



AMBROSE E. BURNSIDE.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BURNSIDE'S CAMPAIGN.—FREDERICKSBURG.

Burnside in Command.—His Plan for the Campaign.—Its Merits and Demerits.—New Organization of the Army of the Potomac.—The Movement from Warrenton to Fredericksburg.—Delay in crossing the Rappahannock.—The pontoons.—Fredericksburg threatened with Bombardment.—The Confederate Army reaches Fredericksburg.—The Position on the Rappahannock.—Burnside's Preparations for Crossing.—The Delay opposite Fredericksburg.—Lee's Plan of Operations.—Crossing the River, and Preparations for Attack.—Burnside's final Plan for two Assaults.—Franklin's Attack upon the Left.—Meade's Advance repulsed.—Gibson advances, and is repulsed.—The Confederate Pursuit checked by Birney.—The Moments of the Action.—The Confederate Position on the Right at Marye's Hill.—Its Strength.—Assailed by Sumner.—French and Hancock repelled.—Hooker ordered to attack.—Humphreys assaults, and is driven back.—Close of the Battle.—The Numbers engaged.—Burnside proposes to renew the Battle the next Day.—Is dissuaded by his Generals.—He recrosses the Rappahannock.—Effects of the Battle of Fredericksburg.—Condition of the Union Army.—Burnside designs a new Movement.—The proposed Cavalry Expedition.—The President forbids the Movement.—The Reasons for the Prohibition.—Franklin and Smith criticise Burnside's Plan, and propose another.—Cochrane and Newton's Interview with the President.—Burnside and Halleck.—Burnside's third Plan.—The Mud Campaign.—Burnside's Order No. 8, dismissing Hooker and others.—The President refuses to sanction the Order.—Burnside resigns, and Hooker is placed in Command.—Sumner and Franklin relieved.—Death of Sumner.—Hooker takes Command.

THE command of the Army of the Potomac was thrust into the unwilling hands of Burnside. He had twice declined it, and would have done so now had it been left to his choice;¹ but the order was peremptory, and he had no alternative but to obey. Yet, as if foreseeing the issue, he repeated to the messenger who brought the order and to members of his own staff what he had before said to the President and the Secretary of War, that he did not consider himself competent to take the command of so large an army, and, moreover, that from the place which his command had held during the campaign, he knew less than any other general of the posi-

¹ *Com. Rep.*, 645.

tion, numbers, and character of the several corps.¹ Still, with the knowledge then possessed by the military authorities, the choice was the wisest that could have been made. No other general had held an important separate command. His expedition to North Carolina had been successful. He had become entangled in none of the jealousies which impeded, or were thought to impede, the efficiency of the army. His personal and military character was unreproached and irreproachable. Burnside's modesty, contrasted with Hooker's vehement self-assertion, decided the question of the generalship. He was taken at the high estimate which the administration placed upon him, rather than at the low one which he placed upon himself.

Burnside was required not only to take command of the army, but to state what he proposed to do with it.² He had been from the first opposed to the movement made by McClellan upon Warrenton. He argued that if the army was to go to Richmond by land, the only way was that by Fredericksburg. McClellan was half convinced of the truth of this, and on the day before he was superseded gave orders which looked toward the abandonment of his present line of operations.³ Two days after he had been placed in command, Burnside presented his plan.

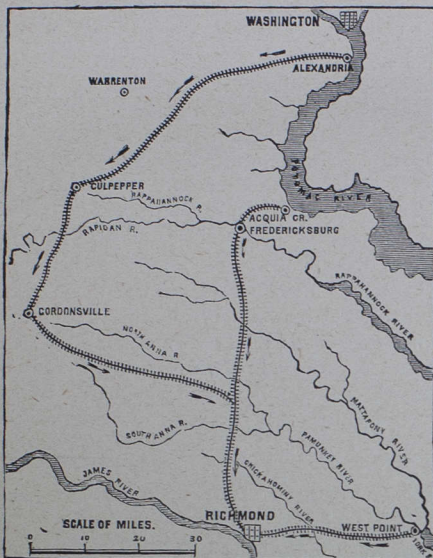
Its essential features were that McClellan's design of attacking Lee should be given up, the movement toward Gordonsville abandoned, and then there should be "a rapid move of the whole force to Fredericksburg, with a view to a movement upon Richmond from that point." In favor of his plan he urged that if the Union army should move upon Culpepper and Gordonsville, and even fight a successful battle, the enemy would still have many lines of retreat, and would be able to reach Richmond with enough of force to render necessary another battle there. Should the enemy fall back without giving battle, the pursuit would be simply following up a retreating army well supplied with provisions in dépôts in its rear, while the pursuing army would have to rely for supplies upon a single long line of communication, liable to be cut at any point. But in moving by the way which he proposed, the army would cover Washington until it reached Fredericksburg, where it would be on the shortest road to Richmond, the taking of which, he thought, "should be the great object of the campaign, as the fall of that place would tend more to cripple the rebel cause than almost any other military event, except the absolute breaking up of their army." The presence of a large army on the Fredericksburg line would render it impossible for the enemy to make any successful movement upon Washington. An invasion of Pennsylvania was not to be expected at that season of the year; and, even should a lodgment be made there by any force that could be spared, its destruction would be

certain soon after winter set in. "Could the army before Richmond be beaten, and their capital taken," he added, "the loss of half a dozen of our towns and cities in the interior of Pennsylvania could well be afforded."⁴

This plan was undoubtedly a judicious one upon the assumption that the capture of Richmond was the main aim of the campaign. For an advance thither by way of Gordonsville, the main base of supplies must be Alexandria, involving transportation by land of fully 150 miles by the route which must be followed. For an advance by way of Fredericksburg, Acquia Creek, on the Potomac, would be the base to which supplies could be sent by water, leaving but 75 miles of land transportation, by a line much less exposed. The advantage of the Peninsular route are still greater. The base of supplies would be at West Point, only 30 miles from Richmond. The main objection to this, that the army here would not be in a position to cover Washington, would be obviated by concentrating there a force sufficient for its defense, which the great numerical preponderance of the Union troops rendered easy. In fact, there was at this moment in and around Washington, independent of Burnside's army in the field, a force very nearly equal to the whole Confederate Army of Northern Virginia.⁵

¹ *Com. Rep.*, 650.² *Ibid.*, 650.³ *Ibid.*, 649.⁴ For the entire text of this plan, see *Com. Rep.*, 643; and for Burnside's own explanation of it, *Ibid.*, 650.⁵ The advantages of the Peninsular route, or rather a modification of it, taking the James River instead of the York as the base, were set forth six weeks later by Franklin and Smith, in a letter to the President, first made public in Swinton's *Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac*, pp. 263-265. Mr. Swinton indeed affirms (*Ibid.*, 233), upon the authority of "the corps commander then most intimate in his confidence," that "Burnside had not matured any definite plan of action, for the reason that he hoped to be able to postpone operations till the spring. He did not favor operating against Richmond by the overland route, but had his mind turned toward a repetition of McClellan's movement to the Peninsula; and in determining to march to Fredericksburg, he cherished the hope of being able to winter there upon an easy base of supplies, and in the spring embarking his army for the James River." Not only is there no trace of any such purpose to be found in Burnside's written plan, but every recommendation implies the design of moving by the overland route.

The fatal error in Burnside's plan was that it wholly misconceived the main object to be aimed at. The capture of Richmond would indeed have been in itself a great material and moral loss to the Confederacy, but it would have been of far less moment than the destruction, or even the signal defeat of the army. That army was the head and front of the offending, and at this the blow should have been aimed. The President, with a keener insight into the case than any other man had yet attained, had written, "We must beat the enemy somewhere, or fail finally. If we can not beat him where he now is, we never can, he being again within the intrenchments of Richmond." This was as true now as it was a month before. It so happened that the Confederate commander had placed his army in such a position as to invite an attack. A little more than half of it was massed at Culpepper, a little less than half was lying three days' march away in the Valley of the Shenandoah. The Union army was massed only a few hours' march from the enemy, outnumbering him more than two to one. An attack in force could hardly have resulted otherwise than in a decisive victory. Burnside proposed deliberately to throw away the advantage thus thrust into his hands, and march directly away from his inferior foe, in quest of an object which, even if attained, was of wholly secondary consequence. The President, however, though with some reluctance, acceded to Burnside's plan, but with the significant intimation, "I think it will succeed if you move rapidly, otherwise not."¹ While preparing for this movement, Burnside organized his force into three "Grand Divisions"—Sumner being placed in command of the "Right," Hooker of the "Centre," and Franklin of the "Left."²

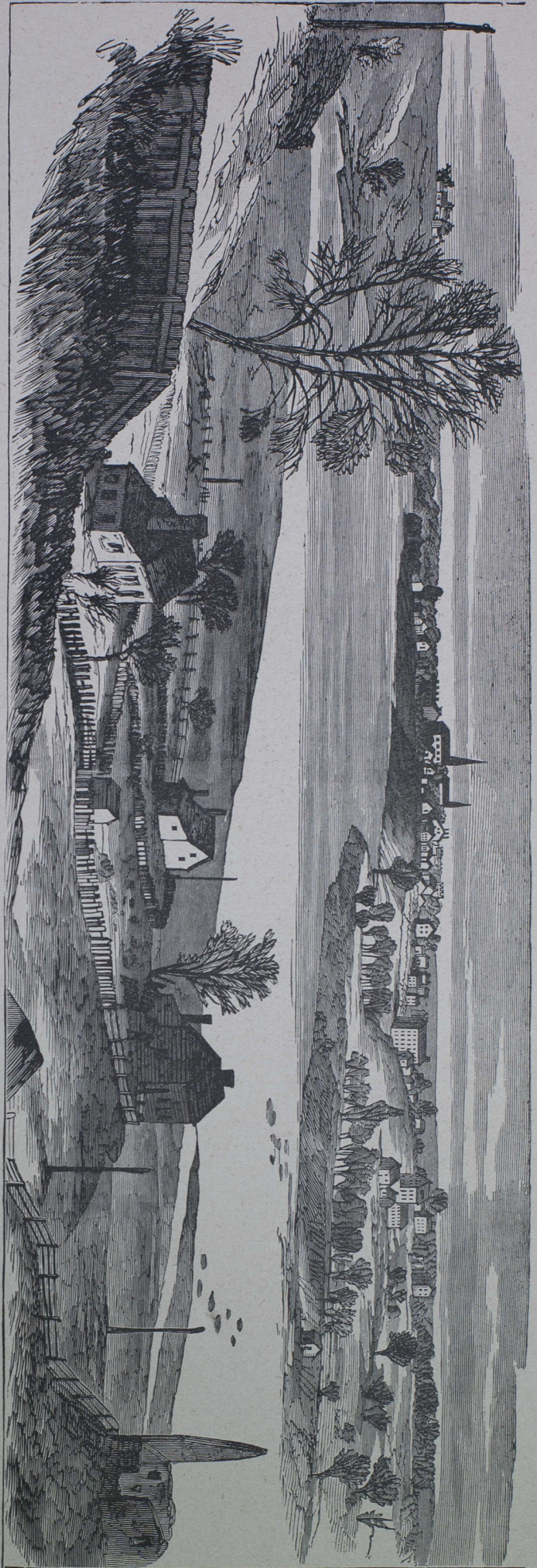


This sketch illustrates the advantages, in point of distance, of the three proposed routes to Richmond. The first, abandoned by Burnside, assumes the basis of supply to be Alexandria. The second, proposed by him, assumes it to be at Acquia Creek. The third, that adopted by McClellan, places it at West Point.

Burnside began his movement from Warrenton to Fredericksburg on the 15th of November. He had proposed to make it by concentrating his force at Warrenton, as though he intended to attack Culpepper or Gordonsville. But Lee was not deceived. On the 17th he learned that Sumner had marched toward Falmouth, and that Federal gun-boats had entered Acquia Creek. This, he thought, "looked as if Fredericksburg was to be re-occupied," and he dispatched two divisions of infantry, with cavalry and artillery, to augment the small force which had held the town. Next day a bold dash by Stuart's cavalry upon Warrenton disclosed that the Federal army were gone, whereupon Longstreet's whole command was

sent toward Fredericksburg, while Jackson was ordered from the Valley to rejoin the main army.³ Lee, having divined Burnside's movement, met it in just the manner in which one would suppose he would have done, but, as it would seem, just in the way his opponent did not anticipate. There were five conceivable things to be done: To repass down the Valley of the Shenandoah and again invade Maryland, and threaten Pennsylvania; to make a demonstration upon Washington, with the intent of recalling the march to Fredericksburg; to fall back at once toward Richmond; to remain where he was, and await the issue of events; or to throw himself directly across the new line of advance proposed by Burnside. The first two movements Burnside had ruled out as impracticable or ruinous. For the third there was no immediate necessity; it could be done, if need were, afterward as well as then. Burnside seems to have supposed that Lee would choose the fourth. As it happened, he chose the fifth course, which accident enabled him to carry out under auspices far more favorable than he could have dared to anticipate.

Sumner, with the advance of the Union army, reached Falmouth, opposite Fredericksburg, on the 17th. The design was that he should cross the Rappahannock at once, and seize the heights in the rear of Fredericksburg before Lee could re-enforce the small force stationed there. The river at that point could not be forded by an army in mass, and the railroad and turnpike bridges which had spanned it were destroyed. Burnside had, as he supposed, made arrangements by which pontoons sufficient to span the stream would have been sent to him from Washington so as to meet him on his arrival. But none came for a week, during which time nothing could be done to carry out the plan of operations.⁴ Sumner, indeed, who



FREDERICKSBURG, FROM FALMOUTH.

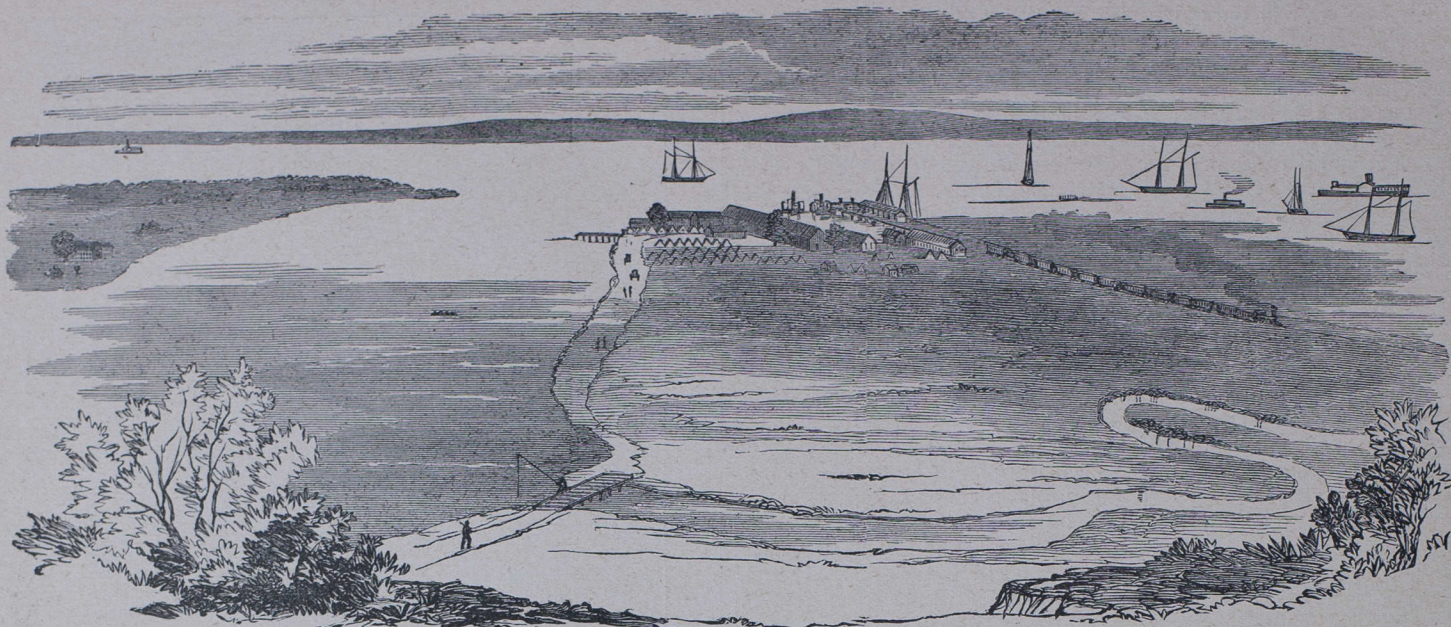
¹ *Com. Rep.*, 645.

² Sumner's Grand Division consisted of the 2d Corps, under Couch, lately Sumner's, and the 9th Corps, under Wilcox, formerly Burnside's. Hooker's Grand Division comprised the 3d Corps, under Stoneman, from the garrison of Washington, and the 5th Corps, formerly Fitz John Porter's, under Butterfield. Franklin's Grand Division consisted of the 1st Corps, formerly Hooker's, under Reynolds, and the 6th Corps, formerly Franklin's, under W. F. Smith. The 12th Corps, so briefly commanded by Mansfield, formerly Franklin's, under W. F. Smith. The 11th Corps, under Sigel, detached from the defenses of Washington, was near Manassas Junction, guarding the railway line. This corps did not strictly form a part of Burnside's movable army. Among the commanders of "divisions," as distinguished from the "Grand Divisions," were Birney, Doubleday, French, Gibbon, Hancock, Howard, Humphreys, Meade, Newton, Sykes.

³ *Lee's Rep.*, i., 37.

⁴ This delay, upon which so much hinged, was made the subject of strict scrutiny. Each per-

son immediately concerned endeavored to shift from himself the burden of the responsibility. Burnside says (*Com. Rep.*, 651, 655): "My plan had been discussed by General Halleck and General Meigs at my head-quarters at Warrenton on the night of the 11th or 12th, and, after discussing it fully there, they sat down and sent telegrams to Washington, which, as I supposed, fully covered the case, and would secure the starting of the pontoons at once. I supposed, of course, that those portions of the plan which required to be attended to at Washington would have been carried out there. I understood that General Halleck was to give the necessary orders, and then the officers who should receive those orders were the ones responsible for the pontoons coming here. I could have carried out that part of the plan through officers of my own; but, having just taken the command of an army with which I was unacquainted, it was evident that it was as much as I could attend to, with the assistance of all my officers, to change its position from Warrenton to Fredericksburg."—Halleck says (*Ibid.*, 673): "On my visit to General Burnside at Warrenton on the 12th of November, in speaking about the boats and things which he required from Washington, I told him that they were all subject to his orders. To prevent the ne-



ACQUIA CREEK. BURNSIDE'S BASE OF SUPPLY.

had been fired upon by a battery from across the river, and had silenced it so easily as to show that the enemy were there in only trifling force, was disposed to send a detachment by a ford which was practicable for the purpose, and gave an order to that effect. But he had received explicit orders not to cross and occupy Fredericksburg; and, "upon reflection, he concluded that he was rather too old a soldier to disobey a direct order; besides, he had had a little too much experience on the Peninsula of the consequence of getting astride a river to risk it here." So, having revoked the order, he sent a note to Burnside, asking whether he should take Fredericksburg the next morning, provided he could find, what he had already found, a practicable ford. Burnside replied in the negative; he did not think it advisable to occupy Fredericksburg until his communications were established; and Sumner coincided in this decision.¹ Hooker, who brought up the rear of the army, requested permission, on the 20th, to send a division across the Rappahannock, which should march down the south side and seize the heights behind Fredericksburg. Burnside next day refused permission. He thought that although Hooker might "beat any force of the enemy he would meet on his way, yet it would be a very hazardous movement to throw a column like that beyond the reach of its proper support;" and, moreover, a rain-storm which had set in during the night rendered the movement impossible.² Sumner, on the 21st, sent over a message to the corporate authorities of Fredericksburg demanding the surrender of the town, under pain of bombardment in case of refusal. The civic authorities were told by the military commander that "while the town would not be occupied for military purposes, its occupation by the enemy would be resisted." Directions were given for the removal of the people, and almost the entire population left their homes.³ No bombardment then took place; but a fortnight later, when the movement across the river was made, Fredericksburg, which was then used by the Confederates for "military purposes," and almost the entire population having been removed in consequence of the threat, was bombarded. This was fiercely denounced as a violation of the laws of war, but without the slightest ground. The town had been formally summoned to surrender; the unarmed population had abandoned it after abundant notice; and it was used for the direct "military purpose" of "resisting the occupation by the enemy."

A fortnight passed, during which time the Union army lay upon the north bank of the Rappahannock, waiting for means to cross the stream, and for the accumulation of supplies at the Acquia Creek, and the means of transporting them from the Potomac to the Rappahannock. The Confederate army was meanwhile concentrating on the southern side to resist any advance. About this time that army was formally organized into two corps, under the immediate command of Longstreet and Jackson, who had each been raised to the rank of lieutenant general. Longstreet's corps consisted of the troops formerly belonging to his command. To Jackson was assigned, besides those which he had heretofore commanded, the division of D. H. Hill. The two corps were now of nearly equal force, that of Longstreet being perhaps slightly in excess.⁴

necessity of the commanding officer here reporting the order for the boats there, the order was drawn up on his table and signed by me directly to General Woodbury. I saw General Woodbury on my return, and he told me that he had received the order. I told him that in all these matters he was under General Burnside's direction; I had nothing farther to give him except to communicate that order to him. I gave no other order or direction in relation to the matter.—There seems to have been an unaccountable misapprehension as to the purport of the order which was addressed to General Woodbury, of the Engineer Brigade. It read: "Call upon the chief quartermaster to transport all your pontoons to Acquia Creek" (*Ibid.*, 663). Woodbury did not understand that this order demanded instant execution. "Had the emergency been made known to me in any manner," he says, "I could have disregarded the forms of service, seized teams, teamsters, and wagon-masters for instant service wherever I could find them. Then, with good roads and good weather, they might possibly have been in time. But I had no warrant for such a course, which, after all, could only have been carried out by the authority of the general-in-chief" (*Ibid.*, 665).—Quartermaster General Meigs said that the blame did not rest upon his department, "which was no more responsible for the march of a pontoon train than for the march of a battery of artillery or of a regiment of infantry. Its business was to provide material for the transportation of an army. If General Woodbury had orders from General Burnside, he was responsible for carrying them out" (*Ibid.*, 680).

¹ Sumner, in *Com. Rep.*, 657.

² *Com. Rep.*, 654, 666.

³ *Lee's Rep.*, i., 38.

⁴ Longstreet's corps, the First, consisted of the divisions of Anderson, Pickett, Ransom, Wood,

It was almost the middle of December. Four weeks had passed since Burnside's plan had been sanctioned by the President; but the essential thing upon which he had based the probability of success—that the movement should be rapidly made—had failed. The faultiness of the whole scheme was now apparent. Burnside had shrunk from assailing the half of Lee's force which lay directly in his front, in a position hastily taken and of no great natural strength. He was now confronted by the Confederate army, drawn up in a position almost unassailable by nature, strengthened by the labor of three unobstructed weeks, which could be assailed only by crossing a formidable stream; and even if that were passed, the enemy assailed and driven from his position, the pursuit would still encounter at every step of the way just the same obstructions which would have been met on the line which had been abandoned. If military considerations were alone in question, no farther movement would have been made, and the army would have gone into winter quarters. But public feeling demanded a movement, and Burnside, sanctioned by his generals, resolved to take the offensive. The only question was where the intervening river should be crossed.¹

The Rappahannock, with a general course from south to north, makes a sharp bend westward a mile above Fredericksburg, running between two lines of heights. Those on the north, known as Stafford Heights, slope steeply down to the river bank, with an elevation sufficient to command the valley across the river. On the south side, the hills just in the rear of Fredericksburg rise sharply something less than a mile from the river; then they trend away, in a semicircular form, until they sink down into the valley of the Massaponax, six miles below Fredericksburg, leaving an irregular broken valley, two miles broad at its widest point. This range of heights was mostly covered with dense woods, oaks with branches now leafless, skirted with sombre pines, rising southward by a succession of wooded ridges, each dominating the one below until lost in a wild wooded region soon to become famous under the name of the "Wilderness." Upon the crests and slopes of these wooded heights Longstreet's corps had been disposed, covering a front of about five miles. There was little need of artificial aid to the natural strength of the position; but artillery and rifle pits were dug and abatis constructed.² D. H. Hill's division was posted near Port Royal, twenty miles below, to prevent the Union gun-boats from ascending the river, and some skirmishing here took place.³ The remainder of Jackson's corps was

and McLaws, comprising 21 brigades. Jackson's corps, the Second, consisted of the divisions of A. P. Hill, D. H. Hill, Ewell, and Taliaferro, comprising 19 brigades. The cavalry and horse artillery, under Stuart, acted somewhat independently with either corps; at the battle of Fredericksburg, mainly with Jackson.

¹ Sumner: "I was in favor of crossing the Rappahannock, because I knew that neither our government nor our people would be satisfied to have our army retire from this position or go into winter quarters until we knew the force that was on the other side of the river, and the only way of ascertaining that was by feeling them" (*Com. Rep.*, 658).

Franklin: "General Burnside called a council, in which it was the unanimous opinion, I think, of all the generals present, that if this river could be crossed, it ought to be crossed, no matter what might happen afterward. The point of crossing was not then definitely determined upon; but I thought at the time that we were to cross several miles farther down. Afterward General Burnside called us together again, and informed us that he had determined to cross at the two points at which we finally did cross. I had no objection to that, but thought they were as good as the point farther down" (*Ibid.*, 661).

Hooker: "After the pontoons arrived, it became a matter of importance to determine where and in what way we should cross the Rappahannock. The officers commanding the Grand Divisions were called together to discuss and determine that matter. General Burnside proposed that a portion of the command should cross at Fredericksburg, and a portion should cross about twelve miles below. I objected by my vote in the council to crossing two columns so far apart, and stated my preference that the whole army should cross at what is called the United States or Richards's Ford, about twelve miles above; but I was overruled" (*Ibid.*, 666).

² "Pits were made for the protection of the batteries; and, in addition to the natural strength of the position, ditches, stone fences, and road-cuttings were found along different portions of the line, and parts were farther strengthened by rifle-trenches and abatis."—Longstreet, in *Lee's Rep.*, ii., 427.

³ Hill always managed to say something quite out of harmony with the usual decorum of the Confederate official reports. Here, with abridgments, is his account of what took place at his extremity of the line: "Four Yankee gun-boats were then lying opposite the town of Port Royal. Rifle-pits were constructed to prevent the pirates from ascending. Hardaway opened upon the gun-boats. Finding the fire too hot for them, they fled back. Hardaway continued to pelt them, and, to stop his fire, the ruffians commenced shelling the town. A dog was killed and a negro wounded. The pirates fled down the river; but a worse fate awaited them than a distant cannonade—a section of artillery immediately on the bank gave them a parting salute. From Yankee sources we learned that the pirates lost six killed and twenty wounded. Whether they over-esti-

AN ARMY TRAIN





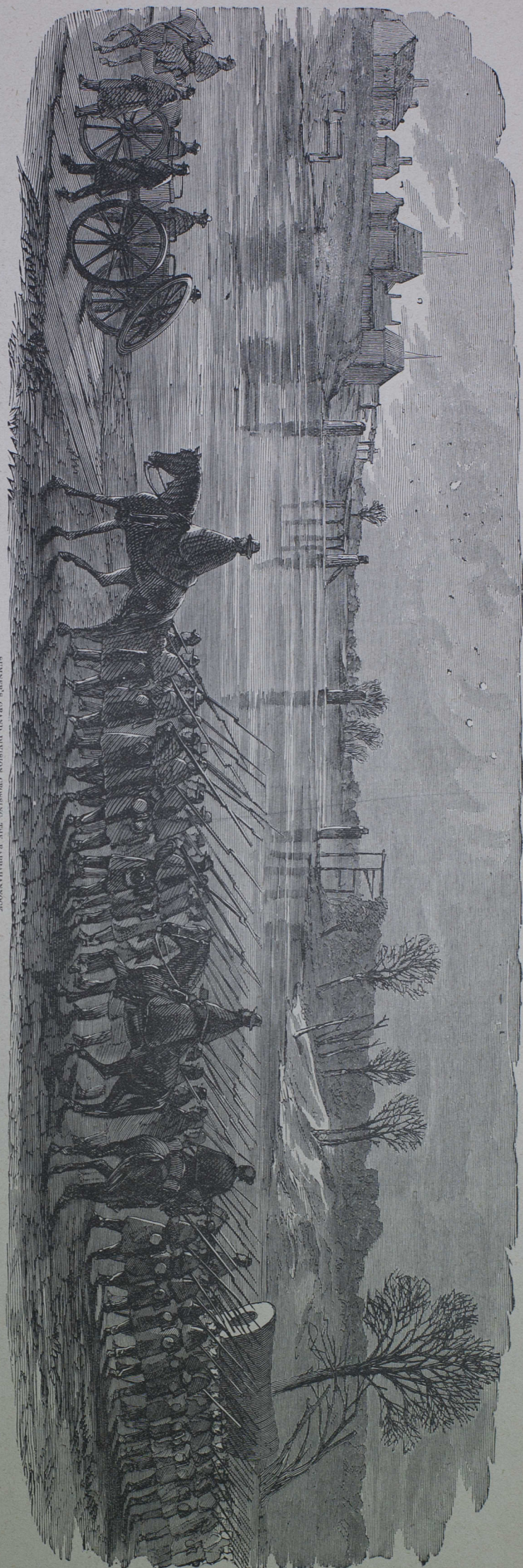
BUILDING THE BRIDGE AT FREDERICKSBURG.

posted so as to be in a position to support either Hill or Longstreet. Two shots in immediate succession were to be the signal giving notice for the whole of the Confederate force to concentrate upon any point that should be menaced in force.

Burnside had resolved to cross at a point known by the euphonic designation of Skinker's Neck, about twelve miles below Fredericksburg. The movements which were made for this purpose caused the enemy to concentrate much of his strength in that direction. The thought then occurred to him to detain this force there by ostentatious demonstrations, and to make the crossing at Fredericksburg. "I decided," he says, "to cross at Fredericksburg, because, in the first place, I felt satisfied that they did not expect us to cross here, but down below; and, in the next place, I felt satisfied that this was the place to fight the most decisive battle, because, if we could divide their forces by piercing their lines at one or two points, separating their left from their right, then a vigorous attack with the whole army would succeed in breaking their army in pieces."¹ No conclusion could, as matters stood, be more sound, provided that the premises upon which it was based were sure. If it was certain that Lee's left would be behind Fredericksburg, and his right a dozen miles or more away, then an adequate force flung into this great gap would divide the Confederate army, and a vigorous assault upon its left might be expected to crush it when cut off from aid from the right. To carry out this plan, it was necessary that the river should be crossed and battle be waged and won in a single day. Failing this, the rest must depend upon contingencies which no man could foresee.

The 11th of December was fixed upon as the day for crossing the river. During the previous night nearly one hundred and fifty heavy guns were placed in position upon the crest of Stafford Heights, commanding a great part of the opposite valley. The intention was to throw three bridges across at Fredericksburg, and as many more at a point two or three miles below. Sumner's Grand Division was to cross by the upper bridges, Franklin's by the lower, while Hooker's was to be held in reserve, ready, if the assault was successful, to spring upon the enemy in his retreat.² It was supposed that the bridges could be built in two or three hours.³ Before dawn the pontoons were brought down to the river bank, and the work of laying the bridges was begun in the darkness. Two single shots broke the stillness which reigned through the Confederate lines. These were the signal for Longstreet's corps to concentrate upon the threatened point. Fredericksburg was held by only two regiments of sharpshooters, who were sheltered in houses and rifle-pits, and behind walls on the river bank. In addition to the darkness of night, a dense fog filled the valley. The engineers had hardly begun to lay the bridges when they were assailed by rifle-shots at short range from the opposite shore, and driven off with severe loss. Again and again they returned, and again and again were driven off. The two or three hours had stretched to six, and the narrow stream was only half spanned, and not another length could be laid under the fierce fire. Burnside now ordered that fire should be opened upon the town from his artillery which crowned the opposite crests. Nearly one hundred and fifty heavy guns at once opened fire into the pall of mist which still shrouded the scene. After two hours a column of rising smoke indicated that a part of the town was in flames, and another attempt was made to complete the bridges. This was repelled as the former ones had been, showing that almost ten thousand shot had failed to dislodge the sharpshooters from their coverts. When the fog lifted at noon, it was found that the elevation at which the guns were placed was so great that few of them could be sufficiently depressed to bear upon the river front of the town. The day was fast wearing away, and nothing had been accomplished. The officers reported that the bridges could not be built. Burnside said that it must be done, and some means must be found to dislodge the sharpshooters. It was now decided that a detachment should cross in open pontoon boats and carry the town. Two regiments from Massachusetts and one from Michigan volunteered for the perilous work. They rushed down the bank and pushed the boats into the stream; a few strong strokes with the oars, and they were under shelter of the opposite bluffs, up which they dashed, and in a quarter of an hour carried the town.⁴ In half an hour more the bridges were finished, and, as evening was falling, Couch's division was over and the first step in the enterprise fairly taken.⁵ Franklin had indeed met with scarcely a show of opposition. His artillery covered the opposite shore, and his bridges were ready before noon; but Burnside had resolved that the attack should be made in two separate columns, and Franklin was not suffered to cross until the other bridges were completed.

It was no part of Lee's plan seriously to oppose the passage of the river by the Federal force, or even to assail it when over. He wisely chose to await its assault upon his strong position,⁶ to which his opponent would



REPRODUCED FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY G. H. R. DEL. W. H. H. SCULPT.

mated or under-estimated their losses I do not know; they sometimes lie on one side and sometimes on another. In a few days the pirates returned with some more of their thievish consorts. Guns were brought down to the river under cover of a dense fog, and when it lifted were opened upon them. We have learned from the same respectable Yankee source that three of the pirates were struck, one three times, and that a captain was killed, and four or five other thieves knocked on the head.—D. H. Hill, in *Lee's Rep.*, ii., 458.

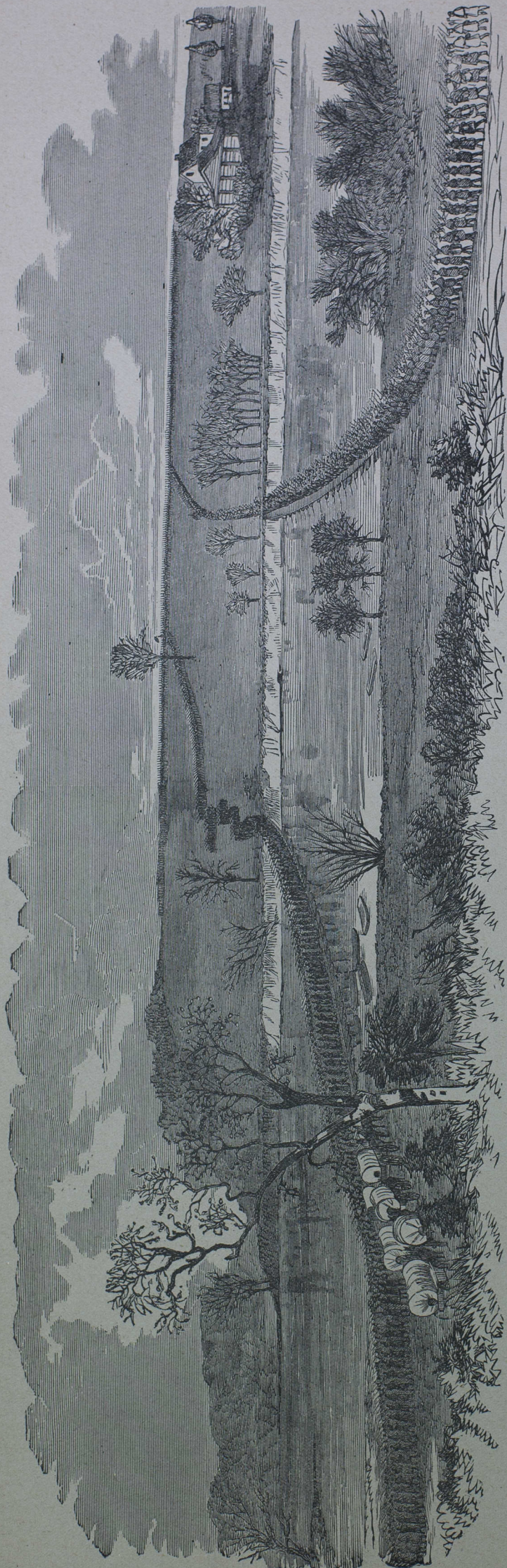
¹ Burnside's Testimony, in *Com. Rep.*, 652.

² Hooker, in *Com. Rep.*, 667.

³ Burnside, *Ibid.*, 655.

⁴ McLaws says (*Lee's Rep.*, ii., 445) that the artillery fire was so severe that his "men could not use their rifles, and the different places occupied by them becoming untenable, the troops were withdrawn from the river bank at half past four, when the enemy crossed in boats, and, completing their bridges, passed over in force and advanced into the town." ⁵ Burnside, in *Com. Rep.*, 656.

⁶ Lee indeed believed that it was impossible to prevent the crossing. He says (*Rep.*, i., 39): "The plain of Fredericksburg is so completely commanded by the Stafford Heights, that no effectual opposition could be made to the construction of bridges or the passage of the river without exposing our troops to the destructive fire of the numerous batteries of the enemy. At the same time, the narrowness of the Rappahannock, its winding course and deep bed, presented opportunities for laying down bridges at points secure from the fire of our artillery. Our position was therefore selected with a view to resist the enemy's advance after crossing, and the river was guarded only by a force sufficient to impede his movements until the army could be concentrated."—Franklin, however, was confident that not only might his passage have been prevented, but that his division, when over, could have been crushed. He says (*Testimony*, in *Com. Rep.*, 661): "I always



FRANKLIN'S GRAND DIVISION CROSSING THE RAPPAHANNOCK.

have been pledged by crossing the river. He seems, indeed, to have been uncertain whether the movement in his front was a serious one, or merely a feint to cover an attempt upon one of his flanks; for it was not until from twenty-four to forty hours after the firing of the signal-guns that Jackson's corps was brought up from its positions nearly a score of miles down the river.¹ Could the bridges have been completed, as was expected, early on the morning of the 11th, and the attack made that day, Burnside would have encountered only half of the Confederate force, and the result of the action could hardly have failed to have been different.

The whole of the 12th was most unaccountably spent in crossing the river and deciding upon the order of the attack on the next day. It was found that the extreme Confederate right was protected by a canal, all the bridges crossing which had been destroyed; there was, besides, a sluiceway and mill-pond, so that this point was unassailable; and an attack upon the right could only be made against the steep front of Marye's Hill, rising in the rear of the town and presenting a front of a mile, then sloping off sharply to a ravine traversed by a small stream; thence the heights sweep away from the river, leaving a broken plain, its edges deeply indented by wooded spurs. This plain, about two miles broad, is traversed by the Richmond and Fredericksburg Railroad, which winds around the base of the heights, occasionally cutting through the extremities of the projecting spurs. Midway between the railway and the river runs the old Richmond or Port Royal Road, often embanked and fringed with trees, affording shelter behind which the Union force could be deployed. When the final arrangements had been made on both sides, the Confederate forces, 80,000 strong, were posted along the ridge of the range of hills, their advance line in places pushed forward to the wooded base, Jackson's corps holding the right and Longstreet's the left. The Union army, 100,000 strong, was posted along the Richmond Road, from Fredericksburg down; Couch's corps, of Sumner's division, in the town; then Wilcox's corps, forming the connection with Franklin's Grand Division on the left.

The character of the ground unmistakably indicated that the main attack should be made by Franklin; for not only was the Confederate position here manifestly weaker, but the plain in front of it was spacious enough to give room to deploy his whole force; while to the right, in front of Sumner, the plain was so narrow that only a fragment of his force could at any one moment be brought into action. If he assailed the strong position before him, it must be by successive blows, not by a single attack with his whole force. Franklin understood, on the afternoon of the 12th, that Burnside intended that he should make the attack with his Grand Division, to which had been added a part of Hooker's. Hooker understood that there was to be a twofold assault, at distinct points, the main one by Sumner, on the right.² Burnside clearly proposed a twofold attack in force, that on the left to be the first.³ But when, on the morning of the 13th, Franklin received his order, it was so worded as to lead him and his generals to suppose that it meant he should make merely an armed reconnoissance of the enemy's lines with but one of his eight divisions, to be supported by another, keeping the remainder in position for a different movement.⁴ Franklin was also informed that a column, consisting of a division or more, detached from Sumner's corps, was to move against the heights in the rear of Fredericksburg. Thus, as the plan was framed, not more than four divisions, one quarter of the force which had crossed or was ready to cross the river, were to assail the position held by the Confederates. We can only account for this plan by supposing that Burnside thought that the enemy in his front was really inconsiderable force, its bulk being still a score of miles away, and that not only had he crossed the Rappahannock at a point where he was not expected, but that during the eight-and-forty hours which had passed since the attempt was begun the enemy had not concentrated his strength in his front. Thus only can we explain the part assigned to Hooker, to spring upon the enemy on his retreat, and the order to Franklin to be in readiness to march down the Richmond Road, that being the direction which the retreating Confederates would naturally take. If such was his belief, he must have been confirmed in it by the trifling opposition offered to his passage of the river. There was, indeed, nothing to show the neighborhood of a great hostile army. Hardly a reply had been made to his heavy bombardment; not

doubted our power to cross, and I do not believe we could have crossed had the enemy chosen to prevent it; and I know, from what I have seen since and what I before suspected, that they could have prevented our crossing at those two points if they had chosen. However, the crossing was successfully made, under cover of a fog, and, as far as my wing was concerned, we got into position safely, with the loss of a very few men. Still, we were in such a position that, if the enemy had at any moment opened upon us with the guns they had bearing upon us, I think in the course of an hour our men would have been so scattered that it would have been impossible to rally them. For some unaccountable reason they did not open their batteries."

¹ "It having been definitely ascertained that the enemy had crossed the Rappahannock in large force, I was ordered to move my division at dawn on the 12th" (A. P. Hill, in *Lee's Rep.*, ii., 461).—
² "Just before sundown on the 12th I received an order to march that night to Fredericksburg, as the Yankees were expected to attack General Lee that day. A portion of my command was twenty-two miles from that city, and the most of them from eighteen to twenty" (D. H. Hill, *Ibid.*, 458).—
³ "A. P. Hill moved his division at dawn on the morning of the 12th. At the same time, Taliaferro, then in command of Jackson's division, moved from his encampment. Early on the morning of the 13th, Ewell's division, under Early, and D. H. Hill, with his division, arrived, after a severe night's march, from their respective encampments, the troops of D. H. Hill being from fifteen to eighteen miles distant from the points to which they were ordered" (Jackson, *Ibid.*, 434).

⁴ "General Burnside said [in the council] that his favorite plan of attack was on the telegraph road."—Hooker, in *Com. Rep.*, 667.

⁵ "The enemy had cut a road along in the rear of the line of heights where we made our attack, by means of which they connected the two wings of their army, and avoided a long detour through a bad country. I wanted to obtain possession of that new road, and that was my reason for making an attack on the extreme left. I did not intend to make the attack on the right until that position had been taken, which I supposed would stagger the enemy, cutting their line in two; and then I proposed to make a direct attack on their front, and drive them out of their works."—Burnside, in *Com. Rep.*, 653.

⁶ Franklin, in *Com. Rep.*, 708. The order is given in full in *Com. Rep.*, 707. The essential portions are these: "The general commanding directs that you keep your whole command in position for a rapid movement down the old Richmond Road; and you will send out at once a division at least to pass below Smithfield, to seize, if possible, the heights near Captain Hamilton's, on this side of the Massaponax, taking care to keep it well supported and its line of retreat open. . . . You will keep your whole command ready to move at once, as soon as the fog lifts."

an enemy showed himself during that day or the next besides the few regiments which had been driven from Fredericksburg, and the scanty line of sharpshooters, hardly more than a picket-guard, scattered along the river bank. He had indeed been informed by a German prisoner, who represented that he had been impressed into the Confederate service, of the strength of the enemy, of their positions and batteries, and that they regarded it as an impossibility that the heights could be carried; but Burnside clearly placed no faith in his story.¹

The morning of Saturday, December 13, broke with a dense fog resting in the valley, shutting the two armies from all sight of each other. So dense was it that the Confederates could hear the word of command given to the invisible lines before them.² The night had been bitterly cold. Some of the Confederate pickets were frozen at their posts.³ About ten o'clock the fog lifted, and showed Franklin's command in motion. He had placed a liberal construction upon the order to assault with at least one division, and threw forward Reynolds's entire corps, Meade's division in advance in the centre, supported by Gibbon's on the right, and Doubleday's on the left, somewhat in the rear. The Confederate horse artillery, under Stuart, was so posted across the Richmond Road as to enfilade the Union line, and Doubleday was deflected still farther to the left to dislodge them. After an hour's sharp cannonading Stuart's guns were withdrawn, and Meade opened a fierce artillery fire upon the woods in his front. The Confederate batteries making no response, Meade pushed forward right against what proved to be the centre of Jackson's position.⁴

Jackson's front line was composed of three brigades of A. P. Hill's division, posted in the woods at Hamilton's Crossing, the point which Franklin had been ordered to assail with a single division; the other three brigades formed the second line along the military road, while the divisions of D. H. Hill, Ewell, and Taliaferro were in reserve beyond the crest of the heights. A wide gap had been left between two of Hill's front brigades, just behind a strip of boggy wood which was supposed to be inaccessible.⁵ By one of those accidents which sometimes change the result of a battle, Meade advanced right upon this point, and his division thrust itself like a wedge through the unguarded opening, in the face of a fierce artillery fire now opened upon his column from the hitherto silent batteries. This wedge, by sheer force of impact, forced itself between and past the Confederate brigades of Lane and Archer, sweeping back the flanks of each, and gaining the second line along the military road. A part of Gregg's brigade was thrown into confusion, but the remainder of the line stood firm, and checked the rush of Meade's column. This had pushed in so rapidly that it was separated from Gibbon's division, which was to be its immediate support, and was enveloped, for it had pierced, not shattered, the first Confederate line, whose separated portions assailed each of its flanks, while its front was headed by the second line. It was now a mere question of force. Meade's three brigades were opposed to Hill's six, and they fell back in confusion over the ground which they had gained. Meanwhile Gibbon's supporting division, after a brief delay, which to Meade seemed long,⁶ came up on his right, and for a moment stemmed the Confederate advance. But in the mean while a messenger from Hill had dashed up to Early, who was in the rear, bringing tidings that "an awful gap" had been left in the front line, through which the enemy were pouring, endangering not only the infantry of that line, but all the batteries. Early sent Lawton's brigade into the fight; they rushed in with the wild "cheer peculiar to the Confederate soldier, and which is never to be mistaken for the studied hurrahs of the Yankees,"⁷ closely followed by the remainder of the division. At the same time Hood, whose division of Longstreet's corps was next to Jackson, and who had received orders to co-operate with him, sent a brigade to the scene of action. This united force swept back Gibbon's division, as well as the shattered remains of Meade's.⁸

The consequences of the wording of Burnside's order, and Franklin's understanding of it, were now apparent. Franklin held his Grand Division in a position for a "rapid advance down the Richmond Road," and so, with the exception of Meade and Gibbon, it was stretched along the road, the nearest part being a full mile from the scene of conflict, and most of it much farther, for Doubleday's division, which was to have directly supported the attack, had gone so far to the left as to be beyond reach. But, fortunately, Stoneman's corps of Hooker's Grand Division had begun to cross the river opposite the place of the fight. Birney's division of that corps, which led, had been ordered to follow Meade when he advanced; but the order was countermanded, and he was directed to retire his men from a hot artillery fire which was opening upon them. He had begun to do this when he was told to push forward to aid Meade, whose division was flying back in all direc-

tions. The fugitives rushed straight through Birney's lines, closely pursued by the enemy, who dashed within fifty yards of Birney's guns. Four batteries of these opened such a furious fire of canister that the Confederates were checked; they then recoiled, falling back to their original first line on the railroad.¹ The battle on the left was now over. It had lasted about two hours, counting from the time when Meade advanced down to the moment when the Confederates recoiled from the pursuit.² Burnside, indeed, sent an order to Franklin directing him to attack in front, but before this was received Franklin deemed it too late to make any change in his dispositions.³ Jackson also planned an assault under cover of darkness upon the Federal position. He proposed to attack with his artillery in advance, followed by the infantry; but his first guns had hardly moved forward a hundred yards when the Federal artillery reopened its fire, and so completely swept his front as to satisfy him that the attempt must be abandoned.⁴

In this action upon the left the Federals lost, in killed and wounded, about 3700, of which nearly 2600 fell upon the two divisions of Meade and Gibbon, and 900 upon that of Birney. The Confederates lost about 3200, of which half fell upon the division of A. P. Hill, and a fourth upon that of Ewell. In their advance the Federals captured 500 prisoners, and lost about as many in the retreat.⁵

During this action on the left, a still more fiercely contested fight was raging three miles away on the right, at the foot of Marye's Hill, directly behind Fredericksburg. The Confederate position here was of great strength.⁶ "Marye's Hill, covered with their batteries, falls off abruptly toward Fredericksburg, to a stone wall which forms a terrace on the side of the hill, and the outer margin of the Telegraph Road, which winds along the foot of the hill. The road is about twenty-five feet wide, and is faced by a stone wall, about four feet high, on the city side. The road having been cut out of the side of the hill in many places, this last wall is not visible above the surface of the ground. The ground falls off rapidly to almost a level surface, which extends about a hundred and fifty yards; then, with another abrupt fall of a few feet, to another plain, which extends some two hundred yards, and then falls off abruptly into a wide ravine, which extends along the whole front of the city."⁷ This road, invisible from the direction whence the attack was to come, was precisely like the ditch of a fortress, affording perfect protection to the men posted in it. Parts of two brigades, numbering in all not 2000 men, were stationed here, and yet so small was the space that they stood four deep.⁸ The line of this sunken road was continued on each side by a stone wall raised above the ground, and by rifle-pits and trenches. The crest of the hill was covered with artillery, but so narrow was the space that there was here only room for eleven guns of the Washington Artillery; these were mostly 12-pounders. Other guns, about fifty in all, of heavier calibre, were posted so as to enfilade the approaches, while the bulk of the artillery was held in reserve beyond the crest of the hills, the ammunition trains being several miles in the rear.⁹ Lee, indeed, seems to have assumed that the enemy would succeed in gaining the crest of the hills, and that the battle would be fought on the plateau beyond, where his whole system of defensive works had been constructed; while Burnside supposed that these crests once gained the victory would be won.

The attack upon Marye's Hill was committed to Sumner; but, as Wilcox's corps of his Grand Division had been stretched down the river to keep up the connection with Franklin, the burden of the assault was laid upon Couch's corps. French's division was to begin the attack, followed by that of Hancock, "two of the most gallant officers in the army, and two divisions that had never turned their backs to the enemy."¹⁰ When the fog lifted at noon, these divisions were seen formed in two columns of attack, marching straight toward the base of the heights, along two roads which here run parallel, that on the right being the "Orange Plank Road," leading westward to the "Wilderness," four months hence to become historical in connection with

¹ Birney, in *Com. Rep.*, 705; Reynolds, *Ibid.*, 698; Jackson, in *Lee's Rep.*, ii., 436; A. P. Hill, *Ibid.*, 464; Early, *Ibid.*, 471.

² The moments of the fight are best given in the dispatches of General Hardie, of Burnside's staff, who was placed at Franklin's head-quarters to report upon the operations. We give the main points of his consecutive dispatches, as contained in *Com. Rep.*, 712-714: "December 13, 7 40 A.M. Meade's division is to make the movement from our left; but it is just reported that the enemy's skirmishers are advancing, indicating an attack upon our position on the left.—9 A.M. Meade just moved out; Doubleday supports him. Meade's skirmishers engaged with enemy's skirmishers.—9 40. Two batteries playing upon Reynolds. They must be silenced before he can advance.—11 A.M. Meade advanced half a mile, and holds on.—12 M. Birney's division now getting into position. That done, Reynolds will order Meade to advance.—12 5 P.M. Meade's line is advancing in the direction you prescribed this morning.—1 P.M. Enemy opened a battery enfilading Meade; Reynolds has opened all his batteries upon it. Reynolds hotly engaged.—1 15 P.M. Heavy engagement of infantry; Meade is assaulting the hill.—1 25 P.M. Meade is in the woods; seems to be able to hold on. Reynolds will push Gibbon in if necessary; the infantry firing is prolonged and quite heavy; things look well enough; men in fine spirits.—1 40 P.M. Meade having carried a portion of the enemy's position in the woods, we have 300 prisoners; tough work; men fight well; Gibbon has advanced to Meade's right; Meade has suffered severely; Doubleday, to Meade's left, not engaged.—2 15 P.M. Gibbon and Meade driven back from the woods; Newton gone forward; Jackson's corps of the enemy attacks on the left; Gibbon slightly wounded; Bayard mortally wounded by a shell. Things do not look so well on Reynolds's front; still we will have new troops in soon.—2 25 P.M. Franklin will do his best; new troops gone in.—3 P.M. Reynolds seems to be holding his own; things look better somewhat.—3 40 P.M. Gibbon's and Meade's divisions are badly used up, and I fear another attack can not be made this afternoon. Doubleday's division will replace Meade's as soon as it can be collected, and if it be done in time another attack will be made. The enemy are in force in the woods on our left, threatening the safety of that portion of our line. Just as soon as the left is safe, our forces here will be prepared for a front attack; but it may be too late this afternoon; indeed, we are engaged in front any how. Notwithstanding the unpleasant items I relate, the morale generally of the troops is good.—4 30 P.M. The enemy is still in force on our left and front. An attack on our batteries in front has been repulsed. A new attack has just opened on our left; but the left is safe, though it is too late to advance either to the left or front."

³ *Com. Rep.*, 710.

⁴ Jackson, in *Lee's Rep.*, ii., 438.

⁵ For detail of the losses in this action, and in that on the right, see *supra*, p. 416.

⁶ This description is copied from Kershaw's Report (in *Lee's Rep.*, ii., 487). Of all the Reports on either side, this of Kershaw, who commanded here, is the only one which gives any adequate idea of the strength of the Confederate position. The existence of the sunken road, which, as it happened, was the key to the whole action here, seems never to have been known to any of the Union generals, even when they furnished their reports.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 488.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 522, 533, 547.

⁹ Sumner, in *Com. Rep.*, 658.

¹ Hooker, in *Com. Rep.*, 667.

² *Lee's Rep.*, ii., 428.

³ *Ibid.*, ii., 487.

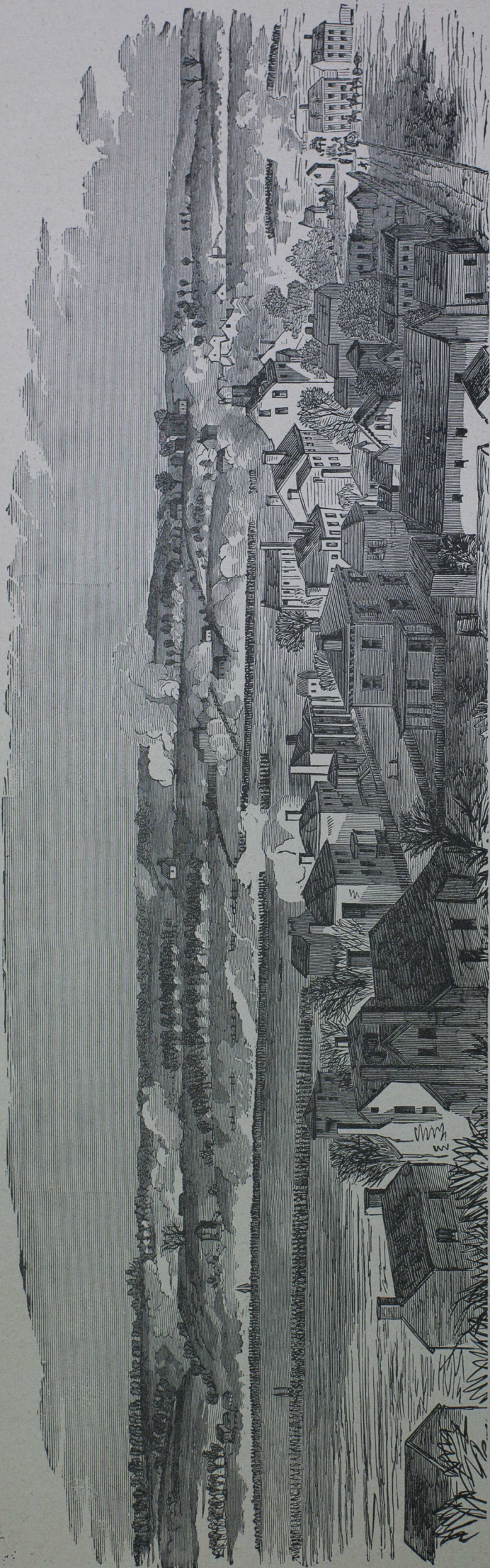
⁴ Reynolds, in *Com. Rep.*, 698; A. P. Hill, in *Lee's Rep.*, ii., 462.

⁵ *Lee's Rep.*, ii., 466.

⁶ "General Gibbon's division on my right, which I understood was to have advanced simultaneously with my own, did not advance. It was driven back. It advanced until it came within short range of the enemy, when it halted. The officers could not get the men forward to a charge, and the division was held at bay there some twenty or thirty minutes, during which time my division had gone forward. That delay enabled the enemy to concentrate their force and attack me on my front and both flanks. I had penetrated the enemy's lines so far that I had no support on either flank, and was therefore forced to fall back. As I came out, Gibbon's forces advanced, and got as far probably as the railroad, which was the enemy's outer line" (Meade, in *Com. Rep.*, 691).—Gibbon says: "I saw General Meade's troops moving forward into action, and I at once sent orders to my leading brigade to advance and engage the enemy. Shortly afterward I ordered up another brigade to the support of the first. The fire was very heavy from the enemy's infantry, and I ordered up the third brigade, and directed them to take the position with the bayonet, having previously given that order to the leading brigade. But the general commanding that brigade told me that the noise and confusion was so great that it was impossible to get the men to charge, or to get them to hear any order to charge. The third brigade went in, took the position with the bayonet, and captured a considerable number of prisoners. I had just received the report of the success of the third brigade, when shortly after I saw a regiment of infantry come out on the left of my line, between myself and General Meade. No troops came up in support of my division to enable me to hold the position which I had gained" (*Ibid.*, 715).

⁷ Early, in *Lee's Rep.*, ii., 470.

⁸ *Lee's Rep.*, ii., 428, 457.



THE ASSAULT UPON MARYE'S HILL.

the battle of Chancellorsville; the other, the "Telegraph Road," bending southwardly, and leading to Richmond, in which, hidden from view, lay the few regiments forming the advance line of the Confederate force, commanded by Cobb;¹ but he having been killed early in the day, the command was given to Kershaw, whose brigade was thrust forward into and near the sunken road.

No sooner had the Federal columns moved in dense masses out of the deep ravine, through which some suppose that the Rappahannock once flowed, and emerged upon the narrow plain at the foot of Marye's Hill, than they came within range of the Confederate artillery posted upon the crests. Every gun opened upon them with terrible effect, "making great gaps that could be seen at the distance of a mile."² The light guns of the Confederates, at this close range, were better than though they had been heavier, for they could be worked more rapidly. French's division, in the advance, pressed on in the face of the artillery fire, closing up the great gaps plowed through their ranks, and had crossed half of the narrow space toward the foot of the hill, when they were met by a sheet of fire full in their faces from an invisible foe. It came from the Confederate infantry hidden in the road "cut out of the side of the hill," not a man of whom was visible above the smooth slope. The heads of the advancing columns melted away before this solid wall of fire, delivered from ranks four deep,³ like a snow-bank before a jet of steam.

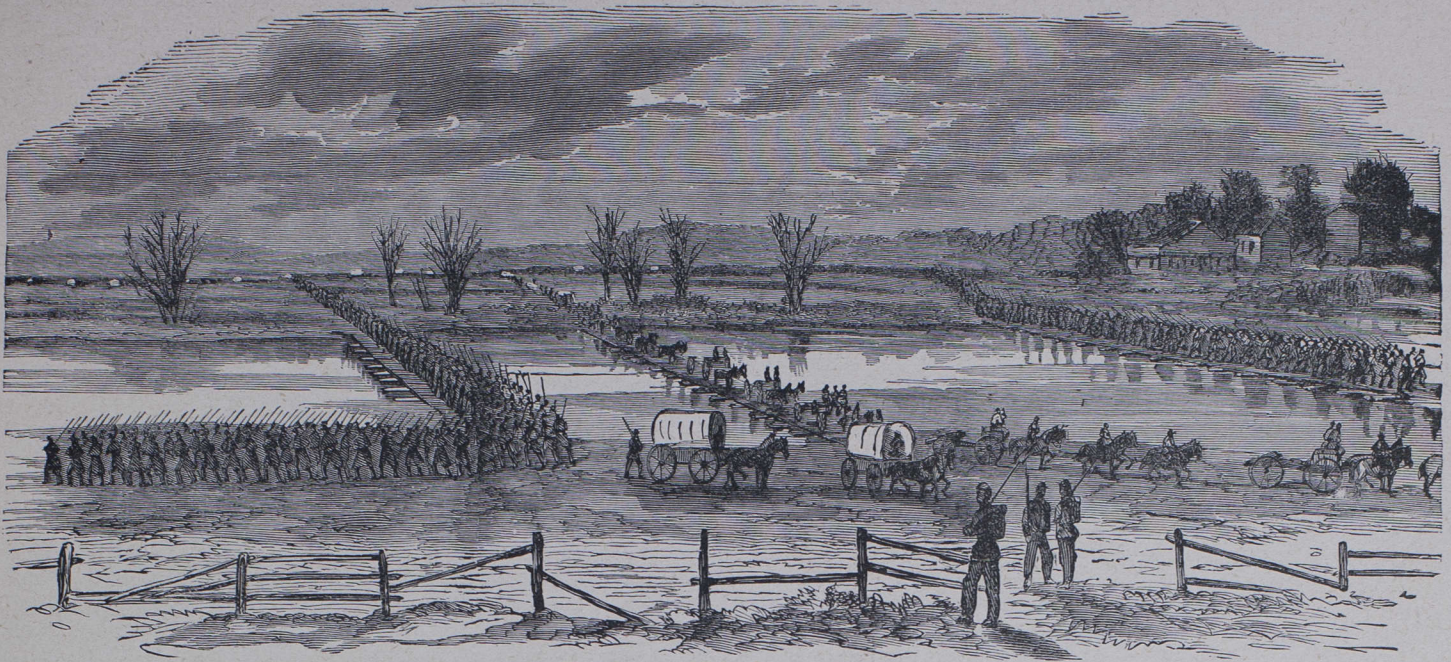
French's division recoiled before this fierce fire, and streamed back over the narrow plain across which they had advanced, leaving almost half their number behind. Hancock's came close after; this, with French's remaining men, pushed straight on, disregarding the hot artillery fire from the heights; but no sooner did they come within musket-range of the sunken road than a solid sheet of lead poured upon them. The front which was to be carried was so narrow that scarcely more than a brigade could be brought upon it at once. Brigade dashed in after brigade, each taking the place of one which had been swept back so rapidly that it seemed, from the Union lines in the plain, but a single assault, lasting three hours; but, as seen from the Confederate positions on the hill, it seemed a succession of waves dashed against the rocky wall at its base. But it was not a question of numbers. Had twice as many men been brought up the result would have been the same, only the loss would have been twice as great. Nor was it a question of bravery; for never, not even when, seven months later, the Confederates in their turn dashed and were shattered against the steeps at Gettysburg, was an assault made with more desperate and unavailing valor.⁴ The main stress of the assault had been borne by divisions of French and Hancock. They had pressed across the narrow plain, about 10,000 strong, and lost fully 4000 in killed and wounded.

Burnside had watched the action from the heights across the Rappahannock. Two full hours had passed, and nothing seemed gained. Assault after assault had been made by divisions which had "never turned their backs to the enemy." The regiments which he had expected to see crowning the crest had been repelled from the base. "That crest must be crossed to-night," he exclaimed, and directed Hooker to cross and attack upon the Telegraph Road—the very position against which French and Hancock had been "butting all day long." Of Hooker's six divisions, two, and these, he says, "were my favorite divisions, for the one was that which I had educated myself, and the other was that which Kearney had commanded, and of these I knew more than of any others in my command," had been sent to the left to support Franklin. Another division had been sent across to the upper end of Fredericksburg to support Howard, and still another lower down to support Sturgis, both of whom had been pushed forward to aid French and Howard. Hooker had then but two divisions left with which to act; they were that of Humphreys, composed of new men, and Sykes's regulars, who had fought at Bull Run and Cold Harbor, at Malvern and Groveton. Hooker rode forward across the river to consult with the generals who had been engaged in the attack. He saw Couch and Wilcox, French and Hancock. With a single exception, they were all of opinion that no attack could be successfully made there. Hooker examined the position himself, and sent to Burnside an aid with a message dissuading from a new assault. The messenger returned with orders that an attempt must be made. Hooker then rode back, and in person repeated his urgency

¹ T. R. R. Cobb, not to be confounded with Howell Cobb, once Buchanan's Secretary of the Treasury, but now also a general in the Confederate army. ² *Lee's Rep.*, ii., 429.

³ "I found, on my arrival, that Cobb's brigade occupied our entire front, and our troops could only get into position by doubling on them. This was accordingly done, and the formation along most of the line was consequently four deep. As an evidence of the coolness of the command, I may mention here that, notwithstanding that their fire was the most rapid and continuous that I have ever witnessed, not a man was injured by the fire of his comrades."—Kershaw, in *Lee's Rep.*, ii., 488.

⁴ The Confederate reports testify abundantly to the desperate bravery with which this assault was carried on. Lee says (*Rep.*, i., 42): "Our batteries poured a rapid and destructive fire into the dense lines of the enemy as they advanced to the attack, frequently breaking their ranks, and forcing them to retreat to the shelter of the houses. Six times did the enemy, notwithstanding the havoc caused by our batteries, press on with great determination to within one hundred yards of the foot of the hill; but here, encountering the deadly fire of our infantry, his columns were broken, and fled in confusion to the town."—Ransom, whose division bore half the brunt of the fight, says (*Ibid.*, 451): "Another line was formed by the enemy, he all the while keeping up a brisk fire with sharpshooters. This line advanced with the utmost determination, and some few of them got within fifty yards of our line; but the whole were forced to retire in wild confusion before the telling fire of our small-arms at such short range. For some minutes there was a cessation; but we were not long kept in expectancy. The enemy now seemed determined to reach our position, and formed apparently a triple line, and, almost massed, moved to the charge heroically, and met the withering fire of our artillery and small-arms with wonderful stanchness. On they came to within less than one hundred and fifty paces of our line; but nothing could live before the sheet of lead that was hurled at them from this distance. They momentarily recovered, broke, and rushed headlong from the field. A few, however, more resolute than the rest, lingered under cover of some fences and houses, and annoyed us with a scattering but well-directed fire. Nothing daunted by the fearful punishment he had received, the enemy brought out fresh and increased numbers of troops. Our men held their fire until it would be fatally effective; meanwhile the artillery was spreading fearful havoc among the enemy's ranks. Still he advanced, and received the destructive fire of our line; even more resolute than before, he seemed determined madly to press on; but his efforts could avail nothing."



FRANKLIN'S DIVISION RE-CROSSING THE RAPPAHANNOCK.

against an attack. But Burnside was inflexible, and insisted that it should be made.¹

The short December day was verging to a close before Hooker was prepared to attack. He thought that the assault had not been sufficiently concentrated, and proposed to breach "a hole sufficiently large for a forlorn hope to enter." He brought forward batteries, and poured in a fire from every gun at his command. It made no more impression than if it had been poured upon "the side of a mountain of rock;" indeed, the sunken wall, which formed the real Confederate defense, could not be touched by any fire from the plain. Just at sunset Hooker ordered Humphreys's division to form in column of assault. Knapsacks, overcoats, and haversacks were thrown aside, and the men were directed "to make the assault with empty muskets, for there was no time there to load and fire." At the word, they rushed forward with loud hurrahs, charging straight for the stone wall. As it happened, the Confederate artillery, which had been posted on the crest of Marye's Hill, had exhausted its ammunition, and was passing to the rear, while other guns were coming forward to supply their places.² Humphreys's men thus escaped the terrible artillery fire which had staggered French and Hancock, and the head of the column gained a few yards—possibly rods—beyond the point attained by those who had gone before, and had then been hurled back by the musketry fire from the sunken road.³ Here they met, as those who had gone before had met, the solid sheet of lead, winged with flame, poured in their faces, and turned, as they had done, from that fierce fire. Of the 4000 men whom Humphreys led up to that hidden defense, almost a half were stricken down in a quarter of an hour, for so brief had been the time between their rush and their repulse. Had Humphreys succeeded in his assault, Hooker had proposed to support him by Sykes; but the assault had signally failed; and, says Hooker, grimly, "finding that I had lost as many men as my orders required me to lose, I suspended the attack, and directed that the men should hold, for the advance line between Fredericksburg and the enemy, a ditch that runs along about midway between the enemy's lines and the city, and which would afford a shelter for the men."⁴

The Confederate army lay on their arms that night, fully expecting that the battle would be renewed the next day. The attack had been made by so small a portion of the Union force, and had been repulsed, especially on the right, by so small a part of the Confederate force, that Lee could not believe it to be the final attempt, and he resolved to await its renewal in his strong position, rather than run the risk of attacking in turn.⁵ Burnside had crossed the river with 100,000 men. About 55,000 of these were with Franklin on the left; of these, about 17,000 had been fairly put into action. Against these Jackson had brought in about 20,000, being half of his own corps, and a brigade of Hood's division of Longstreet's corps. Hooker and Sumner, on the Union left, had 45,000; of these, 15,000 had been thrown

against the stone wall. Actually opposed to them were not more than 5000 of Longstreet's corps, though the whole, 40,000 strong, exclusive of Hood, could have been brought in had it been necessary; so that, in this twofold action, less than one third on either side were actually engaged.¹

Burnside passed the night in consultation with his officers and men. Notwithstanding their dissuasion, he resolved to renew the assault next morning. Sumner, with the corps which Burnside himself had originally commanded, and which had not been seriously engaged, was to assail the heights by a direct attack, conducted just as that had been which had been so disastrously repulsed. He thought that these regiments, "coming quickly after each other, would be able to carry the stone wall and the batteries in front, forcing the enemy into their next line, and, by going in with them, they would not be able to fire upon us to any great extent." And so the order was given. With Sumner, to receive an order was to set about its execution, and before the morning lifted the columns of attack were formed. Then, when all was ready for the desperate attempt, the veteran soldier felt at liberty to remonstrate. "General," he said, "I hope you will desist from this attack. I do not know of any general officer who approves of it, and I think it will prove disastrous to the army." Burnside could not but hesitate when such advice was given by one "who was always in favor of an advance when it was possible." He kept the column formed, but suspended the order for advance until he could consult with his generals. One and all—commanders of corps and divisions on the right—were against the attempt. He sent for Franklin from the left, and his opinion was the same. So, after hours of thought, Burnside resolved that he would not venture the attack, which he himself at the time believed would have been successful, though he soon became convinced to the contrary. Night had almost come when he informed his officers that he had determined to recross the river with the bulk of the army, but to leave enough to hold Fredericksburg itself, and to protect the bridges, which were to remain, in case he should want to cross again. But upon the representations of Hooker and Butterfield—two men into whose composition entered no feeble fibre—he was convinced that even Fredericksburg could not be held; that every thing must be withdrawn across the river, and the whole enterprise abandoned as a failure.² Sumner alone, of all the council, was still in favor of holding on to Fredericksburg. He thought this might have been done by a single division, provided the batteries across the river were rightly posted, and so the upshot of the affair would have presented a better appearance:

¹ There is some discrepancy of statement as to the numbers of Union force which crossed the river, the forces constituting each wing, and the numbers actually engaged. Burnside, however, testifies (in *Com. Rep.*, 656): "We had about 100,000 men on the other side of the river. Every single man of them was under artillery fire, and about half of them were at different times formed into column of attack. Every man was put in column of attack that could be got in." But a careful perusal of all the testimony shows that of the divisions formed into "columns of attack," fully a third were not fairly thrown into action.—Franklin estimated (*Com. Rep.*, 709): "The force under my command was somewhat over 40,000 men. I do not think it was over 50,000, counting Stoneman's two divisions; but I can not tell without looking at the figures. There were six divisions engaged in supporting the attack—Meade's, Doubleday's, Gibbon's, Birney's, Sickles's, and Newton's; I think the number was about 40,000." But, as has been shown, only three of these six were seriously engaged—Meade's and Gibbon's, of Reynolds's corps, which together lost fully 2500 out of the 2800 in Franklin's Grand Division, leaving only 300 for the three divisions of Doubleday, Sickles, and Newton, and of these 200 were from Doubleday's. Birney's division of Hooker's command was also engaged, losing nearly 1000 (*Ibid.*, 706). Three days before the battle Meade's and Gibbon's divisions, according to the returns of the day, numbered not quite 12,000 "present for duty," of which Meade had 6800; but he says he brought into action only 4500. Birney's numbered 7000 (*Ibid.*, 691, 702, 706); so that the estimate of 17,000 brought into action by Franklin on the left is fully equal to the truth. On the right we have seen that the three divisions of French, Hancock, and Humphreys were the only ones brought directly into the fight: the utmost strength of these divisions was 5000 each.

In placing the Confederates at 80,000 I am guided mainly by the official returns (*Ante*, p. 406), which give the numbers "present for duty" on the 20th of November, a fortnight before the battle, at 73,554; and on the 31st of December, a fortnight after the battle, at 79,092. At each date there were about 12,000 reported as "present," besides those "present for duty;" while the nominal strength, "present and absent," exceeded 150,000, being greater at the first date than the last. Of the "absent" I suppose that none could in the interval have been brought back; of those "present," but not reported as "for duty," probably a few thousand might have been available in an emergency. The Confederate Reports give the movements and losses of every brigade and regiment, so that, assuming their whole force to have been 80,000 effective men, I am able to give, without the possibility of material error, the numbers actually engaged on any part of the field.

² Burnside, in *Com. Rep.*, 653.

¹ Hooker, in *Com. Rep.*, 667; Burnside, *Ibid.*, 723. Both generals agree precisely as to facts. Burnside, however, considered this delay on the part of Hooker as "loss of time, and a preparation on the part of an officer for a failure, inasmuch as it was his duty to attack when ordered."

² *Lee's Rep.*, ii., 532.

³ Hooker says (*Com. Rep.*, 668): "The head of General Humphreys's column advanced to within perhaps fifteen or twenty yards of the stone wall, which was the advanced position which the rebels held, and then they were thrown back as quickly as they had advanced. Probably the whole of the advance and the retiring did not occupy fifteen minutes. They left behind, as was reported to me, 1760 of their number out of about 4000."—McLaws, describing the field as it appeared after the close of the action, says (*Lee's Rep.*, ii., 447): "The body of one man, supposed to be an officer, was found within about thirty yards of the stone wall, and other single bodies were scattered at increased distances, until the main mass of the dead lay thickly strewn over the ground at something over one hundred yards off, extending to the ravine, commencing at the point where our men would allow the enemy's column to approach before opening fire, and beyond which no organized body of men was able to pass."

⁴ *Com. Rep.*, 668. This ditch is what is called in the Confederate Reports a "ravine."

⁵ "The attack on the 13th had been so easily repulsed, and by so small a part of our army, that it was not supposed the enemy would limit his efforts to one attempt, which, in view of the magnitude of his preparations and the extent of his forces, seemed to be comparatively insignificant. Believing, therefore, that he would attack us, it was not deemed expedient to lose the advantages of our position, and expose the troops to the fire of his inaccessible batteries beyond the river by advancing against him. But we were necessarily ignorant of the extent to which he had suffered."

—*Lee's Rep.*, i., 43.

it would have been merely "a change of tactics—a drawing back a little in order to try it again."¹

During Sunday, the 14th, and the greater part of Monday, the 15th, the two great armies lay in their positions, each expecting when the morning fog lifted to be attacked by the other. There was some firing at different points along the extended lines, but nothing which approached to an engagement. On the afternoon of the 15th a formal truce for the purpose of removing the wounded was agreed upon between Jackson and Franklin on their part of the field—the Union left and the Confederate right.² Opposite Fredericksburg, on the Union right, while there was no formal truce, there was little actual hostility. Each force was waiting to see what the other would do. Burnside, after some hours of deliberation, ordered, on the afternoon of the 15th, that his whole force should recross the Rappahannock. A cold rain-storm had in the mean while set in during the night, under cover of which the passage was effected without its being suspected by the enemy. Next morning, the 16th, when the fog lifted from the valley, the whole Union force was seen across the Rappahannock; the pontoons were swung back, and the river once more separated the two armies. Burnside left nothing behind save a part of the dead in front of the stone wall, some ammunition, and 9000 muskets which had fallen from the hands of his slain and wounded.³

The Confederates lost about 4600 men, of whom 600 were killed and 4000 wounded. The Union loss was nearly twice and a half as great: about 1500 killed and 9000 wounded. The Confederates lost also 650 prisoners, the Federals 900,⁴ besides 1200 stragglers who never rejoined their commands. In the action on the left the losses were not greatly disproportionate, that of the Federals being somewhat in excess. But on the right, in front of the stone wall, the disproportion was enormous. Of the 1800 losses in Longstreet's corps, 250 occurred in holding Fredericksburg on the 11th, and as many more in Hood's division which supported Jackson, leaving but 1300 who fell in the defense of Marye's Hill.⁵ The Union loss here was fully 6500, of which probably 5000 fell before the fire of the 2000 infantry who held the stone wall. These lost not more than 500, and most of these fell while getting into position; when once behind that defense they were perfectly sheltered, except when a man exposed himself accidentally to a chance shot from a skirmisher. Two thirds of the Confederate loss at Marye's Hill was sustained by regiments posted on the surrounding slopes, and partially exposed to distant artillery fire. In the final charge, when Humphreys's division dashed with unloaded muskets toward the sunken road, and were flung back in a quarter of an hour with a loss of 1700 men, it is doubtful whether the Confederates suffered the loss of a single man killed or wounded.⁶

Severe as were the casualties of the battle, they formed a small part of the injury inflicted upon the Union army. Its morale was seriously impaired. It was clear to every man, the commanding general only excepted, that the whole plan of the campaign was thwarted. Whatever might have been the chances of its success had it been promptly executed, they were all destroyed by the fatal delay of a month. Officers in their tents, and soldiers by their bivouac fires, discussed the campaign, and declared that it was not possible even to cross the Rappahannock, much less to march to Richmond. The feeling of discouragement was universal from the private up to the commander of a grand division. Burnside alone appeared ignorant of the real condition of his army. "I do not," he said, "consider the troops demoralized, or the condition of the army impaired, except so far as it has been by the loss of so many men."⁷ But his officers knew otherwise. Sumner, a week after the battle, thought the army far more demoralized than

was warranted by its losses. "There is a great deal too much croaking; there is not sufficient confidence," he said; but he still thought that "within a few days, with sufficient exertion, the army will again be in excellent order."⁸ But this revival of confidence never came. The tone of the army was indicated by resignations among officers and desertions among privates, which increased to an alarming extent.

Burnside meanwhile determined upon another attempt, which was in effect a repetition of the one which he had first proposed, of crossing the river some miles below Fredericksburg, and thus turning the Confederate right, wholly avoiding the strong position from which he had been so disastrously hurled. Meanwhile a cavalry force of 2500 was to cross the Rappahannock by the upper fords, and gain the rear of Lee's army; they were then to separate, a part returning by different routes, while a picked body of 1000 men, with four pieces of artillery, were to press on, passing to the south of Richmond, and joining General Peck at Suffolk, where steamers were to be in waiting to bring them back to Acquia Creek. The object of this cavalry expedition was twofold: To attract the attention of the enemy from his main movement, and to "blow up the locks on the James River Canal, the iron bridge over the Nottoway, on the Richmond and Weldon Railroad," thereby seriously interrupting the Confederate communications and sources of supply.

On the 26th of December, all the preparations for this movement were made. The place of crossing had been selected, the positions for artillery to protect the passage chosen, and orders given that three days' rations should be cooked for the whole army, while ten or twelve days' supply of food, forage, and ammunition should be provided, and the whole army be in readiness to move at twelve hours' notice. On the 30th the movement had been fairly commenced, when Burnside received a telegram from the President informing him that he had good reason to order that there should be no general movement until he had been informed of it. Burnside suspended the movement, and hastened to Washington to ascertain the reason for this order.⁹

A week before, Franklin and Smith had addressed a letter to the President, declaring that in their opinion the plan of the campaign already commenced could not be successful. It was, they said, sixty-one miles to Richmond, and for the whole distance it would be necessary to keep the communications open, and these communications were liable to be broken at many points. If the railroad was rebuilt as the army advanced, the enemy would destroy it at important points. If wagon transportation was depended upon, the trains must be so large that much of the strength of the army would be required to guard them, and the troops would be so separated by the trains blocking the road that the van and the rear could not be within supporting distance. The enemy would, moreover, be able to post himself defiantly in strong positions, whence probably the whole strength of the army would not be able to drive him; and even if he were driven away, the result would not be decisive. His losses in these strong positions would be slight, while ours would be enormous. To insure a successful campaign, it was in their judgment essential that all the troops in the East should be massed; that they should approach as near as possible to Richmond without an engagement; and that the line of communication should be absolutely free from danger of interruption. These requisites could only be secured by a campaign on the James River, and they accordingly drew up the outlines of such a campaign.⁹

While the President was deliberating upon this letter, Generals Newton and Cochrane went up to Washington, and laid before him what they considered the condition of the army. They told him that it was the general opinion of officers and men that it would be a dangerous and ruinous folly to attempt to cross the Rappahannock; that they knew they could not succeed, and would therefore be deprived of a great portion of their vigor.⁴ The President thereupon gave the order prohibiting any movement of which he was not previously informed. Burnside urged that the movement should be made. The President refused his assent until he had consulted with his military advisers. The general returned to his camp, whence he wrote asking for distinct authority from Halleck to cross the river. He knew, he wrote, that there was hardly an officer holding any important command who would favor the movement, but he was confident that it should be made, and he would take the responsibility of making it upon himself; but he felt that the general-in-chief should at least sanction it. Halleck replied in general terms, laying down sundry general rules which ought to govern the management of an army, and saying that while he had always favored a forward movement, he could not take the responsibility of giving any directions as to how or when it should be made. The prohibitory order appears to have been withdrawn, for Burnside resolved to make another move upon his own responsibility, and without making any reply to this letter of Halleck.⁵

This movement was to be commenced by passing the Rappahannock

¹ Burnside, in *Com. Rep.*, 716-718.

² This letter is given entire in Swinton's *Army of the Potomac*, 263-265. The arguments in its favor were, that "on the James River our troops can be concentrated more rapidly than they can be at any other point; that they can be brought to points within twenty miles of Richmond without the risk of an engagement; that the communication by the James River can be kept, by the assistance of the navy, without the slightest danger of interruption." The principal features of the proposed plan were these: Concentrate 250,000 men; land 150,000 on the north, and 100,000 on the south side of the James, as near as possible to Richmond. Let both bodies advance in the lightest marching order, pontoons being ready to make a connection at any time. It was not probable that the enemy would have sufficient force to withstand the shock of two such bodies. If he declined to fight on the river, the army on the south bank should seize the railroads running from Richmond southward, while the remainder should either attack or invest the Confederate capital.

³ Newton's Testimony, in *Com. Rep.*, 730-740; Cochrane's, *Ibid.*, 740-746. They must also have implied, if they did not express the opinion which Newton had formed (*Ibid.*, 731), "that the dissatisfaction of the troops arose from a want of confidence in General Burnside's military capacity."

⁴ Burnside, in *Com. Rep.*, 718, 719.

¹ Sumner, *Ibid.*, 659.

² *Ibid.*, i., 43.

³ The Official Reports of Losses (Union, in *Com. Rep.*, 681; Confederate, in *Lee's Rep.*, ii., 433, 439) are as follows:

	UNION.				CONFEDERATE.			
	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Total.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Total.
Sumner's Grand Div.	480	4159	855	5494				
Hooker's " "	327	2469	748	3544	251	1516	137	1894
Franklin's " "	338	2430	1531	4679	844	2545	526	5415
Engineers' " "	7	43	100	150	595	4061	653	5409
	1152	9101	3234	13771				

This Union Report, furnished by the Medical Inspector General soon after the battle, requires some considerable emendations. Of those set down as "missing," about 1200 returned to their commands (*Halleck's Report of Operations*), reducing the missing to 2078. The Confederates claim about 900 prisoners (*Lee's Rep.*, i., 43), leaving nearly 1200 missing to be accounted for. I have no doubt that a third of these were slain outright on the field, in addition to those reported as killed. I attribute all these to the assault on the stone wall on the right, for on the left the dead and wounded were buried or removed by truce between Franklin and Jackson. It is only by making such an addition that I can explain the great disproportion between the killed and wounded on the right, as reported. The usual ratio in a close engagement is one killed to five or six wounded; here it is put down as a little more than one to ten, while all the circumstances of the fight indicate that the killed must have borne an unusual proportion to the wounded. Moreover, the Medical Inspector says, "The return of killed may be too small." I have therefore adopted these emendations into the text, increasing the killed by 450, and diminishing the missing by 1650.

As the Confederates remained in undisturbed possession of the entire field of battle, they were able to account for every man of their army. I adopt their Official Report as accurate. In *Lee's Report*, i., 33, there is a statement of the Confederate losses, making them 458 killed and 3743 wounded; and there seems to have been published a statement purporting to be Lee's Official Report, making his entire loss only 1800 killed and wounded. I find this reproduced in several histories, notably in Pollard's *Lost Cause*, p. 346, where it appears thus: "General Lee, in his official dispatch, writes, 'Our loss during the entire operations since the movements of the enemy began amounts to about 1800 killed and wounded.'" This was published fully two years after the real official report of Lee was printed by order of the Confederate Congress. I can account for this statement only by supposing that as Lee was with Longstreet's corps during the whole action, he only referred to the casualties in that corps, not including that in Jackson's corps, which were almost twice as many.

The estimate of losses at various movements, and on the different parts of the field, has been formed from a careful analysis of the reports on both sides. The absolute loss in each army was, however, much less than the reports indicate, the proportion of those wounded so slightly as not to be disabled having been unusually large on both sides. Several of the Confederate reports note this fact. The Union Medical Inspector General says (*Com. Rep.*, 681) that, of the 9101 reported as wounded, there were only 1630 whose cases required to be treated in hospitals; these, added to the 1152 reported as killed—which he thought probably too small—amounting in all to 2782, would, he was confident, "cover the whole amount of disabling casualties occurring at the battle of Fredericksburg."

⁵ Testimony in *Com. Rep.*, 656.

at fords six miles above Fredericksburg, masked by a feint at crossing some miles below the town, the feint to be made in such force that it might be converted into the real attempt, if circumstances should warrant, for there were conflicting accounts of the positions of the enemy. This required that roads should be cut through forests in both directions, and corduroyed so as to be passable for artillery and trains; sites for batteries chosen and prepared, and other arrangements made. At last a trusty spy brought information which decided Burnside to make the real attempt above Fredericksburg.

It was now the 20th of January. After the friendly storm, under whose cover the Union army had safely recrossed the Rappahannock, there had ensued five weeks of serene weather. The roads were as good as the bad Virginia roads can be. Burnside gave the final order to move in a hopeful spirit. "The commanding general," he said, "announces to the Army of the Potomac that they are about to meet the enemy once more. The late brilliant actions in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas have weakened the enemy on the Rappahannock, and the auspicious moment seems to have arrived to strike a great and mortal blow to the rebellion, and to gain that decisive victory which is due to the country." The movement had been commenced the day before. The infantry of the grand divisions of Franklin and Hooker having marched up the river by parallel roads, screened from the observation of the enemy by the intervening heights, and encamped near the fords where the crossing was to be effected, while Couch's corps moved down the river to make the proposed feint, and Sigel's reserve corps, which had in the mean while been brought up, held the communications between the two wings. But the pleasant weather, upon the continuance of which every thing depended, had come to a close. Late in the afternoon a cold, fierce storm set in. The sleet, driven by a furious gale, penetrated the clothing, and cut the faces of the men as they staggered on in their weary march. In two hours every mud-hole became a little lake, and the clayey roads, unhardened by frost, were transformed into quagmires wherein the wagons sank beyond the axles, and the mules to their bellies. It seemed as though the bottom had dropped out. The storm raged all that night and the next day. There was but one man in the army who did not perceive that the movement must be a failure. That one man was Burnside. He still hoped against hope, and resolved to struggle against fate. So all day on the 21st the army staggered on in its march through the mud. Not a gun or a wagon could be moved except by doubling or trebling the teams, and often a hundred men and more pulling at a stout rope were required to drag a pontoon-wagon through the mire. By terrible exertions some were got forward, while the roads were strewn with a chaos of confusion—shipwrecked wagons, horses and mules dead and dying, pontoons and guns immovable in the mud. Still, a formidable force of all arms was got together upon the river bank at the points where the crossing was to be essayed. But before the artillery and pontoons could be put in position, the Confederates had divined every thing, and had posted their forces so as to render the possibility of even crossing the river a matter of doubt; while, had the passage been effected, any farther advance was impossible. So thought the general officers of the army; and the opinions of some of them were expressed in such a form, that Burnside perceived that either he or they must vacate their posts. He sought direction from Halleck, but vainly. Then he recalled the troops to their former positions, and the three days' mud campaign came to an end.¹

Burnside had for weeks been aware that his entire plan of operations was denounced by some of his leading generals. While he would not charge them with any willful disobedience of orders, he thought that they manifested a want of alacrity which seriously affected the result of the operations. He now resolved to get rid of persons whom he regarded as of no use, and to make some strong examples to the army.² He drew up a general order dismissing from the service Hooker, the commander of a grand division, Brooks, Newton, and Cochrane, commanding army divisions, and relieving from duty Franklin, commander of a grand division, together with Smith, Sturgis, and Ferrero, commanding army divisions, and Colonel Taylor, the acting adjutant general of Sumner's grand division.³ This sweeping order was drawn up with the knowledge of but two men besides the

general, and was ordered to be issued. But one of these confidants, "a cool, sensible man, and a firm friend" of Burnside, intimated that while the order was just and should be issued, it transcended in some points the authority of the general. He could not dismiss an officer or hang a deserter without the express approval of the President; and, moreover, by publishing the order, he would force the President to take sides in the military dispute. If he sanctioned the order, his administration would incur the hostility of many influential men, friends of the dismissed officers; if he refused to sanction it after it was issued, he would appear to be the enemy of the commanding general. Still Burnside was firmly convinced he could not retain the command unless he issued the order, with the assurance that it should be sustained. He accordingly went to Washington with the order in one hand and his resignation in the other. He told the President, "If you will say to me, 'You may take the responsibility of issuing the order, and I will sustain it,' I will take that responsibility: this is the only way in which I can retain the command of the Army of the Potomac; otherwise here is my resignation; accept it, and here is the end of the matter as far as I am concerned." The President hesitated. He must consult his advisers. "If you consult any body," replied Burnside, "you will not sanction the order." And so it proved. After deliberating for a day, the President decided to relieve Burnside from the command of the Army of the Potomac, and place Hooker in command, making also some important changes in other respects, principal among which were that Sumner and Franklin should be relieved from their commands. Burnside was satisfied with this decision. "If Hooker can gain a victory," he said to the President, "neither you nor he will be a happier man than I shall be."

Burnside then supposed that his resignation would be accepted; but the President judged otherwise. "We need you," he said, "and can not accept your resignation." The truth was, that while Burnside's own opinion had proved true, that he was not fitted for the command of so large an army, he had yet shown so much capacity for a less onerous command, and had, above all, manifested such an entire absence of all selfish purposes, that the nation could not spare him. He still wished to resign; his private affairs required his attention; and, moreover, he said, if all general officers whom it was found necessary to relieve should resign, it would be better for the President, as it would relieve him from the applications of their friends. "True," replied the President; "but there is no reason for you to resign; you can have as much time as you please for your private business, but we can not accept your resignation." Several commands were proposed to him. He could have the department of South Carolina, or the departments of South and North Carolina would be combined and given to him. He declined both, because he thought these departments were then in good hands. He would remain in the army if his services were absolutely required; but, if he staid, he wished to be employed. Then came up the question as to the form in which his retirement from the command of the Army of the Potomac should be announced. An order had been drawn up at the War Department stating simply that Burnside had been relieved at his own request. To this he objected; he did not wish to appear as having voluntarily given up his command without good reason. This order did not express the real facts of the case, and he still wished to resign. The general-in-chief and the Secretary of War urged that by so doing he would injure himself and the cause. For himself, Burnside "did not care a snap," but he did not wish to injure the cause; the Department might issue just what order it chose; he would take thirty days' leave of absence, and would then come back and go wherever ordered, even if it were to command his old army corps under Hooker. So, when the official order appeared,¹ it announced that Burnside, "at his own request," had been relieved from the command of the Army of the Potomac, and Hooker assigned to the command; that Sumner, "at his own request," had been relieved from duty in this army, and that Franklin was also relieved, but without the significant addition of "at his own request."²

Sumner was soon after assigned to the command of the Department of Missouri; but while on his way to the West he died at Syracuse, in New York, on the 21st of March, leaving his name honorably identified with many of the severest struggles of the war. He entered the army in 1819, and had been in active service for forty-four years. He was twice brevetted for gallant and meritorious conduct in the Mexican battles; then he was placed in command of the Department of New Mexico, where he directed important military operations against the turbulent tribes of savages. The opening of the civil war found him a colonel of cavalry, but with an appointment of brigadier general to command upon the Pacific coast. From this, at his own request, he was recalled to take part in the operations of the Army of the Potomac, where his services were rewarded by promotion to the rank of major general of volunteers, and, later, of major general by brevet in the regular army.

Burnside, his thirty days' leave of absence having expired, was assigned to the command of the Department of the Ohio, his own old army corps, the 9th, going with him. Subsequently, as we shall have occasion to see, he was recalled to the Army of the Potomac, acting an important part in the closing campaign of the war.

The formal transfer of the command of the Army of the Potomac from Burnside to Hooker was made on the 26th of January. Burnside, in his farewell order, said that the short time in which he had been in command "had not been fruitful in victory," but the army had shown qualities which, under more favorable circumstances, would have accomplished great results."

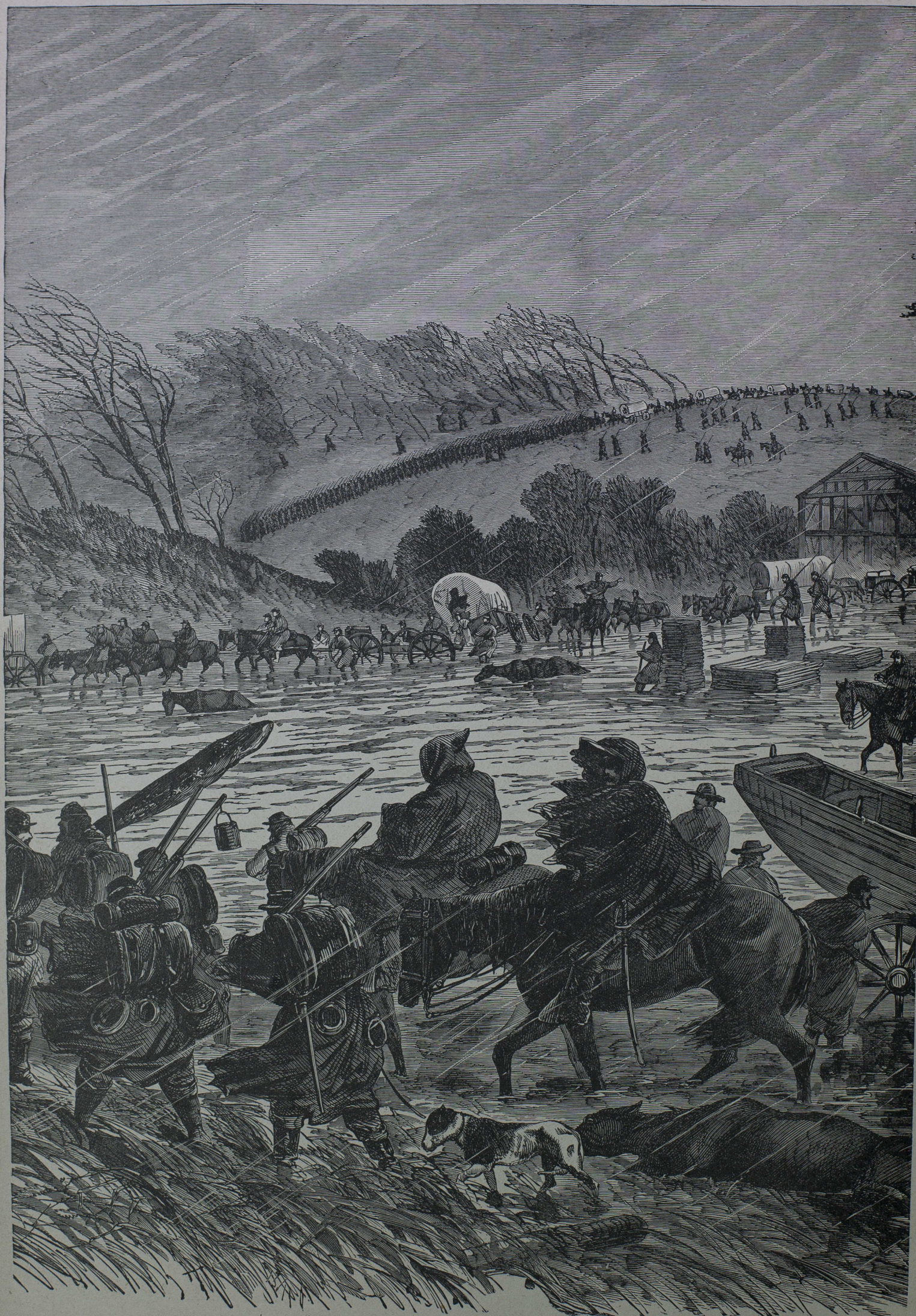
¹ Jan. 28, 1863.

² For the details of the transactions relating to the closing period of Burnside's command, see *Com. Rep.*, 57-60, and *Ibid.*, 716-722.

¹ "Before we could get the pontoons and artillery in position, the plan had been discovered by the enemy, which rendered the crossing very precarious, and the movement of artillery on the opposite bank, even if they had been got over, would have been rendered almost impossible from the state of the roads and the whole face of the country, in consequence of the storm. But a very serious objection to attempting the crossing after this occurred was the almost universal feeling among the general officers that the crossing could not be made there. Some of them gave vent to these opinions in a very public manner, even in the presence of my own staff officers, who informed me of the fact. I telegraphed to General Halleck that I would be very glad to meet him at Aquia Creek; or, if he wished it, I would run up for an hour to Washington. He sent me word that I must be my own judge about coming up. I at once telegraphed back, 'I shall not come up.' I then determined to order the commands back to their original encampments. After doing that, I went to my adjutant general's office, and issued an order which I termed General Order No. 8. That order dismissed some officers from service, subject to the approval of the President, and relieved others from duty with the Army of the Potomac."—Burnside's Testimony, in *Com. Rep.*, 719.

² Testimony in *Com. Rep.*, 723.

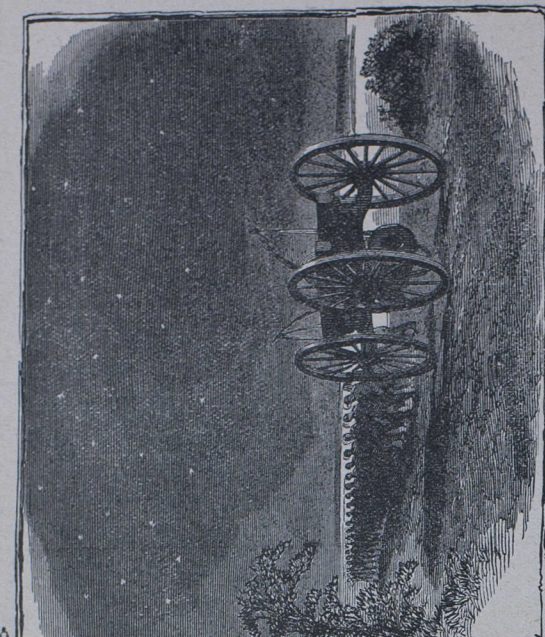
³ GENERAL ORDER No. 8, Jan. 23, 1863 (Extracts): "General Joseph E. Hooker having been guilty of unjust and unnecessary criticisms of the actions of his superior officers, and of the authorities, and having, by the general tone of his conversation, endeavored to create distrust in the minds of officers who have associated with him, and having, by omissions and otherwise, made reports and statements which were calculated to create incorrect impressions, and of habitually speaking in disparaging terms of other officers, is hereby dismissed the service of the United States as a man unfit to hold an important commission during a crisis like the present." General W. T. H. Brooks was dismissed "for complaining of the policy of the government, and for using language tending to demoralize his command." Generals John Newton and John Cochrane were also dismissed "for going to the President of the United States with criticisms upon the plans of their commanding officer." These dismissals were made subject to the approval of the President. Then followed a list of officers who were "relieved from duty," it "being evident that they can be of no farther service in this army." The names on this list were Generals Franklin, commanding a grand division; Smith, commanding an army corps; Sturgis, Ferrero, and Cochrane, commanding army divisions; and Lieutenant Colonel Taylor, adjutant general of Sumner's Corps. Cochrane's name appears in both lists, as relieved absolutely by Burnside's authority and dismissed subject to the approval of the President.



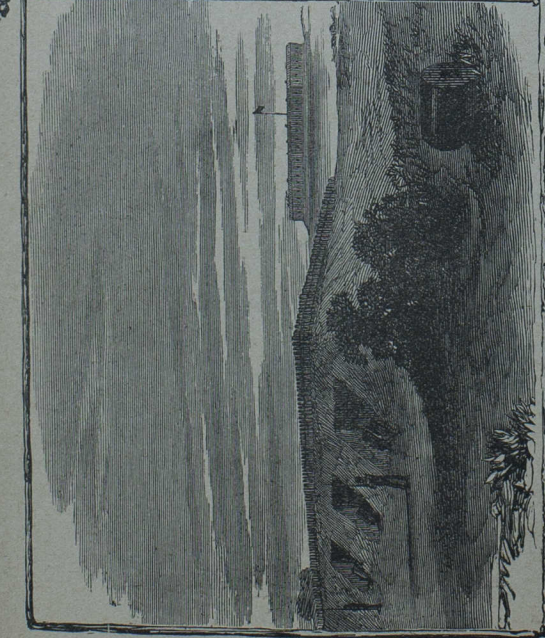
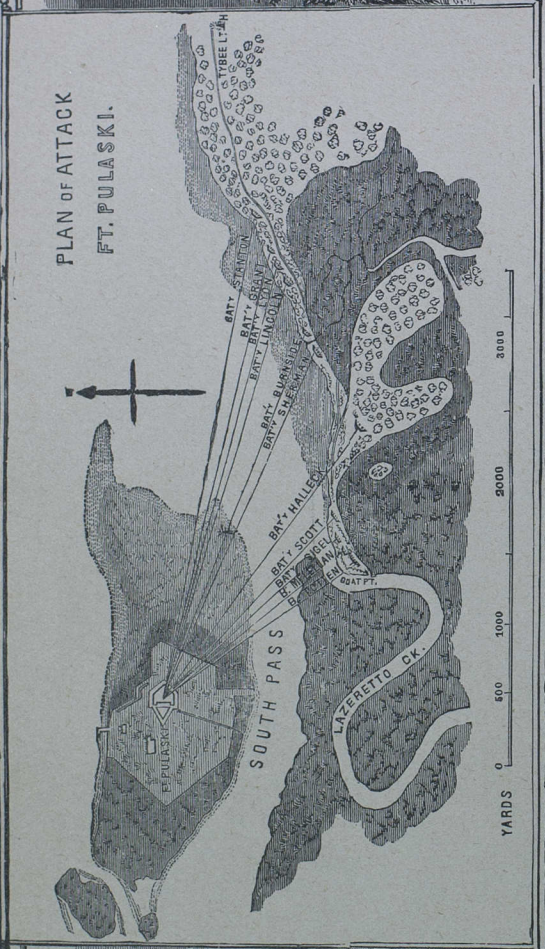
THE CAMPAIGN



IN THE MUD.



HAULING MORTARS



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