ALTSHELER JOSEPH ALEXANDER

THE STAR OF GETTYSBURG: A STORY OF SOUTHERN HIGH TIDE

Joseph Altsheler

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Altsheler J.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY

A youth sat upon a log by a clear stream in the Valley of Virginia, mending clothes.

He showed skill and rapidity in his homely task. A shining needle darted in and out of the gray cloth, and the rent that had seemed hopeless was being closed up with neatness and precision. No one derided him because he was engaged upon a task that was usually performed by women. The Army of Northern Virginia did its own sewing.

"Will the seam show much, Arthur?" asked Harry Kenton, who lay luxuriously upon the leafy ground beside the log.

"Very little when I finish," replied St. Clair, examining his work with a critical eye. "Of course I can't pass the uniform off as wholly new. It's been a long time since I've seen a new one in our army, but it will be a lot above the average."

"I admire your care of your clothes, Arthur, even if I can't quite imitate it. I've concluded that good clothes give a certain amount of moral courage, and if you get killed you make a much more decent body."

"But Arthur St. Clair, of Charleston, sir, has no intention of getting killed," said Happy Tom Langdon, who was also resting upon the earth. "He means after this war is over to go back to his native city, buy the most magnificent uniforms that were ever made, and tell the girls how Lee and Jackson turned to him for advice at the crisis of every great battle."

"We surely needed wisdom and everything else we could get at Antietam—leadership, tenacity and the willingness to die," said Dalton, the sober young Virginia Presbyterian. "Boys, we were in the deepest of holes there, and we had to lift ourselves out almost by our own boot straps."

Harry's face clouded. The field of Antietam often returned to him, almost as real and vivid as on that terrible day, when the dead lay heaped in masses around the Dunkard church and the Southern army called forth every ounce of courage and endurance for its very salvation.

"Antietam is a month away," he said, "and I still shudder at the name. We didn't think McClellan would come up and attack Lee while Jackson was away at Harper's Ferry, but he did. How did it happen? How did he know that our army was divided?"

"I've heard a strange story," said Dalton. "It's come through some Union prisoners we've taken. They say that McClellan found a copy of General Lee's orders in Frederick, and learned from them exactly where all our troops were and what they intended. Then, of course, he attacked."

"A strange tale, as you say, a most extraordinary chance," said Harry. "Do you think it's true, George?"

"I've no doubt it fell out that way. The same report comes from other sources."

"At any rate," said Happy Tom, "it gave us a chance to show how less than fifty thousand men could stand off nearly ninety thousand. Besides, we didn't lose any ground. We went over into Maryland to give the Marylanders a chance to rise for the South. They didn't rise worth a cent. I suppose we didn't get more than five hundred volunteers in that state. 'The despot's heel is on thy shore, Maryland, my Maryland,' and it can stay on thy shore, Maryland, my Maryland, if that's the way you treat us. I feel a lot more at home here in Virginia."

"It is fine," said Harry, stirring comfortably on the leaves and looking down at the clear stream of the Opequon. "One can't fight all the time. I feel as if I had been in a thousand battles, and two or three months of the year are left. It's fine to lie here by the water, and breathe pure air instead of dust."

"I've heard that every man eats a peck of dirt in the course of his life," said Happy Tom, "but I know that I've already beat the measure a dozen times over. Why, I took in a bushel at least at the Second Manassas, but I still live, and here I am, surveying this peaceful domestic scene. Arthur is mending his best uniform, Harry stretched on the leaves is resting and dreaming dreams, George is wondering how he will get a new pair of shoes for the season, and the army is doing its autumn washing."

Harry glanced up and down the stream, and he smiled at the homely sight. Thousands of soldiers were washing their ragged clothes in the little river and the equally ragged clothes of many others were drying on the banks or on the bushes. The sun-browned lads who skylarked along the shores or in the water, playing pranks on one another, bore little resemblance to those who had charged so fiercely and so often into the mouths of the cannon at Antietam.

Harry marvelled at them and at himself. It seemed scarcely possible that human nature could rush to such violent extremes within so short a space. But youth conquered all. There was very little gloom in this great army which disported itself in the water or in the shade. Thousands of wounded, still pale, but with returning strength, lay on the October leaves and looked forward to the day when they could join their comrades in either games or war.

Harry himself had suffered for a while from a great exhaustion. He had been terribly anxious, too, about his father, but a letter written just after the battle of Perryville, and coming through with unusual promptness by the way of Chattanooga and Richmond, had arrived the day before, informing him of Colonel Kenton's safety. In this letter his father had spoken of his meeting with Dick Mason in his home at Pendleton, and that also contributed to his new lightness of heart. Dick was not a brother, but he stood in the place of one, and it was good to hear again of him.

The sounds of shouts and laughter far up and down the Opequon became steady and soothing. The October winds blowing gently were crisp and fresh, but not too cold. The four boys ceased talking and Harry on his bed of leaves became drowsy. The forests on the far hills and mountains burned in vivid reds and yellows and browns, painted by the master hand of autumn. Harry heard a bird singing on a bough among red leaves directly over his head, and the note was piercingly sweet to ears used so long to the roar of cannon and rifles.

His drowsy lids sank lower and he would have gone to sleep had he not been roused by a shouting farther down the little river. His eyes opened wide and he sat up.

"What is it, George?" he said to Dalton.

"I don't know, but here comes Captain Sherburne, and I'll ask him."

Sherburne was approaching with long strides, his face flushed with enthusiasm.

"What is it, Captain?" asked Harry. "What are the boys shouting about?"

"The news has just reached them that Old Jack has been made a lieutenant-general. General Lee asked the government to divide his army into two corps, with Old Jack in command of one and Longstreet in charge of the other. The government has seen fit to do what General Lee advises it to do, and we are now the Second Army Corps, two thousand officers, twenty-five thousand men and one hundred and thirty guns, commanded by Lieutenant-General Thomas Jonathan Jackson, better known to his enemy as 'Stonewall' Jackson and to his men as 'Old Jack.'"

"Splendid!" exclaimed Harry. "Never was a promotion better earned!"

"And so say we all of us," said Happy Tom. "But just a moment, Captain. What is the news about me?"

"About you, Tom?"

"Yes, about me? Didn't I win the victory at the Second Manassas? Didn't I save the army at Antietam? Am I promoted to be a colonel or is it merely a lieutenant-colonel?"

"I'm sorry, Tom," replied Sherburne with great gravity, "but there is no mention of your promotion. I know it's an oversight, and we'll join in a general petition to Richmond that you be made a lieutenant-colonel at the very least."

"Oh, never mind. If it has to be done through the begging of my friends I decline the honor. I don't know that I'd care to be any kind of a colonel, anyhow. I'd have to pass the boys here, and maybe I'd have to command 'em, which would make 'em feel bad. Old Jack himself might become jealous of me. I guess I'm satisfied as I am."

"I like the modesty of the South Carolinians, Tom," said Dalton. "There's a story going the rounds that you South Carolinians made the war and that we Virginians have got to fight it."

"There may be such a story. It seems to me that it was whispered to me once, but the internal evidence shows that it was invented by a Virginian. Haven't I come up here and shed some of my blood and more of my perspiration to save the sacred soil of the Mother of Presidents from invasion? And didn't I bring with me Arthur St. Clair, the best dressed man in Charleston, for the Yankees to shoot at? Hello, what's that? This is a day of events!"

Hoots, cat-calls, and derisive yells arose along a long line. A trim young officer on a fine bay horse was riding down a path beside the Opequon. He was as beautifully dressed as St. Clair at his best. His hands were encased in long white buckskin gloves, and long brown mustaches curled beautifully up until they touched either cheek. It was he, this Beau Brummel of the Southern army, who had attracted the attention of irreverent youth. From the shelter of trees and bushes came a chorus of cries:

"Take them mice out o' your mouth! I know they're there, 'cause I see their tails stickin' out!"

"What kind o' hair oil do you use? I know your head's oiled, or it wouldn't shine so."

"Be sure you keep your gloves on or the sun'll tan your hands!"

"Oh, my, it's mother's pretty boy, goin' to see his best girl!"

The young officer flushed crimson through his brown, but he knew it was no use to resent the words of his tormentors, and he rode steadily on, looking straight before him.

"That's Caswell, a Georgian, of Longstreet's corps," said Sherburne; "a good soldier and one of the bravest men I ever saw."

"Which proves," said St. Clair, in a tone of conviction, "that clothes do help make the man."

Caswell passed out of sight, pursued by derisive comment, but his place was taken quickly by a new victim. A man of middle age, in civilian clothes, came riding slowly on a fat horse. He was a well-known sutler named Williams and the wild lads did not confine themselves to hidden cries, but rushed from the shelter of trees and bushes, and held up worn articles of apparel, shouting in his ears:

"Hey, Mr. Williams! The soles of these shoes are made of paper, not leather. I bought leather, not paper."

"What's the price of blue silk neckties? I've got a Yankee sweetheart in New York, and I want to look well when our conquering army marches into that city!"

"A pair of blankets for me, Mr. Williams, to be paid for when we loot the Yankee treasury!"

But Williams was not disconcerted. He was used to such badinage. He spread out his large hands soothingly.

"Boys," he said, "those shoes wore out so fast because you chased the Yankees so hard. They were made for walking, not for foot races. Why do you want to buy blankets on time when you can get them more cheaply by capturing them from the enemy?"

His answers pleased them, and some one called for three cheers for Williams, which were given with a will, and he rode on, unmolested. But in a few minutes another and greater roar arose. Now it was swelling, continuous, and there was in it no note whatever of criticism or derision. It was made up wholly of affection and admiration, and it rolled in unceasing volume along the stream and through the forest.

The four lads and Sherburne sprang to their feet, shading their eyes with their hands as they looked.

"By the great Jupiter!" exclaimed Sherburne, "it's Old Jack himself in a new uniform on Little Sorrel! The boys, I imagine, have heard that he's been made lieutenant-general."

"I knew that nothing could stir up the corps this way except Old Jack or a rabbit," said Happy Tom, as he sprang to his feet—he meant no disrespect to his commander, as thousands would give chase to a rabbit when it happened to be roused out of the bushes.

"Thunderation! What a change!" exclaimed St. Clair, as he ran with the others to the edge of the road to see Stonewall Jackson, the victor of twenty battles, go past in a uniform that at first had almost disguised him from his amazed soldiers. Little Sorrel was galloping. He had learned to do so whenever the soldiers cheered his rider. Applause always embarrassed Jackson, and Little Sorrel, of his own volition, now obeyed his wish to get by it as soon as possible.

"What splendor!" exclaimed Harry. "Did you ever see Old Jack looking like this before?"

"Never! Never!" they exclaimed in chorus.

Stonewall Jackson wore a magnificent uniform of the richest gray, with heavy gold lace wherever gold lace could be used, and massive epaulets of gold. A thick gold cord tied in a bow in front surrounded the fine gray hat, and never did a famous general look more embarrassed as the faithful horse took him along at an easy gallop.

All through the woods spread the word that Stonewall Jackson was riding by arrayed in plumage like that of the dandy, Jeb Stuart himself. It was wonderful, miraculous, but it was true, and the cheers rolled continuously, like those of troops about to go into battle and confident of victory.

Harry saw clearly that his commander was terribly abashed. Blushes showed through the tan of his cheeks, and the soldiers, who would not have dared to disobey a single word of his on the battlefield, now ran joyously among the woods and bushes. Harry and the other three lads, being on Jackson's staff, hid discreetly behind the log as he passed, but they heard the thunder of the cheering following him down the road.

It was in truth a most singular scene. These were citizen soldiers, welded into a terrible machine by battle after battle and the genius of a great leader, but with their youth they retained their personality and independence. Affection was strongly mingled with their admiration for Jackson. He was the head of the family, and they felt free to cheer their usually dingy hero as he rode abroad in his magnificent new uniform.

"I think we'd better cut across the woods to headquarters," said Harry. "I want to see the arrival of Old Jack, and I'd wager any of you five cents to a cent that he'll never wear that uniform again. Why, he doesn't look natural in it at all."

"I won't take your bet," said Happy Tom, "because I'm thinking just as you do. Arthur, here, would look all right in it—he needs clothes to hold him up, anyway, but it doesn't suit Old Jack."

Their short cut took them through the woods to the general's quarters in time to see him arrive and spring hurriedly from Little Sorrel. The man whose name was a very synonym of victorious war was still embarrassed and blushing, and as Harry followed him into the tent he took off the gorgeous uniform and hat and handed them to his young aide. Then as he put on his usual dingy gray, he said to an officer who had brought him the new clothes:

"Give my thanks to General Stuart, Major, but tell him that the uniform is far too magnificent for me. I value the gift, however, and shall keep it in recollection of him."

The major and Harry took the uniform and, smoothing it carefully, laid it away. But Harry, having further leave of absence went forth and answered many questions. Was the general going to wear that uniform all the time? Would he ride into battle clothed in it? When Harry replied that, in his belief, he would never put it on again, the young soldiers seemed to feel a kind of relief. The head of the family was not going to be too splendid for them. Yet the event had heightened their spirits, already high, and they began to sing a favorite song:

"Come, stack arms, men, pile on the rails;

Stir up the camp fires bright.
No matter if the canteen fails,
We'll make a roaring night.
Here Shenandoah brawls along,
There lofty Blue Ridge echoes strong
To swell the brigade's rousing song
Of Stonewall Jackson's way."

"It's a bully song!" exclaimed Happy Tom, who had a deep and thunderous voice. Then snatching up a long stick he began to wave it as a baton, and the others, instinctively following their leader, roared it forth, more than ten thousand strong.

Langdon in his glory led his cohorts in a vast circle around Jackson's quarters, and the mighty chorus thundered through verse after verse, until they closed in a lower tone with the lines:

"Silence! ground arms! kneel all! caps off!
Old Blue Light's going to pray;
Strangle the fool that dares to scoff!
Attention! it's his way!
Appealing from his native sod
In forma pauperis to God
Lay bare thine arm—stretch forth thy rod,
Amen! That's Stonewall Jackson's way."

Then Happy Tom threw down his stick and the men dispersed to their quarters. But they had paid Stonewall Jackson a tribute that few generals ever received.

"You're a wild and foolish fellow, Tom Langdon," said Dalton, "but I like you for this thing you've done."

"You'll notice that Old Jack never appeared while we were singing," said Langdon. "I don't see why a man should be so modest and bashful. Why, if I'd done half what he's done I'd ride the tallest horse in the country; I'd have one of those Mexican saddles of yellow leather studded with large golden-headed nails; the stirrups would be of gold and the bridle bit would be gold, too. I'd have twelve uniforms all covered with gold lace, and I'd have hats with gold-colored ostrich plumes waving in them after the fashion of Jeb Stuart."

"Don't you worry, Tom," said Dalton. "You'll never have any excuse for wearing so much gold. Have you heard what one of the boys said after the chaplain preached the sermon to us last Sunday about leading the children of Israel forty years through the wilderness?"

"No, George; what was it?"

"Forty years going through the wilderness," he growled. "Why, Stonewall Jackson would have double-quicked 'em through in three days, and on half rations, too."

"And so he would," exclaimed Harry with emphasis. The great affection and admiration in which his troops held Jackson began to be tinged with something that bordered upon superstition. They regarded his mental powers, his intuition, judgment and quickness as something almost supernatural. His great flanking movement at the Second Manassas, and his arrival in time to save the army at Antietam, inspired them with awe for a man who could do such things. They had long since ceased to grumble when he undertook one of his tremendous marches, and they never asked why they were sent to do a thing—they had absolute confidence in the one who sent them to do it.

The great excitement of Jackson in his new uniform passed and the boys resumed their luxurious quarters on the leaves beside the Opequon. Sherburne, who had left them a while, returned, riding a splendid bay horse, which he tethered to a bush before rejoining them.

"That's not the horse I saw you riding at Antietam, Captain," said Langdon. "I counted that fellow's ribs, and none show in this one. It's no business of mine, but I want to know where you got that fine brute."

"No, it's none of your business, Tom," replied Sherburne, as he settled himself comfortably, "you haven't anything in the world to do with it, but that's no reason why you shouldn't ask and I shouldn't answer."

"Drop the long-winded preliminaries, then, and go ahead."

"I got him on a wild ride with the general, General Stuart. What a cavalryman! I don't believe there was ever such another glutton for adventure and battle. General Lee wasn't just sure what McClellan meant to do, and he ordered General Stuart to pick his men and go see.

"The general took six hundred of us, and four light guns, and we crossed the Potomac at dawn. Then we rode straight toward the north, exchanging shots here and there with Northern pickets. We went across Maryland and clear up into Pennsylvania, a hundred miles it must have been, I think, and at a town called Chambersburg we got a great supply of Yankee stores, including five hundred horses, which came in mighty handy, I can tell you. I got Bucephalus there. He's a fine steed, too, I can tell you. He was intended to carry some fat Pennsylvania colonel or major, and instead he has me for a rider, a thinner and consequently a lighter man. I haven't heard him expressing any sorrow over the exchange."

"What did you do after you got the remounts?" asked Harry.

"We began to curve then. We passed a town called Gettysburg, and we went squarely behind the Union army. Mountainous and hilly country up there, but good and cultivated beautifully. Those Pennsylvania Germans, Harry, beat us all hollow at farming. I'm beginning to think that slaves are not worth owning. They ruin our land."

"Which may be so," interrupted Langdon, "but we're not the kind of people to give them up because a lot of other people order us to do it."

"Shut up, Tom," exclaimed Harry. "Let the captain go on with his story."

"We went on around the Union rear, rode another hundred miles after leaving Chambersburg, coming to a place called Hyattstown, near which we cut across McClellan's communications with Washington. Things grew warm, as the Yankees, learning that we were in the country, began to assemble in great force. They tried to prevent our crossing the Monocacy River, and we had a sharp fight, but we drove them off before they could get up a big enough force to hold us. Then we came on, forded the Potomac and got back after having made an entire circuit of McClellan's army."

"What a ride!" exclaimed St. Clair, his eyes sparkling. "I wish I had been with you. It would have been something to talk about."

"We did stir 'em up," said Sherburne with pardonable pride, "and we got a lot of information, too, some of it beyond price. We've learned that there will be no more attempts on Richmond by sea. The Yankee armies will come across Virginia soil or not at all."

"I imagine McClellan won't be in any hurry to cross the Potomac," said Harry. "He certainly got us into a hot corner at Antietam, and if the reports are true he had plenty of time to come up and wipe out General Lee's whole force, while Old Jack was tied up at Harper's Ferry. They feel that way about McClellan in the North, too. I've got an old Philadelphia newspaper and I'll read to you part of a poem that's reprinted in it. The poem is called 'Tardy George.' Listen:

"What are you waiting for, George, I pray?
To scour your cross belts with fresh pipe clay?
To burnish your buttons, to brighten your guns?
Or wait for May-day, and warm spring suns?
Are you blowing your fingers because they're cold,
Or catching your breath ere you take a hold?

Is the mud knee-deep in valley and gorge?
What are you waiting for, Tardy George?"

"That's pretty bitter," said Harry, "but it must have been written before the Seven Days. You notice what the author says about waiting for May-day."

"Likely enough you're right, but it applies just the same or they wouldn't be reprinting it in their newspapers. Some of them claim a victory over us at Antietam, and nearly all are angry at McClellan because he wouldn't follow us into Virginia. They think he ought to have crossed the Potomac after us and smashed us."

"He might have got smashed himself."

"Which people are likely to debate all through this generation and the next. But they're bitter against McClellan, although he's done better than any other Yankee general in the east. Just listen to this verse, will you?

"Suppose for a moment, George, my friend,
Just for a moment you condescend
To use the means that are in your hands
The eager muskets and guns and brands;
Take one bold step on the Southern sod,
And leave the issue to watchful God!
For now the nation raises its gorge,
Waiting and watching you, Tardy George."

Harry carefully folded up the paper and put it back in his pocket. The contrast between these verses and the song that he had just heard ten thousand men sing, as they whirled around Stonewall Jackson's headquarters, impressed him deeply.

"It's hard, boys," he said, "for a general to see things like this printed about him, even if he should deserve them. McClellan, so all the prisoners say, has the confidence of his men. They believe that he can win."

"And we know that we can and do win!" exclaimed Langdon. "We've got the soldiers and the generals, too. Hurrah for Bobby Lee, and Stonewall Jackson and Jim Longstreet, and old Jubal Early, and A. P. Hill and D. H. Hill and Jeb Stuart and—and–"

"And for Happy Tom Langdon, the greatest soldier and general of them all," interrupted Dalton.

"That's true," said Langdon, "only people don't know it yet. Now, by the great horn spoon, what is that? What a day this is!"

A great uproar had begun suddenly, and, as if by magic, hundreds of men had risen from the ground and were running about like mad creatures. But the boys knew that they were not mad. They understood in an instant what it was all about as they heard innumerable voices crying, "Rabbit! Rabbit!"

Rabbits were numerous in the underbrush and they made good stew. The soldiers often surrounded them and caught them with their bare hands, but they dared not shoot at them, as, owing to the number of pursuers, somebody would certainly have been hurt.

Harry and his comrades instantly joined in the chase, which led into the deep woods. The rabbit, frightened into unusual speed by the shouts, darted into the thick brush and escaped them all.

"Poor little rascal," said Harry, "I'm glad he got away after all. What good would one rabbit be to an army corps of twenty-five thousand men?"

As they were returning to their place on the creek bank an orderly came for Harry, and he was summoned to the tent of Jackson. It was a large tent spread in the shade of an old oak, and Harry found that Captain Sherburne had already preceded him there. All signs of splendor were hidden

completely. Jackson once more wore with ease his dingy old gray clothes, but the skin of his brow was drawn into a tiny knot in the center, as if he were concentrating thought with his utmost power.

"Sit down, Mr. Kenton," he said kindly. "I've already been speaking to Captain Sherburne and I'll tell you now what I want. General McClellan's army is still beyond the Potomac. As nearly as our spies can estimate it has, present and fit for duty, one hundred and thirty-five thousand men and three hundred and fifty cannon. McClellan, as we well know, is always overcautious and overestimates our numbers, but public opinion in the North will force him to action. They claim there that Antietam was a victory for them, and he will surely invade Virginia again. I shall send Captain Sherburne and his troop to find out where and when, and you are to go with him as my aide and personal representative."

"Thanks, sir," said Harry.

"When can you start?"

"Within five minutes."

"Good. I was going to allow you ten, but it's better to take only five. Captain Sherburne, you have your instructions already. Now go, and bear in mind, both of you, that you are to bring back what you are sent to get, no matter what the cost. Prepare no excuses."

There was a stern and ominous ring in his last words, and Harry and Sherburne, saluting, retired with all speed. Harry ran to his own tent, snatched up his arms and blanket-roll, saddled and bridled his horse, and well within five minutes was riding by the side of Captain Sherburne. He shouted to St. Clair, who had run forward in amazement:

"Gone on a mission for Old Jack. Will be back—some time."

The cavalry troop of two hundred splendid men, led by Sherburne, one of the finest of the younger leaders, trotted fast through the oak forest. They were fully refreshed and they were glad of action. The great heats of that famous summer, unusually hot alike in both east and west, were gone, and now the cool, crisp breezes of autumn blew in their faces.

"Have you heard at what point on the Potomac the Union army is gathered?" Harry asked.

"At a village called Berlin, so our spies say. You know McClellan really has some high qualities. We found a heavy reconnoitering force of cavalry not far in our front two or three days ago, and we did not know what it meant, but General Jackson now has an idea that McClellan wanted to find out whether we were near enough to the Potomac to dispute his passage."

"We are not."

"No, we're not, and I don't suppose General Lee and General Jackson wish to keep him on the other side. But, at any rate, we're sent to find out whether he is crossing."

"And we'll see."

"We surely will."

CHAPTER II
AHORSE WITH SHERBURNE

Harry was glad that General Jackson had detailed him for this task. He missed his comrades of the staff, but Sherburne was a host in himself, and he was greatly attached to him. He rode a good horse and there was pleasure in galloping with these men over the rolling country, and breathing the crisp and vital air of autumn.

They soon left the forest, and rode along a narrow road between fields. Their spirits rose continually. It was a singular fact that the Army of Northern Virginia was not depressed by Antietam. It had been a bitter disappointment to the Southern people, who expected to see Lee take Baltimore and Philadelphia, but the army itself was full of pride over its achievement in beating off numbers so much superior.

It was for these reasons that Sherburne and those who rode with him felt pride and elation. They had seen the ranks of the army fill up again. Lee had retreated across the Potomac after Antietam with less than forty thousand men. Now he had more than seventy thousand, and Sherburne and Harry felt certain that instead of waiting to be attacked by McClellan he himself would go forth to attack.

Harry had seldom seen a day more beautiful. That long hot, dry summer had been followed by a fine autumn, the most glorious of all seasons in North America, when the air has snap and life enough in it to make the old young again.

He was familiar now with the rolling country into which they rode after leaving the forest. Off in one direction lay the fields on which they had fought the First and Second Manassas, and off in another, behind the loom of the blue mountains, he had ridden with Stonewall Jackson on that marvelous campaign which seemed to Harry without an equal.

But the land about them was deserted now. There were no harvests in the fields. No smoke rose from the deserted farm houses. This soil had been trodden over and over again by great armies, and it would be a long time before it called again for the plough. The stone fences stood, as solid as ever, but those of wood had been used for fuel by the soldiers.

They watered their horses at a clear creek, and then Sherburne and Harry, from the summit of a low hill, scanned the country with their glasses.

They saw no human being. There was the rolling country, brown now with autumn, and the clear, cool streams flowing through almost every valley, but so far as man was concerned the scene was one of desolation.

"I should think that McClellan would have mounted scouts some distance this side of the Potomac," said Sherburne. "Certainly, if he were making the crossing, as our reports say, he would send them ahead."

"We're sure to strike 'em before we reach the river," said Harry.

"I think with you that we'll see 'em, but it's our business to avoid 'em. We're sent forth to see and not to fight. But if General Stuart could ride away up into Pennsylvania, make a complete circuit around the Union army and come back without loss, then we ought to be successful with our own task, which is an easier one."

Harry smiled.

"I never knew you to fail, Captain. I consider your task as done already."

"Thanks, Harry. You're a noble optimist. If we fail, it will not be for lack of trying. Forward, my lads, and we'll reach the Potomac some time to-night."

They rode on through the same silence and desolation. They had no doubt that eyes watched them from groves and fence corners, keeping cautiously out of the way, because it was sometimes

difficult now to tell Federals from Confederates. But it did not matter to Sherburne. He kept a straight course for the Potomac, at least half of his men knowing thoroughly every foot of the way.

"What time can we reach the river and the place at which they say McClellan is going to cross?" asked Harry.

"By midnight anyway," replied Sherburne. "Of course, we'll have to slow down as we draw near, or we may run square into an ambush. Do you see that grove about two miles ahead? We'll go into that first, rest our horses, and take some food."

It was a fine oak grove, covering about an acre, with no undergrowth and a fair amount of grass, still green under the shade, on which the horses could graze. The trunks of the trees also were close enough together to hide them from anyone else who was not very near. Here the men ate cold food from their haversacks and let their horses nibble the grass for a half hour.

They emerged refreshed and resumed their course toward the Potomac. In the very height of the afternoon blaze they saw a horseman on the crest of a hill, watching them intently through glasses. Sherburne instantly raised his own glasses to his eyes.

"A Yankee scout," he said. "He sees us and knows us for what we are, but he doesn't know what we're about."

"But he's trying to guess," said Harry, who was also using glasses. "I can't see his face well enough to tell, but I know that in his place I'd be guessing."

"As we don't want him hanging on to our heels and watching us, I think we'd better charge him."

"Have the whole troop turn aside and chase him?"

"No; Harry, you and I and eight men will do it. Marlowe, take the rest of the company straight along the road at an easy gait. But keep well behind the hedge that you see ahead."

Marlowe was his second in command, and taking the lead he continued with the troop.

Marlowe rode behind one of the hedges, where they were hidden from the lone horseman on the hill, and Sherburne and Harry and the eight men followed. While they were yet hidden, Sherburne and his chosen band suddenly detached themselves from the others at a break in the hedge and galloped toward the horseman who was still standing on the hill, gazing intently toward the point where he had last seen the troop riding.

Sherburne, Harry and the privates rode at a gallop across the field, straight for the Union sentinel. He did not see them until they had covered nearly half the distance, and then with aggravating slowness he turned and rode over the opposite side of the hill. Harry had been watching him intently, and when he had come much nearer the figure seemed familiar to him. At first he could not recall it to mind, but a moment or two later he turned excitedly to Sherburne.

"I know that man, although I've never seen him before in a uniform," he said. "I met him when President Davis was inaugurated at Montgomery and I saw him again at Washington. His name is Shepard, the most skillful and daring of all the Union spies."

"I've heard you speak of that fellow before," said Sherburne, "and since we've put him to flight, I think we'd better stop. Ten to one, if we follow him over the brow of the hill, he'll lead us into an ambush."

"I think you're right, Captain, and it's likely, too, that he'll come back soon with a heavy cavalry detachment. I've no doubt that thousands of Union horsemen are this side of the river."

Sherburne was impressed by Harry's words, and the little detachment, returning at a gallop, joined the main troop, which was now close to a considerable stretch of forest.

"Ah, there they are!" exclaimed Harry, looking back at the hill on which he had seen the lone horseman.

A powerful body of cavalry showed for a moment against the sun, which was burning low and red in the west. The background was so intense and vivid that the horsemen did not form a mass, but every figure stood detached, a black outline against the sky. Harry judged that they were at least a thousand in number.

"Too strong a force for us to meet," said Sherburne. "They must outnumber us five to one, and since they've had practice the Northern cavalry has improved a lot. It must be a part of the big force that made the scout toward our lines. Good thing the forest is just ahead."

"And a good thing, too, that night is not far off."

"Right, my boy, we need 'em both, the forest and the dark. The Union cavalry is going to pursue us, and I don't mean to turn back. General Jackson sent us to find about McClellan's crossing, and we've got to do it."

"I wouldn't dare go back to Old Jack without the information we're sent to get."

"Nor I. Hurry up the men, Marlowe. We've got to lose the Union cavalry in the forest somehow."

The men urged their horses forward at a gallop and quickly reached the trees. But when Harry looked back he saw the thousand in blue about a mile away, coming at a pace equal to their own. He felt much apprehension. The road through the forest led straight before them, but the trail of two hundred horses could not be hidden even by night. They could turn into the forest and elude their pursuers, but, as Sherburne said, that meant abandoning their errand, and no one in all the group thought of such a thing.

Sherburne increased the pace a little now, while he tried to think of some way out. Harry rode by his side in silence, and he, too, was seeking a solution. Through the trees, now nearly leafless, they saw the blue line still coming, and the perplexities of the brave young captain grew fast.

But the night was coming down, and suddenly the long, lean figure of a man on the long, lean figure of a horse shot from the trees on their right and drew up by the side of Sherburne and Harry.

"Lankford, sir, Jim Lankford is my name," he said to Sherburne, touching one finger to his forehead in a queer kind of salute.

Harry saw that the man had a thin, clean-shaven face with a strong nose and chin.

"I 'low you're runnin' away from the Yankees," said Lankford to Sherburne.

Sherburne flushed, but no anger showed in his voice as he replied:

"You're right, but we run for two reasons. They're five to our one, and we have business elsewhere that mustn't be interrupted by fighting."

"First reason is enough. A man who fights five to one is five times a fool. I'm a good Johnny Reb myself, though I keep off the fightin' lines. I live back there in a house among the trees, just off the road. You'd have seen it when you passed by, if you hadn't been in such a hurry. Just settin' down to take a smoke when Mandy, my wife, tells me she hears the feet of many horses thunderin' on the road. In a moment I hear 'em, too. Run to the front porch, and see Confederate cavalry coming at a gallop, followed by a big Yankee force. Mandy and me didn't like the sight, and we agree that I take a hand. Now I'm takin' it."

"How do you intend to help us?"

"I'm gettin' to that. I saddled my big horse quick as lightnin', and takin' a runnin' jump out of the woods, landed beside you. Now, listen, Captain; I reckon you're on some sort of scoutin' trip, and want to go on toward the river."

"You reckon right."

"About a mile further on we dip into a little valley. A creek, wide but shallow and with a bed all rocks, takes up most of the width of that valley. It goes nearly to the north, and at last reaches the Potomac. A half mile from the crossin' ahead it runs through steep, high banks that come right down to its edges, but the creek bottom is smooth enough for the horses. I 'low I make myself plain enough, don't I, Mr. Captain?"

"You do, Mr. Lankford, and you're an angel in homespun. Without you we could never do what we want to do. Lead the way to that blessed creek. We don't want any of the Yankee vanguard to see us when we turn and follow its stream."

"We can make it easy. They might guess that we're ridin' in the water to hide our tracks, but the bottom is so rocky they won't know whether we've gone up or down the stream. And if they guessed the right way, and followed it, they'd be likely to turn back at the cliffs, anyhow."

They urged their horses now to the uttermost, and Harry soon saw the waters of the creek shining through the darkness. Everything was falling out as Lankford had said. The pursuit was unseen and unheard behind them, but they knew it was there.

"Slow now, boys," said Sherburne, as they rode into the stream. "We don't want to make too much noise splashing the water. Are there many boulders in here, Mr. Lankford?"

"Not enough to hurt."

"Then you lead the way. The men can come four abreast."

The water was about a foot deep, and despite their care eight hundred hoofs made a considerable splashing, but the creek soon turned around a hill and led on through dense forest. Sherburne and Harry were satisfied that no Union horseman had either seen or heard them, and they followed Lankford with absolute confidence. Now and then the hoofs of a stumbling horse would grind on the stones, but there was no other noise save the steady marching of two hundred men through water.

The things that Lankford had asserted continued to come true. The creek presently flowed between banks fifty feet high, rocky and steep as a wall. But the stone bed of the creek was almost as smooth as a floor, and they stopped here a while to rest and let their horses drink.

The enclosing walls were not more than fifty or sixty feet across the top and it was very dark in the gorge. Harry saw overhead a slice of dusky sky, lit by only a few stars, but it was pitchy black where he sat on his horse, and listened to his contented gurglings as he drank. He could merely make out the outlines of his comrades, but he knew that Sherburne was on one side of him and Lankford on the other. He could not hear the slightest sound of pursuit, and he was convinced that the Union cavalry had lost their trail. So was Sherburne.

"We owe you a big debt, Mr. Lankford," said the captain.

"I've tried to serve my side," said Lankford, "though, as I told you, I'm not goin' on the firin' line. It's not worth while for all of us to get killed. Later on this country will need some people who are not dead."

"You're right about that, Mr. Lankford," said Sherburne, with a little laugh, "and you, for one, although you haven't gone on the firing lines, have earned the right to live. You've done us a great service, sir."

"I reckon I have," said Lankford with calm egotism, "but it was necessary for me to do it. I've got an inquirin' mind, I have, and also a calculatin' one. When I saw your little troop comin', an' then that big troop of the Yankees comin' on behind, I knowed that you needed help. I knowed that this creek run down a gorge, and that I could lead you into the gorge and escape pursuit. I figgered, too, that you were on your way to see about McClellan crossin' the Potomac, an' I figgered next that you meant to keep straight on, no matter what happened. So I'm goin' to lead you out of the gorge, and some miles further ahead you'll come to the Potomac, where I guess you can use your own eyes and see all you want to see."

"The horses are all right now and I think we'd better be moving, Mr. Lankford."

They started, but did not go faster than a walk while they were in the gorge. Harry's eyes had grown somewhat used to the darkness, and he could make out the rocky walls, crested with trees, the higher branches of which seemed almost to meet over the chasm.

It was a weird passage, but time and place did not oppress Harry. He felt instead a certain surge of the spirits. They had thrown off the pursuit—there could be no doubt of it—and the first step in their mission was accomplished. They were now in the midst of action, action thrilling and of the highest importance, and his soul rose to the issue.

He had no doubt that some great movement, possibly like that of the Second Manassas, hung upon their mission, and Lee and Jackson might be together at that very moment, planning the mighty enterprise which would be shaped according to their news.

They emerged from the gorge and rode up a low, sloping bank which gave back but little sound to the tread of the horses, and here Lankford said that he would leave them. Sherburne reached over his gauntleted hand and gave him a powerful grasp.

"We won't forget this service, Mr. Lankford," he said.

"I ain't goin' to let you forget it. Keep straight ahead an' you'll strike a cross-country road in 'bout a quarter of a mile. It leads you to the Potomac, an' I reckon from now on you'll have to take care of yourselves."

Lankford melted away in the darkness as he rode back up the gorge, and the troop went on at a good pace across a country, half field, half forest. They came to a road which was smooth and hard, and increased their speed. They soon reached a region which several of their horsemen knew, and, as the night lightened a little, they rode fast toward the Potomac.

Harry looked at his watch and saw that it was not much past midnight. They would have ample opportunity for observation before morning. A half hour later they discerned dim lights ahead and they knew that the Potomac could not be far away.

They drew to one side in a bit of forest, and Sherburne again detached himself, Harry and eight others from the troop, which he left as before under the command of Marlowe.

"Wait here in the wood for us," he said to his second in command. "We should be back by dawn. Of course, if any force of the enemy threatens you, you'll have to do what seems best, and we'll ride back to General Jackson alone."

The ten went on a bit farther, using extreme care lest they run into a Northern picket. Fortunately the fringe of wood, in which they found shelter, continued to a point near the river, and as they went forward quietly they saw many lights. They heard also a great tumult, a mixture of many noises, the rumbling of cannon and wagon wheels, the cracking of drivers' whips by the hundreds and hundreds, the sounds of drivers swearing many oaths, but swearing together and in an unbroken stream.

They rode to the crest of the hill, where they were well hidden among oaks and beeches, and there the whole scene burst upon them. The late moon had brightened, and many stars had come out as if for their especial benefit. They saw the broad stream of the Potomac shining like silver and spanned by a bridge of boats, on which a great force, horse, foot, artillery, and wagons, was crossing.

"That's McClellan's army," said Harry.

"And coming into Virginia," said Sherburne. "Well, we can't help their entering the state, but we can make it a very uncomfortable resting place for them."

"How many men do you suppose they have?"

"A hundred thousand here at the least, and others must be crossing elsewhere. But don't you worry, Harry. We've got seventy thousand men of our own, and Lee and Jackson, who, as you have been told before, are equal to a hundred thousand more. McClellan will march out again faster than he has marched in."

"Still, he's shown more capacity than the other Union generals in the East, and his soldiers are devoted to him."

"But he isn't swift, Harry. While he's thinking, Lee and Jackson have thought and are acting. Queer, isn't it, that a young general should be slow, and older ones so much swifter. Why, General Lee must be nearly old enough to be General McClellan's father."

"It's so, Captain, but those men are crossing fast. Listen how the cannon wheels rumble! And I know that a thousand whips are cracking at once. They'll all be on our soil to-morrow."

"So they will, but long before that time we'll be back at General Jackson's tent with the news of their coming."

"If nothing gets in the way. Do you remember that man whom we saw on the hill watching, the one who I said was Shepard, the ablest and most daring of all their spies?"

"I haven't forgotten him."

"This man Shepard, Captain, is one of the most dangerous of all our enemies. The Union could much more easily spare one of its generals than Shepard. He's omniscient. He's a lineal descendant of Argus, and has all the old man's hundred eyes, with a few extra ones added in convenient places. He's a witch doctor, medicine man, and other things beside. I believe he's followed us, that some way he's picked up our trail somewhere. He may have been hanging on the rear of the troop when we came through the gorge."

"Nonsense, Harry, you're turning the man into a supernatural being."

"That's just the way I feel about him."

"Then, if that's the case, we'd better be clearing out as fast as we can. We've seen enough, anyhow. We'll go straight back to the company and ride hard for the camp."

They reached the troop, which was waiting silently under the command of the faithful Marlowe. But before they could gallop back toward the south, the loud, clear call of a trumpet came from a point near by, and it was followed quickly by the beat of many hoofs.

"I see him! It's Shepard," exclaimed Harry excitedly.

He had beheld what was almost the ghost of a horseman galloping among the trees, followed in an instant by the more solid rush of the cavalry.

It was evident to both Sherburne and Harry that the Federal pickets and outriders had acquired much skill and alertness, and they urged the troop to its greatest speed. Even if they should be able to defeat their immediate pursuers, it was no place for them to engage in battle, as the enemy could soon come up in thousands.

As they galloped down the road they heard bullets kicking up the dust behind, and the sound made them go faster. But they were still out of range and the pursuit did not make any gain in the next few minutes. But Harry, looking back, saw that the Union cavalry was hanging on grimly, and he surmised also that other forces might appear soon on their flanks.

"We've got to use every effort," he said to Sherburne.

"That's apparent. You were right about your man Shepard, Harry. He has certainly inherited all the eyes of his ancestor, Argus, and about three times as many besides. He's omniscient, right enough."

"Are they gaining?"

"Not yet. But they will, as fresh pursuers come up on the flank. Some of us must fall or be taken, but then at least one of us must get back to Old Jack with the news. So we're bound to scatter. When we reach that patch of woods on the left running down to the road, you're to leave us, gallop into it and make your way back through the gorge. I'll throw off the other messengers as we go on."

"Must I be the first to go?"

"Yes, you're under my orders now, and I think you the most trustworthy. Now, Harry, off with you, and remember that luck is with him who tries the hardest."

They were within the dark shade of the trees and Harry turned at a gallop among them, guiding his horse between the trunks, pausing a moment further on to hear the pursuit thunder by, and then resuming his race for the gorge.

He continued to ride at a great pace, meeting no enemy, and at last reached the creek. He was a good observer and he was confident that he could ride back up it without trouble. He feared nothing but Shepard. A single horseman in the darkness could throw off any pursuit by cavalry, but the terrible spy might turn at once to the creek and the gorge. He had the consolation, though, of knowing that Shepard could not follow him and all the others at the same time.

Harry paused a moment at the water's edge and listened for the sounds of pursuit. None came. Then he plunged boldly in and rode against the stream, passing into the depths of the gorge. It was darker now, being near to that darkest hour before the dawn, and the slit of sky above was somber.

But he rode on at a good walk until he was about half way through the gorge. Then he heard sounds above, and drawing his horse in by the cliff he stopped and waited. Voices came down to him, and once or twice he caught the partial silhouette of a horse against the dark sky.

He felt quite sure that it was a body of Union cavalry riding practically at random—if they were led by Shepard they would have come up the gorge itself.

Presently something splashed heavily in the water near him. A stone had been rolled over the brink. He drew his horse and himself more closely against the wall. Another stone fell near and a laugh came from above. Evidently the lads in blue had pushed the stones over merely to hear the splash, because Harry ceased to hear the voices and he was quite sure that they had ridden away.

He waited a little while for precaution, and then resumed his own careful journey through the gorge. Just as the dawn was breaking he emerged from the stream and entered the forest. It was a cold dawn, that of late October, white with frost, and Harry shivered. There was still food in his knapsack, and he ate hungrily as he rode through the deserted country, and wondered what had become of Shepard and the others.

It was not yet full day. The grass was still white with frost. The early wind, blowing out of the north, brought an increased chill. The food Harry had eaten defended him somewhat against the cold, but his body had been weakened by so much riding and loss of sleep that he found it wise to unroll his blanket and wrap it around his shoulders and chest.

He was, perhaps, affected by the cold and anxiety, but the country seemed singularly lonesome and depressing. Sweeping the whole circle of the horizon with his glasses, he saw several farm houses, but no smoke was rising from their chimneys. Silent and cold, they added to his own feeling of desolation. He wondered what had become of his comrades. Perhaps Sherburne had been taken, or killed. He was not one to surrender, even to overwhelming numbers, without a fight.

But he would go on. Drawing the blanket more tightly around his body, he turned into the narrow road by which he had come, and urged his horse into that easy Southern gait known as a pace. He would have been glad to go faster, but he was too wise to push a horse that had already been traveling twenty hours.

Harry did not yet feel secure by any means. The lads of the South, where the cities were few and small, had been used from childhood to the horse. They had become at once cavalry of the highest order; but the lads of the North were learning, too. He had no doubt that bands of Northern horsemen were now ranging the country to the very verge of the camps of Jackson and Lee.

The belief became a certainty when a score of riders in blue appeared on a hill behind him. One of their number blew a musical note on a trumpet, and then all of them, with a shout, urged their horses in pursuit of Harry, who felt as if it were for all the world a fox chase, with himself as the fox.

He knew that his danger was great, but he resolved to triumph over it. He must get through to Jackson with the news that the Army of the Potomac was in Virginia. Others from Sherburne's troop might arrive with the same news, but he did not know it. It was not his place to reckon on the possible achievements of others. So far as this errand was concerned, and so far as he was now concerned, there was nobody in the world but himself. Swiftly he reckoned the chances.

He changed the pace of his horse into an easy gallop and sped along the road. But the horse did not have sufficient reserve of strength to increase his speed and maintain the increase. He knew without looking back that the Union riders were gaining, and he continued to mature his plan.

Harry was now cool and deliberate. It was possible that a Confederate troop scouting in that direction might save him, but it was far from a certainty, and he could not take it into his calculations. He was now riding between two cornfields in which all the corn had been cut, but he saw forest on the right, about a half mile ahead.

He believed that his salvation lay in that forest. He hoped that it stretched far toward the right. He had never seen a finer forest, a more magnificent forest, one that looked more sheltering, and the nearer he came to it the better it looked.

He did not glance back, but he felt sure that the blue horsemen must still be gaining. Then came that mellow, hunting note of the trumpet, much nearer than before. Harry felt a thrill of anger. He remained the fox, and they remained the hunters. He could feel the good horse panting beneath him, and white foam was on his mouth.

Harry began to fear now that he would be overtaken before he could reach the trees. He glanced at the fields. If it had been only a few weeks earlier he might have sprung from his horse and have escaped in the thick and standing corn, but now he would be an easy target. He must gain the forest somehow. He said over and over to himself, "I must reach it! I must reach it! I must reach it!"

Now he heard the crack of rifles. Bullets whizzed past. They no longer kicked up the dust behind him, but on the side, and even in front. Men began to shout to him, and he heard certain words that meant surrender. Chance had kept the bullets away from him so far, but the same chance might turn them upon him at any moment. It was a risk that he must take.

The shouts grew louder. The rapid thudding of hoofs behind him beat on his ears in that minute of excitement like thunder. Nearer and nearer came the forest. The rifles behind him were now crashing faster. It seemed to him that he could almost smell their smoke, and still neither he nor his horse was hit. After making all due allowance for badness of aim at a gallop, it was almost a miracle, and he drew new courage from the fact.

He passed the cornfields and with a sharp jerk of the reins turned his weary horse into the woods on the right. The forest was thick with a considerable growth of underbrush, but Harry was a skillful and daring rider, and he guided his horse so expertly that in a few moments he was hidden from the view of the cavalry. But he knew that it could not continue so long. They would spread out, driving everything in front of them as they advanced. He was still the fox and they were still the hunters. Yet he had gained something. For a fugitive the forest was better than the open.

He maintained his direction toward Jackson's camp. His horse leaped a gully and he barely escaped being swept off on the farther side by the bough of a tree. Then some of his pursuers caught sight of him again, and a half dozen shots were fired. He was not touched, but he felt his horse shiver and he knew at once that the good, true animal had been hit. A few leaps more and the living machinery beneath him began to jar heavily.

Another thick clump of undergrowth hid him at that moment from the cavalrymen, and he did the only thing that was left to him. Throwing one leg over the saddle, he leaped clear and darted away. Before he had gone a dozen steps he heard his horse fall heavily, and he sighed for a true and faithful servant and comrade gone forever.

He heard the shouts of the Union horsemen who had overtaken the fallen horse, but not the rider. Then the shouts ceased, and for a little while there was no thud of hoofs. Evidently they were puzzled. They had no use for a dead horse, but they wanted his rider, and they did not know which way he had gone. Harry knew, however, that they would soon spread out to a yet greater extent, and being able to go much faster on horseback than he could on foot, they would have a certain advantage.

He had lost his blanket from his shoulders, but he still had his pistol, and he kept one hand on the butt, resolved not to be taken. He heard the horsemen crashing here and there among the bushes and calling to one another. He knew that they pursued him so persistently because they believed him to be one who had spied upon their army and it would be of great value to them that he be taken or slain.

He might have turned and run back toward the Potomac, doubling on his own track, as it were, a trick which would have deluded the Union cavalry, but his resolution held firm not only to escape, but also to reach Jackson with his news.

He stood at least a minute behind some thick bushes, and it was a precious minute to his panting lungs. The fresh air flowed in again and strength returned. His pulses leaped once more with courage

and resolve, and he plunged anew into the deep wood. If he could only reach a part of the forest that was much roughened by outcroppings of rock or gulleyed by rains, he felt that his chance of escape would almost turn into a certainty. He presently came to one such gulley or ravine, and as he crossed it he felt that he had made a distinct gain. The horsemen would secure a passage lower down or higher up, but it gave him an advantage of two hundred yards at least.

Part of the gain he utilized for another rest, lying down this time behind a rocky ridge until he heard the cavalrymen calling to one another. Then he rose and ran forward again, slipping as quietly as he could among the trees and bushes. He still had the feeling of being the fox, with the hounds hot on his trail, but he was no longer making a random rush. He had become skillful and cunning like the real fox.

He knew that the horsemen were not trailers. They could not follow him by his footsteps on the hard ground, and he took full advantage of it. Yet they utilized their numbers and pursued in a long line. Once, two of them would have galloped directly upon him, but just before they came in sight he threw himself flat in a shallow gully and pulled over his body a mass of fallen leaves.

The two men rode within ten yards of him. Had they not been so eager they would have seen him, as his body was but partly covered. But they looked only in front, thinking that the fugitive was still running ahead of them through the forest, and galloped on.

As soon as they were out of sight Harry rose and followed. He deemed it best to keep directly in their track, because then no one was likely to come up behind him, and if they turned, he could turn, too.

He heard the two men crashing on ahead and once or twice he caught glimpses of them. Then he knew by the sounds of the hoofs that they were separating, and he followed the one who was bearing to the left, keeping a wary watch from side to side, lest others overhaul him.

In those moments of danger and daring enterprise the spirit of Harry's great ancestor descended upon him again. This flight through the forest and hiding among bushes and gulleys was more like the early days of the border than those of the great civil war in which he was now a young soldier.

Instincts and perceptions, atrophied by civilization, suddenly sprang up. He seemed to be able to read every sound. Not a whisper in the forest escaped his understanding, and this sudden flame of a great early life put into him new thoughts and a new intelligence.

Now a plan, astonishing in its boldness, formed itself in his mind. He saw through openings in the trees that the forest did not extend much farther, and he also saw not far ahead of him the single horseman whom he was following. The man had slowed down and was looking about as if puzzled. He rode a powerful horse that seemed but little wearied by the pursuit.

Harry picked up a long fragment of a fallen bough, and he ran toward the horseman, springing from the shelter of one tree trunk to that of another with all the deftness of a primitive Wyandot. He was almost upon the rider before the man turned with a startled exclamation.

Then Harry struck, and his was no light hand. The end of the stick met the man's head, and without a sound he rolled unconscious from the saddle. It was a tribute to Harry's humanity that he caught him and broke his fall. A single glance at his face as he lay upon the ground showed that he had no serious hurt, being merely stunned.

Then Harry grasped the bridle and sprang into the saddle that he had emptied, urging the horse directly through the opening toward the cleared ground. He relied with absolute faith upon his new mount and the temporary ignorance of the others that his horse had changed riders.

As he passed out of the forest he leaned low in the saddle to keep the color of his clothing from being seen too soon, and speaking encouraging words in his horse's ears, raced toward the south. He heard shouts behind him, but no shots, and he knew that the cavalrymen still believed him to be their own man following some new sign.

He was at least a half mile away before they discovered the difference. Perhaps some one had found their wounded comrade in the forest, or the man himself, reviving quickly, had told the tale.

In any event Harry heard a distant shout of anger and surprise. Chance had favored him in giving him another splendid horse, and now, as he rode like the wind, the waning pursuit sank out of sight behind him.

CHAPTER III
JACKSON MOVES

It was impossible for Harry to restrain a vivid feeling of exultation. He was in the open, and he was leaving the Northern cavalry far behind. Nor was it likely that any further enemy would appear now between him and Jackson's army. Chance had certainly favored him. What a glorious goddess Chance was when she happened to be on your side! Then everything fell out as you wished it. You could not go wrong.

The horse he rode was even better than the one he had lost, and a pair of splendid pistols in holsters lay across the saddle. He could account for two enemies if need be, but when he looked back he saw no pursuers in sight, and he slowed his pace in order not to overtax the horse.

Not long afterwards he saw the Southern pickets belonging to the vanguard of the Invincibles. St. Clair himself was with them, and when he saw Harry he galloped forward, uttering a shout.

St. Clair had known of the errand upon which Harry had gone with Sherburne, and now he was alarmed to see him riding back alone, worn and covered with dust.

"What's the matter, Harry?" he cried, "and where are the others?"

"Nothing's the matter with me, and I don't know where the others are. But, Arthur, I've got to see General Jackson at once! Where is he?"

Harry's manner was enough to impress his comrade, who knew him so well.

"This way," he said. "Not more than four or five hundred yards. There, that's General Jackson's tent!"

Harry leaped from his horse as he came near and made a rush for the tent. The flap was open, but a sentinel who stood in front put up his rifle, and barred the way. A low monotone came from within the tent.

"The General's praying," he said. "I can't let you in for a minute or two."

Harry took off his hat and stood in silence while the two minutes lasted. All his haste was suddenly gone from him. The strong affection that he felt for Jackson was tinged at times with awe, and this awe was always strongest when the general was praying. He knew that the prayer was no affectation, that it came from the bottom of his soul, like that of a crusader, asking forgiveness for his sins.

The monotone ceased, the soldier took down his rifle which was held like a bar across the way, and Harry, entering, saluted his general, who was sitting in the half light at a table, reading a little book, which the lad guessed was a pocket Bible.

Harry saluted and Jackson looked at him gravely.

"You've come back alone, it seems," he said, "but you've obeyed my instructions not to come without definite news?"

"I have, sir."

"What have you seen?"

"We saw the main army of General McClellan crossing the Potomac at Berlin. He must have had there a hundred thousand men and three or four hundred guns, and others were certainly crossing elsewhere."

"You saw all this with your own eyes?"

"I did, sir. We watched them for a long time. They were crossing on a bridge of boats."

"You are dusty and you look very worn. Did you come in contact with the enemy?"

"Yes, sir. Many of their horsemen were already on this side of the river, and this morning I was pressed very hard by a troop of their cavalry. I gained a wood, but just at the edge of it my horse was killed by a chance shot."

"Your horse killed? Then how could you escape from cavalry?"

"Chance favored me, sir. I dodged them for a while in the woods and underbrush, helped by gullies here and there, and when I came to the edge of the wood only a single horseman was near me. I hid behind a tree and knocked him out of the saddle as he was riding past."

"I hope you did not kill him."

"I did not. He was merely stunned. He will have a headache for a day or two, and then he will be as well as ever. I jumped on his horse and galloped here as straight and fast as I could."

A faint smile passed over Jackson's face.

"You were lucky to make the exchange of horses," he said, "and you have done well. The enemy comes and our days of rest are over. Do you know anything of Captain Sherburne and his troop?"

"Captain Sherburne, under the urgency of pursuit, scattered his men in order that some of them at least might reach you with the news of General McClellan's crossing. I was the first detached, and so I know nothing of the others."

"And also you were the first to arrive. I trust that Captain Sherburne and all of his men will yet come. We can ill spare them."

"I truly hope so, sir."

"You need food and sleep. Get both. You will be called when you are needed. You have done well, Lieutenant Kenton."

"Thank you, sir."

Harry, saluting again, withdrew. He was very proud of his general's commendation, but he was also on the verge of physical collapse. He obtained some food at a camp fire near by, ate it quickly, wrapped himself in borrowed blankets, and lay down under the shade of an oak. Langdon saw him just as he was about to close his eyes, and called to him:

"Here, Harry, I didn't know you were back. What's your news?"

"That McClellan and the Yankee army are this side of the Potomac. That's all. Good night."

He closed his eyes, and although it was near the middle of the day, with the multifarious noises of the camp about him, he fell into the deep and beautiful sleep of the tired youth who has done his duty.

He was still asleep when Captain Sherburne, worn and wounded slightly, came in and reported also to General Jackson. He and his main force had been pursued and had been in a hot little brush with the Union cavalry, both sides losing several men. Others who had been detached before the action also returned and reported. All of them, like Harry, were told to seek food and sleep.

Harry slept a long time, and the soldiers who passed, making many preparations, never disturbed him. But the entire Southern army under Lee, assisted by his two great corps commanders, Jackson and Longstreet, was making ready to meet the Army of the Potomac under McClellan. The spirit of the Army of Northern Virginia was high, and the news that the enemy was marching was welcome to them.

When Harry awoke the sun had passed its zenith and the cool October shadows were falling. He yawned prodigiously, stretched his arms, and for a few moments could not remember where he was, or what he had been doing.

"Quit yawning so hard," said Happy Tom Langdon. "You may get your mouth so wide open that you'll never be able to shut it again."

"What's happened?"

"What's happened, while you were asleep? Well, it will take a long time to tell it, Mr. Rip Van Winkle. You have slept exactly a week, and in the course of that time we fought a great battle with McClellan, were defeated by him, chiefly owing to your comatose condition, and have fallen back on Richmond, carrying you with us asleep in a wagon. If you will look behind you you will see the spires of Richmond. Oh, Harry! Harry! Why did you sleep so long and so hard when we needed you so much?"

"Shut up, Tom. If ever talking matches become the fashion, I mean to enter you in all of them for the first prize. Now, tell me what happened while I was asleep, and tell it quick!"

"Well, me lad, since you're high and haughty, not to say dictatorial about it, I, as proud and haughty as thyself, defy thee. George, you tell him all about it." Dalton grinned. A grave and serious youth himself, he liked Langdon's perpetual fund of chaff and good humor.

"Nothing has happened, Harry, while you slept," he said, "except that the army, or at least General Jackson's corps, has been making ready for a possible great battle. We're scattered along a long line, and General Lee and General Longstreet are some distance from us, but our generals don't seem to be alarmed in the least. It's said that McClellan will soon be between us and Richmond, but I can't see any alarm about that either."

"Why should there be?" said St. Clair, who was also sitting by. "It would make McClellan's position dangerous, not ours."

"Arthur puts it right," said Langdon. "When we go to our tents, show him the new uniform you've got, Arthur. It's the most gorgeous affair in the Army of Northern Virginia, and it cost him a whole year's pay in Confederate money. Have you noticed, Harry, that the weakest thing about us is our money? We're the greatest marchers and fighters in the world, but nobody, not even our own people, seem to fall in love with our money."

"I suppose that General Jackson is now ready to march whenever the word should come," said St. Clair. "The boys, as far as I can see, have returned to their rest and play. There's that Cajun band playing again."

"And it sounds mighty good," said Harry. "Look at those Louisiana Frenchmen dancing."

The spirits of the swarthy Acadians were irrepressible. As they had danced in the great days in the valley in the spring, now they were dancing when autumn was merging into winter, and they sang their songs of the South, some of which had come from old Brittany through Nova Scotia to Louisiana.

Harry liked the French blood, and he had learned to like greatly these men who were so much underestimated in the beginning. He and his comrades watched them as they whirled in the dance, clasped in one another's arms, their dark faces glowing, white teeth flashing and black eyes sparkling. He saw that they were carried away by the music and the dance, and as they floated over the turf they were dreaming of their far and sunny land and the girls they had left behind them. He had been reared in a stern and more northern school, but he had learned long since that a love of innocent pleasure was no sign of effeminacy or corruption.

"Good to look on, isn't it, Harry?" said St. Clair.

"Yes, and good to hear, too."

"Come with me into this little dip, and I'll show you another sight that's good to see."

There was a low ridge on their right, crested with tall trees and dropping down abruptly on the other side. A little distance on rose another low ridge, but between the two was a snug and grassy bowl, and within the bowl, sitting on the dry grass, with a chessboard between them, were Colonel Leonidas Talbot and Lieutenant-Colonel Hector St. Hilaire. They were absorbed so deeply in their game that they did not notice the boys on the crest of the bank looking over at them.

Colonel Leonidas Talbot and Lieutenant-Colonel Hector St. Hilaire had not changed a particle —to the eyes, at least—in a year and a half of campaigning and tremendous battles. They may have been a little leaner and a little thinner, but they were lean and thin men, anyhow. Their uniforms, although faded and worn, were neat and clean, and as each sat on a fragment of log, while the board rested on a stump between, they were able to maintain their dignity.

It was Colonel Talbot's move. His hand rested on the red king and he pondered long. Lieutenant-Colonel St. Hilaire waited without a sign of impatience. He would take just as long a time with his knight or bishop, or whichever of the white men he chose to use.

"I confess, Hector," said Colonel Talbot at length, "that this move puzzles me greatly."

"It would puzzle me too, Leonidas, were I in your place," said Lieutenant-Colonel St. Hilaire; "but you must recall that just before the Second Manassas you seemed to have me checkmated, and that I have escaped from a most dangerous position."

"True, true, Hector! I thought I had you, but you slipped from my net. Those were, beyond all dispute, most skillful and daring moves you made. It pays to be bold in this world."

"Do you know," whispered St. Clair to Harry, "that this unfinished game is the one they began last spring in the valley? We saw them playing it in a fence corner before action. They've taken it up again at least four or five times between battles, but neither has ever been able to win. However, they'll fight it out to a finish, if a bullet doesn't get one first. They always remember the exact position in which the figures were when they quit."

Colonel Talbot happened to look up and saw the boys.

"Come down," he said, "and join us. It is pleasant to see you again, Harry. I heard of your mission, its success and your safe return. Hector, I suppose we'll have to postpone the next stage of our game until we whip the Yankees again or are whipped by them. I believe I can yet rescue that red king."

"Perhaps so, Leonidas. Undoubtedly you'll have plenty of time to think over it."

"Which is a good thing, Hector."

"Which is undoubtedly a good thing, Leonidas."

They put the chess men carefully in a box, which they gave to an orderly with very strict injunctions. Then both, after heaving a deep sigh, transformed themselves into men of energy, action, precision and judgment. Every soldier and officer in the trim ranks of the Invincibles was ready.

But action did not come as soon as Harry and his friends had thought. Lee made preliminary movements to mass his army for battle, and then stopped. The spies reported that political wire-pulling, that bane of the North, was at work. McClellan's enemies at Washington were active, and his indiscreet utterances were used to the full against him. Attention was called again and again to his great overestimates of Lee's army and to the paralysis that seemed to overcome him when he was in the presence of the enemy. Lincoln, the most forgiving of men, could not forgive him for his failure to use his full opportunity at Antietam and destroy Lee.

The advance of McClellan stopped. His army remained motionless while October passed into November. The cold winds off the mountains swept the last leaves from the trees, and Harry wondered what was going to happen. Then St. Clair came to him, precise and dignified in manner, but obviously anxious to tell important news.

"What is it, Arthur?" asked Harry.

"We've got news straight from Washington that McClellan is no longer commander of the Army of the Potomac."

"What! They've nobody to put in his place."

"But they have put somebody in his place, just the same."

"Name, please."

"Burnside, Ambrose E. Burnside, with a beautiful fringe of whiskers along each side of his face."

"Well, we can beat any general who wears side whiskers. After all, I'm glad we don't have McClellan to deal with again. Wasn't this Burnside the man who delayed a part of the Union attack at Antietam so long that we had time to beat off the other part?"

"The same."

"Then I'm thinking that he'll be caught between the hammer and the anvil of Lee and Jackson, just as Pope was."

"Most likely. Anyhow, our army is rejoicing over the removal of McClellan as commander-in-chief of the Army of the Potomac. That's something of a tribute to McClellan, isn't it?"

"Yes, good-bye, George! We've had two good fights with you, Seven Days and Antietam, with Pope in between at the Second Manassas, and now, ho! for Burnside!"

The reception of the news that Burnside had replaced McClellan was the same throughout the Army of Northern Virginia. The officers and soldiers now felt that they were going to face a man who was far less of a match for Lee and Jackson than McClellan had been, and McClellan himself had been unequal to the task. They were anxious to meet Burnside. They heard that he was honest and had no overweening opinion of his own abilities. He did not wish to be put in the place of McClellan, preferring to remain a division or corps commander.

"Then, if that's so," said Sherburne, "we've won already. If a man thinks he's not able to lead the Army of the Potomac, then he isn't. Anyhow, we'll quickly see what will happen."

But again it was not as soon as they had had expected. The Northern advance was delayed once more, and Jackson with his staff and a large part of his force moved to Winchester, the town that he loved so much, and around which he had won so much of his glory. His tent was pitched beside the Presbyterian manse, and he and Dr. Graham resumed their theological discussions, in which Jackson had an interest so deep and abiding that the great war rolling about them, with himself as a central figure, could not disturb it.

The coldness of the weather increased and the winds from the mountains were often bitter, but the new stay in Winchester was pleasant, like the old. Harry himself felt a throb of joy when they returned to the familiar places. Despite the coldness of mid-November the weather was often beautiful. The troops, scattered through the fields and in the forest about the town, were in a happy mood. They had many dead comrades to remember, but youth cannot mourn long. They were there in ease and plenty again, under a commander who had led them to nothing but victory. They heard many reports that Burnside was marching and that he might soon cross the Rappahannock, and they heard also that Jackson's advance to Winchester with his corps had created the deepest alarm in Washington. The North did not trust Burnside as a commander-in-chief, and it had great cause to fear Jackson. Even the North itself openly expressed admiration for his brilliant achievements.

Reports came to Winchester that an attack by Jackson on Washington was feared. Maryland expected another invasion. Pennsylvania, remembering the daring raid which Stuart had made through Chambersburg, one of her cities, picking up prisoners on the way, dreaded the coming of a far mightier force than the one Stuart had led. At the capital itself it was said that many people were packing, preparatory to fleeing into the farther North.

But Harry and his comrades thought little of these things for a few days. It was certainly pleasant there in the little Virginia town. The people of Winchester and those of the country far and wide delighted to help and honor them. Food was abundant and the crisp cold strengthened and freshened the blood in their veins. The fire and courage of Jackson's men had never risen higher.

Jackson himself seemed to be thinking but little of war for a day or two. His inseparable companion was the Presbyterian minister, Dr. Graham, to whom he often said that he thought it was the noblest and grandest thing in the world to be a great minister. Harry, as his aide, being invariably near him, was impressed more and more by his extraordinary mixture of martial and religious fervor. The man who prayed before going into battle, and who was never willing to fight on Sunday, would nevertheless hurl his men directly into the cannon's mouth for the sake of victory, and would never excuse the least flinching on the part of either officer or private.

It seemed to Harry that the two kinds of fervor in Jackson, the martial and the religious, were in about equal proportions, and they always inspired him with a sort of awe. Deep as were his affection and admiration for Jackson, he would never have presumed upon the slightest familiarity. Nor would any other officer of his command.

Yet the tender side of Jackson was often shown during his last days in his beloved Winchester. The hero-worshipping women of the South often brought their children to see him, to receive his blessing, and to say when they were grown that the great Jackson had put his hands upon their heads.

Harry and his three comrades of his own age, who had been down near the creek, were returning late one afternoon to headquarters near the manse, when they heard the shout of many childish voices.

They saw that he was walking again with the minister, but that he was surrounded by at least a dozen little girls, every one of whom demanded in turn that he shake her hand. He was busily engaged in this task when the whole group passed out of sight into the manse.

"The Northern newspapers denounce us as passionate and headstrong, with all the faults of the cavaliers," said St. Clair. "I only wish they could see General Jackson as he is. Lee and Jackson come much nearer being Puritans than their generals do."

Harry that night, as he sat in the little anteroom of Jackson's quarters awaiting orders, heard again the low tone of his general praying. The words were not audible, but the steady and earnest sound came to him for some time. It was late, and all the soldiers were asleep or at rest. No sound came from the army, and besides Jackson's voice there was none other, save the sighing of the winds down from the mountains.

Harry, as he listened to the prayer, felt a deep and overwhelming sense of solemnity and awe. He felt that it was at once a petition and a presage. Sitting there in the half dark mighty events were foreshadowed. It seemed to him that they were about to enter upon a struggle more terrible than any that had gone before, and those had been terrible beyond the anticipation of anybody.

The omens did not fail. Jackson's army marched the next morning, turning southward along the turnpike in order to effect the junction with Lee and Longstreet. All Winchester had assembled to bid them farewell, the people confident that the army would win victory, but knowing its cost now.

There was water in Harry's eyes as he listened to the shouts and cheers and saw the young girls waving the little Confederate flags.

"If good wishes can do anything," said Harry, "then we ought to win."

"So we should. I'm glad to have the good wishes, but, Harry, when you're up against the enemy, they can't take the place of cannon and rifles. Look at Colonel Talbot and Lieutenant-Colonel St. Hilaire. See how straight and precise they are. But both are suffering from a deep disappointment. They started their chess game again last night, Colonel Talbot to make the first move with his king, but before he could decide upon any course with that king the orders came for us to get ready for the march. The chessmen went into the box, and they'll have another chance, probably after we beat Burnside."

They went on up the valley, through the scenes of triumphs remembered so well. All around them were their battlefields of the spring, and there were the massive ridges of the Massanuttons that Jackson had used so skillfully, not clothed in green now, but with the scanty leaves of closing autumn.

Neither Harry nor any of his comrades knew just where they were going. That secret was locked fast under the old slouch hat of Jackson, and Harry, like all the others, was content to wait. Old Jack knew where he was going and what he meant to do. And wherever he was going it was the right place to go to, and whatever he meant to do was just the thing that ought to be done. His extraordinary spell over his men deepened with the passing days.

As they went farther southward they saw sheltered slopes of the mountains where the foliage yet glowed in the reds and yellows of autumn, "purple patches" on the landscape. Over ridges to both east and west the fine haze of Indian summer yet hung. It was a wonderful world, full of beauty. The air was better and nobler than wine, and the creeks and brooks flowing swiftly down the slopes flashed in silver.

There were no enemies here. The people, mostly women and children—nearly all the men had gone to war—came out to cheer them as they passed, and to bring them what food and clothing they could. The Valley never wavered in its allegiance to the South, although great armies fought and trod back and forth over its whole course through all the years of the war.

They turned east and defiled through a narrow pass in the mountains, where the sheltered slopes again glowed in yellow and gold. Jackson, in somber and faded gray, rode near the head of the corps

on his faithful Little Sorrel, his chin sunk upon his breast, his eyes apparently not seeing what was about them, the worn face somber and thoughtful. Harry knew that the great brain under the old slouch hat was working every moment, always working with an intensity and concentration of which few men were ever capable. Harry, following close behind him, invariably watched him, but he could never read anything of Jackson's mind from his actions.

Then came the soldiers in broad and flowing columns, that is, they seemed to Harry, in the intense autumn light, to flow like a river of men and horses and steel, beautiful to look on now, but terrible in battle.

"We're better than ever," said the sober Dalton. "Antietam stopped us for the time, but we are stronger than we were before that battle."

"Stronger and even more enthusiastic," Harry concurred. "Ah, there goes the Cajun band and the other bands and our boys singing our great tune! Listen to it!"

"Southrons hear your country call you;
Up, lest worse than death befall you!
To arms! To arms! To arms in Dixie!
Lo! all the beacon fires are lighted—
Let all hearts now be united!
To arms! To arms! To arms in Dixie!"

The chorus of the battle song, so little in words, so great in its thrilling battle note, was taken up by more than a score of thousand, and the vast volume of sound, confined in narrow defiles, rolled like thunder, giving forth mighty echoes. Harry was moved tremendously and he saw Jackson himself come out of his deep thought and lift up his face that glowed.

"It's certainly great," said Dalton to Harry. "It would drag a man from the hospital and send him into battle. I know now how the French republican troops on the march felt when they heard the Marseillaise."

"But the words don't seem to me to be the same that I heard at Bull Run."

"No, they're not; but what does it matter? That thrilling music is always the same, and it's enough."

Already the origin of the renowned battle song was veiled in doubt, and different versions of the words were appearing; but the music never changed and every step responded to it.

The army passed through the defile, entered another portion of the valley, forded a fork of the Shenandoah, crossed the Luray Valley, and then entered the steep passes of the Blue Ridge. Here they found autumn gone and winter upon them. As the passes rose and the mountains, clothed in pine forest, hung over them, the soft haze of Indian summer fled, and in its place came a low, gray sky, somber and chill. Sharp winds cut them, but the blood flowed warm and strong in their veins as they trod the upward path between the ridges. Once more a verse of the defiant Dixie rolled and echoed through the lofty and bleak pine forest:

"How the South's great heart rejoices
At your cannon's ringing voices;
To arms!
For faith betrayed, and pledges broken,
Wrongs inflicted, insults spoken
To arms!
Advance the flag of Dixie."

Now on the heights the last shreds and patches of autumn were blown away by the winds of winter. The sullen skies lowered continually. Flakes of snow whirled into their faces, but they merely bent their heads to the storm and marched steadily onward. They had not been called Jackson's Foot Cavalry for nothing. They were proud of the name, and they meant to deserve it more thoroughly than ever.

"I take it," said Dalton to Harry, "that some change has occurred in the Northern plans. The Army of the Potomac must be marching along in a new line."

"So do I. The battle will be fought in lower country."

"And we will be with Lee and Longstreet in a day or two."

"So it looks."

Jackson stopped twice, a full day each time, for rest, but at the end of the eighth day, including the two for rest, he had driven his men one hundred and twenty miles over mountains and across rivers. They also passed through cold and heavy snow, but they now found themselves in lower country at the village of Orange Court House. The larger town of Fredericksburg lay less than forty miles away. Harry was not familiar with the name of Fredericksburg, but it was destined to be before long one that he could never forget. In after years it was hard for him to persuade himself that famous names were not famous always. The name of some village or river or mountain would be burned into his brain with such force and intensity that the letters seemed to have been there since the beginning.

It lacked but two days of December when they came to Orange Court House, but they heard that the Northern front was more formidable and menacing than ever. Burnside had shown more energy than was expected of him. He had formed a plan to march upon Richmond, and, despite the alterations in his course, he was clinging to that plan. He had at the least, so the scouts said, one hundred and twenty thousand men and four hundred guns. The North, moreover, which always commanded the water, had gunboats in the Rappahannock below Fredericksburg, and they would be, as they were throughout the war, a powerful arm.

Harry knew, too, the temper and resolution of the North, the slow, cold wrath that could not be checked by one defeat or half a dozen. Antietam, as he saw it, had merely been a temporary check to the Confederate arms, where the forces of Lee and Jackson had fought off at least double their number. The Northern men could not yet boast of a single clean-cut victory in the battles of the east, but they were coming on again as stern and resolute as ever. Defeat seemed to serve only as an incentive to them. After every one, recruits poured down from the north and west to lift anew the flag of the Union.

There was something in this steady, unyielding resolve that sent a chill through Harry. It was possible that men who came on and who never ceased coming would win in the end. The South—and he was sanguine that such men as Lee and Jackson could not be beaten–might wear itself out by the very winning of victories. The chill came again when he counted the resources pitted against his side. He was a lad of education and great intelligence, and he had no illusions now about the might of the North and its willingness to fight.

But youth, in spite of facts, can forget odds as well as loss. The doubts that would come at times were always dispelled when he looked upon the glorious Army of Northern Virginia. It was now nearly eighty thousand strong, with an almost unbroken record of victory, trusting absolutely in its leadership and supremely confident that it could whip any other army on the planet. Its brilliant generals were gathered with Jackson or with Lee and Longstreet. They were as confident as their soldiers and no movement of the enemy escaped them. Stuart, with his plume and sash, at which no man now dared to scoff, hung with his horsemen like a fringe on the flank of Burnside's own army, cutting off the Union scouts and skirmishers and hiding the plans of Lee.

Messengers brought news that Burnside would certainly cross the Rappahannock, covered by the Union artillery, which was always far superior in weight and power to that of the South. Harry

heard that the passage of the river would not be opposed, because the Southern army could occupy stronger positions farther back, but he did not know whether the rumors were true.

The word now came, and they went forward from Orange Court House toward Fredericksburg to join Lee and Longstreet. When they marched toward the Second Manassas they had suffered from an almost intolerable heat and dust. Now they advanced through a winter that seemed to pour upon them every variety of discomfort. Heavy snows fell, icy rains came and fierce winds blew. The country was deserted, and the roads beneath the rain and snow and the passage of great armies disappeared. Vast muddy trenches marked where they had been, and the mud was deep and sticky, covering everything as it was ground up, and coloring the whole army the same hue. Somber and sullen skies brooded over them continually. Not even Jackson's foot cavalry could make much progress through such a sea of mud.

"A battle would be a relief," said Harry, as he rode with the Invincibles, having brought some order to Colonel Talbot. "There's nothing like this to take the starch out of men. Isn't that so, Happy?"

"It depresses ordinary persons like you, Harry," replied Langdon, "but a soul like mine leaps up to meet the difficulties. Mud as an obstacle is nothing to me. As I was riding along here I was merely thinking about the different kinds we have. I note that this Virginia mud is tremendously sticky, inclined to be red in color, and I should say that on the whole it's not as handsome as our South Carolina mud, especially when I see our product at its best. What kind of mud do you have in Kentucky, Harry?"

"All kinds, red, black, brown and every other shade."

"Well, there's a lot of snow mixed with this, too. I think that at the very bottom there is a layer of snow, and then the mud and the snow come in alternate layers until within a foot of the top, after which it's all mud. Harry, Old Jack doesn't believe it's right to fight on Sunday, but do you believe it's right to fight in winter, when the armies have to waste so much strength and effort in getting at one another?"

He was interrupted by the mellow tones of a bugle, and a brilliant troop of horsemen came trotting toward them through a field, where the mud was not so deep. They recognized Stuart in his gorgeous panoply at their head and behind him was Sherburne.

Stuart rode up to the Invincibles. Colonel Leonidas Talbot and Lieutenant-Colonel Hector St. Hilaire gravely saluted the brilliant apparition.

"I am General Stuart," said Stuart, lifting the plumed hat, "and I am glad to welcome the vanguard of General Jackson. May I ask, sir, what regiment is this?"

"It is the South Carolina regiment known as the Invincibles," said Colonel Talbot proudly, as he lifted his cap in a return salute, "although it does not now contain many South Carolinians. Alas! most of the lads who marched so proudly away from Charleston have gone to their last rest, and their places have been filled chiefly by Virginians. But the Virginians are a brave and gallant people, sir, almost equal in fire and dash to the South Carolinians."

Stuart smiled. He knew that it was meant as a compliment of the first class, and as such he took it.

"I think, sir," he said, "that I am speaking to Colonel Leonidas Talbot?"

"You are, sir, and the gentleman on my right is the second in command of this regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Hector St. Hilaire, a most noble gentleman and valiant and skillful officer. We have met you before, sir. You saved us before Bull Run when we were beleaguered at a fort in the Valley."

"Ah, I remember!" exclaimed Stuart. "And a most gallant fight you were making. And I recognize this young officer, too. He was the messenger who met me in the fields. Your hand, Mr. Kenton."

He stretched out his own hand in its long yellow buckskin glove, and Harry, flushing with pride, shook it warmly.

"It's good of you, General," he said, "to remember me."

"I'm glad to remember you and all like you. Is General Jackson near?"

"About a quarter of a mile farther back, sir. I'm a member of his staff, and I'll ride with you to him."

"Thanks. Lead the way."

Harry turned with Stuart and Sherburne and they soon reached General Jackson, who was plodding slowly on Little Sorrel, his chin sunk upon his breast as usual, the lines of thought deep in his face. General Stuart bowed low before him and the plumed hat was lifted high. The knight paid deep and willing deference to the Puritan.

Jackson's face brightened. He wished plain apparel upon himself, but he did not disapprove of the reverse upon General Stuart.

"You are very welcome, General Stuart," he said.

"I thank you, sir. I have come to report to you, sir, that General Burnside's army is gathering in great force on the other side of the Rappahannock, and that we are massed along the river and back of Fredericksburg."

"General Burnside will cross, will he not?"

"So we think. He can lay a pontoon bridge, and he has a great artillery to protect it. The river, as you know, sir, has a width of about two hundred yards at Fredericksburg, and the Northern batteries can sweep the farther shore."

"I'm sorry that we've elected to fight at Fredericksburg," said General Jackson thoughtfully. "The Rappahannock will protect General Burnside's army."

Stuart gazed at him in astonishment.

"I don't understand you, sir," he said. "You say that the Rappahannock will protect General Burnside when it seems to be our defense."

"My meaning is perfectly clear. When we defeat General Burnside at Fredericksburg he will retreat across the river over his bridge or bridges and we shall not be able to get at him. We will win a great victory, but we will not gather the fruits of it, because of our inability to reach him."

"Oh, I see," said Stuart, the light breaking on his face. "You consider the victory already won, sir?"

"Beyond a doubt."

"Then if you think so, General Jackson, I think so, too," said Stuart, as he saluted and rode away.

CHAPTER IV
ON THE RAPPAHANNOCK

The division of Jackson reached Fredericksburg the next day and went into camp, partly in the rear of the town, and a portion of it further down the Rappahannock. Harry, as an aide, rode back and forth on many errands while the troops were settling into place. Once more he saw General Lee on his famous white horse, Traveler, conferring with Jackson on Little Sorrel. And the stalwart and bearded Longstreet was there, too.

But Harry's heart bled when he rode into the ancient town of Fredericksburg, a place homelike and picturesque in peaceful days, but now lying between two mighty armies, directly within their line of fire, and abandoned for a time by its people, all save a hardy few.

The effect upon him was startling. He rode along the deserted streets and looked at the closed windows, like the eyeless sockets of a blind man. In the streets mud and slush and snow had gathered, with no attempt of man to clean them away, but the wheels of the cannon had cut ruts in them a foot deep. The great white colonial houses, with their green shutters fastened tightly, stood lone and desolate amid their deserted lawns. No smoke rose from the chimneys. The shops were closed. There was no sound of a child's voice in the whole town. It was the first time that Harry had ever ridden through a deserted city, and it was truly a city of the dead to him.

"It's almost as bad as a battlefield after the battle is over," he said to Dalton, who was with him.

"It gives you a haunted, weird feeling," said Dalton, looking at the closed windows and smokeless chimneys.

But the people of Fredericksburg had good cause to go. Two hundred thousand men, hardened now to war, faced one another across the two hundred yards of the Rappahannock. Four hundred Union cannon on the other side of the river could easily smash their little city to pieces. The people were scattered among their relatives in the farmhouses and villages about Fredericksburg, eagerly awaiting the news that the invincible Lee and Jackson had beaten back the hated invader.

But the Southern army, save for a small force, did not occupy Fredericksburg itself.

Along the low ridge, a mile or so west of the town, Longstreet had been posted and he had dug trenches and gunpits. The crest of this ridge, called Marye's Hill, was bare, and here, in addition to the pits and trenches, Longstreet threw up breastworks. Down the slopes were ravines and much timber, making the whole position one of great strength. Harry gazed at it as he carried one of his messages from general to general, and he was enough of a soldier to know that an enemy who attacked here was undertaking a mighty task.

But Burnside did not move, and the somber blanket of winter thickened. More snows fell and the icy rains came again. Then the mercury slid down until it reached zero. Thick ice formed over everything and some of the shallower brooks froze solidly in their beds. The Southern lads were not nearly so well equipped against the winter as their foes. Not many had heavy overcoats, and blankets and shoes were thin and worn.

The forest was now their refuge. The river was lined thickly with it, running for a long distance, and thousands of axes began to bite into the timber. Hardy youths, skilled in such work, they rapidly built log huts or shelters for themselves, and within these or outside under the trees innumerable fires blazed along the Rappahannock, the crackling flames sending a defiance to other such flames beyond the frozen river.

Harry had a letter from Dr. Russell, which had come by the way of the mountains and Richmond. He had already heard of the terrible day of Perryville in Kentucky, and the doctor had been able to confirm his earlier news that his father, Colonel Kenton, had passed through it safely. But the hostile armies in the west had gone down into Tennessee, and there were reports that they

would soon move toward each other for a great battle. It seemed that the rival forces in both east and west would meet at nearly the same time in terrible conflict.

Dr. Russell told that Dick Mason had been wounded in the combat at Perryville, but had been nursed back to health by his mother, who with others had found him upon the field. He had since gone into Tennessee to rejoin the Union army, and his mother had returned to Pendleton.

Harry folded the letter, put it in his pocket, and for a while he was very thoughtful.

It was a great relief to be sure that his father had gone safely through Perryville, and that Dick Mason, although wounded there, was well again. His heart yearned over both. His devotion to his father had always been strong and Dick Mason had stood in the place of a brother. They were alive for the present at least, but Harry knew of the sinister threat that hung over the west. The terrible battle that was to be fought at Stone River was already sending forth its preliminary signals, and for a little while Harry thought more of those marching forces in Tennessee than of the great army to which he belonged and of the one yet more numerous that faced it.

But these thoughts could not last long. The events in which he was to have a part were too imminent and mighty for anyone to detach himself from them more than a few minutes. He quickly returned, heart and soul, to his duties, which in these days took all his time. Many messages were passing between Lee and Jackson and Longstreet and the commanders next to them in rank, and Harry carried his share.

A few days after the letter from Dr. Russell the cold abated considerably. The ice in the river broke, the melting snows made the country a sea of mud and slush and horses often became mired so deeply that it took a dozen soldiers to drag them out again. It was on such a day as this that Dalton came to him, his grave face wearing a look of importance.

"General Jackson has just told me," he said, "to take you and join General Stuart, who is going with his horse to the neighborhood of Port Royal on the river."

"What's up?"

"Nothing's up yet. But we understand that some of the Yankee gunboats are trying to get up, now that they have a clear passage through the ice."

"Cavalry can't stop them."

"No, but Stuart is taking horse artillery with him, and he's likely to make it warm for the enemy in the water. Harry, if we only had a navy, too, this war wouldn't be doubtful."

"But, as we haven't got a navy, it is doubtful, very doubtful."

They quickly joined General Stuart, who was eager for the duty, and falling in line with the troop of Sherburne rode swiftly toward Port Royal, the cavalrymen carrying with them several light guns.

As they galloped along, mixed mud and snow flew in every direction, but most of them had grown so used to it that they paid little attention. The river flowed a deep and somber stream, and all the hills about were yet white with snow. At that time, colored too, as it was by his feelings, it was the most sinister landscape that Harry had ever looked upon. Black winter and red war, neither of which spared, were allied against man.

But his pulses began to leap when they saw coils of black smoke blown a little to one side by the wind. He knew that the smoke came from gunboats. They must be endeavoring to land troops, and Stuart was no man to allow a detached force to pass the Rappahannock and appear in their rear.

As the cavalry burst into a gallop from the snowy forest Harry saw that he was right. A fleet of gunboats was gathered in the stream and on the far shore they were embarking troops. But his quick eye caught a horseman on their own side of the river who was galloping away. He was already too distant for a rifle shot, but Harry instinctively knew that it was Shepard. He had seen the man under such extraordinarily vivid circumstances that the set of his figure was familiar.

Nor was he surprised to behold Shepard now. He merely wondered that he had not seen him earlier, so great was his activity and daring, and he had no doubt that he had brought the gunboats and

the Union troops warning that Stuart was coming. He was sure of it the moment the cavalry emerged from the woods, because one of the gunboats instantly turned loose with two heavy guns which sent shells whistling and screaming over their heads. Had they been a little better aimed they would have done much destruction, and Harry saw at once that they were going to have an ugly time with these saucy little demons of the water.

Another boat fired. One of the cavalrymen was killed and several wounded. Stuart promptly drew his men back to the edge of the wood, unlimbered and posted his cannon. Quick as they were, the black wasps on the river buzzed and stung as fast. Shells and solid shot were whistling among them and about them. They were good gunners on those boats and the men in gray acknowledged it by the rapidity with which they took to shelter.

But Stuart's blood was at its utmost heat. He had no intention of being driven off, and soon his own light guns were sending shell and solid shot toward the boats, which had relanded their troops on the other side, and which were now puffing up and down the river like the angry little demons they were, sending shells, solid shot, grape and canister into the woods and along the slopes where the horsemen had disappeared.

Harry and Dalton were glad to dismount and to get behind both the trees and the curve of the embankment. Harry, despite a pretty full experience now, could not repress involuntary shivers as the deadly steel flew by. He and Dalton had nothing to do but hold their horses and watch the combat, which they did with the keenest interest.

Stuart's cannon had unlimbered in a good place, where they were protected partly by a ridge, and their deep booming note soon showed the gunboats that they had an enemy worthy of their fire. Dalton and Harry looked on with growing excitement. Dalton, for once, grew garrulous, talking in an excited monotone.

"Look at that, Harry!" he cried. "See the water spurt right by the bow of that boat! A shell broke there! And there goes another! That struck, too! See the fallen men on the boat! Look at that little black fellow coming right out in the middle of the stream! And it got home, too, with that shot! By George, how the shell raked our ranks! Ah, but, you saucy little creature, that shell paid you back! See, Harry, its wheel is smashed, and it's floating away with the stream! Guns on land have an advantage over guns on the water! As the negro said, 'When the boat blows up, whar are you? But if the explosion is on dry land, dar you are!' Ah, another has caught it, and is going out of action! Oh my, little boats, you're brave and saucy, but you can't stand up to Stuart's guns."

Dalton was right. The gunboats, sinkable and fully exposed, were rapidly getting the worst of it. Stuart's guns, protected by the ridge, were inflicting so much damage that they were compelled to drop down the stream, two or three of them disabled and in tow of the others.

A covering Union battery of much heavier guns opened fire from a hill beyond the river, but it was unable either to protect the gunboats or to demolish Stuart's horse artillery, which was sheltered well by the ridge. The men in gray began to cheer. It soon became obvious that they would win. Gradually all of the gunboats, having suffered much loss, dropped down the stream and passed out of range. The heavy battery was also withdrawn from the hill and the detached attempt to cross the Rappahannock had failed.

Stuart and his men rode back exultant, but Dalton said to Harry that he thought it merely a forerunner.

"A good omen, you mean?" said Harry.

"Good, I hope, but I meant chiefly a sign of much greater things to come. I'm thinking that Burnside will attack in a day or two now. Lots of Northern newspapers find their way into our lines, and the whole North is urging him on. They demand that a great victory be won in the east right away."

"I feel sorry for a general who is pushed on like that."

"So do I, because he hasn't a ghost of a chance. He'll be able to cross the river under cover of his great batteries, but look, Harry, look at those frowning heights around Fredericksburg, covered

with the finest riflemen in the world, the ditches and trenches sown with artillery, and the best two military brains on the globe there to direct. What chance have they, Harry? What chance have they?"

"Very little that I can see, but a battle is never won or lost until it's fought. We'd better report now to General Jackson."

They saluted General Stuart, and rode away over the icy mud. General Jackson received their report with pleasure.

"Excellent! Excellent!" he said. "General Stuart has routed them with horse artillery! A capable man! A most wonderful man!"

He said the last words to himself, rather than to Harry, and Stuart soon proved that his horse artillery was not underrated by winning a second encounter with the gunboats a day or two later. Early also beat back an attempt to cross the river at a third place, and it became apparent now that the Union army could make no flanking attack upon its enemy south of the Rappahannock. It must be made, if at all, directly on its front at Fredericksburg.

But Harry had no doubt that it would be made. The reports of their numerous scouts and spies told with detail of the immense preparations going on in the Union camp. He could often watch them himself with his glasses from the hills. He did not see much of St. Clair and Langdon these days, as they remained closely with their regiment, the Invincibles, but Dalton and he were much together.

It was well into December when they were watching through the glasses the concentration of Union cannon on Stafford Heights across the river. One hundred and fifty great guns were in position there and they could easily blow Fredericksburg to pieces. Harry looked down again at this little city which had jumped suddenly into fame by getting itself squarely between the two armies arrayed for battle.

He felt the old sensation of pity as he gazed at the closed shutters and the smokeless chimneys. Nobody was stirring in the streets, except some Mississippi soldiers who had been placed there to oppose the passage, and who were fortifying themselves in the houses and cellars along the river front.

"It's no good looking any more," Harry said to Dalton. "There's nothing to do now but wait. That's what General Jackson is doing. I saw him in his tent to-day, reading a book on theology that Dr. Graham has just sent him."

"You're right, Harry. If the general can rest, so can we. Well, not much of this day is left. See how the Yankee batteries are fading away in the twilight."

"Yes, Harry, fading now, but they'll come back again, massive metal and as sinister as ever, in the morning."

"Which won't keep me from sleeping soundly to-night. Funny how you get used to anything. Neither the presence nor the absence of the Yankee army will interfere with my sleep unless the general wants to send me on an errand."

"And we also grow used to sights so tremendous in their nature that they turn the whole current of our history. Look at that winter sun setting there over the western hills. It may be my fancy, Harry, but it seems to have the colors of bronze and steel in it, a sort of menace, one might call it."

"I see the same colors, George, but I suppose it's fancy. The whole sky is one of steel to me. I see the gleaming of steel everywhere, over the hills, the river and the armies."

"Our imaginations are too vivid, Harry. But look how that darkness closes in on everything! Now the Yankee cannon and the Yankee army are gone! The river itself is fading, and there goes the town! Now, see the lights spring up on the far shore!"

"It's supper and sleep for me," said Harry. "It doesn't do to let your imagination run away with you. You know that Lee and Old Jack and Jim Longstreet have arranged for everything."

They ate their suppers, and, the general giving them leave, they lay down in the tent next to his, wrapped in their blankets. Harry slept soundly, but while the pitchy darkness of a winter night still enclosed the land he was awakened by a heavy rumbling noise. His nerves had been attuned so

highly by exciting days that he was awake in an instant and sprang to his feet, Dalton also springing up with equal promptness.

They saw General Jackson standing in front of his tent and peering down in the darkness toward the river. Other officers were already gathering near him. Harry and Dalton stood at attention, where he could see them, if he wished to send them on any errand. But Jackson was silent and listening.

The heavy rumbling reports—cannon shots—came again, but they were fired on their side of the river.

"Gentlemen," said General Jackson, "the enemy has begun the passage. Those are our guns giving the signal to the army."

Harry's pulses began to throb. But, although fires flared up here and there, little was to be seen in the darkness. Fortune seemed to have shifted suddenly to the side of the Union. Not night alone protected the bridge builders, but a thick, impenetrable fog, rising from the river and the muddy earth, covered the stream and its shores. The Southerners could not see just where the bridge head was and their cannon must fire at random through the heavy darkness. Sixteen hundred Mississippians were stationed in Fredericksburg below, well concealed in cellars and rifle pits, but they could not see either, and for the present their rifles were silent.

But Harry's imagination immediately became intensely vivid again. He fancied that he could hear through all the shifting gloom the sound of axes and hammers and saws at work upon that bridge. These army engineers could throw a bridge across a river in half a day. He recognized at all times the great resources and the mechanical genius of the North. The South had good bridge builders herself, but she had bent all her powers to the development of public men and soldiers. Harry felt more intensely all the time the one-sided character of her growth and its defects.

Dalton stood by Harry's side, and the darkness was so intense that he seemed but a shadow. A little further away was Jackson. No fires had been lighted in his camp, but nevertheless he was not a shadow. That personality, quiet and modest, was so intense, so powerful that it seemed to Harry to become luminous, to radiate light in the blackness of the night. It was imagination, he knew, at work again, but it was Jackson who had loosed its springs.

"Can you see your watch, George?" he whispered to Dalton.

"Yes, and its says only twenty minutes past three in the morning."

"And our signal guns began about twenty minutes ago. They will have nearly four hours in which to work before the sun rises and we can see them well enough to take good aim."

"And maybe longer than that, Harry. The whole night is permeated with the heaviest inland fog I ever knew. Maybe it will take the sun a long time to strike through it or drive it away. It's bad for us."

"But we'll win anyhow. I tell you, we'll win anyhow! Do you hear me, George?"

"Yes, Harry, I hear you. You're excited. So am I. There are mighty few who wouldn't be at such a time; but look at the general! He stands like a statue!"

General Jackson did not move, save to lift his glasses now and then, as if with their magnifying powers he could pierce the dark. But the night and the swollen fog still hid everything going on beyond the river from those on the heights. Down by the shore the Mississippians in their rifle pits might see a little, and the scouts undoubtedly had seen much, else the signal guns would not be firing.

Harry's pulses, after a while, began to beat more smoothly and there was not such a painful and insistent drumming in his head. Emotions yielded now to will and he waited patiently. General Jackson for the first time told some of his young officers that they could lie down and rest.

"There can be no action before daylight," he said, "and it's best to be fresh and ready."

He spoke to them with the grave kindness that he always used, save when some great fault was committed, and then his words burned like fire. Harry and Dalton procured their blankets from their tents, wrapped them about their bodies and lay down on the dryest spots they could find, but they had no thought of sleep. They permitted their limbs to relax, and that was a help to the nerves, but neither closed his eyes.

Those dark hours seemed an eternity to Harry. The floating fog seemed to grow thicker and to enter his very bones. He shivered and drew the blanket close. Now, with his ears close to the earth, he was sure that he could hear the axes and the saws and the hammers beating on steel rivets on the other side of the Rappahannock.

The Confederate cannon still fired the signals of alarm at regular intervals, but the night and the fog always closed in again quickly over the flash that the discharge had made. After a while a murmur came from the long Southern line along the heights and on the ridges. Horses stirred here and there, cannon, moved to new positions, made sighing sounds as their wheels sank in the mud; sabres and bayonets clanked, thousands of men whispered to one another. All these varying sounds united into one great soft voice which was like the murmur of a wind through the summer night.

Toward five o'clock in the morning, when the darkness had not diminished a whit, a messenger from General Lee rode up with a note for General Jackson. It merely stated that all was ready and to hold the positions that he had taken up the night before. Jackson wrote a brief reply by the light of a lantern that an orderly held, and the messenger galloped away with it. It was the only incident that had occurred in a long time.

"They're not using many lights on the other side of the river," said Harry, although he noted an occasional flame in the darkness. "Of course, they want to hide their bridge building, but you'd think they'd have fires burning elsewhere."

"They've learned the value of caution," said Dalton. "I'm bound to say they're going about the first part of their work with skill."

He spoke with the calm superiority of a young Officer.

Harry took out his own watch, and by holding it close to his eyes was able to read its face.

"A quarter to six," he said. "According to the watch it is less than three hours since we first heard those alarm guns, but my five known senses and all the unknown tell me that it has been at least a week."

"In an hour we should see something," said Dalton. "Confound this fog. If it weren't so thick we could see now."

Harry's pulses began to beat hard again in the next hour. He strove with glasses even for a glimpse of the winter sun which he knew would come so late, but as yet the fog showed nothing save a faint luminous tinge low down in the east. An orderly brought food to them, and while they ate they saw the luminous tinge broaden and deepen.

"The sun's rising behind that fog," said Dalton, "but here comes a little wind that will drive away the fog or thin it out so we can see."

"Yes, I feel it," said Harry, "and you can see the dull, somber red of the sun trying to break through. Look, George, unless I'm mistaken the fog's moving down the river!"

"So it is, there's the flash of the stream, the color of steel, and by all the stars, there's their bridge two-thirds of the way across!"

Heavier puffs of wind came and the fog billowed off down the river. The whole gigantic theater of action sprang at once into the light. There were the two great armies clustered on opposing ridges, there was the deserted town, there was the deep river, the color of lead, flowing between the foes, two-thirds of its width already spanned by the Union bridge, the bridge itself covered with workmen, and boats swarming by its side.

Harry felt a thrill and a shudder which were almost simultaneous. Then came a deep muffled roar from the two armies on the ridges looking at each other. But as the roar died it was succeeded by the rapid, stinging fire of rifles. The Mississippians in their pits and cellars near the bank of the river were sending a hail of bullets upon the bridge builders.

The rest of the Southern army stood by and watched. Harry knew that Lee and Jackson would make their chief defense on the ridges, but the Mississippians were there to keep the enemy from

being too forward. So deadly were their rifles that every workman fled off the bridge to the Union shore, save those who were struck down upon it, falling into the water.

Then came a pause, a period of intense waiting, short, but seemingly long, even to the veteran generals, after which the gallant builders, who truly deserved the name of the bravest of the brave, ventured again upon the bridge in the face of those terrible Mississippi rifles. A blast of death again blew upon them. Bullets in hundreds struck upon bodies or rattled on timbers. The workmen could not live in the face of such a fire, and those who had not been slain retreated again to their own side of the stream. A third time the heroic bridge builders returned to their work, and a third time they were driven back by the deadly Mississippi hail. Harry felt pity for them.

"I never saw anything braver," he said to Dalton.

"Nor did I, Harry, nor anything more useless. The bridge builders never had a chance before the rifles. But now their supports, which should have been there all the time, are coming up."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.