

ALTSHELER JOSEPH ALEXANDER

THE SHADES OF THE
WILDERNESS: A STORY OF
LEE'S GREAT STAND

Joseph Altsheler

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CHAPTER I

THE SOUTHERN RETREAT

A train of wagons and men wound slowly over the hills in the darkness and rain toward the South. In the wagons lay fourteen or fifteen thousand wounded soldiers, but they made little noise, as the wheels sank suddenly in the mud or bumped over stones. Although the vast majority of them were young, boys or not much more, they had learned to be masters of themselves, and they suffered in silence, save when some one, lost in fever, uttered a groan.

But the chief sound was a blended note made by the turning of wheels, and the hoofs of horses sinking in the soft earth. The officers gave but few orders, and the cavalrymen who rode on either flank looked solicitously into the wagons now and then to see how their wounded friends fared, though they seldom spoke. The darkness they did not mind, because they were used to it, and the rain and the coolness were a relief, after three days of the fiercest battle the American continent had ever known, fought in the hottest days that the troops could recall.

Thus Lee's army drew its long length from the fatal field of Gettysburg, although his valiant brigades did not yet know that the clump of trees upon Cemetery Hill had marked the high tide of the Confederacy. All that memorable Fourth of July, following the close of the battle they had lain, facing Meade and challenging him to come on, confident that while the invasion of the North was over they could beat back once more the invasion of the South.

They had no word of complaint against their great commander, Lee. The faith in him, which was so high, remained unbroken, as it was destined to remain so to the last. But men began to whisper to one another, and say if only Jackson had been there. They mourned anew that terrible evening in the Wilderness when Lee had lost his mighty lieutenant, his striking arm, the invincible Stonewall. If the man in the old slouch hat had only been with Lee on Seminary Ridge it would now be the army of Meade retreating farther into the North, and they would be pursuing. That belief was destined to sink deep in the soul of the South, and remain there long after the Confederacy was but a name.

The same thought was often in the mind of Harry Kenton, as he rode near the rear of the column, whence he had been sent by Lee to observe and then to report. It was far after midnight now, and the last of the Southern army could not leave Seminary Ridge before morning. But Harry could detect no sign of pursuit. Now and then, a distant gun boomed, and the thunder muttered on the horizon, as if in answer. But there was nothing to indicate that the Army of the Potomac was moving from Gettysburg in pursuit, although the President in Washington, his heart filled with bitterness, was vainly asking why his army would not reap the fruits of a victory won so hardly. Fifty thousand men had fallen on the hills and in the valleys about Gettysburg, and it seemed, for the time, that nothing would come of such a slaughter. But the Northern army had suffered immense losses, and Lee and his men were ready to fight again if attacked. Perhaps it was wiser to remain content upon the field with their sanguinary success. At least, Meade and his generals thought so.

Harry, toward morning came upon St. Clair and Langdon riding together. Both had been wounded slightly, but their hurts had not kept them from the saddle, and they were in cheerful mood.

"You've been further back than we, Harry," said St. Clair. "Is Meade hot upon our track? We hear the throb of a cannon now and then."

"It doesn't mean anything. Meade hasn't moved. While we didn't win we struck the Yankees such a mighty blow that they'll have to rest, and breathe a while before they follow."

"And I guess we need a little resting and breathing ourselves," said Langdon frankly. "There were times when I thought the whole world had just turned itself into a volcano of fire."

"But we'll come back again," said St. Clair. "We'll make these Pennsylvania Dutchmen take notice of us a second time."

"That's the right spirit," said Langdon. "Arthur had nearly all of his fine uniform shot off him, but he's managed to fasten the pieces together, and ride on, just as if it were brand new."

But Harry was silent. The prescient spirit of his famous great grandfather, Henry Ware, had descended upon his valiant great grandson. Hope had not gone from him, but it did not enter his mind that they should invade Pennsylvania again.

"I'm glad to leave Gettysburg," he said. "More good men of ours have fallen there than anywhere else."

"That's true," said St. Clair, "but Marse Bob will win for us, anyhow. You don't think any of these Union generals here in the East can whip our Lee, do you?"

"Of course not!" said Happy Tom. "Besides, Lee has me to help him."

"How are Colonel Talbot and Lieutenant-Colonel St. Hilaire?" asked Harry.

"Sound asleep, both of 'em," replied St. Clair. "And it's a strange thing, too. They were sitting in a wagon, having resumed that game of chess which they began in the Valley of Virginia, but they were so exhausted that both fell sound asleep while playing. They are sitting upright, as they sleep, and Lieutenant-Colonel St. Hilaire's thumb and forefinger rest upon a white pawn that he intended to move."

"I hope they won't be jarred out of their rest and that they'll sleep on," said Harry. "Nobody deserves it more."

He waved a hand to his friends and continued his ride toward the rear. The column passed slowly on in silence. Now and then gusts of rain lashed across his face, but he liked the feeling. It was a fillip to his blood, and his nerves began to recover from the tremendous strain and excitement of the last four days.

Obedying his orders he rode almost directly back toward the field of Gettysburg from which the Southern forces were still marching. A friendly voice from a little wood hailed him, and he recognized it at once as that of Sherburne, who sat his horse alone among the trees.

"Come here, Harry," he said.

"Glad to find you alive, Sherburne. Where's your troop?"

"What's left of it is on ahead. I'll join the men in a few minutes. But look back there!"

Harry from the knoll, which was higher than he had thought, gazed upon a vast and dusky panorama. Once more the field of Gettysburg swam before him, not now in fire and smoke, but in vapors and misty rain. When he shut his eyes he saw again the great armies charging on the slopes, the blazing fire from hundreds of cannon and a hundred thousand rifles. There, too, went Pickett's brigades, devoted to death but never flinching. A sob burst from his throat, and he opened his eyes again.

"You feel about it as I do," said Sherburne. "We'll never come back into the North."

"It isn't merely a feeling within me, I know it."

"So do I, but we can still hold Virginia."

"I think so, too. Come, we'd better turn. There goes the field of Gettysburg. The rain and mist have blotted it out."

The panorama, the most terrible upon which Harry had ever looked, vanished in the darkness. The two rode slowly from the knoll and into the road.

"It will be daylight in an hour," said Sherburne, "and by that time the last of our men will be gone."

"And I must hasten to our commander-in-chief," said Harry.

"How is he?" asked Sherburne. "Does he seem downcast?"

"No, he holds his head as high as ever, and cheers the men. They say that Pickett's charge was a glorious mistake, but he takes all the blame for it, if there is any. He doesn't criticize any of his generals."

"Only a man of the greatest moral grandeur could act like that. It's because of such things that our people, boys, officers and all, will follow him to the death."

"Good-by, Sherburne," said Harry. "Hope I'll see you again soon."

He urged his horse into a faster gait, anxious to overtake Lee and report that all was well with the rear guard. He noticed once more, and with the greatest care that long line of the wounded and the unwounded, winding sixteen miles across the hills from Gettysburg to Chambersburg, and his mind was full of grave thoughts. More than two years in the very thick of the greatest war, then known, were sufficient to make a boy a man, at least in intellect and responsibility.

Harry saw very clearly, as he rode beside the retreating but valiant army that had failed in its great attempt, that their role would be the defensive. For a little while he was sunk in deep depression. Then invincible youth conquered anew, and hope sprang up again. The night was at the darkest, but dawn was not far away. Fugitive gusts of wind drenched him once more, but he did not mind it, nor did he pay any attention to the occasional growl of a distant gun. He was strong in the belief that Meade would not pursue—at least not yet. A general who had just lost nearly one-third of his own army was not in much condition to follow his enemy.

He urged his horse to increased speed, and pressed on toward the head of the column. The rain ceased and cool puffs of wind came out of the east. Then the blackness there turned to gray, which soon deepened into silver. Through the silver veil shot a bolt of red fire, and the sun came over the hills.

Although the green world had been touched with brown by the hot sun of July it looked fresh and beautiful to Harry. The brown in the morning sunlight was a rosy red, and the winds of dawn were charged with life. His horse, too, felt the change and it was easy now to force him into a gallop toward a fire on a low hill, which Harry felt sure had been built to cook breakfast for their great commander.

As he approached he saw Lee and his generals standing before the blaze, some eating, and others drinking. An orderly, near by, held the commander's famous horse, Traveller, and two or three horses belonging to the other generals were trying to find a little grass between the stony outcrops of the hills. Harry felt an overwhelming curiosity, but he kept it in restraint, dismounting at a little distance, and approaching on foot.

He could not observe much change in the general's appearance. His handsome gray suit was as neat as ever, and the three stars, the only marks of his rank that he wore, shone untarnished upon his collar. The dignified and cheerful manner that marked him before Gettysburg marked him also afterward. To Harry, so young and so thoroughly charged with the emotions of his time and section, he was a figure to be approached with veneration.

He saw the stalwart and bearded Longstreet and other generals whom he knew, among them the brilliant Stuart in his brilliant plumage, but rather quiet and subdued in manner now, since he had not come to Gettysburg as soon as he was needed. Harry hung back a little, fearing lest he might be regarded as thrusting himself into a company so much his superior in rank, but Lee saw him and beckoned to him.

"I sent you back toward Gettysburg to report on our withdrawal, Lieutenant Kenton," he said.

"Yes, sir. I returned all the way to the field. The last of our troops should be leaving there just about now. The Northern army had made no preparation for immediate pursuit."

"Your report agrees with all the others that I have received. How long have you been without sleep?"

"I don't know, sir," he said at last. "I can't remember. Maybe it has been two or three days."

Stuart, who held a cup of coffee in his hand, laughed. "The times have been such that there are generals as well as lieutenants," he said, "who can't remember when they've slept."

"You're exhausted, my lad," said Lee gravely and kindly, "and there's nothing more you can do for us just now. Take some breakfast with us, and then you must sleep in one of the wagons. An orderly will look after your horse."

Lee handed him a cup of coffee with his own hand, and Harry, thanking him, withdrew to the outer fringe of the little group, where he took his breakfast, amazed to find how hungry he was, although he had not thought of food before. Then without a word, as he saw that the generals were engrossed in a conference, he withdrew.

"You'll find Lieutenant Dalton of the staff in the covered wagon over there," said the orderly who had taken his horse. "The general sent him to it more'n two hours ago."

"Then I'll be inside it in less than two minutes," said Harry.

But with rest in sight he collapsed suddenly. His head fell forward of its own weight. His feet became lead. Everything swam before his eyes. He felt that he must sleep or die. But he managed to drag himself to the wagon and climbed inside. Dalton lay in the center of it so sound asleep that he was like one dead. Harry rolled him to one side, making room for himself, and lay down beside him. Then his eyes closed, and he, too, slept so soundly that he also looked like one dead.

He was awakened by Dalton pulling at him. The young Virginian was sitting up and looking at Harry with curiosity. He clapped his hands when the Kentuckian opened his eyes.

"Now I know that you're not dead," he said. "When I woke up and found you lying beside me I thought they had just put your body in here for safekeeping. As that's not the case, kindly explain to me and at once what you're doing in my wagon."

"I'm waking up just at present, but for an hour or two before that I was sleeping."

"Hour or two? Hour or two? Hear him! An orderly who I know is no liar told me that you got in here just after dawn. Now kindly lift that canvasflap, look out and tell me what you see."

Harry did as he was told, and was amazed. The same rolling landscape still met his eyes, and the sun was just about as high in the sky as it was when he had climbed into the wagon. But it was in the west now instead of the east.

"See and know, young man!" said Dalton, paternally. "The entire day has elapsed and here you have lain in ignorant slumber, careless of everything, reckless of what might happen to the army. For twelve hours General Lee has been without your advice, and how, lacking it, he has got this far, Heaven alone knows."

"It seems that he's pulled through, and, since I'm now awake, you can hurry to him and tell him I'm ready to furnish the right plans to stop the forthcoming Yankee invasion."

"They'll keep another day, but we've certainly had a good sleep, Harry."

"Yes, a provision or ammunition wagon isn't a bad place for a wornout soldier. I remember I slept in another such as this in the Valley of Virginia, when we were with Jackson."

He stopped suddenly and choked. He could not mention the name of Jackson, until long afterward, without something rising in his throat.

The driver obscured a good deal of the front view, but he suddenly turned a rubicund and smiling face upon them.

"Waked up, hev ye?" he exclaimed. "Wa'al it's about time. I've looked back from time to time an' I wuzn't at all shore whether you two gen'ral's wuz alive or dead. Sometimes when the wagon slanted a lot you would roll over each other, but it didn't seem to make no diffunce. Pow'ful good sleepers you are."

"Yes," said Harry. "We're two of the original Seven Sleepers."

"I don't doubt that you are two, but they wuz more'n seven."

"How do you know?"

""Cause at least seven thousand in this train have been sleepin' as hard as you wuz. I guess you mean the 'rig'nal Seventy Thousand Sleepers."

Harry's spirits had returned after his long sleep. He was a lad again. The weight of Gettysburg no longer rested upon him. The Army of Northern Virginia had merely made a single failure. It would strike again and again, as hard as ever.

"It's true that we've been slumbering," he said, "but we're as wide awake now as ever, Mr. Driver."

"My name ain't Driver," said the man.

"Then what is it?"

"Jones, Dick Jones, which I hold to be a right proper name."

"Not romantic, but short, simple and satisfying."

"I reckon so. Leastways, I've never wanted to change it. I'm from No'th Calliny, an' I've been followin' Bobby Lee a pow'ful long distance from home. Fine country up here in Pennsylvania, but I'd ruther be back in them No'th Calliny mountains. You two young gen'ral's may think it's an easy an' safe job drivin' a wagon loaded with ammunition. But s'pose you have to drive it right under fire, as you most often have to do, an' then if a shell or somethin' like it hits your wagon the whole thing goes off kerplunk, an' whar are you?"

"It's a sudden an' easy death," said Dalton, philosophically.

"Too sudden an' too easy. I don't mind tellin' you that seein' men killed an' wounded is a spo't that's beginnin' to pall on me. Reckon I've had enough of it to last me for the next thousand years. I've forgot, if I ever knowed, what this war wuz started about. Say, young fellers, I've got a wife back thar, a high-steppin', fine-lookin' gal not more'n twenty years old—I'm just twenty-five myself, an' we've got a year-old baby the cutest that wuz ever born. Now, when I wuz lookin' at that charge of Pickett's men, an' the whole world wuz blazin' with fire, an' all the skies wuz rainin' steel and lead, an' whar grass growed before, nothin' but bayonets wuz growin' then, do you know what I seed sometimes?"

"What was it?" asked Harry.

"Fur a secon' all that hell of fire an' smoke an' killin' would float away, an' I seed our mountain, with the cove, an' the trees, an' the green grass growin' in it, an' the branch, with the water so clear you could see your face in it, runnin' down the center, an' thar at the head of the cove my cabin, not much uv a buildin' to look at, no towerin' mansion, but just a stout two-room log cabin that the snows an' hails of winter can't break into, an' in the door wuz standin' Mary with the hair flyin' about her face, an' her eyes shinin', with the little feller in her arms, lookin' at me 'way off as I come walkin' fast down the cove toward 'em, returnin' from the big war."

There was a moment's silence, and Dalton said gruffly to hide his feelings:

"Dick Jones, by the time this war is over, and you go walking down the cove toward your home, a man with mustache and side whiskers will come forward to meet you, and he'll be that son of yours."

But Dick Jones cheerfully shook his head.

"The war ain't goin' to last that long," he said confidently, "an' I ain't goin' to git killed. What I saw will come true, 'cause I feel it so strong."

"There ought to be a general law forbidin' a man with a young wife and baby to go to a war," said Harry.

"But they ain't no sich law," said Dick Jones, in his optimistic tone, "an' so we needn't worry 'bout it. But if you two gen'ral's should happen along through the mountains uv western No'th Calliny after the war I'd like fur you to come to my cabin, an' see Mary an' the baby an' me. Our cove is named Jones' Cove, after my fater, an' the branch that runs through it runs into Jones' Creek, an' Jones' Creek runs into the Yadkin River an' our county is Yadkin. Oh, you could find it plumb easy, if two sich great gen'ral's as you wuzn't ashamed to eat sweet pertaters an' ham an' turkey an' co'n pone with a wagon driver like me."

Harry saw, despite his playful method of calling them generals, that he was thoroughly in earnest, and he was more moved than he would have been willing to confess.

"Too proud!" he said. "Why, we'd be glad!"

"Mebbe your road will lead that way," said Jones. "An' ef you do, jest remember that the skillet's on the fire, an' the latch string is hangin' outside the do'."

The allusion to the mountains made Harry's mind travel far back, over an almost interminable space of time now, it seemed, when he was yet a novice in war, to the home of Sam Jarvis, deep in the Kentucky mountains, and the old, old woman who had said to him as he left: "You will come again, and you will be thin and pale, and in rags, and you will fall at the door. I see you coming with these two eyes of mine."

A little shiver passed over him. He knew that no one could penetrate the future, but he shivered nevertheless, and he found himself saying mechanically:

"It's likely that I'll return through the mountains, and if so I'll look you up at that home in the cove on the brook that runs into Jones' Creek."

"That bein' settled," said Jones, "what do you gen'ral's reckon to do jest now, after havin' finished your big sleep?"

"Your wagon is about to lose the first two passengers it has ever carried," replied Harry. "Orderlies have our horses somewhere. We belong on the staff of General Lee."

"An' you see him an' hear him talk every day? Some people are pow'ful lucky. I guess you'll say a lot about it when you're old men."

"We're going to say a lot about it while we're young men. Good-by, Mr. Jones. We've been in some good hotels, but we never slept better in any of them than we have in this moving one of yours."

"Good-by, you're always welcome to it. I think Marse Bob is on ahead."

The two left the wagon and took to a path beside the road, which was muddy and rutted deeply by innumerable hoofs and wheels. But grass and foliage were now dry after the heavy rains that followed the Battle of Gettysburg, and the sun was shining in late splendor. The army, taking the lack of pursuit and attack as proof that the enemy had suffered as much as they, if not more, was in good spirits, and many of the men sang their marching songs. A band ahead of them suddenly began to play mellow music, "Partant Pour La Syrie," and other old French songs. The airs became gay, festive, uplifting to the soul, and they tickled the feet of the young men.

"The Cajun band!" exclaimed Harry. "It never occurred to me that they weren't all dead, and here they are, playing us into happiness!"

"And the Invincibles, or what's left of them, won't be far away," said Dalton.

They walked on a little more briskly and beside them the vast length of the unsuccessful army still trailed its slow way back into the South. The sun was setting in uncommon magnificence, clothing everything in a shower of gold, through which the lilting notes of the music came to Harry and Dalton's ears. Presently the two saw them, the short, dark men from far Louisiana, not so many as they had been, but playing with all the fervor of old, putting their Latin souls into their music.

"And there are the Invincibles just ahead of them!" exclaimed Dalton. "The two colonels have left the wagon and are riding with their men. See, how erect they sit."

"I do see them, and they're a good sight to see," said Harry. "I hope they'll live to finish that chess game."

"And fifty years afterward, too."

A shout of joy burst from the road, and a tall young man, slender, dark and handsome, rushed out, and, seizing the hands of first one and then the other, shook them eagerly, his dark eyes glittering with happy surprise.

"Kenton! Dalton!" he exclaimed. "Both alive! Both well!"

It was young Julien de Langeais, the kinsman of Lieutenant-Colonel Hector St. Hilaire, and he too was unhurt. The lads returned his grasp warmly. They could not have kept from liking him had they tried, and they certainly did not wish to try.

"You don't know how it rejoices me to see you," said Julien, speaking very fast. "I was sad! very sad! Some of my best friends have perished back there in those inhospitable Pennsylvania hills, and while the band was playing it made me think of the homes they will never see any more! Don't think I'm effusive and that I show grief too much, but my heart has been very heavy! Alas, for the brave lads!"

"Come, come, de Langeais," said Harry, putting his hand on his shoulder. "You've no need to apologize for sorrow. God knows we all have enough of it, but a lot of us are still alive and here's an army ready to fight again, whenever the enemy says the word."

"True! True!" exclaimed de Langeais, changing at once from shadow to sunshine. "And when we're back in Virginia we'll turn our faces once more to our foe!"

He took a step or two on the grass in time to the music which was now that of a dance, and the brilliant beams of the setting sun showed a face without a care. Invincible youth and the invincible gayety of the part of the South that was French were supreme again. Dalton, looking at him, shook his Presbyterian head. Yet his eyes expressed admiration.

"I know your feelings," said Harry to the Virginian.

"Well, what are they?"

"You don't approve of de Langeais' lightness, which in your stern code you would call levity, and yet you envy him possession of it. You don't think it's right to be joyous, without a care, and yet you know it would be mighty pleasant. You criticize de Langeais a little, but you feel it would be a gorgeous thing to have that joyous spirit of his."

Dalton laughed.

"You're pretty near the truth," he said. "I haven't known de Langeais so very long, but if he were to get killed I'd feel that I had lost a younger brother."

"So would I."

Two immaculate youths, riding excellent horses, approached them, and favored them with a long and supercilious stare.

"Can the large fair person be Lieutenant Kenton of the staff of the commander-in-chief?" asked St. Clair.

"It can be and it is, although we did not think to see him again so soon," replied Happy Tom Langdon, "and the other—I do not allude to de Langeais—is that spruce and devout young man, Lieutenant George Dalton, also of the staff of the commander-in-chief."

"Why do we find them in such humble plight, walking on weary feet in a path beside the road?"

"For the most excellent reason in the world, Arthur."

"And what may that reason be, Tom?"

"Because at last they have come down to their proper station in life, just as surely as water finds its level."

"But we'll not treat them too sternly. We must remember that they also serve who walk and wait."

But St. Clair and Langdon, their chaff over, gave them happy greeting, and told them that the two colonels would be rejoiced to see them again, if they could spare a few minutes before rejoining their commander.

"And here is an orderly with both your horses," said St. Clair, "so, under the circumstances, we'll sink our pride and let you ride with us."

De Langeais, with a cheerful farewell until the next day, returned to his command, and Harry and Dalton, mounting, were in a few minutes beside the Invincibles. Colonel Leonidas Talbot and

Lieutenant-Colonel Hector St. Hilaire turned their horses from the road into the path and saluted them with warmth.

"We caught a glimpse of you just after our departure, Harry," said Colonel Talbot, "but we did not know what had happened since. There is always a certain amount of risk attending the removal of a great army."

"I am glad, Leonidas, that you used the word 'removal' to describe our operations after our great victory at Gettysburg," said Lieutenant-Colonel St. Hilaire. "I have been feeling about for the right word or phrase myself, but you have found it first."

"Do you think it was a victory, sir?" asked Harry.

"Undoubtedly. We have won several vast and brilliant triumphs, but this is the greatest of them all. We have gone far into the enemy's country, where we have struck him a terrible blow, and now, of our own choice—understand it is of our own choice—we withdraw and challenge him to come and repeat on our own soil our exploit if he can. It is like a skilled and daring prize fighter who leaps back and laughingly bids his foe come on. Am I not right, Leonidas?"

"Neither Aristotle nor Plato was ever more right, Hector, old friend. Usually there is more to a grave affair than appears upon the surface. We could have gone on, after the battle, to Philadelphia, had we chosen, but it was not alone a question of military might that General Lee had to decide. He was bound to give weight to some very subtle considerations. You boys remember your Roman history, do you not?"

"Fragments of it, sir," replied Harry.

"Then you will recall that Hannibal, a fine general, to be named worthily with our great Lee so far as military movements are concerned, after famous victories over greatly superior numbers of Romans, went into camp at Capua, crowded with beauty, wine and games, and the soldiers became enervated. Their fiber was weakened and their bodies softened. They were quicker to heed the call to a banquet than the call to arms."

"Unless it was the arms of beauty, Leonidas."

"Well spoken, Hector. The correction is most important, and I accept it. But to take up again the main thread of my discourse. General Lee undoubtedly had the example of the Carthaginian army and Capua in mind when he left Gettysburg and returned toward the South. Philadelphia is a great city, far larger and richer than any in our section. It is filled with magnificent houses, beautiful women, luxury of every description, ease and softness. Our brave lads, crowned with mighty exploits and arriving there as conquerors, would have been received with immense admiration, although we are official enemies. And the head of youth is easily turned. The Army of Northern Virginia, emerging from Philadelphia, to achieve the conquest of New York and Boston would not be the army that it is to-day. It would lack some of that fire and dash, some of the extraordinary courage and tenacity which have enabled it to surpass the deeds of the veterans of Hannibal and Napoleon."

"But, sir, I've heard that the people of Philadelphia are mostly Quakers, very sober in dress and manner."

"Harry, my lad, when you've lived as long as I have you will know that a merry heart may beat beneath a plain brown dress, and that an ugly hood cannot wholly hide a sweet and saucy face. The girls—God bless 'em—have been the same in all lands since the world began, and will continue so to the end. While this war is on you boys cannot go a-courting, either in the North or South. Am I not right, Hector, old friend?"

"Right, as always, Leonidas. I perceive, though, that the sun is about to set; not a new thing, I admit, but we must not delay our young friends, when the general perhaps needs them."

"Well spoken again, Hector. You are an unfailing fount of wisdom. Good night, my brave lads. Not many of the Invincibles are left, but every one of them is a true friend of you both."

As they rode across the darkening fields Harry and Dalton knew that the colonel spoke the truth about the Invincibles.

"I like a faith such as theirs," said Dalton.

"Yes, it can often turn defeat into real victory."

They quickly found the general's headquarters, and as usual, whenever the weather permitted, he had made arrangements to sleep in the open air, his blankets spread upon soft boughs. Harry and Dalton, having slept all day, would be on night duty, and after supper they sat at a little distance, awaiting orders.

Coolness had come with the dark. A good moon and swarms of bright stars rode in the heavens, turning the skies to misty silver, and softening the scars of the army, which now lay encamped over a great space. Lee was talking with Stuart, who evidently had just arrived from a swift ride, as an orderly near by was holding his horse, covered with foam. The famous cavalryman was clothed in his gorgeous best. His hat was heavy with gold braid, and the broad sash about his waist was heavy with gold, also. Dandy he was, but brilliant cavalryman and great soldier too! Both friend and foe had said so.

Harry, sitting on the grass, with his back against a tree, watched the two generals as they talked long and earnestly. Now and then Stuart nervously switched the tops of his own high riding boots with the little whip that he carried, but the face of Lee, revealed clearly in the near twilight, remained grave and impassive.

After a long while Stuart mounted and rode away, and Sherburne, who had been sitting among the trees on the far side of the fire, came over and joined Harry and Dalton. He too was very grave.

"Do you know what has happened?" he said in a low tone to the two lads.

"Yes, there was a big battle at Gettysburg, and as we failed to win it we're now retreating," replied Harry.

"That's true as far as it goes, but it's not all. We've heard—and the news is correct beyond a doubt—that Grant has taken Vicksburg and Pemberton's army with it."

"Good God, Sherburne, it can't be so!"

"It shouldn't be so, but it is! Oh, why did Pemberton let himself be trapped in such a way! A whole army of ours lost and our greatest fortress in the West taken! Why, the Yankee men-of-war can steam up the Mississippi untouched, all the way from the Gulf to Minnesota."

Harry and Dalton were appalled, and, for a little while, were silent.

"I knew that man Grant would do something terrible to us," Harry said at last. "I've heard from my people in Kentucky what sort of a general he is. My father was at Shiloh, where we had a great victory on, but Grant wouldn't admit it, and held on, until another Union army came up and turned our victory into defeat. My cousin, Dick Mason, has been with Grant a lot, and I used to get a letter from him now and then, even if he is in the Yankee army. He says that when Grant takes hold of a thing he never lets go, and that he'll win the war for his side."

"Your cousin may be right about Grant's hanging on," said Dalton with sudden angry emphasis, "but neither he nor anybody else will win this war for the Yankees. We've lost Vicksburg, and an army with it, and we've retreated from Gettysburg, with enough men fallen there to make another army, but they'll never break through the iron front of Lee and his veterans."

"Hope you're right," said Sherburne, "but I'm off now. I'm in the saddle all night with my troop. We've got to watch the Yankee cavalry. Custer and Pleasanton and the rest of them have learned to ride in a way that won't let Jeb Stuart himself do any nodding."

He cantered off and the lads sat under the trees, ready for possible orders. They saw the fire die. They heard the murmur of the camp sink. Lee lay down on his bed of boughs, other generals withdrew to similar beds or to tents, and the two boys still sat under the trees, waiting and watching, and never knowing at what moment they would be needed.

CHAPTER II

THE NORTHERN SPY

But the night remained very quiet. Harry and Dalton, growing tired of sitting, walked about the camp, and looked again to their horses, which, saddled and bridled, were nevertheless allowed to nip the grass as best they could at the end of their lariats. The last embers of the fire went out, but the moon and stars remained bright, and they saw dimly the sleeping forms of Lee and his generals. Harry, who had seen nothing strange in Meade's lack of pursuit, now wondered at it. Surely when the news of Vicksburg came the exultant Army of the Potomac would follow, and try to deliver a crushing blow.

It was revealed to him as he stood silent in the moonlight that a gulf had suddenly yawned before the South. The slash of Grant's sword in the West had been terrible, and the wound that it made could not be cured easily. And the Army of Northern Virginia had not only failed in its supreme attempt, but a great river now flowed between it and Virginia. If the Northern leaders, gathering courage anew, should hurl their masses upon Lee's retreating force, neither skill nor courage might avail to save them. He suddenly beheld the situation in all its desperation; he shivered from head to foot.

Dalton saw the muscles of Harry's face quivering, and he noticed a pallor that came for an instant.

"I understand," he said. "I had thought of it already. If a Northern general like Lee or Stonewall Jackson were behind us we might never get back across the Potomac. It's somewhat the same position that we were in after Antietam."

"But we've no Stonewall Jackson now to help us."

Again that lump rose in Harry's throat. The vision of the sober figure on Little Sorrel, leading his brigades to victory, came before him, but it was a vision only.

"It's strange that we've not come in contact with their scouts or cavalry," he said. "In that fight with Pleasanton we saw what horsemen they've become, and a force of some kind must be hanging on our rear."

"If it's there, Sherburne and his troop will find it."

"I think I can detect signs of the enemy now," said Harry, putting his glasses to his eyes. "See that hill far behind us. Can't you catch the gleam of lights on it?"

"I think I can," replied Dalton, also using glasses. "Four lights are there, and they are winking, doubtless to lights on another hill too far away for us to see."

"It shows that the enemy at least is watching, and that while we may retreat unattacked it will not be unobserved. Hark! do you hear that, George? It's rifle shots, isn't it?"

"Yes, and a lot of 'em, but they're a long distance away. I don't think we could hear 'em at all if it were not night time."

"But it means something! There they go again! I believe it's a heavy skirmish and it's in the direction in which Sherburne rode."

"The general's up. It's likely that one of us will be sent to see what it's all about."

General Lee and his whole staff had risen and were listening attentively. The faint sound of many shots still came, and then a sharper, more penetrating crash, as if light field guns were at work. The commander beckoned to Harry.

"Ride toward it," he said briefly, "and return with a report as soon as you can."

Harry touched his cap, sprang upon his horse and galloped away. He knew that other messengers would be dispatched also, but, as he had been sent first, he wished to arrive first. He found a path among the trees along which he could make good speed, and, keeping his mind fixed on the firing, he sped forward.

Thousands of soldiers lay asleep in the woods and fields on either side of him, but the thud of the horse's hoofs awakened few of them. Nor did the firing disturb them. They had fought a great battle three days long, and then after a tense day of waiting under arms, they had marched hard. What to them was the noise made by an affair of outposts, when they had heard so long the firing of a hundred and fifty thousand rifles and three or four hundred big guns? Not one in a hundred stood up to see.

The country grew rougher, and Harry was compelled to draw his horse down to a walk. But the firing, a half-mile or more ahead, maintained its volume, and as he approached through thick underbrush, being able to find no other way, he dismounted and led his horse. Presently he saw beads of flame appearing among the bushes, seen a moment, then gone like a firefly, and as he went further he heard voices. He had no doubt that it was the Southern pickets in the undergrowth, and, calling softly, he received confirmatory replies.

A rifleman, a tall, slender fellow in ragged butternut, appeared beside him, and, recognizing Harry's near-gray uniform as that of an officer, said:

"They're dismounted cavalry on the other side of a creek that runs along over there among the bushes. I don't think they mean any real attack. They expect to sting us a little an' find out what we're about."

"Seems likely to me too. They aren't strong enough, of course, for an attempt at rushing us. What troops are in here in the woods on our side?"

"Captain Sherburne's cavalry, sir. They're a bit to our right, an' they're dismounted too. You'll find the captain himself on a little knoll about a hundred yards away."

"Thanks," said Harry, and leading his horse he reached the knoll, to find the rifleman's statement correct. Sherburne was kneeling behind some bushes, trying with the aid of glasses and moonlight to pick out the enemy.

"That you, Harry?" he said, glancing back.

"Yes, Captain. The general has sent me to see what you and the rest of you noisy fellows are doing."

"Shooting across a creek at an enemy who first shot at us. It's only under provocation that we've roused the general and his staff from sleep. Use your glasses and see what you can make out in those bushes on the other side! Keep down, Harry! For Heaven's sake keep down! That bullet didn't miss you more than three inches. You wouldn't be much loss to the army, of course, but you're my personal friend."

"Thanks for your advice. I intend to stay so far down that I'll lie almost flat."

He meant to keep his word, too. The warning had been a stern one. Evidently the sharpshooters who lay in the thickets on the Union side of the creek were of the first quality.

"There's considerable moonlight," whispered Sherburne, "and you mustn't expose an inch of your face. I take it that we have Custer's cavalry over there, mixed with a lot of scouts and skirmishers from the Northwest, Michigan and Wisconsin, most likely. They're the boys who can use the rifles in the woods. Had to do it before they came here, and they're a bad lot to go up against."

"It's a pretty heavy fire for a mere scouting party. If they want to discover our location they can do it without wasting so much powder and lead."

"I think it's more than a scout. They must have discovered long since just where we are. I imagine they mean to shake our nerve by constant buzzing and stinging. I fancy that Meade and his generals after deciding not to pursue us have changed their minds, perhaps under pressure from Washington, and mean to cut us off if they can."

"A little late."

"But not too late. We're still in the enemy's country. The whole population is dead against us, and we can't make a move that isn't known within an hour to the Union leaders. I tell you, Harry, that if we didn't have a Lee to lead I'd be afraid that we'd never get out of Pennsylvania."

"But we have a Lee and the question is settled. What a volley that was! Didn't you feel the twigs and leaves falling on your face?"

"Yes, it went directly over our heads. It's a good thing we're lying so close. Perhaps they intend to force a passage of the creek and stampede at least a portion of our camp."

"And you're here to prevent it."

"I am. They can't cross that creek in face of our fire. We're good night-hawks. Every boy in the South knows the night and the woods, and here in the bush we're something like Indians."

"I'm the descendant of a famous Indian fighter myself," said Harry. And there, surrounded by deep gloom and danger, the spirit of his mighty ancestor, the great Henry Ware, descended upon him once more. An orderly had taken their horses to the rear, where they would be out of range of the bullets, and, as they crouched low in the bushes, Sherburne looked curiously at him.

Harry's face as he turned from the soldier to the Indian fighter of old had changed. To Sherburne's fascinated gaze the eyes seemed amazingly vivid and bright, like those of one who has learned to see in the dark. The complexion was redder—Henry Ware had always burned red instead of brown—like that of one who sleeps oftener in the open air than in a house. His whole look was dominant, compelling and fierce, as he leaned on his elbows and studied the opposing thickets through his glasses.

The glasses even did not destroy the illusion. To Sherburne, who had learned Harry's family history, the great Henry Ware was alive, and in the flesh before him. He felt with all the certainty of truth that the Union skirmishers in the thicket could not escape the keen eyes that sought them out.

"I can see at least twenty men creeping about among the bushes, and seeking chances for shots," whispered Harry.

"I knew that you would see them."

It was Harry's turn to give a look of curiosity.

"What do you mean, Captain?" he asked.

"I knew that you had good eyes and I believed that with the aid of the glasses you would be able to trace figures, despite the shelter of the bushes. Study the undergrowth again, will you, Harry, and tell me what more you can see there?"

"I don't need to study it. I can tell at one look that they're gathering a force. Maybe they mean to rush the creek at a shallow place."

"Is that force moving in any direction?"

"Yes, it's going down the creek."

"Then we'll go down the creek with it. We mustn't be lacking in hospitality."

Sherburne drew a whistle from his pocket and blew a low call upon it. Scores of shadowy figures rose from the undergrowth, and followed his lead down the stream. Harry was still able to see that the force on the other side was increasing largely in numbers, but Sherburne reminded him that his duties, as far as the coming skirmish was concerned, were over.

"General Lee didn't send you here to get killed," he said. "He wants you instead to report how many of us get killed. You know that while the general is a kind man he can be stern, too, and you're not to take the risk. The orderly is behind that hill with your horse and mine."

Harry, with a sigh, fell back toward the hill. But he did not yet go behind it, where the orderly stood. Instead he lay down among the trees on the slope, where he could watch what was going forward, and once more his face turned to the likeness of the great Indian fighter.

He saw Sherburne's dismounted troop and others, perhaps five hundred in all, moving slowly among the bushes parallel with the stream, and he saw a force which he surmised to be of about equal size, creeping along in the undergrowth on the other side. He followed both bodies with his glasses. With long looking everything became clearer and clearer. The moonlight had to him almost the brilliancy of day.

His eyes followed the Union force, until it came to a point where the creek ran shallow over pebbles. Then the Union leader raised his sword, uttered a cry of command, and the whole force dashed at the ford. The cry met its response in an order from Sherburne, and the thickets flamed with the Southern rifles.

The advantage was wholly with the South, standing on the defense in dark undergrowth, and the Union troop, despite its desperate attempts at the ford, was beaten back with great loss.

Harry waited until the result was sure, and then he walked slowly over the hill toward the point, where the orderly was waiting with the horses. The man, who knew him, handed him the reins of his mount, saying at the same time:

"I've a note for you, sir."

"For me?"

"Yes, sir. It was handed to me about fifteen minutes ago by a large man in our uniform, whom I didn't know."

"Probably a dispatch that I'm to carry to General Lee."

"No, sir. It's addressed to you."

The note was written in pencil on a piece of coarse gray paper, folded several times, but with a face large enough to show Harry's name upon it. He wondered, but said nothing to the sentinel, and did not look at the note again, until he had ridden some distance.

He stopped in a little glade where the moonlight fell clearly. He still heard scattered firing behind him, but he knew that the skirmish was in reality over, and he concluded that no further attempt by Union detachments to advance would be made in the face of such vigilance. He could report to General Lee that the rear of his army was safe. So he would delay and look at the letter that had come to him out of the mysterious darkness.

The superscription was in a large, bold hand, and read:

LIEUTENANT HARRY KENTON,

STAFF OF GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE, C. S. A.,

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF,

ARMY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA

He felt instinctively that something uncommon was coming, and, as most people do when they are puzzled at the appearance of a letter, he looked at it some seconds before opening it. Then he read:

MR. KENTON:

I have warned you twice before, once when Jefferson Davis was inaugurated at Montgomery, and once again in Virginia. I told you that the South could never win. I told you that she might achieve brilliant victories, and she may achieve them even yet, but they will avail her nothing. Victories permit her to maintain her position for the time being, but they do not enable her to advance. A single defeat causes her to lose ground that she can never regain.

I tell you this as a warning. Although your enemy, I have seen you more than once and talked with you. I like you and would save your life if I could. I would induce you, if I could, to leave the army and return to your home, but that I know

to be impossible. So, I merely tell you that you are fighting for a cause now lost. Perhaps it is pride on my part to remind you that my early predictions have come true, and perhaps it is a wish that the thought I may plant in your mind will spread to others. You have lost at Gettysburg a hope and an offensive that you can never regain, and Grant at Vicksburg has given a death blow to the Western half of the Confederacy.

As for you, I wish you well.

WILLIAM J. SHEPARD.

Harry stared in amazement at this extraordinary communication, and read it over two or three times. He was not surprised that Shepard should be near, and that he should have been inside the Confederate lines, but that he should leave a letter, and such a letter, for him was uncanny. His first feeling, wonder, was succeeded by anger. Did Shepard really think that he could influence him in such a way, that he could plant in his mind a thought that would spread to others of his age and rank and weaken the cause for which he fought? It was a singular idea, but Shepard was a singular man.

But perhaps pride in recalling the prediction that he had made long ago was Shepard's stronger motive, and Harry took fire at that also. The Confederacy was not beaten. A single defeat—no, it was not a defeat, merely a failure to win—was not mortal, and as for the West, the Confederacy would gather itself together there and overwhelm Grant!

Then came a new emotion, a kind of gratitude to Shepard. The man was really a friend, and would do him a service, if it could be done, without injuring his own cause! He could not feel any doubt of it, else the spy would not have taken the risk to send him such a letter. He read it for the last time, then tore it into little pieces which he entrusted to the winds.

The firing behind him had died completely, and there was no sound but the rustle of dry leaves in the light wind, nothing to tell that there had been sharp fighting along the creek, and that men lay dead in the forest. The moon and the stars clothed everything in a whitish light, that seemed surcharged with a powerful essence, and this essence was danger.

The spirit of the great forest ranger descended upon him once more, and he read the omens, all of which were sinister. He foresaw terrible campaigns, mighty battles in the forest, and a roll of the dead so long that it seemed to stretch away into infinity.

Then he shook himself violently, cast off the spell, and rode rapidly back with his report. Lee had risen and was standing under a tree. He was fully dressed and his uniform was trim and unwrinkled. Harry thought anew as he rode up, what a magnificent figure he was. He was the only great man he ever saw who really looked his greatness. Nothing could stir that calm. Nothing could break down that loftiness of manner. Harry was destined to feel then, as he felt many times afterward, that without him the South had never a chance. And the choking came in his throat again, as he thought of him who was gone, of him who had been the right arm of victory, the hammer of Thor.

But he hid all these feelings as he quickly dismounted and saluted the commander-in-chief.

"What have you seen, Lieutenant Kenton?" asked Lee.

"A considerable detachment of the enemy tried to force the passage of the creek in our right rear. They were met by Captain Sherburne's troop dismounted, and three companies of infantry, and were driven back after a sharp fight."

"Very good. Captain Sherburne is an alert officer."

He turned away, and Harry, giving his horse to an orderly, again resumed his old position under a tree, out of hearing of the generals, but in sight. Dalton was not there, but he knew that skirmishing had occurred in other directions, and doubtless the Virginian had been sent on an errand like his own.

He had a sense of rest and realization as he leaned back against the tree. But it was mental tension, not physical, for which relief came, and Shepard, much more than the battle at the creek, was in his thoughts.

The strong personality of the spy and his seeming omniscience oppressed him again. Apparently he was able to go anywhere, and nothing could be hidden from him. He might be somewhere in the circling shadows at that very moment, watching Lee and his lieutenants. His pulses leaped. Shepard had achieved an extraordinary influence over him, and he was prepared to believe the impossible.

He stood up and stared into the bushes, but sentinels stood there, and no human being could pass their ring unseen. Presently Dalton came, made a brief report to General Lee and joined his comrade. Harry was glad of his arrival. The presence of a comrade brought him back to earth and earth's realities. The sinister shadows that oppressed him melted away and he saw only the ordinary darkness of a summer night.

The two sat side by side. Dalton perhaps drew as much strength as Harry from the comradeship, and they watched other messengers arrive with dispatches, some of whom rolled themselves in their blankets at once, and went to sleep, although three, who had evidently slept in the day, joined Harry and Dalton in their vigil.

Harry saw that the commander-in-chief was holding a council at that hour, nearer morning than midnight. A general kicked some of the pieces of burned wood together and fanned them into a light flame, enough to take away the slight chill that was coming with the morning. The men stood around it, and talked a long time, although it seemed to Harry that Lee said least. Nevertheless his tall figure dominated them all. Now and then Harry saw his face in the starshine, and it bore its habitual grave and impassive look.

The youth did not hear a word that was said, but his imaginative power enabled him to put himself in the place of the commander-in-chief. He knew that no man, however great his courage, could fail to appreciate his position in the heart of a hostile country, with a lost field behind him, and with superior numbers hovering somewhere in his rear or on his flank. He realized then to the full the critical nature of their position and what a mighty task Lee had to save the army.

One of his young comrades whispered to him that the Potomac, the barrier between North and South, was rising, flooded by heavy rains in both mountains and lowlands, and that a body of Northern cavalry had already destroyed a pontoon bridge built by the South across it. They might be hemmed in, with their backs to an unfordable river, and an enemy two or three times as numerous in front.

"Don't you worry," whispered Dalton, with sublime confidence. "The general will take us to Virginia."

Harry projected his imagination once more. He sought to put himself in the place of Lee, receiving all the reports and studying them, trying to measure space that could not be measured, and to weigh a total that could not be weighed. Greatness and responsibility were compelled to pay thrice over for themselves, and he was glad that he was only a young lieutenant, the chief business of whom was to fetch and carry orders.

Shafts of sunlight were piercing the eastern foliage when the council broke up, and shortly after daylight the Southern army was again on the march, with Northern cavalry and riflemen hanging on its flanks and rear. Harry was permitted to rejoin, for a while, his friends of the Invincibles and he found Colonel Leonidas Talbot and Lieutenant-Colonel Hector St. Hilaire riding very erect, a fine color in their faces.

"You come from headquarters, Harry, and therefore you are omniscient," said Colonel Talbot. "We heard firing in the night. What did it mean?"

"Only skirmishers, Colonel. I think they wanted to annoy us, but they paid the price."

"Inevitably. Our general is as dangerous in retreat as in advance. I fancy that General Meade will not bring up his lagging forces until we near the Potomac."

"They say it's rising, sir, and that it will be very hard to cross."

"That creates a difficulty but not an impossibility. Ordinary men yield to difficulties, men like our commander-in-chief are overcome only by impossibilities. But the further we go, Harry, the more reconciled I grow to our withdrawal. I have seen scarcely a friendly face among the population. I

would not have us thrust ourselves upon people who do not like us. It would go very hard with our kindly Southern nature to have to rule by force over people who are in fact our brethren. Defensive wars are the just wars, and perhaps it will be really better for us to retire to Virginia and protect its sacred soil from the tread of the invader. Eh, Hector?"

"Right, as usual, Leonidas. The reasons for our retirement are most excellent. We have already spoken of the fact that Philadelphia might prove a Capua for our young troops, and now we are relieved from the chance of appearing as oppressors. It can never be said of us by the people of Pennsylvania that we were tyrants. It's an invidious task to rule over the unwilling, even when one rules with justice and wisdom. It's strange, perhaps, Leonidas, but it's a universal truth, that people would rather be ruled by themselves in a second rate manner than by the foreigner in a first rate manner. Now, the government of our states is attacked by Northern critics, but such as it is, it is ours and it's our first choice. Do we bore you, Harry?"

"Not at all, sir. I never listen to either you or Colonel Talbot without learning something."

The two colonels bowed politely.

"I have wished for some time to speak to you about a certain matter, Hector," said Colonel Talbot.

"What is it, Leonidas?"

"During the height of that tremendous artillery fire from Little Round Top I was at a spot where I could see the artillerymen very well whenever the smoke lifted. Several times, I noticed an officer directing the fire of the guns, and I don't think I could have been mistaken in his identity."

"No, Leonidas, you were not. I too observed him, and we could not possibly be mistaken. It was John Carrington, of course."

"Dear old John Carrington, who was with us at West Point, the greatest artilleryman in the world. And he was facing us, when the fortunes of the South were turning on a hair. If any other man had been there, directing those guns, we might have taken Cemetery Hill."

"That's true, Leonidas, but it was not possible for any other man to be in such a place at such a time. Granting that such a crisis should arise and that it should arise at Gettysburg you and I would have known long before that John would be there with the guns to stop us. Why, we saw that quality in him all the years we were with him at West Point. The world has never seen and never will see another such artilleryman as John Carrington."

"Good old John. I hope he wasn't killed."

"And I hope so too, from the bottom of my heart. But we'll know before many days."

"How will you find out?" asked Harry curiously.

Both colonels laughed genially.

"Because he will send us signs, unmistakable signs," replied Colonel Talbot.

"I don't understand, sir."

"His signs will be shells, shrapnel and solid shot. We may not have a battle this week or next week, but a big one is bound to come some time or other and then if any section of the Northern artillery shows uncommon deadliness and precision we'll know that Carrington is there. Why, we can recognize his presence as readily as the deer scents the hunter. We'll have many notes to compare with him when the war is over."

Harry sincerely hoped that the three would meet in friendship around some festive table, and he was moved by the affection and admiration the two colonels held for Carrington. Doubtless the great artilleryman's feelings toward them were the same.

They went into camp once more that night in a pleasant rolling country of high hills, rich valleys, scattered forests, and swift streams of clear water. Harry liked this Northern land, which was yet not so far from the South. It was not more beautiful than his own Kentucky, but it was much trimmer and neater than the states toward the Gulf. He saw all about him the evidences of free labor, the proof that man worked more readily, and with better results, when success or failure were all his own.

He was too young to spend much time in concentrated thinking, but as he looked upon the neat Pennsylvania houses and farms and the cultivated fields he felt the curse of black slavery in the South, but he felt also that it was for the South itself to abolish it, and not for the armed hand of the outsider, an outsider to whom its removal meant no financial loss and dislocation.

Despite himself his mind dwelt upon these things longer than before. He disliked slavery, his father disliked it, and nearly all their friends and relatives, and here they were fighting for it, as one of the two great reasons of the Civil War. He felt anew how strangely things come about, and that even the wisest cannot always choose their own courses as they wish them.

A fire, chiefly for cooking purposes, had been built for the general and his staff in a cove surrounded by trees. A small cold spring gushed from the side of a hill, flowed down the center of the cove, and then made its way through the trees into the wider world beyond. It was a fine little spring, and before the general came, the younger members of the staff knelt and drank deeply at it. It brought thoughts of home to all these young rovers of the woods, who had drunk a thousand times before at just such springs as this.

Soon Lee and his generals sat there on the stones or on the moss. Longstreet, Stuart, Pickett, Alexander, Ewell, Early, Hill and many others, some suffering from wounds, were with their commander, while the young officers who were to fetch and carry sat on the fringe in the woods, or stretched themselves on the turf.

Harry was in the group, but except in extreme emergency he would not be on duty that night, as he had already been twenty-four hours in the saddle. Nevertheless he was not yet sleepy, and lying on his blanket, he watched the leaders confer, as they had conferred every other night since the Battle of Gettysburg. He was aware, too, that the air was heavy with suspense and anxiety. He breathed it in at every breath. Cruel doubt was not shown by words or actions, but it was an atmosphere which one could not mistake.

Word had been brought in the afternoon by hard riders of Stuart that the Potomac was still rising. It could not be forded and the active Northern cavalry was in between, keeping advanced parties of the Southern army from laying pontoons. Every day made the situation more desperate, and it could not be hidden from the soldiers, who, nevertheless, marched cheerfully on, in the sublime faith that Lee would carry them through.

Harry knew that if the Army of the Potomac was not active in pursuit its cavalymen and skirmishers were. As on the night before, he heard the faint report of shots, and he knew that rough work was going forward along the doubtful line, where the fringes of the two armies almost met. But hardened so much was he that he fell asleep while the generals were still in anxious council, and the fitful firing continued in the distant dark.

CHAPTER III

THE FLOODED RIVER

Harry and Dalton were aroused before daylight by Colonel Peyton of Lee's staff, with instructions to mount at once, and join a strong detachment, ready to go ahead and clear a way. Sherburne's troop would lead. The Invincibles, for whom mounts had been obtained, would follow. There were fragments of other regiments, the whole force amounting to about fifteen hundred men, under the command of Sherburne, who had been raised the preceding afternoon to the rank of Colonel, and whose skill and valor were so well known that such veterans as Colonel Talbot and Lieutenant Colonel St. Hilaire were glad to serve under him. Harry and Dalton would represent the commander-in-chief, and would return whenever Colonel Sherburne thought fit to report to him.

Harry was glad to go. While he had his periods of intense thought, and his character was serious, he was like his great ancestor, essentially a creature of action. His blood flowed more swiftly with the beat of his horse's hoofs, and his spirits rose as the free air of the fields and forests rushed past him. Moreover he was extremely anxious to see what lay ahead. If barriers were there he wanted to look upon them. If the Union cavalry were trying to keep them from laying bridges across the Potomac he wanted to help drive them away.

Harry and Dalton had a right as aides and messengers of Lee to ride with Sherburne, but before they joined him they rode among the Invincibles, who were in great feather, because they too, for the time being, rode, and toiled in neither dust nor mud.

"Colonel Sherburne may think a good deal of his own immediate troop," said St. Clair to Harry, "but if the men of the Invincibles could achieve so much on foot they'll truly deserve their name on horseback. Where is this enemy of ours? Lead us to him."

"You'll find him soon enough," said Harry. "You South Carolina talkers have learned many times that the Yankees will fight."

"Yes, Harry, I admit it freely. But you must admit on your part that the South Carolinians will fight as well as talk, although at present most of the South Carolinians in this regiment are Virginians."

"But not our colonel and lieutenant-colonel," said Happy Tom. "Real old South Carolina still leads."

"May they always lead!" said Harry heartily, looking at the two gray figures.

"Tell Colonel Sherburne," said Happy Tom, who was in splendid spirits, "that we congratulate him on his promotion and are ready to obey him without question."

"All right. He'll be glad to know that he has your approval."

"He might have the approval of worse men. I feel surging within me the talents of a great general, but I'm too young to get 'em recognized."

"You'll have to wait until the sections are not fighting each other, but are united against a common foe. But meanwhile I'll tell Colonel Sherburne that if he gets into a tight pinch not to lose heart as you are here."

Saluting Colonel Talbot and Lieutenant-Colonel St. Hilaire, Harry and Dalton rode to the head of the column, where Sherburne led. They ate their breakfast on horseback, and went swiftly down a valley in the general direction of the Potomac. The dawn had broadened into full morning, clear and bright, save for a small cloud that hung low in the southwest, which Sherburne noticed with a frown.

"That's a little cloud and it looks innocent," he said to Harry, "but I don't like it."

"Why not?"

"Because in the ten minutes that I've been watching it I've been able to notice growth. I'm weather-wise and we may have more rain. More rain means a higher Potomac. A higher Potomac

means more difficulty in crossing it. More difficulty in crossing it means more danger of our destruction, and our destruction would mean the end of the Confederacy."

He spoke with deadly earnestness as he continued to look at the tiny dusky spot on the western sky. Harry had a feeling of awe. Again he realized that such mighty issues could turn upon a single hair. The increase or decrease of that black splotch might mean the death or life of the Confederacy. As he rode he watched it.

His heart sank slowly. The little baby cloud, looking so harmless, was growing. He said to himself in anger that it was not, but he knew that it was. Black at the center, it radiated in every direction until it became pale gray at the edges, and by and by, as it still spread, it gave to the southwest an aspect that was distinctly sinister.

Sherburne shook his head and the gravity of his face increased. As the cloud grew alarm grew with it in his mind.

"Maybe it will pass," said Harry hopefully.

"I don't think so. It's not moving away. It just hangs there and grows and grows. You're a woodsman, Harry, and you ought to feel it. Don't you think the atmosphere has changed?"

"I didn't have the courage to say so until you asked me, but it's damper. If I were posing as a prophet I should say that we're going to have rain."

"And so should I. Usually at this period of the year in our country we want rain, but now we dread it like a pestilence. At any other time the Potomac could rise or fall, whenever it pleased, for all I cared, but now it's life and death."

"Our doubts are decided and we've lost. Look, sir the whole southwest is dark now!"

"And here come the first drops!"

Sherburne sent hurried orders among the men to keep their ammunition and weapons dry, and then they bent their heads to the storm which would beat almost directly in their faces. Soon it came without much preliminary thunder and lightning. The morning that had been warm turned cold and the rain poured hard upon them. Most of the horsemen were wet through in a short time, and they shivered in their sodden uniforms, but it was a condition to which they were used, and they thought little of themselves but nearly all the while of the Potomac.

Few words were spoken. The only sounds were the driving of the rain and the thud of many hoofs in the mud. Harry often saw misty figures among the trees on the hills, and he knew that they were watched by hostile eyes as the Northern armies in Virginia, were always watched with the same hostility. It was impossible for Lee's men to make any secret march. The population, intensely loyal to the Union, promptly carried news of it to Meade or his generals.

Twice he pointed out the watchers to Sherburne who merely shrugged his shoulders.

"I might send out men and cut off a few of them," he said, "but for what good? Hundreds more would be left and we'd merely be burdened with useless prisoners. Here's a creek ahead, Harry, and look how muddy and foamy it is! It's probably raining harder higher up in the hills than it is here, and all these creeks and brooks go to swell the Potomac."

The swift water rose beyond their stirrups and there was a vast splashing as fifteen hundred men rode through the creek. It was a land of many streams, and a few miles farther on they crossed another, equally swollen and swift.

They had hoped that the rain, like the sudden violence of a summer shower, would pass soon, but the skies remained a solid gray and it settled into a steady solemn pour, cold and threatening, and promising to continue all day long. They could see that every stream they crossed was far above its normal mark, and the last hope that they might find the Potomac low enough for fording disappeared.

The watchers on the hills were still there, despite the rain, but they did no sharpshooting. Nor did the Southern force do damage to anybody or anything, as it passed. Near noon Sherburne resolved to build a fire in a cove protected by cliffs and heavy timber, and give his men warm food lest they become dispirited.

It was a task to set the wet wood, but the men of his command, used to forest life, soon mastered it. Then they threw on boughs and whole tree trunks, until a great bonfire blazed and roared merrily, thrusting out innumerable tongues of red and friendly flame.

"Is there anything more beautiful than a fine fire at such a time?" said St. Clair to Harry. "As it blazes and eats into the wood it crackles and those crackling sounds are words."

"What do the words say?"

"They say, 'Come here and stand before me. So long as you respect me and don't come too close I'll do you nothing but good. I'll warm you and I'll dry you. I'll drive the wet from your skin and your clothes, and I'll chase the cold out of your body and bones. I'll take hold of your depressed and sunken heart and lift it up again. Where you saw only gray and black I'll make you see gold and red. I'll warm and cook your food for you, giving you fresh life and strength. With my crackling coals and my leaping flames I'll change your world of despair into a world of hope.'"

"Hear! Hear!" said Happy Tom. "Arthur has turned from a sodden soldier into a giddy poet! Is any more poetry left in the barrel, Arthur?"

"Plenty, but I won't turn on the tap again to-day. I've translated for you. I've shown you where beauty and happiness lie, and you must do the rest for yourself."

They crowded about the huge fire which ran the entire length of the cove, and watched the cooks who had brought their supplies on horseback. Great quantities of coffee were made, and they had bacon and hard biscuits.

Although the rain still reached them in the cove they forgot it as they ate the good food—any food was good to them—and drank cup after cup of hot coffee. Youthful spirits rose once more. It wasn't such a bad day after all! It had rained many times before and people still lived. Also, the Potomac had risen many times before, but it always fell again. They were riding to clear the way for Lee's invincible army which could go wherever it wanted to go.

"Men on horseback looking at us!" hailed Happy Tom. "About fifty on a low hill on our right. Look like Yankee cavalymen. Wonder what they take us for anyway!"

Harry, St. Clair, Langdon and Dalton walked to the edge of the cove, every one holding a cup of hot coffee in his hand. Sherburne was already there and with his glasses was examining the strange group, as well as he could through the sweeping rain.

"A scouting party undoubtedly," he said, "but weather has made their uniforms and ours look just about alike. It's equally certain though that they're Yankees. No troop of ours so small would be found here."

Harry was also watching them through glasses, and he took particular note of one stalwart figure mounted upon a powerful horse. The distance was too great to recognize the face, but he knew the swing of the broad shoulders. It was Shepard and once more he had the uneasy feeling winch the man always inspired in him. He appeared and reappeared with such facility, and he was so absolutely trackless that he had begun to appear to him as omniscient. Of course the man knew all about Sherburne's advance and could readily surmise its purpose.

"They're an impudent lot to sit there staring at us in that supercilious manner," said Colonel Talbot. "Shall I take the Invincibles, sir, and teach them a lesson?"

Sherburne smiled and shook his head.

"No, Colonel," he said, "although I thank you for the offer. They'd melt away before you and we'd merely waste our energies. Let them look as much as they please, and now that the boys have eaten their bread and bacon and drunk their coffee, and are giants again, we'll ride on toward the Potomac."

"Do we reach it to-day, sir?" asked Colonel Talbot.

"Not before to-morrow afternoon, even if we should not be interrupted. This is the enemy's country and we may run at any time into a force as large as our own if not larger."

"Thank you for the information, Colonel Sherburne. My ignorance of geography may appear astonishing to you, although we had to study it very hard at West Point. But I admit my weakness and I add, as perhaps some excuse, that I have lately devoted very little attention to the Northern states. It did not seem worth my time to spend much study on the rivers, and creeks and mountains of what is to be a foreign country—although I may never be able to think of John Carrington and many other of my old friends in the army as the foreigners they're sure to become. Has the thought ever occurred to you, Colonel, that by our victories we're making a tremendous lot of foreigners in America?"

"It has, Colonel Talbot, but I can't say that the thought has ever been a particularly happy one."

"It's the Yankees who are being made into foreigners," said Lieutenant-Colonel St. Hilaire. "The gallant Southern people, of course, remain what they are."

"They're going," said Harry. "They've seen enough of us."

The distant troop disappeared over the crest of the hill. Harry had noticed that Shepard led the way as if he were the ruling spirit, but he did not consider it necessary to say anything to the others about him. The trumpet blew and Sherburne's force, mounting, rode away from the cove. Harry cast one regretful glance back at the splendid fire which still glowed there, and then resigned himself to the cold and rain.

They did not stop again until far in the night. The rain ceased, but the whole earth was sodden and the trees on the low ridge, on which Sherburne camped, dripped with water. Spies might be all around them, but for the sake of physical comfort and the courage that he knew would come with it, he ordered another big fire built. Vigilant riflemen took turns in beating up the forests and fields for possible enemies, but the young officers once more enjoyed the luxury of the fire. Their clothing was dried thoroughly, and their tough and sinewy frames recovered all their strength and elasticity.

"To enjoy being dry it is well to have been wet," said Dalton sententiously.

"That's just like you, you old Presbyterian," said Happy Tom. "I suppose you'll argue next that you can't enjoy Heaven unless you've first burned in the other place for a thousand years."

"There may be something in that," said Dalton gravely, "although the test, of course, would be an extremely severe one."

"I know which way you're headed, George."

"Then tell me, because I don't know myself."

"As soon as this war is over you'll enter the ministry, and no sin will get by you, not even those nice little ones that all of us like to forgive."

"Maybe you're right, Happy, and if I do go into the ministry I shall at once begin long and earnest preparation for the task which would necessarily be the most difficult of my life."

"And may I make so bold as to inquire what it is, George?"

"Your conversion, Happy."

Langdon grinned.

"But why do you want to convert me, George? I'm perfectly happy as I am."

"For your own well being, Tom. Your happiness is nothing to me, but I want to make you good."

Both laughed the easy laugh of youth, but Harry looked long at Dalton. He thought that he detected in him much of the spirit of Stonewall Jackson, and that here was one who had in him the makings of a great minister. The thought lingered with him.

St. Clair was carefully smoothing out his uniform and brushing from it the least particle of mud. His first preoccupation always asserted itself at the earliest opportunity, and in a very short time he was the neatest looking man in the entire force. Harry, although he often jested with him about it, secretly admired this characteristic of St. Clair's.

"You boys sleep while you can," said Sherburne, "because we can't afford to linger in this region. Our safety lies in rapid marching, giving the enemy no chance to gather a large force and trap us. Make the best of your time because we're up and away an hour after midnight."

The young officers were asleep within ten minutes, but the vigilant riflemen patrolled the country in a wide circuit about them. Sherburne himself, although worn by hard riding, slept but little. Anxiety kept his eyes open. He knew that his task to find a passage for the army across the swollen Potomac was of the utmost importance and he meant to achieve it. He understood to the full the dangerous position in which the chief army of the Confederacy stood. His own force might be attacked at any moment by overwhelming numbers and be cut off and destroyed or captured, but he also knew the quality of the men he led, and he believed they were equal to any task.

As he sat by the fire thinking somberly, a figure in the brush no great distance away was watching him. Shepard, the spy, in the darkness had passed with ease between the sentinels, using the skill of an Indian in stalking or approaching, and now, lying well hidden, almost flat upon his stomach, he surveyed the camp. He looked at Sherburne, sitting on a log and brooding, and he made out Harry's figure wrapped in a blanket and lying with his feet to the fire.

Shepard's mind was powerfully affected. An intense patriot, something remote and solitary in his nature had caused him to undertake this most dangerous of all trades, to which he brought an intellectual power and comprehension that few spies possess. As Harry had discovered long since, he was a most uncommon man.

Now Shepard as he gazed at this little group felt no hatred for them or their men. He had devoted his life to the task of keeping the Union intact. His work must be carried out in obscure ways. He could never hope for material reward, and if he perished it would be in some out-of-the-way corner, perhaps at the end of a rope, a man known to so few that there would be none to forget him. And yet his patriotism was so great and of such a fine quality that he viewed his enemies around the fire as his brethren. He felt confident that the armies of the North would bring them back into the Union, and when that occurred they must come as Americans on an equal footing with other Americans. They could not be in the Union and not of it.

But Shepard's feeling for his official enemies would not keep him from acting against them with all the skill, courage and daring that he possessed in such supreme measure. He knew that it was Sherburne's task to open a way for the Army of Northern Virginia to the Potomac and to find a ford, or, in cooperation with some other force, to build a bridge. It was for him to defeat the plan if he could.

While the rain all the day before had brought gloom to the hearts of Sherburne and his men it had filled his with joy, as he thought of the innumerable brooks and creeks that were pouring their swollen waters into the Potomac, already swollen too. He meant now to follow Sherburne's force, see what plan it would attempt, what point, perhaps, it would select for the bridge, and then bring the Union brigades in haste to defeat it.

It is said that men often feel when they are watched, although the watcher is invisible, but it was not so in Sherburne's case. He did not in the least suspect the presence of Shepard or of any foe, and the spy, after he had seen all he wished, withdrew, with the same stealth that had marked his coming.

An hour after midnight all were awakened and they rode away. The next day they reached the Potomac near Williamsport, where their pontoon bridge had been destroyed, and looked upon the wide stream of the Potomac, far too deep for fording.

"If General Lee is attacked on the banks of this river by greatly superior forces," said Sherburne, "he'll have no time to build bridges. If we didn't happen to be victorious our forces would have to scatter into the mountains, where they could be hunted down, man by man."

"But such a thing as that is unthinkable, sir," said Harry. "We may not win always, but here in the East we never lose. Remember Antietam and the river at our back."

"Right you are, Harry," said Sherburne more cheerfully. "The general will get us out of this, and here is where we must cross. The river may run down enough in two or three days to permit of fording. God grant that it will!"

"And so say I!" repeated Harry with emphasis.

"I mean to hold this place for our army," continued Sherburne.

"A reserved seat, so to speak."

"Yes, that's it. We must keep the country cleared until our main force comes up. It shouldn't be difficult. I haven't heard of any considerable body of Union troops between us and the river."

They made camp rapidly in a strong position, built their fires for cooking, set their horses to grazing and awaited what would come. It was a dry, clear night, and Harry, who had no duties, save to ride with a message at the vital moment, looked at once for his friends, the Invincibles.

St. Clair met him and held up a warning hand, while Happy touched his lip with his finger. Before the double injunction of silence and caution, Harry whispered:

"What's happened?"

"A tragedy," replied St. Clair.

"And a victory, too," said Happy Tom.

"I don't understand," said Harry.

"Then look and you will," said St. Clair.

He pointed to a small clear space in which Colonel Leonidas Talbot and Lieutenant-Colonel Hector St. Hilaire sat on their blankets facing each other with an empty cracker box between them, upon which their chess men were spread. The firelight plainly revealed a look of dismay upon the face of Colonel Talbot, and with equal plainness a triumphant expression upon that of Lieutenant-Colonel St. Hilaire.

"Colonel Talbot has lost his remaining knight," whispered St. Clair. "I don't know how it came about, but when the event occurred we heard them both utter a cry. Listen!"

"I fail even yet, Hector, to see just how it occurred," said Colonel Talbot.

"But it has occurred, Leonidas, and that's the main thing. A general in battle does not always know how he is whipped, but the whipping hurts just as much."

"You should not show too much elation over your triumph, Hector. Remember that he laughs best who laughs last."

"I take my laugh whenever I can, Leonidas, because no one knows who is going to laugh last. It may be that he who laughs in the present will also laugh at the end. What do you mean by that move, Leonidas?"

"That to you is a mystery, Hector. It's like one of Stonewall Jackson's flanking marches, and in due time the secret will be revealed with terrible results."

"Pshaw, Leonidas, you can't frighten a veteran like me. That for your move, and here's mine in reply."

The two gray heads bent lower over the board as the colonels made move after move. The youths standing in the shadow of the trees watched until the second time that night the two uttered a simultaneous cry. But they were very different in quality. Now Colonel Talbot's expressed victory and Lieutenant-Colonel St. Hilaire's consternation.

"Your bishop, Hector!" exclaimed Colonel Talbot. "Pious and able gentleman as he is, an honor to his cloth, he is nevertheless my captive."

"I admit that it was most unexpected, Leonidas. You have matched my victory with one of yours. It was indeed most skillful and I don't yet see what led to it."

"Did I not warn you a little while ago that you couldn't frighten me? I prepared a trap for you, and thus I rise from defeat to victory."

"At any rate we are about even on the evening's work, Leonidas, and we have made more progress than for the whole six months preceding. It seems likely now that we can finish our game soon."

A sudden crash of rifle fire toward the east and from a point not distant told them no. They rose to their feet, but they put the chessmen away very deliberately, while the young officers hastened to their posts. The fire continued and spread about them in a half circle, accompanied now and then by

the deeper note of a light field gun. Sherburne made his dispositions rapidly. All the men remained on foot, but a certain number were told off to hold the horses in the center of the camp.

"We're attacked by a large force," said Sherburne, "Our scouts gave us warning in time. Evidently they wish to drive us away from here because this will be the ford in case the river falls in time."

"Then you look for a sharp fight?"

"Without question. And remember that you're to avoid all risk if you can. It's not your business to get shot here, but it is your business, and your highly important business, to ride back to General Lee with the news of what's happening. In order to do that it's necessary for you to remain alive."

"I obey orders," said Harry reluctantly.

"Of course you do. Keep back with the men who are holding the horses. That fire is growing fast! I'm glad we were able to find a camp so defensible as this hill."

He hurried away to watch his lines and Harry remained at his station near the horses, where Dalton was compelled by the same responsibility to stay with him. It was the first time that Harry had been forced to remain a mere spectator of a battle raging around him, and while not one who sought danger for danger's sake, it was hard work to control himself and remain quiet and unmoved.

"I suspect they're trying to cut us off completely from our own army," he said to Dalton.

"Seems likely to me, too," said Dalton. "Wipe us out here, and hold the river for themselves. Our scouts assured us that there was no large force of the enemy in this region. It must have been gathered in great haste."

"In whatever way it was gathered, it's here, that's sure."

There was a good moon now, and, using his glasses, Harry saw many details of the battle. The attack was being pressed with great vigor and courage. He saw in a valley numerous bodies of cavalry, firing their carbines, and he saw two batteries, of eight light guns each, move forward for a better range. Soon their shells were exploding near the hill on which Harry stood, and the fire of the rifles, unbroken now, grew rapidly in volume.

But the men under Sherburne, youthful though most of them might be, were veterans. They knew every trick of war, and columns of infantry swept forward to meet the attack, preceded by the skirmishers, who took heavy toll of the foe.

"If they'd been able to make it a surprise they might have rushed us," said Harry.

"Nobody catches Sherburne sleeping," said Dalton.

"That's true, and because they can't they won't be able to overcome him here. Now there go our rifles! Listen to that crash. I fancy that about a thousand were fired together, and they weren't fired for nothing."

"No," said Dalton, "but the Yankees don't give way. You can see by their line of fire that they're still coming. Look there! A powerful body of horse is charging!"

It was unusual to see cavalry attack at night, and the spectacle was remarkable, as the moonlight fell on the raised sabers. But the defiant rebel yell, long and fierce, rose from the thicket, and, as the rifles crashed, the entire front of the charging column was burned away, as if by a stroke of lightning. But after a moment of hesitation they came on, only to ride deeper into a rifle fire which emptied saddles so fast that they were at last compelled to turn and gallop away.

"Brave men," said Harry. "A gallant charge, but it had to meet too many Southern rifles, aimed by men who know how to shoot."

"But their infantry are advancing through that wood," said Dalton. "Hear them cheering above the rifle fire!"

The Northern shout rang through the forest, and the rebel yell, again full of defiance, replied. The cavalry had been driven off, but the infantry and artillery were far from beaten. The sixteen guns of the two batteries were massed on a hill and they began to sweep the Southern lines with a storm of shells and shrapnel. The forest and the dark were no protection, because the guns searched every

point of the Southern line with their fire. Sherburne's men were forced to give ground, before cannon served with such deadly effect.

"What will the colonel do?" asked Dalton. "The big guns give the Yankees the advantage."

"He'll go straight to the heart of the trouble," said Harry. "He'll attack the guns themselves."

He did not know actually in what manner Sherburne would proceed, but he was quite sure that such would be his course. The wary Southern leader instantly detailed a swarm of his best riflemen to creep through the woods toward the cannon. In a few minutes the gunners themselves were under the fire of hidden marksmen who shot surpassingly well. The gunners, the cannoneers, the spongers, the rammers and the ammunition passers were cut down with deadly certainty.

The captain of the guns, knowing that the terrible rifle fire was coming from the thickets, deluged the woods and bushes with shells and shrapnel, but the riflemen lay close, hugging the ground, and although a few were killed and more wounded, the vast majority crept closer and closer, shooting straight and true in the moonlight. The fire from the batteries became scattered and wild. Their crews were cut down so fast that not enough men were left to work the guns, and their commander reluctantly gave the order to withdraw to a less exposed position.

"Rifles triumphant over artillery," said Harry, who studied everything through his glasses; "but of course the dusk helped the riflemen."

"That's true," said Dalton, "but it takes good men like Sherburne to use the favoring chances. Now our boys are charging!"

The tremendous rebel yell swelled through the forest, and the Southern infantry rushed to the attack. Harry saw that the charge was successful, and his ears told him so too. The firing moved further and further away, and soon declined in volume.

"They've been beaten off," said Harry.

"At least for the time," said Dalton, "but I've an idea they'll hang on our front and may attack again in a day or so."

"How then are you and I to get through and tell General Lee that this is the place to bridge the Potomac, if it's to be bridged at all?"

Dalton shook his head.

"I don't know," he replied, "and I won't think about it until Colonel Sherburne gives his orders."

The sounds of battle died in the distant woods. The last shot, whether from cannon or rifle, was fired, and the Southern troops returned to their positions, which they began to fortify strongly. Sherburne appeared presently, his uniform cut by bullets in two or three places, but his body untouched. He drew Harry and Dalton aside, where their words could not be heard by anybody else.

"You two," he said, "were to report to General Lee when I thought fit. Well, the time has come; Harry, you go first, and, at a suitable moment, George will follow. We have news of surpassing importance. We took a number of prisoners in that battle and we were also lucky enough to rescue several of our men who had been held as captives. We've learned from them that General Meade, after making up his mind to pursue, followed straight behind us for a while, but he has now turned and gone southward in the direction of Frederick. He will cross South Mountain, advance toward Sharpsburg, and attempt to smash us here, with our backs to this swollen river. Why, some of the Federal leaders consider the Army of Northern Virginia as good as destroyed already!"

He spoke with angry emphasis.

"But it isn't," said Harry.

"No, it isn't. Doubtless General Lee will learn from scouts of his own of General Meade's flanking movement, but we mustn't take the chance. Moreover, we must tell him that this is the place for our army to cross. If the river runs down in two or three days we'll have a ford here."

"I'm ready to go at any moment," said Harry. "Night helping me, I may be able to ride through the lines of our enemies out there."

"No, Harry, you must not go that way. They're so vigilant that you would not have any possible chance. Nor can you ride. You must leave your horse behind."

"What way then must I go, sir?"

"By the river. We have gathered up a few small boats, used at the crossing here. You can row, can't you?"

"Fairly well, sir."

"I'll do, because you're not to stay in the boat long. I want you to drop down the stream until you're well beyond the Federal lines. Then leave the boat and strike out across the country for General Lee. You know the way. You can buy or seize a horse, and you must not fail."

"I will not fail," said Harry confidently.

"You'll succeed if anybody will, and now you must be off. Your pistols are loaded, Harry? You may have to use them."

They did not delay a minute, going down the shelving shore to the Potomac, where a man held a small boat against the bank.

"Get in, Harry," said Sherburne. "You'd better drop down three or four miles, at least. Good-bye and good luck."

He shook hands with his colonel and Dalton, took the oars and pulled far out into the stream.

CHAPTER IV

A HERALD TO LEE

When he swept out upon the sullen bosom of the Potomac, Harry looked back only once. He saw two dim figures going up the bank, and, at its crest, a line of lights that showed the presence of the Southern force. There was no sound of firing, and he judged that the enemy had withdrawn to a distance of two or three miles.

The night had turned darker since the battle ceased, and not many stars were out. Clouds indicated that flurries of rain might come, but he did not view them now with apprehension. Darkness and rain would help a herald to Lee. The current was strong, and he did not have to pull hard, but, observing presently that the far shore was fringed with bushes, he sent the boat into their shadow.

He did not anticipate any danger from the southern shore, but the old inherited caution of the forest runners was strong within him. Under the hanging bushes he was well hidden, but, in some places, the flood in the river had turned the current back upon itself, and he was compelled to pull with vigor on the oars.

The clouds that had threatened did not develop much, and while the forests were dark, the surface of the river showed clearly in the faint moonlight. Any object upon it could be seen from either bank, and Harry was glad that he had sought the shelter of the overhanging bushes. He realized now that in this region, which was really the theater of war, many scouts and skirmishers must be about.

The bank above him was rather high and quite steep, for which he was glad, as it afforded protection. A half mile farther down he came to the mouth of a creek coming in from the South, and just as he passed it he heard voices on the bank. He held his boat among the bushes on the cliff and listened. Several men were talking, but he judged them to be farmers, not soldiers. Yet they talked of the battle that night, and Harry surmised that they were looking at the lights in the Southern camp which might yet be visible from the high point on which they stood. He could not gather from their words whether they were Northern or Southern sympathizers, but it did not matter, as he had no intention of speaking to them, hoping only that they would go away in a few minutes and let him continue his journey unseen.

His hope speedily came to pass. He heard their voices sinking in the distance, and leaving the shelter of the bushes he pulled down the stream once more. Then he found that he had deceived himself about the clouds. If they had retired, they had merely recoiled, to use the French phrase, in order to gather again with greater force.

During his short stay among the bushes at the foot of the cliff the whole heavens had blackened and the air was surcharged with the heavy damp and tensivity that betokened a coming storm. The lightning blazed across the river thrice, and he heard a mutter which was not that of cannon. Then came rain and a rushing wind and the surface of the river was troubled grievously. It rose up in waves like those of a lake, and Harry's boat rocked and tumbled so badly that in a few minutes it was half-full of water.

Fearing he might sink, carrying with him his great message, he pulled again, but fiercely now, for the southern bank and the shelter of the bushes, which, fortunately for him, grew here in the water's edge. He shoved his boat with all his might among them, as their tops snapped and crackled in the hurricane. But he knew he was safe there, and he continued to push until it reached the edge of the land.

The river would be swollen by another storm, but for the present it did not bother him greatly. He was more immediately concerned with his wish to get back to Lee as soon as possible, and he was grateful for that dense clump of bushes, growing in the very water's edge, because the wind was blowing like a hurricane and the waves were chasing one another on the Potomac, like the billows

on a lake. He was a fair oarsman, but it would have taken greater skill than his to have kept his boat afloat in the tempestuous river.

The bushes formed an absolute protection. His boat swayed with them, which saved it from being damaged, and the overhanging lee of the cliff kept most of the rain from him. He also wrapped about his body the pair of blankets that he always carried, and he sat there not only in safety, but with a certain physical pleasure.

Once more amid surroundings with the like of which Henry Ware had been so familiar, the soul of his great ancestor seemed to have descended upon him. Most young officers, no matter how brave or how skilled in war, would have been awed and alarmed. He had no comrades at his elbow. There was no light, no friendly sound to encourage him, he was as truly alone, so far as his present situation was concerned, as any pioneer had ever been in the heart of the wilderness. But for him there was pleasure at that moment in being alone. He did not quiver when the thunder rolled and crashed above his head, and the lightning blazed in one Titanic sword slash after another across the surface of the river. Rather, the wilderness and majesty of the scene appealed to him. Leaning well back in his boat with his blankets closely wrapped about him, he watched it, and his soul rose with the storm.

Harry knew from its sudden violence that the rain would soon pass, and if the waves abated a little he would certainly take his boat into the river and try his fortunes again. Yet a precious hour was lost, and nothing could replace it. The thunder ceased by and by and there was only dim lightning on the far horizon. The waves began to abate, and, taking off his blankets, he pushed his boat once more into the stream.

It rocked prodigiously and shipped water, but by strenuous effort he kept it afloat, and as the wind sank still further he decided that he would seek the northern shore and disembark as soon as possible. It would be easier to steal through the thickets than to navigate what amounted to a wild sea. But the banks were yet too high and steep for a landing, and he continued to row, keeping now near the middle of the stream.

Wind and rain were dying fast, and he heard a sound behind uncommonly like the distant swish of oars. It sent an unpleasant thrill through him, because he wished to be alone on the river at that particular time, but his eyes, tracing a course through all the dusk and gloom, rested upon another boat, about two hundred yards away, containing a single occupant.

A farmer or a riverman, Harry thought, but to his great astonishment the man suddenly raised himself up a little and shouted to him in a tremendous voice to halt. Harry had not the least idea of stopping for anybody. He bent to his oars and rowed swiftly on. Again came that shout to halt, and it seemed more insolent to him than before. He put a few more ounces of strength into his arms and shoulders and increased his speed.

The pursuer, suddenly drawing in his oars, raised a rifle from the bottom of his boat, and fired point blank at the fugitive. The bullet whistled so near Harry that he felt his ear burn, and at first thought he was hit. He would have been glad to fire back, but his pistols could not carry like his enemy's rifle, and there was nothing to do but flee. Once again he sought to draw a few more ounces of energy from his body. But the man behind him was a much greater oarsman than he and gained rapidly. The stranger, shouting another command to halt, to which no attention was paid, fired a second time, and the bullet went through the side of Harry's boat, barely scraping his knee as it passed.

His rage became intense. He had been shot at many times in battle, and many times he had fired his pistols into the opposing masses, but here upon this river a man sought his life, as the savages of old sought the hunter. Another glance showed him that pursuer had closed up half the distance between them, and, snatching one of the pistols from his belt, he fired. He knew that he had missed, as he saw the water spurt up beside the boat, but he thought that his bullet and the probability of more might delay the pursuit. Nevertheless the man came on as boldly and as fast as ever. If he fired a third time he could scarcely miss at such short range.

It seemed to Harry the gift of Heaven, that a whole pack of clouds should drift above them at that moment, deepening the obscurity and making the pursuing boat, although it was so near, a shapeless form in the mist. He could not see the features of the man, but he was able to discern his large and powerful figure, and he noticed the rhythmic manner in which his arms and shoulders worked at the oars. Obviously he had no chance to escape him by flight, and drawing his second pistol he fired. The bullet struck the boat but did no damage. The man came on faster than ever. Harry took a desperate resolution, and, whirling his boat about, he rowed it straight at his pursuer, who was now almost level with him. He intended to ram and take his chances. His movement was so quick and unexpected that it succeeded. The bow of his boat, helped perhaps by a wave, struck the other with such violence that both were shattered and sank instantly.

Harry went down with his craft, but in a few seconds came up again, his mouth and eyes full of muddy water. He was a splendid swimmer, and his eyes clearing in a moment he looked toward the northern shore, seeking an easy place for landing. They encountered ten feet away a large sun-browned face and two burning eyes.

"Shepard!" Harry gasped.

"And so it was you, Lieutenant Kenton. Perhaps if I had known it was you I wouldn't have fired upon you."

"Don't let that deter you. We're enemies."

"I merely said 'perhaps!' I like you, but that wouldn't keep me from stopping you by any method I could from reaching Lee."

"I'm sure it wouldn't. I like you, too, Mr. Shepard, but we're enemies here in this river, deadly enemies, and I mean to beat you off."

"One may mean to do a thing and yet not do it. I'm the larger and the more powerful. Besides, I'm toughened by superior age. You'd better surrender, Mr. Kenton. I don't want to do you any bodily harm."

"I admit that you're larger and stronger, but on land only. I'm the better swimmer. We're both floating now, but if you'll make a comparison, Mr. Shepard, you'll find that I'm doing it with the greatest ease. Take my advice, and swim to the southern bank of the river while I go to the northern. I say it in all good faith."

"I've no doubt of that, but the young are likely to over-estimate their powers. I'm a good swimmer, and you can't escape me."

"The important point is not whether I can escape you, but whether you can escape me. Since you have lost your boat and your rifle and we're in such a treacherous and unstable element as water, I occupy the superior position. The young may indeed over-estimate their powers, but in swimming at least I'm a competent critic. For instance, you're holding your shoulders too high, and you kick too much. You're splashing water, a useless waste of energy. Now observe me. The surface of this river is rough. Little waves are yet running upon it, but I float as easily as a fish, come up to see by the moon what time it is. It is not egotism on my part, merely a recognition of the facts, but I warn you, Mr. Shepard, to swim to the other shore and let me alone."

The two were not ten feet apart, and, despite the lightness of their talk, their eyes burned with eagerness and intensity. Harry knew that Shepard would not dream of turning back. Yet in the water he awaited the result with a confidence that he would not have felt on land.

"It's your move, Mr. Shepard," he said.

The intensity of Shepard's gaze increased, and Harry never took his eyes from those of his enemy. He intended like a prize fighter to read there what the man's next effort would be.

"I don't see that it's my move," said Shepard, as he floated calmly.

"You're following me for the purpose of capturing me."

"To capture you, or delay you. Meanwhile, it seems to me that I'm delaying you very successfully. I can't see that you're making much progress towards Lee."

"That depends upon which way this river is flowing. You note that we float gently with the stream."

"It's a poor argument. The Potomac flows directly by Washington, and if we were to float on we'd float into the heart of great Northern fortresses instead of Lee's camp."

"That's true as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. I'm leaving the river soon. You can have it all then."

"Thanks, but I think I'll go with you, Lieutenant Kenton."

"Then come to the bottom!" exclaimed Harry, as he dived forward like a flash, seized Shepard by the ankles and headed for the bottom of the river with him. The water gurgled in his eyes and ears and nose, but he held on for many seconds, despite the man's desperate struggles. Then he was forced to let go and rise.

As his head shot above the stream he saw another shooting up in the same manner about fifteen feet away. Both were choked and gasping, but Harry managed to say:

"I didn't intend for you to come up so soon."

"I suppose not, but perhaps you didn't pause to think that when you rose I'd rise with you."

"Yes, that's true. It seems to me that matters grow complicated. Can't you persuade yourself, Mr. Shepard, to go and leave me alone? I really have no use for you here."

"I'd like to oblige you, Lieutenant Kenton, but I intend to see that you don't reach General Lee."

"Still harping upon that? It seems to me that you're a stupidly stubborn man. Don't you know that I'm going anyhow?"

Harry had never ceased to watch his eyes, and he saw there the signal of a coming movement. Shepard dived suddenly for him, intending to repeat his own trick, but the youth was like a fish in the water, and he darted to the right. The man came up grasping nothing. Harry laughed. The chagrin of Shepard compelled his amusement, although he liked the man.

"I wish you'd go away, Mr. Shepard," he said. "On land you could, perhaps, overpower me, but in the water I think I'm your master. All through my boyhood I devoted a great deal of my time to swimming. Dr. Russell of the Pendleton Academy—but you never knew him—used to say that if I would swim less and study more I could make greater pretensions to scholarship."

Shepard, swimming rather easily, regarded him thoughtfully.

"While we talk to each other in this more or less polite manner, Mr. Kenton," he said, "we must not forget that we're in deadly earnest. I mean to take you, and our scouts mean to take every other messenger who goes out from Colonel Sherburne's camp. You know, and I know, that if the Army of Northern Virginia does not reach in a few days that camp, where there is a ford in ordinary weather, it will be driven up against the Potomac and we can accumulate such great forces against it that it cannot possibly escape. Even at Sherburne's place its escape is more than doubtful, if it has to linger long."

"Yes, I know these things quite well, Mr. Shepard. I know also, as you do, that General Meade's army is not in direct pursuit, and, that in a flanking movement, he is advancing across South Mountain and toward Sharpsburg. It is a march well calculated and extremely dangerous to General Lee, if he does not hear of it in time. But he will hear of it soon enough. A comrade of mine, George Dalton, will tell him. Others from Colonel Sherburne's camp will tell him, and I mean to tell him too. I hope to be the first to do so."

Harry never deceived himself for a moment. He knew that although Shepard liked him, he would go to the uttermost to stop him, and as for himself, while he had a friendly feeling for the spy, he meant to use every weapon he could against him. Realizing that he could not linger much longer, as the chill of the water was already entering his body, he swam closer to Shepard, still staring directly into his eyes. How thankful he was now for those innumerable swimings in the little river that ran near Pendleton! Everything learned well justifies itself some day.

Although there was but little moonlight they were so close together that they could see the eyes of each other clearly, and Harry detected a trace of uneasiness in those of Shepard. A good swimmer,

the water nevertheless was not his element, and although a man of great physique and extraordinary powers, he longed for the solid earth under his feet.

Harry drew himself together as if he were going to dive, but instead of doing so suddenly raised himself in the water and shot forth his clenched tight fist with all his might. Shepard was taken completely by surprise and he sank back under the water, leaving a blood stain on its surface. Harry watched anxiously, but Shepard came up again in a moment or two, gasping and swimming wildly. The point of his jaw was presented fairly and Harry struck again as hard as he could in the water. Shepard with a choked cry went under and Harry, diving forward, seized his body, bringing it to the surface.

Shepard was senseless, but getting an arm under his shoulders Harry was able to swim with him to the northern shore, although it took nearly all his strength. Then he dragged him out upon the bank, and sank down, panting, beside him.

The great Civil War in America, the greatest of all wars until nearly all the nations of Europe joined in a common slaughter, was a humane war compared with other wars approaching it in magnitude. It did not occur to Harry to let Shepard drown, nor did he leave him senseless on the bank. As soon as his own strength returned he dragged him into a half-sitting position, and rubbed the palms of his hands. The spy opened his eyes.

"Good-by, Mr. Shepard," said Harry. "I'm bound to leave before you recover fully because then I wouldn't be your match. I'm sorry I had to hit you so hard, but there was nothing else to do."

"I don't blame you. It was man against man."

"The water was in my favor. I'm bound to admit that on land you'd have won."

"At any rate I thank you for dragging me out of the river."

"You'd have done as much for me."

"So I would, but our personal debts of gratitude can't be allowed to interfere with our military duty."

"I know it. Therefore I take a running start. Good-by."

"We'll meet again."

"But not on this side of the Potomac. It may happen when the Army of Northern Virginia and the Army of the Potomac go into battle on the other side of the river."

Harry darted into the forest, and ran for a half-hour. He meant to put as much distance as possible between Shepard and himself before the latter's full strength returned. He knew that Shepard would follow, if he could, but it was not possible to trail one who had a long start through dark and wet woods.

He came through the forest and into a meadow surrounded by a rail fence, on which he sat until his breath came back again. He had forgotten all about his wet uniform, but the run was really beneficial to him as it sent the blood leaping through his veins and warmed his body.

"So far have I come," said Harry, "but the omens promise a hard march."

He had his course fixed very clearly, and a veteran now in experience, he could guide himself easily by the moon and stars. The clouds were clearing away and a warm wind promised him dry clothing, soon. Long afterward he thought it a strange coincidence that his cousin, Dick Mason, in the far South should have been engaged upon an errand very similar in nature, but different in incident.

He crossed the meadow, entered an orchard and then came to a narrow road. The presence of the orchard indicated the proximity of a farmhouse, and it occurred to Harry that he might buy a horse there. The farmer was likely to be hostile, but risks must be taken. He drew his pistols. He knew that neither could be fired after the thorough wetting in the river, but the farmer would not know that. He saw the house presently, a comfortable two-story frame building, standing among fine shade trees. Without hesitation he knocked heavily on the door with the butt of a pistol.

He was so anxious to hasten that his blows would have aroused the best sleeper who ever slept, and the door was quickly opened by an elderly man, not yet fully awake.

"I want to buy a horse."

"Buy a horse? At this time of the night?"

He was about to slam the door, but Harry put his foot over the sill and the muzzle of his pistol within six inches of the man's nose.

"I want to buy a horse," he repeated, "and you want to sell one to me. I think you realize that fact, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," replied the man, looking down the muzzle of the big horse pistol.

"Come outside and close the door behind you. I know you haven't on many clothes, but the night's warm, and you need fresh air."

The man with the muzzle of the pistol still near his nose, obeyed. But as he looked at the weapon he also had a comprehensive view of the one who held it.

"Wet ain't you?" he said.

"Do you think it necessary to put it in the form of a question?"

"I don't like to say, unless I'm shore."

"Where do you keep your horses?"

"In the barn here to the left. What kind of a horse did you think you'd keer fur most, stranger?"

"The biggest, the strongest and fastest you've got"

"I thought mebbe you'd want one with wings, you 'pear to be in such a pow'ful hurry. I wish you wouldn't keep that pistol so near to my nose. 'Sides, you've gethered so much mud an' water 'bout you that you ain't so very purty to look at!"

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