

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER.

Early Life—Dropped into West Point—Plebe Custer—Becomes Cadet—"Benny Havens, oh!"—Graduation Time—Lieutenant Custer—Incidents of Battle of Bull Run—Peninsular Campaign—Custer's First Charge—Promotion—Harrison's Landing—Urbana Expedition—Winning his Star—As Cavalry Chief—After Gettysburg—Winchester—"Whip or Get Whipped"—Chasing Early—Appomattox—Custer in Texas—Regular Army—Seventh Cavalry—First Scout—Learning Indian Tricks—Court-Martialed—Again on the Frontier—Black Hills—Last Campaign—Custer and Grant—Great Expedition—Custer's Departure—Trail of Sitting Bull—Reno's Fight—Custer's Last Charge—Monuments to his Memory.

GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER was born in 1839, in the town of New Rumley, Ohio. His father was a farmer, and the boy received the ordinary education of farmers' sons in the West. He was very intelligent, and, from his earliest years, appears to have had an inclination towards military life, his favorite books being the novels of Lever and other writers whose works describe the adventures of soldiers. He determined if possible to procure admission to West Point, and was fortunate enough to obtain a cadetship. He was seventeen when he entered the military academy, and became what in West Point phrase is known as a Plebe. The hardships and annoyances inflicted at colleges on freshmen have their counterpart

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in the system of petty persecutions which Plebes have to undergo, with the additional grievance that they last longer. The freshman is usually let alone after the first two or three months; the Plebe continues to be the butt of his tormentors until he is admitted to the fourth class and is known as a full-fledged cadet. Life at West Point has been described frequently; its duties and its pleasures are well known to most readers, and need not here be dwelt on. One of the "institutions" of West Point is Benny Havens's, a sort of restaurant kept by an old man who has seen generations of cadets eating, drinking and smoking in his establishment, which is little more than a cabin, under the cliffs, about a mile from the Academy. Benny is a perfect storehouse of reminiscences, and for years it has been the delight of cadets to meet at his tables, listen to his stories and sing their songs. One of these bears the name of Benny Havens, and is a favorite of the students. It is sung to the air known as the "Wearing of the Green." It is very long, and we insert but a few verses as a specimen of the style:—

Come, fellows, fill your glasses and stand up in a row,  
For sentimental drinking we're going for to go.  
In the army there's sobriety; promotion's very slow;  
So we'll cheer our hearts with choruses at Benny Havens', oh!

. . . . .  
To the ladies of our army our cups shall ever flow;  
Companions of our exile, and our shield against all woe;  
May they see their husbands generals, with double pay, also,  
And join us in our choruses at Benny Havens', oh!

May the army be augmented, promotion be less slow:  
May our country in her hour of need be ready for the foe;  
May we find a soldier's resting-place beneath a soldier's blow,  
With space enough beside our graves for Benny Havens, oh!

At the battle of Winchester he took a prominent part. We quote from his own report :

“ My command was in readiness to move from its encampment near Summit Point at two o'clock in the morning. It being the intention to reach Opequan, some five miles distant, before daylight, the march was begun soon after two o'clock A. M., and conducted by the most direct route across the country independent of roads. My brigade moved in advance of the division, and reached the vicinity of the Opequan before daylight, unobserved by the enemy, whose pickets were posted along the opposite bank. Massing my command in rear of a belt of woods and opposite a ford, situated about three miles from the point at which the railroad crossed the stream, I awaited the arrival of the division commander and the remainder of the division. At daylight I received orders to move to a ford one mile and a half up the stream, and there attempt a crossing. This movement was also made beyond the view of the enemy, and my command was massed opposite the point designated in rear of a range of hills overlooking the Opequan. . . . A junction was formed with General Averill on my right, which, with the connection on my left, made our line unbroken. At this time five brigades of cavalry were moving on parallel lines. Most, if not all, of the brigades moved by brigade front, regiments being in parallel columns of squadrons. One continuous and heavy line of skirmishers covered the advance, using only the carbine, while the line of brigades, as they advanced across the open country, the bands playing the national airs, presented in the sunlight one moving mass of glistening sabres. This, combined with the various bright-col-

ored banners and battle-flags, intermingled here and there with the plain blue uniforms of the troops, furnished one of the most inspiring as well as imposing scenes of martial grandeur I ever witnessed on a battlefield.

“ No encouragement was required to inspire either men or horses. On the contrary it was necessary to check the ardor of both until the time for action should arrive. The enemy had effected a junction of his entire cavalry force. . . . Concealed by an open pine forest they awaited our approach. No obstacles to the successful manœuvring of large bodies of cavalry were encountered. Even the forests were so open as to offer little or no hindrance to a charging column. Upon our left and in plain view could be seen the struggle now raging between the infantry lines of each army, while at various points the columns of smoke showed that the artillery was not idle. . . . The enemy relied wholly on the carbine and pistol ; my men preferred the sabre. A short but closely contested struggle ensued, which resulted in the repulse of the enemy. Many prisoners were taken, and quite a number on both sides were left on the field. . . . The enemy, on our approach, turned and delivered a well-directed volley of musketry, but before a second discharge could be given my command was in their midst, sabre-ing right and left, and capturing prisoners more rapidly than they could be disposed of. . . . No further resistance was offered ; the charge just made had decided the day, and the entire body of the enemy not killed or captured was in full retreat up the valley. My command, however, which entered the last charge, about five hundred strong, captured over seven hun-

dred prisoners. Night put an end to the pursuit, and the brigade bivouacked on the left of the valley, three miles from the battle-field. Our loss was by no means trifling."

Thus closed the battle of Winchester, the most decisive field victory won in the war, and won principally by the proper use of cavalry.

In September, 1864, Custer was relieved from the command of the Michigan brigade, and transferred to the head of the Second division, hitherto led by General Averill, but later he was retransferred to the Third, his own old division, with the rank of major-general. "Under Kilpatrick, this division had done more fighting, killed more horses, marched further and charged oftener than perhaps any other in the army."

Custer's accession to its command took place when Sheridan's policy was undergoing a change. The enemy was waiting in the Blue Ridge gaps, prepared to dispute any further advance to Richmond. A series of fights took place between the Union and the rebel cavalry, and Custer had been obliged more than once to order a retreat, much to his annoyance. On the 8th of October, Sheridan came up to the front, and seeing how bold the enemy was growing, determined to give him a check. General Torbert says of that night's orders, "I received orders from General Sheridan to start out at daylight and whip the rebel cavalry or get whipped myself."

The contest commenced at daybreak. The forces were nearly equal. Custer and Merritt's divisions were matched against Rosser and Lomax's. They swept across the level surface of the valley, and almost

before any one could tell what had happened, the Confederates gave way. They were driven back two miles at a gallop, until one brigade turned and opened a furious fire on Custer's force, and sent it back half a mile, but Custer reformed his three brigades for a second grand charge, and once more advanced at a trot. The Confederates were thrown into confusion, and were driven back no less than twenty-six miles. The enemy lost all their artillery in this sweeping flight, which was afterwards known throughout the army as "Woodstock Races."

At Cedar Creek, Custer fought brilliantly, and in the succession of conflicts which led to the surrender of Lee's army, the young general was Sheridan's right hand. At Appomattox, Custer's command was considered to have ensured the success of the day. The rebel General Kershaw, who surrendered his sword to Custer on that day, remarked that he considered Custer one of the best cavalry officers that this or any country ever produced. The captures of that battle included over 7,000 prisoners, thirty-seven flags, and numbers of guns. Of these the larger part were taken by the Third division.

After Lee's surrender Custer was ordered to Texas, as it was anticipated that there would be much disturbance among the disaffected people of that region. He was appointed lieutenant-colonel of the Seventh cavalry, a considerable descent from the rank of major-general which he had held, but not an uncommon experience among army officers at that time. No such difficulties as called for armed intervention took place, however, and after a sufficiently peaceful period, Custer was ordered to the Indian country in the

spring of 1867. The Cheyennes and Sioux had been troublesome; travellers had been murdered; property stolen; bands of ruffians, red and white, were roaming through the whole region, and it was considered expedient to keep a body of troops there to preserve order and intimidate the lawless. It was decided that Custer's command should scout the country from Fort Hays to Fort McPherson, thence to Fort Wallace, and so back to Fort Hays, a distance of about one thousand miles. Custer soon discovered the difference between civilized warfare and that carried on by Indians.

It has to be admitted that this campaign was a failure. The Indians carried on their depredations and outrages almost unimpeded; the massacre of Lieutenant Kidder and his party took place. Everywhere, partly owing to a lack of experience in this desultory warfare, and partly to a want of knowledge of the country, the whites were at a disadvantage. After nearly a year of unsatisfactory operations, Custer asked and obtained leave to visit Fort Riley, where his family was then residing.

A court-martial was ordered at this time to try Custer on two counts—for acting on his own responsibility in leaving Fort Wallace, and, secondly, for cruelty and illegal conduct in shooting deserters. The sentence was that he was to be suspended from rank and pay for a year. General Sheridan, however, held Custer in high regard, and in September, 1868, he asked specially for Custer's assistance in a new campaign against the Indians. In this the reverses of the previous year were more than compensated for. Custer beat tribe after tribe of Indians with complete success,



HEROIC DEATH OF CUSTER.

and the final submission of the Cheyennes set on his efforts the seal of complete success. The campaign lasted seven months, and Custer passed the winter in writing "Life on the Plains," a series of papers which were published in the "Galaxy." In March, 1873, Custer was ordered to Dakota, the principal object of the expedition being to protect the exploring and constructing parties of the Pacific road. Several skirmishes with the Indians took place during the ensuing few months, and Custer increased his reputation as a brave and successful Indian fighter. In 1874 he was ordered to the Black Hills. A long series of difficulties with the Indians extended over the next two years, and in 1876 war was formally declared against the Sioux. But a knot of politicians had found fault with Custer, and after many petty vexations he went to Washington, and endeavored to obtain an interview with the president. Grant refused to see him, for he had never been favorable to the younger general. Custer returned to his command, and after some detention at Chicago, joined the expedition which was starting from Fort Lincoln. He was ordered to proceed up the Rosebud river in search of Indians whose trail was discovered by Major Reno. According to the report of this officer, made after Custer's death, the general came up with a band of Indians under Sitting Bull after a very rapid march. His men were consequently much exhausted, and after three hours, they were completely surrounded and overpowered. The fight became a slaughter. Custer and all his officers were slain, the former fighting gallantly to the last.

It is said that after his last shot had been ex-

pended, he killed three Indians with his sabre, but was himself shot by an Indian named Rain-in-the-Face. His reputation as a brave and generous young soldier was universal, and his death caused grief and horror through the whole community.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THOMAS J. JACKSON ("STONEWALL").

Jackson's Ancestry—Early Childhood—Getting Appointed to West Point—Trials as a Cadet—Siege of Vera Cruz—Promotion—Resigns—At Lexington—Married—Marching to Richmond—Colonel in the Confederacy—At Harper's Ferry—Brigadier-General—At Manassas—Promotion—Winchester—Battles around Richmond—Lieutenant-General—Winter-Quarters of 1863—Consultation between Lee and Jackson—Fired upon by his own Men—Last Military Order—Despatch from Lee—Personal Appearance.

THE Jackson family came from England in the seventeenth century, and the genealogy of the subject of this sketch can be traced directly to that English progenitor who settled in Lewis county, Virginia.

His father, Jonathan, was a lawyer in Clarksburg, Harrison county, and Thomas Jonathan, born January 21, 1824, was his youngest child. The family were intelligent, thrifty, energetic; in style unpretentious, but justly regarded as among the sturdy yeomanry of West Virginia. When three years of age he was left, together with two other children, to the care of his mother, his father having suddenly died, and, by reason of a series of misfortunes, left his family extremely poor.

The mother, being a cultivated and intelligent lady, of "graceful and commanding presence," quite above

During Custer's cadetship West Point was the scene of constant debates among the students as to the probabilities of war. Talk of secession was rife, and the cadets from the South lost no opportunity of declaring their intention to fight for their own section, should secession lead to war. The matter was, however, discussed in a friendly way, and rarely led to ill feeling. When, finally, the secession ordinance passed, and one by one the cadets from the seceding States announced their intention of leaving the academy, a sense of gravity and gloom was felt among the light-hearted young soldiers. Nearly all the Southern students left the academy before graduating; that is, in April, 1861. Custer's class graduated in June, and he was ordered to report directly to the adjutant-general at Washington for orders. Here he was introduced to General Scott, who at once selected him to be the bearer of some despatches to General McDowell. After a long and fatiguing night ride he reached General McDowell's quarters, and was directly assigned to the Second Cavalry for duty. On the third day after leaving West Point, a schoolboy, he was under fire at the battle of Bull Run. Over the same road which he had traversed the preceding night as the bearer of despatches, he rode with the retreating troops the following night, startled and shocked beyond measure at the disastrous termination of the day. On reaching Arlington Heights, worn out by two nights of riding and a day of fighting, the young soldier flung himself on the ground and slept for many hours, the sleep of utter exhaustion. It was a somewhat rough experience for the soldier of a day.

In July Custer was appointed aide-de-camp to Gen-

eral Philip Kearney, an appointment which was soon afterwards annulled by a general order forbidding officers of the regular army from serving on the staff of generals of volunteers. In February, 1862, he was assigned to the Fifth cavalry, then serving in the Army of the Potomac. Near Cedar Run he ordered his first charge in one of the slight skirmishes which passed for battles at the beginning of the war. He served through all the Peninsular campaign under McClellan. At Williamsburg Custer distinguished himself, and was mentioned in General Hancock's official report. He led a charge on the brigade commanded by General Early, which cost that officer four hundred men. Shortly afterwards he made a reconnaissance of the enemy's lines, which brought him under the notice of General McClellan, who offered Custer a position on his staff. This was the commencement of a very warm attachment on his part to McClellan, which lasted all his life. At the same time of his appointment as aide to McClellan, he was promoted to the rank of captain.

During the seven days' battles Custer was noticed for the dash and impetuosity with which he joined in the continual fighting of that stormy period. A period of repose followed, while McClellan lay intrenched at Harrison's Landing, and Lee was preparing his exhausted army for the next campaign.

After the disastrous battle of Antietam McClellan was removed from the chief command, and General Burnside appointed in his place. This created extreme dissatisfaction among McClellan's officers, and Custer in especial was furious at the removal of his beloved chief. Custer made a visit to his relatives and was ab-

sent for some months. On returning he served on the staff of General Pleasanton, and while there was sent on an expedition across the Rappahannock river to reconnoitre the country. Crossing the river near Urbana they drove the rebel pickets from the town, captured some prisoners, took a number of horses, several wagons filled with supplies, rode some miles through the country, and returned to report to General Hooker. Later he took part in the fight at Beverly Ford, which checked the advance of Stuart's cavalry. At the battle of Aldie, in Virginia, Custer gained his star. Kilpatrick was wounded and Douty was shot dead. Custer, at the head of his cavalymen, rode into the rebel lines so far ahead of his regiment, that he found himself entirely separated from his own men and surrounded by rebel troops. He was obliged to fight his way out, and only rejoined his regiment by vigorous use of the sabre and energetic riding.

Four days later he was made a brigadier, to his extreme surprise and delight, for although he had had the ambition and determination to achieve high promotion before the war was over, it seemed almost incredible that at the age of twenty-four he should be appointed general. He was probably the youngest man who had ever held that rank. There was considerable ill feeling shown at his sudden elevation. Men who had been colonels and brigadiers while he was still a cadet did not relish this rapid advancement of one who was so much their junior. A certain dandyism in dress which Custer practised called out a good deal of sarcastic comment. The young general was quite aware of this state of feeling, but trusted that the first battle would show his seniors that he was not a mere military coxcomb.

The opportunity was not long in arriving. On the 1st of July, 1863, Kilpatrick's cavalry division was moving from Hanover toward Gettysburg with Custer's division in the advance. The rebel cavalry under Wade Hampton were opposed to them. Custer led a very successful attack on the Confederate column. The battle, or rather series of battles, was continued on the following day. Kilpatrick ordered Custer's and Farnsworth's brigades to attack the rebel cavalry, Wade Hampton's division, which barred the advance. Custer ordered out the Sixth Michigan for a mounted charge; he himself called out, "I'll lead you this time, boys, come on!" and rode at a gallop right into the midst of the enemy. His horse was shot under him, but he mounted with another man, and they rode together until they reached their own lines again. The soldiers were extremely pleased at the pluck exhibited by their boy-general, and the older officers forgave his youth in consideration of his bravery. The result of the attack was that Hampton's cavalry was driven back, a result which contributed largely to the success of the battle. After the contest was over, and the enemy was in full retreat, Kilpatrick's division moved on to destroy his train and harass his column. Custer took part in this movement, and after the series of skirmishes which closed the campaign, it was admitted on all sides that he had given proofs of remarkable skill and generalship.

In August, 1863, Sheridan was assigned to the Army of the Shenandoah, and Custer served him ably in the brilliant campaign against the Southern forces commanded by Early. Sheridan's system of raids gave ample opportunity for Custer's peculiar talents.