

TEN BOOKS OF THE MONTH

I. PICKETT AND HIS MEN. II. THE BUGLES OF GETTYSBURG. III. THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG. IV. GETTYSBURG. V. THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF GENERAL GEORGE GORDON MEADE.*

When Abraham Lincoln stood at the foot of Cemetery Ridge not long after the battle of Gettysburg and looked up-

*Pickett and His Men. By La Salle Corbell Pickett (Mrs. Gen. George E. Pickett). Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company.

The Bugles of Gettysburg. By La Salle

ward, some one said to him: "Think of the men who held these heights!" "Yes," he replied, "but think of the men who stormed these heights!"

The tribute which came so naturally from the great-hearted President when Northerners and Southerners were foes has not diminished with the years and the passing away of sectional differences. One cannot to-day think of the battle of Gettysburg without remembering the culmination of it in that wild charge of Pickett and his five thousand Virginians.

In *Pickett and His Men*, General Pickett's widow has written a history of one of the most famous divisions of either side in the Civil War.

Oddly enough George E. Pickett owed his appointment to West Point to a Congressman from Illinois,—one Abraham Lincoln. The friendship between the two never weakened, and Mrs. Pickett records a touching incident of the troublous days after the fall of Richmond when a tall, gaunt, sad-faced man in ill-fitting clothes knocked at her door and asked her:

"Is this George Pickett's place?"

"Yes, sir," I answered, "but he is not here."

"I know that, ma'am," he replied, "but I just wanted to see the place. I am Abraham Lincoln."

"The President!" I gasped.

The stranger shook his head and said:

"No, ma'am; no, ma'am; just Abraham Lincoln, George's old friend."

The leader of Pickett's men received his first experience of war in Mexico, where, under Scott, he was engaged in all the battles of the expedition that fought its way from Vera Cruz into Mexico City. And he early proved his fitness to lead a charge at the storming of Chapultepec, the most brilliant feat of American arms during the war, where young Lieutenant Pickett led the way into the castle and planted the colors on the highest point.

Fourteen years later Brigadier-General Pickett, C. S. A., took command of a brigade of Virginians, and thenceforward Pickett and his men made thrilling history. They fought their first battle near the quaint old town of Williamsburg, Virginia, on May 5, 1862. A few weeks

Corbell Pickett. Chicago: F. G. Browne and Company.

The Battle of Gettysburg. By Jesse Bowman Young. New York: Harper and Brothers.

Gettysburg. By Elsie, Singmaster. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade. By George Meade. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons,

later they were heavily engaged at Seven Pines; at the bloody battle of Gaines Mill they were one of the two brigades that finally broke the Federal line; and again in the same year they had desperate fighting at the second battle of Manassas, and again at Antietam. At Fredericksburg they were in reserve; Chancellorsville they missed. But at Gettysburg, after a forced march of twenty-four miles on a stifling July day, Pickett and his men, now a division some five thousand strong, reached the battle late in the afternoon of July 2d. All the next morning the troops were under fire; and at three o'clock they marched forth, in long and even lines, upon the charge the memory of which will never die. Forty-seven hundred and sixty-one privates and two hundred and eighty officers marched down the slope of Seminary Ridge to the attack; a bare fifteen hundred in all came back.

Upon a road which ran across their line of march, and almost within grappling distance of the foe, was given, says Mrs. Pickett—

the grandest exhibition of discipline and endurance, of coolness and courage under a withering fire, ever recorded in military history; a scene which has made the story of Pickett's charge the glory of American arms. There in the road, with the deafening explosion of unnumbered shells filling the air, their ranks ploughed through again and again by the fiery hail which the batteries from the heights beyond were pouring into them, amid all this terrific roar and the not less disconcerting cries of the wounded and dying, they heard the command of their company officers: "Halt men! Form line! Fall in! Right dress!"

Imagine, if you can, these heroes reforming and aligning their ranks while their comrades dropped in death agony about them, the shells bursting above their heads, and an iron storm beating them to the earth. Yet the line was formed, and coolly they awaited the command, "Forward!" At last it came: "Forward! Quick march!" With perfect precision, with all the grace and accuracy of the parade-ground instead of the

bloodiest of battle-fields, Pickett's division took up its death-march.

In the months of privation and terrible fighting that followed, at Newbern, Cold Harbor, Petersburg, Five Forks, Pickett and his men played their part bravely. And so to the last chapter in the drama—Sailor's Creek, just before Appomattox, where,—

Overwhelmed by numbers, fighting hand-to-hand, they stubbornly resisted to the bitter end their inevitable fate. Many of the men broke their guns, and many of the officers snapped their swords in two, rather than surrender them to the enemy. They fought as heroically and nobly on this, their last battle-field, when all hope was gone, as they had ever done in any battle.

Stirring history Pickett and his men made, and Mrs. Pickett has recorded it remarkably well. With a spirit of *noblesse oblige* she lays as much stress, or more, upon the doings of Pickett's men than on their leader's. And, rare gift in a woman,—she is a good historian,—clear in the presentation of her facts, and at the same time unflaggingly picturesque and entertaining.

In *The Bugles of Gettysburg* the same writer cloaks historic fact with a bit of fiction. In the form of a romance she tells the story of a brother officer, and at times companion of Captain Pickett, from the time they leave the Pacific Coast and slip quietly away to join the army of the Confederacy, until after the battle of Gettysburg. Like most romances of the war time there is a big Virginia mansion, and a slim, dark-haired girl in white. But Mrs. Pickett knows these things, not from hearsay, or tradition, but at first hand, and one has only to hear her negroes talk to realise how true to life she is. And there is, in this little book, a remarkable description of the famous charge at Gettysburg—a description that reveals the charge from within, as it were; and as it seemed to the Virginians who followed their slender, long-haired general into the valley of smoke and bursting shells, and up

the other slope, until he drew aside, and watched his "boys" rush past. Pitifully, so many of them were boys in their teens and twenties, and they crowded past him, yelling deliriously like boys at a baseball game, to death.

It has been said that shoes were the reason that the decisive battle of the Civil War was fought at Gettysburg. Pettigrew came to the town with a brigade of Confederates in quest of shoes for his barefooted men, and found there a force of Federal cavalry. He was driven away, but returned with reinforcements. The Federals, too, were reinforced, and in a flash the great fight was on. In *The Battle of Gettysburg* Jesse Bowman Young mentions the incident in passing, and shows how neither Lee nor Meade planned or desired to give battle at Gettysburg, but that those "two eager and desperately roused antagonists, the Army of Northern Virginia and the Army of the Potomac, once clinched in the death-grapple, nothing could separate them until they had fought it out."

The author was present at the great battle as an officer in one of the Pennsylvania regiments. And for a dozen years after the war he resided in or near Gettysburg, and in performing his duties as a "circuit-rider" became familiar with every village, mountain, and road in the neighbourhood. Add to this a life-long interest in the subject, and a vast amount of reading, and it is evident that the author is unusually well equipped to write about the battle of Gettysburg.

He has written a book indeed which will have a permanent value. While lacking the vividness and human interest of Mrs. Pickett's volume, it is a work of a very different kind. A comprehensive narrative, the author calls it, and this it is, giving the movements of different bodies of troops, the plans and mistakes of officers, and quoting liberally from that vast amount of published reminiscence, theory, argument, accusation and recrimination which has been put forth as freely as blood was shed at the time of the battle.

Gleaming in a field which historians and authors of reminiscences have passed by, Miss Elsie Singmaster has devoted her little volume, called *Gettysburg*, to the inhabitants of the quiet Pennsylvania town where two hundred thousand soldiers came suddenly together and fought one of the bloodiest battles of the war. In short stories she describes some incidents of the battle as it affected the townspeople at whose very doors it raged; while other stories are about that later Gettysburg which has become a Mecca for veterans' reunions. Not all the stories are of equal merit, those of the later period disclosing a familiarity with characters and conditions which seems rather lacking in the stories about the battle.

It is a curious fact that the injunction of Abraham Lincoln which has been most laid to heart by the American people, while crossing a stream, was disregarded by Lincoln himself at the most critical moment of his administration. For just three days before the turning point of the war, at Gettysburg, Hooker, by the President's order, was deposed from the command of the Army of the Potomac and Meade was appointed in his stead. Only three days before the change was made, General Meade, writing to his wife, says:

I see you are still troubled with visions of my being placed in command. . . . I do not stand any chance, because I have no friends, political or other, who press or advance my claims or pretensions. . . . Besides, I have not the folly to think my capacity pre-eminent, and I know there are plenty of others equally competent with myself. For these reasons I have never indulged in any dreams of ambition, contented to await events, and do my duty in the sphere it pleases God to place me in, and I really think it would be as well for you to take the same philosophical view; but do you know, I think *your* ambition is being roused and that you are beginning to be bitten with the dazzling prospect of having for a husband a commanding general of an army. How is this?

This modest and frank letter, as from one comrade to another, is a fair sample of the letters from General Meade to his wife, with which *The Life and Letters of General George Gordon Meade* abound. Remarkable letters they are to pass from a soldier to his wife, possessing as they do unbounded confidence not only in their recipient's love and loyalty, but also in her intelligent understanding at all times of the details of his campaigns and the stage of his military fortunes.

In spite of his modest opinion as to his chances, Meade was appointed to the command of the Army of the Potomac, and in a few days was fighting the crucial battle of the war. Level-headed engineer officer that he was, he was the right man for the place, and so maintained and strengthened his defensive position that Lee exhausted himself in fruitless attacks. That Meade's was not, at this strenuous time, a bed of roses may be inferred from another letter to his wife in which he exclaims:

From the time I took command till to-day, now over ten days, I have not changed my clothes, have not had a regular night's rest, and many nights not a wink of sleep, and for several days did not even wash my face and hands, no regular food, and all the time in a great state of mental anxiety.

The victory of Gettysburg was not allowed to remain a source of unalloyed satisfaction to General Meade. The fact that Lee escaped with his army seemed incomprehensible to those who were not acquainted with actual conditions,—which number included the authorities at Washington and the public in general, and stirred up a vast amount of criticism. Of this Meade complains to his wife, saying:

This is exactly what I expected; unless I did impracticable things, fault would be found with me.

And again:

Your indignation at the manner in which I was treated on Lee's escape is not only natural, but was and is fully shared by me. I did think at one time of writing frankly to

the President, informing him I never desired the command, and would be most glad at any time to be relieved.

We are rather of the opinion that this life of General Meade, prepared in part by his son and brought to completion by his grandson, is going to take high rank among the books of the year, not only from the fact that it contains the military memoirs of one of the foremost commanders of the Civil War, but because as an autobiography it is illuminating and full of vital interest.

Arthur M. Chase.