

The Brigade Commander

by John William DeForest, 1826-1906

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The Colonel was the idol of his bragging old regiment and of the bragging brigade which for the last six months he had commanded.

He was the idol, not because he was good and gracious, not because he spared his soldiers or treated them as fellow-citizens, but because he had led them to victory and made them famous. If a man will win battles and give his brigade a right to brag loudly of its doings, he may have its admiration and even its enthusiastic devotion, though he be as pitiless and as wicked as Lucifer.

"It's nothin' to me what the Currnell is in prravit, so long as he shows us how to whack the rrebs," said Major Gahogan, commandant of the "Old Tenth." "Moses saw God in the burrnin' bussh, an' bowed down to it, an' worr-shipt it. It wasn't the bussh he worrshipt; it was his God that was in it. An' I worrship this villin of a Currnell (if he is a villin) because he's almighty and gives us the vict'ry. He's nothin' but a human burrnin' bussh, perhaps, but he's got the god of war in um. Adjetant Wallis, it's a——long time between dhrinks, as I think ye was sayin', an' with rayson. See if ye can't confiscate a canteen of whiskee somewhere in the camp. Bedad, if I can't buy it I'll stale it. We're goin' to fight

tomorrow, and it may be it's the last chance we'll have for a drink, unless there's more lik'r now in the other world than Dives got."

The brigade was bivouacked in some invisible region, amid the damp, misty darkness of a September night. The men lay in their ranks, each with his feet to the front and his head rearward, each covered by his overcoat and pillowed upon his haversack, each with his loaded rifle nestled close beside him. Asleep as they were, or dropping placidly into slumber, they were ready to start in order to their feet and pour out the red light and harsh roar of combat. There were two lines of battle, each of three regiments of infantry, the first some two hundred yards in advance of the second. In the space between them lay two four-gun batteries, one of them brass twelve-pounder "Napoleons," and the other rifled Parrotts. To the rear of the infantry were the recumbent troopers and picketed horses of a regiment of cavalry. All around, in the far, black distance, invisible and inaudible, paced or watched stealthily the sentinels of the grand guards.

There was not a fire, not a torch, nor a star-beam in the whole bivouac to guide the feet of Adjutant Wallis in his pilgrimage after whiskey. The orders from brigade headquarters had been strict against illuminations, for the Confederates were near at hand in force, and a surprise was proposed as well as feared. A tired and sleepy youngster, almost dropping with the heavy somnolence of wearied adolescence, he stumbled on through the trials of an undiscernible and unfamiliar footing, lifting his heavy riding-boots sluggishly over imaginary obstacles, and fearing the while lest his toil were labor misspent. It was a dry camp, he felt dolefully certain, or there would have been more noise in it. He fell over a sleeping sergeant, and said to him hastily, "Steady, man—a friend!" as the half-roused soldier clutched his rifle. Then he found a lieutenant, and shook him in vain; further on a captain, and exchanged saddening murmurs with him; further still a camp-follower of African extraction, and blasphemed him.

"It's a God-forsaken camp, and there isn't a horn in it," said Adjutant Wallis to himself as he pursued his groping journey. "Bet you I don't find the first drop," he continued, for he was a betting boy, and frequently argued by wagers, even with himself. "Bet you two to one I don't. Bet you three to one—ten to one."

Then he saw, an indefinite distance beyond him, burning like red-hot iron through the darkness, a little scarlet or crimson gleam, as of a lighted cigar.

"That's Old Grumps, of the Bloody Fourteenth," he thought. "I've raided into his happy sleeping-grounds. I'll draw on him."

But Old Grumps, otherwise Colonel Lafayette Gildersleeve, had no rations—that is, no whiskey.

"How do you suppose an officer is to have a drink, Lieutenant?" he grumbled. "Don't you know that our would-be Brigadier sent all the commissary to the rear day before yesterday? A canteenful can't last two days. Mine went empty about five minutes ago."

"Oh, thunder!" groaned Wallis, saddened by that saddest of all thoughts, "Too late!" "Well, least said soonest mended. I must wobble back to my Major."

"He'll send you off to some other camp as dry as this one. Wait ten minutes, and he'll be asleep. Lie down on my blanket and light your pipe. I want to talk to you about official business—about our would-be Brigadier."

"Oh, your turn will come some day," mumbled Wallis, remembering Gildersleeve's jealousy of the brigade commander—a jealousy which only gave

tongue when aroused by "commissary." "If you do as well as usual to-morrow you can have your own brigade."

"I suppose you think we are all going to do well to-morrow," scoffed Old Grumps, whose utterance by this time stumbled. "I suppose you expect to whip and to have a good time. I suppose you brag on fighting and enjoy it."

"I like it well enough when it goes right; and it generally does go right with this brigade. I should like it better if the rebs would fire higher and break quicker."

"That depends on the way those are commanded whose business it is to break them," growled Old Grumps. "I don't say but what we are rightly commanded," he added, remembering his duty to superiors. "I concede and acknowledge that our would-be Brigadier knows his military business. But the blessing of God, Wallis! I believe in Waldron as a soldier. But as a man and a Christian, faugh!"

Gildersleeve had clearly emptied his canteen unassisted; he never talked about Christianity when perfectly sober.

"What was your last remark?" inquired Wallis, taking his pipe from his mouth to grin. Even a superior officer might be chaffed a little in the darkness.

"I made no last remark," asserted the Colonel with dignity. "I'm not a-dying yet. If I said anything last it was a mere exclamation of disgust—the disgust of an officer and gentleman. I suppose you know something about our would-be Brigadier. I suppose you think you know something about him."

"Bet you I know all about him," affirmed Wallis. "He enlisted in the Old Tenth as a common soldier. Before he had been a week in camp they found that he knew his biz, and they made him a sergeant. Before we started for the field the Governor got his eye on him and shoved him into a lieutenancy. The first battle h'isted him to a captain. And the second—bang! whiz! he shot up to colonel right over the heads of everybody, line and field. Nobody in the Old Tenth grumbled. They saw that he knew his biz. I know all about him. What'll you bet?"

"I'm not a betting man, Lieutenant, except in a friendly game of poker," sighed Old Grumps. "You don't know anything about your Brigadier," he added in a sepulchral murmur, the echo of an empty canteen. "I have only been in this brigade a month, and I know more than you do, far, very far more, sorry to say it. He's a reformed clergyman. He's an apostatized minister." The Colonel's voice as he said this was solemn and sad enough to do credit to an undertaker. "It's a bad sort, Wallis," he continued, after another deep sigh, a very highly perfumed one, the sigh of a barkeeper. "When a clergyman falls, he falls for life and eternity, like a woman or an angel. I never knew a backslidden shepherd to come to good. Sooner or later he always goes to the devil, and takes down whomsoever hangs to him."

"He'll take down the Old Tenth, then," asserted Wallis. "It hangs to him. Bet you two to one he takes it along."

"You're right, Adjutant; spoken like a soldier," swore Gildersleeve, "And the Bloody Fourteenth, too. It will march into the burning pit as far as any regiment; and the whole brigade, yes, sir! But a backslidden shepherd, my God! Have we come to that? I often say to myself, in the solemn hours of the night, as I remember my Sabbath-school days, 'Great Scott! have we come to that?' A reformed clergyman! An apostatized minister! Think of it, Wallis, think of it! Why, sir, his very wife ran away from him. They had but just buried their first

boy," pursued Old Grumps, his hoarse voice sinking to a whimper. "They drove home from the burial-place, where lay the new-made grave. Arrived at their door, he got out and extended his hand to help her out. Instead of accepting, instead of throwing herself into his arms and weeping there, she turned to the coachman and said, 'Driver, drive me to my father's house.' That was the end of their wedded life, Wallis."

The Colonel actually wept at this point, and the maudlin tears were not altogether insincere. His own wife and children he heartily loved, and remembered them now with honest tenderness. At home he was not a drinker and a rough; only amid the hardships and perils of the field.

"That was the end of it, Wallis," he repeated. "And what was it while it lasted? What does a woman leave her husband for? Why does she separate from him over the grave of her innocent first-born? There are twenty reasons, but they must all of them be good ones. I am sorry to give it as my decided opinion, Wallis, in perfect confidence, that they must all be whopping good ones. Well, that was the beginning; only the beginning. After that he held on for a while, breaking the bread of life to a skedaddling flock, and then he bolted. The next known of him, three years later, he enlisted in your regiment, a smart but seedy recruit, smelling strongly of whiskey."

"I wish I smelt half as strong of it myself," grumbled Wallis. "It might keep out the swamp fever."

"That's the true story of Col. John James Waldron," continued Old Grumps, with a groan which was very somnolent, as if it were a twin to a snore. "That's the true story."

"I don't believe the first word of it—that is to say, Colonel, I think you have been misinformed—and I'll bet you two to one on it. If he was nothing more than a minister, how did he know drill and tactics?"

"Oh, I forgot to say he went through West Point—that is, nearly through. They graduated him in his third year by the back door, Wallis."

"Oh, that was it, was it? He was a West Pointer, was he? Well, then, the backsliding was natural, and oughtn't to count against him. A member of Benny Haven's church has a right to backslide anywhere, especially as the Colonel doesn't seem to be any worse than some of the rest of us, who haven't fallen from grace the least particle, but took our stand at the start just where we are now. A fellow that begins with a handful of trumps has a right to play a risky game."

"I know what euchered him, Wallis. It was the old Little Joker; and there's another of the same on hand now."

"On hand where? What are you driving at, Colonel?"

"He looks like a boy. I mean she looks like a boy. You know what I mean, Wallis; I mean the boy that makes believe to wait on him. And her brother is in camp, got here to-night. There'll be an explanation to-morrow, and there'll be bloodshed."

"Good-night, Colonel, and sleep it off," said Wallis, rising from the side of a man whom he believed to be sillily drunk and altogether untrustworthy. "You know we get after the rebs at dawn."

"I know it—goo-night, Adjutant—gawbless-you," mumbled Old Grumps. "We'll lick those rebs, won't we?" he chuckled. "Goo-night, ole fellow, an' gawblessyou."

Whereupon Old Grumps fell asleep, very absurdly overcome by liquor, we extremely regret to concede, but nobly sure to do his soldierly duty as soon as he should awake.

Stumbling wearily blanketward, Wallis found his Major and regimental commander, the genial and gallant Gahogan, slumbering in a peace like that of the just. He stretched himself anear, put out his hand to touch his sabre and revolver, drew his caped great-coat over him, moved once to free his back of a root or pebble, glanced languidly at a single struggling star, thought for an instant of his far-away mother, turned his head with a sigh and slept. In the morning he was to fight, and perhaps to die; but the boyish veteran was too seasoned, and also too tired, to mind that; he could mind but one thing—nature's pleading for rest.

In the iron-gray dawn, while the troops were falling dimly and spectrally into line, and he was mounting his horse to be ready for orders, he remembered Gildersleeve's drunken tale concerning the commandant, and laughed aloud. But turning his face toward brigade headquarters (a sylvan region marked out by the branches of a great oak), he was surprised to see a strange officer, a fair young man in captain's uniform, riding slowly toward it.

"Is that the boy's brother?" he said to himself; and in the next instant he had forgotten the whole subject; it was time to form and present the regiment.

Quietly and without tap of drum the small, battle-worn battalions filed out of their bivouacs into the highway, ordered arms and waited for the word to march. With a dull rumble the field-pieces trundled slowly after, and halted in rear of the infantry. The cavalry trotted off circuitously through the fields, emerged upon a road in advance and likewise halted, all but a single company, which pushed on for half a mile, spreading out as it went into a thin line of skirmishers.

Meanwhile a strange interview took place near the great oak which had sheltered brigade headquarters. As the unknown officer, whom Wallis had noted, approached it, Col. Waldron was standing by his horse ready to mount. The commandant was a man of medium size, fairly handsome in person and features, and apparently about twenty-eight years of age. Perhaps it was the singular breadth of his forehead which made the lower part of his face look so unusually slight and feminine. His eyes were dark hazel, as clear, brilliant, and tender as a girl's, and brimming full of a pensiveness which seemed both loving and melancholy. Few persons, at all events few women, who looked upon him ever looked beyond his eyes. They were very fascinating, and in a man's countenance very strange. They were the kind of eyes which reveal passionate romances, and which make them.

By his side stood a boy, a singularly interesting and beautiful boy, fair-haired and blue-eyed, and delicate in color. When this boy saw the stranger approach he turned as pale as marble, slid away from the brigade commander's side, and disappeared behind a group of staff officers and orderlies. The new-comer also became deathly white as he glanced after the retreating youth. Then he dismounted, touched his cap slightly and, as if mechanically, advanced a few steps, and said hoarsely, "I believe this is Colonel Waldron. I am Captain Fitz Hugh, of the —th Delaware."

Waldron put his hand to his revolver, withdrew it instantaneously, and stood motionless.

"I am on leave of absence from my regiment, Colonel," continued Fitz Hugh, speaking now with an elaborate ceremoniousness of utterance significant of a struggle to suppress violent emotion. "I suppose you can understand why I made use of it in seeking you."

Waldron hesitated; he stood gazing at the earth with the air of one who represses deep pain; at last, after a profound sigh, he raised his eyes and answered:

"Captain, we are on the eve of a battle. I must attend to my public duties first. After the battle we will settle our private affair."

"There is but one way to settle it, Colonel."

"You shall have your way if you will. You shall do what you will. I only ask what good will it do to her?"

"It will do good to me, Colonel," whispered Fitz Hugh, suddenly turning crimson. "You forget me."

Waldron's face also flushed, and an angry sparkle shot from under his lashes in reply to this utterance of hate, but it died out in an instant.

"I have done a wrong, and I will accept the consequences," he said. "I pledge you my word that I will be at your disposal if I survive the battle. Where do you propose to remain meanwhile?"

"I will take the same chance, sir. I propose to do my share in the fighting if you will use me."

"I am short of staff officers. Will you act as my aid?"

"I will, Colonel," bowed Fitz Hugh, with a glance which expressed surprise, and perhaps admiration, at this confidence.

Waldron turned, beckoned his staff officers to approach, and said, "Gentlemen, this is Captain Fitz Hugh of the —th Delaware. He has volunteered to join us for the day, and will act as my aid. And now, Captain, will you ride to the head of the column and order it forward? There will be no drum-beat and no noise. When you have given your order and seen it executed, you will wait for me."

Fitz Hugh saluted, sprang into his saddle and galloped away. A few minutes later the whole column was plodding on silently toward its bloody goal. To a civilian, unaccustomed to scenes of war, the tranquillity of these men would have seemed very wonderful. Many of the soldiers were still munching the hard bread and raw pork of their meagre breakfasts, or drinking the cold coffee with which they had filled their canteens the day previous. Many more were chatting in an undertone, grumbling over their sore feet and other discomfits, chaffing each other, and laughing. The general bearing, however, was grave, patient, quietly enduring, and one might almost say stolid. You would have said, to judge by their expressions, that these sunburned fellows were merely doing hard work, and thoroughly commonplace work, without a prospect of adventure, and much less of danger. The explanation of this calmness, so brutal perhaps to the eye of a sensitive soul, lies mainly in the fact that they were all veterans, the survivors of marches, privations, maladies, sieges, and battles. Not a regiment present numbered four hundred men, and the average was not above three hundred. The whole force, including artillery and cavalry, might have been about twenty-five hundred sabres and bayonets.

At the beginning of the march Waldron fell into the rear of his staff and mounted orderlies. Then the boy who had fled from Fitz Hugh dropped out of the tramping escort, and rode up to his side.

"Well, Charlie," said Waldron, casting a pitying glance at the yet pallid face and anxious eyes of the youth, "you have had a sad fright. I make you very miserable."

"He has found us at last," murmured Charlie in a tremulous soprano voice. "What did he say?"

"We are to talk to-morrow. He acts as my aide-de-camp to-day. I ought to tell you frankly that he is not friendly."

"Of course, I knew it," sighed Charlie, while the tears fell.

"It is only one more trouble—one more danger, and perhaps it may pass. So many have passed."

"Did you tell him anything to quiet him? Did you tell him that we were married?"

"But we are not married yet, Charlie. We shall be, I hope."

"But you ought to have told him that we were. It might stop him from doing something—mad. Why didn't you tell him so? Why didn't you think of it?"

"My dear little child, we are about to have a battle. I should like to carry some honor and truth into it."

"Where is he?" continued Charlie, unconvinced and unappeased. "I want to see him. Is he at the head of the column? I want to speak to him, just one word. He won't hurt me."

She suddenly spurred her horse, wheeled into the fields, and dashed onward. Fitz Hugh was lounging in his saddle, and sombrely surveying the passing column, when she galloped up to him.

"Carrol!" she said, in a choked voice, reining in by his side, and leaning forward to touch his sleeve.

He threw one glance at her—a glance of aversion, if not of downright hatred, and turned his back in silence.

"He is my husband, Carrol," she went on rapidly. "I knew you didn't understand it. I ought to have written you about it. I thought I would come and tell you before you did anything absurd. We were married as soon as he heard that his wife was dead."

"What is the use of this?" he muttered hoarsely. "She is not dead. I heard from her a week ago. She was living a week ago."

"Oh, Carrol!" stammered Charlie. "It was some mistake then. Is it possible! And he was so sure! But he can get a divorce, you know. She abandoned him. Or she can get one. No, he can get it—of course, when she abandoned him. But, Carrol, she must be dead—he was so sure."

"She is not dead, I tell you. And there can be no divorce. Insanity bars all claim to a divorce. She is in an asylum. She had to leave him, and then she went mad."

"Oh, no, Carrol, it is all a mistake; it is not so. Carrol," she murmured in a voice so faint that he could not help glancing at her, half in fury and half in pity. She was slowly falling from her horse. He sprang from his saddle, caught her in his arms, and laid her on the turf, wishing the while that it covered her grave. Just then one of Waldron's orderlies rode up and exclaimed: "What is the matter with the—the boy? Hullo, Charlie."

Fitz Hugh stared at the man in silence, tempted to tear him from his horse. "The boy is ill," he answered when he recovered his self-command. "Take charge of him yourself." He remounted, rode onward out of sight beyond a thicket, and there waited for the brigade commander, now and then fingering his revolver.

As Charlie was being placed in an ambulance by the orderly and a sergeant's wife, Waldron came up, reined in his horse violently, and asked in a furious voice, "Is that boy hurt?"

"Ah—fainted," he added immediately. "Thank you, Mrs. Gunner. Take good care of him—the best of care, my dear woman, and don't let him leave you all day."

Further on, when Fitz Hugh silently fell into his escort, he merely glanced at him in a furtive way, and then cantered on rapidly to the head of the cavalry. There he beckoned to the tall, grave, iron-gray Chaplain of the Tenth, and rode with him for nearly an hour, apart, engaged in low and seemingly impassioned discourse. From this interview Mr. Colquhoun returned to the escort with a strangely solemnized, tender countenance, while the commandant, with a more cheerful air than he had yet worn that day, gave himself to his martial duties, inspecting the landscape incessantly with his glass, and sending frequently for news to the advance scouts. It may properly be stated here that the Chaplain never divulged to any one the nature of the conversation which he had held with his Colonel.

Nothing further of note occurred until the little army, after two hours of plodding march, wound through a sinuous, wooded ravine, entered a broad, bare, slightly undulating valley, and for the second time halted. Waldron galloped to the summit of a knoll, pointed to a long eminence which faced him some two miles distant, and said tranquilly, "There is our battle-ground."

"Is that the enemy's position?" returned Captain Ives, his adjutant-general. "We shall have a tough job if we go at it from here."

Waldron remained in deep thought for some minutes, meanwhile scanning the ridge and all its surroundings.

"What I want to know," he observed, at last, "is whether they have occupied the wooded knolls in front of their right and around their right flank."

Shortly afterward the commander of the scouting squadron came riding back at a furious pace.

"They are on the hill, Colonel," he shouted.

"Yes, of course," nodded Waldron; "but have they occupied the woods which veil their right front and flank?"

"Not a bit of it; my fellows have cantered all through, and up to the base of the hill."

"Ah!" exclaimed the brigade commander, with a rush of elation. "Then it will be easy work. Go back, Captain, and scatter your men through the wood, and hold it, if possible. Adjutant, call up the regimental commanders at once. I want them to understand my plan fully."

In a few minutes, Gahogan, of the Tenth; Gildersleeve, of the Fourteenth; Peck, of the First; Thomas, of the Seventh; Taylor, of the Eighth, and Colburn, of the Fifth, were gathered around their commander. There, too, was Bradley, the boyish, red-cheeked chief of the artillery; and Stilton, the rough, old, bearded regular, who headed the cavalry. The staff was at hand, also, including Fitz Hugh, who sat his horse a little apart, downcast and sombre and silent, but nevertheless keenly interested. It is worthy of remark, by the way, that Waldron took no special note of him, and did not seem conscious of any disturbing presence. Evil as the man may have been, he was a thoroughly good soldier, and just now he thought but of his duties.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I want you to see your field of battle. The enemy occupy that long ridge. How shall we reach it?"

"I think, if we got at it straight from here, we shan't miss it," promptly judged Old Grumps, his red-oak countenance admirably cheerful and hopeful, and his jealousy all dissolved in the interest of approaching combat.

"Nor they won't miss us nuther," laughed Major Gahogan. "Betther slide our infantree into thim wuds, push up our skirmishers, play wid our guns for an hour, an' thin rowl in a couple o' col'ns."

There was a general murmur of approval. The limits of volunteer invention in tactics had been reached by Gahogan. The other regimental commanders looked upon him as their superior in the art of war.

"That would be well, Major, if we could do nothing better," said Waldron. "But I do not feel obliged to attack the front seriously at all. The rebels have been thoughtless enough to leave that long semicircle of wooded knolls unoccupied, even by scouts. It stretches from the front of their centre clear around their right flank. I shall use it as a veil to cover us while we get into position. I shall throw out a regiment, a battery, and five companies of cavalry, to make a feint against their centre and left. With the remainder of the brigade I shall skirt the woods, double around the right of the position, and close in upon it front and rear."

"Loike scissors blades upon a snip o' paper," shouted Gahogan, in delight. Then he turned to Fitz Hugh, who happened to be nearest him, and added, "I tell ye he's got the God o' War in um. He's the burnin' bussh of humanity, wid a God o' Battles inside on't."

"But how if they come down on our thin right wing?" asked a cautious officer, Taylor, of the Eighth. "They might smash it and seize our line of retreat."

"Men who have taken up a strong position, a position obviously chosen for defence, rarely quit it promptly for an attack," replied Waldron. "There is not one chance in ten that these gentlemen will make a considerable forward movement early in the fight. Only the greatest geniuses jump from the defensive to the offensive. Besides, we must hold the wood. So long as we hold the wood in front of their centre we save the road."

Then came personal and detailed instructions. Each regimental commander was told whither he should march, the point where he should halt to form line, and the direction by which he should attack. The mass of the command was to advance in marching column toward a knoll where the highway entered and traversed the wood. Some time before reaching it Taylor was to deploy the Eighth to the right, throw out a strong skirmish line and open fire on the enemy's centre and left, supported by the battery of Parrotts, and, if pushed, by five companies of cavalry. The remaining troops would reach the knoll, file to the left under cover of the forest, skirt it for a mile as rapidly as possible, infold the right of the Confederate position, and then move upon it concentrically. Counting from the left, the Tenth, the Seventh, and the Fourteenth were to constitute the first line of battle, while five companies of cavalry, then the First, and then the Fifth formed the second line. Not until Gahogan might have time to wind into the enemy's right rear should Gildersleeve move out of the wood and commence the real attack.

"You will go straight at the front of their right," said Waldron, with a gay smile, to this latter Colonel. "Send up two companies as skirmishers. The moment they are clearly checked, lead up the other eight in line. It will be

rough work. But keep pushing. You won't have fifteen minutes of it before Thomas, on your left, will be climbing the end of the ridge to take the rebels in flank. In fifteen minutes more Gahogan will be running in on their backs. Of course, they will try to change front and meet us. But they have extended their line a long way in order to cover the whole ridge. They will not be quick enough. We shall get hold of their right, and we shall roll them up. Then, Colonel Stilton, I shall expect to see the troopers jumping into the gaps and making prisoners."

"All right, Colonel," answered Stilton in that hoarse growl which is apt to mark the old cavalry officer. "Where shall we find you if we want a fresh order?"

"I shall be with Colburn, in rear of Gildersleeve. That is our centre. But never mind me; you know what the battle is to be, and you know how to fight it. The whole point with the infantry is to fold around the enemy's right, go in upon it concentrically, smash it, and roll up their line. The cavalry will watch against the infantry being flanked, and when the latter have seized the hill, will charge for prisoners. The artillery will reply to the enemy's guns with shell, and fire grape at any offensive demonstration. You all know your duties, now, gentlemen. Go to your commands, and march!"

The colonels saluted and started off at a gallop. In a few minutes twenty-five hundred men were in simultaneous movement. Five companies of cavalry wheeled into column of companies, and advanced at a trot through the fields, seeking to gain the shelter of the forest. The six infantry regiments slid up alongside of each other, and pushed on in six parallel columns of march, two on the right of the road and four on the left. The artillery, which alone left the highway, followed at a distance of two or three hundred yards. The remaining cavalry made a wide detour to the right as if to flank the enemy's left.

It was a mile and a quarter—it was a march of fully twenty minutes—to the edge of the woodland, the proposed cover of the column. Ten minutes before this point was reached a tiny puff of smoke showed on the brow of the hostile ridge; then, at an interval of several seconds, followed the sound of a distant explosion; then, almost immediately, came the screech of a rifled shell. Every man who heard it swiftly asked himself, "Will it strike me?" But even as the words were thought out it had passed, high in air, clean to the rear, and burst harmlessly. A few faces turned upward and a few eyes glanced backward, as if to see the invisible enemy. But there was no pause in the column; it flowed onward quietly, eagerly, and with business-like precision; it gave forth no sound but the trampling of feet and the muttering of the officers. "Steady, men! For-ward, men!"

The Confederates, however, had got their range. A half minute later four puffs of smoke dotted the ridge, and a flight of hoarse humming shrieks tore the air. A little aureole cracked and splintered over the First, followed by loud cries of anguish and a brief, slight confusion. The voice of an officer rose sharply out of the flurry, "Close up, Company A! Forward, men!" The battalion column resumed its even formation in an instant, and tramped unitedly onward, leaving behind it two quivering corpses and a wounded man who tottered rearward.

Then came more screeches, and a shell exploded over the highroad, knocking a gunner lifeless from his carriage. The brigade commander glanced anxiously along his batteries, and addressed a few words to his chief of artillery. Presently the four Napoleons set forward at a gallop for the wood, while the four Parrotts

wheeled to the right, deployed, and advanced across the fields, inclining toward the left of the enemy. Next Taylor's regiment (the Eighth) halted, fronted, faced to the right, and filed off in column of march at a double-quick until it had gained the rear of the Parrotts, when it fronted again, and pushed on in support. A quarter of a mile further on these guns went into battery behind the brow of a little knoll, and opened fire. Four companies of the Eighth spread out to the right as skirmishers, and commenced stealing toward the ridge, from time to time measuring the distance with rifle-balls. The remainder of the regiment lay down in line between the Parrotts and the forest. Far away to the right, five companies of cavalry showed themselves, manoeuvring as if they proposed to turn the left flank of the Southerners. The attack on this side was in form and in operation.

Meantime the Confederate fire had divided. Two guns pounded away at Taylor's feint, while two shelled the main column. The latter was struck repeatedly; more than twenty men dropped silent or groaning out of the hurrying files; but the survivors pushed on without faltering and without even caring for the wounded. At last a broad belt of green branches rose between the regiments and the ridge; and the rebel gunners, unable to see their foe, dropped suddenly into silence.

Here it appeared that the road divided. The highway traversed the forest, mounted the slope beyond and dissected the enemy's position, while a branch road turned to the left and skirted the exterior of the long curve of wooded hillocks. At the fork the battery of Napoleons had halted, and there it was ordered to remain for the present in quiet. There, too, the Fourteenth filed in among the dense greenery, threw out two companies of skirmishers toward the ridge, and pushed slowly after them into the shadows.

"Get sight of the enemy at once!" was Waldron's last word to Gildersleeve. "If they move down the slope, drive them back. But don't commence your attack under half an hour."

Next he filed the Fifth to the thickets, saying to Colburn, "I want you to halt a hundred yards to the left and rear of Gildersleeve. Cover his flank if he is attacked; but otherwise lie quiet. As soon as he charges, move forward to the edge of the wood, and be ready to support him. But make no assault yourself until further orders."

The next two regiments—the Seventh and First—he placed in *échelon*, in like manner, a quarter of a mile further along. Then he galloped forward to the cavalry, and a last word with Stilton. "You and Gahogan must take care of yourselves. Push on four or five hundred yards, and then face to the right. Whatever Gahogan finds let him go at it. If he can't shake it, help him. You two must reach the top of the ridge. Only, look out for your left flank. Keep a squadron or two in reserve on that side."

"Curren, if we don't reach the top of the hill, it'll be because it hasn't got wan," answered Gahogan. Stilton only laughed and rode forward.

Waldron now returned toward the fork of the road. On the way he sent a staff officer to the Seventh with renewed orders to attack as soon as possible after Gildersleeve. Then another staff officer was hurried forward to Taylor with directions to push his feint strongly, and drive his skirmishers as far up the slope as they could get. A third staff officer set the Parrotts in rear of Taylor to firing with all their might. By the time that the commandant had returned to Colburn's ambushed ranks, no one was with him but his enemy, Fitz Hugh.

"You don't seem to trust me with duty, Colonel," said the young man.

"I shall use you only in case of extremity, Captain," replied Waldron. "We have business to settle to-morrow."

"I ask no favors on that account. I hope you will offer me none."

"In case of need I shall spare no one," declared Waldron.

Then he took out his watch, looked at it impatiently, put it to his ear, restored it to his pocket, and fell into an attitude of deep attention. Evidently his whole mind was on his battle, and he was waiting, watching, yearning for its outburst.

"If he wins this fight," thought Fitz Hugh, "how can I do him a harm? And yet," he added, "how can I help it?"

Minutes passed. Fitz Hugh tried to think of his injury, and to steel himself against his chief. But the roar of battle on the right, and the suspense and imminence of battle on the left, absorbed the attention of even this wounded and angry spirit, as, indeed, they might have absorbed that of any being not more or less than human. A private wrong, insupportable though it might be, seemed so small amid that deadly clamor and awful expectation! Moreover, the intellect which worked so calmly and vigorously by his side, and which alone of all things near appeared able to rule the coming crisis, began to dominate him, in spite of his sense of injury. A thought crossed him to the effect that the great among men are too valuable to be punished for their evil deeds. He turned to the absorbed brigade commander, now not only his ruler, but even his protector, with a feeling that he must accord him a word of peace, a proffer in some form of possible forgiveness and friendship. But the man's face was clouded and stern with responsibility and authority. He seemed at that moment too lofty to be approached with a message of pardon. Fitz Hugh gazed at him with a mixture of profound respect and smothered hate. He gazed, turned away, and remained silent.

Minutes more passed. Then a mounted orderly dashed up at full speed, with the words, "Colonel, Major Gahogan has fronted."

"Has he?" answered Waldron, with a smile which thanked the trooper and made him happy. "Ride on through the thicket here, my man, and tell Colonel Gildersleeve to push up his skirmishers."

With a thud of hoofs and a rustling of parting foliage the cavalryman disappeared amid the underwood. A minute or two later a thin, dropping rattle of musketry, five hundred yards or so to the front, announced that the sharpshooters of the Fourteenth were at work. Almost immediately there was an angry response, full of the threatenings and execution of death. Through the lofty leafage tore the screech of a shell, bursting with a sharp crash as it passed overhead, and scattering in humming slivers. Then came another, and another, and many more, chasing each other with hoarse hissings through the trembling air, a succession of flying serpents. The enemy doubtless believed that nearly the whole attacking force was massed in the wood around the road, and they had brought at least four guns to bear upon that point, and were working them with the utmost possible rapidity. Presently a large chestnut, not fifty yards from Fitz Hugh, was struck by a shot. The solid trunk, nearly three feet in diameter, parted asunder as if it were the brittlest of vegetable matter. The upper portion started aside with a monstrous groan, dropped in a standing posture to the earth, and then toppled slowly, sublimely prostrate, its branches crashing and all its leaves wailing. Ere long, a little further to the front, another

Anak of the forest went down; and, mingled with the noise of its sylvan agony, there arose sharp cries of human suffering. Then Colonel Colburn, a broad-chested and ruddy man of thirty-five, with a look of indignant anxiety in his iron-gray eyes, rode up to the brigade commander.

"This is very annoying, Colonel," he said. "I am losing my men without using them. That last tree fell into my command."

"Are they firing toward our left?" asked Waldron.

"Not a shot."

"Very good," said the chief, with a sigh of contentment. "If we can only keep them occupied in this direction! By the way, let your men lie down under the fallen tree, as far as it will go. It will protect them from others."

Colburn rode back to his regiment. Waldron looked impatiently at his watch. At that moment a fierce burst of line firing arose in front, followed and almost overborne by a long-drawn yell, the scream of charging men. Waldron put up his watch, glanced excitedly at Fitz Hugh, and smiled.

"I must forgive or forget," the latter could not help saying to himself. "All the rest of life is nothing compared with this."

"Captain," said Waldron, "ride off to the left at full speed. As soon as you hear firing at the shoulder of the ridge, return instantly and let me know."

Fitz Hugh dashed away. Three minutes carried him into perfect peace, beyond the whistling of ball or the screeching of shell. On the right was a tranquil, wide waving of foliage, and on the left a serene landscape of cultivated fields, with here and there an embowered farm-house. Only for the clamor of artillery and musketry far behind him, he could not have believed in the near presence of battle, of blood and suffering and triumphant death. But suddenly he heard to his right, assaulting and slaughtering the tranquillity of nature, a tumultuous outbreak of file firing, mingled with savage yells. He wheeled, drove spurs into his horse, and flew back to Waldron. As he re-entered the wood he met wounded men streaming through it, a few marching alertly upright, many more crouching and groaning, some clinging to their less injured comrades, but all haggard in face and ghastly.

"Are we winning?" he hastily asked of one man who held up a hand with three fingers gone and the bones projecting in sharp spikes through mangled flesh.

"All right, sir; sailing in," was the answer.

"Is the brigade commander all right?" he inquired of another who was winding a bloody handkerchief around his arm.

"Straight ahead, sir; hurrah for Waldron!" responded the soldier, and almost in the same instant fell lifeless with a fresh ball through his head.

"Hurrah for him!" Fitz Hugh answered frantically, plunging on through the underwood. He found Waldron with Colburn, the two conversing tranquilly in their saddles amid hissing bullets and dropping branches.

"Move your regiment forward now," the brigade commander was saying; "but halt it in the edge of the wood."

"Shan't I relieve Gildersleeve if he gets beaten?" asked the subordinate officer eagerly.

"No. The regiments on the left will help him out. I want your men and Peck's for the fight on top of the hill. Of course the rebels will try to retake it; then I shall call for you."

Fitz Hugh now approached and said, "Colonel, the Seventh has attacked in force."

"Good!" answered Waldron, with that sweet smile of his which thanked people who brought him pleasant news. "I thought I heard his fire. Gahogan will be on their right rear in ten minutes. Then we shall get the ridge. Ride back now to Major Bradley, and tell him to bring his Napoleons through the wood, and set two of them to shelling the enemy's centre. Tell him my idea is to amuse them, and keep them from changing front."

Again Fitz Hugh galloped off as before on a comfortably safe errand, safer at all events than many errands of that day. "This man is sparing my life," he said to himself. "Would to God I knew how to spare his!"

He found Bradley lurching on a gun caisson, and delivered his orders. "Something to do at last, eh?" laughed the rosy-cheeked youngster. "The smallest favors thankfully received. Won't you take a bite of rebel chicken, Captain? This rebellion must be put down. No? Well, tell the Colonel I am moving on, and John Brown's soul not far ahead."

When Fitz Hugh returned to Waldron he found him outside of the wood, at the base of the long incline which rose into the rebel position. About the slope were scattered prostrate forms, most numerous near the bottom, some crawling slowly rearward, some quiescent. Under the brow of the ridge, decimated and broken into a mere skirmish line sheltered in knots and singly, behind rocks and knolls, and bushes, lay the Fourteenth Regiment, keeping up a steady, slow fire. From the edge above, smokily dim against a pure, blue heaven, answered another rattle of musketry, incessant, obstinate, and spiteful. The combatants on both sides were lying down; otherwise neither party could have lasted ten minutes. From Fitz Hugh's point of view not a Confederate uniform could be seen. But the smoke of their rifles made a long gray line, which was disagreeably visible and permanent; and the sharp whit! whit! of their bullets continually passed him, and cheeped away in the leafage behind.

"Our men can't get on another inch," he ventured to say to his commander. "Wouldn't it be well for me to ride up and say a cheering word?"

"Every battle consists largely in waiting," replied Waldron thoughtfully. "They have undoubtedly brought up a reserve to face Thomas. But when Gahogan strikes the flank of the reserve, we shall win."

"I wish you would take shelter," begged Fitz Hugh. "Everything depends on your life."

"My life has been both a help and a hurt to my fellow-creatures," sighed the brigade commander. "Let come what will to it."

He glanced upward with an expression of profound emotion; he was evidently fighting two battles, an outward and an inward one.

Presently he added, "I think the musketry is increasing on the left. Does it strike you so?"

He was all eagerness again, leaning forward with an air of earnest listening, his face deeply flushed and his eye brilliant. Of a sudden the combat above rose and swelled into higher violence. There was a clamor far away—it seemed nearly a mile away—over the hill. Then the nearer musketry—first Thomas's on the shoulder of the ridge, next Gildersleeve's in front—caught fire and raged with new fury.

Waldron laughed outright. "Gahogan has reached them," he said to one of his staff who had just rejoined him. "We shall all be up there in five minutes. Tell Colburn to bring on his regiment slowly."

Then, turning to Fitz Hugh, he added, "Captain, we will ride forward."

They set off at a walk, now watching the smoking brow of the eminence, now picking their way among dead and wounded. Suddenly there was a shout above them and a sudden diminution of the firing; and looking upward they saw the men of the Fourteenth running confusedly toward the summit. Without a word the brigade commander struck spurs into his horse and dashed up the long slope at a run, closely followed by his enemy and aid. What they saw when they overtook the straggling, running, panting, screaming pellmell of the Fourteenth was victory!

The entire right wing of the Confederates, attacked on three sides at once, placed at enormous disadvantage, completely outgeneraled, had given way in confusion, was retreating, breaking, and flying. There were lines yet of dirty gray or butternut; but they were few, meagre, fluctuating, and recoiling, and there were scattered and scurrying men in hundreds. Three veteran and gallant regiments had gone all to wreck under the shock of three similar regiments far more intelligently directed. A strong position had been lost because the heroes who held it could not perform the impossible feat of forming successively two fresh fronts under a concentric fire of musketry. The inferior brain power had confessed the superiority of the stronger one.

On the victorious side there was wild, clamorous, fierce exultation. The hurrying, shouting, firing soldiers, who noted their commander riding among them, swung their rifles or their tattered hats at him, and screamed "Hurrah!" No one thought of the Confederate dead underfoot, nor of the Union dead who dotted the slope behind. "What are you here for, Colonel?" shouted rough old Gildersleeve, one leg of his trousers dripping blood. "We can do it alone."

"It is a battle won," laughed Fitz Hugh, almost worshipping the man whom he had come to slay.

"It is a battle won, but not used," answered Waldron. "We haven't a gun yet, nor a flag. Where is the cavalry? Why isn't Stilton here? He must have got afool of the enemy's horse, and been obliged to beat it off. Can anybody hear anything of Stilton?"

"Let him go," roared Old Grumps. "The infantry don't want any help."

"Your regiment has suffered, Colonel," answered Waldron, glancing at the scattered files of the Fourteenth. "Halt it and reorganize it, and let it fall in with the right of the First when Peck comes up. I shall replace you with the Fifth. Send your Adjutant back to Colburn and tell him to hurry along. Those fellows are making a new front over there," he added, pointing to the centre of the hill. "I want the Fifth, Seventh and Tenth in *échelon* as quickly as possible. And I want that cavalry. Lieutenant," turning to one of his staff, "ride off to the left and find Colonel Stilton. Tell him that I need a charge in ten minutes."

Presently cannon opened from that part of the ridge still held by the Confederates, the shell tearing through or over the dissolving groups of their right wing, and cracking viciously above the heads of the victorious Unionists. The explosions followed each other with stunning rapidity, and the shrill whirring of the splinters was ominous. Men began to fall again in the ranks or to drop out of them wounded. Of all this Waldron took no further note than to ride hastily to the brow of the ridge and look for his own artillery.

"See how he attends to everything himself," said Major Gahogan, who had cantered up to the side of Fitz Hugh. "It's just a matter of plain business, and he looks after it like a business man. Did ye see us, though, Captin, when we come in on their right flank? By George, we murdered 'em. There's more'n a hundred lyin' in hapes back there. As for old Stilton, I just caught sight of 'um behind that wood to our left, and he's makin' for the enemy's right rear. He'll have lots o' prisoners in half an hour."

When Waldron returned to the group he was told of his cavalry's whereabouts, and responded to the information with a smile of satisfaction.

"Bradley is hurrying up," he said, "and Taylor is pushing their left smartly. They will make one more tussle to recover their line of retreat; but we shall smash them from end to end and take every gun."

He galloped now to his infantry, and gave the word "Forward!" The three regiments which composed the *échelon* were the Fifth on the right, the Seventh fifty yards to the rear and left of the Fifth, the Tenth to the rear and left of the Seventh. It was behind the Fifth, that is, the foremost battalion, that the brigade commander posted himself.

"Do you mean to stay here, Colonel?" asked Fitz Hugh, in surprise and anxiety.

"It is a certain victory now," answered Waldron, with a singular glance upward. "My life is no longer important. I prefer to do my duty to the utmost in the sight of all men."

"I shall follow you and do mine, sir," said the Captain, much moved, he could scarcely say by what emotions, they were so many and conflicting.

"I want you otherwheres. Ride to Colonel Taylor at once, and hurry him up the hill. Tell him the enemy have greatly weakened their left. Tell him to push up everything, infantry, and cavalry, and artillery, and to do it in haste."

"Colonel, this is saving my life against my will," remonstrated Fitz Hugh.

"Go!" ordered Waldron, imperiously. "Time is precious."

Fitz Hugh dashed down the slope to the right at a gallop. The brigade commander turned tranquilly, and followed the march of his *échelon*. The second and decisive crisis of the little battle was approaching, and to understand it we must glance at the ground on which it was to be fought. Two hostile lines were marching toward each other along the broad, gently rounded crest of the hill and at right angles to its general course. Between these lines, but much the nearest to the Union troops, a spacious road came up out of the forest in front, crossed the ridge, swept down the smooth decline in rear, and led to a single wooden bridge over a narrow but deep rivulet. On either hand the road was hedged in by a close board fence, four feet or so in height. It was for the possession of this highway that the approaching lines were about to shed their blood. If the Confederates failed to win it all their artillery would be lost, and their army captured or dispersed.

The two parties came on without firing. The soldiers on both sides were veterans, cool, obedient to orders, intelligent through long service, and able to reserve all their resources for a short-range and final struggle. Moreover, the fences as yet partially hid them from each other, and would have rendered all aim for the present vague and uncertain.

"Forward, Fifth!" shouted Waldron. "Steady. Reserve your fire." Then, as the regiment came up to the fence, he added, "Halt; right dress. Steady, men."

Meantime he watched the advancing array with an eager gaze. It was a noble sight, full of moral sublimity, and worthy of all admiration. The long, lean, sunburned, weather-beaten soldiers, in ragged gray stepped forward, superbly, their ranks loose, but swift and firm, the men leaning forward in their haste, their tattered slouch hats pushed backward, their whole aspect business-like and virile. Their line was three battalions strong, far outflanking the Fifth, and at least equal to the entire échelon. When within thirty or forty yards of the further fence they increased their pace to nearly a double-quick, many of them stooping low in hunter fashion, and a few firing. Then Waldron rose in his stirrups and yelled, "Battalion! ready—aim—aim low. Fire!"

There was a stunning roar of three hundred and fifty rifles, and a deadly screech of bullets. But the smoke rolled out, the haste to reload was intense, and none could mark what execution was done. Whatever the Confederates may have suffered, they bore up under the volley, and they came on. In another minute each of those fences, not more than twenty-five yards apart, was lined by the shattered fragment of a regiment, each firing as fast as possible into the face of the other.

The Fifth bled fearfully: it had five of its ten company commanders shot dead in three minutes; and its loss in other officers and in men fell scarcely short of this terrible ratio. On its left the Seventh and the Tenth were up, pouring in musketry, and receiving it in a fashion hardly less sanguinary. No one present had ever seen, or ever afterward saw, such another close and deadly contest.

But the strangest thing in this whole wonderful fight was the conduct of the brigade commander. Up and down the rear of the lacerated Fifth Waldron rode thrice, spurring his plunging and wounded horse close to the yelling and fighting file-closers, and shouting in a piercing voice encouragement to his men. Stranger still, considering the character which he had borne in the army, and considering the evil deed for which he was to account on the morrow, were the words which he was distinctly and repeatedly heard to utter. "Stand steady, men—God is with us!" was the extraordinary battle-cry of this backslidden clergyman, this sinner above many.

And it was a prophecy of victory. Bradley ran up his Napoleons on the right in the nick of time, and, although only one of them could be brought to bear, it was enough; the grape raked the Confederate left, broke it, and the battle was over. In five minutes more their whole array was scattered, and the entire position open to galloping cavalry, seizing guns, standards, and prisoners.

It was in the very moment of triumph, just as the stubborn Southern line reeled back from the fence in isolated clusters, that the miraculous immunity of Waldron terminated, and he received his death wound. A quarter of an hour later Fitz Hugh found a sorrowful group of officers gazing from a little distance upon their dying commander.

"Is the Colonel hit?" he asked, shocked and grieved, incredible as the emotion may seem.

"Don't go near him," called Gildersleeve, who, it will be remembered, knew or guessed his errand in camp. "The chaplain and surgeon are there. Let him alone."

"He's going to render his account," added Ga-hogan. "An' whatever he's done wrong, he's made it square to-day. Let um lave it to his brigade."

Adjutant Wallis, who had been blubbing aloud, who had cursed the rebels and the luck energetically, and who had also been trying to pray inwardly, groaned out, "This is our last victory. You see if it ain't. Bet you two to one."

"Hush, man!" replied Gahogan. "We'll win our share of um, though we'll have to work harder for it. We'll have to do more ourselves, an' get less done for us in the way of tactics."

"That's so, Major," whimpered a drummer, looking up from his duty of attending to a wounded comrade. "He knowed how to put his men in the right place, and his men knowed when they was in the right place. But it's goin' to be uphill through the steepest part of hell the rest of the way."

Soldiers, some of them weeping, some of them bleeding, arrived constantly to inquire after their commander, only to be sent quietly back to their ranks or to the rear. Around lay other men—dead men, and senseless, groaning men—all for the present unnoticed. Everything, except the distant pursuit of the cavalry, waited for Waldron to die. Fitz Hugh looked on silently with the tears of mingled emotions in his eyes, and with hopes and hatreds expiring in his heart. The surgeon supported the expiring victor's head, while Chaplain Colquhoun knelt beside him, holding his hand and praying audibly. Of a sudden the petition ceased, both bent hastily toward the wounded man, and after what seemed a long time exchanged whispers. Then the Chaplain rose, came slowly toward the now advancing group of officers, his hands outspread toward heaven in an attitude of benediction, and tears running down his haggard white face.

"I trust, dear friends," he said, in a tremulous voice, "that all is well with our brother and commander. His last words were, 'God is with us.'"

"Oh! but, man, that isn't well," broke out Gahogan, in a groan. "What did ye pray for his soul for? Why didn't ye pray for his loife?"

Fitz Hugh turned his horse and rode silently away. The next day he was seen journeying rearward by the side of an ambulance, within which lay what seemed a strangely delicate boy, insensible, and, one would say, mortally ill.
