

THE EVENING TELEGRAPH.

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TRIPLE SHEET—THREE CENTS.

THE FINE ARTS.

Rothermel's Painting of "The Battle of Gettysburg."

The great three days' conflict that was waged at Gettysburg was the culmination of the war for the preservation of the Union, and it practically decided the fate of the Rebellion. From the time that the baffled and broken army of Lee commenced its retreat to the Potomac the fortunes of the Southern Confederacy declined, and the total collapse that occurred when Lee surrendered at Appomattox was only a question of time. The battle of Gettysburg was a splendid display of valor on both sides. The Rebels were determined if possible to make Pennsylvania the battle-field instead of Virginia, and to obtain possession of the rich cities of Philadelphia and New York. The rank and file, as well as the leaders, knew what a rich prize was at stake, and with the remembrances of impoverished and war-torn Virginia in their minds, and the almost unlimited wealth of Pennsylvania and New York before them, they met the Union army at Gettysburg with a determination to stake everything upon the issues of the battle. The consequences of a victory for the Rebels were fully appreciated by the Union army and its leaders, and they were inspired to make a mighty effort to make this invasion of loyal Pennsylvania the last, and to strike a blow that would have a decisive effect in determining the fortunes of the war. For three long July days the battle raged, and then the broken fragments of Lee's army fled towards the Potomac, leaving the field strewn with the wounded, dead, and dying who had fallen in the furious charges made upon the Union ranks. From first to last this was one of the most fiercely contested combats of the war, and it is no disparagement to the officers in command to say that the victory was achieved even more by the hard fighting of the men in the ranks than by good generalship.

It was eminently proper that the Legislature of the State within whose borders such a battle as that of Gettysburg was fought should desire to possess a memorial of it in the shape of a great historical picture, that upon a single canvas would epitomize the conflict and hand down to future generations the counterfeited presentments of the officers and men who specially distinguished themselves. By a fortunate coincidence, the only American painter who was capable of doing full justice to such a subject was also a Pennsylvanian, and there was a general feeling of congratulation when the commission for the picture was given to Mr. Peter F. Rothermel of this city.

Mr. Rothermel is the American colorist, and in his coloring, as in the other characteristics of his style, he is original and distinctively American. None of the European color masters can approach him in the peculiar qualities that give his pictures their greatest value, and there are few if any artists on either side of the Atlantic who are in other respects as highly qualified to appropriately treat such a subject as "The Battle of Gettysburg." It was a fortunate chance that gave Mr. Rothermel such a theme for his *magnus opus*, and he has produced a picture that is an admirable representation of the great battle it commemorates, that is not only a credit to American art, but without exaggeration the greatest pictorial work of art ever executed on this side of the Atlantic, and that does honor to the State of Pennsylvania that ordered it as well as to the artist who produced it.

The commission for this picture was given to Mr. Rothermel four years ago, the price being fixed at \$25,000. This sum, large as it is, is small when the time, talent, and labor necessarily expended upon the work are taken into consideration. His acceptance of the commission required Mr. Rothermel to decline all other commissions, and for nearly a year he was busily employed in studying out his subject and in deciding what particular points in the battle should be represented. He made repeated visits to the battle-field and carefully studied the ground, taking numerous sketches, and consulting with the prominent officers who had participated in the combat and all others who could give him advice and information.

The main difficulty was to choose the particular point of view that was most advantageous for pictorial effect, and the particular point in the battle that would epitomize it most effectively and at the same time admit of the best treatment from an artistic point of view. There were certain things that must be represented and certain persons to be introduced without whose presence any picture of the Battle of Gettysburg would of necessity be incomplete. It was found to be impossible to reconcile all the conflicting elements with literal accuracy, and the artist was obliged to some extent to fall back upon the license of his art, and while making his composition as literal as possible a representation of a particular episode at the same time to include in it features that would make it a record of the battle as a whole. The restrictions imposed upon Mr. Rothermel have somewhat impaired the excellence of his picture as a mere composition, but its deficiencies in this respect are not very marked, and they are more than counterbalanced by the additional historical interest given to the work.

The immediate subject of the picture is the last desperate charge made by Pickett's division of the Rebel army upon the left centre of the Union line under the command of General Hancock. In the centre of the picture is the stone fence across which some of the most desperate fighting of the battle took place. The most prominent figure, that attracts the eye of the spectator immediately, and constitutes as it were the key-note to the

whole work, is a stalwart Union soldier, stripped of coat and accoutrements and standing one foot upon the wall and the other upon a dead Rebel, bending back the enemy with the butt of his musket. There is magnificent action in this figure, which is in itself a personification of the valor of the rank and file of the Union army. To the right the Rebels are marching up to the stone wall with fixed bayonets, and far beyond the well-defined figures in the foreground a mass of heads, tattered battle-flags, and banished arms are seen pressing on in eager haste to join in the fray. On the left the Union soldiers are dashing forward to meet the enemy, and the front ranks of the combatants meet over the stone wall, which runs in a slightly diagonal direction towards the left, nearly in the centre of the picture. Along the line of the wall are seen the flash of the muskets, the bristling of bayonets, the clashing of muskets, the fall of wounded and slaughtered men, and all the innumerable incidents of a fierce hand-to-hand conflict.

Mr. Rothermel has been criticized, unjustly we think, for making the common soldiers the heroes of his picture, and placing the officers rather in the background. Gettysburg was emphatically a soldiers' battle, and while all honor and credit are due to the officers who aided in winning the victory, Mr. Rothermel's picture more truly represents the true character of the battle, and gains in historical value as well as interest by the adoption of this treatment.

General Meade was in another part of the field at the time the particular incident recorded by Mr. Rothermel occurred, but very properly he and a number of other distinguished officers are introduced on the extreme left. In this group are a number of portraits of officers who figured prominently in the battle. General Meade, his son George, and Colonel Haskell, of his staff, are seen on horseback. General Hancock, severely wounded, is near the centre of the picture, and in the midst of the melee is seen General Hunt, Chief of Artillery, firing his revolver. General Webb, who had command of the Philadelphia brigade, is represented on foot. Colonel Bains, Adjutant-General Webb, General Gibbons, Colonel Wessner, General Bingham, Colonel Mitchell, General Hall, Colonel Devereaux, Major Roberts, Colonel Mason, Colonel Hesser, and Captain McConen are among the most prominent of the Union officers. On the Rebel side are portraits of General Armistead and General Garnett. In addition to the officers a number of the other figures are portraits of soldiers who participated in the battle, and the aim of the artist has been to make the picture as literal as possible by including all the portraits obtainable.

In the distance on each side the battle is seen fiercely raging in different parts of the field, and in the immediate foreground on the right is depicted a group of dead and wounded Rebels, while on the extreme left Union artillerymen are actively engaged in working a field-piece. The ground is strewn with muskets, broken drums, canteens, and accoutrements of every description, and a pathetic incident of the battle is recorded in the beautiful figure of a poor little Union drummer boy lying dead beside his instrument.

Colorists are not usually draughtsmen, and Mr. Rothermel's weak point is his drawing. His usual faults are not so apparent in this picture as in some of his previous works, but few of the figures are really well drawn, and some of them are positively bad. As a compensation for this the flesh is magnificently painted, and the figures are full of life and movement. The motion that fills the picture is one of its most admirable qualities, and the spectator can almost imagine that he hears the noise and rush of the battle as he gazes upon the animated scene that the artist has represented. Simply as a piece of painting the picture is superb, and apart from its size and the importance of its subject, it is Mr. Rothermel's masterpiece.

It may surprise many who are aware of Mr. Rothermel's reputation as a colorist, and who hear this work praised as a color picture, to find so little positive color in it. The prevailing tone is grey, but none but a colorist of genius could have produced such a wonderful harmony of tints, and whenever a bit of color is introduced, as in the flags that wave over the heads of the fighters, it tells with remarkable effect. The sky, overhung by the clouds of battle, is a beautiful piece of painting, and the landscape portion of the picture is treated admirably. The bit of distance to the right seen above the heads of the Rebels and the view of Round Top upon the left would be sufficient of themselves to make Mr. Rothermel's reputation as a landscape painter.

Large as is the sum the artist will receive for this work, it does not represent the full value of his labors. Since he undertook to paint the picture he has devoted himself entirely to it. The progress of the work has involved the expenditure of a large sum of money, and the artist's profits will not be by any means what they would had he not devoted himself to this labor of love; for such it has been to him. Some rather censorious remarks have been made in regard to the proposed exhibition of the picture for the artist's profit, and it is well that the public should be acquainted with the above facts. Mr. Rothermel received full permission for the proposed exhibition from the committee of the Legislature having charge of the matter, and we hope that the public appreciation of his work will enable him to realize handsomely by it. On the 20th instant the picture will be unveiled at the Academy of Music with appropriate ceremonies, and afterwards it will be placed on view in the temporary building now being pre-

pared for it in Chestnut street, above Tenth, where it will remain for several weeks. About its future disposition no arrangements have as yet been made, but it should by all means be retained in Philadelphia. There is no proper place for it in the State Capitol at Harrisburg, and if there were, it would be a pity to bury such a work of art in a country town, where comparatively few persons would ever have an opportunity to inspect it.

Porter & Coates' Gallery.

Messrs. Porter & Coates have attached to their store, No. 822 Chestnut street, one of the handsomest picture galleries in the city, which is now filled with some choice works of art that will repay an inspection. They have just received a very pleasing picture by Professor Raupp, of Munich, entitled "The Snow Battle." It represents a group of urchins engaged in a lively snow-balling conflict, and it is as admirable as a piece of execution as it is attractive in subject. Besides this, there are a number of very beautiful landscapes, full of poetical feeling, by Inness, of New York; a couple of fine marines by Hamilton; several spirited landscapes by E. D. Lewis, and some excellent specimens by English, German, and American artists of reputation, in various styles, sizes, and subjects. Messrs. Porter & Coates have also a very complete stock of fine engravings, chromos, and photographs, from which those who wish to make holiday gifts that will possess permanent attractions can scarcely fail to make suitable selections. A good picture is one of the handsomest ornaments that can be placed in a room, for it is not only attractive as a piece of furniture, but it is a constant source of pleasure in itself. Some of the smaller works in the gallery of Messrs. Porter & Coates possess great merit, and their prices, as a general rule, are not so great as to place them beyond the reach of persons of moderate means. A good original will always give more satisfaction than a copy, but for those who cannot afford originals, a well-executed chromo, or an engraving or photograph of some masterpiece, presents substantial artistic attractions that commend them to the regard of art lovers, while a good chromo, photograph, or engraving is always better worth having than an indifferent original work. We commend the art collection in the gallery of Messrs. Porter & Coates to the attention of our readers, and we advise those who wish to invest in something attractive for the holiday season, but who are in doubt as to what disposition to make of their money, to visit this gallery and inspect the choice works of art that it contains.

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The January number of Scribner's is one of the handsomest, most valuable, complete, and entertaining numbers of a magazine ever published. The illustrations are of a high order.

The article on "FAIRMOUNT PARK" has sixteen exquisite pictures by Thomas Moran. Mr. Wilkinson's poem, "THE NORTHERN LIGHTS," has also a design by Mr. Moran, one of the first of American landscape artists.

Dr. Hayes' Christmas Story, "THE GOBLIN OF THE ICE," is founded on a legend of Greenland, and is a strange and thrilling love story, presenting many striking features of Arctic life. Mr. Bolles' full-page picture of "The Goblin" (page 240) is a powerful piece of drawing, and the other illustrations are excellent. "MIRABEL'S CHRISTMAS" is a strong story by a new author.

The six original views of "STRASBURG AFTER THE SURRENDER" are from photographs taken especially for this magazine, and Professor Riddle's article is very interesting.

Hon. John Bigelow's "TERMS OF PEACE PROPOSED BY THE GREAT POWERS" is a timely and commanding article. Mr. Bigelow is near the seat of war, and has had peculiar advantages for the study of his subject.

Mr. Crouse's "HOW WE ESCAPED WAR WITH SPAIN" will attract immediate and wide attention, presenting, as it does, the hitherto unpublished details of a recent affair of national importance.

"A CHRISTMAS EVE IN GERMANY" tells of the Christmas customs of a singular society in Germany.

Professor Wilder's article on "KINGS OF THE AIR" and J. T. Headley's article on "SHIPS" are both splendidly illustrated as well as entertaining and instructive.

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SOMETHING FOR ALL—A HUMOROUS DEPARTMENT—Miss MALONY on the CHINESE QUESTION.

MACDONALD'S Story of "WILFRID CUMBERMEDE" grows in interest.

That powerful story, "NATASQUA," is concluded.

There is also an unpublished Poem by the late N. P. Willis, and a Christmas Poem by a young lady of remarkable genius, etc. etc.

A glance at the Table of Contents will show its richness in varied articles and illustrations.

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