

THE BATTLE OF FREDERICKSBURG.

The following graphic description of the battle of Fredericksburg on Saturday, Dec. 13th, is from the correspondence of the New York Times:

The theatre of operations extended from Fredericksburg on the right and down the south side of the Rappahannock for two miles.

Immediately behind the town of Fredericksburg, the land forms a plateau, or smooth field, running back for about a third of a mile. It then rises for forty or fifty yards, forming a ridge of ground, which runs along to the left for about a quarter of a mile, where it abuts at Hazel Dell, a ravine formed by the Hazel River, which empties into the Rappahannock, west of the town. At the foot of the ridge runs the telegraph road, flanked by a stone wall. This eminence was studded with rebel batteries. To the right, along up the river, the ridge prolongs itself to opposite Falmouth, and beyond; and here, too, batteries were planted on every advantageous position. Back of the first ridge is another plateau, and then a second terrace of wooden hills, where a second line of fortifications were placed. Between the rear of the town and the first ridge, a canal runs right and left, and empties into the river some distance above Falmouth.

This plan, of a third of a mile deep, between the suburbs of Fredericksburg and the first ridge of hills, was the theatre of operations of the Right Grand Division of the army, under Major-General Sumner. On this narrow theatre our brave troops surged and swept, forward and backward, in the tide of battle, for ten long hours.

A word now on the scene of operations of the Left Grand Division. From the lower part of the town the ridge on which it is built slopes abruptly down to a comparatively level or undulating country, which stretches for some miles down the Rappahannock. About a couple of miles back of the river it rises into a wooded slope. At a point a mile and a half below Fredericksburg two pontoons had been thrown across on Thursday morning, and on Friday the whole of the Left Grand Division, under the command of Major-General Franklin, had marched over the river. Daylight of Saturday found the force drawn up in battle array on this broad plain skirting the Rappahannock. The flat ground though very marshy in some places, presented a fine field for military evolutions. The turnpike leading to Fredericksburg runs about one-half of a mile from an nearly parallel to the river. Beyond is the railroad and, still further beyond, the woody range of hills in which the enemy were strongly entrenched. About a mile and a half from Fredericksburg, nearly on the river edge, is situated A. N. Barnard's stone mansion, after the English style.

The line of battle as it appeared in the morning, was as follows: The Sixth Army Corps, under Gen. Smith (Franklin's old force) on the right, composed of three divisions, namely: Gen. Newton on extreme right and rear; Gen. Burke on the center, and Gen. Howe on the left. The First Army Corps, Gen. Reynolds, extending still further to the left, drawn up in the following order: Gen. Gibbons' Division on the right, connecting with Gen. Howe's; Gen. Meade's, centre, and Gen. Doubleday, left, fronting to the southward and resting nearly on the river. This constituted the order in which our forces were drawn up, there being three distinct lines of battle.

Opposed to our right, under Gen. Sumner, was the rebel left, under command of Gen. Longstreet. Opposed to our left, under Gen. Franklin, was the rebel right, under Gen. Jackson. Gen. Lee, Generalissimo of the Southern army, was in person in command of the Confederate forces during the whole day.

The plan of Gen. Burnside, agreed upon in council of war, was to endeavor to pierce the rebel centre. Early on the morning of Saturday, the order was given that Sumner's left, composed of the Ninth Army corps, under command of General Wilcox, should be extended until it reached Franklin's right—thus forming a continuous line of battle along the river for two miles, the left resting on the river at the point where the lower pontoons cross, and the right on Fredericksburg.

The left wing, comprising the whole of Franklin's command, (fifty thousand men) should then be swung round, as on a pivot formed by Sumner's extreme right, resting on Fredericksburg. If successful in this maneuver, Franklin would divide the rebel line, take possession of the railroad (the line of retreat) and come in on the flank of the rebel works back of Fredericksburg. While this movement was being developed, a division was to be sent up from Gen. Sumner's command by the plank road to storm the ridge. If there should be any failure in this, it was hoped the co-operation of Franklin would presently make success certain. Hooker's corps was destined to act as a reserve.

The dawn of Saturday found the forces distributed as thus indicated. About 8 o'clock, the Phillips House (the headquarters of Gen. Sumner, about a mile from the river on the north side) was the scene of a numerous assemblage of officers. Gen. Burnside and Gen. Hooker joined Gen. Sumner here, and the balcony and grounds in front were presently filled with officers and aides.

Skirmishing had been going on all the forenoon, and the rebel pickets had been driven out of Fredericksburg. The time had now come to attempt an advance on the rebel position. The orders were to move rapidly,

charge up the hill, and take the batteries at the point of the bayonet.

The line of battle was formed by Couch's corps, [the second,] composed of the divisions of French, Hancock and Howard, the left of the line abutting on Sturgis' division of Wilcox's corps [the ninth]. The first advanced was French's, composed of the brigades of Kimball, Morris and Weber, supported by Hancock's division, consisting of the brigades of Caldwell, Zook and Meagher. Forming his men under cover of a small knoll in the rear of the town, skirmishers were deployed to the left toward Hazel Dell; Sturgis supporting at the same time, moved up, and rested on a point on the railroad. The moment they exposed themselves on the railroad, forth burst the deadly hail. From the rifle-pits came the murderously-aimed missiles;—from the batteries, tier above tier, on the terraces, shot planes of fire; from the enfilading cannon, distributed on the arc of a circle two miles in extent, came cross of shot and shell. Imagine, if you can, for my resources are unequal to the task of telling you, the situation of that gallant but doomed division. Across the plain for a while they swept under this fatal fire. They were literally mowed down. The bursting shells made great gaps in their ranks; but these are presently filled by the "closing up" of the line. Fifty-five immortal minutes at least they remained under this fiery surge. Onward they press, though their ranks grow fearfully thin. They have passed over a greater part of the interval and have almost reached the base of the hill, when brigade after brigade of rebels rise up on the crest and pour in fresh volleys of musketry at short range. To those who, through the glass, looked on, it was a perilous sight indeed. Flesh and blood could not endure it. They fell back shattered and broken, amid shouts and yells from the enemy. Gen. French's division went into the field six thousand strong; late at night he told me he could count but fifteen hundred! The fire of the rebel batteries was not the only thing from which our men had to suffer. Thinking to silence the enemy's guns, our batteries planted on the bluff, on the north side of the river, embracing the 11-2 siege guns, some batteries of 20 pounder Parrots and the artillery of the left and left centre opened fire. The intervening space is between twenty-seven hundred and three thousand yards; too great a distance to calculate on the projectiles carrying with accuracy—particular contractors' ammunition. If shell should fall short, or take an oblique direction and explode among our troops, it would be difficult to see how a panic could be prevented. Promptly seeing this danger, Gen. Hunt, Chief of Artillery, instantly despatched orders to cease firing. It was well he did so, for immediately afterward an Aid came galloping from Gen. Couch, from the other side of the river, begging that our batteries should cease, as they were actually firing into his command! While the broken column retires to its original position in the outskirts of the town, to re-form for a new encounter, let us see what goes on on the left. At daylight the forces comprising the left Grand Division of the army appeared drawn up in battle array on the broad plain below Fredericksburg and skirting the Rappahannock. At early morn, the 13th Massachusetts, Pennsylv. Bucktails, and two or three other regiments, were employed in front as skirmishers, between whom and the rebel skirmishers considerable firing took place. No sooner, however, had the heavy mist cleared away, than Capt. Hall's Battery (2d Me.) planted at the right of Gibbons' division, opened fire upon the rebels. Artillery firing now became general along the whole line, which was returned by the rebels.—Heavy siege guns in our rear, the 1st Maryland, 1st Massachusetts batteries, and battery D, 5th Artillery, on the right; Capt. Ransom's and Capt. Walker's in front, and Cowan's New York, and Lieut. Harn's 3d New York Independent on the left, and other batteries, kept up a terrific fire on the rebels. Orders now came to advance, and about nine o'clock Gibbons' and Meade's divisions commenced moving slowly forward. Gen. Meade's command, consisting of the Pennsylvania Reserves, arranged in the following order, a 1st brigade, embracing the 1st, 2d, 12th, and 6th regiments at the left; 2d brigade—3d, 4th, 7th, and 8th, centre; and 3d brigade, (Jackson's) 5th, 10th, 11th and 12th, at the right. The advance resulted in almost straightening our lines, which were before somewhat of a crescent. Considerable resistance was met with, yet the forces continued to move forward, until at mid-day the line of battle was three-quarters of a mile in advance of where it had been at the outset. But now came the reserve fire of the enemy with terrific force. Shot, shell and canister were poured into our men from various points, while the rebel infantry appeared, fired with rapidity. Still they continued to press on. Several batteries moved forward at the same time.—As our troops saw the enemy giving way, cheer after cheer rent the air. About one o'clock, Gen. Meade ordered a charge, which was well executed—the men pressing on the edge of the very crest and skillfully penetrating, by a movement on the flank, an opening which happened to occur between the division of A. P. Hill and Early's brigade, capturing several hundred prisoners belonging to the 61st Georgia, and 31st North Carolina.

While the right was progressing at this point, the enemy sent four heavy columns down on our left, near the river. They were handsomely repulsed and driven back, however, by Gen. Doubleday's division.

Owing to the lack of reinforcements, Gen. Meade's command was obliged to fall back a quarter of a mile, where they remained—

three-quarters of a mile beyond the ground first occupied. Very heavy musketry firing continued along the line, neither side gaining any material advantage. About 11-2 o'clock the first line of battle in Gen. Gibbons' division was relieved by the second, when Tower's brigade, now commanded by Col. Root, charged over an open field beyond the railroad, and down into the edge of the woods, occupying the breastworks which the enemy had constructed here, and captured 260 prisoners, belonging to the 36th North Carolina and a South Carolina regiment. Gen. Gibbons was severely wounded in the right hand. They held their own for some time, but were eventually compelled to fall back. The 2d Maine battery advanced with Gibbons' division. When it fell back, three guns were left to bear upon the advancing enemy. An order came at that moment to cease firing, as the force coming from the woods were our own men. When it had advanced, however, to within fifty yards, the commander of the battery became convinced that they were rebels, and moving on to capture this battery, five guns were opened upon them, but after five rounds had been fired, the battery was ordered to fall back. The Captain called for volunteers to return and bring off the battery. Sergeant Berry, Sergeant Stubbs, Corporal R. Freely, and twelve men belonging to the 6th Maine regiment, stepped forward. The undertaking, though a hazardous one, proved successful, as the abandoned gun was brought off in safety. It was while the fight was progressing at this point that Gen. Bayard was fatally wounded. He had just reached Gen. Franklin's headquarters in a small grove of the Bernard House, and taking a seat under one of the trees, when a ball, striking a few yards in front of him, glanced and then went thro' his thigh, inflicting a fearful wound. He was immediately conveyed to the Bernard House and placed in charge of Dr. Phelps, Surgeon of the brigade. As he was lying on the couch, the Chaplain of the Harris Light Cavalry approached and inquired if he desired him to write anything for him. "By-and-by," he replied; then turning to Surgeon Hockley, he inquired if he should be able to live forty-eight hours. A negative answer being given, he further inquired if he should die easy. Several of the surgeons in attendance thought his life might be saved by amputating the wounded limb, but the chances were so small he preferred not to undergo the operation. He was perfectly sensible, and never for once lost that self-possession which has always characterized him on the field of battle.

About 2 o'clock Gen. Birney's Division, of Gen. Hooker's Grand Division, which had been delayed for some time in crossing by the enemy's shells, moved forward to the left of the support of Meade's Division. Gibbons had become much cut up. The musketry fight was then very heavy, and this division suffered severely.

Adjoining the First Corps under Gen. Smith, presents the following formation, in three lines of battle: Gen. Newton at the right; Gen. Burke at the center, and Gen. Howe on the left, connecting with Reynold's Corps. At sunrise the skirmishers commenced moving forward, Gen. Vinson commanding. About 8 o'clock the rebels opened a heavy cannonade upon the men. Some of their batteries were but a short distance away. A burning building, which attracted considerable attention the night previous, was destroyed by them in order to make better their range. Martin's New York Battery, Frank's First New York, and Snow's First Maryland replied to the rebel guns with much spite. At 9 o'clock, Gen. Newton's was withdrawn from the extreme right of this corps, and took a position on the extreme right of Reynold's command, where it was actively employed during the remainder of the day. About four o'clock the Fourth New Jersey were ordered to charge upon a force of the enemy near the railroad, which they did, driving them back for 100 yards or more. A superior force then appearing against them, they were forced to retire. Col. H. H. Hatch fell, wounded in the leg. The rebels ceased their artillery fire on this portion of the army about 10 o'clock in the morning. Towards evening, however, they sent a full brigade in the direction of Martin's Battery, who came on with a yell, expecting to capture it. The warm reception which they received from the battery and the Second and Fourth Vermont regiments, which were acting as skirmishers, compelled them to fall back. At the same time the three lines of infantry, composed of Pratt's and Vinton's brigades, stood to arms, and advanced with fixed bayonets.

Returning to the right, I found Gen. Sumner seated on the front seat of an unyoked ambulance, at the Lacey House, directly opposite Fredericksburg, at the point where the first pontoon bridge spans the stream. The veteran soldier had been extremely desirous of crossing over and directing in person the movements of his Grand Division, but the Commanding General would not permit it, and as a compromise he had come down from the Phillips House, (which Gen. Burnside had made his headquarters for the day) a mile from the river, and established it here at its brink. The old man looked next us and fearful things were not going well with his command. For three hours his men had been fighting at fearful odds. They were much exhausted, their loss was excessive, and nothing had been accomplished. Indeed, to the test of the ear, at the point where we were located, it seemed as though they were being badly pressed. The batteries had been brought down and planted at the heads of the streets. The troops were hugging the city closely to escape the fearful fire. "Where is Franklin?" was

the eager inquiry. "Everything depends on Franklin's coming up on the flank."

Franklin's position was plainly observable by the line of smoke and a fire a couple of miles to our left below. He was making no nearer.

At three o'clock an aid arrives from Gen. Couch to say that his (Couch's) troops were advancing finely; but that Wilcox was not keeping up. "Tell Gen. Wilcox," replied Gen. Sumner, "tell him he must make the Ninth Army Corps keep pace with the Second, if he can."

At 4 o'clock, French reports that his right is held by a brigade (Mason's) which is without ammunition!

Sumner sends a message begging Burnside that Franklin be directed to advance, but Franklin cannot advance. He has enough to do at this moment to hold his own, for Jackson has just thrown in reinforcements, and is pushing hard to turn his left.

Meantime the reserves have not been touched. Hooker's Central Grand Division—50,000 fresh men—have not yet been engaged; indeed are yet mainly on this side of the river.

At 4 o'clock Gen. Hooker, who had not yet been across the river, proceeded over, remarking to a friend that he "was going to put this thing through." In half an hour prodigious volleys of musketry announced that Hooker, with the Reserves, is engaged. This last assaulting column consisted of the divisions of Humphrey, Monk, Howard, Getty and Sykes. They had, however, hardly got fairly engaged before the sun went down, and night closed around the clamorous wrath of the combatants.

At this time Gen. Burnside, who had remained all day at the Phillips House, came down to the Lacey House; and, in the garden facing the city, followed the progress of the fight. Externally calm, the leading player in this tremendous game was agitated by such intensity of feeling as no one can conceive, and he paced the garden gloomily as night.

"That crest," he exclaimed passionately, "must be carried to-night!"

The brevity of time into which the stupendous issue of the day had to be crowded seemed to add redoubled energy to the fury of the combatants.

Not "Night or Blucher," as Wellington exclaimed at Waterloo, but rather Ajax's prayer for "more light," was the prompting of every heart.

Creeping up on the flank by the left, Getty's troops succeeded in gaining the stone wall which we had been unable all day to wrench from the rebels. The other forces rushed for the crest. Our field batteries, which, owing to the restricted space, had been of but little use all day, were brought vigorously into play. It was the fierce passionate climax of the battle. From both sides belched forth their fiery missiles athwart the dark background of the night. Volleys of musketry were poured forth such as we have no parallel of in all our experiences of the war, and which seemed as though all the demons of earth and air were contending together. Rushing up the crest our troops had got within a stone's throw of the batteries, when the hill top swarmed forth in new reinforcements of rebel infantry, who, rushing upon our men, drove them back. The turn of a die decides such situations. The day was lost! Our men retired. Immediately cannon and musketry ceased their roar, and in a moment the silence of death succeeded the stormy fury of ten hours battle.

As Gen. Burnside, turning, walked off through the garden and mounting his horse galloped back to his headquarters, what thoughts and feelings passed through his mind! No illusions could make him believe that a victory had been achieved.

Shall we say, then, it was a defeat?—Certainly, if to have started out to accomplish a certain object, and to have failed in doing so, be a defeat, you can apply no other term to the upshot of today's battle.

In spite of all the glosses of official telegrams which you may receive, it seems there to-night that we have suffered a defeat. Let us hope that, when fully prepared, the assault may be renewed with new tactical combination, the position carried and the day retrieved. If it be not so, Saturday, the 13th day of December, must be accounted a black day in the calendar of the Republic.

DEPRECIATION IN THE VALUE OF GOLD.—The political economists of England are discussing the question whether or no there is a risk of depreciation in the value of gold, such as will revolutionize the business relations of society. The Times, which sides with the depreciationists, says that the influx of gold from abroad, instead of being regarded with joy, is cause, in some quarters, for the greatest alarm. With an annual production of from fifty to fifty-five millions of dollars' worth of gold since 1848, over and above the amount which was previously produced every year, and which was found sufficient for the common needs of commerce and manufacturers, it is argued that gold cannot be kept at its present value. Mr. Cobden, the leader of the English political economists, favors this opinion. On the other side it is argued that the country can easily absorb all the gold produced which is not required for commercial purposes, but those who advance this belief do not seem to be very tenacious of their opinion; they rather hope than assert that some process is at work to absorb the surplus of gold, and prevent the stream of supply from becoming a destructive flood.

—Massachusetts has 37,000 more females than males.