

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers* 2, 1886 – 1887 June 5, '86 to May 21, '87)

## The Taking of the Redout

A friend of mine, a soldier, who died of the fever some years ago in Greece, gave me one day an account of the first battle in which he took part. His story interested me so much that I wrote it down from memory as soon as I had leisure. Here it is: —

“I joined my regiment in the morning of Sept. 4th. I found the colonel at the bivouac. He received me at first very gruffly, but after he had read my letter of recommendation from Gen. B., his manner changed, and he spoke pleasantly to me. By then I was presented to my captain, who had just returned from a reconnaissance. The captain, with whom I had scarcely time to become acquainted was a tall, dark-complexioned man, with a stern and repulsive countenance. He had commenced as a private, and had won his epaulets and his crop on battle-field. His voice which was hoarse and feeble, contrasted singularly with his gigantic stature. I learned that the peculiarity of his voice was caused by the fact that a musket-ball had passed through him at the battle of Jena.

On learning that I had just come from the school of Fountainsbleau, he made a wry face and said “My lieutenant died to-day.” I understood that impliedly meant to say “you are here to replace him, and you are not capable.” A sharp answer was on my lips, but I restrained myself. The moon was rising behind the redout of Cheverina, which was about two cannon shots from our bivouac. It was now large and red, its usual appearance at its rising. But this evening it appeared to me of unusual size. For an instant the redout cropped (sic) in dark outline the shining disc of the moon. It looked like the summit of a volcano on the point of eruption. An old soldier near me noticed the color of the moon. “It is very red” he said; “that means that it will be bloody work to take that famous redout.” I have always been superstitious, and that omen, at that moment especially, affected me. I laid down, but could not sleep. I got up and walked for some time, watching the long line of camp fires which covered the heights beyond the village of Cheverina. When I thought that the pure, keen night-air had sufficiently freshened my blood, I returned, and laid down by my camp-fire. I wrapped myself carefully in my cloak, and shut my eyes, hoping that I would not open them until daylight.

But sleep came not to me. Insensibly my thoughts became sad. I said to myself that I had not a friend among the hundred thousand men who covered the plain; that if I were wounded, I would be put in the hospital and cared for by ignorant surgeons. What I had heard about surgical operations came to my memory. My heart beat violently, and mechanically I placed on my breast as a sort of curiass a handkerchief and a pocket book which I had. Overcome by fatigue, at one moment I would fall asleep; the next moment some sad thought would return more forcibly to my mind, and I would jump to my feet. At length I was overcome by weariness, and when the reveille was beaten, I was sound asleep. We were drawn up in a line of battle, and the roll was called. Then we stacked arms. All appearances gave promises of a quiet day.

In about three hours and aide-de-camp came with an order. We were formed in line of battle. Our skirmishers spread over the plain. We followed them slowly, and in about

twenty minutes we saw the advance posts of the Russians fall back into the redout. A battery of artillery was placed on our right, another on her left, but both some distance in advance of us. A lively fire was opened on the enemy who energetically responded. In a short time, the redout of Cheverina was hidden by thick clouds of smoke. Our regiment was pretty well protected from the fire of the Russians by a ridge behind which we were stationed. Their balls, few of which were intended for us as they fired at our batteries, passed over our heads, or at best scattered dirt and gravel over us.

As soon as the order to advance had been given, my captain looked so attentively at me that I was forced to pass my hand over my young mustache as carelessly as was possible to me. Indeed, I was not afraid: my only fear was that some one would think that I was afraid. Those harmless bullets assisted me in maintaining my heroic calm. My self-esteem told me that my real danger would commence as soon as I came under the fire of artillery. I was enchanted at being so at my ease, and I thought with what pleasure I would relate the taking of the Redout of Cheverina in the Salon of Madame de B. rue de Provence.

The colonel passed by our Regiment. He said to me, "You are going to have a lively time at your debut." I smiled in a warlike manner, at the same time brushing the sleeve of my coat, on which a cannon-ball, which had struck the ground about thirty steps from me, had thrown some dirt. The Russians had noted the poor effect of their solid shot, for they commenced firing shells with which they could more easily reach us in the hollow where we lay. A shell burst near me. My shako was knocked off; a man standing by me was killed. "My compliments to you" said the Capt., as I was picking up my Shako; "you are safe for the rest of the day." I knew the superstitious belief of soldiers that the maxim, "Not twice on the same day," finds its application as well on the battlefield as in a court of justice. I put on my Shako with a bold air. "They make you salute without ceremony," I said as gaily as possible. That poor attempt at pleasantry seemed excellent under the circumstances. "I congratulate you," said the captain, "you will run no further risk, and this evening you will command a company. I know very well that my turn has come. Every time that I have been wounded, the officer under me has been struck by a ball which has done him no injury; and," added he in a low tone, as if ashamed, "their names commenced with the P."

I appeared unconcerned: many persons would have done as I did; most persons would have been struck, as I was, by such prophetic words. Being a conscript, I felt that I should not reveal my feelings, and that I should appear indifferent. At the end of a half hour the fire of the Russians ceased. Then we set out from our place of shelter to advance on the redout. Our regiment was composed of three battalions. The second was to turn the redout on the side of entrance; the other two were to make assault. I was in the third battalion.

As soon as we were out of the hollow which had sheltered us, we were received with volleys of musketry which did little harm to our ranks. The whistling of the balls surprised me: I turned my head, and this brought upon myself the jests of my comrades who were more familiar with the noise. "After all," I thought, "a battle is not such a terrible thing." We advanced at quick step, preceded by our skirmishers. Suddenly the Russians shouted three times, three times distinctly: then remained silent and without firing. "I like not that silence," said my captain; "it is an evil omen for us." I thought that

our people were a little too noisy, and I could not refrain from inwardly contrasting their tumultuous clamors with the imposing silence of the enemy. We advanced rapidly to the foot of the redout: the palisades had been broken, and the earth torn up by the fire of our artillery. Our soldiers sprang up the ruins, shouting "vive l'empereur" more loudly than one would have expected from those who had already shouted so much.

I raise my eyes, and never will I forget the spectacle I saw. Most of the smoke had raised, and had remained suspended like a canopy about twenty feet above the redout. Through a bluish vapor, we saw behind the half-destroyed parapet the Russian grenadiers with raised guns, immovable as statues. I can still see each soldier, his left eye fixed on me, his right hidden by his musket: in an embrasure some feet from us, a man holding a lance tipped with fire stood near a cannon. I shuddered, thinking my last hour had come. "The dance will soon commence," said my captain. "Good evening". Those were the last words I heard him speak.

The roll of drums was heard in the redout. I saw all guns lowered. I shut my eyes. I heard a dreadful explosion, followed by cries and groans. I opened my eyes, surprised to find myself still in the world. The redout was again hidden by smoke. I was surrounded by the wounded and the dead. My captain was lying at my feet. His head had been broken by a musket-ball, and my clothes were spattered with his brains and his blood. Of all my company, only six men and myself remained standing. To this carnage succeeded a moment of stupor. The colonel, putting his hat on the end of his sword and shouting, "vive l'empereur," was the first to ascend the parapet. He was immediately followed by all the survivors. I have no clear recollection of what followed; we went into the redout I know not how. We fought, body to body in the midst of a smoke so thick that one could scarcely see. I believe that I struck some one, for my sword was bloody. At last I heard the cry of victory. The earth of the redout was hidden by blood and dead bodies. Around the cannon were the dead especially heaped up. About two hundred men in French uniform were standing without order, in groups, some loading their muskets, some fixing bayonets. Eleven Russian prisoners were with them.

The colonel, bleeding freely, was stretched on a broken caisson near the entrance to the redout. Some soldiers gathered around him. I drew near. "Where is the senior captain?" He asked a sergeant. The sergeant shrugged his shoulders in a very expressive manner. "And the senior lieutenant?" "It is the gentleman who came yesterday," said the sergeant in a very quiet tone. The colonel smiled sarcastically. "Come, sir," he said to me, "You are in command. At once fortify the entrance to the redout with these wagons for the enemy is advancing in force: but the Gen'l C. will come to your support."

"Colonel," said I, "you are badly wounded." "Fatally, my friend, but the redout is taken."

[Anonymous]

Budget

Hooper editor

Dec 31 1886 Editor's note:

The spelling "Redout" is used throughout the original. (JNM)

<rev jnm 01/2012>