

Through Blood and Fire at Gettysburgh

by

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October 3, 1889

Prepared in Palm Format

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INTRODUCTION

This article was written by, then Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlin, commanding officer of the Twentieth Maine. It is his own account of the actions which took place on Little Round Top. The article was originally published in 1913 in Hearst's Magazine.

On the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg, the armies engaged for the first time...on the second day of July, 1863 the events in this article take place on the Round Tops, the three day battle ended with over 6600 dead. By his stalwart actions and personal courage Colonel Chamberlin was able to hold his positions and literally save the day by preserving the far left flank of the Union line. Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlin was given a Medal of Honor for his part in the following events.

THROUGH BLOOD AND FIRE AT GETTYSBURG

Nightfall brought us to Hanover, Pennsylvania, and to a halt. And it was the evening of the first day of July, 1863. All day we had been marching North from Maryland, searching and pushing out on all roads for the hoped-for collision with Lee - eagerly, hurriedly, yet cautiously, with skirmishers and flankers out to sound the first challenge, and our main body ready for the call. Fanwise our divisions had been spread out to cover Washington, but more was at stake than the capitol city of the Union; there was that important political and international question, the recognition of the Southern Confederacy as independent by France and England. This recognition, denying the very contentions of the North from the beginning, would have been almost fatal to it. And Lee need not win a decided victory in the field to bring about the recognition; his capture and occupation of an important and strategic point in the North would have been enough.

All day, ever and again, we had seen detachments of Lee's cavalry; even as we passed an outlying field to our encampment the red slanting sunlight fell softly across the grim relics of a cavalry fight of the afternoon, the survivors of which had swept on, flying and pursuing.

Worn and famished we stacked arms in camping order, hoping to bivouac beside them, and scampered like madcaps for those two prime factors of a desultory supper-water and fence-rails; for the finding of which the Yankee

volunteer has an aptitude which should be ranked among the spiritual intuitions, though in their old-school theology most farmers of our acquaintance were inclined to reckon the aptitude among the carnal appetites of the totally depraved. Some of the forage wagons had now got up, and there was a brief rally at their tail ends for quick justice to be dispensed. But the unregenerate fires had hardly blackened the coffee-dippers, and thehardtack hardly been hammered into working order by the bayonet-shanks, when everything was stopped short by whispers of disaster away on the left; the enemy had struck our column at Gettysburg, and driven it back with terrible loss; Reynolds, the commander, had been killed, and the remnant scarcely able to hold on to the hillsides unless rescue came before morning. These were only rumors flitting owl-like in the gathering shadows. We could not quite believe them, but they deepened our mood.

TO THE MARCH! ON TO GETTYSBURG!

Suddenly the startling bugle-call from, unseen headquarters! "The General!" it rang! "To the march! No moment of delay!"

Word was coming, too. Staff officers dashed from corps, to division, to brigade, to regiment, to battery-and the order flew like the hawk, and not the owl. "To Gettysburg!" it said, a forced march of sixteen miles. But what forced it? And what opposed? Not supper, nor sleep nor sore feet and aching limbs.

In a moment, the whole corps was in marching order; rest, rations, earth itself forgotten; one thought, -to be first on that Gettysburg road. The iron-faced veterans were transformed to boys. They insisted on starting out with colors flying, so that even the night might know what manner of men were coming to redeem the day.

All things, even the most common, were magnified and made mysterious by the strange spell of night. At a turn of the road a staff officer, with an air of authority, told each colonel as he came up, that McClellan was in command again, and riding ahead of us on the road. Then wild cheers rolled from the crowding column into the brooding sky, and the earth shook under the quickened tread. Now from a dark angle of the roadside came a whisper, whether from earthly or unearthly voice one cannot feel quite sure, that the August form of Washington had been seen that afternoon at sunset riding over the Gettysburg hills. Let no one smile at me! I half believed it myself, - so did the powers of the other world draw nigh!

But there were wayside greetings such as we had never met before. We were in a free state, and among friendly people. All along the road, citizens came out to contemplate this martial array with a certain awe, and greet us with hearty welcome. But, most of all, our dark way was illumined by groups of girls in sweet attire gathered on the embowered lawns of modest

homes, with lights and banners and flowers, and stirring songs whose import and effect were quite other than impersonal. Those who were not sisters of the muse of song waved their welcome in the ripple of white handkerchiefs-which token the gallant young gentlemen of the staff were prompt to take as summons to parley, and boldly rode up meet with soft, half-tone scenes under the summer night; those meetings looked much like proposals for exchange of prisoners, or unconditional surrender. And others still, not daring quite so much, but unable to repress the gracious impulse of giving, offered their silent benediction in a cup of water. And we remembered then with what sanction it was that water had been turned to wine in Cana of Galilee!

OUR BATTLEFIELD, A THIRST FOR BLOOD

Snatching an hour's sleep by the roadside just before dawn, we reached at about seven o'clock in the morning the heights east of Gettysburg, confronting the ground over which the lost battle of the first day had ebbed. After a little we were moved to the left, across Rock Creek and up the Baltimore Pike to an open field more nearly overlooking the town. On our front and left were the troops of the Eleventh and First Corps; on a commanding height to our right was strongly established the Twelfth Corps of our army. Told to rest awhile, we first resumed the homely repast so sharply interrupted the evening before. Next we stretched ourselves on the ground to make up lost sleep, and rest our feet after a twenty-four hours' scarcely broken march, and get our heads level for the coming test. We knew that a great battle was soon to be fought, a desperate and momentous one. But what much more impressed my mind was the great calm, the uncertainty of overture, and seeming lack of tactical plan for the tremendous issue. We were aware that other troops were coming up, on one side and the other; but we had no means of knowing or judging which side would take the offensive and which the defensive, or where the battle would begin. All the forenoon we had no other intimation as to this, than an order given in an impressive tone to hold ourselves ready to take part in an attack on our right; but whether to be begun by us or the enemy, we neither knew, nor could guess.

We were on Cemetery Hill, the apex of the angle made by an extended ridge, on the right bending sharply back for a mile to end in a lofty wooded crest known as Culp's Hill, and on the left running southerly from the Cemetery, declining somewhat in its course till at the distance of two miles or more it makes an abrupt and rugged rise in a rocky spur 500 feet high, named Little Round Top. This was as now the outpost of a steep and craggy peak southward, one hundred and fifty feet higher, terminating the range, named Great Round Top. These landmarks for the whole region near and

far, to the west and north especially, in a military point of view commanded the entire ground available for a great battle.

Within the wings of this sharp-beaked ridge there entered and met in the town two great thoroughfares, the Baltimore Pike and the Taneytown Road, perfectly commanded by the Little Round Top. The latter road opened the direct way to Washington, and in the aspect of affairs was our only practicable line of retreat in case of disaster. Our Second Corps, Hancock's, had taken position on the ridge, from the Cemetery, southerly; and on the extension on this line our Third Corps, Sickles', was forming-its left, we were told, resting on the northern slope of Little Round Top. This formation indicated a defensive attitude for us, and deepened our confidence in Meade.

Opposite Cemetery Ridge, occupied by us, westerly, something like a mile away, is another ridge, extending from behind the upper limits of the town to nearly opposite Great Round Top. This is known as Seminary Ridge, so named from the Lutheran Seminary on its northern slope. Between these two ridges comes another great thoroughfare, the Emmitsburg Road, entering the town close past the base of Cemetery Hill-thus all three thoroughfares mentioned converged. Along this ridge Hill's Confederate Corps had established itself, and up this Emmitsburg Road from Chambersburg, Longstreet's Corps were advancing. Ewell's Confederate Corps held the town, and Early's Division extended northerly and easterly around to the front of Culp's Hill. Their attack, it is curious to observe, was from the north and east-from the direction of York and Hanover-so quickly and completely had Lee turned from his first, and so far successful, attempt to occupy the northern cities, to face the army of the Potomac now threatening their rear.

Our orders and expectations still kept us looking anxiously to the right, where the yesterday's battle had left off, and the new one was to begin. But all was as yet uncertain. We were told that General Meade was now conferring with his Corps commanders as to the best point and part for the battle to open. But this symposium was cut short, and a plan of opening announced by a thunder burst of artillery from the rocks and woods away in front of the Round Tops, where we least of all expected it. A crash of musketry followed.

DOUBLE-QUICK TO THE HAVOC OF BATTLE

So the awakening bugle, sounded "To the left! At utmost speed!" Down to the left we pushed-the whole Fifth Corps - our brigade nearest and leading; at the double-quick, straight for the strife; not seeking roads, nor minding roughness of the ground, thornhedges, stone-fences, or miry swamps mid-way, earth quaking, sky ablaze, and a deepening uproar as we drew near.

We soon saw that our Third Corps was not where we thought-between the Second Corps and the Round Tops-but had been moved forward a Mile, it seemed, almost to the Emmitsburg Road.

The fight was desperate already. We passed along its rear, first getting a glimpse of the Peach Orchard on the right, where our troops were caught between Hill's Corps on Seminary Ridge and Longstreet's Corps fast arriving on the Emmitsburg Road; -and the havoc was terrible. We passed on to the Wheat-field where heroic men standing bright as golden grain were ravaged by Death's wild reapers from the woods. Here we halted to be shown our places. We had a momentary glimpse of the Third Corps left in front of Round Top, and the fearful struggle at the Devil's Den, and Hood's out-flanking troops swarming beyond. Our halt was brief, but our senses alert. I saw our First and Second Brigades go on to the roaring woods, between the Peach Orchard and the Wheat-field.

THE RACE TO LITTLE ROUND TOP

In another instant, a staff officer from General Warren rushed up to find Sykes, our Corps Commander, to beg him to send a brigade at least, to seize Little Round Top before the enemy's surging waves should overwhelm it. Other supplications were in the air; calling for aid everywhere. Our Vincent, soldierly and self-reliant, hearing this entreaty for Round Top, waited word from no superior, but taking the responsibility ordered us to turn and push for Round Top at all possible speed, and dashed ahead to study how best to place us. We broke to the right and rear, found a rude log bridge over Plum Run, and a rough farm-road leading to the base of the mountain. Here, as we could, we took the doublequick.

Now we learned that Warren, chief engineer of our army, sent by Meade to see how things were going on the left, drawn to Little Round Top by its evident importance, found to his astonishment that it was unoccupied except by a little group of signalmen, earnestly observing the movements over in the region of the Emmitsburg Road beyond the Devil's Den. Warren, to test a surmise, sent word to a battery of ours in position below, to throw a solid shot into a mass of woods in that vicinity. The whir of the shot overhead brought out the glitter of many musket-barrels and bayonets in the slanting sunlight-the revelation of fact, the end of dreams! In a moment more, the fierce attack fell on our Third Corps' left, lashed the Devil's Den into a seething cauldron, leaving free a large Confederate force to sweep past for the base of the Round Tops. They would make short work in taking the height, and Warren did likewise in his call for the race.

Earnestly we scanned that rugged peak which was to be the touchstone of that day's battle. It bore a rough forbidding face, wrinkled with jagged edges, bearded with mighty boulders; even the smooth spots were strewn

with fragments of rock like the play-ground or battle-ground of giants in the elemental storms of old. Straggling trees wrestled with the rocks for a foothold; some were in a rich vein of mould and shot up stark and grim.

Altogether it was a strange and solemn place, looking forlorn and barren now, but to be made rich enough soon with precious blood and far-wept tears.

As we mounted its lower gradient, Longstreet's batteries across Plum Run had us in full view, and turned their whole force upon our path, to sweep the heights free of us till their gray line, now straining towards them, could take them by foot or hand. Shells burst overhead and brought down tree-tops as the hissing fragments fell; or glanced along the shelving ledges and launched splinters of rock to multiply their terrors; solid shot swept close above our heads, their compressed, burning breath driving the men's breath like lead to the bottom of their breasts.

At that fiery moment three brothers of us were riding abreast, and a solid shot driving close past our faces disturbed me. 'Boys,' I said, 'I don't like this. Another such shot might make it hard for mother. Tom, go to the rear of the regiment, and see that it is well closed up! John, pass up ahead and look out a place for our wounded.' Tom, the youngest Lieutenant of Company G, was serving as adjutant of the regiment; John, a little older, was sent out by the Christian Commission for this battle, and I had applied for him. We had no surgeon; the old ones were gone, and the new ones not come. So I pressed him into field hospital service, with Chaplain French and the ambulance men, under charge of Hospital Steward Baker.

HOLD THE LINE AT ALL COSTS""HOLD THE LINE AT ALL COSTS"

As we neared the summit of the mountain, the shot so raked the crest that we had to keep our men below it to save our heads, although this did not wholly avert the visits of tree-tops and splinters of rock and iron, while the boulders and clefts and pitfalls in our path made it seem like the replica of the evil 'den' across the sweetly named Plum Run.

Reaching the southern face of Little Round Top, I found Vincent there, with intense poise and look. He said with a voice of awe, as if translating the tables of the eternal law, "I place you here! This is the left of the Union line. You understand. You are to hold this ground at all costs!" I did understand-full well; but had more to learn about costs.

The regiment coming up 'right in front' was put in position by a quite uncommon order, 'on the right by file into line;' both that we should thus be facing the enemy when we came to a front, and also be ready to commence firing as fast as each man arrived. This is a rather slow style of formation,

but this time it was needful. Knowing that we had no supports on the left, I dispatched a stalwart company under the level-headed Captain Morrill in that direction, with orders to move along up the valley to our front and left, between us and the eastern base of the Great Round Top, to keep within supporting distance of us, and to act as exigencies of the battle should require.

DO DUTY OR BE SHOT

The Twentieth Maine Regiment had 358 men equipped for duty in the ranks with twenty-eight officers. They were all well-seasoned soldiers, and what is more, well-rounded men, body and brain. One somewhat important side-note must have place here, in order properly to appreciate the mental and moral attitude of the men before us. One hundred and twenty of these men from the Second Maine were recruits, whom some recruiting officer had led into the belief that they should be discharged with their regiment at the end of its term of service. In their enthusiasm they had not noticed that they were signing enlistment papers for "three years of the war"; and when they had been held in the field after the discharge of the regiment they had refused to do military duty, and had been sequestered in a prisoners' camp as mutineers, waiting court-martial. The exigency of our movement the last of May had not permitted this semi-civil treatment; and orders from the Secretary of War had directed me to take these men up on my rolls and put them to duty. This made it still harder for them to accept, as they had never enlisted in this regiment. However, they had been soon brought over to me under the guard of the One Hundred and Eighteenth Pennsylvania, with fixed bayonets; with orders to me to take them into my regiment and "make them do duty, or shoot them down the moment they refused;" these had been the very words of the Corps Commander in person. The responsibility, I had thought, gave me some discretionary power. So I had placed their names on our rolls, distributed them by groups, to equalize companies, and particularly to break up the 'esprit de corps' of banded mutineers. Then I had called them together and pointed out to them the situation: that they could not be entertained as civilian guests by me; that they were by authority of the United States on my rolls as soldiers, and I should treat them as soldiers should be treated; that they should lose no rights by obeying orders, and I would see what could be done for their claim. It is pleasant to record that all but one or two had gone back manfully to duty, to become some of the best soldiers in the regiment, as I was to prove this very day.

NOT A MAN WAVERS NOW

The exigency was great. I released the pioneers and provost guards altogether, and sent them to their companies. All but the drummer boys and

hospital attendants went into the ranks. Even the cooks and servants not liable to such service, asked to go in. Others whom I knew to be sick or footsore, and had given a pass to ?fall out? on the forced marches of the day and night before, came up, now that the battle was on, dragging themselves along on lame and bleeding feet, finding their regiment with the sagacity of the brave, and their places where need is greatest and hearts truest.

"Places?" Did any of these heroic men ever leave them? -although for all too many we passed their names at evening roll call thereafter, with only the heart's answer, "Here forever!"

Our line looked towards the Great Round Top, frowning above us not a gunshot away, and raising grave thoughts of what might happen if the enemy should gain foothold there, even if impracticable for artillery. We had enough of that, as it was. For the tremendous cannonade from across the Plum Run gorge was still pounding the Little Round Top crests; happily, not as yet striking my line, which it would have enfiladed if it got the range. The other regiments of the brigade were forming on our right; the Eighty-third Pennsylvania, the Forty-fourth New York and the Sixteenth Michigan. I was observing and meditating as to the impending and the possible, when something of the real was substituted by a visit from Colonel Rice. He thought it would be profitable for us to utilize these few minutes by going to the clearer space on the right of the regiment to take a look at the aspect of things in the Plum Run valley-the direction of the advance on our front. It was a forewarning indeed. The enemy had already turned the Third Corps left, the Devil's Den was a smoking crater, the Plum Run gorge was a whirling maelstrom; one force was charging our advance batteries near the Wheat-field; the flanking force was pressing past the base of the Round Tops; all rolling towards us in tumultuous waves.

It was a stirring, not to say, appalling sight: here a whole battery of shot and shell cutting a ragged chasm through a serried mass, flinging men and horses like drift aside; there, a rifle volley at close range, with reeling shock, hands tossed in air, muskets dropped with death's quick relax, or clutched with last, convulsive energy, men falling like grass before the scythers with manhood's proud calm and rally; there, a little group kneeling above some favorite officer slain, -his intense spirit still animating the fiery steed pressing headlong with empty saddle to the van; here, a defiant regiment of ours, broken, slaughtered, captured; or survivors, of both sides crouching among the rocks for shelter from the terrible cross-fire where there is no rear! But all advancing all the frenzied force, victors and vanquished, each scarcely knowing which-surgings and foaming towards us; death around, behind, before, and madness everywhere!

Yes, brave Rice! It was well for us to see this; the better to see it through. A look into each other's eyes; without a word, we resumed our respective places.

A LULL, THEN THE CRASH OF HELL

Ten minutes had not passed. Suddenly, the thunder of artillery and the crash of iron that had all the while been roaring over the Round Top crests stopped short.

We understood this, too. The storming lines, that had swept past the Third Corps' flank, had got up the base of Little Round Top, and under the range and reach of their guns. They were close upon us among the rocks, we knew, unseen, because so near. In a minute more came the roll of musketry. It struck the exposed right center of our brigade.

Promptly answered, repulsed, and renewed again and again, it soon reached us, still extending. Two brigades of Hood's Division had attacked Texas and Alabama. The Fourth Alabama reached our right, the Forty-seventh Alabama joined and crowded in, but gradually, owing to their echelon advance. Soon seven companies of this regiment were in our front. We had all we could stand. My attention was sharply called, now here, now there. In the thick and smoke, Lieutenant Nichols, a bright officer near our center, ran up to tell me something queer was going on in his front, behind those engaging us.

THE GRAY IS FLANKING US!

I sprang forward, mounted a great rock in the midst of his company line, and was soon able to resolve the 'queer' impression into positive knowledge. Thick groups in gray were pushing up along the smooth dale between the Round Tops in a direction to gain our left flank. There was no mistaking this. If they could hold our attention by a hot fight in front while they got in force on that flank, it would be bad for us and our whole defense. How many were coming we could not know. We were rather too busy to send out a reconnaissance. If a strong force should gain our rear, our brigade would be caught as by a mighty shears-blade, and be cut and crushed. What would follow it was easy to foresee. This must not be. Our orders to hold that ground had to be liberally interpreted. That front had to be held, and that rear covered. Something must be done, -quickly and coolly. I called the captains and told them my tactics: to keep the front fire at the hottest, without special regard to its need or immediate effect, and at the same time, as they found opportunity, to take side steps to the left, coming gradually into one rank, file-closers and all. Then I took the colors with their guard and placed them at our extreme left, where a great boulder gave token and support; thence bending back at a right angle the whole body gained ground leftward and made twice our original front. And were not so long doing it. This was a difficult movement to execute under such a fire, requiring coolness as well as heat. Of rare quality were my officers and

men. I shall never cease to admire and honor them for what they did in this desperate crisis.

TO THE RESCUE OR ALL IS LOST!

Now as an important element of the situation, let our thought turn to what was going on meanwhile to the right of us. When Warren saw us started for Little Round Top, looking still intently down, he saw Hood's two brigades breaking past the Third Corps' left and sweeping straight for Little Round Top. Then he flew down to bring reinforcement for this vital place and moment. He came upon the One Hundred and Fortieth New York, of Weed's Brigade of our Second Division, just going into Sickles' relief, and dispatched it headlong for Round Top. Weed was to follow, and Ayres' whole division-but not yet. Warren also laid hold of Hazlett, with his battery, D of the Fifth Regulars, and sent him to scale those heights-if in the power of man so to master nature. Meantime the tremendous blow of the Fourth and Fifth Texas struck the right of our brigade, and our Sixteenth Michigan reeled and staggered back under the shock. Confusion followed. Vincent felt that all was lost, unless the very gods should intervene. Sword aloft and face aflame, he rushed in among the broken companies in desperate effort to rally them, man by man. By sheer force of his superb personality he restored a portion of his line, and was urging up the rest. "Don't yield an inch now, men, or all is lost!" he cried, when an answering volley scorched the very faces of the men, and Vincent's soul went up in a chariot of fire. In that agonizing moment came tearing up the One Hundred and Fortieth New York, gallant O'Rorke at the head. Not waiting to load a musket or form a line, they sprang forward into that turmoil. Met by a withering volley that killed its fine young colonel and laid low many of his intrepid officers and a hundred of his men, this splendid regiment, as by a providence we may well call divine, saved us all in that moment of threatened doom.

To add a tragic splendor to this dark scene, in the midst of it all, the indomitable Hazlett was trying to get his guns-ten pounder rifled Parrotts-up to a working place on the summit close beyond. Finally he was obliged to take his horses entirely off, and lift his guns by hand and handspike up the craggy steep, whence he launched death and defiance wide and far around. The roar of all this tumult reached us on the left, and heightened the intensity of our resolve. Meanwhile the flanking column worked around to our left and joined with those before us in a fierce assault, which lasted with increasing fury for an intense hour. The two lines met and broke and mingled in the shock. The crush of musketry gave way to cuts and thrusts, grapplings and wrestlings. The edge of conflict swayed to and fro, with wild whirl-pools and eddies. At times I saw around me more of the enemy than of my own men; gaps opening, swallowing, closing again with sharp convulsive energy; squads of stalwart men who had cut their way through us, disappearing as if translated. All around, strange, mingled roar-shouts of

defiance, rally, and desperation; and underneath, murmured entreaty and stifled moans; gasping prayers, snatches of Sabbath song, whispers of loved names; everywhere men torn and broken, staggering, creeping, quivering on the earth, and dead faces with strangely fixed eyes staring stark into the sky. Things which cannot be told-nor dreamed.

How men held on, each one knows-not I. But manhood commands admiration. There was one fine young fellow, who had been cut down early in the fight with a ghastly wound across his forehead, and who I had thought might possibly be saved with prompt attention. So I had sent him back to our little field hospital, at least to die in peace. Within a half-hour, in a desperate rally I saw that noble youth amidst the rolling smoke as an apparition from the dead, with bloody bandage for the only covering of his head, in the thick of the fight, high-borne and pressing on as they that shall see death no more. I shall know him when I see him again, on whatever shore!

THE COLORS STAND ALONE

So, too, another. In the very deepest of the struggle while our shattered line had pressed the enemy well below their first point of contact, and the struggle to regain it was fierce, I saw through a sudden rift in the thick smoke our colors standing alone. I first thought some optical illusion imposed upon me. But as forms emerged through the drifting smoke, the truth came to view. The cross-fire had cut keenly; the center had been almost shot away; only two of the color guard had been left, and they fighting to fill the whole space; and in the center, wreathed in battle smoke, stood the Color-Sergeant, Andrew Tozier. His color-staff planted in the ground at his side, the upper part clasped in his elbow, so holding the flag upright, with musket and cartridges seized from the fallen comrade at his side he was defending his sacred trust in the manner of the songs of chivalry. It was a stirring picture-its import still more stirring. That color must be saved, and that center too. I sent first to the regiment on our right for a dozen men to help us here, but they could not spare a man. I then called my young brother, Tom, the adjutant, and sent him forward to close that gap somehow; if no men could be drawn from neighboring companies, to draw back the salient angle and contract our center. The fire down there at this moment was so hot I thought it impossible for him to get there alive; and I dispatched immediately after him Sergeant Thomas whom I had made a special orderly, with the same instructions. It needed them both; and both came back with personal proofs of the perilous undertaking. It was strange that the enemy did not seize that moment and point of weakness. Perhaps they saw no weakness. Perhaps it was awe or admiration that held them back from breaking in upon that sublime scene.

When that mad carnival lulled, -from some strange instinct in human nature and without any reason in the situation that can be seen-when the battling

edges drew asunder, there stood our little line, groups and gaps, notched like saw-teeth, but sharp as steel, tempered in internal heats like a magic sword of the Goths. We were on the appointed and entrusted line. We had held ground - 'at all costs!'

But sad surprise! It had seemed to us we were all the while holding our own, and had never left it. But now that the smoke dissolved, we saw our dead and wounded all out in front of us, mingled with more of the enemy. They were scattered all the way down to the very feet of the baffled hostile line now rallying in the low shrubbery for a new onset. We could not wait for this. They knew our weakness now. And they were gathering force. No place for tactics now! The appeal must be to primal instincts of human nature!

DOWN THE DEATH-STREWN SLOPE!

"Shall they die there, under the enemy's feet, and under your eyes?" Words like those brokenly uttered, from heart to heart, struck the stalwart groups holding together for a stand, and roused them to the front quicker than any voice or bugle of command. These true-hearted men but a little before buffeted back and forth by superior force, and now bracing for a dubious test, dashed down the death-strewn slope into the face of the rallied and recovering foe, and hurled them, tore them from above our fallen as the tiger avenges its young. Nor did they stop till they had cleared the farthest verge of the field, redeemed by the loving for the lost-the brave for the brave.

Now came a longer lull. But this meant, not rest, but thought and action. First, it was to gather our wounded, and bear them to the sheltered lawn for saving life, or peace in dying; the dead, too, that not even our feet should do them dishonor in the coming encounter. Then-such is heavenly human pity-the wounded of our Country's foes; brothers in blood for us now, so far from other caring; borne to like refuge and succor by the drummer-boys who had become angels of the field.

In this lull I took a turn over the dismal field to see what could be done for the living, in ranks or recumbent; and came upon a manly form and face I well remembered. He was a sergeant earlier in the field of Antietam and of Fredericksburg; and for refusing to perform some menial personal service for a bullying quartermaster in winter camp, was reduced to the ranks by a commander who had not carefully investigated the case. It was a degradation, and the injustice of it rankled in his high-born spirit. But his well-bred pride would not allow him to ask for justice as a favor. I had kept this in mind, for early action. Now he was lying there, stretched on an open front where a brave stand had been made, face to the sky, a great bullet-hole in the middle of his breast, from which he had loosened the clothing, to

ease his breathing, and the rich blood was pouring in a stream. I bent down over him. His face lightened; his lips moved. But I spoke first, "My dear boy, it has gone hard with you. You shall be cared for!" He whispered, "Tell my mother I did not die a coward!" It was the prayer of home-bred manhood poured out with his life blood. I knew and answered him, "You die a sergeant. I promote you for faithful service and noble courage on the field of Gettysburg!" This was all he wanted. No word more. I had him borne from the field, but his high spirit had passed to its place. It is needless to add that as soon as a piece of parchment could be found after that battle, a warrant was made out promoting George Washington Buck to sergeant in the terms told him; and this evidence placed the sad, proud mother's name on the rolls of the Country's benefactors.

MY LIFE HANGS ON AN IMPULSE

As for myself, so far I had escaped. How close an escape I had had I did not know till afterwards. I think I may mention here, as a psychological incident, that some years after the war, I received a letter written in a homely but manly style by one subscribing himself "a member of the Fifteenth Alabama," in these words:

Dear Sir: I want to tell you of a little passage in the battle of Round Top, Gettysburg, concerning you and me, which I am now glad of. Twice in that fight I had your life in my hands. I got a safe place between two rocks, and drew bead fair and square on you. You were standing in the open behind the center of your line, full exposed. I knew your rank by your uniform and your actions, and I thought it a mighty good thing to put you out of the way. I rested my gun on the rock and took steady aim. I started to pull the trigger, but some queer notion stopped me. Then I got ashamed of my weakness and went through the same motions again. I had you, perfectly certain. But that same queer something shut right down on me. I couldn't pull the trigger, and, gave it up-that is, your life. I am glad of it now, and hope you are.
Yours Truly.

I thought he was that, and answered him accordingly, asking him to come up North and see whether I was worth what he missed. But my answer never found him, nor could I afterwards.

THE LAST CARTRIDGE AND BARE STEEL

The silence and the doubt of the momentary lull were quickly dispelled. The formidable Fifteenth Alabama, repulsed and as we hoped dispersed, now in solid and orderly array-still more than twice our numbers came rolling through the fringe of chaparral on our left. No dash; no yells; no

demonstration for effect; but settled purpose and determination! We opened on them as best we could. The fire was returned, cutting us to the quick. The Forty-seventh Alabama had rallied on our right. We were enveloped in fire, and sure to be overwhelmed in fact when the great surge struck us. Whatever might be elsewhere, what was here before us was evident; these far-outnumbering, confident eyes, yet watching for a sign of weakness. Already I could see the bold flankers on their right darting out and creeping catlike under the smoke to gain our left, thrown back as it was. It was for us, then, once for all. Our thin line was broken, and the enemy were in rear of the whole Round Top defense-infantry, artillery, humanity itself-with the Round Top and the day theirs.

Now, too, our fire was slackening; our last rounds of shot had been fired; what I had sent for could not get to us. I saw the faces of my men, one after another, when they had fired their last cartridge, turn anxiously towards mine for a moment; then square to the front again. To the front for them lay death; to the rear what they would die to save. My thought was running deep. I was combining the elements of a 'forlorn hope,' and had just communicated this to Captain Spear of the wheeling flank, on which the initiative was to fall. Just then-so will a little incident fleck a brooding cloud of doom with a tint of human tenderness-brave, warm-hearted Lieutenant Melcher, of the Color Company, whose Captain and nearly half of his men were down, came up and asked if he might take his company and go forward and pick up one or two of his men left wounded on the field, and bring them in before the enemy got too near. This would be a most hazardous move in itself, and in this desperate moment we could not break our line. But I admired him. With a glance, he understood, I answered, "Yes, sir, in a moment! I am about to order a charge!"

Not a moment was about to be lost! Five minutes more of such a defensive, and the last roll call would sound for us! Desperate as the chances were, there was nothing for it, but to take the offensive. I stepped to the colors. The men turned towards me. One word was enough, "-BAYONETS!"- It caught like fire, and swept along the ranks. The men took it up with a shout, one could not say, whether from the pit, or the song of the morning star! It was vain to order "Forward." No mortal could have heard it in the mighty hosanna that was winging the sky. Nor would he wait to hear. There are things still as of the first creation, 'whose seed is in itself.' The grating clash of steel in fixing bayonets told its own story; the color rose in front; the whole line quivered for the start; the edge of the left-wing rippled, swung, tossed among the rocks, straightened, changed curve from scimitar to sickle-shape; and the bristling archers swooped down upon the serried host-down into the face of half a thousand! Two hundred men!

It was a great right wheel. Our left swung first. The advancing foe stopped, tried to make a stand amidst the trees and boulders, but the frenzied bayonets pressing through every space forced a constant settling to the rear. Morrill with his detached company and the remnants of our valorous

sharpshooters who had held the enemy so long in check on the slopes of the Great Round Top, now fell upon the flank of the retiring crowd, and it turned to full retreat-some amidst the crags of Great Round Top, but most down the smooth vale towards their own main line on Plum Run. This tended to mass them before our center. Here their stand was more stubborn. At the first dash the commanding officer I happened to confront, coming on fiercely, sword in one hand, and big navy revolver on the other, fires one barrel almost in my face; but seeing the quick saber-point at his throat, reverses arms, gives sword and pistol into my hands and yields himself prisoner. I took him at his word, but could not give him further attention. I passed him over into the custody of a brave sergeant at my side, to whom I gave the sword as emblem of his authority, but kept the pistol with its loaded barrels, which I thought might come handy soon, as indeed it did.

Ranks were broken; many retired before us somewhat hastily; some threw their muskets to the ground-even loaded; sunk on their knees, threw up their hands, calling out, "We surrender. Don't kill us!" As if we wanted to do that! We kill only to resist killing. And these were manly men, whom we could befriend, and by no means kill, if they came our way in peace and good will. Charging right through and over these, we struck the second line of the Forty-seventh Alabama doing their best to stand, but offering little resistance. Their Lieutenant-Colonel as I passed-and a fine gentleman was Colonel Bulger-introduced himself as my prisoner, and as he was wounded, I had him cared for as best we could. Still swinging to the right as a great gate on its hinges, we swept the front clean of assailants. We were taking in prisoners by the scores-more than we could hold, or send to the rear, so that many made final escape up Great Round Top. Half way down to the throat of the vale I came upon Colonel Powell of the Fourth Alabama, a man of courtly bearing, who was badly wounded. I sent him to the Eighty-third Pennsylvania, nearest to us and better able to take care of him than we were.

TWO FOR EVERY MAN OF US

When we reached the front of the Forty-fourth New York, I thought it far enough. Beyond on the right the Texas Brigade had rallied or rendezvoused, I took thought of that. Most of the fugitives before us, rather than run the gauntlet of our whole brigade, had taken the shelter of the rocks of Great Round Top, on our left as we now faced. It was hazardous to be so far out, in the very presence of so many baffled but far from beaten veterans of Hood's renowned division. A sudden rush on either flank might not only cut us off, but cut in behind us and seize that vital point which it was our orders and our trust to hold. But it was no light task to get our men to stop. They were under the momentum of their deed. They thought they were 'on the

road to Richmond.' They had to be reasoned with, persuaded, but at last faced about and marched back to that dedicated crest with swelling hearts. Not without sad interest and service was the return. For many of the wounded had to be gathered up. There was a burden, too, of the living. Nearly four hundred prisoners remained in our hands-two for every man of ours.

THE FAREWELL MESSENGERS

Shortly the twilight deepened, and we disposed ourselves to meet any new assault that might come from the courage of exasperation. But the attack was not renewed. Whether that cold steel had chilled the ardor, which flaming muzzles seem to enliven and sustain, or the revulsion of the retiring mood was not yet over, a wide silence brooded over the hostile line. Our worn-out men, bid at last to rest, fitted themselves to their environment or followed their souls' behest. Some bent as if senseless to the earth, some gazed up at the stars and sent wireless messages through them to dear ones far-away; some wandered dreamily away in a search for water to wash from their throats the nitrous fumes of battle; others too manly to seek a surgeon, looked even for a shred of cartridge paper to staunch a too free wound or yet more deeply drawn sought the sheltered nook where our wounded had been borne to render such aid as they could, and take the farewell message home from lips of brave men to hearts that had to be more brave.

At nine o'clock the next morning we were withdrawn, being relieved by our First Brigade. But we were sent to anything but a place of rest. Our new position was in support of Hanmck's troops near the left center of the Union line, which proved to be the point aimed at by Pickett's charge that afternoon.

This is the story of my participation in the action and the passion of the second day at Gettysburg.

It was certainly a narrow chance for us, and for the Round Tops. Had we not used up our ammunition, and had we continued to meet the enemy musket to musket, this 'give and take' would soon have finished us by reason of the enemy's superior numbers. Or had the Fifteenth Alabama continued their onset not regarding our preposterous demonstrations, they would have walked over our bodies to their victory. Or, still again, if one more Confederate regiment had come upon our flank, we must have been rolled into a zero figure and swallowed up in the envelopment. It was a psychological success, -a miracle in the scheme of military science. Those brave Alabama fellows-none braver or better in either army-were victims of a surprise, of their quick and mobile imagination.

Return we now to our field and our parting. On the Fourth of July we took part in a reconnaissance over the wreck-strewn field amidst scene of insupportable horror. Pushing out as far as Willoughby's Run, finding no

enemy, we returned to our ground. We were now told to rest and be ready to move from the field the next day.

DEATH'S SOFT WHISPER

But there was neither removal nor rest for us, till we had gone up the Round Top slopes to bid farewell to our dead. We found them there on the sheltered lawn where we had laid them, on the velvet moss fringed by low cedars that veiled the place with peace and beauty. I rode up near, and flinging the rein upon my horse's neck, dismounted to bend over them for a soldier's farewell. There they lay, side by side, with touch of elbow still; brave, bronzed faces where the last thought was written: manly resolution, heroic self-giving, divine reconciliation; or where on some young face the sweet mother look had come out under death's soft whisper.

We buried them there, in a grave, alas, too wide, on the sunny side of a great rock, eternal witnesses of their worth-the rock and the sun. Rude head-boards, made of ammunition boxes, rudely carved under tear-dimmed eyes, marked and named each grave, and told each home.

I went-it is not long ago-to stand again upon that crest whose one day's crown of fire has passed into the blazoned coronet of fame; to look again upon the rocks whereon were laid as on the altar the lives of Vincent and O'Rorke, of Weed and Hazlett-all the chief commanders. And farther on, where my own young heroes mounted to fall no more-Billings, the valor of whose onward-looking eyes not death itself could quench; Kendall, almost maiden-sweet and fair, yet heeding not the bolts that dashed his lifeblood on the rocks; Estes and Steele, and Noyes and Buck, lifted high above self, pure in heart as they that shall see God; and far up the rugged sides of Great Round Top, swept in darkness and silence like its own, where the impetuous Linscott halted at last before the morning star.

I thought of those other noble men of every type, commanders all, who bore their wounds so bravely-many to meet their end on later fields-and those on whose true hearts further high trusts were to be laid. Nor did I forget those others, whether their names are written on the scrolls of honor and fame, or their dust left on some far field and nameless here-nameless never to me, nor nameless, I trust in God, where they are to-night.

I sat there alone, on the storied crest, till the sun went down as it did before over the misty hills, and the darkness crept up the slopes, till from all earthly sight I was buried as with those before. But oh, what radiant companionship rose around, what steadfast ranks of power, what bearing of heroic souls. Oh, the glory that beamed through those nights and days.

Nobody will ever know it here! -I am sorry most of all for that. The proud young valor that rose above the mortal, and then at last was mortal after all; the chivalry of hand and heart that in other days and other lands would have sent their names ringing down in song and story!

UNFORGOTTEN SONS OF GOD

They did not know it themselves-those boys of ours whose remembered faces in every home should be cherished symbols of the true, for life or death-what were their lofty deeds of body, mind, heart, soul, on that tremendous day.

Unknown-but kept! The earth itself shall be its treasurer. It holds something of ours besides graves. These strange influences of material nature, its mountains and seas, its sunset skies and nights of stars, its colors and tones and odors, carry something of the mutual, reciprocal. It is a sympathy. On that other side it is represented to us as suffering. The whole creation, travailing in pain together, in earnest expectation, waiting for the adoption-having right, then, to something which is to be its own.

And go these Gettysburg hills, which lifted up such splendid valor, and drank in such high heart's blood, shall hold the mighty secret in their bosom till the great day of revelation and recompense, when these heights shall flame again with transfigured light - they, too, have part in that adoption, which is the manifestation of the sons of God!

EPILOGUE

The inspiration of a noble cause involving human interests wide and far, enables men to do things they did not dream themselves capable of before, and which they were not capable of alone. The consciousness of belonging, vitally, to something beyond individuality; of being part of a personality that reaches we know not where, in space and time, greatens the heart to the limit of the soul's ideal, and builds out the supreme of character.

Joshua L. Chamberlin

October 3, 1889

End