

CHAPTER XXIII.

GETTYSBURG AND RICHMOND.

THE Confederate government had always been eager to carry the contest into Northern territory. It was satisfying to the natural pride of the South, and it was thought that some experience of the evils of war might incline the Northern mind to peace. Lee was ordered to march into Pennsylvania. He gathered all the troops at his disposal, and with seventy-five thousand men he crossed the Potomac, and was once more prepared to face the enemy on his own soil. The rich cities of the North trembled. It was not unlikely that he would possess himself of Baltimore and Philadelphia. Could he once again defeat Hooker's army, as he had often done before, no further resistance was possible. Pennsylvania and New York were at his mercy.

Lee advanced to the little Pennsylvanian town of Gettysburg. Hooker, after marching his army northward, had been relieved of the command. A battle was near; and in face of the enemy a new commander had to be chosen. Two days before the hostile armies met, General Meade was appointed. Meade was an experienced soldier, who had filled with honor the various positions assigned to him. It was seemingly a hopeless task which he was now asked to perform. With an oft-defeated army of sixty thousand to seventy thousand men, to whom he was a stranger, he had

to meet Lee with his victorious seventy-five thousand. Meade quietly undertook the work appointed to him, and did it, too, like a brave, prudent, unpretending man.

The battle lasted for three days. On the first day the Confederates had some advantage. Their attack broke and scattered a Federal division with considerable loss. But that night the careful Meade took up a strong position on a crescent-shaped line of heights near the little town.

Next day Lee attempted to dislodge the enemy. The key of the Federal position was Cemetery Hill, and there the utmost strength of the Confederate attack was put forth. Nor was it in vain. Part of the Federal line was broken. At one point an important position had been taken by the Confederates. Lee might fairly hope that another day's fighting would complete his success and give him undisputed possession of the wealthiest Northern States. His loss had been small, while the Federals had been seriously weakened.

Perhaps no hours of deeper gloom were ever passed in the North than the hours of that summer evening when the telegraph flashed over the country the news of Lee's success. The lavish sacrifice of blood and treasure seemed in vain. A million of men were in arms to defend the Union, and yet the northward progress of the enemy could not be withstood. Should Lee be victorious on the morrow, the most hopeful must despond.

The day on which so much of the destiny of America hung opened bright and warm and still. The morning was occupied by Lee in preparations for a crushing attack upon the centre of the Federal position; by Meade, in carefully strengthening his power of resistance at the point where he was to win or to lose this decisive battle. About noon all was completed. Over both armies there fell a marvellous still-

Battle of Gettysburg.

ness, — the silence of anxious and awful expectation. It was broken by a solitary cannon-shot, and the shriek of a Whitworth shell as it rushed through the air. That was the signal at which one hundred and fifty Confederate guns opened their fire. The Federal artillery replied. For three hours a prodigious hail of shells fell upon either army. No decisive supremacy was, however, established by the guns on either side, although heavy loss was sustained by both. While the cannonade still continued, Lee sent forth the columns whose errand it was to break the Federal centre. They marched down the low range of heights on which they had stood, and across the little intervening valley. As they moved up the opposite height the friendly shelter of Confederate fire ceased. Terrific discharges of grape and shell smote but did not shake their steady ranks. As the men fell their comrades stepped into their places, and the undismayed lines moved swiftly on. Up to the low stone wall which sheltered the Federals, up to the very muzzles of guns whose rapid fire cut every instant deep lines in their ranks, the heroic advance was continued.

General Lee from the opposite height watched, as Napoleon did at Waterloo, the progress of his attack. Once the smoke of battle was for a moment blown aside, and the Confederate flag was seen to wave within the enemy's position. Lee's generals congratulate him that the victory is gained. Again the cloud gathers around the combatants. When it lifts next, the Confederates are seen broken and fleeing down that fatal slope, where a man can walk now without once putting his foot upon the grass, so thick lie the bodies of the slain. The attack had failed. The battle was lost. The Union was saved.

General Lee's business was now to save his army. "This has been a sad day for us," he said to a friend, "a

sad day ; but we can't expect always to gain victories." He rallied his broken troops, expecting to be attacked by the victorious Federals. But Meade did not follow up his success. Next day Lee began his retreat. In perfect order he moved towards the Potomac, and safely crossed the swollen river back into Virginia.

The losses sustained in this battle were terrible. Forty-eight thousand men lay dead or wounded on the field. Lee's army was weakened by over forty thousand men, killed, wounded, and prisoners. Meade lost twenty-three thousand. For miles around, every barn, every cottage, contained wounded men. The streets of the little town were all dabbled with blood. Men were for many days engaged in burying the dead, of whom there were nearly eight thousand. The wounded of both armies, who were able to be removed, were at once carried into hospitals and tenderly cared for. There were many so mangled that their removal was impossible. These were ministered to on the field till death relieved them from their pain.

The tidings of the victory at Gettysburg came to the Northern people on the 4th of July, side by side with the tidings of the fall of Vicksburg. The proud old anniversary had perhaps never before been celebrated by the American people with hearts so thankful and so glad. Mr. Lincoln, who had become grave and humble and reverential under the influence of those awful circumstances amid which he lived, proclaimed a solemn day of thanksgiving for the deliverance granted to the nation, and of prayer that God would lead them all, "through the paths of repentance and submission to the divine will, to unity and fraternal peace."

The deep enthusiasm which in those anxious days thrilled the American heart sought in song that fulness of expression which speech could not afford. Foremost among

Battle-Hymn of the Republic.

the favorite poetic utterances of the people was this, by Mrs. Julia Ward Howe : —

BATTLE-HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord ;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored ;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword ;
His Truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps ;
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps ;
I have read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps ;
His Day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel, —
“ As ye deal with my contemners, so with you My grace shall deal ; ”
Let the Hero born of woman crush the serpent with His heel,
Since God is marching on.

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat ;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment-seat ;
Oh ! be swift, my soul, to answer Him ; be jubilant, my feet, —
Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me ;
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.

These strangely musical verses were sung at all public meetings in the North, the audience ordinarily starting to their feet and joining in the strain, often interrupted by emotion too deeply stirred to be concealed. President Lincoln has been seen listening to the hymn with tears rolling down his face. When the battle of Gettysburg was fought there were many hundreds of Northern officers captive in the Libby prison, — a huge, shapeless structure,

once a tobacco factory, standing by the wayside in a suburb of Richmond. A false report was brought to them that the Confederates had gained. There were sleepless eyes and sorrowing hearts that night among the prisoners. But next morning an old negro brought them the true account of the battle. The sudden joy was too deep for words. By one universal impulse the gladdened captives burst into song. Midst weeping and midst laughter the Battle-Hymn of the Republic was caught up until five hundred voices were joining in the strain. There, as elsewhere, it was felt with unutterable joy and thankfulness that the country was saved.

The victory at Gettysburg lifted a great load from the hearts of the Northern people. There was yet a work vast and grim to be accomplished before a solid peace could be attained. But there was now a sure hope of final success. It was remarked by President Lincoln's friends that his appearance underwent a noticeable change after Gettysburg. His eye grew brighter; his bowed-down form was once more erect. In the winter after the battle, part of the battle-ground was consecrated as a cemetery, into which were gathered the remains of the brave men who fell. Lincoln took part in the ceremony, and spoke these memorable words: "It is for us, the living, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."