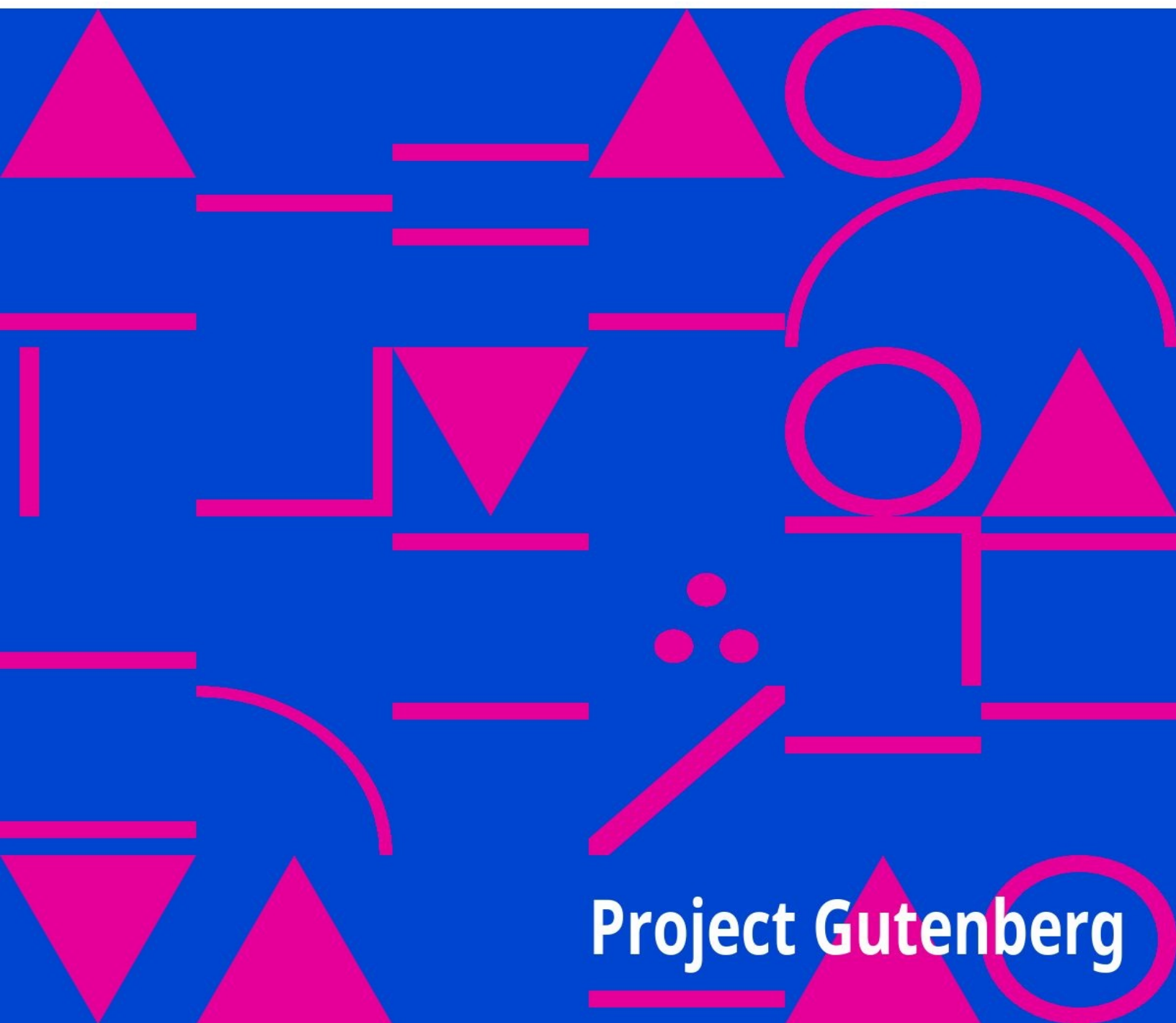


A Raw Recruit's War Experiences

Ansel D. Nickerson



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THE "RAW RECRUIT."

A RAW RECRUIT'S WAR EXPERIENCES.

BY

ANSEL D. NICKERSON,

Late Private Co. B, Eleventh Rhode Island Volunteers.

**PROVIDENCE:
PRINTED BY THE PRESS COMPANY.
1888.**

FOR PRIVATE DISTRIBUTION ONLY.

**AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED
To My Wife,
WHOSE PATRIOTIC SPIRIT PROMPTED
ME TO OFFER MY SERVICES
TO MY COUNTRY.**

“The neighing troop, the flashing blade,
The bugle’s stirring blast,
The charge, the dreadful cannonade,
The din and shout are past.”



APOLOGY.

This “war paper” was first read before the Rhode Island Soldiers and Sailors Society, in Providence, October 19, 1886. Subsequently it was read at the annual winter reunion of the Eleventh Rhode Island Regiment (January 27, 1887), two companies of which regiment (B and F) were recruited in Pawtucket, the former commanded by Captain Charles W. Thrasher and Lieutenant Thomas Moies, and the latter by Captain Edward Taft. It has since been read several times before other associations and societies. The paper was not intended for publication, nor was it originally broken into chapters, and in allowing it to be published, the author permits the urgent requests of numerous friends to outweigh his own judgment. It does not assume to be a connected or detailed history of the regiment; nor is it the history of any one company of the regiment; nor is it the diary of an officer of the regiment, but simply what its title indicates, “A RAW RECRUIT’S WAR EXPERIENCES.” More is said about Company B than of any other company in the Eleventh Regiment for the reason that the aforesaid “raw recruit’s war experiences” were especially identified with that company. Being personal recollections, and to a large extent the recital of personal incidents connected with the nine months’ campaign of the regiment in Virginia, must be my apology for the frequent use of the personal pronoun I.

As the events of which I speak occurred at a period in our country’s history when a spade was called a spade, and among a class of men who could not be justly accused of ambiguity of expression, my paper will be found to contain more than one “strong, old-fashioned English word, familiar to all who read their Bibles.”

To those comrades whose war experiences were of a very different character from my own, and into whose hands this unpretentious little volume may fall, I trust that the recital of some of the ludicrous scenes in camp and on the march, rather than the harrowing descriptions of sanguinary battles, may not prove wholly unwelcome.

A. D. N.

PAWTUCKET, R. I.,
April, 1888.

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A Raw Recruit's War Experiences.

CHAPTER I.

During the winter preceding the firing upon Sumter, I was one of a group of young fellows of about my own age who regularly assembled evenings at the corner grocery of the village where we lived, to listen to older persons discuss the affairs of the nation and all other matters, moral, intellectual and social, as is the nightly custom in country groceries, and particularly the probabilities of war between the North and the South, which, I will say in passing, every day grew more probable. Each several barrel-head in that grocery seemed to know its own occupant, and for any one else to have appropriated it to his own use, especially had he been a young man, would, I am sure, have been deemed an unpardonable breach of courtesy. The grocer himself was the acknowledged spokesman of the company, and never allowed himself to be “switched off” from the subject in hand, however pressing the demands of his waiting customers. He did not believe there would be any war; but in the event that the South should “kick in the traces,” as he expressed it, “our boys would only have to arm themselves with brooms and go down there and give ’em a thrashing.” This *sweeping* assertion was received with liberal applause by all of his hearers, the impatient customers not excepted.

I hope I shall not detract from your favorable estimate of the grocer’s patriotism when I add that, being a dealer in brooms himself, he remarked that he “would like nothing better than a contract to supply the government with them.” I hardly need mention the fact that the grocer was a genuine specimen of the Yankee, and always kept an anchor to the windward and his eyes wide open for the main chance. “They all did it”—in war times.

I only mention this incident in illustration of the opinion which our northern people generally had in the winter of ’60 and ’61 as to the likelihood of a war with the South, and their estimate as to what would be necessary to suppress a rebellion against the government in that section of the country if, unfortunately, one should break out.

But, as we all know, the groceryman proved a false prophet. When the news of the attack upon Fort Sumter came, it found me setting type in the “Gazette and Chronicle” printing office in Pawtucket, where I had been regularly employed as apprentice and journeyman since 1846. “All work and no play” had made Jack a

pretty dull boy indeed, and the war promised a vacation, temporary or permanent, which I had long been seeking, and which I at once made up my mind that I would avail myself of at the earliest possible opportunity. As the war news became more and more interesting, filling the paper nearly full every week to the exclusion of less important matters, I became more and more determined to give the country the benefit of my services. Very many of my associates had enlisted and gone “to the front,” and I could not satisfy myself with any good reason for longer remaining at home when men were so much needed to defend the honor of the old flag and assist in upholding the integrity of the government in its day of greatest peril. In the language of that good old hymn, I realized that

“I can but perish if I go,”

and said:

“I am resolved to try.”

And I did. With what result will be seen.

I expected to encounter opposition at home, and consequently I kept my plans to myself. A year had passed away, and yet I was not enrolled among the “boys in blue.” Three hundred thousand nine months’ volunteers were called for by President Lincoln, and proclamation was made that if the necessary quota from each State was not filled by the fifteenth of August, 1862, a draft would be resorted to. I concluded to step in out of the draft. War meetings were held almost every night in the old Armory Hall on High street in Pawtucket. I was a regular attendant in the capacity of reporter for the newspaper upon which I was employed. The speakers were generally men past middle life, whose principal business seemed to be to urge the young men to volunteer, and not to volunteer themselves. One evening, for some reason, there was a dearth of speakers, and after a while some one in the audience called out my name, and soon the call became so loud and so general that I was compelled to respond. I ascended the platform, and, as nearly as I can remember, I spoke as follows: “Young men, one thing has especially impressed me this evening. Every speaker who has preceded me has said to you, ‘Go!’ Now, boys, I say *Come!*” and turning to a recruiting officer who sat on my right, I said, “Put my name down!” I think it was the shortest speech I ever made; at any rate, I know it was the best received. There seemed to be no bounds to the enthusiasm which was manifested, and the recruiting business in Pawtucket at once received a “boom.”

After the meeting was over and congratulations were ended, I went home. Now

began the “tug of war.” The house was silent—very silent—and so was I. I didn’t sleep much that night. In my wakefulness I concluded not to say anything to my family about what I had done, but leave her to learn the news from some other source. But this little scheme was upset very early in the morning by the lady of the house asking me concerning the war meeting of the previous evening, and the names of the speakers. After giving her such general information as I possessed, I hesitatingly informed her that she had had the honor of entertaining one of the speakers over night. Woman like, she then wanted to know if anybody enlisted. Things were getting pretty close home now. The ice must be broken. I told her that several persons enlisted, and gave her the names of some of them; and, after a moment’s hesitation, I said, “I don’t know what you will think, or say, when I tell you that I was one of them, and that I am going to the war.” Judge of my surprise, and of my own depreciated estimate of what I had previously considered my great patriotism, when she exclaimed, “*Well, all I have got to say is, that if I had been a man, I should have gone long ago.*” The ice was pretty effectually broken now, and what I feared might prove a council of war, was turned into a council of peace. That speech settled the whole business for me, and I was ready, yea, anxious, to shoulder my musket and go “to the front” immediately; in fact, I wished I had gone before. Woman’s work in the war! I fear it has not been fully appreciated or justly acknowledged. The patriotism, the heroism and the sacrifice were not confined to the soldiers. They knew little of the inexpressible longings, the fears, the prayers, the yearning hopes, the terrible suspense, of those at home who loved them. What pen can truthfully describe the weary watching and waiting of the wives and mothers, the daughters and sisters, during those long four years of fire and blood? God bless them, one and all!

Several weeks elapsed between the time of enlistment and going into camp. At last we were ordered to report on Dexter Training Ground, in Providence, the name of the camp being “Camp Stevens,” in honor of Major General Isaac Ingalls Stevens, who was killed September 1st, 1862, in the battle of Chantilly, Virginia, while leading his division in a charge. To very many of the members of the regiment, their first military experience began on Camp Stevens, and truthfulness to history compels me to add that with no small number of the enlisted men it ended there, they being unable to “pass muster,” or, in other words, to endure the severe ordeal to which they were subjected by the chief mustering officer, Captain William Silvey, of the regular army. I had entertained fears from the start that I would be “thrown out” on account of a supposed pulmonary difficulty. I “braced up” as best I could for the examination. Captain Silvey looked me squarely in the face as I stood in line, and placing one of his

hands upon my breast, he struck with the other a blow which seemed hard enough to fell an ox, and then remarked "All right!" I could not have been made more happy than I was by his decision if he had knocked me down. He settled one thing at any rate which had long been a disputed question in our family, namely, that my breathing apparatus was "all right."

After the examinations were concluded, the "lucky ones" were sworn in and marched down to the quartermaster's department to receive their equipments. The "pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war" had never possessed any great charm for me. I had belonged to an engine company and a Sunday-school, but never to a military company; in fact, until I went on to Camp Stevens I do not remember ever to have had a musket in my hand. This will serve to explain why, when all of the members of my company had been supplied with arms, the officer in command called attention to the fact that I had my gun wrong side before, my hand grasping the lock or hammer instead of the "guard." The suggestion that I should join the "awkward squad" was sufficiently exasperating to have almost induced me to throw up my commission.

But a still further humiliation was in store for me. At our first drill in the manual of arms, among the other orders given was, "ram cartridge," when the officer in charge discovered that I had inserted the wrong end of the ramrod into the muzzle of the gun, I having found the hollow space in the large end very convenient in which to insert the ball of my little finger in sending the imaginary cartridge to its destination. Fortunately for me, no further opportunities for demonstrating my fitness for promotion in the "awkward squad" were furnished me, and my leisure hours were spent in acquiring proficiency in drill. How well I succeeded will appear.

While we were on Camp Stevens we had a great many visitors. Among those whom I shall ever remember was that "grand, square and upright" citizen of Pawtucket, Charley Chickering. It so happened that the day he visited us, I was performing guard duty around the camp. I noticed that my portly friend, as he paraded up and down the sidewalk opposite me, seemed deeply interested in my movements. Presently he came across the street and walked alongside of me awhile as I paced my beat back and forth. He was silent. So was I. But at length that ominous chuckle of his began to be heard, or perhaps I should say a series of chuckles, which all who are acquainted with him so well know always precedes his quaint and original utterances. I fancied that my martial air and my dexterity in handling my musket, although I knew it did bob around considerably when carried at "support," or perpendicularly, was to evoke from my old friend and

schoolmate a compliment. But judge of my surprise when instead he opened upon me as follows, his every word being punctuated with one of those peculiar chuckles to which I have referred: “Nickerson,—I—admire—your— patriotism,—but—I—swear—I—can’t—compliment—you—on—your— soldierly— bearing.”

I confess that I experienced considerable difficulty in learning to keep step, but, like the raw Irish recruit, I stoutly maintained that the trouble was with “the other b’ys; they wouldn’t kape step wid me.”



CHAPTER II.

It was on the afternoon of the sixth of October, 1862, when we kissed our wives and sweethearts, and

“With our guns upon our shoulders,
And our bayonets by our sides,”

left Camp Stevens for the seat of war. We were in anything but light marching order when we broke camp. To this day the remembrance of those back-breaking knapsacks makes me weary. Feminine ingenuity seemingly exhausted itself in conjuring up all sorts of things, describable and indescribable, that could make life a burden to a “raw recruit,” a wheelbarrow being needed for their transportation. But the size of those knapsacks grew “beautifully less” shortly after leaving home, a blanket and overcoat being all that were absolutely needed in active service, and often one of these proved a burden rather than a necessity. In addition to clothing enough to have overstocked one of the numerous Palestine merchants on Chatham street, in New York, there were, among other things, family Bibles, pocket Testaments, prayer-books and dictionaries, Pilgrim’s Progress, Old Farmer’s Almanac, photograph and autograph albums, ambrotypes and daguerreotypes, diaries, razors, mirrors of various sizes, boxes of blacking, button-hooks, collars and cuffs, corkscrews, tooth powder, brushes for the hair, teeth and boots, whisk brooms, clothing and hat brushes, combs, shaving utensils, slippers, clothes-wringers, frying-pans and patent coffee-pots, soap, towels, napkins, pins, needles and thread, buttons of various dimensions, boots and shoes, both thick and thin, hair oil and pomade, matches, pipes, tobacco, plug and fine cut, rolls of linen bandages and bundles of lint, Pain Killer, Jamaica ginger, Seidlitz powders, pills, cayenne pepper, and almost everything else but umbrellas. Then there were the equipments provided by the government,—haversack, canteen, cartridge box and sixty rounds of cartridges, not to mention the musket,—until our appearance resembled the pictures of the dromedaries crossing the Great Desert which I saw in the geography in my school days. When we embarked on the cars at Olneyville, bound for New York, and unslung those corpulent knapsacks, the sense of relief which we experienced was, I fancy, somewhat akin to that felt by Bunyan’s pilgrim when he dropped his burden. Indeed, it seemed like getting out from under a haystack or a mountain.

From New York to Washington our trip possessed no features uncommon to other regiments. From Philadelphia to the National Capital we were transported in freight cars, a new experience to all of us, but one to which we became accustomed before we saw Rhode Island again. It was at Perryville, Maryland, that we had our first glimpse of the devastation wrought by war. Here the extensive bridge across the Susquehanna had been burned by the enemy, and we were transferred in detachments across the river to Havre de Grace in a small steamer. We arrived in Washington about ten o'clock on one of the most beautiful moonlight nights I ever saw. Our arrival was expected by some of our friends who had enlisted earlier than ourselves, and they were at the railroad station to welcome us.

Immediately upon landing from the cars we were marched to the "Soldiers' Retreat" for refreshments. No soldier who has frequented that place needs to be told that we beat a hasty retreat therefrom. I am very confident that the most of the men would gladly have taken the next train back to Rhode Island, if the matter of return tickets had not been entirely overlooked by the master of transportation.

How marked the contrast between our reception in Washington and in Philadelphia! Even to this day pleasant memories remain of the hospitality dispensed to our regiment by the patriotic ladies of the "City of Brotherly Love," at the famous "Cooper Shop Volunteer Refreshment Saloon," a hospitality which was extended to all of the "boys in blue" who passed through Philadelphia on their way to the National Capital.

Fancy our feelings when we were informed that our first night in Washington must be spent in this same unsavory "Soldiers' Retreat." Acting upon the maxim that "what cannot be cured must be endured," and in unquestioned obedience to orders, we spread our blankets upon the hard, dirty floor, and taking our huge knapsacks for pillows we wrapped our mantles (poetry for army overcoats) about us and laid down to pleasant dreams of home, and feather beds, and hair mattresses, and other comforts and luxuries to which we had been so long accustomed as to have wholly failed to appreciate them at their proper value. Truly in our case, distance lent enchantment. But to come down to solid, matter-of-fact prose, we didn't sleep much that night anyway. Whether it was the effects of the heat of the preceding day when we were marching through Baltimore at a "double quick," with those burdensome knapsacks breaking our backs, or whether it was the souvenirs left by our comrades-in-arms who had occupied that same floor the previous night, I cannot positively affirm, but this one thing I

know, that we *scratched* out a miserable existence until morning, when, after declining without thanks to regale ourselves with the so-called coffee which was furnished us, which our boys affirmed was poor water spoilt, and the turning of the cold shoulder upon the salt junk which was so temptingly spread before us, we cheerfully obeyed the order of our Colonel to “fall in,” and were soon wending our way to East Capitol hill, near the east branch of the Potomac, where, our tents not having arrived, we encamped in the open air, which was far preferable to spending a second night at the “Soldiers’ Retreat.” The soil where we encamped was of a clayey nature, and the surface as free from moisture as polishing powder, and when we awoke on the following morning we had very much the appearance of having slept in an ash-pit.

We remained here but a day or two, when we received orders to join General Casey’s Division, and bidding adieu without regrets to “Camp Misery,” as our boys had named the spot, we were soon on our way across Chain Bridge, and in due season found ourselves on the “sacred soil” of Virginia.

I can never forget a laughable scene which was enacted on Pennsylvania avenue by Company B while on this march. We were on the extreme left of the line. In front of a tonsorial saloon on the avenue our boys espied a Dutchman who formerly carried on business in Pawtucket. The surprise at the unexpected meeting was mutual on the part of the barber and the boys. It was his habit when a customer entered his shop to inquire as to whether he preferred the water hot or cold, but for any one to repeat the question in his presence, whether on the street or elsewhere, was sure to stir up the barber’s ire. Immediately upon seeing him standing in front of his shop, our boys began to sing out, “Vater hot, or vater cold?” The old Dutchman became terribly excited, and the result was that that portion of the procession which was composed of Company B became sadly demoralized. As soon as our officers took in the situation, order was at once restored, and a few minutes of “double quick” enabled us to regain our position in line. But no sooner had this been done than we saw coming directly toward us, down the avenue, a regiment which had the appearance of having just come from “the front.” It was a new and strange sight to us, those “battle-scarred veterans” of the war, and we made up our minds that the right thing for us to do was to tender them a reception. Without any orders from our officers, and without even their knowledge, we immediately came to “company front” and presented arms, to the great amusement and evident astonishment of those old soldiers. This action on our part caused us to receive a well-merited reprimand from our officers, and it was the first and only performance of the kind in which

Company B bore a conspicuous part.



CHAPTER III.

Of the movements of the Eleventh regiment while in Virginia, I will not weary you with a rehearsal in detail. Our first regular camp was established on Miner's Hill, the extreme outer part of the defenses of Washington, and when we reached it on a cold, raw, blustering day late in the fall of 1862, the wind filling our eyes and mouths with a blinding and grinding dust, it was the most dismal and dreary-looking place that I ever saw—with the single exception of Seekonk Plains. We remained here about three months, building and stockading our winter quarters, drilling and doing picket duty, and making occasional raids when we felt sure that the enemy was a safe distance from us. We were in General Robert Cowdin's brigade, which comprised, in addition to our own regiment, the Fortieth Massachusetts, the Twenty-second Connecticut, the One Hundred and Forty-first New York, and the Sixteenth Virginia Battery.

Company B had a fund of one thousand dollars which was raised by the patriotic citizens of Pawtucket and Central Falls for the purpose of enabling the officers to procure for the members of the company, among other things, some articles for the table when we were in camp which were not to be found on the government "bill of fare." In consequence of this "company fund" we had a greater share of "extras" than any other company in the regiment while we were encamped in the vicinity of Washington. Among those "extras" were milk for our coffee and tea (fresh when it could be obtained, and condensed at other times); writing paper, envelopes and stamps; a copy of the Washington "Daily Chronicle" for each mess, and a weekly pictorial paper; blacking, oil, sand paper, emery paper, polishing powder, soap, matches, green apples, tallow candles and other delicacies of the season. The extra candles were used on special occasions, such as the reception of friends from home, and so forth. Naturally enough the members of the other companies looked upon us at times with envious eyes. The historian of the regiment writes thus of Company B: "Their company fund was large, their friends with money many, and their visitors, who always remembered them handsomely, numerous." We did, indeed, have quite a number of visitors from home while we were encamped near Washington, and I can assure you that their visits were always occasions of great pleasure to us. Later they became like angels' visits, "few and far between."

The first death in our company occurred at Miner's Hill, and the funeral

ceremonies were deeply impressive. The ambulance containing the remains of our dead comrade was preceded by an escort composed of the non-commissioned staff of the regiment, (the deceased having held the position of regimental hospital steward,) and sixteen men of Company B, in command of the first sergeant, accompanied by the drum corps. The officers and men of Company B followed in the rear of the procession. Arriving on the parade ground, the coffin was taken from the ambulance and placed on a stretcher, when appropriate services were performed by the chaplain, consisting of prayer, the reading of scripture, and brief remarks, after which three volleys were fired and the remains of Jacob S. Pervear, Jr., were replaced in the ambulance to be conveyed to Washington and thence to the home of the deceased in Pawtucket.

In the course of his remarks, the chaplain used the following very appropriate poetical quotation:

“Ye number it in days since he
 Strode up the foot-worn aisle,
With his dark eye flashing gloriously,
 And his lip wreathed with a smile;
Oh, had it been but told you then
 To mark whose lamp was dim,
From out those ranks of fresh-lipped men,
 Would ye have singled him?

* * * *

“His heart, in generous deed and thought,
 No rivalry might brook,
And yet, distinction claiming not,
 There lies he—go and look.”

The occasion was of a very mournful character, and it was not without effect upon some of the hardest men in the regiment, for young Pervear was greatly beloved by all.

One Sunday, when instead of going to church I was doing picket duty on the line of the Norfolk and Petersburg railroad, I halted an old man who was riding along in a dilapidated two-wheeled vehicle, to which was attached a still more dilapidated horned beast which, apparently, from time immemorial had served for its owner all the requirements of a horse. In answer to my inquiry whether he was a Union man, the old fellow gave me the following reply: “Stranger, I was born in the Union; I have always lived in the Union; I have always loved the old

Union, and I love her still; I have always voted for the old Union; and, stranger, when I die, whether I go to heaven or hell, I shall stick by the old Union!" All doubts as to his loyalty having been dispelled, I grasped him warmly by the hand, and, whispering in his ear, said, "Old man, *stick!*"

Perhaps I should have stated ere this that in addition to my duties as a soldier, I combined those of a "war correspondent." My letters were generally written in the evening in my tent, lying prone upon my face, the light being furnished by a dripping tallow candle which was stuck into the top of a bayonet whose point was inserted in the earth. Here, under such circumstances, I criticised the conduct of the war, and directed campaigns as best I could. I mention this fact at this time because the incident just related has already appeared in print.

An incident which has not appeared in print, but which made a deep impression upon the "family men" of the regiment, occurred on a beautiful Sunday afternoon while on dress parade at Miner's Hill. General Robert Cowdin, the brigade commander, was frequently an interested observer on these occasions. At the time to which I refer, he was accompanied by a lady friend from Washington, who held by the hand a beautiful little boy of four or five years of age. The sight of the little fellow, particularly when he let go his mother's hand and ran about and shouted in his childish glee, so affected the men that it was almost impossible to preserve a steady line and secure prompt obedience to orders. Men whom I had seldom or never before seen exhibit any emotion were moved to tears by the sight and the remembrance of dear ones at home, and many of them were heard to say that they would willingly part with a month's pay just to take the little fellow in their arms for a moment, while a Pawtucket man, who had a wife but no children, said he would give all his bounty money and throw the "cow" in, just to kiss the little fellow's mother—for *his wife's sake*. The order to "march off your companies" cut short other equally complimentary expressions concerning the mother and her darling boy.

One of the most ludicrous events which occurred in our regiment was on a very dark night when the "long roll" sounded for the first time. We were at once ordered under arms, it being whispered among the "knowing ones" that we were likely to have a brush with the enemy before daylight, while the officers knew it was only to "break in" the men, to see how they would behave in the time of actual service. There was a hurrying to and fro of officers of all grades; signal lights were swung here and there in response to similar signals which could be seen quite a distance away; the surgeons were overhauling and sharpening their instruments and filing their saws and getting out large quantities of lint and

bandages; all orders were given in a whisper, and everything betokened speedy and decisive action, the time having come for our men to cover themselves with glory—or shame.

In Company B there was an Irishman named Mike Cassidy. He was an old man, and when he got into line it was evident that he was sleeping soundly when the order fell upon his ears to “turn out,” and that he had not been able in the darkness to find his entire wardrobe, or if he found it, that he did not have time to get properly inside of it. But he had his old and trusty musket, with which he had often declared he could alone whip the whole Southern Confederacy if they would only give him time. Time was what Mike most needed. He always had time enough, but it was “behind time,” save when the order was given to “fall in for rations.” But it happened on that particular night some member of his “mess” whose musket was without a tube or nipple upon which to put a cap, had appropriated Cassidy’s to his own use. I seem now to see Cassidy as he appeared in line on that dark night trying to put a percussion cap on that nippleless gun. Comrade, did you ever swear? Do you think you ever heard anybody swear? You should have heard Cassidy. He swore vengeance upon all of his comrades, and declared that if he was killed, his ghost would forever haunt the man who stole the nipple from his gun. “Here I am,” he exclaimed, “with no nipple on me gun, and the whole dommed Confederacy right on us!”

In the midst of all the excitement which he occasioned by his vociferous tones and profane explosives, the order came to “break ranks,” and poor Cassidy was the laughing-stock of the whole company. I believe he forgave the rank and file for what he termed the “sell,” but he said he would never forgive the officers—and I am confident that he never did.

A large number of the members of the Eleventh regiment reënlisted upon the expiration of their term of service. Cassidy was, I think, among them. But be that as it may, a very funny story is told about his trying to get a pension on account of some real or fancied injury received while in an engagement. The chief of the board of examiners asked him where he was wounded. Mike placed his hand on his left breast and said, “About here, sor.” The examiner exclaimed: “Why, man, if you had been hit there you would have been killed on the spot, for the bullet would have gone right through your heart!”

“I know it, sor,” replied Cassidy, “but, bejabbers, me heart was in me mouth.”

CHAPTER IV.

All were in high glee and the mythical goose occupied an elevated position when we “broke camp” and left Miner’s Hill. The intelligent contraband who used to visit us every morning to dispose of his “baked fried pies” was promptly on hand to collect the small sums from the boys which still remained unpaid; and after the line had begun to move, another darkey, who had been doing the washing for a large number of persons connected with the regiment, and one of whose customers—presumably an officer—had failed to meet his obligations, kept up with the regiment for a mile or more, running along the line from one company to the other, peering into the faces of all, and shouting at the top of his voice, “*Some gemman here owes me free cents!*” The only satisfaction he got was that he would be paid when “the cruel war was over.”

The Eleventh regiment saw but little service in the field. Our regimental colors bear the names of no battles in which we were engaged, although we took part in several very lively skirmishes, and for an entire day stood in line in a broiling sun, expecting every moment to be ordered to take part in a fight which was going on directly in front of us, across the river at Suffolk, Virginia. The roar of the artillery and the rattle of the musketry saluted our ears from morning until night; the ambulances passed by us all day long with the wounded and the dying, and some of our men who were on guard at the hospitals, which comprised the churches, rendered assistance as nurses. As matters turned, however, the rebels retreating, the services of our regiment were not required. But had they been, there is no reason to doubt that the Eleventh would have acquitted itself in such a manner as to have done honor to the State which sent it into the field. One who knew the Eleventh regiment well, writes as follows concerning it: “I feel warranted in saying, without fear of contradiction, that no State sent into the service during the war, any better regiment, in everything that goes to make a good regiment, than this nine months’ regiment; and I do not hesitate to say here and everywhere, that in the character of the enlisted men, in the fidelity with which they performed every duty, disagreeable as well as agreeable, it had no superior.”

But while little opportunity was given the Eleventh regiment to acquire distinction in the field, yet it performed a service which, while bringing no renown to the regiment, was as important as it was disagreeable, and which

subjected not only the men but the officers to very many unpleasant experiences. I now refer to the arduous duty which the regiment performed at the Convalescent Camp, midway between Washington and Alexandria. Here we found between ten thousand and fifteen thousand old soldiers who had been discharged from the hospitals in and around Washington, waiting to be sent home or back to their regiments. Long lines of ambulances went back and forth every day between the camp and Washington, carrying those to whom transportation to their homes or regiments had been furnished, and bringing from the hospitals others to take their vacant places. The camp was in a very filthy condition when we arrived there, and the men greatly demoralized. Of course our appearance as a guard over these old soldiers was anything but welcome, and they were not slow in acquainting us with the fact. For a time it seemed as if only the most extreme measures on our part would prevent such insubordination as we should be unable to control. Our duties were not only very disagreeable, but they were performed at that season of the year when mud was for the most part of the time nearly knee-deep, and frozen feet were no novelty.

Here, day by day, our eyes witnessed the terrible effects of war upon human life. Men who had been wounded in battle and were recovering from their injuries were hobbling about on canes and crutches, while wounded arms were supported by various ingenious devices. Some had lost a leg, some both legs, some an arm, and some both arms. Others had an eye gone, an ear torn off, a jaw which had been crushed into fragments. The wounds were of every conceivable sort, and in every part of the body, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot. They had been shot in the head, in the face, in the neck, in the shoulders, the arms, the legs, and the feet. They had been shot through the chest, through the lungs, through the hips and through the thighs. While here and there, gathered in small groups, were victims of disease contracted in camp or on the march, whose looks plainly indicated that they realized that there was but a step between them and death. In recalling these scenes even at this late day, my heart sickens as those pale faces and gaunt forms again rise up before me, and I thank God that “the cruel war is over.”

An entire paper might be written of the experiences—grave and gay—at Convalescent Camp. For the most part of the three winter months that we were there, the time passed away very slowly, and all were anxious for a change. Before we left, the external appearance of the camp had been greatly improved, and the convalescents generally had become reconciled to our presence among them, and less inclined to “run the guard” than at first, a few object lessons as to

the sure results of such doings on their part causing them to regard “discretion as the better part of valor.” However, candor compels me to say that when we left for Suffolk, no regrets at our departure were expressed by the convalescents, and as we passed through the camp on our way to take the cars for Alexandria, their taunts and jeers came near provoking an unpleasant collision, which, however, was happily averted by the coolness and firmness of our officers. Whatever else concerning the war an Eleventh Rhode Island man may forget, you can be sure that it will not be his unpleasant personal experiences at the Convalescent Camp.

Permit me to relate an incident that occurred there in which I bore a conspicuous part, and which has afforded me much more amusement since than it did at the time.

As I have already remarked, while we were on duty at the Convalescent Camp, time hung heavily upon our hands, and quite a number of the members of the regiment who had “influential friends” in Washington obtained furloughs to visit home. Among those who sought the autograph of Drake DeKay, by whom all furloughs were signed, and whose signature looked as if it was written with his thumb about a month after a buzz-saw had got its work in on the first joint, was the “raw recruit” of Company B. Others received their furloughs, but mine tarried. I began to fear that my “influential friends” had “got left”—at home. One afternoon, as I was sitting in my tent ruminating as to how I would surprise my friends by coming home unexpectedly, particularly my family, and as to how I would spend my time while there, an orderly from the colonel’s headquarters came to our first sergeant and told him that the colonel wanted him to send a man there immediately. Our first sergeant knowing that I expected a furlough, and being willing to have a little fun at my expense, told me that the colonel wished to see me at once. Getting myself together in the best style I could at such short notice, and expecting to receive my furlough and start for home by the evening train, I speedily reported myself at the colonel’s quarters. Judge of my great surprise when, instead of the colonel stepping to the door of his tent with the coveted furlough in his hand, and politely requesting me to accept it with his compliments, and wishing me a pleasant visit home and a safe return, the aforesaid orderly informed me that the colonel wished me to go to the blacksmith’s and keep the flies off his horse while he was being shod. I obeyed orders as a matter of course, the flies were kept off, the horse was eventually shod, my furlough never came, and my ways of spending it at home were never realized. Such are the fortunes of war. The private soldier proposes, and the officer opposes—that is, as a general thing.

CHAPTER V.

“Jumping from the frying-pan into the fire,” the most of us thought when we reached Alexandria, after leaving the Convalescent Camp, and found that we were to be furnished with transportation to Norfolk on the old steamer “Hero,” which, as the “Argo,” ran between Providence and Rocky Point long “befo’ de wah.” We thought our accommodations could never be worse than they were when we landed at the “Soldiers’ Retreat” in Washington, but had a rivalry existed between the two concerns, the “Hero” would have most effectually distanced its competitor. It seemed, indeed, as if extra pains had been taken by somebody to make our condition as uncomfortable and unsatisfactory as possible. A cold rainstorm was prevailing when we went on board the steamer. There were no sleeping accommodations whatever for the men, and even the floor of the cabin which the officers occupied was covered with sheets of boiler-iron, strewn helter-skelter here, there and everywhere. The decks, where the men were huddled together like sheep, were covered with mud and water several inches deep, our clothing was damp, the air foul, and everything about as disagreeable as it could well be. If we had been left in the starch over night we could not have been more stiff the next morning than we were. Yet few complaints were heard, the men generally preferring almost anything to longer remaining to guard sick and disabled soldiers, especially where our room was better than our company.

In course of time—that is, very slow time—Norfolk was reached, and when transportation could be obtained we piled into freight cars and were soon on our way through the famous Dismal Swamp to Suffolk. Here we found the Fourth regiment, and the reception which the boys gave us was next to getting back to Rhode Island itself. I will not attempt to speak in detail of what was done at Suffolk by our regiment. It was the pleasantest place which we visited while we were away from home, and the service being more active than any which we had previously performed, it was more congenial and satisfactory to the men. Our camp was delightfully located, and the occasional sharp skirmishes which we had with the rebels, who were just across the Nansemond river, together with numerous expeditions to the Blackwater and thereabouts, served to keep the regiment in good condition and remove all apprehensions of demoralization because of inactivity.

There were a large number of Union troops at Suffolk before our arrival. The weather soon became very hot, and previous to their departure the deaths were numerous. Daily the solemn processions wended their way to the populous city of the dead. The funerals usually took place in the morning just before sunrise, or at night just after sunset. I seem now to hear the dirges played by the bands, and the volleys fired by the soldiers over the graves of their dead comrades.

Upon my return home, I learned that among those in the rebel army while I was at Suffolk was a young man who learned his trade with me in the "Chronicle" office in Pawtucket, and who went to Alabama several years before the "late unpleasantness." At the close of the war he returned to the North and again became a loyal citizen.

On one of the expeditions to which I have referred, the Eleventh regiment marched to the extreme front, three miles from Blackwater bridge, throwing out Company F as pickets one mile in advance, who were soon engaged by the enemy, and a brisk skirmish ensued which lasted until dark, when hostilities ceased for that day. On the following afternoon, while three of the companies of the regiment were picketing the front, they were attacked in a spirited manner by six companies of a Mississippi regiment deployed as skirmishers. Company B was sent forward as a support, but soon deployed as skirmishers. The firing continued several hours, the enemy being steadily driven back, leaving their dead on the field. Several prisoners were captured. Obeying orders to fall back to Windsor, the picket companies acted as rear guard. On this expedition the regiment was absent from Suffolk eleven days, and was attached to the division under command of General Corcoran. This was the nearest approach to a hand-to-hand encounter with the enemy that the regiment had during its term of service, and the two Pawtucket companies occupied the most exposed and conspicuous positions.

It was at this time that Lieutenant Thomas Moies came near being shot by a man who belonged to one of the companies of the Eleventh which were in the rear of Company B. The affair to which I refer occurred just in the edge of the woods, between daylight and dark. Lieutenant Moies, with an old straw hat on his head, and in advance of his men, was cautiously crawling along on his hands and knees in the underbrush up to the enemy's line. Having satisfied himself that the enemy was falling back, he rose up, and a member of Company C observing his hat mistook it for the head-gear of one of the rebels, as their uniform always lacked uniformity, and immediately fired. Fortunately for Lieutenant Moies, and to the great joy of the entire regiment, the man who fired failed to obey the

stereotyped order to “fire low,” and the misdirected bullet went over the head of our esteemed lieutenant, and his valuable life was spared.

Since this paper was prepared, Lieutenant Moies has been “mustered out.” I knew him well as a neighbor and as a soldier. Together we slept on the field with the same starry canopy for our covering, and together on the weary march we shared the scanty contents of the same haversack and drank from the same canteen. For him, “war’s glorious art” had no allurements. He loved his quiet home and the peaceful pursuits of life, and when he gave himself to the service of his country it was because, being a true patriot, he felt that its claims upon him were greater than those of family and friends.

“Wife, children and neighbor,
May mourn at his knell;
He was lover and friend
Of his country as well.”

His rank in the service, when measured by the army standard, was a subordinate one, but had his shoulders been covered with eagles or stars, he could not have been other than the same quiet, unassuming citizen-soldier that he was, winning by his modest demeanor, sterling integrity, and kindliness of heart, the esteem of his brother officers, and the love and affection of his men. I know whereof I speak, when I say that no officer who went from Rhode Island was more respected and beloved by his command than was Lieutenant Thomas Moies, and by none is his death more sincerely mourned than by those who served under him in Virginia in 1862-3. Such was the man—such was the soldier.

CHAPTER VI.

Elsewhere I have spoken of an “unconditional surrender” Union man whom I overhauled while on picket duty on the Norfolk and Petersburg railroad. All southern men—and women, too, as to that matter—were not so loyal as that old man was, as is shown by the following incident which occurred on the morning of our arrival in Suffolk. While marching down the principal street we were halted for a few minutes. Immediately all the doorsteps of the houses were appropriated by our men to their own use. My doorstep belonged to a house which had all the appearance of being occupied by one of the “first families.” Presently a well dressed, intelligent looking, elderly lady appeared at the door and inquired what regiment ours was. Before time was given me to reply, a comrade who was sharing the step with me, said, “One Hundred and Eleventh Rhode Island!” She then asked, “Is that in North Carolina?” To assist her in locating “Little Rhody,” I remarked that Massachusetts was its nearest neighbor, presuming that all southerners knew where the “bottled up” hero of Dutch Gap belonged when at home. Having straightened out her geography, which seemed considerably mixed, she then wanted to know what we came out there for. I told her we came to fight for the Union. With considerable fire in her eye, and vinegar in her tone, she replied, “They tell me you’ve come down here to fight for the nasty niggers; and if I were a man, I would resist to the death before *I* would do such a thing!” Here the conversation was suddenly interrupted by the order to “fall in,” and I left the old lady soliloquizing upon the causes which led to the war, and its probable result to both North and South. Whether she had confounded Rhode Island with Roanoke Island by reason of the similarity of names, or whether our sudden appearance in front of her residence had caused her to lose her reckoning generally, I am not sure. Possibly she was not up in geography.

We had our pastimes when in camp. While we were at Suffolk it was not an uncommon thing just after supper to see the men of Companies I and K (commonly known as the Young Men’s Christian Association companies) holding prayer-meetings in the open air and singing revival melodies at the ends of their streets, while the men of the other companies, at the ends of their streets, would be dancing to the music of a violin or banjo, or singing songs of a less spiritual character than those of the Y. M. C. A. companies, all having a good

time in their way, and neither infringing nor trespassing upon the rights of the others, although some of the men in the regiment, I feel compelled to say, were not the embodiment of all the Christian virtues.

While we were in winter quarters on Miner's Hill, the religiously inclined men of the regiment erected a log chapel in which to hold services in the evening and on Sundays. No church bell summoned them to worship, but a few taps of the drum or a few notes from the bugle, or, better still, the singing of some old, familiar hymn learned in boyhood in New England homes, served as a "church call," and from every part of the camp the men came to reverently worship the God of battles. I like good church music, but believe me when I say that I would not exchange the memory of one of those grand old hymns which "the boys" used to sing with "the spirit, and the understanding also," at their meetings in that old log chapel, and into which they threw their whole souls, for all of the so called "classical music" which I have since heard rendered by grand organ and artistic quartette on two continents.

One Sabbath while we were in Suffolk, a special service for the soldiers who were on duty there was held in one of the churches, the chaplains of the various regiments officiating. The house was filled to its utmost capacity,—the galleries, the aisles, the pulpit steps and the vestibule,—while many were unable to find even standing room. At the close of the sermon, officers and men knelt together at the same altar, their confessions and supplications ascending to a common Father, and, irrespective of distinctive creed or belief, partook of the Lord's Supper, realizing as never before the truth that "God is no respecter of persons;" and to one at least of that company of reverent worshipers, the Master's words, "This do in remembrance of ME," had a deeper significance than ever before.

Religious services were also held at the Convalescent Camp, for there were some faithful Christian men even there who did not forget their religious vows when the fortunes of war called them away from their homes and accustomed places of worship. At one of the evening meetings in the large tent, which was filled to its utmost limits, an invitation was given to those present who were striving, as "soldiers of the cross," to render faithful service to the Captain of their salvation, to raise the right hand. In response to the request, a large number of hands were raised. It occurred, however, to the leader of the meeting that some were there whose right arms had been shot off, and to such he gave opportunity to raise the left hand—and there were quite a number raised. But the most affecting sight was when a few men who had lost both arms in battle, and had only stumps remaining, rose to their feet and gave evidence of their loyalty

to their Lord and Master. Such men could well sing at the close of the service:

“God of all nations! sovereign Lord,
In Thy dread name we draw the sword;
We lift the starry flag on high,
That fills with light our stormy sky.

“From treason’s rent, from murder’s stain,
Guard Thou its folds till peace shall reign,
Till fort and field, till shore and sea,
Join our loud anthem, PRAISE TO THEE!”

I used to be greatly amused at times at the kind of literature which reached us when in camp from kind friends at home who were solicitous concerning our moral welfare. Sometimes it was very evident that a book or tract smuggled itself into the package sent which had never been “passed upon” by any member of the Christian Commission. Just think of placing a cook-book in the hands of a man who had been living for months on hard-tack and salt junk, with no prospect of a change in diet for months to come!

I am reminded, in this connection, of an incident which occurred in one of the hospitals in Washington. A kind-hearted Christian lady passed through the wards one day distributing religious tracts. She placed one in the hands of a young soldier who was occupying one of the numerous cots. As she turned away from him on her mission of love, she heard him laugh. The good woman’s feelings were hurt, and retracing her steps she mildly rebuked him for his seeming rudeness and ingratitude. He begged her pardon and assured her that no discourtesy was intended, and remarked that he was amused by the inappropriateness of the title of the tract she had given him, “The Sin of Dancing,” when both of his legs had been shot off.



CHAPTER VII.

In common with soldiers generally, the *ménu* of our company was somewhat limited in variety, and the dishes served did not materially differ from day to day. Sunday, however, was an exception to this general rule when we were in camp. In accordance with the time-honored New England custom, on Sunday morning we had *our* “baked beans.” If we did not always remember to keep the Sabbath day holy, we certainly never forgot that it was the day for baked beans; and I sometimes thought that the appearance of that article of food on Sunday morning served us better than a Church calendar or the “Old Farmer’s Almanac” could have done as a reminder how the day should be spent.

Our cook had a novel way of cooking or baking beans. He soaked them in the usual style, parboiled them in a large kettle, and then put them in a deep, iron mess-pan, generous slices of pork being placed on top of the beans. A hole was then made in the ground a foot or two feet deep and the bottom well filled with live coals, and on top of the coals was placed the iron mess-pan with its savory contents. Upon the cover of the pan was then placed more live coals, and the whole covered with turf well tamped down. This was done on Saturday afternoon, and on Sunday morning the beans came out of their improvised oven piping hot and in no wise inferior to those which furnished the staple article of the Sunday morning meal in so many New England homes.

Burns tells us that “the well-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley.” On one occasion it occurred that we encamped one Saturday afternoon on an old battlefield, and as it was known that we were to remain there over Sunday, our cook began the usual preliminary work whereby he was to furnish the company with baked beans on the following morning. It so happened that at the spot where the hole was dug in the ground an unexploded shell was buried a little farther down, and after the live coals and the bean pot had been deposited in the earth long enough to form a mutual acquaintance and become warm friends a loud explosion was heard, and immediately the beans took an upward tendency and the air was completely filled with them, confirming the assertion of Artemas Ward that the “festive bean, when baked, is a *very lively fruit*.”

The spring of 1863 was particularly favorable to the development of typhoid fever, and a good many men in our regiment were in the hospital with that

disease. The surgeon ordered a gill of whiskey to be served to every man daily, and as an inducement for him to “put it where it would do the most good”—at least in the surgeon’s opinion—he was told that he would not be excused from duty if reported on the sick list. The whiskey was usually taken by the men and put into their canteens with the water, but in very many cases it did not take such a roundabout way in reaching its destination. In my “mess” was a good, orthodox, prohibitionist deacon, a man whose example I was told before leaving home that I could consistently follow in all things—especially in *spiritual* things. One day he remarked to me that he had observed that I did not take my ration of whiskey when it was dealt out. I told him that I had not felt the need of it. He replied that he was very much afraid of the typhoid fever, and had no scruples in regard to the taking of a little whiskey as a precautionary measure, and if I was going to continue to refuse to take my ration of it, he wished I would let it be poured into my canteen, and he would turn it into his own when we got back to our quarters;—“only be careful,” said he, “that there is no water in your canteen.” After that I allowed the whiskey to be poured into my canteen; but the good deacon’s argument as to its being a preventive for typhoid fever was so convincing that I did not allow it to be transferred to his.

As is well known, a wide and almost impassable gulf of difference exists between the officers and the rank and file in the regular army. But I had not been long in the volunteer service before I discovered that considerable difference existed even there between the private soldier and the officer. To illustrate. While in Suffolk there happened to be an “r” in the month. Walking along the principal street one day, I espied in the window of a restaurant a card, upon which was printed or painted in letters of large dimensions these two words: “STEAMED OYSTERS.” Visions of Pawtucket and Providence river bivalves immediately came up before me, and I then and there resolved to have a good square meal of “steamed oysters,” even though it should pecuniarily impoverish me. So, entering the restaurant, I seated myself upon one of the unoccupied high stools at the oyster bar. And here I will remark that I could not have felt the importance of my elevated position any more if my blouse had been covered with shoulder-straps. Presently the proprietor of the establishment presented himself, and eyeing me with an air of indifference almost amounting to contempt, he asked me what I wanted. I replied, “Steamed oysters.” I confess I was somewhat surprised and considerably “down in the mouth” when he informed me that he couldn’t sell steamed oysters to a private soldier. My suggestion that he might overcome the difficulty by *giving them to me*, failed to secure the much-coveted bivalves, and I retired from the restaurant a sadder but wiser man than when I

entered it.

As I remarked at the outset, there was considerable difference between the private soldier and the officer even in the volunteer service; and this was, as I have shown, particularly true as to which one should eat steamed oysters. But the line had to be drawn somewhere, I suppose, and so at Suffolk they drew it at steamed oysters, and, unfortunately for the man who was serving his country at thirteen dollars a month, he “got left.”



CHAPTER VIII.

While the Eleventh regiment was in service only nine months, and was never in action as a full regiment, yet it lost in that time two colonels. A certain fatality appeared to await those who were sent to take command of the regiment during the early part of its term of service. It seemed at one time as if the regiment was raised for the sole purpose of giving those who were to become colonels of other Rhode Island regiments an opportunity to perfect themselves in battalion drill and other military movements before assuming command elsewhere—a sort of stepping-stone, as it were, to something which was considered more desirable. There was, for instance, Colonel Edwin Metcalf, who went out with us and who left us to take command of the Third Rhode Island. Then there was Colonel Horatio Rogers, who came to us from the Third regiment and remained less than two weeks, leaving us to take command of the Second Rhode Island. The next to put in an appearance was Colonel George E. Church, who had previously served as lieutenant-colonel of the Seventh Rhode Island. He remained with us until the expiration of our term of enlistment.

It is not within the province of a private soldier—more especially a “raw recruit”—to criticise his superiors, and consequently I will not attempt it, notwithstanding this is the “piping time of peace,” and all fear of the guard-house has forever vanished. I will say, however, that all of the officers named had their peculiarities, and that our lieutenant-colonel was peculiarly peculiar; and yet I believe him to have been every inch a soldier—at any rate, there was no such word as fear in his dictionary. He was in command when the regiment came the nearest to being in an engagement, and I fancy I see him now, mounted on his horse and riding at the head of the column, wearing a moth-eaten blouse and an exceedingly dilapidated straw hat, with a very black “T. D.” clay pipe stuck in his mouth, the bowl downwards. He looked more like the “cowboy” of modern times than the pictures of military heroes which I used to see in my school-books when a boy. This was our lieutenant-colonel—John Talbot Pitman. He had good “staying qualities.” He never threw up his commission, nor did he die. He remained with us to the last, and rose considerably in the estimation of the men after his appearance at the head of the regiment at the time I have just mentioned. Men everywhere—especially soldiers—admire pluck. Our lieutenant-colonel had pluck, even though at times his heart seemed somewhat

lacking in tenderness. He never winked at any breach of discipline on the part of an officer or a private while he was in command of the regiment. If at times he appeared to have too little consideration for his men, he never failed to exact the fullest measure of consideration for them from all others.

Colonel Metcalf, as I have stated, came to us first, and was the first to leave us. Universal regret on the part of officers and men was felt when he took his departure for Hilton Head.

Colonel Rogers did not remain with us long enough for us to learn to like him or dislike him. He came to us “sp’ilin’ for a fight,” his heart’s desire all the time he was with us was to fight, and when he found that he couldn’t fight the rebels with us, he began to fight the War Department for a “change of base;” and in order to have peace within our own borders, and in response to a very general demand on the part of the loyal North for a vigorous prosecution of the war, coupled with a declaration on the part of certain northern newspapers that no further delay in pushing “On to Richmond” would be tolerated without a satisfactory reason being given therefor, the authorities at Washington compromised matters by sending the plucky colonel to the Second Rhode Island regiment, where he “honored his regiment, his State and himself by his gallant deeds.” It is, however, but simple justice to the Eleventh regiment to say that the men were hopeful that Colonel Rogers’ vigorous and persistent efforts with the War Department to relieve them from the disagreeable duty which they were performing at the Convalescent Camp would be crowned with success. Service in the field was coveted.

Colonel Rogers was a strict disciplinarian. The surgeon of the regiment was a great lover of horses. It was said of him, before he entered the service, that if he was sent for in a case of expected immediate death, and he had an opportunity while on the road to trade a good horse for a better one, he would always let his patient take the chances.—I do not wish to be considered as authority for the truthfulness of this assertion.—One Sunday morning our company was ordered to report in front of the colonel’s “markee” for inspection. While the inspection was going on, the colonel stood in front of us, and just a little to his left the surgeon and quartermaster, it being just before divine service, were driving a horse trade. Naturally enough this attracted the attention of the men, and it being noticed by Colonel Rogers, he exclaimed in that melodious tone of voice so characteristic of him: “*Eyes to the front; you wa’n’t ordered down here to inspect the quartermaster’s department!*” Colonel Rogers was, indeed, peculiar.

In an excellent paper which was read by Captain Charles H. Parkhurst, of Company C, at a recent reunion of the Eleventh regiment, he thus contrasted Colonel Metcalf and Colonel Rogers:

“Colonel Metcalf, as a rule, commanded without saying anything about it. When Colonel Rogers commanded he couldn’t help saying something about it. No one seeing Colonel Metcalf off duty, or un-uniformed, would have suspected that he had any command, while the most casual observer looking at Colonel Rogers, even when asleep, would instinctively know that even then the colonel, at least, thought that he was in the exercise of authority.”

Our last commanding officer, Colonel Church, was a thorough soldier and, like Colonel Rogers, whom he succeeded, a strict disciplinarian. He was, apparently, a favorite with the officers of the regiment, but his ways smacked too much of the regular army to have ever made him popular with volunteer soldiers. It is, however, due Colonel Church to say that while under his command the regiment attained a high degree of proficiency in all that characterizes good soldiership, and won for itself much praise from those who were even superior in rank to its colonel.

Speaking of the peculiarities of Colonel Church, for he had them too, perhaps nothing created a greater dislike for him on the part of his men than the severity of his discipline in regard to very small matters. To illustrate: The sending of a man to the guard-house because in his exasperation he so far forgot himself as to raise his hand to brush a fly off of his nose when on dress parade, was not relished. It might have done for a holiday, but not in time of war. At any rate, that is the way the boys looked at it.



CHAPTER IX.

Suffolk was our last regular encampment. From there we went to Yorktown, expecting to take transportation home, as our term of service had nearly expired. After remaining there a few days we were, very much to our surprise, ordered up the peninsula. Somebody evidently made a mistake in his reckoning, for when we arrived at Williamsburg, only twelve miles distant from Yorktown, we were ordered back, an order which was not reluctantly obeyed, although had there been urgent need for the regiment's services for a longer period, I feel sure that they would have been cheerfully rendered.

Upon our return to Yorktown we once more pitched our shelter (or "dog") tents, and made ourselves as comfortable as we could until transportation was furnished. Finally we embarked on the steamer "John Rice," and after a three days' sail arrived in Providence on the afternoon of the sixth of July, 1863, just nine months to a day from the time we left Rhode Island.

The reception of the regiment by the patriotic citizens of Providence was as generous as it was hospitable. The Pawtucket companies (B and F) reached home just before six o'clock, and were welcomed with the firing of cannon, the ringing of bells, and other demonstrations of respect and kindness. After the warm greetings at the railroad station by friends, the band meanwhile vigorously playing "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," and other popular airs, a line was formed, (the escort comprising the Home Guard and officers of the Light Guard,) and moved through the principal streets, including a march to Central Falls and back. It was a proud day for the "raw recruit" and his comrades. In marching through the streets of both places, cheers and the waving of handkerchiefs testified the delight of the multitude at our safe return. On arriving at the old Armory Hall in Pawtucket, where, nine or ten months previously, so many of us had enlisted, and which never looked so well to us before, a bountiful collation was partaken of, and then, with good judgment on the part of somebody, the companies were dismissed without being compelled to listen to speeches from those who, for "prudential reasons," remained at home.

The second death in Company B occurred on the evening of the first day out from Yorktown. Frank M. Bliss, the "drummer boy" of the company, had been sick several days with typhoid fever in the hospital at Yorktown, and his

recovery was considered hopeless when he was carried on board the steamer by his comrades. The deceased was a son of Captain Albert Bliss, of Pawtucket, and a young man of excellent qualities. He was very anxious to serve his country in some capacity, and being only eighteen years of age, and not physically able to carry the load of an infantry soldier he enlisted as a drummer, and did good service in that capacity. His remains were tenderly borne by a detail of his comrades from the steamer to the home of his afflicted parents, and what in so many other homes was a day of great joy on account of the return of loved ones, in theirs was a day of deepest sorrow, for the loved son and brother whose return had been so long joyously anticipated came not.

The regiment was paid off and “mustered out” of service in Providence on the thirteenth day of July, 1863. It left Rhode Island a little more than one thousand strong. It came back numbering eight hundred and thirty-eight enlisted men and thirty-eight commissioned officers. During its absence it lost sixty men by discharge, and seven others by death. Fifty-five of its members were left behind in various hospitals, and twenty-five sick men were brought home on the steamer. It is a remarkable fact in the history of the regiment that not one man was killed in an engagement with the enemy during its entire nine months’ campaign. It is doubtful whether this has its parallel in any other regiment which entered the service during the civil war.

But there were many other things which the soldier had to do besides fighting. One thing all had to do, namely, *obey orders*, and when that was done, the soldier had done all that was required of him, all that he promised to do when he enlisted. The entire regiment never appeared in line once after we left Providence, so many of the men being detailed for various kinds of service, such as hospital nurses, ambulance drivers, wagoners, and so forth. But, comrades, whatever the service performed by our regiment, it should be esteemed honor and distinction enough for any one of us to have it said of him, “*This is the country which he helped to save.*”



CHAPTER X.

I have thus imperfectly, and to myself at least very unsatisfactorily, sketched the nine months' war experiences of a "raw recruit" of the Eleventh Rhode Island regiment. Whatever has been said, if anything, which shall provoke criticism, be assured that "naught has been set down in malice."

As was said by one whose words I have already quoted, "the men composing the Eleventh regiment compared favorably with those of other regiments which went from Rhode Island." Some theories, however, in regard to what constitutes the best material for soldiers were upset by the results of our nine months' campaign. In my own company, for instance, the majority of the men were recruited from the professions and the counting-room. But before leaving home it was deemed best by the officers to enlist a few men upon whom they could rely to do the fighting in the event that the classes to whom I have referred should show the "white feather" in the hour of trial. Consequently a few "roughs," or "toughs," or "bruisers," or "scalawags," were introduced into the company. With what result? Just what every intelligent man should have known at the outset. They were absolutely good for nothing when we were in camp but to furnish the company's quota for the guard-house, and when an emergency required their services they were either drunk or in the hospital by reason of their excesses. They were, indeed, "invincible in peace and invisible in war." The best men at home proved the most serviceable in the field. And this I believe to be true not only of our own company and regiment, but of all the troops who entered the service of the country.

All soldiers have a regimental pride and affection. It would sound equally as strange to hear a man not speak well of his mother, as to hear a soldier not speak well of his regiment. The rebel General Hill tells of an Irish soldier belonging to a New Orleans regiment whom he found after the second day's battle at Gettysburg lying alone in the woods, his head partly supported by a tree. He was shockingly injured. General Hill said to him: "My poor fellow, you are badly hurt. What regiment do you belong to?" He replied: "The Fifth Confederit, sir; and a dommed good regiment it is." The answer, though almost ludicrous, well illustrates a soldier's pride in his regiment.

That the Eleventh did not accomplish all that the men composing it expected it

would when it left Rhode Island is admitted. But that it did its full duty in the obedience of every order, who will deny? As another has so well and truthfully said in regard to the regiment, "it had not the ordering of its own destiny. It went where it was ordered to go, and performed the duty to which it was assigned, and left no stain to sully the fair fame and honor of the State or country." While it is true that to some regiments better opportunities were furnished to achieve distinction and renown than to others, there is no reason to suppose that the Eleventh Rhode Island would not have done equally as well under the same circumstances.

I am not insensible to the fact that during the war, and for some time after it was ended, a feeling was entertained by some of the men who first went out in the three years' regiments that the patriotism of the nine months' men was stimulated by the bounties which were offered. In Rhode Island, so far as my knowledge extends, the largest bounty paid any one person was one hundred and fifty dollars. Would any old soldier, especially if he has a family or others dependent upon him, consider the sum mentioned compensation in any adequate sense to induce him again to become a target for rebel bullets? It cannot be denied that there were some men—unworthy the name of soldiers—who were induced by the offers of bounty money to enlist and take the chances of "jumping" the bounty, or of desertion, but by far the larger proportion of those who enlisted after the bounties were offered, did so because they were then enabled to leave those who were dependent upon them for their daily bread in such a condition as to keep the wolf of starvation from the door in their absence.

Every man who, from love of his country, left home and friends to defend the honor of the old flag in the hour of its assailment by traitorous hands was a true patriot and deserves well of his fellow-countrymen, and whether he served for a longer or a shorter period, or whether his service was performed in the army or in the navy, on land or on sea, he has, by the faithful discharge of his duty, honored the State which he represented far more than it can ever honor him, and of him a grateful and appreciative people will unite in saying, "WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT."

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