offered. The state is doing much planting of indigenous species. Dogwood and laurel, when removed to clear the view of a distant scene, are replanted elsewhere and small growths of natural shrubbery in which forest fires start easily have been transplanted to roadside gardens.

### Providing Picnic Nooks

The Connecticut highway department is encouraging family touring and picnics by creating wide spaces by the road for the parking of cars at a safe distance from the thoroughfare. In selecting picnic nooks the commissioners have been guided by the natural advantages. Where the trees provide ample shade and a spring bubbles up, the road is widened. Several cars may be driven into the cleared area where they will not be a hazard to other motorists.

### Frightful Fire Waste

The importance of guarding against home fires is shown in estimates of a large insurance company. In the last ten years, according to this firm, enough money has been wasted, on the average, in fire losses to pay for 101,000 one-family houses at the cost of construction prevailing in 1926, or to pay for all the new residences erected in 56 principal cities of the United States the same year.

### Correct Ideas in Painting

Large houses on small plots of ground are best painted in unobtrusive colors—that is to say, colors that lend themselves to their immediate surroundings. Blue-grays or gray-greens show off such houses to good advantage without making them appear too unwieldy for the size plot upon which they have been erected.

### Build Well for Beauty

Good and lasting construction is an essential quality of real beauty. Shoddiness and beauty are hard to conceive as existing together in the same creation, so when we build we must think of economy, construction and beauty in the closest relationship.

### Work for Civic Leaders

Most of the improvement work of a town is done by a dozen men whom the other citizens back up.—Exchange



## Mosquitoes Die, or Money Back

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# FLIT

### Who Can Recall Days of the Singing School?

The passing of winter recalls an institution that flourished in the Middle West, as it had in earlier days farther east—the old-fashioned singing school, says the Omaha World-Herald. It ran its course in the earlier '80s, and was at its best in the '70s. Little is ever heard of this pleasant educational feature. It flourished mostly in small towns and rural districts, ending with an entertainment at the schoolhouse or a town hall, where the singing teacher exhibited his wares in the shape of bass, tenor, alto and soprano voices that had been trained with the aid of the old-time tuning fork. Singing masters were difficult to obtain. Sometimes a traveling teacher taught, generally having schools in several different localities, all easily reached, but not conflicting. Notes and scales were first taught, written on a blackboard. Singing of simple tunes by note came next. Eventually came the songs with words.

### Views Future of World With Pessimistic Eye

Dr. Frederick Graves in an article entitled "2000 A. D." in Chambers' Journal, discounts the anticipation of those who expect the evolution of a race of supermen living roseate and perfect lives. Remarking on the strain of modern life, he says that it has been predicted by medical men that the wear and tear of existence will make the world little better than an asylum of nervous wrecks in a hundred years more. There is the more serious threat of a state of strife in which not only cities but perhaps nations will be passed out of existence by laboratories.

More armies and navies will be obliterated before they have a chance of deploying into action, according to Doctor Graves. It might well happen that such another calamity would paralyze or even destroy humanity and civilization together.

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### Money Spent on Roofs

It cost \$123,210,305 literally to keep a roof over the heads of the American people in 1927, the Department of Commerce survey indicates. That amount was spent on all types of roof material—slate, tile, shingle, asbestos and so on. Cement products used for roofing are not included in the total given, however, and that material probably added considerably to the total spent upon roofs.

### The Surprise

Master—What does this label "Wait and See" mean?  
Gardener—Well, I forgot jus' wot I planted there, sir.—London Opinion.

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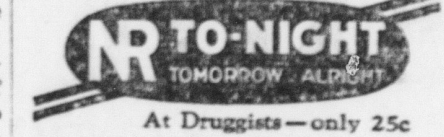


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### Smashed Precedent

An American girl relates that when she sat for an examination at Oxford university, the following directions as to costume were handed out: "If the candidate is a woman, she shall wear a dark suit, white jumper and black tie, black shoes and stockings. No detail may be changed or disregarded. N. B.—If anyone should disregard these regulations, proctors are authorized to ask them to withdraw