

E 525

.5

43d

Copy 1

"OUR KIRBY SMITH."

43d 10.11.11

John W. Leader

E 525
5
43

“OUR KIRBY SMITH.”

A PAPER

READ BEFORE THE OHIO COMMANDERY

OF THE

MILITARY ORDER

OF THE

Loyal Legion of the United States

MARCH 2, 1887,

BY

Companion JOHN W. FULLER,

Late Brigadier and Brevet Major-General, U. S. V.

CINCINNATI:
H. C. SHERICK & CO.
1887.

61503

'05 . .

OUR KIRBY SMITH.

There have been three Kirby Smiths—all of them soldiers. The elder, Ephraim Kirby Smith, dropped all but the initial of his first name, and was always known as E. Kirby Smith. During the War of the Rebellion it was common to hear the older officers of our army speak of him as a soldier of marked ability, and as one who had been universally respected and honored.

Major E. Kirby Smith fell in battle at the head of his battalion at Molina-del-Rey; a battle in which we lost fifty-nine officers (one-third of all engaged), and nearly eight hundred men. A battle so much more fatal, proportionately, to us, than any other with the same foe, that it seems evident “somebody blundered.” Indeed, General Grant, in his memoirs, thinks this battle ought never to have been fought at all, as the enemy’s very strong position could have been easily turned.

Major E. Kirby Smith was the father of *our* Kirby Smith, whose memory, still cherished in some hearts, I desire to revive and freshen to-night—the memory of *J. L. Kirby Smith*, the first Colonel of the Forty-third Ohio.

It is not an easy task, I know, to interest a listener in the story of one who fell so young, no matter how

highly esteemed, nor how beloved by his immediate comrades; for, though he gave promise of a brilliant career, he died too soon to verify the promise. His service in the field covered merely eight brief months, and he was but twenty-six years old when he fell in battle. So young, that only a few could realize that a born soldier had been lost; so soon, that only his kindred and a few who loved him would keep his memory green.

Perhaps, when asking you to listen to the brief story of this young soldier, it may be well, at the outset, to show that I am not alone in thinking his memory worthy of preservation; and to this end will quote a few lines from a letter written by a General who once commanded the Twelfth, and afterwards the Twentieth Corps. General A. S. Williams, who knew Colonel Smith, perhaps, even better than I did, speaks thus of him: "He was my beau-ideal of a young man. Cheerful, religious, faithful, and sincere; frank, brave, affectionate, and dutiful, he combined all the severer virtues of mature age without illiberality, prejudice, bigotry, envy, or malevolence. 'There was 'a daily beauty in his life' that won the hearts of all who knew him." And again the same General says: "His heart was so given to the cause of his country, and he was so free from selfish considerations; he was so capable, so brave, so self-reliant without vanity, so patient and so persevering in the line of duty, that I have looked confidently—though not without apprehensions for his personal safety—for splendid services and rapid and well-earned advancement."

The father of our Colonel was born in New England, and always gloried in that love of freedom and that sturdy independence which he associated with his childhood's home; and yet he was appointed to the Military Academy from Florida, for *his* father, Joseph Lee Smith, had been sent there by President Monroe to serve as United States Judge, immediately on the change of flags, when our government purchased that territory from Spain.

There was another and younger son of Judge Smith in the army, afterwards known as the Rebel General E. Kirby Smith, who had been registered at West Point as Edmund K. Smith, and who was always known, up to the close of the Mexican War, by his first name. The elder brother had made the name of E. Kirby Smith both honored and beloved, and when, soon after his death, his brother Edmund assumed that name, and began to write himself E. Kirby Smith, it gave sore offense to the widow and friends of the original Kirby, which was intensified by his joining the Rebels. It seemed to them that Edmund had stolen his brother's honored name and linked it with treason, and it is not strange that the son—our Kirby Smith—grew up to feel that his uncle was guilty of a grievous wrong. When, during the rebellion, the name of this uncle was mentioned in some Confederate dispatch, our Kirby would refer to him bitterly, saying, "Years ago he stole my father's good name, and now he has betrayed his country's flag. If I could meet him in battle, with force enough to thoroughly beat him, it would do my soul good; and I would like to capture him, that I

might tell him how his kindred and his former comrades despise him.”

But, to take events in their proper order, I must go back to say that our Kirby was born in Syracuse, N. Y., on the 25th day of July, 1836, where his father was then stationed on recruiting service. For some years the boy grew up amid the scenes of the camp, and when later he was sent to school, a little incident occurred which gives us a glimpse of character not often seen in boys of his years. His reverend teacher believed in the use of the rod. Some mischief had been done, and, as Kirby refused to tell who the guilty party was, the teacher believed it was Kirby, and punished him accordingly. An aunt who learned the facts, was very indignant at this injustice, notwithstanding the teacher had subsequently apologized, and went with the story to the boy's mother. When Kirby's mother talked it over with her son, and dwelt upon the fact of his innocence, the boy replied: “Mother, do you remember what Socrates said when his friends lamented that he, an innocent man, should be put to death? Would you then have me guilty?”

Our Kirby entered the Academy at West Point in 1853. He had less than the usual trouble in conforming to the discipline of the school, as he had long been taught both the propriety and the necessity of obedience. That other attribute, without which we should have no true soldier, viz., loyalty, was born in him.

At the Military Academy he had the usual experience which comes with the first or second year when

cadets must settle some real or fancied insult in a private set-to with the fist; arms, of course, being prohibited. The Kansas troubles were at that time exciting everybody, and Kirby made some remarks about the aggressiveness of the slave power, which gave offense to a stalwart Georgian. He must withdraw the remarks or take the consequences. Kirby said he had a right to his opinions, and also the right to express them. So a fight, on the classic ground near the Kosciusko Monument, had to come. Kirby seemed to look upon it as a joke, and went in a merry mood to the rendezvous, alone. But when he saw the tall Southerner with half a dozen of his friends awaiting him, Kirby grew indignant, and began to wonder whether he could jump high enough to hit the Georgian between the eyes. He accomplished this so thoroughly that his antagonist soon lay sprawling on the ground, bleeding profusely from the nose. When the Southerner's companions could not bring him to the scratch again, they proposed that our Kirby should fight each one of them in turn. At this moment Cadet Orlando Poe (well known to us as General Poe), who had been looking on from behind some bushes, stepped forward and announced that if there was to be any more fighting he would take a hand himself. As Poe was older, and a full head taller than our Kirby, he presented a formidable appearance, and the Georgian's seconds soon decided that honor did not require them to fight, and they withdrew. But long before graduation day our Kirby and his antagonist were devoted friends.

Smith was graduated from the Academy in 1857—

sixth in his class - and when the war broke out he was a Lieutenant in the Corps of Topographical Engineers, and stationed at Detroit under Captain George G. Meade, who afterward became Commander of the Army of the Potomac. They were awaiting the opening of navigation to resume duty in triangulating Lake Superior.

Both Meade and Smith were afraid the great Rebellion would be put down, while they were measuring the shores and sounding the depths of that inland sea. But it was not long before they learned that every soldier would find enough to do.

Our Kirby's first war service was on the staff of General Patterson; then on that of Banks. But he was restive while doing merely topographical duty, and longed for a regiment he might lead to the field. After some disappointments he was offered a cavalry regiment, which he declined, as he once told me, merely "because he could not shoe a horse." Then the Forty-third Ohio was offered him by Governor Dennison, which he promptly and gladly accepted. On reaching Camp Chase, near Columbus, he found a mere squad of men, all like Artemus Ward's company, willing to be brigadiers. He removed headquarters to Mount Vernon. Speedily the ranks were filled, and so thoroughly were the men drilled, that the Forty-third was soon known as one of the finest regiments Ohio sent into the field—and this is saying a good deal.

It was about the last of February, 1862, when I first met Colonel Smith. He, with his regiment, joined the Army of the Mississippi at Commerce

Missouri, where General Pope was organizing his forces preparatory to the movement upon New Madrid. Smith's regiment and mine both belonged to the First Division of that army, commanded then by General Schuyler Hamilton. I did not see Smith during the first day's operations at New Madrid, when the enemy's gunboats made so much noise, as his regiment was held in reserve; but General Pope soon after gave him an order to make a reconnoissance with his regiment, to learn more of the enemy's strength and position. He discharged this duty very satisfactorily to General Pope, and he did it in such a fearless manner as to attract the enemy's attention; for when we captured the Rebels, some weeks thereafter, some of them inquired particularly after the officer who that day rode the white horse, and were loud in their commendations of his gallantry.

When we were on transports down the Mississippi, and near Fort Pillow, General Pope gave Smith another opportunity to make an important reconnoissance. He was to explore the banks opposite Fort Pillow, looking for some bayou or passage through which steamboats might pass the fort and thus reach Memphis. Before this was accomplished, however, General Pope's army was ordered to immediately join the forces of Grant and Buell, then approaching Corinth.

About the time we reached Pittsburg Landing, the four Ohio Regiments which originally formed the First Division of the Army of the Mississippi, became the First Brigade of that Division. General Daniel Tyler was assigned to command the Brigade, and

General D. S. Stanley commanded the Division. This change brought me into more frequent contact with Colonel Smith, and I had learned to like him well before he came under my command in the following July.

There was a good deal of humor in Smith. During one of our marches the sutler of his regiment (whom Smith told me he had scarcely ever seen) came to the front with his wagons, and with—a sense of his responsibility. One day, near the end of a weary march, while the Colonel was riding in rear of his regiment encouraging the foot-sore to keep their places, the sutler galloped up from the rear to find a good place in the new camp. “Give way there!” he sang out, “I want to get to the head of the column; please give way.” “Who are you, sir?” inquired Smith, as the sutler grew importunate. “Why, I am the sutler of the Forty-third Ohio.” was the confident reply. “Oh, you are the sutler, are you? then I’ll give way immediately,” said Smith, reining out to one side with considerable ado, “for I am nothing but the durned Colonel!”

During the summer, our Kirby’s health was seriously affected by a disease which threatened to become chronic. After repeated warnings from his surgeon, and at the earnest instance of some comrades who were alarmed about him, he applied for a leave. Rosecrans said he would find some duty for Colonel Smith, temporarily, at the North, and would order him there. But he forgot it, and so the next month, when I also was ill, we each requested a leave of absence. When these requests reached Rosecrans,

he said: "What! grant a leave to two Colonels at once, and of the same Brigade! I can't think of it!" "All right," said General Stanley, who happened (?) to be at Rosecrans' headquarters at the time—"all right, General; but if you don't give them a leave, God Almighty will, pretty soon." "Is it so bad as that?" responded Rosecrans, "well, then, Mr. Adjutant, send these leaves at once." I remember that little kindness of General Stanley with deep gratitude to this day; and I know that Colonel Smith appreciated it keenly. Stanley sometimes seemed almost savage in battle, and would fight the devil himself if he got in the way; and yet he was as gentle and considerate as a woman when his sympathies were touched.

It was a happy journey we made together. The bracing air of the North was to bring back health and strength. The society of those dearer than all was again to be ours. At Columbus, Ohio, we separated; Colonel Smith to see his mother and sister in Philadelphia, and I to meet my young family at Toledo.

When the time came for our return, we arranged by telegraph to meet at Chicago that we might go back together. Smith was a charming talker, and I enjoyed very heartily his story of what he had seen and heard. It would be difficult to repeat what was said, for his voice and gesture were so much a part of all, that his listener could recall the impression left more easily than the story itself. But quaint sketches of people, told in the kindest manner; the joyous meeting with his mother and sister; the tender refer-

ences to one who was to be closer than all, were all given with a charm I could never describe. Ah! little did he think that they of whom he talked so long, so gaily, and withal so tenderly—little did he think they would never hear his voice again.

It was early in September when we returned to the army, and found the Ohio Brigade had marched eastward, near to Iuka. Smith's regiment was a short distance still further east, guarding the crossing of Bear Creek. We were just in time to take part in the manœuvres which preceded the battle of Iuka, and which culminated in the battle of Corinth. Almost immediately we marched back to Corinth, as it was thought Van Dorn was heading for that place. We were only comfortably encamped when General Price, with a large Rebel force, occupied Iuka, driving out the garrison we had left there.

General Grant immediately resolved to try to capture or destroy Price. Rosecrans was to approach Iuka from the south, while another column under Ord was to attack from the west. One of Rosecrans' Divisions had to make a round-about march, and on the night preceding the battle was several miles behind the place of rendezvous. This led Grant to fear that Rosecrans could not reach Iuka in time to carry out the original programme. So he instructed Ord, who was not strong enough alone to fight Price, to await the sound of Rosecrans' guns before attacking. The wind blew from Ord toward Rosecrans, and the former heard nothing of the fierce battle which Rosecrans had all to himself, not more than four or five miles away to the south of the town. The Ohio

Brigade, to which Smith belonged, formed the rear guard that day, and was only ordered to the front just as the darkness suddenly grew so dense that Rosecrans ordered us, after getting into position, to await for aiming light.

The next morning when we moved forward Price was gone; and when we had advanced into the town and had come to a halt, with arms stacked, Ord's forces were seen approaching from the west with drums beating and banners flying. Rosecrans asked Ord, as soon as that General rode forward, why he did not come to time in accordance with the mutual understanding—why he, Rosecrans, had been left in the lurch. Ord answered by showing Grant's order to postpone the attack. This miscarriage was the beginning of a misunderstanding which grew into positive dislike between Grant and Rosecrans—a breach which was never healed.

The Division to which Smith's Regiment belonged (Stanley's) followed Price for ten or a dozen miles to the southward, then marched to the westward, keeping between the army of Price and Corinth. After resting at Rienzi for a day or two, we moved by the round-about way of Kossuth to Corinth.

Rosecrans by this time knew that Price had rejoined Van Dorn, and that their united forces were moving in a northerly direction; but whether they were aiming for Boliver and Jackson, or would first strike Corinth, he was waiting to see.

On the 2d of October Colonel Smith was ordered with his regiment and a section of artillery to Kossuth; but during the night, Rosecrans, now satisfied

that Corinth was Van Dorn's objective, ordered everything to concentrate there. So Smith had hardly bivouacked when he received orders to countermarch. Though very weary with so much marching, Smith was too good a soldier to delay, and the next morning at 10 o'clock he rejoined his Brigade.

The firing was already rapid and heavy to the west of the town, but Corinth itself was not threatened until late in the afternoon. Then the Division of General Davis, greatly outnumbered, fell back to the line of woods not far from and in full sight of the town itself.

The Ohio Brigade was ordered to the crest crowned by Battery Robinet, to resist any further advance of the enemy. Van Dorn, however, postponed his grand assault until morning, and during the evening each army was formed in position for the morrow's strife. The lines of the Ohio Brigade were not over two hundred yards from the spot where the Rebels planted Tobin's Battery, and all night we could plainly hear the preparations the enemy was making. Moreover, the skirmishers were so close that any slight movement on either side was instantly followed by the sharp crack of the rifle. Colonel Smith's regiment was formed on the left of Battery Robinet, facing to the west; the other regiments of the Brigade were to the right of the Battery facing to the north.

During the night the Brigade Commander called Colonel Smith to accompany him while making the rounds, to suggest anything which might have been overlooked, to guard against any surprise. The chat

we had together that night was the last I enjoyed with him. He was cheery as ever, and joked in low tones with as much unconcern as though the Rebels were miles away. "Colonel," said he, "where did you get forage for your horses to-night? I don't know whether mine smells the battle afar off, but he keeps singing out 'Ha(y)! Ha(y)!' and I think he made a remark about oats."

Before the first glimpse of day on that memorable morning, October 4, 1862, the enemy opened with several batteries which he had planted during the night. Smith lost a few men, but his position was not at first much exposed, as the enemy's guns were mostly aimed at the town. As soon as it was light enough to see, our own batteries drove the Rebels back. About 11 o'clock the enemy's columns were seen moving to attack the troops stationed on our right. As the Ohio Brigade occupied the crest of a ridge near the center of Rosecrans' line of battle, we had a magnificent view of the enemy as he came out of the woods in fine style, and marched over and through the obstructions with such noticeable gallantry. Our guns were all turned in that direction, and, though many gaps were made in their ranks, they closed up without a moment's delay and moved forward in splendid style. We saw the Rebels drive back a portion of our line—saw them climbing over the light intrenchments; saw them moving onward to the town. Soon after we saw them going back again, followed by our boys in blue. A struggle occurred at some points on the line, but the Rebels were giving way, and most of them were running

backwards to the woods, when our attention became wholly occupied with the movement in our own front.

Another Division of the enemy was coming through the woods, directly toward us. Their banners waived gaily, and on reaching the edge of the woods they halted a few seconds, as if to perfect their formation, and then bore down upon us. The column in the road, meeting little or no obstruction, was soon far in advance of the others. Captain Lathrop, of my staff, was sent to order Colonel Smith to "change front forward." This manœuver Smith proceeded to execute, just as if his regiment was on parade, aligning his right company on the markers before giving the order for the other companies to advance. This movement was not fully completed when Smith was shot down. A column which advanced along the west side of the road got close to the battery, and the men, sheltering themselves behind stumps and logs, were firing sharply. "Those fellows are firing at you, Colonel," said one of the Forty-third's men. "Well, give it to them," answered the Colonel, and immediately thereafter fell from his horse. When the column in the road had been driven back by the point-blank fire of the Sixty-third and Twenty-seventh Regiments, fearing another, and perhaps stronger effort, would be made to drive us from the crest, I ran back to near the railroad to bring forward the Eleventh Missouri to a position directly behind the Sixty-third Ohio. This Regiment did not belong to my Brigade, but it was the nearest at hand, and very promptly moved up to the position

assigned. The Commander of the Brigade to which the Eleventh Missouri belonged had mistaken the Rebel skirmishers for ours, and had been taken prisoner by them some hours before; and General Stanley, our Division Commander, had gone over to the right, when it seemed all the fighting was to be done there, and had not yet returned. While I was bringing up the Eleventh Missouri, glancing over my left shoulder, I saw some men picking up a wounded officer whose face was stained with blood. I did not then know it was Colonel Smith, but directly after I saw his Adjutant, Heyl, ride up to that group, and with a futile effort to steady himself, by grasping his horse's mane, fall also to the ground.

By this time the enemy's battalions were coming along the Chewalla Road again, and my attention was wholly absorbed by their gallant charge. Their leader, Colonel Rogers, of Texas, was unhorsed soon after leaving the cover of the woods, but he advanced fearlessly on foot at the head of his column. When his color-bearer was shot down, Rogers picked up the flag and deliberately carried it forward until he fell, a few feet before reaching the ditch of the little fort. The Rebel column pushed forward until it began to trample on the dead of the Sixty-third Ohio, still lying where they fell, when it was charged by the Eleventh Missouri, the Twenty-seventh Ohio, and a remnant of the Sixty-third. This charge smashed the head of that column, and drove its rear backwards to the woods.

To go back a few minutes, when Colonel Smith, his Adjutant, and others of the Forty-third were shot

down, that regiment seemed dazed, and liable to confusion; but Lieutenant-Colonel Wager Swayne immediately began to steady the ranks, and General Stanley galloped up just in time to help. Stanley was a host in battle, and always seemed to be where the strife was fiercest. Just as our boys were moving for the charge, which broke the Rebel column in the road, I was astonished to see Stanley rushing in between the file closers and the line of battle of the Eleventh Missouri, his arms outstretched, to touch as many men as he could reach, pushing them forward to strike the head of the Rebel column. I wondered how he got there; for, only a minute or two before he was with the Forty-third, making it hot for the Rebels to the left of the Battery.

Very soon after the charge—when the exultant shout of victory was so quickly followed by that revulsion which came with the whispered names of the dead—occurred the scene thus touchingly referred to by General Stanley in his official report of the battle: “I have not words to describe the qualities of this model soldier, or to express the loss we have sustained in his death. The best testimony I can give to his memory, is the spectacle I witnessed myself, in the very moment of battle, of stern, brave men weeping like children, as the word passed, ‘Kirby Smith is killed!’”

It was nearly an hour after he was shot when Smith became conscious, and word came to us from the hospital that his wound was not mortal. I jumped upon a fallen tree in rear of the Forty-third and sang out to them that Colonel Smith was not killed, but would recover. This was repeated by Swayne and

others, and the cheer which followed, taken up by the men of other regiments also, would have gladdened our Kirby's heart. From the moment that consciousness returned, Colonel Smith never forgot he was a soldier, never failed to receive us with the customary salute, never allowed any complaint or signal of pain to escape him.

It seemed a singular coincidence to us, and I think also to Smith, that his wound was identical with that which struck down his honored father, years before, at the gates of Mexico. A shot entered just under the right nostril, passing somewhat upward, until deflected by a bone, when it passed out at the left ear.

That evening I went with General Stanley to the hospital. It will be readily understood that the nature of Kirby's wound prevented speech; but as soon as he saw us he indicated a desire to write. I took out a memorandum book and pencil, when he immediately wrote: "How did my regiment behave?" General Stanley commenced to write a reply, when a quizzical look of the Colonel's reminded us he could *hear* well enough, and Stanley answered "Most gallantly." This seemed to please Smith greatly, and he at once acknowledged it with one of his graceful salutes.

When Stanley had passed on, to speak to others, I sat down at Kirby's side and expressed a desire to do anything for him that I could. Would he like to have me write to his mother? A nod said "yes." Was there any one else he wished me to write? He made no sign in response, but seemed hesitating about something he felt loth to drop, and kept looking

at me with a steady gaze. "Shall I write to Miss ——?" naming the lady to whom he was betrothed. A pleasant smile and nod together was his answer, and I said I would do the best I could. The next morning before we started in pursuit of the enemy I rode back to see him again. I found him so cheerful, and apparently so much better, that I said: "My dear fellow, you will be able to write your own letters before we get back." I thought he felt so, too.

During the eight days we were absent, frequent letters advised us that Colonel Smith was better, and when we reached camp near Corinth we received word that he was still improving—was walking about the room a little, making people laugh at the quaint things he wrote, and the comical gestures he made; in short, seemed like himself again. So I did not go into town that evening (we were five miles away), but waited until morning, when the Brigade would march in.

About noon I rode to the house where the Colonel was lying, and saw, almost at a glance, that all hope of his recovery must be fast fading out. I was greatly surprised, after so many accounts of improvement, to find him so feeble, so cold, so drowsy. I could hardly suppress my disappointment. Poor Kirby, however, did not observe much. He put out his hand before I could reach his cot, and grasping mine, made a feeble effort to shake it. In response to my question, "How are you, my dear fellow?" he took a pencil, and in my memorandum book slowly scrawled two words, "Utter exhaustion." Soon thereafter he took my hand again, and held it until he

fell into a troubled sleep. The surgeon of his regiment did not think the case so hopeless as it seemed to me. He thought the Colonel would rally to-morrow, and even if he did not recover, thought it probable he would linger for several days. "He was not in this condition yesterday," said the surgeon, "and I think it is only temporary."

Just after supper that evening, Colonel Swayne came to my tent and said he had been sent for. Colonel Smith was worse. We sent immediately for Dr. Thrall to accompany us, and all rode over together to see if, in any way, we could contribute to his comfort. We were too late. As we entered we noticed that the room had been freshly swept, and we saw a white sheet covering something on the cot, now moved back against the wall, which told us that he was gone.

There is one other word to say, which I could wish were said by some one better fitted to say it. Colonel Smith was more than a soldier; he was a Christian. He never made a parade of his religious ideas. No man ever saw in him the least particle of cant. Yet in and through the soldier, there shone forth in the life of our Kirby Smith, the evidence of that life which is eternal.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 013 704 312 9