VI.—THE CHANGE OF BASE.

The Necessity of a Movement from the Chickahominy to the James.—Difficulties to be Surmounted.—Conflict at Beacon Dam.—Battle of Gaines's Mill.—Thrilling Incident.—Sufferings of the Rebels.—Charge of the Fifth Cavalry.—Testimony of Colonel Estvan.—Heroic Fighting.—Valor of the Rear-Guard of the Army of the Potomac.—Flight from the Hospital.—The Train on Fire.—Touching Scenes.—Severity of General McClellan.

EARLY in June, 1862, the patriot army, under General George B. McClellan, having slowly followed the retreating rebels from Yorktown, encamped in the midst of the marshy swamps of the Chickahominy. The hospitals were filled with the sick, the wounded, and the dying. The patriot army, in its encampment, presented to the enemy a front of about twenty miles in length. The extreme left rested upon an almost impassable morass, called White Oak Swamp. The right wing was stationed upon some slight eminences on each side of the Chickahominy. Strong divisions were posted at some distance from the right wing, to guard against surprise. The left wing, protected by the swamp, was within five miles of the James-River.

All the troops were sheltered by intrenchments. Eight divisions of the army were on the Richmond side of the Chickahominy. Two divisions, under General Fitz-John Porter, with the regulars, under General Sykes, were posted on the left banks of the Chickahominy. Notwithstanding the vast amount of sickness, it was
reported that one hundred and fifteen thousand could in an hour be marshaled in battle-array.

But it was speedily seen, even by eyes not practiced in military affairs, that the patriot army was in an extremely critical position. Never were troops more perfectly entrapped. The enemy were before them in great numbers, and so concentrated that they could direct their whole force, almost at any hour, upon any portion of our widely-extended lines. Should we withdraw the two divisions and the regulars from the left banks of the Chickahominy the rebels could, with a rush, destroy our only line of communication, and seize upon our immense supply of stores upon the Pamunkey. Should we, on the other hand, send back across the Chickahominy the eight divisions besieging Richmond, it would be the relinquishment of the siege, and there would remain nothing before us but a disgraceful and disastrous retreat to Fortress Monroe, pursued by an exultant enemy. To remain as we were, was to accomplish nothing, and only to expose ourselves to sure destruction. It was manifest that there was no salvation for the army but in effecting a change of base, so that the depot of our supplies could be upon the James River. The supplies could then be brought up the river under the protection of our gun-boats; and thus the exposed line of transportation from the Pamunkey could be avoided.

This change of base should have been effected immediately upon the destruction of the Merrimack, when our army, without any difficulty, could have passed over from the York River to the James. Now it could only be accomplished under circumstances of the utmost peril. Still there was delay, while every hour of delay only added to the difficulty and the danger. On Wednesday, the 25th of June, General McClellan, who was manifestly oppressed with the most intense anxiety, telegraphed the Secretary of War:

"Several contrabands, just in, give information confirming the supposition that Jackson's advance is at or near Hanover Court House. I am inclined to think that Jackson will attack my right and rear. The rebel force is stated at 280,000, including Jackson and Beauregard. I regret my great inferiority of numbers, but feel that I am in no way responsible for it, as I have not failed to represent repeatedly the necessity of reinforcements; that this was the decisive point, and that all the available means of the Government should be concentrated here. I will do all I can do with the splendid army I have the honor to command, and, if it is destroyed by overwhelming numbers, I shall let it be known that I have done what I could to avert the disaster. If, however, if the result of the action which will occur to-morrow, or within a short time, is a disaster, the responsibility can not be thrown on my shoulders. It must rest where it belongs. I feel that there is no use in my again asking for reinforcements."

To this the President replied:

"Your dispatch of yesterday, suggesting the probability of your being overwhelmed by 260,000 men, and talking of whom the responsibility will belong to, pains me very much. I give you all I can, and act on the presumption that you will do the best you can with what you have; while you continue—ungenerously, I think—to assume that I could give you more if I would. I have omitted, I shall omit, no opportunity to send reinforcements whenever I possibly can."**

The morning of Thursday, the 26th of June, dawned upon the two hostile hosts. Twenty-five days had now passed since the battle of Seven Pines. Three months had elapsed since our troops first landed upon the Peninsula. The two armies had for several weeks been so near together that their pickets were within hailing distance, and often banded jokes or conversed amicably with each other, exchanging newspapers and other trifles.

On the 25th of June a council of war had been held in the rebel capital. Nearly all the prominent generals of the rebellion were present. The front of General McClellan's army extended in a gentle curve along a line, as we have mentioned, more than twenty miles in extent. It was decided by the rebel officers to concentrate nearly their whole force, now greatly augmented, and to fall with the utmost possible impetuosity upon the extreme right wing of the National army, and annihilate it before it could receive any support. The victorious rebels would then, with a rush and a yell, fall upon the centre, and then upon the left wing, and thus, by piecemeal, utterly destroy the army. It was a well laid plan. Its execution seemed so feasible and simple that the rebels entertained no doubt whatever of its entire success. Unprofessional men all over the country had long anticipated this precise movement. It was a peril obvious to any ordinary common sense.

General McClellan was now so conscious of the exposed position of the army that, abandoning all offensive movements, he assumed a defensive attitude; and at this disastrously late hour, when the exultant rebels were just about to dash upon him, resolved to attempt a movement to the James River. The execution of this plan was exceedingly perilous in the presence of a vigilant and powerful foe; but there was no other salvation for the army. In preparation for this movement, there was a curious reconnaissance made by General McClellan and several officers of his staff. They climbed a very high tree within a hundred yards of the rebel pickets, and with spy-glasses surveyed the whole ground, and held a council of war. It was necessary to move the stores and baggage, much of it for a distance of thirty miles, mainly by a single road, exposed all the way to the enemy, who by several different roads, radiating from Richmond, could throw a heavy force upon any one point, or upon several points at the same time.

On the whole of Thursday, June 26, the woods resounded with cannon and musketry, as evolutions were going on upon both sides—the rebels preparing to make an attack, the patriots preparing for retreat. But in all the conflicts of that eventful day the patriot troops, led by Porter, Kearney, and Hooker—who ever rushed where danger was thickest—won signal
success. General Fitz John Porter had withdrawn his forces from Mechanicsville and Meadow Bridge, and had concentrated them upon a diminutive stream called Beaver Dam Creek. General M'Cull's division was at Mechanicsville; General Stoneman's division was stationed twelve miles northwest, at Hanover Court House. The rebels had constructed several bridges across the Chickahominy, above Mechanicsville, and commenced crossing the stream in great force. About forty thousand passed over on Thursday, the 26th; twenty thousand the next day; and by noon of Saturday, the 28th, full seventy thousand rebels were on the left banks of the Chickahominy.*

* Siege of Richmond, by Joel Cook, p. 297. Vol. XXX.—No. 180.—3 B

The whole rebel force was under the command of General Robert E. Lee, who had succeeded Johnston. In the afternoon of Thursday, the 26th, the first of the famous seven days' battles commenced. General Hill threw himself, with the impetuosity of assured success, upon the patriot troops under General M'Cull, who held the advance of General Porter at Mechanicsville, upon the left banks of the Chickahominy. The conflict was very severe. But General M'Cull had posted himself on the banks of a ravine called Beaver Dam. Here he had made an abatis and thrown up some light intrenchments, and the outnumbering enemy, notwithstanding the most desperate efforts, was unable to dislodge him. The battle raged with great fury till half past nine at night. The attacking rebels were about 60,000. The patriots numbered but 35,000. Thus terminated the first day's fight, with a decided repulse to the rebels. The exhausted soldiers, friend and foe, slept upon their arms. The most distinguished honor is due the patriot soldiers, who thus successfully repelled their greatly outnumbering assailants in this hard-fought battle of Mechanicsville.

All the night both parties were busy in collecting the wounded, and burying the dead. Each army was watchful to guard against a night attack. General M'Cull and his staff
bivouacked sleeplessly in the open air. During the night the whole of General Porter's baggage was sent across the Chickahominy in preparation for the retreat, and united with the immense train which was to struggle along, mainly by a single road, assaulted at every point, to the banks of the James River. At the same time orders were given to evacuate White House, to destroy all the immense stores there which could not be removed, and also to burn all the magazines along the railway between the Pamunkey and the Chickahominy. General Stone man, with his flying artillery, was charged with the execution of this order.

A little after midnight, on Friday morning, General M'Call was ordered to fall back on the bridges which had been thrown across the Chickahominy about a mile in his rear. Here he was to make another desperate stand with the troops of Generals Porter, Morrell, and Sykes, and bent back the foe, while the main body of the army attempted the humiliating movement to which it was doomed. The soldiers now awoke for the first time to the consciousness that the siege of Richmond was abandoned, that the whole army was on the retreat, and that the divisions under General Porter were merely operating as a rear-guard, to beat back the exultant on-rushing rebels.

At three o'clock in the morning the patriot troops, under General M'Call, commenced slowly retiring. The rebels were on the alert, and immediately pressed forward in pursuit, yet very cautiously, lest they should be drawn into a snare. With great precision and firmness the patriots, crowded by their assailants, fell back, not a man proving recreant to duty. General Porter formed them in line, with the other troops composing the rear-guard, in ranks of battle extending over two miles from the Chickahominy to Coal Harbor. The extreme left was held by General Meade. Then followed successively Generals Butterfield, Martindale, Griffin, and Sykes. General Reynolds, of the reserve, held the right of the line at Coal Harbor. Generals Cook and Seymour were slightly in the rear to support any portion of the line which might be broken. General Fitz John Porter was in command of the whole corps. He had in all about 30,000 troops. Sixty pieces of cannon were advantageously stationed upon the eminences around. The enemy were advancing with forces now swelled to between sixty and ninety thousand. Cautiously, yet resolutely, the rebels advanced in three columns. The second day of the bloody fight, Friday, June 27, was to be ushered in, with its clouds of terror and its flow of blood. One rebel column advanced along the banks of the river. One marched by a parallel path about a mile inland. The third column moved.

* See Report of Congressional Committee, p. 11.
directly upon Coal Harbor. It was not until near noon that the battle, in all its fury, commenced. It has been called the battle of Gaines's Mill, since a mill by that name was near the central point of attack. One hundred and twenty pieces of artillery, on the two sides, opened their tremendous fire. The hills shook with the concussion, and the two armies were soon enveloped in clouds of smoke. Under cover of this fire the rebels made several charges, with a disregard of death never surpassed. But the National troops were well posted; they fought with all the bravery which mortal men could show, and repulsed their overwhelming foes with prodigious slaughter.

During the action, which, as we have mentioned, extended along a line over two miles in length, the Rev. Wm. Dickson, Chaplain of the Twelfth Pennsylvania Reserves, was in a hospital attending to the wounded men. The hospital was in the shelter of a ravine, up which the rebels commenced marching several columns that they might outflank us. Soon the alarm reached the hospital that the rebels were upon them. Mr. Dickson ran up the side of the ravine and saw close at hand, in rapid march,
the columns of the foe. At the same moment he heard a shout from a patriot battery in his rear, "Lie down; you are right in our way!" He threw himself upon his face, and there was a thunder roar, and a shell went shrieking over his head. Knowing that the guns were fired in line, and that the line extended along the only route for his retreat, he instantly sprang up, ran a few steps, and again threw himself upon the ground. There was another lightning flash, thunder roar, and shrieking shell, when he was again upon his feet. Thus he ran the perilous gauntlet of two batteries in full play; springing from the ground at every flash as the charge passed over him, and nicely calculating the time when to throw himself upon his face to avoid another discharge. The men working the guns often caught a glimpse of him, and shouted, "Out of the way, or you'll be shot!" He coolly shouted back, "Fire away. I'll take care of myself!" A man must not only have great strength of nerve, but must have been often under fire, to pass thus heroically through such an ordeal as this.

The battle is described by those who witnessed it as one of very peculiar picturesque beauty, if beauty can be ascribed to evolutions leading to such awful carnage. The extended plain was undulating, rising into many gentle swells densely wooded. Numerous batteries were thundering on every side. The polished weapons of over one hundred thousand combatants were gleaming over the hills and through the valleys in the rays of a brilliant June sun. Squadrons of cavalry were sweeping through the dells; columns of infantry, in dense black masses, with their bristling bayonets, were climbing the hills, or, defiling in long lines, were rushing upon the foe in impetuous charges. Flying artillery were moving with almost supernatural velocity from ridge to ridge, bellowing forth their deadly thunders. Thousands of lancers finely
mounted, and with their floating pennons, were stationed along the banks of the ravine awaiting the summons to plunge into the maelstrom of death. Many of the reserves were concealed in the hollows or behind the dense foliage of the woods, and as the exigencies of the battle called them forth, they rose from their concealment, and, with loud cheers, rushed to meet the foe. Indeed, at one time it seemed as though the National troops, even against such fearful odds, would surely gain the victory.

General Butterfield signalized himself greatly on this day by his almost superhuman efforts to beat back the foe. His horse was shot under him. A fragment of a shell struck his hat. His sword was indented by a musket ball. Several of his aids fell at his side. Still, reckless of danger and death, he rallied his heroic men to the most desperate resistance, sharing with them every peril.

The fury of the cannonade was such that clouds of dust plowed up by the balls hung smotheringly over the battle-field. Thus hour after hour the desperate struggle was continued. Every man of the National reserves was at length in action. There was not another
muskets or another gun which General Porter could bring into the field. And now the rebel reserves, nearly twenty thousand strong, fresh and unbroken, are moving up upon our flank and rear. It is an awful moment. Our troops are worn out, their ammunition nearly exhausted, and the multitudinous foe are about to surround them, cutting off all possibility of retreat. There is a little disorder on the left wing. Some regiments break and retreat. The disorder spreads toward the centre. There is no panic, no wild, tumultuous flight. But the intelligent Northern soldiers perceive the hopelessness of continuing the struggle where they are, against such vast inequality of numbers, and they perceive also the folly of allowing themselves to be surrounded. Shouldering their muskets, and disdaining to run, they silently retire. The French Prince—du Calonne de Paris and the Due de Chartres—who had nobly drawn their swords to aid us in maintaining that republican liberty which France assisted us in establishing, threw themselves into the thickest of the peril to prevent the retreat from being converted into a rout. The rebels were advancing, assured of perfect victory, and in majestic strength.

"Then," writes the Prince de Joinville, "came the order for the cavalry to charge. I happened at this moment to be near its position. I saw the troopers draw their swords with the sudden and electrical impulse of determination and devotion. As they got into motion I asked a young officer the name of his regiment. 'The Fifth Cavalry,' he replied, brandishing his sabre with a soldier's pride in his regiment. 'Unfortunately young man! I saw the same regiment the next day. From the charge of that evening but two officers had returned. He was not one of them.'

The patriot charge failed, and the broken squadrons, leaving the ground covered with their slain, were driven back in disorder. There were two batteries alone now left to check the onward sweep of this great blood of war. The gunners continued to load and fire with the utmost rapidity at point-blank range, opening immense gaps at every discharge in the rebel lines. But the foe advanced with courage which even the patriot troopers were compelled to respect, notwithstanding the infamy of the rebel cause. The Union artillery horses had all been shot down; the guns were surrounded with the wounded and the dead. The surviving gunners, in the fading twilight, abandoned their pieces and fled. All these guns, twenty-two in number, were lost. About 5 o'clock General McClellan directed General Sumner, whose corps was at Fair Oaks, to send two brigades to the aid of General Porter, then so sorely pressed. French's and Meagher's were instantly put on the march for the battle-field about five miles distant. They moved at the double-quick. General French, in virtue of seniority, commanded. They met the troops of Porter sternly retiring before the foe. Forcing their way through the dense and broken mass, they ascended a hill and deployed in line of battle near Gaines's Mill. Then at the pas de charge, with loud cheers, while a smothering storm of balls and shells were poured upon them, they rushed upon the exultant rebels. Both the rebel infantry and artillery were driven back before them. The reinforcements having gained the crests of the hill made a stand, and the retreating troops rallied in their rear. "A Federal brigade," writes a rebel General, "commanded by Meagher, and consisting chiefly of Irishmen, offered the most heroic resistance. After a severe struggle our men gave way, and retired in great disorder. At this critical moment, foaming at his mouth with rage, and without his hat, General Cobb hastened up sword in hand, with his legion and renewed the attack. But the efforts of these troops were in vain. The brave Irishman held their ground with a determination which heaped the admiration even of our own officers."

The rebels, like ocean billows, in incessant thundering surges, dashed vainly against the patriots. Eight o'clock came. The gloom of night was now at hand. The rebels had been effectually repulsed at every point along the line except the extreme left. Here the battle was still raging with the utmost desperation. French's and Meagher's brigades had effectually stemmed the rush of the foe, and now with but six thousand men firmly held the front, while the patriot troops, who were utterly exhausted by the long battle, threw themselves upon the ground to rest, a mile in the rear of their heroic guardians. A rebel colonel thus describes the close of this eventful day:

"It is due to our opponents to admit that they sustained the shock of our incessant attacks with undaunted bravery. Although some of their brigades had been fighting from 4 o'clock, A.M., to 8 o'clock, P.M., they had continued to stand firm, and it was only when they found, at the last-named hour, Jackson was about to attack them in the rear, that they abandoned their positions. Although their loss must have been severe, they retired in good order, with drums beating and colors flying, taking their slightly wounded and their baggage along with them. When hotly pressed in pursuit by Davis's and WIcham's cavalry regiments, they faced round and repulsed them."

It was now night—a night of awful gloom. The second day's battle—the battle of Gaines's Mill—had ended, and silence succeeded the thunders of war which all the day had shaken the hills. Even the darkness could not conceal the harrowing spectacle of death's ravages. The dead lay upon the field in extended windrows. The wounded were to be counted by thousands. Their heart-rending cries and groans were audible on all sides.

"In by-gone days," writes Colonel Estvan, "I had been on many a battle-field in Italy and Hungary; but I confess that I never witnessed so

* War Pictures, by B. Estvan, Colonel of Cavalry in the Confederate Army, p. 515.
† War Pictures, by B. Estvan, p. 515.
pitiable a picture of human slaughter and horri-
ble suffering.*

* In the examination before the Congressional Commit-
tee upon the Conduct of the War, we find the following rec-
ords.

† On the 27th, the battle of Gaines's Mill was fought,
 principally by the troops under General Porter. Our forces
there engaged were from 27,000 to 30,000; the force of the
enemy being from two to three times that number. The
enemy were in such superior force that, although our
forces fought with exceeding bravery, they were driven
back with a loss of about 9000 men in killed, wounded,
and missing.

General M'Cllellan was questioned as to the policy of
leasing the right wing, consisting of only about 20,000 men
to meet the attack of the superior force of the enemy,
instead of withdrawing it to the right bank of the Chicka-
hominy, before the battle of Gaines's Mill. His testimony
on that point is as follows:

"Question. Whatever might have been the intentions
of the enemy, as the attack was to have been made by him,
would it not have been better to have placed both wings
of our army on the same side of the Chickahominy prior to
the battle of Gaines's Mill?"

"Answer. I do not think that they ought to have been
brought to the same side of the river before they actually
were.

"Question. What advantage was gained by leaving the
right wing of our army to be attacked by a greatly supe-
rior force?"

"Answer. It prevented the enemy from getting on our
flank and rear, and in my opinion, enabled us to withdraw
the army and its material.

"Question. Will you explain what was done by the
right wing of our army, at or about the time the left was
engaged, which saved our flank from attack, and enabled
the army and its material to be withdrawn?"

"Answer. By desperate fighting they inflicted so great
a loss upon the enemy as to check his movement on the
left bank of the river, and gave us time to get our mate-
rial out of the way."
bills five hundred, and another one thousand dollars. Twenty-two guns, as we have above mentioned, a large number of small-arms, and a considerable amount of clothing were also abandoned in the retreat. The rebels, with their usual exaggeration, claimed the capture of fifteen thousand stand of arms.

The retreat, during Friday night, was pushed with the utmost vigor. The train of five thousand wagons, the ponderous siege guns, a herd of twenty-five thousand cattle, and the long, dense lines of the majestic army, pressed forward to seek the protection of the gun-boats on the James River, in an indescribable scene of haste, tumult, and confusion.

At length the sun of Saturday morning, June 28, rose over this scene of disaster and ruin. Not the report of a gun was to be heard. The rebels were looking for the retreat of our army toward the Pamunkey, and not toward the James River. General Stoneman, with his cavalry, was sent to delude them into this belief, which he accomplished admirably. The bridges across the Chickahominy were destroyed, and it required some time for the rebels to rebuild them. Thus twelve hours were obtained for marching
toward our new base, almost without molestation. About ten o'clock all communications with White House were cut off, the rebels having obtained possession of the line.

More than two thousand of the sick and wounded, in an awful state of suffering, were at Savage's Station and its immediate vicinity, terror-stricken in view of the prospect of being abandoned to the foe, whose barbaric treatment they dreaded more than death. Their cries for water, for food, for blankets, for the dressing of their wounds were piteous. The number of surgeons was entirely inadequate to the wants of the sufferers. The draft upon the nervous system of the surgeon performing a constant series of capital operations, in the midst of such scenes of misery, is so great that ere long he sinks under prostration which paralyzes every vital power and even endangers life. The most humane man, blest with the strongest nerves, after for a time breathing the poisoned atmosphere of festering wounds, gazing upon the most ghastly sights, and hearing shrieks from the sufferers which pierce the heart, is absolutely compelled to shut his eyes to the misery, and to turn a deaf ear to the most imploring cries for aid.
The scene of misery and death in the rebel camp must even have surpassed that in our own. As the rebels marched up to our intrenchments the slaughter which swept their ranks was awful. The battle was fought within six miles of Richmond. The rebel Colonel Estvan took into the city sixty vehicles containing two hundred of the most severely wounded men. Every hospital was then found crowded, and either from inefficiency or despair no suitable provision could be found for these poor sufferers. At last they were turned into an old shed which had been used for storing tobacco. Colonel Estvan indignantly writes:

"A sad hole it was for such a purpose; an open warehouse, unprovided with doors or windows, and with merely a few planks to serve for beds for the dying soldiers. On this memorable day our brave fellows had to endure everything—hunger, thirst, and heat, besides facing death in its most fearful forms. And now, wounded at the very threshold of the dwellings of their own friends, whose rights and property they had been fighting for, we beheld them left to die uncared for in an open shed. And yet this city numbered as many as 40,000 inhabitants. It contained, moreover, many churches, admirably adapted for hospitals on such emergencies, and was well provided with clergy. Yet no church door was opened; no minister of religion came forward to soothe the last moments of the dying soldier. With mixed feelings of sadness and indignation I gave the order to place the wounded men inside the wretched building, and having bestowed a parting look on the ill-cared-for sufferers, I mounted my horse and hastened back to rejoin my regiment."

General McClellan kept his purposes unrevealed except to his prominent officers. Thus the great mass of the sub-officers and privates, spread, as we have said, along a line twenty miles in extent, could see all around them the indications of disaster and confusion; yet they knew not what it all meant, and could only guess respecting the movements which were now on foot. At Savage's Station there was a small cluster of houses, all of which were filled with the wounded. There were also pitched there three hundred hospital tents. Each of these tents contained about twenty men. One nurse was assigned to three tents. The tents were arranged in streets. Each surgeon had his ward, which contained about one hundred and fifty patients. The following testimony is rendered to the services of Dr. John Svinburne, of Albany, by Rev. J. J. Marks:

"Of this man I can not speak in terms of too high praise. He was thoughtful of himself, forgetful even of the wants of nature, uniting in his labors, musing to the highest courage of man the tenderness of a woman and the gentleness of a child. In that terrible hour, when other surgeons were worn-out and exhausted, no labor appeared to diminish his vigor. After days of toil and nights of sleeplessness, he was as fresh and earnest as though he had stepped forth from a night of quiet sleep. And while others became impatient, and had to escape from those scenes to seek repose, he, operating for hours at a time, found relaxation and refreshment in going from tent to tent, counseling the surgeons, advising the nurses, and speaking words of cheer to the wounded and the dying."

To some of the sufferers death was coming every hour. They were immediately wrapped in their blankets, placed upon stretchers, and borne away to a little distance, when they were let down gently into a shallow grave, and their over-coats were spread upon them. If a chaplain could be present a short prayer was offered, and then a few shovelfuls of sand were thrown over them, and dust was left to return to dust. All the day of Saturday the regiments of the right wing of the National army were marching rapidly by Savage's Station, taking the Williamsburg road toward the James River. Frequent scouts were sent out to give warning of any approach of the enemy. The road led through a region of impenetrable swamps and forests, where it would be very easy to entrap an army into ambuscades. The negroes, always our fast friends, lent us invaluable aid in these emergencies. They were our only guides. The country had not been explored by our cavalry, and our retreating troops struggled through these entangling masses led only by the ignorant but faithful contrabands.

The most vigorous preparations had been made at White House to save as much of the property there as possible, by placing it on board transports and floating it down the stream to Fortress Monroe. The contrabands were in great terror lest they should be abandoned to their merciless masters. They were all taken, with their wives and children, in canal boats out into the stream. Every thing which could not be removed was committed to the flames. About seven o'clock Saturday evening the rebels arrived at White House, and found the post deserted, and nothing left but smouldering ruins. "We had scarcely passed the White House," says Colonel Estvan, "when our attention was attracted by a dense column of smoke, apparently rising from the forest. Approaching cautiously in that direction, we discovered a huge burning pyramid. The Federal general had ordered every thing that could not be taken away to be piled up and burned. Property to the amount of millions of dollars was thus consigned to the flames that it might not fall into the hands of the victors. Our men rushed to the burning pile in order to save all they could from the flames. Hundreds of casks of preserved meats, coffee, sugar, rice, wine, including even Champagne and similar delicacies, with which the Federal army was amply provided, and of which we Southerners scarcely knew the names, were here piled up for destruction. But the enemy had done their work so skillfully that our poor fellows managed to get but little out of the fire. Fortunately, however, the whole place was strewed with serviceable cloth cloaks, which proved most useful to our ill-clad troops."
The route of the retreating army was directly through the heart of White Oak Swamp. Multitudes of wounded men hobbled along in the melancholy train. All the ambulances which could be found were loaded with such sufferers as it was possible to move. A large number who could not be moved were left to the tender mercies of the enemy.

The rebels, not fully comprehending the plans of General McClellan, were at this time confident of his capture, and of the destruction of his whole army. He had abandoned his intrenchments on the north side of the Chickahominy. His disordered divisions, in long extended lines, were in all the confusion of a tumultuous retreat. He was cut off from all communication with the base of his supplies at the White House. The Chickahominy, with broken bridges, was in his rear. The rebel generals, Longstreet, Magruder, and Huger, were pressing him fiercely. His escape seemed impossible.

At 10 o'clock Saturday night the last of the Union troops left Woodbury Bridge. A single company of cavalry had been left to guard the passage. As night came on, that they might deceive the rebels, they lighted camp-fires as for a vast army. The fires of the rebels gleamed brilliantly on the opposite banks. The scene presented was solemnly sublime. The night was dark, and gathering clouds threatened a tempest. The exhausted soldiers could not stop for rest. All the night long onward they dragged their weary limbs.

It was about six miles from Savage's Station to White Oak Swamp bridge. This whole distance was jammed full of wagons, horses, cannon, ambulances, pontoon-boats, and all the indescribable materiel of a great army. There were frequent halts when the current became ebb-dowered. The scene of confusion which then ensued beggars description. Twenty wagons would often be side by side. The efforts of the officers to push the line along, the shouting of the teamsters, the struggling of the horses, the occasional break-downs, presented a picture of tumult which Babel could hardly have surpassed. During the whole of the day there was but little fighting, as our movements were concealed from the knowledge of the enemy. Colonel B. S. Alexander was sent to the James River to order the gun-boats to be in position to protect the soldiers upon their arrival—to obtain guides for the different columns of the army, and to have supplies in readiness for the troops. He testifies that, while at head-quarters receiving his instructions, he was shown a printed order from General McClellan, then not issued, directing the destruction of the baggage of officers and men, and the tents, camps, equipage, and all things of that kind, appealing to the army to submit to this privation, as it would be only for a few days. He remonstrated with General McClellan against this extraordinary measure, assuring him that it would have so depressing an effect as seriously to demoralize the army, convincing the soldiers that they were retreating in hopeless defeat to save their lives. The order was not issued, and it is due to General McClellan to state that he testifies, before the same committee, that he had no recollection of having given such an order.

The sun of the Sabbath morning, June 29, rose over this scene of tumult and consternation. It ushered in one of the most glaring and sultry of summer days. The heat was all but insupportable. One hour after midnight General McClellan, with his staff and escort, left Savage's Station, and, advancing five or six miles, established his head-quarters at White Oak Swamp. General Smith was intrusted with the post of honor—the charge of the rear. He was to beat the pursuing enemy back until the wagons were at a safe distance, and was then slowly to follow them. As the apparently interminable train, through the hours of the night, filed painfully along, Generals Sumner, Heintzelman, and Keys gradually brought their forces into position to repel the foes rushing upon them from Richmond and from the Chickahominy.

Early in the morning the whole army, with all its vast artillery and baggage trains, were on the move. Soon the enemy discovered the line of the retreat and commenced a vigorous pursuit. The patriot army took the road directly through White Oak Swamp toward Charles City. On this march General Heintzelman protected the rear. The rebels made several attempts to flank him; but he baffled all their efforts, repelled all their assaults, and throughout the day the pursuit was conducted by this thorough soldier with great ability and success. Our troops had not reached more than a mile and a half beyond Savage's Station when the pursuers commenced a furious assault. We slowly retired, beating back the advancing foe by an incessant storm of shot and shell from our artillery, which made a stand at every commanding point, and pierced the dense columns of the rebels with terrible destruction. There was not a breath of air. The sun poured down fiercely upon the unsheltered heads of the troops. There was an incessant rattle of musketry and roar of artillery. As we were slowly driven along we were compelled to leave our dead and many of the severely wounded behind us. The hurry was so great and the heat so intolerable, that the troops threw away their knapsacks and their outer garments, but desperately clenching their weapons, which they would surrender only with their lives.

Many from the effect of sun-stroke dropped by the way-side, foaming at the mouth and raving in delirium. During most of this time round shot and shells from the enemy's artillery were dropping in the midst of our ranks. Occasionally, as our rear-guard made a stand, a fierce battle ensued, with the most desperate charges of infantry and cavalry. Meagher's Irish Brigade rendered itself very conspicuous by the gallantry with which it rushed, with cheers which made the welkin ring, upon the

* Report of Congressional Committee, p. 72.
swarming rebels. The Fifteenth Massachusetts also performed deeds of chivalric valor never surpassed. But it seems invidious to single out for special mention individual regiments or brigades where all ennobled themselves.

Gathering clouds in that rainy land brought the day to an early close, and a stormy night set in. The assailants had been effectually repulsed on every charge they had made, and the loud cheers of our troops announced the patriot victory; for it was indeed a victory for the rear-guard alone, of the retreating army, to beat back all the mighty hosts of rebellion which had emerged from Richmond in the pursuit. Still the National troops were ordered to press on as rapidly as possible through the darkness and the rain, and the pools of the swamp. They were compelled to leave their wounded comrades, groaning and dying on the little hillocks, to the mercilessness of the barbaric rebels.

On, on pressed the rear-guard through the Egyptian darkness of the tempest-riven night—the forest illumined by incessant flashes of lightning, and the heaviest peals of thunder breaking over their heads. All arms of the service were mixed and crowded together in the narrow road, while still a degree of order was preserved far better than could have been supposed possible. Columns of infantry, gun-carriages, squadrons of cavalry, were all commingled, while the glistening lightning flashed along the bayonets and bright bands of the muskets, in strong contrast with the dark mass surging onward like a swollen stream.

The entire capacity of the road was filled with the moving multitude, as were also the fields beside the road wherever the ground was sufficiently firm. The whole line of the retreat was marked by abandoned baggage wagons, broken-down caissons, and all the debris of a routed army. It was observed that the men spoke in low tones of voice. All loud noises were avoided as the rear-guard pressed on, hoping to get through the swamp before the dawn of morn-
ing. One of the officers on this dreadful retreat says:

"My breakfast was nothing. My dinner at four o'clock was a raw egg and a biscuit. My supper consisted of two hard crackers. My drink was the stagnant, muddy water of the swamp, scooped up with my hand."

There is a little stream called White Oak Creek, which passes through the heart of the swamp. The bridge was destroyed as soon as the troops had crossed it. Now and then, all along the lines, soldiers, utterly exhausted, would throw themselves down for a few moments' sleep, and then, terrified lest they should fall into the hands of the enemy, would spring up, and, not more than half awake, toil painfully on.

In the earliest dawn of the morning of this day, as the army torrent was surging forward in its choked and narrow channel, few knew why or where, the Rev. J. J. Marks, the devoted, heroic chaplain of the Sixty-third Pennsylvania Regiment, rode to Savage's Station to see what could be done toward removing the thousands of sick and wounded men collected at that place. At General Heintzelman's tent he found the officers met in council, and orderlies, surgeons,
commissaries, and colonels hurried backward and forward in the wildest haste. The air was full of rumors of peril and disaster. General Heintzelman, with the calmness of one accustomed to danger, was issuing his commands; and after listening to Dr. Mark's appeal in behalf of the wounded, said that nothing could be done to save them; that all the wounded must be left at Savage's Station to meet such doom as the rebels might award to them. General McClellan had ordered all the ambulances to depart empty. He deemed that five thousand wounded men in the train of the army would so retard and embarrass its movements as to render escape impossible. It was therefore deemed a stern necessity to leave the wounded in the hands of the rebels. It is sadly to be deplored that the sick could not have been all removed a few days before the retreat commenced. Nobby Dr. Marks, and his friend Mr. Brutont, resolved to remain with the sufferers to minister to their wants and to share their fate. A colonel rode into the hospital grounds and said, as he withdrew the pickets, that within half an hour the rebels would be there. Every patient who could leave his cot now endeavored to escape.

"I beheld," says Dr. Marks, "a long scattering line of the patients staggering away, some carrying their guns and supporting a companion on an arm, others tottering feebly over a staff, which they appeared to have scarcely strength to lift up. One was borne on the shoulders of two of his companions, in the hope that when he had gone a little distance he might be able to walk. One had already sat down, fainting from the exertion of a few steps. Some had risen from the first rest, staggered forward a few steps and fell in the road; but after a few moments in the open air, and stimulated by the fear of the enemy, they could walk more strongly. Never have I beheld a spectacle more touching and more sad."

An immense amount of provisions, which had been accumulated for the army, was here destroyed to prevent it from falling into the hands of the enemy. Hundreds of barrels of flour, rice, sugar, molasses, salt, and bread were piled up in immense pyramids and consigned to the flames. It was not easy to dispose suddenly of the ammunition, consisting of hundreds of barrels of powder and tons of shells. The following expeditious was adopted. The whole mass of powder and shells was piled up in a long train of cars. The engine, under full pressure of steam, was attached. There was a descending grade of about two and a half miles from the station to the Chickahominy, where the railroad bridge had been destroyed. The torch was applied to the combustibles placed in the cars and the train put in motion. The currents of air fanned the flames, and in billows of fire they wreathed around the long serpentine train, whose wheels revolved every moment with more frightful velocity. As multitudes stood upon the hills watching the rushing meteor it seemed as though a serpent of fire, lashed with demoniac tortures, had escaped from the pit and was rushing it knew not where. Suddenly there was a tremendous crash. Tons of powder and hundreds of shells were exploding. An eye-witness writes:

"Bomb after bomb sprang from the fiery mass, hissing and screaming like fiends in agony, and coursing in every direction through the forests and the clear heavens. Rarely has there been a spectacle of greater wonder and grandeur. Such was the momentum of this train that when it reached the chasm it sprang out fully forty feet; and the engine and first car leaped over the first pier in the stream, and there they hung suspended, one of the most impressive monuments of the Peninsular disasters."

It was not until three o'clock in the afternoon that General Heintzelman and his staff left the station. A very affecting scene was now witnessed as the troops bade adieu to their sick and wounded friends, whom they were compelled to leave behind—to abandon as prisoners to the rebels.

"Fathers had to drag themselves away from the couches of their sons; and after they had gone a few steps would return to look once more. Up to this time the disabled had not known that they were to be left behind; and when it became manifest, the scene could not be pictured by human language. I heard one man crying out, 'O my God! is this the reward I deserve for all the sacrifices I have made, the battles I have fought, and the agony I have endured from my wounds?' Some of the younger soldiers wept like children; others turned pale and some fainted. Poor fellows! they thought this was the last drop in the cup of bitterness, but there were many yet to be added."

There is a large open plain of several hundred acres opposite Savage's Station. Along this plain the Williamsburg Road passes, by which our troops were mainly to effect their retreat. Beyond the plain is a dark pine forest. It was here on the edge of this forest that General Sumner was stationed with 20,000 men, who were to hold in check the enemy until our troops had escaped beyond White Oak Swamp. Here this heroic band for hours awaited the approach of the trebly outnumbering foe, while regiments and divisions and trains of wagons filed by them. The fate of the army was in their hands, and they proved worthy of the trust.

"About five o'clock in the afternoon an immense cloud of dust announced the approach of the enemy. As they drew nearer, from their whole mass of artillery in front they opened a terrific fire. The national guns responded. For an hour not a musket was discharged, but the reverberating thunder of the cannon shook the hills. Then the whole majestic mass of the rebels, with their peculiar yell, not cheer, which their savage allies had apparently taught them, sprang forward upon the open plain, presenting
a crested billow of glittering bayonets which it would seem that no mortal power could stem. Every musket in the Union line was brought into deliberate aim. Not a man wavered. For a moment there was a pause until it was certain that every bullet would fulfill its mission, and then there was a flash, followed by a storm of lead, which covered the ground with the dead and the dying. At the same moment, the cheer of the patriot responded to the yell of the rebel. I can not refrain from again quoting from the graphic pen of an eye-witness:

"Beaten back by this leaden storm the enemy wavered and retreated a few steps to the railroad. But soon after troops coming up behind them pressed the front line once more into the field. Again there leaped from ten thousand guns the fiery blast, and yell answered yell. For a moment there would be a pause, a lull in the battle, to be succeeded by the instantaneous discharge of five thousand guns; and then, as if the contending hosts had been stung to frenzy, the rage of the contest was redoubled. The clash of arms was occasionally interrupted by the coming into the field of fresh regiments, cheering their companions with loud shouts."
The dullest ear could perceive the difference between the voices of our men and those of the enemy. Ours shouted in clear, ringing, and manly tones, while the enemy's sounded like the scream of the panther and the yell of the savage. At one time in the conflict there was the simultaneous discharge of two thousand muskets, as if men had fired in each other's faces. It was a moment I shall never forget; the thought of the crashing, the piercing, and the agony; the life-blood gushing out; the strong arm palsied, and the bright eye darkened forever; the many souls appearing the same instant before God—all brought to the heart overwhelming emotions as if in a moment I had lived years."

In the confusion and darkness of the smoke-enveloped field, as the shades of evening were deepening, two regiments approached each other, and each withheld its fire, anxiously uncertain whether the other were friend or foe. When they could almost touch with their muskets the patriot Colonel of the one, stepped forward and inquired, "What regiment is that?" hoping that he was in the presence of brothers. There was a moment's pause, and then the response was returned, "What regiment is yours?" "The Fifth Vermont," was the reply. "Then," exclaimed the rebel Colonel of the other, which proved to be the Eleventh Alabama, "in God's name take it—fire." Both regiments discharged their guns simultaneously into each other's bosoms when scarcely ten feet apart. What was the loss of the rebels is not known. But two hundred of the Vermonters, noble boys from their happy homes amidst the Green Mountains, were left by that fire dead or helplessly wounded upon the field. In this, which was one of the most desperate battles of the war, the rebels brought into action fifty thousand men to crush our rear-guard of twenty thousand. The patriots, under their heroic leader, were nobly the victors. They repelled and drove back their assailants. And as night parted the combatants, and the rebels gave up the strife to await the morning and the arrival of fresh troops, a shout of victory ran along our lines which resounded for miles through the solitude of the forest. General M'Clellan, who, some miles in the rear, was conducting vigorously the retreat, was, by the heroic repulse thus given to the foe, enabled to save our retreating columns and baggage-trains by conveying them through the almost impassable slough of White Oak Swamp.

The battle continued quite into the night. Its roar, as heard by the retreating army in the depths of White Oak Swamp, was majestic and awful. During this dreadful day General M'Clellan remained most of the time at his head-quarters, in the interior of White Oak Swamp, watching the passage of the almost interminable lines of the army.

"Nothing," writes the Prince de Joinville, "disturbed the serene self-possession of the General-in-Chief. He had stopped to rest in the veranda of a house. The heat was overwhelming. The mistress came to complain that the soldiers were eating her cherries. The General rose with a smile, went himself and put a stop to their pilage. But he could not prevent the shells next day from setting fire to the house of his pretty hostess."

An account of the successful achievement of the change of base must be reserved for our next number.

OVER THE MEADOW.

THERE are some days one never forgets. I doubt if I ever forget those days, so long ago, but still so fresh as if they broke but yesterday—those days spent with Donald gathering the crimson jets of samphire! Oh, but they were days of grace, and though I've jogged through many calmer ones, there's been none like them—none.

Since I had just come from believing in fairy-folks haunting the green dingles of the hill, rowing all day down the meadow stream in cherries carved from bubbles by the wandering Djin, the wind, I must needs believe in something, and so I believed in him. Alas, and that passed by as well!

I have only to open my window on a still autumn morning with just a breath off the river, and once more I am Christine Miller and twenty, and the samphire is ripening over yonder, and Donald is the gay, handsome heart again, lithe and lovely; but soon this glamour passes too, and I know well that Donald's dead these ten years, and that I am only the Widow Brown with sixty years astern.

It was just across the river we always went when my mother had said: "Christine, where is your samphire for picking, now your preserves be all made and your cowecumbers done?"

So Donald would out with his boat, and Susan and Ned Brown and I with our baskets, and away we would spin over the water in the sunshine, making merry.

I had two lovers in those days, Ned Brown and Donald; but Donald he was born to be a lover, while Ned was an awkward, staving boy, always with his hands in his breeches pockets when they weren't handling a ship's rope, for he followed the men between whales.

It was Donald who helped me ashore, but it was Ned who staid behind to anchor the little craft; if I lost my footing in the foggy spots it was Donald who came to my help with a lightsome solicitude, but all the time Ned's eyes never left me, and I knew that but for his elod-hopper ways he would rescue me first from a den of lions if need were. For all that Donald was my earliest and latest thought. "What will Donald think? Will Donald go? Will Donald come?" That was the catechism I learned alike Sunday and week-day; and, sooth to say, I hardly knew Ned lived at all save when I saw him before me!