

NINTH LETTER.

FORTS HENRY AND DONELSON—GENERAL NELSON—MAYSVILLE BOYS
IN CAMP AND ON THE BATTLE FIELD—HARVEY STRODE AND SOLO-
MON FORMON—GEORGE HAMMER.

LOUISVILLE, KY., June 7, 1883.

Dr. John P. Phister—My Young Friend: In the last two weeks I have visited the scenes of my early days in the war. What war say you? Since 1812 there has been but one war in which the people of the United States were much interested. The Indian fights and the Mexican disturbance do not rank as wars. I was at Forts Henry and Donelson in February, 1862. Why that first-named man trap was ever built has been a puzzle to me, and why, after it fell, a stand should have been attempted at the latter named one has been a still greater puzzle. I gave up the solution of the thing long ago and I say to you that a Sunday school scholar is not a safe critic in matters of military movement. Thanks to the foresight of general Tilghman, the affair at Fort Henry was not so disastrous in the loss of life as it might have been. The place should have been evacuated in my judgment before a gun was fired or in fact before the enemy were in sight. The men who were killed in that fight were needlessly killed. The show of resistance was a farce, the tragedy was at Fort Donelson. The performances of the military geniuses who had command of that fort will be the wonder of military men long after the actors in the tragedy are dead. As long as any soldier lives who was in Fort Donelson he will remember the night of the 13th of February, 1862. A more cheerless night never came to a soldier. Oh! how bitter cold it was. How the snow, hail and sleet did fall, and how illy prepared the soldiers were for this infliction of the elements. It was the first baptism in privation and hardship very many of them had ever had. It was the baptism of blood to many a gallant man. It must have been known to many that it would be a fruitless fight. The commanding officer in assuming command had in orders said, "Our battle cry shall be 'Liberty or Death.'" With that cry it was not thought necessary to make any arrangements for retreat or escape from the fort, and none were made. When the crisis came the order was forgotten by the officer who issued it and he coolly passed the command to another, who with equal coolness passed it to another. The whole thing was very much like passing the blind in a game of poker, if I correctly understand that game. Whilst this passing business was a miracle in military manners the effrontery with which the ring leaders jumped the game was simply appalling. They not only preferred liberty to death, but they preferred it to every chance of privation. Be it said to the great credit of general Simon Bolivar Buckner, a junior officer, that

he displayed the qualities of a true soldier when he assumed the responsibility of preventing needless slaughter by the surrendering of a fort no longer tenable. He took the chances fairly and shared the privations of the men he was forced by necessity to surrender. The surrender of Donelson upset all the calculations of the confederacy, and especially did it run the city of Nashville wild. I cannot go into particulars of the true condition of affairs in that city when the news of the fall of Donelson reached there. The appearance of Pillow and Floyd gave it a touch of the comical. Bob Acres was never so determined to give or receive satisfaction as they. As a Mason county man, A. S. Johnson, moved out of the city with the resolution to retrieve the disaster at Donelson, a Maysville man, William Nelson, moved in and caused the federal flag to be raised on the capital as an emblem of the faith he had that the disaster was fatal and final. From Nashville I found my way to Shiloh by circumlocutory movements, and there the great battle of this continent was fought. I said something about it in a former letter. I want to impress on your mind that a Mason county man had much to do with getting up that battle and a Mason county man had much to do with its final issue.

It was known to general Johnson that the impetuous Nelson was marching his command across Duck river, wading the stream almost up to their arm-pits with their knapsacks, guns and cartridges on their heads. He knew that meant a speedy juncture with Grant's command and that to make success certain he, Johnson, must move quickly and quietly. Unforeseen circumstances delayed one day, and the delay was fatal.

When in Nashville I remember my collaborators in the whig cause, Felix K. Zollicoffer and Robert Hatton. Early in the war the former was sent to east Tennessee to "preserve peace, protect the railroad and repel invasion." He was killed in January, 1862, at the battle of Mill Spring. I knew him well. He was a brave man, a warm-hearted friend, and the soul of honor. Robert Hatton was comparatively a young man of many attractive qualities. He raised a regiment and went off to the army in Virginia, where he yielded up his life in one of the battles on the Chickahominy. I remember my parting with my old townsman, the Rev. Dr. Edgar. In fact I remember ten thousand things intimately connected with war times in that state capital. I remember the comrades who stood shoulder to shoulder with me on the weary march. The jolly fellows who enlivened the bivouac with story and song, and those other fellows who marched to their death amid the rattle of musketry and the thunder of artillery. I remember another who did not go to the war, but whose tender good bye as I took my place in the ranks to march off is now ringing in my ears. I never saw her face again. When life's battle is over with me she will welcome me to a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. I have wandered off and I find myself telling the stories of war. I should not have done so. I am not an historian of the war. I only know that I performed the humble duties which devolved upon me with integrity to the cause and entire satisfaction to my own personal honor, and it may be that others did no more. I may not be

known to the historian and I trust I will not be forgotten by those to whom I told the story of the old Maysville gun.

Suppose you talk to some of the old citizens of Maysville and ask them if they remember how fifty and more years ago, we used to get canoes of very large size, put sheet iron on the bottoms, hitch six or eight horses to them and in the cold winter nights when the ground was covered with snow we would go scooting over the turnpike to Washington and beyond, and how the people along the road would think the country was haunted. These canoes would hold forty or fifty people comfortably on a straight road, but when you come to swing corners a good many would fly out, and I have known some to be very badly bruised. If you find any one who remembers these good old times have him ready to meet me on my arrival. Talk to these old men about Heath's wagon yard and livery stable; they will remember the connection between the canoes and the livery stable.

I remember Harvey Stroad, or Strode, and Solomon Froman. They did not go riding with us. They were good men and stayed at home. I have in my mind that a man used to live in Maysville named George Hammer. I can't remember what business he was engaged in and I don't know that it is very important, inasmuch as his business affairs must have been closed up long ago.

I am now the custodian of great expectations. The meeting with the mayor and council, the Aberdeen ferryman, and a delegation from Cabin Creek is what excites me. I shall expect you to stand close up to me.

O. B.