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Reminiscences

OF THE

Thirty-fourth.

REMINISCENCES

OF THE

Thirty-Fourth Regiment,

MASS. VOL. INFANTRY.

BY WILLIAM H. CLARK,

[PRIVATE, CO. E.]



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TO
GEN. WM. S. LINCOLN,

OF WORCESTER,

SO LONG AND HONORABLY ASSOCIATED

WITH THE REGIMENT,

THESE SKETCHES ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY THE AUTHOR.

NOTE.

The Reader will please bear in mind that this little work does not claim in any sense to be a *history* of the Regiment; but simply the recollections of the writer up to May 15th, 1864, when he received the wound which disabled him from further military service.



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CHAPTER I.

THE FAREWELL.

t is the afternoon of a summer day, with but little breeze more than enough to gently sway the folds of a new and handsome National Flag, which is in full view of the multitude who encompass it. We have taken the reader, in thought, to the spacious and beautiful Common in Worcester, on the 15th of August, 1862.

A few words concerning this great gathering; the close attention of all being drawn to the speaker's stand in its centre. Citizens of all classes are here, gazing and listening, representing the population of the city and suburbs. Its inner circles are clothed in the uniform of their country's service, and stand in military order. To them, as a Regiment, through

their commander, who is conspicuous on the stand by his uncovered head and noble bearing, the Flag is being presented: a touching farewell act of the ladies of Worcester.

It is delivered with fitting words, and now not only the soldier, but the orator speaks. Never, while memory lasts, will the picture be erased from the mind of one, at least; the central figure, the devoted Wells: so soon, comparatively, to be the lamented.

The throng breaks, and the Regiment gradually prepares to leave the city for fields of duty, not to shrink from fields of danger. Hark! as they slowly recede from sight, and the clangor of martial music is hushed, can you not almost distinguish, stealing through yonder casement where a lonely heart is thinking of the absent ones, the plaintive words:

“ Thinking no less of them,
But loving our country the more;
We’ve sent them forth to fight for the flag,
That our fathers before them bore.

Brave boys are they,
Gone at their country’s call;
And yet, and yet, we cannot forget
That many brave boys must fall.”

CHAPTER II.

FUN IN CAMP.



Wearry and monotonous indeed, would be many of the days spent in camp by the soldier, did not something crop out of an amusing nature, either in the proper members of the camp or in some of its motley group of followers.

One such safety-valve was found in a stout, unctuous darkey, who seemed to be the "right hand man" of our regimental sutler. Worthy Oscar! I know not whether thou dost still walk on this earth of ours, or hast entered the spirit land which so many of thy brave fellow-Africans reached, who with a more warlike spirit than thine, died on fields of duty and glory. Peace to thee, in any event, for none more faithfully performed his duty.

On one occasion, however, the "even tenor of his way" was rudely broken in upon, to the great amusement of the large number who happened to be in view of that part of the camp at the time. It seems that a private soldier of mischievous propensities had been for some time teasing our colored friend by thrusting a burning twig from the camp fire into his face; yet during the ordeal he had kept his patience, and only tried to get rid of his tormentor by entreaties. Suddenly he turns upon him, forbearance having ceased to be a virtue in the case, and the two fall heavily to the ground; Oscar having decidedly the advantage of his enemy, which he as decidedly keeps. The roar of laughter which followed this unexpected discomfiture was probably more pleasant to the ears of Oscar than to those of his antagonist.

Another case in which our hero was concerned related to the legitimate business of the sutler's tent, and was told in Company E to the amusement of many, by poor Hunter, who afterwards while in the performance of duty at the Shenandoah, fell through an opening in the bridge in an unguarded moment and was drowned.

The story was something like this: "Well, yer see de feller he comes up 'mongst de crowd, an' says he, I wants a *fried pie*. So I takes de fried pie an' hands it to him, an' looks for de money; but somehow de feller gits shook up in de crowd, an' I hav'nt seen *him*, nor de *money*, nor de *fried pie* since." This was given with capital powers of imitation, and never failed to "bring down the house."

There is something which irresistably appeals, in many phases of the African character, to our American sense of humor. At the same time we discover running through it a vein of sentiment, which blending with the other, dignifies the effect.

"Way down upon de Swanee Riber,
Far, far away;
Dere's where my heart am turning eber,
Dere's where de old folks stay.

When I was in de fields a hoeing,
Near set ob sun;
So glad to hear de horn a blowing,
Telling dat de work was done.

O, den de darkies frolic sweetly,
Banjo in tune;
Dinah and Phillis dressed so neatly,
Dance by de big round moon."

CHAPTER III.

HARPER'S FERRY.

For some weeks the Thirty-Fourth had remained in Washington, D. C., furnishing daily heavy details of neatly equipped men for guard duty; principally to be employed in guarding the Carroll and Old Capitol Prisons. During this time the general soldierly deportment of the rank and file, together with the fine appearance of the regiment on dress parade, attracted much attention and called forth many complimentary expressions from the residents of Washington.

But "marching orders" do not stop to take counsel of their subjects, and on a well-remembered evening in July, 1863, they turned our quiet barracks into a scene of bustle and confusion. A ride of a few hours

over the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad brought us into the immediate vicinity of Harper's Ferry.

The activity which prevailed throughout our force on the morning of July 14th made it evident to all that a movement across the Potomac was intended. All needful preparations having been made, a lively cannonade was opened from the heights above, under cover of which our force embarked in pontoon boats that were near at hand, and crossing, passed through the deserted streets up to the higher ground beyond; dislodging a small body of the enemy which had been holding possession. As the afternoon advanced a considerable force of cavalry passed through the place, file following file in a seemingly endless succession, till the eye was wearied with attempting to take in the living current. Our occupation of Harper's Ferry, begun under these circumstances, was destined to continue for many months, with the exception of an occasional brief visit to Martinsburg towards the close of winter.

Perhaps the most notable incident of our service during these months was a trip to Harrisonburg, about one hundred miles into Virginian territory,

over that noble production of the road-maker's art, the "Shenandoah Valley turnpike." This demonstration, which was successfully and safely accomplished, was doubtless intended as a diversion in favor of the raid at that time being executed by Gen. Averill, with his much larger force. Although we were closely followed by a brigade of the enemy, in our rapid and forced march homewards; yet by the intervention of favorable events, the friendly shadow of the Maryland heights was reached with no loss from our hazardous attempt at "bearding the lion in his den," as our adventure was described by the Richmond *Examiner*.

Our long stay in this town gave many opportunities for examining its objects of interest, including the Engine House, worthy of note as the fortress occupied by John Brown while he held possession, during the brief campaign destined to end so disastrously for those engaged in it. The ruins of Armory and other buildings made it very evident that an immense amount of property had been destroyed in the two years in which the spirit of war had held carnival there.

The climate, through the winter months we spent


in this place, seemed to suggest some New England locality rather than a part of the "sunny South." Snow storms and bleak, cold winds, find as congenial a home around those rocky heights as Massachusetts could offer them; at least, such was the impression made upon the mind of the writer. The sublimity and grandeur of Nature's works here well repay any effort required to reach an eligible point of view; but it requires no effort to enable the mind nurtured "beneath New England's sky" to dwell again, in thought, among its native hills.

"Once more, O Mountains of the North, unveil
 Your brows, and lay your cloudy mantles by!
 And once more, ere the eyes that seek ye fail,
 Uplift against the blue walls of the sky
 Your mighty shapes, and let the sunshine weave
 Its golden net-work in your belting woods,
 Smile down in rainbows from your falling floods
 And on your kingly brows at morn and eve
 Set crowns of fire! So shall my soul receive
 Haply the secret of your calm and strength,
 Your unforgotten beauty interfuse
 My common life, your glorious shapes and hues
 And sun-dropped splendors at my bidding come,
 Loom vast through dreams, and stretch in billowy length
 From the sea-level of my lowland home!

Whittier.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SKIRMISH.

he morning of Sunday, October 13, 1863, proved a disastrous one to the Ninth Maryland Regiment, who were only a few miles distant from our encampment at Harper's Ferry. As it proved, the enemy in considerable force, under Gen. Imboden, had made an early and vigorous attack on that Regiment at Charlestown, and captured them bodily, in number about three hundred. Every available man of the Thirty-Fourth was promptly called out, and preceded by a Battery which was stationed near by, we started in pursuit. Often had the wish been expressed that we might see some actual fighting, and at last the wish was to be gratified.

A running fight commenced soon after reaching

Charlestown, the Battery which was still in advance, having engaged the enemy just beyond that place. We pushed on, passing at one time the dead body of a soldier, killed during the morning's engagement, and a few miles of rapid marching bring us into close proximity to the foe, as the shells falling within a short distance from our ranks fully prove. Each Company has been assigned the best position allowed by the character of the ground, which is somewhat uneven and obstructed by fences. A lively discharge of musketry is kept up from both sides for a time, but finally ceases. At about this period in the fight, a small body of mounted infantry from the enemy's force charge toward us till but a short space intervenes, and then wheeling easily, soon disappear in the distance. We afterwards learn that the Springfield muskets of one of our wing Companies told with effect on their ranks. The firing has now ceased, and we are ordered to cross the open ground which separates our position from that of the enemy. This is safely accomplished, and it is found that they have again retreated.

Our Commanding Officer now considers that the

pursuit has been pushed far enough, and the order is given to return to Harper's Ferry. Marching and resting alternately, we reach our quarters at a late hour, feeling well satisfied with this first experience of actual fighting. Two of the Color Corporals, Clark of Co. K and Gage of Co. E, have laid down their lives; but they died gloriously, and what matters the form in which death comes, if it finds us in the path of duty.

“ Come to the bridal chamber, Death;
 Come to the mother, when she feels
 For the first time her first-born's breath:
 Come when the blessed seals
 Which close the pestilence are broke,
 And crowded cities wail its stroke;
 Come in Consumption's ghastly form;
 The earthquake shock, the ocean storm;
 Come when the heart beats high and warm,
 With banquet song, and dance, and wine,
 And thou art terrible: the tear,
 The groan, the knell, the pall, the bier,
 And all we know, or dream, or fear
 Of agony, are thine.
 But to the warrior, when his sword

Has won the battle for the free,
Thy voice sounds like a prophet's word,
And in its hollow tones are heard
The thanks of millions yet to be."

Halleck.



CHAPTER V.

NEWMARKET.

After a march of some hours, our Regiment had arrived in the vicinity of Newmarket, Va.; not, however, without an occasional shot being exchanged between the light artillery which preceded us and that of the enemy. As we were marched to a position somewhat sheltered by a low ridge, this firing was kept up with vigor. The peculiar tone and expression assumed by our commander, Colonel Wells, as he directed our movements will be remembered by many. "Don't you see how they are firing at me?" was his demand, evidently more for its effect on his men than from any special concern as to his own safety.

So passed the afternoon of Saturday, May 14, 1864,

and the night, a rainy and uncomfortable one, settled down upon us; but war is no respecter of the stillness of night, and the fact of a foe being close at hand is a great promoter of uneasiness. Suddenly a shot is heard, then a volley, and we are roused up without ceremony; but the alarm proves nothing serious, being caused by a small reconnoitring party from the enemy. We lie down again, all save the watchful sentinels, and sheltering ourselves from the rain so far as possible, get what sleep may be had under the circumstances. A part of the morning is occupied in putting our arms and ourselves in good fighting condition, though this is a difficult matter in some cases; the rain having, in spite of our care, reached our muskets to some extent.

The quiet is broken by an order to a different position, which order is repeated occasionally during the forenoon, keeping us in motion almost constantly from one point to another. At last, a satisfactory position having been reached, we lie down on our arms for a short time, but soon are ordered to rise and then to load and fire as rapidly as we can. In the meantime, a Battery has been stationed on our

right and its guns begin to play on the enemy. After firing several volleys a charge is ordered, and as we advance, the opposing force comes plainly into view. The yells and cheers accompanying this movement make it almost impossible to hear any order from our superior officers, but we finally comprehend that a "right-about" is ordered. This is executed, and we retrace our steps for a short distance, still keeping on a line with the colors, while the continuous cheering of the enemy shows that they fully appreciate their advantage. We now begin to feel seriously the effect of the heavy fire, both musketry and artillery, which fills the air with deadly missiles. A prominent field officer is disabled by a severe wound, and as the enemy press close upon us, necessarily falls into their hands; while others who are less injured are supported from the field to receive surgical aid.

The Regiment, having reached a good position, is halted, faced about, and aids in checking the enemy's advance, much to the satisfaction of the wounded, who are making their way to Mt. Jackson, some four miles distant. Night falls, and the sounds of battle are hushed; but this Sabbath day, so disturbed by

mortal strife, has proved the last for many who had cherished hopes of "bright days yet to be."

"And Ardennes waves above them her green leaves,
Dewy with Nature's tear drops, as they pass;
Grieving, if aught inanimate e'er grieves,
Over the unreturning brave: alas!
Ere evening to be trodden like the grass;
Which now beneath them, but above shall grow
In its next verdure, when this fiery mass
Of living valor, rolling on the foe,
And burning with high hope, shall moulder cold and low."

Byron.



CHAPTER VI.

INCIDENTS.

It will be remembered by some, that at an early period of our regimental history, a fever for enlistment into the regular army prevailed to a certain extent. The causes which produced this state of things are unknown to the writer, but it seems probable that highly colored statements as to the relative advantages of one branch of the service over another had been employed.

Col. Wells, as the event proved, felt no sympathy with this movement, and had no idea of quietly looking on while his Regiment was depleted in numbers to fill the voracious maw of Uncle Sam. Accordingly, taking his opportunity when they were drawn up for dress parade, he expressed his views in the case

in a manner that held the attention of all to the close. That part of his argument which covered the points of promotion and travel, as nearly as can be recalled, was something like this. "You have been promised opportunities for promotion and travel: as for *travel*, you would have plenty of that, and would have to travel *pretty close to the line*. With regard to promotion in the regular army, there is a regular system of promotion, in which non-commissioned officers only stand a chance of sharing, and they after years of waiting." The address, whether from its sarcasm or its sense, was effectual in curing the uneasiness that had prevailed.

At one time, the young and popular Captain of a certain Company saw fit to celebrate his birthday by furnishing his men with an unusual treat. A supply of "lager" was secured from a neighboring fort, and placed conveniently in one of the tents, with the understanding that all were welcomed to partake. As the evening advanced a spirit of jollity naturally prevailed, stimulated a little, it may be, by the influence of the Teutonic beverage, till the stentorian voice of Orderly B— rang out even more loudly than

usual, summoning the Company to fall in for evening roll-call, after which quiet was restored, and night settled down peacefully as usual over our camp.

The Company in which occurred the last incident numbered among its original members two, who were truly of a kindred spirit, though of different birth. Once, for some infraction of discipline in which both were concerned, they were compelled to wear "the wooden shirt," and to march back and forth before the Captain's quarters: yet they were far from being disheartened, but with great merriment performed this unusual sentry duty, assisting each other, in case of any accident, with an almost brotherly regard. One of this pair of intimate friends is believed to have died at Andersonville. As to his comrade, many years have passed since the writer last beheld his strongly marked features, and whether he is still in the land of the living is a matter of uncertainty. So drops the curtain over our heroes.

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages." *Shakspeare.*

CHAPTER VII.

IN MEMORIAM.



few closing words as a tribute to the honored dead. While referring especially to a few names in this connection, no peculiar honor is claimed for them above the large number of their comrades in other Companies whose record is equally honorable; but of those we know best we can, doubtless, best speak.

Brave Christopher Pennell; with a noble ambition leaving his many friends to serve in another field, and falling at last before Petersburg.

Captain William B. Bacon: an able and intrepid soldier, than whom few had brighter prospects of advancement and honor, stricken down at Newmarket

while inspiring his men with his own fearlessness of spirit.

Sergeant Henry B. King: of a gentle and obliging spirit and beloved by all his comrades, dying on the field of battle, and leaving only the knowledge of his devotion to duty to cheer his youthful and bereaved companion.

The brothers, Dwight and Henry Chickering: noble and promising youths, making the woods ring with the sound of their axes, and their whole-souled laughter, as we prepared to encamp after the day's weary march.

But one more will be particularly mentioned here, in reference to whom Brigade Surgeon Clarke uses this language, in a letter informing his friends of his death: "he was a brave, conscientious and faithful soldier." And what shall I say of thee, my brother, my faithful friend? Though the snows of seven winters have in their season robed thy grave with a stainless winding-sheet, yet is thy memory cherished fondly as at first: still shall the flowers of each succeeding summer strew that grave, and the lofty pines of thy native state shall furnish thy requiem.

“ How sleep the brave, who sink to rest
By all their Country’s wishes blest :
By fairy hands their knell is rung ;
By forms unseen their dirge is sung ;
Here Honor comes, a pilgrim gray,
To deck the turf that wraps their clay ;
And Freedom shall awhile repair
To dwell, a weeping hermit, there.”

Collins.







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