

**AN INITIAL
EXPERIENCE AND
OTHER STORIES**

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An initial experience and other stories by Charles King

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CHARLES KING

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AND OTHER STORIES.

EDITED BY
CAPT. CHARLES KING.



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INTRODUCTION.

FIFTEEN years ago there were no soldier stories—so far as the regulars were concerned. War literature was abundant : hosts of tales, long and short, good, bad, and indifferent, had been told and were in active circulation regarding the volunteers and their stirring service during the four years' struggle ; but of the life and doings of the soldier of the little standing army—either during the days of the Rebellion or the still more hazardous and trying times on the Indian frontier, the people knew next to nothing. Just why this should have been so, it is hard to say. With such rich mine of experiences to draw upon, with men to paint the scenes who had been both actor and artist in the field, there were still no pictures of our bluecoats on the border. Then, one by one the "professionals" began to take up the pen, and in the columns of military periodicals to tell of scenes and deeds whereof the public had never heard. Soon these began to find their way into framing of their own and be offered in open market, and lo ! the reading public bid for more, and others came, and brush was added to pen, and artists like Remington and Zogbaum illumined the pages of the great weeklies and the magazines with vivid scenes from our life on the plains. And still old soldiers said that better

yarns were spun around the camp fires than found their way into the papers, and young soldiers began to tell them in print. One of these, all too soon, at the outset of what promised to be a brilliant—what was sure to be an honored career, was taken from the ranks to join an immortal host, and one of the last stories from his gifted pen, grouped with these camp-fire talks of older and graver heads, the publisher has chosen from among the many soldier tales now told on every side, and in this little volume commends them, one and all, to the reader.

AN INITIAL EXPERIENCE.

NEXT to his first battle, I know of nothing that more deeply impresses a young soldier than his first night march. Out of the chaos and confusion that followed Bull Run-the-First, came the order, organization, and discipline introduced by McClellan. We had had weeks of daily drill and parade in the camps around the Capital. We had seen our brigade swelled into the proportions of a division by the successive addition of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Massachusetts, the Seventy-ninth Highlanders of New York, the Second Fire Zouaves, and the Thirty-second Pennsylvania. We were, or thought we were, a rousing big brigade before, and prided ourselves on being the only real Western brigade around Washington ; for, when ordered into camp back of the old Porter mansion on Kalorama Heights, our Second Wisconsin—ragged “veterans” of the first battle—were reinforced by the Fifth and Sixth from our own State, and Sol Meredith's Nineteenth Indiana, all “cram full,” as we said, of enthusiastic Westerners, with a Wisconsin West Pointer for our brigadier. The Massachusetts and Pennsylvania men, with the Fire Zouaves, remained with us only until after McClellan's first review ; but we still had five full regiments when the chilly nights of late August made our sentries' noses and fingers tingle, and I had dropped the drumsticks to go on permanent duty as orderly at brigade head-quarters, a promotion which to any juvenile mind carried with it the rank and more than the emoluments of a volunteer aid. I doubt if ever before the functions of brigade orderly were clothed by the incumbent with greater importance—or ever since. It led me into blunders which, superadded to the bumptiousness of boyhood, came near putting an end to what I honestly believed was the dawning of a brilliant military career ; as, for instance, when I thought the patrol of regulars had no business to try to halt me when