



# THE CRUTCH.

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## THE CRUTCH,

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For the Crutch.

### Battle Vignettes.—In the Wilderness.

It was the second day in the Wilderness. All the preceding day we, of Burnside's Corps, had listened to the roar of the musketry, mingled with an occasional throb of the artillery, but had not shared the danger or the glory; yet we all felt that the morrow was to be the "battle-day."

Long before daylight our men rose up where they had lain in battle-line, and like an army of dark spectres, glided silently through the dim shadows of the woods.— Having reached the plank road, we pushed out rapidly toward the "Old Wilderness Farm." The road was literally covered with the "impedimenta" of a vast army, just from winter-quarters, and now lightening their loads for action. Blankets, overcoats, clothing of all kinds, knapsacks, everything that could impede most efficient action, carpeted the road for miles. It was the ever memorable 6th of May. As we hurry along, while the duskiess of night is verging to the grey of dawn, we pass vast hospitals, where hundreds, yes, thousands, of the wounded are ranged in long lines, like immense cabinets of human suffering.

And who are these, still wrapped in their blankets, who lie in these long ranks, and slumber so profoundly while the tide of war is surging all around them? No muskets are by their sides; their accoutrements are laid by; no banners flutter over them. These are the heroes who yesterday charged through the gates of Life into the dim regions beyond. They sleep well, while the long procession of ambulances continues to roll by, with their bleeding, mangled load.

The East is beginning to flush with the coming day, as we file along the banks of Wilderness Run.

Flags, inscribed with many a glorious field, are flung to the breeze, and the ringing rammers, as they drive home the messengers of death, tell us of work at hand. Far away to the left, and near on the right, the storm of battle breaks.

The artillery is heard at unfrequent intervals, but the musketry thunders and crashes and rolls, in massive volumes of sound.

Longstreet has hurled his splendid corps of veterans upon our left, while on the right Ewell is thundering upon the lines of Sedgewick and Warren, and in the centre Burnside and Hill maintain the fearful contest.

It was a battle of Giants. The two best armies upon the continent had engaged in a life and death struggle. Fighting in the Wilderness, is fighting with the eyes blinded and the right hand bound. Thick forests, intersected with difficult ravines, dense thickets, almost impervious to battle-lines, and impenetrable undergrowth of pine and cedar rendered it well nigh impossible to determine the position of the enemy, to manoeuvre troops, or to use artillery, which is the right arm of the service.

There is, there can be no grand, general engagement here, but there are many minor battles.

Standing on the heights near the "Old Wilderness Farm," you look out over that green sea of fresh foliage, beneath which the destiny of the Great Republic is solving.

Here and there, along the line, the battle breaks out with redoubled fury, but a terrific crackling roar, and, stretching away in the distance, a dim milky line of smoke rising just above the tops of the trees, is all that tells of the carnival of death that rages among those dim forest aisles. Under that canopy of green leaves and sulphurous smoke is enacting the greatest tragedy of modern times.

I will not attempt to paint the battle of the Wilderness. No man can paint it. It was a grand *melange* of battles and skirmishes, of attacks and repulses, of charges and counter-charges, of victories and defeats.

But out of all this confusion, we may seize a few "miniatures of war," or "Battle Vignettes" we may call them, which will afford some idea of the sights of the battle field.

It is past mid-day, and since the earliest dawn, the battle has raged with almost unintermitted fury. Back and forth through the mazes of the Wilderness surge and sway the opposing lines of battle, until the earth is covered with a sad mosaic of blue and grey.

The NINTH CORPS had been thrown in between the left and centre, where Longstreet and Hill were pressing forward for the purpose of cutting our line. Potter's division charged with impetuosity, and after forcing the enemy steadily back for a mile, they were in turn struck on front and flank, and pressed back over most of the ground which they had gained. Hartrauff's Brigade of Wilcox's Division is thrown forward to stay the reluctant wave.

With irresistible *elan* they spring forward, and again the grey masses of the enemy are borne back, back, until our brave boys are exhausted with their very success. While their ranks are still broken and scattered with the rapidity of their pursuit, they are again struck with fresh masses of the enemy, and for the second time the earth is strewn with our dead.

It was during this temporary repulse, that the Rebels performed one of those *chivourous* and heroic deeds for which they have become famous.

Col. Frank Graves, 8th Michigan Infantry, overcome with the heat which was intense, and the fatigue of the charge, being ill at the time, fell into the hands of the enemy. They ordered him to go to the rear, and when he told them that he could not, they deliberately blew his brains out. Another instance of chivalry was displayed in the treatment of the body of the gallant Col. Griswold of one of the Mass. Regiments, I think the 56th. When, the next day, we recovered the ground on which he fell, the body was found stripped of all valuables, the hat, boots and pants; the shoulder straps and buttons cut from his coat, and the body itself treated with the grossest disrespect. Back, in confusion, came Hartrauff's Brigade, and in the tangled thickets of the Wilderness the formation of some of the regiments was almost entirely destroyed. Regiments are reduced to companies, companies to squads.

The woods are filled with stragglers and wounded.— Long lines of prisoners are hurrying to the rear, with a few guards; the guards themselves in many instances wounded; in some cases the uninjured Rebel prisoners assisting their wounded captors.

Christ's Brigade is hurried to the support of Hartrauff. Forward, almost at the double quick, we press, through immense crowds of the wounded, with heads in handkerchiefs, arms in slings, or hobbling along, supported with their muskets. The more severely wounded are stretched upon the ground, pale, bleeding and smoke-begrimmed, but stifling their groans between their close compressed lips. Through this bloody vestibule, we are ushered upon the battle field. Our brave boys, after falling back nearly to their starting point, had turned and repulsed the confused lines of the enemy, and are now standing grimly at bay, unable to advance, and determined to die there, rather than yield another foot.

Around each stand of regimental colors, a handfull of devoted heroes stand, answering the fiendish yells of the Rebels with sturdy cheers of defiance. One regiment seems to be quite disorganized, and nothing but the color-guard remains around the flag. Presently a few officers come up. They plant their color lances in the ground, and with heads uncovered, faces smeared with powder, clothes torn with bullets, and in some instances,

themselves wounded, they shouted their *battle-cry*, "RALLY ROUND THE FLAG BOYS," and as they came to the chorus

"The Union forever! Hurrah, boys, hurrah!  
Down with the traitor, up with the star!"

a hundred voices caught up the refrain, and rolled it out through the forest aisles to the rebel lines, to be greeted with their usual unearthly yell.

But it had the desired effect, and the regiment rallied to their colors, and took its place in line. To us who were spectators, there seemed, perhaps, a little of stage effect in the scene, but it left a deep impression, and none could deny that there was something beautiful and heroic in the scene. A few minutes later, and the charge was ordered, and the line swept forward. For the third time that afternoon the rebel legions were forced back, and over ground covered with commingled grey and blue, we pressed, across a ravine, up an opposite hill, and to the crest of a second ravine, a good, defensive position which we had been anxious to secure. Darkness was now upon us, and gradually the rattle of musketry subsided, and there was silence, except the groans of a few of the rebel wounded. Pickets were posted, and the troops ordered to sleep upon their arms.

Face to face, and separated by only a few rods of ground, the hostile lines rested from their work of mutual destruction, fully expecting to renew it at the coming dawn. Moving the lifeless forms of their fallen comrades a few feet to the rear, and covering them with blankets, the men sunk, weary, upon the ground, and soon it was impossible to distinguish between the dead and the sleeping, except by the deep heavy breathing of the latter.

Wrapped in my overcoat, I reclined at the foot of a tree, but not to sleep. A few yards from me lay the Adjutant of the 9th Ala., seriously, and probably mortally wounded. His cries of anguish were truly heart rending. He was a rebel, but human; and our compassionate surgeon administered to him the few grains of morphine which he had reserved for our own suffering braves. He believed that the hour of his departure was close at hand, but said he did not so much dread to die, as to live to see the battle renewed in the morning. It was about midnight when, attracted by his cries, ever repeated, of "O! my God—O! my God," a few rough, warm hearted Northmen gathered around him. He said that he had once been a Christian, but he had wandered in forbidden paths. He besought some one to pray with him. Our warm and gentle hearted Surgeon knelt by his side, and others bent reverentially around, and there in the solemn hush of midnight, there in the very presence of our foes, the earnest, tender, pleading voice of prayer went up to the great All-Father in behalf of him our enemy, now enemy no longer. Never did this unnatural slaughter seem so horrible, never did this cursed Rebellion seem so groundless and so devilish, as by the revelation of that midnight prayer.

The morning broke resplendent, to usher in the third day of battle; but these "vignettes have already far exceeded their proper limits.

The Battle of the Wilderness was over. Its flowers blush with a blood-red hue. But humanity moves steadily and irresistibly forward, and the consummation of its great hopes is nearer now than on that bloody day.

Far southward have flashed our banners,  
And southward have boomed our guns,  
And Freedom's proud march grows grander  
With the cycles of the suns.

B. M. C.

Officers' Hosp'tl, Middle Dep't, Annapolis, Md. June '64.

AN HONEST CONFESSION.—A New York correspondent of a western paper thus graphically describes the condition of the Democratic party: "The great struggle is over. We have met the enemy, and we are theirs. The Democratic planet has sustained a partial eclipse, and the indications are, that it will not shine out again with its former brilliancy very soon. We are gone in, stove up, smashed, played out, used up, catawampused, in fact—whipped. Like old Mother Earth, we are flattened at the poles.

"Bob, did you go to the mines?" "Yes."  
"What did you dig?" "I dug home as soon as possible."