

CHAPTER III.  

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The brigade of General Elzey (for his promotion dates from July 21, 1861) reached the neighborhood of Manassas in the early part of the night and in the midst of a heavy rain, which dampened the spirits of the men and heightened the disappointment felt by them. A great battle had been won — of that there was no doubt — but, like little Peterkin in the ballad, they were wondering what good had come of it, when they were not to be permitted to see the dome of the Northern Capitol.

The men, however, were wet and weary, and while the rain fell they wrapped themselves in their blankets and slept soundly, until aroused by the reveille at early dawn. All that day the rain fell, everything was dull and dreary, and the men fretted and fumed under their inactivity and the depressing surroundings. And when darkness fell upon them, when they lay down shivering and weary, and no orders had been given them to move, those of the First Maryland gave vent to their disappointment in low-spoken but unmistakable language.

But at midnight the long roll sounded through the camp, and at once every man was on his feet. What could this mean? Was the enemy advancing, or was this the signal for their own forward movement? The explanation soon came. Colonel J. E. B. Stuart had been ordered to advance to Fairfax Court House, and the First Maryland and the Third Tennessee were to report to him.

The movement was soon begun, and all through the long night the troops marched slowly, wading through mud, pelted by the pitiless storm of rain, and stumbling in the darkness, until daylight came, and the turnpike leading to Alexandria was reached. The rain had ceased, the clouds took on a brighter hue, and rolled away in light and fleecy folds. Then a light breeze sprung up and they were driven faster across the sky, melting away in the distant blue. No shipwrecked mariner in mid-ocean, tossing on a frail raft, ever welcomed the sight of a sail more gladly than did these worn and haggard men the rising sun. It seemed to smile on them, it warmed and gladdened them; they forgot all the suffering of the past thirty-six hours; they were themselves again.

As they marched along the road evidences of the wild flight of two days before were to be seen on every hand. It was a sight that baffled description. Artillery was there just in the position in which it had been when the horses were cut loose, and joined in the mad stampede. There were ordnance wagons, their lumbering wheels wedged in deep ruts; there commissary and quartermasters' wagons, their varied contents jumbled in a general wreck; and again carriages which had been abandoned by those invincible sons of Mars — Northern