CHAPTER XXI.
THE PENINSULAR CAMPAIGN.

IV. THE WITHDRAWAL FROM THE PENINSULA.

Position of the two Armies.—McClellan was in Command of the Army of Virginia. Halleck appeased General-in-Chief. McClellan asks for Re-enforcements. His Plan of carrying on the War. McGlennon and Halleck. Jackson and Hill sent to General McClellan in command of the Army of the Potomac. McClellan ordered to withdraw from the Peninsula. His Remonstrance. Hooker's Advice. Halleck's Reasons for the Order. The Withdrawal. McClellan begins to urge the appointment of a commander-in-chief over all the forces. McClellan's plan was to cross the James, establish a base at Petersburg, cut off Richmond. A long pontoon bridge had been prepared. McClellan's movements are watched by the Confederates. Halleck's removal brings his forces from North Carolina. McClellan was still fearful of an attack. Lee was undoubtedly aware of the Confederate movements, but it was almost harmless, there being nothing to show the position of the enemy.

SIX weeks of almost unceasing inactivity followed the battle of Malvern Hill, and the re-employment of the Federal army to Harrison's Landing. The Confederate force remained for some days in the vicinity of the battle-field, and on the 8th of July returned to its positions near Richmond, the movement being so completely masked by the cavalry that no intelligence of it reached the Federal General. The army was still in considerable force promptly, is simply absurd.' McClellan still continued possible promptness in re-enforcements, in view of the expected movements of the people of the North, and was still fearful of an attack. Lee was utterly desolate, not a spadeful of earth having been thrown up around it. A system of fortifications was now begun, which were ultimately developed into the formidable works which afterward resisted for so long the approach of General Grant. All the troops that could be spared from before Richmond were set to work upon these intrenchments, besides a thousand negroes brought from North Carolina.1

On the 26th of June, General Pope had been called from the West, and placed in command of the Army of Virginia, comprising the forces of McClellan and Hooker. Pope was to assume command on the 27th.2

On the 25th of July General Halleck went to the James to consult with the commander of the Army of the Potomac. At that time McClellan's plan was to cross the James River, attack Petersburg, cut off the enemy's communications with the South, making no further demonstrations against Richmond. Petersburg being then wholly unfortified, this attempt might probably have succeeded. Halleck was, however, utterly averse to the plan, and it was abandoned.3 McClellan then said that with 30,000 re-enforcements he could attack Richmond with a good chance of success, although he would then have but 120,000 effective men, while he estimated the force of the enemy at not less than 200,000. Halleck would promise only 20,000, and said that unless McClellan could attack Richmond with these, with a strong probability of success, it would be a military necessity to unite the forces of McClellan and Pope. McClellan, after consulting with his officers, decided that he would make the attempts with 20,000, although he would not say that the probabilities were in favor of success; still, there was a chance, and he would try it, and Halleck returned to Washington with the information that the attempt should be made. The next day McClellan wrote asking 15,000 or 20,000 more re-enforcements.

The four weeks' quiet on the James was interrupted on the night of July 81. The Union fleet lay stretched along for two miles above and below Harrison's Landing. Just opposite, across the James, was Cöggin's Point, a peninsula projection putting out into the river, being two miles wide and 1000 yards. Hill ordered forty-three guns to be quietly placed on the point; this was done without being discovered from the opposite shore, and just after midnight fire was opened upon the Federal shipping and camp.

1 The rebel army is in our front, with the purpose of overwhelming us by attacking our positions with overwhelming numbers. This is not less born grave consideration regarding the enemy.5—McClellan to the President, July 7.


Innumerable lights from the vessels and camp served to show just where the objects of aim, and for half an hour there was a continuous bombardment. But, owing to the difficulty of the roads, and the necessity for concealing the operation, only a small quantity of ammunition had been brought forward. In all only 1000 shots were fired, by which ten men were killed and two wounded. The enemy was being engaged in the concentration and the driving of the battle-fleet against the main, the in-juring of the fleet. The fire was returned briskly from the gun-boats, but it was almost harmless, there being nothing to show the position of the enemy. Of the Confederates but one man was killed and two wounded. The position of their batteries was being exposed, and the enemy had been advanced.6 The south bank of the river opposite his position was then occupied by McClellan, who wrote cheerily to Halleck, who had urged him to press the enemy: "I will attend to your telegram about pressing on." I will send Hooker out. Give me Burnside, and I will still strenuous.

On the 4th of August McClellan moved, as if to press the enemy. Hooker and Sedgwick advanced to Malvern Hill, drove back the enemy's pickets, took possession of the point, and pushed reconnaissances toward Richmond. McClellan reported: This is a very advantageous position to cover an advance on Richmond, only 142 miles distant; and I feel confident that, with re-enforcements, I could march this army there in five days.7 When in-telligence of this advance reached Richmond, the greater part of the troops there were hurried down, and the night of the 6th closed upon the two armies occupying nearly the same positions as on the 1st of July. Next morning, when the Confederates looked to the hill, they found it abandoned by the Union force.8 McClellan had, during the night, received peremptory orders from Halleck to withdraw his army from the Peninsula. He sent an order by express, declaring that he had no option but to obey the order. As the movement was made during the night, he supposed that, if there had been a pursuit, he would have been able to escape with his army. But at length, on the 15th, the enemy commenced an attack upon his line of communication; he was ready to take the offensive, and he had promised that it would be promptly re-enforced to enable him to press the enemy.9 Hooker, indeed, wished to disobey the order of the general-in-chief. He said that they had then force enough to take Richmond; he himself was ready to take the army, and the movement had been made with great caution. McClellan was still fearful of an attack. "He might as well die for an attack," said McClellan for a time seemed inclined to follow Hooker's counsel. On the 10th he gave Hooker a written order to supply himself with ammunition and three days' rations, and to be ready to march the next day. This order, says Hooker, was communicated to the whole army, and I firmly believed that order meant Richmond; but, before the time arrived for executing it, it was countermanded.10

McClellan's remonstrance Halleck replied briefly by telegram, "The order will not be rescinded, and you will be expected to execute it with all possible celerity;" and a copy forthwith, setting forth his reasons for giving and adhering to the order.11

After this definite and final order for the withdrawal from the Peninsula ten days passed before the army began to move. Sharp communications and337 days' rations were passed by Hooker and McClellan on account of the delay. But at length, on the 14th, the sick and stricken were sent to this point, and the movement of the troops had begun. A long pontoon bridge had been thrown across the Chickahominy near its mouth, and by this and other bridges the troops recrossed that fatal stream. On the morning of the 18th the rear guard was over and the bridge was removed. McClellan, who had apprehended an attack upon his rear, did not feel secure until he had his whole army across the river. But almost the entire Confederate force had been gradually withdrawn from Richmond. Jackson and Ewell had been sent to Gordonsville five weeks before; they had been followed a fortnight later by A. P. Hill. On the 13th of August, Longstreet, Lee, and other corps, with the bulk of Magruder's and Huger's divisions marched northward; and while McClellan was congratulating himself that he had got safely across the Chickahominy, the whole Confederate force was a hundred miles away, confounding Pope on the James.

1 Letts Rep., 8, 222


3 Letts Rep., 286-289.

4 Hooker's Testimony, in O'Reilly's History of the War, ch. 1.

5 In reply to the strategical and political arguments advanced by McClellan, Halleck says: In my estimate of the chances of success, I considered your requisition for 30,000 re-enforcements was perfectly reasonable; but it was perfectly impossible to fill it until new troops had been recruited and organized, which was impossible, if the enemy should assume a present position until it could be so re-enforced would almost destroy it in that climate; and, even supposing the re-enforced army to be so posted, there would be the river batteries before you could advance upon Richmond. It is by no means certain that the enemy would not force the capture of the batteries and the river batteries before you could advance upon Richmond. It is by no means certain that the enemy would not force the capture of the batteries and the river batteries before you could advance upon Richmond. It is by no means certain that the enemy would not force the capture of the batteries and the river batteries before you could advance upon Richmond. It is by no means certain that the enemy would not force the capture of the batteries and the river batteries before you could advance upon Richmond. It is by no means certain that the enemy would not force the capture of the batteries and the river batteries before you could advance upon Richmond. It is by no means certain that the enemy would not force the capture of the batteries and the river batteries before you could advance upon Richmond.

6 Memoirs. 289

7 Letts Rep., i, 15; ii, 1, 80.