

A NEW STUDY OF CHANCELLORSVILLE.*

In 1894 Major John Bigelow, U. S. A., was assigned as Professor of Military Science and Tactics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and selected the Campaign of Chancellorsville as his subject for a course of lectures. This campaign had been treated, in 1867, by Captain Hotchkiss and Lieut.-Col. Allan, both staff officers of the Second Corps of Lee's army, and later by Bates, Dodge, and Hamlin, of the Federal service, not to mention the well-known works of Swinton, Ropes, Henderson, and others. There was, however, room for another book on the subject, as Major Bigelow has well shown. It would be difficult to find a volume on any campaign of the Civil War that has treated its subject more fully, and embellished it with more numerous and excellent maps, so necessary to the intelligent study of military campaigns.

Major Bigelow well says, in his Preface: "There is no comfortable way of reading military history. Whoever expects to follow a campaign reclining in an easy chair, with a book in one hand and a cigar in the other, is doomed to disappointment." I would add that he is doomed also to know little or nothing about the campaign when he finishes the volume. The student must read carefully, with maps spread out before him, and frequently referred to for information; for without them it is not possible to bear in mind the mass of details needed in

following a campaign. There is no more interesting study than military history; but the work studied must be worth while, and the writer must be able to grasp the salient points, not to let the details master the situation, not to let the irrelevant obscure the relevant. Also, he should "hew to the line, no matter where the chips fall." Fifty years after the events there is no excuse for maintaining prejudices, for exaggerating the achievements of the one side or depreciating those of the other. That might have been excused some years ago; but the day for such writing of so-called history is gone, and now we want the abiding truth.

The great mistake on the part of the Federal commanders at Chancellorsville was a total misconception of the situation. They got it into their heads that the Confederates were withdrawing, which they had no idea of doing; and it took Jackson's sudden flank attack on their extreme right to correct this fatal misconception. The original mistake was made by Hooker; and Howard did not correct it. Schurz appears to have been the only one of the Federal generals who had a correct idea of what was going on; and he was third in rank on the right, and so was not chiefly responsible. It is seldom that troops on the field of battle are found so unprepared when the thunderclap comes. No troops could have stood their ground under such circumstances. The Confederates had things all their own way until darkness fell upon the scene. Jackson was eager to press on, even in the dark; but the change of the Confederate troops ruined his plan. Lane's brigade had not seen Jackson and his staff go to the front, hence their unexpected return caused the Confederates to anticipate a cavalry attack and to fire the volley which laid Jackson low. Oh, the irretrievable disaster of that volley! But for that, a glorious victory would have been won by the Confederates that night. The next day the situation had changed. Even Stuart's *élan*, with his troopers' loud and joyous refrain, "Old Joe Hooker, won't you come out of the Wilderness?" required hours to win success. Considering the number of Federal troops at hand—three corps really being unengaged—Hooker's failure to retrieve the day can only be attributed to the shock he received by the cannon-ball's striking near him at his headquarters, and to the hesitation of Couch to take command and to give the necessary orders. (See Bigelow, p. 362, *ad fin.*, and compare pp. 477-8; note Doubleday's question and Hooker's answer.)

*THE CAMPAIGN OF CHANCELLORSVILLE. A Strategic and Tactical Study. By John Bigelow, Jr., Major U. S. A., retired. With maps and plans. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Just as Hooker was forced back to his second position, and Lee was ready to attack his lines, a halt was called to the Confederate forces in consequence of Sedgwick's success over Early's Division on the Federal left at Fredericksburg, compelling Lee to suspend his attack and hasten with McLaws's Division to the field at Salem Church. Here was another splendid chance for Hooker to take advantage of the division of the Confederate forces; but he did not avail himself of it. It took Lee all the afternoon to fight the battle of Salem Church, and push Sedgwick back across the Rappahannock at Banks's Ford, which was accomplished by dark, but too late to return upon Hooker at United States Ford and renew the attack. This shows the mistake of Hooker in separating his wings so far that neither could support the other. Either was strong enough to sustain itself, but the respective commanders did not think so. In view of the actual results, how curiously were fulfilled Hooker's General Orders No. 47 of April 30 and No. 49 of May 6, for which there was no excuse!

The unequal numbers of the two armies are seen from Major Bigelow's statements; and so with respect to casualties and prisoners. I have no fault to find with his figures, and consider that he has been eminently fair in his account. Hooker has thrown too much blame upon Sedgwick. While the latter might have moved faster, Hooker might have got along without his assistance if he had had more confidence in himself. It is almost amusing to read the correspondence between the two as given in Dodge's book on Chancellorsville. Each expected the other to prove the *Deus ex machina* who would rescue him from his dilemma.

A word of comment may be given, in conclusion, to the movements of the cavalry in this famous campaign. Neither of the Federal commanders accomplished what was expected of him, and Hooker removed Averill from command, considering him the most to blame. But Stoneman can hardly be regarded as having carried out his orders. It would seem that, having been in chief command, Stoneman bore the chief responsibility; and he could not rid himself of it by telling Averill he turned the enemy over to him. Hooker was to blame for separating himself from his cavalry, as he was for his other grave error of placing his wings so far apart that neither could support the other. Worse than all was his failure to take advantage of two critical situations when the Confederate forces were dangerously divided

and exposed to an attack which, if made vigorously and at the right moment, could hardly have failed of success. With a commander of the first military order in place of Hooker, Chancellorsville might have been the Gettysburg of the Confederacy. Hooker congratulated his army on having crossed the rivers and taken position at Chancellorsville, but only then did his troubles begin; for Lee had no intention of resisting the passage of the rivers, any more than when Grant crossed the Rapidan in 1864, and then found himself unable to move out of the Wilderness. Major Bigelow's book deserves the highest praise.

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