

Chancellorsville and Gettysburg

By JOHN McELROY.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE STORM GATHERS ON THE LEFT.

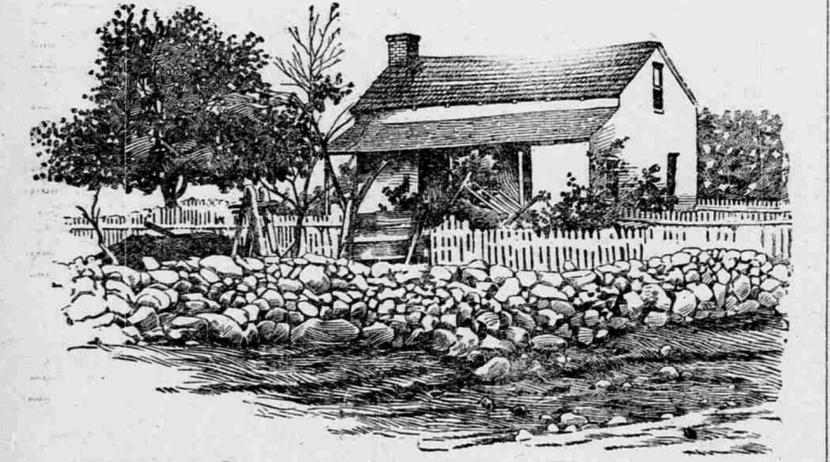
Lee's Plan to Crush the Third Corps and Seize the Round Tops—Sickles's Much Criticized Line on the Emmitsburg Road.

The Morning of the Second Day. The sun rose early in harvest splendor that morning of July 2. As soon as it was light enough to see the pickets on both sides began a slow, deliberate, murderous fire on each other, sheltering themselves behind trees, stone fences

Meade also consulted with Gens. Doubleday, Howard and Stocum, listened to their explanations of the dispositions of their men, decided upon the general line of battle, and about daylight dispatched his headquarters in a small frame house south of Cemetery Hill and near the center of the line that he proposed to occupy. This house was an unpainted frame building of a poverty and plainness not usual in that country, and was on the Taneytown road about a furlong in the rear of the line Hancock was establishing. There were a few scattered trees around it, but it was at best a cheerless and inhospitable accommodation. The headquarters staff promptly collected their wazons and horses, making quite

crossing the Potomac, and he had actually taken command by seniority when Reynolds fell. Gen. Doubleday had the reputation among the men of his division of being an austere man not calculated to excite much enthusiasm, but in handling the corps that day he displayed skill and courage which the duller private could not help commending; and he had, moreover, exposed himself all day in plain sight of the enemy with a reckless gallantry which never fails to win the affection of soldiers, no matter what may be the other qualities of an officer. Hence the men considered Doubleday entitled to the command of the corps, and they were disgusted to find that a stranger had been put over them. "Gen. Doubleday was not a man of personal magnetism" nor what is called a "daring officer." He was earnest and conscientious man and a safe and steady soldier—precise, methodical and to be depended on in any emergency. He was not the idol of his troops; and, in fact, the phrase so hackneyed by historians, really never means much of substantial credit in the estimation of a soldier. You will generally notice that the "idol of his troops" is some officer who cultivates the friendship of the newspaper correspondents, has his headquarters in the saddle, or issues general orders largely composed of wind. The average man in the ranks, particularly if he is a veteran, is pretty cynical, and cannot be easily fooled by pretension and gasconade. Doubleday, Griffin, Reynolds,

same time gave orders for the attack to be made by his right, following up the direction of the Emmitsburg road toward the Cemetery Ridge, holding Hood's left as well as could be toward the Emmitsburg road. McLaws followed the movements of Hood, attacking the Peach Orchard, the Federal Third Corps, with a part of R. H. Anderson's Division following the movements of McLaws to guard his left flank. As soon as the troops were in position and we could find the points against which we should march and give the guiding points, the advance was ordered—at half-past 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The attack was made in splendid style by both divisions, and the Federal line was broken by the first impact. They retired, many of them in the direction of Round Top, behind boulders and fences, which gave them shelter, and where they received reinforcements. "This was an unequal battle. Gen. Lee's orders had been that when my advance was made the Second Corps (Ewell), on his left, should move and make a simultaneous attack; that the Third Corps (Hill) should strike close by and engage, so as to prevent Ewell's moving in front of me. Ewell made no move at all until about 8 o'clock at night, after the heat of the battle was over, his line having been broken by a call for one of his brigades to go elsewhere. Hill made no move whatever, save that of the brigades of his right division that were covering our left."



GEN. MEADE'S HEADQUARTERS ON THE TANEYTOWN ROAD.

and whatever offered a covert. While the armies were slowly moving into position back of the pickets, with the most of the men lying idly behind their gun stacks, the pickets maintained a sharp little battle, with frequent rushes to gain favorable positions or to dislodge the enemy from those which had been gained to stop a too distressing fire. One story from Maj. Hartwell Osborn's "Trials and Triumphs" as to the occurrences in front of his regiment, the 56th Ohio, will be an illustration of what was happening from time to time along the whole front.

a conspicuous group, which later attracted the severe attention of the Confederate artillery. Gen. Lee established his headquarters in a brick house near the Seminary.

Formation of the Line.

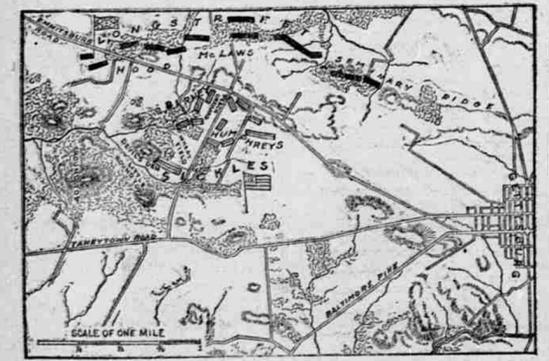
Early in the morning the Second Corps moved from its bivouac, three miles south of Gettysburg, and went into position on the left of Cemetery Hill. This position was where the ridge began to sink down to the level of the country in front. The Third Corps formed on the left of the Second Corps, and from this formation resulted the bitter feud between Sickles and Meade which will be discussed later. Sickles's two brigades, which he had left at Emmitsburg, rejoined the corps about 9:30, and Sickles stretched his line out until it reached nearly to Little Round Top. Geary's Division of the Twelfth Corps had bivouacked near Little Round Top during the night, with two regiments actually on that eminence. Now fearing the intent of Ewell's heavy masses on our right, Stocum ordered Geary to join the corps and take position on Culp's Hill, connecting on the left with Wadsworth's Division of the First Corps. Williams went into position on Geary's right, and extended the Union flank to Rock Creek. Stocum and his men had learned the value of field defenses at Chancellorsville, and immediately began covering their front with works and barricades of fallen timber, trees, rocks and fence rails. The Fifth Corps, under Gen. Sykes, arrived on the field about 8 o'clock, and was posted as a reserve of the right and in supporting distance of the Twelfth Corps. Meade seems to have been full of aggression, and his first plan was to attack Lee's left with the Twelfth and Fifth Corps, supported by the Sixth Corps when it should arrive. At 10 o'clock, the Sixth Corps not having yet come up, Meade sent orders to wait no longer for it, but begin the attack. Again Stocum gave evidence of that negative character which he so often manifested, and sent in a strong recommendation against making the attack, which was not heeded.

Lee Decides to Attack.

Some of the higher Confederate officers saw in the Union position a reversal of the conditions at Fredericksburg, and felt that any attack would be as hopeless as the one before the assault of Burnside's men upon Marye's Heights, they could not convince Lee of this. Longstreet says that he tried to dissuade Gen. Lee from attacking, and to induce him to turn our left flank and interpose between us and Washington. He said that Lee was in that condition of mind that frequently came to him when he felt that "he was up," and nothing would do him but to fight. He pointed with his clenched fist to the Union line, and said, "I will strike them dead, and I will receive encouragement from his suggestion to Ewell and Early to attack our right, and they both insisted that the greatest hope would be in an attack upon our left by Longstreet. The army which they saw before them on Cemetery and Culp's Hills was entirely too strong to be encouraging. It had too much the appearance of their own positions behind Fredericksburg. Lee still had hopes of having succeeded in catching the Army of the Potomac before fully concentrated, and of whipping it in detail. He could not see that actually the whole of the army was in front of him. He had started out from Fredericksburg with the fond expectation of marching on swiftly to scatter the Army of the Potomac and beat its fractions, one after another, and he could not quite relinquish that hope. At 11 o'clock he issued his orders for Anderson's Division to extend the line to his right and southward on Seminary Ridge, while Longstreet, with the two strong divisions of Hood and McLaws, were to repeat the Chancellorsville tactics by making a swift detour to the southward to strike the Union left and rear in the neighborhood of the Taneytown road. Longstreet was directed to make his march at first sight of our army, so as to fall with crushing surprise upon the flank. Here begins the bitter feud between the partisans of Lee and Longstreet, rather, it may be said it is the effort of the Southern historians to make excuses for losing the battle by placing the blame upon Longstreet. There were signal flags waving on the Round Top, and Longstreet imagined that his movement was being followed from that point of observation, so that he made a wider circuit than he had at first contemplated. In fact, two hours more than was expected were consumed in making this march, during which time Lee and the rest of his army were disconcerted with impatience to hear the report of Longstreet's guns, which was to be the signal for a general attack on all the rest of the Union lines.

Gen. Lee's Headquarters on the Chambersburg Pike.

the level of the surrounding country; in fact, at one place there was nearly a swale before reaching Little Round Top. On the other hand, the Emmitsburg road, after leaving Gettysburg, swings off toward the west and Seminary Ridge, until, when opposite the Round Tops, it is one mile from them. This road runs along a considerable ridge commanding the stretch between it and the Round Tops. Above this shallow valley Big Round Top rises to a height of 300 feet and Little Round Top to 187 feet. Both these hills are steep, partly wooded, and covered with huge boulders. In case must rest on Round Top, and connect with the left of the Second Corps—as to require a larger force than the Third Corps alone to hold it, and it would be difficult to occupy and strengthen the angle if the enemy already held the wood in its front. At my instance Gen. Sickles ordered reconnaissance to ascertain if the wood was occupied. "About this time a cannonade was opened on Cemetery Hill, which indicated an attack there, and as I had examined the Emmitsburg Ridge I said I would not await the result of the recon-



POSITIONS OF BIRNEY AND HUMPHREYS ON THE EMMITSBURG ROAD.

Gettysburg and keeping under cover as much as possible, he was discovered by the rebel line of battle before the sharpshooters in the woods grasped the situation. There was but one thing to do, namely, to go ahead, and that he did. He made a rush for the house, captured it, and held it during the remainder of the battle; most of the men, however, were afterwards taken by the enemy. This occurred when great history was being made, and beyond the view of ordinary observers. It was one of many like incidents for which medals of honor were issued, but Capt. Boalt never made any claim for superior valor. He was as modest as brave. His death at the hands of an assassin many years after was mourned by every survivor of the regiment, who remembered him as a brave and gallant gentleman and a warm-hearted comrade.

The Commander of the First Corps.

Thru a miscomprehension of the facts Gen. Meade had assigned Brig. Gen. John Newton, who commanded a division of the Sixth Corps, to superintend the march of the First Corps, thus making the magnificent fight of the day before. Baell in his "Cannoner" gives this description of the way the news was received by the men: "Such was the state of public opinion in the ranks of the old First Corps when it fell that it was announced that Gen. John Newton, of the Sixth Corps, had been placed in command vice Reynolds, killed. This met the instant disapprobation of the men. Newton was a man they did not know. The corps had already been commanded for several days by Gen. Doubleday, of the Third Division, in consequence of Gen. Reynolds being placed in command of the whole Left Wing of the army after

Longstreet's Account.

In his article in "Battles and Leaders," Gen. Longstreet says: "About 11 o'clock on the morning of the 2d he ordered the march, and put it under the conduct of his engineer officers, so as to be assured that the troops would move by the best route and encounter the least delay in reaching the position designated by him for the attack on the Federal left at the same time concealing the movements then under orders from view of the Federals. "McLaws's Division was in advance, with Hood following. After marching some distance there was a delay in front, and I rode forward to ascertain the cause, when it was reported to me that part of the road just in advance of us was in plain view of the Federal signal station on Round Top. To avoid that point the direction of the troops was changed. Again I found there was some delay, and I ordered Hood's Division, then in the rear, to move on at double with the division in front, so as to save as much time as possible. I went forward again to see the cause of the delay, when I found that the men being concealed, when I stated that I could see the signal station, and there was no reason why they could not see it, I seemed to me useless, therefore, to delay the troops any longer with the idea of concealing the movement, and the two divisions advanced. Gen. Lee had deployed I rode along from left to right, examining the Federal position and putting my troops in the best position we could find." Gen. Lee at the

Sickles began by placing his troops in a continuation of Hancock's line, with Humphreys's Division toward Hancock's left and Birney's Division on Humphreys's left. Sickles wisely threw forward skirmishers to the Emmitsburg road, where they could observe the enemy from the higher ground, and these became sharply engaged. Beyond the Emmitsburg road was a heavy belt of timber, and Sickles was very apprehensive of what was going on under this veil. On a knoll at the Emmitsburg road, directly in front of Little Round Top and one mile distant, was the Peach Orchard, soon to become famous in American history, and east of this was the equally famous Wheat Field, while lying between them and the Round Tops was the rivulet of Plum Run and the wild confusion of rocks and boulders which had been appropriately named Devil's Den.

As soon were on Gen. Sickles became more and more apprehensive of such a flank movement as at Chancellorsville, and, desirous of advancing his line, with Humphreys's Division along the Emmitsburg road and Birney's thrown back thru the woods and rocks toward the Devil's Den and Little Round Top. He was convinced that this was the more favorable place to resist the attack than he expected rather than the line which he felt Gen. Meade had mistakenly ordered him to assume. He went to headquarters, represented his strong desire to attack, and asked Gen. Meade to accompany him and examine the line which he had selected. Gen. Meade was incredulous; would not find time to go there himself, nor would he send Gen. Warren, his Chief Engineer. Gen. Sickles then asked for Gen. Hunt, the Chief of Artillery, who went with him, saw the disadvantages of the position, coincided with Sickles as to the superiority of the other line, but declined to give any orders. Gen. Hunt rode away, saying that he would report the situation to headquarters and obtain the necessary orders.

Gen. Hunt's Statement.

In "Battles and Leaders," Gen. Hunt gives this statement of the incident: "On my return to headquarters from this inspection Gen. Meade told me that Gen. Sickles, then with him, wished me to send Gen. Warren, his Chief Engineer, that assigned to him was not a good one, especially that he could not use his artillery there. I had been as far as Round Top that morning, and had noticed the unfavorable character of the ground, and therefore I accompanied Sickles direct to the Peach Orchard, where he pointed out the ridges, and he described, as his proposed line, which he commanded as the ground behind, as well as in front of them, and together constituted a favorable position for the enemy to hold. This was one good reason for our taking position to it. It would, it is true, in our hands present a salient angle, which generally presents a disadvantage, but here the ridges were so high that each would serve as a 'traverse' for the other and reduce that to a minimum. On the other hand, it would so greatly lengthen our line—which in any

no instance, but return to headquarters by way of Round Top, and examine that part of the proposed line. As I was leaving Gen. Sickles asked me if I should move forward his corps. I answered, 'Not on my authority; I will report to Gen. Meade for his instructions.' I had not reached the Wheat Field when a sharp rattle of musketry showed that the enemy held the wood in front of the Peach Orchard angle. "As I rode back a view from that direction showed how much farther the Peach Orchard was to the front of the direct line than it appeared from the orchard itself. In fact, there was a third line between them, which appeared as seen from the orchard, to be continuous with Cemetery Ridge, but was nearly 600 yards in front of it. This is the open ground east of Plum Run, already described, and which may be called the Plum Run line. Its left, where it crossed the run, abuts rather on Devil's Den than Round Top; it was commanded by the much higher Peach Orchard crest, and was therefore not an eligible line to occupy, altho it became of importance during the battle."

Gen. Sickles Moves Forward.

It was not until 2 o'clock that Gen. Sickles determined upon a flank movement on the left with Birney's Division, Ward's Brigade and Smith's 4th N. Y. Battery were posted at the Devil's Den, with Ward's left regiment, the 4th Me., extended across the valley of Plum Run to the slope of Little Round Top. Next came De Trobriand's Brigade, with Graham on the right extending Birney's line up the Peach Orchard, Ward and De Trobriand took up strong positions in the south edge of the woods, where they had open fields beyond in the open country at the angle of the two roads; that is, the road ran from the Devil's Den to the Emmitsburg pike, with the larger part on the Emmitsburg road. This formed the much-talked-of salient. Sickles saw its vital importance, and massed behind it 34 guns. The Peach Orchard was a high ground, commanding the country in front of it, and had the line taken up by Sickles been manned with a fair amount of troops it would have been exceedingly difficult of assault. Humphreys's Division extended along the Emmitsburg road to the right of the Peach Orchard, but was several hundred yards in advance of the prolongation of Hancock's line. Carr's and the Excelsior Brigades were on the Emmitsburg road, while the Third Brigade—Burling's—was sent to Birney, and was soon broken up in the battle by the regiments being sent hither and yon as they were urgently needed. The movements of Sickles's troops were in sight of the rest of the army on the higher ground around. They presented a brilliant spectacle as the well-drilled regiments moved with the precision of a parade, with gleaming arms and streaming colors.

While this was going on Longstreet was massing the greater celebrity behind the screen of woods a force of 20,000 men, with which he sanguinely expected to crush the thin line he saw before him. The Third Brigade advanced and reached the Round Tops and the Baltimore pike beyond them, upon which were the Union trains. This would have compelled the disorderly retirement of the Union army from Cemetery Ridge.

Berney's Reconnaissance.

Becoming more and more anxious as to what the enemy was doing in the woods beyond, Gen. Sickles sent forward skirmishers to press those of the enemy back and get information if possible. About 11 o'clock he sent forward Gen. Hiram Berney, with a portion of his regiment of sharpshooters, supported by the 3d Me., to push a reconnaissance home. Gen. Berney in his report says of this: "I moved down the Emmitsburg road some distance beyond our extreme left, and employed the sharpshooters a line running nearly east and west, and moved forward in a northerly direction parallel with the Emmitsburg road. We soon came upon the enemy, and drove them sufficiently to discover three columns in motion in rear of the woods, changing direction, as it were, by the right flank. We attacked them vigorously on the flank, and from our having come upon them very unexpectedly and getting close upon them, we were enabled to do great execution, and threw them for a time into confusion. They soon rallied, however, and attacked us, when, having accomplished the object of the reconnaissance, I withdrew under cover of the woods, bringing off most of our wounded, and discovered, if possible, Gen. Berney the result of our operations and discoveries. "Col. Moses B. Lakeman, 3d Me., says of this: "Advancing to and for some distance

on the Emmitsburg road, I approached a dense wood on the west side of the road, and on entering it formed my regiment (as ordered) to support the advancing line of skirmishers, and followed at supporting distance. They soon, however, became hotly engaged, and by order of Col. Berney I advanced double-quick to the line they occupied, and instantly formed my regiment under a heavy fire from the enemy, which we returned with a good will. Here I labored under a decided disadvantage, which will account for my heavy loss. The skirmishers were well secured behind trees, while my battalion filled the intervals. The enemy showed himself in overwhelming force, but so well did we hold our position that his advance was much checked and very disastrous, and not until ordered by Col. Berney to fall back did a single man leave his ranks, with the exception of those slightly wounded, when I retired, giving an occasional volley to check his advance, which now became quicker. "I was obliged to leave my dead and seriously wounded on the field, and on arriving at the wood formed my regiment, which had gotten some, then confused from loss of men and obstructions in our retreat.

"This engagement was short, but very severe, and serves to give me a general confidence in the men I command. I sustained a loss of 48 in killed, wounded and missing. "The importance of this reconnaissance was afterward testified to most liberally by Gen. Longstreet and other Confederates. It greatly retarded Longstreet's preparations for the attack. The enemy could not undertake a general assault by so small a body of men, and it seemed to them that their movements were discovered, and that the Union army was prepared to attack them before they could complete their formation. It certainly delayed Longstreet for over an hour in the attack which was awaiting with so much impatience.

The Story of "Historicus."

Some time after the battle an account appeared in the New York Herald, signed "Historicus," which was believed with good reason to have been written by one of Gen. Sickles's staff at his dictation. It gave great offense to Gen. Meade, who appealed to the War Department about it, and was so particular in his demands that President Lincoln finally had to quiet him with the admonition that there was much more important work for him to do than to engage in a newspaper controversy with Gen. Sickles. A portion of the article relating to this episode of the fight reads as follows: "The critical moment had now arrived. The enemy's movements indicated their purpose to seize the Round Top Hill, and this in their possession Gen. Longstreet would have had easy work in cutting up our Left Wing. To prevent this disaster Sickles waited no longer for orders from Gen. Meade, but directed Gen. Howard Ward's Brigade and Smith's Battery (4th N. Y.) to secure that vital position, and at the same time advancing his line of battle about 300 yards, so as to hold the crest in his front, he extended his left to support Ward and cover the threatened rear of the army.

"These dispositions were made in the very face of the enemy, who were advancing in columns of attack, and Sickles dreaded lest the conflict should open before his dispositions were completed. At this juncture he was summoned to appear in person at headquarters to attend a council of corps commanders. His preparations were such moment and the attack so near that Gen. Sickles delayed attending the council while giving all his attention to the carrying out of his orders. "A second peremptory summons came from Gen. Meade, and leaving his unfinished task to the active supervision of Gen. Birney and Gen. Humphreys, Sickles rode off to the rear to headquarters. Before he reached there the sound of cannon announced that the battle had begun. Hastening rapidly on, he was met by Gen. Meade at the door of his quarters, who said, 'General, I will not ask you to dismount; the enemy are engaging your front; the council is over.' It was an unfortunate moment, as it proved, for a council of war. Sickles, putting spurs to his horse, flew back to his command, and finding that Graham's Brigade was not advanced as far as he desired, he was pushing that brigade and a battery forward about 100 yards when Gen. Meade at length arrived on the field. The following colloquy ensued, which I gathered from several officers present: 'Are you not too much extended, General?' said Meade. 'Can you hold this front?' 'Yes,' replied Sickles, 'until more troops are brought up; the enemy are attacking in force, and I shall need support.'

(Continued from page three.)

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