

brigade of the Twentieth Corps, ordered to report to General Davis, filled the gap just before the enemy reached our line.

The enemy fought bravely, but their line had become somewhat broken in advancing through the woods, and when they came up to our line, posted behind slight intrenchments, they received a fire which compelled them to fall back. The assaults were repeated over and over again until a late hour, each assault finding us better prepared for resistance. During the night Hazen reported to me and was placed on the right of the Fourteenth Corps. Early on the next morning Generals Baird and Geary, each with two brigades, arrived on the field. Baird was placed in front of our works and moved out beyond the advanced position held by us on the preceding day. The 20th was spent in strengthening our position and developing the line of the enemy. On the morning of the 21st the right wing arrived. This wing had marched

twenty miles over bad roads, skirmishing most of the way with the enemy. On the 21st General Johnston found Sherman's army united, and in position on three sides of him. On the other was Mill Creek. Our troops were pressed closely to the works of the enemy, and the entire day was spent in skirmishing. During the night of the 21st the enemy crossed Mill Creek and retreated towards Raleigh. I have not attempted to give such a description of the battle as its importance would justify. The plans of the enemy to surprise us and destroy our army in detail were well formed and well executed, and would have been more successful had not the men of the Fourteenth and Twentieth Corps been veterans who had passed the days when they were liable to become panic-stricken. They were soldiers who had passed through many hard-fought battles and were the equals in courage and endurance of any soldiers of this or any other country.

*H. W. Slocum.*



BENTONVILLE THE MORNING AFTER THE BATTLE—THE SMOKE IS FROM RESIN THAT WAS FIRED BY THE CONFEDERATES. FROM A SKETCH MADE AT THE TIME.

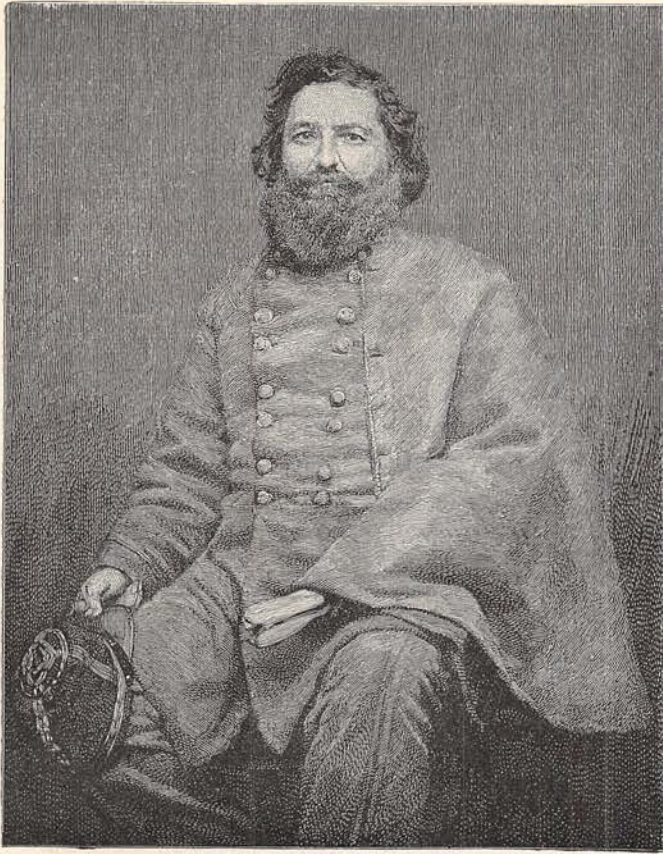
## THE BATTLE OF BENTONVILLE.

THE battle of Bentonville was in many particulars one of the most remarkable which occurred during the late Civil War, and though the report of this fight made by the commander of the Confederate forces, General Joseph E. Johnston, is clear and accurate, there may be some minor details which would be of interest to the general reader, as throwing light on this battle, which was the last important one of the war. When the disparity of the numbers engaged is taken into consideration, it must be regarded also as one of the most brilliant, and its conduct and its results added luster to the fame of the great soldier who commanded the Southern troops. In order to have a clear conception of this battle, the reader should understand the con-

dition of affairs in the South at the time it occurred and just previous to it. A few words on this point are also necessary, to give the reasons which induced General Johnston to deliver battle.

When Sherman cut loose from Atlanta, after expelling the inhabitants and burning a part of the city, it was evident to every one who had given a thought to the subject, that his objective point was a junction with General Grant's army. The Army of Tennessee, after its disastrous repulse before Franklin, was, with its shattered columns, in rear of instead of in front of Sherman's advancing forces, and thus he was allowed to make his march to Savannah a mere holiday excursion. At this latter point there was no adequate force to oppose him, and





MAJOR-GENERAL LAFAYETTE McLAWS, C. S. A., COMMANDING A DIVISION IN HARDEE'S CORPS. (FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.)

when Hardee, who commanded there, withdrew, the city fell an easy prey. The situation then was as follows: Sherman had established a new base, where communication with the sea was open to him, while Hardee's line extended from the Savannah River to James Island, beyond Charleston, a distance of 115 miles. Outside of the garrison of Charleston, he had but a handful of unorganized troops to hold this long line, and our true policy then was to abandon Charleston, to concentrate every available man in front of Sherman, and to dispute the passage of the rivers and swamps which were in his line of march, and which offered most admirable positions for an inferior force to strike a superior one. The garrison of Charleston consisted, I think, of about 16,000 well-equipped, well-drilled infantry, fully supplied with excellent artillery. Stevenson's division, Army of Tennessee, consisting of 2600 men, reached Columbia before the appearance of the enemy. In addition to the troops already mentioned, there were here Wheeler's and Butler's commands of cavalry and several unattached bodies of State troops and reserves. A rapid concentration of these

forces would have put from 25,000 to 30,000 men in front of Sherman, and an attack upon one wing of his army, when separated from the other, would either have resulted in a victory to our army or would have encumbered him with so many wounded men that he would have been forced to retreat to the sea, at Charleston. The views I have here expressed were entertained at the time spoken of, for as I happened to be in Columbia then, not on duty, however, I urged upon General Beauregard, who had assumed command about that time, the abandonment of Charleston and the concentration of his whole force at the first-named city. I pressed the same views on Governor Magrath, telling him that as important as Charleston was to us, Branchville, the junction of the railroads from Columbia, Augusta, and Charleston, was far more important. In these opinions, my recollection is that General Beauregard concurred, but why the movements suggested were not made I have never known. At all events Charleston was evacuated, and its garrison was sent to Cheraw on the Pedee River, and thence by a long march to North Carolina. When the Federal army appeared before Columbia, the only troops in and around the city were Stevenson's division, Wheeler's cavalry, and a portion of Butler's division, in all about five thousand of all arms. Practically there was no force in the city, for the troops were on picket duty from a point three miles above Columbia, to one twenty miles below. Of course no defense of the place was attempted, and it was surrendered by the mayor before the enemy entered it, with the hope that, as no resistance had been offered, it would be protected from pillage and destruction.

It is not my purpose here to speak of the fate that befell it: Sherman, in his memoirs, tells what it was in these brief and suggestive words, "The army, having totally ruined Columbia, moved on towards Winnsboro'." Stevenson's division, which was above the city, was withdrawn, taking the road to Winnsboro', and I having been assigned the night previous



to the command of the cavalry, fell back in the same direction, covering the retreat of the infantry. These details, which have taken greater space than was anticipated, are given so as to present clearly the positions, numbers, and condition of our forces at the beginning of the campaign in the Carolinas. It will be seen, from what has been said, that it would scarcely have been possible to disperse a force more effectually than was done in our case. Circumstances may have caused this, but the fact was patent. Hardee was moving towards Fayetteville in North Carolina; Beauregard was directing Stevenson's march to Charlotte; Cheat-ham, with his division from the Army of Tennessee, had come from Augusta and was moving towards the same point as Stevenson, but on the west side of the Congaree and Broad rivers, and the cavalry kept in close observation of the enemy. Hardee's men, though good soldiers, had been kept so long on garrison duty that the long marches broke down many of them, and half of his command, or perhaps more, fell out of the ranks while going to the scene of action. It was from these widely separated forces, these *disjecta membra*, that General Johnston, who was assigned to the command of this department, February 23d, had to form the army with which he fought the battle of Bentonville, and his first task was to bring together these detached bodies of troops. Hoke's fine division from the Army of Northern Virginia also joined him before the fight, and rendered gallant and efficient service. General Johnston had united all his available infantry at Smithfield, North Carolina, and Sherman, whose progress had been entirely unobstructed, except by a spirited fight made by Hardee at Averysboro', and some affairs with our cavalry, was moving east from Fayetteville towards Goldsboro'. This being the condition of affairs, General Johnston realized that unless the advance of the enemy could be checked it would be only a question of time before Sherman would effect a junction with Grant, when their united armies would overwhelm the depleted and exhausted Army of Northern Virginia. Under these circumstances, but two alternatives were presented to the Confederate general: one was to transport his infantry by rail rapidly to Virginia, where the reinforcements he could thus bring to General Lee might enable these two great soldiers to strike a decisive blow on Grant's left flank. The other was to throw his small force on the army confronting him, with the hope of crippling that army, if he could not defeat it. As we could hope for no reinforcements from Virginia, or indeed from any quarter, my judgment was that the first-named plan held out the best promise of success, and

if my memory serves me right, I think that General Johnston mentions in his "Narrative" that he suggested it. Of this, however, I am not certain, and I cannot verify my impression, as his report is not within my reach. However the case may be, that plan was not adopted, and the general determined to resort to the other. His determination was a bold, I think a wise one; for, great as was the risk involved, it offered the only hope of success left to us. The relative position of the opposing armies being then as it has been described, the Confederate cavalry bivouacking about two miles south of the little hamlet of Bentonville, where the road from Smithfield intersected that from Fayetteville to Goldsboro', I received a dispatch from General Johnston about 12 o'clock on the night of March 17th. In this letter he asked if I could give him information as to the positions of the several corps of the Federal army; what I thought of the practicability of his attacking them; if advisable in my opinion to do so; when and where an attack could be made to most advantage; and requesting me to "give him my views." He was then, as I have said, at Smithfield, about 16 miles from Bentonville, and I replied at once, telling him that the Fourteenth Corps was in my immediate front; the Twentieth Corps was on the same road, five or six miles in the rear; while the other two corps were on a road some miles to the south, which ran parallel to the one on which we were. I suggested that the point at which I was camped was an admirable one for the attack he contemplated, and that I would delay the advance of the enemy as much as possible so as to enable our troops to concentrate there.

In a few hours a reply came from General Johnston saying that he would move at once to the position indicated, and directing me to hold it if possible. In obedience to these orders, I moved out on the morning of the 18th to meet the enemy, with whom we skirmished until the afternoon, when I was pressed back by the force of numbers to the crest of a wooded hill, which overlooked a very large field that I had selected as the proper place for the battle, which was to take place as soon as our infantry reached the ground. It was vitally important that this position should be held by us during the night, so I dismounted all my men, placing them along the edge of the woods, and at great risk of losing my guns I put my artillery some distance to the right of the road, where, though exposed, it had a commanding position. I knew that if a serious attack was made on me the guns would be lost, but I determined to run this risk in the hope of checking the Federal advance.



As an illustration of the quick perception of our private soldiers, I recall an expression of one of them, as I rode off after placing the guns in position. Turning to some of his comrades he said with a laugh, "Old Hampton is playing a bluff game, and if he don't mind Sherman will call him." He evidently understood the game of war as well as that of poker! It was nearly sunset when the enemy moved on this position, and recognizing its strength, not knowing also, I suppose, what number of troops held it, they withdrew after a rather feeble demonstration against us. We were thus left in possession of the ground chosen for the fight which we expected the next day. That night General Johnston reached Bentonville, as did a part of his command, but Hardee's troops had not been able to form a junction with the rest of our forces as the distance they had to march was greater than had been anticipated. As soon as General Johnston had established his headquarters at Bentonville, I reported to him, giving him all the information in my possession as to the position of the enemy, and the character of the ground on which we had to operate. The following extracts from the report of the general will show the nature of our conference:

"Lieutenant-General Hampton gave all necessary information that night, at Bentonville. He described the ground near the road abreast of us as favorable for our purpose. The Federal camp, however, was but five or six miles from that ground, nearer, by several miles, than Hardee's bivouac, and therefore we could not hope for the advantage of attacking the head of a deep column. . . . As soon as General Hardee's troops reached Bentonville next morning, we moved by the left flank, Hoke's division leading, to the ground selected by General Hampton, and adopted from his description."

As the general had not been able to examine the ground, I ventured to suggest such disposition of our forces as I thought would be most advantageous, and my suggestions were adopted. The plan proposed was that the cavalry should move out at daylight and occupy the position held by them on the previous evening. The infantry could then be deployed, with one corps across the main road and the other two obliquely in echelon to the right of the first. As soon as these positions were occupied, I was to fall back, with my command, through the first corps, and passing to the rear of the infantry line, I was to take position on our extreme right. These movements were carried out successfully, except that Hardee had not reached his position in the center when the enemy who were following me struck Bragg's corps, which was in line of battle across the road. This absence of Hardee left a gap between Bragg and Stewart; and in order to hold this gap until the arrival of Hardee, I had two batteries of horse artil-

lery—Captains Halsey and Earle—placed in the vacant space. The former of these batteries had constituted a part of the Hampton Legion; it served with me during all the campaigns in Virginia, making an honorable and brilliant record, and it joined me at Bentonville, just in time to render efficient service in the last battle in which we fought together. All the guns of both batteries were admirably served, and their fire held the enemy in their front until Hardee reached his allotted position. In the meantime Bragg's troops had repulsed the attack made on them, and the opportune moment had arrived when the other two corps, in accordance with the plan agreed on, should have been thrown on the flank of the retreating enemy. But unfortunately there occurred one of those incidents which so often change the fate of battles, and which broke in on the plan of this fight just at the crisis of the engagement. About the time that the head of Hardee's column appeared a very heavy attack was made on Hoke's division, and Bragg, fearing that he could not maintain his ground, applied for reinforcements. General Johnston at once determined to comply with this request, and he directed Hardee to send a portion of his force to the support of Hoke. This movement was in my judgment the only mistake committed on our part during the fight, and when the general notified me of the intended change in the plans, I advised that we should adhere to the one agreed on. It would be great presumption in me to criticise any movement directed by General Johnston, in whose skill and generalship I have always entertained implicit confidence, and I should not now venture to express an opinion as to the propriety of the order given to Hardee had not the general in his report stated that this movement was a mistake. In reference to it, he uses the following language in his "Narrative":

"The enemy attacked Hoke's division vigorously, especially its left, so vigorously that General Bragg apprehended that Hoke, although slightly entrenched, would be driven from his position. He therefore applied urgently for strong reinforcements. Lieutenant-General Hardee, the head of whose column was then near, was directed most injudiciously to send his leading division, McLaws's, to the assistance of the troops assailed," etc.

General Johnston evidently became satisfied, in the progress of the fight, that this movement was "most injudicious," for it became apparent that it was unnecessary, as Hoke repulsed the attack made on him fully and handsomely. Had Hardee been in the position originally assigned him at the time Hoke struck the enemy, and could his command and Stewart's have been thrown on the flanks of the retreating Federal forces, I think that the



Fourteenth Corps would have been driven back in disorder on the Twentieth, which was moving up to its support. This, however, is but speculation, and I refer to it only as presenting an interesting problem to the military student. Had these two corps been driven back to the west with loss, while the right wing of the Federal army was moving rapidly to the east on another road, all the subsequent operations of the campaign might have been changed. But "facts are stubborn things," and we are dealing now, as then, with them. And the fact that confronted General Johnston then was that much precious time had been lost by a delay in following up promptly the success gained by his troops in their first conflict with the enemy. His orders were that Bragg should change front to the left, which movement would have aligned him with the other corps and enabled him to attack on the flank. For some reason, not known to me, these orders were not carried out promptly, or perhaps not at all, and hence delay occurred which, while hurtful to us, was of infinite value to the enemy, for time was given to him to bring up the Twentieth Corps to the support of the broken ranks of the Fourteenth. It thus happened that though the attack of the Fourteenth Corps was repulsed early in the morning, our counter-attack was delayed until quite late in the afternoon, when we encountered a force double that met in the morning, and we found them behind breastworks. The fighting that evening was close and bloody. As General Johnston has described it far better than I could do, I quote his account:

"The Confederates passed over three hundred yards of the space between the two lines in quick time and in excellent order, and the remaining distance in double-quick, without pausing to fire until their near approach had driven the enemy from the shelter of their intrenchments, in full retreat, to their second line. After firing a few rounds, the Confederates again pressed forward, and when they were near the second intrenchment, now manned by both lines of Federal troops, Lieutenant-General Hardee, after commanding the double-quick, led the charge, and with his knightly gallantry dashed over the enemy's breastworks on horseback in front of his men. Some distance in the rear there was a very thick wood of young pines into which the Federal troops were pursued, and in which they rallied and renewed the fight. But the Confederates continued to advance, driving the enemy back slowly, notwithstanding the advantage given to the party on the defensive by the thicket, which made united action by the assailants impossible. On the extreme left, however, General Bragg's troops were held in check by the Federal right, which had the aid of breastworks and the thicket of black-jack. . . . Four pieces of artillery were taken, but as we had only spare harnessed horses enough to draw off three, one was left on the field. The impossibility of concentrating the Confederate forces in time to attack the Federal left wing, while in column on the march, made complete success also impossible, from the enemy's great numerical superiority."

Night closed upon a hard-fought field and a dearly won victory, for the losses in our handful of troops had been heavy. After dark General Johnston withdrew to the position from which he had moved to the attack, and our first line with slight modifications was resumed. No disturbance occurred that night, but early on the morning of the 20th, Brigadier-General Law, whom I had placed temporarily in command of Butler's division in the unavoidable absence of that gallant and distinguished officer, who had won his way from the rank of captain to that of major-general under my command, reported that the right wing of the Federal army, which had struck the road on which we were some miles to the east, was rapidly moving down on our rear and left flank. Hoke then held our left, and General Johnston directed him to refuse his left flank so that he could meet the attack of the approaching force. I prolonged the rear line taken by Hoke by placing Butler's and Wheeler's commands on his left, and while doing this we met and checked a sharp attack. Sherman thus had his whole army united in front of us, about 12 o'clock on the 20th, and he made repeated attacks during the day, mainly on Hoke's division. In all of them he was repulsed, and many of his wounded left in front of our lines were carried to our hospitals. Our line was a very weak one, and our position was extremely perilous, for our small force was confronted, almost surrounded, by one nearly five times as large. Our flanks rested on no natural defenses, and behind us was a deep and rapid stream over which there was but one bridge, which gave the only means of withdrawal. Our left flank — far overlapped by the enemy — was held along a small stream, which flowed into Mill Creek, and this was held only by cavalry videttes stationed at long intervals apart. On the 21st there was active skirmishing on the left of our line, and my pickets reported that the enemy seemed to be moving in force to our left on the opposite side of the small stream, along which my videttes were stationed. I immediately rode down to report this fact to General Johnston, and I told him that there was no force present able to resist an attack, and that if the enemy broke through at that point which was near the bridge across the main stream our only line of retreat would be cut off. The general directed me to return to the point indicated to ascertain the exact condition of affairs, and as I was riding back I met a courier, who informed me that the enemy in force had crossed the branch, had driven back the cavalry pickets, and were then very near the main road which led to the bridge. This attack rendered our position extremely dangerous, for if the



attacking force had been able to attain possession of the road we could not have withdrawn without very heavy loss, if we could have done so at all. Just before the courier who brought me the information of the advance of the army met me, I had passed a brigade, though its numbers were not more than sufficient to constitute a regiment, moving towards our left. This was Cumming's Georgia brigade, commanded then, I think, by Colonel Henderson, and I doubt if there were more than two hundred to two hundred and fifty in the command.

Realizing the importance of prompt action, I ordered this command to move at once to the point threatened, and I also ordered up a battery which I had passed. I then sent a courier to bring up all the mounted men he could find, and in a few minutes a portion of the 8th Texas Cavalry—60 or 80 men—responded to my call. All of these troops were hurried up to meet the enemy, who were then within a few hundred yards of the road, and just as I had put them in position General Hardee arrived on the ground. Explaining the position to him and telling him of the dispositions I had made, he at once ordered a charge and our small force was hurled against the advancing enemy. The attack was so sudden and so impetuous that it carried everything before it, and the enemy retreated hastily across the branch. This attack on our position was made by Mower's division, and it was repulsed by a force which certainly did not exceed, if it reached, three hundred men. Sherman in his "Memoirs" says that he "ordered Mower back"; but if this statement is true, the order was obeyed with wonderful promptness and alacrity. General Hardee, who assumed command when he reached the field, led this charge with his usual conspicuous gallantry; and as he returned from it successful, his face bright with the light of battle, he turned to me and exclaimed: "That was Nip and Tuck, and for a time I thought Tuck had it." A sad incident marred his triumph, for his only son, a gallant boy of sixteen, who had joined the 8th Texas Cavalry two hours before, fell in the charge led by his father. This affair practically ended the battle of Bentonville for that night. General Johnston withdrew his command safely across Mill Creek, where he camped two miles beyond the bridge. On the morning of the 22d there was a sharp skirmish at the bridge between some of Wheeler's cavalry and the advance-guard of the enemy, who tried to force a passage, but who were handsomely repulsed with some loss. I have not specified the services of the cavalry during the operations described, but they were important and were gallantly performed. The commands of Butler and

Wheeler numbered, I think, about three thousand men, and after the engagement became general nearly all of this force fought alongside of the infantry in their improvised breastworks. When Sherman moved up on our left flank, they checked his advance until our main line could be refused on the left wing, and in Mower's subsequent repulse they bore an important part, for, in addition to the gallant charge of the 8th Texas made in conjunction with the infantry, other portions of my command struck his flank as he was retreating, and contributed largely to our success. As, however, I am not attempting to write a report of this battle, but simply to give a brief sketch of its main incidents, I have not alluded to the conduct of any of the troops engaged. I proposed merely to give my reminiscences and impressions of an engagement which is memorable as the last general battle of the Civil War, and which, in my judgment, was one of the most extraordinary. Let me give my reasons briefly for this opinion. The infantry forces of General Johnston amounted to about 14,100 men, and they were composed of three separate commands which had never acted together. These were Hardee's troops, brought from Savannah and Charleston; Stewart's, from the Army of Tennessee; and Hoke's division of veterans, many of whom had served in the campaigns of Virginia. Bragg, by reason of his rank, was in command of this latter force, but it was really Hoke's division, and he directed the fighting. These troops, concentrated only recently for the first time, were stationed at and near Smithfield, eighteen miles from the field where the battle was fought, and it was from these points that General Johnston moved them, to strike a veteran army numbering about 60,000 men. This latter army had marched from Atlanta to Savannah without meeting any force to dispute its passage, and from the latter city to Bentonville unobstructed save by the useless and costly affair at Averysboro', where Hardee made a gallant stand, though at a heavy loss. No bolder movement was conceived during the war than this of General Johnston, when he threw his handful of men on the overwhelming force in front of him, and no more gallant defense was ever made than his, when he confronted and baffled this force, holding a weak line for three days against nearly five times his number. For the last two days of this fight he only held his position to secure the removal of his wounded, and when he had accomplished that he withdrew leisurely, moving in his first march only about four miles. All the Federal wounded who fell into his hands were cared for in his field-hospitals, when all of his, who could not be removed, were left. Of course General John-



ston's only object in making this fight was to cripple the enemy, and to impede his advance. And I think that if his original plan of battle could have been carried out, and if his orders had been executed promptly, he would have inflicted a very heavy, if not an irretrievable, disaster on the Fourteenth and the Twentieth corps. These two corps were opposed to him in the first day's fight, and in that of the last two days he was confronted by the whole of Sherman's army. It must be remembered, too, that General Schofield was in supporting distance of Sherman with 26,000 men. Few soldiers would have adopted the bold measure resorted to by General Johnston, and none could have carried it out more skillfully nor more successfully than he did. I believed during that fight, and my opinion has never changed, that if he could have had his plans executed promptly he would have gained one of the most brilliant victories of the war, and even under all the difficulties that confronted him he achieved a wonderful success. In this connection I may recall a conversation I had with the distinguished soldier who commanded the left wing of Sherman's army, General Slocum. We met in New York in 1868, and in speaking of this battle I asked him what would have been the result in his opin-

ion had General Johnston been able to follow up his first success. His reply was in substance, for I cannot quote his exact language, that the movement might have resulted in great disaster to his command, for he had been able to get up the Twentieth Corps only in time to meet the attack made on him in the afternoon.

The unhappy war which arrayed the two sections of our country in hostile ranks is ended; the wounds left by that conflict are healing; the animosities engendered by it are dying out; the active participants in that great struggle are passing from the stage, and nothing is left to the survivors but the memory of the heroic deeds performed. It will be the task, as it will be the duty, of the future historian to sift out the truth of this great war and to put it on record. Any contribution to the history of that war cannot be without some value; and mine, brief and imperfect as I feel it to be, is offered as a small addition to the fund of knowledge which the historian will seek to acquire. All my opinions, all my conclusions, about the battle of Bentonville may be erroneous, but I have tried to narrate the facts connected with it as they struck me then and as my subsequent reflections have confirmed them.

*Wade Hampton.*

### THE WILD RIDE.

*I hear in my heart, I hear in its ominous pulses,  
All day, the commotion of sinewy, mane-tossing horses;  
All night, from their cells, the importunate tramping and neighing!*

Cowards and laggards fall back; but alert to the saddle,  
Straight, grim, and abreast, vault the weather-worn, galloping legion,  
With a stirrup-cup each to the one gracious woman that loves him.

The road is thro' dolor and dread, over crags and morasses;  
There are shapes by the way, there are things that appall or entice us:  
What odds? We are knights; and our souls are but bent on the riding.

*I hear in my heart, I hear in its ominous pulses,  
All day, the commotion of sinewy, mane-tossing horses;  
All night, from their cells, the importunate tramping and neighing!*

We spur to a land of no name, out-racing the storm-wind;  
We leap to the infinite dark, like the sparks from the anvil:  
Thou leadest, O God! All's well with thy troopers that follow.

*Louise Imogen Guiney.*