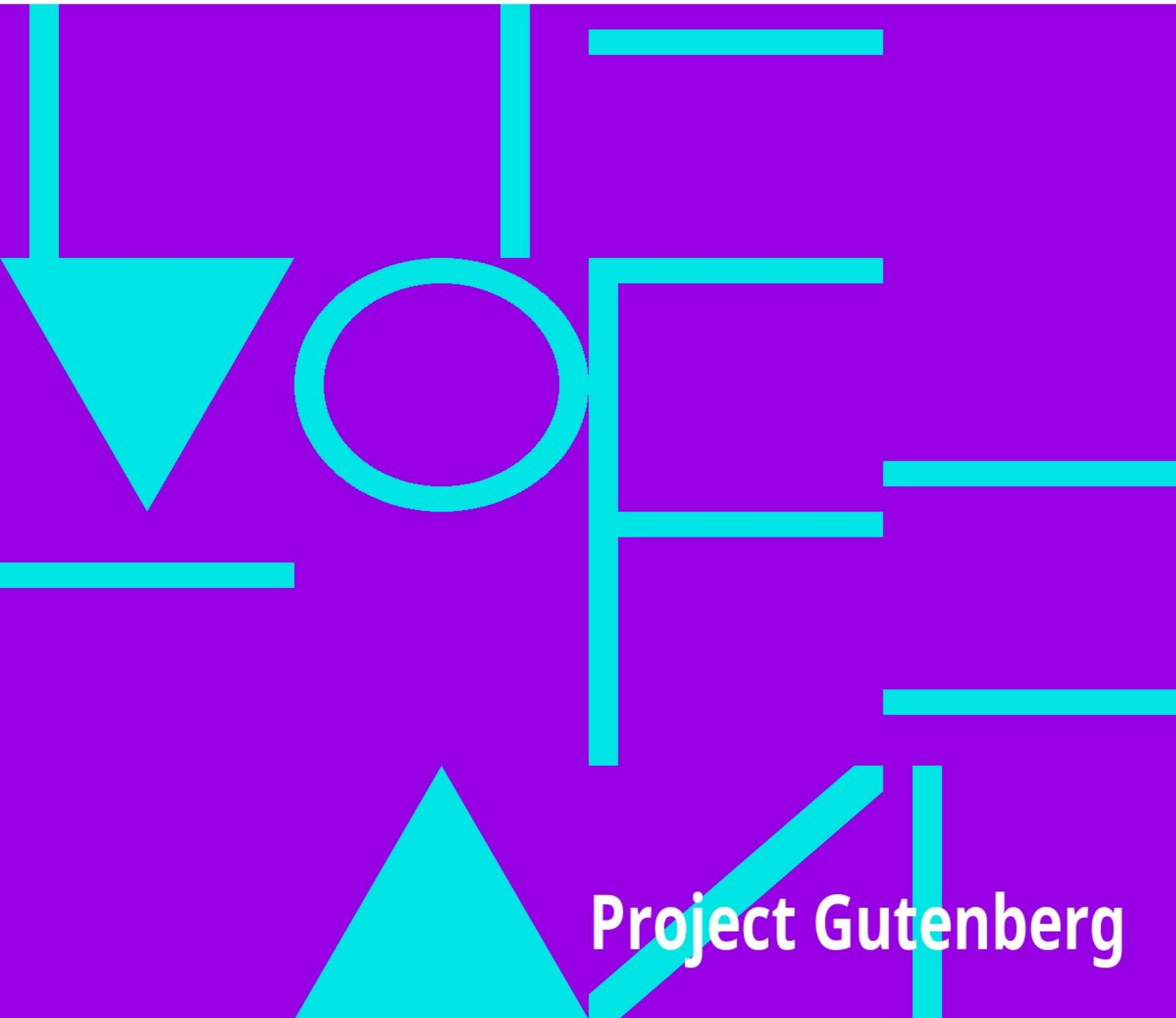
The Sword of Antietam

A Story of the Nation's Crisis

Joseph A. Altsheler



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FOREWORD

“The Sword of Antietam” tells a complete story, but it is one in the chain of Civil War romances, begun in “The Guns of Bull Run” and continued through “The Guns of Shiloh” and “The Scouts of Stonewall.” The young Northern hero, Dick Mason, and his friends are in the forefront of the tale.

THE CIVIL WAR SERIES

VOLUMES IN THE CIVIL WAR SERIES

THE GUNS OF BULL RUN.
THE GUNS OF SHILOH.
THE SCOUTS OF STONEWALL.
THE SWORD OF ANTIETAM.
THE STAR OF GETTYSBURG.
THE ROCK OF CHICKAMAUGA.
THE SHADES OF THE WILDERNESS.
THE TREE OF APPOMATTOX.

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WILLIAM L. YANCEY, Alabama Orator.
JAMES A. GARFIELD, Northern General, afterwards President of the United States.

And many others

IMPORTANT BATTLES DESCRIBED IN THE CIVIL WAR SERIES

BULL RUN
KERNSTOWN
CROSS KEYS
WINCHESTER
PORT REPUBLIC
THE SEVEN DAYS
MILL SPRING
FORT DONELSON
SHILOH
PERRYVILLE
STONE RIVER
THE SECOND MANASSAS
ANTIETAM
FREDERICKSBURG

CHANCELLORSVILLE
GETTYSBURG
CHAMPION HILL
VICKSBURG
CHICKAMAUGA
MISSIONARY RIDGE
THE WILDERNESS
SPOTTSYLVANIA
COLD HARBOR
FISHER'S HILL
CEDAR CREEK
APPOMATTOX

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THE SWORD OF ANTIETAM

CHAPTER I. CEDAR MOUNTAIN

The first youth rode to the crest of the hill, and, still sitting on his horse, examined the country in the south with minute care through a pair of powerful glasses. The other two dismounted and waited patiently. All three were thin and their faces were darkened by sun and wind. But they were strong alike of body and soul. Beneath the faded blue uniforms brave hearts beat and powerful muscles responded at once to every command of the will.

“What do you see, Dick?” asked Warner, who leaned easily against his horse, with one arm over the pommel of his saddle.

“Hills, valleys, mountains, the August heat shimmering over all, but no human being.”

“A fine country,” said young Pennington, “and I like to look at it, but just now my Nebraska prairie would be better for us. We could at least see the advance of Stonewall Jackson before he was right on top of us.”

Dick took another long look, searching every point in the half circle of the south with his glasses. Although burned by summer the country was beautiful, and neither heat nor cold could take away its picturesqueness. He saw valleys in which the grass grew thick and strong, clusters of hills dotted with trees, and then the blue loom of mountains clothed heavily with foliage. Over everything bent a dazzling sky of blue and gold.

The light was so intense that with his glasses he could pick out individual trees and rocks on the far slopes. He saw an occasional roof, but nowhere did he see man. He knew the reason, but he had become so used to his trade that at the moment, he felt no sadness. All this region had been swept by great armies. Here the tide of battle in the mightiest of all wars had rolled back and forth, and here it was destined to surge again in a volume increasing always.

“I don't find anything,” repeated Dick, “but three pairs of eyes are better than none. George, you take the glasses and see what you can see and Frank will follow.”

He dismounted and stood holding the reins of his horse while the young Vermonter looked. He noticed that the mathematical turn of Warner's mind showed in every emergency. He swept the glasses back and forth in a regular curve, not looking here and now there, but taking his time and missing nothing.

It occurred to Dick that he was a type of his region, slow but thorough, and sure to win after defeat.

“What's the result of your examination?” asked Dick as Warner passed the glasses in turn to Pennington.

“Let x equal what I saw, which is nothing. Let y equal the result I draw, which is nothing. Hence we have x + y which still equals nothing.”

Pennington was swifter in his examination. The blood in his veins flowed a little faster than Warner's.

“I find nothing but land and water,” he said without waiting to be asked, “and I'm disappointed. I had a hope, Dick, that I'd see Stonewall Jackson himself riding along a slope.”

“Even if you saw him, how would you know it was Stonewall?”

“I hadn't thought of that. We've heard so much of him that it just seemed to me I'd know him anywhere.”

“Same here,” said Warner. “Remember all the tales we've heard about his whiskers, his old slouch hat and his sorrel horse.”

“I'd like to see him myself,” confessed Dick. “From all we hear he's the man who kept McClellan from taking Richmond. He certainly played hob with the plans of our generals. You know, I've got a cousin, Harry Kenton, with him. I had a letter from him a week ago—passing through the lines, and coming in a round-about way. Writes as if he thought Stonewall Jackson was a demigod. Says we'd better quit and go home, as we haven't any earthly chance to win this war.”

“He fights best who wins last,” said Warner. “I'm thinking I won't see the green hills of Vermont for a long time yet, because I mean to pay a visit to Richmond first. Have you got your cousin's letter with you, Dick?”

“No, I destroyed it. I didn't want it bobbing up some time or other to cause either of us trouble. A man I know at home says he's kept out of a lot of trouble by 'never writin' nothin' to nobody.' And if you do write a letter the next best thing is to burn it as quick as you can.”

“If my eyes tell the truth, and they do,” said Pennington, “here comes a short, thick man riding a long, thick horse and he—the man, not the horse—bears a startling resemblance to our friend, ally, guide and sometime mentor, Sergeant Daniel Whitley.”

“Yes, it's the sergeant,” said Dick, looking down into the valley, “and I'm glad he's joining us. Do you know, boys, I often think these veteran sergeants know

more than some of our generals.”

“It's not an opinion. It's a fact,” said Warner. “Hi, there, sergeant! Here are your friends! Come up and make the same empty report that we've got ready for the colonel.”

Sergeant Daniel Whitley looked at the three lads, and his face brightened. He had a good intellect under his thatch of hair, and a warm heart within his strong body. The boys, although lieutenants, and he only a sergeant in the ranks, treated him usually as an equal and often as a superior.

Colonel Winchester's regiment and the remains of Colonel Newcomb's Pennsylvanians had been sent east after the defeat of the Union army at the Seven Days, and were now with Pope's Army of Virginia, which was to hold the valley and also protect Washington. Grant's success at Shiloh had been offset by McClellan's failure before Richmond, and the President and his Cabinet at Washington were filled with justifiable alarm. Pope was a western man, a Kentuckian, and he had insisted upon having some of the western troops with him.

The sergeant rode his horse slowly up the slope, and joined the lads over whom he watched like a father.

“And what have the hundred eyes of Argus beheld?” asked Warner.

“Argus?” said the sergeant. “I don't know any such man. Name sounds queer, too.”

“He belongs to a distant and mythical past, sergeant, but he'd be mighty useful if we had him here. If even a single one of his hundred eyes were to light on Stonewall Jackson, it would be a great service.”

The sergeant shook his head and looked reprovingly at Warner.

“It ain't no time for jokin',” he said.

“I was never further from it. It seems to me that we need a lot of Arguses more than anything else. This is the enemy's country, and we hear that Stonewall Jackson is advancing. Advancing where, from what and when? There is no Argus to tell. The country supports a fairly numerous population, but it hasn't a single kind or informing word for us. Is Stonewall Jackson going to drop from the sky, which rumor says is his favorite method of approach?”

“He's usin' the solid ground this time, anyway,” said Sergeant Daniel Whitley. “I've been eight miles farther south, an' if I didn't see cavalry comin' along the skirt of a ridge, then my eyes ain't any friends of mine. Then I came through a little place of not more'n five houses. No men there, just women an' children, but

when I looked back I saw them women an' children, too, grinnin' at me. That means somethin', as shore as we're livin' an' breathin'. I'm bettin' that we new fellows from the west will get acquainted with Stonewall Jackson inside of twenty-four hours."

"You don't mean that? It's not possible!" exclaimed Dick, startled. "Why, when we last heard of Jackson he was so far south we can't expect him in a week!"

"You've heard that they call his men the foot cavalry," said the sergeant gravely, "an' I reckon from all I've learned since I come east that they've won the name fair an' true. See them woods off to the south there. See the black line they make ag'inst the sky. I know, the same as if I had seen him, that Stonewall Jackson is down in them forests, comin' an' comin' fast."

The sergeant's tone was ominous, and Dick felt a tingling at the roots of his hair. The western troops were eager to meet this new Southern phenomenon who had suddenly shot like a burning star across the sky, but for the first time there was apprehension in his soul. He had seen but little of the new general, Pope, but he had read his proclamations and he had thought them bombastic. He talked lightly of the enemy and of the grand deeds that he was going to do. Who was Pope to sweep away such men as Lee and Jackson with mere words!

Dick longed for Grant, the stern, unyielding, unbeatable Grant whom he had known at Shiloh. In the west the Union troops had felt the strong hand over them, and confidence had flowed into them, but here they were in doubt. They felt that the powerful and directing mind was absent.

Silence fell upon them all for a little space, while the four gazed intently into the south, strange fears assailing everyone. Dick never doubted that the Union would win. He never doubted it then and he never doubted it afterward, through all the vast hecatomb when the flag of the Union fell more than once in terrible defeat.

But their ignorance was mystifying and oppressive. They saw before them the beautiful country, the hills and valleys, the forest and the blue loom of the mountains, so much that appealed to the eye, and yet the horizon, looking so peaceful in the distance, was barbed with spears. Jackson was there! The sergeant's theory had become conviction with them. Distance had been nothing to him. He was at hand with a great force, and Lee with another army might fall at any time upon their flank, while McClellan was isolated and left useless, far away.

Dick's heart missed a beat or two, as he saw the sinister picture that he had

created in his own mind. Highly imaginative, he had leaped to the conclusion that Lee and Jackson meant to trap the Union army, the hammer beating it out on the anvil. He raised the glasses to his eyes, surveyed the forests in the South once more, and then his heart missed another beat.

He had caught the flash of steel, the sun's rays falling across a bayonet or a polished rifle barrel. And then as he looked he saw the flash again and again. He handed the glasses to Warner and said quietly:

“George, I see troops on the edge of that far hill to the south and the east. Can't you see them, too?”

“Yes, I can make them out clearly now, as they pass across a bit of open land. They're Confederate cavalry, two hundred at least, I should say.”

Dick learned long afterward that it was the troop of Sherburne, but, for the present, the name of Sherburne was unknown to him. He merely felt that this was the vanguard of Jackson riding forward to set the trap. The men were now so near that they could be seen with the naked eye, and the sergeant said tersely:

“At last we've seen what we were afraid we would see.”

“And look to the left also,” said Warner, who still held the glasses. “There's a troop of horse coming up another road, too. By George, they're advancing at a trot! We'd better clear out or we may be enclosed between the two horns of their cavalry.”

“We'll go back to our force at Cedar Run,” said Harry, “and report what we've seen. As you say, George, there's no time to waste.”

The four mounted and rode fast, the dust of the road flying in a cloud behind their horses' heels. Dick felt that they had fulfilled their errand, but he had his doubts how their news would be received. The Northern generals in the east did not seem to him to equal those of the west in keenness and resolution, while the case was reversed so far as the Southern generals were concerned.

But fast as they went the Southern cavalry was coming with equal speed. They continually saw the flash of arms in both east and west. The force in the west was the nearer of the two. Not only was Sherburne there, but Harry Kenton was with him, and besides their own natural zeal they had all the eagerness and daring infused into them by the great spirit and brilliant successes of Jackson.

“They won't be able to enclose us between the two horns of their horsemen,” said Sergeant Whitley, whose face was very grave, “and the battle won't be to-morrow or the next day.”

“Why not? I thought Jackson was swift,” said Warner.

“Cause it will be fought to-day. I thought Jackson was swift, too, but he's swifter than I thought. Them feet cavalry of his don't have to change their name. Look into the road comin' up that narrow valley.”

The eyes of the three boys followed his pointing finger, and they now saw masses of infantry, men in gray pressing forward at full speed. They saw also batteries of cannon, and Dick almost fancied he could hear the rumble of their wheels.

“Looks as if the sergeant was right,” said Pennington. “Stonewall Jackson is here.”

They increased their speed to a gallop, making directly for Cedar Run, a cold, clear little stream coming out of the hills. It was now about the middle of the morning and the day was burning hot and breathless. Their hearts began to pound with excitement, and their breath was drawn painfully through throats lined with dust.

A long ridge covered with forest rose on one side of them and now they saw the flash of many bayonets and rifle barrels along its lowest slope. Another heavy column of infantry was advancing, and presently they heard the far note of trumpets calling to one another.

“Their whole army is in touch,” said the sergeant. “The trumpets show it. Often on the plains, when we had to divide our little force into detachments, they'd have bugle talk with one another. We must go faster if we can.”

They got another ounce of strength out of their horses, and now they saw Union cavalry in front. In a minute or two they were among the blue horsemen, giving the hasty news of Jackson's advance. Other scouts and staff officers arrived a little later with like messages, and not long afterward they heard shots behind them telling them that the hostile pickets were in touch.

They watered their horses in Cedar Run, crossed it and rejoined their own regiment under Colonel Arthur Winchester. The colonel was thin, bronzed and strong, and he, too, like the other new men from the West, was eager for battle with the redoubtable Jackson.

“What have you seen, Dick?” he exclaimed. “Is it a mere scouting force of cavalry, or is Jackson really at hand?”

“I think it's Jackson himself. We saw heavy columns coming up. They were pressing forward, too, as if they meant to brush aside whatever got in their way.”

“Then we'll show them!” exclaimed Colonel Winchester. “We've only seven thousand men here on Cedar Run, but Banks, who is in immediate command,

has been stung deeply by his defeats at the hands of Jackson, and he means a fight to the last ditch. So does everybody else."

Dick, at that moment, the thrill of the gallop gone, was not so sanguine. The great weight of Jackson's name hung over him like a sinister menace, and the Union troops on Cedar Run were but seven thousand. The famous Confederate leader must have at least three times that number. Were the Union forces, separated into several armies, to be beaten again in detail? Pope himself should be present with at least fifty thousand men.

Their horses had been given to an orderly and Dick threw himself upon the turf to rest a little. All along the creek the Union army, including his own regiment, was forming in line of battle but his colonel had not yet called upon him for any duty. Warner and Pennington were also resting from their long and exciting ride, but the sergeant, who seemed never to know fatigue, was already at work with his men.

"Listen to those skirmishers," said Dick. "It sounds like the popping of corn at home on winter evenings, when I was a little boy."

"But a lot more deadly," said Pennington. "I wouldn't like to be a skirmisher. I don't mind firing into the smoke and the crowd, but I'd hate to sit down behind a stump or in the grass and pick out the spot on a man that I meant for my bullet to hit."

"You won't have to do any such work, Frank," said Warner. "Hark to it! The sergeant was right. We're going to have a battle to-day and a big one. The popping of your corn, Dick, has become an unbroken sound."

Dick, from the crest of the hillock on which they lay, gazed over the heads of the men in blue. The skirmishers were showing a hideous activity. A continuous line of light ran along the front of both armies, and behind the flash of the Southern firing he saw heavy masses of infantry emerging from the woods. A deep thrill ran through him. Jackson, the famous, the redoubtable, the unbeatable, was at hand with his army. Would he remain unbeaten? Dick said to himself, in unspoken words, over and over again, "No! No! No! No!" He and his comrades had been victors in the west. They must not fail here.

Colonel Winchester now called to them, and mounting their horses they gathered around him to await his orders. These officers, though mere boys, learned fast. Dick knew enough already of war to see that they were in a strong position. Before them flowed the creek. On their flank and partly in their front was a great field of Indian corn. A quarter of a mile away was a lofty ridge on which were posted Union guns with gunners who knew so well how to use them.

To right and left ran the long files of infantry, their faces white but resolute.

“I think,” said Dick to Warner, “that if Jackson passes over this place he will at least know that we've been here.”

“Yes, he'll know it, and besides he'll make quite a halt before passing. At least, that's my way of thinking.”

There was a sudden dying of the rifle fire. The Union skirmishers were driven in, and they fell back on the main body which was silent, awaiting the attack. Dick was no longer compelled to use the glasses. He saw with unaided eye the great Southern columns marching forward with the utmost confidence, heavy batteries advancing between the regiments, ready at command to sweep the Northern ranks with shot and shell.

Dick shivered a little. He could not help it. They were face to face with Jackson, and he was all that the heralds of fame had promised. He had eye enough to see that the Southern force was much greater than their own, and, led by such a man, how could they fail to win another triumph? He looked around upon the army in blue, but he did not see any sign of fear. Both the beaten and the unbeaten were ready for a new battle.

There was a mighty crash from the hill and the Northern batteries poured a stream of metal into the advancing ranks of their foe.

The Confederate advance staggered, but, recovering itself, came on again. A tremendous cheer burst from the ranks of the lads in blue. Stonewall Jackson with all his skill and fame was before them, but they meant to stop him. Numbers were against them, and Banks, their leader, had been defeated already by Jackson, but they meant to stop him, nevertheless.

The Southern guns replied. Posted along the slopes of Slaughter Mountain, sinister of name, they sent a sheet of death upon the Union ranks. But the regiments, the new and the old, stood firm. Those that had been beaten before by Jackson were resolved not to be beaten again by him, and the new regiments from the west, one or two of which had been at Shiloh, were resolved never to be beaten at all.

“The lads are steady,” said Colonel Winchester. “It's a fine sign. I've news, too, that two thousand men have come up. We shall now have nine thousand with which to withstand the attack, and I don't believe they can drive us away. Oh, why isn't Pope himself here with his whole army? Then we could wipe Jackson off the face of the earth!”

But Pope was not there. The commander of a huge force, the man of boastful words who was to do such great things, the man who sent such grandiloquent

dispatches from “Headquarters in the Saddle,” to the anxious Lincoln at Washington, had strung his numerous forces along in detachments, just as the others had done before him, and the booming of Jackson's cannon attacking the Northern vanguard with his whole army could not reach ears so far away.

The fire now became heavy along the whole Union front. All the batteries on both sides were coming into action, and the earth trembled with the rolling crash. The smoke rose and hung in clouds over the hills, the valley and the cornfield. The hot air, surcharged with dust, smoke and burned gunpowder, was painful and rasping to the throat. The frightful screaming of the shells filled the air, and then came the hissing of the bullets like a storm of sleet.

Colonel Winchester and his staff dismounted, giving their horses to an orderly who led them to the rear. Horses would not be needed for the present, at least, and they had learned to avoid needless risk.

The attack was coming closer, and the bullets as they swept through their ranks found many victims. Colonel Winchester ordered his regiment to kneel and open fire, being held hitherto in reserve. Dick snatched up a rifle from a soldier who had fallen almost beside him, and he saw that Warner and Pennington had equipped themselves in like fashion.

A strong gust of wind lifted the smoke before them a little. Dick saw many splashes of water on the surface of the creek where bullets struck, and there were many tiny spurts of dust in the road, where other bullets fell. Then he saw beyond the dark masses of the Southern infantry. It seemed to him that they were strangely close. He believed that he could see their tanned faces, one by one, and their vengeful eyes, but it was only fancy.

The next instant the signal was given, and the regiment fired as one. There was a long flash of fire, a tremendous roaring in Dick's ears, then for an instant or two a vast cloud of smoke hid the advancing gray mass. When it was lifted a moment later the men in gray were advancing no longer. Their ranks were shattered and broken, the ground was covered with the fallen and the others were reeling back.

“We win! We win!” shouted Pennington, wild with enthusiasm.

“For the present, at least,” said Warner, a deep flush blazing in either cheek.

There was no return fire just then from that point, and the smoke lifted a little more. Above the crash of the battle which raged fiercely on either flank, they heard the notes of a trumpet rising, loud, clear, and distinct from all other sounds. Dick knew that it was a rallying call, and then he heard Pennington utter a wild shout.

“I see him! I see him!” he cried. “It's old Stonewall himself! There on the hillock, on the little horse!”

The vision was but for an instant. Dick gazed with all his eyes, and he saw several hundred yards away a thickset man on a sorrel horse. He was bearded and he stooped a little, seeming to bend an intense gaze upon the Northern lines.

There was no time for anyone to fire, because in a few seconds the smoke came back, a huge, impenetrable curtain, and hid the man and the hillock. But Dick had not the slightest doubt that it was the great Southern leader, and he was right. It was Stonewall Jackson on the hillock, rallying his men, and Dick's own cousin, Harry Kenton, rode by his side.

They reloaded, but a staff officer galloped up and delivered a written order to Colonel Winchester. The whole regiment left the line, another less seasoned taking its place, and they marched off to one flank, where a field of wheat lately cut, and a wood on the extreme end, lay before them. Behind them they heard the battle swelling anew, but Dick knew that a new force of the foe was coming here, and he felt proud that his own regiment had been moved to meet an attack which would certainly be made with the greatest violence.

“Who are those men down in the wheat-field?” asked Pennington.

“Our own skirmishers,” replied Warner. “See them running forward, hiding behind the shocks of straw and firing!”

The riflemen were busy. They fired from the shelter of every straw stack in the field, and they stung the new Southern advance, which was already showing its front. Southern guns now began to search the wheat field. A shell struck squarely in the center of one of the shocks behind which three Northern skirmishers were kneeling. Dick saw the straw fly into the air as if picked up by a whirlwind. When it settled back it lay in scattered masses and three dark figures lay with it, motionless and silent. He shuddered and looked away.

The edge of the wood was now lined with Southern infantry, and on their right flank was a numerous body of cavalry. Officers were waving their swords aloft, leading the men in person to the charge.

“The attack will be heavy here,” said Colonel Winchester. “Ah, there are our guns firing over our heads. We need 'em.”

The Southern cannon were more numerous, but the Northern guns, posted well on the hill, refused to be silenced. Some of them were dismounted and the gunners about them were killed, but the others, served with speed and valor, sprayed the whole Southern front with a deadly shower of steel.

It was this welcome metal that Dick and his comrades heard over their heads, and then the trumpets rang a shrill note of defiance along the whole line. Banks, remembering his bitter defeats and resolved upon victory now, was not awaiting the attack. He would make it himself.

The whole wing lifted itself up and rushed through the wheat field, firing as they charged. The cannon were pushed forward and poured in volleys as fast as the gunners could load and discharge them. Dick felt the ground reeling beneath his feet, but he knew that they were advancing and that the enemy was giving way again. Stonewall Jackson and his generals felt a certain hardening of the Northern resistance that day. The recruits in blue were becoming trained now. They did not break in a panic, although their lines were raked through and through by the Southern shells. New men stepped in the place of the fallen, and the lines, filled up, came on again.

The Northern wing charging through the wheat field continued to bear back the enemy. Jackson was not yet able to stop the fierce masses in blue. A formidable body of men issuing from the Northern side of the wood charged with the bayonet, pushing the charge home with a courage and a recklessness of death that the war had not yet seen surpassed. The Southern rifles and cannon raked them, but they never stopped, bursting like a tornado upon their foe.

One of Jackson's Virginia regiments gave way and then another. The men in blue from the wood and Colonel Winchester's regiment joined, their shouts rising above the smoke while they steadily pushed the enemy before them.

Dick as he shouted with the rest felt a wild exultation. They were showing Jackson what they could do! They were proving to him that he could not win always. His joy was warranted. No such confusion had ever before existed in Jackson's army. The Northern charge was driven like a wedge of steel into its ranks.

Jackson had able generals, valiant lieutenants, with him, Ewell and Early, and A. P. Hill and Winder, and they strove together to stop the retreat. The valiant Winder was mortally wounded and died upon the field, and Jackson, with his wonderful ability to see what was happening and his equal power of decision, swiftly withdrew that wing of his army, also carrying with it every gun.

A great shout of triumph rose from the men in blue as they saw the Southern retreat.

“We win! We win!” cried Pennington again.

“Yes, we win!” shouted Warner, usually so cool.

And it did seem even to older men that the triumph was complete. The blue

and the gray were face to face in the smoke, but the gray were driven back by the fierce and irresistible charge, and, as their flight became swifter, the shells and grape from the Northern batteries plunged and tore through their ranks. Nothing stopped the blue wave. It rolled on and on, sweeping a mass of fugitives before it, and engulfing others.

Dick had no ordered knowledge of the charge. He was a part of it, and he saw only straight in front of him, but he was conscious that all around him there was a fiery red mist, and a confused and terrible noise of shouting and firing. But they were winning! They were beating Stonewall Jackson himself. His pulses throbbed so hard that he thought his arteries would burst, and his lips were dry and blackened from smoke, burned gunpowder and his own hot breath issuing like steam between them.

Then came a halt so sudden and terrible that it shook Dick as if by physical contact. He looked around in wonder. The charge was spent, not from its lack of strength but because they had struck an obstacle. They had reckoned ill, because they had not reckoned upon all the resources of Stonewall Jackson's mind. He had stemmed the rout in person and now he was pushing forward the Stonewall Brigade, five regiments, which always had but two alternatives, to conquer or to die. Hill and Ewell with fresh troops were coming up also on his flanks, and now the blue and the gray, face to face again, closed in mortal combat.

“We've stopped! We've stopped! Do you hear it, we've stopped!” exclaimed Pennington, his face a ghastly reek of dust and perspiration, his eyes showing amazement and wonder how the halt could have happened. Dick shared in the terrible surprise. The fire in front of him deepened suddenly. Men were struck down all about him. Heavy masses of troops in gray showed through the smoke. The Stonewall Brigade was charging, and regiments were charging with it on either side.

The column in blue was struck in front and on either flank. It not only ceased its victorious advance, but it began to give ground. The men could not help it, despite their most desperate efforts. It seemed to Dick that the earth slipped under their feet. A tremendous excitement seized him at the thought of victory lost just when it seemed won. He ran up and down the lines, shouting to the men to stand firm. He saw that the senior officers were doing the same, but there was little order or method in his own movements. It was the excitement and bitter humiliation that drove him on.

He stumbled in the smoke against Sergeant Whitley. The sergeant's forehead had been creased by a bullet, but so much dust and burned gunpowder had gathered upon it that it was as black as the face of a black man.

“Are we to lose after all?” exclaimed Dick.

It seemed strange to him, even at that moment, that he should hear his own voice amid such a roar of cannon and rifles. But it was an undernote, and he heard with equal ease the sergeant's reply:

“It ain't decided yet, Mr. Mason, but we've got to fight as we never fought before.”

The Union men, both those who had faced Jackson before and those who were now meeting him for the first time, fought with unsurpassed valor, but, unequal in numbers, they saw the victory wrenched from their grasp. Jackson now had his forces in the hollow of his hand. He saw everything that was passing, and with the mind of a master he read the meaning of it. He strengthened his own weak points and increased the attack upon those of the North.

Dick remained beside the sergeant. He had lost sight of Colonel Winchester, Warner and Pennington in the smoke and the dreadful confusion, but he saw well enough that his fears were coming true.

The attack in front increased in violence, and the Northern army was also attacked with fiery energy on both flanks. The men had the actual physical feeling that they were enclosed in the jaws of a vise, and, forced to abandon all hope of victory, they fought now to escape. Two small squadrons of cavalry, scarce two hundred in number, sent forward from a wood, charged the whole Southern army under a storm of cannon and rifle fire. They equalled the ride of the Six Hundred at Balaklava, but with no poet to celebrate it, it remained like so many other charges in this war, an obscure and forgotten incident.

Dick saw the charge of the horsemen, and the return of the few. Then he lost hope. Above the roar of the battle the rebel yell continually swelled afresh. The setting sun, no longer golden but red, cast a sinister light over the trampled wheat field, the slopes and the woods torn by cannon balls. The dead and the wounded lay in thousands, and Banks, brave and tenacious, but with bitter despair in his heart, was seeking to drag the remains of his army from that merciless vise which continued to close down harder and harder.

Dick's excitement and tension seemed to abate. He had been keyed to so high a pitch that his pulses grew gentler through very lack of force, and with the relaxation came a clearer view. He saw the sinking red sun through the banks of smoke, and in fancy he already felt the cool darkness upon his face after the hot and terrible August day. He knew that night might save them, and he prayed deeply and fervently for its swift coming.

He and the sergeant came suddenly to Colonel Winchester, whose hat had

been shot from his head, but who was otherwise unharmed. Warner and Pennington were near, Warner slightly wounded but apparently unaware of the fact. The colonel, by shout and by gesture, was gathering around him the remains of his regiment. Other regiments on either side were trying to do the same, and eventually they formed a compact mass which, driving with all its force back toward its old position, reached the hills and the woods just as the jaws of Stonewall Jackson's vise shut down, but not upon the main body.

Victory, won for a little while, had been lost. Night protected their retreat, and they fought with a valor that made Jackson and all his generals cautious. But this knowledge was little compensation to the Northern troops. They knew that behind them was a great army, that Pope might have been present with fifty thousand men, sufficient to overwhelm Jackson. Instead of the odds being more than two to one in their favor, they had been two to one against them.

It was a sullen army that lay in the woods in the first hour or two of the night, gasping for breath. These men had boasted that they were a match for those of Jackson, and they were, if they could only have traded generals. Dick and his comrades from the west began to share in the awe that the name of Stonewall Jackson inspired.

“He comes up to his advertisements. There ain't no doubt of it,” said Sergeant Whitley. “I never saw anybody fight better than our men did, an' that charge of the little troop of cavalry was never beat anywhere in the world. But here we are licked, and thirty or forty thousand men of ours not many miles away!”

He spoke the last words with a bitterness that Dick had never heard in his voice before.

“It's simple,” said Warner, who was binding up his little wound with his own hand. “It's just a question in mathematics. I see now how Stonewall Jackson won so many triumphs in the Valley of Virginia. Give Jackson, say, fifteen thousand men. We have fifty thousand, but we divide them into five armies of ten thousand apiece. Jackson fights them in detail, which is five battles, of course. His fifteen thousand defeat the ten thousand every time. Hence Jackson with fifteen thousand men has beaten our side. It's simple but painful. In time our leaders will learn.”

“After we're all killed,” said Pennington sadly.

“And the country is ripped apart so that it will take half a century to put the pieces back together again and put 'em back right,” said Dick, with equal sadness.

“Never mind,” said Sergeant Whitley with returning cheerfulness. “Other

countries have survived great wars and so will ours.”

Some food was obtained for the exhausted men and they ate it nervously, paying little attention to the crackling fire of the skirmishers which was still going on in the darkness along their front. Dick saw the pink flashes along the edges of the woods and the wheat field, but his mind, deadened for the time, took no further impressions. Skirmishers were unpleasant people, anyway. Let them fight down there. It did not matter what they might do to one another. A minute or two later he was ashamed of such thoughts.

Colonel Winchester, who had been to see General Banks, returned presently and told them that they would march again in half an hour.

“General Banks,” he said with bitter irony, “is afraid that a powerful force of the rebels will gain his rear and that we shall be surrounded. He ought to know. He has had enough dealings with Jackson. Outmaneuvered and outflanked again! Why can't we learn something?”

But he said this to the young officers only. He forced a cheerfulness of tone when he spoke to the men, and they dragged themselves wearily to their feet in order to begin the retreat. But though the muscles were tired the spirit was not unwilling. All the omens were sinister, pointing to the need of withdrawal. The vicious skirmishers were still busy and a crackling fire came from many points in the woods. The occasional rolling thunder of a cannon deepened the somberness of the scene.

All the officers of the regiment had lost their horses and they walked now with the men. A full moon threw a silvery light over the marching troops, who strode on in silence, the wounded suppressing their groans. A full moon cast a silvery light over the pallid faces.

“Do you know where we are going?” Dick asked of the Vermonter.

“I heard that we're bound for a place called Culpeper Court House, six or seven miles away. I suppose we'll get there in the morning, if Stonewall Jackson doesn't insist on another interview with us.”

“There's enough time in the day for fighting,” said Pennington, “without borrowing of the night. Hear that big gun over there on our right! Why do they want to be firing cannon balls at such a time?”

They trudged gloomily on, following other regiments ghostly in the moonlight, and followed by others as ghostly. But the sinister omens, the flash of rifle firing and the far boom of a cannon, were always on their flanks. The impression of Jackson's skill and power which Dick had gained so quickly was deepening already. He did not have the slightest doubt now that the Southern

leader was pressing forward through the woods to cut them off. As the sergeant had said truly, he came up to his advertisements and more. Dick shivered and it was a shiver of apprehension for the army, and not for himself.

In accordance with human nature he and the boy officers who were his good comrades talked together, but their sentences were short and broken.

“Marching toward a court house,” said Pennington. “What'll we do when we get there? Lawyers won't help us.”

“Not so much marching toward a court house as marching away from Jackson,” said the Vermonter.

“We'll march back again,” said Dick hopefully.

“But when?” said Pennington. “Look through the trees there on our right. Aren't those rebel troops?”

Dick's startled gaze beheld a long line of horsemen in gray on their flank and only a few hundred yards away.

CHAPTER II. AT THE CAPITAL

The Southern cavalry was seen almost at the same time by many men in the regiments, and nervous and hasty, as was natural at such a time, they opened a scattering fire. The horsemen did not return the fire, but seemed to melt away in the darkness.

But the shrewdest of the officers, among whom was Colonel Winchester, took alarm at this sudden appearance and disappearance. Dick would have divined from their manner, even without their talk, that they believed Jackson was at hand. Action followed quickly. The army stopped and began to seek a strong position in the wood. Cannon were drawn up, their mouths turned to the side on which the horsemen had appeared, and the worn regiments assumed the attitude of defense. Dick's heart throbbed with pride when he saw that they were as ready as ever to fight, although they had suffered great losses and the bitterest of disappointments.

“What I said I've got to say over again,” said Pennington ruefully: “the night's no time for fighting. It's heathenish in Stonewall Jackson to follow us, and annoy us in such a way.”

“Such a way! Such a way!” said Dick impatiently. “We've got to learn to fight as he does. Good God, Frank, think of all the sacrifices we are making to save our Union, the great republic! Think how the hateful old monarchies will sneer and rejoice if we fall, and here in the East our generals just throw our men away! They divide and scatter our armies in such a manner that we simply ask to be beaten.”

“Sh! sh!” said Warner, as he listened to the violent outbreak, so unusual on the part of the reserved and self-contained lad. “Here come two generals.”

“Two too many,” muttered Dick. A moment or two later he was ashamed of himself, not because of what he had said, but because he had said it. Then Warner seized him by the arm and pointed.

“A new general, bigger than all the rest, has come,” he said, “and although I've never seen him before I know with mathematical certainty that it's General John Pope, commander-in-chief of the Army of Virginia.”

Both Dick and Pennington knew instinctively that Warner was right. General Pope, a strongly built man in early middle years, surrounded by a brilliant staff,

rode into a little glade in the midst of the troops, and summoned to him the leading officers who had taken part in the battle.

Dick and his two comrades stood on one side, but they could not keep from hearing what was said and done. In truth they did not seek to avoid hearing, nor did many of the young privates who stood near and who considered themselves quite as good as their officers.

Pope, florid and full-faced, was in a fine humor. He complimented the officers on their valor, spoke as if they had won a victory—which would have been a fact had others done their duty—and talked slightingly of Jackson. The men of the west would show this man his match in the art of war.

Dick listened to it all with bitterness in his heart. He had no doubt that Pope was brave, and he could see that he was confident. Yet it took something more than confidence to defeat an able enemy. What had become of those gray horsemen in the bush? They had appeared once and they could appear again. He had believed that Jackson himself was at hand, and he still believed it. His eyes shifted from Pope to the dark woods, which, with their thick foliage, turned back the moonlight.

"George," he whispered to Warner, "do you think you can see anything among those trees?"

"I can make out dimly one or two figures, which no doubt are our scouts. Ah-h!"

The long "Ah-h!" was drawn by a flash and the report of a rifle. A second and a third report came, and then the crash of a heavy fire. The scouts and sentinels came running in, reporting that a great force with batteries, presumably the whole army of Jackson, was at hand.

A deep murmur ran through the Union army, but there was no confusion. The long hours of fighting had habituated them to danger. They were also too tired to become excited, and in addition, they were of as stern stuff at night as they had been in the morning. They were ready to fight again.

Formidable columns of troops appeared through the woods, their bayonets glistening in the moonlight. The heavy rifle fire began once more, although it was nearly midnight, and then came the deep thunder of cannon, sending round shot and shells among the Union troops. But the men in blue, harried beyond endurance, fought back fiercely. They shared the feelings of Pennington. They felt that they had been persecuted, that this thing had grown inhuman, and they used rifles and cannon with astonishing vigor and energy.

Two heavy Union batteries replied to the Southern cannon, raking the woods

with shell, round shot and grape, and Dick concluded that in the face of so much resolution Jackson would not press an attack at night, when every kind of disaster might happen in the darkness. His own regiment had lain down among the leaves, and the men were firing at the flashes on their right. Dick looked for General Pope and his brilliant staff, but he did not see them.

“Gone to bring up the reserves,” whispered Warner, who saw Dick's inquiring look.

But the Vermonter's slur was not wholly true. Pope was on his way to his main force, doubtless not really believing that Jackson himself was at hand. But the little army that he left behind fighting with renewed energy and valor broke away from the Southern grasp and continued its march toward that court house, in which the boys could see no merit. Jackson himself, knowing what great numbers were ahead, was content to swing away and seek for prey elsewhere.

They emerged from the wood toward morning and saw ahead of them great masses of troops in blue. They would have shouted with joy, but they were too tired. Besides, nearly two thousand of their men were killed or wounded, and they had no victory to celebrate.

Dick ate breakfast with his comrades. The Northern armies nearly always had an abundance of provisions, and now they were served in plenty. For the moment, the physical overcame the mental in Dick. It was enough to eat and to rest and to feel secure. Thousands of friendly faces were around them, and they would not have to fight in either day or dark for their lives. Their bones ceased to ache, and the good food and the good coffee began to rebuild the worn tissues. What did the rest matter?

After breakfast these men who had marched and fought for nearly twenty hours were told to sleep. Only one command was needed. It was August, and the dry grass and the soft earth were good enough for anybody. The three lads, each with an arm under his head, slept side by side. At noon they were still sleeping, and Colonel Winchester, as he was passing, looked at the three, but longest at Dick. His gaze was half affection, half protection, but it was not the boy alone whom he saw. He saw also his fair-haired young mother in that little town on the other side of the mountains.

While Dick still slept, the minds of men were at work. Pope's army, hitherto separated, was now called together by a battle. Troops from every direction were pouring upon the common center. The little army which had fought so gallantly the day before now amounted to only one-fourth of the whole. McDowell, Sigel and many other generals joined Pope, who, with the strange faculty of always

seeing his enemy too small, while McClellan always saw him too large, began to feed upon his own sanguine anticipations, and to regard as won the great victory that he intended to win. He sent telegrams to Washington announcing that his triumph at Cedar Run was only the first of a series that his army would soon achieve.

It was late in the afternoon when Dick awoke, and he was amazed to see that the sun was far down the western sky. But he rubbed his eyes and, remembering, knew that he had slept at least ten hours. He looked down at the relaxed figures of Warner and Pennington on either side of him. They still slumbered soundly, but he decided that they had slept long enough.

“Here, you,” he exclaimed, seizing Warner by the collar and dragging him to a sitting position, “look at the sun! Do you realize that you've lost a day out of your bright young life?”

Then he seized Pennington by the collar also and dragged him up. Both Warner and Pennington yawned prodigiously.

“If I've lost a day, and it would seem that I have, then I'm glad of it,” replied Warner. “I could afford to lose several in such a pleasant manner. I suppose a lot of Stonewall Jackson's men were shooting at me while I slept, but I was lucky and didn't know about it.”

“You talk too long,” said Pennington. “That comes of your having taught school. You could talk all day to boys younger than yourself, and they were afraid to answer back.”

“Shut up, both of you,” said Dick. “Here comes the sergeant, and I think from his look he has something to say worth hearing.”

Sergeant Whitley had cleansed the blood and dust from his face, and a handkerchief tied neatly around his head covered up the small wound there. He looked trim and entirely restored, both mentally and physically.

“Well, sergeant,” said Dick ingratiatingly, “if any thing has happened in this army you're sure to know of it. We'd have known it ourselves, but we had an important engagement with Morpheus, a world away, and we had to keep it. Now what is the news?”

“I don't know who Morpheus is,” replied the sergeant, laughing, “but I'd guess from your looks that he is another name for sleep. There is no news of anything big happenin'. We've got a great army here, and Jackson remains near our battlefield of yesterday. I should say that we number at least fifty thousand men, or about twice the rebels.”

“Then why don't we march against 'em at once?”

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders. It was not for him to tell why generals did not do things.

“I think,” he said, “that we're likely to stay here a day or two.”

“Which means,” said Dick, his alert mind interpreting at once, “that our generals don't know what to do. Why is it that they always seem paralyzed when they get in front of Stonewall Jackson? He's only a man like the rest of them!”

He spoke with perfect freedom in the presence of Sergeant Whitley, knowing that he would repeat nothing.

“A man, yes,” said Warner, in his precise manner, “but not exactly like the others. He seems to have more of the lightning flash about him. What a pity such a leader should be on the wrong side! Perhaps we'll have his equal in time.”

“Is Jackson's army just sitting still?” asked Dick.

“So far as scouts can gather, an' I've been one of them,” replied Sergeant Whitley, “it seems to be just campin'. But I wish I knew which way it was goin' to jump. I don't trust Jackson when he seems to be nappin'.”

But the good sergeant's doubts were to remain for two days at least. The two armies sat still, only two miles apart, and sentinels, as was common throughout the great war, became friendly with one another. Often they met in the woods and exchanged news and abundant criticism of generals. At last there was a truce to bury the dead who still lay upon the sanguinary field of Cedar Run.

Dick was in charge of one of these burial parties, and toward the close of the day he saw a familiar figure, also in command of a burial party, although it was in a gray uniform. His heart began to thump, and he uttered a cry of joy. The unexpected, but not the unnatural, had happened.

“Oh, Harry! Harry!” he shouted.

The strong young figure in the uniform of a lieutenant in the Southern army turned in surprise at the sound of a familiar voice, and stood, staring.

“Dick! Dick Mason!” he cried. Then the two sprang forward and grasped the hands of each other. There was no display of emotion—they were of the stern American stock, taught not to show its feelings—but their eyes showed their gladness.

“Harry,” said Dick, “I knew that you had been with Jackson, but I had no way of knowing until a moment ago that you were yet alive.”

“Nor I you, Dick. I thought you were in the west.”

“I was, but after Shiloh, some of us came east to help. It seemed after the Seven Days that we were needed more here than in the west.”

“You never said truer words, Dick. They'll need you and many more thousands like you. Why, Dick, we're not led here by a man, we're led by a thunderbolt. I'm on his staff, I see him every day. He talks to me, and I talk to him. I tell you, Dick, it's a wonderful thing to serve such a genius. You can't beat him! His kind appears only a few times in the ages. He always knows what's to be done and he does it. Even if your generals knew what ought to be done, most likely they'd do something else.”

Harry's face glowed with enthusiasm as he spoke of his hero, and Dick, looking at him, shook his head sadly.

“I'm afraid that what you say is true for the present at least, Harry,” he said. “You beat us now here in the east, but don't forget that we're winning in the west. And don't forget that here in the east even, you can never wear us out. We'll be coming, always coming.”

“All right, old Sober Sides, we won't quarrel about it. We'll let time settle it. Here come some friends of mine whom I want you to know. Curious that you should meet them at such a time.”

Two other young lieutenants in gray uniforms at the head of burial parties came near in the course of their work, and Harry called to them.

“Tom! Arthur! A moment, please! This is my cousin, Dick Mason, a Yankee, though I think he's honest in his folly. Dick, this is Arthur St. Clair, and this is Tom Langdon, both friends of mine from South Carolina.”

They shook hands warmly. There was no animosity between them. Dick liked the looks and manners of Harry's friends. He could have been their friend, too.

“Harry has talked about you often,” said Happy Tom Langdon. “Says you're a great scholar, and a good fellow, all right every way, except the crack in your head that makes you a Yankee. I hope you won't get hurt in this unpleasantness, and when our victorious army comes into Washington we'll take good care of you and release you soon.”

Dick smiled. He liked this youth who could keep up the spirit of fun among such scenes.

“Don't you pay any attention to Langdon, Mr. Mason,” said St. Clair. “If he'd only fight as well and fast as he talks there'd be no need for the rest of us.”

“You know you couldn't win the war without me,” said Langdon.

They talked a little more together, then trumpets blew, the work was done and

they must withdraw to their own armies. They had been engaged in a grewsome task, but Dick was glad to the bottom of his heart to have been sent upon it. He had learned that Harry still lived, and he had met him. He did not understand until then how dear his cousin was to him. They were more like brothers than cousins. It was like the affection their great-grandfathers, Henry Ware and Paul Cotter, had felt for each other, although those famous heroes of the border had always fought side by side, while their descendants were compelled to face each other across a gulf.

They shook hands and withdrew slowly. At the edge of the field, Dick turned to wave another farewell, and he found that Harry, actuated by the same motive at the same time, had also turned to make a like gesture. Each waved twice, instead of once, and then they disappeared among the woods. Dick returned to Colonel Winchester.

“While we were under the flag of truce I met my cousin, Harry Kenton,” he said.

“One of the lucky fortunes of war.”

“Yes, sir, I was very glad to see him. I did not know how glad I was until I came away. He says that we can never beat Jackson, that nothing but death can ever stop him.”

“Youth often deceives itself, nor is age any exception. Never lose hope, Dick.”

“I don't mean to do so, sir.”

The next morning, when Dick was with one of the outposts, a man of powerful build, wonderfully quick and alert in his movements, appeared. His coming was so quick and silent that he seemed to rise from the earth, and Dick was startled. The man's face was uncommon. His features were of great strength, the eyes being singularly vivid and penetrating. He was in civilian's dress, but he promptly showed a pass from General Pope, and Dick volunteered to take him to headquarters, where he said he wished to go.

Dick became conscious as they walked along that the man was examining him minutely with those searching eyes of his which seemed to look one through and through.

“You are Lieutenant Richard Mason,” said the stranger presently, “and you have a cousin, Harry Kenton, also a lieutenant, but in the army of Stonewall Jackson.”

Dick stared at him in amazement.

“Everything you say is true,” he said, “but how did you know it?”

“It's my business to know. Knowledge is my sole pursuit in this great war, and a most engrossing and dangerous task I find it. Yet, I would not leave it. My name is Shepard, and I am a spy. You needn't shrink. I'm not ashamed of my occupation. Why should I be? I don't kill. I don't commit any violence. I'm a guide and educator. I and my kind are the eyes of an army. We show the generals where the enemy is, and we tell them his plans. An able and daring spy is worth more than many a general. Besides, he takes the risk of execution, and he can win no glory, for he must always remain obscure, if not wholly unknown. Which, then, makes the greater sacrifice for his country, the spy or the general?”

“You give me a new point of view. I had not thought before how spies risked so much for so little reward.”

Shepard smiled. He saw that in spite of his logic Dick yet retained that slight feeling of aversion. The boy left him, when they arrived at headquarters, but the news that Shepard brought was soon known to the whole army.

Jackson had left his camp. He was gone again, disappeared into the ether. “Retreated” was the word that Pope at once seized upon, and he sent forth happy bulletins. Shepard and other scouts and spies reported a day or two later that Jackson's army was on the Rapidan, one of the numerous Virginia rivers. Then Dick accompanied Colonel Winchester, who was sent by rail to Washington with dispatches.

He did not find in the capital the optimism that reigned in the mind of Pope. McClellan was withdrawing his army from Virginia, but the eyes of the nation were turned toward Pope. Many who had taken deep thought of the times and of men, were more alarmed about Pope than he was about himself. They did not like those jubilant dispatches from “Headquarters in the Saddle.” There was ominous news that Lee himself was marching north, and that he and Jackson would soon be together. Anxious eyes scanned the hills about Washington. The enemy had been very near once before, and he might soon be near again.

Dick had an hour of leisure, and he wandered into an old hotel, at which many great men had lived. They would point to Henry Clay's famous chair in the lobby, and the whole place was thick with memories of Webster, Calhoun and others who had seemed almost demigods to their own generation.

But a different crowd was there now. They were mostly paunchy men who talked of contracts and profits. One, to whom the others paid deference, was fat, heavy and of middle age, with a fat, heavy face and pouches under his eyes. His small eyes were set close together, but they sparkled with shrewdness and cunning.

The big man presently noticed the lad who was sitting quietly in one of the chairs against the wall. Dick's was an alien presence there, and doubtless this fact had attracted his attention.

“Good day to you,” said the stranger in a bluff, deep voice. “I take it from your uniform, your tan and your thinness that you've come from active service.”

“In both the west and the east,” replied Dick politely. “I was at Shiloh, but soon afterward I was transferred with my regiment to the east.”

“Ah, then, of course, you know what is going on in Virginia?”

“No more than the general public does. I was at Cedar Run, which both we and the rebels claim as a victory.”

The man instantly showed a great increase of interest.

“Were you?” he said. “My own information says that Banks and Pope were surprised by Jackson and that the rebel general has merely drawn off to make a bigger jump. Did you get that impression?”

“Will you tell me why you ask me these questions?” said Dick in the same polite tone.

“Because I've a big stake in the results out there. My name is John Watson, and I'm supplying vast quantities of shoes and clothing to our troops.”

Dick turned up the sole of one of his shoes and picked thoughtfully at a hole half way through the sole. Little pieces of paper came out.

“I bought these, Mr. Watson, from a sutler in General Pope's army,” he said. “I wonder if they came from you?”

A deeper tint flushed the contractor's cheeks, but in a moment he threw off anger.

“A good joke,” he said jovially. “I see that you're ready of wit, despite your youth. No, those are not my shoes. I know dishonest men are making great sums out of supplies that are defective or short. A great war gives such people many opportunities, but I scorn them. I'll not deny that I seek a fair profit, but my chief object is to serve my country. Do you ever reflect, my young friend, that the men who clothe and feed an army have almost as much to do with winning the victory as the men who fight?”

“I've thought of it,” said Dick, wondering what the contractor had in mind.

“What regiment do you belong to, if I may ask? My motive in asking these questions is wholly good.”

“One commanded by Colonel Winchester, recently sent from the west. We've

been in only one battle in the east, that fought at Cedar Run against Jackson."

Watson again looked at Dick intently. The boy felt that he was being measured and weighed by a man of uncommon perceptions. Whatever might be his moral quality there could be no question of his ability.

"I am, as I told you before," said Watson, "a servant of my country. A man who feeds and clothes the soldiers well is a patriot, while he who feeds and clothes them badly is a mere money grubber."

He paused, as if he expected Dick to say something, but the boy was silent and he went on:

"It is to the interest of the country that it be served well in all departments, particularly in the tremendous crisis that we now face. Yet the best patriot cannot always get a chance to serve. He needs friends at court, as they say. Now this colonel of yours, Colonel Winchester—I've observed both him and you, although I approached you as if I'd never heard of either of you before—is a man of character and influence. Certain words from him at the right time would be of great value, nor would his favorite aide suffer through bringing the matter to his attention."

Dick saw clearly now, but he was not impulsive. Experience was teaching him, while yet a boy, to speak softly.

"The young aide of whom you speak," he said, "would never think of mentioning such a matter to the colonel, of whom you also speak, and even if he should, the colonel wouldn't listen to him for a moment."

Watson shrugged his shoulders slightly, but made no other gesture of displeasure.

"Doubtless you are well informed about this aide and this colonel," he said, "but it's a pity. If more food is thrown to the sparrows than they can eat, is it any harm for other birds to eat the remainder?"

"I scarcely regard it as a study in ornithology."

"Ornithology? That's a big word, but I suppose it will serve. We'll drop the matter, and if at any time my words here should be quoted I'll promptly deny them. It's a bad thing for a boy to have his statements disputed by a man of years who can command wealth and other powerful influences. Unless he had witnesses nobody would believe the boy. I tell you this, my lad, partly for your own good, because I'm inclined to like you."

Dick stared. There was nothing insulting in the man's tone. He seemed to be thoroughly in earnest. Perhaps he regarded his point of view as right, and Dick, a

boy of thought and resource, saw that it was not worth while to make a quarrel. But he resolved to remember Watson, feeling that the course of events might bring them together again.

“I suppose it's as you say,” he said. “You're a man of affairs and you ought to know.”

Watson smiled at him. Dick felt that the contractor had been telling the truth when he said that he was inclined to like him. Perhaps he was honest and supplied good materials, when others supplied bad.

“You will shake hands with me, Mr. Mason,” he said. “You think that I will be hostile to you, but maybe some day I can prove myself your friend. Young soldiers often need friends.”

His eyes twinkled and his smile widened. In spite of his appearance and his proposition, something winning had suddenly appeared in the manner of this man. Dick found himself shaking hands with him.

“Good-bye, Mr. Mason,” said Watson. “It may be that we shall meet on the field, although I shall not be within range of the guns.”

He left the lobby of the hotel, and Dick was rather puzzled. It was his first thought to tell Colonel Winchester about him, but he finally decided that Watson's own advice to him to keep silent was best. He and Colonel Winchester took the train from Washington the next day, and on the day after were with Pope's army on the Rapidan.

Dick detected at once a feeling of excitement or tension in this army, at least among the young officers with whom he associated most. They felt that a storm of some kind was gathering, either in front or on their flank. McClellan's army was now on the transports, leaving behind the Virginia that he had failed to conquer, and Pope's, with a new commander, was not yet in shape. The moment was propitious for Lee and Jackson to strike, and the elusive Jackson was lost again.

“Our scouts discover nothing,” said Warner to Dick. “The country is chockfull of hostility to us. Not a soul will tell us a word. We have to see a thing with our own eyes before we know it's there, but the people, the little children even, take news to the rebels. A veil is hung before us, but there is none before them.”

“There is one man who is sure to find out about Jackson.”

“Who?”

Dick's only answer was a shake of the head. But he was thinking of Shepard. He did not see him about the camp, and he had no doubt that he was gone on

another of his dangerous missions. Meanwhile newspapers from New York and other great cities reflected the doubts of the North. They spoke of Pope's grandiloquent dispatches, and they wondered what had become of Lee and Jackson.

Dick, an intense patriot, passed many bitter moments. He, like others, felt that the hand upon the reins was not sure. Instead of finding the enemy and assailing him with all their strength, they were waiting in doubt and alarm to fend off a stroke that would come from some unknown point out of the dark.

The army now lay in one of the finest parts of Virginia, a region of picturesque mountains, wide and fertile valleys, and of many clear creeks and rivers coming down from the peaks and ridges. To one side lay a great forest, known as the Wilderness, destined, with the country near it, to become the greatest battlefield of the world. Here, the terrible battles of the Second Manassas, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness, Spottsylvania, and others less sanguinary, but great struggles, nevertheless, were to be fought.

But these were yet in the future, and Dick, much as his eyes had been opened, did not yet dream how tremendous the epic combat was to be. He only knew that to-day it was the middle of August, the valleys were very hot, but it was shady and cool on the hills and mountains. He knew, too, that he was young, and that pessimism and gloom could not abide long with him.

He and Warner and Pennington had good horses, in place of those that they had lost at Cedar Run, and often they rode to the front to see what might be seen of the enemy, which at present was nothing. Their battlefield at Cedar Run had been reoccupied by Northern troops and Pope was now confirmed in his belief that his men had won a victory there. And this victory was to be merely a prelude to another and far greater one.

As they rode here and there in search of the enemy, Dick came upon familiar ground. Once more he saw the field of Manassas which had been lost so hardly the year before. He remembered every hill and brook and curve of the little river, because they had been etched into his brain with steel and fire. How could anyone forget that day?

“Looks as if we might fight our battle of last year over again, but on a much bigger scale,” he said to Warner.

“Here or hereabouts,” said the Vermonter, “and I think we ought to win. They've got the better generals, but we've got more men. Besides, our troops are becoming experienced and they've shown their mettle. Dick, here's a farmer gathering corn. Let's ask him some questions, but I'll wager you a hundred to one

before we begin that he knows absolutely nothing about the rebel army. In fact, I doubt that he will know of its existence."

"I won't take your bet," said Dick.

They called to the man, a typical Virginia farmer in his shirt sleeves, tall and spare, short whiskers growing under his chin. There was not much difference between him and his brother farmer in New England.

"Good-day," said Warner.

"Good-day."

"You seem to be working hard."

"I've need to do it. Farm hands are scarce these days."

"Farming is hard work."

"Yes; but it's a lot safer than some other kinds men are doin' nowadays."

"True, no doubt, but have you seen anything of the army?"

"What army?"

"The one under Lee and Jackson, the rebel army."

"I ain't heard of no rebel army, mister. I don't know of any such people as rebels."

"You call it the Confederate army. Can you tell us anything about the Confederate army?"

"What Confederate army, mister? I heard last month when I went in to the court house that there was more than one of them."

"I mean the one under Lee and Jackson."

"That's cur'us. A man come ridin' 'long here three or four weeks ago. Mebbe he was a lightnin' rod agent an' mebbe he had patent medicines to sell, he didn't say, but he did tell me that General Jackson was in one place an General Lee was in another. Now which army do you mean?"

"That was nearly a month ago. They are together now."

"Then, mister, if you know so much more about it than I do, what are you askin' me questions for?"

"But I want to know about Lee and Jackson. Have you seen them?"

"Lord bless you, mister, them big generals don't come visitin' the likes o' me. You kin see my house over thar among the trees. You kin search it if you want to, but you won't find nothin'."

"I don't want to search your house. You can't hide a great army in a house. I

want to know if you've seen the Southern Army. I want to know if you've heard anything about it."

"I ain't seed it. My sight's none too good, mister. Sometimes the blazin' sun gits in my eyes and kinder blinds me for a long time. Then, too, I'm bad of hearin'; but I'm a powerful good sleeper. When I sleep I don't hear nothin', of course, an' nothin' wakes me up. I just sleep on, sometimes dreamin' beautiful dreams. A million men wouldn't wake me, an' mebbe a dozen armies or so have passed in the night while I was sleepin' so good. I'd tell you anything I know, but them that knows nothin' has nothin' to tell."

Warner's temper, although he had always practiced self-control, had begun to rise, but he checked it, seeing that it would be a mere foolish display of weakness in the face of the blank wall that confronted him.

"My friend," he said with gravity, "I judge from the extreme ignorance you display concerning great affairs that you sleep a large part of the time."

"Mebbe so, an' mebbe not. I most gen'ally sleep when I'm sleepy. I've heard tell there was a big war goin' on in these parts, but this is my land, an' I'm goin' to stay on it."

"A good farmer, if not a good patriot. Good day."

"Good day."

They rode on and, in spite of themselves, laughed.

"I'm willing to wager that he knows a lot about Lee and Jackson," said Warner, "but the days of the rack and the thumbscrew passed long ago, and there is no way to make him tell."

"No," said Dick, "but we ought to find out for ourselves."

Nevertheless, they discovered nothing. They saw no trace of a Southern soldier, nor did they hear news of any, and toward nightfall they rode back toward the army, much disappointed. The sunset was of uncommon beauty. The hot day was growing cool. Pleasant shadows were creeping up in the east. In the west a round mountain shouldered its black bulk against the sky. Dick looked at it vaguely. He had heard it called Clark's Mountain, and it was about seven miles away from the Union army which lay behind the Rapidan River.

Dick liked mountains, and the peak looked beautiful against the red and yellow bars of the western horizon.

"Have you ever been over there?" he said to Pennington and Warner.

"No; but a lot of our scouts have," replied Pennington. "It's just a mountain and nothing more. Funny how all those peaks and ridges crop up suddenly

around here out of what seems meant to have been a level country."

"I like it better because it isn't level," said Dick. "I'm afraid George and I wouldn't care much for your prairie country which just rolls on forever, almost without trees and clear running streams."

"You would care for it," said Pennington stoutly. "You'd miss at first the clear rivers and creeks, but then the spell of it would take hold of you. The air you breathe isn't like the air you breathe anywhere else."

"We've got some air of our own in Vermont that we could brag about, if we wanted to," said Warner, defiantly.

"It's good, but not as good as ours. And then the vast distances, the great spaces take hold of you. And there's the sky so high and so clear. When you come away from the great plains you feel cooped up anywhere else."

Pennington spoke with enthusiasm, his nostrils dilating and his eyes flashing. Dick was impressed.

"When the war's over I'm going out there to see your plains," he said.

"Then you're coming to see me!" exclaimed Pennington, with all the impulsive warmth of youth. "And George here is coming with you. I won't show you any mountains like the one over there, but boys, west of the Platte River, when I was with my father and some other men I watched for three days a buffalo herd passing. The herd was going north and all the time it stretched so far from east to west that it sank under each horizon. There must have been millions of them. Don't you think that was something worth seeing?"

"We're surely coming," said Dick, "and you be equally sure to have your buffalo herd ready for us when we come."

"It'll be there."

"Meanwhile, here we are at the Rapidan," said the practical Warner, "and beyond it is our army. Look at that long line of fires, boys. Aren't they cheering? A fine big army like ours ought to beat off anything. We almost held our own with Jackson himself at Cedar Run, and he had two to one."

"We will win! We're bound to win!" said Dick, with sudden access of hope. "We'll crush Lee and Jackson, and next summer you and I, George, will be out on the western plains with Frank, watching the buffalo millions go thundering by!"

They forded the Rapidan and rejoined their regiment with nothing to tell. But it was cheerful about the fires. Optimism reigned once more in the Army of Virginia. McClellan had sent word to Pope that he would have plenty of soldiers

to face the attack that now seemed to be threatened by the South. Brigades from the Army of the Potomac would make the Army of Virginia invincible.

Dick having nothing particular to do, sat late with his comrades before one of the finest of the fires, and he read only cheerful omens in the flames. It was a beautiful night. The moon seemed large and near, and the sky was full of dancing stars. In the clear night Dick saw the black bulk of Clark's Mountain off there against the horizon, but he could not see what was behind it.

CHAPTER III. BESIDE THE RIVER

Dick was on duty early in the morning when he saw a horseman coming at a gallop toward the Rapidan. The man was in civilian clothing, but his figure seemed familiar. The boy raised his glasses, and he saw at once that it was Shepard. He saw, too, that he was urging his horse to its utmost speed.

The boy's heart suddenly began to throb, and there was a cold, prickling sensation at the roots of his hair. Shepard had made an extraordinary impression upon him and he did not believe that the man would be coming at such a pace unless he came with great news.

He saw Shepard stop, give the pass word to the pickets, then gallop on, ford the river and come straight toward the heart of the army. Dick ran forward and met him.

“What is it?” he cried.

“General Pope's tent! Where it is! I can't wait a minute.”

Dick pointed toward a big marquee, standing in an open space, and Shepard leaping from his horse and abandoning it entirely, ran toward the marquee. A word or two to the sentinels, and he disappeared inside.

Dick, devoured with curiosity and anxiety, went to Colonel Winchester with the story of what he had seen.

“I know of Shepard,” said the colonel. “He is the best and most daring spy in the whole service of the North. I think you're right in inferring that he rides so fast for good cause.”

Shepard remained with the commander-in-chief a quarter of an hour. When he came forth from the tent he regained his horse and rode away without a word, going in the direction of Clark's Mountain. But his news was quickly known, because it was of a kind that could not be concealed. Pennington came running with it to the regiment, his face flushed and his eyes big.

“Look! Look at the mountain!” he exclaimed.

“I see it,” said Warner. “I saw it there yesterday, too, in exactly the same place.”

“So did I, but there's something behind it. Lee and Jackson are there with sixty or eighty thousand men! The whole Southern army is only six or seven miles away.”

Even Warner's face changed.

“How do you know this?” he asked.

“A spy has seen their army. They say he is a man whose reports are never false. At any rate orders have already been issued for us to retreat and I hear that we're going back until we reach the Rappahannock, behind which we will camp.”

Dick knew very well now that it was Shepard who brought the news, and Pennington's report about the retreat was also soon verified. The whole army was soon in motion and a feeling of depression replaced the optimism of the night before. The advance had been turned into a retreat. Were they to go back and forth in this manner forever? But Colonel Winchester spoke hopefully to his young aides and said that the retreat was right.

“We're drawing out of a trap,” he said, “and time is always on our side. The South to win has to hit hard and fast, and in this case the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Virginia may join before Lee and Jackson can come up.”

The lads tried to reconcile themselves, but nevertheless they did not like retreat. Dick with his powerful glasses often looked back toward the dark bulk of Clark's Mountain. He saw nothing there, nor anything in the low country between, save the rear ranks of the Union army marching on.

But Shepard had been right. Lee and Jackson, advancing silently and with every avenue of news guarded, were there behind the mountain with sixty thousand men, flushed with victories, and putting a supreme faith in their great commanders who so well deserved their trust. The men of the valley and the Seven Days, wholly confident, asked only to be led against Pope and his army, and most of them expected a battle that very day, while the Northern commander was slipping from the well-laid trap.

Pope's judgment in this case was good and fortune, too, favored him. Before the last of his men had left the Rapidan Lee himself, with his staff officers, climbed to the summit of Clark's Mountain. They were armed with the best of glasses, but drifting fogs coming down from the north spread along the whole side of the mountain and hung like a curtain between it and the retreating army. None of their glasses could pierce the veil, and it was not until nearly night that rising winds caught the fog and took it away. Then Lee and his generals saw a vast cloud of dust in the northwest and they knew that under it marched Pope's retreating army.

The Southern army was at once ordered forward in pursuit and in the night the vanguard, wading the Rapidan, followed eagerly. Dick and his comrades did not

know then that they were followed so closely, but they were destined to know it before morning. The regiment of Colonel Winchester, one of the best and bravest in the whole service, formed a part of the rearguard, and Dick, Warner and Pennington rode with their chief.

The country was broken and they crossed small streams. Sometimes they were in open fields, and again they passed through long stretches of forest. There was a strong force of cavalry with the regiment, and the beat of the horses' hoofs made a steady rolling sound which was not unpleasant.

But Dick found the night full of sinister omens. They had left the Rapidan in such haste that there was still a certain confusion of impressions. The gigantic scale of everything took hold of him. One hundred and fifty thousand men, or near it, were marching northward in two armies which could not be many miles apart. The darkness and the feeling of tragedy soon to come oppressed him.

He listened eagerly for the sounds of pursuit, but the long hours passed and he heard nothing. The rear guard did not talk. The men wasted no strength that way, but marched stolidly on in the moonlight. Midnight passed and after a while it grew darker. Colonel Winchester and his young officers rode at the very rear, and Pennington suddenly held up his hand.

“What is it?” asked Colonel Winchester.

“Somebody following us, sir. I was trained out on the plains to take notice of such things. May I get down and put my ear to the ground? I may look ridiculous, sir, but I can make sure.”

“Certainly. Go ahead.”

Pennington sprang down and put his ear to the road. He did not listen long, but when he stood up again he said:

“Horsemen are coming. I can't tell how many, but several hundreds at least.”

“As we're the very last of our own army, they must be Southern cavalry,” said Colonel Winchester. “If they want to attack, I dare say our boys are willing.”

Very soon they heard clearly the gallop of the cavalry, and the men heard it also. They looked up and turned their faces toward those who must be foes. Despite the dimness Dick saw their eyes brighten. Colonel Winchester had judged rightly. The boys were willing.

The rear guard turned back and waited, and in a few minutes the Southern horsemen came in sight, opening fire at once. Their infantry, too, soon appeared in the woods and fields and the dark hours before the dawn were filled with the crackle of small arms.

Dick kept close to Colonel Winchester who anxiously watched the pursuit, throwing his own regiment across the road, and keeping up a heavy fire on the enemy. The Union loss was not great as most of the firing in the dusk, of necessity, was at random, and Dick heard bullets whistling all about him. Some times the bark flew from trees and now and then there was a rain of twigs, shorn from the branches by the showers of missiles.

It was arduous work. The men were worn by the darkness, the uncertainty and the incessant pursuit. The Northern rear guard presented a strong front, retreating slowly with its face to the enemy, and always disputing the road. Dick meanwhile could hear through the crash of the firing the deep rumble of Pope's great army with its artillery and thousands of wagons continually marching toward the Rappahannock. His mind became absorbed in a vital question. Would Lee and Jackson come up before they could reach the bigger river? Would a battle be forced the next day while the Union army was in retreat? He confided his anxieties to Warner who rode by his side.

“I take it that it's only a vanguard that's pursuing us,” said the Vermonter. “If they were in great force they'd have been pushing harder and harder. We must have got a good start before Lee and Jackson found us out. We know our Jackson, Dick, and he'd have been right on top of us without delay.”

“That's right, George. It must be their cavalry mostly. I suppose Jeb Stuart is there leading them. At any rate we'll soon know better what's doing. Look there toward the east. Don't you see a ray of light behind that hill?”

“I see it, Dick.”

“Is it the first ray of the morning, or is it just a low star?”

“It's the dawn, Dick, and mighty glad I am to see it. Look how fast it comes!”

The sun shot up, over the hill. The sky turning to silver soon gave way to gold, and the clear August light poured in a flood over the rolling country.

Dick saw ahead of him a vast cloud of dust extending miles from east to west, marking where the army of Pope pushed on its retreat to the Rappahannock. There was no need to search for the Northern force. The newest recruit would know that it was here.

The Southern vanguard was behind them and not many hundred yards away. Dick distinctly saw the cavalry, riding along the road, and hundreds of skirmishers pushing through the woods and fields. He judged that the force did not number many thousands and that it could not think of assailing the whole Union army. But with the coming of day the vigor of the attack increased. The skirmishers fired from the shelter of every tree stump, fence or hillock and the

bullets pattered about Dick and his comrades.

The Union rear guard maintained its answering fire, but as it was retreating it was at a disadvantage. The regiments began to suffer. Many men were wounded. The fire became most galling. A sudden charge by the rearguard was ordered and it was made with spirit. The Southern van was driven back, but when the retreat was resumed the skirmishers and the cavalry came forward again, always firing at their retreating foe.

“I judge that it's going to be a very hot morning,” said Colonel Winchester, wiping away a few drops of blood, where a bullet had barely touched his face. “I think the wind of that bullet hurt me more than its kiss. There will be no great battle to-day. We can see now that they are not yet in strong enough force, but we'll never know a minute's rest until we're behind the Rappahannock. Oh, Dick, if McClellan's army were only here also! This business of retreating is as bitter as death itself!”

Dick saw the pain on his colonel's face and it was reflected on his own.

“I feel it, sir, in the same way. Our men are just as eager as the Johnnies to fight and they are as brave and tenacious. What do you think will happen, sir?”

“We'll reach the Rappahannock and take refuge behind it. We command the railroad bridge there, and can cross and destroy it afterward. But the river is broad and deep with high banks and the army of the enemy cannot possibly force the passage in any way while we defend it.”

“And after that, sir?”

“God alone knows. Look out, Dick, those men are aiming at us!”

Colonel Winchester seized the bridle of Dick's horse and pulled him violently to one side, pulling his own horse in the same direction in the same manner. The bullets of half a dozen Southern skirmishers, standing under the boughs of a beech tree less than two hundred yards away, hissed angrily by them.

“A close call,” said the colonel. “There, they've been scattered by our own riflemen and one of them remains to pay the toll.”

The reply of the Northern skirmishers had been quick, and the gray figure lying prone by the trunk of the tree told Dick that the colonel had been right. He was shaken by a momentary shudder, but he could not long remember one among so many. They rode on, leaving the prone figure out of sight, and the Southern cavalry and skirmishers pressed forward afresh.

Many of the Union men had food in their saddle bags, and supplies were sent back for those who did not have it. Colonel Winchester who was now thoroughly

cool, advised his officers to eat, even if they felt no hunger.

“I'm hungry enough,” said Pennington to Dick. “Out on the plains, where the air is so fresh and so full of life I was always hungry, and I suppose I brought my appetite here with me. Dick, I've opened a can of cove oysters, and that's a great deal for a fellow on horseback to do. Here, take your share, and they'll help out that dry bread you're munching.”

Dick accepted with thanks. He learned that he, too, could eat with a good appetite while bullets were knocking up dust only twenty yards away. Meanwhile there was a steady flash of firing from every wood and cornfield behind them.

As he ate he watched and he saw an amazing panorama. Miles in front the great cloud of dust, cutting across from horizon to horizon swelled slowly on toward the Rappahannock. Behind them rode the Southern cavalry and masses of infantry were pressing forward, too. Far off on either flank rolled the pleasant country, its beauty heightened by the loom of blue mountains.

Colonel Winchester had predicted truly. The fighting between the Northern rearguard, and the Southern vanguard never ceased. Every moment the bullets were whistling, and occasionally a cannon lent its deep roar to the crackling fire of the rifles. Daring detachments of the Southern cavalry often galloped up and charged lagging regiments. And they were driven off with equal courage and daring.

The three boys took especial notice of those cavalry bands and began to believe at last that they could identify the very men in them. Dick looked for his cousin, Harry Kenton. He was sure that he would be there in the front—but he did not see him. Instead he saw after a while an extraordinary figure on a large black horse, a large man in magnificent uniform, with a great plume in his hat. He was nearer to them than any other Southern horseman, and he seemed to be indifferent to danger.

“Look! look! There's Jeb Stuart!” exclaimed Dick. He had heard so much about the famous Stuart and his gorgeous uniform that he knew him instinctively, and, Warner and Pennington, as their eyes followed his pointing finger felt the same conviction.

Three of the Northern riflemen fired at once at the conspicuous target, and Dick breathed a little sigh of relief when all their bullets missed. Then the brilliant figure turned to one side and was lost in the smoke.

“Well,” said Pennington. “We've seen Stonewall Jackson and Jeb Stuart both in battle against us. I wonder who will come next.”

“Lee is due,” said Warner, “but I doubt whether his men will let him expose himself in such a way. We'll have to slip under cover to get a chance of seeing him.”

The hours went on, and the fight between rear guard and vanguard never ceased. That column of dust miles long was at the same distance in front, continuing in its slow course for the river, but the foes in contact were having plenty of dust showers of their own. Dick's throat and mouth burned with the dust and heat of the pitiless August day, and his bones ached with the tension and the long hours in the saddle. But his spirit was high. They were holding off the Southern cavalry and he felt that they would continue to do so.

About noon he ate more cold food, and then rode on, while the sun blazed and blazed and the dust whirled in clouds like the “dust devils” of the desert, continually spitting forth bullets instead of sand. Late in the afternoon he heard the sound of many trumpets, and saw the Southern cavalry getting together in a great mass. A warning ran instantly among the Union troops and the horsemen in blue and one or two infantry regiments drew closer together.

“They're going to charge in force,” said Colonel Winchester to Dick. “See, our rearguard has lost touch with our main army, leaving a side opening between. They see this chance and intend to make the most of it.”

“But our men are willing and anxious to meet them,” said Dick. “You can see it in their faces.”

He had made no mistake, as the fire in their rear deepened, and they saw the gathering squadrons of gray cavalry, a fierce anger seized the retreating Union rearguard. Those wasps had been buzzing and stinging them all day long and they had had enough of it. They could fight, and they would, if their officers would let them. Now it seemed that the officers were willing.

A deep and menacing mutter of satisfaction ran along the whole line. They would show the Southerners what kind of men they were. Colonel Winchester drew his infantry regiment into a small wood which at that point skirted the road.

“There is no doubt that we've found it at the right time,” said Warner.

Both knew that the forest would protect the infantry from the fierce charges of the Southern cavalry, while proving no obstacle to the Northern defense. His own cavalry was gathering in the road ready to meet Jeb Stuart and his squadrons.

The three boys sat on their horses within the covering of the trees, and watched eagerly, while the hostile forces massed for battle. The Southern cavalry was supported by infantry also on its flanks, and once again Dick caught sight of

Jeb Stuart with his floating plume. But that time he was too far away for any of the Northern riflemen to reach him with a bullet, and as before he disappeared quickly in the clouds of dust and smoke which never ceased to float over both forces.

“Look out! The charge!” suddenly exclaimed Colonel Winchester.

They heard the thunder of the galloping horses, and also the flash of many rifles and carbines. Cavalry met cavalry but the men in gray reeled back, and as they retreated the Northern infantry in the wood sent a deadly fire into the flank of the attacking force. The Southern infantry replied, and a fierce battle raged along the road and through the woods. Dick heard once more the rattling of bullets on bark, and felt the twigs falling upon his face as they were shorn off by the missiles.

“We hold the road and we'll hold it for a while,” exclaimed Colonel Winchester, exultation showing in his tone.

“Why can't we hold it all the time?” Dick could not refrain from asking.

“Because we are retreating and the Southerners are continually coming up, while our army wishes to go away.”

Dick glanced through the trees and saw that great clouds of dust still were rolling toward the northwest. It must be almost at the Rappahannock now, and he began to appreciate what this desperate combat in the woods meant. They were holding back the Southern army, while their men could cross the river and reform behind it.

The battle swayed back and forth, and it was most desperate between the cavalry. The bugles again and again called the gray horsemen to the charge, and although the blue infantry supported their own horsemen with a heavy rifle fire, and held the wood undaunted, the Northern rear guard was forced to give way at last before the pressure of numbers and attacks that would not cease.

Their own bugles sounded the retreat and they began to retire slowly.

“Do we run again?” exclaimed Pennington, a tear ploughing its way through the smoky grime on his cheek.

“No, we don't run,” replied Warner calmly, “We're forced back, and the rebels will claim a victory but we haven't fought for nothing. Lee and Jackson will never get up in time to attack our army before it's over the river.”

The regiment began its slow retreat. It had not suffered much, owing to the shelter of the forest, and, full of courage and resolution, it was a formidable support on the flank of the slowly retreating cavalry.

The evening was now at hand. The sun was setting once more over the Virginia hills destined to be scarred so deeply by battle, but attack and defense went on. As night came the thudding of cannon added to the tumult, and then the three boys saw the Rappahannock, a deep and wide stream flowing between high banks crested with timber. Ahead of them Pope's army was crossing on the bridge and in boats, and masses of infantry supported by heavy batteries had turned to protect the crossing. The Southern vanguard could not assail such a powerful force, and before the night was over the whole Union army passed to the Northern side of the Rappahannock.

Dick felt a mixture of chagrin and satisfaction as he crossed the river, chagrin that this great army should draw back, as McClellan's had been forced to draw back at the Seven Days, and satisfaction that they were safe for the time being and could prepare for a new start.

But the feeling of exultation soon passed and gave way wholly to chagrin. They were retreating before an army not exceeding their own, in numbers, perhaps less. They had another great force, the Army of the Potomac, which should have been there, and then they could have bade defiance to Lee and Jackson. The North with its great numbers, its fine courage and its splendid patriotism should never be retreating. He felt once more as thousands of others felt that the hand on the reins was neither strong nor sure, and that the great trouble lay there. They ought not to be hiding behind a river. Lee and Jackson did not do it. Dick remembered that grim commander in the West, the silent Grant, and he did not believe he would be retreating.

Long after darkness came the firing continued between skirmishers across the stream, but finally it, too, waned and Dick was permitted to throw himself upon the ground and sleep with the sleeping thousands. Warner and Pennington slept near him and not far away was the brave sergeant. Even he was overpowered by fatigue and he slept like one dead, never stirring.

Dick was awakened next morning by the booming of cannon. He had become so much used to such sounds that he would have slept on had not the crashes been so irregular. He stood up, rubbed his eyes and then looked in the direction whence came the cannonade. He saw from the crest of a hill great numbers of Confederate troops on the other side of the river, the August sun glittering over thousands of bayonets and rifle barrels, and along the somber batteries of great guns. The firing, so far as he could determine, was merely to feel out or annoy the Northern army.

It was a strange sight to Dick, one that is not looked upon often, two great armies gazing across a river at each other, and, sure to meet, sooner or later, in

mortal combat. It was thrilling, awe-inspiring, but it made his heart miss a beat or two at the thought of the wounds and death to come, all the more terrible because those who fought together were of the same blood, and the same nation.

Warner and Pennington joined him on the height where he stood, and they saw that in the early hours before dawn the Northern generals had not been idle. The whole army of Pope was massed along the left bank of the river and every high point was crowned with heavy batteries of artillery. There had been a long drought, and at some points the Rappahannock could be forded, but not in the face of such a defence as the North here offered.

Colonel Winchester himself came a moment or two later and joined them as they gazed at the two armies and the river between. Both he and the boys used their glasses and they distinctly saw the Southern masses.

“Will they try to cross, sir?” asked Dick of the colonel.

“I don't think so, but if they do we ought to beat them back. Meanwhile, Dick, my boy, every day's delay is a fresh card in our hand. McClellan is landing his army at Aquia Creek, whence it can march in two days to a junction with us, when we would become overwhelming and irresistible. But I wish it didn't take so long to disembark an army!”

The note of anxiety in his voice did not escape Dick. “You wish then to be sure of the junction between our two armies before Lee and Jackson strike?”

“Yes, Dick. That is what is on my mind. The retreat of this army, although it may have caused us chagrin, was most opportune. It gave us two chances, when we had but one before. But, Dick, I'm afraid. I wouldn't say this to anybody but you and you must not repeat me. I wish I could divine what is in the mind of those two men, Lee and Jackson. They surely have a plan of some kind, but what is it?”

“Have we any definite news from the other side, sir?”

“Shepard came in this morning. But little ever escapes him, and he says that the whole Southern army is up. All their best leaders are there. Lee and Jackson and Longstreet and the Hills and Early and Lawton and the others. He says that they are all flushed with confidence in their own courage and fighting powers and the ability of their leaders. Oh, if only the Army of the Potomac would come! If we could only stave off battle long enough for it to reach us!”

“Don't you think we could do it, sir? Couldn't General Pope retreat on Washington then, and, as they continued to follow us, we could turn and spring on them with both armies.”

But Colonel Winchester shook his head.

“It would never do,” he said. “All Europe, eager to see the Union split, would then help the Confederacy in every possible manner. The old monarchies would say that despite our superior numbers we're not able to maintain ourselves outside the defenses of Washington. And these things would injure us in ways that we cannot afford. Remember, Dick, my boy, that this republic is the hope of the world, and that we must save it.”

“It will be done, sir,” said Dick, almost in the tone of a young prophet. “I know the spirit of the men. No matter how many defeats are inflicted upon us by our own brethren we'll triumph in the end.”

“It's my own feeling, Dick. It cannot, it must not be any other way!”

Dick remained upborne by a confidence in the future rather than in the present, and throughout the morning he remained with his comrades, under arms, but doing little, save to hear the fitful firing which ran along a front of several miles. But later in the day a heavy crash came from a ford further up the stream.

Under cover of a great artillery fire Stuart's cavalry dashed into the ford, and drove off the infantry and a battery posted to defend it. Then they triumphantly placed heavy lines of pickets about the ford on the Union side.

It was more than the Union lads could stand. A heavy mass of infantry, Colonel Winchester's regiment in the very front of it, marched forward to drive back these impertinent horsemen. They charged with so much impetuosity that Stuart's cavalry abandoned such dangerous ground. All the pickets were drawn in and they retreated in haste across the stream, the water foaming up in spurts about them beneath the pursuing bullets.

Then came a silence and a great looking back and forth. The threatening armies stared at each other across the water, but throughout the afternoon they lay idle. The pitiless August sun burned on and the dust that had been trodden up by the scores of thousands hung in clouds low, but almost motionless.

Dick went down into a little creek, emptying into the Rappahannock, and bathed his face and hands. Hundreds of others were doing the same. The water brought a great relief. Then he went back to Colonel Winchester and his comrades, and waited patiently with them until evening.

He remembered Colonel Winchester's words earlier in the day, and, as the darkness came, he began to wonder what Lee and Jackson were thinking. He believed that two such redoubtable commanders must have formed a plan by this time, and, perhaps in the end, it would be worth a hundred thousand men to know it. But he could only stare into the darkness and guess and guess. And one

guess was as good as another.

The night seemed portentous to him. It was full of sinister omens. He strove to pierce the darkness on the other shore with his eyes, and see what was going on there, but he distinguished only a black background and the dim light of fires.

Dick was not wrong. The Confederate commanders did have a plan and the omens which seemed sinister to him were sinister in fact. Jackson with his forces was marching up his side of the Rappahannock and the great brain under the old slouch hat was working hard.

When Lee and Jackson found that the Union army on the Rapidan had slipped away from them they felt that they had wasted a great opportunity to strike the retreating force before it reached the Rappahannock, and that, as they followed, the situation of the Confederacy would become most critical. They would leave McClellan and the Army of the Potomac nearer to Richmond, their own capital, than they were. Nevertheless Lee, full of daring despite his years, followed, and the dangers were growing thicker every hour around Pope.

Dick, with his regiment, moved the next morning up the river. The enemy was in plain view beyond the stream, and Shepard and the other spies reported that the Southern army showed no signs of retiring. But Shepard had said also that he would not be able to cross the river again. The hostile scouts and sharpshooters had become too vigilant. Yet he was sure that Lee and Jackson would attempt to force a passage higher up, where the drought had made good fords.

“It's well that we're showing vigilance,” said Colonel Winchester to Dick. He had fallen into the habit of talking much and confidentially to the boy, because he liked and trusted him, and for another reason which to Dick was yet in the background.

“Do you feel sure that the rebels will attempt the crossing?” asked Dick.

“Beyond a doubt. They have every reason to strike before the Army of the Potomac can come. Besides, it is in accord with the character of their generals. Both Lee and Jackson are always for the swift offensive, and Early, Longstreet and the Hills are the same way. Hear that booming ahead! They're attacking one of the fords now!”

At a ford a mile above and also at another a mile or two further on, the Southern troops had begun a heavy fire, and gathered in strong masses were threatening every moment to attempt the passage. But the Union guns posted on hills made a vigorous reply and the time passed in heavy cannonades. Colonel Winchester, his brows knitted and anxious, watched the fire of the cannon. He confided at last to his favorite aide his belief that what lay behind the cannonade

was more important than the cannonade itself.

“It must be a feint or a blind,” he said. “They fire a great deal, but they don't make any dash for the stream. Now, the rebels haven't ammunition to waste.”

“Then what do you think they're up to, sir?”

“They must be sending a heavy force higher up the river to cross where there is no resistance. And we must meet them there, with my regiment only, if we can obtain no other men.”

The colonel obtained leave to go up the Rappahannock until nightfall, but only his own regiment, now reduced to less than four hundred men, was allotted to him. In truth his division commander thought his purpose useless, but yielded to the insistence of Winchester who was known to be an officer of great merit. It seemed to the Union generals that they must defend the fords where the Southern army lay massed before them.

Dick learned that there was a little place called Sulphur Springs some miles ahead, and that the river there was spanned by a bridge which the Union cavalry had wrecked the day before. He divined at once that Colonel Winchester had that ford in mind, and he was glad to be with him on the march to it.

They left behind them the sound of the cannonade which they learned afterward was being carried on by Longstreet, and followed the course of the stream as fast as they could over the hills and through the woods. But with so many obstacles they made slow progress, and, in the close heat, the men soon grew breathless. It was also late in the afternoon and Dick was quite sure that they would not reach Sulphur Springs before nightfall.

“I've felt exactly this same air on the great plains,” said Pennington, as they stopped on the crest of a hill for the troops to rest a little. “It's heavy and close as if it were being all crowded together. It makes your lungs work twice as hard as usual, and it's also a sign.”

“Tell your sign, old weather sharp,” said Warner.

“It's simple enough. The sign may not be so strong here, but it applies just as it does on the great plains. It means that a storm is coming. Anybody could tell that. Look there, in the southwest. See that cloud edging itself over the horizon. Things will turn loose to-night. Don't you say the same, sergeant? You've been out in my country.”

Sergeant Whitley was standing near them regarding the cloud attentively.

“Yes, Mr. Pennington,” he replied. “I was out there a long time and I'd rather be there now fighting the Indians, instead of fighting our own people, although no other choice was left me. I've seen some terrible hurricanes on the plains, winds that would cut the earth as if it was done with a ploughshare, and these armies are going to be rained on mighty hard to-night.”

Dick smiled a little at the sergeant's solemn tone, and formal words, but he saw that he was very much in earnest. Nor was he one to underrate weather effects upon movements in war.

“What will it mean to the two armies, sergeant?” he asked.

“Depends upon what happens before she busts. If a rebel force is then across it's bad for us, but if it ain't the more water between us an' them the better. This, I take it, is the end of the drought, and a flood will come tumbling down from the mountains.”

The sun now darkened and the clouds gathered heavily on the Western horizon. Colonel Winchester's anxiety increased fast. It became evident that the regiment could not reach Sulphur Springs until far into the night, and, still full of alarms, he resolved to take a small detachment, chiefly of his staff, and ride forward at the utmost speed.

He chose about twenty men, including Dick, Warner, Pennington, Sergeant Whitley, and another veteran who were mounted on the horses of junior officers left behind, and pressed forward with speed. A West Virginian named Shattuck knew something of the country, and led them.

“What is this place, Sulphur Springs?” asked Colonel Winchester of Shattuck.

“Some big sulphur springs spout out of the bank and run down to the river. They are fine and healthy to drink an' there's a lot of cottages built up by people

who come there to stay a while. But I guess them people have gone away. It ain't no place for health just at this time."

"That's a certainty," said Colonel Winchester.

"An' then there's the bridge, which, as we know, the cavalry has broke down."

"Fortunately. But can't we go a little faster, boys?"

There was a well defined road and Shattuck now led them at a gallop. As they approached the springs they checked their speed, owing to the increasing darkness. But Dick's good ears soon told him that something was happening at the springs. He heard faintly the sound of voices, and the clank and rattle which many men with weapons cannot keep from making now and then.

"I'm afraid, sir," he said to Colonel Winchester, "that they're already across."

The little troop stopped at the command of its leader and all listened intently. It was very dark now and the wood was moaning, but the columns of air came directly from the wood, bearing clearly upon their crest the noises made by regiments.

"You're right, Dick," said Colonel Winchester, bitter mortification showing in his tone. "They're there, and they're on our side of the river. Oh, we might have known it! They say that Stonewall Jackson never sleeps, and they make no mistake, when they call his infantry foot cavalry!"

Dick was silent. He shared his leader's intense disappointment, but he knew that it was not for him to speak at this moment.

"Mr. Shattuck," said Colonel Winchester, "how near do you think we can approach without being seen?"

"I know a neck of woods leading within a hundred yards of the cottages. If we was to leave our horses here with a couple of men we could slip down among the trees and bushes, and there ain't one chance in ten that we'd be seen on so dark a night."

"Then you lead us. Pawley, you and Woodfall hold the horses. Now follow softly, lads! All of you have hunted the 'coon and 'possum at night, and you should know how to step without making noise."

Shattuck advanced with certainty, and the others, true to their training, came behind him in single file, and without noise. But as they advanced the sounds of an army ahead of them increased, and when they reached the edge of the covert they saw a great Confederate division on their side of the stream, in full possession of the cottages and occupying all the ground about them. Many men were at work, restoring the wrecked bridge, but the others were eating their

suppers or were at rest.

“There must be seven or eight thousand men here,” said Dick, who did not miss the full significance of the fact.

“So it seems,” said Warner, “and I'm afraid it bodes ill for General Pope.”

CHAPTER IV. SPRINGING THE TRAP

Lying close in the bushes the little party watched the Southerners making themselves ready for the night. The cottages were prepared for the higher officers, but the men stacked arms in the open ground all about. As well as they could judge by the light of the low fires, soldiers were still crossing the river to strengthen the force already on the Union side.

Colonel Winchester suppressed a groan. Dick noticed that his face was pallid in the uncertain shadows, and he understood the agony of spirit that the brave man must suffer when he saw that they had been outflanked by their enemy.

Sergeant Whitley, moving forward a little, touched the colonel on the arm.

“All the clouds that we saw a little further back,” he said, “have gathered together, an' the storm is about to bust. See, sir, how fast the Johnnies are spreadin' their tents an' runnin' to shelter.”

“It's so, sergeant,” said Colonel Winchester. “I was so much absorbed in watching those men that I thank you for reminding me. We've seen enough anyway and we'd better get back as fast as we can.”

They hurried through the trees and bushes toward their horses, taking no particular pains now to deaden their footsteps, since the Southerners themselves were making a good deal of noise as they took refuge.

But the storm was upon them before they could reach their horses. The last star was gone and the somber clouds covered the whole heavens. The wind ceased to moan and the air was heavy with apprehension. Deep and sullen thunder began to mutter on the southwestern horizon. Then came a mighty crash and a great blaze of lightning seemed to cleave the sky straight down the center.

The lightning and thunder made Dick jump, and for a few moments he was blinded by the electric glare. He heard a heavy sound of something falling, and exclaimed:

“Are any of you hurt?”

“No,” said Warner, who alone heard him, “but we're scared half to death. When a drought breaks up I wish it wouldn't break up with such a terrible fuss. Listen to that thunder again, won't you!”

There was another terrible crash of thunder and the whole sky blazed with lightning. Despite himself Dick shrank again. The first bolt had struck a tree

which had fallen within thirty feet of them, but the second left this bit of the woods unscathed.

A third and a fourth bolt struck somewhere, and then came the rush and roar of the rain, driven on by a fierce wind out of the southwest. The close, dense heat was swept away, and the first blasts of the rain were as cold as ice. The little party was drenched in an instant, and every one was shivering through and through with combined wet and cold.

The cessation of the lightning was succeeded by pitchy darkness, and the roaring of the wind and rain was so great that they called loudly to one another lest they lose touch in the blackness. Dick heard Warner on his right, and he followed the sound of his voice. But before he went much further his foot struck a trailing vine, and he fell so hard, his head striking the trunk of a tree, that he lay unconscious.

The cold rain drove so fiercely on the fallen boy's face and body that he revived in two or three minutes, and stood up. He clapped his hand to the left side of his head, and felt there a big bump and a sharp ache. His weapons were still in his belt and he knew that his injuries were not serious, but he heard nothing save the drive and roar of the wind and rain. There was no calling of voices and no beat of footsteps.

He divined at once that his comrades, wholly unaware of his fall, when no one could either see or hear it, had gone on without missing him. They might also mount their horses and gallop away wholly ignorant that he was not among them.

Although he was a little dazed, Dick had a good idea of direction and he plunged through the mud which was now growing deep toward the little ravine in which they had hitched their horses. All were gone, including his own mount, and he had no doubt that the horse had broken or slipped the bridle in the darkness and followed the others.

He stood a while behind the trunk of a great tree, trying to shelter himself a little from the rain, and listened. But he could hear neither his friends leaving nor any foes approaching. The storm was of uncommon fury. He had never seen one fiercer, and knowing that he had little to dread from the Southerners while it raged he knew also that he must make his way on foot, and as best he could, to his own people.

Making a calculation of the direction and remembering that one might wander in a curve in the darkness, he set off down the stream. He meant to keep close to the banks of the Rappahannock, and if he persisted he would surely come in time

to Pope's army. The rain did not abate. Both armies were flooded that night, but they could find some measure of protection. To the scouts and skirmishers and to Dick, wandering through the forest, nature was an unmitigated foe.

But nothing could stop the boy. He was resolved to get back to the army with the news that a heavy Southern force was across the Rappahannock. Others might get there first with the fact, but one never knew. A hundred might fall by the wayside, leaving it to him alone to bear the message.

He stumbled on. He was able to keep his cartridges dry in his pouch, but that was all. His wet, cold clothes flapped around him and he shivered to the bone. He could see only the loom of the black forest before him, and sometimes he slipped to the waist in swollen brooks. Then the wind shifted and drove the sheets of rain, sprinkled with hail, directly in his face. He was compelled to stop a while and take refuge behind a big oak. While he shivered in the shelter of the tree the only things that he thought of spontaneously were dry clothes, hot food, a fire and a warm bed. The Union and its fate, gigantic as they were, slipped away from his mind, and it took an effort of the will to bring them back.

But his will made the effort, and recalling his mission he struggled on again. He had the river on his right, and it now became an unfailing guide. It had probably been raining much earlier in the mountains along the headwaters and the flood was already pouring down. The river swished high against its banks and once or twice, when he caught dim glimpses of it through the trees, he saw a yellow torrent bearing much brushwood upon its bosom.

He had very little idea of his progress. It was impossible to judge of pace under such circumstances. The army might be ten miles further on or it might be only two. Then he found himself sliding down a muddy and slippery bank. He grasped at weeds and bushes, but they slipped through his hands. Then he shot into a creek, swollen by the flood, and went over his head.

He came up, gasping, struck out and reached the further shore. Here he found bushes more friendly than the others and pulled himself upon the bank. But he had lost everything. His belt had broken in his struggles, and pistols, small sword and ammunition were gone. He would be helpless against an enemy. Then he laughed at the idea. Surely enemies would not be in search of him at such a time and such a place.

Nevertheless when he saw an open space in front of him he paused at its edge. He could see well enough here to notice a file of dim figures riding slowly by. At first his heart leaped up with the belief that they were Colonel Winchester and his own people, but they were going in the wrong direction, and then he was able

to discern the bedraggled and faded Confederate gray.

The horsemen were about fifty in number and most of them rode with the reins hanging loose on their horses' necks. They were wrapped in cloaks, but cloaks and uniforms alike were sodden. A stream of water ran from every stirrup to the ground.

Dick looked at them attentively. Near the head of the column but on one side rode a soldierly figure, apparently that of a young man of twenty-three or four. Just behind came three youths, and Dick's heart fairly leaped when he saw the last of the three. He could not mistake the figure, and a turning of the head caused him to catch a faint glimpse of the face. Then he knew beyond all shadow of doubt. It was Harry and he surmised that the other two were his comrades, St. Clair and Langdon, whom he had met when they were burying the dead.

Dick was so sodden and cold and wretched that he was tempted to call out to them—the sight of Harry was like a light in the darkness—but the temptation was gone in an instant. His way lay in another direction. What they wished he did not wish, and while they fought for the triumph of the South it was his business to endure and struggle on that he might do his own little part for the Union.

But despite the storm and his sufferings, he drew courage from nature itself. While a portion of the Southern army was across it must be a minor portion, and certainly the major part could not span such a flood and attack. The storm and time allied were now fighting for Pope.

He wandered away a little into the open fields in order to find easier going, but he came back presently to the forest lining the bank of the river, for fear he should lose his direction. The yellow torrent of the Rappahannock was now his only sure guide and he stuck to it. He wondered why the rain and wind did not die down. It was not usual for a storm so furious to last so long, but he could not see any abatement of either.

He became conscious after a while of a growing weakness, but he had recalled all the powers of his will and it was triumphant over his body. He trudged on on feet that were unconscious of sensation, and his face as if the flesh were paralyzed no longer felt the beat of the rain.

A mile or two further and in the swish of the storm he heard hoofbeats again. Looking forth from the bushes he saw another line of horsemen, but now they were going in the direction of Pope's army. Dick recognized these figures. Shapeless as he might appear on his horse that was Colonel Winchester, and there were the broad shoulders of Sergeant Whitley and the figures of the others.

He rushed through the dripping forest and shouted in a tone that could be heard above the shriek of wind and rain. Colonel Winchester recognized the voice, but the light was so dim that he did not recognize him from whom it came. Certainly the figure that emerged from the forest did not look human.

“Colonel,” cried Dick, “it is I, Richard Mason, whom you left behind!”

“So it is,” said Sergeant Whitley, keener of eye than the others.

The whole troop set up a shout as Dick came forward, taking off his dripping cap.

“Why, Dick, it is you!” exclaimed Colonel Winchester in a tone of immeasurable relief. “We missed you and your horse and hoped that you were somewhere ahead. Your horse must have broken loose in the storm. But here, you look as if you were nearly dead! Jump up behind me!”

Dick made an effort, but his strength failed and he slipped back to the ground. He had not realized that he was walking on his spirit and courage and that his strength was gone, so powerful had been the buffets of the wind and rain.

The colonel reached down, gave him a hand and a strong pull, and with a second effort Dick landed astride the horse behind the rider. Then Colonel Winchester gave the word and the sodden file wound on again.

“Dick,” said the colonel, looking back over his shoulder, “you come as near being a wreck as anything that I've seen in a long time. It's lucky we found you.”

“It is, sir, and I not only look like a wreck but I feel like one. But I had made up my mind to reach General Pope's camp, with the news of the Confederates crossing, and I think I'd have done it.”

“I know you would. But what a night! What a night! Not many men can be abroad at such a time. We have seen nothing.”

“But I have, sir.”

“You have! What did you see?”

“A mile or two back I passed a line of Southern horsemen, just as wet and bedraggled as ours.”

“Might they not have been our own men? It would be hard to tell blue and gray apart on such a night.”

“One could make such a mistake, but in this case it was not possible. I saw my own cousin, Harry Kenton, riding with them. I recognized them perfectly.”

“Then that settles it. The Confederate scouts and cavalry are abroad to-night also, and on our side of the river. But they must be few who dare to ride in such

a storm.”

“That's surely true, sir.”

But both Dick and his commanding officer were mistaken. They still underrated the daring and resolution of the Confederate leaders, the extraordinary group of men who were the very bloom and flower of Virginia's military glory, the equal of whom—two at least being in the very first rank in the world's history—no other country with so small a population has produced in so short a time.

Earlier in the day Stuart, full of enterprise, and almost insensible to fatigue, had crossed the Rappahannock much higher up and at the head of a formidable body of his horsemen, unseen by scouts and spies, was riding around the Union right. They galloped into Warrenton where the people, red hot as usual for the South, crowded around them cheering and laughing and many of the women crying with joy. It was like Jackson and Stuart to drop from the clouds this way and to tell them, although the land had been occupied by the enemy, that their brave soldiers would come in time.

News, where a Northern force could not have obtained a word, was poured out for the South. They told Stuart that none of the Northern cavalry was about, and that Pope's vast supply train was gathered at a little point only ten miles to the southeast. Stuart shook his plumed head until his long golden hair flew about his neck. Then he laughed aloud and calling to his equally fiery young officers, told them of the great spoil that waited upon quickness and daring.

The whole force galloped away for the supply train, but before it reached it the storm fell in all its violence upon Stuart and his men. Despite rain and darkness Stuart pushed on. He said afterward that it was the darkest night he had ever seen. A captured negro guided them on the final stage of the gallop and just when Dick was riding back to camp behind Colonel Winchester, Stuart fell like a thunderbolt upon the supply train and its guard.

Stuart could not drive wholly away the Northern guard, which though surprised, fought with great courage, but he burned the supply train, then galloped off with prisoners, and Pope's own uniform, horses, treasure chest and dispatch book. He found in the dispatch book minute information about the movements of all the Union troops, and Pope's belief that he ought to retreat from the river on Washington. Doubtless the Confederate horseman shook his head again and again and laughed aloud, when he put this book, more precious than jewels, inside his gold braided tunic, to be taken to Lee and Jackson.

But these things were all hidden from the little group of weary men who rode

into Pope's camp. Colonel Winchester carried the news of the crossing—Early had made it—to the commander, and the rest sought the best shelter to be found. Dick was lucky enough to be taken into a tent that was thoroughly dry, and the sergeant who had followed him managed to obtain a supply of dry clothing which would be ready for him when he awoke.

Dick did not revive as usual. He threw all of his clothing aside and water flew where it fell, put on dry undergarments and crept between warm blankets. Nevertheless he still felt cold, and he was amazed at his own lack of interest in everything. He might have perished out there in the stream, but what did it matter? He would probably be killed in some battle anyway. Besides, their information about the crossing of the rebels was of no importance either. The rebels might stay on their side of the Rappahannock, or they might go back. It was all the same either way. All things seemed, for the moment, useless to him.

He began to shiver, but after a while he became so hot that he wanted to throw off all the cover. But he retained enough knowledge and will not to do so, and he sank soon into a feverish doze from which he was awakened by the light of a lantern shining in his face.

He saw Colonel Winchester and another man, a stranger, who held a small leather case in his hand. But Dick was in such a dull and apathetic state that he had no curiosity about them and he shut his eyes to keep out the light of the lantern.

“What is it, doctor?” he heard Colonel Winchester asking.

“Chill and a little fever, brought on by exposure and exhaustion. But he's a hardy youth. Look what a chest and shoulders! With the aid of these little white pills of mine he'll be all right in the morning. Colonel, Napoleon said that an army fights on its stomach, which I suppose is true, but in our heavily watered and but partly settled country, it must fight sometimes on a stomach charged with quinine.”

“I was afraid it might be worse. A dose or two then will bring him around?”

“Wish I could be so sure of a quick cure in every case. Here, my lad, take two of these. A big start is often a good one.”

Dick raised his head obediently and took the two quinine pills. Soon he sank into a condition which was as near stupor as sleep. But before he passed into unconsciousness he heard the doctor say:

“Wake him soon enough in the morning, Colonel, to take two more. What a wonderful thing for our armies that we can get all the quinine we want! The rebel supply, I know, is exhausted. With General Quinine on our side we're

bound to win.”

“But that isn't the only reason, doctor. Now—” Their voices trailed away as Dick sank into oblivion. He had a dim memory of being awakened the next morning and of swallowing two more pills, but in a minute or two he sank back into a sleep which was neither feverish nor troubled. When he awoke the dark had come a second time. The fever was wholly gone, and his head had ceased to ache.

Dick felt weak, but angry at himself for having broken down at such a time, he sat up and began to put on the dry uniform that lay in the tent. Then he was astonished to find how great his weakness really was, but he persevered, and as he slipped on the tunic Warner came into the tent.

“You've been asleep a long time,” he said, looking at Dick critically.

“I know it. I suppose I slept all through the night as well as the day.”

“And the great battle was fought without you.”

Dick started, and looked at his comrade, but Warner's eyes were twinkling.

“There's been no battle, and you know it,” Dick said.

“No, there hasn't been any; there won't be any for several days at least. That whopping big rain last night did us a service after all. It was Early who crossed the river, and now he is in a way cut off from the rest of the Southern army. We hear that he'll go back to the other side. But Stuart has curved about us, raided our supply train and destroyed it. And he's done more than that. He's captured General Pope's important papers.”

“What does it mean for us?”

“A delay, but I don't know anything more. I suppose that whatever is going to happen will happen in its own good time. You feel like a man again, don't you Dick? And you can have the consolation of knowing that nothing has happened all day long when you slept.”

Dick finished his dressing, rejoined his regiment and ate supper with the other officers around a fine camp fire. He found that he had a good appetite, and as he ate strength flowed rapidly back into his veins. He gathered from the talk of the older officers that they were still hoping for a junction with McClellan before Lee and Jackson could attack. They expected at the very least to have one hundred and fifty thousand men in line, most of them veterans.

But Dick saw Shepard again that evening. He had come from a long journey and he reported great activity in the Southern camp. When Dick said that Lee and Jackson would have to fight both Pope and McClellan the spy merely

replied:

“Yes, if Pope and McClellan hurry.”

But Dick learned that night that Pope was not discouraged. He had an army full of fighting power, and eager to meet its enemy. He began the next day to move up the river in order that he might face Lee's whole force as it attempted to cross at the upper fords. Their spirits increased as they learned that Early, through fear of being cut off, was going back to join the main Southern army.

The ground had now dried up after the great storm, but the refreshed earth took on a greener tinge, and the air was full of sparkle and life. Dick had not seen such elasticity among the troops in a long time. As they marched they spoke confidently of victory. One regiment took up a song which had appeared in print just after the fall of Sumter:

“Men of the North and West,
    Wake in your might.
 Prepare as the rebels have done
    For the fight.
 You cannot shrink from the test;
 Rise! Men of the North and West.”

Another regiment took up the song, and soon many thousands were singing it; those who did not know the words following the others. Dick felt his heart beat and his courage mount high, as he sang with Warner and Pennington the last verse:

“Not with words; they laugh them to scorn,
    And tears they despise.
 But with swords in your hands
    And death in your eyes!
 Strike home! Leave to God all the rest;
 Strike! Men of the North and West!”

The song sung by so many men rolled off across the fields, and the woods and the hills gave back the echo.

“We will strike home!” exclaimed Dick, putting great emphasis on the “will.” “Our time for victory is at hand.”

“The other side may think they're striking home; too,” said Warner, speaking according to the directness of his dry mathematical mind. “Then I suppose it will be a case of victory for the one that strikes the harder for home.”

“That's a fine old mind of yours. Don't you ever feel any enthusiasm?”

“I do, when the figures warrant it. But I must reckon everything with care before I permit myself to feel joy.”

“I'm glad I'm not like you, Mr. Arithmetic, Mr. Algebra, Mr. Geometry and Mr. Trigonometry.”

“You mustn't make fun of such serious matters, Dick. It would be a noble

thing to be the greatest professor of mathematics in the world."

"Of course, George, but we wouldn't need him at this minute. But here we are back at those cottages in which I saw the Southern officers sheltering themselves. Well, they're ours again and I take it as a good omen."

"Yes, here we rest, as the French general said, but I don't know that I care about resting much more. I've had about all I want of it."

Nevertheless they spent the day quietly at the Sulphur Springs, and lay down in peace that night. But the storm cloud, the blackest storm cloud of the whole war so far, was gathering.

Lee, knowing the danger of the junction between Pope and McClellan had resolved to hazard all on a single stroke. He would divide his army. Jackson, so well called "the striking arm," would pass far around through the maze of hills and mountains and fall like a thunderbolt upon Pope's flank. At the sound of his guns Lee himself would attack in front.

As Dick and his young comrades lay down to sleep this march, the greatest of Stonewall Jackson's famous turning movements, had begun already. Jackson was on his horse, Little Sorrel, his old slouch hat drawn down over his eyes, his head bent forward a little, and the great brain thinking, always thinking. His face was turned to the North.

Just a little behind Jackson rode one of his most trusted aides, Harry Kenton, a mere youth in years, but already a veteran in service. Not far away was the gallant young Sherburne at the head of his troop of cavalry, and in the first brigade was the regiment of the Invincibles led by Colonel Leonidas Talbot and Lieutenant Colonel Hector St. Hilaire. Never had the two colonels seemed more prim and precise, and not even in youth had the fire of battle ever burned more brightly in their bosoms.

Jackson meant to pass around his enemy's right, crossing the Bull Run Mountain at Thoroughfare Gap, then strike the railway in Pope's rear. Longstreet, one of the heaviest hitters of the South, meanwhile was to worry Pope incessantly along the line of the Rappahannock, and when Jackson attacked they were to drive him toward the northeast and away from McClellan.

The hot August night was one of the most momentous in American history, and the next few days were to see the Union in greater danger than it has ever stood either before or since. Perhaps it was not given to the actors in the drama to know it then, but the retrospect shows it now. The North had not attained its full fighting strength, and the genius of the two great Southern commanders was at the zenith, while behind them stood a group of generals, full of talent and

fearless of death.

Jackson had been directly before Sulphur Springs where Dick lay with the division to which he belonged. But Jackson, under cover of the darkness, had slipped away and the division of Longstreet had taken its place so quietly that the Union scouts and spies, including Shepard himself, did not know the difference.

Jackson's army marched swiftly and silently, while that of Pope slept. The plan of Lee was complicated and delicate to the last degree, but Jackson, the mainspring in this organism, never doubted that he could carry it out. His division soon left the rest of the army far behind, as they marched steadily on over the hills, the fate of the nation almost in the hollow of their hands.

The foot cavalry of Jackson were proud of their ability that night. They carried only three days' rations, expecting to feed off the enemy at the end of that time. Near midnight they lay down and slept a while, but long before dawn they were in line again marching over the hills and across the mountains. There were skirmishers in advance on either side, but they met no Union scouts. The march of Jackson's great fighting column was still unseen and unsuspected. A single Union scout or a message carried by a woman or child might destroy the whole plan, as a grain of dust stops all the wheels and levers of a watch, but neither the scout, the woman nor the child appeared.

Toward dawn the marching Southerners heard far behind them the thunder of guns along the Rappahannock. They knew that Longstreet had opened with his batteries across the river, and that those of Pope were replying. The men looked at one another. There was a deep feeling of excitement and suspense among them. They did not know what all this marching meant, but they had learned to trust the man who led them. He had led them only to victory, and they did not doubt that he was doing so again.

The march never paused for an instant. On they went, and the sound of the great guns behind them grew fainter and fainter until it faded away. Where were they going? Was it a raid on Washington? Were they to hurl themselves upon Pope's rear, or was there some new army that they were to destroy?

Up swept the sun and the coolness left by the storm disappeared. The August day began to blaze again with fierce burning heat, but there was no complaint among Jackson's men. They knew now that they were on one of his great turning movements, on a far greater scale than any hitherto, and full of confidence, they followed in the wake of Little Sorrel.

In the daylight now Jackson had scouts and skirmishers far in front and on

either flank. They were to blaze the way for the army and they made a far out-flung line, through which no hostile scout could pass and see the marching army within. At the close of the day they were still marching, and when the sun was setting Jackson stood by the dusty roadside and watched his men as they passed. For the first time in that long march they broke through restraint and thundering cheers swept along the whole line as they took off their caps to the man whom they deemed at once their friend and a very god of war. The stern Jackson giving way so seldom to emotion was heard to say to himself:

“Who can fail to win battles with such men as these?”

Jackson's column did not stop until midnight. They had been more than twenty-four hours on the march, and they had not seen a hostile soldier. Harry Kenton himself did not know where they were going. But he lay down and gratefully, like the others, took the rest that was allowed to him. But a few hours only and they were marching again under a starry sky. Morning showed the forest lining the slopes of the mountains and then all the men seemed to realize suddenly which way they were going.

This was the road that led to Pope. It was not Washington, or Winchester, or some unknown army, but their foe on the Rappahannock that they were going to strike. A deep murmur of joy ran through the ranks, and the men who had now been marching thirty hours, with but little rest, suddenly increased their speed. Knowledge had brought them new strength.

They entered the forest and passed into Thoroughfare Gap, which leads through Bull Run Mountain. The files narrowed now and stretched out in a longer line. This was a deep gorge, pines and bushes lining the summits and crests. The confined air here was closer and hotter than ever, but the men pressed on with undiminished speed.

Harry Kenton felt a certain awe as he rode behind Jackson, and looked up at the lofty cliffs that enclosed them. The pines along the summit on either side were like long, green ribbons, and he half feared to see men in blue appear there and open fire on those in the gorge below. But reason told him that there was no such danger. No Northern force could be on Bull Run Mountain.

Harry had not asked a question during all that march. He had not known where they were going, but like all the soldiers he had supreme confidence in Jackson. He might be going to any of a number of places, but the place to which he was going was sure to be the right place. Now as he rode in the pass he knew that they were bound for the rear of Pope's army. Well, that would be bad for Pope! Harry had no doubt of it.

They passed out of the gap, leaving the mountain behind them, and swept on through two little villages, and over the famous plateau of Manassas Junction which many of them had seen before in the fire and smoke of the war's first terrible day. Here were the fields and hills over which they had fought and won the victory. Harry recognized at once the places which had been burned so vividly into his memory, and he considered it a good omen.

Not so far away was Washington, and so strongly was Harry's imagination impressed that he believed he could have seen through powerful glasses and from the crest of some tall hill that they passed, the dome of the Capitol shining in the August sun. He wondered why there was no attack, nor even any alarm. The cloud of dust that so many thousands of marching men made could be seen for miles. He did not know that Sherburne and the fastest of the rough riders were now far in front, seizing every Union scout or sentinel, and enabling Jackson's army to march on its great turning movement wholly unknown to any officer or soldier of the North. Soon he would stand squarely between Pope and Washington.

Before noon, Stuart and his wild horsemen joined them and their spirits surged yet higher. All through the afternoon the march continued, and at night Jackson fell upon Pope's vast store of supplies, surprising and routing the guard. Taking what he could use he set fire to the rest and the vast conflagration filled the sky.

Night came with Jackson standing directly in the rear of Pope. The trap had been shut down, and it was to be seen whether Pope was strong enough to break from it.

CHAPTER V. THE SECOND MANASSAS

The sunbeams seemed fairly to dance over the dusty earth. The dust was not only over the earth, but over everything, men, animals, wagons and tents. Dick Mason who had struggled so hard through a storm but a few nights ago now longed for another like it. Anything to get away from this blinding blaze.

But he soon forgot heat and dust. He was conscious of a great quiver and thrill running through the whole army. Something was happening. Something had happened, but nobody knew what. Warner and Pennington felt the same quiver and thrill, because they looked at him as if in inquiry. Colonel Winchester showed it, too. He said nothing, but gazed uneasily toward the Northern horizon. Dick found himself looking that way also. Along the Rappahannock there was but little firing now, and he began to forget the river which had loomed so large in the affairs of the armies. Perhaps the importance of the Rappahannock had passed.

It was said that Pope himself with his staff had ridden away toward Washington, but Dick did not know. Far off toward the capital he saw dust clouds, but he concluded that they must be made by marching reinforcements.

The long hot hours dragged and then came a messenger. It was Shepard who had reported to headquarters and who afterwards came over to the shade of a tree where Colonel Winchester and his little staff were gathered. He was on the verge of exhaustion. He was black under the eyes and the veins of his neck were distended. Dust covered him from head to foot. He threw himself on the ground and drank deeply from a canteen of cool water that Dick handed to him. All saw that Shepard, the spy, the man whose life was a continual danger, who had never before shown emotion, was in a state of excitement, and if they waited a little he would speak of his own accord.

Shepard took the canteen from his lips, drew several long deep breaths of relief and said:

“Do you know what I have seen?”

“I don't, but I infer from your manner, Shepard, that it must be of great importance,” said Colonel Winchester.

“I've seen Stonewall Jackson at the head of half of Lee's army behind us! Standing between us and Washington!”

“What! Impossible! How could he get there?”

“It's possible, because it's been done—I've seen the rebel army behind us. In these civilian clothes of mine, I've been in their ranks, and I've talked with their men. While they were amusing us here on the Rappahannock with their cannon, Jackson with the best of the army crossed the river higher up, passed through Thoroughfare Gap, marching two or three days before a soul of ours knew it, and then struck our great camp at Bristoe Station.”

“Shepard, you must be sunstruck!”

“My mind was never clearer. What I saw at close range General Pope himself saw at long range. He and his staff and a detachment came near enough to see the looting and burning of all our stores—I don't suppose so many were ever gathered together before. But I was right there. You ought to have seen the sight, Colonel, when those ragged rebels who had been living on green corn burst into our camp. I've heard about the Goths and Vandals coming down on Rome and it must have been something like it. They ate as I never saw anybody eat before, and then throwing away their rags they put on our new uniforms which were stored there in thousands. At least half the rebel army must now be wearing the Union blue. And the way they danced about and sang was enough to make a loyal man's heart sick.”

“You told all this to General Pope?”

“I did, sir, but I could not make him believe the half of it. He insists that it can only be a raiding detachment, that it is impossible for a great army to have come to such a place. But, sir, I was among them. I know Stonewall Jackson, and I saw him with my own eyes. He was there at the head of thirty thousand men, and we've already lost stores worth millions and millions. Jeb Stuart was there, too. I saw him. And I saw Munford, who leads Jackson's cavalry since the death of Turner Ashby. Oh, they'll find out soon enough that it's Jackson. We're trapped, sir! I tell you we're trapped, and our own commander-in-chief won't believe it. Good God, Colonel, the trap has shut down on us and if we get out of it we've got to be up and doing! This is no time for waiting!”

Colonel Winchester saw from the rapidity and emphasis with which Shepard spoke that his excitement had increased, but knowing the man's great devotion to the Union he had no rebuke for his plain speech.

“You have done splendid work, Mr. Shepard,” he said, “and the commander-in-chief will recognize what great risks you have run for the cause. I've no doubt that the accuracy of your reports will soon be proved.”

Colonel Winchester in truth believed every word that Shepard had said,

sinister though they were. He said that Jackson was behind them, that he had done the great destruction at Bristoe Station and he had not the slightest doubt that Jackson was there.

Shepard flushing a little with gratification at Colonel Winchester's praise quickly recovered his customary self possession. Once more he was the iron-willed, self-contained man who daily dared everything for the cause he served.

“Thank you, Colonel,” he said, “I've got to go out and get a little food now. All I say will be proved soon enough.”

The three boys, like Colonel Winchester, did not doubt the truth of Shepard's news, and they looked northeast for the dust clouds which should mark the approach of Jackson.

“We've been outmaneuvered,” said Warner to Dick, “but it's no reason why we should be outfought.”

“No, George, it isn't. We've eighty thousand men as brave as any in the world, and, from what we hear they haven't as many. We ought to smash their old trap all to pieces.”

“If our generals will only give us a chance.”

Shepard's prediction that his news would soon prove true was verified almost at once. General Pope himself returned to his army and dispatch after dispatch arrived stating that Jackson and his whole force had been at Bristoe Station while the Union stores were burning.

“Now is our chance,” said Dick to his comrades, “why doesn't the general move on Jackson at once, and destroy him before Lee can come to his help?”

“I'm praying for it,” said Warner.

“From what I hear it's going to be done,” said Pennington.

Their hopes came true. Pope at once took the bold course, and marched on Jackson, but the elusive Stonewall was gone. They tramped about in the heat and dust in search of him. One portion of the army including Colonel Winchester's regiment turned off in the afternoon toward a place of a few houses called Warrenton. It lay over toward the Gap through which Jackson had gone and while the division ten thousand strong did not expect to find anything there it was nevertheless ordered to look.

Dick rode by the side of his colonel ready for any command, but the mystery, and uncertainty had begun to weigh upon him again. It seemed when they had the first news that Jackson was behind them, that they had a splendid opportunity to turn upon him and annihilate him before Lee could come. But he was gone.

They had looked upon the smoldering ruins of their great supply camp, but they had found there no trace of a Confederate soldier. Was Harry Kenton right, when he told them they could not beat Jackson? He asked himself angrily why the man would not stay and fight. He believed, too, that he must be off there somewhere to the right, and he listened eagerly but vainly for the distant throb of guns in the east.

A cloud of dust hovered over the ten thousand as they marched on in the blazing sunshine. The country was well peopled, but all the inhabitants had disappeared save a few, and from not one of these could they obtain a scrap of information.

Dick noticed through the dusty veil a heavy wood on their left extending for a long distance. Then as in a flash, he saw that the whole forest was filled with troops, and he saw also two batteries galloping from it toward the crest of a ridge. It occurred to him instantly that here was the army of Jackson, and others who saw had the same instinctive belief.

There was a flash and roar from the batteries. Shot and shell cut through the clouds of dust and among the ranks of the men in blue. Now came from the forest a vast shout, the defiant rebel yell and nobody in the column doubted that Jackson was there. He had swung away toward the Gap, where Lee could come to him more readily, and he would fight the whole Union army until Lee came up.

As the roar of the first discharge from the batteries was dying swarms of skirmishers sprang up from ambush and poured a storm of bullets upon the Union front and flanks. A cry as of anguish arose from the column and it reeled back, but the men, many of them hardy young farmers from the West, men of staunch stuff, were eager to get at the enemy and the terrible surprise could not daunt them. Uttering a tremendous shout they charged directly upon the Southern force.

It was a case largely of vanguards, the main forces not yet having come up, but the two detachments charged into each other with a courage and fierceness that was astounding. In a minute the woods and fields were filled with fire and smoke, and hissing shells and bullets. Men fell by hundreds, but neither side yielded. The South could not drive away the North and the North could not hurl back the South.

The field of battle became a terrible and deadly vortex. The fire of the opposing lines blazed in the faces of each other. Often they were only three or four score yards apart. Ewell, Jackson's ablest and most trusted lieutenant, fell

wounded almost to death, and lay long upon the field. Other Southern generals fell also, and despite their superior numbers they could not drive back the North.

Dick never had much recollection of the combat, save a reek of fire and smoke in which men fought. He saw Colonel Winchester's horse pitch forward on his head and springing from his own he pulled the half-stunned colonel to his feet. Both leaped aside just in time to avoid Dick's own falling horse, which had been slain by a shell. Then the colonel ran up and down the lines of his men, waving his sword and encouraging them to stand fast.

The Southern lines spread out and endeavored to overlap the Union men, but they were held back by a deep railroad cut and masses of felled timber. The combat redoubled in fury. Cannon and rifles together made a continuous roar. Both sides seemed to have gone mad with the rage of battle.

The Southern generals astonished at such a resistance by a smaller force, ordered up more men and cannon. The Union troops were slowly pushed back by the weight of numbers, but then the night, the coming of which neither had noticed, swept down suddenly upon them, leaving fifteen hundred men, nearly a third of those engaged, fallen upon the small area within which the two vanguards had fought.

But the Union men did not retreat far. Practically, they were holding their ground, when the darkness put an end to the battle, and they were full of elation at having fought a draw with superior numbers of the formidable Jackson. Dick, although exultant, was so much exhausted that he threw himself upon the ground and panted for breath. When he was able to rise he looked for Warner and Pennington and found them uninjured. So was Sergeant Whitley, but the sergeant, contrary to his custom, was gloomy.

“What's the matter, sergeant?” exclaimed Dick in surprise. “Didn't we give 'em a great fight?”

“Splendid, Mr. Mason, I don't believe that troops ever fought better than ours did. But we're not many here. Where's all the rest of our army? Scattered, while I'm certain that Jackson with twenty-five or thirty thousand men is in front of us, with more coming. We'll fall back. We'll have to do it before morning.”

The sergeant on this occasion had the power of divination. An hour after midnight the whole force which had fought with so much heroism was withdrawn. It was a strange night to the whole Union army, full of sinister omens.

Pope, in his quest for Jackson, had heard about sunset the booming of guns in the west, but he could not believe that the Southern general was there. Many of

his dispatches had been captured by the hard-riding cavalry of Stuart. His own division commanders had lost touch with him. It was not possible for him to know what to do until morning, and no one could tell him. Meanwhile Longstreet was advancing in the darkness through the Gap to reinforce Jackson.

Dick had found another horse belonging to a slain owner, and, in the darkness, his heart full of bitterness, he rode back beside Colonel Winchester toward Manassas. Could they never win a big victory in the east? The men were brave and tenacious. They had proved it over and over again, but they were always mismanaged. It seemed to him that they were never sent to the right place at the right time.

Nevertheless, many of the Northern generals, able and patriotic, achieved great deeds before the dawn of that momentous morning. Messengers were riding in the darkness in a zealous attempt to gather the forces together. There was yet abundant hope that they could crush Jackson before Lee came, and in the darkness brigade after brigade marched toward Warrenton.

Dick, after tasting all the bitterness of retreat, felt his hopes rise again. They had not really been beaten. They had fought a superior force of Jackson's own men to a standstill. He could never forget that. He cherished it and rolled it under his tongue. It was an omen of what was to come. If they could only get leaders of the first rank they would soon end the war.

He found himself laughing aloud in the anticipation of what Pope's Army of Virginia would do in the coming day to the rebels. It might even happen that McClellan with the Army of the Potomac would also come upon the field. And then! Lee and Jackson thought they had Pope in a trap! Pope and McClellan would have them between the hammer and the anvil, and they would be pounded to pieces!

“Here, stop that foolishness, Dick! Quit, I say, quit it at once!”

It was Warner who was speaking, and he gripped Dick's arm hard, while he peered anxiously into his face.

“What's the matter with you?” he continued. “What do you find to laugh at? Besides, I don't like the way you laugh.”

Dick shook himself, and then rubbed his hand across his brow.

“Thanks, George,” he said. “I'm glad you called me back to myself. I was thinking what would happen to the enemy if McClellan and the Army of the Potomac came up also, and I was laughing over it.”

“Well, the next time, don't you laugh at a thing until it happens. You may have

to take your laugh back."

Dick shook himself again, and the nervous excitement passed.

"You always give good advice, George," he said. "Do you know where we are?"

"I couldn't name the place, but we're not so far from Warrenton that we can't get back there in a short time and tackle Jackson again. Dick, see all those moving lights to right and left of us. They're the brigades coming up in the night. Isn't it a weird and tremendous scene? You and I and Pennington will see this night over and over again, many and many a time."

"It's so, George," said Dick, "I feel the truth of what you say all through me. Listen to the rumble of the cannon wheels! I hear 'em on both sides of us, and behind us, and I've no doubt, too, that it's going on before us, where the Southerners are massing their batteries. How the lights move! It's the field of Manassas again, and we're going to win this time!"

All of Dick's senses were excited once more, and everything he saw was vivid and highly colored. Warner, cool of blood as he habitually was, had no words of rebuke for him now, because he, too, was affected in the same way. The fields and plains of Manassas were alive not alone with marching armies, but the ghosts of those who had fallen there the year before rose and walked again.

Despite the darkness everything swelled into life again for Dick. Off there was the little river of Manassas, Young's Branch, the railway station, and the Henry House, around which the battle had raged so fiercely. They would have won the victory then if it had not been for Stonewall Jackson. If he had not been there the war would have been ended on that sanguinary summer day.

But Jackson was in front of them now, and they had him fast. Lee and Jackson had thought to trap Pope, but Jackson himself was in the trap, and they would destroy him utterly. His admiration for the great Southern general had changed for the time into consuming rage. They must overwhelm him, annihilate him, sweep him from the face of the earth.

They mounted again and moved back, but did not go far.

"Get down, Dick," said Colonel Winchester. "Here's food for us, and hot coffee. I don't remember myself how long we've been in the saddle and how long we've been without food, but we mustn't go into battle until we've eaten."

Dick was the last of the officers to dismount. He, too, did not remember how long they had been in the saddle. He could not say at that moment, whether it had been one night or two. He ate and drank mechanically, but hungrily—the

Union army nearly always had plenty of stores—and then he felt better and stronger.

A faint bluish tint was appearing under the gray horizon in the east. Dick felt the touch of a light wind on his forehead. The dawn was coming.

Yes, the dawn was coming, but it was coming heavy with sinister omens and the frown of battle. Before the bluish tint in the east had turned to silver Dick heard the faint and far thudding of great guns, and closer a heavy regular beat which he knew was the gallop of cavalry. Surely the North could not fail now. Fierce anger against those who would break up the Union surged up in him again.

The gray came at last, driving the bluish tint away, and the sun rose hot and bright over the field of Manassas which already had been stained with the blood of one fierce battle. But now the armies were far greater. Nearly a hundred and fifty thousand men were gathering for the combat, and Dick was still hoping that McClellan would come with seventy or eighty thousand more. But within the Confederate lines, where they must always win and never lose, because losing meant to lose all there was a stern determination to shatter Pope and his superior numbers before McClellan could come. Never had the genius and resolution of the two great Southern leaders burned more brightly.

As the brazen sun swung slowly up Dick felt that the intense nervous excitement he had felt the night before was seizing him again. The officers of the regiment remained on foot. Colonel Winchester had sent their horses away to some cavalrymen who had lost their own. He and his staff and other officers, dismounted, could lead the men better into battle.

And that it was battle, great and bloody, the youngest of them all could see. Never had an August day been brighter and hotter. Every object seemed to swell into new size in the vivid and burning sunlight. Plain before them lay Jackson's army. Two of his regiments were between them and a turnpike that Dick remembered well. Off to the left ran the dark masses in gray, until they ended against a thick wood. In the center was a huge battery, and Dick from his position could see the mouths of the cannon waiting for them.

But he also saw the great line of the Northern Army. It was both deeper and longer than that of the South, and he knew that the men were full of resolve and courage.

“How many have we got here?” Dick heard himself asking Warner.

“Forty or fifty thousand, I suppose,” he heard Warner replying, “and before night there will be eighty thousand. Our line is two miles long now. We ought to

wrap around Jackson and crush him to death. Listen to the bugles! What a mellow note! And how they draw men on to death! And listen to the throbbing of the big cannon, too!”

Warner's face was flushed. He had become excited, as the two armies stood there, and looked at each other a moment or two like prize fighters in the ring before closing in battle. Then they heard the order to charge and far up and down the line their own cannon opened with a crash so great that Dick and his comrades could not hear one another talking.

Then they charged. The whole army lifted itself up and rushed at the enemy, animated by patriotism, the fire of battle and the desire for revenge. Among the officers were Milroy and Schenck and others who had been beaten by Jackson in the valley. There, too, was the brigade of Germans whom Jackson had beaten at Cross Keyes. Many of them were veterans of the sternest discipline known in Europe and they longed fiercely for revenge. And there were more Germans, too, under Schurz—hired Germans, fighting nearly a hundred years before to prevent the Union—and free Germans now fighting to save it.

Driven forward thus by all the motives that sway men in battle, the Union army rushed upon Jackson. Confident from many victories and trusting absolutely in their leader the Southern defense received the mighty charge without flinching. The wood now swarmed with riflemen and they filled the air with their bullets, so many of them that their passage was like the continual rush of a hurricane. Along the whole line came the same metallic scream, and the great battery in the center was a volcano, pouring forth a fiery hurricane of shot and shell.

Dick felt their front lines being shorn. Although he was untouched it was an actual physical sensation. He could see but little save that fearful blaze in their faces, and the cries of the wounded and dying were drowned by the awful roar of so many cannon and rifles.

The cloud of dust and smoke had become immense and overwhelming in an instant, but it was pierced always in front by the blaze of fire, and by its flaming light Dick saw the long lines of the Southern men, their faces gray and fixed, as he knew those of his own comrades were.

But the charge, brave, even reckless, failed. The brigades broke in vain on Jackson's iron front. Riddled by the fire of the great battery and of the riflemen they could not go on and live. The Germans had longed for revenge, but they did not get it. The South Carolinians fell upon them at the edge of the wood and hurled them back. They rallied, and charged again, but again they were handled

terribly, and were forced back by the charging masses of the Southerners.

Dick had been at Shiloh. He had seen the men of the west in a great battle, and now he saw the men of the east in a battle yet greater. There it had been largely in the forest, here it was mostly in the open, yet he saw but little more. One of the extraordinary features of this battle was dust. Trampled up from the dry fields by fighting men in scores of thousands it rose in vast floating clouds that permeated everything. It was even more persistent than the smoke. It clogged Dick's throat. It stung and burnt him like powder. Often it filled his eyes so completely that for a moment or two he could not see the blaze of the cannon and rifle fire, almost in his face.

But as they fell back he felt again that sensation of actual physical pain, although he was still untouched. Added to it was an intense mental anguish. They were failing! They had been driven back! They had not crushed Jackson! He forgot all about Colonel Winchester, and his comrades Warner and Pennington. He forgot all about his own danger in this terrible reversal of his hopes, and he began to shout angrily at the men to stand. He did not know by and by that no sound came from his mouth, that words could not come from a throat so choked with dust and burned gunpowder.

But the charge was made again. The thudding great guns now told all the Northern divisions where Jackson was. The eighty thousand men of Pope were crowding forward to attack him, and the batteries were galloping over the plateau to add to the volume of shot and shell that was poured upon the Southern ranks.

Dick was quite unconscious of the passage of time. Hope had sprung anew in his breast. He heard a report that ten thousand fresh troops under Kearney had arrived and were attacking the Southerners in the wood. He knew by the immense volume of fire coming from that point that the report was true, and he heard that McDowell, too, would soon be at hand with nearly thirty thousand men.

Then he saw Colonel Winchester, his face a mass of grime and his clothing flecked with blood. But he did not seem to have suffered any wound and he was calmly rallying his men.

“It's hot!” Dick shouted, why he knew not.

“Yes, my boy, and it will soon be hotter! Look at the new brigades coming into battle! See them on both right and left! We'll crush Jackson yet!”

It was now mid-morning, and neither Colonel Winchester nor any other of the Northern officers facing the Southern force knew that Lee and the other

Southern army was at hand. The front ranks of Longstreet were already in battle, and the most difficult and dangerous of all tasks was accomplished. Two armies coming from points widely divergent, but acting in concert had joined upon the field of battle at the very moment when the junction meant the most. Lee had come, but McClellan and the Army of the Potomac were far away.

Dick heard the trumpets calling again, and once more they charged, hurling heavy masses now upon the wood, which was held by the Southern general, A. P. Hill. Rifle fire gave way to bayonet charges by either side, and after swaying back and forth the Union men held the wood for a while, but at last they were driven out to stay, and as they retreated cannon and rifles decimated their ranks.

The regiment had suffered so terribly that after its retreat it was compelled to lie down a while and rest. Dick gasped for breath, but he was not as much excited as he had been earlier in the day. Perhaps one can become hardened to anything. Although he and his immediate comrades were resting he could see no diminution of the battle.

As far to left and right as the eye reached, cannon and rifles blazed and thundered. In front of their own exhausted regiment hundreds of sharpshooters, creeping forward, were now pouring a deadly fire among the Southern troops who held the wood. They were men of the west and northwest, accustomed all their lives to the use of firearms, and if a Confederate officer in the forest showed himself for a moment it was at the risk of his life. Captains and lieutenants fell fast beneath the aim of the sharpshooters.

The burning sun was at the zenith, pouring fiery rays upon the vast conflict which raged along a front of two miles. Pope himself was now upon the field and his troops were pouring from every point to his aid. So deadly was the fire of the sharpshooters that they regained the wood, driving out the Southerners who had exhausted their cartridges. Hill's division of the Confederates was almost cut to pieces by the cannon and rifles, and the Southern leaders from their posts on the hills saw brigades and regiments continually coming to the help of the North.

Dick saw or rather felt the fortunes of the North rising again, and as his regiment stood up for action once more he began to shout with the others in triumph. The roar of the battle grew so steady that the voices of men became audible and articulate beneath it.

“They shut their trap down upon us, but we're breaking that trap all to pieces,” he heard Pennington say.

“Looks as if we might win a victory,” said the cooler Warner.

Then he heard no more, as they were once again upon the enemy who received them almost hand to hand, and the battle swelled anew. It was now long past noon, and in that prodigious canopy of dust and fire and smoke it seemed for a while that the Union army in truth had shattered the trap. The men in gray were borne back by the courage and weight of their opponents. Hooker, Kearney, Reynolds and all the gallant generals of the North continually urged on their troops. Confidence in victory at last passed through all the army, and incited it to greater efforts.

But Jackson was undaunted. Never was he cooler. Never did his genius shine more brilliantly. Never did any man in all the fury and turmoil of battle, amid a thousand conflicting reports and appalling confusion, have a keener perception, a greater power to sum up what was actually passing, and a better knowledge of what to do.

Lee was a mile away, standing on a wooded hill, the bearded Longstreet by his side, watching the battle in his immediate front, where accumulating masses under Pope's own eye were gathering. On the other flank where Jackson stood and the conflict was heaviest he trusted all to his great lieutenant and not in vain.

Jackson had formed his plan. There came for a few moments a lull in the battle which had now lasted nine hours, and then gathering a powerful reserve he sent them charging through the wood with the bayonet. Dick saw the massive line of glittering steel coming on at the double quick and he felt his regiment giving back. The men could not help it. Physically exhausted and with ammunition running low they slowly yielded the wood. Many of the youths wept with rage, but although they had lost thousands in five desperate charges they were compelled to see all five fail.

Dick, aghast, gazed at Warner through the smoke.

“It's true!” gasped Warner, “we didn't break the trap, Dick. But maybe they'll succeed off there to the left! Our own commander is there, and they say that Lee himself has come to the help of Jackson!”

They had been driven back at all points and their own battle was dying, but off to the left it thundered a while longer, and then as night suddenly rushed over the field it, too, sank, leaving the hostile forces on that wing also still face to face, but with the North pushed back.

The coming of night was as sudden to Dick as if it had been the abrupt dropping of a great dark blanket. In the fury of conflict he had not noticed the gathering shadows in the west. The dimness around him, if he had taken time to think about it, he would have ascribed to the vast columns of dust that eddied

and surged about.

Again it was the dust that he felt and remembered. The surging back and forth of seven score thousand men, the tread of horses and the wheels of hundreds of cannon raised it in such quantities that it covered the forest and the armies with a vast whitish curtain. Even in the darkness it showed dim and ghastly like a funeral veil.

Out of that fatal forest came a dreadful moaning. Dick did not know whether it was the wind among the leaves or the dying. Once more the ghosts of the year before walked the fatal field, but the ghosts of this year would be a far greater company. They had not broken the trap and Dick knew that the battle was far from over.

It would be renewed in the morning with greater fierceness than ever, but he was grateful for the present darkness and rest. He and his comrades had thrown themselves upon the ground, and they felt as if they could never move again. Their bones did not ache. They merely felt dead within them.

Dick was roused after a long time. The camp cooks were bringing food and coffee. He saw a figure lying at his feet as still as death, and he shoved it with his foot.

“Get up, Frank,” he said. “You're not dead.”

“No, I'm not, but I'm as good as dead. You just let me finish dying in peace.”

Dick shoved him again and Pennington sat up. When he saw the food and coffee he suddenly remembered to be hungry. Warner was already eating and drinking. Off to the left they still heard cannon and rifles, although the sound was sinking. Occasionally flashes from the mouths of the great guns illumined the darkness.

Dick did not know what time it was. He had no idea how long he had been lying upon the ground panting, the air surcharged with menace and suspense. The vast clouds of dust, impregnated with burned gunpowder still floated about, and it scorched his mouth and throat as he breathed it.

The boys, after eating and drinking lay down again. They still heard the firing of pickets, but it was no more than the buzzing of bees to them, and after a while they fell into the sleep of nervous and physical exhaustion. But while many of the soldiers slept all of the generals were awake.

It was a singular fact but in the night that divided the great battle of the Second Manassas into two days both sides were full of confidence. Jackson's men, who had borne the brunt of the first day, rested upon their arms and awaited

the dawn with implicit confidence in their leader. On the other flank Lee and Longstreet were massing their men for a fresh attack.

The losses within the Union lines were replaced by reinforcements. Pope rode among them, sanguine, full of hope, telegraphing to Washington that the enemy had lost two to his one, and that Lee was retreating toward the mountains.

Dick slept uneasily through the night, and rose to another hot August sun. Then the two armies looked at each other and it seemed that each was waiting for the other to begin, as the morning hours dragged on and only the skirmishers were busy. During this comparative peace, the heavy clouds of dust were not floating about, and Dick whose body had come to life again walked back and forth with his colonel, gazing through their glasses at the enemy. He scarcely noticed it, but Colonel Winchester's manner toward him had become paternal. The boy merely ascribed it to the friendly feeling an officer would feel for a faithful aide, but he knew that he had in his colonel one to whom he could speak both as a friend and a protector. Walking together they talked freely of the enemy who stood before them in such an imposing array.

“Colonel,” said Dick, “do you think General Pope is correct in stating that one wing of the Southern army is already retreating through Thoroughfare Gap?”

“I don't, Dick. I don't think it is even remotely probable. I'm quite sure, too, that we have the whole Confederate army in front of us. We'll have to beat both Lee and Jackson, if we can.”

“Where do you think the main attack will be?”

“On Jackson, who is still in front of us. But we have waited a long time. It must be full noon now.”

“It is past noon, sir, but I hear the trumpets, calling up our men.”

“They are calling to us, too.”

The regiment shifted a little to the right, where a great column was forming for a direct attack upon the Confederate lines. Twenty thousand men stood in a vast line and forty thousand were behind them to march in support.

Dick had thought that he would be insensible to emotions, but his heart began to throb again. The spectacle thrilled and awed him—the great army marching to the attack and the resolute army awaiting it. Soon he heard behind him the firing of the artillery which sent shot and shell over their heads at the enemy. A dozen cannon came into action, then twenty, fifty, a hundred and more, and the earth trembled with the mighty concussion.

Dick felt the surge of triumph. They had yet met no answering fire. Perhaps General Pope and not Colonel Winchester had been right after all, and the Confederates were crushed. Awaiting them was only a rear guard which would

flee at the first flash of the bayonets in the wood.

The great line marched steadily onward, and the cannon thundered and roared over the heads of the men raking the wood with steel. Still no reply. Surely the sixty thousand Union men would now march over everything. They were driving in the swarms of skirmishers. Dick could see them retreating everywhere, in the wood over the hills and along an embankment.

Warner was on his right and Pennington on his left. Dick glanced at them and he saw the belief in speedy victory expressed on the faces of both. It seemed to him, too, that nothing could now stop the massive columns that Pope was sending forward against the thinned ranks of the Confederates.

They were much nearer and he saw gray lines along an embankment and in a wood. Then above the crash and thunder of their covering artillery he heard another sound. It was the Southern bugles calling with a piercing note to their own men just as the Northern trumpets had called.

Dick saw a great gray multitude suddenly pour forward. It looked to him in the blur and the smoke like an avalanche, and in truth it was a human avalanche, a far greater force of the South than they expected to meet there. Directly in front of the Union column stood the Stonewall Brigade, and all the chosen veterans of Stonewall Jackson's army.

“It's a fight, face to face,” Dick heard Colonel Winchester say.

Then he saw a Union officer, whose name he did not know suddenly gallop out in front of the division, wave his saber over his head and shout the charge. A tremendous rolling cry came from the blue ranks and Dick physically felt the whole division leap forward and rush at the enemy.

Dick saw the officer who had made himself the leader of the charge gallop straight at a breastwork that the Southerners had built, reach and stand, horse and rider, a moment at the top, then both fall in a limp heap. The next instant the officer, not dead but wounded, was dragged a prisoner behind the embankment by generous foes who had refused to shoot at him until compelled to do so.

The Union men, with a roar, followed their champion, and Dick felt a very storm burst upon them. The Southerners had thrown up earthworks at midnight and thousands of riflemen lying behind them sent in a fire at short range that caused the first Union line to go down like falling grain. Cannon from the wood and elsewhere raked them through and through.

It was a vortex of fire and death. The Confederates themselves were losing heavily, but taught by the stern Jackson and knowing that his eye was upon them they refused to yield. The Northern charge broke on their front, but the men did

not retreat far. The shrill trumpet called them back to the charge, and once more the blue masses hurled themselves upon the barrier of fire and steel, to break again, and to come yet a third time at the trumpet's call. Often the combatants were within ten yards of one another, but strive as they would the Union columns could not break through the Confederate defense.

Elsewhere the men of Hill and Longstreet showed a sternness and valor equal to that of Jackson's. Their ranks held firm everywhere, and now, as the long afternoon drew on, the eye of Lee, watching every rising and falling wave of the battle, saw his chance. He drew his batteries together in great masses and as the last charge broke on Jackson's lines the trumpets sounded the charge for the Southern troops who hitherto had stood on the defensive.

Dick heard a tremendous shout, the great rebel yell, that he had heard so often before, and that he was destined to hear so often again. Through the clouds of smoke and dust he saw the long lines of Southern bayonets advancing swiftly. His regiment, which had already lost more than half its numbers, was borne back by an appalling weight.

Then hope deserted the boy for the first time. The Union was not to be saved here on this field. It was instead another lost Manassas, but far greater than the first. The genius of Lee and Jackson which bore up the Confederacy was triumphing once again. Dick shut his teeth in grim despair. He heard the triumphant shouts of the advancing enemy, and he saw that not only his own regiment, but the whole Northern line, was being driven back, slowly it is true, but they were going.

Now at the critical moment, Lee was hurling forward every man and gun. Although his army was inferior in numbers he was always superior at the point of contact, and his exultant veterans pressed harder and harder upon their weakening foes. Only the artillery behind them now protected Dick and his comrades. But the Confederates still came with a rush.

Jackson was leading on his own men who had stood so long on the defensive. The retreating Union line was broken, guns were lost, and there was a vast turmoil and confusion. Yet out of it some order finally emerged, and although the Union army was now driven back at every point it inflicted heavy losses upon its foe, and under the lead of brave commanders great masses gathered upon the famous Henry Hill, resolved, although they could not prevent defeat, to save the army from destruction.

Night was coming down for the second time upon the field of battle, lost to the North, although the North was ready to fight again.

Lee and Jackson looked upon the heavy Union masses gathered at the Henry Hill, and then looking at the coming darkness they stopped the attack. Night heavier than usual came down over the field, covering with its friendly veil those who had lost and those who had won, and the twenty-five thousand who had fallen.

CHAPTER VI. THE MOURNFUL FOREST

As the night settled down, heavy and dark, and the sounds of firing died away along the great line, Dick again sank to the ground exhausted. Although the battle itself had ceased, it seemed to him that the drums of his ears still reproduced its thunder and roar, or at least the echo of it was left upon the brain.

He lay upon the dry grass, and although the night was again hot and breathless, surcharged with smoke and dust and fire, he felt a chill that went to the bone, and he trembled all over. Then a cold perspiration broke out upon him. It was the collapse after two days of tremendous exertion, excitement and anxiety. He did not move for eight or ten minutes, blind to everything that was going on about him, and then through the darkness he saw Colonel Winchester standing by and looking down at him.

“Are you all right, Dick, my boy?” the colonel asked.

“Yes, sir,” replied Dick, as his pride made him drag himself to his feet. “I'm not wounded at all. I was just clean played out.”

“You're lucky to get off so well,” said the colonel, smiling sadly. “We've lost many thousands and we've lost the battle, too. The killed or wounded in my regiment number more than two-thirds.”

“Have you seen anything of Warner and Pennington, sir? I lost sight of them in that last terrible attack.”

“Pennington is here. He has had a bullet through the fleshy part of his left arm, but he's so healthy it won't take him long to get well. I'm sorry to say that Warner is missing.”

“Missing, sir? You don't say that George has been killed?”

“I don't say it. I'm hoping instead that he's been captured.”

Dick knew what the colonel meant. In Colonel Winchester's opinion only two things, death or capture, could keep Warner from being with them.

“Maybe he will come in yet,” he said. “We were mixed up a good deal when the darkness fell, and he may have trouble in finding our position.”

“That's true. There are not so many of us left, and we do not cover any great area of ground. Lie still, Dick, and take a little rest. We don't know what's going to happen in the night. We may have to do more fighting yet, despite the darkness.”

The colonel's figure disappeared in the shadow, and Dick, following his advice, lay quiet. All around him were other forms stretched upon the earth, motionless. But Dick knew they were not dead, merely sleeping. His own nervous system was being restored by youth and the habit of courage. Yet he felt a personal grief, and it grew stronger with returning physical strength. Warner, his comrade, knitted to him by ties of hardship and danger, was missing, dead no doubt in the battle. For the moment he forgot about the defeat. All his thoughts were for the brave youth who lay out there somewhere, stretched on the dusty field.

Dick strained his eyes into the darkness, as if by straining he might see where Warner lay. He saw, indeed, dim fires here and there along a long line, marking where the Confederates now stood, or rather lay. Then a bitter pang came. It was ground upon which the Union army had stood in the morning.

The rifle fire, which had died down, began again in a fitful way. Far off, skirmishers, not satisfied with the slaughter of the day, were seeing what harm they could do in the dark. Somewhere the plumed and unresting Stuart was charging with his horsemen, driving back some portion of the Union army that the Confederate forces might be on their flank in the morning.

But Dick, as he lay quietly and felt his strength, mental and physical, returning, was taking a resolution. Down there in front of them and in the darkness was the wood upon which they had made five great assaults, all to fail. In front of that mournful forest, and within its edge, more than ten thousand men had fallen. He had no doubt that Warner was among them.

His sense of direction was good, and, as his blurred faculties regained their normal keenness, he could mark the exact line by which they had advanced, and the exact line by which they had retreated. Warner unquestionably lay near the edge of the wood and he must seek him. Were it the other way, Warner would do the same.

Dick stood up. He was no longer dizzy, and every muscle felt steady and strong. He did not know what had become of Colonel Winchester, and his comrades still lay upon the ground in a deep stupor.

It could not be a night of order and precision, with every man numbered and in his place, as if they were going to begin a battle instead of just having finished one, and Dick, leaving his comrades, walked calmly toward the wood. He passed one sentinel, but a few words satisfied him, and he continued to advance. Far to right and left he still heard the sound of firing and saw the flash of guns, but these facts did not disturb him. In front of him lay darkness and silence, with the

horizon bounded by that saddest of all woods where the heaped dead lay.

Dick looked back toward the Henry Hill, on the slopes of which were the fragments of his own regiment. Lights were moving there, but they were so dim they showed nothing. Then he turned his face toward the enemy's position and did not look back again.

The character of the night was changing. It had come on dark and heavy. Hot and breathless like the one before, he had taken no notice of the change save for the increased darkness. Now he felt a sudden damp touch on his face, as if a wet finger had been laid there. The faintest of winds had blown for a moment or two, and when Dick looked up, he saw that the sky was covered with black clouds. The saddest of woods had moved far away, but by some sort of optical illusion he could yet see it.

Save for the distant flash of random firing, the darkness was intense. Every star was gone, and Dick moved without any guide. But he needed none. His course was fixed. He could not miss the mournful wood hanging there like a pall on the horizon.

His feet struck against something. It was a man, but he was past all feeling, and Dick went on, striking by and by against many more. It was impossible at the moment to see Warner's face, but he began to feel of the figures with his hands. There was none so long and slender as Warner's, and he continued his search, moving steadily toward the wood.

He saw presently a lantern moving over the field, and he walked toward it. Three men were with the lantern, and the one who carried it held it up as he approached. The beams fell directly upon Dick, revealing his pale face and torn and dusty uniform.

“What do you want, Yank?” called the man.

“I'm looking for a friend of mine who must have fallen somewhere near here.”

The man laughed, but it was not a laugh of joy or irony. It was a laugh of pity and sadness.

“You've shorely got a big look comin',” he said. “They're scattered all around here, coverin' acres an' acres, just like dead leaves shook by a storm from the trees. But j'in us, Yank. You can't do nothin' in the darkness all by yourself. We're Johnny Rebs, good and true, and I may be shootin' straight at you to-morrow mornin', but I reckon I've got nothin' ag'in you now. We're lookin' for a brother o' mine.”

Dick joined them, and the four, the three in gray and the one in blue, moved

on. A friendly current had passed between him and them, and there would be no thought of hostility until the morning, when it would come again. It was often so in this war, when men of the same blood met in the night between battles.

“What sort of a fellow is it that you're lookin' for?” asked the man with the lantern.

“About my age. Very tall and thin. You could mark him by his height.”

“It takes different kinds of people to make the world. My brother ain't like him a-tall. Sam's short, an' thick as a buffalo. Weighs two twenty with no fat on him. What crowd do you belong to, youngster?”

“The division on our right. We attacked the wood there.”

“Well, you're a bully boy. Give me your hand, if you are a Yank. You shorely came right up there and looked us in the eyes. How often did you charge us?”

“Five times, I think. But I may be mistaken. You know it wasn't a day when a fellow could be very particular about his count.”

“Guess you're right there. I made it five. What do you say, Jim?”

“Five she was.”

“That settles it. Jim kin always count up to five an' never make a mistake. What you fellers goin' to do in the mornin'?”

“I don't know.”

“Pope ain't asked you yet what to do. Well, Bobby Lee and Old Stonewall ain't been lookin' for me either to get my advice, but, Yank, you fellers do just what I tell you.”

“What's that?”

“Pack up your clothes before daylight, say good-bye, and go back to Washington. You needn't think you kin ever lick Marse Bobby an' Stonewall Jackson.”

“But what if we do think it? We've got a big army back there yet, and more are always coming to us. We'll beat you yet.”

“There seems to be a pow'ful wide difference in our opinions, an' I can't persuade you an' you can't persuade me. We'll just let the question rip. I'm glad, after all, Yank, it's so dark. I don't want to see ten thousand dead men stretched out in rows.”

“We're going to get a wettin',” said the man to Jim. “The air's already damp on my face. Thar, do you hear that thunder growlin' in the southwest? Tremenjously like cannon far away, but it's thunder all the same.”

“What do we care 'bout a wettin', Jim? Fur the last few days this young Yank here an' his comrades have shot at me 'bout a million cannon balls an' shells, an' more 'n a hundred million rifle bullets. Leastways I felt as if they was all aimed at me, which is just as bad. After bein' drenched fur two days with a storm of steel an' lead an' fire, what do you think I care for a summer shower of rain, just drops of rain?”

“But I don't like to get wet after havin' fit so hard. It's unhealthy, likely to give me a cold.”

“Never min' 'bout ketchin' cold. You're goin' to get wet, shore. Thunder, but I thought fur a second that was the flash of a hull battery aimed at me. Fellers, if you wasn't with me I'd be plumb scared, prowlin' 'roun' here in a big storm on the biggest graveyard in the world. Keep close, Yank, we don't want to lose you in the dark.”

A tremendous flash of lightning had cut the sky down the middle, as if it intended to divide the world in two halves, but after its passage the darkness closed in thicker and heavier than ever. The sinister sound of thunder muttering on the horizon now went on without ceasing.

Dick was awed. Like many another his brain exposed to such tremendous pressure for two or three days, was not quite normal. It was quickly heated and excited by fancies, and time and place alone were enough to weigh down even the coolest and most seasoned. He pressed close to his Confederate friends, whose names he never knew, and who never knew his, and they, feeling the same influence, never for an instant left the man who held the lantern.

The muttering thunder now came closer and broke in terrible crashes. The lightning flashed again and again so vividly that Dick, with involuntary motion, threw up his hands to shelter his eyes. But he could see before him the mournful forest, where so many good men had fallen, and, turned red in the gleam of the lightning, it was more terrifying than it had been in the mere black of the night. The wind, too, was now blowing, and the forest gave forth what Dick's ears turned into a long despairing wail.

“She's about to bust,” said the lantern bearer, looking up at the menacing sky. “Jim, you'll have to take your wettin' as it comes.”

A moment later the storm burst in fact. The rain rushed down on them, soaking them through in an instant, but Dick, so far from caring, liked it. It cooled his heated body and brain, and he knew that it was more likely to help than hurt the wounded who yet lay on the ground.

The lightning ceased before the sweep of the rain, but the lantern was well

protected by its glass cover, and they still searched. The lantern bearer suddenly uttered a low cry.

“Boys!” he said, “Here's Sam!”

A thick and uncommonly powerful man lay doubled up against a bush. His face was white. Dick saw that blood had just been washed from it by the rain. But he could see no rising and falling of the chest, and he concluded that he was dead.

“Take the lantern, Jim,” said the leader. Then he knelt down and put his finger on his brother's wrist.

“He ain't dead,” he said at last. “His pulse is beatin' an' he'll come to soon. The rain helped him. Whar was he hit? By gum, here it is! A bullet has ploughed all along the side of his head, runnin' 'roun' his skull. Here, you Yank, did you think you could kill Sam by shootin' him in the head with a bullet? We've stood him up in front of our lines, and let you fellows break fifty pound shells on his head. You never done him no harm, 'cept once when two solid shot struck him at the same time an' he had a headache nigh until sundown. Besides havin' natural thickness of the skull Sam trained his head by buttin' with the black boys when he was young.”

Dick saw that the man really felt deep emotion and was chattering, partly to hide it. He was glad that they had found his brother, and he helped them to lift him. Then they rubbed Sam's wrists and poured a stimulant down his throat. In a few minutes he stood alone on his feet, yawned mightily, and by the light of the dim lantern gazed at them in a sort of stupid wonder.

“What's happened?” he asked.

“What's happened?” replied his brother. “You was always late with the news, Sam. Of course you've been takin' a nap, but a lot has happened. We met the Yankees an' we've been fightin' 'em for two days. Tremenjous big battle, an' we've whipped 'em. 'Scuse me, Yank, I forgot you was with us. Well, nigh onto a million have been killed, which ought to be enough for anybody. I love my country, but I don't care to love another at such a price. But resumin' 'bout you pussonally, Sam, you stopped so many shells an' solid shot with that thick head of yourn that the concussion at last put you to sleep, an' we've found you so we kin take you in out of the wet an' let you sleep in a dry place. Kin you walk?”

Sam made an effort, but staggered badly.

“Jim, you an' Dave take him by each shoulder an' walk him back to camp,” said the lantern bearer. “You jest keep straight ahead an' you'll butt into Marse Bob or old Stonewall, one or the other.”

“You lead the way with the lantern.”

“Never you mind about me or the lantern.”

“What you goin' to do?”

“Me? I'm goin' to keep this lantern an' help Yank here find his friend. Ain't he done stuck with us till we found Sam, an' I reckon I'll stick with him till he gits the boy he's lookin for, dead or alive. Now, you keep Sam straight, and walk him back to camp. He ain't hurt. Why, that bullet didn't dent his skull. It said to itself when it came smack up against the bone: 'This is too tough for me, I guess I'll go 'roun'.' An' it did go 'roun'. You can see whar it come out of the flesh on the other side. Why, by the time Sam was fourteen years old we quit splittin' old boards with an axe or a hatchet. We jest let Sam set on a log an' we split 'em over his head. Everybody was suited. Sam could make himself pow'ful useful without havin' to work.”

Nevertheless, the lantern bearer gave his brother the tenderest care, and watched him until he and the men on either side of him were lost in the darkness as they walked toward the Southern camp.

“I jest had to come an' find old Sam, dead or alive,” he said. “Now, which way, Yank, do you think this friend of yours is layin'?”

“But you're comin' with us,” repeated Jim.

“No, I'm not. Didn't Yank here help us find Sam? An' are we to let the Yanks give us lessons in manners? I reckon not. 'Sides, he's only a boy, an' I'm goin' to see him through.”

“I thank you,” said Dick, much moved.

“Don't thank me too much, 'cause while I'm walkin' 'roun' with you friendly like to-night I may shoot you to-morrow.”

“I thank you, all the same,” said Dick, his gratitude in nowise diminished.

“Them that will stir no more are layin' mighty thick 'roun' here, but we ought to find your friend pretty soon. By gum, how it rains! W'all, it'll wash away some big stains, that wouldn't look nice in the mornin'. Say, sonny, what started this rumpus, anyway?”

“I don't know.”

“An' I don't, either, so I guess it's hoss an' hoss with you an' me. But, sonny, I'll bet you a cracker ag'in a barrel of beef that none of them that did start the rumpus are a-layin' on this field to-night. What kind of lookin' feller did you say your young friend was?”

“Very tall, very thin, and about my age or perhaps a year or two older.”

“Take a good look, an' see if this ain't him.”

He held up the lantern and the beams fell upon a long figure half raised upon an elbow. The figure was turned toward the light and stared unknowing at Dick and the Southerner. There was a great clot of blood upon his right breast and shoulder, but it was Warner. Dick swallowed hard.

“Yes,” he said, “it's my comrade, but he's hurt badly.”

“So bad that he don't know you or anybody else. He's clean out of his head.”

They leaned over him, and Dick called:

“George! George! It's Dick Mason, your comrade, come to help you back to camp!”

But Warner merely stared with feverish, unseeing eyes.

“He's out of his head, as I told you, an' he's like to be for many hours,” said the lantern bearer. “It's a shore thing that I won't shoot him to-morrow, nor he won't shoot me.”

He leaned over Warner and carefully examined the wound.

“He's lucky, after all,” he said, “the bullet went in just under the right shoulder, but it curved, as bullets have a way of doin' sometimes, an' has come out on the side. There ain't no lead in him now, which is good. He was pow'ful lucky, too, in not bein' hit in the head, 'cause he ain't got no such skull as Sam has, not within a mile of it. His skull wouldn't have turned no bullet. He has lost a power of blood, but if you kin get him back to camp, an' use the med'cines which you Yanks have in such lots an' which we haven't, he may get well.”

“That's good advice,” said Dick. “Help me up with him.”

“Take him on your back. That's the best way to carry a sick man.”

He set down his lantern, took up Warner bodily and put him on Dick's back.

“I guess you can carry him all right,” he said. “I'd light you with the lantern a piece of the way, but I've been out here long enough. Marse Bob an' old Stonewall will get tired waitin' fur me to tell 'em how to end this war in a month.”

Dick, holding Warner in place with one hand, held out the other, and said:

“You're a white man, through and through, Johnny Reb. Shake!”

“So are you, Yank. There's nothin' wrong with you 'cept that you happened to get on the wrong side, an' I don't hold that ag'in you. I guess it was an innercent mistake.”

“Good-bye.”

“Good-bye. Keep straight ahead an' you'll strike that camp of yourn that we're goin' to take in the mornin'. Gosh, how it rains!”

Dick retained his idea of direction, and he walked straight through the darkness toward the Northern camp. George was a heavy load, but he did not struggle. His head sank down against his comrade's and Dick felt that it was burning with fever.

“Good old George,” he murmured to himself rather than to his comrade, “I'll save you.”

Excitement and resolve had given him a strength twice the normal, a strength that would last the fifteen or twenty minutes needed until this task was finished. Despite the darkness and the driving rain, he could now see the lights in his own camp, and bending forward a little to support the dead weight on his back, he walked in a straight course toward them.

“Halt! Who are you?”

The form of a sentinel, rifle raised, rose up before him in the darkness and the rain.

“Lieutenant Richard Mason of Colonel Winchester's regiment, bringing in Lieutenant George Warner of the same regiment, who is badly wounded.”

The sentinel lowered his rifle and looked at them sympathetically.

“Hangs like he's dead, but he ain't,” he said. “You'll find a sort of hospital over thar in the big tents among them trees.”

Dick found the improvised hospital, and put George down on a rude cot, within the shelter of one of the tents.

“He's my friend,” he said to a young doctor, “and I wish you'd save him.”

“There are hundreds of others who have friends also, but I'll do my best. Shot just under the right shoulder, but the bullet, luckily, has turned and gone out. It's loss of blood that hurt him most. You soldiers kill more men than we doctors can save. I'm bound to say that. But your friend won't die. I'll see to it.”

“Thank you,” said Dick. He saw that the doctor was kind-hearted, and a marvel of endurance and industry. He could not ask for more at such a time, and he went out of the tent, leaving George to his care.

It was still raining, but the soldiers managed to keep many fires going, despite it, and Dick passed between them as he sought Colonel Winchester, and the fragments of his regiment. He found the colonel wrapped in a greatcoat, leaning against a tree under a few feet of canvas supported on sticks. Pennington, sound asleep, sat on a root of the same tree, also under the canvas, but with the rain

beating on his left arm and shoulder.

Colonel Winchester looked inquiringly at Dick, but said nothing.

“I've been away without leave, sir,” said Dick, “but I think I have sufficient excuse.”

“What is it?”

“I've brought in Warner.”

“Ah! Is he dead?”

“No, sir. He's had a bullet through him and he's feverish and unconscious, but the doctor says that with care he'll get well.”

“Where did you find him?”

“Over there by the edge of the wood, sir, within what is now the Confederate lines.”

“A credit to your courage and to your heart. Sit down here. There's a little more shelter under the canvas, and go to sleep. You're too much hardened now to be hurt seriously by wet clothes.”

Dick sat down with his back against the tree, and, despite his soaked condition, slept as soundly as Pennington. When he awoke in the morning the hot sun was shining again, and his clothes soon dried on him. He felt a little stiffness and awkwardness at first, but in a few minutes it passed away. Then breakfast restored his strength, and he looked curiously about him.

Around him was the Northern army, and before him was the vast battlefield, now occupied by the foe. He heard sounds of distant rifle shots, indicating that the skirmishers were still restless, but it was no more now than the buzzing of flies. Pennington, coming back from the hospital, hailed him.

“George has come to,” he said. “Great deed of yours last night, Dick. Wish I'd done it myself. They let old George talk just a little, but he's his real old Vermont self again. Says chances were ninety-nine and a half per cent that he would die there on the battlefield, but that the half per cent, which was yourself, won. Fancy being only half of one per cent, and doing a thing like that. No, you can't see him. Only one visitor was allowed, and that's me. His fever is leaving him, and he swallowed a little soup. Now, he's going to sleep.”

Dick felt very grateful. Pennington had been up some time, and as they sat down in the sun he gave Dick the news.

“It was a bad night,” he said. “After you staggered in with George, the rebels, in spite of the rain, harassed us. I was waked up after midnight, and the colonel began to believe that we would have to fight again before morning, though the

need didn't come, so far as we were concerned. But we were terribly worried on the flanks. They say it was Stuart and his cavalry who were bothering us."

"What's the outlook for to-day?"

"I don't know. I hear that General Pope has sent a dispatch saying that the enemy is badly whipped, and that we'll hold our own here. But between you and me, Dick, I don't believe it. We've been driven out of all our positions, so we can hardly call it a victory for our side."

"But we may hold on where we are and win a victory yet. McClellan and the Army of the Potomac may come. Anyway, we can get big reinforcements."

Pennington clasped his arms over his knees and sang:

"The race is not to him that's got
The longest legs to run,
Nor the battle to those people
That shoot the biggest gun."

"Where did you get that song?" asked Dick. "I'll allow, under the circumstances, that there seems to be some sense in it."

"A Texan that we captured last night sang it to us. He was a funny kind of fellow. Didn't seem to be worried a bit because he was taken. Said if his own people didn't retake him that he'd escape in a week, anyhow. Likely enough he will, too. But he was good company, and he sang us that song. Impudent, wasn't he?"

"But true so far, at least in the east. I fancy from what you say, Frank, that we'll be here a day longer anyhow. I hope so, I want to rest."

"So do I. I won't fight to-day, unless I'm ordered to do it. But I'm thinking with you, Dick, that we'll retreat. We were outmaneuvered by Lee and Jackson. That circuit of Jackson's through Thoroughfare Gap and the attack from the rear undid us. It comes of being kept in the dark by the enemy, instead of your keeping him in the dark. We never knew where the blow was going to fall, and when it fell a lot of us weren't there. But, Dick, old boy, we're going to win, in the end, aren't we, in spite of Lee, in spite of Jackson, and in spite of everybody and everything?"

"As surely as the rising and setting of the sun, Frank."

Although Dick had little to do that day, events were occurring. It was in the minds of Lee and Jackson that they might yet destroy the army which they had already defeated, and heavy divisions of the Southern army were moving. Dick heard about night that Jackson had marched ten miles, through fields deep in mud, and meant to fall on Pope's flank or rear again. Stuart and his unresting cavalry were also on their right flank and in the rear, doing damage everywhere.

Longstreet had sent a brigade across Bull Run, and at many points the enemy was pressing closer.

The next morning, Pope, alarmed by all the sinister movements on his flanks and in his rear, gathered up his army and retreated. It was full time or the vise would have shut down on him again. Late that day the division under Kearney came into contact with Jackson's flanking force in the forest. A short but fierce battle ensued, fought in the night and amid new torrents of driving rain. General Kearney was killed by a skirmisher, but the night and the rain grew so dense, and they were in such a tangle of thickets and forests that both sides drew off, and Pope's army passed on.

Dick was not in this battle, but he heard it's crash and roar above the sweep of the storm. He and the balance of the regiment were helping to guard the long train of the wounded. Now and then, he leaned from his horse and looked at Warner who lay in one of the covered wagons.

“I'm getting along all right, Dick, old man,” said Warner. “What's all that firing off toward the woods?”

“A battle, but it won't stop us. We retreated in time.”

“And we've been defeated. Well, we can stand it. It takes a good nation to stand big defeats. You know I taught school once, Dick, and I learned that the biggest nation the world has ever known was the one that suffered the biggest defeats. Look at the terrible knocks the Romans got! Why the Gauls nearly ate 'em alive two or three times, and for years Hannibal whipped 'em every time he could get at 'em. But they ended by whipping everybody who had whipped them. They whipped the whole world, and they kept it whipped until they played out from old age.”

Dick laughed cheerily.

“Now, you shut up, George,” he said. “You've talked too much. What's the use of going back as far as the old Romans for comfort. We can win without having to copy a lot of old timers.”

He dropped the flap of canvas and rode on listening to the sounds of the combat. A powerful figure stepped out of the bushes and stood beside his horse. It was Sergeant Whitley, who had passed through the battle without a scratch.

“What has happened, Sergeant?” asked Dick, as he sat in the rain and listened to the dying fire.

“There has been a fight, and both are quitting because they can't see enough to carry it on any longer. But General Kearney has been killed.”

The retreat continued until they reached the Potomac and were in the great fortifications before Washington. Then Pope resigned, and the star of McClellan rose again. The command of the armies about Washington was entrusted to him, and the North gathered itself anew for the mighty struggle.

CHAPTER VII. ORDERS NO. 191

When the Union army, defeated at the Second Manassas fell back on Washington, Dick was detached for a few days from the regiment by Colonel Winchester, partly that he might have a day or two of leave, and partly that he might watch over Warner, who was making good progress.

Warner was in a wagon that contained half a dozen other wounded men, or rather boys, and they were all silent like stoics as they passed over the bridge to a hospital in Washington. His side and shoulder pained him, and he had recurrent periods of fever, but he was making fine progress.

Dick found his comrade on a small cot among dozens of others in a great room. But George's cot was near a window and the pleasant sunshine poured in. It was now the opening of September, and the hot days were passing. There was a new sparkle and crispness in the air, and Warner, wounded as he was, felt it.

“We're back in the capital to enjoy ourselves a while,” he said lightly to Dick, “and I'm glad to see that the weather will be fine for sight-seeing.”

“Yes, here we are,” said Dick. “The Johnnies beat us this time. They didn't outfight us, but they had the best generals. As soon as you're well, George, we'll start out again and lick 'em.”

“I'm glad you told 'em to wait for me, Dick. That's what you ought to do. I hear that McClellan is at the head of things again.”

“Yes, the Army of the Potomac is to the front once more, and it's taken over the Army of Virginia. We hear that Pope is going out to the northwest to fight Indians.”

“McClellan is not likely to be trapped as Pope was, but he's so tremendously cautious that he'll never trap anything himself. Now, which kind of a general would you choose, Dick?”

“As between those two I'll take McClellan. The soldiers at least like him and believe in him. And George, our man in the east hasn't come yet. The generals we've had don't hammer. They don't concentrate, rush right in and rain blows on the enemy.”

“Do you think you know the right man, Dick?”

“I'm making a guess. It's Grant. We saw him at Donelson and Shiloh. Surprised at both places, he won anyhow. He wouldn't be beat. That's the kind of

man we want here in the east.”

“You may be right, Dick, but the politicians in this part of the country all run him down. Halleck has been transferred to Washington as a sort of general commander and adviser to the President, and they say he doesn't like Grant.”

Further talk was cut short by a young army surgeon, and Dick left George, saying that he would come back the next day. The streets of Washington were full of sunshine, but not of hope and cheerfulness. The most terrible suspense reigned there. Never before or since was Washington in such alarm. A hostile and victorious army was within a day's march. Pope almost to the last had talked of victory. Then came a telegram, asking if the capital could be defended in case his army was destroyed. Next came the army preceded by thousands of stragglers and heralds of disaster.

The people were dropped from the golden clouds of hope to the hard earth of despair. They strained their eyes toward Manassas, where the flag of the Union had twice gone down in disaster. It was said, and there was ample cause for the saying of it, that Lee and Jackson with their victorious veterans would appear any moment before the capital. There were rumors that the government was packing up in order to flee northward to Philadelphia or even New York.

But Dick believed none of these rumors. In fact, he was not greatly alarmed by any of them. He was sure that McClellan, although without genius, would restore the stamina of the troops, if indeed it were ever lost, which he doubted very much. He had seen how splendidly they fought at the Second Manassas, and he knew that there was no panic among them. Moreover, the North was an inexhaustible storehouse of men and material, and whenever one soldier fell two grew in his place.

So he strode through the crowded streets, calm of face and manner, and took his way once more to the hotel, where he had sat and listened to the talk before the Second Manassas. The lobby was packed with men, and there was but one topic, the military situation. Would Lee and Jackson advance, hot upon the heels of their victory? Would Washington fall? Would McClellan be able to save them? Why weren't the generals of the North as good as those of the South?

Dick listened to the talk which was for all who might choose to hear. He did not assume any superior frame of mind, merely because he had fought in many battles and these men had fought in none. He retained the natural modesty of youth, and knowing that one who looked on might sometimes be a better judge of what was happening than the one who took part, he weighed carefully what they said.

He was in a comfortable chair by the wall, and while he sat there a heavy man of middle age, whom he remembered well, approached and stood before him, regarding him with a keen and measuring eye.

“Good morning, Mr. Watson,” said Dick politely.

“Ah, it is you, Lieutenant Mason!” said the contractor. “I thought so, but I was not sure, as you are thinner than you were when I last saw you. I'll just take this seat beside you.”

A man in the next chair had moved and the contractor dropped into it. Then he crossed his legs, and smoothed the upper knee with a strong, fat hand.

“You've had quite a trip since I last saw you, Mr. Mason,” he said.

“We didn't go so terribly far.”

“It's not length that makes a trip. It's what you see and what happens.”

“I saw a lot, and a hundred times more than what I saw happened.”

The contractor took two fine cigars from his vest pocket and handed one to Dick.

“No, thank you,” said the boy, “I've never learned to smoke.”

“I suppose that's because you come from Kentucky, where they raise so much tobacco. When you see a thing so thick around you, you don't care for it. Well, we'll talk while I light mine and puff it. And so, young man, you ran against Lee and Jackson!”

“We did, or they ran against us, which comes to the same thing.”

“And got well thrashed. There's no denying it.”

“I'm not trying to do so.”

“That's right. I thought from the first that you were a young man of sense. I'm glad to see that you didn't get yourself killed.”

“A great many good men did.”

“That's so, and a great many more will go the same way. You just listen to me. I don't wear any uniform, but I've got eyes to see and ears to hear. I suppose that more monumental foolishness has been hidden under cocked hats and gold lace than under anything else, since the world began. Easy now, I don't say that fools are not more numerous outside armies than in them—there are more people outside—but the mistakes of generals are more costly.”

“I suppose our generals are doing the best they can. You will let me speak plainly, will you, Mr. Watson?”

“Of course, young man. Go ahead.”

“Perhaps you feel badly over a disaster of your own. I saw the smoking fires at Bristoe Station. The rebels burned there several million dollars worth of stores belonging to us. Maybe a large part of them were your own goods.”

The contractor rubbed his huge knee with one hand, took his cigar out of his mouth with the other hand, blew several rings of fine blue smoke from his nose, and watched them break against the ceiling.

“Young man,” he said, “you're a good guesser, but you don't guess all. More than a million dollars worth of material that I supplied was burned or looted at Bristoe Station. But it had all been paid for by a perfectly solvent Union government. So, if I were to consider it from the purely material standpoint, which you imagine to be the only one I have, I should rejoice over the raids of the rebels because they make trade for contractors. I'm a patriot, even if I do not fight at the front. Besides my feelings have been hurt.”

“In what way?”

The contractor drew from his pocket a coarse brown envelope, and he took from the envelope a letter, written on paper equally coarse and brown.

“I received this letter last night,” he said. “It was addressed simply 'John Watson, Washington, D. C.,' and the post office people gave it to me at once. It came from somebody within the Confederate lines. You know how the Northern and Southern pickets exchange tobacco, newspapers and such things, when they're not fighting. I suppose the letter was passed on to me in that way. Listen.”

“John Watson, Washington, D. C.

“My dear sir: I have never met you, but certain circumstances have made me acquainted with your name. Believing therefore that you are a man of judgment and fairness I feel justified in making to you a complaint which I am sure you will agree with me is well-founded. At a little place called Bristoe Station I recently obtained a fine, blue uniform, the tint of which wind and rain will soon turn to our own excellent Confederate gray. I found your own name as maker stamped upon the neck band of both coat and vest.

“I ought to say however that after I had worn the coat only twice the seams ripped across both shoulders, I admit that the fit was a little tight, but work well done would not yield so quickly. I also picked out a pair of beautiful shoes, bearing your name stamped upon them. The leather cracked after the first day's use, and good leather will never crack so soon.

“Now, my dear Mr. Watson, I feel that you have treated me unfairly. I will not use any harsher word. We do not expect you to supply us with goods of this quality, and we certainly look for something better from you next time.

“Your obedient servant,
ARTHUR ST. CLAIR,
Lieutenant 'The Invincibles,'
C. S. A.”

“Now, did you ever hear of another piece of impudence like that?” said Watson. “It has its humorous side, I admit, and you're justified in laughing, but it's impudence all the same.”

“Yes, it is impudence, and do you know, Mr. Watson, I've met the writer of that letter. He is a South Carolinian, and from his standpoint he has a real grievance. I never knew anybody else as particular about his clothes, and it seems that the uniform and shoes you furnished him are not all right. He's a gentleman and he wouldn't lie. I met him at Cedar Run, when the burying parties were going over the field. He was introduced to me by my cousin, Harry Kenton, who is on the other side. Harry wouldn't associate with any fellow who isn't all right.”

“All the same, if I ever catch that young jackanapes of a St. Clair—it's an easy name to remember—I'll strip my uniform off him and turn him loose for his own comrades to laugh at.”

“But we won't catch either him or his comrades for a long time.”

“That's so, but in the end we'll catch 'em. Now, Mr. Mason, you don't agree with me about many things, but you're only a boy and you'll know better later on. Anyway, I like you, and if you need help at any time and can reach me, come.”

“I'll do so, and I thank you now,” said Dick, who saw that the contractor's tone was sincere.

“That's right, good-bye. I see a senator whom I need.”

They shook hands and Watson hurried away with great lightness and agility for so large a man.

Dick stayed two days longer in Washington, visiting Warner twice a day and seeing with gladness his rapid improvement. When he was with him the last time, and told him he was going to join the Army of the Potomac, Warner said:

“Dick, old man, I haven't spoken before of the way you brought me in from that last battlefield. Pennington has told me about it—but if I didn't it was not because I wasn't grateful. Up in Vermont we're not much on words—our training I suppose, though I don't say it is the best training. It's quite sure that I'd have died if you hadn't found me.”

“Why, George, I looked for you as a matter of course. You'd have done exactly the same for me.”

“That's just it, but I didn't get the chance. Now, Dick, there's going to be another big battle before long, and I shall be up in time for it. You'll be there, too. Couldn't you get yourself shot late in the afternoon, lie on the ground, feverish and delirious until far in the night, when I'd come for you. Then I could pay you back.”

Dick laughed. He knew that at the bottom of Warner's jest lay a resolve to match the score, whenever the chance should come.

“Good-bye, George,” he said. “I'll look for you in two weeks.”

“Make it only ten days. McClellan will need me by that time.”

But it seemed to Dick that McClellan would need him and every other man at once. Lee was marching. Passing by the capital he had advanced into Maryland, a Southern state, but one that had never seceded. The Southerners expected to find many reinforcements here among their kindred. The regiments in gray, flushed with victory, advanced singing:

“The despot's heel is on thy shore,
Maryland!
His torch is at thy temple door,
Maryland!
Avenge the patriotic gore
That flecked the streets of Baltimore
And be the battle queen of yore,
Maryland, my Maryland!”

Dick knew that the South expected much of Maryland. Her people were Southerners. Their valor in the Revolution was unsurpassed. People still talked of the Maryland line and its great deeds. Many of the Marylanders had already come to Lee and Jackson, and now that the Southern army, led by its famous leaders and crowned with victories, was on their soil, it was expected that they would pour forward in thousands, relieved from the fear of Northern armies.

Alarm, deep and intense, spread all through the North. McClellan, as usual, doubled Lee's numbers but he organized with all speed to meet him. Dick heard that Lee was already at Frederick, giving his troops a few days' repose before meeting any enemy who might come. The utmost confidence reigned in the South.

McClellan marched, but he advanced slowly. The old mystery and uncertainty about the Southern army returned. It suddenly disappeared from Frederick, and McClellan became extremely cautious. He had nearly a hundred thousand men, veterans now, but he believed that Lee had two hundred thousand.

Colonel Winchester again complained bitterly to Dick, who was a comrade as well as an aide.

“What we need,” he said, “is a general who doesn't see double, and we haven't

got him yet. We must spend less time counting the rebels and more hammering them."

"A civilian in Washington told me that," said Dick. "I believed then that he was right, and I believe it yet. If General Grant were here he'd attack instead of waiting to be attacked."

But the Army of the Potomac continued to march forward in a slow and hesitating fashion. Dick, despite his impatience, appreciated the position of General McClellan. No one in the Union army or in the North knew the plans of Lee and Jackson. Lee had not even consulted the President of the Confederacy but had merely notified him that he was going into Maryland.

Now Lee and Jackson had melted away again in the mist that so often overhung their movements. McClellan could not be absolutely sure they intended an important invasion of Maryland. They might be planning to fall upon the capital from another direction. The Union commander must protect Washington and at the same time look for his enemy.

The army marched near the Potomac, and Dick, as he rode with his regiment, saw McClellan several times. It had not been many months since he took his great army by sea for what seemed to be the certain capture of Richmond, but McClellan, although a very young man for so high a position, had already changed much. His face was thinner, and it seemed to Dick that he had lost something of his confident look. The awful Seven Days and his bitter disappointment had left their imprint. Nevertheless he was trim, neat and upright, and always wore a splendid uniform. An unfailing favorite with the soldiers, they cheered him as he passed, and he would raise his hat, a flush of pride showing through the tan of his cheeks.

"If a general, after being defeated, can still retain the confidence of his army he must have great qualities of some kind," said Dick to Colonel Winchester.

"That's true, Dick. McClellan lost at the Seven Days, and he has just taken over an army that was trapped and beaten under Pope, but behold the spirits of the men, although the Second Manassas is only a few days away. McClellan looks after the private soldier, and if he could only look after an army in the way that he organizes it this war would soon be over."

Dick noticed that the colonel put emphasis on the "if" and his heart sank a little. But it soon rose again. The Army of the Potomac was now a veteran body. It had been tested in the fire of defeat, and it had emerged stronger and braver than ever.

But Dick did not like the mystery about Lee and Jackson. They had an

extraordinary ability to drop out of sight, to draw a veil before them so completely that no Union scout or skirmisher could penetrate it. And these disappearances were always full of sinister omens, portending a terrible attack from an unknown quarter. But when Dick looked upon the great and brave Army of the Potomac, nearly a hundred thousand strong, his apprehensions disappeared. The Army of the Potomac could not be beaten, and since Lee and Jackson were venturing so far from their base, they might be destroyed. He confided his faith to Pennington who rode beside him.

“I tell you, Frank, old man,” he said, “the Southern army may never get back into Virginia.”

“Not if we light a prairie fire behind it and set another in front. Then we'll have 'em trapped same as they trapped us at Manassas. Wouldn't it be funny if we'd turn their own trick on 'em, and end the war right away?”

“It would be more than funny. It would be grand, superb, splendid, magnificent. But I wish old George was here. Why did he want to get in the way of that bullet? I hate to think of ending the war without him.”

“Maybe he'll get up in time yet, Dick. I saw him a few hours before we started. The doctors said that youth, clean blood and clean living counted for a lot—I guess George would put it at ninety per cent, and that his wound, the bullet having gone through, would heal at a record rate.”

“Then we'll see him soon. When he's strong enough to ride a horse, nothing can hold him back.”

“That's so. I see houses ahead. What place is it, Dick?”

“It must be Frederick. We had reports that the Johnnies were about here, but they must have vanished, since no bullets meet us. The colonel is looking through his glasses, and, as he does not check his horse, it is evident that the enemy is not there.”

“But maybe he has been there, and if he has we'll just take his place. I like the looks of these Maryland towns, Frank, and they're not so hostile to us.”

Colonel Winchester's skeleton regiment, now not amounting to more than three hundred men, was in the vanguard and it rode forward rapidly. The people received them without either enthusiasm or marked hostility. Yet the Union vanguard obtained news. Lee had been there with his army, but he had gone away! Where! They could not say. The Southern officers had been silent and the soldiers had not known. None of the people of Frederick had been allowed to follow. A cloud of cavalry covered the Southern movements.

“Not so definite after all,” said Dick. “We know that the Southern army has been here, but we don't know where it has gone.”

“At any rate,” said Pennington, “we're on the trail, and we're bound to find it sooner or later. I learned from the hunters in Nebraska that when you strike the trail of a buffalo herd, all you had to do was to keep on and you'd strike the herd itself.”

It was not yet noon and McClellan's army began to go into camp at Frederick. Dick and Pennington got a chance to stroll about a little, and they picked up much gossip. Young women, with strong Southern proclivities, looked with frowning eyes upon their blue uniforms, but the frank and pleasant smiles of the two lads disarmed them. Older women of the same proclivities did not melt so easily, but continued to regard them with a hard and burning gaze.

But there were men strongly for the Union, and the two friendly lads picked up many details from them. They showed them a grove in which Lee, Jackson, Longstreet and D. H. Hill had all been camped at once. People had gone there daily for a glimpse of these famous men.

They also showed the boys the very spot where Stonewall Jackson had come near to making an ignominious end of his great career. His faithful horse, Little Sorrel, had been worn out by incessant marchings and must rest for a while. The people gave him a splendid horse, but one that had not been broken well. The first time he mounted it a band happened to begin playing, the horse sprang wildly, the saddle girth broke and Jackson was thrown heavily to the ground.

“You'd better believe there was excitement then,” said the narrator, a clerk in one of the stores. “Everybody ran forward to pick up the general. He had been thrown so hard that he was stunned and had big bruises. That horse did him more damage than all the armies of the North have done. I can tell you there was alarm for a while among the Johnnies, but they say he was all over it before he left.”

They wandered back toward their own command and the obliging guide pointed out to them a house which the Confederate generals had made their headquarters. They saw Colonel Winchester entering it, and thanking the clerk, followed him.

Union officers were already in the house looking with curiosity at the chairs and tables that Jackson and Lee and Longstreet had occupied. Dick caught sight of a small package lying on one of the tables, but another man picked it up first. As he did so he looked at Dick and said in triumph:

“Three good cigars that the rebels have left behind. Have one, Mason?”

“Thanks, but I don't smoke.”

“All right, I'll find someone else who does.”

He pulled off a piece of paper wrapped around them, threw it on the floor and put the cigars in his pocket. Dick was about to turn away when he happened to glance at the wrapping lying on the floor.

His eyes were caught by the words written in large letters:

HEADQUARTERS OF THE ARMY OF NORTH—

Something seemed to shoot through his brain. It was like a flash of warning or command and he obeyed at once. He picked up the paper and smoothed it out in his hand. The full line read like the headline in a newspaper:

HEADQUARTERS OF THE ARMY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA.
September 9, 1862.

Then with eyes bulging in his head he read:

HEADQUARTERS OF THE ARMY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA.
September 9, 1862.

Special Orders, No. 191.

The army will resume its march tomorrow, taking the Hagerstown road. General Jackson's command will form the advance, and after passing Middletown with such portions as he may select, take their route toward Sharpsburg, cross the Potomac at the most convenient point and by Friday morning take possession of the Baltimore and Ohio Railway, capture such of them as may be at Martinsburg, and intercept such as may attempt to escape from Harper's Ferry.

General Longstreet's command will pursue the main road as far as Boonsborough, where it will halt with the reserve supply and baggage train of the army.

General McLaws with his own division and that of General R. H. Anderson will follow General Longstreet. On reaching Middletown will take the route to Harper's Ferry, and by Friday morning possess himself of the Maryland Heights and endeavor to capture the enemy at Harper's Ferry and vicinity.

Dick stopped a moment and gasped.

“Come on,” called the man with the cigars, “there is nothing more to be seen here.”

“Wait a moment,” said Dick.

Perhaps it was his duty to rush at once with it to a superior officer, but the spell was too strong. He read on:

General Walker with his division, after accomplishing the object on which he is now engaged, will cross the Potomac at Cheek's Ford, ascend its right bank to

Lovettsville, take possession of Sundown Heights, if practicable, by Friday morning, Key's Grove on his left, and the road between the end of the mountains and the Potomac on his right. He will, as far as practicable, co-operate with General McLaws and General Jackson, and intercept the retreat of the enemy.

General D. H. Hill's division will form the rear-guard of the army, pursuing the road taken by the main body. The reserve artillery, ordinance and supply trains, etc., will precede General Hill.

Dick gasped and he heard someone calling again to him to come, but he read on:

General Stuart will detach a squadron of cavalry to accompany the commands of Generals Longstreet, Jackson and McLaws, and with the main body of the cavalry will cover the route of the army, bringing up all the stragglers that may have been left behind.

The commands of General Jackson, McLaws and Walker, after accomplishing the objects for which they have been detached, will join the main body of the army at Boonsborough or Hagerstown.

Each regiment on the march will habitually carry its axes in the regimental ordnance wagons, for use of the men at their encampments, to procure wood, etc. R. H. CHILTON,
Assistant Adjutant General.

Dick clutched the paper in his hands and for the moment his throat seemed to contract so tightly that he could not breathe. Then he felt a burst of wild joy.

One of the most extraordinary incidents in the whole history of war had occurred. He knew in an instant that this was Lee's general orders to his army, and that at such a time nothing could be more important. Evidently copies of it had been sent to all his division commanders, and this one by some singular chance either had not reached its destination, or had been tossed carelessly aside after reading. Found by those who needed it most wrapped around three cigars! It was a miracle! Nothing short of it! How could the Union army be defeated after such an omen?

It was the copy intended for the Southern general, D. H. Hill—he denied that he ever received it—but it did not matter to Dick then for whom it was intended. He saw at once all the possibilities. Lee and Jackson had divided their army again. Emboldened by the splendid success of their daring maneuver at Manassas they were going to repeat it.

He looked again at the date on the order. September 9th! And this was the 13th! Jackson was to march on the 10th. He had been gone three days with the half, perhaps, of Lee's army, and Lee himself must be somewhere near at hand.

The Union scouts could quickly find him and the ninety thousand veterans of the Army of the Potomac could crush him to powder in a day. What a chance! No, it was not a chance. It was a miracle. The key had been put in McClellan's hand and it would take but one turn of his wrist to unlock the door upon dazzling success.

Dick saw the war finished in a month. Lee could not have more than twenty or twenty-five thousand men with him, and Jackson was three or four days' march away. He clutched the order in his hand and ran toward Colonel Winchester.

“Here, take it, sir! Take it!” he exclaimed.

“Take what?”

“Look! Look! See what it is!”

Colonel Winchester took one glance at it, and then he, too, became excited. He hurried with it to General McClellan, and that day the commander-in-chief telegraphed to the anxious President at Washington:

“I have all the plans of the rebels, and will catch them in my own trap, if my men are equal to the emergency.”

The shrewd Lincoln took notice of the qualifying clause, “if my men are equal to the emergency,” and sighed a little. Already this general, so bold in design and so great in preparation was making excuses for possible failure in action—if he failed his men and not he would be to blame.

CHAPTER VIII. THE DUEL IN THE PASS

Dick carried the news to Pennington who danced with delight.

“We've got 'em! we've got 'em!” he cried over and over again.

“So we have,” said Dick, “we'll be marching in a half hour and then the trap will shut down so tight on Robert Lee that he'll never raise the lid again.”

It was nearly noon, and they expected every moment the order to start, but it did not come. Dick began to be tormented by an astonished impatience, and he saw that Colonel Winchester suffered in the same way. The army showed no signs of moving. Was it possible that McClellan would not advance at once on Lee, whom the scouts had now located definitely? The hot afternoon hours grew long as they passed one by one, and many a brave man ate his heart out with anger at the delay. Dick saw Sergeant Whitley walking up and down, and he was eager to hear his opinion.

“What is it, sergeant?” he asked. “Why do we sit here, twiddling our thumbs when there is an army waiting to be taken by us?”

“You're a commissioned officer, sir, and I'm only a private.”

“Never mind about that. You're a veteran of many years and many fights, and I know but little. Why do we sit still in the dust and fail to take the great prize that's offered to us?”

“The men of an army, sir, do the fighting, but its generals are its brains. It is for the brains to judge, to see and to command. The generals cannot win without the men, and the men cannot win without the generals. Now, in this case, sir, you can see—”

He stopped and shrugged his shoulders, as if it were not for him to say any more.

“I see,” said Dick bitterly. “You needn't say it, sergeant, but I'll say it for you. General McClellan has been overcome by caution again, and he sees two Johnnies where but one stands.”

Sergeant Whitley shrugged his shoulders again, but said nothing. Dick was about to turn away, when he saw a tall, thin figure approaching.

“Mr. Warner,” said Sergeant Whitley.

“So it is,” exclaimed Dick. “It's really good old George come to help us!”

He rushed forward and shook hands with Warner who although thin and pale was as cool and apparently almost as strong as ever.

“Here I am, Dick,” he said, “and the great battle hasn't been fought. I knew they couldn't fight it without me. The hospital at Washington dismissed me in disgrace because I got well so fast. 'What's the use,' said one of the doctors, 'in getting up and running away to the army to get killed? You could die much more comfortably here in bed.' 'Not at all,' I replied. 'I don't get killed when I'm with the army. I merely get nearly killed. Then I lie unconscious on the field, in the rain, until some good friend comes along, takes me away on his back and puts me in a warm bed. It's a lot safer than staying in your hospital all the time.'”

“Oh, shut up, George! Come and see the boys. They'll be glad to know you're back—what's left of 'em.”

Warner's welcome was in truth warm. He seemed more phlegmatic than ever, but he opened his eyes wide when they told him of the dispatch that had been lost and found.

“General McClellan must have been waiting for me,” he said. “Tell him I've come.”

But General McClellan did not yet move. The last long hour of the day passed. The sun set in red and gold behind the western mountains, and the Army of the Potomac still rested in its camp, although privates even knew that precious hours were being lost, and that booming cannon might already be telling the defenders of Harper's Ferry that Jackson was at hand.

Nor were they far wrong. While McClellan lingered on through the night, never moving from his camp, Jackson and his generals were pushing forward with fiery energy and at dawn the next day had surrounded Harper's Ferry and its doomed garrison of more than twelve thousand men.

But these were things that Dick could not guess that night. One small detachment had been sent ahead by McClellan, chiefly for scouting purposes, and in the darkness the boy who had gone a little distance forward with Colonel Winchester heard the booming of cannon. It was a faint sound but unmistakable, and Dick glanced at his chief.

“That detachment has come into contact with the rebels somewhere there in the mountains,” he said, “and the ridges and valleys are bringing us the echoes. Oh, why in Heaven's name are we delayed here through all the precious moments! Every hour's delay will cost the lives of ten thousand good men!”

And it is likely that in the end Colonel Winchester's reckoning was too moderate. He and Dick gazed long in the direction in which Harper's Ferry lay,

and they listened, too, to the faint mutter of the guns among the hills. Before dawn, scouts came in, saying that there had been hard fighting off toward Harper's Ferry, and that Lee with the other division of the Southern army was retreating into a peninsula formed by the junction of the river Antietam with the Potomac, where he would await the coming of Jackson, after taking Harper's Ferry.

“Jackson hasn't taken Harper's Ferry yet,” said Dick, when he heard the news. “Many of Banks' veterans of the valley are there, and, our men instead of being crushed by defeat, are always improved by it.”

“Still, I wish we'd march,” said Warner. “I didn't come here merely to go into camp. I might as well have stayed in the hospital.”

Nevertheless they moved at daylight. McClellan had made up his mind at last, and the army advanced joyfully to shut down the trap on Lee. Dick's spirits rose with the sun and the advance of the troops. They had delayed, but they would get Lee yet. There was nothing to tell them that Harper's Ferry had fallen, and Jackson's force must still be detained there far away. They ought to strike Lee on the morrow and destroy him, and then they would destroy Jackson. Oh, Lee and Jackson had been reckless generals to venture beyond the seceding states!

They marched fast now, and the fiery Hooker soon to be called Fighting Joe led the advance. He was eager to get at Lee, who some said did not now have more than twenty thousand men with him, although McClellan insisted on doubling or tripling his numbers and those of Jackson. Scouts and skirmishers came in fast now. Yes, Lee was between the Antietam and the Potomac and they ought to strike him on the morrow. The spirits of the Army of the Potomac continually rose.

Dick remained in a joyous mood. He had been greatly uplifted by the return of his comrade, Warner, for whom he had formed a strong attachment, and he could not keep down the thought that they would now be able to trap Lee and end the war. The terrible field of the Second Manassas was behind him and forgotten for the time. They rode now to a new battle and to victory.

Another great cloud of dust like that at Manassas rolled slowly on toward the little river or creek of Antietam, but the heat was not so great now. A pleasant breeze blew from the distant western mountains and cooled the faces of the soldiers. The country through which they were passing was old for America. They saw a carefully cultivated soil, good roads and stone bridges.

None of the lads and young men around Colonel Winchester rejoiced more than Warner. Released from the hospital and with his tried comrades once more

he felt as if he were the dead come back. He was in time, too, for the great battle which was to end the war. The cool wind that blew upon his face tingled with life and made his pulses leap. Beneath the granite of his nature and a phlegmatic exterior, he concealed a warm heart that always beat steadfastly for his friends and his country.

“Dick,” he said, “have they heard anything directly from Harper's Ferry?”

“Not a word, at least none that I've heard about, but it's quite sure that Jackson hasn't taken the place yet. Why should he? We have there twelve or thirteen thousand good men, most of whom have proven their worth in the valley. Why, they ought to beat him off entirely.”

“And while they're doing that we ought to be taking Mr. Lee and a lot of well-known Confederate gentlemen. I've made a close calculation, Dick, and I figure that the chances are at least eighty per cent in favor of our taking or destroying Lee's army.”

“I wish we had started sooner,” said Pennington. “We've lost a whole day, one of the most precious days the world has ever known.”

“You're right, Frank, and I've allowed that fact to figure importantly in my reckoning. If it were not for the lost day I'd figure our chance of making the finishing stroke at ninety-five per cent. But boys, it's glorious to be back with you. Once, I thought when we were marching back and forth so much that if I could only lie down and rest for a week or two I'd be the happiest fellow on earth. But it became awful as I lay there, day after day. I had suddenly left the world. All the great events were going on without me. North or South might win, while I lay stretched on a hospital bed. It was beyond endurance. If I hadn't got well so fast that they could let me go, I'd have climbed out of the window with what strength I had, and have made for the army anyhow. Did you ever feel a finer wind than this? What a beautiful country! It must be the most magnificent in the world!”

Dick and Pennington laughed. Old George was growing gushy. But they understood that he saw with the eyes of the released prisoner.

“It is beautiful,” said Dick, “and it's a pity that it should be ripped up by war. Listen, boys, there's the call that's growing mighty familiar to us all!”

Far in front behind the hills they heard the low grumbling of cannon. And further away to the west they heard the same sinister mutter. The Confederates were scattered widely, and the fateful Orders No. 191 might cause their total destruction, but they were on guard, nevertheless. Jackson, foreseeing the possible advance of McClellan, had sent back Hill with a division to help Lee,

and to delay the Northern army until he himself should come with all his force.

In this desperate crisis of the Confederacy, more desperate than any of the Southern generals yet realized, the brain under the old slouch hat never worked with more precision, clearness and brilliancy. He would not only do his own task, but he would help his chief while doing it. When McClellan began his march after a delay of a day he was nearer to Lee than Jackson was and every chance was his, save those that lightning perception and unyielding courage win.

The lads heard the mutter of the cannon grow louder, and rise to a distant thunder. Far ahead of them, where high hills thick with forest rose, they saw smoke and flashes of fire. A young Maryland cavalry officer, riding near, explained to them that the point from which the cannonade came was a gap in South Mountain, although it was as yet invisible, owing to the forest.

“We heard that Lee's army was much further away,” said Warner to Dick. “What can it mean? What force is there fighting our vanguard?”

It was Shepard, the spy, who brought them the facts. He had already reported to General McClellan, when he approached Colonel Winchester. His face was worn and drawn, and he was black under the eyes. His clothes were covered with dust. His body was weary almost unto death, but his eyes burned with the fire of an undying spirit.

“I've been all the night and all this morning in the mountains and hills,” he said. “Harper's Ferry is not yet taken, but I think it will fall. But Hill, McLaws and Longstreet are all in this pass or the other which leads through the mountain. They mean to hold us as long as they can, and then hang on to the flank of our army.”

He passed on and the little regiment advanced more rapidly. Dick saw Colonel Winchester's eyes sparkling and he knew he was anxious to be in the thick of it. Other and heavier forces were deploying upon the same point, but Winchester's regiment led.

As they approached a deadly fire swept the plain and the hills. Rifle bullets crashed among them and shell and shrapnel came whining and shrieking. Once more the Winchester regiment, as it had come to be called, was smitten with a bitter and deadly hail. Men fell all around Dick but the survivors pressed on, still leading the way for the heavy brigades which they heard thundering behind them.

The mouth of the pass poured forth fire and missiles like a volcano, but Dick heard Colonel Winchester still shouting to his men to come on, and he charged with the rest. The fire became so hot that the vanguard could not live in it

without shelter, and the colonel, shouting to the officers to dismount, ordered them all to take cover behind trees and rocks.

Dick who had been carried a little ahead of the rest, sprang down, still holding his horse, and made for a great rock which he saw on one side just within the mouth of the pass. His frightened horse reared and jerked so violently that he tore the bridle from the lad's hand and ran away.

Dick stood for a moment, scarcely knowing what to do, and then, as a half dozen bullets whistled by his head, urging him to do something, he finished his dash for the rock, throwing himself down behind it just as a half a dozen more bullets striking on the stone told him that he had done the right thing in the very nick of time.

He carried with him a light rifle of a fine improved make, a number of which had been captured at the Second Manassas, and which some of the younger officers had been allowed to take. He did not drop it in his rush for the rock, holding on to it mechanically.

He lay for at least a minute or two flat upon the ground behind the great stone, while the perspiration rolled from his face and his hair prickled at the roots. He could never learn to be unconcerned when a dozen or fifteen riflemen were shooting at him.

When he raised his head a little he saw that the Winchester regiment had fallen back, and that, in truth, the entire advance had stopped until it could make an attack in full force upon the enemy.

Dick recognized with a certain grim humor that he was isolated. He was just a little Federal island in a Confederate sea. Up the gap he saw cannon and masses of gray infantry. Gathered on a comparatively level spot was a troop of cavalry. He saw all the signs of a desperate defense, and, while he watched, the great guns of the South began to fire again, their missiles flying far over his head toward the Northern army.

Dick was puzzled, but for the present he did not feel great alarm about himself. He lay almost midway between the hostile forces, but it was likely that they would take no notice of him.

With a judgment born of a clear mind, he lay quite still, while the hostile forces massed themselves for attack and defense. Each was feeling out the other with cannon, but every missile passed well over his head, and he did not take the trouble to bow to them as they sailed on their errands. Yet he lay close behind that splendid and friendly rock.

He knew that the Southerners would have sharpshooters and skirmishers

ahead of their main force. They would lie behind stones, trees and brush and at any moment one of them might pick him off. The Confederate force seemed to incline to the side of the valley, opposite the slope on which he lay, and he was hopeful that the fact would keep him hidden until the masses of his own people could charge into the gap.

It was painful work to flatten his body out behind a stone and lie there. No trees or bushes grew near enough to give him shade, and the afternoon sun began to send down upon him direct rays that burned. He wondered how long it would be until the Union brigades came. It seemed to him that they were doing a tremendous amount of waiting. Nothing was to be gained by this long range cannon fire. They must charge home with the bayonet.

He raised himself a little in order that he might peep over the stone and see if the charge were coming, and then with a little cry he dropped back, a fine gray powder stinging his face. A rifle had been fired across the valley and a bullet chipping the top of the rock sheltering Dick warned him that he was not the only sharpshooter who lay in an ambush.

Peeping again from the side of the rock, he saw curls of blue smoke rising from a point behind a stone just like his own on the other side of the valley. It was enough to tell him that a Southern sharpshooter lay there and had marked him for prey.

Dick's anger rose. Why should anyone seek his life, trying to pick him off as if he were a beast of prey? He had been keeping quiet, disturbing nobody, merely seeking a chance to escape, when this ruthless rebel had seen him. He became in his turn hot and fiercely ready to give bullet for bullet. Smoke floating through the pass and the flash of the cannon, made him more eager to hit the sharpshooter who was seeking so hard to hit him.

Watching intently he caught a glimpse of a gray cap showing above the rock across the valley, and, raising his light rifle, he fired, quick as a flash. The return shot came at once, and chipped the rock as before, but he dropped back unhurt, and peeping from the side he could see nothing. He might or might not have slain his enemy. The gray cap was no longer visible, and he watched to see if it would reappear.

He heard the sound of a great cannonade before the mouth of the pass, and he saw his own people advancing in force, their lines extending far to the left and right, with several batteries showing at intervals. Then came the rebel yell from the pass and as the Union lines advanced the Southerners poured upon them a vast concentrated fire.

Dick, watching through the smoke and forgetful of his enemy across the valley, saw the Union charge rolled back. But he also saw the men out of range gathering themselves for a new attack. Within the pass preparations were going on to repel it a second time. Then he glanced toward the opposite rock and dropped down just in time. He had seen a rifle barrel protruding above it, and a second later the bullet whistled where his head had been.

He grew angrier than ever. He had left that sharpshooter alone for at least ten minutes, while he watched charge and repulse, and he expected to be treated with the same consideration. He would pay him for such ferocity, and seeing an edge of gray shoulder, he fired.

No sign came from the rock, and Dick was quite sure that he had missed. The blood mounted to his head and surcharged his brain. A thousand little pulses that he had never heard of before began to beat in his head, and he was devoured by a consuming anger. He vowed to get that fellow yet.

Lying flat upon his stomach he drew himself around the edge of the rock and watched. There was a great deal of covering smoke from the artillery in the pass now, and he believed that it would serve his purpose.

But when he got a little distance away from the rock the bank of smoke lifted suddenly, and it was only by quickly flattening himself down behind a little ridge of stone that he saved his life. The sharpshooter's bullet passed so close to his head that Dick felt as if he had received a complete hair cut, all in a flash.

He fairly sprang back to the cover of his rock. What a fine rock that was! How big and thick! And it was so protective! In a spirit of defiance he fired at the top of the other stone and saw the gray dust shoot up from it. Quick came the answering shot, and a little piece of his coat flew with it. That was certainly a great sharpshooter across the valley! Dick gave him full credit for his skill.

Then he heard the rolling of drums and the mellow call of trumpets in front of the pass. Taking care to keep well under cover he looked back. The Union army was advancing in great force now, its front tipped with a long line of bayonets and the mouths of fifty cannon turned to the pass. In front of them swarmed the skirmishers, eager, active fellows leaping from rock to rock and from tree to tree.

Dick foresaw that the second charge would not fail. Its numbers were so great that it would at least enter the pass and hold the mouth of it. Already a mighty cannonade was pouring a storm of death over the heads of the skirmishers toward the defenders, and the brigades came on steadily and splendidly to the continued rolling of the drums.

Dick rose up again, watching now for his enemy who, he knew, could not

remain much longer behind the rock, as he would soon be within range of the Northern skirmishers advancing on that side.

He fancied that he could hear the massive tread of the thousands coming toward the pass, and the roll of the drums, distinct amid the roar of the cannon, told him that his comrades would soon be at hand, driving everything before them. But his eyes were for that big rock on the other side of the valley. Now was his time for revenge upon the sharpshooter who had sought his life with such savage persistence. The Northern skirmishers were drawing nearer and the fellow must flee or die.

Suddenly the sharpshooter sprang from the rock, and up flew Dick's rifle as he drew a bead straight upon his heart. Then he dropped the weapon with a cry of horror. Across the valley and through the smoke he recognized Harry Kenton, and Harry Kenton looking toward his enemy recognized him also.

Each threw up his hand in a gesture of friendliness and farewell—the roar of the battle was so loud now that no voice could have been heard at the distance—and then they disappeared in the smoke, each returning to his own, each heart thrilling with a great joy, because its owner had always missed the sharpshooter behind the stone.

The impression of that vivid encounter in the pass was dimmed for a while for Dick by the fierceness of the fighting that followed. The defense had the advantage of the narrow pass and the rocky slopes, and numbers could not be put to the most account. Nevertheless, the Confederates were pressed back along the gap, and when night came the Union army was in full possession of its summit.

But at the other gap the North had not achieved equal success. Longstreet, marching thirteen miles that day, had come upon the field in time, and when darkness fell the Southern troops still held their ground there. But later in the night Hill and Longstreet, through fear of being cut off, abandoned their positions and marched to join Lee.

Dick and his comrades who did not lie down until after midnight had come, felt that a great success had been gained. McClellan had been slow to march, but, now that he was marching, he was sweeping the enemy out of his way.

The whole Army of the Potomac felt that it was winning and McClellan himself was exultant. Early the next morning he reported to his superior at Washington that the enemy was fleeing in panic and that General Lee admitted that he had been “shockingly whipped.”

Full of confidence, the army advanced to destroy Lee, who lay between the peninsula of the Antietam and the Potomac, but just about the time McClellan

was writing his dispatch, the white flag was hoisted at Harper's Ferry, the whole garrison surrendered, and messengers were on their way to Lee with the news that Stonewall Jackson was coming.

CHAPTER IX. ACROSS THE STREAM

Dick and his comrades had not heard of the taking of Harper's Ferry and they were full of enthusiasm that brilliant morning in mid-September. McClellan, if slow to move, nevertheless had shown vigor in action, and the sanguine youths could not doubt that they had driven Lee into a corner. The Confederates, after the fierce fighting of the day before, had abandoned both gaps, and the way at last lay clear before the Army of the Potomac.

Dick was mounted again. In fact his horse, after pulling the reins from his hands and fleeing from the Confederate fire, had been retaken by a member of his own regiment and returned to him. It was another good omen. The lost had been found again and defeat would become victory.

But Dick said nothing to anybody of his duel with Harry Kenton. He shuddered even now when he recalled it. And yet there had been no guilt in either. Neither had known that the other lay behind the stone, but happy chance had made all their bullets go astray. Again he was thankful.

“How did you stand that fighting yesterday afternoon, George?” Dick asked of Warner.

“First rate. The open air agreed with me, and as no bullet sought me out I felt benefited. I didn't get away from that hospital too soon. How far away is this Antietam River, behind which they say Lee lies?”

“It's only eight miles from the gap,” said Pennington, who had been making inquiries, “and as we have come three miles it must be only five miles away.”

“Correct,” said Warner, who was in an uncommonly fine humor. “Your mathematical power grows every day, Frank. Let x equal the whole distance from the gap to the Antietam, which is eight miles, let y equal the distance which we have come which is three miles, then x minus y equals the distance left, which is five miles. Wonderful! wonderful! You'll soon have a great head on you, Frank.”

“If some rebel cannoneer doesn't shoot it off in the coming battle. By George, we're driving their skirmishers before us! They don't seem to make any stand at all!”

The vanguard certainly met with no very formidable resistance as it advanced over the rolling country. The sound of firing was continuous, but it came from

small squads here and there, and after firing a few volleys the men in gray invariably withdrew.

Yet the Northern advance was slow. Colonel Winchester became intensely impatient again.

“Why don't we hurry!” he exclaimed. “Of all things in the world the one that we need most is haste. With Jackson tied up before Harper's Ferry, Lee's defeat is sure, unless he retreats across the Potomac, and that would be equivalent to a defeat. Good Heavens, why don't we push on?”

He had not yet heard of the fall of Harper's Ferry, and that Jackson with picked brigades was already on the way to join Lee. Had he known these two vital facts his anger would have burned to a white heat. Surely no day lost was ever lost at a greater cost than the one McClellan lost after the finding of Orders No. 191.

“Do you know anything about the Antietam, colonel?” asked Dick.

“It's a narrow stream, but deep, and crossed by several stone bridges. It will be hard to force a crossing here, but further up it can be done with ease since we outnumber Lee so much that we can overlap him by far. I have my information from Shepard, and he makes no mistakes. There is a church, too, on the upper part of the peninsula, a little church belonging to an order called the Dunkards.”

“Ah,” murmured Dick, “the little church of Shiloh!”

“What do you mean by that?”

“There was a little church at Shiloh, too. The battle raged all around it more than once. We lost it at first, but in the end we won. It's another good omen. We're bound to achieve a great victory, colonel.”

“I hope and believe so. We've the materials with which to do it. But we've got to push and push hard.”

The colonel raised his glasses and took a long look in front. Dick also had a pair and he, too, examined the country before them. It was a fine, rolling region and all the forest was gone, except clumps of trees here and there. The whole country would have been heavy with forest had it not been for the tramp of war.

It was now nearly noon and the sunlight was brilliant and intense. The glasses carried far. Dick saw a line of trees which he surmised marked the course of the Antietam, and he saw small detachments of cavalry which he knew were watching the advance of the Army of the Potomac. Their purpose convinced him that Lee had not retreated across the Potomac, but that he would fight and surely lose. Dick now believed that so many good omens could not fail.

A horseman galloped toward them. It was Shepard again, dustier than ever, his face pale from weariness.

“What is it, Mr. Shepard?” asked Colonel Winchester.

“I've just reported to General McClellan that our whole command at Harper's Ferry, thirteen thousand strong, surrendered early this morning and that Jackson with picked men has already started to join Lee!”

“My God! My God!” cried the colonel. “Oh, that lost day! We ought to have fought yesterday and destroyed Lee, while Harper's Ferry was still holding out! What a day! What a day! Nothing can ever pay us back for the losing of it!”

Dick, too, felt a sinking of the heart, but despair was not written on his face as it was on that of his colonel. Jackson might come, but it would only be with a part of his force, that which marched the swiftest, and the victory of the Army of the Potomac would be all the grander. The more enemies crushed the better it would be for the Union.

“Why, colonel!” he exclaimed, “we can beat them anyhow!”

“That's so, my lad, so we can! And so we will! It was childish of me to talk as I did. Here, Johnson, blow your best on that trumpet. I want our regiment to be the first to reach the Antietam.”

Johnson blew a long and mellow tune and the Winchester regiment swung forward at a more rapid gait. The weather, after a day or two of coolness, had grown intensely hot again, and the noon sun poured down upon them sheaves of fiery rays. Dick looked back, and he saw once more that vast billowing cloud of dust made by the marching army. But in front he saw only quiet and peace, save for a few distant horsemen who seemed to be riding at random.

“There's a little town called Sharpsburg in the peninsula formed by the Potomac and the Antietam,” said Shepard, who stayed with them, his immediate work done, “and the Potomac being very low, owing to the dry season, there is one ford by which Lee can cross and go back to Virginia. But he isn't going to cross without a battle, that's sure. The rebels are flushed with victory, they think they have the greatest leaders ever born and they believe, despite the disparity of numbers, that they can beat us.”

“And I believe they can't,” said Dick.

“If it were not for that lost day we'd have 'em beaten now,” said Shepard, “and we'd be marching against Jackson.”

The regiment in its swift advance now came nearer to the Antietam, the narrow but deep creek between its high banks. One or two shots from the far side

warned them to come more slowly, and Colonel Winchester drew his men up on a knoll, waiting for the rest of the army to advance.

Dick put his glasses to his eyes, and slowly swept a wide curve on the peninsula of Antietam. Great armies drawn up for battle were a spectacle that no boy could ever view calmly, and his heart beat so hard that it caused him actual physical pain.

He saw through the powerful glasses the walls of the little village of Sharpsburg, and to the north a roof which he believed was that of the Dunkard Church, of which Shepard spoke. But his eyes came back from the church and rested on the country around Sharpsburg. The Confederate masses were there and he clearly saw the batteries posted along the Antietam. Beyond the peninsula he caught glimpses of the broad Potomac.

There lay Lee before them again, and now was the time to destroy his army. Jackson, even with his vanguard, could not arrive before night, and the main force certainly could not come from Harper's Ferry before the morrow. Here was a full half day for the Army of the Potomac, enough in which to destroy a divided portion of the Army of Northern Virginia.

But Colonel Winchester raged again and again in vain. There was no attack. Brigade after brigade in blue came up and sat down before the Antietam. The cannon exchanged salutes across the little river, but no harm was done, and the great masses of McClellan faced the whole peninsula, within which lay Lee with half of his army. The Winchester regiment was moved far to the north, where its officers hopefully believed that the first attack would be made. Here they extended beyond Lee's line, and it would be easy to cross the Antietam and hurl themselves upon his flank.

Despite the delay, Dick and his comrades, thrilled at the great and terrible panorama spread before them. The mid-September day had become as hot as those of August had been. The late afternoon sun was brazen, and immense clouds of dust drifted about. But they did not hide the view of the armies, arrayed for battle, and with only a narrow river between.

Dick, through his own glasses saw Confederate officers watching them also. He tried to imagine that this was Lee and that Longstreet, and that one of the Hills, and the one who wore a gorgeous uniform must surely be Stuart. Why should they be allowed to ride about so calmly? His heart fairly ached for the attack. McClellan said that fifty thousand men were there, and that Jackson was coming with fifty thousand more, but Shepard, who always knew, said that they did not number more than twenty thousand. What a chance! What a chance! He

almost repeated Colonel Winchester's words, but he was only a young staff officer and it was not for him to complain. If he said anything at all he would have to say it in a guarded manner and to his best friends.

The Winchester regiment went into camp in a pleasant grove at the northern end of the Union line. Dick and his two young comrades had no fault to find with their quarters. They had dry grass, warm air and the open sky. A more comfortable summer home for a night could not be asked. And there was plenty of food, too. The Army of the Potomac never lacked it. The coffee was already boiling in the pots, and beef and pork were frying in the skillets. Heavenly aromas arose.

Dick and his comrades ate and drank, and then lay down in the grove. If they must rest they would rest well. Now and then they heard the booming of guns, and just before dark there had been a short artillery duel across the Antietam, but now the night was quiet, save for the murmur and movement of a great army. Through the darkness came the sound of many voices and the clank of moving wheels.

Dick asked permission for his two comrades and himself to go down near the river and obtained it.

“But don't get shot,” cautioned Colonel Winchester. “The Confederate riflemen will certainly be on watch on the other side of the stream.”

Dick promised and the three went forward very carefully among some bushes. They were led on by curiosity and they did not believe that they would be in any great danger. The singular friendliness which always marked the pickets of the hostile armies in the Civil War would prevail.

It was several hundred yards down to the Antietam, and luckily the ribbon of bushes held out. But when they were half way to the stream a thick, dark figure rose up before them. Dick, in an instant, recognized Sergeant Whitley.

“We want to get a nearer view of the enemy,” said the boy.

“I'll go with you,” said the sergeant. “I'm on what may be called scouting duty. Besides, I've a couple of friends down there by the river, but on the other side.”

“Friends on the other side of the Antietam. What do you mean, sergeant?”

“I was scouting along there and I came across 'em. Only one in fact is an old acquaintance, an' he's just introduced me to the other.”

“That's cryptic.”

“I don't rightly know what 'cryptic' means, but I guess I don't make myself understood well. In my campaign on the plains against the Indians I had a

comrade named Bill Brayton. A Tennesseean, Bill was an' a fine feller, too. Him an' me have bunked together many a time an' we've dug out of the snow together, too, after the blizzards was over. But when we saw the war comin' up, Bill had fool notions. Said he didn't know anything 'bout the right an' wrong of it, guessed there was some of each on each side, but whichever way his state would flop, he'd flop. Well, we waited. Tennessee flopped right out of the Union an' Bill flopped with it.

"I felt powerful sorry when Bill told me good-bye, and so did he. I ain't seen or heard of him since 'till to-night, when I was cruisin' down there by the side of the river in the dark an' keepin' under cover of the bushes. Had no intention of shootin' anybody. Just wanted to take a look. I saw on the other side a dim figure walkin' up an' down, rifle on shoulder. Thought I noticed something familiar about it, an' the longer I watched the shorer I was.

"At last I crept right to the edge of the bank an' layin' down lest some fool who didn't know the manners of our war take a pot shot at me, I called out, 'Bill Brayton, you thick-headed rebel, are you well an' doin' well?'

"You ought to have seen him jump. He stopped walkin', dropped his rifle in the hollow of his arm, looked the way my voice come and called out, likewise in a loud voice: 'Who's callin' me a thick-headed rebel? Is it some blue-backed Yankee? You know we see nothin' of you but your backs. Come out in the light, an' I'll let some sense into you with a bullet.'

"'Oh, no I won't,' says I, still layin' close, an' not mindin' his taunt 'bout seein' our backs only. 'You couldn't hit me if I stood up an' marked the place on my chest. Nothin' will save you but them days on the plain in the blizzards when you was more useful with a shovel than you are with a rifle, 'cause to-morrow at sunrise we're goin' to cross this little river and tie all you fellows hand an' foot an' take you away as prisoners to Washington.'

"That made him mighty mad, but the part 'bout the blizzards on the plains set him to thinkin', too. 'Who in thunderation are you?' sez he. 'You're Bill Brayton, of Tennessee, fightin' in the rebel army, when you ought to know better,' says I. 'Now, who in thunderation am I?' 'Sufferin' Moses!' says he, 'that voice grows more like his every time he speaks. It can't be that empty-headed galoot, Dan Whitley, who never knew nothin' 'bout the rights an' wrongs of the war, an' had to go off with the Yanks!'

"'It's him an' nobody else,' says I, as I rose right up an' stood there on the bank, 'an' mighty glad am I to see you Bill, an' to know that your fool head ain't knocked off by a cannon ball.' He shorely jumped up an' down with pleasure an'

he called back: 'The good Lord certainly watches over them that ain't got any sense. Dan, you flat-headed, hump-backed, round-shouldered, thin-chested, knock-kneed, club-footed son of a gun, I was never so glad to see anybody before in my life.'

“His eyes were shinin' with delight an' I know mine was, too. Reunions of old friends who for all each know have been dead a year or two, clean blowed to pieces by shells, or shot through by a hundred rifle bullets are powerful affectin'. He come down to the edge of the river an' he shot questions across to me, an' I shot questions at him, an' I felt as if a brother had riz from the dead. An' as we can't shake hands we reaches out the muzzles of our guns and shakes them towards each other in the most friendly way. Then another picket comes up, fellow by name of Henderson, from Mississippi. Bill introduces him to his good old pal, an' we three have a friendly talk. Guess they're down there yet, if you want to see 'em. I liked that fellow, Henderson, too, though he was a powerful boaster.”

“All right,” said Dick. “Lead on, but don't get us shot.”

They went cautiously through the bushes to the bank of the river, and then the sergeant blew softly between his fingers. Two figures at once appeared on the other side, and Sergeant Whitley and the boys rose up.

“Mr. Brayton and Mr. Henderson,” said the sergeant politely, “I want to introduce my friends, Lieutenant Mason, Lieutenant Warner and Lieutenant Pennington.”

“Movin' in mighty good comp'ny, though young, Dan,” said Brayton, who was about Whitley's age and build.

“They're officers, an' they're young, as you say,” said Whitley, “but they're good ones.”

“Them's the kind we eat alive, when we ain't got anything else to eat,” said the Mississippian, a very tall, sallow and youngish man. “We're never too strong on rations, and when I eat prisoners I like 'em under twenty the best. They ain't had time to get tough. I speak right now for that yellow-haired one in the middle.”

“You can't swallow me,” said Pennington, good naturedly. “I'll just turn myself crossways and stick in your throat.”

“What are you fellows after around here, anyway?” continued the Mississippian. “The weather's hot an' we all want to go in swimmin' to-morrow, bein' as we have two rivers handy. Shore as you live if you get to botherin' us we'll hurt you.”

“You won't hurt us,” said Dick, “because to-morrow we're going to surround you and drive you into a coop.”

“Drive us in a coop. See here, Yank, you're gettin' excited. Do you know how many men we have here waitin' for you? Of course you don't. Why, it's four hundred thousand, ain't it, Bill?”

“No, it's just two hundred thousand. I don't believe in lyin' fur effect, Jim.”

“I ain't lyin'. There's two hundred thousand men. Then there's Bobby Lee. That's a hundred thousand more, which makes three hundred thousand. Then there's Stonewall Jackson, who's another hundred thousand, which brings the figures up to exactly what I said, four hundred thousand. Now, ain't I right, Bill?”

“You shorely are, Jim. I was a fool for countin' the way I did. Will you overlook it this time?”

“Wa'al, I will this time, but be shore you don't do it ag'in. Now, see here, you Yanks: we like you well enough. You're friends of Bill, who is a friend of me. Just you take my advice an' go home. Start to-night while the weather is warm, an' the roads are good. If you're afraid of our chasin' you we'll give you a runnin' start of a hunderd miles.”

“Wa'al now, that's right kind of you,” said Whitley. “I for one might take your advice, but I was froze up so much in them wild mountains an' plains of the northwest that I like to go south when the winter's comin' on. It's hot now, all right, but in two months the chilly blasts will be seekin' my marrow.”

“I was speakin' for your own good,” said the Mississippian gravely. “Anyway, you won't be troubled by the cold weather 'cause if you don't go back into the no'th where you belong, we'll be takin' you a prisoner way down south, where you don't belong. But you could have a good time there. We won't treat you bad. There's fine huntin' for b'ars in the canebrake an' the rivers an' bayous are full of fish. Your captivity won't be downright painful on you.”

“Glad to get your welcome, Mr. Henderson,” said Whitley, “'cause we've heard a lot 'bout the hospitality of Mississippi, an' we're shorely goin' to stretch it. I'm comin', an' I'm bringin' a couple of hundred thousand fellers 'bout my size with me. Funny thing, we'll all wear blue coats just alike. Think you'd find room for us?”

“Plenty of it. What was it the feller said—we welcome you with bloody hands to hospitable graves—but we ain't feelin' that way to-night. Got a plug of terbacker?”

The sergeant took out a square of tobacco, cut it in exact halves with his pocket knife, and tossed one-half across the Antietam, where it was deftly caught by the Mississippian.

“Thanks mightily,” said Henderson. “Mr. Commissary Banks used to supply us with good things, then it was Mr. Commissary Pope, and now I reckon it'll be Mr. Commissary McClellan. Say, how many fellers have you got over thar, anyway?”

“When I counted 'em last night,” replied the sergeant calmly, “there was five hundred and twelve thousand two hundred and fifty-three infantry, sixty-four thousand two hundred and nineteen cavalry an' three thousand one hundred and seventy-five cannon, but I reckon we'll receive reinforcements of three hundred thousand before mornin'.”

“Then we'll have more prisoners than I thought. Are you shore them three hundred thousand reinforcements will get up in time?”

“Quite shore. I've sent 'em word to hurry.”

“Then we'll have to take them, too.”

“Time you fellers quit your talkin',” said Brayton, “a major or a colonel may come strollin' 'long here any minute, an' they don't like for us fellers to be too friendly. Dan, I'm powerful glad to see you ag'in, an' I hope you won't get killed. I've a feelin' that you an' me will be ridin' over the plains once more some day, an' we won't be fightin' each other. We'll be fightin' Sioux an' Cheyennes an' all that red lot, just as we did in the old days. Here's a good-bye.”

He thrust out the muzzle of his gun, an' Whitley thrust out his. Then they shook them at each other in friendly salute, and the little group moved away from the river bank.

“I'm glad I've seen Bill again,” said the sergeant. “Fine feller an' that Mississippian with him was quaint like. Mighty big bragger.”

“You did some bragging yourself, sergeant,” said Dick.

“So I did, but it was in answer to Henderson. I'm glad we had that little talk across the river. It was a friendly thing to do, before we fall to slaughterin' one another.”

They rejoined Colonel Winchester, and Dick worked through a part of the night carrying orders and other messages. A great movement was going on. Fresh troops were continually coming up, but there was little noise beyond the Antietam, although he saw the light of many fires.

He slept after midnight and awoke at dawn, expecting to go at once into battle.

Some of the troops were moved about and Colonel Winchester began to rage again.

“Good God! can it be possible!” he exclaimed, “that another day will be lost? Is General McClellan instead of General Lee waiting for Jackson to come? With the enemy safely within the trap, we refuse to shut it down upon him!”

He said these things only within the hearing of Dick, who he knew would never repeat them. But he was not the only one to complain. Men higher in rank than he, generals, spoke their discontent openly. Why would not McClellan attack? He had claimed that the rebels had two hundred thousand men at the Seven Days, when it was well known that half that figure or less was their true number. Why should he persist in seeing the enemy double, and even if Lee did have fifty thousand men on the other side of the Antietam, instead of the twenty thousand the scouts assigned to him, the Army of the Potomac could defeat him before Jackson came up.

But McClellan was overcome by caution. In spite of everything he doubled or tripled the numbers of the enemy. Personally brave beyond dispute, he feared for his army. The position of the enemy on the peninsula seemed to have changed somewhat through the night. He believed that the batteries had been moved about, and he telegraphed to Washington that he must find out exactly the disposition of Lee's forces and where the fords were.

Meanwhile the long, hot hours dragged on. The dust trodden up by so many marching feet was terrible. It hung in clouds and added a sting to the burning heat. Dick was wild with impatience, but he knew that it was not worth while to say anything. He, Warner and Pennington, for the lack of something else to do, lay on the dry grass, whispering and watching as well as they could what was going on in Sharpsburg.

Meanwhile Sharpsburg itself seemed a monument to peace. It was deep in dust and the sun blazed on the roofs. Staff officers rode up, and when they dismounted they lazily led their horses to the best shade that could be found. Within a residence Lee sat in close conference with his lieutenants, Stonewall Jackson and Longstreet. Now and then, they looked at the reports of brigade commanders and sometimes they studied the maps of Maryland and Virginia. Lee was calm and confident. The odds against him—and he knew what they were—apparently mattered nothing.

He knew the strength and spirit of his army and to what a pitch it was keyed by victory. Moreover, he knew McClellan, whom he had met at the Seven Days, and he believed, in truth he felt positive that McClellan would delay long enough

for the remainder of Jackson's troops to come up. Upon this belief he staked the future of the Confederacy in the battle to be fought there between the Potomac and the Antietam. His troops were worn by battles and tremendous marches. Jackson's men in three days had marched sixty miles, and had fought a battle at Harper's Ferry within that time, also, taking more than thirteen thousand prisoners. Never before had the foot cavalry marched so hard.

The men in gray, ragged and many of them barefooted, slept in the woods about Sharpsburg all through the hot hours of the day. Their officers had told them that the drums and bugles would call them when needed, and they sank quietly into the deepest of slumbers. From where they lay Red Hill, a spur of a mountain, separated them from the Union army. It was only those like Dick and his comrades who mounted elevations and who had powerful field glasses who could see into Sharpsburg. The main Union force saw only the top of a church spire or two in the village. But each felt fully the presence of the other and knew that the battle could not be delayed long.

Dick, in his anxiety and excitement, fell asleep. The heat and the waiting seemed to overpower him. He did not know how long he had slept, but he was awakened by the sharp call of a trumpet, and when he sprang to his feet Warner told him it was about four o'clock.

“What's up?” he cried, as he wiped the haze of heat and dust from his eyes.

“We're about to march,” replied Warner, “but as it's so late in the day I don't think it can be a general attack. Still, I know that our division is going to cross the Antietam. Up here the stream is narrower than it is down below, and the banks are not so high. Look, the colonel is beckoning to us! Here we go!”

They sprang upon their horses, and a great corps advanced toward the Antietam, far above the town of Sharpsburg. The sun had declined in the West, and a breeze, bringing a little coolness, had begun to blow. They did not see much preparation for defense beyond the river, but as they advanced some cannon in the woods opened there. The Union cannon replied, and then the brigades in blue moved forward swiftly.

The officers and the cavalry galloped their horses into the little river and Dick felt a fierce joy as the water was dashed into his face. This was action, movement, the attack that had been delayed so long but which was not yet too late. He thought nothing of the shells hissing and shrieking over his head, and he shouted with the others in exultation as they passed the fords of the Antietam and set foot on the peninsula. The cannon dashed after them through the stream and up the bank.

A heavy rifle fire from the woods met them, but the triumphant division pressed on. They were held back at the edge of the woods by cannon aiding the rifles, and for some time a battle swayed back and forth, but the Confederate resistance ceased suddenly. Infantry and batteries disappeared in woods or beyond a ridge, and then Dick noticed that night was coming. The sun was already hidden by the lofty slopes of the western mountains, and there would be no battle that day. In another half hour full darkness would be upon them.

But Dick felt that something had been achieved. A powerful Union force was now beyond the Antietam, with its feet rooted firmly in the soil of the peninsula. It looked directly south at the Confederate army and there was no barrier between. Lee would have to face at once, Hooker on the north and McClellan on the east across the Antietam. The Union army had been numerous enough to outflank him.

Dick was quite sure of success now. They had lost two of the most precious of all days instead of one, but they had closed the gap on the north, through which Lee's army might march in an attempt to escape. It was likely, too, that the last of Jackson's men would come that way and the Union force would cut them off from Lee. Two entire army corps were now beyond the Antietam, and they should be able to do anything.

The Winchester regiment lay in deep woods, and the great division although it had rested nearly all the day was quiet in the night. But some ardent souls could not rest. A group of officers, including Colonel Winchester and the three young members of his staff, walked forward through the woods, taking the chance of stray shots from sentinels or skirmishers. But they knew that this risk was not great.

They passed near a mill, its wheels and saws silent now, and presently as the moon rose they saw the square white walls of a building shining in its light.

“The Dunkard church,” said one of the officers. “I think we'd better not go any closer. The Johnnies must be lying thick close at hand.”

“The dim light off to the right must be made by their fires,” said Colonel Winchester. “I wish I knew what troops they are. Jackson's perhaps. It's a rough country, and all these forests and ridges and hills will help the defense. I understand that the farms in here are surrounded by stone fences and that, too, will help the Johnnies.”

“But we'll get 'em,” said another confidently. “The battle can't be put off any longer, and we're bound to smash 'em in the morning.”

They remained in the darkness for a while, trying to see what was passing

toward the Southern lines, but they could see little. There was some rifle firing after a while, and the occasional deep note of a cannon, mostly at random and the little group walked back.

“I'm going to sleep, Dick,” said Warner. “I've just remembered that I'm an invalid and that if I overtask myself it will be a bad thing for McClellan to-morrow. The colonel doesn't want us any longer, and so here goes.”

“I follow,” said Pennington. “The dry earth is good enough for me. May I stay on top of it for the next half century.”

Warner and Pennington slept quickly, but Dick lay awake a long time, listening to the stray rifle shots and the distant boom of a cannon at far intervals. After a while, he looked at his watch and saw that it was midnight. It was more than an hour later when slumber overtook him, and while he and his comrades lay there the last of Jackson's men were coming with the help that Lee needed so sorely.

Two divisions which had been left at Harper's Ferry started at midnight just as Dick was looking at his watch and at dawn they were almost to the Potomac. On their flank was a cavalry brigade and A. P. Hill was hurrying with another of infantry. Messenger after messenger from them came to Lee that on the fateful day they with their fourteen thousand bayonets would be in line when they were needed most.

Few of those who fought for the Lost Cause ever cherished anything more vividly than those hours between midnight and the next noon when they marched at the double quick across hill and valley and forest to the relief of their great commander. There was little need for the officers to urge them on, and at sunrise the rolling of the cannon was calling to them to come faster, always faster.

CHAPTER X. ANTIETAM

Dick arose at the first flash of dawn. All the men of the Winchester regiment were on their feet. The officers had sent their horses to the rear, knowing that they would be worse than useless among the rocks and in the forest in front of them.

A mist arising from the two rivers floated over everything, but Dick knew that the battle was at hand. The Northern trumpets were calling, and in the haze in front of them the Southern trumpets were calling, too.

The fog lifted, and then Dick saw the Confederate lines stretched through forest, rock and ploughed ground. Near the front was a rail fence with lines of skirmishers crouching behind it. As the last bit of mist rolled away the fence became a twisted line of flame. The fire of the Southern skirmishers crashed in the Union ranks, and the Northern skirmishers, pressing in on the right replied with a fire equally swift and deadly. Then came the roar of the Southern cannon, well aimed and tearing gaps in the Union lines.

“Its time to charge!” exclaimed Pennington. “It scares me, standing still under the enemy's fire, but I forget about it when I'm rushing forward.”

The Winchester regiment did not move for the present, although the battle thickened and deepened about it. The fire of the Confederate cannon was heavy and terrible, yet the Union masses on either wing had begun to press forward. Hooker hurled in two divisions, one under Meade, and one under Doubleday, and another came up behind to support them. The western men were here and remembering how they had been decimated at Manassas, they fought for revenge as well as patriotism.

At last the Winchester regiment in the center moved forward also. They struck heavy ploughed land, and as they struggled through it they met a devastating fire. It seemed to Dick that the last of the little regiment was about to be blown away, but as he looked through the fire and smoke he saw Warner and Pennington still by his side, and the colonel a little ahead, waving his sword and shouting orders that could not be heard.

Dick saw shining far before him the white walls of the Dunkard church, and he was seized with a frantic desire to reach it. It seemed to him if they could get there that the victory would be won. Yet they made little progress. The cannon facing them fairly spouted fire, and thousands of expert riflemen in front of them

lying behind ridges and among rocks and bushes sent shower after shower of leaden balls that swept away the front ranks of the charging Union lines. The shell and the shrapnel and the grape and the round shot made a great noise, but the little bullets coming in swarms like bees were the true messengers of death.

Jackson and four thousand of his veterans formed the thin line between the Dunkard church and the Antietam. They were ragged and worn by war, but they were the children of victory, led by a man of genius, and they felt equal to any task. Near Jackson stood his favorite young aide, Harry Kenton, and on the other side was the thin regiment of the Invincibles, led by Colonel Leonidas Talbot, and Lieutenant-Colonel Hector St. Hilaire.

Around the church itself were the Texans under Hood, stalwart, sunburned men who could ride like Comanches, some of whom when lads had been present at San Jacinto, when the Texans struck with such terrible might and success for liberty.

“Are we winning? Tell me, that we are winning!” shouted Dick in Warner's ear.

“We're not winning, but we will! Confound that fog! It's coming up again!” Warner shouted back.

The heavy fog from the Potomac and the Antietam which the early and burning sunrise had driven away was drifting back, thickened by the smoke from the cannon and rifles. The gray lines in front disappeared and the church was hidden. Yet the Northern artillery continued to pour a terrible fire through the smoke toward the point where the Confederate infantry had been posted.

Dick heard at the same time a tremendous roar on the left, and he knew that the Union batteries beyond the Antietam had opened a flanking fire on the Southern army. He breathed a sigh of triumph. McClellan, who could organize and prepare so well, was aroused at last to such a point that he could concentrate his full strength in battle itself, and push home with all his might until able to snatch the reward, victory. As the lad heard the supporting guns across the Antietam, he suddenly found himself shouting with all his might. His voice could not be heard in the uproar, but he saw that the lips of those about him were moving in like manner.

The two corps on the peninsula had a good leader that morning. Hooker, fiery, impetuous, scorning death, continually led his men to the attack. The gaps in their ranks were closed up, and on they went, infantry, cavalry and artillery. The fog blew away again and they beheld once more the gray lines of the Southerners, and the white wooden walls of the church.

So fierce and overwhelming was the Northern rush that all of Jackson's men and the Texans were borne back, and were driven from the ridges and out of the woods. Exultant, the men in blue followed, their roar of triumph swelling above the thunder of the battle.

“Victory!” cried Dick, but Warner shouted:

“Look out!”

The keen eyes of the young Vermonter had seen masses of infantry and cavalry on their flank. Hooker, fierce and impetuous, had gone too far, and now the Southern trumpets sang the charge. Stuart, fiery and dauntless, his saber flashing, led his charging horsemen, and Hill threw his infantry upon the Northern flank.

It seemed to Dick that he was in a huge volcano of fire and smoke. Men who, in their calm moments, did not hate one another, glared into hostile eyes. There was often actual physical contact, and the flash from the cannon and rifles blazed in Dick's face. The Southerners in front who had been driven back returned, and as Stuart and Hill continued to beat hard upon their flanks, the troops of Hooker were compelled to retreat. Once more the white church faded in the mists and smoke.

But Hooker and his generals rallied their men and advanced anew. The ground around the Dunkard church became one of the most sanguinary places in all America. One side advanced and then the other, and they continually reeled to and fro. Even the young soldiers knew the immensity of the stake. This was the open ground, elsewhere the Antietam separated the fighting armies. But victory here would decide the whole battle, and the war, too. The Northern troops fought for a triumph that would end all, and the Southern troops for salvation.

So close and obstinate was the conflict that colonels and generals themselves were in the thick of it. Starke and Lawton of the South were both killed. Mansfield, who led one of the Northern army corps fell dead in the very front line, and the valiant Hooker, caught in the arms of his soldiers, was borne away so severely wounded that he could no longer give orders.

Scarcely any generals were left on either side, but the colonels and the majors and the captains still led the men into the thick of the conflict. Dick felt a terrible constriction. It was as if some one were choking him with powerful hands, and he strove for breath. He knew that the masses pressed upon their flank by Stuart and Hill, were riddling them through and through.

The Union men were giving ground, slowly, it is true, and leaving heaps of dead and wounded behind them, but nobody could stand the terrible rifle fire that

was raking them at short range from side to side, and they were no longer able to advance. Now Dick heard once more that terrible and triumphant rebel yell, and it seemed to him that they were about to be destroyed utterly, when shell and shot began to shriek and whistle over their heads. The woods behind them were alive with the blaze of fire, and the great Union batteries were driving back the triumphant and cheering Confederates.

The Union generals on the other side of the Antietam saw the fate that was about to overtake Hooker's valiant men, and Sumner, with another army corps, had crossed the river to the rescue, coming just in time. They moved up to Hooker's men and the united masses returned to the charge.

The battle grew more desperate with the arrival of fresh troops. Again it was charge and repulse, charge and repulse, and the continuous swaying to and fro by two combatants, each resolved to win. There were the Union men who had forced the passes through the mountains to reach this field, and they were struggling to follow up those successes by a victory far greater, and there were the Confederates resolved upon another glorious success.

The fire became so tremendous that the men could no longer hear orders. Here was a field of ripe corn, the stems and blades higher than a man's head, forty acres or so, nearly a quarter of a mile each way, but the corn soon ceased to hide the combatants from one another. The fire from the cannon and rifles came in such close sheets that scarcely a stalk stood upright in that whole field.

Long this mighty conflict swayed back and forth. Dick had seen nothing like it before, not even at the Second Manassas. It was almost hand to hand. Cannons were lost and retaken by each side. Stuart, finding the ground too rough for his cavalry, dismounted them and put them at the guns. Jackson, with an eye that missed nothing, called up Early's brigade and hurled it into the battle. The North replied with fresh troops, and the combat was as much in doubt as ever. Every brigade commander on the Southern side had been killed or wounded. Nearly all the colonels had fallen, but Jackson's men still fought with a fire and spirit that only such a leader as he could inspire.

It seemed to Dick that the whole world was on fire with the flash of cannon and rifles. The roar and crash came from not only in front and around him, but far down the side, where the main army of McClellan was advancing directly upon the Antietam, and the stone bridges which the Confederates had not found time to tear down.

There stood Lee, supremely confident that if his lieutenant, Jackson, could not hold the Northern opening into the peninsula nobody could. His men, who knew

the desperate nature of the crisis, said that they had never seen him more confident than he was that day.

On the ridge just south of the village was a huge limestone bowlder, and Lee, field glasses in hand, stood on it. He listened a while to the growing thunder of the battle in the north—the Dunkard church, around which Jackson and Hooker were fighting so desperately, was a mile away—but he soon turned his attention to the blue masses across the Antietam.

The Southern commander faced the Antietam with the hard-hitting Longstreet on his right, his left being composed of the forces of Jackson, already in furious conflict. Nothing escaped him. As he listened to the thunder of the dreadful battle in the north, he never ceased to watch the great army in front of him on the other side of the little river.

While Hooker and his men were fighting with such desperate courage, why did not McClellan and the main body of the Union army move forward to the attack? Doubtless Lee asked himself this question, and doubtless also he had gauged accurately the mind of the Union leader, who always saw two or even three enemies where but one stood. Relying so strongly upon his judgment he dared to strip himself yet further and send more men to Jackson. A messenger brought him news that more of Jackson's men had come to his aid and that he was now holding the whole line against the attacks of Meade and Hooker and all the rest.

Lee nodded and turned his glasses again toward the long blue line across the Antietam. McClellan himself was there, standing on a hill and also watching. Around him was a great division under the command of Burnside, and his time to win victory had come. He sent the order to Burnside to move forward and force the Antietam. It is said that at this moment Lee had only five thousand men with him, all the rest having been sent to Jackson, and, if so, time itself fought against the Union, as it was a full two hours before Burnside carried out his order and moved forward on the Antietam.

But Dick, on the north, did not know that it was as yet only cannon fire, and not the charge of troops to the south and west. In truth, he knew little of his own part of the battle. Once he was knocked down, but it was only the wind from a cannon ball, and when he sprang to his feet and drew a few long breaths he was as well as ever.

From muttered talk around him, talk that he could hear under the thunder of the battle, he learned that Sumner, who had come with the great reinforcement, was now leading the battle, with Hooker wounded and Mansfield dying.

Sumner, as brave and daring as any, had gathered twenty thousand men, and they were advancing in splendid order over the wreck of the dead and the dying, apparently an irresistible force.

Jackson, standing at the edge of a wood, saw the magnificent advance, and while the officers around him despaired, he did not think of awaiting the Northern attack, but prepared instead for an attack of his own. There was word that McLaws and the Harper's Ferry men had come. Jackson galloped to meet them, formed them quickly with his own, and then the Southern drums rolled out the charge. The weary veterans, gathering themselves anew for another burst of strength, fell with all their might on the Northern flank.

Dick felt the force of that charge. Men seemed to be driven in upon him. He was hurled down, how he knew not, but he sprang up again, and then he saw that their advance was stopped. Long lines of bayonets advanced upon them, and a terrible artillery fire crashed through and through their ranks. Two or three thousand men in blue fell in a moment or so. Fortune in an instant had made a terrible change of front.

Dick shouted aloud in despair as the brigades steadily gave back. The great Union batteries were firing over their heads again, but even they could not arrest the Southern advance. Their regiments were coming now across the shorn cornfield. Dick saw the galloping horses drawing their batteries up closer and around the flanks. And the rebel yell of victory which he had heard too often was now swelling from thousands of throats, as the fierce sons of the South rushed upon their foe.

But the North refused to abandon the battle here. These were splendid troops, so tenacious and so much bent upon victory that they scarcely needed leaders. Sedgwick, another of their gallant generals, fell and was carried off the field, wounded severely. Richardson, yet another, was killed a little later, but heavy reinforcements arrived, and the Southerners were driven back in their turn.

These were picked troops who met here, veterans almost all of them, and neither would yield. The superior weight and range of the Northern guns gave them an advantage in artillery, and it was used to the utmost. Dick did not see how men could live under such a horrible fire, but there were the gray lines replying, and wherever they yielded, yielding but little.

Noon came and then one o'clock. They had been fighting since dawn, and a combat so impetuous and terrible could not be maintained forever, particularly when the awful demon of war was eating up men so fast. Many of the regiments on either side had lost more than half their number and would lose more. They

were human beings, and even the unwounded began to collapse from mere physical exhaustion. Some dropped to the ground from sheer inability to stand, and as they lay there, they heard to the south and west the rolling thunder that told of Burnside's belated advance upon the Antietam.

Down where Lee stood watching, the battle blazed up with extraordinary rapidity. The men who had been held in leash so long by McClellan were anxious to get at the foe. Burnside's brigades charged directly for one of the stone bridges, and Lee, watching from his bowlder, hurried the Southern troops forward to meet them. Again the Northern artillery proved its worth. The great batteries sent a hurricane of death over the heads of the men in blue and toward the town of Sharpsburg. Despite all the valor of the Southern veterans, the heavy masses of the Union men forced their way across the bridge to the peninsula. Lee's batteries and infantry regiments could not hold them.

It seemed now that Lee's own force was to be destroyed and that victory was won, but fortune had in store yet another of those dazzling recoveries for the South. At the very moment when Lee seemed overwhelmed, A. P. Hill, as valiant and vigorous as the other Hill, arrived with the last of the Harper's Ferry veterans, having marched seventeen miles, almost on a dead run. They crossed the Potomac at a ford below the mouth of the Antietam, then crossed the Antietam on the lowest bridge back into the peninsula, and without waiting for orders rushed upon the Northern flank.

The attack was so sudden and fierce that Burnside's entire division reeled back. Here, as in the north, the face of the battle had been changed in an instant. Not only could Colonel Winchester mourn over those lost two days, but he could mourn over every lost half hour in them. Had Hill come a half hour later Lee's whole center would have been swept away.

Lee and his great lieutenants, Jackson and Longstreet, were still confident. Despite the disparity in numbers they had beaten back every attack.

A. P. Hill was a man who corresponded in fire and impetuosity to Hooker. The number of his veterans was not so great, but their rush was so fierce, and they struck at such a critical time that the Northern brigades were unable to hold the ground they had gained. More troops from the dying battle on the north came to Lee's aid, and every attempt of McClellan to take Sharpsburg failed.

Dick, fighting with his comrades on the north, knew little of what was passing on the peninsula in the south, but he became conscious after a while that the appalling fury of the battle around him was diminishing. He had not seen such a desperate hand-to-hand battle at either Shiloh or the Second Manassas, and they

were terrible enough. But he felt as the Confederates themselves had felt, that the Southern army was fighting for existence.

But as the day waned, Dick believed that they would never be able to crush Jackson. The Union troops always returned to the attack, but the men in gray never failed to meet it, and actual physical exhaustion overwhelmed the combatants. Pennington went down, and Dick dragged him to his feet, fearing that he was wounded mortally, but found that his comrade had merely dropped through weakness.

The long day of heat and strife neared its close. Neither Northern tenacity nor Southern fire could win, and the sun began to droop over the field piled so thickly with bodies. As the twilight crept up the battle sank in all parts of the peninsula. McClellan, who had lost those two most precious days, and who had finally failed to make use of all his numbers at the same time, now, great in preparation, as usual, made ready for the emergency of the morrow.

All the powerful and improved artillery which McClellan had in such abundance was brought up. The mathematical minds and the workshops of the North bore full fruit upon this sanguinary field of Antietam. The shattered divisions of Hooker, with which Dick and his comrades lay, were sheltered behind a great line of artillery. No less than thirty rifled guns of the latest and finest make were massed in one battery to command the road by which the South might attack.

To the south the Northern artillery was equally strong, and beyond the Antietam also it was massed in battery after battery to protect its men.

But the coming twilight found both sides too exhausted to move. The sun was setting upon the fiercest single day's fighting ever seen in America. Nearly twenty-five thousand dead or wounded lay upon the field. More than one fourth of the Southern army was killed or wounded, yet it was in Lee's mind to attack on the morrow.

After night had come the weary Southern generals—those left alive—reported to Lee as he sat on his horse in the road. The shadows gathered on his face, as they told of their awful losses, and of the long list of high officers killed or wounded. Jackson was among the last, and he was gloomy. The man who had always insisted upon battle did not insist upon it now. Hood reported that his Texans, who had fought so valiantly for the Dunkard church, were almost destroyed.

The scene in the darkness with the awful battlefield around them was one which not even the greatest of painters could have reproduced. When the last

general had told his tale of slaughter and destruction, they sat for a while in silence. They realized the smallness of their army, and the immense extent of their losses. The light wind that had sprung up swept over the dead faces of thousands of the bravest men in the Southern army. They had held their ground, but on the morrow McClellan could bring into line three to one and an artillery far superior alike in quality, weight and numbers to theirs.

The strange, intense silence lasted. Every eye was upon Lee. When the generals were making their reports he had shown more emotion than they had ever seen on his face before. Now he was quiet, but he drew his lips close together, his eyes shone with blue fire, and rising in his stirrups he said:

“We will not cross the Potomac to-night, gentlemen.”

Then while they still waited in silence, he said:

“Go to your commands! Reform and strengthen your lines. Collect all your stragglers. Bring up every man who is in the rear. If McClellan wants a battle again in the morning, he shall have it. Now go!”

Not a general said a word in objection, in fact, they did not speak at all, but rode slowly away, every one to his command. Yet they were, without exception, against the decision of their great leader.

Even Stonewall Jackson did not want a second battle. He had shown through the doubtful conflict a most extraordinary calmness. While the combat in the north, where he commanded, was at its height, he had sat on Little Sorrel, now happily restored to him, eating from time to time a peach that he took from his pocket. Nothing had escaped his observation; he watched every movement, and noticed every rise and fall in the tide of success. His silence now indicated that he concurred with the others in his belief that the remains of the Confederate army should withdraw across the Potomac, but his manner indicated complete acquiescence in the decision of his leader.

But in the north of the peninsula the remnants of either side had scarce a thought to bestow upon victory or defeat. It was a question that did not concern them for the present, so utter was their exhaustion. As night came and the battle ceased they dropped where they were and sank into sleep or a stupor that was deeper than sleep.

But Dick this time did neither. His nervous system had been strained so severely that it was impossible for him to keep still. He had found that all of his friends had received wounds, although they were too slight to put them out of action. But the Winchester regiment had suffered terribly again. It did not have a hundred men left fit for service, and even at that it had got off better than some

others. In one of the Virginia regiments under Longstreet only fourteen men had been left unhurt.

Dick stood beside his colonel—Warner and Pennington were lying in a stupor—and he was appalled. The battle had been fought within a narrow area, and the tremendous destruction was visible in the moonlight, heaped up everywhere. Colonel Winchester was as much shaken as he, and the two, the man and the boy, walked toward the picket line, drawn by a sort of hideous fascination, as they looked upon the area of conflict.

The dead lay in windrows between the two armies which were waiting to fight on the dawn. Dick and the colonel walked toward the field where the corn had been waving high that morning, and where it was now mown by cannon and rifles to the last stalk. In the edge of the wood the boy paused and grasping the man suddenly by the arm pulled him back.

“Look! Look!” he exclaimed in a sharp whisper. “The Confederate skirmishers! The woods are full of them! They are making ready for a night attack!” Both he and Colonel Winchester sprang back behind a big tree, sheltering themselves from a possible shot. But no sound came, not even that of men creeping forward through the undergrowth. All they heard was the moaning of the wind through the foliage. They waited, and then the two looked at each other. The true reason for the extraordinary silence had occurred to both at the same instant, and they stepped from the shelter of the tree.

Awed and appalled, the man and the boy gazed at the silent forms which lay row on row in the woods and in the shorn cornfield. It seemed as if they slept, but Dick knew that all were dead. He and Colonel Winchester gazed again at each other and shuddering turned away lest they disturb the sleep of the dead.

When they returned to a position behind the guns they heard others coming in with equally terrible tales. A sunken lane that ran between the hostile lines was filled to the brim with dead. Boys, yet in their teens, with nerves completely shattered for the time, chattered hysterically of what they had seen. The Antietam was still running red. Both Lee and Stonewall Jackson had been killed and the whole Confederate army would be taken in the morning. Some said, on the other hand, that the Southerners still had a hundred thousand men, and that McClellan would certainly be beaten the next day, if he did not retreat in time.

None of the talk, either of victory or defeat, made any impression upon Dick. His senses were too much dulled by all through which he had gone. Words no longer meant anything. Although the night was warm he began to shiver, as if he were seized with a chill.

“Lie down, Dick,” said Colonel Winchester, who noticed him. “I don't think you can stand it any longer. Here, under this tree will do.”

Dick threw himself down and Colonel Winchester, finding a blanket, spread it over him. Then the boy closed his eyes, and, for a while, phase after phase of the terrible conflict passed before him. He could see the white wall of the Dunkard church, the Bloody Lane, and most ghastly of all, those dead men in rows lying on their arms, like regiments asleep, but his nerves grew quiet at last, and after midnight he slept.

Dawn came and found the two armies ready. Dick and the sad remnant of the Winchester regiment rose to their feet. Although food had been prepared for them very few in all these brigades had touched a bite the night before, sinking into sleep or stupor before it could be brought to them. But now they ate hungrily while they watched for their foes, the skirmishers of either army already being massed in front to be ready for any movement by the other.

As on the morning before, a mist arose from the Potomac and the Antietam. The sun, bright and hot, soon dispersed it. But there was no movement by either army. Dick did not hear the sound of a single shot. Warner and Pennington, recovered from their stupor, stood beside him gazing southward toward the rocks and ridges, where the Confederate army lay.

“I'm thinking,” said Warner, “that they're just as much exhausted as we are. We're waiting for an attack, and they're waiting for the same. The odds are at least ninety per cent in favor of my theory. Their losses are something awful, and I don't think they can do anything against us. Look how our batteries are massed for them.”

Dick was watching through his glasses, and even with their aid he could see no movement within the Southern lines. Hours passed and still neither army stirred. McClellan counted his tremendous losses, and he, too, preferred to await attack rather than offer it. His old obsession that his enemy was double his real strength seized him, and he was not willing to risk his army in a second rush upon Lee.

While Dick and his comrades were waiting through the long morning hours, Lee and Jackson and his other lieutenants were deciding whether or not they should make an attack of their own. But when they studied with their glasses the Northern lines and the great batteries, they decided that it would be better not to try it.

When noon came and still no shot had been fired, Colonel Winchester shook his head.

“We might yet destroy the Southern army,” he said to Dick, “but I'm convinced that General McClellan will not move it.”

The hot afternoon passed, and then the night came with the sound of rumbling wheels and marching men. Dick surmised that Lee was leaving the peninsula, and, crossing the Potomac in to Virginia, and that therefore tactical victory would rest with the Northern side. The noises continued all night long, but McClellan made no advance, nor did he do so the next day, while the whole Confederate army was crossing the Potomac, until nearly night.

But the Winchester regiment and several more of the same skeleton character, pushing forward a little on the morning of that day, found that the last Confederate soldier was gone from Sharpsburg. Colonel Winchester and other officers were eager for the Army of the Potomac to attack the Army of Northern Virginia, while it dragged itself across the wide and dangerous ford.

But McClellan delayed again, and it was sunset when Dick saw the first sign of action. A strong division with cannon crossed the river and attacked the batteries which were covering the Southern rearguard. Four guns and prisoners were taken, but when Lee heard of it he sent back Jackson, who beat off all pursuit.

Dick and his comrades did not see this last fight, which was the dying echo of Antietam. They felt that they had defeated the enemy's purpose, but they did not rejoice over any victory. The sword of Antietam had turned back Lee and Jackson for a time and perhaps had saved the Union, but Dick was gloomy and depressed that so little had been won when they seemed to hold so much in the hollow of their hands.

This feeling spread through the whole army, and the privates, even, talked of it openly. Nobody could forget those precious two days lost before the battle. Orders No. 191 had put all the cards in their hands, but the commander had not played them.

“I feel that we've really failed,” said Warner, as they sat beside a camp fire. “The Southerners certainly fought like demons, but we ought to have been there long before Jackson came, and we ought to have whipped them, even after Jackson did come.”

“But we didn't,” said Pennington, “and so we've got the job to do all over again. You know, George, we're bound to win.”

“Of course, Frank; but while we're doing it the country is being ripped to pieces. I'll never quit mourning over that lost chance at Antietam.”

“At any rate we came off better than at the Second Manassas,” said Dick.

“What's ahead of us now?”

“I don't know,” replied Warner. “I saw Shepard yesterday, and he says that the Southerners are recuperating in Virginia. We need restoratives ourselves, and I don't suppose we'll have any important movements along this line for a while.”

“But there'll be big fighting somewhere,” said Dick.

CHAPTER XI. A FAMILY AFFAIR

Two days after the battle of Antietam, Dick went with Colonel Winchester to Washington on official duty. His nerves, shaken so severely by that awful battle, were not yet fully restored and he was glad of the little respite, and change of scene. The sights of the city and the talk of men were a restorative to him.

The capital was undoubtedly gay. The deep depression and fear that had hung over it a few weeks ago were gone. Men had believed after the Second Manassas that Lee might take Washington and this fear was not decreased when he passed into Maryland on what seemed to be an invasion. Many had begun to believe that he was invincible, that every Northern commander whoever he might be, would be beaten by him, but Antietam, although there were bitter complaints that Lee might have been destroyed instead of merely being checked, had changed a sky of steel into a sky of blue.

Washington was not only gay, it was brilliant. Life flowed fast and it was astonishingly vivid. A restless society, always seeking something new flitted from house to house. Dick, young and impressionable, would have been glad to share a little in it, but his time was too short. He went once with Colonel Winchester to the theatre, and the boy who had thrice seen a hundred and fifty thousand men in deadly action hung breathless over the mimic struggles of a few men and women on a painted stage.

The second day after his arrival he received a letter from his mother that had been awaiting him there. It had come by the way of Louisville through the Northern lines, and it was long and full of news. Pendleton, she said, was a sad town in these days. All of the older boys and young men had gone away to the armies, and many of them had been killed already, or had died in hospitals. Here she gave names and Dick's heart grew heavy, because in this fatal list were old friends of his.

It was not alone the boys and young men who had gone, wrote Mrs. Mason, but the middle-aged men, too. Dr. Russell had kept the Pendleton Academy open, but he had no pupil over sixteen years of age. There were no trustees, because they had all gone to the war. Senator Culver had been killed in the fighting in Tennessee, but she heard that Colonel Kenton was alive and well and with Bragg's army.

The affairs of the Union, she continued, were not going well in Tennessee and

Kentucky. The terrible Confederate cavalryman Forrest had suddenly raided Murfreesborough in Tennessee, where Union regiments were stationed, and had destroyed or captured them all. Throughout the west the Southerners were raising their heads again. General Bragg, it was said, was advancing with a strong army, and was already farther north than the army of General Buell, which was in Tennessee. It was said that Louisville, one of the largest and richest of the border cities, would surely fall into the hands of the South.

Dick read the letter with changing and strong emotions. Amid the terrible struggles in the east, the west was almost blotted out of his mind. The Second Manassas and Antietam had great power to absorb attention wholly upon themselves. He had wholly forgotten for the time about Pendleton, the people whom he knew, and even his mother. Now they returned with increased strength. His memory was flooded with recollections of the little town, every house and face of which he knew.

And so the Confederates were coming north again with a great army. Shiloh had been far from crushing them in the west. The letter had been written before the Second Manassas, and that and Lee's great fight against odds at Antietam would certainly arouse in them the wish for like achievements. He inferred that since the armies in the east were exhausted, the great field for action would be for a while, in the west, and he was seized with an intense longing for that region which was his own.

It was not coincidence, but the need for men that made Dick's wish come true almost at once. A few hours after he received his letter Colonel Winchester found him sitting in the lobby of the hotel in which Dick had twice talked with the contractor. But the boy was alone this time, and as Colonel Winchester sat down beside him he said:

“Dick, the capital has received alarming news from Kentucky. Buoyed up by their successes in the east the Confederacy is going to make an effort to secure that state. Bragg with a powerful force is already on his way toward Louisville, and we fear that he has slipped away from Buell.”

“So I've heard. I found here a letter from my mother, and she told me all the reports from that section.”

“And is Mrs. Mason well? She has not been troubled by guerillas, or in any other way?”

“Not at all. Mother's health is always good, and she has not been molested.”

“Dick, it's possible that we may see Kentucky again soon.”

“Can that be true, and how is it so, sir?”

“The administration is greatly alarmed about Kentucky and the west. This movement of Bragg's army is formidable, and it would be a great blow for us if he took Louisville. Dispatches have been sent east for help. My regiment and several others that really belong in the west have been asked for, and we are to start in three days. Dick, do you know how many men of the Winchester regiment are left? We shall be able to start with only one hundred and five men, and when we attacked at Donelson we were a thousand strong.”

“And the end of the war, sir, seems as far off as ever.”

“So it does, Dick, but we'll go, and we'll do our best. Starting from Washington we can reach Louisville in two days by train. Bragg, no matter what progress he may make across the state, cannot be there then. If any big battle is to be fought we're likely to be in it.”

The scanty remainder of the regiment was brought to Washington and two days later they were in Louisville, which they found full of alarm. The famous Southern partisan leader, John Morgan, had been roaming everywhere over the state, capturing towns, taking prisoners and throwing all the Union communications into confusion by means of false dispatches.

People told with mingled amusement and apprehension of Morgan's telegrapher, Ellsworth, who cut the wires, attached his own instrument, and replied to the Union messages and sent answers as his general pleased. It was said that Bragg was already approaching Munfordville where there was a Northern fort and garrison. And it was said that Buell on another line was endeavoring to march past Bragg and get between him and Louisville.

But Dick found that the western states across the Ohio were responding as usual. Hardy volunteers from the prairies and plains were pouring into Louisville. While Dick waited there the news came that Bragg had captured the entire Northern garrison of four thousand men at Munfordville, the crossing of Green River, and was continuing his steady advance.

But there was yet hope that the rapid march of Buell and the gathering force at Louisville would cause Bragg to turn aside.

At last the welcome news came. Bragg had suddenly turned to the east, and then Buell arrived in Louisville. With his own force, the army already gathered there and a division sent by Grant from his station at Corinth, in Mississippi, he was at the head of a hundred thousand men, and Bragg could not muster more than half as many.

So rapid had been the passage of events that Dick found himself a member of Buell's reorganized army, and ready to march, only thirteen days after the sun set

on the bloody field of Antietam, seven hundred miles away. Bragg, they said, was at Lexington, in the heart of the state, and the Union army was in motion to punish him for his temerity in venturing out of the far south.

Dick felt a great elation as he rode once more over the soil of his native state. He beheld again many of the officers whom he had seen at Donelson, and also he spoke to General Buell, who although as taciturn and somber as ever, remembered him.

Warner and Pennington were by his side, the colonel rode before, and the Winchester regiment marched behind. Volunteers from Kentucky and other states had raised it to about three hundred men, and the new lads listened with amazement, while the unbearded veterans told them of Shiloh, the Second Manassas and Antietam.

“Good country, this of yours, Dick,” said Warner, as they rode through the rich lands east of Louisville. “Worth saving. I'm glad the doctor ordered me west for my health.”

“He didn't order you west for your health,” said Pennington. “He ordered you west to get killed for your country.”

“Well, at any rate, I'm here, and as I said, this looks like a land worth saving.”

“It's still finer when you get eastward into the Bluegrass,” said Dick, “but it isn't showing at its best. I never before saw the ground looking so burnt and parched. They say it's the dryest summer known since the country was settled eighty or ninety years ago.”

Dick hoped that their line of march would take them near Pendleton, and as it soon dropped southward he saw that his hope had come true. They would pass within twenty miles of his mother's home, and at Dick's urgent and repeated request, Colonel Winchester strained a point and allowed him to go. He was permitted to select a horse of unusual power and speed, and he departed just before sundown.

“Remember that you're to rejoin us to-morrow,” said Colonel Winchester. “Beware of guerillas. I hope you'll find your mother well.”

“I feel sure of it, and I shall tell her how very kind and helpful you've been to me, sir.”

“Thank you, Dick.”

Dick, in his haste to be off did not notice that the colonel's voice quivered and that his face flushed as he uttered the emphatic “thank you.” A few minutes later he was riding swiftly southward over a road that he knew well. His start was

made at six o'clock and he was sure that by ten o'clock he would be in Pendleton.

The road was deserted. This was a well-peopled country, and he saw many houses, but nearly always the doors and shutters of the windows were closed. The men were away, and the women and children were shutting out the bands that robbed in the name of either army.

The night came down, and Dick still sped southward with no one appearing to stop him. He did not know just where the Southern army lay, but he did not believe that he would come in contact with any of its flankers. His horse was so good and true, that earlier than he had hoped, he was approaching Pendleton. The moon was up now, and every foot of the ground was familiar. He crossed brooks in which he and Harry Kenton and other boys of his age had waded—but he had never seen them so low before—and he marked the tree in which he had shot his first squirrel.

It had not been so many months since he had been in Pendleton, and yet it seemed years and years. Three great battles in which seventy or eighty thousand men had fallen were enough to make anybody older.

Dick paused on the crest of a little hill and looked toward the place where his mother's house stood. He had come just in this way in the winter, and he looked forward to another meeting as happy. The moonlight was very clear now and he saw no smoke rising from the chimneys, but this was summer, and of course they would not have a fire burning at such an hour.

He rode on a little further and paused again at the crest of another hill. His view of Pendleton here was still better. He could see more roofs, and walls, but he noticed that no smoke rose from any house. Pendleton lay very still in its hollow. On the far side he saw the white walls of Colonel Kenton's house shining in the moonlight. Something leaped in his brain. He seemed to have been looking upon such white walls only yesterday, white walls that stood out in a fiery haze, white walls that he could never forget though he lived to be a hundred.

Then he remembered. The white walls were those of the Dunkard church at Antietam, around which the blue and the gray had piled their bodies in masses. The vast battlefield ranged past him like a moving panorama, and then he was merely looking at Pendleton lying there below, so still.

Dick was sensitive and his affections were strong. He loved his mother with a remarkable devotion, and his friends were for all time. Highly imaginative, he felt a powerful stirring of the heart, at his second return to Pendleton since his departure for the war. Yet he was chilled somewhat by the strange silence

hanging over the little town that he loved so well. It was night, it was true, but not even a dog barked at his coming, and there was not the faintest trail of smoke across the sky. A brilliant moon shone, and white stars unnumbered glittered and danced, yet they showed no movement of man in the town below.

He shook off the feeling, believing that it was merely a sensitiveness born of time and place, and rode straight for his mother's house. Then he dismounted, tied his horse to one of the pines, and ran up the walk to the front door, where he knocked softly at first, and then more loudly.

No answer came and Dick's heart sank within him like a plummet in a pool. He went to the edge of the walk, gathered up some gravel and threw it against a window in his mother's room on the second floor. That would arouse her, because he knew that she slept lightly in these times, when her son was off to the wars. But the window was not raised, and he could hear no sound of movement in the room.

Alarmed, he went back to the front door, and he noticed that while the door was locked the keyhole was empty. Then his mother was gone away. The sign was almost infallible. Had any one been at home the key would have been on the inside.

His heart grew lighter. There had been no violence. No roving band had come there to plunder. He whistled and shouted through the keyhole, although he did not want anyone who might possibly be passing in the road to hear him, as this town was almost wholly Southern in its sympathies.

There was still no answer, and leading his horse behind one of the pine trees on the lawn, where it would not be observed, he went to the rear of the house, and taking a stick pried open a kitchen window. He had learned this trick when he was a young boy, and climbing lightly inside he closed the window behind him and fastened the catch.

He knew of course every hall and room of the house, but the moment he entered it he felt that it was deserted. The air was close and heavy, showing that no fresh breeze had blown through it for days. It was impossible that his mother or the faithful colored woman could have lived there so long a time with closed doors and shuttered windows.

When he passed into the main part of his home, and touched a door or chair, a fine dust grated slightly under his fingers. Here was confirmation, if further confirmation was needed. Dust on chairs and tables and sofas in the house in which his mother was present. Impossible! Such a thing could not occur with her there. It was not the white dust of the road or fields, but the black dust that

gathers in closed chambers.

He went up to his mother's room, and, opening one of the shutters a few inches, let in a little light. It was in perfect order. Everything was in its place. Upon the dresser was a little vase containing some shrivelled flowers. The water in the vase had dried up days ago, and the flowers had dried up with it.

In this room and in all the others everything was arranged with order and method, as if one were going away for a long time. Dick drew a chair near the window, that he had opened slightly, and sat down. Much of his fear for his mother disappeared. It was obvious that she and her faithful attendant, Juliana, had gone, probably to be out of the track of the armies or to escape plundering bands like Skelly's.

He wondered where she had gone, whether northward or southward. There were many places that would gladly receive her. Nearly all the people in this part of the state were more or less related, and with them the tie of kinship was strong. It was probable that she would go north, or east. She might have gone to Lexington, or Winchester, or Richmond, or even in the hills to Somerset.

Well, he could not solve it. He was deeply disappointed because he had not found her there, but he was relieved from his first fear that the guerillas had come. He closed and fastened the window again, and then walked all through the house once more. His eyes had now grown so used to the darkness that he could see everything dimly. He went into his own room. A picture of himself that used to hang on the wall now stood on the dresser. He knew very well why, and he knew, too, that his mother often passed hours in that room.

Below stairs everything was neatness and in order. He went into the parlor, of which he had stood in so much awe, when he was a little child. The floor was covered with an imported carpet, mingled brown and red. A great Bible lay upon a small marble-topped table in the center of the room. Two larger tables stood against the wall. Upon them lay volumes of the English classics, and a cluster of wax flowers under a glass cover, that had seemed wonderful to Dick in his childhood.

But the room awed him no more, and he turned at once to the great squares of light that faced each other from wall to wall.

A famous portrait painter had arisen at Lexington when the canebrake was scarcely yet cleared away from the heart of Kentucky. His work was astonishing to have come out of a country yet a wilderness, and a century later he is ranked among the great painters. But it is said that the best work he ever did is the pair of portraits that face each other in the Mason home, and the other pair, the exact

duplicates that face each other in the same manner in the Kenton house.

Dick opened a shutter entirely, and the light of the white moon, white like marble, streamed in. The sudden inpouring illuminated the room so vividly that Dick's heart missed a beat. It seemed, for a minute, that the two men in the portraits were stepping from the wall. Then his heart beat steadily again and the color returned to his face. They had always been there, those two portraits. Men had never lived more intensely than they, and the artist, at the instant his genius was burning brightest, had caught them in the moment of extraordinary concentration. Their souls had looked through their eyes and his own soul looking through his had met theirs.

Dick gazed at one and then at the other. There was his great grandfather, Paul Cotter, a man of vision and inspiration, the greatest scholar the west had ever produced, and there facing him was his comrade of a long life-time, Henry Ware, the famous borderer, afterward the great governor of the state. They had been painted in hunting suits of deerskin, with the fringed borders and beaded moccasins, and raccoon skin caps.

These were men, Dick's great grandfather and Harry's. An immense pride that he was the great-grandson of one of them suddenly swelled up in his bosom, and he was proud, too, that the descendants of the borderers, and of the earlier borderers in the east, should show the same spirit and stamina. No one could look upon the fields of Shiloh, and Manassas and Antietam and say that any braver men ever lived.

He drew his chair into the middle of the room and sat and looked at them a long time. His steady gazing and his own imaginative brain, keyed to the point of excitement, brought back into the portraits that singular quality of intense life. Had they moved he would not have been surprised, and the eyes certainly looked down at him in full and ample recognition.

What did they say? He gazed straight into the eyes of one and then straight into the eyes of the other, and over and over again. But the expression there was Delphic. He must choose for himself, as they had chosen for themselves, and remembering that he was lingering, when he should not linger, he closed and fastened the window, slipped out at the kitchen window and returned to his horse.

He remounted in the road and rode a few paces nearer to Pendleton, which still lay silent in the white moonlight. He had no doubt now that many of the people had fled like his mother. Most of the houses must be closed and shuttered like hers. That was why the town was so silent. He would have been glad to see

Dr. Russell and old Judge Kendrick and others again, but it would have been risky to go into the center of the place, and it would have been a breach, too, of the faith that Colonel Winchester had put in him.

He crushed the wish and turned away. Then he saw the white walls of Colonel Kenton's house shining upon a hill among the pines beyond the town. He was quite sure that it would be deserted, and there was no harm in passing it. He knew it as well as his own home. He and Harry had played in every part of it, and it was, in truth, a second home to him.

He rode slowly along the road which led to the quiet house. Colonel Kenton had all the instincts so strong in the Kentuckians and Virginians of his type. A portion of his wealth had been devoted to decoration and beauty. The white, sanded road led upward through a great park, splendid with oak and beech and maple, and elms of great size. Nearer the house he came to the cedars and clipped pines, like those surrounding his mother's own home.

He opened the iron gate that led to the house, and tied his horse inside. Here was the same desolation and silence that he had beheld at his own home. The grass on the lawn, although withered and dry from the intense drought that had prevailed in Kentucky that summer, was long and showed signs of neglect. The great stone pillars of the portico, from the shelter of which Harry and his father and their friends had fought Skelly and his mountaineers, were stained, and around their bases were dirty from the sand and earth blown against them. The lawn and even the portico were littered with autumn leaves.

Dick felt the chill settling down on him again. War, not war with armies, but war in its results, had swept over his uncle's home as truly as it had swept over his mother's. There was no sign of a human being. Doubtless the colored servants had fled to the Union armies, and to the freedom which they as yet knew so little how to use. He felt a sudden access of anger against them, because they had deserted a master so kind and just, forgetting, for the moment that he was fighting to free them from that very master.

All the windows were dark, but he walked upon the portico and the dry autumn leaves rustled under his feet. He would have turned away, but he noticed that the front door stood ajar six or eight inches. The fact amazed him. If a servant was about, he would not leave it open, and if robbers were in the house, they would close it in order not to attract attention. It was a great door of massive and magnificent oak, highly polished, with heavy bands of glittering bronze running across it. But it was so lightly poised on its hinges, that, despite its great weight, a child could have swung it back and forth with his little finger. Henry Ware, who built the house after his term as governor was over, was

always proud of this door.

Dick ran his hand along one of the polished bronze bars as he had often done when he was a boy, enjoying the cool touch of the metal. Then he put his thumb against the edge of the door, and pushed it a little further open. Something was wrong here, and he meant to see what it was. He had no scruples about entering. He did not consider himself in the least an intruder. This was his uncle's house, and his uncle and his cousin were far away.

The door made no sound as it swung back, and soundless, too, was Dick as he stepped within. It was dark in the big hall, but as he stood there, listening, he became conscious of a light. It proceeded from one of the rooms opening into the hall on the right, and a door nearly closed only allowed a narrow band of it to fall upon the hall floor.

Dick, believing now that a robber had indeed come, drew a pistol from his pocket, stepped lightly across the hall and looked in at the door.

He checked a cry, and it was his first thought to go away as quietly as he had come. He had seen a man in the uniform of a Confederate colonel, sitting in a chair, and staring out at one of the little side windows which Dick could not see from the front, and which was now open. It was his own uncle, Colonel George Kenton, C. S. A., his gold braided cap on the window sill, and his sword in its scabbard lying across his knees.

But Dick changed his mind. His uncle was a colonel on one side, and he was a lieutenant on the other, and from one point of view it was almost high treason for them to meet there and talk quietly together, but from another it was the most natural thing in the world, commanded alike by duty and affection.

He pushed open the door a little further and stepped inside.

“Uncle George,” he said.

Colonel Kenton sprang to his feet, and his sword clattered upon the floor.

“Good God!” he cried. “You, Dick! Here! To-night!”

“Yes, Uncle George, it's no other.”

“And I suppose you have Yankees without to take me.”

“Those are hard words, sir, and you don't mean them. I'm all alone, just as you were. I galloped south, sir, to see my mother, whom I found gone, where, I don't know, and then I couldn't resist the temptation to come by here and see your house and Harry's, which, as you know, sir, has been almost a home to me, too.”

“Thank God you came, Dick,” said the colonel putting his arms around Dick's shoulders, and giving him an affectionate hug. “You were right. I did not mean

what I said. There is only one other in the world whom I'd rather see than you. Dick, I didn't know whether you were dead or alive, until I saw your face there in the doorway."

It was obvious to Dick that his uncle's emotions were deeply stirred. He felt the strong hands upon his shoulders trembling, but the veteran soldier soon steadied his nerves, and asked Dick to sit down in a chair which he drew close beside his own at the window.

"I thank God again that the notion took you to come by the house," he said. "It's pleasant and cool here at the window, isn't it, Dick, boy?"

Dick knew that he was thinking nothing about the window and the pleasant coolness of the night. He knew equally well the question that was trembling on his lips but which he could not muster the courage to ask. But he had one of his own to ask first.

"My mother?" he asked. "Do you know where she has gone?"

"Yes, Dick, I came here in secret, but I've seen two men, Judge Kendrick and Dr. Russell. The armies are passing so close to this place, and the guerillas from the mountains have become so troublesome, that she has gone to Danville to stay a while with her relatives. Nearly everybody else has gone, too. That's why the town is so silent. There were not many left anyway, except old people and children. But, Dick, I have ridden as far as you have to-night, and I came to ask a question which I thought Judge Kendrick or Dr. Russell might answer—news of those who leave a town often comes back to it—but neither of them could tell me what I wanted to hear. Dick, I have not heard a word of Harry since spring. His army has fought since then two great battles and many smaller ones! It was for this, to get some word of him, that I risked everything in leaving our army to come to Pendleton!"

He turned upon Dick a face distorted with pain and anxiety, and the boy quickly said:

"Uncle George, I have every reason to believe that Harry is alive and well."

"What do you know? What have you heard about him?"

"I have not merely heard. I have seen him and talked with him. It was after the Second Manassas, when we were both with burial parties, and met on the field. I was at Antietam, and he, of course, was there, too, as he is with Stonewall Jackson. I did not see him in that battle, but I learned from a prisoner who knew him that he had escaped unwounded, and had gone with Lee's army into Virginia."

“I thank God once more, Dick, that you were moved to come by my house. To know that both Harry and you are alive and well is joy enough for one man.”

“But it is likely, sir, that we'll soon meet in battle,” said Dick.

“So it would seem.”

And that was all that either said about his army. There was no attempt to obtain information by direct or indirect methods. This was a family meeting.

“You have a horse, of course,” said Colonel Kenton.

“Yes, sir. He is on the lawn, tied to your fence. His hoofs may now be in a flower bed.”

“It doesn't matter, Dick. People are not thinking much of flower beds nowadays. My own horse is further down the lawn between the pines, and as he is an impatient beast it is probable that he has already dug up a square yard or two of turf with his hoofs. How did you get in, Dick?”

“You forgot about the front door, sir, and left it open six or seven inches. I thought some plunderer was within and entered, to find you.”

“I must have been watched over to-night when forgetfulness was rewarded so well. Dick, we've found out what we came for and neither should linger here. Do you need anything?”

“Nothing at all, sir.”

“Then we'll go.”

Colonel Kenton carefully closed and fastened the window and door again and the two mounted their horses, which they led into the road.

“Dick,” said the colonel, “you and I are on opposing sides, but we can never be enemies.”

Then, after a strong handclasp, they rode away by different roads, each riding with a lighter heart.

CHAPTER XII. THROUGH THE BLUEGRASS

Dick's horse had had a good rest, and he was fighting for his head before they were clear of the outskirts of Pendleton. When the road emerged once more into the deep woods the boy gave him the rein. It was well past midnight now, and he wished to reach the army before dawn.

Soon the great horse was galloping, and Dick felt exhilaration as the cool air of early October rushed past. The heat in both east and west had been so long and intense, that year, that the coming of autumn was full of tonic. Yet the uncommon dryness, the least rainy summer and autumn in two generations, still prevailed. The hoofs of Dick's horse left a cloud of dust behind him. The leaves of the trees were falling already, rustling dryly as they fell. Brooks that were old friends of his and that he had never known to go dry before were merely chains of yellow pools in a shallow bed.

He watered his horse at one or two of the creeks that still flowed in good volume, and then went on again, sometimes at a gallop. He passed but one horseman, a farmer who evidently had taken an unusually early start for a mill, as a sack of corn lay across his saddle behind him. Dick nodded but the farmer stared open-mouthed at the youth in the blue uniform who flew past him.

Dick never looked back and by dawn he was with the army. He found Colonel Winchester taking breakfast under the thin shade of an oak, and joined him.

“What did you find, Dick?” asked the colonel, striving to hide the note of anxiety in his voice.

“I found all right at the house, but I did not see mother.”

“What had become of her?”

“I learned from a friend that in order to be out of the path of the army or of prowling bands she had gone to relatives of ours in Danville. Then I came away.”

“She did well,” said Colonel Winchester. “The rebels are concentrating about Lexington, but the battle, I think, will take place far south of that city.”

Before the day was old they heard news that changed their opinion for the time at least. A scout brought news that a division of the Confederate army was much nearer than Lexington; in fact, that it was at Frankfort, the capital of the state. And the news was heightened in interest by the statement that the division

was there to assist in the inauguration of a Confederate government of the state, so little of which the Confederate army held.

Colonel Winchester at once applied to General Buell for permission for a few officers like himself, natives of Kentucky and familiar with the region, to ride forward and see what the enemy was really doing. Dick was present at the interview and it was characteristic.

“If you leave, what of your regiment, Colonel Winchester?” said General Buell.

“I shall certainly rejoin it in time for battle.”

“Suppose the enemy should prevent you?”

“He cannot do so.”

“I remember you at Shiloh. You did good work there.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“And this lad, Lieutenant Mason, he has also done well. But he is young.”

“I can vouch for him, sir.”

“Then take twenty of your bravest and most intelligent men and ride toward Frankfort. It may be that we shall have to take a part in this inauguration, which I hear is scheduled for to-morrow.”

“It may be so, sir,” said Colonel Winchester, returning General Buell's grim smile. Then he and Dick saluted and withdrew.

But it did not take the colonel long to make his preparations. Among his twenty men all were natives of Kentucky except Warner, Pennington and Sergeant Whitley. Two were from Frankfort itself, and they were confident that they could approach through the hills with comparative security, the little capital nestling in its little valley.

They rode rapidly and by nightfall drew near to the rough Benson Hills, which suddenly shooting up in a beautiful rolling country, hem in the capital. Although it was now the third day of October the little party marked anew the extreme dryness and the shrunken condition of everything. It was all the more remarkable as no region in the world is better watered than Kentucky, with many great rivers, more small ones, and innumerable creeks and brooks. There are few points in the state where a man can be more than a mile from running water.

The dryness impressed Dick. They had dust here, as they had had it in Virginia, but there it was trampled up by great armies. Here it was raised by their own little party, and as the October winds swept across the dry fields it filled their eyes with particles. Yet it was one of the finest regions of the world,

underlaid with vitalizing limestone, a land where the grass grows thick and long and does not die even in winter.

“If one were superstitious,” said Dick, “he could think it was a punishment sent upon us all for fighting so much, and for killing so many men about questions that lots of us don't understand, and that at least could have been settled in some other way.”

“It's easy enough to imagine it so,” said Warner in his precise way, “but after all, despite the reasons against it, here we are fighting and killing one another with a persistence that has never been surpassed. It's a perfectly simple question in mathematics. Let x equal the anger of the South, let y equal the anger of the North, let 10 equal the percentage of reason, 100, of course, being the whole, then you have x + y + 10 equalling 100. The anger of the two sections is consequently x + y, equalling 100 - 10, or 90. When anger constitutes 90 per cent., what chance has reason, which is only 10 per cent., or one-ninth of anger?”

“No chance at all,” replied Dick. “That has already been proved without the aid of algebra. Here is a man in a cornfield signaling to us. I wonder what he wants?”

As Dick spoke, Colonel Winchester, who had already noticed the man, gave an order to stop. The stranger, bent and knotted by hard work on the farm, hurried toward them. He leaned against the fence a moment, gasping for breath, and then said:

“You're Union men, ain't you? It's no disguise?”

“Yes,” replied Colonel Winchester, “we're Union men, and it's no disguise that we're wearing, Malachi White. I've seen you several times in Frankfort, selling hay.”

The farmer, who had climbed upon the fence and who was sitting on the top rail, hands on his knees, stared at him open-mouthed.

“You've got my name right. Malachi White it is,” he said, “suah enough, but I don't know yours. 'Pears to me, however, that they's somethin' familiar about you. Mebbe it's the way you throw back your shoulders an' look a fellow squah in the eyes.”

Colonel Winchester smiled. No man is insensible to a compliment which is obviously spontaneous.

“I spent a night once at your house, Mr. White,” he said. “I was going to Frankfort on horseback. I was overtaken at dusk by a storm and I reached your

place just in time. I remember that I slept on a mighty soft feather bed, and ate a splendid breakfast in the morning."

Malachi White was not insensible to compliments either. He smiled, and the smile which merely showed his middle front teeth at first, gradually broadened until it showed all of them. Then it rippled and stretched in little waves, until it stopped somewhere near his ears. Dick regarded him with delight. It was the broadest and finest smile that he had seen in many a long month.

"Now I know you," said Malachi White, looking intently at the colonel. "I ain't as strong on faces as some people, though I reckon I'm right strong on 'em, too, but I'm pow'ful strong on recollectin' hear'in', that is, the voice and the trick of it. It was fo' yea's ago when you stopped at my house. You had a curious trick of pronouncin' r's when they wasn't no r's. You'd say door, an' hour, when ev'body knowed it was doah, an' houah, but I don't hold it ag'in you fo' not knowin' how to pronounce them wo'ds. Yoh name is Ahthuh Winchestuh."

"As right as right can be," said Colonel Winchester, reaching over and giving him a hearty hand. "I'm a colonel in the Union army now, and these are my officers and men. What was it you wanted to tell us?"

"Not to ride on fuhthah. It ain't mo' than fifteen miles to Frankfort. The place is plum full of the Johnnies. I seed 'em thah myself. Ki'by Smith, an' a sma't gen'ral he is, too, is thah, an' so's Bragg, who I don't know much 'bout. They's as thick as black be'ies in a patch, an' they's all gettin ready fo' a gran' ma'ch an' display to-mo'ow when they sweah in the new Southe'n gove'nuh, Mistah Hawes. They've got out scouts, too, colonel, an' if you go on you'll run right squah into 'em an' be took, which I allow you don't want to happen, nohow."

"No, Malachi, I don't, nor do any of us, but we're going on and we don't mean to be taken. Most of the men know this country well. Two of them, in fact, were born in Frankfort."

"Then mebbe you kin look out fo' yo'selves, bein' as you are Kentuckians. I'm mighty strong fo' the Union myself, but a lot of them officers that came down from the no'th 'pear to tu'n into pow'ful fools when they git away from home, knowin' nothin' 'bout the country, an' not willin' to lea'n. Always walkin' into traps. I guess they've nevah missed a single trap the rebels have planted. Sometimes I've been so mad 'bout it that I've felt like quittin' bein' a Yank an' tu'nin' to a Johnny. But somehow I've nevah been able to make up my mind to go ag'in my principles. Is Gen'ral Grant leadin' you?"

"No, General Buell."

"I'm so'y of that. Gen'ral Buell, f'om all I heah, is a good fightah, but slow.

Liable to git thar, an' hit like all ta'nation, when it's a little mite too late. He's one of ouah own Kentuckians, an' I won't say anything ag'in him; not a wo'd, colonel, don't think that, but I've been pow'ful took with this fellow Grant. I ain't any sojah, myself, but I like the tales I heah 'bout him. When a fellow hits him he hits back ha'dah, then the fellow comes back with anothah ha'dah still, an' then Grant up an' hits him a wallop that you heah a mile, an' so on an' so on."

"You're right, Malachi. I was with him at Donelson and Shiloh and that's the way he did."

"I reckon it's the right way. Is it true, colonel, that he taps the ba'el?"

"Taps the barrel? What do you mean, Malachi?"

White put his hands hollowed out like a scoop to his mouth and turned up his face.

"I see," said Colonel Winchester, "and I'm glad to say no, Malachi. If he takes anything he takes water just like the rest of us."

"Pow'ful glad to heah it, but it ain't easy to get too much good watah this yeah. Nevah knowed such a dry season befoah, an' I was fifty-two yeahs old, three weeks an' one day ago yestuhday."

"Thank you, Malachi, for your warning. We'll be doubly careful, because of it, and I hope after this war is over to share your fine hospitality once more."

"You'll sho'ly be welcome an' ev'y man an' boy with you will be welcome, too. Fuhthah on, 'bout foah hund'ed yahds, you'll come to a path leadin' into the woods. You take that path, colonel. It'll be sundown soon, an' you follow it th'ough the night."

The two men shook hands again, and then the soldiers rode on at a brisk trot. Malachi White sat on the fence, looking at them from under the brim of his old straw hat, until they came to the path that he had indicated and disappeared in the woods. Then he sighed and walked back slowly to his house in the cornfield. Malachi White had no education, but he had much judgment and he was a philosopher.

But Dick and the others rode on through the forest, penetrating into the high and rough hills which were sparsely inhabited. The nights, as it was now October, were cool, despite the heat and dust of the day, and they rode in a grateful silence. It was more than an hour after dark when Powell, one of the Frankforters, spoke:

"We can hit the old town by midnight easy enough," he said. "Unless they've stretched pretty wide lines of pickets I can lead you, sir, within four hundred

yards of Frankfort, where you can stay under cover yourself and look right down into it. I guess by this good moonlight I could point out old Bragg himself, if he should be up and walking around the streets."

"That suits us, Powell," said Colonel Winchester. "You and May lead the way."

May was the other Frankforter and they took the task eagerly. They were about to look down upon home after an absence of more than a year, a year that was more than a normal ten. They were both young, not over twenty, and after a while they turned out of the path and led into the deep woods.

"It's open forest through here, no underbrush, colonel," said Powell, "and it makes easy riding. Besides, about a mile on there's a creek running down to the Kentucky that will have deep water in it, no matter how dry the season has been. Tom May and I have swum in it many a time, and I reckon our horses need water, colonel."

"So they do, and so do we. We'll stop a bit at this creek of yours, Powell."

The creek was all that the two Frankfort lads had claimed for it. It was two feet deep, clear, cold and swift, shadowed by great primeval trees. Men and horses drank eagerly, and at last Colonel Winchester, feeling that there was neither danger nor the need of hurry, permitted them to undress and take a quick bath, which was a heavenly relief and stimulant, allowing them to get clear of the dust and dirt of the day.

"It's a beauty of a creek," said Powell to Dick. "About a half mile further down the stream is a tremendous tree on which is cut with a penknife, 'Dan'l Boone killed a bar here, June 26, 1781.' I found it myself, and I cut away enough of the bark growth with a penknife for it to show clearly. I imagine the great Daniel and Simon Kenton and Harrod and the rest killed lots of bears in these hills."

"I'd go and see that inscription in the morning," said Dick, "if I didn't have a bit of war on my hands."

"Maybe you'll have a chance later on. But I'm feeling bully after this cold bath. Dick, I came into the creek weighing two hundred and twenty-five pounds, one hundred and fifty pounds of human being and seventy-five pounds of dust and dirt. I'm back to one hundred and fifty now. Besides, I was fifty years old when I entered the stream, and I've returned to twenty."

"That just about describes me, too, but the colonel is whistling for us to come. Rush your jacket on and jump for your horse."

They had stayed about a half-hour at the creek, and about two o'clock in the morning Powell and May led them through a dense wood to the edge of a high hill.

“There's Frankfort below you,” said May in a voice that trembled.

The night was brilliant, almost like day, and they saw the little city clustered along the banks of the Kentucky which flowed, a dark ribbon of blue. Their powerful glasses brought out everything distinctly. They saw the old state house, its trees, and in the open spaces, tents standing by the dozens and scores. It was the division of Kirby Smith that occupied the town, and Bragg himself had made a triumphant entry. Dick wondered which house sheltered him. It was undoubtedly that of some prominent citizen, proud of the honor.

“Isn't it the snuggest and sweetest little place you ever saw?” said May. “Lend me your glasses a minute, please, Dick.”

Dick handed them to him, and May took a long look, Dick noticed that the glasses remained directed toward a house among some trees near the river.

“You're looking at your home, are you not?” he asked.

“I surely am. It's that cottage among the oaks. It's bigger than it looks from here. Front porch and back porch, too. You go from the back porch straight down to the river. I've swum across the Kentucky there at night many and many a time. My father and mother are sure to be there now, staying inside with the doors closed, because they're red hot for the Union. Farther up the street, the low red brick house with the iron fence around the yard is Jim Powell's home. You don't mind letting Jim have a look through the glasses, do you?”

“Of course not.”

The glasses were handed in turn to Powell, who, as May had done, took a long, long look. He made no comment, when he gave the glasses back to Dick, merely saying: “Thank you.” But Dick knew that Powell was deeply moved.

“It may be, lads,” said Colonel Winchester, “that you will be able to enter your homes by the front doors in a day or two. Evidently the Southerners intend to make it a big day to-morrow when they inaugurate Hawes, their governor.”

“A governor who's a governor only when he is surrounded by an army, won't be much of a governor,” said Pennington. “This state refused to secede, and I guess that stands.”

“Beyond a doubt it does,” said Colonel Winchester, “but they've made great preparations, nevertheless. There are Confederate flags on the Capitol and the buildings back of it, and I see scaffolding for seats outside. Are there other

places from which we can get good looks, lads?”

“Plenty of them,” May and Powell responded together, and they led them from hill to hill, all covered with dense forest. Several times they saw Southern sentinels on the slopes near the edge of the woods, but May and Powell knew the ground so thoroughly that they were always able to keep the little troop under cover without interfering with their own scouting operations.

Buell had given final instructions to the colonel to come back with all the information possible, and, led by his capable guides, the colonel used his opportunities to the utmost. He made a half circle about Frankfort, going to the river, and then back again. With the aid of the glasses and the brilliancy of the night he was able to see that the division of Kirby Smith was not strong enough to hold the town under any circumstances, if the main Union army under Buell came up, and the colonel was resolved that it should come.

It was a singular coincidence that the Southerners were making a military occupation of Frankfort with a Union army only a day's march away. The colonel found a certain grim irony in it as he took his last look and turned away to join Buell.

A half mile into the forest and they heard the crashing of hoofs in the brushwood. Colonel Winchester drew up his little troop abruptly as a band of men in gray emerged into an open space.

“Confederate cavalry!” exclaimed Dick.

“Yes,” said the colonel.

But the gray troopers were not much more numerous than the blue. Evidently they were a scouting party, too, and for a few minutes they stared at each other across a space of a couple of hundred yards or so. Both parties fired a few random rifle shots, more from a sense of duty than a desire to harm. Then they fell away, as if by mutual consent, the gray riding toward Frankfort and the blue toward the Union army.

“Was it a misfortune to meet them?” asked Dick.

“I don't think so,” replied Colonel Winchester. “They had probably found out already that our army was near. Of course they had out scouts. Kirby Smith, I know, is an alert man, and anyway, the march of an army as large as ours could not be hidden.”

It was dawn again when the colonel's little party reached the Union camp, and when he made his report the heavy columns advanced at once. But the alarm had already spread about at Frankfort. The morning there looked upon a scene even

more lively than the one that had occurred in Buell's camp. The scouts brought in the news that the Union army in great force was at hand. They had met some of their cavalry patrols in the night, on the very edge of the city. Resistance to the great Union force was out of the question, because Bragg had committed the error that the Union generals had been committing so often in the east. He had been dividing and scattering his forces so much that he could not now concentrate them and fight at the point where they were needed most.

The division of the Southern army that occupied Frankfort hastily gathered up its arms and supplies and departed, taking with it the governor who was never inaugurated, and soon afterward the Union men marched in. Both May and Powell had the satisfaction of entering their homes by the front doors, and seeing the parents who did not know until then whether they were dead or alive.

Dick had a few hours' leave and he walked about the town. He had made friends when he was there in the course of that memorable struggle over secession, and he saw again all of them who had not gone to the war.

Harry and his father were much present in his mind then, because he had recently seen Colonel Kenton, and because the year before, all three of them had talked together in these very places.

But he could not dwell too much in the past. He was too young for it, and the bustle of war was too great. It was said that Bragg's forces had turned toward the southeast, but were still divided. It was reported that the Bishop-General, Polk, had been ordered to attack the Northern force in or near Frankfort, but the attack did not come. Colonel Winchester said it was because Polk recognized the superior strength of his enemy, and was waiting until he could co-operate with Bragg and Hardee.

But whatever it was Dick soon found himself leaving Frankfort and marching into the heart of the Bluegrass. He began to have the feeling, or rather instinct warned him, that battle was near. Yet he did not fear for the Northern army as he had feared in Virginia and Maryland. He never felt that such men as Lee and Jackson were before them. He felt instead that the Southern commanders were doubtful and hesitating. They now had there no such leaders as Albert Sidney Johnston, who fell at Shiloh when victory was in Southern hands and before it had time to slip from their grasp.

So the army dropped slowly down eastward and southward through the Bluegrass. May and Powell had obtained but a brief glimpse of their home town, before they were on their way again with a purpose which had little to do with such peaceful things as home.

Dick saw with dismay that the concentric march of the armies was bringing them toward the very region into which his mother had fled for refuge. She was at Danville, which is in the county of Boyle, and he heard now that the Confederate army, or at least a large division of it, was gathering at a group of splendid springs near a village called Perryville in the same county. But second thought told him that she would be safe yet in Danville, as he began to feel sure now that the meeting of the armies would be at Perryville.

Dick's certainty grew out of the fact that the great springs were about Perryville. The extraordinary drouth and the remarkable phenomenon of brooks drying up in Kentucky had continued. Water, cool and fresh for many thousands of men, was wanted or typhoid would come.

This need of vast quantities of water fresh and cool from the earth, was obvious to everybody, and the men marched gladly toward the springs. The march would serve two purposes: it would quench their thirst, and it would bring on the battle they wanted to clear Kentucky of the enemy.

“Fine country, this of yours, Dick,” said Warner as they rode side by side. “I don't think I ever saw dust of a higher quality. It sifts through everything, fills your eyes, nose and mouth and then goes down under your collar and gives you a neat and continuous dust bath.”

“You mustn't judge us by this phenomenon,” said Dick. “It has not happened before since the white man came, and it won't happen again in a hundred years.”

“You may speak with certainty of the past, Dickie, my lad, but I don't think we can tell much about the next century. I'll grant the fact, however, that fifty or a hundred thousand men marching through a dry country anywhere are likely to raise a lot of dust. Still, Dickie, my boy, I don't mean to hurt your feelings, but if I live through this, as I mean to do, I intend to call it the Dusty Campaign.”

“Call it what you like if in the end you call it victory.”

“The dust doesn't hurt me,” said Pennington. “I've seen it as dry as a bone on the plains with great clouds of it rolling away behind the buffalo herds. There's nothing the matter with dust. Country dust is one of the cleanest things in the world.”

“That's so,” said Warner, “but it tickles and makes you hot. I should say that despite its cleanly qualities, of which you speak, Frank, my friend, its power to annoy is unsurpassed. Remember that bath we took in the creek the night we went to Frankfort. Did you ever before see such cool running water, and Dickie, old boy, remember how much there was of it! It was just as deep and cool and fine after we left it.”

“George,” said Dick, as he wiped his dusty face, “if you say anything more about the creek and its cool water this army will lose a capable lieutenant, and it will lose him mighty soon. It will be necessary, too, to bury him very far from his home in Vermont.”

“Keep cool, Dickie boy, and let who will be dusty. Brooks may fail once in a hundred years in Kentucky, but they haven't failed in a thousand in Vermont. You need not remind me that the white man has been there only two or three hundred years. My information comes straight from a very old Indian chief who was the depository of tribal recollections absolutely unassailable. The streams even in midsummer come down as full and cold as ever from the mountains.”

“We'll have water and plenty of it in a day or two. The scouts say that the Confederate force at the springs is not strong enough to withstand us.”

“But General Buell, not knowing exactly what General Bragg intends with his divided force, has divided his own in order to meet him at all points.”

“Has he done that?” exclaimed Dick aghast. Like other young officers he felt perfectly competent to criticize anybody.

“He has, and it seems to me that when the enemy divided was the time for us to unite or remain united. Then we could scoop him up in detail. Why, Dick, with an army of sixty thousand men or so, made of such material as ours has shown itself to be, we could surely beat any Southern force in Kentucky!”

“Especially as we have no Lees and Stonewall Jacksons to fight.”

“Maybe General Buell has divided his force in order to obtain plenty of water,” said Pennington. “We fellows ought to be fair to him.”

“Perhaps you're right,” said Warner, “and you're right when you say we ought to be fair to him. I know it will be a great relief to General Buell to find that we three are supporting his management of this army. Shall I go and tell him, Frank?”

“Not now, but you can a little later on. Suppose you wait until a day or two after the battle which we all believe is coming.”

The three boys were really in high spirits. Little troubled them but the dryness and the dust. They had tasted so much of defeat and drawn battle in the east that they had an actual physical sense of better things in the west. The horizons were wider, the mountains were lower, and there was not so much enveloping forest. They did not have the strangling sensation, mental only, which came from the fear that hostile armies would suddenly rush from the woods and fall upon their flank.

Besides, there was Shiloh. After all, they had won Shiloh, and the coming of this very Buell who led them now had enabled them to win it. And Shiloh was the only great battle that they had yet really won.

They camped that night in the dry fields. The Winchester regiment was a part of the division under McCook, while Buell with the rest of the army was some miles away. It was still warm, although October was now seven days old, and Dick had never before heard the grass and leaves rustle so dryly under the wind. Off in the direction of Perryville they saw the dim gleam of red, and they knew it came from the camp-fires of the Southern army. Buell had in his detached divisions sixty thousand men, most of them veterans and Dick believed that if they were brought together victory was absolutely sure on the morrow.

The troops around the Winchester regiment were lads from Ohio, and they affiliated readily. Most of the new men were in these Ohio regiments, and Dick, Warner and Frank felt themselves ancient veterans who could talk to the recruits and give them good advice. And the recruits took it in the proper spirit. They looked up with admiration to those who had been at Shiloh, and the Second Manassas and Antietam.

Dick thought their spirit remarkable. They were not daunted at all by the great failures in the east. They did not discount the valor of the Southern troops, but they asked to be led against them.

“Come over here,” said one of the Ohio boys to Dick. “Ahead of us and on the side there's rough ground with thick woods and deep ravines. I'll show you something just at the edge of the woods. Bring your friends with you.”

The twilight had already turned to night and Dick, calling Warner and Pennington, went with his new friend. There, flowing from under a great stone, shaded by a huge oak, was a tiny stream of pure cold water a couple of inches deep but seven or eight inches broad. Under the stone a beautiful basin a foot and a half across and about as deep had been chiselled out.

“A lot of us found it here,” said the Ohio boy, “and we found, too, a tin cup chained to a staple driven into the stone. See, it's here still. We haven't broken the chain. I suppose it belongs to some farmer close by. The boys brought other tin cups and we drank so fast that the brook itself became dry. The water never got any further than the pool. I suppose it's just started again. Drink.”

The boys drank deeply and gratefully. No such refreshing stream had ever flowed down their throats before.

“Ohio,” said Dick, “you're a lovely, dirty angel.”

“I guess I am,” said Ohio, “'cause I found the spring. It turned me from an old

man back to a boy again. Cold as ice, ain't it? I can tell you why. This spring starts right at the North Pole, right under the pole itself, dives away down into the earth, comes under Bering Sea and then under British America, and then under the lakes, and then under Ohio, and then under a part of Kentucky, and then comes out here especially to oblige us, this being a dry season."

"I believe every word you say, Ohio," said Warner, "since your statements are proved by the quality of the water. I could easily demonstrate it as a mathematical proposition."

"Don't you pay any attention to him, Ohio," said Dick. "He's from Vermont, and he's so full of big words that he's bound to get rid of some of them."

"I'm not doubting you, Vermont," said Ohio. "As you believe every word I said, I believe every word you said."

"There's nothing extraordinary about them things," said another Ohio boy belonging to a different brigade, who was sitting near. "Do you know that we swallowed a whole river coming down here? We began swallowing it when we crossed the Ohio, just like a big snake swallowing a snake not quite so big, taking down his head first, then keeping on swallowing him until the last tip of his tail disappeared inside. It was a good big stream when we started, water up to our knees, but we formed across it in a line five hundred men deep and then began to drink as we marched forward. Of course, a lot of water got past the first four hundred lines or so, but the five hundredth always swallowed up the last drop."

"We marched against that stream for something like a hundred and fifty miles. No water ever got past us. We left a perfectly dry bed behind. Up in the northern part of the state not a drop of water came down the river in a month. We followed it, or at least a lot of us did, clean to its source in some hills a piece back of us. We drank it dry up to a place like this, only bigger, and do you know, a fellow of our company named Jim Lambert was following it up under the rocks, and we had to pull him out by the feet to keep him from being suffocated. That was four days ago, and we had a field telegram yesterday from a place near the Ohio, saying that a full head of water had come down the river again, three feet deep from bank to bank and running as if there had been a cloudburst in the hills. Mighty glad they were to see it, too."

There was a silence, but at length a solemn youth sitting near said in very serious tones:

"I've thought over that story very thoroughly, and I believe it's a lie."

"Vermont," said the first Ohio lad, "don't you have faith in my friend's

narrative?”

“I believe every word of it,” said Warner warmly. “Our friend here, who I see can see, despite the dim light, has a countenance which one could justly say indicates a doubtful and disputatious nature, wishes to discredit it because he has not heard of such a thing before. Now, I ask you, gentlemen, intelligent and fair-minded as I know you are, where would we be, where would civilization be if we assumed the attitude of our friend here. If a thing is ever seen at all somebody sees it first, else it would never be seen. *Quod erat demonstrandum*. You remember your schooldays, of course. I thank you for your applause, gentlemen, but I'm not through yet. We have passed the question of things seen, and we now come to the question of things done, which is perhaps more important. It is obvious even to the doubtful or carping mind that if a new thing is done it is done by somebody first. Others will do it afterward, but there must and always will be a first.

“Nobody ever swallowed a river before, beginning at its mouth and swallowing it clean down to its source, but a division of gallant young troops from Ohio have done so. They are the first, and they must and always will be the first. Doubtless, other rivers will be swallowed later on. As the population increases, larger rivers will be swallowed, but the credit for initiating the first and greatest pure-water drinking movement in the history of the world will always belong to a brave army division from the state of Ohio.”

A roar of applause burst forth, and Warner, standing up, bowed gracefully with his hand upon his heart. Then came a dead silence, as a hand fell upon the Vermonter's shoulder. Warner looked around and his jaw fell. General McCook, who commanded this part of the army, was standing beside him.

“Excuse me, sir, I—” began Warner.

“Never mind,” said the general. “I had come for a drink of water, and hearing your debate I stopped for a few moments behind a tree to listen. I don't know your name, young gentleman.”

“Warner, sir, George Warner, first lieutenant in the regiment of Colonel Winchester.”

“I merely wished to say, Lieutenant Warner, that I listened to your speech from the first word to the last, and I found it very cogent and powerful. As you say, things must have beginnings. If there is no first, there can be no second or third. I am entirely convinced by your argument that our army swallowed a river as it marched southward. In fact, I have often felt so thirsty that I felt as if I could have swallowed it myself all alone.”

There was another roar of applause, and as a dozen cups filled with water were pushed at the general, he drank deeply and often, and then retired amid further applause.

“They'll fight well for him, to-morrow,” said Dick.

“No doubt of it,” said Warner.

They went into the edge of the wood and sought sleep and rest. But there was much merry chatter first among these lads, for many of whom death had already spread its somber wings.

CHAPTER XIII. PERRYVILLE

Dick slept very well that night. The water from the little spring, gushing out from under the rock, had refreshed him greatly. He would have rejoiced in another bath, such as one as they had luxuriated in that night before Frankfort, but it was a thing not be dreamed of now, and making the best of things as they were, he had gone to sleep among his comrades.

The dryness of the ground had at least one advantage. They had not colds and rheumatism to fear, and, with warm earth beneath them and fresh air above, they slept more soundly than if they had been in their own beds. But while they were sleeping the wary Sergeant Whitley was slipping forward among the woods and ravines. He had received permission from Colonel Winchester, confirmed by a higher officer, to go on a scout, and he meant to use his opportunity. He had made many a scouting trip on the plains, where there was less cover than here, and there torture and death were certain if captured, but here it would only be imprisonment among men who were in no sense his personal enemies, and who would not ill-treat him. So the sergeant took plenty of chances.

He passed the Union pickets, entered a ravine which led up between two hills and followed it for some distance. In a cross ravine he found a little stream of water, flowing down from some high, rocky ground above, and, at one point, he came to a pool several yards across and three or four feet deep. It was cool and fresh, and the sergeant could not resist the temptation to slip off his clothes and dive into it once or twice. He slipped his clothes on again, the whole not consuming more than five minutes, and then went on much better equipped for war than he had been five minutes before.

Then he descended the hills and came down into a valley crossed by a creek, which in ordinary times had plenty of water, but which was now reduced to a few muddy pools. The Southern pickets did not reach so far, and save for the two tiny streams in the hills this was all the water that the Northern army could reach. Farther down, its muddy and detached stream lay within the Confederate lines.

Crossing the creek's bed the sergeant ascended a wooded ridge, and now he proceeded with extreme caution. He had learned that beyond this ridge was another creek containing much more water than the first. Upon its banks at the crossing of the road stood the village of Perryville, and there, according to his

best information and belief, lay the Southern army. But he meant to see with his own eyes and hear with his own ears, and thus return to McCook's force with absolute certainty.

The sergeant, as he had expected, found cover more plentiful than it was on the plains, but he never stalked an Indian camp with more caution. He knew that the most of the Southern scouts and skirmishers were as wary as the Indians that once hunted in these woods, and that, unless he used extreme care, he was not likely to get past them.

He came at last to a point where he lay down flat on his stomach and wormed himself along, keeping in the thickest shadow of woods and bushes. The night was bright, and although his own body was blended with the ground, he could see well about him. The sergeant was a very patient man. Life as a lumberman and then as a soldier on the plains had taught him to look where he was crawling. He spent a full hour worming himself up to the crest of that ridge and a little way down on the other side. In the course of the last fifteen minutes he passed directly between two alert and vigilant Southern pickets. They looked his way several times, but the sergeant was so much in harmony with the color scheme of the earth on which he crept, that no blame lay upon them for not seeing him.

The sergeant was already hearing with his own ears. He heard these pickets and others talking in low voices of the Northern army and of their own. They knew that Buell's great force was approaching from different points and that a battle was expected on the morrow. He knew this already, but he wanted to know how much of the Confederate army lay in Perryville, and he intended to see with his own eyes.

Having passed the first line of pickets the sergeant advanced more rapidly, although he still kept well under cover. Advancing thus he reached the bed of the creek and hid himself against the bank, allowing his body to drop down in the water, in order that he might feel the glorious cool thrill again, and also that he might be hidden to the neck. His rifle and ammunition he laid at the edge of the bank within reach. Situated thus comfortably, he used his excellent eyes with excellent results. He could see Perryville on his left, and also a great camp on some heights that ran along the creek. There were plenty of lights in this camp, and, despite the lateness of the hour, officers were passing about.

It was obvious to the sergeant that many thousands of soldiers were on those heights, and now he wanted to hear again with his own ears. He did not dare go any nearer, and the water in the creek was growing cold to his body. But his patience was great, and still he waited, only his head showing above the water,

and it hidden in the black gloom of the bank's shadows.

His reward came by-and-by. A number of cavalrymen led their horses down to the creek to drink, and while the horses drank and then blew the water away from their noses, the men talked at some length, enabling the sergeant to pick up important scraps of information.

He learned that the heights were occupied by Hardee with two divisions. It was the same Hardee, the famous tactician who had been one of the Southern generals at Shiloh. Polk was expected, but he had not yet come up. Bragg, too, would be there.

The brave sergeant's heart thumped as he listened. He gathered that Polk, perhaps, could not arrive before noon, and here was a brilliant chance to destroy a large part of the Southern army early in the morning.

He waited until all the cavalrymen had gone away with their horses, and then he crawled cautiously out of the stream. His limbs were cold and stiff, but his enforced exercise in crawling soon brought back their flexibility. He passed between the pickets again, and, when he was safely beyond their hearing, he rose and stretched himself again and again.

The sergeant greatly preferred walking to crawling. Primitive men might have crawled, but to do so made the modern man's knees uncommonly sore. So he continued to stretch, to inhale great draughts of air, and to feel proudly that he was a man who walked upright and not a bear or a pig creeping on four legs through the bushes.

He reached his own army not long afterward, and, walking among the thousands of sleeping forms, reached the tree under which Colonel Winchester slept.

“Colonel,” he said gently.

The colonel awoke instantly and sat up. Despite the dusk he recognized Whitley at once.

“Well, sergeant?” he said.

“I've been clean over the ridge to the rebel camp. I reached the next creek and lay on the heights just beyond it. I've seen with my own eyes and I've heard with my own ears. They've only two divisions there, though they're expectin' Polk to come up in the mornin' an' Bragg, too. Colonel, I'm a good reckoner, as I've seen lots of war, and they ain't got more `n fifteen thousand men there on the creek, while if we get all our divisions together we can hit `em with nigh on to sixty thousand. For God's sake, Colonel, can't we do it?”

“We ought to, and if I can do anything, we will. Sergeant, you've done a great service at a great risk, and all of us owe you thanks. I shall see General McCook at once.”

The sergeant, forgetting that he was wet to the skin, stretched himself in the dry grass near Dick and his comrades, and soon fell fast asleep, while his clothes dried upon him. But Colonel Winchester went to General McCook's tent and insisted upon awakening him. The general received him eagerly and listened with close attention.

“This man Whitley is trustworthy?” he said.

“Absolutely. He has had years of experience on the plains, fighting Sioux, Cheyennes and other Indians, and he has been with me through most of the war so far. There is probably no more skillful scout, and none with a clearer head and better judgment in either army.”

“Then, Colonel, we owe him thanks, and you thanks for letting him go. We'll certainly bring on a battle to-morrow, and we ought to have all our army present. I shall send a messenger at once to General Buell with your news. Messengers shall also go to Crittenden, Rousseau, and the other generals. But you recognize, of course, that General Buell is the commander-in-chief, and that it is for him to make the final arrangements.”

“I do, sir,” said the colonel, as he saluted and retired. He went back to the point where his own little regiment lay. He knew every man and boy in it, and he had known them all in the beginning, when they were many times more. But few of the splendid regiment with which he had started south a year and a half before remained. He looked at Dick and Warner and Pennington and the sergeant and wondered if they would be present to answer to the roll the next night, or if he himself would be there?

The colonel cherished no illusions. He was not sanguine that the whole Union army would come up, and even if it came, and if victory should be won it would be dark and bloody. He knew how the Southerners fought, and here more so than anywhere else, it would be brother against brother. This state was divided more than any other, and, however the battle went, kindred would meet kindred. Colonel Kenton, Dick's uncle, a man whom he liked and admired, was undoubtedly across those ridges, and they might meet face to face in the coming battle.

It was far into the morning now and the colonel did not sleep again. He saw the messengers leaving the tent of General McCook, and he knew that the commander of the division was active. Just what success he would have would

remain for the morrow to say. The colonel saw the dawn come. The dry fields and forests reddened with the rising sun, and then the army rose up from its sleep. The cooks had already prepared coffee and food.

“Show me the enemy,” said Pennington fiercely, “and as soon as I finish this cup of coffee, I'll go over and give him the thrashing he needs.”

“He's just across those ridges, sir, and on the banks of the far creek,” said Sergeant Whitley.

“How do you know?”

“I made a call on him last night.”

“You did? And what did he say?”

“I didn't send in my card. I just took a look at his front door and came away. He's at home, waiting and willing to give us a fight.”

“Well, it's a fine day for a battle anyway. Look what a splendid sun is rising! And you can see the soft haze of fall over the hills and woods.”

“It's not as fine a fall as usual in Kentucky,” said Dick, in an apologetic tone to Warner and Pennington. “It's been so dry that the leaves are falling too early, and the reds, the yellows and the browns are not so bright.”

“Never mind, Dickie, boy,” said Warner consolingly. “We'll see it in a better year, because Pennington and I are both coming back to spend six months with you when this war is over. I've already accepted the invitation. So get ready for us, Dick.”

“It's an understood thing now,” said Dick sincerely. “There go the trumpets, and they mean for us to get in line.”

A large portion of the division was already on the way, having started at five o'clock, and the little Winchester regiment was soon marching, too. The day was again hot. October, even, did not seem able to break that singular heat, and the dust was soon billowing about them in columns, stinging and burning them. The sergeant the night before had taken a short cut through the hills, but the brigades, needing wide spaces, marched along the roads and through the fields. A portion of their own army was hidden from them by ridges and forest, and Dick did not know whether Buell with the other half of the army had come up.

After a long and exhausting march they stopped, and the Winchester regiment and the Ohio lads concluded that they had been wrong after all. No battle would be fought that day. They were willing now, too, to postpone it, as they were almost exhausted by heat and thirst, and that stinging, burning dust was maddening. A portion of their line rested on the first creek, and they drank

eagerly of the muddy water. Dick saw before him fields in which the corn stood thick and heavy. The fields were divided by hedges which cut off the view somewhat and which the sergeant said would furnish great ambush for sharpshooters.

The men were now allowed to lie down, but most of them were still panting with the heat. The three boys on horseback rode with Colonel Winchester to the crest of a low hill, just beyond the first creek. From that point they clearly saw the enemy gathered in battle array along the second stream. Dick, with his glasses, saw the batteries, and could even mark the sun-browned faces of the men.

“Has General Buell come?” he asked Colonel Winchester.

“He has not. Not half of our army is here.”

The answer was made with emphasis and chagrin. There was a report that Buell did not intend to attack until the following day, when he would have his numbers well in hand.

“Under the circumstances,” said the colonel, “we have to wait. Better get off your horses, boys, and hunt the shade.”

They rode back and obeyed. It was now getting well along into the afternoon. Thousands of soldiers lay on the grass in the shadiest places they could find. Many were asleep. Overhead the sun burned and burned in a sky of absolute blazing white.

A cannon boomed suddenly and then another. The artillery of the two armies watching one another had opened at long range, but the fire was so distant that it did no harm. Dick and his comrades watched the shells in their flight, noting the trails of white smoke they left behind, and then the showers of earth that flew up when they burst. It was rather a pleasant occupation to watch them. In a way it broke the monotony of a long summer day.

They did not know that Polk, the bishop-general, was arriving at that moment in the Southern camp with five thousand men. Bragg had come, too, but he left the command to Polk, who outranked Hardee, and the three together listened to the long-range cannonade, while they also examined with powerful glasses the Union army which was now mostly lying on the ground.

Dick himself felt a strong temptation to sleep. The march through the heat that morning had been dusty and tiresome, and the warm wind that blew over him made his eyelids very heavy. The cannonade itself was conducive to slumber. The guns were fired at regular intervals, which created a sort of rhythm. The shells with their trailing white smoke ceased to interest him, and his eyelids grew

heavier. It was now about 2:30 o'clock and as his eyes were about to close a sudden shout made him open them wide and then spring to his feet.

“Look out! Look out!” cried Sergeant Whitley, “The Johnnies are coming!”

The Union forces in an instant were in line, rifles ready and eager. The gray masses were already charging across the fields and hills, while their cannon made a sudden and rapid increase in the volume of fire. Their batteries were coming nearer, too, and the shells hitherto harmless were now shrieking and hissing among their ranks, killing and wounding.

Dick looked around him. The members of the slim Winchester regiment were all veterans; but thousands of the Ohio lads were recruits who had never seen battle before. Now shell and shot were teaching them the terrible realities. He saw many a face grow pale, as his own had often grown pale, in the first minutes of battle, but he did not see any one flinch.

The Northern cannon posted in the intervals and along the edges of the woods opened with a mighty crash, and as the enemy came nearer the riflemen began to send a hail of bullets. But the charge did not break. It was led by Buckner, taken at Donelson, but now exchanged, and some of the best troops of the South followed him.

“Steady! Steady!” shouted Colonel Winchester. The ranks were so close that he and all of his staff, having no room for their horses, had dismounted, and they stood now in the front rank, encouraging the men to meet the charge. But the rush of the Southern veterans was so sudden and fierce that despite every effort of valor the division gave way, suffering frightful losses.

Two of the Union generals seeking to hold their men were killed. Each side rushed forward reinforcements. A stream of Confederates issued from a wood and flung themselves upon the Union flank. Dick was dazed with the suddenness and ferocity with which the two armies had closed in mortal combat. He could see but little. He was half blinded by the smoke, the flash of rifles and cannon and the dust. Officers and men were falling all around him. The numbers were not so great as at Antietam, but it seemed to him that within the contracted area of Perryville the fight was even more fierce and deadly than it had been on that famous Maryland field.

But he was conscious of one thing. They were being borne back. Tears of rage ran down his face. Was it always to be this way? Were their numbers never to be of any avail? He heard some one shout for Buell, and he heard some one else shout in reply that he was far away, as he had been at Shiloh.

It was true. The wind blowing away from him, Buell had not yet heard a

sound from the raging battle, which for its numbers and the time it lasted, was probably the fiercest ever fought on the American continent. The larger Union force, divided by ridges and thick woods from the field, had not heard the fire of a single cannon, and did not know that two armies were engaged in deadly combat so near.

Dick kept close to Colonel Winchester and Warner and Pennington were by his side. The sergeant was also near. There was no chance to give or send orders, and the officers, snatching up the rifles of the fallen soldiers, fought almost as privates. The Winchester regiment performed prodigies of valor on that day, and the Ohio lads strove desperately for every inch of ground.

It seemed to Dick once that they would hold fast, when he heard in front a tremendous cry of: “On, my boys!” As the smoke lifted a little he saw that it was Colonel Kenton leading his own trained and veteran regiment. Colonel Winchester and Colonel Kenton, in fact, had met face to face, but the Southern regiment was the more numerous and the stronger. Winchester's men were gradually borne back and the colonel gasped to Dick:

“Didn't I see your uncle leading on his regiment?”

“Yes, it was he. It was his regiment that struck us, but he's hidden now by the smoke.”

The Southern rush did not cease. McCook's whole division, between the shallow creeks was driven back, sustaining frightful losses, and it would have been destroyed, but the artillery of Sheridan on the flank suddenly opened upon the Southern victors. The Southerners whirled and charged Sheridan, but his defense was so strong, and so powerful was his artillery that they were compelled to recoil every time with shattered ranks.

The decimated Ohio regiments beyond the creek were gathering themselves anew for the battle, and so were the men of Colonel Winchester, now reduced to half their numbers again. Then a great shout arose. A fresh brigade had come up to their relief, and aided by these new men they made good the ground upon which they stood.

Another shout arose, telling that Buell was coming, and, two hours after the combat had opened, he arrived with more troops. But night was now at hand, and the sun set over a draw like that at Antietam. Forty thousand men had fought a battle only about three hours long, and eight thousand of them lay dead or wounded upon the sanguinary field. One half the Union army never reached the field in time to fight.

As both sides drew off in the darkness, Dick shouted in triumph, thinking they

had won a victory. A bullet fired by some retiring Southern skirmisher glanced along his head. There was a sudden flash of fire before him and then darkness. His body fell on a little slope and rolled among some bushes.

The close hot night came down upon the field, and the battle, the most sanguinary ever fought on Kentucky soil, had closed. Like so many other terrible struggles of the Civil War, it had been doubtful, or almost, so far as the fighting was concerned. The Northern left wing had been driven back, but the Northern right wing had held firm against every attack of the enemy.

Pennington, when he lay panting on the ground with the remnant of the Winchesters, knew little about the result of the combat. He knew that their own division had suffered terribly. The Ohio recruits had been cut almost to pieces, and the Winchester regiment had been reduced by half again. He was so tired that he did not believe he could stir for a long time. He felt no wound, but every bone ached from weariness, and his throat and mouth seemed to burn with smoke and dust.

Pennington did not see either Dick or Warner, but as soon as he got a little strength into his limbs he would look for them. No doubt they were safe. A special providence always watched over those fellows. It was true that Warner had been wounded at the Second Manassas, but a hidden power had guided Dick to him, and he got well so fast that he was able to fight soon afterward at Antietam.

Pennington lay still, and he heard all around him the deep breathing of men who, like himself, were so worn that they could scarcely move. The field in front of him darkened greatly, but he saw lights moving there, and he knew that they belonged to little parties from either army looking for the wounded. He began to wonder which side had won the battle.

“Ohio,” he said to one of the Ohio lads who lay near, “did we lick the Johnnies, or did the Johnnies lick us?”

“Blessed if I know, and I don't care much, either. Four fellows that I used to play with at school were killed right beside me. It was my first battle, and, Oh, I tell you, it was awful!”

He gulped suddenly and began to cry. Pennington, who was no older than he, patted him soothingly on the shoulder.

“I know that you were the bravest of the brave, because I saw you,” he said.

“I don't know about that, but I do know that I can never get used to killing men and seeing them killed.”

Pennington was surprised that Dick and Warner had not appeared. They would certainly rejoin their own regiment, and he began to feel uneasy. The last shot had been fired, the night was darkening fast and a mournful wind blew over the battlefield. But up and down the lines they were lighting the cooking fires.

Pennington rose to his feet. He saw Colonel Winchester, standing a little distance away, and he was about to ask him for leave to look for his comrades, when he was startled by the appearance of a woman, a woman of thirty-eight or nine, tall, slender, dressed well, and as Pennington plainly saw, very beautiful. But now she was dusty, her face was pale, and her eyes shone with a terrible anxiety. Women were often seen in the camps at the very verge or close of battle, saying good-bye or looking for the lost, but she was unusual.

The soldiers stood aside for her respectfully, and she looked about, until her gaze fell upon the colonel. Then she ran to him, seized him by the arm, and exclaimed:

“Colonel Winchester! Colonel Winchester!”

“Good heavens, Mrs. Mason! You! How did you come?”

“I was at Danville, not so far from here. Of course I knew that the armies were about to meet for battle! And it was only two days ago that I heard the Winchester regiment had come west to join General Buell's army.”

A stalwart and powerful colored woman emerged from the darkness and put her arm around Mrs. Mason's waist.

“Don't you get too much excited, chile,” she said soothingly.

Juliana stood beside her mistress, a very tower of defense, glaring at the soldiers about them as if she would resent their curiosity.

“I thought I would come and try to see Dick,” continued Mrs. Mason. “My relatives sought to persuade me not to do it. They were right, I know, but I wanted to come so badly that I had to do it. We slipped away yesterday, Juliana and I. We stayed at a farmhouse last night, and this morning we rode through the woods. We expected to be in the camp this afternoon, but as we were coming to the edge of the forest we heard the cannon and then the rifles. Through three or four dreadful hours, while we shook there in the woods, we listened to a roar and thunder that I would have thought impossible.”

“The battle was very fierce and terrible,” said Colonel Winchester.

“I don't think it could have been more so. We saw a part of it, but only a confused and awful sweep of smoke and flame. And now, Colonel Winchester, where is my boy, Dick?”

Colonel Winchester's face turned deadly pale, and she noticed it at once. Her own turned to the same pallor, but she did not shriek or faint.

“You do not know that he is killed?” she said in a low, distinct tone that was appalling to the other.

“I missed him only a little while ago,” said Colonel Winchester, “and I've been looking for him. But I'm sure he is not dead. He can't be!”

“No, he can't be! I can't think it!” she said, and she looked at the colonel appealingly.

“If you please, sir,” said Pennington, “Lieutenant Warner is missing also. I think we'll find them together. You remember what happened at the Second Manassas.”

“Yes, Frank, I do remember it, and your supposition may be right.”

He asked a lantern from one of the men, and whispered to Pennington to come. But Mrs. Mason and Juliana had been standing at strained attention, and Mrs. Mason inferred at once what was about to be done.

“You mean to look for him on the field,” she said. “We will go with you.”

Colonel Winchester opened his lips to protest, but shut them again in silence.

“It is right that you should come,” he said a moment later, “but you will see terrible things.”

“I am ready.”

She seemed all the more admirable and wonderful to Colonel Winchester, because she did not weep or faint. The deathly pallor on her face remained, but she held herself firmly erect beside the gigantic colored woman.

“Come with me, Pennington,” said Colonel Winchester, “and you, too, Sergeant Whitley.”

The two men and the boy led the way upon the field, and the two women came close behind. They soon entered upon the area of conflict. The colonel had said that it would be terrible, but Mrs. Mason scarcely dreamed of the reality. It was one vast scene of frightful destruction, of torn and trampled earth and of dead men lying in all directions. The black of her faithful servant's face turned to an ashen gray, and she trembled more than her mistress.

Colonel Winchester had a very clear idea of the line along which his regiment had advanced and retreated, and he followed it. But the lantern did not enable them to see far. As happened so often after the great battles of the Civil War, the signs began to portend rain. The long drouth would be broken, but whether by natural change or so much firing Colonel Winchester did not know. Despite the

lateness of the season dim lightning was seen on the horizon. The great heat was broken by a cool wind that began to blow from the northwest.

The five advanced in silence, the two men and the boy still leading and the two women following close behind. Colonel Winchester's heart began to sink yet farther. He had not felt much hope at first, and now he felt scarcely any at all. A few moments later, however, the sergeant suddenly held up his hand.

“What is it?” asked the colonel.

“I think I hear somebody calling.”

“Like as not. Plenty of wounded men may be calling in delirium.”

“But, colonel, I've been on battlefields before, and this sounds like the voice of some one calling for help.”

“Which way do you think it is?”

“To the left and not far off. It's a weak voice.”

“We'll turn and follow it. Don't say anything to the others yet.”

They curved and walked on, the colonel swinging his lantern from side to side, and now all of them heard the voice distinctly.

“What is that?” exclaimed Mrs. Mason, speaking for the first time since they had come upon the field of conflict.

“Some one shouting for help,” replied Colonel Winchester. “One could not neglect him at such a time.”

“No, that is so.”

“It's the voice of Lieutenant Warner, colonel,” whispered the sergeant.

Colonel Winchester nodded. “Say nothing as yet,” he whispered.

They walked a dozen steps farther and the colonel, swinging high the lantern, disclosed Warner sitting on the trunk of a tree that had been cut through by cannon balls. Warner, as well as they could see, was not wounded, but he seemed to be suffering from an overpowering weakness. The colonel, the sergeant and the boy alike dreaded to see what lay beyond the log, but the two women did not know Warner or that his presence portended anything.

The Vermonter saw them coming, and raised his hand in a proper salute to his superior officer. Then as they came nearer, and he saw the white woman who came with them, he lifted his head, tried to straighten his uniform a little with his left hand, and said as he bowed:

“I think this must be Mrs. Mason, Dick's mother.”

“It is,” said Colonel Winchester, and then they waited a moment or two in an

awful silence.

“I don't rise because there is something heavy lying in my lap which keeps me from it,” said Warner very quietly, but with deep feeling. “After the Second Manassas, where I was badly wounded and left on the ground for dead, a boy named Dick Mason hunted over the field, found me and brought me in. I felt grateful about it and told him that if he happened to get hit in the same way I'd find him and bring him in as he had brought me.

“I didn't think the chance would come so soon. Curious how things happen as you don't think they're going to happen, and don't happen as you think they're going to happen, and here the whole thing comes out in only a few weeks. We were driven back and I missed Dick as the battle closed. Of course I came to hunt for him, and I found him. Easy, Mrs. Mason, don't get excited now. Yes, you can have his head in your own lap, but it must be moved gently. That's where he's hurt. Don't tremble, ma'am. He isn't going to die, not by a long shot. The bullet meant to kill him, but finding his head too hard, it turned away, and went out through his hair. He won't have any scar, either, because it's all under the thickest part of his hair.

“Of course his eyes are closed, ma'am. He hasn't come around yet, but he's coming fast. Don't cry on his face, ma'am. Boys never like to have their faces cried on. I'd have brought him in myself, but I found I was too weak to carry him. It's been too short a time since the Second Manassas for me to have got back all my strength. So I just bound up his head, held it in my lap, and yelled for help. Along came a rebel party, bearing two wounded, and they looked at me. 'You're about pumped out,' said one of them, 'but we'll take your friend in for you.' 'No, you won't,' I said. 'Why not?' said they. 'Because you're no account Johnnies,' I said, 'while my wounded friend and I are high-toned Yanks.' 'I beg your pardon,' said the Johnny, who was one of the most polite fellows I ever saw, 'I didn't see your uniform clearly by this dim light, but the parties looking for the wounded are mostly going in, and you're likely to be left here with your friend, who needs attention. Better come along with us and be prisoners and give him a chance to get well.'

“Now, that was white, real white, but I thanked him and said that as soon as General Buell heard that the best two soldiers in his whole army were here resting, he'd come with his finest ambulance for us, driving his horses himself. They said then they didn't suppose they were needed and went on. But do you know, ma'am, every one of those Johnnies, as he passed poor old unconscious Dick with his head in my lap, took off his hat.”

“It was a fine thing for them to do,” said Colonel Winchester, and then he

whispered: “I'm glad you talked that way, Warner. It helps. You see, she's feeling more cheerful already.”

“Yes, and you see old Dick's opening his eyes. Isn't it strange that the first thing he should see when he opens them here on the battlefield should be his mother?”

“A strange and happy circumstance,” said Colonel Winchester.

Dick opened his eyes.

“Mother!” he exclaimed.

Her arms were already around him.

CHAPTER XIV. SEEKING BRAGG

They took Dick to the house of his relatives, the Careys, in Danville, and in a few days he learned the sequel of that sudden and terrible storm of death at Perryville. Buell had gathered all his forces in the night, and in the morning had intended to attack again, but the Confederate army was gone, carrying with it vast stores of supplies that it had gathered on the way.

The rains, too, had come. They had begun the morning after the battle, and they poured for days. In the southeast, among the mountains toward which Bragg had turned the head of his army, the roads were quagmires. Nevertheless he had toiled on and was passing through Cumberland Gap. Buell had gone in the other direction toward the southwest, and then came the news that he was relieved of his command, and that Rosecrans would take his place.

Dick felt the call of the trumpet. He knew that his comrades were now down there in Tennessee with the army under Rosecrans, and he felt that he must join them. His mother begged him to stay. He had done enough for his country. He had fought in great battles, and he had narrowly escaped a mortal wound. He should come home, and stay safely at Pendleton until the war was over.

But Dick, though grieving with her, felt that he must go. He would stay with the army until the end, and he departed for Lexington, where he took the train for Louisville. Thence he went southward directly by rail to Bowling Green, where the Northern army was encamped, with lines stretching as far south as Nashville, and where he received the heartiest of greetings from his comrades.

“I knew you'd come,” said Warner. “Perhaps a man with a mother like yours ought to stay at home, and again he ought to come. So there you are, and here you are!”

Dick was familiar with the country about Bowling Green. It was a part of the state in which he had relatives, and he had visited it more than once. He also saw the camps left by Buckner's men nearly a year ago, when they were marching southward to be taken by Grant at Donelson. Since he had come back to this region it seemed to him that they were always fighting their battles over again. Grant and Rosecrans had fought a terrible but victorious battle at Corinth in Mississippi, and now Rosecrans had come north while Grant remained in the further south. He was sorry it was not Grant who commanded on that line. He would have been glad to be under his command again, to feel that strong and

sure hand on the reins once more.

Dick stayed a while in Bowling Green, and he saw all his relatives in the little city. They were mostly on the other side, but they could not resist an ingenuous youth like Dick, and he passed some pleasant hours with them. For his sake they also made Warner and Pennington welcome, but they freely predicted a great disaster for the North. Bragg would come out of East Tennessee with his veterans, and they would give Rosecrans the defeat that he deserved. The boys held good natured arguments with them on this point, but all finally agreed to leave it to the decision of the war itself.

The great dryness had now passed so completely that it seemed impossible such a thing ever could have been. The rains had been heavy and almost continuous, and the earth soaked in water. But despite chill winds and chill rains rumors of Southern activity came to them, and in the last month of the year Rosecrans gathered his forces at Nashville in Tennessee.

Dick and his comrades enjoyed a few bright days here. The city was crowded with an army and those who supply it and live by it, and it was a center of vivid activity. Dick had letters from his mother and he also heard in a roundabout way that Colonel Kenton had gone through the battle of Perryville uninjured and was now with Bragg at Chattanooga.

But the boys soon heard that despite the winter there was great activity in the Southern camp. Undismayed by their loss of Kentucky, the Southern generals meant to fight Rosecrans in Tennessee. The Confederacy had not been cheered by Lee's withdrawal at Antietam and Bragg's retreat at Perryville, and meant to strike a heavy blow for new prestige. The whole Confederate army, they soon heard, had moved forward to Murfreesborough, where it was waiting, while Forrest and Morgan, the famous cavalry leaders, were off on great raids.

It was this absence of Forrest and Morgan with the best of the cavalry that put it into the mind of Rosecrans to attack at once. The thousands of lads in the army who were celebrating Christmas received that night the news that they were to march in the morning.

“I've fought three great battles this year,” said Warner, “and I don't think they ought to ask any more of me.”

“Be comforted,” said Dick. “We start to-morrow, the 26th, which leaves five days of the year, and I don't think we can arrange a battle in that time. You'll not have to whip Bragg before the New Year, George.”

“Well, I'm glad of it. You can have too many battles in one year. I didn't get rest enough after my wound at the Second Manassas before I had to go in and

save our army at Antietam, and then it was but a little time before we fought at Perryville. That wasn't as big a battle as some of the others, but Dick, for those mad three hours it seemed that all the demons of death were turned loose."

"It certainly looked like it, George, you stiff old Vermonter, and I don't forget that you came to save me."

"Shut up about that, or I'll hit you over the head with the butt of my pistol. I merely paid back, though I only paid about half of what I was owing to you. The chance luckily came sooner than I had hoped. But, Dick, what a morning to follow Christmas."

A chilly rain was pouring down. A cold fog was rising from the Cumberland, wrapping the town in mists. It was certainly a dreary time in which to march to battle, and the young soldiers rising in the gloom of the dawn and starting amid such weather were depressed.

"Pennington," said Warner, "will you help me in a request to our Kentucky friend to join us in three cheers for the Sunny South, the edge of which he has the good fortune to inhabit? I haven't seen the real sun for about a month, and I suppose that's why they call it sunny, and I'm informed that this big river, the Cumberland, often freezes over, which I suppose is the reason why they call it Southern. I hear, too, that people often freeze to death in North Georgia, which is further south than this. After this bit of business is over I'm going to forbid winter campaigns in the south."

"It does get mighty cold," said Dick. "You see we're not really a southern people. We just lie south of the northern states and in Kentucky, at least, we have a lot of cold weather. Why, I've seen it twenty-three degrees below zero in the southern part of the state, and it certainly can get cold in Tennessee, too."

"I believe I'd rather have it than this awful rain," said Pennington. "I don't seem to get used to these cold soakings."

"Good-bye, Nashville," said Dick, turning about. "I don't know when we will have to come back, and if we do I don't know what will have happened before then. Good-bye, Nashville. I regret your roofs and your solid walls, and your dry tents and floors."

"But we're going forth to fight. Don't forget that, Dick. Remember how in Virginia we pined for battle, and the use of our superior numbers. Anyhow Rosecrans is going out to look for the enemy, but all the same, and between you and me, Dick, I wish it was Grant who was leading us. I saw a copy of the New York Times a while back, and some lines in it are haunting me. Here they are:

"Back from the trebly crimsoned field

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  Terrible woods are thunder-tost:
Full of the wrath that will not yield,
  Full of revenge for battles lost:
Hark to their echo as it crost
  The capital making faces wan:
End this murderous holocaust;
  Abraham Lincoln give us a man.”
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“Sounds good,” said Dick, “and, George, you and Frank and I know that what we want is a man. We've lost big battles, because we didn't have a big man, who could see at once and think like lightning, to lead us. But we'll get him sooner or later! We'll get him. Did any other troops ever bear up like ours under defeats and drawn battles? Listen to 'em now!”

Slow and deep and sung by many thousand men rose the rolling chorus:

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“The army is gathering from near and from far;
 The trumpet is sounding the call for the war;
 Old Rosey's our leader, he's gallant and strong;
 We'll gird on our armor and be marching along.”
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“Now,” cried Warner, “all together.” And the thundering chorus rose:

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“Marching, we are marching along,
 Gird on the armor and be marching along;
 Old Rosey's our leader, he's gallant and strong;
 For God and our country we are marching along.”
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As the mighty chorus, sung by fifty thousand men, rose and throbbed through the cold and rain, Dick felt his own heart throbbing in unison. Rosecrans might or might not be a great general, but he certainly was not permitting the enemy to rest easy in winter quarters at Murfreesborough. Dick had no doubt that they were about to meet the foe of Perryville face to face again.

The enemies were largely the same as those of other battles in the west. The Northern army advanced in three divisions toward Murfreesborough. McCook, whose division contained the Winchester regiment, was in the center, General Thomas led the right wing on the Franklin road, and General Crittenden led the left wing. Bragg who was before them had nearly the same generals as at Shiloh, Hardee, Breckinridge, and the others.

Dick knew that the advance of the Northern army would be seen at once. This was the country of the enemy. The forces of the Union held only the ground on which they were camped. Thousands of hostile eyes were watching Rosecrans, and, even if Bragg himself were lax, any movement by the army from Nashville would be reported at once to the army in Murfreesborough. But they had a vigilant foe, they knew, and they expected to encounter his pickets soon.

“They're probably watching us now through the fog and rain,” said Colonel Winchester to Dick as they left the last house of Nashville behind. “They know every inch of these hills and valleys.”

It was not a great distance to Murfreesborough, but they found the marching slow. The feet of the horses sank deep in the mud and the cannon and wagons were almost mired. But despite mud and rain and cold, the army pressed bravely on. They were the same lads and their like who had marched forward so hopefully to Donelson and Shiloh. Through the rain and the soughing of wheels in the mud rolled their battle songs, sung with all the spirit and fire of youth.

Colonel Winchester and all the officers helped with the cannon and wagons and soon they were covered with mud. The Winchester regiment was in the lead, and Sergeant Whitley suddenly pointing with a thick forefinger, said:

“There are the Johnnies! Their pickets are waiting for us!”

Dick saw through the mist and rain a considerable body of men down the road, most of them on horseback. He knew at once that they were Southern pickets, and the eager lads around him, seeing them, knew it, too. Not waiting for command they set up a shout and charged down the road. Rifles instantly flashed through the rain and a sharp fire met them. Men fell, but others pressed on with all the more zeal, seeing just beyond the Southern pickets the roofs of a little town. Cannon shot also whizzed among them, indicating that the Southern pickets were in strong force.

But the Northern troops, full of vigor and zeal, swept back the pickets and charged directly upon a larger force in the town beyond. A short and fierce battle for the possession of the village ensued, but this was only a Southern outpost, and it was not strong enough to withstand the rush of the Ohio men and Winchester's regiment. Fighting at every step they retreated through the village and into the forest beyond, leaving one of their cannon in the hands of the Union troops.

“An omen of victory,” exclaimed Dick, when he saw the captured cannon.

“Careful, Dick! Careful!” said Warner. “Remember that you're not strong on omens. You're always seeing sure signs of success just before we go into a big battle.”

“If Dick sees visions, and they're visions of the right kind, then he's right,” said Pennington. “I'd a good deal rather go into battle with Dick by my side singing a song of victory, than croaking of defeat.”

“That's good as a general proposition,” said Warner, “but I was merely cautioning him not to be too enthusiastic. What kind of a country, Dick, is this into which we are going?”

“Hilly, lots of forests, particularly of cedar, and brooks, creeks and rivers. Murfreesborough itself is right on Lytle's Creek. Bragg will meet us at the line of

Stone River.”

“Maybe they'll retreat and go eastward to Chattanooga,” said Pennington.

“I think we'd better dismiss that 'maybe,'” said Dick. “You haven't heard of the rebels running away from battles, have you?”

“What I've generally seen, in the beginning at least,” said Warner, “is the rebels running toward us, jumping out of the woods and yelling like Indians. I have seldom found it a pleasant sight. I'm glad, too, Dick, that Stonewall Jackson isn't here. Do you see that big cedar forest over there on the hillside? Suppose he should come rushing out of it with twenty or twenty-five thousand men.”

“Stop,” said Pennington. “You give me the shivers, talking about Stonewall Jackson swooping down on us with an army corps, when happily he's four or five hundred miles away. I'm seeing enough unfriendly faces as it is. Look how the people in this village are glaring at us. Fellows, I've decided after due consideration that they don't love us here in Tennessee. If you were to ask me I'd say that blue was not their favorite color.”

“At any rate we don't stay long. Good-bye, friends, good-bye,” said Warner, waving his hand toward two or three men who stood in the door of an old blacksmith shop.

“You laugh, young feller,” said a gnarled and knotted old man past eighty, “an' mebbe it's as well for you to laugh while you have the time to do it in. Mebbe you'll never come back from Stone River, an' if you do, an' if you win everywhere, remember that we, too, will yet win everywhere.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“All the Yankees, whether they win or not, will have to go back north, except them that are dead, an' we'll be here right on top of the lan', livin' on it, an' runnin' it, same as we've always done.”

“I hadn't thought of that,” said Warner soberly.

“There's a power of things the young don't think of,” said the ancient man. “Mebbe the South can be whipped, but she can't be moved. She'll always be here. People hev made a war. I don't know who started it. I reckon there's been some powerful mean an' hot talk on both sides. I knowed great men that seed this very thing comin' long ago an' tried to stop it. I went over in Kentucky more than once an' heard Henry Clay speak. I don't believe there was ever another such a talker as he was. He had sense an' knowledge as well as voice. He done his best to smooth over this quarrel between North and South that others was eggin' on all the time, but he couldn't, and I reckon when Henry Clay, the greatest man

God ever made, failed, it wasn't worth while for anybody else to try. Ride on, young fellers, an' get yourselves killed. You ain't twenty, an' I'm over eighty, but I guess I'll be lookin' at the green trees when you're under the ground. Ride on in the rain an' the cold, an' I'll go inside the shop an' warm myself by the forge fire."

The three boys rode on in sober silence. The words of the ancient philosopher were soaking in with the rain.

"Suppose we don't come back from Stone River," said Pennington.

"We take our chances, of course," said Dick.

"And suppose what he said about the South should prove true," said Warner, thoughtfully. "One part of it, at least, is bound to come true. That phrase of his sticks in my mind: 'Mebbe the South can be whipped, but she can't be moved.' The Southern states, as he says, will be here just the same after the war is over, no matter who wins."

But such thoughts as these could not endure long in minds so young. They passed through the village and soon were in the forests of red cedar. The rain ceased, but in its place came a thick and heavy fog. The mud grew deeper than ever. Progress became very slow. It was difficult in the great foggy veil for the regiments to keep in touch with one another, and occasional shots in front warned them that the enemy was active and watchful. The division barely crept along.

Dick and his comrades were mounted again, and they kept close to Colonel Winchester, who, however, had few orders to send. The command of the corps rested with General McCook, and it behooved him as any private could see, to exercise the utmost caution. They were strangers in the land and the Confederates were not.

Dick had thought that morning that they would get into touch with heavy forces of the enemy before night, but the fog and the mud rendered their advance so slow that at sunset they went into camp in a vast forest of red cedar, still a good distance from Stone River. The fog had lifted somewhat, but the night was heavy, damp and dark. There was an abundance of fallen wood, and the veterans soon built long rows of fires which contributed wonderfully to their cheerfulness.

"There's nothing like a fine fire on a cold, dark night," said Sergeant Whitley, holding his hands over the flames. "Out on the plains when there was only a hundred or so of us, an' nothin' on any side five hundred miles away 'xcept hostile Indians, an' a blizzard whistlin' an' roarin', with the mercury thirty

degrees below zero, it was glorious to have a big fire lighted in a hollow or a dip an' bend over the coals, until the warmth went right through you."

"It was the power of contrast," said Warner sagely. "The real comfort from the fire was fifty per cent and the howling of the icy gale, in which you might have frozen to death, but didn't, was fifty per cent more. That's why I'm feeling so good now, although I'd say that those red cedars and their dark background are none too cheerful."

"I've got two good blankets," said Pennington, who was returning from a trip further down the line, "and I'm going to sleep. Haven't you fellows learned that all your foolish talking before a battle never changes the result? I can tell you this. Our three divisions that are marching toward Murfreesborough are in touch. We've put out swarms of scouts and they all tell us so. They know exactly where the enemy is, too, and he's too far away to surprise us to-night. So it's sleep, my boys, sleep. Sleep will recover for you so much strength that it will be much harder for you to get killed on the morrow."

Dick had dried himself very thoroughly before one of the fires, and wrapping himself in his two blankets he slept soundly and heavily. There was fog again the next morning, but they reached a little village called Triune and all through the day they heard the sounds of scattered firing. One of the scouts told Colonel Winchester that the whole Southern army would be concentrated the next day on the line of Stone River, but that it would be inferior to the Union army in numbers by ten thousand men. Bragg's force, however, had the advantage of experience, being composed almost wholly of veterans.

It was on the afternoon of this day that Dick came into personal contact with General Thomas again. He had been sent through the cedar forest with dispatches to him from General McCook, and after the general had read them he glanced at the messenger.

"You reached General Buell safely with my letter, Lieutenant Mason," he said, "and I'm very glad to see you here with us again."

"Thank you, sir," said Dick, feeling an immense pride because this man, whom he admired so much, remembered him.

"It was a difficult duty and you did it well. I found that you got through safely. I made inquiries about you and I traced you as far as Shiloh, but I could get no further."

"I was at Shiloh," said Dick proudly. "I was captured just before it began, but I escaped while it was at its height and fought until the close."

"And after that?"

“My regiment was sent east, sir. I went with it through the Second Manassas and Antietam. Then we came back west to help General Buell. I was at Perryville and was wounded there, but I soon got well.”

“Perryville was a terrible battle. It was short, but it is incredible with what fury the troops fought. We should do better here.”

Dick saw that the last sentence which was spoken in a low tone was not addressed to him. It was merely a murmured expression of the general's own thoughts, and he remained silent.

“You can go now, Lieutenant Mason,” said General Thomas, after a few moments, “and let us together wish for the best.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Dick, highly flattered again. Then he saluted and retired.

He rode back somewhat slowly through the cedars, but he kept a wary eye. The enemy's cavalry was daring, and he might be rushed by them at any time or be ambushed by sharpshooters on foot. His watch for the enemy also enabled him to examine the country closely. He saw many hills and hollows covered mostly with forests, with the red cedar and its dark green boughs predominating. He also saw the flash of many waters, and, where the roads cut through the soil, a deep red clay was exposed to view. He knew that it would be difficult for the armies to get into line for battle, because of the heavy, sticky nature of the ground, upon which so much rain had fallen.

He made his way safely back to the camp of his corps, although he saw hostile cavalry galloping in the valleys in the direction of Stone River, and all through the afternoon he heard the crackle of rifle shots in the same direction. The skirmishers were continually in touch and they were busy.

The corps moved up a little, but Dick thought it likely that there would be no battle the next day either. Rosecrans could not afford to attack until his full force, with all its artillery, was up, and marching was slow and exhausting in the sea of sticky mud.

Dick was right. The Northern army was practically united the next day, but so great was the exhaustion of the troops that Rosecrans did not deem it wise yet to attack his foe. He was fully aware of the quality of the Southern soldiers. He remembered how they had turned suddenly at Perryville and with inferior numbers had fought a draw. Now on the defensive, and in such a deep and sticky soil, they would have a great advantage and his generals agreed with him in waiting.

Dick spent much of this day in riding with Colonel Winchester along their

lines. There was some talk about Bragg retreating, but the boy, a veteran in everything but years, knew the ominous signs. Bragg had no notion of retreating.

In the night that followed Colonel Winchester himself and some of his young officers, accompanied by the brave and skillful Sergeant Whitley, scouted toward Stone River. In the darkness and with great care, in order to avoid any sound of splashing, they waded a deep creek and came out upon a plateau, rolling slightly in character, and with a deep clay soil, very muddy from the heavy rains. A part of the plateau was cleared of forest, but here and there were groves, chiefly of the red cedar, and thickets, some of them so dense that a man would have difficulty in forcing his way through.

Colonel Winchester and his little group paused at the edge of the creek, and then dived promptly into a thicket. They saw further up the plateau many fires and the figures of men walking before them and they saw nearer by sentinels marching back and forth. They were even able to make out cannon in batteries, and they knew that it was not worth while to go any further. The Confederate army was there, and they would merely walk directly into its arms.

They returned with even greater caution than they had come, but the next day the whole division crossed the creek at another point, and as it cautiously felt its way forward it encountered another formidable body of Southern pickets hidden in the woods. There was sharp firing for a quarter of an hour, and many of the Ohio men fell, but the pickets were finally swept back, and at sunset the half circle that Rosecrans had intended to form for the attack upon the Southern army was complete.

All the movements and delays brought them up to the night before the last day in the year. The Winchester regiment with the Ohio division lay in a region of little hills and rocks, covered with forest, with which its officers and men were not familiar. On the other hand the Southern army would know every inch of it, and the inhabitants were ready and eager to give it information.

Dick could not keep from regarding the dark forests with apprehension. He had seen the Northern generals lose so much through ignorance of the ground and uncertain movements that he feared for them again. He soon learned that Rosecrans himself shared this fear. He had come to the division and recommended its closer concentration.

But the young Ohio troops were not afraid. They said that if they were attacked they would hold their ground long enough for the rest of the Northern army to beat the Southern, and McCook himself was confident.

Meanwhile, Bragg, after delaying, had suddenly decided to make the attack

himself, and throughout the day he had been gathering his whole army for the spring. All his generals, Hardee, Breckinridge, Polk, Cleburne and the rest were in position and the cavalry was led by Wheeler, a youthful rough rider, destined to become famous as Fighting Joe Wheeler.

Each general was ready to attack in the morning, but neither knew the willingness of the other. Yet everybody was aware that a great battle was soon to come. They had felt it in both armies, and for two or three days the firing of the skirmishers had been almost continuous. Scouts kept each side well informed.

Dick, Warner and Pennington, before they lay down in their blankets, listened to the faint reports of rifles. They could see little owing to the deep woods in which they lay, but the sound of the shots came clearly.

“A part of our army is to cross the fords of Stone River in the morning by daylight or before,” said Warner, “and we're to surprise the enemy and rush him. I wonder if we'll do it.”

“We will not,” said Pennington with emphasis. “We may beat the enemy, but we will not surprise him. We never do. Why should we surprise him? He is here in his own country. If the whole Southern army were sound asleep, a thousand of the natives would wake up their generals and tell them that the Yankee army was advancing.”

“Their sentinels are watching, anyhow,” said Dick, “but I imagine that we'd gain something if the first rush was ours and not theirs.”

“We'll hope for the best,” said Warner, “I wonder whose time this will be to get wounded. It was mine at Antietam, yours, Dick, at Perryville, and only you are left Pennington, so it's bound to be you.”

“No, it won't be me,” said Pennington stoutly. “I've been wounded in two or three battles already, not bad wounds, just scratches and bruises, but as there were so many of 'em you can lump 'em together, and make one big wound. That lets me out.”

The Winchester regiment lay in the very thickest of the forest and in order not to indicate to the enemy their precise position no fires were lighted. The earth was still soaked deep with the heavy rains and their feet sank at every step. But they did not make many steps. They had learned enough to lie quiet, seek what rest and sleep they could find, and await the dawn.

CHAPTER XV. STONE RIVER

Dick awoke at sunrise of the last day of the year, and Warner and Pennington were up a moment later. There was no fog. The sun hung a low, red ball in the steel blue sky of winter. No fires had been lighted, cold food being served.

He heard far off to right a steady tattoo like the rapid beat of many small drums. A quiver ran through the lads who were now gathering in the wood and at its edge. But Dick knew that the fire was distant. The other wing had opened the battle, and it might be a long time before their own division was drawn into the conflict.

He stood there as the sound grew louder, a continuous crash of rifles, accompanied by the heavy boom of cannon, and far off he saw a great cloud of smoke gathering over the forest. But no shouting reached his ears, nor could he see the men in combat. Colonel Winchester, who was standing beside him, shrugged his shoulders.

“They're engaged heavily, or they will be very soon,” he said.

“And it looks as if we'd have to wait,” said Dick.

“Things point that way. The general thinks so, too. It seems that Bragg has moved his forces in the night, and that the portion of the enemy in front of us is some distance off.”

Dick soon confided this news to Warner and Pennington, who looked discontented.

“If we've got to fight, I'd rather do it now and get it over,” said Pennington. “If I'm going to be killed the difference between morning and afternoon won't matter, but if I'm not going to be killed it'll be worth a lot to get this weight off my mind.”

“And if we're far away from the enemy it's easy enough for us to go up close to him,” said Warner. “I take it that we're not here to keep out of his way, and, if our brethren are pounding now, oughtn't we to go in and help them pound? Remember how we divided our strength at Antietam.”

Dick shrugged his shoulders. His feelings were too bitter for him to make a reply save to say: “I don't know anything about it.”

Meanwhile the distant combat roared and deepened. It was obvious that a great battle was going on, but the division lay quiet obeying its orders. The sun

rose higher in the cold, steely blue heavens and then Dick, who was watching a forest opposite them, uttered a loud cry. He had seen many bayonets flashing among the leafless trees.

The cry was taken up by others who saw also, and suddenly a long Southern line, less than half a mile away, emerged into the open and advanced upon them in silence, but with resolution, a bristling and terrific front of steel. After all their watching and waiting the Northern division had been surprised. Many of the officers and soldiers, too, were in tents that had been set against the cold and damp. The horses that drew the artillery were being taken to water.

It was an awful moment and Dick's heart missed more than one beat, but in that crisis the American, often impatient of discipline, showed his power of initiative and his resolute courage. While that bristling front of steel came on the soldiers formed themselves into line without waiting for the commands of the officers. The artillerymen rushed to their guns.

“Kneel, men! Kneel!” shouted Colonel Winchester to his own regiment. He and all his officers were on foot, their horses having been left in the rear the night before.

His men threw themselves down at his command, and, all along the Northern line formed so hastily, the rifles began to crackle, sending forth a sheet of fire and bullets.

The Northern cannon, handled as always with skill and courage, were at work now, too, and their shells and shot lashed the Southern ranks through and through. But Dick saw no pause in the advance of the men in gray. They did not even falter. Without a particle of shelter they came on through the rain of death, their ranks closing up over the slain, their front line always presenting that bristling line of steel.

It seemed to Dick now that the points of the bayonets shone almost in his face, gleaming through the smoke that hung between them and the foe, a gap that continually grew narrower as the Southern line never ceased to come.

“Stand firm, lads; steady for God's sake, steady!” shouted Colonel Winchester, and then Dick heard no single voice, because the roar of the battle broke over them like the sudden rush of a storm. He was conscious only that the tips of the bayonets had reached them, and behind them he saw the eyes in the brown faces gleaming.

Then he did not even see the brown faces, because there was such a storm of fire and smoke pouring forth bullets like hail, and the tumult of shouts and of the crash of cannon and rifles was so awful that it blended into one general sound

like the roaring of the infernal regions.

Dick felt himself borne back. It seemed to him that their line had cracked like a bow bent too much. It was not anything that he saw but a sense of the general result, and he was right. The Northern line which had not found time to form properly, was hurled back. Neither cannon nor rifles could stop the three Southern brigades which were charging them.

The South struck like a tornado, and despite a resistance made with all the fury and rage of despair, the Northern division was driven from its position, and its line broken in many places. A Northern general was taken prisoner. The guns which could not be carried, because the horses were gone, were taken by the triumphant Southerners, and over all the roar and tumult of the frightful battle Dick heard that piercing and triumphant rebel yell, poured forth by thousands of throats and swelling over everything, in a fierce, dominant note.

Dick bumped against Warner as they were borne back in the smoke. He saw the Vermonter's blackened lips move, and his own moved in the same way, but neither heard what the other said. Nevertheless Dick read the words in his comrade's eyes, and they said:

“Surprised again, Dick! Good God, surprised!”

Yet the young troops fought with a courage worthy of the toughest veterans. They gave ground, because the rush against them was overpowering, but they maintained a terrible fire which strewed the earth in front of them with dead and wounded.

“Behind those trees! Behind those trees!” suddenly called Colonel Winchester as they continued their sullen and fighting retreat, and he and the remnants of his regiment darted into a little wood just in time. There was a sudden rush of hoofbeats on their flank, and a cloud of Southern cavalry swept down, shearing away the entire side of the Northern division as if it had been cleft with the slash of a mighty sword. Besides the fallen a thousand prisoners and seven cannon fell into the hands of the cavalrymen, who rushed on in search of fresh triumphs.

Dick shuddered with horror, but he saw that all his own immediate friends were safe in the wood. A swarm of fugitives poured in after them, and then came colonels and generals making desperate efforts to reform their line of battle. But the Southern brigades gave them no chance. Their leaders continually urged on the pursuit. The broken regiments fell back still loading and firing, and they would soon be on the banks of the creek again.

After a time that seemed almost infinite, Dick heard the roar of shells over their heads. In their retreat the regiments had come upon another Northern

division which opposed a strong resistance to the Southern advance. Winchester's men welcomed their friends joyfully. But the fresh troops could not stop the advance. The fire of the Southern cannon and rifles was so deadly that nearly all the Northern artillerymen were killed around their guns.

The North again gave ground, seeking point after point for fresh resistance. They rallied strongly around a building used as a hospital, and filled it with riflemen. But they were driven from that, too, although they inflicted terrible losses on their enemy.

“We've got to stop this backward slide somewhere,” gasped Pennington.

“Yes, but where?” cried Dick.

Whether Warner made any reply he did not know, because he lost him then in the flame and the smoke. An instant or two later the charging swarms of infantry and cavalry drove them into one of the woods of red cedars, where they lay shattered and gasping. The smoke lifted a little, and Dick saw the field which he already regarded as lost. Then there was a renewed burst of firing and cheering, as a regiment of veteran regulars galloped into the open space and drove off the Southern cavalry which was just about to seize the ammunition wagons and more cannon.

Encouraged by the charge of the regulars, the men in the cedar wood rose and began to reform for battle. Now chance, or rather watchfulness, interposed to save Dick and his comrades from destruction. Rosecrans, at another point, confident that McCook could hold out against all attacks, listened with amazement to the roar of battle coming nearer and nearer. His officers called his attention to the fact that save at the opening there was no cannon fire. All that approaching crash was made by rifles. They judged from it that their cannon had been taken, but they did not know that the rush of the Southern troops had been so fast that their own batteries were not able to keep up.

Rosecrans read the signs with them and his alarm was great and justified. Then a dispatch came from McCook telling him that his right wing was routed and he took an instant resolve.

Many regiments were marching to another point in the line, and the commander at once changed their course. He meant to save his right wing, but at the same moment a tremendous attack was begun upon the center of his army. He struck his horse smartly and galloped straight toward the rolling flame.

Dick and his friends, driven from the defense around the hospital, lost touch with the rest of the troops. Colonel Winchester held together what was left of his regiment, and presently they found themselves in the woods with the troops of

the young officer, Sheridan, who had saved the battle of Perryville. Here they took their stand, and when Dick saw the quick and warlike glance of Sheridan that embraced everything he believed they were not going to retreat.

He heard cheers all around him, men shouting to one another to stand firm. They refused to take alarm from the fugitives pouring back upon them, and sent volley after volley into the advancing gray lines. The artillery, too, handled with splendid skill and daring, poured a storm along the whole gray front. The combat deepened to an almost incredible degree. The cannon were compelled to cease firing because the men were now face to face. Regiments lost half their numbers and more, but Sheridan still held his ground and the South still attacked.

Dick began to shout with joy. He saw that the indomitable stand of Sheridan was saving the whole Northern army from rout. The South must continually turn aside troops to attack Sheridan, and they dared not advance too far leaving him unbeaten in their rear. Rosecrans in the center was urging his troops to a great resistance and the battle flamed high there. It now thundered along the whole front. Nearly every man and cannon were in action.

Dick was glad that chance had thrown his regiment with Sheridan, when he saw the splendid resistance made by the young general. Sheridan massed all his guns at the vital point and backed them up with riflemen. Nothing broke through his line. Nothing was able to move him.

“He'll have to retreat later on,” Colonel Winchester shouted in Dick's ear, “because our lines are giving way elsewhere, but his courage and that of his men has saved us from an awful defeat.”

The battle in front of Sheridan increased in violence. The Confederates were continually pouring fresh troops upon him, and it became apparent that even he, with all his courage and quickness of eye at the vital moment, could not withstand all day long the fierce attacks that were being made upon him. The Southern fire from cannon and rifles grew more terrible. Sheridan had three brigades and the commanders of all three of them were killed. The Confederate attack had been repulsed three times, but it was coming again, stronger and fiercer than ever.

Dick, aghast, gazed at Colonel Winchester and somehow through the thunder of the battle he heard the colonel's reply:

“Yes, we'll have to give up this position, but we have saved so much time that the army itself is saved. Rosecrans is forming a new line behind us.”

Rosecrans, no genius, but a brave and resolute fighter, had indeed brought up fresh troops and made a new line. Sheridan, having that greatest of all gifts of

the general, the eye to see amid the terrible tumult of battle the time to do a thing, and the courage to do it then, sounded the trumpet. Nearly all his wagons had been captured by the Southern cavalry, and his ammunition was beginning to fail. Around him lay two thousand of his best men, dead or wounded. Rosecrans and the fresh troops were appearing just in time.

Yet the retreat of Sheridan was made with the greatest difficulty. A part of his troops were cut off and captured. Others drove back the Confederate flankers with a bayonet charge, and then the remnant retreated, the new lines opening to let them through. Dick, as he passed through the gap, saw that he was among countrymen. That is, a Kentucky regiment, fighting for the Union was standing as a shield to let his comrades and himself through, and the people of the state were related so closely that in the flare of the battle he saw among these new men at least a half dozen faces that he knew.

It was this Kentucky regiment, led by its colonel, Shepherd, that now formed itself in the very apex of the battle. The remains of the Winchester regiment, forming behind it, saw a terrible sight. Some of the regiments crushed earlier in the action had entirely disbanded. The woods and the bushes were filled with fugitives, soldiers seeking the rear. Vast clouds of smoke drifted everywhere, the air was filled with the odors of exploded gunpowder, cannon were piled in inextricable heaps in the road, and horses, killed by shells or bullets, lay on the guns or between the wheels.

Dick had never beheld a more terrible sight. Their army was defeated so far, the dead and the wounded were heaped everywhere, terrified fugitives were pouring to the rear, and the enemy, wild with triumph, and shouting his terrible battle yell, was coming on with an onset that seemed invincible.

Colonel Winchester darted among the fugitives and with stinging words and the flat of his sword beat many of them back into line. Dick, Warner, Pennington and other young officers did likewise. More Kentucky troops bringing artillery came up and joined those who were standing so sternly. It became obvious to all that they must hold the ground here or the battle indeed was lost once and for all.

Thomas, the silent and resolute Virginian, had arrived also, and had joined Rosecrans. Dick observed them both. Rosecrans, tremendously excited, and reckless of death from the flying shells and bullets, galloped from point to point, urging on his soldiers, telling them to die rather than yield. Thomas, cool, and showing no trace of excitement also directed the troops. Both by their courage and resolution inspired the men. The beaten became the unbeaten. Dick felt rather than saw the stiffening of the lines, and the return of a great courage.

The new line of battle was formed directly under the fire of a victorious and charging enemy. Three batteries were gathered on a height overlooking a railroad cut, where they could sweep the front of the foe.

Just as they were in battle order Dick saw the faces of the Southerners coming through the woods, led by Hardee in person. Then he saw, too, the value of presence of mind and of a courage that would not yield. The three batteries planted by the Kentuckian, Rousseau, on the railway embankment suddenly opened a terrible enfilading fire upon the Southern advance. The Kentucky regiment standing so firmly in the breach also opened with every rifle firing directly into the ranks of their brother Kentuckians, who were advancing in the vanguard of the South. Here again people of the same state and even of the same county fought one another.

The Confederates pursuing a defeated and apparently disorganized enemy were astounded by such a sudden and fierce fire. One of their generals was killed almost instantly, and a part of their line was hurled back with great violence. Thomas pushed forward with a portion of the troops, and after a desperate assault the Southern line reeled and then stopped in the wood. Courage and presence of mind had saved a battle for the time being, at least.

At that point the combat sank for a while, and Dick, unwounded but exhausted, dropped upon the ground. Around him lay his friends, and they, too, were unwounded. It was with a sort of grim humor that he remembered a conversation they had held before the battle.

“Well, Frank,” he said, “you've escaped.”

“So far only,” said Warner. “The hurricane has softened down a lot here, but not everywhere else. Listen!”

He pointed through the woods toward the left where another battle was swelling with a mighty uproar. Bragg having driven in the Union right was now seeking to shatter the Union left, but at this point there was a Northern commander, Hazen, who was no less indomitable than Sheridan. Sheltering themselves along the railway embankment his men, always encouraged by their commander, and his officers, resisted every effort to drive them back. Noon came and found them still holding tenaciously to their positions. For a while now the whole battle sank through sheer exhaustion on both sides. Each commander reformed his line, disentangled his guns, brought forward fresh ammunition and prepared for the great combat which he knew was coming. Bragg, as he noticed the advance of the short winter day, resolved upon the utmost effort to crush his enemy. Victory had seemed wholly in his grasp in the morning, but he had been

checked at the last moment. He would make good the defeat in the afternoon.

The armies had disentangled themselves from the woods and bushes. They were now in the open and face to face on a long line. The Winchester regiment had risen to its feet again, and stood directly behind and almost mingled with the Kentucky regiment that had saved it.

“They're coming!” exclaimed Warner in quick, excited tones. “Look, there on the flank!”

It was the division of Cleburne, in the hottest of the battle all through the morning advancing to a fresh attack upon the Union lines, but it was received with such a powerful fire that it was driven back in disorder into some woods.

Dick, however, did not have a chance to see this as the Southerners, reinforced by fresh troops from Breckinridge's division, were charging in the center with great violence. So terrible was the fire that received them that some of the regiments lost half their numbers in five minutes. Yet the remainder, upheld by their cannon, returned a fire almost as deadly. Rosecrans, absolutely fearless, stood in the very front where the danger was greatest. A cannon ball blew off the head of his chief of staff who stood by his side. “Many a brave fellow must fall!” cried Rosecrans, a devoted Catholic. “Cross yourselves, and fire low and fast!”

Many a brave fellow did fall, but his men fired low and fast, and, while the Southern troops charged again and again to the very mouths of the cannon they were unable to break down the last desperate stand of the Northern army. They had driven it back, but they had not driven it back far enough. Then the sun set as it had set so often before on an undecisive battle, terrible in its long list of the slain, but leaving everything to be fought over again.

“They didn't beat us,” said Dick as the firing ceased.

“No,” said Colonel Winchester, “nor have we won a victory, but we're saved. Thank God for the night!”

“They'll attack again to-morrow, sir,” said Sergeant Whitley.

“Undoubtedly so,” said Colonel Winchester, who felt at this moment not as if he were speaking as colonel to sergeant, but as man to man, “and I hope that our artillery will be ready again. It is what has saved us. We have always been superior in that arm.”

The colonel had spoken the truth, and the fact was also recognized by Rosecrans, Thomas and the other generals. While they rectified their lines in the darkness, the great batteries were posted in good positions, and fresh gunners took the place of those who had been killed. Both Rosecrans and Thomas were

made of stern stuff. Afraid of no enemy, and, despite their great losses of the day and the fact that they had been driven back, they would be ready to fight on the morrow. Sheridan, Crittenden, McCook, Van Cleve and the others were equally ready.

Food was brought from the rear and the exhausted combatants sank down to rest. Dick was in such an apathy from sheer overtasking of the body and spirit that he did not think of anything. He lay like an animal that has escaped from a long chase. Silence had settled down with the darkness and the Confederate army had become invisible.

Dick revived later. He talked more freely with those about him, and he gathered from the gossip which travels fast, much of what had happened. The Union army, so confident in the morning, was in a dangerous position at night. Nearly thirty of its guns were taken. Three thousand unwounded and many wounded men were prisoners in the hands of the South. Arms and ammunition by the wholesale had been captured. The Southern cavalry under Fighting Joe Wheeler had gone behind Rosecrans' whole army and had cut his communications with his base at Nashville, at the same time raiding his wagon trains. Another body of cavalry under Wharton had taken all the wagons of McCook's corps, and still a third under Pegram had captured many prisoners on the Nashville road in the rear of the Northern army.

Dick became aware of a great, an intense anxiety among the leaders. The army was isolated. The raiding Southern cavalry kept it from receiving fresh supplies of either food or ammunition, unless it retreated.

“We're stripped of everything but our arms,” said Warner.

“Then we've really lost nothing,” said the valiant Pennington, “because with our arms we'll recover everything.”

They had a commander of like spirit. At that moment Rosecrans, gathering his generals in a tent pitched hastily for him, was saying to them, “Gentlemen, we will conquer or die here.” Short and strong, but every word meant. There was no need to say more. The generals animated by the same spirit went forth to their commands, and first among them was the grim and silent Thomas, who had the bulldog grip of Grant. Perhaps it was this indomitable tenacity and resolution that made the Northern generals so much more successful in the west than they were in the east during the early years of the war.

But there was exultation in the Confederate camp. Bragg and Polk and Hardee and Breckinridge and the others felt now that Rosecrans would retreat in the night after losing so many men and one-third of his artillery. Great then was their

astonishment when the rising sun of New Year's day showed him sitting there, grimly waiting, with his back to Stone River, a formidable foe despite his losses. Above all the Southern generals saw the heavily massed artillery, which they had such good reason to fear.

Dick, who had slept soundly through the night, was up like all the others at dawn and he beheld the Southern army before them, yet not moving, as if uncertain what to do. He felt again that thrill of courage and resolution, and, born of it, was the belief that despite the first day's defeat the chances were yet even. These western youths were of a tough and enduring stock, as he had seen at Shiloh and Perryville, and the battle was not always to him who won the first day. A long time passed and there was no firing.

“Not so eager to rush us as they were,” said Warner. “It's a mathematical certainty that an army that's not running away is not whipped, and that certainty is patent to our Southern friends also. But to descend from mathematics to poetry, a great poet says that he who runs away will live to fight another day. I will transpose and otherwise change that, making it to read: He who does not run away may make the other fellow unable to fight another day.”

“You talk too much like a schoolmaster, George,” said Pennington.

“The most important business of a school teacher is to teach the young idea how to shoot, and lately I've had ample chances to give such instruction.”

It was not that they were frivolous, but like most other lads in the army, they had grown into the habit of teasing one another, which was often a relief to teaser as well as teased.

“I think, sir,” said Dick to Colonel Winchester, “that some of our troops are moving.”

He was looking through his glasses toward the left, where he saw a strong Union force, with banners waving, advancing toward Bragg's right.

“Ah, that is well done!” exclaimed Colonel Winchester. “If our men break through there we'll cut Bragg off from Murfreesborough and his ammunition and supplies.”

They did not break through, but they maintained a long and vigorous battle, while the centers and other wings of the two armies did not stir. But it became evident to Dick later in the afternoon that a mighty movement was about to begin. His glasses told him so, and the thrill of expectation confirmed it.

Bragg was preparing to hurl his full strength upon Rosecrans. Breckinridge, who would have been the President of the United States, had not the Democrats

divided, was to lead it. This division of five brigades had formed under cover of a wood. On its flank was a battery of ten guns and two thousand of the fierce riders of the South under Wharton and Pegram. Dick felt instinctively that Colonel Kenton with his regiment was there in the very thick of it.

Dick's regiment with Negley's strong Kentucky brigade, which had stopped the panic and rout the day before, had now recrossed Stone River and were posted strongly behind it. Ahead of them were two small brigades with some cannon, and Rosecrans himself was with this force just as Breckinridge's powerful division emerged into the open and began its advance upon the Union lines.

“Now, lads, stand firm!” exclaimed Colonel Winchester. “This is the crisis.”

The colonel had measured the situation with a cool eye and brain. He knew that the regiments on the other side of the river were worn down by the day's fighting and would not stand long. But he believed that the Kentuckians around him, and the men from beyond the Ohio would not yield an inch. They were largely Kentuckians also coming against them.

The rolling fire burst from the Southern front, and the cannon on their flanks crashed heavily. Then their infantry came forward fast, and with a wild shout and rush the two thousand cavalry on their flanks charged. As Colonel Winchester had expected, the two weak brigades, although Rosecrans in person was among them, gave way, retreated rapidly to the little river and crossed it.

The Confederates came on in swift pursuit, but Negley's Kentuckians and the other Union men, standing fast, received them with a tremendous volley. It was at short range, and their bullets crashed through the crowded Southern ranks. The Winchesters were on the flank of the defenders, where they could get a better view, and although they also were firing as fast as they could reload and pull the trigger, they saw the great column pause and then reel.

Rosecrans, who had fallen back with the retreating brigades, instantly noted the opportunity. Here, a general who received too little reward from the nation, and to whom popular esteem did not pay enough tribute, rushed two brigades across Stone River and hurled them with all their weight upon the Southern flank. Sixty cannon posted on the hillocks just behind the river poured an awful fire upon the Southern column. The fire from front and flank was so tremendous that the Southerners, veterans as they were, gave way. The men who had held victory in their hands felt it slipping from their grasp.

“They waver! They retreat!” shouted Colonel Winchester. “Up, boys, and at 'em!”

The whole Union force, led by its heroic generals, rushed forward, crossed the river and joined in the charge. The two thousand Southern cavalry were driven off by a fire that no horsemen could withstand. The division of Breckinridge, although fighting with furious courage, was gradually driven back, and the day closed with the Union army in possession of most of the territory it had lost the day before.

As they lay that night in the damp woods, Dick and his comrades, all of whom had been fortunate enough to escape this time without injury, discussed the battle. For a while they claimed that it was a victory, but they finally agreed that it was a draw. The losses were enormous. Each side had lost about one third of its force.

Rosecrans, raging like a wounded lion, talked of attacking again, but the rains had been so heavy, the roads were so soft and deep in mud that the cannon and the wagons could not be pushed forward.

Bragg retreated four days later from Murfreesborough, and Dick and his comrades therefore claimed a victory, but as the winter was now shutting down cold and hard, Rosecrans remained on the line of Murfreesborough and Nashville.

The Winchester regiment was sent back to Nashville to recuperate and seek recruits for its ranks. Dick and Warner and Pennington felt that their army had done well in the west, but their hopes for the Union were clouded by the news from the east. Lee and Jackson had triumphed again. Burnside, in midwinter, had hurled the gallant Army of the Potomac in vain against the heights of Fredericksburg, and twelve thousand men had fallen for nothing.

“We need a man, a man in the east, even more than in the west,” said Warner.

“He'll come. I'm sure he'll come,” said Dick.

Appendix: Transcription notes:

This ebook was transcribed from a volume of the 16th printing

Despite the fact that this is a fictional work, I myself find it inappropriate that our fictional hero, Dick Mason, is credited with discovering the “lost” copy of Lee's General Order No. 191. In fact, Sergeant Bloss and Corporal Mitchell, of the 27th Indiana Infantry, found the envelope containing the order, along with the three cigars, in a field of clover on the morning of 09/13/1862.

The following modifications were applied while transcribing the printed book to ebook:

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Chapter 2
   Page 31, para 4, add missing close-quotes
   Page 51, para 3, add missing comma
   Page 51, para 6, fix typo (“Pennigton”)
   Page 52, para 7, add missing open-quotes

Chapter 3
   Page 68, para 4, changed “it” to “its”

Chapter 4
   Page 83, para 3, added a missing comma  (In these books, I am
     often tempted to add/move/remove commas, but I generally avoid
     doing so.  In this case, an additional comma was sorely needed.)

Chapter 5
   Page 105, para 3, add missing open-quotes
   Page 107, para 2, add missing open-quotes
   Page 118, para 5, changed “he know not” to “he knew not”

Chapter 6
   Page 142, para 11, add missing open-quotes

Chapter 7
   Page 157, para 2, add missing open-quotes

Chapter 9
   Page 191, para 6, add missing comma
   Page 196, para 2 and 3, fix closing quotation marks
   Page 197, para 1, add missing close-quote

Chapter 10
   Page 210, para 1, fix typo (“Pennigton”)

Chapter 13
   Page 276, para 1, change “a” to “as”
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Page 281, para 2, add missing close-quotes
Page 283, para 8, change “in” to “is”
Page 288, para 4, fix typo (“seeemd”)
Page 293, para 4, add missing close-quotes
Page 297, para 2, closing double-quote should be single-quote

Limitations imposed by converting to plain ASCII:

- The word “marquee” in chapter 3 was presented in the printed book with an accented “e”

I did not change:

- Inconsistent spelling/presentation in the printed book: “rearguard” and “rear guard”, “guerrilla” and “guerilla”, “round-about” and “roundabout”, “to-morrow” and “tomorrow”

- “bowlder” in chapter 10

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