

# EDWARD YARTON GALLANT SOLDIER OF THE GRAND ARMY

Story of a Soldier Boy Who Has Borne More Than Mortal Hurt on Many Stricken Fields and Who Survived the Horrors of Andersonville to Rear a Family and Settle in Nebraska

**E**NGAGED in nineteen great battles of the civil war, besides smaller skirmishes. Wounded seventeen times. Left on the battlefield for dead twice. Captured and held in Andersonville prison more than nine months, reported dead at home.

This is a part of the civil war record of Edward Yarton, who has lived for many years in Omaha and now resides in Benson. Left an orphan at an early age he grew up in Rochester, N. Y., the place of his birth, getting what education he could and making a precarious living in any way that offered. He was 17 years old when the war broke out and he immediately offered himself as a candidate for the army. He was only a boy and very small for his age. He was refused without hesitation. But he persisted, and in the fall of 1861 he was finally accepted and enrolled in Company G, Ninth New York cavalry. They were mustered into the service October 11, 1861, and in December of the same year marched away to join the famous First corps of the Army of the Potomac, with which corps he remained throughout the war, always in the midst of the fiercest fighting of the great conflict.

As they marched away from home amid the playing of bands and the waving of handkerchiefs the boys in blue sang a soldier song which opened as follows:

We joined the army the other day,  
Because we thought we'd get big pay,  
And have some fun 'most every day,  
And go way down to Dixie.

The closing verse of the song was added some weeks later and ran thus:

When down the river we took our 'tour,  
We tried to sleep about an hour;  
Our meat was bad, our coffee sour;  
'Twas fun to go to Dixie.

(\*Pronounced tower.)

Into Washington and across the river into the very theater of war the recruits were hurried and there they received immediately such a baptism of fire as made veterans of those who withstood it. While on vidette duty one night young Yarton was shot in the thigh of the left leg. It was an ugly wound, but he merely sat down long enough to tie a piece of cloth around it and then finished his duty. In the first few weeks of the campaign in the Army of the Potomac he received five wounds, some of them serious, but never once did he think of going to the hospital and only on one occasion did he see the surgeon attend to his wound. "Let 'Frenchy' alone. He'll get through all right," the surgeons were accustomed to say.

### His Dread of Doctors

But at the second battle of Bull Run a bullet went through the cap of his right knee. It was a serious wound and disabled him entirely. He was taken off the field in an ambulance and sent back to Washington. There he lay in St. Aloysius hospital waiting to have the wound dressed.

"There was groaning and screaming all around me," he says. "The doctors were at work cutting and sawing like so many butchers. I saw a pile of arms and legs and feet and hands two feet high. The surgeons were mostly students and they decided pretty quick whether to cut off a limb or not. I was sure if they got hold of me they would cut my leg off. A steward came in and I asked him where a little door which was close to my cot led to. He said it opened on to the road at the back of the hospital. When no one was looking I got up and slipped out of the door. An army transport wagon was passing and I begged the driver to take me along. He looked at me—I had nothing on but my pants and undershirt. "They'll butcher me up if I stay here in the slaughter house," I said. He laughed and told me to crawl in. I did so and then I found he was bound for my own army corps. Well, the boys were mighty surprised to see me, but I got well of the wound all right, though it pained me most every day since."

He arrived back in time to take part in the bloody battle of Antietam, where he sustained two more flesh wounds, which he tied up with a piece of a comrade's "shirt tail." "After a few of those battles there were hardly any of us had any shirt left above our waists," he says.

He took part in the fierce assault of the union troops on the strong confederate position at Fredericksburg in December, 1862. There he was again disabled in the very front of the rebel position by a ball which grazed the side of his head and destroyed the hearing of his left ear. He also received a sabre cut in the left wrist in this battle which nearly severed the hand from the arm. It has been paralyzed ever since. He was sent back to Washington where he again found himself in St. Aloysius hospital. This time he stayed on the assurance that he would not be "butchered up," and on January 23, 1863, he was discharged from the service as being unfit for further duty.

### Enlisted Again and Captured

He was sent home to Rochester, where he recruited his strength. But the war fever had so firm a hold on him that he could not rest at home. He heard from his brother, whose enlistment had run out, and found that he was going to re-enlist in the Seventy-sixth New York Infantry. Immediately he also set about getting back into the service. But the recruiting officers declared he was badly enough scarred up already and refused to take him. But the doughy little fighter persisted and was successful in the end, though it took considerable tact to get over the matter of the paralyzed left hand. Few of those who enlisted in that regiment were to see the fighting and endure the hardships that he was to see and endure. His regiment was assigned to the First corps; he soon found himself back in the Shenandoah valley. He fought through the battles there that led up to the great fight at Gettysburg. At the battle of Chancellorsville a bullet struck the barrel of his gun and glanced, entering the bend of the arm just above the elbow. "Pull out that shirt sleeve," he said to the man next to him. And it was not till the man had looked at it that he knew he had received a bad wound. But he bound it up roughly, as was his custom, and continued through the fight.

One day came orders to march to the north. The rebels had invaded Pennsylvania. Yarton's regiment was hurried to Harper's Ferry and thence north to the field where the greatest battle of the war was to be fought. Yarton took part in the bloody struggle of that famous first day, when 10,000 out of 15,000 were killed or disabled. At about noon part of the first corps were on Little Round Top, when their ammunition gave out and the weapons failed to arrive with more. The rebels captured 1,100 of them. They were marched over to the cemetery, just back of Little Round Top, and their captors proceeded to despoil them of everything they had.

"They completely stripped us," says Mr. Yarton. "They took our watches, our money, our clothes. Some of the boys were left almost naked. One big fellow took my gold watch. Late in the afternoon the balance of the First corps came up and recaptured us. I had kept my eye on that big fellow with my watch in his pocket and I made a rush for him first thing. I was on him before he saw me. He never stole anything more and never killed any more union men. I took my watch out of his pocket where he had put it and then it was back to the fight for me.

"It was on the second day of the battle that I got the most painful wound of all. We were assaulting the rebels, who were firmly entrenched. It was a hand-to-hand fight; we on the earthworks and they in the trenches. Suddenly I felt a sharp pain in my cheek and when I put my hand there I felt a bayonet being pulled out and saw a rebel grinning up at me. He had stood on a stone and run his bayonet into my chin. It had gone up through my cheek to my cheek bone. I was so paralyzed with pain for a moment that I could do nothing. The rebel was just about to run me through the body when my brother, who was fighting close to me, knocked his gun away and with the same thrust killed him.

"We were in the thick of the fight again on the third day, and

then I noticed for the first time the number of farmers and other Pennsylvanians who were on the field of battle armed with pitchforks, axes, corn knives, anything they could lay hands on to fight with. Many of these were old fellows who would not have been taken as regular soldiers. They were there to protect their homes against the invasion of the rebels. They seemed to be fearless."

On the fourth day of the battle, July 4, 1863, the First corps pursued the fleeing rebels to Harper's Ferry. There, Mr. Yarton says, the river was full of the men and horses swimming across. Many of them were shot as they swam and a great many more were taken prisoners.

### On the Way to Andersonville

May 4, 1864, Yarton's company was at Culpepper Court House, when one day at 3 a. m. orders were given to be ready to march in an hour. All that day they marched and most of the night and early the next morning they were in the thick of the Battle of the Wilderness. There young Yarton received the most serious wound of his life. An officer caught him with his sabre on the right side of the neck, cutting a gash deep and long, which bled heavily. In the moment this put him off his guard a soldier hit him over the back of the head with his gun and Yarton knew no more. When he regained his senses he was in the hands of the enemy and a few weeks later he was marched into the great confederate prison of Andersonville.

The horrors which he endured there in the nine months he remained a prisoner are almost beyond belief. The Andersonville prison consisted of a stockade made of logs driven into the ground side by side and enclosing twenty acres. The stockade was twenty feet in height and on the top were planks on which the guards stood. The main stockade was surrounded by two other stockades, one sixteen feet high and the outer one twelve feet high. On this twenty acres at times were as many as 40,000 federal prisoners.

Notably among the latter is General Crook, who did so much for the state in subduing the Indians during his command of the regiment stationed here in 1878 and subsequent years. Then Nebraska can claim as its own General Ware Lawton, who was of invaluable service to the whole country. Enlisting in the ranks, his promotion was rapid, until in 1862 he was promoted to the rank of captain, just one year from the time of his enlistment. During the civil war he distinguished himself for his bravery, received a medal from congress in recognition of the splendid work done at Atlanta, Ga., when he led the attack in the very teeth of the enemy's guns. His knowledge of Indian tactics proved invaluable to his country during the Spanish-American war, both in Cuba and the Philippines. But one morning while leading an attack at San Mateo he was shot by a foe while walking in front of the line. Then there is General Stanton and General Stoenbergh, all brave sons of the soil, and many more soldiers and officers whom Nebraska has done its part to contribute to this great republic.

A small hamlet lies at the end of the bridge that spans the Potomac, which you have to cross to reach the National cemetery. The electric cars wait to convey travelers to Arlington, but usually after a glance into the shady wood and long breadths of country air they decide to walk and learn the topography of the country better than if they were under the dictation of the modern wizard of electricity. While passing along the wood lying between the village and the wood they stop to view Washington. With its white buildings rising in solemn quietude, hazy clouds floating in fleecy rolls over its heights, it reminds one of the fabled cities rising Phoenix like out of the mist, or that strange city that arose out of the sea, seen by Christopher Columbus and his men, who, under the decree of destiny, discovered a home for weary Liberty. Softly through the stillness comes the "Dead March" in solemn strains. Nearer it comes, its many sobbings sounding strangely in nature's many echoes. Down the white road rides a funeral train. First the guard and then the caisson bearing the body of the dead soldier, shrouded in the folds of the flag he loved so well. Sadly the notes ring out; in the heavens the remorseless sun looks on in cruel indifference. Above the music rises the song of a bird. The carol of hope. Joyously it rings, cutting with clearness through the deeper tones of the dirge. Nature's solace for nature's decree. The people gaze at the caisson, still, but their eyes are fixed on the stars of the flag; stars that suggest and beckon to the above—the soldier's rest and reward.

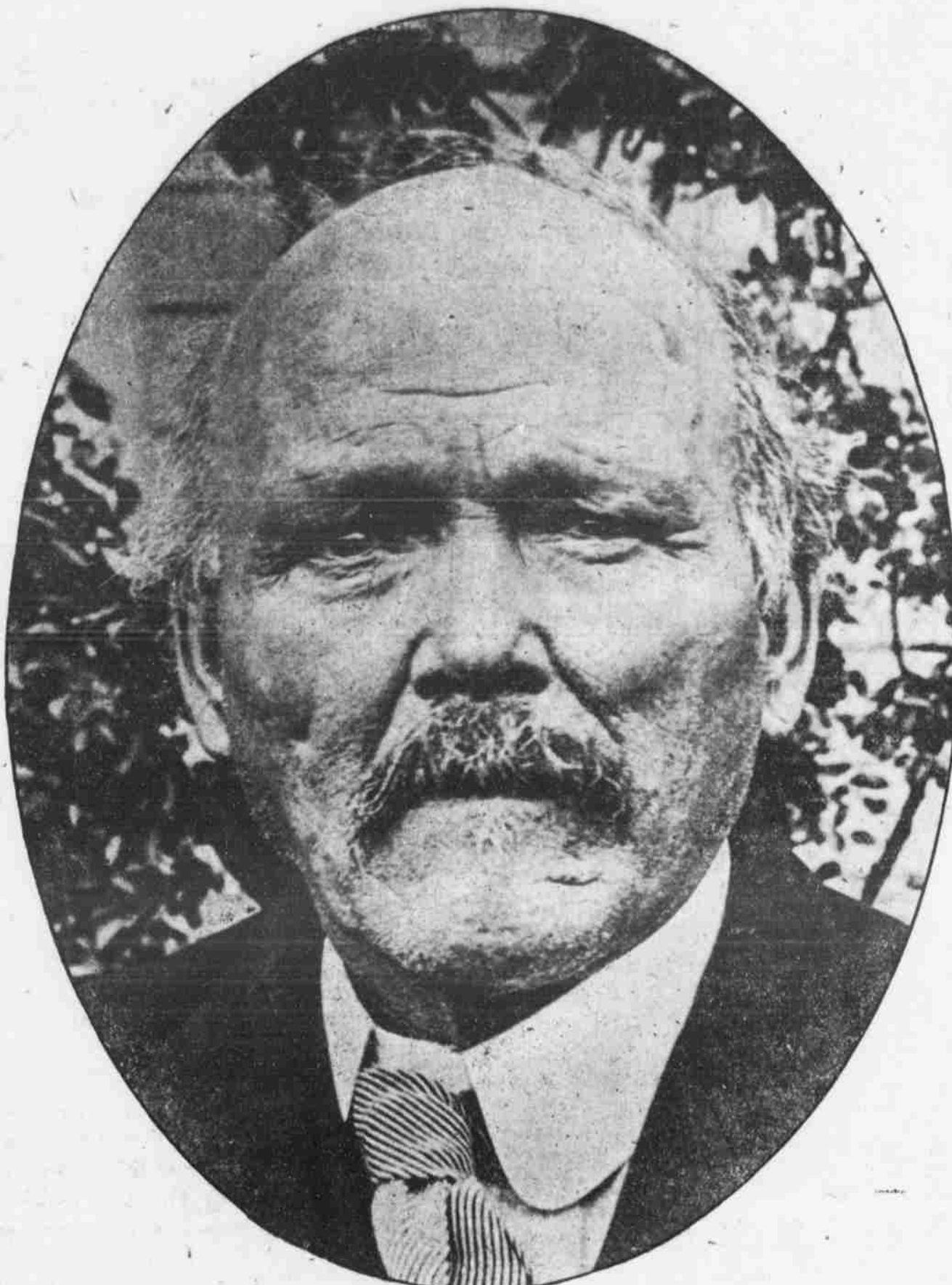
## Arlington Cemetery Where Sleep the Nation's Dead

**N**EBRASKA has a heart interest in the imposing services for the dead which are held at the National cemetery at Arlington every Decoration day, for here rest many of Nebraska's soldiers and heroes. Notably among the latter is General Crook, who did so much for the state in subduing the Indians during his command of the regiment stationed here in 1878 and subsequent years. Then Nebraska can claim as its own General Ware Lawton, who was of invaluable service to the whole country. Enlisting in the ranks, his promotion was rapid, until in 1862 he was promoted to the rank of captain, just one year from the time of his enlistment. During the civil war he distinguished himself for his bravery, received a medal from congress in recognition of the splendid work done at Atlanta, Ga., when he led the attack in the very teeth of the enemy's guns. His knowledge of Indian tactics proved invaluable to his country during the Spanish-American war, both in Cuba and the Philippines. But one morning while leading an attack at San Mateo he was shot by a foe while walking in front of the line. Then there is General Stanton and General Stoenbergh, all brave sons of the soil, and many more soldiers and officers whom Nebraska has done its part to contribute to this great republic. A small hamlet lies at the end of the bridge that spans the Potomac, which you have to cross to reach the National cemetery. The electric cars wait to convey travelers to Arlington, but

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Through the woods they hurry on, for the advance notes of evening are sounding. The purring brook at the right sings on its vaulted lay of eternity: For men may come, and men may go, But I go on forever. We know better, little brook. Other waters will come and sport and play in your place. You must meet the inevitable, the destroying touch of change. Fort Myer looms before us. Soldiers are stationed to guard their dead comrades. The graves have a better guardian—One who never sleeps. On fame's eternal camping ground Their silent tents are spread, And glory guards with solemn round The bivouac of the dead. These immortal lines are engraven on the gates at the entrance of Arlington. The low green graves are all around us. It little matters what side they battled on. If the wrong, we will forgive them, for they have paid the price of their misjudgment. Let confederates bending over the grave of federal whisper low words of peace, while federal at the grave of confederate whisper, "They lost, but were brave." An impressive sight, yet one that stirs deep thoughts is the monument erected over the remains of the unknown dead. Unknown. Mothers have wept over the uncertainty of their fate; sweethearts have waited in alternate hope and despair, while little children have called in vain

for father, but they are sleeping in peace with the foe in the common bosom of Mother Earth. To the south is the plot set apart for Spanish war veterans. Many a young life was laid low in the very springtime of youth. Off they went, with buoyant steps, flushed with the wine of war. Back they came, cold in death's embrace. Over this slaughter of young life one can imagine Peace weeping as a mother weeps for her only son. But the pitying hand of compassion has returned them to Peace, and she guards them safe for ever more. The mansion at Arlington was built by John Parke Custis, the stepson and protégé of George Washington. In after years a Custis intermarried with a Lee, so the property came into the Lee family. It was this quiet home that Robert E. Lee left when he went to Richmond to take up arms for his native state. How often during the years that followed his heart must have turned to the quiet peace of Arlington. The government while he was fighting confiscated his home for unpaid taxes and for many years refused to render adequate remuneration for the injustice. At last it awoke in a sense to the recognition of individual rights, even when demanded by persons holding opinions other than the opinions of state. Compensation was made to the Lee family and the place was set aside as a final resting place (Continued on Page Five.)



EDWARD YARTON.

miracle as wonderful as when Moses smote the rock and the water gushed forth.

"The dead line was just twelve feet inside the stockade. The minute a man stepped over that he got a bullet. Many a one took the step purposely. He wanted to be out of his misery. When a guard shot a man we said he was 'going to see his girl.' It was said they got a furlough of thirty days when they had shot a prisoner.

"At one time Wirtz got mad at me and took my thousand away and sent me to the prison stockade. There I was starved for ten days, with nothing but filthy water to drink. I was also strung up by the thumbs for ten hours at a time. Others were suspended by the waist, a rope being passed around them and in that position they hung for hours, their body horizontal and their head hanging down. Many a weakened man was brought out of there after this torture and consigned to the dead wagon.

### Life in the Stockade

"From June 1 to July 5 it rained nearly all the time. The clay soil became a sticky swamp, with mud a foot deep. Many a night I have gotten up when unable to endure that muddy bed any longer and hunted around with my comrades for dead bodies. These we would lay side by side and lie down on them and in that way keep out of the mud and get a little sleep. There were always plenty of dead, for they died at the rate of 300 a day, and at one time it kept three carts busy hauling them out.

"I saw the six raiders hanged in the prison. They were about as low down fellows as you could find. Think of men who would prey on their comrades in such a hell as that prison. I have seen those raiders go through the camp and struggle with a man who was very sick or dying and take his few valuables away from him. Of course, the confederates did not give us any police protection and that gave these fellows a chance. But finally they were apprehended. Wirtz allowed them to be tried by some of us. They were convicted and then one day timber was brought in and a scaffold erected. We chose a few of the strongest from our number to act as executioners. The men's hands were tied behind them and they walked up on the scaffold one by one, where the noose was adjusted and they fell to the death they deserved. Curtis, the last man, broke his rope and ran off across the prison and into the swamp. He kept crying out that if the rope broke a man ought to be freed. He was the only coward in the six. But it was no use. He was dragged back and was soon hanging motionless at the end of another rope.

"The hanging of these men did much to restore order and to stop stealing and murder less frequent among us. I had now been in the prison more than two months and the horrible life was telling on me. I had lost all flesh and was a mere shadow. Without experiencing it, no one can imagine the horrors of life in that hell hole. If you would stand in the middle of a muddy pig pen on a hot day when the sun is drawing the steam and reek from the filth on the ground up into the air so that you are compelled to breathe it, you could have some slight idea of Andersonville. Imagine enduring that for months, sleeping in the mud, sitting and standing in it with scurvy, dysentery, hospital gangrene, malarial fever and a hundred other diseases all around you; with men in the last throes of death, living skeletons with horror-marked faces praying for death; with the dead wagons gathering up the light emaciated forms and hauling them out to be dumped into the ditch and with men all around on the stockade ready to shoot you if you give them the least excuse. That is a mild picture of Andersonville."

### Home Again and Married

Mr. Yarton was released from the prison February 22, 1865. He tells a pitiful story of his heroic effort to appear well, though he was nearly dead. Had he not done this he would have been kept in prison. Two comrades helped him into the train and then after days of delay they arrived in Washington. He was sent on to Rochester after a short period in the hospital. When he arrived at home he weighed just sixty-one pounds. It took months for the recovery, but there was a young woman in Rochester who made a good nurse. She was Miss Olive Boardwell, the girl he had "left behind him" when he marched away to the war in '61. On August 6, 1865, they were married. They have seven children, William E. Yarton, Benson; Charles E. Yarton, Syracuse, N. Y.; John F. Yarton, Kansas City; Mrs. Joseph Calabria, Omaha; Llewellyn A. Yarton, Kansas City; Mrs. Michael Hogan, St. Paul, Minn., and Mrs. Clyde Hollett, Lincoln, Neb.

After the veteran had recovered he moved about into various parts of the country working at his trade of carpenter. They finally arrived in Omaha in 1887. Here he worked for a time in the railroad shops and a few years ago he and Mrs. Yarton moved to Benson, where they have a pleasant little place, with chickens and a garden, and there the battle-scarred veteran tries to take his ease. He still suffers considerably from his wounds. The dent in his head put there by that rebel at the Battle of the Wilderness gives him more pain than the rest. A silver plate two inches in diameter takes the place of a large piece of skull which the surgeons removed. Five years ago Dr. R. M. Stone and other surgeons performed an operation on Mr. Yarton and took from his abdomen a big and badly battered bullet. That bullet had entered his body at the Battle of Gettysburg and for nearly forty years had lodged in him and given him pain.

Mr. Yarton is a Blue Lodge Mason, a member of the Methodist church and, of course, a prominent and honored member of the local Grand Army organization, Crook post, No. 262. He still has the Springfield rifle which went with him through his adventures. "I'll always keep it," he says, "and when I die it goes into the box with me. It was my friend in life and in death I won't be parted from it."

### God Sends Water to Men

"Down near the middle of the land enclosed in the stockade was a slough in which was a pool of stagnant water. This was all we had to drink. We would push the green stuff out of the way and drink. It was warm and dirty and reeking with filth, but Wirtz used to say, 'Dot's good enough for them.' But God did not forget us, for just when the suffering was at its worst a spring of cold water burst out of the ground just inside the dead line. It was a