

Chapter XXIII

Father Sheerans account of Stonewall Jackson's death - The battle of Chancellorsville - Jackson's Council adopted - The attack on Hooker's right - Jackson wounded - The battle supposing - His last order in the field - "Give me back your ground, General Pender." - Jackson's last words - "Let us cross over the river and rest under the shade of the trees." His death -

So many and such various and conflicting statements as to the manner in which Stonewall Jackson came by his death, have been published that the following account written by Father Sheerans, who had such close connection with his command, and who, consequently, must be thoroughly conversant with the manner of his death will be read with deep interest. The following account, which has never been published, is taken from a diary of Father Sheerans's which was placed in the author's hands. Father Sheerans says: -

The Spring of 1863 witnessed a large Federal Army assembled on the north bank of the Rappahannock and

on the first day of May General Hooker, its
 commander, had crossed and firmly established
 himself at Chancellorsville. Gen Lee's forces were op-
 posite Fredericksburg, chiefly a small body of
 infantry only watching the upper fords. This latter
 was compelled to fall back, before Gen Hooker's
^{immense} ~~great~~ force, ~~led by Major General Price of the~~
~~W. A. Army, in the New York Cavalry to the num-~~
~~ber of 15,000 men, and Lee hastened by forced~~
 marches from Fredericksburg towards Chancellors-
 ville, to check the further advance of the enemy.
 This was on the first ^{day} of May ~~at~~ ^{and} The Confeder-
 ate advance force under Jackson, on the same evening,
 attacked Gen Hooker's entrenchments facing
 towards Fredericksburg. These were found im-
 pregnable, the dense ^{forest} ~~thicket~~ having been
 converted into an abattoir, and every avenue of
 approach defended with artillery. Gen Lee
 therefore ~~directed~~ ^{ordered} assault to cease and consulted
 with his corps Commanders as to future operations.
 Jackson suggested a rapid movement around
 the Federal front, and a determined attack upon
 the right flank of Gen Hooker, west of Chen-
 cellorsville. The ground on his left and in his front
 gave such enormous advantages to the Federal troops
 that ^{an} ~~own~~ assault therefore was impossible, and
 the result of the consultation was the adoption
 of Jackson's suggestions ~~to attack the enemy at night,~~
~~* This is just by the way, Jackson's army numbered about 15,000 men and Lee~~
~~had 11,000~~

Every preparation was made that night and on the morning of May 2nd Jackson set out with Hill, Rhodes and Long's divisions, in all about 22,000 men, to accomplish his undertaking. Chancellorville was a single buck house of large dimensions, situated on the plank road from Fredericksburg to Orange, and all around it were the ~~thickets~~ of the country known as the Wilderness. In this tangled undergrowth the Federal works had been thrown up, and such was the denseness of the woods, that a column moving a mile or two to the south was not ~~likely~~ ^{likely} to be seen. Jackson calculated upon this but fortune seemed against him. At the Catherine Farm a mile or two from the Federal line, his march was discovered, and a ~~hot~~ ^{crusade} attack was made on his rear guard as he ~~marched~~ ^{passed} past. All seemed now discovered, but strange to say such was not the fact. The Federal officers saw him plainly, but the winding road which he pursued chanced here to bend towards the south, and it was afterwards discovered that Gen. Hooker supposed him to be in full retreat ^{for} ~~upon~~ Richmond; such at least was the statement of Federal officers. Jackson repulsed the attack upon his rear, & continued his march and striking in to what is called the Brook road, ^{then} turned the head of his column northwards, and rapidly ~~retreated~~

advanced around Gen Hooker's right flank, a Cavalry force, under Gen Stuart, had moved in front and on the flanks of the column, driving off scouting parties, ~~and other the insignificant way farers,~~ and on reaching the junction of the Orange and Germania roads, a heavy Federal picket ^{line} was forced to retire, Gen Fitz Lee then informed Jackson that from a hill near at hand he could obtain a view of the Federal Works, and proceeding thither Jackson reconnoitred. This reconnoissance showed him that he was not far enough to the left, and he said briefly to an aid "Tell my column to cross that road", pointing to the Plank road. His object was to reach the old turnpike which ran straight down into the Federal right flank. It was reached at about 5 ^{pm} in the afternoon, and without a moment's delay Jackson formed his line of battle for an attack. Rhodes division moved in front, supported at an interval of two hundred yards by Keelston, and behind these A. P. Hells division marched in column ~~like the artillery~~. In account of the almost impenetrable character of the thickets on each side of the road, Jackson's assault was sudden and terrible. It struck the 11th Corps, Commanded on the occasion by Gen. Howard, ^{wholly} ~~as to~~ completely surprised, retreated, in confusion upon the heavy works around Chancellorsville. Rhode and Keelston followed them took possession of the breast works across the road, and a little after eight o'clock the Confederate

troops were within less than a mile of Chancellorsville, preparing for a new and more determined attack, Jackson's plan was worthy of being the last military project conceived by that resolute and enterprising intellect. He designed putting his entire force into action, extending his left, and placing that wing between Gen. Hooker and the Rappahannock. Then, unless the Federal Commander could cut his way through, his army would be captured or destroyed. Jackson commenced the execution of his plan with vigor, and ~~with~~ ^{with} ~~the~~ ^{the} determination to strain every nerve, and incur every hazard, ^{to secure} ~~to achieve~~ a success. Rhode and Leiston were directed to ^{retire} ~~ride~~ a short distance and reform their lines now greatly ^{crushed and squabbed} ~~crushed~~, and Keill was ordered to move to the front ^{with} ~~and~~ his division ~~to take~~ ^{it place}. On fire with this great design, Jackson ^{then} rode forward in front of the troops towards Chancellorsville, and ~~there~~ ^{there} and then the bullet struck him which was to terminate his career. The details which follow are given on the authority of Jackson's staff officers, and one or two others who witnessed all that occurred. ^{As} ~~in~~ relation to the most tragic portion of the scenes, there remained as will be seen but a single witness. Jackson had ridden forward on the turnpike to reconnoitre and ascertain, if possible, in spite of the darkness of the night, the position of the Federal lines. The moon shone but it was ~~obscured~~ ^{obscured} with a ^{dark} ~~bank~~ of clouds, and afforded

but a dim light ^{through} the gloomy thickets, on each side of the turnpike, looking more wearied and sombre in the half light ~~came the melancholy notes of the~~
~~Whip-poor-will, "I think there must have been 10000 said~~
~~Gen. Stuart afterwards,~~ such was the scene amid which the events now about to be narrated took place, Jackson had advanced with some members of his staff considerably beyond the building known as Trezzi Chancellors, about a mile from Chancellorsville, ^{house,} and had reached a point nearly opposite an old dismantled house in the woods, near the road, whose shell torn roof may still be seen, when he ^{reined in} ~~reigned in~~ his horse and remained perfectly quiet and motionless ^{listening} ~~listening~~ intently for any indications of a movement in the Federal lines. They were scarcely ^{two hundred} ~~200~~ yards ^{in front} of him, and seeing the danger to which he exposed himself, one of his staff officers said "General don't you think this is the wrong place for you?" He replied quickly, almost impatiently "The danger is all over! the enemy is routed go back and tell A. P. Hill to press right on!" The officer obeyed but had scarcely disappeared when a sudden volley was fired from the Confederate ^{infantry} ~~infantry~~ in Jackson's rear, and on the right of the road, evidently directed upon him and his escort. The origin of this fire has never been discovered and after Jackson's death, there was little disposition to investigate an occurrence which occasioned bitter distress to all who by any possibility could have taken part in it. It is probable

however, that some movement of the Federal Skirmishers had provoked the fire. If this is an error the troops fired deliberately upon Jackson and his party under the impression that they were a body of Federal cavalry reconnoitering. It is said that the men had orders to fire ^{fire} upon any object in front, especially upon cavalry, and the absence of pickets or advance ^{posts} forces of any kind on the Confederate side, explains the rest. The enemy were almost in contact with them. The Federal artillery, fully commanding the position of the troops, was expected to open every moment, and the men were in that excited condition which induces troops to fire at any and every object they see. Whatever may have been the origin of the volley, it came, and many of the staff and escort were shot and fell from their horses. Jackson wheeled to the left and galloped into the woods to get out of the range of the bullets, but he had not gone twenty ^{paces} ~~steps~~ beyond the edge of the turnpike in the thicket, when one of his brigades drawn up within thirty yards of him fired a volley in their turn ~~trailing on the right horse~~ ~~in the place of the gun shields as if preparing to guard against cavalry.~~ By this fire Jackson was wounded in three places. He received one ball in his left arm two inches below the shoulder joint, shattering the bone and severing the chief artery, a second passed through the arm between the elbow and ~~the~~ wrist making its exit through the palm of the hand, And a third

ball entered the palm of his right hand about the middle and passing through broke two of the bones. At the moment when he was struck he was holding his ~~reign~~ in his left hand and his right was raised in the singular gesture, habitual to him at times of excitement, or to protect his face from the boughs of the trees. His left hand immediately dropped at his side and his horse, no longer controlled by the rein, and frightened at the firing, wheeled suddenly from the fire in the direction of the Federal lines. Jackson's helpless condition, now exposed him to a distressing accident. His horse ran violently between two trees, from one of which a horizontal bough extended at about the height of his head to the other, and as he passed between the trees this bough struck him in the face tore off his cap and threw him violently back on his horse. The blow was so violent as nearly to upset him, but it did not do so, and rising erect again he caught the bridle with the broken and bleeding fingers of his right hand and succeeded in turning his horse back into the turnpike. Here Capt. Wilbourne of his staff, succeeded in catching the animal, which was almost frantic from terror, at the moment when from ^{the} loss of blood and exhaustion Jackson was about to fall from his saddle. The scene at this time was gloomy and depressing. Horses mad with fright at the close firing were seen running in every direction some of them riderless.

others defying control, and in the wood lay many
 wounded and dying men, Jackson's whole party except
 Capt Wilbourn and a member of a signal corps,
 had been killed, wounded or dispersed. The man riding
 behind Jackson had had his horse killed, ^{and a} ~~the~~ courier
 nearby was wounded and his horse ran into the Federal
 lines. Lieut Morrison Aid-de-Camp, threw him-
 self from the saddle and his horse fell dead a
 moment afterwards. Capt. Howard was wounded and
 carried by his horse into the Federal ~~lines~~ ^{lines}. Capt. Leigh
 had his horse shot under him; Capt. Forbes was
 killed and Capt. Russell, Jackson's Chief Engineer,
 was shot through the heart and his body carried
 by his horse into the lines of the enemy near at hand.
 Such was the result of the careless fire. It had ceased
 as suddenly as it began and the position in the
 road side Jackson now occupied was the same
 from which he had been driven. Capt. Wilbourn, who
 with Wm. Wyman of the Signal Corps, was all that was
 left of the party, noticed a singular circumstance which
 attracted ~~their~~ attention at this moment. The turnpike was
~~still~~ deserted with the exception of himself his com-
 panion and Jackson; but in the shifting of the thicket
 on the left he observed some one sitting on his horse
 by the side of the wood, and coolly looking on, motionless
 and silent. The unknown individual was clad in a dark
 dress which strongly represented the Federal uniform but
 it seemed impossible that he could have penetrated to

that spot without being discovered, and ~~from~~ what followed
seemed to prove that he belonged to the Confederates.
Capt Wilbourn directed him to ride up there and
see what ~~what~~ ^{these} troops were. ~~The~~ ^{the} man who had fired
on Jackson, ~~when~~ The stranger slowly rode in the
direction pointed out but never returned with any
answer. Who this silent personage was is left to con-
jecture. Capt Wilbourn who was standing by Jackson
now said they must be certainly must be our troops
to which the general assented with a nod of the head
but said nothing. He was looking up the road
towards his line with apparent astonishment and
continued for some time to look in that direction as
if unable to realize that he could have been fired
upon and wounded by his own men. His wounds
were bleeding profusely, the blood streaming down so as to
fill his gauntlets and it was necessary to secure ad-
vantage promptly. Capt Wilbourn asked him if
he were much injured and urged him to make an effort
to move his fingers, ^{and} his ability to do this would
prove that his arm was not broken. He endeavored
to do so, looking down at his hand during the at-
tempt, but speedily gave it up announcing that
his arm was broken. An effort which his companion
made to straighten it caused him great pain and
murmuring. "You'd better take me down" He leaned
forward and fell into Captain Wilbourn's arms. He was so
much exhausted by loss of blood that he was unable to

take his feet out of the stirrups and this was done by W^m Nunn. He was then carried to the side of the road and laid under a small tree, where Capt Wilbourn supported his head, while his Companion went for a surgeon and ambulance to carry him to the rear, receiving strict instruction, however not to tell any one but Dr. McQuinn or the other Surgeon, Capt Wilbourn ~~then~~ ^{they} made an examination of the General's wounds, removing his field glasses and haversack, which latter contained some paper and envelopes for dispatches and two religious tracts and putting them on his own person for safety, he with a small putknife proceeded to cut away the sleeve of the India Rubber overall dress coat and two shirt from the bleeding arm, While this duty was being performed, Gen. Hill rode up with his staff and dismounting beside the General expressed his great regret at the ~~occurrence~~ ^{occurrence} ~~of the accident~~. To the question whether his wound was painful Jackson replied "very painful" and added that his arm was broken. Gen Hill pulled off his gaiters which were full of blood and his sabre and belt were also removed, He then seemed easier, and having swallowed a mouthful of whiskey, which was held to his lips, ^{he} appeared much refreshed. It seemed impossible to move him without making his wounds bleed afresh, but it was absolutely necessary to do so as the enemy were not more than 150 yards distant, and might advance at any moment, and all at once a proof was given of the dangerous position which he occupied, Capt Adams of

Gen. Hill's staff, had ridden ten or fifteen yards ahead of the group, ~~and then he heard calling out~~ ^{when he called out} "Halt! Surrender fire on them if they don't surrender." At the next moment he came up with two Federal skirmishers, who had at once surrendered, with an air of astonishment, declaring that they were not aware they were in the Confederate lines. Gen. Hill had drawn his pistol and mounted his horse and he now returned to take command of his line and advance, promising Jackson to keep his accident from the knowledge of his troops, for which the latter thanked him. He had scarcely gone when Lieut. Morrison, who had come up reporting the Federal line advancing rapidly, and then within about a hundred yards of the spot, he exclaimed "Let us take the General up in our arms and carry him off!" Lieut. Jackson said "If you can help me up I can walk." He was accordingly lifted up, and placed upon his feet, when the Federal batteries in front opened in great violence and Capt. Leigh, who had arrived with a letter, had his horse killed under him with a shell. He leaped to the ground near Jackson, and the latter leaning his right arm on Capt. Leigh's shoulder, slowly dragged himself along towards the Confederate lines, the blood from his wounded arm flowing profusely over Capt. Leigh's uniform. Hill's lines were now in motion to meet the coming attack, and as the men passed Jackson, they saw from the number and rank of his escort that he must be a superior officer,

"Who is that & who have you there?" was called out, to which they reply was "Oh it is only a friend of ours who is wounded." It was with the utmost difficulty that the curiosity of the troops was evaded. They seemed to suspect something and would go around the horses which were led along on each side of the General to conceal him, to see if they could discover who it was. At last one of them got a glimpse of a man who had lost his cap as we have seen, in the woods and was walking bare headed in the moonlight, and suddenly the man exclaimed in the most pitiful tone, ~~say a secret~~, "Great God that is General Jackson!" an evasive reply was made, implying that this was a mistake, and the man looked from the speaker to Jackson with a bewildered air; but passed on without further comment. All this had occurred before Jackson had been able to drag himself more than twenty steps; but Capt. Leigh had the litter at hand and ~~his~~ ^{his} strength being completely exhausted the General was placed upon it, and borne towards the rear. The litter was carried by two officers and two privates, the rest of the escort walking beside it, and leading the horses. They had scarcely begun to move however when the Federal artillery opened a furious fire upon the turnpike, from the works in front of Chancellorsville, and a hurricane of shell and canister swept down the road. ~~That the day then was a scene of decided triumph for our horses and other confusion.~~ The intended advance of the Confederates had

double then been discovered, and this fire was directed along the road over which they would move, By this fire Generals Hull and Pender, with several of their staff were wounded, and one of the men carrying the litter was shot through both arms, and dropped his burden, His Companion did likewise, heathily flying from the dangerous locality, and but for Capt Leigh who caught the handle of the litter it would have fallen to the ground, Lieutenant Smith had been leading his own and the Generals horses, but the animals now broke away, in uncontrollable terror, and the rest of the party scattered to find shelter, Under these circumstances the litter was lowered by Captain Leigh and Lieutenant Smith into the road, and those officers lay down by it, to protect themselves, in some degree from the heavy fire of artillery which swept the two paths and swept ~~thence to within a few feet of the litter, and side,~~ Jackson raised himself upon his elbow and attempted to get up, but Lieut. Smith threw his arm across his breast and compelled him to desist, They lay in this manner for some minutes without moving, the hurricane shells sweeping over them, As far as I could see ^{none} of the officers "Men and horses were struggling with a most terrible death, The road was other wise deserted, Jackson and his two officers were the sole living occupants of the spot, The fire of Canister soon relaxed though

that of shot and shell continued, and Jackson rose to his feet, leaning on the shoulders of the party who had rejoined him; he turned aside from the road, which was again filling with infantry and struck into the woods - one of the officers following with the litter. Here he moved with difficulty among the troops, who were lying down in line of battle, and the party encountered General Pender, who had just been slightly wounded. He asked who it was that had been wounded and they replied "a Confederate officer" then, Pender however recognized Jackson, and exclaimed "Ah General I am sorry to see you wounded. The lines are so much broken that I fear we will have to fall back." These words seemed to affect Jackson strongly. He raised his head, and said with a flash of the eye, "You must hold your ground General Pender, You must hold your ground Sir." This was the last order Jackson ever gave upon the field. His strength was now completely exhausted and he asked to be permitted to lie down upon the ground, but to this the officers would not consent. The hot fire of artillery which still continued, and the expected advance of the Federal infantry made it necessary to move on, and the litter was again put in requisition. The General now nearly fainting was laid upon it, and some litter bearers having

been procured, the whole party continued to move through the tangled woods towards Pelzichan-callow; so dense was the undergrowth and the ground so difficult ^{to pass over} that their progress was very slow.

An accident now occasioned Jackson untold agony. One of the men caught his foot in a vine and stumbling let go the handle of the litter which fell heavily to the ground. Jackson fell upon his left shoulder where the bone had been shattered and his agony must have been extreme. "For the first time," said one of the party "he groaned, and that most piteously." He was quickly raised however and a beam of moonlight passing through the foliage overhead he revealed his pale face, closed eyes, and bleeding breast. Those around around him thought he was dying. What a death for such a man! All around him was the tangled wood only half illumined by the struggling moon beams. Above him burst the shells of the enemy "exploding" says an officer "like falling stars" and in the distance came the melancholy notes of the Whip-poor-wills, borne on the night air, and in this strange wilderness the man of Port Republic and Hannassee, who had led so many desperate charges, seemed about to close his eyes ^{for ever} ~~and sleep~~ ^{forever} ~~the night~~ but such was not to be the result then, When asked by one of the officers whether he was much hurt he opened his eyes and said quietly without further ~~ex-~~

exhibition of pain, "No my friends don't trouble yourselves about me." The litter was then passed upon the shoulders of the men, the party continued its way and reached an ambulance near Prebys-Chancellors & ~~placed~~^{dropped} the wounded General in it. He was then borne to the Field Hospital, at the Wilderness Tavern, some five miles distant. Here he lay through out the next day (Sunday) listening to the thunder of the artillery and the long roll of the Anshetry from Chancellorsville, & where Stuart, who had succeeded him in Command, was pressing General Hooker back towards the Rappahannock. His soul must have thrilled at that sound long so familiar ^{to his ears} but he could take no part in the conflict, lying faint and pale in a tent in the rear of the Wilderness Tavern, he seemed to be perfectly resigned and submitted to the painful pressing of his wounds with soldierly patience. It was obviously necessary to amputate the arm and one of his Surgeons asked "If we find Amputation necessary, shall it be done at once?" to which he replied with alacrity, "Yes, Certainly." "Dr. McQuire do for me whatever you think right." The arm was then taken off and he slept soundly. After the operation and on waking began to converse about the battle, "If I had not been wounded, he said, or had one hour more of daylight I would have cut off the enemy from

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the road to the United States for. d; we would have them entirely surrounded, and they would have been obliged to surrender, or cut their way out. They would have no other alternative. My troops may sometimes fail in driving an enemy from position, but the enemy always fails to drive my men from a position. It was about this time that ~~he~~ received the following letter from General Lee; "I have just received your note informing me that you were wounded. I cannot express my regret at the occurrence, could I have directed events I should have chosen for the good of the country to have been disabled in your stead. I congratulate you upon the victory which is due to your skill and energy. The remaining details of Jackson's illness and death are known. Lee was removed to Guinea's Depot, on the Richmond and Fredericksburg Railroad where he gradually sank, pneumonia having attacked him. When told that his men on Sunday had advanced upon the enemy shouting, 'Charge and Remember Jackson' he exclaimed 'It was not like them, it was just like them.' 'They are a noble body of men.' The men who will live through this war" he added, "will be proud to say it was one of the Stonewall Brigade." Looking afterwards at the stump of his arm he said many people would regard this as a great misfortune. I regard it as one of the great blessings of my life."

He subsequently said "I consider these wounds a blessing" "they were given me for some good and wise purpose and I would not part with them if I could" His wife was now with him and when she announced to him weeping his approaching death he replied with perfect calmness "Very good - Very Good - It is all right!" These were nearly his last ^{uttered} words. He soon afterwards became delirious and was heard to mutter, "Order A. P. Hill to prepare for action, pass the infantry to the front, Tell Major Hancock to send forward provisions for the men," Then his martial ardour disappeared, a smile diffused itself over his pale features; and he murmured "let us cross over the river and rest under the shade of the trees," It was the river of death, he was about to pass as soon after uttering these words he expired.

~~The battle of Chancellorsville ended after four days fighting and skirmishing by Hooker retreating across the Rappahannock. Father Sheeran never worked ^{harder} than he did on this occasion. Besides his own men whom he attended and prepared for death, he had a considerable number of Federal soldiers to attend and prepare for death. Among these were several of preachers Irish Brigade whom he paid considerable attention. He also ~~made~~ had to authoritatively command the Federal surgeons and ~~paroled~~ prisoners paroled as nurses to attend~~