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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ARMY OF THE CUMBERLAND AND THE BATTLE OF STONE'S RIVER ***

Military Order of the Loyal Legion

of the

United States.



COMMANDERY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



WAR PAPERS.

68

Army of the Cumberland and the Battle of Stone's River.

PREPARED BY COMPANION
LIEUTENANT-COLONEL GILBERT C. KNIFFIN,
U. S. VOLUNTEERS,

AND READ AT THE STATED MEETING OF APRIL 3, 1907.

Army of the Cumberland and the Battle of Stone River.

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The Army of the Ohio, after crowding into the space of six weeks more hard marching and fighting than fell to the lot of any other army in the United States during the summer of 1862, was, on the last of October, encamped in the vicinity of Bowling Green, Kentucky. General Bragg and Kirby Smith, turning Buell's left flank, had invaded Kentucky, gained the rear of Buell, threatened his base at Louisville, and but for the *vis inertia* which always seemed to seize upon the Confederates when in sight of complete victory, would have

captured Louisville. The battle of Perryville resulting in the hasty exit of the combined armies of Bragg and Smith through Cumberland Gap into East Tennessee, the deliberate sweep of Buell's columns in their rear, the halt at Crab Orchard, and the return march towards Nashville are part of the events of an earlier chapter in the history of the rebellion. The occupation of East Tennessee by the Union Army had from the commencement of hostilities been an object dear to the great heart of President Lincoln. He had hoped for its accomplishment under General Sherman. It had been included in the instructions to General Buell, but eighteen months had passed and the Confederate flag still waved in triumph from the spire of the court-house at Knoxville. The retreat of the Confederate Army into East Tennessee in what was reported as a routed and disorganized condition had seemed like a favorable opportunity to carry out the long-cherished design of the Government. The movement of large armies across the country upon a map in the War Office, although apparently practicable, bore so little relation to actual campaigning as to have already caused the decapitation of more than one general.

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The positive refusal of General Buell to march 60,000 men into a sterile and hostile country across a range of mountains in pursuit of an army of equal strength with his own, when by simply turning southward he could meet it around the western spur of the same range, although it has since been upheld by every military authority, caused his prompt removal from command of the army he had organized and led to victory. The army had been slow to believe in the incapacity of General Buell, and had recognized the wisdom of his change of front from Cumberland Gap towards Nashville, but there were causes for dissatisfaction, which, in the absence of knowledge as to the difficulties under which he labored were attributed to him. A full knowledge of all the circumstances would have transferred them to the War Department. Major-General William S. Rosecrans, the newly-appointed commander of the Army of the Cumberland, graduated at West Point July 1, 1842, as brevet second lieutenant corps of engineers. He resigned from the army April 1, 1854, and entered civil life at Cincinnati as a civil engineer and architect. His energy and capability for large undertakings, coupled with an inherent capacity for command, caused him to be selected as superintendent of a canal coal company in Virginia and president of the Coal River Navigation Company.

The discovery of coal oil at this period at once attracted his attention, and he had embarked in its manufacture when the tocsin of war called him into the field. His first duty was as volunteer aid to General McClellan, where his military experience rendered him very efficient in the organization of troops. He became commander of Camp Chase, colonel on the staff, chief engineer of the State of Ohio, and colonel Twenty-third Ohio Volunteer Infantry, commanded later by Rutherford B. Hayes and Stanley Matthews, and was appointed brigadier-general U. S. A., May 16, 1861. After conducting the campaigns in West Virginia to a successful issue he was ordered South and assigned to command of a division in the Army of the Mississippi under General Pope. He participated creditably in the siege of Corinth, and after its evacuation, and the transfer of General Pope to the eastern army assumed command of the Army of the Mississippi and District of Corinth. His heroic defense of that post and pursuit of Van Dorn's defeated army following closely upon his military record in West Virginia again attracted the attention of the President and pointed him out as eminently fitted to succeed General Buell. General Rosecrans ordered to proceed to Cincinnati did not specify the command to which he was to be assigned. His commission as major-general, dated September 16th, was of much later date than the commissions of Buell, Thomas, McCook, and Crittenden. General Thomas ranked him five months—McCook and Crittenden two months. On opening his orders at Cincinnati he found an autograph letter from General Halleck directing him to proceed to Louisville and relieve General Buell in command of the Army of the Ohio. The usual method has always been to issue simultaneous orders to both officers, thus affording time to the officer to be relieved in which to arrange the details of his office, but Halleck was a law unto himself, and in relieving an army officer usually did it in a way to render it equivalent to dismissal from the service. Rosecrans afterward referred to his visit to Buell's headquarters as more like that of a constable bearing a writ for the ejection of a tenant than as a general on his way to relieve a brother officer in command of an army. The difficulty of rank was bridged over by antedating Rosecrans' commission to March 16th. In a subsequent interview with General Thomas, when that splendid soldier expressed the pleasure it would give him to serve under a general who had given such satisfactory evidence of fitness to command, but felt doubts as to his right to do so on account of the disparity of their rank, General Rosecrans frankly revealed the means by which his commission had been made to date from the period of his operations in Western Virginia, and that as it now stood, General Thomas need have no fears of compromising his dignity as a United States officer. The explanation was entirely satisfactory, and no question of the superior rank of the commanding general was ever raised. After a rest and visit to his family of only sixty hours, General Rosecrans proceeded to Louisville, and assumed command of the army on the 28th of October, and on the 30th joined it at Bowling Green.

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Here the first interview took place between the General and his corps commanders. Major-General George H. Thomas, strong, grave, benignant, majestic in deportment, had now been with the army a year; revered by the entire army, loved by his old division, he was a man to be trusted. Major-General Thomas L. Crittenden, a son of Senator Crittenden, of Kentucky, bold, impetuous, and of knightly grace of manner, possessed of that cheerful courage which finds its best expression on the battle field, the idol of his old division, whose gallant conduct

at Shiloh had won for its brave commander promotion to the rank of major-general. Major-General Alexander McD. McCook, the antipodes of Thomas, of never-failing good humor and undoubted courage, apt to neglect proper precautions for the safety of his command, but ever ready to assume all the responsibility of failure, over-confident, generous, yielding in his disposition, yet enjoying the confidence of the men whose heroism at Shiloh had won the eulogies of Sherman, added a second star upon his broad shoulders, and saved him from reproach after the repulse upon the field at Perryville. In physique the three corps commanders were as unlike as in personal character. Thomas had a massive, full-rounded, erect and powerful figure, six feet in stature. His features heavy but well carved, with a strong, combative nose, his upper lip and square jaws and chin covered with a growth of sandy beard slightly silvered, bushy brows set like a canopy over clear blue eyes, a broad, white forehead, and curly golden hair in luxuriant profusion, covering a large, well-formed head. Out of fifty-four years of life he had worn the uniform of a United States officer twenty-two years, and in all that time he had borne himself as an officer and a gentleman. Altogether a soldier, simple and unaffected, honest, truthful, patient, obedient to orders and requiring obedience, he never swerved an iota from the path of duty; acting upon well-matured opinions, he was a friend to be loved and an enemy to be feared.

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Crittenden was tall, slender, and straight as an arrow. His clean-cut features were handsomely modeled, his eyes dark and full of expression, were full of mirth when there was no cause for anger—then they shone with a dangerous light—a thin black beard worn full and pointed at the end, long flowing locks of raven hair falling nearly to his shoulders, beneath a black felt hat turned up at the sides, booted and spurred, with sword dangling at his side, and mounted upon his blooded horse, he was indeed a knight “without fear and without reproach.” A long experience in the diplomatic service and in refined society had imparted a high degree of grace and polish of manner, which united to fair intellectual attainments and a magnetic smile which greeted all, from the simplest private soldier to the highest officer in his command, won the admiration and boundless affection of all who knew him.

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McCook, low in stature, was inclined to be fleshy, a full face innocent of beard, with the exception of a slight mustache, a broad low forehead, regular features easily wrought into a smile, light hair and a well-shaped head gave him a boyish appearance. Closer observation revealed the presence of more character. There was in the steadiness of gaze, the massive jaws, and the respectful demeanor of his subordinate officers, reason to believe that the youthful major-general had fairly won the twin stars that shone upon his shoulder. He had graduated from West Point with the brevet rank of second lieutenant, had served in several campaigns against the Indians, been instructor in infantry tactics at West Point, where the breaking out of the war found him at thirty years of age. Ordered to Columbus, Ohio, as mustering and disbursing officer, he was appointed colonel of the First Ohio Infantry, which he led in the first battle of Bull Run, receiving commendation where so many failed to deserve it. Reward came in the form of a commission as brigadier-general, with orders to report for duty to General Buell. The heroic conduct of his division at Shiloh added another star, and, but for the censure of General Buell for bringing on the battle of Perryville without orders, there was no reason why he should not be entrusted with the command to which his rank entitled him.

Notwithstanding General Rosecrans was a stranger to the army, to the command of which he had been assigned, his name had long been familiar to both officers and men, for war literature had sounded his praises. They had followed him through his campaigns in Western Virginia, had heard the sharp volleys of his musketry on their left at the siege of Corinth, and more recently the country had been electrified by his brilliant victory over Van Dorn. The contrast between Generals Buell and Rosecrans was not more marked in personal appearance than in methods. The former was cold, impassive, and polite; the latter boisterous, warm-hearted, and brusque. The frigid dignity which hedged the person of Buell, enclosing department headquarters as within a wall of ice, behind which silence reigned, and through the guarded portals of which none ventured unbidden, was swept away by General Rosecrans, who transformed its solemn precincts into a busy workhouse, where chiefs of staff departments, surrounded by an army of clerks, wrought at their respective vocations, placing the new commander *en rapport* with the most minute details of his army. Most of his staff accompanied him from the Army of the Mississippi. They had proved themselves capable and trustworthy, and the general naturally desired the presence of old friends in his military family. But there was at least one officer of the old department staff with whom the entire army parted with sincere regret—Colonel James B. Fry, Buell’s adjutant-general and chief of staff. The kindness of manner, the inexhaustible patience and good humor and never-failing knowledge of military affairs which this officer possessed had gone far to soften the asperities and dispel the chill which hung about department headquarters.

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Brigadier-General D. S. Stanley reported for duty as chief of cavalry early in December, and at once assumed command.

General Stanley graduated at West Point in the class of 1852, and was assigned to the Second Dragoons with the rank of second lieutenant. After three years’ service on the plains he was transferred to the First Cavalry as first lieutenant, then under command of Colonel E. V. Sumner. Joe Johnston was lieutenant-colonel, and John Sedgwick and William H. Emory

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majors. In 1857 he accompanied Colonel Sumner on an expedition against the Cheyenne Indians, in which he was engaged in a sharp fight on Solomon's Fork of the Kansas River, in which the Indians were defeated. In 1858 he was engaged in the Utah Expedition, and in the same year he crossed the plains to the northern boundary of Texas. In a sharp and decisive battle with the Comanches Lieutenant Stanley displayed such courage and skill in handling his command as to receive the complimentary orders of General Scott. The opening of the rebellion found him stationed at Fort Scott, Arkansas, where, in March, he received his commission as captain in the Fourth Cavalry. His command was included in the surrender made by General Twiggs, but the heart of the brave officer beat loyal to the flag of his country, and he resolved upon a march northward to Kansas City, Mo. Uniting his force with that at Fort Smith, the column moved through the Indian country. A Confederate force sent against them was, on the eighth of May, captured and paroled. On the fifteenth of June they occupied Kansas City, and marched at once upon Independence, where Captain Stanley was fired upon while carrying a flag of truce. He joined General Lyon in his expedition against Springfield, which was occupied July twelfth. He participated in the various engagements in Missouri in the summer of 1861, displaying in an eminent degree the dash and conspicuous courage which so distinguished him in his subsequent career, and in September he reported with his regiment to General Fremont at St. Louis. He marched against Price from Syracuse, and in November moved against Springfield. Captain Stanley was appointed brigadier-general in November, 1861, and in March, 1862, was assigned to the command of the Second division of Pope's army in the expedition against New Madrid and Island No. 10, the Fort Pillow Expedition, and in the siege of Corinth. Here his acquaintance with General Rosecrans began, ripening into sincere attachment under the fire of Price's guns at Iuka, and the yet fiercer blaze of Van Dorn's hard-fighting battalions at Corinth in October. His conspicuous gallantry on this occasion added a second star to the insignia of his rank and caused him to be selected by his old commander in arms to organize and lead the cavalry of his new command. In person General Stanley was tall and erect. A handsome face and long, flowing beard, slightly silvered, engaging in manner and full of enthusiasm for the success of the cause in which he held his own life as nothing in comparison, he soon impressed his personality upon the cavalry of the Army of the Cumberland and made it a reliable branch of the service.

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December, 1862, was a busy month. The year was fast drawing to a close, and both Union and Confederate generals had little to report save plots and counter-plots. On the part of each there was little that was encouraging. The early spring had found Middle and West Tennessee in the possession of the former. Two large armies occupied all prominent points, and the beaten Confederates encamped in Mississippi were confronted by an army too powerful for them to attack.

Early autumn witnessed the enforced retirement of Buell's army to the line of the Ohio River, while the Confederates reaped the harvests in Kentucky and Middle Tennessee.

The tenth of October found Grant embarked upon his march southward to Vicksburg, driving Pemberton before him. Sherman arranging for co-operation by water, the Army of the Cumberland encamped near Nashville, with Bragg's twice defeated army in its front, and Hindman's beaten troops flying before the victorious divisions of Herron and Blunt from the battle field of Prairie Grove.

East Tennessee being left comparatively free from molestation by the abandonment of pursuit through Cumberland Gap, General Kirby Smith was at liberty to reinforce points more strongly threatened. He had no sooner succeeded in collecting his stragglers and reorganizing his army, reinforcing it by several new regiments, than, in compliance with orders from the Confederate War Department, he dispatched Stevenson's division to the relief of Pemberton at Grenada, and McCown, with his division, to report to Bragg at Murfreesboro.

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Orders for a forward movement were issued by General Rosecrans on Wednesday, the twenty-fourth of December, and on Christmas morning the camps were alive with preparation. The day was spent in writing to loved ones far away among the snow-covered hills of the great Northwest. Tattoo found men discussing the chances of coming battle. Here and there was a soldier giving the last finishing touch to the gleaming gun-barrel. The surgeon, in his tent, sat before a table on which in glittering display lay the implements of his craft. The long, keen knife, the saw, the probe, were each in turn subjected to close inspection and carefully adjusted in the case. Field officers paid a last visit to their faithful chargers and exhorted grooms to feed early and not to forget to bring along an extra feed lest perchance the following night would find the troops far in advance of the wagons. Quartermasters, that hard-worked and little-appreciated class of officers, toiling through the long night with their loaded wagon trains getting into position for an orderly march; commissaries, upon whose vigilance all depended, carrying out orders for three days' rations in haversacks and five days' more in wagons. A busy day was followed by a busy night. The clatter of horses' hoofs upon the turnpike roads leading out of Nashville to the encampments sounded all through the night. Now a solitary orderly galloped down from division headquarters bearing a message to a brigade commander. Soon a group of officers rode gaily by from a late carousal at the St. Cloud; then came a corps commander with staff and escort from conference with the chief, his last injunction ringing in his ears, "We move tomorrow, gentlemen. We shall begin to skirmish probably as soon as we pass the outposts.

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Press them hard. Drive them out of their nests. Make them fight or run. Strike hard and fast; give them no rest. Fight them! fight them! fight them! I say," as the uplifted right hand emphasized each sentence upon the palm of the left hand. Thomas received the orders with a grim smile of approval; McCook's sharp eyes twinkled with enjoyment; Crittenden straightened his trim figure, and his eyes shone as he stalked out of the room, followed by his aides, as if in haste to begin his part of the programme. There was glorious assurance in the manly stride, the determined look, and in the triple armor with which he is clad who hath his quarrel just; and his must have been a dull ear, indeed, who did not note, in the merry jest and tuneful song that floated along the ranks, the augury of victory.

At the head of their respective columns rode Thomas, accompanied by his staff officers, with the brave and accomplished Major George E. Flynt at their head. There was Von Schroeder, Mack, Mackey, and the rest. McCook, with Langdon, Nodine, Thruston, Campbell, and Williams. Crittenden, followed by Starling, Loder, Mendenhall, Buford, John McCook, Knox, and the writer of this chronicle. Brave hearts beat high that day. On the right, far in advance of the infantry, rode Stanley, with trusty Sinclair by his side, while his cavalry swept on out the Nolensville pike, driving Wheeler's pickets before them.

Sturdy John Kennett, with a brigade of cavalry at his heels, advanced upon the broad turnpike road straight toward the enemy, nor stopped until nightfall, notwithstanding constant skirmishing, when, on reaching an eminence that overlooked La Vergne, a large force was encountered. The plain below was dotted with groups of cavalry. Suddenly a puff of smoke and a shell well aimed along the line of the road, carried death in its track. Another and another followed in quick succession, clearing the road as fast as men's legs could carry them. The head of Palmer's infantry column came up and halted at the side of the road. General Crittenden and his staff rode forward to watch the artillery duel now in progress—for Newell's battery had unlimbered at the first shot and was firing rapidly. Mr. Robert H. Crittenden (a brother of the general), and the writer, his boon companion, riding side by side, advanced beyond their companions in full view of the artillerists, presenting a conspicuous mark. Quick as lightning a shell came hissing through the air and passed in the narrow space of a yard between their horses. It is needless to add that, their curiosity being gratified, they lost no time in seeking the friendly cover of a log-house by the roadside. Newell planted his shots from two three-inch Rodmans with such dexterity as to silence the enemy's battery of four guns. Colonel Enyart, with the First Kentucky and the Thirty-first Indiana Infantry, supported on the right by Colonel W. C. Whitaker with the Sixth Kentucky and the Thirty-first Indiana Infantry, supported on the right by Colonel W. C. Whitaker with the Sixth Kentucky and Ninth Indiana, preceded by Colonel Murray with the Third Kentucky Cavalry, now moved to the left and advanced through the cedars towards Stony Creek, where they were met by a force sent to intercept them. The order to charge with the bayonet was followed by a swift rush across the creek, the routed Confederates flying before the gleaming steel, and the army bivouacked for the night before La Vergne.

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After five days' fighting into position the army formed line of battle in front of Murfreesboro. Summoning his corps commanders the General promulgated his plan of battle. General McCook was to occupy the most advantageous position, refusing his right as much as practicable and necessary to secure it, to receive the attack of the enemy, or, if that did not come, to attack sufficiently to hold all the forces in his front. Generals Negley and Palmer to open with skirmishing, and engage the enemy's center and left as far as the river. Crittenden to cross Van Cleve's division at the lower ford, covered and supported by Morgan's pioneer corps, 1,700 strong, and to advance on Breckinridge. Wood's division to cross by brigades at the upper ford, and moving on Van Cleve's right, to carry everything before them to Murfreesboro. This movement would, it was supposed, dislodge Breckinridge, and gaining the high ground east of Stones River, Wood's batteries could obtain an enfilading fire upon the heavy body of troops massed in front of Negley and Palmer. The center and left, using Negley's right as a pivote, were to swing around through Murfreesboro and take the force confronting McCook in rear, driving it into the country towards Salem. The successful execution of General Rosecrans' design depended not more upon the spirit and gallantry of the assaulting column than upon the courage and obstinacy with which the position held by the Right Wing was maintained. Having explained this fact to General McCook, the commanding general asked him if, with a full knowledge of the ground over which he had fought, he could hold his position three hours—again alluding to his dissatisfaction with the direction which his line had assumed, but, as before, leaving that to the corps commander—"I think I can," said McCook, and the conference ended.

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General Braxton Bragg, a graduate of West Point, a master in military science, a commander whose endurance and hard fighting qualities in the field were more conspicuous than his generalship in the management of campaign, was in command of the Confederate army at Murfreesboro. He had taken up the execution of the plan of battle where it had dropped from the dying hand of Albert Sydney Johnston, and was advancing to carry it out at Shiloh, when his brigades were recalled by Beauregard, sick in an ambulance three miles in the rear. He had, by a brilliant flank movement of three hundred miles through a mountainous region, gained Buell's rear in Kentucky, only to emerge from the farthest corner of the State without a decisive battle. Recriminations had grown out of this campaign which threatened to sap the influence of the commanding general. General Polk had been threatened with court-martial, and Hardee expressed the opinion that if Bragg persisted in bringing charges, Polk could, if he would, "rip up the Kentucky campaign—tear Bragg to tatters." These

compliments, however, passed only between prominent officers; the army was in good state of discipline, although out of an aggregate 85,372 only 47,930 were carried on the rolls as effectives, and 30,000 were absent, with and without leave.

Bragg had in his army about the same proportion of raw troops to veterans as were found in that in his front, and both armies were equally well armed. Men who had tested each other's metal at Pea Ridge, Shiloh, and Perryville, and in innumerable skirmishes, were again arrayed for a final conflict. Here was Bragg, sullen, hard-featured, unapproachable; Polk, benignant, dignified, majestic; Hardee, the superb rider, the strict disciplinarian, the steady, persistent fighter; Breckinridge, elegant in manner, eloquent in speech, courteous, courageous, the idol of the Kentucky brigade, and, like the men who composed it, dimly unconscious possibly of the crime against his favorite dogma of States rights, and the ingratitude of a people whose cause they had espoused against the expressed will of their native State.

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Among the division commanders were Cheatham, whose headlong charges at Shiloh and Perryville thousands of maimed soldiers both North and South had cause to remember; Cleburne, stubborn and stout of heart, blunt, impassive and heavy, who was destined two years later to pour out his life's blood upon the breastworks at Franklin; McCown and Withers of lesser note, and a host of brigade and regimental commanders who had won their rank under the eyes of their grim commander.

General Rosecrans, having arranged his plan of battle, had risen early to superintend its execution. General Crittenden, whose headquarters were a few paces distant, mounted at 6 A. M., and with his staff rode to an eminence, where the chief, surrounded by his staff officers, sat on their horses listening to the opening guns on the right. The plan of General Bragg was instantly divined, but no apprehension of danger was felt. Suddenly the woods on the right in the rear of Negley, appeared to be alive with men wandering aimlessly in the direction of the rear. The roar of artillery grows more distinct, mingled with continuous volleys of musketry. It can not be that the veteran brigades of the Right Wing are being driven back. McCook is surely only falling back to secure a position that he can hold for the promised three hours. The rear of a line of battle always presents the pitiable spectacle of a horde of skulkers—men who, when tried in the fierce flame of battle, find, often to their own disgust, that they are lacking in the element of courage. But the sight of whole regiments of soldiers flying in panic to the rear was a sight never seen but on that solitary occasion, before or since, by the Army of the Cumberland. Captain Otis, from his position on the extreme right, who arrives breathless, his horse reeking with foam, to inform General Rosecrans that the Right Wing is in rapid retreat. The astounding intelligence is confirmed a moment later by a staff officer from General McCook, calling for reinforcements. "Tell General McCook," roared the chief, "to contest every inch of ground. If he holds them, we will swing into Murfreesboro and cut them off." Then Rousseau, with his reserves, was sent into the fight, and Van Cleve, at the head of Crittenden's old Shiloh division, came dashing across the fields, with water dripping from their clothing, to take a hand in the fray.

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Harker's brigade was withdrawn from the left and sent in on Rousseau's right, and the Pioneer brigade, relieved at the ford by Price's brigade, was posted on Harker's right. The remaining brigades of Van Cleve's division, Beatty's and Fyffe's, formed on the extreme right, and thus an improvised line half a mile in extent, presented a new and unexpected front to the approaching enemy. It was a trying position to Van Cleve's men to stand in line, a living wall, while the panic-stricken soldiers of McCook's beaten regiments, flying in terror through the woods, rushed past them, the sharp rattle of McCown's musketry behind them lending wings to their flight. The Union lines could not fire, for their comrades were between them and the enemy. Rosecrans seemed ubiquitous. All these dispositions had been made under his personal direction. Finding Sheridan coming out of the cedars into which Rousseau had just retired, he directed him to the ammunition train, with orders to fill his cartridge boxes and return to the support of Hazen's brigade on the edge of the Round Forrest. Captain Morton, with the Pioneers and the Chicago Board of Trade Battery, pushed into the cedars, and disappeared from view simultaneously with Harker. The general course of the tide of stragglers toward the rear struck the turnpike at the point where Van Cleve stood impatiently awaiting the order to advance. All along the line men were falling, struck by the bullets of the enemy, who soon appeared at the edge of the woods on Morton's flank. The order to charge was given by General Rosecrans in person, and, like hounds from the leash, the division sprang forward, reserving their fire for close quarters. It was the crisis in the battle. If this line was broken all was lost. Every man rose to the occasion and proved himself a hero. Steadily, as a majestic river moves on its resistless way, the line swept forward, sending a shower of bullets to the front. The left was now exposed to attack, and, riding rapidly to the ford, General Rosecrans inquired who commanded the brigade. "I do, sir," said Colonel Price. "Will you hold this ford?" "I will try, sir." "Will you hold this ford?" "I will die right here." "Will you hold this ford?" for the third time thundered the general. "Yes, sir," said the colonel. "That will do"; and away galloped the general to where Palmer was contending against long odds for the possession of the Round Forrest in the center of the line. All along the line from Van Cleve's right to Wood's left, the space gradually narrowed between the contending hosts. The weak had gone to the rear; no room now for any but brave men, and no time given for new dispositions; every man who had a stomach for fighting was engaged on the firing line. From a right angle the Confederate left had been pressed back by Van Cleve and Harker and the Pioneers to an angle of forty-five degrees in less than that number of minutes. This advance brought Van Cleve within view of Rousseau,

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General Rosecrans, having arranged his plan of battle, had risen early to superintend its execution. General Crittenden, whose headquarters were a few paces distant, mounted at 6 A. M., and with his staff rode to an eminence, where the chief, surrounded by his staff officers, sat on their horses listening to the opening guns on the right. The plan of General Bragg was instantly divined, but no apprehension of danger was felt. Suddenly the woods on the right in the rear of Negley, appeared to be alive with men wandering aimlessly in the direction of the rear. The roar of artillery grows more distinct, mingled with continuous volleys of musketry. It can not be that the veteran brigades of the Right Wing are being driven back. McCook is surely only falling back to secure a position that he can hold for the promised three hours. The rear of a line of battle always presents the pitiable spectacle of a horde of skulkers—men who, when tried in the fierce flame of battle, find, often to their own disgust, that they are lacking in the element of courage. But the sight of whole regiments of soldiers flying in panic to the rear was a sight never seen but on that solitary occasion, before or since, by the Army of the Cumberland. Captain Otis, from his position on the extreme right, who arrives breathless, his horse reeking with foam, to inform General Rosecrans that the Right Wing is in rapid retreat. The astounding intelligence is confirmed a moment later by a staff officer from General McCook, calling for reinforcements. "Tell General McCook," roared the chief, "to contest every inch of ground. If he holds them, we will swing into Murfreesboro and cut them off." Then Rousseau, with his reserves, was sent into the fight, and Van Cleve, at the head of Crittenden's old Shiloh division, came dashing across the fields, with water dripping from their clothing, to take a hand in the fray. Harker's brigade was withdrawn from the left and sent in on Rousseau's right, and the Pioneer brigade, relieved at the ford by Price's brigade, was posted on Harker's right. The remaining brigades of Van Cleve's division, Beatty's and Fyffe's, formed on the extreme right, and thus an improvised line half a mile in extent, presented a new and unexpected front to the approaching enemy. It was a trying position to Van Cleve's men to stand in line, a living wall, while the panic-stricken soldiers of McCook's beaten regiments, flying in terror through the woods, rushed past them, the sharp rattle of McCown's musketry behind them lending wings to their flight. The Union lines could not fire, for their comrades were between them and the enemy. Rosecrans seemed ubiquitous. All these dispositions had been made under his personal direction. Finding Sheridan coming out of the cedars into which Rousseau had just retired, he directed him to the ammunition train, with orders to fill his cartridge boxes and return to the support of Hazen's brigade on the edge of the Round Forrest. Captain Morton, with the Pioneers and the Chicago Board of Trade Battery, pushed into the cedars, and disappeared from view simultaneously with Harker. The general course of the tide of stragglers toward the rear struck the turnpike at the point where Van Cleve stood impatiently awaiting the order to advance. All along the line men were falling, struck by the bullets of the enemy, who soon appeared at the edge of the woods on Morton's flank. The order to charge was given by General Rosecrans in person, and, like hounds from the leash, the division sprang forward, reserving their fire for close quarters. It was the crisis in the battle. If this line was broken all was lost. Every man rose to the occasion and proved himself a hero. Steadily, as a majestic river moves on its resistless way, the line swept forward, sending a shower of bullets to the front. The left was now exposed to attack, and, riding rapidly to the ford, General Rosecrans inquired who commanded the brigade. "I do, sir," said Colonel Price. "Will you hold this ford?" "I will try, sir." "Will you hold this ford?" "I will die right here." "Will you hold this ford?" for the third time thundered the general. "Yes, sir," said the colonel. "That will do"; and away galloped the general to where Palmer was contending against long odds for the possession of the Round Forrest in the center of the line. All along the line from Van Cleve's right to Wood's left, the space gradually narrowed between the contending hosts. The weak had gone to the rear; no room now for any but brave men, and no time given for new dispositions; every man who had a stomach for fighting was engaged on the firing line. From a right angle the Confederate left had been pressed back by Van Cleve and Harker and the Pioneers to an angle of forty-five degrees in less than that number of minutes. This advance brought Van Cleve within view of Rousseau,

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who at once requested him to form on his right. Harker, entering the woods on the left of Van Cleve, passed to his right, and now closed up on his flank. The enemy had fallen back stubbornly fighting, and made a stand on the left of Cheatham. Brave old Van Cleve, his white hair streaming in the wind, the blood flowing from a gaping wound in his foot, rode gallantly along the line to where Harker was stiffly holding his position, with his right "in the air." Bidding him to hold fast to every inch of ground, he rode to Swallow's Battery, which was working with the rapidity of a steam fire-engine, "Don't let them get your guns, Swallow!" he shouted, as he dashed by on his way to the left, where Sam Beatty, heavy and impassive, was pounding away with his minie rifles at a line of men who seemed always on the point of advancing. The brigades of Stanley and Miller having fallen back, as previously described, and the entire strength of Cheatham and three brigades of Withers and Cleburne having fallen upon Rousseau, he had fallen back into the open field, where he found Van Cleve. Loomis's and Guenther's batteries, double-shotted with canister, were posted on a ridge, and as the Confederate line advanced, opened upon it with terrible force. Men fell like ripened grain before a reaper, but the line moved straight ahead. The field, swept by a storm of iron hail, was covered with dead and wounded men. The deep bass of the artillery was mingled with the higher notes of the minie rifles, while the brief pauses could be distinguished the quickly-spoken orders of the commanding officers, and the groans of the wounded. It was the full orchestra of battle. But there is a limit of human endurance. The Confederate brigades, now melted to three-fourths their original numbers, wavered and fell back; again and again they reformed in the woods and advanced to the charge, only to meet with a bloody repulse. Four deliberate and sustained attempts were made to carry the position, and each failed. While these events were following each other in rapid succession, and some of them occurring simultaneously, the Left Wing had not only held its position, but had furnished three brigades to repel the advance of Bragg's left upon the rear of the army.

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While Colonel Hazen was gallantly defending the left of the line from nine o'clock in the morning until two in the afternoon, the fight raged no less furiously on his immediate right. Here a line composed of two brigades of Palmer's division and one of Wood's, filled out by the remains of Sheridan's divisions, who, after they had replenished their ammunition, formed behind the railroad embankment at right angles with Hazen's brigade, which alone retained its position upon the original line. Farther to the right was Rousseau, with Van Cleve and Harker on his right. I leave to more graphic pens to describe the grand pyrotechnics of the battle field at this supreme moment when victory hung evenly balanced. Past the crowd of fugitives from the Right Wing the undaunted soldiers of the Left and Center had swept "with the light of battle in their faces," and now in strong array they stood like a rock-bound coast beating back the tide which threatened to engulf the rear. Along this line rode Rosecrans with face illuminated by the light of exalted courage; Thomas, calm, inflexible as a mighty judge, from whose gaze skulkers shrank abashed; Crittenden, cheerful and full of hope, complimenting his men as he rode along the lines; Rousseau, whose fiery impetuosity no disaster could quell; Palmer, with a stock of cool courage and presence of mind equal to any emergency; Wood, suffering from a wound in his heel, stayed in the saddle, but had lost the jocularly which usually characterized him. "Good-bye, General, 'we will all meet at the hatter's' as one coon said to another when the dogs were after them," he said to Crittenden early in the action, but at ten o'clock a minie ball struck his boot and lacerated his heel—his good humor was gone for the day. "Are we going about it right now, General?" asked Morton, as he glanced along the blazing line of muskets to where the Chicago battery quivered with the rapidity of its discharges. "All right, fire low," said the chief as he dashed by. Colonel Grose, always in his place, had command of the Ammen brigade, the "glorious Tenth" of Shiloh memory, with which, and with Hazen's and Cruft's brigades, the gallant and lamented Nelson had swept, like an avenging Nemesis, upon the right of Beauregard's victorious army, driving it back to its base at Corinth.

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After the formation of this line at noon it never receded; as has been stated, the right swung around until, at two o'clock, about one-half of the lost ground had been retaken. The artillery, more than fifty guns, was massed in the open ground behind the angle in the line; twenty-eight guns had been captured, when they poured a continuous torrent of iron missiles upon the Confederate line. They could not fire amiss. The fire from Cox's Battery was directed upon Hanson's brigade across the river, where Cobb, with Napoleons, returned the compliment with zeal and precision. Schaefer's brigade having received a new stock of cartridges, formed on Palmer's right, where later the brave commander received his death wound, the last of Sheridan's brigade commanders who had fallen during the day.

At four o'clock it became evident to the Confederate commander that his only hope of success lay in a charge upon the Union left, which, by its overpowering weight, should carry everything before it. The movement of Cleburne to the left in support of McCown had deprived him of reserves; but Breckinridge had four brigades unemployed on the right, and these were peremptorily ordered across the river to the support of General Polk. The error made by General Polk in making an attack with the two brigades that first arrived upon the field, instead of awaiting the arrival of General Breckinridge with the remaining brigades, was so palpable as to render an excuse for failure necessary. This was easily found in the tardy execution of Bragg's order by Breckinridge, and resulted in sharp criticism of the latter. The Third Kentucky, now nearly annihilated, and its Colonel, Sam McKee, killed, was relieved by the Fifty-eighth Indiana, Colonel George P. Buell. The Sixth Ohio, with the gallant Colonel Nicholas L. Anderson at its head, took position on the right of the Twenty-sixth Ohio, with its right advanced so that its line of fire would sweep the front of the

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regiments on its left. The Ninety-seventh Ohio and One Hundredth Illinois came up and still further strengthened the right of Hazen's position. They had not long to wait for the attack. These dispositions had barely been made when a long line of infantry emerged from behind the hill. Adam's and Jackson's fresh brigades were on the right, and Donelson's and Chalmers's, badly cut up but stout of heart, were on the left. Out they came in splendid style, full six thousand strong. Estep's case-shot tore through their ranks, but the gaps closed up. Parsons sent volley after volley of grape shot against it, and the Sixth and Twenty-sixth Ohio, taking up the refrain, added the sharp rattle of their minie rifles to the unearthly din. Still the line pressed forward, firing as they came, nor wavered in the onward march, until met by a simultaneous volley of musketry which stretched hundreds of their number mangled upon the earth. They staggered back, but, quickly reformed and reinforced by Preston and Palmer, advanced again to the charge. The battle had hushed on the extreme right, and the dreadful splendor of this advance is indescribable. The right was even with the left of the Union line, and the left stretched way past the point of woods from which Negley had retired. It was such a charge as this that broke the lines of Wallace and Hurlbut at Shiloh, and enveloped Prentice in its strong embrace. It had no sooner moved into the open field from the cover of the river bank than it was saluted with such a roar of artillery as shook the earth. Men plucked the cotton from the bolls at their feet and stuffed it in their ears. No human force could withstand the tornado of iron that swept against it. Huge gaps were torn in it at every discharge. Men lay in heaps before and behind it. Shells exploding sent showers of mangled forms into the air. They staggered forward half the distance across the fields, when the infantry lines blazed in their front, and a shower of minie balls was added to the fury of the storm. They wavered and fell back. The field was won. Night fell upon a field strewn with the mangled forms of men, who, but twenty-four hours before were buoyant with life and hope, upon the faces of dead men turned upward to the sky; upon long lines of infantry faint for lack of food and gasping for water; upon a horde of panic-stricken men wending their way in solemn procession to the rear, "where the subsequent proceedings interested them no more," and upon Walker's and Shackelford's brigades marching to the front, Garesche, Schaefer, Sill, Roberts, McKee, and genial, happy hearted Fred. Jones, and a host of others were dead or suffering mortal agony.

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The first day's fight was over.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ARMY OF THE CUMBERLAND AND THE BATTLE OF STONE'S RIVER ***

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