

THE GETTYSBURG DESECRATION (Harper's Weekly JULY 1, 1893) BY JOHN REED SCOTT,

Within the last few weeks a storm of protests has broken upon the heads of those who are responsible for the scheme of running an electric railway over the famous battlefield of Gettysburg. It is thirty years since Meade and Lee decided the issue between the North and the South at that little town, within seven miles of the Maryland line. Since then the veterans of the blue have regarded as holy the scenes of the three days' awful struggle, and Gettysburg has become known the Union over as the "American Mecca." With a reverence unappreciable by the ordinary civilian the veteran has journeyed back to it, and standing bareheaded on some hallowed spot, has recalled with mental vision the awful carnage that swept from the Round Tops to the Cemetery. The imagination was not taxed greatly to reproduce the scenes, for the field has remained mainly as it was in '63, and the conditions that existed then have been preserved by the gratuitous efforts of the Memorial Association, aided by the various States that were represented in the Army of the Potomac.

The battlefield of Gettysburg covers twenty-five square miles, the first day's engagement having occurred to the north and west of the town, and that of the second and third days to the southward. It is over the second and third days' field that the electric railway has run its desecrating track, ploughing, hacking, blasting, destroying everything that impeded its progress, and shattering with vandalistic completeness all the sentiment that has hung over the bloodstained ground.

The trolley goes out the Emmittsburg road—that runs about midway between Seminary and Cemetery ridges, upon which the two armies were stationed—to the Peach Orchard. Here it turns to the left, and pursues the narrow lane leading to the Taneytown road. Just before reaching the Wheat Field it deflects abruptly to the right, making for the Devil's Den region.

The Memorial Association has from the first opposed the electric railway, and scorned their request for a right of way over its land and avenues. Consequently the trolley purchased from private parties the necessary privileges and wherever possible it lies run its route along the line of the Memorial Association's land.

Below the "Loop," at the southwest edge of the Wheat Field, there is a three-foot fill directly on the ground over which Brooks' brigade charged against Longstreet's columns on the afternoon of the second day. Back of the Devil's Den there is one cut twelve feet deep, that has destroyed that locality beyond repartition, and made it an eyesore to the tourist and stranger.

A group of granite rocks seventy-five by twenty-five feet that formed a portion of the defenses in front of the left of the Third Corps have been blasted for material to fill a swampy portion of the track. The boulders that covered the combatants in the desperate engagement between the Fourth Maine and Fortieth New York and the Forty-fourth Alabama and the right of Benning's Confederate brigade have also been put to the same use.

In the words of Colonel Bachelder, of the United States commission "For the distance of over one mile before reaching this locality, the road cuts through the scene of some of the most desperate encounters of the battle, in which DeTrobriand's, Tilton's, Sweetzer's, Zook's, Kelly's, Cross's, and Ward's Union brigades, and Kershaw's, Semme's, Wofford's, Anderson's, and Robertson's Confederate brigades, contended for hours. The railway cuts straight through lines of battle, forest trees are leveled, boulders and ledges blasted, streams are bridged, and the whole character of the field is changed."

After curving around to the southward of the Devil's Den, the trolley swings abruptly northward and tears its way toward the "Valley of Death". This was the most romantic portion of the battlefield. Thick, heavy pines, making in their density a solid wall of verdure, lent a magnificent impenetrableness to the region between the Den and Big Round Top. Down the very centre of this locality the trolley vandals have hewed their course of destruction, and all the pristine beauty is gone forever, the victim of corporate greed.

But it is through the "Valley of Death" itself that the desecration rules supreme. Over this ground General Crawford led his division of Pennsylvania Reserves against Hood's Confederates, and sent them headlong from the Federal front. Huge boulders litter the valley, every one of which sheltered a soldier and afforded a rest for his musket. The place won its sanguine name honestly. Plum Run ran red with blood, and the turf was carpeted with the bodies of the slain, blue and gray, that lay side by side where death had found them in the struggle. But all the sacredness of such associations has been as naught, and with a ruthlessness that resembles the ruthlessness of the Vandals that King Attila led, the trolley has blasted the boulders asunder, piled the fragments into a road-bed, and run the hideous track right down the centre of the "Valley".

The railway then climbs around the western and northern faces of Little Round Top, disfiguring the landscape by cuts and fills of from ten to twelve feet, and then effects a juncture with the Reading Railroad branch. At this portion of the line a few days ago one of the gangs unearthed the bones of some of McCandless's Pennsylvania Reserves. Without a moment's hesitation they were tossed into the cart with the dirt and dumped away with it. A citizen of Gettysburg, however, sickened by such wantonness, gathered as many of the bones as possible and gave them decent burial.

The Reading tracks are followed toward the town as far as Hancock station. Here the trolley turns to the right in front of the line of battle of the Second Corps. If there is one spot on the battle-field that should lie sacred, it is this stretch from where Hancock fell wounded to the Brian house, along which Pickett's division of Virginians beat in vain in the grandest charge of the century, and which has gone into history its designating the "high-water mark of the rebellion."

The trolley vandals have run directly across the line of Stannard's Vermont Brigade, over the position of Battery C (Wier's), Fifth U. S. Artillery, over the advanced positions of thirty-eight Confederate regiments, which comprised Pickett's command, right along in front of the "Bloody Angle," and the spot where General Garnet died is buried beneath the electric road-bed.

From the Brian House the trolley passes along the north side of Zeigler's Grove over a huge fill, follows the Taneytown road to the field south of the Soldiers' National Cemetery, and turning to the left, skirts the cemetery wall to the Baltimore Pike, and thence returns to the town, passing the place from which General Howard directed the Federals into position after their retreat of the first day.

The railway through its entire length is a piece of dissolute vandalism, without excuse or purpose beyond the destruction of the greatest battle-field of the continent, for the sake of an investment that is now shown to be hare-brained in the extreme. The veterans who visit Gettysburg and see the extent of the desecration are filled with indignation. The Commander-in-Chief of the G. A. R. has appointed a committee to take whatever measures may be deemed within the power of the order. The United States has expressed its determination to acquire the entire battle-field, and make of it a national park and a regular army post. The power to take the battle-field has been delegated to the general government by an act of the Pennsylvania Legislature in 1889, and the sole means of preserving the field from further desecration now lies in the prompt action of the War Department. The government commissioners have recommended immediate action, and there is nothing now but to wait and hope.