

THE CHARGE AT GETTYSBURG

For the Lord
On the whirlwind is abroad;
In the earthquake he has spoken;
He has smitten with his thunder
The iron walls asunder,
And the gates of brass are broken!

--Whittier

With bray of the trumpet,
And roll of the drum,
And keen ring of bugle
The cavalry come:
Sharp clank the steel scabbards,
The bridle-chains ring,
And foam from red nostrils
The wild chargers fling!

Tramp, tramp o'er the greensward
That quivers below,
Scarce held by the curb bit
The fierce horses go!
And the grim-visaged colonel,
With ear-rending shout,
Peals forth to the squadrons
The order, "Trot Out"!

--Francis A. Durivage.

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The battle of Chancellorsville marked the zenith of Confederate good fortune. Immediately afterward, in June, 1863, Lee led the victorious army of Northern Virginia into Pennsylvania. The South was now the invader, not the invaded, and its heart beat proudly with hopes of success; but these hopes went down in bloody wreck on July 4, when word was sent to the world that the high valor of Virginia had failed at last on the field of Gettysburg, and that in the far West Vicksburg had been taken by the army of the "silent soldier."

At Gettysburg Lee had under him some seventy thousand men, and his opponent, Meade, about ninety thousand. Both armies were composed mainly of seasoned veterans, trained to the highest point by campaign after campaign and battle after battle; and there was nothing to choose between them as to the fighting power of the rank and file. The Union

army was the larger, yet most of the time it stood on the defensive; for the difference between the generals, Lee and Meade, was greater than could be bridged by twenty thousand men. For three days the battle raged. No other battle of recent time has been so obstinate and so bloody. The victorious Union army lost a greater percentage in killed and wounded than the allied armies of England, Germany, and the Netherlands lost at Waterloo. Four of its seven corps suffered each a greater relative loss than befell the world-renowned British infantry on the day that saw the doom of the French emperor. The defeated Confederates at Gettysburg lost, relatively, as many men as the defeated French at Waterloo; but whereas the French army became a mere rabble, Lee withdrew his formidable soldiery with their courage unbroken, and their fighting power only diminished by their actual losses in the field.

The decisive moment of the battle, and perhaps of the whole war, was in the afternoon of the third day, when Lee sent forward his choicest troops in a last effort to break the middle of the Union line. The center of the attacking force was Pickett's division, the flower of the Virginia infantry; but many other brigades took part in the assault, and the column, all told, numbered over fifteen thousand men. At the same time, the Confederates attacked the Union left to create a diversion. The attack was preceded by a terrific cannonade, Lee gathering one hundred and fifteen guns, and opening a fire on the center of the Union line. In response, Hunt, the Union chief of artillery, and Tyler, of the artillery reserves, gathered eighty guns on the crest of the gently sloping hill, where attack was threatened. For two hours, from one till three, the cannonade lasted, and the batteries on both sides suffered severely. In both the Union and Confederate lines caissons were blown up by the fire, riderless horses dashed hither and thither, the dead lay in heaps, and throngs of wounded streamed to the rear. Every man lay down and sought what cover he could. It was evident that the Confederate cannonade was but a prelude to a great infantry attack, and at three o'clock Hunt ordered the fire to stop, that the guns might cool, to be ready for the coming assault. The Confederates thought that they had silenced the hostile artillery, and for a few minutes their firing continued; then, suddenly, it ceased, and there was a lull.

The men on the Union side who were not at the point directly menaced peered anxiously across the space between the lines to watch the next move, while the men in the divisions which it was certain were about to be assaulted, lay hugging the ground and gripping their muskets, excited, but confident and resolute. They saw the smoke clouds rise slowly from the opposite crest, where the Confederate army lay, and the sunlight glinted again on the long line of brass and iron guns which had been hidden from view during the cannonade. In another moment, out of the lifting smoke there appeared, beautiful and terrible, the picked thousands of the Southern army coming on to the assault. They advanced in three lines, each over a mile long, and in perfect order. Pickett's Virginians held the center, with on their left the North Carolinians of Pender and Pettigrew, and on their right the Alabama regiments of Wilcox; and there were also Georgian and Tennessee regiments in the attacking force. Pickett's division, however, was the only one able to press its charge home. After leaving the woods where they started, the Confederates had nearly a mile and a half to go in their charge. As the Virginians moved,

they bent slightly to the left, so as to leave a gap between them and the Alabamians on the right.

The Confederate lines came on magnificently. As they crossed the Emmetsburg Pike the eighty guns on the Union crest, now cool and in good shape, opened upon them, first with shot and then with shell. Great gaps were made every second in the ranks, but the gray-clad soldiers closed up to the center, and the color-bearers leaped to the front, shaking and waving the flags. The Union infantry reserved their fire until the Confederates were within easy range, when the musketry crashed out with a roar, and the big guns began to fire grape and canister. On came the Confederates, the men falling by hundreds, the colors fluttering in front like a little forest; for as fast as a color-bearer was shot some one else seized the flag from his hand before it fell. The North Carolinians were more exposed to the fire than any other portion of the attacking force, and they were broken before they reached the line. There was a gap between the Virginians and the Alabama troops, and this was taken advantage of by Stannard's Vermont brigade and a demi-brigade under Gates, of the 20th New York, who were thrust forward into it. Stannard changed front with his regiments and fell on Pickett's forces in flank, and Gates continued the attack. When thus struck in the flank, the Virginians could not defend themselves, and they crowded off toward the center to avoid the pressure. Many of them were killed or captured; many were driven back; but two of the brigades, headed by General Armistead, forced their way forward to the stone wall on the crest, where the Pennsylvania regiments were posted under Gibbon and Webb.

The Union guns fired to the last moment, until of the two batteries immediately in front of the charging Virginians every officer but one had been struck. One of the mortally wounded officers was young Cushing, a brother of the hero of the Albemarle fight. He was almost cut in two, but holding his body together with one hand, with the other he fired his last gun, and fell dead, just as Armistead, pressing forward at the head of his men, leaped the wall, waving his hat on his sword. Immediately afterward the battle-flags of the foremost Confederate regiments crowned the crest; but their strength was spent. The Union troops moved forward with the bayonet, and the remnant of Pickett's division, attacked on all sides, either surrendered or retreated down the hill again. Armistead fell, dying, by the body of the dead Cushing. Both Gibbon and Webb were wounded. Of Pickett's command two thirds were killed, wounded or captured, and every brigade commander and every field officer, save one, fell. The Virginians tried to rally, but were broken and driven again by Gates, while Stannard repeated, at the expense of the Alabamians, the movement he had made against the Virginians, and, reversing his front, attacked them in flank. Their lines were torn by the batteries in front, and they fell back before the Vermonter's attack, and Stannard reaped a rich harvest of prisoners and of battle-flags.

The charge was over. It was the greatest charge in any battle of modern times, and it had failed. It would be impossible to surpass the gallantry of those that made it, or the gallantry of those that withstood it. Had there been in command of the Union army a general like Grant, it would have been followed by a counter-charge, and in all

probability the war would have been shortened by nearly two years; but no countercharge was made.

As the afternoon waned, a fierce cavalry fight took place on the Union right. Stuart, the famous Confederate cavalry commander, had moved forward to turn the Union right, but he was met by Gregg's cavalry, and there followed a contest, at close quarters, with "the white arm." It closed with a desperate melee, in which the Confederates, charged under Generals Wade Hampton and Fitz Lee, were met in mid career by the Union generals Custer and McIntosh. All four fought, saber in hand, at the head of their troopers, and every man on each side was put into the struggle. Custer, his yellow hair flowing, his face aflame with the eager joy of battle, was in the thick of the fight, rising in his stirrups as he called to his famous Michigan swordsmen: "Come on, you Wolverines, come on!" All that the Union infantry, watching eagerly from their lines, could see, was a vast dust-cloud where flakes of light shimmered as the sun shone upon the swinging sabers. At last the Confederate horsemen were beaten back, and they did not come forward again or seek to renew the combat; for Pickett's charge had failed, and there was no longer hope of Confederate victory.

When night fell, the Union flags waved in triumph on the field of Gettysburg; but over thirty thousand men lay dead or wounded, strewn through wood and meadow, on field and hill, where the three days' fight had surged.