

## FROM THE PENINSULA TO ANTIETAM.

POSTHUMOUS NOTES BY GENERAL McCLELLAN,—  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY GENERAL McCLELLAN'S LITERARY EXECUTOR.



HEADQUARTERS IN THE FIELD.

AFTER General McClellan had written the article on the Peninsula Campaign (published in *THE CENTURY* for May, 1885), he was requested to write an account of the battle of Antietam, which he promised to do at his leisure. He had kept the promise in mind, and as occasion served had sketched introductory portions of the proposed article. In the morning, after his sudden death, these manuscript pages were found on his table, with some others freshly written, possibly on the previous day or evening. There was also an unsealed note to one of the editors (in reply to one he had received), in which he said that he would at once proceed with the article and finish it.

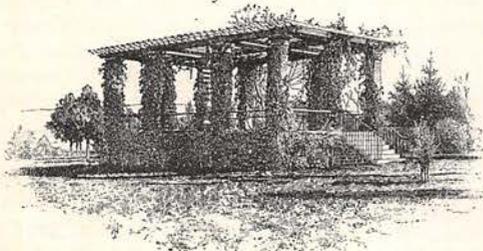
It was his custom in writing for the press to make a rapid but complete sketch, often abbreviating words and leaving blanks for matter to be copied from documents, then to rewrite the entire article for publication. It would seem that in this case he had first in

mind the consideration stated in the second paragraph of the article, and had given his attention to the history of the army, from the close of the Seven Days' battles to the advance from Washington toward South Mountain and Antietam. There was no manuscript relating to later events. He had commenced what appears to be his final copy of this first portion of the article, but had completed only about three pages of foolscap, which extend in the print below to a place indicated.

It is an interesting fact that in this final copy the paragraph commencing with the words "So long as life lasts" was apparently the last written, being on a separate page and indicated by a letter A for insertion where it stands. This tribute of admiration for the army which loved him as he loved them was among the last thoughts, if it was not the very last, which his pen committed to paper.

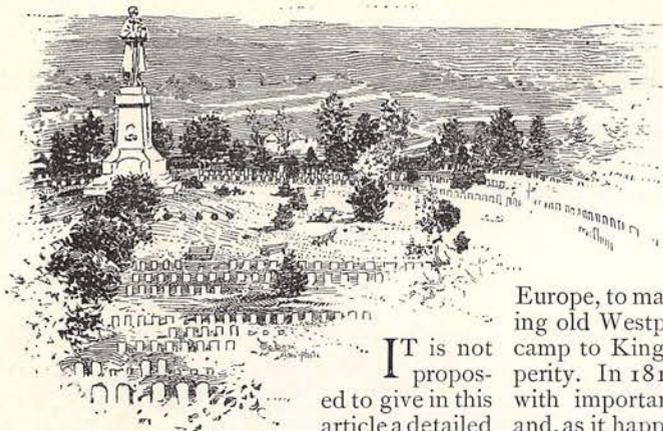
Although this introduction to the account of Antietam is but his first sketch, and not in the final shape he would have given it for publication, it is so comprehensive and complete, and contains so much that is of historical importance, his literary executor has considered it his duty to allow its publication in *THE CENTURY* in the form in which General McClellan left it, and thus as far as possible fulfill a promise made in the last hours of his life.

*William C. Prime.*



ROSTRUM IN THE NATIONAL CEMETERY AT SHARPSBURG.  
(FROM A RECENT PHOTOGRAPH.)

On Memorial Day of last year, General McClellan addressed from this rostrum a large assembly of members of the "Army of the Republic."—EDITOR.



THE NATIONAL CEMETERY AT SHARPSBURG—OVERLOOKING THE VALLEY OF THE ANTIETAM.

It is not proposed to give in this article a detailed account of the battles of South Mountain and Antietam, but simply a sketch of the general operations of the Maryland campaign of 1862 intended for general readers, especially for those whose memory does not extend back to those exciting days, and whose knowledge is derived from the meager accounts in so-called histories, too often intended to mislead and pander to party prejudices rather than to seek and record the truth.

A great battle can never be regarded as "a solitaire," a jewel to be admired or condemned for itself alone, and without reference to surrounding objects and circumstances. A battle is always one link in a long chain of events; the culmination of one series of manœuvres, and the starting-point of another series—therefore it can never be fully understood without reference to preceding and subsequent events.

Restricted as this narrative is intended to be, it is nevertheless necessary to preface it by a brief story of the antecedent circumstances.

In an article already published in *THE CENTURY* [May, 1885], I have narrated the events of the Peninsular campaign up to the time when, at the close of the Seven Days' battles, the Army of the Potomac was firmly established on its proper line of operations, the James River.

So long as life lasts the survivors of those glorious days will remember with quickened pulse the attitude of that army when it reached the goal for which it had striven with such transcendent heroism. Exhausted, depleted in numbers, bleeding at every pore, but still proud and defiant, and strong in the consciousness of a great feat of arms heroically accomplished, it stood ready to renew

the struggle with undiminished ardor whenever its commander should give the word. It was one of those magnificent episodes which dignify a nation's history, and are fit subjects for the grandest efforts of the poet and the painter.

[Many years ago it was my good fortune, when in Europe, to make the acquaintance of a charming old Westphalian Baron who was aide-de-camp to King Jerome in the days of his prosperity. In 1813 my friend was sent by his king with important dispatches to the Emperor, and, as it happened, arrived while the battle of Lutzen was in progress. He approached from the rear and for miles passed through crowds of stragglers, feeling no doubt that the battle was lost, and that he was about to witness the crushing defeat of the French. Still keeping on and on, he at last found the Emperor at the front, and to his great surprise discovered that the battle was won. Thus it very often happens in war that there are on each side, two armies in the field, one of the fighting men with the colors, the other of stragglers and marauders in the rear; the relative strength of these two armies depends upon the state of discipline and the peculiar circumstances of the time.\*]

At the close of such a series of battles and marches the returns of the killed, wounded, and missing by no means fully measure the temporary decrease of strength; there were also many thousands unfitted for duty for some days by illness, demoralization, and fatigue. The first thing to be done was to issue supplies from the vessels already sent to the James, and to allow the men some little time to rest and recover their strength after the great fatigue and nervous tension they had undergone.

In order to permit a small number to watch over the safety of the whole army, and at the same time to prepare the way for ulterior operations, so that when the army advanced again upon Richmond by either bank of the James its base of supplies might be secure with a small guard, the position was rapidly entrenched, the work being completed about the 10th of July.

Prior to the 10th of July two brigades of Shields's division, numbering about 5300 men, had joined the army, bringing its numbers for duty up to 89,549, officers and men, about the same strength as that with which it entered upon the siege of Yorktown, the reën-

\* The paragraph enclosed by brackets was in the first sketch of the article but was omitted by General McClellan in the final manuscript.—W. C. P.

forcements received in the shape of the divisions of Franklin and McCall, the brigades of Shields, and a few regiments from Fort Monroe having slightly more than made good

the losses in battle, and by disease. But among these 89,000 for duty on the 10th of July were included all the extra duty men employed as teamsters, and in the various ad-

ministrative services, and with the further deductions necessary for camp guards; guards of communications, depots and trains, flank detachments, etc., reduced the numbers actually available for offensive battle to not more than [60,000?]

A few days sufficed to give the men the necessary rest, and to renew the supplies exhausted on the march across the Peninsula; the army was once more in condition to undertake any operation justified by its numbers, and was in an excellent position to advance by either bank of the James. [End of finished draft.]

\* \* \* \* \*

It was at last upon its true line of operations, which I had been unable to adopt at an earlier day in consequence of the Secretary of War's peremptory order of the 18th of May requiring the right wing to be extended to the north of Richmond in order to establish communication with General McDowell. General McDowell was then under orders to advance from Fredericksburg, but never came, because, in spite of his earnest protest, these orders were countermanded from Washington, and he was sent upon a fruitless expedition towards the Shenandoah instead of being permitted to join me, as he could have done, at the time of the affair of Hanover Court House.

I urged in vain that the Army of the Potomac should remain on the line of the James, and that it should resume the offensive as soon as reënforced to the full extent of the means

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 and are fit subjects for the painter's eye of the past & the present.



GENERAL McCLELLAN RIDING THE LINE OF BATTLE AT ANTIETAM.  
(BY EDWIN FORBES, AFTER HIS SKETCH MADE AT THE TIME.)

The troops were Hooker's and Sedgwick's, and the time about 11 A. M. of September 17. General McClellan rode his black horse, "Daniel Webster," which, on account of the difficulty of keeping pace with him, was better known to the staff as "that devil Dan."—EDITOR.

in possession of the Government. Had the Army of the Potomac been permitted to remain on the line of the James, I would have crossed to the south bank of that river, and while engaging Lee's attention in front of Malvern, have made a rapid movement in force on Petersburg, having gained which, I would have operated against Richmond and its communications from the west, having already gained those from the south.

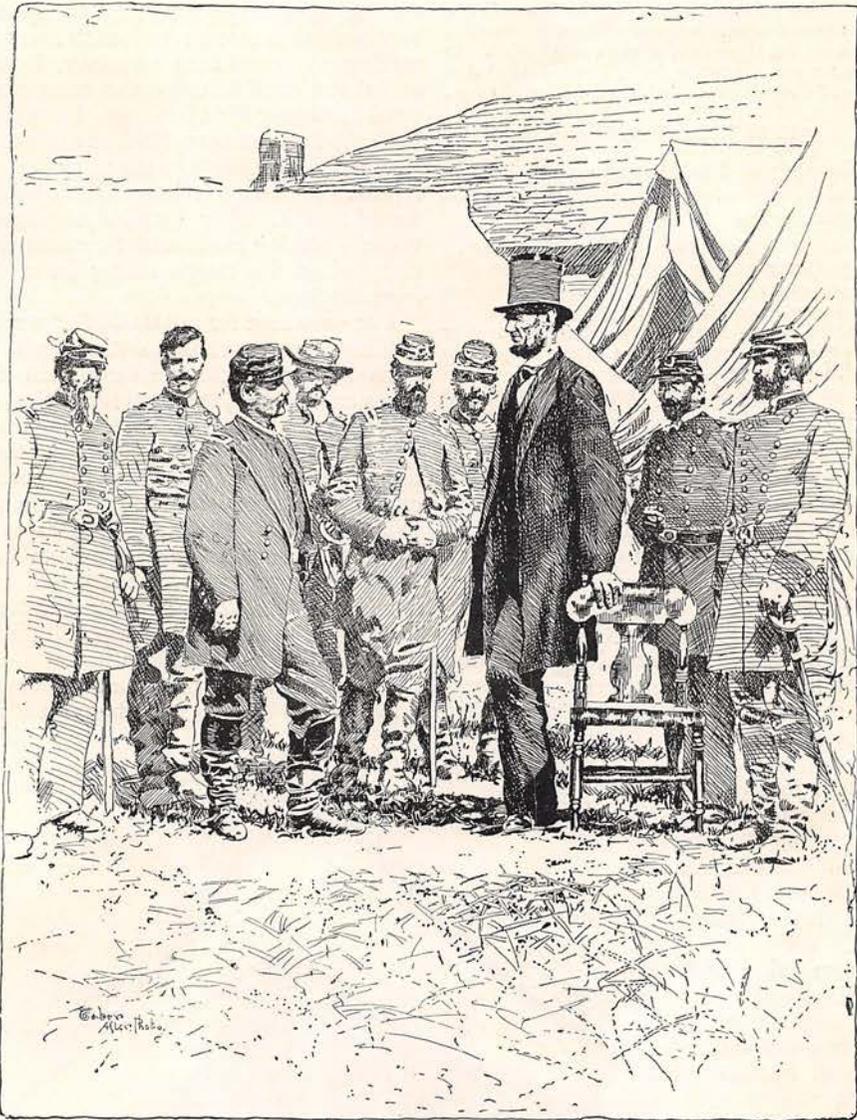
Subsequent events proved that Lee did not move northward from Richmond with his army until assured that the Army of the Potomac was actually on its way to Fort Monroe; and they also found that so long as the Army of the Potomac was on the James, Washington and Maryland would have been entirely safe under the protection of the fortifications and a comparatively small part of the troops then in that vicinity; so that Burnside's troops and a large part of the Union army of Virginia might, with entire propriety, have been sent by water to join the army under my command which—with detachments from the West—could easily have been brought up to more than one hundred thousand men disposable on the actual field of battle.

In spite of my most pressing and oft-repeated

entreaties, the order was insisted upon for the abandonment of the Peninsula line and the return of the Army of the Potomac to Washington in order to support General Pope, who was in no danger so long as the Army of the Potomac remained on the James. With a heavy heart I relinquished the position gained at the cost of so much time and blood.

As an evidence of my good faith in opposing this movement it should be mentioned that General Halleck had assured me, verbally and in writing, that I was to command all the troops in front of Washington, including those of Generals Burnside and Pope—a promise which was not carried into effect.

As the different divisions of the Army of the Potomac reached Acquia Creek and the vicinity of Washington they were removed from my command, even to my personal escort and camp guard, so that on the 30th of August, in reply to a telegram from him, I telegraphed General Halleck from Alexandria, "I have no sharp-shooters except the guard around my camp. I have sent off every man but those, and will now send them with the train as you direct. I will also send my only remaining squadron of cavalry with General Sumner. I can do no more. You now have



GENERAL MCCLELLAN AND PRESIDENT LINCOLN AT ANTIETAM. (FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.)

After the battle of Antietam, President Lincoln was impatient because Lee was not followed across the Potomac. He visited the army to see for himself if it was in no condition to pursue. General McClellan thought it necessary to wait for supplies and reinforcements. On the return of President Lincoln to Washington General Halleck telegraphed to General McClellan under date of October 6:

"The President directs that you cross the Potomac and give battle to the enemy or drive him south," etc.

every man of the Army of the Potomac who is within my reach." I had already sent off even my headquarters wagons—so far as landed—with ammunition to the front.

On the same day I telegraphed to General Halleck, "I cannot express to you, etc."

[The dispatch which General McClellan here indicates, as intending to insert when revising the manuscript, proceeds as follows:

In his volume of reports General McClellan says: "On the first day of October, his Excellency the President honored the Army of the Potomac with a visit, and remained several days, during which he went through the different encampments, reviewed the troops, and went over the battle-fields of South Mountain and Antietam. I had the opportunity during this visit to describe to him the operations of the army since the time it left Washington, and gave him my reasons for not following the enemy after he crossed the Potomac."—EDITOR.

"I cannot express to you the pain and mortification I have experienced to-day in listening to the distant sound of the firing of my men. As I can be of no further use here, I respectfully ask that if there is a possibility of the conflict being renewed to-morrow, I may be permitted to go to the scene of battle with my staff, merely to be with my own men, if nothing more; they will fight none the worse for my being with them. If it is not deemed best to intrust me with the command even of my own army, I simply ask to be permitted to share their fate on the field of battle. Please reply to this to-night.

"I have been engaged for the last few hours in doing what I can to make arrangements for the wounded. I have started out all the ambulances now landed. As I have sent my escort to the front, I would be glad to take some of Gregg's cavalry with me, if allowed to go.

"G. B. McCLELLAN, Major-General."

The dispatch was dated "Camp near Alexandria, Aug. 30, 1862, 10:30 P. M." On the following day he received this answer:

WASHINGTON, Aug. 31, 1862, 9:18 A.M.

"MAJOR-GENERAL McCLELLAN: I have just seen your telegram of 11:5 last night. The substance was stated to me when received, but I did not know that you asked for a reply immediately. I cannot answer without seeing the President, as General Pope is in command, by his orders, of the department.

"I think Couch's division should go forward as rapidly as possible, and find the battle-field.

"H. W. HALLECK, General-in-Chief."]

On the 1st of September I met General Halleck at his office in Washington, who by verbal order directed me to take charge of Washington and its defenses, but expressly prohibited me from exercising any control over the active troops under General Pope.

At this interview I informed General Halleck that from information received through one of my aides I was satisfied that affairs were not progressing favorably at the front, and urged him to go out in person to ascertain the exact state of the case. He declined doing this, but finally sent Colonel Kelton, his adjutant-general.

Next morning while at breakfast at an early hour I received a call from the President, accompanied by General Halleck.

The President informed me that Colonel Kelton had returned and represented the condition of affairs as much worse than I had stated to Halleck on the previous day; that there were 30,000 stragglers on the roads; that the army was entirely defeated and falling back to Washington in confusion. He then said that he regarded Washington as lost and asked me if I would, under the circumstances, con-

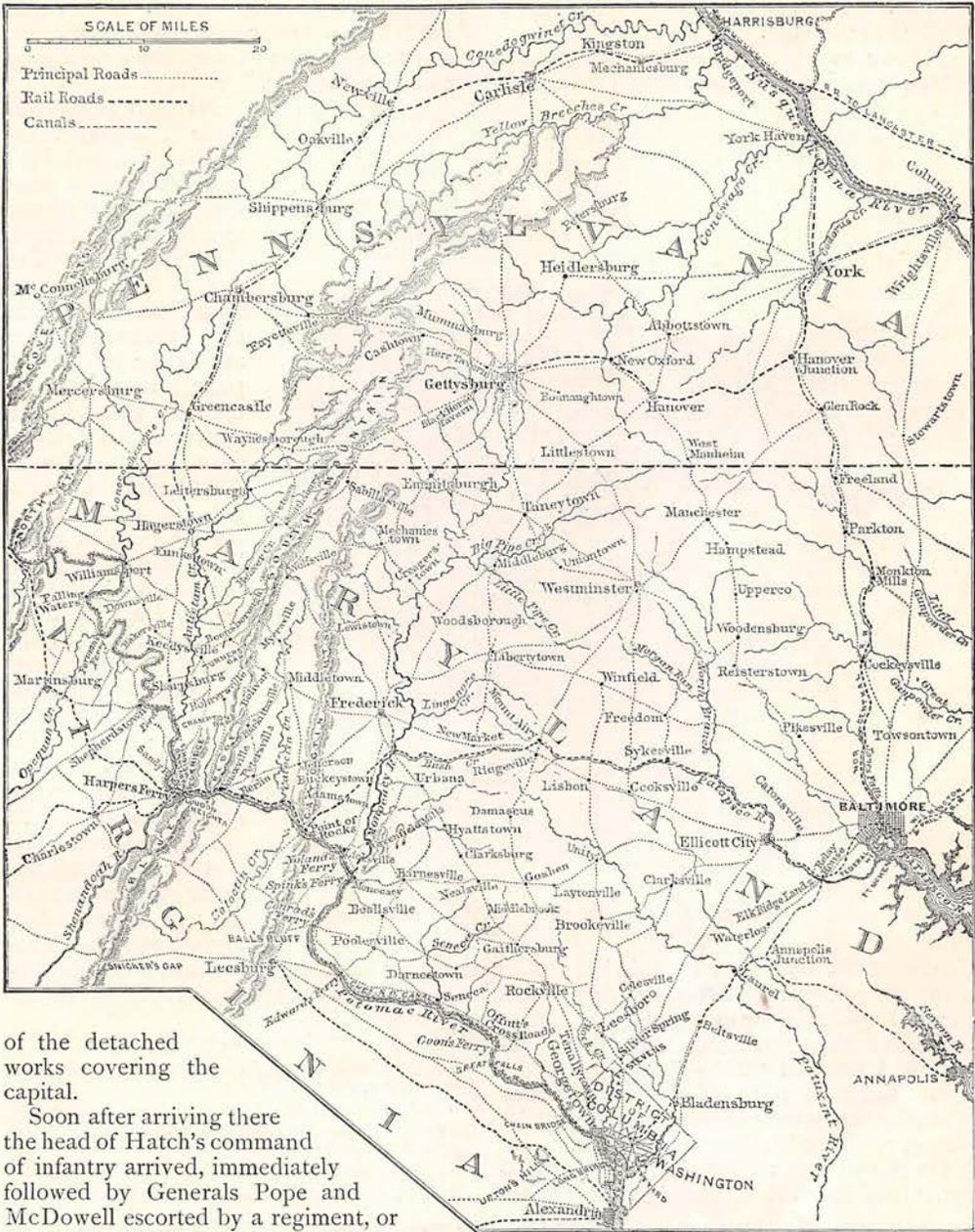
sent to accept command of all the forces. Without one moment's hesitation and without making any conditions whatever, I at once said that I would accept the command and would stake my life that I would save the city. Both the President and Halleck again asserted that it was impossible to save the city, and I repeated my firm conviction that I could and would save it. They then left, the President verbally placing me in entire command of the city and of the troops falling back upon it from the front.

I at once sent for my staff-officers and dispatched them on various duties; some to the front with orders for the disposition of such corps as they met, others to see to the prompt forwarding of ammunition and supplies to meet the retreating troops. In a very short time I had made all the requisite preparations and was about to start to the front in person to assume command as far out as possible, when a message came to me from General Halleck informing me that it was the President's order that I should not assume command until the troops had reached the immediate vicinity of the fortifications.

I therefore waited until the afternoon, when I rode out to Upton's Hill, the most advanced



PRESIDENT LINCOLN IN GENERAL McCLELLAN'S TENT. (FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.)



of the detached works covering the capital.

Soon after arriving there the head of Hatch's command of infantry arrived, immediately followed by Generals Pope and McDowell escorted by a regiment, or part of a regiment, of cavalry. I obtained what information I could from General Pope and dispatched the few remaining aides with me to meet the troops on the roads leading in on the left, with final orders to them, when quite a heavy distant artillery firing broke out in the direction of the Chantilly and Vienna road. Asking General Pope what that was, he replied it was probably an attack on Sumner, who commanded the rear-guard in that direction; in reply to an-

other question he said that he thought it probably a serious affair. He and McDowell then asked if I had any objection to their proceeding to Washington. I said that they might do so, but that I was going to the firing. They then proceeded on with their escort while with a single aide (Colonel Colburn) and three orderlies, I struck across country to

MAP OF THE MARYLAND CAMPAIGN.

intercept the column on our right by the shortest line. It was a little after dark when I reached the column.

I leave to others who were present the description of what then occurred; the frantic

sylvania by crossing the upper Potomac; I therefore moved the Second, Ninth, and Twelfth Corps to the Maryland side of the Potomac in position to meet any attack upon the city on that side.

As soon as this was done I reported the fact to General Halleck, who asked what general I had placed in command of those three corps; I replied that I had made no such detail, as I should take command in person if the enemy appeared in that direction. He then said that my command included only the defenses of Washington and did not extend to any active column that might be moved out beyond the line of works; that no decision had yet been made as to the commander of the active army. He repeated the same thing on more than one occasion before the final advance to South Mountain and Antietam took place.

I should here state that the only published order ever issued in regard to the extent of my command after my

interview with the President on the morning of the 2d, was the following:

“WAR DEPARTMENT.

“ADJUTANT-GENERAL’S OFFICE, WASHINGTON, September 2, 1862.

“Major-General McClellan will have command of the fortifications of Washington and of all the troops for the defense of the capital.”

“By order of MAJOR-GENERAL HALLECK.

“E. D. TOWNSEND, Assistant Adjutant-General.”

“The two horsemen passed on to where the column of troops was lying, standing, or sitting, as pleased each individual, and were lost in the shadowy gloom. But a few moments had elapsed, however, when Captain John D. Wilkins, of the Third Infantry (now Colonel of the Fifth), came running towards Colonel Buchanan, crying out:

“Colonel! Colonel! General McClellan is here!”

“The enlisted men caught the sound! Whoever was awake aroused his neighbor. Eyes were rubbed, and those tired fellows, as the news passed down the column, jumped to their feet, and sent up such a hurrah as the Army of the Potomac had never heard before. Shout upon shout went out into the stillness of the night; and, as it was taken up along the road and repeated by regiment, brigade, division, and corps, we could hear the roar dying away in the distance. The effect of this man’s presence upon the Army of the Potomac—in sunshine or rain, in darkness or in daylight, in victory or defeat—was ever electrical, and too wonderful to make it worth while attempting to give a reason for it.”—EDITOR.



THE PRY HOUSE, GENERAL MCCLELLAN'S HEADQUARTERS AT THE BATTLE OF ANTIETAM. (FROM A RECENT PHOTOGRAPH.)

cheers of welcome that extended for miles along the column; the breaking of ranks and the wild appeals of the men that I should then and there take them back on the line of retreat and let them snatch victory out of defeat.\* Let it suffice to say that before the day broke the troops were all in position to repulse attack, and that Washington was safe.

On the 3d it was clear that the enemy intended an invasion of Maryland and Penn-

\* Captain William H. Powell, of the Fourth Regular Infantry, described this meeting, in the *JANUARY CENTURY*, as follows:

“About four o’clock on the next afternoon, from a prominent point, we descried in the distance the dome of the Capitol. We would be there at least in time to defend it. Darkness came upon us, and still we marched. As the night wore on, we found at each halt that it was more and more difficult to arouse the men from the sleep they would fall into apparently as soon as they touched the ground. During one of these halts, while Colonel Buchanan, the brigade commander, was resting a little off the road, some distance in advance of the head of the column, it being starlight, two horsemen came down the road towards us. I thought I observed a familiar form, and turning to Colonel Buchanan, said:

“Colonel, if I did not know that General McClellan had been relieved of all command, I should say that he was one of that party,” and adding immediately, “I do really believe it is he!”

“Nonsense,” said the Colonel; “what would General McClellan be doing out in this lonely place, at this time of night, without an escort?”

A few days after this and before I went to the front, Secretary Seward came to my quarters one evening and asked my opinion of the condition of affairs at Harper's Ferry, remarking that he was not at ease on the subject. Harper's Ferry was not at that time in any sense under my control, but I told Mr. Seward that I regarded the arrangements there as exceedingly dangerous; that in my opinion the proper course was to abandon the position and unite the garrison (ten thousand men about) to the main army of operations, for the reason that its presence at Harper's Ferry would not hinder the enemy from crossing the Potomac; that if we were unsuccessful in the approaching battle, Harper's Ferry would be of no use to us and its garrison necessarily lost; that if we were successful we would immediately recover the post without any difficulty, while the addition of ten thousand men to the active army would be an important factor in insuring success. I added that if it were determined to hold the position the existing arrangements were all wrong, as it would be easy for the enemy to surround and capture the garrison, and that the garrison ought, at least, to be withdrawn to the Maryland Heights where they could resist attack until relieved.

The secretary was much impressed by what I said, and asked me to accompany him to General Halleck and repeat my statement to him. I acquiesced and we went together to General Halleck's quarters, where we found that he had retired for the night. But he received us in his bedroom, when, after a preliminary explanation by the secretary as to the interview being at his request, I said to Halleck precisely what I had stated to Mr. Seward.

Halleck received my statement with ill-concealed contempt — said that everything was all right as it was; that my views were entirely erroneous, etc., and soon bowed us out, leaving matters at Harper's Ferry precisely as they were.

On the 7th of September, in addition to the three corps already mentioned (the Second, Ninth, and Twelfth), the First and Sixth Corps, Sykes's division of the Fifth Corps, and Couch's division of the Fourth Corps, were also on the Maryland side of the river; the First and Ninth Corps at Leesboro; the Second and Twelfth in front of Rockville; the Sixth Corps at Rockville; Couch's division at Offut's Cross Roads; Sykes's division at Tenallytown.

As the time had now arrived for the army to advance, and I had received no orders to take command of it, but had been expressly told that the assignment of a commander had not been decided, I determined to solve the

question for myself, and when I moved out from Washington with my staff and personal escort I left my card, with *P. P. C.* written upon it, at the White House, War Office, and Secretary Seward's house, and went on my way.

I was afterwards accused of assuming command without authority, for nefarious purposes, and in fact, fought the battles of South Mountain and Antietam with a halter around my neck, for if the Army of the Potomac had been defeated and I had survived I would, no doubt, have been tried for assuming authority without orders and, in the state of feeling which so unjustly condemned the innocent and most meritorious General F. J. Porter, I would probably have been condemned to death. I was fully aware of the risk I ran, but the path of duty was clear and I tried to follow it. It was absolutely necessary that Lee's army should be met, and in the state of affairs I have briefly described, there could be no hesitation on my part as to doing it promptly. Very few in the Army of the Potomac doubted the favorable result of the next collision with the Confederate army, but in other quarters not a little doubt prevailed, and the desire for very rapid movements, so loudly expressed after the result was gained, did not make itself heard during the movements preceding the battles; quite the contrary was the case, as I was more than once cautioned that I was moving too rashly and exposing the capital to an attack from the Virginia side.

As is well known, the result of General Pope's operations had not been favorable, and when I finally resumed command of the troops in and around Washington they were weary, disheartened, their organization impaired, their clothing, ammunition, and supplies in a pitiable condition.

The Army of the Potomac was thoroughly exhausted and depleted by its desperate fighting and severe marches in the unhealthy regions of the Chickahominy and afterwards, during the second Bull Run campaign; its trains, administration services and supplies were disorganized or lacking in consequence of the rapidity and manner of its removal from the Peninsula, as well as from the nature of its operations during the second Bull Run campaign. In the departure from the Peninsula, trains, supplies, cavalry, and artillery were often necessarily left at Fort Monroe and Yorktown for lack of vessels, as the important point was to move the infantry divisions as rapidly as possible to the support of General Pope. The divisions of the Army of Virginia were also exhausted and weakened, and their trains and supplies disorgan-

ized and deficient by the movements in which they had been engaged.

Had General Lee remained in front of Washington it would have been the part of wisdom to hold our own army quiet until its pressing wants were fully supplied, its organization restored and its ranks filled with recruits—in brief, prepared for a campaign. But as the enemy maintained the offensive and crossed the Upper Potomac to threaten or invade Pennsylvania, it became necessary to meet him at any cost notwithstanding the condition of the troops; to put a stop to the invasion, save Baltimore and Washington, and throw him back across the Potomac. Nothing but sheer necessity justified the advance of the Army of the Potomac to South Mountain and Antietam in its then condition; and it is to the eternal honor of the brave men who composed it that under such adverse circumstances they gained those victories; for the work of supply and reorganization was continued as best we might while on the march, and after the close of the battles so much remained to be done to place the army in condition for a campaign, that the delay which ensued was absolutely unavoidable, and the army could not have entered upon a new campaign one day earlier than it did. It must then constantly be borne in mind that the purpose of advancing from Washington was simply to meet the necessities of the moment by frustrating Lee's invasion of the Northern States, and when that was accomplished, to push with the utmost rapidity the work of reorganization and supply so that a new campaign might be promptly inaugurated with the army in condition to prosecute it to a successful termination without intermission.

The advance from Washington was covered by the cavalry, under General Pleasanton, pushed as far to the front as possible, and soon in constant contact with the enemy's cavalry, with whom several well conducted and successful affairs occurred.

Partly in order to move men freely and rapidly, partly in consequence of the lack of accurate information as to the exact position and intention of Lee's army, the troops ad-

vanced by three main roads: That near the Potomac by Offut's Cross Roads and the mouth of the Seneca; that by Rockville to Frederick, and that by Brookville and Urbana to New Market. We were then in condition to act according to the development of the enemy's plans and to concentrate rapidly in any position. If Lee threatened our left flank by moving down the river road or by crossing the Potomac at any of the forks from Coon's Ferry upward, there were enough troops on the river road to hold him in check until the rest of the army could move over to support them; if Lee took up a position behind the Seneca near Frederick the whole army could be rapidly concentrated in that direction to attack him in force; if he moved upon Baltimore the entire army could rapidly be thrown in his rear and his retreat cut off; if he moved by Gettysburg or Chambersburg upon York or Carlisle we were equally in position to throw ourselves in his rear.

The first thing was to gain accurate information as to Lee's movements, and meanwhile to push the work of supply and reorganization as rapidly as possible.

General Lee and I knew each other well in the days before the war. We had served together in Mexico and commanded against each other in the Peninsula. I had the highest respect for his ability as a commander, and knew that he was not a general to be trifled with or carelessly afforded an opportunity of striking a fatal blow. Each of us naturally regarded his own army as the better, but each entertained the highest respect for the endurance, courage, and fighting qualities of the opposing army; and this feeling extended to the officers and men. It was perfectly natural under these circumstances that both of us should exercise a certain amount of caution; I in my endeavors to ascertain Lee's strength, position, and intentions before I struck the final blow; he to abstain from any extended movements of invasion, and to hold his army well in hand until he could be satisfied as to the condition of the Army of the Potomac after its second Bull Run campaign, and as to the intentions of its commander. . .

*E. M. Call*