

## HIS SOMBRE RIVALS.

By EDWARD P. ROE

AUTHOR OF "BARRIERS BURNED AWAY,"

"OPENING A CHESTNUT BURN,"

"WITHOUT A HOME," ETC.

"I reached Centerville late in the evening, and soon learned that the forward movement would take place in the night. Having put my horse in thorough condition for the morrow, and made an enormous supper through the hospitality of some staff officers, I sought a quiet knoll in which to sleep in soldier fashion under the sky, but found the scene too novel and beautiful for such prosaic oblivion. I was on the highest ground I could find, and beneath and on either side of me were the campfires of an army. Around the nearest of these could be seen the forms of the soldiers in every picturesque attitude; some still cooking and making their rude suppers, others executing double-shuffles like war-dances, more discussing earnestly and excitedly the prospects of the coming day, and not a few looking pensively into the flames as if they saw pictures of the home and friends they might never see again. In the main, however, animation and jollity prevailed; and from far and near came the sound of song, and laughter, and chaffing. Far down the long slope towards the dark, wooded valley of Bull Run, the light of the fires shaded off into such obscurity as the full moon permitted, while beyond the stream in the far distance a long, irregular line of luminous haze marked the encampments of the enemy.

"As the night advanced the army grew quiet; near and distant sounds died away; the canvas tents were like mounds of snow; and by the flickering, dying flames were multitudes of quiet forms. At midnight few scenes could be more calm and beautiful, so tenderly did the light of the moon soften and etherealize everything. Even the parked artillery lost much of its grim aspect, and all nature seemed to breathe peace and rest.

"It was rumored that McDowell wished to make part of the march in the evening, and it would have been well if he had done so. A little past midnight a general stir and bustle ran through the sleeping army. Figures were seen moving hurriedly, men forming into lines, and there was a general movement. But there was no promptness in action. The soldiers stood around, sat down, and at last lay on their arms and slept again. Mounting my horse, with saddle-bags well stuffed with such rations as I could obtain, I sought the centres of information.

"It appears that the division under General Tyler was too slow in starting, and blocked the march of the Second and Third Divisions. As I picked my way around, only a horse's sagacity kept me from crushing some sleeping fellow's leg or arm, for a horse won't step on a man unless excited.

"Well, Tyler's men got out of the way at last in a hap-hazard fashion, and the Second and Third Divisions were steadily moving, but hours behind time. Such marching! It reminded one of countrymen streaming along a road to a Fourth of July celebration.

"My main policy was to keep near the commander-in-chief, for thus I hoped to obtain from the staff some idea of the plan of battle and where its brunt would fall. I confess that I was disgusted at first, for the general was said to be ill, and followed his columns in a carriage. It seemed an odd way of leading an army. But he came out all right; and he did his duty as a soldier and a general, although everyone is cursing him to-day. He was the first man on the real battle field, and by no means the first to leave it.

"Of course I came and went along the line of march, or of straggling rather, as I pleased; but I kept my eye on the general and his staff. I soon observed that he decided to make his headquarters at the point where a road leading from the great Warrenton Turnpike passed to the north through what is known as the 'Big Woods.' Tyler's command continued westward down the turnpike to what is known as the Stone Bridge, a single substantial arch at which the enemy were said to be in force. It was now clear that the first fighting would be there, and that it was McDowell's plan to send his main force under Hunter and Heintzelman farther north through the woods to cross at some point above. I therefore followed Tyler's column, as that must soon become engaged.

"The movements had all been so mortally slow that any chance for surprise was lost. As we approached the bridge it was as lovely a summer morning as you would wish to see. I had ridden ahead with the scouts. Thrushes, robins, and other birds were singing in the trees. Startled rabbits, and a mother bird with a brood of quails, scurried across the road, and all seemed as still and peaceful as any Sunday that ever dawned on the scene. It was hard to persuade one's self that in front and rear were the forces of deadly war.

"We soon reached an eminence from which we saw what dispelled at once the illusion of sylvan solitude. The sun had been shining an hour or two, and the bridge before us and the road beyond were defended by abatis and other obstructions. On the farther bank a line of infantry was in full view with batteries in position prepared to receive us. I confess it sent a thrill through every nerve when I first saw the ranks of the foe we must encounter in no mere pageant of war.

"In a few moments our forces came up, and at once one brigade deployed on the left, another on the right of the pike. I witnessed a scene that had to be of war. A great thirty-pound gun unlimbered in the centre of the pike, and looked like a surly mastiff. In a moment an officer, who understood his business, sighted it. There was a flash, bright even in the July sunlight, a grand report awakening the first echoes of a battle whose thunder was heard even in Washington, and a second later we saw the shell explode directly over the line of Confederate infantry. Their ranks broke and melted away as if by magic."

"Good shot, well aimed. O heavens! what would I not give to be thirty years younger. Go on, Graham, go on;" for the young man had stopped to take a sip of wine.

"Yes, Graham," cried Hillard, springing to his feet; "what next?"

"I fear we are doing Mr. Graham much wrong," Grace interrupted. "He must be going far beyond his strength."

The young man had addressed his words almost solely to the major, not out of courtesy, but also for a reason that Grace partially surmised. He now turned and smiled into her flushed, troubled face, and said, "I fear you find these details of war dull and wearisome."

"On the contrary, you are so vivid a raconteur that I fear Warren will start for the front before you are through."

"When I am through you will think differently."

"But you are going beyond your strength."

"I assure you I am not; though I thank you for your thoughtfulness. I never felt better in my life; and it gives me a kind of pleasure to make you all realize things as I saw them."

"And it gives as great pleasure to listen," cried Hillard. "Even Mrs. Mayburn there is knitting as if her needles were bayonets; and Grace has the flush of a soldier's daughter on her cheeks."

"O stop your chatter, and let Graham go on," said the major,—"that is, if it's prudent for him," he added from a severe sense of duty. "What followed that blessed shell?"

"A lame and impotent conclusion in the form of many other shells that evoked no reply; and beyond his feeble demonstration Tyler did nothing. It seemed to me that a determined dash at the bridge would have carried it. I was fretting and fuming about when a staff-officer gave me a hint that nothing was to be done at present,—that it was all only a feint, and that the column that had gone northward through the woods would begin the real work. His words were scarcely spoken before I was making my way to the rear. I soon reached McDowell's carriage at the intersection of the roads, and found it empty. Learning that the general, in his impatience, had taken horse and galloped off to see what had become of his tardy commanders, I followed at full speed.

"It was a wild, rough road, scarcely more than a lane through the woods; but Mayburn was equal to it, and like a bird carried me through its gloomy shades, where I observed not a few skulkers cowering in the brush as I sped by. I overtook Heintzelman's command as it was crossing the run at Sudley's Ford; and such a scene of confusion I hope never to witness again. The men were emptying their canteens and refilling them, laving their hands and faces, and refreshing themselves generally. It was really quite a picnic. Officers were storming and ordering "the boys"—and boys they seemed, indeed—to move on; and by dint of much profanity, and the pressure of those following, regiment after regiment at last struggled up the farther bank, went into brigade formation, and shuffled forward."

"The cursed mob!" muttered the major.

"Well, poor fellows! they soon won my respect; and yet, as I saw them there, stopping to pick blackberries along the road, I did feel like riding them down. I suppose my horse and I lowered the stream somewhat as we drank, for the day had grown sultry and the sun's rays intensely hot. Then I hastened on to find the general. It seemed as if we should never get out of the woods, as if the army had lost itself in an interminable forest. Wild birds and game fled before us; and I heard one soldier call out to another that it was 'a regular Virginia coon-hunt.' As I reached the head of the column the timber grew thinner, and I was told that McDowell was reconnoitring in advance. Galloping out into the open fields, I saw him far beyond me, already the target of Rebel bullets. His staff and a company of cavalry were with him; and as I approached he seemed rapidly taking in the topographical features of the field. Having apparently satisfied himself, he galloped to the rear; and at the same time Hunter's troops came pouring out of the woods.

"There was now a prospect of warm work, and plenty of it. For the life of me I can't tell you how the battle began. Our men came forward in an irregular manner, rushing onward impetuously, halting unnecessarily, with no master mind directing. It seemed at first as if the mere momentum of the march carried us under the enemy's fire; and then there was foolish delay. By the aid of my powerful glass I was convinced that we might have walked right over the first thin rebel line on the ridge nearest us.

"The artillery exchanged shots awhile. Regiments under the command of General Burnside deployed in the fields to the left of the road down which we had come; skirmishers were thrown out rapidly, and began their irregular firing at an absurd distance from the enemy. There was hesitancy, delay; and the awkwardness of troops unaccustomed to act together in large bodies was enhanced by the excitement inseparable from their first experience of real war.

"In spite of all this the battle-field began to present grand and inspiring effects. The troops were debouching rapidly from the woods, their bayonets gleaming here and there through the dust raised by their hurrying feet, and

burning in serried lines when they were ranged under the cloudless sun. In every movement made by every soldier the metal points in his accoutrements flashed and scintillated. Again there was something very spirited in the appearance of a battery rushed into position at a gallop—the almost instantaneous unlimbering, the caissons moving to the rear, and the guns at the same moment thundering their defiance, while the smoke, lifting slowly on the heavy air, rises and blends with that of the other side, and hangs like a pall to leeward of the field. The grandest thing of all, however, was the change in the men. The uncouth coarsely-jesting, blackberry-picking fellows that lagged and straggled to the battle became soldiers in their instincts and rising excitement and courage, if not in machine-

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