

Howard University

Digital Howard @ Howard University

Articles and Statements By and About General
Howard

Oliver Otis Howard Collection

10-28-1909

General Grant As I Knew Him Oct. 28, 1909

OOH Collection

Follow this and additional works at: https://dh.howard.edu/ooh_art

Recommended Citation

Collection, OOH, "General Grant As I Knew Him Oct. 28, 1909" (1909). *Articles and Statements By and About General Howard*. 9.

https://dh.howard.edu/ooh_art/9

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Oliver Otis Howard Collection at Digital Howard @ Howard University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles and Statements By and About General Howard by an authorized administrator of Digital Howard @ Howard University. For more information, please contact digitalservices@howard.edu.

General Grant as I Knew Him.

Illuminating Personal Glimpses of the World's Greatest Soldier, by the Only Man Now Living Who Commanded an Army during the Civil War.

By Major-General Oliver Otis Howard, LL. D.,

United States Army, Retired.



GENERAL GRANT was already forty-one years of age when I first met him. It was in September, 1863, in a common railway coach standing on the track of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad at Stevenson, Ala.

Of course I was already familiar with his war record, taking its color from Donelson, Fort Henry, Shiloh, and Vicksburg. But from Union officers, who were always instinctively inclined to be pro-slavery, I had heard accounts and opinions by no means flattering. They imputed every success to sheer accident, and like Halleck were very slow to believe in his ability, and always predicted ultimate failure.

I never gave much credit to pessimists, but I was so much influenced by tales in winter quarters and around camp-fires that I thought that he must be as big and burly as Nelson and as fat and rosy as French.

Coming from Bridgeport, Ala., I had hardly reached Stevenson when I heard the words, "General Grant is on the Nashville train." A crowd of civilians and soldiers were eagerly looking for its arrival.

There was something about him that had won the confidence of the soldiers. One said, "I just want to see the back of his head"; another, "Old Grant doesn't talk much, but I tell you he does things."

When the train came, with one or two officers I waited for a few minutes near the front platform, when one of Grant's

I then felt that he was able to command men, and that he could (as he always did) assert and maintain a proper ascendancy over subordinate commanders.

On the way to Bridgeport he called me to him, and asked me a few questions as to what troops were in that neighborhood, how the rebuilding of the long bridge there across the Tennessee was progressing (it had been destroyed by the Confederates), as to the little steamer Chattanooga that our men were constructing, etc.

A Host in Straits.

The Eleventh Corps, my command, had but recently arrived to occupy an old abandoned camp of the Confederate army. Our baggage had been badly treated when crossing the Ohio on the way, and I was really troubled as to my present ability properly to entertain these distinguished guests.

I explained our crippled condition. Grant laughed, and said, "O, that will be all right; I will bunk with you, Howard."

At Bridgeport we left the cars; and the General with a cane worked his way with me slowly to my small "square" tent. As

This is the first of a notable series of Civil-War reminiscences by General Howard. The other articles will treat President Lincoln, General Lee, and the battle of Gettysburg.

the front was thrown back, there, to my horror, was a liquor-flask hanging against the tent canvas.

I exclaimed at once, "That's not mine, General; it

was left here by an officer down from Chattanooga, going East; I never drink."

Grant smiled pleasantly, and said, "Neither do I."

He was not in sport. His complexion was natural and his eyes steady and clear-sighted.

How the Ohio newspapers had howled against him after Pittsburg Landing! General Hawkins, a comrade of mine at the Military Academy, a consistent Christian, who was on General Grant's staff and with him day and night throughout that campaign, said to me, "Howard, Grant never took even a glass of wine from start to finish during that terrible battle."

No Complaints.

At a later day I found that General Grant was subject to occasional "sick-head-aches," which he simply endured, having a grim determination not even to say a word to anybody till the affliction had

abated. When at home, he did tell his wife, and when near enough he would hasten home to her.

The General and I had a long talk that night in my tent.

Speaking of General Hooker, I remarked that it was hard to be made to step down from a high command to a lower. Grant replied promptly with emphasis: "I don't think so, Howard. I am entitled to a division (as major-general) and nothing more. If I should seek a higher command beyond that intrusted to me by the government, I should be flying in the face of Providence."

In God's Hands.

This conversation clearly indicated to me that General Grant believed himself an instrument in the hands of a higher Power to bring the war to a close. He said that he was confident, after the Vicksburg success, that he should eventually command the armies of the United States.

We had breakfast at sunrise. The country round about was desolate indeed at this time; but the grand old Tennessee, with a swift current and broad reaches, swept by with dignity; the new steamer anchored above the new bridge moved like a prisoner in chains back and forth in an eddy; and a few tall trees near at hand bowed their heads in the stiff morning breeze that kept coming down the great river's valley. The sun rose clear, and the day was cool and pleasant for the ride of Grant and his escort.

Soon after breakfast the horses

General will remain in the car; if you wish to see him, you can come in."

I ascended the steps and went in. There were very few people in the car. This one had probably been reserved for Grant and his staff, so I thought.

I saw a group of uniforms near the rear, and so walked back to pay a proper respect to my new commander. Several young officers knew me. They rose and called my name. Grant remained sitting. He would have risen to greet me, but he was still quite lame from the fall of his horse in a street of New Orleans.

He extended his hand, spoke pleasantly as I grasped it, and said, "I am glad to meet you, General Howard." He then listened and let me do the further talking, which naturally was as brief as practicable.

While I was speaking, an officer came from General Hooker's quarters, then somewhere in the village, and extended a cordial invitation to General Grant to accept Hooker's hospitality.

Grant's reply did not seem to me very gracious. It was, in substance, "If General Hooker wishes to see me, he will find me on this train."

He had known Hooker on the Pacific coast years before, and he understood the ambitious character of the man. As soon as Hooker received Grant's reply, he came in a carriage, and paid his respects in person. Grant thanked him for his offer of hospitality, but said he should not delay at Stevenson, but go on the ten miles to my corps at Bridgeport.

By this time I had had time to study somewhat the new commander-in-chief.

He was about the size and build of McClellan, not big and burly, but with a good, presentable figure, rather pale in complexion, quiet of demeanor, and evidently self-restrained.



TO ARCADY.

By Martha Haskell Clark.

Where is the road to Arcady?
Over the dew-wet downs,
Past the white of the hawthorn hedge
That stars the gloom at the highway's edge,
Afar from the sleeping towns.

Where is the road to Arcady?
Close by the river's edge,
Where pickerel sleep in the river-weed,
And deer come soft o'er the moss to feed,
And wild ducks rise from the sedge.

Where is the road to Arcady?
It lies 'neath a gypsy's feet,
To the vagrant light of a gypsy fire,
To a Hidden Hope, and a Heart's Desire,
And the dusk of the starlight sweet.

Hanover, N. H.

and orderlies were in readiness. General Rawlins with his long black beard and strong arms stood beside General Grant as he bade me adieu, and then on account of Grant's lameness lifted him into the saddle. All mounted and rode away, Grant and Rawlins riding side by side.

In Grant's "Memoirs" he locates the Eleventh Corps and my headquarters at Jasper, the next settlement up river. That is a mistake; the Eleventh Corps was at Bridgeport, Ala.

It was forty miles that Grant rode that day, the highway following substantially the windings of the Tennessee. It was a hard journey even for the well men, and certainly harder for Grant, lame as he was; but in those days of war hardship was reckoned of little account.

There was constant danger from pickets and sharpshooters along that shore; yet Grant, pressed for time, decided to risk going by the river road.

That remarkable journey was very fruitful. It led to the strengthening of Thomas's army by troops under Hooker from the Potomac and by the coming of Sherman's column, three corps, from the Mississippi; to the defeat of the Confederate army under Bragg, which was besieging Chattanooga; and to the saving of Burnside's corps at Knoxville. All this Grant did before winter set in, and forced all hands to take a few months' rest.

In the battles around Chattanooga, I was close to General Grant in old Fort Wood when the Fourth Corps moved forward under his direct observation to take Orchard Knob a mile away.

He watched the showy advance for more than an hour without a word; then he said simply to Thomas, "Have them in-trench, and send up re-enforcements."

That was his brief order. It was hardly executed when Grant himself was there, taking his stand at Orchard Knob.

Grant's orders when he spoke them or wrote them were always the briefest possible and perfectly clear, never easily misunderstood.

As soon as reasonably ready, he gave the command for execution without the

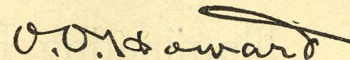
slightest hesitation, and made it a rule so to concentrate his men at given points as to have there more than his opponent.

Then he struck blow after blow, thus, as strategists say, "always taking the offensive" till he won.

Never using profane expressions, never showy, never excited, with an ability when many plans were proposed to choose the best, General Grant impressed me as the ideal commander-in-chief.

I do not like war, and he did not. We

may well treasure one of his latest injunctions; namely, "Let us have peace." Why not?



Burlington, Vt.