VIRGINIA BATTLE-FIELDS.

Standing With Mahone on the Walls of the "Crater."

Dropping Rebel Shells Into a Pit of Dying Soldiers.

How the Rebel Line was Broken and Petersburg was Left Untaken

Special Correspondence Cincinnati Commercial.

PETERSBURG, August 15.—"A fearful scene and a terrible day was that Crater fight," said General Mahone as he stood looking at a large painting on his parlor wall, "and that is the best representation of a battle that I ever saw. It shows you the terrible hand-to-hand struggle which went on that fearful July morning in '64, when 6,000 Union troops and no telling how many Confederates were slain between daylight and noon. By the way, have you ever been out there? The scene of this fight is but a short drive from here. No?"

"The horses at 6, John," and then again to the writer, "it will be pleasant driving at that time, and it will quite repay you to see the old 'crater,' or such parts of it as are left standing."

It was the cool of a delightful summer evening. The roads were free from dust and the rain which had fallen the night before had given the grass and shrubbery a brighter hue, as we whirled by them, behind two dashing blacks, driven by the Virginia senator's liveried coachman.

"The final battles of Lee's army and the last and most stubborn resistance which they made, and which proving futile resulted in the fall of Richmond and the surrender at Appomattox, was around this city, you remember," said the General, "and of them the fight at the crater was the most terrific. For ten months the two great armies of Lee and Grant lay intrenched before this town. The entire country is a battle-ground. Petersburg, Five Forks and Appomattox are all within a comparatively short distance of each other, and all are rich in historic lore. The first assault upon the defensive works which surrounded Petersburg, was made on the evening of the 15th of June. The Second corps, the advance of the army of the Potomac, had crossed the James river two nights before, and at midnight of the 15th, a pontoon bridge had been constructed, and the Ninth, Fifth and Sixth soon followed. The last corps that landed was pushed forward to Petersburg, and on the night of the 15th our line had been broken and held. The fighting continued for three nights, and the Union forces at times reached and mounted our very parapets, and were only repulsed after a desperate struggle and a heavy loss. After this the two great armies remained quiet, recuperating their strength. During the latter part of June and the whole of July the armies were engaged in rectifying and strengthening their respective lines. The Union lines then extended from Appomattox to City Point, and in order to meet them the Confederate lines were naturally very thin. Earthworks were thrown up and much time was consumed in this work. These lines at some points were not over two hundred yards apart, while the picket lines in front were not over that many feet from each other. The sharpshooters of each side kept up a continual firing, and a fellow who placed his hat on a ramrod and pushed it above the earthwork was sure to find a bullet through it when it came down. A fellow lying stretched out along the limb of a tree, concealed by the foliage, would wait hour after hour, through rain and shine, for the pleasure of picking off his man across the way. While the men were engaged in this amusement a very important work was going on, however. The federals had among them a regiment under command of Lieutenant Colonel Pleasants, the forty-eighth Pennsylvania. I think it was composed largely of coal miners who, under the direction of a skillful engineer, executed the idea of mining and blowing up a battery of the enemy. The work was certainly well executed. The gallery was begun at noon on the 25th of June. The utensils were of the rudest kind, but many hands soon made great progress. The gallery was well timbered and perfect in every respect. The main gallery was completed on July 17, and was 510.8 feet in length. General Lee had obtained information of the mine and set his men to work on a counter-mine to find it. They did not strike deep enough and went above the federals, who could hear the confederates above them. We could not hear the federals though. Hearing the confederates above them the federals excavated a little beyond but in the rear of their works, thus giving their gallery a curved direction. A left and right lateral galery were then made, and eight magazines were placed in position. The order to charge the mine was given on the 27th of July, and the work was done between 4 and 10 p. m. on that day."

"How much powder was placed in it?"

"Well, you see the federals desired not only to blow up the fort above them and thus break our lines, but they hoped to create a terrible amount of confusion, during which they could push through and carry the heights beyond. They, therefore, filled the place with 320 kegs of powder, each containing 25 pounds, or 8,000 pounds in all. The tamping was finished by the evening of the 28th, at daybreak; on the 30th of July, 1864, it was fired. The federal troops had been drawn up in battle, and the explosion was to be the signal to charge The hour fixed for the signal came, but the signal came not. It would not do to wait long. The fuse had been lit, but twenty minutes had passed and there was no explosion. It might have gone out, yet at any instant it might explode. It would take an hour to tell certainly what was the matter. By that time the sun would be up and it would be too late. The armies would be astir. There was but one thing to do. Would any man volunteer to enter the gallery. A man did so. He crawled on his hands and knees along the ground tracing the burnt fuse until he came to the curve in the gallery, and there he found that it had gone out. He relit it at that point and then fled for his life. He had scarcely reached the entrance when the earth shook as though its very depths had been stirred. The fort which had been undermined was at the time garrisoned by Pegram's battery from Petersburg, and consisted of four guns and forty men. It overlooked a slight ravine, and behind it was a level field running to the base of Cemetery hill, which the federals had hoped to carry. The fort was blown to atoms, while a deep hole, many yards in length, and shaped like an egg, the sides of which had been thrown up by the explosion, was filled with dying men and horses, all enveloped in the gray smoke which poured out of the crevices of earth in all directions When I arrived on the field, which was soon after, my command consisting of three brigades, the Federal troops had command of the remnant of the fortification, while the road to Petersburg was unguarded. Why they did not pour through sooner and carry the town is one of the things I never could comprehend, for they could have done it as easily as not. My men formed in line at once with fixed bayonets, and feeling that this was our last day's work on earth, we charged. The Federals charged at the same time over the high wall and down upon us like butchers. They fired, and the volley went over our heads. Ours was more effective, and they were stunned. It was then a hand-to-hand conflict, the most terrible I ever saw; but we drove them back behind the smoking walls of the crater, among the dead and dying already there."

A private soldier in General Mahone's brigade, who was wounded that day, but is now the clerk of the Jarrett house, in Petersburg, says that this was the most terrible fighting he saw in the war.

"I had no more idea when I was ordered out that morning that I would live until now, than I have now of dropping dead. I saw that the Union men had command of the place where the old fort had been, and I was only surprised that they had not taken the town. They came down over the crater wall like madmen. We thought our time had surely come. I remember their battle-cry, "Fort Pillow, and no quarter," and I determined to act on the same principle. It was the most satisfactory fighting I ever did. You see when we used to shoot our guns we never knew much whether we had killed anybody or not and the chances were in favor of the latter. I only fired my gun once in that fight, but when I knocked a man down with the butt of my gun, and pinioned him to the ground with a bayonet, I knew he was dead. I made it a principle to make no nigger prisoner. I killed every one I met until I was shot down and carried off the field. We fought like demons, and we were demons. It was every man for himself that day, and I hope I will never live to see another like it."

Finally Mahone's brigade drove the Union forces back into the crater. General Mahone says the ground about him was so thick with the slain that it was impossible to keep his horse's feet off of them. The rebels who were killed in the explosion were of course terribly mangled and many were fastened in the earth only to be trampled down by the soldiers afterwards. The crater was now a mass of dead and dying. One poor fellow after another would crawl up the bank only to be shot down, and finally, when the rebels could do no more, they tossed bombshells into the crater, causing untold agony

There were hundreds of dead taken out of the terrible hole afterwards and many still lie buried there. There is a little shanty near by filled with relics of the battle. Shoes that were found on the field, with the bones of the feet still in them, guns which had been shot to pieces, and one with three bullets buried in its stock and barrel. I picked up a canteen within the crater walls, with nothing left but the rim and its shattered edges, showing that a shell had gone clear through it and the wearer too no doubt. The crater is covered with a growth of peach trees, which have grown up since the war, and probably had their growth from the seeds which the soldiers had thrown away there during the long siege.

As a result of that day's fighting the union forces had made a slight advance but had lost 6,000 men, and gained but little real advantage.

"Those were the dark days of the country," said General Mahone at supper that evening, and standing on the walls of the crater it is not easy to feel that seventeen years have passed around since that terrible tragedy was enacted.

W. S. L.

THE POPE.

Some Personal Points About His Holiness.

Geneva (Switz.) Times.

Leo XIII. is a crowned scholar. From a child he took kindly to his book, and the Jesuits turned him into one of the finest latinists of the age. The one result was pretty certain to follow from the other, as the key to the educational success of the Jesuits is to be found in their principle of first ascertaining a pupil's apitudes and then cultivating them to the best of their power. Joachim Pecci's youth was a series of academical triumphs, each of which signalized the addition of a fresh province of learning to his intellectual dominion. Classics were first mastered, then mathematics, next physics, and afterwards moral philosophy, in which he gave instruction at the age of 19. Perhaps he might have remained a scholar and nothing more, but in the third decade of his life he fell under the influence—one would rather say rose to the influence—of the famous Cardinal Odeschalchi, a man who in another age, might have replayed the great part of Ignatius Loyola. Odeschalchi it was who renounced the purple to enter the order of Jesus and gave innumerable other proofs of Christian humility and devotion to his master's cause. Among the services he rendered to the Church of Rome not the least was the conversion of Pecci, as one may call it, in the true sense of the word. He turned his mind to a serious though not austere view of religion, and had the happiness of admitting him to holy orders. Pecci was then twenty-seven, and already a lay prelate in the household of Gregory XVI

Leo XIII. has now reigned more than three years, and the broad lines of his policy are now sufficiently defined. His attitude toward the government is the wisest, if it be not the only possible one he could have adopted. He stands on the defensive and bides his time. Two points in the purely spiritual policy of Leo XIII. deserve notice. The second of the popes officially recognized as infallible, he has not, any more than the first, made the slightest use of the extraordinary power vested by the last general council in the holy see. He has defined no disputed doctrine In truth the council which proclaimed the pope infallible where speaking ex cathedra has necessarily made the pope extremely cautious of giving expression to ex cathedra utterances. Absolute power has often been remarked to exercise a sobering influence on its possessor. Even so, authority to decide the most solemn questions without appeal is one which a man who is at once an Italian and a priest, a scholar and a diplomatist, will not be likely to abuse. This is the negative result of Leo's reign; the positive is the new impulse he has given to the study of the works of St. Thomas Aquinas. When one remembers that the Angelic Doctor was the favorite of Maurice—unquestionably the largest-minded of Protestant theologians—one cannot help deriving a better hope for the future of the universal church from this circumstance. And, whatever opinion we may have of the schoolmen, it is surely an excellent sign of the times when the chief pastor of Christendom seeks to combat unbelief, not, as of old, with the temporal sword, but simply by the study of what he holds to be the soundest philosophy. The present generation may or may not accept the conclusions of St. Thomas; it will certainly gain by studying, if only with a view to refute him.

Like every Pope since the Reformation, Leo XIII. is a thoroughly good man. Still, if one may venture to compare his moral standard with that of his immediate predecessor, one would be inclined to state the difference between them as consisting in the fact that Leo has more of the wisdom of the serpent, while Pius had more the innocence of the dove. Pius kept a child-like heart and faith to the last, and the Bishop of Perugia, who knew the world had showed it, rose but slowly into his sovereign's confidence. He received the red hat in 1853, but was not appointed Camerlengo till twenty-four years later. The days of Pius were already numbered, and he must have known that in thus singling out Pecci for distinction he was almost designating him as a desirable successor. The courtly and accomplished cardinal had at length won his way to the pontiff's cordial esteem. Pius, too, may have suspected that he had set too little store by the wisdom of this world, and that, humanly speaking, no small share would be necessary to the man who was next to steer the bark of St. Peter through the troubled waters.

Vanderbilt's New Mansion.

New York Letter.

It will be a good many months yet before Mr. W. H. Vanderbilt's magnificent mansion on Fifth avenue is ready to occupy. All the work is so elaborate that even the least part of it takes a great deal of time. The exterior is neither as imposing nor attractive as one might expect to find it after reading any of the descriptions written up from the architect's plans. The flat surface of the wall gives the whole a rather dull look, which, at a short distance, is hardly relieved by the fine carving and scroll work on various parts of the stone. As the stone itself is the ordinary brown stone common to all parts of New York there is nothing particularly striking in the outsine effect. The building is, in fact, rather plain—much more so than they are on the adjoining block, which will be occupied by Mr. Vanderbilt's oldest son—and looks more substantial than ornate. In this respect it may be regarded as reflecting the owner's character, for Vanderbilt is not a showy man by any means. The most nobby thing about him is those stringy sidewhiskers which the comic artists make the most of in their cartoons. Whether Mr. Vanderbilt is particularly well fitted up inside or not, this deponent is not prepared to say, but the inside of this new house certainly will be. No expense is to be spared In the fitting up and decoration, at all events. The smallest thing, as well as the largest, must be the very best. An order was given the other day for silver-plated bath-tubs. A nickel-plated bath-tub is generally considered good enough for the ordinary millionaire, but when a man has a hundred millions to his name the wonder is, not that he must have a silver-plated tub to bathe in, but that he is satisfied with anything less than a gold one.

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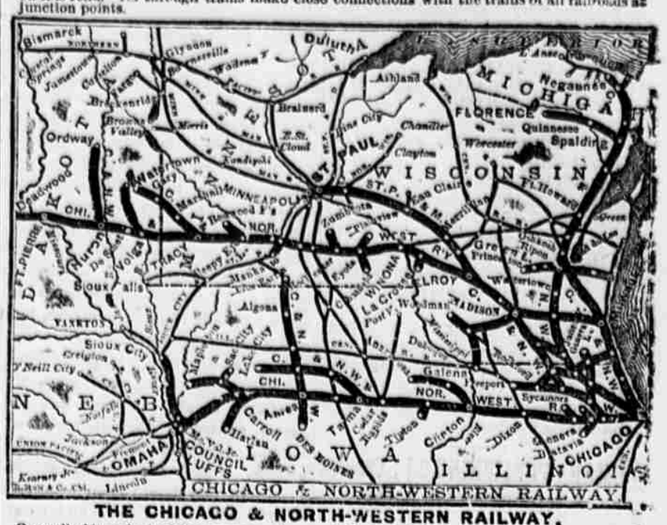

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