

THE YANKEE

IN GRAY.

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CHAPTER XVI.

While Jackson was pressing on to join Lee most of his cavalry was detached and left in the valley. The Shenandoah guards, which had dropped the title when transferred to the cavalry, were a portion of Imboden's command. The Federals poured into the Shenandoah and Luray from the north and recaptured everything and pressed the Confederates slowly back to Staunton. Neither side was strong enough to possess and hold the valley. The Confederate occupation defied one of the roads to Richmond. The Federal occupation defended one of the roads to Washington. There were scouting and raiding and clashing of sabers, but nothing like a general battle resulted. Both commanders had been instructed to avoid this and watch the mighty movements developing elsewhere.

What is a battle like—a battle in which 10,000 men fall in their tracks to die with the rear of the guns still sounding in their ears and as many more lie there nursing and groaning and praying with the pain of their wounds? McClellan was on both sides of the Chickahominy, with the spires of Richmond in view. His front was miles long and defended by rifle pits, earthworks, felled trees and natural obstructions. More than 100,000 Federals faced Lee along the line. Behind them were camps and wagon trains and field hospitals and supplies cumbering the ground for miles and miles.

McClellan was about to attack. He was even writing his order when Lee fell upon his wing at Mechanicsville. That was a feat. The fight at Meadow Bridge, directly in front of his center, was a piece of strategy. The assault upon his wing at Cold Harbor was meant to annihilate him. The battle ground was made up of swamps, cleared fields, patches of forest, timber covered hills and old fields grown up to bushes and briars. McClellan had two and three lines of earthworks here, and here his guns were planted as thickly as men could work them. Longstreet and Hill attacked here. They knew the strength of the position; they had counted the odds. There was no skirmishing, no waiting. On a front three miles long the Confederates suddenly appeared and rushed forward to the attack. Had they numbered five times as many they would have been beaten back. They were repulsed again and again by the fire which seemed to burn them off the face of the earth, but those who lived came back again more desperate than before. Only their leaders knew why this terrible sacrifice was being offered up to the god of war. Lee had planned with Jackson. Jackson had left the valley by way of Brown's gap to fall upon McClellan's flank at Cold Harbor. The sacrifice in front was to give Jackson time and to mask his movement.

And so Longstreet and Hill advanced again and again to the sacrifice until their dead and wounded outnumbered the living. The afternoon sun was sinking lower and lower. By and by it was only an hour high. Then the roar of battle along the front suddenly ceased. Had the remnants of regiments and brigades become panic stricken at the awful waste of life and fled from the field? Had they suddenly refused to obey orders to advance again? Had Lee given up all hope of success and withdrawn from that front? For five minutes scarcely a musket was discharged. Then from the heavy forest directly on the flank of the position Jackson appeared. The flank of an army is its weak spot. Even if attacked in the rear it can face about and fight with hope of success, but if the flank gives way disaster follows. Jackson's coming was a surprise. His attack was as sudden as the stroke of a bell. It dumfounded and dismayed the Federal flank, but only for a few minutes. McClellan was not far away. He had fathomed Lee's plans and discovered his true object. The flank gave back until it had a front of a mile long, and then it halted and battled to save that great army. What was to be done must be done right there. Re-enforcements were ordered up, guns advanced, and for an hour: there was such fighting as war had never witnessed before.

On the Federal flank were swamps and forest and tangled thickets. Engineers had said that the nature of the ground protected this flank. Walling through swamps deep with ooze, bursting through thickets which caught off their caps and left their jackets in tatters, advancing their lines amid the thick forests, Jackson's men rushed to the attack. Time and time again the lines were repulsed, but fresh troops poured out of the woods to take the places of the dead and wounded, and the battle grew more vindictive and murderous. There is a key to every battlefield. There is always a key within a key. Cold Harbor was the key of this great field of slaughter. The exposed flank was the key within the key. Jackson could count his dead by the thousand. His entire force was up, and he had charged and stormed and battered in vain.

The turning of night does not always end a battle, but as darkness shuts down the combatants see their desperation and become more wary of each other. Hunger, thirst and fatigue begin to tell. As the fire of artillery and musketry slackens the cries of the wounded are heard, and those who have escaped unhurt begin to estimate the losses. If Jackson could not break that flank before night shut down, then his sacrifice had been in vain. Then the thousands of dead and wounded belonging to Longstreet and Hill had simply been led to slaughter. An order was sent to General Hood, whose brigade of Texans had been held in reserve for an emergency. Hood placed himself at the head of his 4,000 men and dashed forward. They had to traverse a swamp and then cross an open space on which the dead already lay touching each other. The Texans had only begun their forward movement when every piece of artillery

and every musket on that flank was turned upon them. With yells of defiance they rushed forward. The skeletons of men struck down in that swamp were dug out years afterward as burial parties sought for the dead of the war. Wounded men fell into the pools of black water or floundered about in the ooze, but those unhurt used them for stepping stones.

Nothing could check that rush. Grape and canister and bullet killed and wounded 2,000 men, but the other 2,000 swept forward, dashed over the earthworks and were driven like a wedge into the Federal flank. It was the climax. Beaten but not panic stricken, the men in line fell back step by step, fighting over every foot of the ground, and at length they rested on a new line. McClellan alone knew that he was beaten. He alone realized what would result. That great army, only a portion of which had been driven, must retreat to a new line and a new base of supplies. Jackson's coming from the valley had imperiled the fate of the nation. Like the strategist he was, McClellan assumed much, concealed much. While he brought up fresh troops to hold the victorious enemy at bay he issued orders for retreat.

For weeks and weeks stores had been accumulating in rear of that grand army. There were thousands of beef cattle, train loads of bacon, rice, salt, beans and other eatables. Thousands of spare tents had come forward, thousands of blankets, uniforms, shoes, muskets and other supplies. Boxes of hardtack were piled up 10 feet high for miles and miles. Barrels of flour, covered with tarpaulins, shut out some of



Jackson's men rushed to the attack, the camps from sight of the highways. Here and there in forest and field were great heaps of forage for the animals, and here and there great heaps of fixed ammunition for cannon or musket. There was the value of millions of dollars lying about, and nearly all must be sacrificed. Withdrawal meant retreat. Retreat meant that Lee and Jackson would assume the aggressive and seek to utterly annihilate the Federal army.

The work of destruction began almost before the cheers of Hood's Texans had died away. Whole regiments were detailed for the work. The cattle could be driven away. A part of the most valuable stores could be hauled off. It is a rule of war to leave nothing behind in retreat to benefit your enemy. He is often left the dead and wounded to embarrass him. The soldiers were ordered to destroy, and they seemingly took delight in obeying. The heaps of flour, meat and clothing were given up to the flames, and as the heavens were lighted by the midnight fires people on the horse roads in Richmond believed the green forests to be fiercely blazing. Never had a general more to sacrifice that he might be stripped for fight; never was the hand of destruction more ruthlessly applied. A night was not sufficient. All next day while those in battle line held the enemy at bay thousands of men were burning and destroying. When the Confederates marched over the ground, they were appalled at the sacrifices made. When the last heap of forage had been given up to the flames, McClellan was ready. His lines were abandoned, and his army was in retreat, but there was no panic. Lee and Jackson were ready to follow. They hoped to find a fleeing mob, but whenever they attacked it was to be beaten back by men as valiant as Napoleon ever saw torn at bay. Mile by mile they retreated, passing now and then for a fierce grapple in which they could justly claim a victory, and at last the James was reached, and the army had been saved. What of the dead and wounded? Nothing. They figure in the reports of battles only as figures.

CHAPTER XVII.

Not one soldier in a hundred more than catches a glimpse of a battlefield. He seldom sees what takes place outside of his own regiment. When two great armies grapple, they must have room. The front may be three, four, five or six miles long. The lines of battle run across open fields, through the woods, over hills, across highways, through orchards. As soon as the firing begins the smoke shuts in the vision to the right and left. Troops may stand or lie down, have the cover of a breastwork or none at all. They may charge or be charged, gain ground or be driven back to a new line. However the battle goes, the soldier sees only what takes place in his immediate front.

And how the opening of a battle changes the nature of a man! While he is waiting for it to begin every nerve is strung to its utmost. He may be a brave man, but in that hour of waiting he denies it to himself. He trembles. He doubts himself. He turns pale, and his knees grow weak. He would run away but for his pride. It is pride and not courage that holds him in his place. He may be a man who has never uttered an oath in the hearing of his comrades—a man of Christian principles. A minute after the firing begins all the wickedness born in his soul begins to betray itself. He shouts and raves and curses. His facial expression is so changed that his own brother could not identify him.

For the time being he is a madman—a devil. He cries: "Kill! Kill! Kill!" even though in his excitement he fires among the tree tops or at the clouds.

This is the excitement which numbs all feeling in some men when wounded, and they fight on until they happen to catch sight of their own blood and then sink helplessly down. It is a sort of nightmare in which no man can be held responsible for his words, and in which no one notes the flight of time. To some an hour seems a day. To others the sun passes from the noonday mark to the edge of the horizon so swiftly that they are amazed.

For half a day Lee's whole army had hurled itself against the Federal lines. Every foot of ground on that long front had drunk blood. The line was broken only at one place, but that was fatal. There the fight continued to rage until long after nightfall, but at last it gradually died away, and a solemn hush fell upon the bloody field. One may conquer and yet be so near vanquished that he has no strength for another blow. So it was with Jackson. He had broken the Federal line, but he could not follow up his advantage. Even if night had not come he must reorganize his shattered commands, replenish his ammunition and permit the worn-out men food and sleep.

A battle does not cease at once. It is an hour or more in dying away. There is a sputtering and growling here and there, and men give up their work of death grudgingly. At last a hush comes. It is absolute to the men who have been defeated by the roar for hours and hours. It is a blessed relief, but they look at each other in alarm. The very stillness frightens them. They have seen dead and wounded men before them, to the right or left or rear, for hours, but have scarcely given them a thought. Now when the hush comes the frenzy gradually goes away, and they stand appalled at the slaughter. The hush does not last long. It is broken by the cries of the wounded—by men who have suffered pain and thirst and fear for long hours. There is nothing known to living man which can be compared to these cries rising from a field of slaughter as night comes down. Men who have suffered and made no outcry while daylight lasted now seem to be seized with a fear of the darkness. Men who seemed to have been struck dead are revived by the falling dew to plead for life. Some call out in quivering voices, like children when in the darkness. Some curse; some pray; some revile. Here and there one, realizing that he is wounded unto death and that help will come too late, maintains silence. With an effort which starts the red blood afresh, he carries his hand to the pocket in which lies a photograph of sweet heart or a last letter from the wife at home, and the burial party finds his dead fingers clutching the relic and his glazed eyes fastened upon it—his last glimpse of things mortal.

The full horror of a battlefield is realized only at night. While darkness shuts out a thousand horrible sights, it yet adds to the horrors. Here and there parties searching for some officer, dead or wounded, move about with lantern or torch to guide them. They step over the dead. They tread upon hands and arms outstretched. They slip and stagger on the spots of earth wet with blood. The wounded hear and see them moving about, and they call out with renewed strength for succor. A wounded horse who has been lying down in a pool of blood sees the light approaching, and there is something human in his whimpers. He pleads and coaxes. With a great effort he gains his feet and hobbles along and utters his pleadings and reproaches.

On this battlefield of Cold Harbor are nine or ten thousand dead men, ten or twelve thousand wounded. The living and unhurt are exhausted with the day's struggle, and the wounded must lie through the night. There are no searching parties abroad, no details to give succor. From forest and thicket and field the cries of the stricken continue hour after hour, but they cry in vain. In the swamp over which Hood charged wounded men lap the water thick with mud and slime. They struggle as they sink slowly into the ooze, struggle and shout and pray, but dig their own graves, as it were, and some of their blackened bones are there today. Here, where the brigades of Hill moved over the open ground to charge the troops of Seymour and Reynolds, the dead lie thicker than they will in the streets at Fredericksburg or on the slopes at Gettysburg. There are no wounded—at least no voices cry out to us through the darkness. Here the Federals had no pieces of artillery posted to command the approach, and as the Confederates advanced the slaughter was something terrible. Sixteen hundred and eighty dead men lie here in this open spot of five acres. They were struck down by round shot, by bursting shell and by grape and canister. There are bodies without heads, bodies without arms, bodies which are but fragments. When the burial party reaches this spot to-morrow, they will name it "The Butcher Pen," and that name will cling to it forevermore. Napoleon would have said that no troops in the world could have been advanced under that awful fire, but from 4 o'clock to sundown the Confederates charged again and again, leaving their dead nearer earthwork and breastwork each time.

Here, where Porter massed 80 guns at Alexander's Bridge in the vain hope of saving the center, the dead cannot be gathered and buried for days. They are not corpses, but fragments of corpses. Arms and legs will be found amid the branches of trees, and hands and feet must be raked up as if it were a hayfield. Here, where General Cooke with his cavalry charged one of Longstreet's divisions and was broken and shattered and routed within five minutes, 500 horses

cover two acres of ground. Among them are 300 dead and wounded troopers. It was a gallant charge, but it was made in vain. Even by noonday no man can pass over that field without staining his boots with blood. If corn grows here in after years when men shall be at peace, it will grow rank and tall, and the rustle of the stalks in the summer wind will sound like a chant in memory of the dead.

It is midnight. McClellan is moving quietly to the rear, the Confederates along his front watching, waiting, sleeping. The wounded have almost ceased to call out. The faces of the dead have been made whiter and more ghastly by the bath of dew. And now the



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ghoul steals away from the dying campfire into the darkness and skulks and creeps and crawls about in search of plunder. Every army has its human hyenas. They may have fought bravely during the battle, but as night falls and men cease their work of killing the ghoulish instinct cannot be resisted. They kneel beside the dead and search each pocket. Their knees feel the earth wet with blood, but they do not shrink. Their hands touch gaping wounds and are smeared with blood, but there is no disgust. Whatever plunder they secure is blood stained, but on the morrow they will wash away the stains.

"Here—this way—for God's sake give me water!"

It is a wounded man who has heard the ghoul moving about. No matter whether he is a friend or foe, he may yield plunder. The ghoul bends over him and begins a search. The wounded man may quietly submit, hoping at least to be rewarded with water enough to moisten his parched tongue and burning throat. If so, he is spared. If not, strong fingers seize his throat and fasten there until he is dead, or his own bayonet may be driven into his heart.

And when the summer sun comes up again a hundred burial parties will be scattered along this front, and a thousand men will be busy digging the long trenches into which the dead are to be heaped. There will be no time wasted. The dead will be picked up as fast as possible and dragged or carried to the trenches. No one will ask their names, no one search their pockets. Side by side, like sticks of wood, heads all one way, and then a covering of dirt is begrudgingly given. Years later the trenches hidden by briar and hush will be opened, and the bones lifted out to be carried to the spot where a single monument must serve to cherish the memory of thousands.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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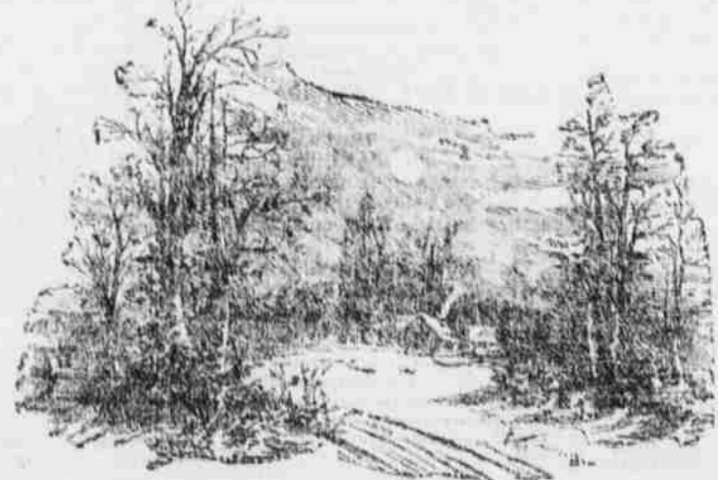
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