



Conspicuous Gallantry: Civil War Diary and Letters of Rutherford B. Hayes (Abridged)

Rutherford B. Hayes

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"My belief in this war is as deep as any faith can be." One of the most personal, compelling, and enduring accounts of life as an American Civil War battlefield commander is in these pages. Wounded five times and promoted to General in January, 1865, Rutherford B. Hayes would later become the 19th President of the United States. In a diary and in letters, Hayes recounts in great detail major battles, his men, technology of arms, and the southern countryside and people. With wit and affection he writes to his beloved wife, Lucy, and his children, mother and uncle (his father died before his birth), and friends. "Sergeant Ritter had a bullet shot into his head lodging between the scalp and skull. He fell, but instantly jumped up saying, 'You must shoot lower if you want to kill me.'" Of Hayes, Ulysses S. Grant wrote, "[h]is conduct on the field was marked by conspicuous gallantry as well as the display of qualities of a higher order than that of mere personal daring." When approached by one of his men for permission to marry, Hayes tells us: "I asked him why he was in a hurry to marry; if he knew much about her; and what was her name. He replied, 'I like her looks;' and after confessing that he didn't know her name, that he thought it was Eliza Watson(!), he admitted that the thing was this: Eight hundred dollars had been left to him payable on his marriage, and he wanted the money out at interest!" At times he becomes introspective and philosophical: "Queer world! We fret our little hour, are happy, and pass away. Away! Where to? This longing after immortality!" At other times, he talks of good times and the friendships among officers and men: "Well, what good times we have had! Wit, anecdote, song, feast, wine, and good fellowship—gentlemen and scholars." Unlike many of the wonderful accounts by everyday foot soldiers, this perspective by an educated commander and future president provides you with a tale that is both broad and personal.

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