

Remembrances of Gettysburg.

BY H. C. MAGON, BEFORE THE WATTSVILLE LITERARY AND RHETORIC SOCIETY, SATURDAY, JAN. 11.

The last week in June, 1863, found the Army of the Potomac creeping up through Virginia from Frederickburg, and from our most excellent position on the Rappahannock, step by step, we were drawn by Lee to Leesburg on the upper Potomac, and here the fact dawned upon us that we were flanked and that the Rebels had crossed the Potomac at Shepherdstown and Williamsport. This was unpleasant news for us. But crossing the river as soon as possible we pushed on through Maryland and into the red clay of Pennsylvania; pushing along through this cherry-pie state in much mud, and judging from observation, but few friends to the cause. We found ourselves on the eve of July 2d within eight miles of Gettysburg. The morning of the 3d found us before daybreak rushing up the rampike but five miles from the battle field, where already two of our splendid corps had been defeated by Hill. On we rush to stay the advance of Lee, Longstreet, Ewell, A. P. Hill and other old generals, who were trying to carry all before them, and make at least one campaign on loyal soil. But the loyal military say nay. And well do you know, friends, that they succeeded. Has it not been so? Oh, yes, through many a bloody war, o'er many a hard-fought battle field, have they fully demonstrated this fact, that loyalty will break down all opposition. But let us on to the battle. "Forward, double quick," is the order, and on we rush, eight ranks deep, supply and ammunition wagons mixed up with battery and ambulance wagons. On, on, with the sound of Howard's cannon in our front. No man straggling, but every one determined to do his duty if it cost him his life; and I hold, friends, that this individual determination to drive back the enemy caused victory to perch upon our standards. About 12 m. we leave the road, and file right into the field. A few, wounded, straggle by while we form by the right of companies to the rear, into column. Then comes the order "load at will." Friends, had you seen how resolutely the men of the 2d Division, 2d Corps jerked the cartridges from their boxes, and bit off the ends with firm-set teeth, and heard the ring of iron ramrods, as they pounded down the buck and ball cartridge, while no other sound escaped them, you would have thought they meant "business," and that before the war is ended Lee will recross the Potomac, and so it was to be. But let us on to the front. The cannonade has stopped, but the skirmishers are picking a way at one another as our division file into line, and look over the (soon to be) battle field. Then we take up our position behind the hill, there to await the final charge, but the assault did not take place that day. Soon my company, the 2d U. S. L. L., were ordered out on the skirmish line, and out we went through our line of battle, with Hancock's orders in our minds to "give them h—ll, in the red barn." Down we went, through the beautiful clover, so soon to be dyed with the blood of our fellow man. We passed through our skirmishers and up to the eight-rail fence. The sun was only one hour high, when we began the old sharp shooter's game of dueling, at about 500 yards. See that puff of smoke from behind that apple tree; "spat" comes the ball into the rail just over my head. I change my position three feet and crack at him. My right-hand man is getting in a shot at a fellow behind a brick bake-oven. The man on my left is exchanging shots with a Johnny from behind the well-curb; and this is the way it goes. Often our Sharp's rifle tells, and so does the Kentucky, with its little ball that spats you long before you hear its pistol-like crack from over the way. But no go; we could not dislodge them; so down comes a German regiment, and as they charge past us, they were dropping like "Autumn leaves," while we covered them the best we could. They take the barn and out-buildings, but the enemy turn loose a battery on them, and rake them right and left. The brave Germans hold their own, and their no less brave surgeon, knowing that the boys wanted his attention, rides down over the field at a break-neck pace, his gray horse, a fine target for the rebels, and soon he falls but a few rods from the barn. Whether the brave doctor was hurt I never knew, for we fell back to Cemetery Ridge. Night coming on, I do not know what became of the boys in the barn, but think they fell back under cover of the darkness. Just as I was about lying down for the night, a fine, six-gun battery trots up the hill and I hear the orders, "action to the front, limbers to the rear," and in a moment Ricketts' battery is ready for to-morrow.

That glorious day for us, and terrible day for many a southern home, dawned bright and fair, no firing from either side, but there we stood glaring at one another like gladiators of old. The stillness was intense; our thoughts were of the terrible struggle before us, the jester was silent, the enemy were sad, the brave were hopeful, the cowardly felt bad. The men tallied to one

another as they do when there is death in their midst. The officers clustered together and counseled and wondered if the single line of battle could hold the heights. Oh, yes, the rank and file ever fully determined to hold the line and then to there to fight it out. No firing until 1 P. M., when all of a sudden there comes a ricochet shot, down from the village, skipping along the line of battle like a flat stone on the water; and then, in a moment, as the signal is seen by the rebels, comes the storm. From the woods in our front, spring forth smoke and fire along the whole line; in a second we hear the roar of a thousand Niagara, an incessant roar; the sun was darkened by the smoke; the hiss of the shot and shell and the bursting of the same was terrible. There were upwards of 125 guns trained on the heights, and having had two days to get the range gave them the advantage. They were mostly masked, so that when they did expose them we could not get the range, and soon much of our artillery was useless; several batteries did well, and when the artillery were killed volunteers came from the infantry. Orderly sergeants would come running down amid the bursting shell, shot, canister and spherical case, saying "for God's sake come up and help man the guns, the cannoners are all killed." The men went. The fact of our infantry being in front of the batteries saved the line, as the artillery of the enemy was trained on ours, so we lost but few out of the battle line. A few were killed by the lead bolts of our shells as they passed over our heads on their deadly mission. This terrible cannonade was kept up for about an hour, then it stopped as suddenly as it began, and all was still. But well we knew what would follow; the smoke hung heavy over the field, and the rebels advanced under its cover. About this time General Hancock rides along the lines. To one regiment he says: "Stand firm, you will soon see them." To another: "Don't waste a shot and don't fire till they get over the last fence." "Stand up to the racket, and give them h—ll," is his order to the "Bloody" 69th N. Y. S. M.; and this is the way he went on talking to the many regiments of his command.

Ten or fifteen minutes pass, and still we do not see the gray lines. I look back at Ricketts' Battery; this was a brass, 6-pound 6-gun battery, but in that terrible sixty-minute storm of shot and shell, four guns were dismounted, three limbers smashed, and three battery or powder wagons blown up; the remaining two guns were black as those of Battery B, 1st Rhode Island, only twelve rods from the first named battery. Of this 12-pound rifle Parrott four gun only two were fit for action, and they were out of "swab water" and case shot. But volunteers were bringing up the same, and also red, white and blue flannel sacks containing two, three or four pounds of powder. One sergeant and four men were all that was left, and they fought their guns up to the taking of the same by the rebels. While walking along the ridge I hear a commotion, down with the line of battle. One glance is enough, and down the hill I run to rejoin my command. As I hurry along behind our line, I glance at what the men were doing. Reading their bibles? No. The last letters from home? No. Looking at the pictures of mother, wife or sweet-heart? Oh, no. But they were laying their cartridges on the stone wall before them in open boxes so as to have them ready; their iron ramrods leaned against the wall, and their muskets had on fresh caps; the rear rank had laid down their food behind them, and put their cartridges into their haversacks to loose no time in taking them from boxes. My friends, those men meant "business." I pass on to the corn-crib where I had left Captain Black, and find my company just firing out to engage the enemy at long range. Out we go, and up to the first fence, where we rest our rifle on the top rail, and with the sights raised up to the 800-yard notch, open the fight by firing on the approaching colors. Many a color guard falls from the effect of our long-ranged, strong-shooting Sharp rifles. On they come, grand sight, three lines of battle, bayonets fixed, colors flying, slow, sure, strong, hopeful and brave. This, thought I, is a clear case of "Greek meeting Greek." On they come; over the first fence they climb, and form as before. Our artillery holding their fire for close range, our infantry silently awaiting the shock. With musket ready-cocked and presented, we fall back over the clover, (so fit for the poor fellows whose life's blood ran there!) through our lines we struggle, by twos and by threes, and up to the stone wall, feeling that, although the sight before us is grand, still in this case, "distance lends enchantment to the view." Just then our cannon open on the gray lines with canister at about 700 rods. Look! Now they are coming! See the front rank drop their musket with its glistening bayonet into the left hand, and move quick. I stand by Captain Black when these remarks were made. Now they begin to yell, and come up on the row. What terrible carnage must follow! As with one accord our line hold their fire till

the enemy are within 300 yards. Then, what a discharge all along the line, at the advancing hordes! Oh, how terrible! See the brave fellows falling! They never return the fire, but close up the broken ranks. The second line takes the place of the first, and on they come. Our brave boys are again ready, their muskets loaded with buck and ball, and repel the second line not five rods from the wall. Still, on comes the third, and after firing one volley, turn and run. Just below us on our left they broke through our lines, captured Battery B. Sergeant, (of whom we spoke), jumped upon his gun and swinging his swab stick around his head defied them to turn his gun, and as nothing but brave men were there, the Johnnies passed him by. Our reserve coming up just then, on the double quick, and the rebels seeing "Yanks" on the right of them, "Yanks" on the left of them, and a division in front coming down on the run, concluded that "discretion was the better part of valor," and many lay down, while some went back much faster than they came up. The broken lines straggled back from our front, with all hope gone ahead of them, and with death's harvest behind.

The shrieks of the wounded, as they rolled from side to side, twisting their arms in agony, or walking around in delirium, are hard to picture, and cannot be described by tongue or pen. The death-rate was greater than in most battles, owing to their standing up while firing; also, their using so much buck and ball cartridge; the rapidity of the volleys was owing to having these cartridges handy. On the right and left, as far as I could see, the poor fellows were rolling and twisting in agony, and in our front for 500 yards or more, the dead lay thicker than I ever saw bundles of grain in a harvest field, and when they received a full discharge of buck and ball, which is very destructive at close range, that lay in winrows. Shoulder to shoulder they fought, side by side they fell; no stone marks their resting place, and but three feet of dirt hides them from view.

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