

A CONFEDERATE HERO.

SERGT. RICHARD KIRKLAND, WHO RISKED HIS LIFE TO GIVE WATER TO HIS DYING FOES.

CAMDEN, S. C., Jan. 29, 1880.

To the Editor of the Charleston News :

Your Columbia correspondent referred to the incident narrated here, telling the story as it was told to him, and inviting corrections. As such a deed should be recorded in the rigid simplicity of actual truth, I take the liberty of sending you for publication an accurate account of a transaction, every feature of which is indelibly impressed upon my memory. Very truly yours,

J. B. KERSHAW.

Richard Kirkland was the son of John Kirkland, an estimable citizen of Kershaw County, a plain, substantial farmer of the olden time. In 1861 he entered, as a private, Capt. J. D. Kennedy's company (E) of the Second South Carolina Volunteers, in which company he was a Sergeant in December, 1862. The day after the sanguinary battle of Fredericksburg, Kershaw's brigade occupied the road at the foot of Marye's Hill and the grounds about Marye's house, the scene of their desperate defense of the day before. One hundred and fifty yards in front of the road, the stone facing of which constituted the famous stone wall, lay Syke's division of regulars, United States Army, between whom and our troops a murderous skirmish occupied the whole day, fatal to many who heedlessly exposed themselves, even for a moment. The ground between the lines was bridged with the wounded, dead, and dying Federals, victims of the many desperately-gallant assaults of that column of 30,000 brave men hurled vainly against that impregnable position.

All that day those wounded men rent the air with their groans and their agonizing cries of "Water! water!" In the afternoon the General sat in the north room up stairs of Mrs. Stevens's house in front of the road surveying the field, when Kirkland came up. With an expression of indignant remonstrance pervading his person, his manner, and the tones of his voice, he said, "General! I can't stand this." "What is the matter, Sergeant?" asked the General. He replied: "All night and all day I have heard these poor people crying for water, and I can stand it no longer. I come to ask permission to go and give them water."

The General regarded him for a moment with feelings of profound admiration, and said: "Kirkland, don't you know that you would get a bullet through your head the moment you stepped over the wall?" "Yes, Sir," he said, "I know that; but if you will let me, I am willing to try it."

After a pause, the General said: "Kirkland, I ought not to allow you to run such a risk, but the sentiment which actuates you is so noble that I will not refuse your request, trusting that God may protect you. You may go."

The Sergeant's eyes lighted up with pleasure. He said: "Thank you, Sir," and ran rapidly down stairs. The General heard him pause for a moment, and then return, bounding two steps at a time. He thought the Sergeant's heart had failed him. He was mistaken. The Sergeant stopped at the door and said: "General, can I show a white handkerchief?" The General slowly shook his head, saying emphatically: "No, Kirkland, you can't do that." "All right, Sir," he said, "I'll take the chances," and ran down with a bright smile on his handsome countenance.

With profound anxiety he was watched as he stepped over the wall on his errand of mercy—Christ-like mercy. Unharméd he reached the nearest sufferer. He knelt beside him, tenderly raised the drooping head, rested it gently upon his own noble breast, and poured the precious, life-giving fluid down the fever-scorched throat. This done, he laid him tenderly down, placed his knapsack under his head, straightened out his broken limb, spread his overcoat over him, replaced his empty canteen with a full one, and turned to another sufferer. By this time his purpose was well understood on both sides, and all danger was over. From all parts of the field arose fresh cries of "Water, water; for God's sake, water!" More piteous still, the mute appeal of some who could only feebly lift a hand to say, here, too, is life and suffering. For an hour and a half did this ministering angel pursue his labor of mercy, nor ceased to go and return until he relieved all the wounded on that part of the field. He returned to his post wholly unhurt. Who shall say how sweet his rest that Winter's night beneath the cold stars!

Little remains to be told. Sergt. Kirkland distinguished himself in battle at Gettysburg, and was promoted Lieutenant. At Chickamauga he fell on the field of battle, in the hour of victory. He was but a youth when called away, and had never formed those ties from which might have resulted a posterity to enjoy his fame and bless his country; but he has bequeathed to the American youth—yea to the world—an example which dignifies our common humanity.

The New York Times

Published: February 10, 1880

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