R. E. MCBRIDE

IN THE RANKS: FROM THE WILDERNESS TO APPOMATTOX COURT HOUSE

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The War, as Seen and Experienced by a Private Soldier in the Army of the Potomac

EAN 8596547327578

DigiCat, 2022
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Organs and Pianos.

PREFACE.

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In giving this book to the public we do so under the same plea which justifies those pleasant gatherings called "reunions," where men of the same regiment, corps, or army, meet to extend friendly greetings to each other, to friends, and all comrades in arms.

The writer has found it a pleasant task to recall the scenes of fifteen years ago, when, a mere boy in years, he had a part in the events here recorded. He is conscious of a kindly affection toward the men who were his companions during those stirring times. Kindness, thoughtfulness, forbearance, toward the boy-soldier, are not forgotten. If he found any thing different from these in his intercourse with men or officers, it has passed from memory, and he would not recall it if he could.

We trust, also, that this work may have a mission of utility to the generation that has grown up since the war.

There is a certain almost indefinable something, which has been summed up under the expression, "military traditions." This comes not alone from formal histories of the wars of the nation, but more largely from the history which each soldier carried home with him after the war was over. It meant something more than a certain amount of small family vanity, when men used to say, "My father was a soldier of the Revolution;" "My father fought at Lundy's Lane."

There lay back of this the stories told to wondering little ones while they gathered around the arm-chair of the soldier grandfather. Here were planted the seeds of military

ardor that found expression at Gettysburg, Vicksburg, Atlanta, and the Wilderness. It is thus the past of the nation projects itself into the present. Our comrades that sleep down yonder guard their country more effectually than if, full armed, they kept unceasing watch on all her borders. Though dead, they yet speak—yes *live*, in the spirit which yet lives in the hearts of their countrymen. The cause they died for our children will love; the institutions they preserved at such cost, our sons will perpetuate by intelligent devotion to freedom and her laws.

Is it in vain, then, my comrade, that I sit down in your family circle, and tell your children the story of our hardships, trials, reverses, victories?

This narrative is submitted to you almost as first written, when intended only for the perusal of my own family. In recounting events subsequent to August 19, 1864, when the One Hundred and Ninetieth is spoken of, the One Hundred and Ninety-first is also included, as they were practically one.

Since completing the work, the author has learned that the report of the Adjutant-general of Pennsylvania gives these regiments, the One Hundred and Ninetieth and One Hundred and Ninety-first, no credit for service subsequent to the battle of Welden Railroad, in August, 1864. We give an explanation of this in the closing chapter, and send forth this volume, hoping that it may serve, in some measure, to do justice to as devoted a body of men as Pennsylvania sent to the field.

SENECA, KANSAS, March, 1881.

INTRODUCTION.

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I have long purposed the following work, designing to put in a form somewhat permanent my recollections of experiences in the great war, believing it may be a source of satisfaction to my children in later years. Already many of those scenes begin to appear dim and dreamlike, through the receding years, and many faces, once so clearly pictured in memory as seen around the camp-fire, in the march, and on the field of battle, have faded quite away. These things admonish me that what is done must be done quickly.

In the following pages you will find the names of men otherwise unknown, because their part in the great conflict was an humble one, yet none the less grand and heroic. This is written during the brief and uncertain intervals of leisure that may be caught up here and there amid the pressing work of the pastorate. You will not, then, I trust, undervalue it because of literary blemishes. It is *history* as really as more pretentious works. It is a specimen of the *minutiæ* of history, a story of the war as seen by a private in the ranks, not by one who, as a favored spectator, could survey the movements of a whole army at a glance, and hence could, *must*, individualize brigades, divisions, army corps. It is the war in field, woods, underbrush, picket-post, skirmish-line, camp, march, bivouac. During 1864 no memorandum was kept, and a diary kept during the spring of 1865 was lost, within a year after the close of the war. Hence I have depended on memory alone, aided in fixing dates, etc., by reference to written works. Beyond this, the

histories consulted were of little assistance, as their record of events sometimes differed materially from my recollection of them. In such cases I tell my own story, as the object is to record these things as they appeared to me.

In recording events of which I was not myself a witness, I give the story as heard from the lips of comrades. Such portions are easily discernible in the body of the narrative. You can have them for what they are worth.

"I can not tell how the truth may be,
I tell the tale as 'twas told to me."

In the Ranks.

Chapter I.

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"WAR!"

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It is a little word. A child may pronounce it; but what word that ever fell from human lips has a meaning full of such intensity of horror as this little word? At its sound there rises up a grim vision of "confused noise and garments rolled in blood." April 12, 1861, cannon fired by traitor hands, boomed out over Charleston harbor. The dire sound that shook the air that Spring morning did not die away in reverberating echoes from sea to shore, from island to headland. It rolled on through all the land, over mountain and valley, moaning in every home, at every fireside, "War! War! War!"

Are we a civilized people? What is civilization? Is it possible to eliminate the tiger from human nature? Who would have dreamed that the men of the North, busy with plowing and sowing, planning, contriving, inventing, could prove themselves on a hundred battle-fields a fiercely warlike people? The world looked on with wonder as they rushed eagerly into the conflict, pouring out their blood like water and their wealth without measure, for a sentiment, a principle, that may be summed up in the one word —"nationality." "The great uprising" was not the movement of a blind, unreasoning impulse. A fire had been smoldering in the North for years. The first cannon shot, that hurtled around the old flag as it floated over the walls of Fort Sumter shook down the barriers that confined it, and the free winds of liberty fanned it to a devouring flame.

The Yankee—let the name be proudly spoken—as he turned the furrow, stood by his work bench, or listened to

the jarring clank of his machinery, had mused with heavy heart and shame-flushed cheek how a haughty, brutal, un-American spirit had drawn a line across the land, and said, "Beyond this is *not* your country. Here your free speech, free labor, and free thought shall never come." While this line was imaginary, he had waited for better days and larger thought to change the current of the times; but when it was transformed into bristling bayonets and frowning cannon, the tiger rose up within him, and with unquestioning faith he took up the gauge of battle. Men talked of the "cold blood of the North." That blood had surged impetuously through the veins of warrior freemen for a hundred generations. Here in the New World it had lost none of its vigor. The sturdy spirit that in other years ruled the hand that wielded the battle-ax, still ruled, when the hand was employed in subduing mountain and prairie. The North was averse to war, because it was rising to that higher civilization that abhors violence, discards brute methods, and relies on the intellectual and moral. Such a people, driven to desperation, move right forward to the accomplishment of their object with a scorn of cost or consequences unknown to a lower type. Hence it is that the people of the North, without hesitation, grappled with a rebellion the most formidable ever successfully encountered by any government. For a like reason their great armies, melting away like frost before the sun when the rebel flag went down, mingled again with the people without jar or confusion.

Turning away from a half million graves, wherein they had buried their slain, their bravest and best beloved, they forgot all bitterness for joy that peace had come. No people in the world had greater reason for severity than the victors in this strife. War, willful, unprovoked, without the shadow of justification, had been thrust upon them. This had been preceded by a series of usurpations the most unblushing ever endured by a free people. These were a part of the

plan of a band of traitors, who had plotted for years to overthrow the existing order of things, and establish an empire with human slavery for its chief corner-stone.

The "Golden Circle," with its center at Havana, Cuba, its radii extending to Pennsylvania on the North, the isthmus on the south, and sweeping from shore to shore, was the bold dream of the men who plotted the destruction of the American republic. Their object was pursued with a cold-blooded disregard of all right, human and divine, worthy of the pagan brutality of the Roman Triumvirate. Prating about the "Constitution" with hypocritical cant, they trampled upon every safeguard of popular liberty, and at last, in defiance of even the forms of law, plunged the people of the Southern States into a war with the government, which, even if successful in securing a separation, could only have been the beginning of woes, as their plans would develop.

But notwithstanding the heinousness of the accomplished crime, not a man was punished. It is doubtful whether popular opinion would have approved the punishment of even the arch-traitor, Jeff Davis. The common sentiment was expressed by the oft-repeated verdict: "Enough of blood has been shed." Whether this was wise or not it is vain to inquire. Perhaps the future will vindicate the wisdom of the generous course of the government. Thus far it has seemed like folly. The South has shown a persistent vindictiveness unequaled in the history of any people, a cruelty toward the helpless victims of their hate that is shameful to the last degree. The cowardly assassination of political opponents, the brutal murder of black men, women, and children, has been defended openly or covertly by pulpit, press, and platform. If any disapprove, their voice is not heard in condemnation of the wrong.

This may have resulted partly from the fact that many of the people of the North, notably many so-called statesmen,

ignored common sense and gave way to gush and sentiment. There is nothing gained in this prosy world by calling black white. The leaders of the rebellion were guilty of the horrible crime of *treason*, and we baptized it something else. The result is manifest to all who are not willfully and wickedly blind to the facts.

Yet it is the part of duty to hope for the speedy coming of an era of calmer judgment, of real and healthy patriotism, when every American citizen will claim our whole land as his *country*.

Chapter II.

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When the civil war began, my home was with the family of Mr. John Dunn, in Butler County, Pennsylvania. The old gentleman was a Democrat, and at first had little to say about the war. One evening he returned from the village in a state of intense excitement. He had heard of the disastrous battle at Bull Run. It is no exaggeration to say that he "pranced" around the room, chewing his tobacco with great vigor, telling how many of our "poor boys" had been slaughtered by the—— rebels. His apathy was at an end. He could see where the line lay between treason and patriotism, when once that line was traced in blood.

At this time two Butler County companies, C and D, of the Eleventh Pennsylvania Reserve Volunteer Corps, were in camp near Pittsburg. The corps was sent forward to Washington at once, and from that time till the close of their term of service, they gallantly represented the Keystone State in every battle fought by the Army of the Potomac. My brother, Wm. A., was a private in Company C. He enlisted June 10, 1861, and fell, with many other brave men, at the battle of Gaines' Mill, June 27, 1862.

From what I could learn from those who were present, the following are the facts concerning the disaster which befell the regiment in this engagement, and my brother's death:

Late in the afternoon of the 27th, the Eleventh moved forward to relieve a New Jersey regiment, which had been fighting in a piece of woods near the center of the line. The rebels came swarming against them, line after line, but