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TWENTY-FIVE YEARS A SOLDIER.

DAVID ROCHE.

I.

Possibly, some other Post can show a longer and better record than that possessed by the man whose story I am about to tell; but if so, that Post has not, as yet, been heard from. Roche is not a large man, but there is no waste matter in his make up. He was born in 1839, but you will have to look very closely to find a gray hair in the profuse growth of black locks that adorn his cranium. His wife says she will pick out every white one that appears. More than half his life he has been a soldier and much of the time he has been in the open air. From the Blizzards of Montana and Dakota to the tropical heat of Texas, he has been through all varieties of weather and yet bears the face and appearance of a man far younger than he is. He was born in Kerry, Ireland, and very early showed a liking for military service. The first time he took the Queen's shilling, his father bought him off and took him home. But he had little liking for the restraints of home and the schooling that was afforded in his father's house. A soldier he was bound to be, though his earliest longing was for a sailor's life. It is safe to say that an adventurous career was what pleased him, whether on land or water. His father, a man of means in those days, was anxious to give him proper instruction, but he

"Was aye a truant bird
Who thought his home a cage."

"It was the 25th day of February, 1856, that I enlisted at Tralee Barricks. Of course I had run away from home and I suppose my father thought it was no use to try

heading me off, longer. I was soon sent to England and there I was drilled and there I did garrison duty for my full term of five years. I was in the 82d and we were at Aldershot. I volunteered to go to the Crimea, but they wouldn't take me, thinking me too young. Once, in 1857, when the Queen visited Aldershot, I was complimented by General Polluck for my soldierly bearing. I had an honorable discharge from the British Army, which was lost with all my papers at 2d Bull Run. My time ran out just at the breaking out of the Rebellion in America and I thought that would be the best place for me. So over the sea I came. I was washed overboard on the way here and I think that adventure pretty thoroughly soaked all sailor notions out of me. I landed in New York, June 9, 1861, and enlisted on the 25th of the same month, so you see I didn't lose much time. I chose to serve in the Third U. S. Infantry, since that is the oldest regiment in the service, though not the first in number. I was assigned to Co. D, and joined the same at Washington. Of course, the old members of the regiment were still paroled prisoners, having, through General Twiggs, fallen into the hands of the Rebels in Texas. Here we did provost duty for a long time, but we were sent away in time to find active work in the Peninsula Campaign. We stretched our legs first in walking to Manassas, thence to Alexandria where we took transports for Fortress Monroe. The main facts of the fight up almost to Richmond, and the retreat, are given in every history. What every man saw and heard would fill many books. General Sykes, the colonel of the regiment, commanded our brigade. At Yorktown, we took part in the siege, dug intrenchments and did all that soldiers could and ought to do in such places. We were constantly under fire from the enemy, and many men were killed in the trenches. After Yorktown, we went on up to Williamsburg and saw all that was to be seen at Gaines' Mill, Mechanicsville and Malvern Hill. We were almost in sight of Richmond and near enough to hear her church bells, but we didn't get in. At Malvern, I made a pillow, for the night, of a dead Rebel and my slumbers were sweet. I must confess, too, to taking some Confederate money and a pipe from the body of another dead enemy; but such memories are not pleasant. The pipe, which I prized very highly, was afterward stolen from me. My clothing was repeatedly cut by bullets, and my belt was not off my person in one case, for three days; but I was not wounded in a single instance. That terrible retreat! all who made it, will ever remember. Virginia mud, and the swamps of the Chickahominy, all Americans are familiar with. We did much rear guard work, the very hardest and most dangerous duty any soldier can perform.

We kept by the James River down to Newport News. Then came transports to Aquia Creek, thence by rail to Falmouth opposite Fredericksburg. General Pope having taken command of the army, the 2d Bull Run campaign followed. We were in that fight, and a hot one it was, too. I had nine bullet holes in my clothing and canteen. I was wounded, too, by a pistol shot from an officer's weapon, for I saw him when he fired. I was hit in the left arm just above the elbow. I was sent, first, to the hospital in Washington and thence to West Philadelphia; but I didn't like that sort of life and was ready to go back to my regiment long before the surgeon was willing to let me. Long before my wound was healed, I worried them so much, that Dr. Hays told me to get ready and I was returned. Besides the wound I had another thing to remember the hospital for—since in the same, the doctors managed to cheat me out of a month's pay. I tried, often to get it back but there was too much red tapé in such matters to ever have a thing of that sort righted. It was in the Fall that I got back to my comrades, and was in time for Fredericksburg. That was a busy place for a soldier. We were all one day and well into the night between the tanyard and the plank road. I remember that I had a long distance duel all through the night with a Confederate sharpshooter, each one firing at the flash of the other's gun, but like many other duels I guess it was bloodless. We were relieved at midnight and I was certain from sounds that I had heard that the enemy were flanking us and I made bold to tell a certain major so, but he wouldn't listen to me. He had fought Indians, he said, and knew very well what he was about. The trouble was he didn't just know what he was about for he had been drinking. As it turned out he did get into a tight place, and the next day I saw him badly wounded. I wondered what he thought then about a private's knowing anything, even if said private hadn't fought the Indians. During a part of the fight we were near the monument erected to the memory of Washington's mother. We were at Falmouth all winter, and in the spring came Burnside 'Stuck in the mud.' I actually sat on a fence all one night to keep dry. I lost my blanket in the mud, and burst the strings of my shoes in trying to pull my feet out of Old Virginia Soil. Chancellorsville was no joke. We had seven days' rations to carry, and any man knows those must weigh something. Our corps, the 5th, was the very first in the fight and we were sent in ahead. On the second day we went along the Plank Road to 'feel' the enemy. Sykes rode at the head when the Rebel artillery opened on us. The general never winked. What a cool man he was under fire! He was a magnificent rider. How he would clear those fences! Late in the afternoon General Ayers commanding our brigade, ordered our company out as skirmishers. We were disposed to go along pretty rapidly, but the general said, 'Don't be in a hurry, boys!' Off at our left was a small body of men watching us, apparently. They were too far to be recognized by their clothing as from their situation they might be either friend

or foe. Suddenly the Rebels in our front fired a volley to their right oblique. It was evident that damage had been done to this party for great confusion followed. Years after, I met an ex-Rebel soldier and our talk naturally turned back to the days of the war. In some way Chancellorsville was mentioned and in our conversation I told him of that oblique volley, imagine my astonishment when he told me that Stonewall Jackson was in that small group and that it was from that very volley he received his mortal wound. Of course this does not tally with the many statements concerning Jackson's death, but when such a variety of statements exists a new version will add only one, I give it for what it is worth. The next day we moved back. I saw the 11th corps give way and men cowardly run away. The officers, too, skulked, I saw Sykes, in the fury of his indignation, tear the shoulder-straps off from a running officer. Had all, officers and men, at all times, stood up in the ranks, the war need not have lasted more than half as long as it did. It is a good thing for the reputations of some men, that all of history is not written. I saw shoulder-straps going to the rear with a bloody handkerchief about his arm. It was not his own blood, either. His name in the papers and a brevet followed of course. The man who does his duty in a fight knows mighty little about the battle as a whole. His business is right at home. The only man I ever saw who knew all about Malvern Hill, wasn't fighting at all. He was up a tree. As a rule, there was no lack of volunteers to carry wounded men off the field. I saw a boy chewing tobacco, vigorously, to make him sick that he might get to the rear. His ambition had all faded and vanished. After Chancellorsville, we took a little spin to Snicker's Gap. We impressed an old colored man into our service and made him show us the way. He was very unwilling, saying, 'Golly, they'll kill me sure.' Meaning the Rebels, if they found him out. We had a little brush with Mosby, the guerilla, and captured two of his men.

"The day before Gettysburg, found us miles away and to get there, we marched all night. We were there in time for me to get another hit, this time in my foot. Before this happened, though, I had a mighty narrow escape. A piece of shell, I suppose, came down just clipping my hat rim, I had stooped to see what it was, when a bullet passed through my knapsack. Had I been standing, it would have been 'Good-bye' to David Roche. It was on Little Round Top, that the shot penetrated my foot. I hopped back to a stone wall and after a while some stretcher-bearers took me away to a barn where they laid me on a manure heap. The doctors, as usual, wanted to amputate, but I resisted and refused to take chloroform. I set my teeth and endured all the pain of dressing the wound. Then for eighteen days I lay out under a shelter tent, with some straw under me, my foot suspended in a sling made of my blanket torn into strips—this to prevent the bursting of the arteries. Every day I crawled down to the water to wash my foot to keep the maggots out of it. In getting down to the water, I moved along on my

hands and one foot, holding the other up, and keeping my body face upward. Finally, I was taken to the hospital at Little York, Penn. There I saw a gun into whose muzzle a Rebel bullet had entered. I afterwards saw the same at Washington. What a surprised man there must have been at the other end of the gun! kicking would be no where. Thence we went to Bedloe's Island, New York, where, now, is the figure of Liberty Enlightening the World. About this time the regiment came home to recruit. Of course I got back into line just as soon as possible, but it was not long before the wound in my foot broke out again and I had to go to the Mansion House Hospital in Alexandria.

"February 20, 1864, I re-enlisted. I should have stated that about Fredericksburg time I was transferred to Company C of the same regiment or both the companies were consolidated. Thereafter I was in Company C, until 1870. I rejoined the regiment at Petersburg, just after the mine explosion, and thence onward was present with my comrades to the end. I saw General Lee at Appomattox, and the next day we were hungry enough for we gave the most of our food to the Rebels whom we had been chasing for the preceding week. I was color sergeant then and carried the flag when we marched through Richmond.

"In the great parade through Washington, May 25th, 1865, my regiment being the oldest in the service led the line of infantry and I carried the colors. It was a proud day for me. A lady gave me a bouquet at starting which I afterwards rolled up in the colors. Cheer after cheer greeted us from the beginning to the end of the line. The President, Grant, Sherman, all the great men of the Nation were on the reviewing stand. A short man cannot help growing taller at the thought of carrying his regiment's flag at such time."

[To be continued.]

ON THE SKIRMISH LINE IN '55 AND '56, BY ONE OF THE SKIRMISHERS.

III.

"He cometh unto you with a tale which holdeth
"Children from play and old men from the chimney corner."

It was the afternoon of June 3d before we left Bull Creek, with "Dick's" certificate of character safely stowed away in the inside pocket of my old red shirt. My team had enjoyed the few days of rest, and I resumed my journey, feeling thankful that I had escaped from the hands of this desperate gang. In less than two hours my spirits met a sudden change, for in the distance I could see a company of mounted men coming from the direction of Missouri. I knew it must be either Atchison or Stringfellow, as both, I had learned, had started to join Capt. Pate. The company proved to be Stringfellow's, and fearful that they might search my person, I took the little buckskin bag in which I carried my money, and threw it in the straw in the bottom of my wagon. When within fifteen or twenty rods of me one of them exclaimed: "There's a damned Yankee! look at his whip!" I used

a small lash whip which, in that country, was used only by men from the East. When the discovery was made that my wagon contained one solitary Yankee the whole company drew their revolvers and made a charge. There were only seventeen of them, so I was not badly frightened as I should have been had our forces not been so equally divided. They surrounded my wagon, and under cover of seventeen revolvers I was put through a civil service examination, which, proving satisfactory, I was permitted to pass on. But by the time my mind had become tranquil, I met the company led by Atchison, more in number, but not so demonstrative. Again I was surrounded, and took my second examination, and allowed to pass. In neither case did I show "Dick's" pass. Late in the evening I went into camp near the line some two miles from Westport, and enjoyed a good night's rest in the seclusion of my wagon.

On the morning of the 4th I drove through Westport, and camped near the house of Fry McGee, with whom I often stopped, a strong pro-slavery man, but otherwise from that, a kind man. The unsettled condition of affairs in Kansas, the numerous marauding bands that had invaded the territory made it very dangerous for Yankees to travel, especially with any property upon which they could seize, so I concluded I would not risk a load in my own name. I paid out all the money I had for goods purchased on my former trip, and looked around for a load. One of the merchants in Westport engaged me to take a load to Council Grove, 150 miles distant, to the agency of the Kaw Indians, about fifty or sixty miles west of Council City.

I was fortunate enough to get an order from Walker & Chick, merchants of Kansas City, to bring back a load of buffalo skins. With a load both ways, I could count on ten dollars a day for the ten days it would take me to complete the trip. The trip was never made. Returning to my wagon to have a little rest after dinner, and to get ready to load up, I fell asleep. When in the midst of peaceful slumbers, I heard the rough voice of a man. When I opened my eyes, old "Milt." McGee stood over me, with his butcher knife held within a few inches of my breast. He was drunk, and a desperate character, and I knew my only safety was to get out from under that knife before McGee knew who I was. I rolled over and came to my knees, facing him.

I will leave him standing on the pole of my wagon until I tell you a little about the McGee family, the most noted family at that time on the border. I believe there were nine brothers. Milton, or "Milt.," as he was called, was as rough a character as ever drew breath. Those who have read "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and remember old Simon Legree, the cruel driver, would have found his twin brother in old Milt. He had a large farm, a fine house, between Kansas City and Westport, and in addition to his farm work kept a hotel, where all the pro-slavery delegates were entertained. He ran a coach to the boats, and that it might be known, he had painted upon its doors, "Sound