CHAPTER X.

EASTERN KENTUCKY. MIDDLE CREEK AND MILL SPRING.

The General Situation at the beginning of 1862—the Necessity for immediate Action.—The President’s Order of January 27th.—The Situation in Eastern Kentucky.—Humphrey Marshall in the Big Sandy.—Garfield’s Brigade.—The March on Paintsville.—Retreat of Marshall.—Middle Creek.—The Battle.—Marshall retires to Abingdon, Va.—The Course of the Campaign.—Cumberland Gap.—Zollicoffer's Camp at Mill Spring.—General Crittenden joins Zollicoffer.—Thomson moves against the Confederate Forces.—The Battle of Mill Spring.—Death of Zollicoffer.—Crittenden’s Retreat to Gatesburg.

Nervous disquiet pervaded the Southern mind at the commencement of a new year, the result, in a great measure, of the highly-wrought anticipations which had grown out of the Trent affair. It was presumed that the Federal government would decide boldly, and without regard to the claims of justice, upon the question which had been forced upon it as we ourselves were concerned, anxiety in regard to the attitude of Europe should despair of an early termination of the war on account of the much galled the Confederates to look back upon the closing events of the parently justifiable as well as natural. If it should come ed the fond expectation of what it called “a popular revulsion in the North- strength as a nation which foreign nations had always entertained, and made the policy of interference, already backed by motives of selfish interest, especially signalized by reverses to the Federal armies extraordinay unanimity with which the people of the North supported the opinions held by the Second Estate both in England and France. Nine months had passed since the declaration of war, and these nine months were very especially signalized by reverses to the Federal armies. Every week’s delay in moving against the enemy’s works endangered that for respect for our strength as a nation which foreign nations had always entertained, and made the policy of interference, already backed by motives of selfish interest, apparently justifiable as well as natural. If it should come to the worst—if Europe should despair of an early termination of the war on account of the vacillation of our military commanders—that nothing short of national ruin, as complete and irretrievable as any upon historic record, stared in the face. And for vacillation and hesitancy, moreover, there seemed little occasion. Hitherto the case had been different; we had, in spite of the vast resources of the nation held in reserve, been compelled to create the very means and organization through which these resources should become available and effective. But now, through unparalleled activity and determination, the great want had been measurably supplied; and although it was impossible to calculate with certainty upon success in every movement which we were prepared to make, yet it is to be remembered, and was then earnestly insisted upon, that in no war of any magnitude was it ever possible to obviate the chances of failure, whatever may have been the previous preparation. The pressing exigencies urging on an immediate movement of our

varied means. The clearest policy of the weaker section in such a conflict was to find in the rapid use of its revolutionary enthusiasm an overmatch for the slower, less spirited, but more enduring North. 1 The Southern people were impatient for an advance of the Confederate army of the Potomac. "We have gazed," they said, "impatiently on the lion while the fox has been weaving its toils. Are we to continue hemmed in for another six months, and lack all things, or shall our armies on to Washington, and lack anything?"

There was somewhat of a restless spirit at the North also, but based upon entirely different grounds, and far more reasonable in its nature and its conclusions. It was not peevishness, nor the outgrowth of a desperate spirit that would venture all at a single throw; it was rather the expression of confident hope mingled with an element of considerable anxiety—hope so far as we ourselves were concerned, anxiety in regard to the attitude of Eu-}

1 In addition to other disarrangements, the Confederate army suffered very much from disease in camp, far more than the Federal armies—not only by reason of less favorable location, but also, and chiefly, through negligence. Says R. A. Pollard, in his Southern History of the War: “The retreating and fording streams were very often the means of disease among the army in Virginia.” The ravages of disease among the army in Virginia were terrible. The accounts of its extent were exaggerated, as was the case with the accounts of the English, who wrote home from the camp and in Western Virgina suffered greatly—those troops in Chanoey and in the vicinity of the Kanawha Valley most intensely. The rain and changeable climate; the rigors of transportation; exposure to cold and rain without tents, the necessity of frequently changing the line of march, and many other similar causes, produced the sickness, and greatly augmented it after its occurrence. 2 The Southern people, when made aware of these facts, with great generosity contributed immense sums in clothing and stores for the relief of their troops. During the latter quarter of 1861, the eleven states of the Confederate con- contributed in this way a million and a half in money, besides the voluntary contributions which came from Missouri and Kentucky.

1 Richmond Examiner, Jan. 1, 1862.
January, 1862. MIDDLE CREEK AND MILL SPRING.

The Big Sandy, having its head waters in Virginia, forms the northwestern boundary between that state and Kentucky, emptying its waters into Ohio. At Louis, a small village situated some twenty-five miles southward from its mouth, West Fork joins the main stream. Following the road up this fork for twenty-five miles farther, we reach Paintville. At high water the river is navigable as far as Piketon, twenty-five miles beyond, and in November General Nelson had no difficulty in transporting his supplies to that point. On the 7th of January, however, when Colonel James A. Garfield broke up his camp on Muddy Creek and advanced against the enemy, the river was low, and occasioned great difficulty in the transportation of supplies. His force at starting was about 1500, consisting of the Forty-second Ohio and the Fourteenth Kentucky, accompanied by a squadron of cavalry. On the route he was re-enforced by a battalion of Virginia cavalry, under Colonel Bolles, and 300 of the Twenty-second Kentucky, making the entire force with which he marched on Paintville about 2200 men. Another battalion of cavalry, under Colonel Wolford, together with the Fortieth Ohio, was also moving toward the same point from the west along Paint Creek. Having threatened a storm, Humphrey Marshall had left his intrenchments two days before, and retired to a position among the heights near Middle Creek, a little below Prestonburg, leaving only a small force of cavalry at the mouth of Jennie Creek, three miles west of Paintville, to act as a corps of observation and to protect his trains. Before reaching Paintville, Garfield was made aware of the situation of this cavalry force, though he had no certain knowledge of the whereabouts of the other and main portion of the enemy. Dispatching Colonel Bolles's cavalry and a company of infantry to attack the former from the north side, he himself, with a thousand men, crossed the Paint at four o'clock in the afternoon, to make an armed reconnaissance, which resulted in the discovery that the main body of the enemy had withdrawn. It was over two hours since he had sent Bolles up the creek, and now, seeing that he had a fair opportunity of securing the Confederate cavalry force, he promptly sent a messenger with orders to the colonel not to attack until he should have time himself to get in the rear and cut off the retreat. The orders, however, came too late, as the attack had already been made, and the colonel was then engaged in pursuing the enemy up the Jennie; so that when Garfield, a little later, had gained, as he supposed, the rear of the enemy, he soon discovered their cavalry equipment, which they had left in the possession of flight, trusting the road, and indicating with certainty that the Confederates had escaped. Bolles, in the mean while, after pursuing until he came up with Marshall's infantry rear-guard, returned to Paintville, where the Federal forces encamped for the night.

The next morning the arrival of the Fortieth Ohio and Wolford's cavalry brought the number of the Federal forces up to 2400 men. On the 9th, Garfield, detailing 1100 men from his four regiments, and detaching two cavalry squadrons to move along his right up Jennie's Creek, followed the river road north to Prestonburg, the distance to this town from Paintville being twelve miles. He had been delayed a whole day at the latter place, awaiting supplies from George's Creek, a few miles below on the river, which arrived in such scanty amounts as to render it impossible to give three days rations of hard bread—and it was useless to act out with less
Colonel Williams's regiment, was on the right-hand side of the road at the head of the gorge, and a crescent-shaped hill on the opposite side concealed another column just behind its crest. It was Marshall's design to draw the Federal forces up the road, and then to open upon them from the front and left. Anticipating a manœuvre of this nature, Garfield, having taken up his position on the slope of a semicircular hill on the right-hand side of the creek, dispatched twenty mounted men, who made a headlong charge up the valley, and, drawing the enemy's fire, disclosed the position above indicated.

Two columns, consisting each of two companies, were sent, one along the crest to the right, behind which Colonel Trigg's Virginia regiment was stationed, and the other across the creek, to ascend the rugged crest farthest up the gorge on the left. The right column became immediately the target of the enemy's artillery, but the latter was so badly served that its shells did not explode, while the small force dispatched to the left, after climbing up the rocky ridge on their hands and knees, engaged the enemy on that side.

Both columns were re-enforced. Trigg's regiment was withdrawn across the creek, and the battle raged cheekily on the left, which Garfield still further re-enforced with one hundred and fifty men. The Confederates in the mean time had gained a commanding position on the top of the ridge, and the enemy being driven from his position at that point. On account of the great disparity of the two opposing forces, the Federals were obliged to resort in many cases to an irregular mode of fighting, sheltering themselves whenever opportunity offered behind trees and rocks. They had no heavy artillery, and the cavalry, having gone in a mistaken direction, did not participate in the engagement. The battle had now continued in this desultory style for over three hours, and it was four o'clock P.M. when Sheldon came up with re-enforcements from Paintville. These had started early in the morning, and had marched fifteen miles without breakfast, but their courage, not
daunted by these unfavorable circumstances, demanded to be tested in the fight with the already checked, if not halted foe. The enthusiasm occasioned by their arrival was unbounded, and Garfield promptly dispatched his entire reserve to the right for an attack upon the enemy's main position and the capture of his guns. Appreciating the new phase which the battle was taking, Humphrey Marshall ordered a retreat, which was continued to Abingdon, in Virginia. It was a short winter's day, and was now too dark to admit of pursuit. The sky was illuminated with the burning of the enemy's stores preparatory to his disorderly flight. The next morning, on the arrival of the cavalry, a pursuit was sustained for several miles, and some prisoners were taken. Two or three days afterward the entire command returned to Paintville.

This success, disposing of the Confederate force in Northeastern Kentucky, had an additional brilliancy imparted to it from the fact that it inaugurated a long series of victories. Humphrey Marshall's political antecedents, and the reminiscences which haunted many citizens of the North of his plump presence in Congress and in the famous American Convention, gave somewhat of piety to the dramatic features of this episode of his defeat. The victor, the young colonel from Ohio, was soon promoted to a brigadier, and afterward a major generalship, and in 1865 was elected to Congress from Ohio, his native state. Although not a graduate of West Point, he proved a most efficient officer in the early Western campaigns.

If we now cross the mountains crowding the southeastern portion of Ken- tucky, we shall find ourselves in the valley of the Cumberland River, which has its rise among these mountains, and, taking a westward direction in its zigzag course, after its two head tributaries, coming down along either side of Pine Mountain, have formed a junction at Cumberland Ford, just north of Cumberland Gap, runs through Barbourville and Williamsburg, thence northwesterly, just leaving Somerset to the north, while it sweeps down into Tennessee, and, after a long and very winding course to the east, passes through Nashville, and then returns through a more regular channel into Western Kentucky, and empties into the Ohio at Smithland, about fifty miles above Cairo, having described a course twice the length of the Hod- son. That portion of Kentucky which this river cuts off before it enters Tennessee was held by the Confederacy, and was a very important tract of country, guarding the entrance into Tennessee from Eastern Ken- tucky.

Nearly at the same time that Crittenden arrived at Mill Springs, General Bussell detached a force from his main army, and sent it against the Con- feredate strong-hold in Eastern Kentucky. The force thus dispatched consisted of seven regiments and a portion of Wolford's cavalry, under the command of General George H. Thomas, who had distinguished himself both in Florida and Mexico, and had, from 1850 up to the beginning of the war, been instructor of artillery and cavalry at West Point. A native of Vir- ginia, General Thomas was still true to his country, and had already, in August, 1861, been appointed a brigadier general of volunteers. Thomas left Lebanon on the 31st of December, and, after a march of nearly two weeks, reached Columbia, and, after a rest of four or five days, pushed on eastward to Fishing Creek, a few miles west of Somerset. It was now the 17th; the march had been over roads almost impassable, and four regiments and one of the batteries—more than one half of Thomas's column—were yet strug- gling along on the road from Columbia. To await these, and also to com- municate with Schoepf, Thomas halted at this point, ten miles north of the enemy's camp. The Tenth Indiana, of Colonel Manson's brigade, held the advance; and from this regiment two companies were sent out as picket guards on the road to Mill Springs, taking up a position beyond the junction of that road with the one leading from Somerset to Mill Springs. In advance of these was stationed a battalion of Wolford's cavalry. The camp of the Tenth was not far in the rear. Colonel R.L. McCook, with two regiments of his brigade, the Second Minnesota and the Ninth Ohio, were encamped a mile to the right, on the Robertport and Danville road. This disposition of Thomas's forces guarded all the approaches to his encampment, and also to Somerset. This was the situation on Friday night.

During the day Schoepf had visited Thomas, and arrangements were made...
for a co-operation of the two columns in the attack on Zollicoffer's camp, which was to take place on the succeeding Monday. Recent rains had swollen Fishing Creek to such an extent as to render it impossible for either of the divisions to support the other in case of an attack being made by the enemy; therefore, to supply the place of the regiments which were yet detained on the road, it was arranged that Carter's brigade should be sent from Somerset to General Thomas. This brigade consisted of the Twelfth Kentucky and two regiments of East Tennesseans. On Saturday the Fourth Kentucky arrived on the field with Wetmore's battery, which, with the regiments and Standart's battery sent from Somerset, raised Thomas's force to a complement of six regiments and three batteries, besides the small detachment of Wolford's cavalry.

In the mean time, the peculiar situation of the Confederate army on the Cumberland led to a movement which anticipated the Federal attack, and resulted in the battle of Mill Spring, otherwise known as the battle of Somerset, though it was fought at neither of these places, but midway between them, at Cross Roads. By extraordinary efforts, Crittenden, having been informed of Thomas's advance, had collected together sufficient provisions for two or three days ahead, and on Friday night had sent out a re-

imiento of the battle. The Federal force, more-

aver-tured in this advance, made thus upon the night, leaving the way open into East Tennessee. The Federal force, more-

ately estimated on the basis of the reconnoissance made the previous night, at considerably less than its real value. Although there was a great deal ventured in this advance, made thus upon the night,

surprise could be gained, the field was theirs. Every nerve was strained to the utmost. Carroll's brigade was ordered up to support Zollicoffer, and on the Federal side McCook's two regiments were called into action. One of these, the Second Mississippi, rapidly made its way along the woods and brushwood to the left, to the place of the Fourth Kentucky, the same time the Ninth Ohio got into position on the right of the road in the woods, where it was separated from the enemy by a corn-field. Only the road separated the two regiments. In the rapid movement of the Con-

federates under Zollicoffer, the Ninth Ohio and the Fourth Kentucky; but the regiments under his command, maddened by the event, rushed furiously on till they came into an almost hand to hand encoun-

ter with McCook's brigade, the Second Mississippi and the Confederates opposed to them pushing their muskets through the same fence. For half an hour the desperate conflict continued, and still remained doubtful. The Confederates had clearly an advantage in the numbers engaged, while the Federals had a compensating advantage in position, and also in the manage-

ment of artillery, for the Confederate batteries over-shot McCook's brigade, while his told with fearful effect against the enemy. Suddenly the battle turned; the Confederates were driven back to their first position. In the mean while, Carter's brigade having gained the enemy's right flank, a bayo-

net charge was ordered along the whole line, and the retreat of the Confederates was turned into a rout. They had lost their leader, and Crittenden in vain endeavored to rally them against the pursuing Federals. One or two fierce stands were made, but without effect, and before night they had been driven within their intrenchments at Beech Grove, having lost in killed and wounded 300 men, besides fifty taken prisoners. The Federal batteries were brought up, and from commanding positions of which were afterward collected together at Gainsborough, on the Cumberland, about thirty miles below the point at which that river enters Tennessee.

The part which Colonel Cook's brigade played in the battle of Mill Spring was prominent. The colonel, a native of Ohio, was thirty-five years of age, and was destined, in a few months, to lose his life, not on the fair field of battle, but by the hand of the assassin. He was murdered, August 6, 1862, by a company of guerrillas, in ambush near Salem, Alabama. Colonel McCook, at the beginning of the war, was placed in command of the Ninth Ohio regiment, which had reached so high a degree of discipline that McClellan pronounced it the first in the army. With this regiment he had passed through the West Virginia campaign; under Rosser he was given the command of the second brigade. At Philippi, Rich Mountain, and Carnifex Ferry his command was always foremost in the fight. The battle of Mill Spring was the last in which he participated. He was wounded here, but it was not long before he was again at the post of duty. For his energy and bravery in this battle he was appointed a brigadier general, but his attach-

ment to his old regiment led him to decline the promotion.1

1 A large number of the McCook family were engaged in the civil war on the Federal side. Among them are the following: General Alexander McCook, the brother to whom Robert sent his last message: "Tell Arab and the rest that I have tried to live like a man and do my duty."

Daniel McCook, jun., adjutant general in General McCook's staff, and who was to suffer death from wounds received at Resaca, Mississippi in 1863: Edwin McCook, then a captain in Colonel Logan's Illinois regiment; Lieutenant Edward N. McCook, of the regular army; Major Amos McCook and Ohio; Henry McCook, captain of an Illinois regiment; Sheldon McCook, a lieutenant in the navy.