

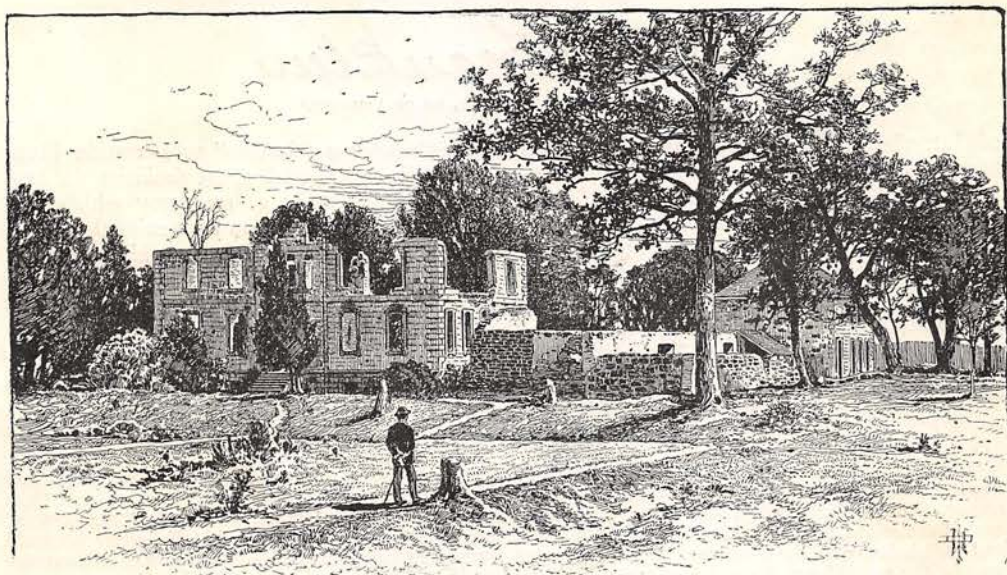


CHARGING ACROSS THE RAILROAD.

FRANKLIN'S "LEFT GRAND DIVISION."

WHEN General Burnside assumed the command of the Army of the Potomac on the 9th of November, 1862, he gave up the immense strategic advantage which McClellan had gained, and led the army to Falmouth on the Rappahannock River, opposite the city of Fredericksburg. A few days after his arrival on the Rappahannock he called a council of war. It was a conference rather than a council, for he stated that he called the generals together to make known something of his plans, and not to put any question before them for decision. The grand division

commanders, Sumner, Franklin, and Hooker, were present, and also, I think, the corps commanders. I was present as commander of the Sixth Army Corps. The entire army was massed within a few miles of Falmouth, and the first object was to cross the river in our front, and gain a fair field for a battle. From the same ground Hooker afterwards marched north-west, and by a series of fine movements placed himself in a position to offer battle at Chancellorsville on at least equal terms. The outcome of Hooker's campaign belied its beginning, but it led to the battle



RUINS OF MANSFIELD, ALSO KNOWN AS THE "BERNARD HOUSE". (FROM A WAR-TIME PHOTOGRAPH.)
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W B Franklin

(FROM A RECENT PHOTOGRAPH, BY DE LAMATER.)

of Gettysburg, which more than compensated in results for the previous failure.*

General Burnside opened the conference by stating that within a few days he proposed to cross the river to offer battle to General Lee, and that after a close study of the reports of his engineers he had chosen Skinker's Neck as the point of crossing. Skinker's Neck is a shoe-shaped bend in the Rappahannock River, about twelve miles below Fredericksburg, which offered all the necessary military features for forcing a crossing, but which, like

Butler's famous "bottle" at Bermuda Hundred, also presented great facilities for preventing the egress of an army which had effected an entrance on its peninsula. After developing to a limited extent his plans, the general said that any one present was at liberty to express his views on the subject. General Sumner, if I recollect aright, remarked only that he would do his utmost to carry out the plans of the commanding general. General Franklin said that we could doubtless effect a crossing at the designated place; he assumed

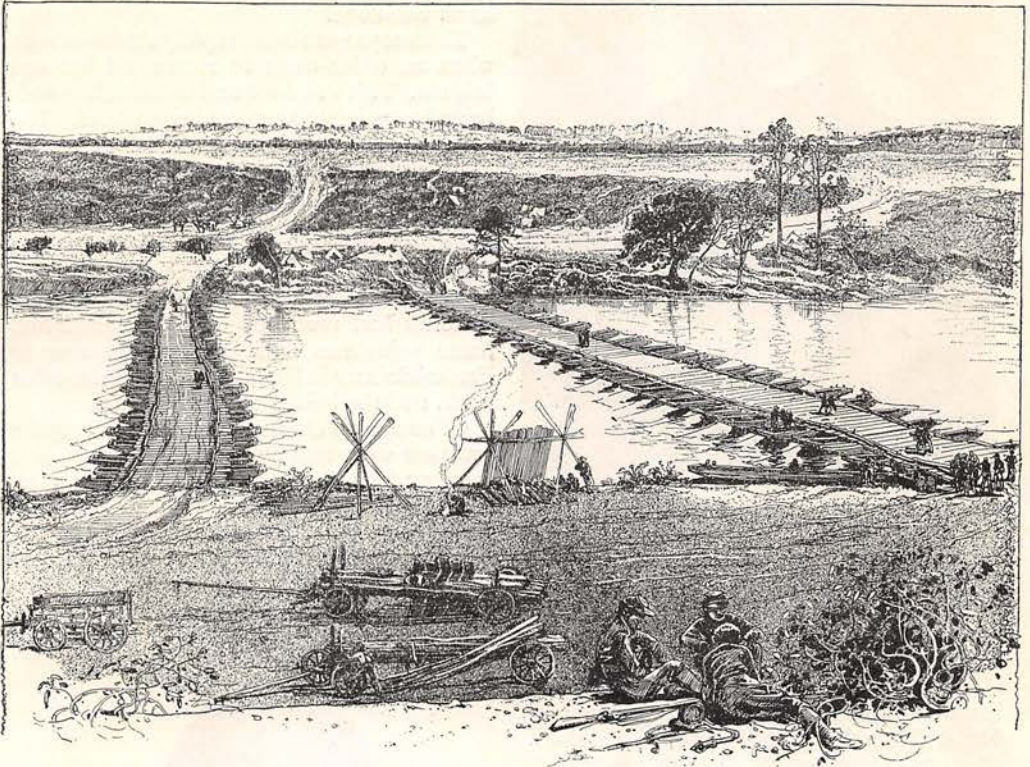
* When General Burnside determined to occupy Fredericksburg it was not held by a large force of the enemy. A body of cavalry, sent from Warrenton, could have seized the place without serious opposition, and have held it until the advance of the infantry came up. In the preliminary discussion of the move from Warrenton to Fredericksburg, the notion that a serious

battle was necessary to enable the army to get into Fredericksburg was not entertained by any one. General Sumner, whose grand division had the advance, reported that when he arrived at Falmouth he could even then have occupied Fredericksburg without opposition, had his orders justified him in crossing the river.—W. B. FRANKLIN.

that the movements, after crossing, had been carefully studied, and he stood ready to execute any orders he might receive. General Hooker then said, in substance, that it was preposterous to talk about our crossing the river in the face of Lee's army; that he would like to be in command of fifty thousand men on the other side of the river, and have an

other, but when your army is across your troubles will begin," calling his attention at the same time to the range of hills on the other side, a mile or more back from the river.

"Oh!" said Burnside, "I know where Lee's forces are, and I expect to surprise him. I expect to cross and occupy the hills before Lee can bring anything serious to meet me."



THE PONTOON BRIDGES AT FRANKLIN'S CROSSING. (FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.)

The hills occupied by Stonewall Jackson's command are seen in the distance.

enemy make the attempt. I then stated that I would guarantee the crossing of the river if my command had the advance. General Burnside closed the conference by stating that his mind was made up; that we must prepare our commands for the work before them; and that we should receive the proper orders in due time.

Three or four days after that I was at Burnside's headquarters, and he invited me to take a ride with him. Riding along on the hills near the river, he pointed out some fine positions for artillery, and said: "My reserve artillery has as yet had no chance to show its value, and I am going to make the crossing here and below, under cover of the guns of the reserve artillery."

To this I replied, "You can cross here without great difficulty, for this bank dominates the

I then said, "If you are sure of that, there is no more to be said on the subject."

On parting, General Burnside said, "I wish you to say nothing to any one about my change of plan. I will make it known at the proper time."

Though General Franklin and myself were on the most intimate terms, and occupied the same tent, I gave him no hint of the change. Two or three days before the movement General Franklin was notified of the point selected for his crossing, and I then told him the story of the change of plan.

He merely said, "Your command is the strongest, and you must take the advance."

As I remember, it was on the afternoon of the 10th of December that General Franklin received an order to have the head of his command at a designated point on the river,



BRIGADIER-GENERAL GEORGE D. BAYARD, KILLED AT FRANKLIN'S HEADQUARTERS. (FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.)

about one and a half miles below Fredericksburg, and since known as Franklin's crossing, at daylight on the morning of the 11th, where he would at once begin crossing by bridges which would be found ready.

On the morning of the 11th of December, at five o'clock, the First Corps, under Major-General John F. Reynolds, marched to take position at the bridges, and cover the crossing of the Sixth Corps over the Rappahannock. A brigade of the corps had moved at two o'clock A. M., to protect the engineer troops while throwing the bridges, which were expected to be finished by daylight. The work was for a while suspended on account of the fire of sharpshooters, covered by some fishing-huts and a thicket on the opposite shore. A couple of batteries placed on the bank opened with canister and shell, and caused the enemy to disappear, and work was resumed. When the head of the Sixth Corps reached the bank at 7:30 A. M., only three or four pontoons of each bridge had been placed in position, and the bridges were not completed till about one P. M. It was not until about four P. M. that I received orders to begin the crossing.

General Devens's brigade held the post of honor and began the movement, using both bridges. One of the commanders of

the leading regiments, more patriotic than wise, had placed his band at the head of the column, and it was ordered to begin playing as it reached the bridge. This threw the men on the bridges into "step," and for some minutes it looked as though both bridges must go down. Fortunately, through the reckless riding of a "Wild Irishman" on the staff, an order reached the colonel, and the music was stopped before any harm was done.

The troops were being rapidly thrown across, when an order came to recross all but one brigade. This was done and General Devens's brigade was left to keep the bridge-head. The cause of this was that the upper bridges opposite the town intended for the use of the right wing had not yet been finished. Sharpshooters in the brick houses near the river had interfered with the work, and the heavy guns of the reserve artillery could not make the same impression on masonry walls that our field batteries had produced on thicket and hut. Some volunteers finally crossed the river to Fredericksburg in boats and cleared the other bank, and the bridge was rapidly laid.

Of course all chance of effecting a surprise was now over, and if we persisted in crossing we must fight for the hills south of the river. There was, however, a very fine opportunity for turning what had been done into a feint, and crossing the main army elsewhere. But this was not done, and early on the morning of the 12th the Sixth Corps recommenced the passage of the river, marched to the front about



BRIGADIER-GENERAL C. FEGER JACKSON, KILLED IN MEADE'S ATTACK UPON A. P. HILL'S DIVISION. (FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.)

a mile, and formed line of battle. Its right was thrown across Deep Run, which, between the Sixth Corps and the river, was an impassable stream, separating us, until bridged, from the right wing of the army. In the right front was an open field, traversed by Deep Run from left to right, bounded by the hills and narrowing as it approached a gorge a mile or more away. In front of the left and right at a distance of perhaps half a mile was the ridge of hills occupied by the enemy.

The First Corps, under Major-General John F. Reynolds, followed the Sixth, and, forming on its left, curved back across the Richmond road and rested its left on the Rappahannock river. In its right front was the range of hills at a short distance, but which broke away, leaving an open space on the left between it and the river. Here were two corps with an impassable stream on their right, a formidable range of hills occupied by the enemy covering almost their entire front, and at their back a river with two frail bridges connecting its shores. It takes soldiers who do not believe that war is an art to be perfectly at their ease under such circumstances.

General Franklin, General Reynolds, and myself were on the most intimate social and official terms. We always discussed questions of general interest to the command, and after General Reynolds had placed his corps in position we met and looked over the situation as it then appeared to us. We unanimously agreed that there was but one thing to do, and that was to put the forty thousand men of the Left Grand Division into columns of assault on the right and left of the Richmond road, carry the ridge, and turn Lee's right flank at any cost. To do this the Sixth Corps must be relieved from its position in line, where it was covering the bridge. This could only be done after dark, but as it would take some time to get the columns formed, and as it was necessary that the men should get some rest before morning, the work of preparation must begin directly after dusk. In coming to this conclusion we had considered the fact that Lee being on the exterior had longer lines than those of our army, and that therefore he could not have force enough on his right to resist an assault by forty thousand men, and that the demonstration made on his left would prevent the withdrawal of any of his force from that flank. Besides this we had in front of Reynolds open country of sufficient width to turn the hills which terminated to the right of the Richmond road.

About five p. m. General Burnside came to the left wing, and after he had taken a hurried gallop along the lines, General Franklin asked him to go to his tent, and there

gave him the above-described plan as the only one that in our judgment offered a fair hope of success. When General Burnside left us we were all of the opinion that he agreed with us, and the last request, urgently pressed upon him, was that he should at once give the order for Birney's and Sickles's divisions of the Third Corps (Hooker's Center Grand Division) to cross the bridge and be ready to begin to relieve the Sixth Corps in the lines at dusk. Under the supposition that the orders asked for would soon be received, General Franklin gave General Reynolds and myself orders to do all the preliminary work possible; which being done, we returned to General Franklin's headquarters to await the arrival of the messenger from General Burnside. As the precious time passed by we fell to discussing the condition of affairs. Burnside had proposed to effect a surprise, and now before Lee could be attacked he would have had forty-eight hours for concentration against us and for fortifying his positions on the hills. Burnside had persisted in crossing the river after all hope of a surprise had faded away, and now we must fight our way out under great disadvantages. Had Burnside been forced into a move by the Administration? Under the circumstances would he make a desperate fight or only one to keep up appearances? Whatever was in store for us the Left Grand Division was a unit in sentiment; the men were brave and well disciplined, and we felt sure that with our forty thousand men we could force back Lee's right flank and get a better position for a general battle, if one were then necessary. Would Burnside adopt our plan, and if so, why this delay which was costing us so much valuable time? We had all known Burnside socially, long and intimately, but in his new position of grave responsibility he was to us entirely unknown.

The weary hours of that long winter night wore away in this profitless manner until about three o'clock, when General Reynolds said: "I know I have hard work ahead of me and I must get some sleep. Send for me if I am wanted." General Franklin then sent an aide to headquarters, who returned with the answer that the orders would "come presently."

The order came, I think, at 7:45 A. M., to "keep your whole command in position for a rapid movement down the old Richmond road." Two-thirds of the command (the Sixth Corps) was so placed that it could not move, without danger of losing the bridges, until relieved by other troops or Lee's right wing should be in full retreat. "And you will send out at once a division, at least, to pass below Smithfield"—a hamlet occupied by Reynolds on the previous evening—

"to seize if possible the heights near Captain Hamilton's on this side of the Massaponax, taking care to keep it well supported and its line of retreat open."

The peculiar wording of the order is positive evidence that when it was penned Burnside's mind was still filled with the fallacy of effecting a surprise. The order recites that the divisions to be sent out by Sumner and Franklin were to *seize*, or attempt to seize, certain heights. The military man is habituated to use the word *seize* when an unguarded position is to be occupied, or a point in the lines of the enemy left weak through ignorance or neglect is to be taken by a sudden rush. Both of these operations are in the nature of a military surprise. When an advantage is to be gained by hard fighting or the weight of a mass of troops, the word *carry* is instinctively used. In corroboration of this proposition, I will state that in the third interview I had with Burnside, after the battle, he said, "I should have ordered Franklin to carry the heights at Captain Hamilton's at all hazards."*

The Sixth Corps had two divisions in line and one in reserve. It remained on the defensive during the day, and owing to the exposed position suffered severely from artillery fire, while the enemy in its front were well covered by woods and rifle-pits.

In obedience to his orders Reynolds moved to the attack at 8:30 A. M., with his center division under Meade, which was to be supported by the division of Gibbon on the right, and next to the Sixth Corps. The third division, under Doubleday, was in reserve and guarding Meade's left.† Meade crossed the ravine in his front, and directed his course towards a point of woods coming down from the heights. The artillery on the crest was silenced by three batteries, and Meade pushed on, supported on his right by Gibbon, and carried, after severe fighting, the crest, capturing flags and prisoners. In the dense woods on the height, the connection with Gibbon was lost,

and Meade, after a stubborn contest, was finally driven back, Gibbon yet holding his ground. Two regiments from the Third Corps arriving were sent to Gibbon's left, but were soon overpowered, and they with Gibbon forced back. The enemy made a strong show of following up their success, but the arrival of two fresh brigades from the Third Corps checked them and drove them back to their sheltered positions. Gibbon's division, after its retreat, was relieved by Sickles's division of the Third Corps. Newton's division, the reserve of the Sixth Corps, arrived late in the afternoon and took position on the left, but was not engaged. The enemy's batteries on their extreme right, having a reverse fire upon Meade, when he advanced up the crest, had maintained their position throughout the battle, as owing to the foggy character of the day our artillery on the left bank of the Rappahannock was obliged to fire somewhat at random. The same reason prevented the fire of the enemy's batteries from being very well directed. The contest ended at nightfall, our troops having made no material permanent advance.

The military reader will see that had Meade and Gibbon had behind them when they carried the enemy's lines the twenty-five thousand men of the Sixth Corps in place of two regiments of the Third Corps, the probabilities would all have been in favor of a success.

When night fell there were no longer forty thousand men in the Left Grand Division, and we had gained no important advance. After Meade's division had been withdrawn from the front he came to General Franklin's headquarters, and on being asked some question about the fight said, "I found it quite hot enough for me," taking off his slouched hat and showing two bullet-holes between which and the top of his head there must have been little space.

During one of the rather feeble attacks made on the lines of the Sixth Corps, when Brooks took some prisoners, Meade, who was at headquarters, was expressing great un-

* Just as General Burnside was leaving, shortly after nightfall, I asked to be permitted to order General Stoneman's corps (the Third) to cross at once. He declined to give the permission, but assured me I would have the orders before midnight. Had the permission been granted, the First and Sixth Corps would have been in position for the attack by daylight, the Third Corps taking the place of the Sixth, which would have attacked with the First Corps. Had the necessary orders been received, even by midnight, the movements would have been made under cover of the darkness, and the whole night after midnight would have been required to make them. It seems that General Burnside went to bed as soon as he arrived at his headquarters, and did not write the orders until the next morning. None of my urgent messages sent to him during the night were delivered

to him, although their receipt at headquarters was acknowledged.

It will be seen that the order sent by General Burnside under which the attack was made is entirely different from that for an attack by forty thousand men, which I had a right to expect from what took place at our interview of the previous evening. And its receipt at 7:45 in the morning [it was dated 5:55 A. M.], instead of midnight, was unaccountable, except under the supposition that General Burnside, for some reason that was unknown to us on the left, disapproved of the plan to which we thought he had assented, or that no serious attack was to be made from the left.—W. B. FRANKLIN.

† It came into action shortly after Meade's advance, to repel a threatened attack from a large force of cavalry which developed between our left and the Massaponax Creek.—W. B. FRANKLIN.

easiness lest the enemy should break through and capture the bridges. General Franklin quieted him by saying that the Sixth Corps could not be driven from its position.

Mansfield, as the Bernard house was called, was a large, square, two-story mansion, of stone, that looked down on the Rappahannock river close beneath it, and was approached by an imposing drive, while behind was an open grove of magnificent trees; and in this grove was the headquarters of General Franklin. The house was evidently one of Virginia's ancestral homes, and had been in former days the center of generous hospitality. Though under artillery fire, it was used as a temporary hospital, and in it the brave Bayard died. The grove was filled with saddled horses, not for the use of fair ladies and gay cavaliers, as in the olden time, but for staff-officers and orderlies to carry orders into the fight and bring back reports from the field. The testy owner, who remained about the house during the early part of the day, and whose word had been law for so many years to all the country side, did not realize, when he demanded the immediate evacuation of his premises, that he spoke to a man who commanded forty thousand armed men, and one who on that day had little regard for proprietary rights, and did not stand much in awe of a Virginia magnate or constable.*

During this day, as in all days of battle, many sad and many humorous incidents occurred. Many of the shots fired too high for the line of battle went hurtling through the headquarters of General Franklin in the open grove of large trees. General Bayard, much endeared to us by his social qualities and his rare merits as a cavalry leader, was mortally wounded by a round shot through the thigh within ten feet of General Franklin. General Bayard and his friend Captain H. G. Gibson, commanding a battery of flying artillery, were just rising from the ground to go to luncheon when the shot came. It cut off Captain Gibson's sword-belt without injury to him, and passing on struck General Bayard. Many generals could have been better spared from the service.

A few days before the battle there had come to the Sixth Corps the first importation of bounty men. They had been placed in the front to save the veterans for heavy work, and as their wounded men were carried back through the ranks of the old soldiers, the latter would cry out, "Take good care of those men;

they have cost the Government a great deal of money." The bounty men were at first a by-word and a cause of irritation to the real volunteers. Later in the afternoon, hearing some heavy musketry firing in my front, I went to ascertain the cause, and while riding along behind a regiment lying with their faces to the ground, a round shot struck the knapsack of a soldier, and, cutting it open, sent a cloud of underclothes into the air, and high above them floated a scattered pack of cards. The soldier, who was unhurt, hearing the shouts of laughter from his comrades, turned over to see what was the matter, and when he saw the mishap which had befallen him made a feeble effort to join in the laugh.

On the morning of December 14th a council of war of the grand division commanders was ordered, and General Burnside announced his intention of leading the Ninth Corps (his old command) in an assault against the works which the Second Corps, led by such men as Couch and Hancock, had failed to carry. For some reason the project was abandoned. During the next two days the Left Grand Division remained in position, with no disturbance except that produced by an angry skirmish line with an occasional artillery engagement.

On Monday afternoon (the 15th) I received an order from General Franklin, then detained at headquarters, to withdraw the Left Grand Division after dark to the left bank of the river, and what remained of the forty thousand men of that command recrossed during the night without loss and without molestation from the enemy.

After the battle I had four interviews with Burnside. The first was on Sunday, the 14th of December. I found him alone in his tent walking up and down, apparently in great distress of mind, and turning to me he said, "Oh! those men! oh! those men!" I asked what he meant, and he said, "Those men over there!" pointing across the river where so many thousands lay dead and wounded, "I am thinking of them all the time."

I made some remark about the fate of soldiers and changed the subject. Burnside also said that he did not lead the Ninth Corps to the charge as he had said he would, because the generals on the right made such statements with reference to the demoralization of their commands that he feared to make the attempt. I told him that I would lead the Sixth Corps against the enemy and that we were not demoralized. After we had re-

* When I first arrived at the Bernard house I found Mr. Bernard holding a very lively interview with General John F. Reynolds. It seemed that Mr. Bernard protested against the use of his house and grounds by the troops because they would spoil them, and insisted

upon staying at the house to protect it. General Reynolds on such occasions was a man of few words, and I presently saw Mr. Bernard hurrying towards the pontoon bridges between two Yankee soldiers, and he was not seen again in that vicinity.—W. B. FRANKLIN.

crossed the river I saw him again, when he told me that he had it in his mind to relieve Sumner from command, place Hooker in arrest, and Franklin in command of the army.

In the third interview General Reynolds was with me, and in that he said that the men on the left did not fight well enough. To this we replied that the list of killed and wounded proved the contrary. He then said, "I did not mean that; I meant there were not muskets enough fired," adding, "I made a mistake in my order to Franklin; I should have directed him to carry the hill at Hamilton's at all hazards."

At the fourth interview he stated that the

mistake was that Franklin did not get the order early enough; that he had started it at four o'clock in the morning, but that General Hardie, to whom the order was committed, had stopped an hour and a half in camp to get breakfast. I then told him that we should have had the order before midnight in order to form such a column of attack as we had proposed.

For a few days General Burnside was dazed by the defeat and grief-stricken at the loss of life; but he soon recovered, and planned and attempted to carry out his harmless "Mud Campaign," his last, at the head of the Army of the Potomac.

William Farrar Smith.

MEMORANDA ON THE CIVIL WAR.

Why Burnside did not Renew the Attack at Fredericksburg.

NOVEMBER 22d the whole Union army had reached Falmouth, opposite Fredericksburg, and General Lee, who had proved upon more than one occasion his watchfulness and enterprise, took means to insure the arrival, about the same time, of the Army of Northern Virginia on the heights in the immediate rear of Fredericksburg.

Without the slightest delay the enemy's line of defense was marked out, nor did their labors cease until their defensive lines were made formidable, and completed by the mounting of a large number of guns. In the mean time the Army of the Potomac had drawn its abundant supply of daily rations, subjected itself to some drilling and several reviews, and its commander had carried on an animated correspondence with the powers at Washington, chiefly in relation to pontoons which had been promised, but failed to reach Falmouth until long after the arrival of both armies at the points they then occupied. Some time during the first week in December the much-looked-for pontoon train appeared, and then came the oft repeated camp rumor of a "movement over the river," which in a few days assumed a more definite form, the actual plan of attack becoming the topic of many a camp gossip. It was freely stated that the whole army was to cross the river about such a time, and that the chief attack was to be made by General Sumner's Right Grand Division upon the enemy's center immediately back of Fredericksburg, where the hills were the steepest and the fortifications the strongest. There were a few officers in the Army of the Potomac who had watched the gradual growth of the enemy's lines, and knew something of the natural formations in that direction,—a succession of steep hills which in themselves were almost as potent for defensive purposes as the average artificial fortifications. I, for one, had been over that ground several times the August before while engaged in ascertaining the best line for a grand guard for the protection of the roads leading from the back country into Fredericksburg. The three or four officers who were possessed of this

knowledge expressed themselves very strongly in opposition to the plan of attack as foreshadowed by the gossips of the camp, and the news of these adverse opinions having come to General Burnside, he sent a circular to the general officers of the Right Grand Division and colonels commanding brigades to meet him at the Phillips house the evening of December 9th. At the time appointed the large room of that mansion was filled with general officers, with here and there a colonel and a few grand division staff-officers. General Burnside made a speech in which he partially disclosed and explained his plan for the coming battle. It was received without any particular criticism or comment, but General French, who was very enthusiastic, said the battle would be won in forty-eight hours, and called for three cheers for the commander, which were given.

The meeting ended, Colonel J. H. Taylor, assistant-adjutant-general of the Right Grand Division, and myself were standing together in the hall of the house; General Burnside came along and said to me, "What do you think of it?" I answered, "If you make the attack as contemplated it will be the greatest slaughter of the war; there isn't infantry enough in our whole army to carry those heights if they are well defended." He then turned to Colonel Taylor and said, "Colonel, what do you say about it?" The response came quickly and was sufficiently definite: "I quite agree with Colonel Hawkins. The carrying out of your plan will be murder, not warfare." The commanding general was very much surprised and irritated at these answers, and made a remark about my readiness to throw cold water upon his "plans"; he repeated the assertion of General French about victory within forty-eight hours, and passed on.

The meeting dispersed, the officers who had composed it going to their respective commands and giving their final orders for the movement of the following day. Besides attending to the details of moving my command on the morrow I found time to write three letters—one to my mother, another to my wife, and a third to Charles P. Kirkland of the city of New York. In each of these defeat was distinctly and without qualification predicted. The first letter in the order