

Reminiscences of the Battle of Bull Run.

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BATTLE of Bull Run—the first battle of Manassas—was a great and decided victory for the Confederate army, and aroused the pride and enthusiasm of the Southern people as no other event ever did. Yet there is a painful recollection in every mind that it was the first act in an awful drama, the first great field upon which the hosts of the North and the South measured arms and opened the series of great tragedies of the Civil War, in which millions of men perished.

If that had been the last battle of the war instead of the first, and if it had been accepted as the final arbitrament of the questions that could not have been settled otherwise, I would still recall its incidents with pride, but also with sadness. But the glory of it would have scarcely compensated for its sacrifices.

I doubt if any humane person can recall without pain even the most gratifying victories of a great war in which he was a participant. The excessive toil and anxiety are only made tolerable, and the suffering and waste of human life can only be endured for the sake of our interest in the cause that demands such victims for the altar of sacrifice. Yet war, like other intense passions, often becomes a consuming desire, as the hope of victory verges upon the recklessness of despair. My earlier impressions of civil war may be illustrated by a few personal incidents connected with the first battle of Manassas.

With the exception of a few "regulars" in either army, every experience of actual warfare was then entirely new to the soldiery, and not a man in any position failed to seriously question his heart as to its fortitude in the approaching crisis of battle. None, perhaps, were about to march upon that great and open field who did not overdraw the pictures of danger and distress that he would be called to meet. It was a relief from this excessive tension that enabled men of highly nervous condition to quiet their emotions and to engage in battle like trained veterans, when its realities were found to be less harrowing than they expected. It is probable that no two armies of trained soldiers ever confronted each other with a less daunted spirit than the hundred thousand proud men who, in almost full view of the extended lines of each army, marched steadily into action across the open fields about Manassas. For many miles the view was uninterrupted.

The approaches of the martial hosts, in line after line of supporting columns, under the fire of artillery that covered the field with the bluish haze of battle, were marked with an air of firm defiance, which spoke of the cause at stake, and of a contest for principles which, as they were felt to be involved, commanded the devotion of each army. It was not a flag or a government for which either army was fighting, but a dispute about rights under the Constitution of a common country. War under such circumstances is always desperate, and too often becomes ferocious. When men make war as political or religious partisans, they often forget the honorable zeal of the true soldier and lend themselves as the instruments of vengeance. We had not then reached that stage of hostility. On this field there met in battle many thousands of the best and most enlightened men of a great nation, all Americans, and all inspired with the love of a common country, and many in the opposing ranks were of the same families. They were gallant and chivalric men, and their fierce onsets left the field thickly strewn with dead and wounded. Almost every man who fell had some personal history in which whole communities felt a proud and grateful interest. The survivors in such armies could not be cruel. As the incidents of the battle were narrated in the camps of the victors, and by parties returning from the pursuit of McDowell's shattered forces, it was clearly manifested that it was political antagonism and not sectional animosity that had brought on the war.

When the death or capture of some leading Federal officer was announced, respectful silence was observed and personal sympathy was manifested with sincerity; but, when the capture of a leading politician or of a member of Congress was announced, the wildest rejoicing was heard in the crowds of delighted listeners.

That was a grand field of battle, and it was occupied by armies that were all the more eager for war because they did not then realize its terrible significance.

Few strategic surprises were possible on such a field, and none were attempted. An approaching column could be seen, as it was headed toward a point of attack, when it was miles away; and the clouds of dust, rolling up in vast volume, indicated its strength. Then, suddenly, arose the opposing cloud, and presently both were illumined with flashes of artillery, and roared with the spiteful din of musketry, in their quickened dash, and were clamorous with hoarse cheers from thousands of sturdy men. A few crashing volleys; the swaying back and forth of the lines, as repeated charges were met and repulsed—and the field was won and lost by some impulse, in which all seemed to share at the same moment, that was as much a mystery to the victors as it was to the vanquished. It was what was called "a square stand-up fight" in an open field, without military defences; and the result was a notable victory of the soldiers engaged, not a victory won by superior strategy or gallant leadership. The battle ended late in the afternoon, and by nightfall, the successful army was in bivouac, while the beaten army was in flight for Washington, unpursued. The rain began to fall in floods as the night came on, adding to the misery of the wounded of both armies, who were treated with every possible kindness. To a novice in warfare, the battlefield was a fearful scene, as the bright morning of the next day dawned upon it, with the dead scattered over it, lying beside dead horses, broken artillery, muskets, wagons, and shattered trees. It was the silent reproach of havoc and death upon the fierce injustice of a resort to war as the arbiter of differences of opinion as to civil government, which had been exaggerated to such awful conclusions, and could not, after all, be in anywise settled by such means. Peace and wiser judgment finally came out of the thousand succeeding conflicts, but were not created by them. They were only made possible by the failure of war to convince anybody of errors. Taking a half-dozen cavalry and a brother officer along, we moved, at daylight, under orders given to me to follow and reconnoitre the army that had moved off in column at the close of the battle, but was supposed to have camped