

A
L
T
S
H
E
L
L
E
R

Civil War Stories

Nine Short Stories

Civil War Stories

Nine short stories

- **Title Page**
- **Preface**
- 1 The Break of Day**
- 2 The Sharpshooter**
- 3 At the Cannon's Mouth**
- 4 After the Battle**
- 5 Guard No. 10**
- 6 At the Twelfth Hour**
- 7 The Stroke of Midnight**
- 8 The Fate of the Gun**
- 9 The Retreat of the Ten**
- **Credits**

Civil War Stories

Nine Short Stories

by Joseph A. Altsheler



Preface

This book contains nine short stories by Joseph A. Altsheler.

Each story relates to the Civil War. One tells about an incident with the war coming to an end, and another takes place in Mexico after the war is over. The remaining seven stories occur within the time frame in which the war was fought.

They are arranged in order of publication date.



The Break of Day

“And you feel sure that the attack will be made before morning?” asked Carson.

“Undoubtedly,” replied Beltone. “They know that our defenses are imperfect and that we have lost heavily. They will not give us time to strengthen ourselves.”

“Can we beat them off?”

“I do not think we can stop them. I would not say this before the men, but I will to you. They appear to be in force much superior to ours. Besides, they are just as good, man for man, as we are. They have shown that here as well as many a time elsewhere. Did you notice the tall, slender man, with the scar across his face, who was in the front of the charge they made this morning?”

“The one who climbed upon the breastwork at the left angle?”

“Yes. Right in the mouth of our guns. Even after the attack was repulsed he leaned over and chopped at our cannoneers with his sword until some of the men seized him and dragged him inside, a prisoner. When they have the advantage of numbers and of darkness to render our aim ineffective we cannot overcome such desperate courage as that.”

“But we may be reinforced.”

“Impossible. We have been tangled up a long time in the wilderness. The movement was well intended, but it has failed; and now we are like a mislaid and forgotten package in this lonely and isolated spot. Remember how long it has been since we have heard from the army. We do not even know which way it has gone.”

“You don’t take a cheerful view of the matter.”

“I was merely presenting the facts. But don’t look upon me as a croaking raven, predicting evil, old fellow. There are no cowards in our party, and I dare say we shall give a good account of ourselves. Only, as the last hand in the game is to be played soon, I wish our hand was as good as

theirs.”

The two young officers shrank close to the rude and hastily thrown up earthwork as they whispered together. The darkness, heavy, clammy, and thick with the exhalations from the slimy ooze of the swamps, oppressed them. Behind them they could see indistinctly the recumbent forms of some of their comrades catching a little sleep upon the ground. To the right and to the left were the sentinels. In front was the little clearing, and beyond the forest in which the enemy lay. The moon cast down a few pallid rays which apparently served only to make the darkness visible.

“What a black night!” whispered Carson. “This darkness and the swamp ooze creep into my marrow and numb my courage. I have to reinforce my nerves with my will.”

“Many a brave man before you has had to do that when old Father Sun has gone down the other side of the earth,” returned Beltone. “Fighting is bad enough at any time, but a night attack, barring the noise, is like a battle among the ghosts. Can you see anything over there in the

wood?”

“No,” said Carson; “I can barely make out the outline of the wood itself. The moon is of very little use tonight. I suppose it is so much ashamed of the war and bloodshed here that it does not consider it worth while to pay any serious attention to this portion of the earth.”

“Never mind,” said Beltone; “it’s the same moon that’s shining, or rather not shining, for the enemy over there. So long as the darkness is as thick as this they will not attack. They could not tell friends from enemies.”

“They are silent in the wood,” resumed Beltone, a moment later. “Such a considerable force lying so very near us makes no noise that we can hear. I should say that circumstance certainly portended an attack. They are resting before the rush. Ah, what is that?”

“You have nerves as well as I,” chuckled Carson, “when the hoot of a swamp owl, which you have heard many and many a time before, would disturb you like that.”

“I don’t deny it,” said Beltone, “nor am I

ashamed of it. It is hard enough work to lie down with the reserves in a big battle and wait your turn to be called, while you hear the cannon thundering in front, and the wounded are taken by you to the rear, and the Minié balls are zip-zipping over your head. But then you have the bright sun shining over you, and there is no friend like the daylight. Here you crouch in the darkness and wait for a hand to cleave the black veil and strike you.”

There was perfect silence in the camp. In the distant wood, the notes of the night owl rose higher and higher and grew more mournful the higher they rose.

“Isn’t that a brooding raven?” whispered Carson. “He makes the lines of that old poem sing through my head.”

“It may be the dirge of some brave man,” returned Beltone; “again, he may be lamenting man’s folly.”

“Confound it, I wish he would stop, whatever he means. The swamp and the darkness and the owl together may be too much for me,” said

Carson.

Beltoné did not reply. A faint breeze sprang up, but it brought to them nothing but the rustling of the leaves, and the owl's melancholy measure. The two young men still sat by the earthwork, and tried to pierce the darkness. Presently Beltoné said,

“The moon is getting brighter; can you see anything in the wood there now?”

“Nothing except the trees that compose it,” returned Carson. “We might send a cannon ball into it. That would stir them up.”

“It's not worth while,” said Beltoné. “They would simply draw further back, if they are not already out of range. There's nothing for us but to wait.”

“Beltoné,” said Carson, “I don't mean to be melodramatic or sentimental, but if I fall you will tell them at home what became of me?”

“Certainly,” replied Beltoné calmly, even cheerfully, “if you are the one taken and I am the one left. If it is the reverse, I ask you to do as much for me. If we both fall, probably enough of

our comrades will be left to make all the history of it the world needs.”

They relapsed again into silence, but remained beside the breastwork, voluntary and vigilant sentinels. Old Time moved on with heavy step. The owl’s hoot died away, and only the rustling of the wind through the leaves was heard.

“It seems a week since the sun set,” said Carson.

“And that means that it will be another week until the sun rises again,” returned Beltone. “It must be about midnight now. Do you see anything in the wood yet?”

“No, only the trees swaying in the wind. I think I shall climb upon the breastwork and get a better view.”

“Don’t do it.”

“Why?”

“Sharpshooters. Some of them can see like owls, and the shadows will not protect you.”

“I’ll chance it.”

Cautiously he climbed the earthwork. There

was a report from the wood, followed by the familiar singing noise that a Minié ball makes, and Carson rolled back into the camp.

“It is nothing, or rather a narrow escape only,” he said getting up. “I felt the swish of his bullet past my cheek. I am not hurt.”

Belton made no comment. By and by he asked again,

“Can you see anything yet in the wood?”

“No; nothing but the black wall of trees.”

“But don’t you hear a sound that is not the rustling of the leaves?”

“I think so, but I can’t tell yet whether it’s reality or the imagination.”

“There, again; don’t you hear it?”

“I seem to hear something; but still it may only be imagination playing one of her tricks at the sunset of life.”

“If I do not really hear it, then imagination is very strong, even for such a night and such a situation as this.”

“The balance is certainly inclining to the side

of reality.”

“Listen!”

They lay perfectly quiet for a minute, straining every sense to hear. Then Beltone drew his pistol belt a little tighter.

“There can be no doubt of it,” he said. “The wind is blowing from the wood towards us, and in the stillness of the night sound comes a long distance with great distinctness. I have heard such sounds too often before to be mistaken. That steady, regular pulsation could not be made by anything but marching troops.”

“It isn’t possible that they are withdrawing! Beltone! Do you think they are?”

“No. They have been reinforced. That sound was made by troops coming to join them. It means heavier odds against us when the rush comes. There—do you hear that? Am I not right?”

A cheer, far away and faint, but unmistakable, came to them. In a moment it was repeated, and then again and again, each time swelling with increased volume.

“I don’t see why they should make so much noise about it,” said Carson, a little pettishly.

“It’s their time to cheer,” returned Beltone quietly.

After the cheers came silence, and for a long time the listening men could hear nothing. Then a confused hum and murmur of voices came from the wood; but this, too, soon died away, and the stillness of the night settled down again. It might have been a half hour afterwards when a plaintive but clear note pierced the air and startled the listening men. As it continued, the sound grew louder and fuller. Mellow and sweet, it filled the darkness around them.

“A violin!” said Carson. “On the eve of battle. How strange!”

“I never knew anything like it before in all my experience of war,” returned Beltone. “But hush, listen. Don’t you recognize the tune?”

Through the heavy night air floated the solemn strains of “Home, Sweet Home,” and the music rose and fell as if the hand of a master held the bow.

“Perhaps the forest is haunted,” whispered Carson.

“If it’s not, the force out there has a strange commander!” returned Beltone. “He has an odd method of rousing the spirits of the men for battle.”

“Beltone,” said Carson gravely, “don’t forget your promise about telling them at home, if I fall in the morning.”

Before Beltone could reply a voice, deep in the wood, took up the strain of the violin and blended with its notes. Over them and around them, clear and sweet, floated the words and the echo of the song:

**Home, home, sweet home
Be it ever so humble
There’s no place like home**

The atmosphere had cleared and the moon shone bright. Beltone could see a tear glisten on the eyelid of his companion.

“Do not be ashamed of it,” said Beltone, with a nervous little laugh, as Carson raised his hand to wipe the tear away. “When we lose our feelings

we cease to be men.”

He stopped, for now a dozen, twenty, even fifty—yes, a hundred voices, far away in the wood, joined in the song of home.

Then the melody ceased. Beltone heard a sigh of regret, like an echo, from Carson.

Neither spoke for some time. Then Carson said,

“Beltone, what does it mean?”

“I cannot say. Perhaps it was for amusement. But I would choose another kind of music for troops who expected to make a bloody assault in an hour or two. Still, you never can tell what a commander will do. The sternest of them grow sentimental sometimes.”

Beltone shrugged his shoulders, and the two again relapsed into their silent waiting. But they heard the music no more.

“What we shall hear next will be music of a different sort,” said Carson.

The night crept on with heavier steps than ever.

“Daylight cannot be far away. The enemy’s

rush is near at hand. We are as well prepared for him as we can be in this camp here. But I wish it were all over.”

“I believe I hear their footsteps now,” said Carson. “Listen. Are they coming?”

But the sound, if there was any, died away, and the two men crouched against the soft earth, waited, and heard nothing.

A slight gray streak appeared in the east. It broadened, and soon bars of light shot up over the forest.

“He will come now,” whispered Beltone, “when there is just light enough for him to see our camp, and too little for us to take aim by.”

But the wood was still silent. No human forms could be seen among the trees. The bars of light broadened. The red edge of the sun arose above the horizon. A full throated bird in a tree began to sing.

“Strange,” said Beltone. “Where is he? He is not wont to be lax like this.”

The morning grew, until camp and forest and swamp were flooded with the yellow sunlight.

Suddenly Carson grasped Beltone's arm.

"There is some one," he said. "They are coming at last!"

A man appeared at the edge of the clearing. He held up his hands and walked towards the camp. He was unarmed.

Beltone and Carson watched him intently. The rifles of the sentinels covered him.

"I wonder what he is after? Does he want to play with us after the cat-and-mouse fashion?" muttered Beltone.

The man came on towards the camp. Other men fell in behind him, but came no further than the edge of the wood. The stranger walked with an easy step, straight and firm, toward the earthwork where Beltone and Carson stood, awaiting his approach.

"An officer of rank. A colonel, at least," said Beltone.

The stranger saluted.

"I wish you a pleasant morning, sirs."

"We are indebted to you. I trust you are well,"

said Beltone, with equal politeness. “May I ask you who has honored us with this visit?”

“Certainly.” He spoke with great dignity. “I am Colonel Walton of the Louisiana troops, commander of the forces out there.”

“I have heard of you often, colonel,” returned Beltone. “We have not forgotten how you held us back that fierce day at the bend of the river.”

“I have done the best that I could for what I thought was right,” said the colonel simply.

Then Beltone asked,

“Have you any message that I may take to our commander?”

“Yes,” said Colonel Walton. “We were joined by Tennessee troops last night. Their officers are fine fellows, and they bring us news. Perhaps you heard us singing in the night?”

“Yes,” said Beltone wonderingly.

“Well, then,” the stranger continued, “say to your commander that I and my officers would be greatly pleased and honored if he and his staff would take dinner with us today. It is true that we

have little to offer, but I dare say we can treat you well.”

“Why, sir,” said Beltone angrily, “what sort of jesting is this? We are aware that you are in overwhelming force, but before we go into your camp as prisoners you must first come and take us. War is bad enough, sir, without such ill timed jokes as this.”

“War?” said Colonel Walton calmly. “Why do you speak of war? General Lee and his army surrendered three days ago. The war is over.”



The Sharpshooter

Whiz-z-z-z sang the Minié ball as it flattened against the rock, and spattered a fine grey, stinging powder into the face of Dick Yorke.

Yorke crouched down until his head was withdrawn from the range of the sharpshooter. Then he turned over on his side and asked Hays for another chew of tobacco.

“Tobacco is good for the nerves,” he said apologetically “and when I’m out on the skirmish line I like to have a free handed fellow like you, Hays, to borrow from.”

“If you don’t keep that bumptious Kentucky head of yours down behind the rocks you’ll be chewing a bullet instead of tobacco,” returned Hays. “It’s foolish to take such risks. That fellow’s alive across the valley over there. He’ll drop you the next time. He was clipping mighty close to you then.”

“So he was,” said Yorke, picking up the piece of lead which had battered itself into a formless mass against the rock, and lay on the ground at his feet, where it had fallen, its mission ended; “but it’s not the first bullet that’s whistled next to my head without stoppin’ to draw blood, an’ I reckon there’ll be as many more. What’s the use of bein’ so careful anyway. One man gets a bullet in the heart the first time he hears the enemy’s gun fire; the other goes through all the toughest fights and comes out without a scratch. It’s the luck of a soldier’s life, my boy.”

“Some people would call you a fatalist.”

“I don’t know much about that sort of thing,” said Dick Yorke, “but I reckon I’ll take my chances. But this debate is not business. Can you make out any movement over there?”

Hays looked through a cleft in the rocks and studied the opposite slope with keen eyes. Everything was so still that he could hear the chirp of a bird in a distant tree. A little white cloud of smoke that had risen when the sharpshooter fired drifted away up the valley, twisting itself into fantastic spirals and at last

dissipating itself in the warm sunshine.



The Sharpshooter

“That pesky sharpshooter is so quick I don’t dare to rise up for a good look,” said Hays. “As it is, I can see nothing but the big grey rocks and the stunted cedar trees, and now and then a fleck of mist that floats along the mountain side. It looks as quiet as a summer morning at home in the country in the old times. I don’t suppose the armies will do anything for a while, as they haven’t had time yet to mass their troops for a big movement.”

“And while they’re massin’ it’s our business to pick off as many of their skirmishers as we can with these long barrellled rifles of ours; eh, Hays, my boy?”

“That’s what we are here for, and I can’t say I

like this sort of business, either. What do you think of sharpshooting, anyway, Yorke?”

Yorke picked up the shapeless piece of lead and looked gravely at it as he held it in his hand. Then he dropped it on the ground and said:

“It’s a bad trade, Hays! A bad trade! Hardly the right sort of way for a fellow to earn his livin’. I tell you, Hays, I don’t like this kind of thing; it’s too much like murder—cold-blooded, calculatin’ murder.”

“It’s not a pleasant sort of business,” said Hays, “but it’s war, and when we’re ordered we’ve got to do it. That’s what you get for being a Kentuckian and a sharpshooter. When a man can pop a squirrel out of the tallest tree every time like you can, you know they’re going to send him out on the skirmish line. Did you ever kill a man while doing skirmish duty, Yorke?”

“Once,” said Yorke, whose face looked gray in the shadow, “and I’d like to forget it. It was last year when we were fallin’ back, followed close by the enemy. They didn’t dare attack us in force, but their skirmishers were mighty active, and

they singed our flanks nearly every day. They got to be so troublesome that the officers sent a lot of picked sharpshooters back to scorch their faces for 'em. I was one of the gang, and I was full of fight, too. They'd been followin' us so close and stingin' us so hard that I wanted to show 'em, Hays, that we could shoot as straight and true as they could. We went back a little till we showed ourselves to the other fellows, then we began to retreat and draw 'em on. We dropped back through a corn field which had been just out of the route of the army, and the corn was standin' in rows higher than a man's head. I was trottin' back between two of the rows, which were so tall that I was in a kind of aisle. I was goin' kind of sideways, lookin' back and watchin' for the enemy's skirmishers. Just then one of 'em came in between the corn rows at the end, behind me. He fired at me and missed. I turned, let him have it, and he dropped. All our fellows turned then, and we drove the whole crowd of 'em before us. I went back down between my corn rows just as I had come, and there lay my man as dead as a door nail. The bullet had gone right through his head. The life blood had streaked his blue

uniform, and some of it had spurted on the green corn. I turned him over on his back. He was a nice lookin' young fellow. I had been a soldier more than a year then; but I tell you, Hays, I turned sick at the sight of what I'd done, though it was fair and open war, give and take. I was sorry that we'd driven those fellows back. Then I might have always thought that I'd merely wounded the man. But, Hays, I can't forget that dead face, and the blood on the blue uniform and the green corn."

In the excitement of the narrative Yorke had raised a little too high, and another Minié ball "zip-zipped" through the air, swished the wind in his face and battered itself like its predecessor against the stony side of the little hollow in which they lay.

"Must be a pretty good marksman out there, and he's watchin' us mighty close," said Yorke as he picked up the lump of lead. "That's a bad habit he's got into, disturbin' two gentlemen when they're tellin' war stories and hurtin' nobody. I think we'll save the free lead we're gettin' and see if our collection grows. We may need this

lead before the war is over.”

He placed the two lumps of lead side by side on a rock. “That’s what you’d call misspent energy,” he said, looking at the misshapen lumps.

“Yorke,” asked Hays, “How did you happen to become a soldier?”

“Well, I don’t know that I can explain it any more than thousands of other fellows in the army can explain how they happened to be there. The war began. Everybody was talkin’ about it. You see, where I lived up in Kentucky was doubtful ground. Some were for secession, some for the Union. Families were divided. Confederate recruitin’ officers came around. The band was playin’, and I was young and got the fever in my blood. I didn’t know much about the wrong or right of it. Didn’t care much either. I was like our colonel. When they came to him to take a commission in the Southern army, he said, ‘Well, boys, you’ll get whipped like tarnation, but I’m of your blood, and I’m with you.’ That’s the way I felt about it. Soon I was in a grey uniform, followin’ the stars and bars. Our family was split up like the rest. Brother Bill, he said the North

was right and off he went to Louisville to join the Yankee army. Brother Tom couldn't quite make up his mind which was right, so he stayed at home, safe out of the way of the bullets. Brother Tom was always smart. So that's our history up to date. Look out there, Hays, or you'll catch it this time! Confound that sharpshooter, anyway! We must give him a dose of lead, or there'll never be any gettin' out of this hole alive."

It was Hays who had become incautious, and a third bullet smashed against the stone wall of the hollow, but did no harm. Yorke picked it up tenderly and put it on the rock by the side of the other two.

"We'll soon have a fine lead mine here in the side of the mountain," he said.

Then he looked to the priming of his rifle and added—"We must wing that fellow, Hays."

"What has become of your scruples against sharpshooting, Yorke?" asked Hays with a laugh. "Do you want to have another dead face haunting you?"

"Oh, that's all right," exclaimed Yorke

impatiently. "But we must do what we are sent to do, and that fellow is interferin' with our work. Our own safety depends on our winging him. Besides this is not a plain shot in the open. If we bring him down he'll fall among the rocks and trees over there. We'll never see his face. How far would you say he is up the mountain side?"

"Full three hundred yards, I think. But the valley between us is narrow. The distance is not too great for a shot, if we can get a good view of him."

The two men peered cautiously through the rocks at the spot where they had seen the flash of the rifle and the whiffs of smoke, and where they thought the sharpshooter lay, but they could see no sign of a human form. The great grey rocks lay heaped along the mountain side, and the scrubby cedar trees grew in the crevices. Rocks and trees together formed a covert impenetrable to the keenest eyes. Apparently they were the only human beings on either hillside. Another puff of smoke had floated upward in white rings and melted into the atmosphere.

"He has rather the better of us," said Yorke.

“He has found out exactly where we are, for he has seen us, while we can’t place him just right.”

“What do you propose to do?” asked Hays.

“I think we’ll work a trick that my old granddad, back in Kentucky, who was an Indian fighter in his young days, used to tell me about. If what he said was straight, and the old gentleman was a truthful man, it was a great scheme for bringin’ the enemy out of his hidin’ place to be a mark for you to shoot at. Now you do just as I say, for two are better than one at this trick.”

Yorke drew himself over cautiously until he lay by the side of Hays. He gave him some instructions, and then they prepared for the trapping of the sharpshooter. Yorke secured a good position, and lay with the muzzle of his rifle projecting between the rocks, where he could secure an almost instant aim at anybody who showed himself on the opposite mountain side. Then Hays placed his cap on the muzzle of his gun, and raised it to the level of the rock in front of him.

“Now steady!” said Yorke. “You don’t want to

let him guess what we're up to."

Hays began to raise the cap with the gun barrel. Slowly the cap went up. A narrow strip of cloth showed above the rock, then a little more and a little more until the brim was in view.

There was a flash from across the valley, a little cloud of smoke, and the cap with a bullet hole through it was dashed from the gun muzzle and against the side of the hollow. A second later and Yorke's own rifle cracked, and then, as the smoke drifted upward, he lay intently regarding the rocks and bushes on the mountain side in front of him. For a moment there was silence, save for the echo of the rifle shots reverberating far up the valley. Then Hays asked:

"What luck, Yorke?"

"None at all," replied Yorke sorrowfully. "He bit at our bait, but he was too quick for me to get back at him. I caught a glimpse of a levelled rifle, a cap and a face below it, but that was all. He fired and dropped back like a flash. I sent a bullet at random, so to speak. There's not one chance in a hundred that he's hit. But our lead mine's

growin'."

He took the fourth bullet and put it on the rock in the row with the other three.

"How are we ever to get out of this place if that fellow stays over there and peppers away at us every time we show the hair of our heads?" asked Hays. "That bullet hole in my cap shows that he knows how to shoot."

"Blessed if I know," said Yorke. "I guess we'll wait. There are big movements on hand, you know. Both armies are marchin' all around here, and maybe there'll be a change in our favour."

The two men lay quite still for some time. By and by they ceased to watch for the sharpshooter and looked far up over the wide brown strath of the valley. They could dimly make out moving forms in the distance, but whether of the blue or the grey they could not tell. Just under the horizon where some trees grew their eyes caught a glint of silver.

"Looks like water. What is it?" asked Yorke.

"Chickamauga Creek, maybe," said Hays. "I don't know much about the country hereabouts,

but I think the creek is off there somewheres.”

“That’s the wrong direction for Chickamauga, seems to me,” said Yorke; “but whether it is or not, there’s somethin’ going on in the valley down there. There’s somethin’ warm ahead, Hays, sure as shootin’.”

The shifting forms up the valley grew more numerous, and they no longer seemed to move about aimlessly. There was a misty veil drooping over the horizon’s rim, but the watchers in the hollow in the hill could see the swarms of men gather coherence and form. Companies and regiments deployed on the slopes and levels. There were men on horses and more men afoot. Sword and bayonet tip flashed back the sunlight.

Yorke and Hays watched the movements with absorbed interest. The two armies had been virtually face to face for several days, and even the newest soldiers knew that battle was almost sure. To comparative veterans like Yorke and Hays the signs were unmistakable. They were much annoyed at their ignorance of the country and of the movements in progress.

“It’s to be an attack of some kind, isn’t—” began Hays.

Two rifle shots almost simultaneous, interrupted his question. Yorke was holding his smoking weapon in his hands and gazing disappointedly across the valley.

“It’s that skulkin’ fellow across there,” he said. “I caught a glimpse of somethin’ movin’ over there among the rocks and bushes and I banged away at it. As soon as I raised my head to fire he popped back at me. I know he’s missed, and I’m about as sure that I have, too. Poorest shootin’ I’ve done for a long time. But our lead mine’s growin’ fast.”

Yorke picked up a fifth flattened lump of lead and put it on the rock in the row with the other four.

“It’s lucky they’ve got plenty of lead in the Yankee army,” he said, “or that fellow would soon make a hole in their stock. I guess he thinks he’ll get us yet.”

“Never mind him now,” said Hays. “Lie close and watch that crowd up the valley there. If I’m

not mistaken, the tune the Minié balls have been singing for us is nothing to the tune they'll soon be singing out there for somebody. Can you make out whether they are ours or the other fellows?"

"Too far away, yet," said Yorke. "We're all mixed up in these valleys and mountains, and it's not safe to be friendly with a fellow until you can see the colour of his uniform; but I know that our fellows are on that mountain over there. But, look what a crowd is gathering in the valley."

Heavy masses of troops were now collected in the valley. There seemed to be many thousands of them, and they were drawn up like men ready for important action. Flags were waving and the sun shimmered along the edges of drawn sabres in the hands of the officers.

"I can't make them out yet," said Hays; "but whoever they are they are in strong force. Perhaps they are to begin the battle we've been expectin' for nearly a week now."

"It's the Yankees," said Yorke, who had the keener eye. "I can see the blue of the uniforms and the stars in their flags. I wonder what's up

now. You and I are in the hole sure enough, Hays, for as long as that sharpshooter over there sticks to us we've got to watch and see what's goin' to be done whether we want to or not."

The troops began to move directly towards a steep mountain slope that lay in front of them, and as that action brought them nearer to Yorke and Hays they perceived that the force was larger and stronger than they had at first supposed. Clearly it was a movement of importance. The troops quickened their step. They were at a trot now, and they spread far over the valley.

"They are going to attack our army's position on the mountain!" exclaimed Hays.

"I don't think it. They would hardly dare."

"Look and see."

The troops advanced on a run towards the base of the mountain, officers waving their swords and apparently cheering them on, though Yorke and Hays were too far away to hear the sound of voices. But there was all the many-coloured medley of an army in motion, columns of men appearing on the hillocks and then sinking out of

sight soon to appear again, while the yellow shafts of sunlight falling across swords and bayonets flung brilliant streaks over the advancing army.

Soon the columns were at the base of the mountain and began to move up the slope. Then Yorke and Hays expected to hear the artillery of the defenders, but there came no sound from the mountain.

“What can our men up there be doing?” exclaimed Hays.

A moment after he spoke there was a heavy crash of artillery on the summit and side of the mountain, and gusts of flame shot from the rocks. The deep boom of the cannon echoed far off through the hills, and a cloud of smoke floated over the valley. The lines of the assailing troops were shattered and those in front were hurled back on the others, where front ranks and rear ranks momentarily remained, huddled together. Yorke and Hays could see the ruts torn through the living mass.

“More than one good man has got his good-

bye out there,” said Yorke, philosophically. “Their lines are broken and they appear to falter. I guess they’ve got enough, Hays! It was a rash charge!”

“The fun has just begun! Look, they are going on!” exclaimed Hays.

The ranks of the charging army closed up and rushed on with waving flags, leaving the ground behind them sprinkled with human forms. Many stumbled and fell on the slope, but dragged themselves up and climbed on. Far up the mountain side countless other forms were now seen outlined against the clear sky, and the flash of the artillery was incessant. The mountain was turned into a blazing volcano, and the cloud of smoke that floated up and hovered over the valley grew denser and darker. The assailants, many thousands of them, despite the fallen, who were becoming very numerous now, still swarmed up the slope in the face of that fire that scorched and burnt like the infernal flames. The flags were waving, and officers flourished their sabres. Sometimes a column was hurled back for a moment, but the men locked shoulders and came

on again.

“Our fellows are firin’ too high,” said Yorke in a judicial tone. “If they’d depress the guns more they’d soon stop that rush. Nothin’ easier.”

“But they won’t stop it! Look how those fellows climb and rush up. What a splendid sight!”

“Hays,” said Yorke, “don’t you know that you are applaudin’ the enemy? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, admirin’ the Yankees in that manner!”

“You don’t mean that, Yorke, I know,” said Hays. “Why shouldn’t I admire a bold deed, whoever does it!”

“It’s a sight worth seein’,” said Yorke, making no direct reply. “That’s the only kind of fightin’ for a man to do with your crowd around you, and the other fellows’ crowd before you, and both bangin’ away like man! Not this infernal takin’ aim in cold blood from ambush! I wish we were there, Hays, old fellow!”

Yorke nervously fingered his gun. He had the light of battle in his eyes.

“If I don’t make a mistake,” he resumed, “we’ll miss the best part of it. See how the clouds are gatherin’ around the upper half of the mountain.”

Heavy mists were coming from somewhere out of the beyond and wrapping the crest of the mountain in their shadow. The figures of the defenders grew indistinct. Those on the top of the mountain soon disappeared, and those on the slopes followed. All were covered by the gathering clouds. The incessant spouting of flame from this canopy and the heavy crash of the artillery showed that they were still active. Below the broken but persistent ranks of the assailants were yet visible and climbing upward.

The heavy pall of smoke, darker and more threatening than the rising mists, lowered over the valley. The edges of the two clouds, one of black and the other of white, met and mingled, but the activity of the cannon bathed the lower half of the mountain in a lurid light. Yorke and Hays saw everything through a blood red mist. The figures of the distant men, shapeless and indistinct, were like splotches of red on the

horizon. They formed a swaying and fighting, but still ascending mass, giving a yard sometimes but soon regaining it. The drifting smoke and cloud now and then obscured the brilliant banners and floating aside again disclosed them still held aloft.

Through the heavy thud, thud of the artillery a new sound was heard, not so deep but steadier.

“The small arms are at work! The rifles are talkin’ now!” cried Yorke, who, eager of eye, and colour heightened, was listening intently. “Don’t you hear them, Hays? Listen to that infernal cracklin’ like the sound of a forest on fire! There’s a storm of lead on that mountain slope now! Can they live before it? I tell you, Hays, I’m not much afraid of the artillery. It roars and it pounds, but there’s too much bark for the bite. But when the rifle balls begin to sing their little song in your ears, look out! The old man with the scythe is abroad. I remember when I heard it at Shiloh for the first time. It was like a million bees swarmin’ around my ears, and nights and nights after when I lay down under the trees to sleep I heard that infernal singin’ and hiss’in’ around

me!”

Hayes made no reply. He was engrossed in the spectacle.

The clouds drooped lower and swallowed up more and more of the mountain. Now only the rear ranks of the assailants were visible. Now these, too, had passed out of sight, the clouds swallowing up them all.

Yorke and Hays still gazed towards the invisible battlefield. It was now a huge cone of mist which enwrapped all the combatants. But out of this cone came flashes of flame, and the grinding and crashing of the cannon and rifles still showed to the watchers how fierce was the activity within the crater of that cloud.

The two men lay silent for some time while the gusts of flame spouted from the cloud-clothed mountain. Absorbed in the terrific spectacle they forgot all else for a while. The clouds grew thicker, but the flames spirited from them as rapidly and as vividly as ever.

Presently Hays pulled Yorke's arm and whispered:

“Look, across the valley, Yorke!”

“What is it?” asked Yorke without turning his eyes from the flaming mountain. “Our sharpshooter! The battle has made him forget us!”

Yorke looked and saw a man’s head projecting, above some rocks. Only the side of the face was visible, and that but dimly, for some of the smoke from the conflict was now drifting up the valley where the men lay. Evidently the sharpshooter was as much engrossed with the battle in the clouds as Yorke and Hays had been. He was sitting upright and stiff, and staring at the mountain, apparently forgetful that his head was exposed.

Hays touched Yorke on the arms and whispered in his ear:

“You don’t forget, Yorke!”

“Forget what?”

“Remember that we must get out of this hole.”

“Well, I know that!”

“We can’t unless that sharpshooter over there

is out of the way. He will remember soon that we are here.”

Yorke was silent for a few moments. He picked up his rifle and put it down again. Then he said:

“It is no more my duty, Hays, than it is yours. You do it.”

“You are the better shot. I might miss him, and there would not be another chance. You must do it. It’s sharpshooter against sharpshooter.”

Yorke picked up his rifle, rested it on a rock, and took aim with slowness and great care at the sharpshooter. Hays waited for the report of the weapon, but Yorke, without firing, took the gun down from the rock, making an impatient gesture as he did so.

“What’s the matter, Yorke?” asked Hays in surprise.

“There’s somethin’ wrong with the sights of the gun,” said Yorke, turning away his face.

He fumbled a moment or two with the weapon. The head of the sharpshooter was still outlined against the mountain side as he watched the cone of cloud in which the battle flamed and seethed.

“You still have the chance, Yorke,” said Hays.

Yorke lifted his gun again, and again took slow and careful aim. The hammer was raised, and Hays looked across at the sharpshooter to see him drop when Yorke pulled the trigger.

Yorke suddenly pulled the hammer down with his hand, and threw the gun upon the ground, exclaiming—

“I can’t, do it, Hays! I can’t do it! I can’t kill a man like that! It’s too much like murder! When I looked down the sights of my rifle I did not see his face, Hays, but the face of that dead man lyin’ between the corn-rows—the face of the man I killed! I tell you, I can’t do it, Hays, even if we never get out of this hole alive!”

“At any rate your chance is gone,” said Hays, “for the man is hidden again, and I suppose he is watching us with that rifle of his in his hand ready for use. The problem now is what is going to become of us?”

Yorke said nothing, but turned his attention again to the battle. The clouds had become darker and the flashes of flame were growing less

numerous. The noise of the cannon and the rifles began to sink.

“That affair in the clouds there is settled, I think,” said Yorke, “for the men who have gone up the mountain have not come down. I think we shall see somethin’ come out of those clouds soon.”

They were not compelled to wait long. Numerous figures shot out of the mist and began to descend the neck of the mountain. There were large bodies of men. Some were dragging artillery and others were helping ammunition waggons down the steep roads. They showed some evidence of haste, though the semblance of order was still preserved.

“They are our fellows,” said Yorke, “and we’ve lost. We’ve been driven off the mountain, but it’s likely to do a good turn to you and me. The boys are retreatin’ our way. Our sharpshooter will have to clear out or become a prisoner. He’s reminded us pretty often that he’s there, hasn’t he. Hays?”

Yorke looked at the five lumps of lead lying

there in a row on the rock. Then he resumed:

“I would like to have a crack at that fellow out in the open, when the battle was rollin’ around us. But I couldn’t pot him as I would shoot a feedin’ deer from ambush.”

The retreating army was now coming up the valley and along the mountain sides, and the columns were near enough for Yorke and Hays to hear the clanking of the artillery and the shouting of the officers.

“What’s the matter with our sharpshooter?” exclaimed Yorke. “It’s time for him to make a run for it.”

“Why, don’t you see he’s trapped?” said Hays. “He’s afraid if he breaks from his cover that he’ll catch one of our bullets. Wonder what he’ll do?”

The retreating columns drew nearer. The front lines were within gunshot. The sharpshooter sprang from the rocks, fired a random bullet that hit nothing, at an approaching column and darted higher up the mountain.

“Fire, Yorke! Fire!” exclaimed Hays. “You’ve got a fair mark now. Wing him, or he’ll escape

over the mountain!”

“Not I,” said Yorke. “I’ve spared his life once and I reckon I can do it again.”

But the sharpshooter was not to escape. A body of men appeared in front of him. He was cut off. Throwing down his gun he held up his hand as a token of surrender.

“We’ll go across and see him,” said Yorke, “we’ve got to join the retreatin’ army. Besides, I’d like to compliment him on the way he watched and waited for us, and plunked away every time he saw a head.”

The two men scrambled down into the valley and across it and quickly overtook the columns.

“A skirmisher was captured up here. Do you know where he is?” asked Yorke of a soldier.

The soldier pointed ahead.

Yorke and Hays reached the first column, and Yorke asked a captain whom he knew if he could see the prisoner.

“There he is marching between two of our boys,” said the captain. “A likely enough looking

fellow, too. I guess we'll hold him to trade for some of those we left back yonder on the mountain top in the enemy's hands."

Yorke walked round until he was in front of the prisoner and could see him well.

The sharpshooter looked up when Yorke appeared before him. The two gazed at each other. Yorke trembled for a moment, and turned very pale. Then he recovered himself and his face became impassive again. He walked up to the man, extended his hand, and said:

"I'm glad to see you, brother Bill. How are you?"



At the Cannon's Mouth

I found it neither pleasant nor an easy task to force my way through the undergrowth which flourished in such thick and tangled fashion, and the smarting of my wound, slight though the latter was, for the ball had merely cut the flesh of my wrist, contributed to both my bodily and mental suffering. The faint flashes of summer lightning in the hot June night gave brief and imperfect glimpses of masses of low, scrubby trees, with interlacing bushes and briars and an occasional pool of dirty and discolored water, rimmed in by the Virginia mud, sticky and yellow. Into which I floundered more than once, when the friendly lightning was not at hand. Then, pulling myself out again, I tore my clothes and skin on the clumps of briars that caught me, as I blindly plunged forward. Two hours of such work and, with the feeling of delight that a shipwrecked sailor must experience when he sees

a rescuing sail, I struck a beaten track. True, it was not much. Merely a path, where the undergrowth had been crushed down, as if by some very heavy weight, probably by a train of artillery, for I tread in the ruts cut by wheels. But it enabled me to advance with much greater speed and less danger to my person, and would undoubtedly lead me to the main body of the army.

A large rain drop splashed in my face, and then another, and soon a torrent came down. I plodded on, while the rain beat upon me. Off to the right I heard the frequent booming of cannon. Twice shells came shrieking high over me, and I involuntarily ducked my head at the noise, for I was not yet an old enough soldier to cure myself of the habit. My wound had now ceased to pain me, but the bitterness of my reflections was sufficient torment. I had come up the Peninsula with the great army to obtain my first taste of war. Often had I, like many another young soldier in that gallant body of men, painted roseate pictures of victory, promotion, rewarded patriotism and a reunited country. With a light

heart had I encountered the tolls and privations of the advance. I had the enthusiasm of youth, and was daunted by no obstacle. I did not fear the fever bred in the swamps of the Chickahominy, which cut down our men as if we were standing in front of the enemy's artillery. I did my share and twice my share of the work which tries a soldier more than fighting. I took an ax and helped to build roads through the swamps and bridges over the swollen streams. Then I tugged at the wheels of the cannon stuck in the mud, and at night I did picket duty in the dense forests, and sometimes, in the darkness, heard a Confederate bullet hiss by me. But at the time we were cheered by the knowledge that we were advancing. We thought of nothing but forward, forward, and our hardships were forgotten in the reflection that at each sunset we were nearer to the enemy's capital.

The reverse side of the picture had come quickly enough, I thought, as I stumbled into the miry edge of a small brook that ran across the path. The prize was almost within our hand. I had even seen one bright morning, the spires of

Richmond glittering in the sunshine—and then we were turned back. For a moment I felt a regret that I had not been taken prisoner by the enemy in the last battle, when I was cut off from my regiment, instead of escaping through their lines to struggle among the woods as best I could in the effort to join the retreating army. The greatness of my anticipations had made the repulse the more mortifying.

The voices of the night repeated the word, retreat, retreat, retreat. The very shells that sang over my head had but one tune, and it was retreat, retreat, retreat. The splashing of the rain formed the same sound, and I began to repeat it to myself as a kind of chorus.

At last I saw a light, far ahead and faint, but very cheerful in the darkness and rain. I was sure that I had overtaken a portion of our rear guard, but, as I came nearer, I saw that it was a house standing in a small clearing, and the light came from one of the windows. There were no pickets about, no evidences of encampment, and I knew that our men were not near. Evidently it was occupied by a family which, more fearless that

others in that region, had not taken itself from this battle ground and gone to Richmond, or some similar place of security. Though it was a risky business to linger with the enemy so close behind. I was tired and hungry, and had lost my way, and I determined to hail them, and get something to eat and news of the army, if I could. I went up to the door and knocked lightly on it with the muzzle of my rifle. I repeated the stroke two or three times before a man's voice called out and asked who I was. I replied that I was a Union soldier who had been cut off from his command, and wished to obtain information that would guide him to the army.

At first he refused entrance to me, saying that the Yankees had found their own way into Virginia, and could find it out again.

I replied that I was sick and wounded, and appealed to the hospitality of Virginians, who boasted that they never refused aid to the suffering and unfortunate.

This evidently touched his pride, for he opened the door, held up a lantern in my face and looked closely at me. He must have been satisfied that I

was not dangerous, for I know that I did not look like it, although I was by no means a pretty figure. I was wet and bedraggled, but the rain had not washed all the yellow mud off me, and on my uniform there were still streaks of the blood that had flowed from my wounded wrist. He invited me to enter, in a not unkindly tone, and I followed him into a room that was furnished with a fair degree of comfort. He seemed to be a Virginia farmer of some cultivation, for his language was not bad. In one corner sat a woman of about 40, evidently his wife, who held in her arms a little girl of three or four years, with beautiful, long yellow curls which at once attracted my notice and admiration. My countenance must have expressed these feelings, for both the man and woman softened toward me, and the latter volunteered to bind up my wrist, while the former stated that some of our troops had passed only an hour before.

While the woman was putting the bandage on my wrist the man brought me something to eat, though he said the provisions in the house were scanty, and he had much rather give them to a

confederate than to a federal soldier. They avowed their confederate sentiments, and gloried in them, exulted over our retreat, knew the enemy were pursuing us, and boasted that our army would be annihilated within a few days. As I was receiving their hospitality, I did not care to dispute these points with them, but asked why they had remained in such an unsafe place, when a cannon ball might come crushing through their house at any time.

The man replied that he did not like to abandon his home, as he had nowhere else to go, and that he did not anticipate any danger.

Again I did not care to differ with him, and I merely uttered some compliments about the pretty little girl and her beautiful yellow hair, which caused the mother's face to flush with pride.

I warned them to keep the child out of danger, as flying bullets might be numerous in that vicinity before long and the father repeated that there was nothing to fear.

I finished eating the food that they had placed

before me, thanked them, kissed the little girl, and followed once more the path of the retreating army, whose rear guard I overtook in encampment.

The sun shouldered his golden disk above the horizon the next morning, and flooded the earth with yellow sunshine. The rain drops dried up, the grass and foliage turned to a deeper green, and the despondency that I had felt during the night passed away before the glorious daylight. We lay upon the heights, and the army had turned at last. We faced the enemy once more, and there, expectant and confident, we awaited his onset, for we knew that he would come, and we believed that we would beat him back. The army was transformed. The men laughed and, when discipline allowed, shouted to each other. Many of the wounded begged the privilege of taking a place in the ranks, and there was no need for the officers to exhort the troops, and endeavor to excite their courage. Secure in their position, they had all the ardor of battle, and awaited with impatience the coming of the enemy.

My regiment was stationed in the front rank.

The privations and bitter feelings of the previous night were forgotten, and I paid no notice to the trifling wound on my arm, for like the others, I was anxious that we should beat the enemy back, and repay him for some of the losses he had inflicted upon us.

Before waiting long, we saw Confederate troops debouche from some woods about a mile distant. We watched them for a little while, and then, as I had had some experience in scouting, the colonel sent me forward to join our skirmishers and 'bring a report to me.' I advanced among the rocks and bushes until within a few hundred yards of the enemy. I stooped down behind a large rock and watched their movements. Within the edge of the woods I could see the house at which I had stopped during the previous night, and I wondered if its inmates had taken me at my word, and had gone.

While I was watching, a shell flew over my head, struck the ground near the Confederate troops, and exploded. Directly came another, and it alighted among them, causing great confusion. One man was killed, as I could plainly see, and

several others were wounded. They withdrew in haste and much disorder. Some of them came back. I suppose they were trying to recover the body of the dead man. But I wondered why they should take so great a risk for so slight an object, slight, at least in war, and upon the eve of a great battle. They were a shining mark for our batteries and again the shells came flying toward them; tearing up the earth around them and covering them with dirt.

They retreated, but in a few minutes returned again to be driven back as before by the shells. I could not understand such obstinacy, but, as I had more serious work to do than to discover the cause, I continued my reconnoissance, and moved off to the right. The Confederate troops remained stationary at the edge of the woods, and I had plenty of time for my duties. About an hour later I started back to my regiment. On the way I met another of our skirmishers and told him about the little episode of the Confederate troops and the shells.

“I can explain that,” he replied. “A curious thing happened over there: We captured some

prisoners a short while ago, and one of them told us about it. A man with his wife and child lived in that house in the edge of the clearing. The man persisted in remaining until the last moment, although he saw our troops massed on the hill. He did not get out until the confederates themselves came, and even then they had to hurry him away. At that time the shells struck, and in the confusion the child disappeared. The troops, instead of coming back after the body of the dead man, came for her, but they did not find her.”

I went on and delivered my report to the colonel, but I thought much, on the way, of the child. What would become of her? Doubtless she would be found after the battle, ridden over by the cavalry, or torn to pieces by a cannon shot.

Heavier masses of the enemy now issued from the woods, and it was evident that the battle was at hand. For some time there had been a lively firing, but this was to be the great trial of strength. The confederates formed batteries in the woods behind their infantry, and replied to our fire. A cannon ball struck in the earth about ten feet from me. Another went over my head and

killed a man in the rear rank. A minie ball broke the colonel's sword sheath. It was getting very uncomfortable. I was willing to fight, but I did not like waiting, and anxiously watched the dense columns of the enemy who were moving toward the hill.

They came on steadily and at a trot. All our batteries were turned upon them, and the men were loading and firing as fast as they could. Whole platoons of the advancing enemy were swept away, but the others never paused nor hesitated. As I stood with my gun in my hands, my admiration for their courage was unlimited. Many of them were in their shirt sleeves, as I have often seen the Georgians and Mississippians fight, but they came on a run over the broken ground, and seemed to fear the rain of shot and shell no more than a boy would a snowball. Even in moments of greater danger and excitement, the mind often involuntarily dwells on trifles, and I remember smiling at the queer appearance their heads made, bobbing up and down as they came over the uneven ground.

Then I fell to watching individual soldiers, for

they were near enough for us to discern their features whenever the clouds of smoke blew aside. I was particularly attracted by one who was coming straight toward me. The fierceness of his appearance indicated the soldier who loved fighting for fighting's sake. He wore neither coat nor waistcoat, and his long, black hair fell partially over his half wild face. He waved his gun above his head, and joined in the rebel yell which I had heard before in the swamps of the Chickahominy. If he were not shot down on the way, this man would charge directly upon me, I thought, and perhaps I would die by his hand.

We were ordered to reserve our fire for closer quarters. I had become fascinated by the appearance of the Confederate who was coming in my direction, and thought little of the bullets that fell around me. I was watching that soldier. When the command to fire should be given I determined to discharge my gun at him. If he ever reached us, I felt sure that he would kill me. I wondered if he would be shot down by the artillery before our turn to fire came. Twice I lost sight of him, and thought that he was down, but

each time it was merely some smoke that had concealed him, and, when it drifted aside, he was still rushing on at the head of the enemy. Once he stumbled and fell upon his knees, and I was sure that he was shot, but he had slipped on a stone or something else, and in a moment recovered himself, and came on again. Balls, grape shot and shells tore the ranks around him, but he was untouched and came straight as the flight of a hawk toward me.

I felt sure that I would have to shoot that man, or he would have my own life, and I deliberated whether to aim at his head or his heart. At length I decided upon the head. A curl of his thick hair fell down upon the left side of his forehead, and, if the smoke did not conceal him, I would shoot straight between the end of that curl and into his head. I wondered if my nerves would remain steady, and I could hit so small a mark amid the great noise and confusion. I even held out one arm to see if it shook, but not a muscle quivered.

The colonel now gave the preliminary command, and I thought the one to fire would come next. I leveled my gun, and looked for my

Confederate. There he was, as before, directly opposite me. The black curl still hung over his left eye and offered a fair mark. They had now reached a little patch of bushes that fringed the base of the slope. I sighted at the black curl, and my hand felt for the trigger while I awaited the order to fire.

An exclamation from the man next to me startled me and disarranged my aim. From the bushes in front of the charging confederates uprose a figure very strange to the battle field. Full into view came the long yellow curls and frightened face of a little girl that I had seen before. I dropped the muzzle of my gun in amazement as she stood there between the lines, scared and appalling.

She came out of the bushes which had concealed her, and, running midway between our lines and those of the advancing enemy, stopped, evidently too much terrified to move any further. She was directly between me and the confederate soldier with the black hair. In a few moments he would be upon her. I felt a thrill of sympathy for the child alone on the battle field, and at the same

time a desire to save her. I wondered what the Confederate soldier would do when he reached her, for I had come to the conclusion that he would not fall unless I shot him. Would he rush on over her? Would he trample her into the dirt, or merely thrust her aside?

The child may have cried out with fear, but I could not hear her, for the roar of the battle filled my ears, and I was watching the wild-looking Confederate. A light wind blew the smoke at that point aside, and I could see distinctly. She turned her face toward the confederate, and a beam of sunlight fell upon her hair. I glanced up and down the ranks. I could see, by the look of apprehension on the faces of our men, that all had noticed her, and the muzzles of many guns had fallen, as mine had.

The dark confederate was almost upon the little one. Evidently he had not perceived her, for the ardor of battle shone undiminished upon his face, and again he waved his gun over his head, a thing which soldiers never do in a charge, unless they are much excited. Another step would bring him to her, and at this moment I think that for the

first time he perceived the frightened face and yellow hair.

The soldier dropped his gun by his side. The fierceness went out of his countenance, and...he stopped... The whole line stopped with him, and those behind coming upon the wall of their comrades were brought also to a halt. He let his gun fall to the ground, stooped down and took the little girl in his arms. The action could be plainly seen by both armies. Suddenly, as if by a preconceived order, the artillery and small arms on either side ceased firing.

The roar of the battle field was replaced by a silence that would have been complete had it not been for the groans of wounded men, and I knew that thousands of eyes were strained upon the soldier and the child. I looked at the colonel, but he had forgotten the command to fire.

The soldier bent his head and kissed the child, and then lifted her high over his shoulder and handed her to the man behind him. Then we could see her passed rapidly from rank to rank, until in a few moments the frightened face and yellow hair had disappeared toward the wood,

and she was in safety.

The soldier seized his gun, uttered the rebel yell and came on again with line after line charging behind him. Our colonel shouted “fire!” and the volley blazed from our rifles. At the same moment a hundred cannon from the summit of the hill poured a torrent of lead and iron upon the charging battalions, and the batteries of the enemy replied. The earth shook as if in the throes of an earthquake. My ears were deafened by the uproar, and thick clouds of floating smoke hid the dark soldier and his companions.



After the Battle

The falling dusk quenched the fury of the battle. The cannon glimmered but feebly on the dim horizon like the sputter of a dying fire. The shouts of combatants were unheard, and Dave Joyce concluded that the fighting was over for that day at least. In his soul he was glad of it.

“Pardner,” he said to the wounded man, “the battle has passed on an’ left us here like a canoe stuck on a sand bank. I think the fightin’ is over, but if it ain’t we’re out of it anyhow, an’ I don’t know any law why we shouldn’t make ourselves as comf’table as things will allow.”

“If there’s anythin’ done,” said the wounded man, “you’ll have to do it, for I can’t walk, an’ I can’t move, except when there’s a bush for me to grab hold of and pull myself along by.”

“That’s mighty bad,” said Joyce, sympathetically. “Where did you say that bullet

took you?”

“I got it in my right leg here,” the other replied, “an’ I think it broke the bone. Leastways the leg ain’t any more use to me than if it was dead, though it hurts like tarnation sometimes. I guess it’ll be weeks before I walk again.”

“Maybe I could do somethin’ for you,” said Joyce, “if there was a little more light. I guess I’ll take a look, anyhow. I haven’t been two years in the army not to know anythin’ about bullet wounds.”

He bent down and with his pocket-knife cut away a patch of the faded blue cloth from the wounded man’s leg.

“I guess I’d better not fool with that,” he said, looking critically at the wound. “The bullet’s gone all the way through, but the blood’s clotted up so thick over the places that the bleedin’ has stopped. You won’t die if you don’t move too much an’ start that wound to bleedin’ again.”

“That’s consolin’,” said the wounded man; “but, since I can’t move, I don’t know what’s to become of me but to lay here on the field an’ die

anyway.”

“Don’t you fret,” said Joyce, cheerfully. “I’ll take care of you. You’re Fed. and I’m Confed., but you’re hurt an’ I ain’t, an’ if the case was the other way I’d expect you to do as much for me. Besides, I’ve lost my regiment in the shuffle, and the chances are if I tried to find it again to-night I’d run right into the middle of the Yankee army, and that would mean Camp Chase for your humble servant, which is a bunk he ain’t covetin’ very bad just now. So I guess it’ll be the safe as well as the right thing for me to do to stick by you. Jerusalem! listen to that! Just hear them crickets chirpin’, will you!”

There was a blaze of light in the west, followed by a crash which seemed to roll around the horizon and set all the trees of the forest to trembling. When the echoes were lost beyond the hills the silence became heavy and portentous. The night was hot and sticky, and the powdery vapor that still hung over the field crept into Joyce’s throat and made him cough for breath.

“Thunderation!” he said at length, still looking in the direction in which the light had blazed up.

“I guess at least a dozen of the big cannon must have been fired at once then. Can’t some fellows get enough fightin’ in the daytime, without pluggin’ away in the night-time too? Now I come of fightin’ stock myself—I’m from Kentucky—but twelve hours out of the twenty-four always ’peared to me to be enough for that sort of thing. Besides, it’s so infernal hot to-night, too.”

“It was hotter than this for me a while ago,” said the wounded man.

“So it was, so it was,” said Joyce, apologetically, “an’ I mustn’t forget you, either. Let ’em fight over there if they want to, an’ if they’re big enough fools to spile a night that way when they might be restin’. What you need just now is water. I think there’s a spring runnin’ out of the side of that hill there. If you’ll listen you’ll hear it tricklin’ away, so cool and refreshin’ like. I guess it was tricklin’ that same way, just as calm an’ peaceful as Sunday mornin’, while the battle was goin’ on round here. Don’t you feel as if a little water would help you mightily, pardner?”

“’Twould so,” said the wounded man. “I’m burnin’ up inside, an’ if you’d get me a big drink

of it I'd think you were mighty nigh good enough to be one of the twelve apostles."

"It's easy enough for me to do it," said Joyce. "I'll be back in a minute."

He took off his big slouch hat and walked toward the source of the trickling sound. From beneath an overhanging rock in the side of the hill near by a tiny stream of water flowed. After a fall of five feet it plunged into a little basin which it had hallowed out for itself in the rock, and formed a deep and cool little pool. Around the edge of the pool the tender green grass grew. The overflow from it wandered away in a little rill through the woods.

"Thunder, but ain't this purty?" exclaimed Joyce, forgetting that the wounded man was out of hearing. "It's just like our springhouse back in old Kentuck. I've put out butter-crocks an' milk-buckets a hundred times to cool in our pool when I was a boy. Wish I had some of them things now!"

The stirring of peaceful memories caused Joyce to linger a little, in forgetfulness of the

wounded man. It was cool in the shadow of the hill, and the gay little stream tinkled merrily in his ears. He would have liked to remain there, but he pulled himself together with an impatient jerk, filled the crown of his hat with the limpid water, and started back to the relief of the wounded man.

He followed the channel of the stream for a little way, and as he turned to step across it he noticed the increasing depth of its waters.

“It’s dammed up,” he muttered. “I wonder what’s done that.”

Then he started back shuddering and spilled half the water from his hat, for he had almost stepped on the body of a man that had fallen across the channel of the poor little rivulet, checking the flow of its waters and deepening the stream.

The body lay face downward, and Joyce could not see the wound that had caused death. But as he stooped down he saw again the broad red flash in the west, and heard the heavy crash of the cannon.

“Will them cannon always be hungry?” he muttered. “But I guess I must give this poor little stream which ain’t done no harm to anybody the right of way again.”

He stooped and pulled the body to one side. With a thankful rush and gurgle the waters of the recent pool sped on in their natural channel, and Joyce returned to the fountain-head to fill his hat again.

He found the wounded man waiting with patience.

“I was gone longer than I ought to have been. Did you think I had left you, pardner?” asked Joyce.

“No,” said the man. “I didn’t believe you’d play that kind of a trick on me.”

“An’ so I haven’t,” said Joyce, “an’ for your faith in me I’ve brought you a hatful of the nicest an’ freshest an’ coolest water you ever put your lips to in all your born days. Raise your head up, there, an’ drink.”

The wounded man drank and drank, and then when the hat was emptied he laid his head back

in the grass and sighed as if he were in heaven.

“I must say that you ’pear to like water, pardner,” said Joyce.

“Like it?” said the wounded man. “Wait till you’ve been wounded, an’ then you’ll know what it is to want water. Why, till you brought it I felt as if my inside was full of hot coals an’ I’d burn all up if I didn’t get something mighty quick to put the fire out.”

“Then I reckon I’ve stopped a whole conflagration,” said Joyce, “an’ with mighty little trouble to myself, too. But I don’t wonder that you get thirsty on a night like this. Thunderation, but ain’t it clammy!”

He sat down on a fallen tree and drew his coat-sleeve across his brow. Then he held up the sleeve: it was wet with sweat. There was no wind. The night had brought no coolness. The thick and heavy atmosphere hung close to the earth and coiled around and embraced everything. Through it came the faint gunpowdery vapor that crept into the throats and nostrils of the two men.

“I wish I was at home sleepin’ on the hall floor,” said Joyce. “I’ll bet it would be cool there.”

The wounded man made no answer, but turned his face up to the sky and drew in great mouthfuls of the warm air.

“Them tarnation fools over yonder ’pear to have their dander up yet,” said Joyce, pointing to the west, where the alternate flashing and rumbling showed that the battle still lingered. “I thought the battle was over long ago, but I guess it ain’t. I’ve knowed some all-fired fools in my time, but the fellows that would keep on fightin’ on a hot night like this must be the all-firedest.”

Then the two lay quite still for a while, watching the uneasy rising and falling of the night battle. Had they not known so much of war, they might have persuaded themselves that the flashes they saw were flashes of heat-lightning and the rumbling but the rumbling of summer thunder. But they knew better. They knew it was men and not the elements that fought.

“It’s mighty curious,” said Joyce, “how the

sand's all gone out of me for the time. To-day I felt as if I could whip the whole Yankee army all by myself. To-night I don't want to fight anythin'. I'm as peaceful in temper as a little lamb friskin' about in our old field at home. I hope that there fightin' won't come our way; at least not to-night. How are you feelin', pardner?"

"Pretty well for a wounded man," replied the other; "but I'd like to have some more water."

"Then I'm the man to get it for you," said Joyce, springing up. "An' I'm goin' to see if I can't get somethin' to eat, too, for my innards are cryin' cupboard mighty loud. There's dead men layin' aroun' here, an' there may be somethin' in their haversacks. I hate to rob the dead, but if they've got grub we need it more'n they do."

He returned with another hatful of water, which the wounded man drank eagerly, gratefully. Then he went back and searched in the grass and bushes for the fallen. Presently he came in great glee, and triumphantly held up two haversacks.

"Luck, pardner!" he exclaimed. "Great luck!

Bully luck! One of these I got off a dead Fed. and t'other off a dead Confed., and both must have been boss foragers, for in one haversack there's a roast chicken an' in t'other there's half a b'iled ham, an' in both there's plenty of bread. I haven't had such luck before in six months. You're a Yank, pardner, and a Northerner, an' maybe you don't know much about the vanities of roast chicken an' cold b'iled ham. But it's time you did know. I've come from the field at home when I'd been plowin' all day, an' my appetite was as sharp as a razor an' as big as our barn. I'd put up old Pete, our black mule that I'd been plowin' with, an' feed him; then I'd go to the house an' kinder loosen my waist-ban', an' mother would say to me, 'Come in the kitchen, Dave; your supper's ready for you,' Say, pardner, you ought to see me then. There'd be a pitcher of cold buttermilk from the spring-house, and one dish of roast chicken, an' another of cold ham, an' all for me, too. An' say, pardner, I can taste that ham now. When you eat one piece you want another, an' then another, an' you keep on till there ain't any left on the dish, an' then you lean back in your chair an' wish that when you come to die you'd feel as

happy as you do then. Pardner, I wish them times was back again.”

“I wish so too,” said the wounded man.

“We can’t have ’em back, at least not now,” said Joyce, cheerily, “but we can make believe, an’ it’ll be mighty good make-believe, too, for we’ve got the ham an’ the chicken, an’ we can get cold water to take the place of cold milk. I guess you can use your arms all right; so you can spread this ham an’ chicken out on the grass, an’ I’ll see if I can’t find a canteen to keep the water in. Say pardner, we’ll have a banquet, you an’ me, that’s what we’ll have.”

The stalwart young fellow, full of boyish delight at the idea that the thought of home had suggested to him, swung off in search of the canteen. He found not one alone, but two. Then he returned clanking them together to indicate his success. As he came up he called out, in his hearty voice—

“Pardner, is the supper-table ready? Have you got the knives an’ forks? You needn’t min’ about the napkins. I guess we can get along without ’em

just this once.”

“All ready,” said the wounded man; “an’ I guess I can keep you company at this ham an’ chicken an’ bread, for I’m gettin’ a mighty sharp edge on my appetite too.”

“So much the better,” said Joyce. “There’s plenty for both, an’ it wouldn’t be good manners for me to eat by myself.”

He sat down on the grass in front of the improvised repast, and placed one canteen beside the wounded man and the other beside himself.

“Now, pardner,” he said, “we’ll drink to each other’s health, an’ then we’ll charge the ham an’ chicken with more vim than either of us ever charged a breastwork.”

They drank from the canteens; and then they made onslaught upon the provisions. Joyce ate for a while in deep and silent content, forgetting the heat and the battle which still lowered in the west. But presently, when his appetite was dulled, he remembered the cannonade.

“There they go again!” he said. “Boom! Boom! Boom! Won’t them fellows ever get enough? I

thought I was hungry, but the cannon over there 'pear to be hungrier. I suppose there ain't men enough in all this country to stop up their iron throats. But bang away! They don't bother us, do they, pardner? They can't spile this supper, for all their boomin' an' flashin'."

The wounded man bowed assent and took another piece of the ham.

Joyce leaned back on the grass, held up a chicken leg in his hand, and looked contemplatively at it.

"Ain't it funny, pardner," he said, "that you, a Tommy Yank, an' me, a Johnny Reb, are sittin' here, eatin' grub together, as friendly as two brothers, when we ought to be killin' each other? I don't know what Jeff Davis an' old Abe Lincoln will say about it when they hear of the way you an' me are doin'."

The wounded man laughed.

"You can say that I was your prisoner," he said, "when they summon you before the court-martial. An' so I am, if you choose to make me. I can't resist."

“I’m thinkin’ more about gettin’ back safe to our army than makin’ prisoners,” said Joyce, as he flung the chicken bone, now bare, into the bushes.

“That may be hard to do,” said the wounded man; “for neither you nor me can tell which way the armies will go. Listen to that boomin’! Wasn’t it louder than before? That fightin’ must be movin’ round nearer to us.”

“Let it move,” said Joyce. “I tell you I’ve had enough of fightin’ for one day. That battle can take care of itself. I won’t let it bother me. I don’t want to shoot anybody.”

“Is that the way you feel when you go into battle?” asked the wounded man.

“I can’t say exactly,” replied Joyce. “Of course when I go out in a charge with my regiment I want to beat the other fellows, but I don’t hate ’em, no, not a bit. I’ve got nothin’ against the Yanks. I’ve knowed some of ’em that was mighty good fellows. There ain’t any of ’em that I want to kill. No, I’ll take that back; there is one, just one, a bloody villain that I’d like to draw a bead

on an' send a bullet through his skulkin' body."

"Who is that?" asked the wounded man; "an' why do you make an exception of him?"

Joyce remained silent for a moment or two and drew a long blade of grass restlessly through his fingers.

"It's not a pleasant story," he said at last, "an' it hurts me now to tell it, but I made you ask the question, an' I guess I might as well tell you, 'cause I feel friendly toward you, pardner, bein' as we are together in distress, like two Robinson Crusoes, so to speak."

The wounded man settled himself in the grass like one who is going to listen comfortably to a story.

"It's just a yarn of the Kentuck hills," said Joyce, "an' a bad enough one, too. We're a good sort of people up there, but we're hot-blooded, an' when we get into trouble, as we sometimes do, kinfolks stan' together. I guess you're from Maine, or York State, or somewhere away up North, an' you can't understand us. But it's just as I say. Sometimes two men up in our hills fight,

an' one kills the other. Then the dead man's brothers, an' sons if he's got any old enough, an' cousins, an' so on, take up their guns an' go huntin' for the man that killed him. An' the livin' man's brothers an' sons an' cousins an' so on take up their guns an come out to help him. An' there you've got your feud, an' there's no tellin' how many years it'll run on, an' how many people will get killed in it.—Thunderation, but wasn't them cannon loud that time! The battle is movin' round toward us sure!”

Joyce listened a moment, but heard nothing more except the echoes.

“Our family got into one of them feuds,” he said. “It was the Joyces and the Ryders. I'm Dave Joyce, the son of Henry Joyce. I don't remember how the feud started; about nothin' much, I guess; but it was a red-hot one, I can tell you, pardner. It was fought fair for a long time, but at last Bill Ryder shot father from ambush and killed him. Father hadn't had much to do with the feud, either; he didn't like that sort of thing—didn't think it was right. I said right then that if I ever found the chance when I got big enough I'd kill

Bill Ryder.”

“Did you get the chance?” asked the wounded man.

No,“ replied Joyce. ”Country got too hot for Ryder, and he went away. He came back after a while, an’ I was big enough to go gunnin’ for him then, but the war broke out, an’ off he went into the Union army before I could get a chance to draw a bead on him. I ain’t heard of him since. Maybe he’s been killed in battle an’ his bones are bleachin’ somewhere in the woods.”

“Most likely,” said the wounded man.

“There’s no tellin’,” said Joyce. “Still, some day when we’re comin’ up against the Yanks face to face I may see him before me, an’ then I’ll hold my gun steady an’ shoot straight at him, instead of whoopin’ like mad an’ firin’ lickety-split into the crowd, aimin’ at nothin’, as I generally do.”

“It’s a sad story, very sad for you,” said the wounded man.

“Yes,” said Joyce. “You don’t have such things as feuds up North, do you?”

“No,” replied the other, “an’ we’re well off without ’em. Hark, there’s the cannon again!”

“Yes, an’ they keep creepin’ round toward us with their infernal racket,” said Joyce. “Cannon love to chaw up people an’ then brag about it. But if them fellows are bent on fightin’ all night I guess we’ll have to give ’em room for it. What do you say to movin’? I’ve eat all I want, an’ I guess you have too, an’ we can take what’s left with us.”

“I don’t know,” said the wounded man. “My leg’s painin’ me a good deal, an’ the grass is soft an’ long here where I’m layin’. It makes a good bed, an’ maybe I’d better stay where I am.”

“I think not,” said Joyce, decidedly. “That night fight’s still swingin’ down on us, an’ if we stay too long them cannon’ll feed on us too. We’d better move, pardner. Let me take a look at your wound. It’s gettin’ lighter, an’ I can see better now. The moon’s up, an’ she’s shinin’ for all she’s worth through them trees. Besides, them cannon-flashes help. Raise up your head, pardner, an’ we’ll take a look at your wound together.”

“I don’t think you can do any good,” said the wounded man. “It would be better not to disturb it.”

“But we must be movin’, pardner,” said Joyce, a little impatiently. “See, the fight’s warmin’ up, an’ it’s still creepin’ down on us. Seems to me I can almost hear the tramp of the men an’ the rollin’ of the cannon-wheels. Jerusalem! what a blaze that was! I say, it’s time for us to be goin’. If we stay here we’re likely to be ground to death under the cannon-wheels, if we ain’t shot first. Just let me get a grip under your shoulders, pardner, an’ I’ll take you out of this.”

The cannon flamed up again, and the deep thunder filled all the night.

“Listen how them old iron throats are growlin’ an’ mutterin’,” said Joyce; “an’ they’re sayin’ it’s time for us to be travelin’.”

“I believe,” said the wounded man, “that I would rather stay where I am an’ take my chances. If I move I’m afraid I’ll break open my wound. Besides, I think you’re mistaken. It seems to me that the fight’s passin’ round to the right of

us.”

“Passin’ to the right of us nothin’,” said Joyce. “It’s coming straight this way, with no more respect for our feelin’s than if you an’ me was a couple of field-mice.”

The wounded man made no answer.

“Do you think, pardner,” asked Joyce, slight offence showing in his voice, “that the Yanks may come this way an’ pick you up an’ then you won’t be a prisoner? Is that your game?”

As his companion made no answer, Joyce continued—

“You don’t think, pardner, that I want to hold you a prisoner, do you? an’ you a wounded man, too, that I picked up on the battle-field and that I’ve eat and drank with? Why, that ain’t my style.”

He waited for an answer and as none came he was seized with a sudden alarm.

“You ain’t dead, pardner?” he cried. “Jerusalem! what if he’s died while I’ve been standin’ here talkin’ an’ wastin’ time!”

He bent over to take a look at the other's face, but the wounded man, with a sudden and convulsive movement, writhed away from him and struck at him with his open hand.

“Keep away!” he cried. “Don't touch me! Don't come near me! I won't have it! I won't have it!”

“Thunderation, pardner!” exclaimed Joyce; “what do you mean? I ain't goin' to harm you. I want to help you.” Then he added, pityingly, “I guess he's got the fever an' gone out of his head. So I'll take him along whether he wants to go or not.”

He bent over again, seized the wounded man by the shoulders, and forcibly raised him up. At the same moment the cannonade burst out afresh and with increased violence. A blaze of light played over the face of the wounded man, revealing and magnifying every feature, every line.

Joyce uttered no exclamation, but he dropped the man as if he had been a coiling serpent in his hands, and looked at him, an expression of hate

and loathing creeping over his face.

“So,” he said, at last, “this is the way I have found you?”

The wounded man lay as he had fallen, with his face to the earth.

“No wonder,” said Joyce, “you wanted to keep your face hid in the grass! No wonder you hide it there now!”

“Oh, Dave! Dave!” exclaimed the man, springing to his knees with sudden energy, “don’t kill me! Don’t kill me, Dave!”

“Why shouldn’t I kill you?” asked Joyce, scornfully. “What reason can you give why I shouldn’t do it?”

“There ain’t any. There ain’t any. Oh, I know there ain’t any,” cried the wounded man. “But don’t do it, Dave! For Christ’s sake don’t do it!”

“You murderer! You sneakin’, ambushin’ murderer!” said Joyce. “It’s right for you to beg for your life an’ then not get it! Hear them cannon! Hear how they growl, an’ see the flash from their throats! They’d like to feed on you, but they won’t. That sort of death is too good for the

likes of you. The death for you is to be shot like a ravin' cur."

He drew the loaded pistol from his belt and cocked it with deliberate motion.

"Dave! Dave!" the man cried, dragging himself to Joyce's feet, "you won't do that! You can't! It would be murder, Dave, to shoot me here, me a wounded man that can't help myself!"

"You done it, an' worse," said Joyce. "Of all the men unburnt in hell I think the one who deserves to be there most is the man who hid in ambush and shot another in the back that had never harmed him."

"I know it, Dave, I know it!" cried the wounded man, grasping Joyce's feet with both hands. "It was an awful thing to do, an' I've been sorry a thousand times that I done it, but all the sorrow in the world an' everythin' else that's in the world can't undo it now."

"That's so," said Joyce, "but it don't make any reason why the murderer ought to be kept on livin'."

"It don't, Dave; you're right, I know; but I

don't want to die!" cried the man. "I'm a coward, Dave, and I don't want to die by myself here in the woods an' in the dark!"

"You'll soon have light enough," said Joyce, "an' I won't shoot you."

He let down the hammer of his pistol and replaced the weapon in his belt.

"Oh, Dave! Dave!" exclaimed the man, kissing Joyce's foot. "I'm so glad you'll let me have my life. I know I ain't fit to live, but I want to live anyhow."

"I said I wouldn't shoot you," said Joyce, "but I never said I'd spare your life. See that blaze in the trees up there."

A few hundred yards away the forest had burst into flame. Sparks fell upon a tree and blazed up. Long red spirals coiled themselves around the trunk and boughs until the tree became a mass of fire, and then other tongues of flame leaped forward and seized other trees. There was a steady crackling and roaring, and the wind that had sprung up drove smoke and ashes and fiery particles before it.

“That,” said Joyce, “is the wood on fire. Them cannon that’s been makin’ so much fuss done it. I’ve seen it often in battle when the cannon have been growlin’. The fire grows an’ it grows, an’ it burns up everythin’ in its way. The army is still busy fightin’, an’ the wounded, them that’s hurt too bad to help theirselves, have to lay there on the ground an’ watch the fire comin’, an’ sure to get ’em. By an’ by it sweeps down on ’em, an’ they shriek an’ shriek, but that don’t do you no good, for before long the fire goes on, an’ there they are, dead an’ burnt to a coal. I tell you it’s an awful death!”

The wounded man was silent now. He had drawn himself up a little, and was watching the fire as it leaped from tree to tree and devoured them one after another.

“That fire is comin’ for us, an’ the wind is bringin’ it along fast,” said Joyce, composedly, “but it’s easy enough for me to get out of its way. All I’ve got to do is to go up the hill, an’ the clearin’s run for a long way beyond. I can stay up there an’ watch the fire pass, an’ you’ll be down here right in its track.”

“Dave!” cried the man, “you ain’t goin’ to let me burn to death right before your eyes?”

“That’s what I mean to do,” said Joyce. “I don’t like to shoot a wounded man that can’t help himself, an’ I won’t do it, but I ain’t got no call to save you from another death.”

“I’d rather be shot than burned to death,” cried the man, in a frenzy.

“It’s just the death for you,” said Joyce.

Then the wounded man again dragged himself to the feet of Joyce.

“Don’t do it, Dave!” he cried. “Don’t leave me here to burn to death! Oh, I tell you, Dave, I ain’t fit to die!”

“Take your hands off my feet,” said Joyce. “I don’t want ’em to touch me. There’s too much blood on ’em.”

“Don’t leave me to the fire!” continued the man. “You’ve been kind to me to-night. Help me a little more, Dave, an’ you’ll be glad you done it when you come to die yourself!”

“I must be goin’,” said Joyce, repulsing the

man's detaining hands. "It's gettin' hot here now, an' that fire will soon be near enough to scorch my face. Good-by."

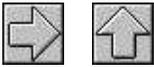
"For the sake of your own soul, Dave Joyce," cried the man, beating the ground with his hands, "don't leave me to be burned to a coal! Think, Dave, how we eat an' drank together tonight, like two brothers, an' how you waited on me an' brought the water an' the grub. You'll remember them things, Dave, when you come to die yourself!"

The fire increased in strength and violence. The flames ran up the trees, and whirled far above them in red coils that met and twined with each other, and then whirled triumphantly on in search of fresh fuel. A giant oak, burned through at the base and swept of all its young boughs and foliage, fell with a rending crash, a charred and shattered trunk. The flames roared, and the burning trees maintained an incessant crackling like a fire of musketry. The smoke through which the sparks of fire were sown in millions grew stifling.

"God, what a sight!" cried Joyce.

“Dave, you won’t leave me to that?” cried
Ryder.

Joyce drew down his hat over his eyes to
shield them from the smoke. Then he stooped,
lifted the wounded man upon his powerful
shoulders, and went on over the hill.



Guard No. 10

Guard No. 10 walked back and forth before the open gate, waiting until the wagon should go out again. It was a dim, gray day of February, the air full of damp chill and a raw wind blowing. The clouds that turned the skies to the color of rusty steel told of snow or sleet somewhere. Beyond the walls the dead weeds rustled sadly as the cold wind blew upon them, and over the yellow ponds tiny waves pursued each other. Across the wastes the wind moaned.

Inside the heavy stone walls of the military prison was some life, but not the life of good cheer. Coils of languid blue smoke arose from the squalid huts in which the prisoners lived. A dozen of them strolled along the rough road that ran between the huts like the street of some shambling village. Some wore the dingy gray uniforms in which they had been taken, ragged and patched, and others were wrapped in blankets

from their beds. All were thin and pale.

Guard No. 10 did not look long at the prisoners; it was too old a sight to stir any emotion in him, a man who was not given to abstruse thought, and who had feelings only of the primitive order. His own figure was in accord with the prison, with its granite walls, dark and stained by time, with the rude huts, the bleak yard, and the wasted, hopeless men. He was short, thick set, wrapped in an old blue overcoat, his face stained like the stone walls about him by all kinds of weather.

He walked back and forth, back and forth, without ceasing, always turning at the same place, and always making his steps of equal length. His blue overcoat and blue cap were the color of the steel blue sky above him. He carried his rifle across his shoulder and held the stock with a firm hand. His figure added the most somber touch to the somber scene.

Guard No. 10 continued to walk monotonously back and forth, and drew up the collar of his overcoat, for the wind was rising and the air grew colder. Most of the prisoners returned to their

huts, and the guard would have gone on his mechanical way had not a prisoner spoken to him in a weak voice. He ordered him back roughly, telling him he was not allowed to approach the gate; but the man said he only wished to see the outside of a prison, a sight that had been denied to him for a year.

“Just to remind me of what I used to be,” he said with a weak little laugh.

Guard No. 10 looked at him more closely. He had noticed this prisoner before, one of the most pathetic figures in a place that was full of them. He was not a man, only a boy of seventeen or eighteen, young enough to be Guard No. 10’s son, slim and fair like a girl, weak from prison air, bad food, and old wounds just healed.

“I saw that the gate was open,” he said appealingly, “and I wanted to take a look at the country outside, just to see the grass and the woods again; it’s been a long time since I saw them.”

“The grass is dead.” said the guard roughly. “It’s had a winter to kill it, and there isn’t a leaf

on the trees.”

“Do you think I care for that?” said the boy. “It’s because there are no prison walls around them.”

He stood where he was, twenty feet from the gate, and the guard did not order him away.

“I could break him in two across my knee if I tried,” thought Guard No. 10.

The air from the free world outside blew through the open gate and the boy breathed it gratefully. Guard No. 10 kept his eye on him and held his rifle ready. If any prisoner dared to make a dash for freedom he knew his duty and would do it. The boy spoke to him again and then again, but the guard was stern and did not reply. The boy looked at the man with an appeal in his face. He wished to speak of the world outside, to hear of anything that was not prison talk.

“Well, what do you want?” asked the guard at last, growing tired of the prisoner’s reproachful gaze.

“I—I don’t know,” said the boy, starting at the suddenness of the question. “How is the war

going?”

“What is that to you?” asked the guard. “Why were you Southern boys such fools as to go into it?”

“I don’t know,” replied the boy, in his thin voice. “I don’t know what the war is all about, do you?”

“No, I don’t, except that you Southern fellows are wrong,” replied the guard more roughly than ever.

The boy did not seem to resent the reply, as if it were an issue for which he did not care. His pale face had flushed a little under the touch of the free wind that blew in at the open gate, and he opened his mouth as if he would breathe an air purer than that within prison walls. The glimpse, the breath of the free world had a charm for him which the leaden skies, the somber day, and the dreary landscape without could not dispel. Guard No. 10 was impressed more than ever by the weakness of his frame, and the look of homesickness in his eyes.

“They say that down there in the South they

have robbed the cradle and the grave to fight this war, and I guess it's true about the cradle," he said.

The boy smiled. He was not hurt at the remark.

"I was fourteen when I went into it," he said, "but there were some younger."

"A mere baby," said Guard No. 10.

"I had been in more than ten battles before I was taken," said the boy proudly.

"But I guess you've had enough," rejoined Guard No. 10.

"Yes, I've had enough," said the boy frankly. "I'm tired of war. I've been here a year, and I'm just getting well from my wounds. I had two of them, one in the shoulder and one in the side." He mentioned his wounds with a little touch of pride. "They are cured, and I'm cured of war, too," he went on, smiling again. "It's the prison life that's done it, and it's the prison life that may end me, too, for though the wounds are healed, I'm mightily run down."

He turned his eyes again toward the open gate, and the look of homesickness in them was

stronger than ever. A faint feeling stirred in the breast of Guard No. 10, and he began to think it was wrong for such young boys to go to the war. His curiosity rose a little.

“Where is your home?” he asked.

“In Georgia, in the southern part of the State, near the sea. Oh. it’s not gray and cold and bleak like this! It’s green all the year round; the sun shines warm and the watermelons grow big and juicy. I’ve had some high old times there.”

“Guess you wish you were there now,” said the guard curtly.

The boy’s face had flushed with enthusiasm as he spoke, but at the guard’s question the flush died out.

“Yes,” he said sadly, “I wish I was there. It’s too cold for me here: it’s not the kind of country I’m used to. The prison doctor says I can’t ever get all my strength so long as I stay in this place. But down in the sunshine I’d be all right in a month. I wish I could get exchanged.”

“No chance of that,” said Guard No. 10. “We’re not exchanging much, because we’ve got

more men than you Rebs have, and we want to wear you out soon.”

Yet pity for the boy was finding a small lodgment in the crusty soul of Guard No. 10.

“And the doctor don’t think you can get well here?” he asked.

“No,” replied the boy. “The air of the place and the bad food are against me.”

“What are you going to do about it?”

“I think I’ll escape,” said the boy, with a sad little laugh. “Some dark night when you guards are asleep at your posts, I’ll climb over that high stone wall there and skip across the fields.”

Guard No. 10 looked at the stone wall rising far above his head, its smooth sides offering no hold for the human foot, and then at the frail figure of the boy.

“I guess you won’t climb over that wall in a hurry, even if we guards should go to sleep at our posts, which we never do,” he said grimly. “But even if you were to get over the walls, what could you do? You are in the country of your enemies, and it’s a long road to Georgia. We’ll have you

back here inside of twenty four hours.”

“Oh, no, you wouldn’t.” said the boy, in a tone of conviction. “It’s only a mile to the town, and I’ve some friends there, some people who used to live in the South. I could get to their house, for my clothes are not the Confederate gray, and then slip down to Georgia, if these walls were not twenty feet high and two feet thick.”

“Yes. that’s the trouble,” said Guard No. 10. “Now, if they were only fifteen feet high and one foot thick you might make it. But we’ve got to keep you, for so long as you’re not with ’em we’ve got a chance to beat the Rebs.”

He laughed a little. The boy amused him and added a bit of interest to his lonely watch. But the prisoner’s delicate face flushed at the guard’s sarcasm.

“Where were you taken?” asked the guard, feeling somewhat sorry for his sneer.

“At Chickamauga.”

“And you have been in ten battles? What was your first?”

“Shiloh.”

“Shiloh?” said the guard, with a sudden increase of interest. “Why, I was there myself!”

“So you’ve served at the front, too?” said the boy.

“Yes,” replied Guard No. 10. “I served until I got a bullet in the thigh at Stone River, that laid me up for three months. I was invalided home, and, after a while, sent to this duty. But about Shiloh. That was a hot fight!”

“Hot?” said the boy. “Hot was no name for it! For a while I thought all the men in the world were there shooting at each other; and even now, just as I am about to go to sleep, I often hear the whistling of the bullets.”

Guard No. 10 walked back and forth more slowly, and for the first time his seamy brown face showed feeling.

“You’re right about the bullets,” he said. “All the lead that was shot off then would make a mine. You fellows caught us napping there that Sunday morning. Our generals say it wasn’t so, but it was. And Lord, how you came, what a rush! You Johnny Rebs can fight well. I give you

that much credit.”

“But you got back at us the next day when your reinforcements came up,” said the boy. “It was our turn to be driven then.”

“Yes, we won back the ground we had lost,” said Guard No. 10 meditatively, his mind going back to the details of the great battle. “But I can’t forget that first morning when you rushed us. And you were there and I was there, and now we’re both here. But it isn’t so strange. More than a hundred thousand others were there, too, and some of them are bound to meet some day.”

“What did you think when you saw us popping out of the woods and bushes that morning?” asked the boy.

“I didn’t have time to think of anything,” replied the guard. “It was just a great red and brown veil of fire and smoke, with you fellows showing dimly through it, rushing down upon us, and the noise of the cannon and rifles banging away in our ears, so we couldn’t hear each other speak or even shout. It was just grab our guns and fire away, every fellow fighting for himself, or

running—mostly running. I guess. But we got together part of our regiment in some fashion or other and tried to make a stand, though you pushed us back and kept pushing us back toward the river. Hot, boy! I should say it was hot, with the rebel bullets whizzing like hail about our ears, and forty thousand rifles and a hundred cannon blazing in our faces! Boy. I don't know where I'm going when I die, but if it comes to the worst it won't be any hotter than it was that morning at Shiloh.”

It was the longest speech he had made in a year, but Guard No. 10 felt emotion at memory of the great battle, and as a mark of feeling shifted his gun from his left to his right shoulder. The boy's eyes sparkled for the first time. He, too, was aroused by the memories of Shiloh, and he waited for Guard No. 10 to continue.

“There was one regiment of the rebels that pushed us specially.” said the guard; “a Georgia regiment. I saw the name of the State on their banner, and I remember how surprised I was to see that they were mostly blue eyed, light haired men; I used to have an idea before the war that all

you Southern fellows were dark. They seemed to have picked us out as their particular meat, and they didn't care whether it was kill or get killed; so it was one or the other. They were brave men, if ever brave men lived. Gunpowder was apple sauce to them. I remember their colonel, funny enough looking for a circus, six feet and a half high, as thin as a rail, his long yellow hair flying back, and his uniform, five times too big for him, flapping about him like clothes on a line. But he was the bravest of them all, always in front, waving his long arms and yelling to 'em to come on, though they were coming as fast as they could. He was thunderation ugly, but he was a man all over."

The guard shook his head and laughed, pleased at the recollection. The prisoner laughed, too, and there was heartiness in his tone.

"That bean pole was my colonel," he said, "and that was my regiment. You fellows were eating your breakfast when we rushed out of the woods and burst upon you. We went right through your camp when we drove you back. I remember stopping to drink a cup of hot coffee

that one of you left unspilled on the ground. It had been poured out for a Yankee, and a rebel drank it before it got cold.”

The two laughed together with heartiness and enjoyment.

“And you were there in that regiment of brave men who pushed us so hard?” said Guard No. 10 admiringly.

“Yes,” said the boy proudly.

“Then we have fought with each other, you and I, hand to hand?” said the guard.

“Yes,” said the boy.

“And here you are, after such fighting as that, in a military prison.”

“Yes,” said the boy.

“And the doctor says you will die if you can’t get out where you’ll have better air and better food?”

“Yes,” said the boy sadly.

“And there’s no chance of an exchange!”

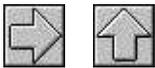
The boy stood there, a thin figure under the

somber sky. The guard looked intently into his eyes, and the prisoner's face grew eager when he met the look.

“That wagon will be here in a minute,” said Guard No. 10, “and I mustn't be seen talking to a prisoner.”

He shifted his rifle again to his left shoulder and walked to the end of his beat, deliberately turning his back to the open gate. The wind blew dismally, and the guard heard a faint, quick footstep.

The wagon was approaching, and he walked back to the other end of his beat. There was no prisoner in sight. The wagon passed out, and the guard, closing and locking the gate, resumed his march, gun on shoulder.



At the Twelfth Hour

There was no pause in the clamor outside, which rose sometimes to a higher key, and then sank back to its level, like the rush of a storm. Every log and plank in the little house would tremble as if it were so much human flesh and blood, when a crash louder than the rest betokened the sudden discharge of all the guns in some battery. The loose windows rattled in their wooden frames alike before the roar of the artillery and the shriller note of the rifles, which clattered and buzzed without ceasing, and seemed to boast a sting sharper and more deadly than that of their comrades the big guns. Whiffs of smoke, like the scud blown about by the winds at sea, would pass before the windows and float off into the forest. Sometimes a yellow light, that wavered like heat-lightning, would shine through the glass and quiver for a moment or two across the wooden floor. In the east there was a haze, a mottled blur

of red and yellow and blue, and whether the crash of the artillery rose or sank, whether the clatter of the rifles was louder or weaker, there came always the unbroken din of two hundred thousand men foot to foot in battle—a shuffling, moaning noise, a shriek, then a roar.

The widow moved the table and its dim candle nearer the window, not that she might see better outside, but there she would have a stronger light on her sewing, which was important and must be finished. The blaze of the battle flared in at the window more than once, and flickered across her face, revealing the strong, harsh features, and the hundreds of fine wrinkles that crossed one another in countless mazes, and clustered under her eyes and around the corners of her mouth. She was not a handsome woman, nor had ever been, even on her bridal morning, but she was still tall and muscular, her figure clothed in a poor print dress—one who had endured much, and could endure more. As she bent over her humble sewing, the dim light of the candle was reflected in hopeless eyes.

The battle rolled a little nearer from the east,

and the flashes of its light grew more frequent. The trembling of the house never ceased. On the hearthstone some tiny half-dead embers danced about under the incessant rocking, like popping grains of corn, and the windows in their frames droned out their steady rattle.

But the widow paid no heed, going on with her sewing. The battle was nothing to her. She did not care who won; she would not go out of her house to see. If men were such barbarians and brutes as to murder one another for they knew not what, then let them. The more human flesh and blood the war devoured, the greater its appetite grew; for upon such food it fattened and prospered. Her three sons had gone to the man-eater, gulped down, one, two, three, in the order of their age: first the eldest, then the second, and then her youngest, her best beloved. She had thought that he, at least, who would not be a man for years, might be left to her; but the news had come from Shiloh, in a meagre letter written by a comrade, that he had fallen there, mortally wounded, and the enemy who kept the field had buried him, perhaps.

She had the letter yet, but she never looked at it. There was no need, when she knew every line, every word, every letter, and just how they looked and stood on the page. The two older sons, like so many of the men of those wild hill regions, had been worthless—drinkers of whiskey, tellers of lies, squalid loafers blinking at the sun; but the third, the boy, had been different, and she had expected him to become a man such as a woman could admire, a man upon whom a woman could depend—that is, one stronger than herself, and as good. He had been both son and daughter to her, for in that way a mother looks upon the youngest or only son when he has no sister; but fair hair and blue eyes and a girl face had not prevented him from following the others, and now she knew not even where his bones lay, save that the mould of a wide and desolate battlefield inclosed them, and, in some place, hid them.

This woman did not cry; no tears came from her eyes when the news of the boy's death was brought to her, and none came now, when she still saw him, fair-haired and white-faced, lying

out there under the sky. She had merely become harsher and harder, and, never much given to speech, she spoke less than before.

The battle rolled yet a little nearer from the east, and the complaining windows rattled more loudly. Above the thud of the cannon and the unbroken crash of the rifles she could hear now the shouting of many men, a guttural tumult which brought to mind the roar and shriek of wild animals in combat. The coming of the twilight did not seem to diminish their ferocity, and, repeating her old formula, she said, "Let them fight on through the night, if it please them."

The earth rumbled and rocked beneath a mighty discharge of artillery, the old house shook, and the heap of coals rolled down and scattered over the hearth. She walked from the window and put them carefully in place with an iron shovel. Thrown back together they sent up little spears of flame, which cast a flickering light over the desolate room—the bare wooden floor, the rough log walls spotted with a few old newspaper prints, the two pine tables, the cane-bottomed chairs, the home-made wooden stool,

the iron kettle in one corner and the tin pans beside it, the low bed covered with a brown counterpane in another corner—a room that suited the mind and temper of the woman who owned it and lived in it.

The battle crept still closer; the departed sun, the twilight deepening into night, had no effect on the fury of the combatants. Gun answered gun, and the rifles hurled opposing showers of lead. The difference in the two notes of the battle, the sullen, bass thunder of the cannon with its curious trembling cadence, and the sharper, shriller crash of the small arms, like the wrath of little people, became clearer, more distinct. Over both, in irregular waves, swelled the shouting; the wild and piercing “rebel yell” and the hoarse Yankee cheer contending and mingling and rolling back and forth in a manner that would tell nothing to a listener save that men were in mortal combat.

She heard a shrieking noise, like the scream of a man, but far louder; a long trail of light appeared in the sky, curving and arching like a rainbow until it touched the earth, when it

disappeared in one grand explosion, throwing red, blue, green, and yellow lights into the air, as if a little volcano had burst. She almost fancied she could hear pieces of the shell whizzing through the air, though it was only fancy; but she knew that the earth where it struck had been torn up, and the dead were scattered about like its own pieces. Up went another, and another, and the air was filled with them, shining and shrieking as if in delight because they gave the finish and crowning touch to the battle. She watched them with a certain pleasure as they curved so beautifully, and gave herself praise when she timed to the second the moment of striking the earth. Soon the air was filled with a shower of the curving lights, and then they ceased for a while.

Still the dim battle raged in the darkness. But presently a light flared up again and did not disappear. It burned with a steady red and blue flame that indicated something more than the flashing of cannon and rifles, and, looking through a window-pane, the widow saw the cause. The forest was on fire, the exploding gunpowder having served as a torch; the blaze

ran high above the trees, adding a new rush and roar to the thunder and sweep of the battle. But she was calm; for the forest did not come near enough to place her house in danger of the fire, and there was no reason why she need disturb herself. She blew out the candle, carefully put away in the cupboard the piece remaining—economy being both a virtue and a necessity with her—and returned to her seat by the window, now lighted only by the blaze of the battle and the burning trees. The light from the flaming forest grew stronger, and flared through the window all the way across the room. When the flash of the guns joined it, the glare was so vivid that the widow was compelled to shield her eyes with her hand; she would have closed the shutter of the window and relighted the candle, had there been a shutter to close. Clouds of smoke—some light, white, and innocent-looking, others heavy and black—floated past the window. Such clouds were needed, she thought, to veil the horrors of the slaughter-yard outside. She looked at the little tin clock on the mantel, ticking placidly away, and saw that it was a quarter to ten. She would have gone to bed, but one could not sleep with all

that noise outside and so near. She thought it wise to take her old seat by the window and watch the flames from the forest, because sparks driven by the wind might fall on her house and set it on fire. There were two buckets filled with water in the little lean-to that served as a kitchen, and she set them in a place that would be handy in case the dangerous sparks came.

But she did not think the water would be needed, since the wind, though light, was blowing the fire from her. This was indicated clearly by the streams of flame, red in the centre, blue and white at the edges, which leaned eastward. The fire had gathered full volume now, and gave her a gorgeous spectacle, the flames leaping far above the trees, where they united into cones and pyramids, flashing with many colors and sending forth millions of sparks, which curved up, and then fell like showers of fireflies. Under this flaming cloud, the cannon spouted and the rifles flashed with as much steadiness and vigor as ever. It seemed to be a vast panoramic effect in fire planned for her alone, after the fashion of the Roman emperors,

of whom she had never heard.

By the light of the fire and the battle she saw, for the first time, some figures struggling in the chaos of flame and smoke. Human beings she knew them to be, though they looked but little like it, being mere writhing black lines in a whirl of red fire and blue smoke. It was a living picture, to her, of the infernal regions, in which she was a firm believer; those ghastly shapes straining and fighting among the eternal flames. She felt a little sympathy for the many—mostly boys like her own boy who had fallen at Shiloh—who were about to pass through the flames of this world into the flames of the next; for she had been taught that only one out of a hundred could be saved, and she never doubted it. If she felt doubt at all, it was about the deserts of the hundredth man.

The thunder of the cannon sank presently to a mutter and a growl, the rifles ceased entirely, and the sudden drop in the noise of the battle caused the fire's roar to be heard above it like a tempest. She could still see the black figures, so many jumping-jacks, through the veil of flame and

smoke; but they were not now a confused and struggling heap, without plan or order; they had drawn apart in two lines, and for two or three minutes remained motionless, save for a few figures which strutted up and down and waved what looked through the fiery mist like little sticks, but which she knew to be long swords. She knew enough more to guess that one line was about to charge the other, or more likely, both would charge at the same time, and the sinking of the battle was but a pause to gather strength for a supreme effort.

She was interested, and her interest increased when she saw the opposing lines swing forward a little, as if making ready for the shock. The sudden ebb of the firing had made all other noises curiously distinct. The ticking of the little clock on the mantel became a steady drumbeat. She even fancied that she could hear the commands given to the two lines of puny black figures, but she knew it was only fancy.

This silence, so heavy that it oppressed her, after all she had heard, was broken by the discharge of hidden batteries, so many great guns

at once that the widow sprang up from her chair; she thought at first that the house was falling about her, and she clapped her hands to her ears to shut out the penetrating crash, which was succeeded by the fierce, unbroken shrieking of the small arms. The cloud of smoke at once thickened and darkened, but she could see through it the two lines, now dim gray images of men, rushing upon each other. She watched with eager, intent eyes. The whirling smoke would hide parts of one line for a moment, leaving it a series of disconnected fragments; then would drift away, revealing the unbroken ranks again. She could hear the ticking of the clock no longer, for the pounding of the guns was so terrific now that continuous thunder roared in her ears, inside her head, and seemed not to come from anything without. A window-pane broke under the impact of so much sound, and the fragments of glass rattled on the floor, but she did not take her eyes from the battle.

Over the heads of the rushing lines the smoke formed in a cloud so thick, so black, so threatening, and so low that it inclosed them, like

a roof. The old likeness came back to the widow. It is the roof of hell, she said to herself; these walls and pillars of flame are its sides, and the men who fight in there, hemmed in by fire, are the damned, condemned to fight so forever.

On they rushed, some of the dim gray figures seeming to dance above the earth in the flames, like the imps they were, and the two lines met midway. She thought she could hear the smash of wave on wave above the red roar of the guns, and figures shot into the air as if hurled up by the meeting of tremendous and equal forces. A long cry, a yell, a shriek, and a wail, which could come only from human throats, thousands of them together, swelled again above everything else—above the roar of the fire, above the crash of the rifles, above the thunder of the cannon.

In spite of her stoicism the watcher quivered a little and turned her eyes away from the window, but she turned them back again. The cry sank to a quaver, then rose again to a scream; and thus it sank and rose, as the battle surged from side to side in the flaming pit. She thought she could hear the clash of arms, bayonet on bayonet,

sword on sword, and all the sounds of war became confused and mingled, like the two lines of men which had rushed so fiercely together. There were no longer two lines—not even one line—but a medley; struggling heaps, red whirlpools which threw out their dead and whirled on, grinding up the living like grain in a hopper. The soldiers fought in the very centre of the pit, and the shifting red curtain of flame between gave them strange shapes, enlarging some, belittling others, and then blending all into a blurred mass, a huddle of men without form or number.

Fantastic and horrible, the scene appealed strongly to the widow's hard religious sense. She could no longer doubt that the red chaos upon which she was looking was a picture of life from the regions of eternal torture, reserved for the damned, reproduced on earth for the benefit of men. It was, then, with a feeling of increased interest that she watched the battle as it blazed and shrieked to and fro. The thunder of the cannon and the crash of the rifles were still as steady as the rush of a tempest, and the wild

shouting of the men now rose above the din, then was crushed out by it, only to be heard again, fiercer and shriller than before.

The great clouds which lowered over the pit grew blacker and bigger, and rolled away in sombre waves on every side. Their vanguard reached even to her house and passed over it. The loathsome smell of burnt gunpowder and raw and roasted human flesh came in at the broken window. She stuffed a quilt into the open space, until neither smoke nor smell could enter; but some of the droppings of the black cloud, little balls and curls of smoke, came down the chimney and floated about the room, to remind the woman that the whirlwind of the battle whirled widely enough to draw her in, too. Her throat felt hot and scaly, and she took a gourd of water from one of the buckets and drank it. It was cool to the throat, and as smooth as oil. How some of those men lying out there, helpless on the ground, longed for water, cold water! How her own boy, doubtless, had longed for it, as he lay on the field of Shiloh waiting for the death that came! A feeling of pity, a strong feeling, swelled up in her soul. She

walked again across the room and looked at the little tin clock on the mantel. Ten forty-five! It was time for the battle to close; it had been time long ago.

Then she went back as usual to the window, and she noticed at once that the roar and blaze of the battle were sinking. The thunder of the guns was not continuous, and the intervals increased in number and became longer. The fire of the rifles was broken into crackling showers, and spots of gray or white, where the air was breaking through, appeared in the wall of flame. The black roof of smoke lifted a little, and seemed to be losing length and breadth as the wind swept off cloudy patches and carried them away. The fire in the forest was dying, and she ceased to hear the rush of the flames from tree to tree. Once the human shout or shriek—she could not tell which—came to her ear, but she heard it no more just then. The men, more distinct now as the veil of flame thinned away or rose in vapor, still struggled, but with less ferocity. The groups were breaking up, and the two lines shrank apart, each seeming to abandon the ground for which it had

fought.

It was nearly eleven o'clock, and the moon, able for the first time to send its beams through the battle-smoke, was beginning to cast a silvery radiance over the field. The flames sank fast. The fire in the forest burnt out. The great cloud of smoke broke up into many little clouds which drifted away westward before the wind. The showers of sparks ceased, and the bits of charred wood no longer fell. A fine cloud of ashes blown through the air began to form a film over the window-panes.

The battle died like the eruption of a volcano, which shoots up with all its strength, and then sinks from exhaustion. The human figures melted away, and the last was gone, though the widow knew that many must be lying in the ravines and on the hillsides beyond her view. There were four cannon-shots at irregular intervals, the fourth a long time after the third, a volley or two from the rifles, a pop-pop or two, and the firing was over. Some feeble flames from grass or bush still spurted up, but they fought in a lost cause, for the silver radiance of the moon grew, and they paled

and sank before it.

The ticking of the clock made the cessation of noise outside more noticeable. She opened the window, and the air that came in was strong with a fleshy smell. But so much smoke had come down the chimney, and the room was so close, that she kept the window open and let the air seek every corner. Outside, the unburnt trees were swaying in the west wind, but there was no other noise. The battlefield, unlighted by the fire of cannon and rifles, had become invisible; but she knew that many men were lying there, and the wind sobbing through the burnt and unburnt forest was their dead march.

Fine ashes, borne by the wind from the burnt forest, still fell; some came in at the open window, and fell in a faint whitish powder on the floor. The widow took her wisp broom and brushed the ashes carefully into the fire; but she did not close the window, for the fresh air which blew in had a tonic strength, though there was still about it some of that strange odor, the breath of slaughter.

She resolved to watch the field a little longer,

and then she would go to bed; she had wasted enough time watching the struggles of lost souls. The light of the moon was beginning to wane, and the trees and hills were growing more shadowy; their silver gray was changing to black, the sombre hue borrowed from the skies above them. Flecks of fire like smouldering coals gleamed through the darkness, showing where a tree-trunk or a bush still burned in the wake of the battle or the fire. The wind rose again, and these tiny patches of flame blazed before it more brightly for a time, and then went out. But the wind moaned more loudly as it blew among the burned tree-trunks and the dead branches. Some trees, eaten through by the fire, fell, and the night, so still otherwise, echoed with the sound.

All the lights from the fire went out, but others took their place. She could see them far apart, but twinkling like little stars fallen to earth; probably the lanterns, she thought, of surgeons and soldiers come to look for those whose wounds were not mortal. Why not let them lie there and pay the price of their own folly? They had gone into the battle knowing its risks, and they should not seek

to shun them. She would go to bed, and she put up her hand to pull down the window. She heard a prolonged cry, a wail and a sob; distant, perhaps, and feeble, but telling of pain and fear.

It came direct from the battlefield. She would have dismissed the sound, as she had dismissed all other signs of the battle, but it came again and was more penetrating. She thought that she had no fancy, no imagination, and that the battle had passed leaving her mind untouched, but the cry lingered. It rose for the third time, louder, fuller, more piercing than before, and the air ached with it. She was sure now that it was many voices in one, all groaning in their agony, and their groans uniting in a single lament, which rose above that of the wind and filled all the air with its wailing. She tried again to crush down her thoughts, and to hide the scenes that she saw with her mind, and not with her eyes; but her will refused to obey her, and yielded readily to imagination, which, held back so long, took possession of its kingdom with despotic power. Her face and hands became cold and wet at the sights and scenes that her fancy made her hear and see. It

was easy to turn this field into the field of Shiloh, and her ready imagination, laughing at her will, did it for her. In that other battle her boy was lying at the foot of a hillock, his white face growing whiter, turned up to the stars; the dead lay around him, and there was no sound but his groans.

She closed the window with a sudden and violent gesture, as if she would shut out the sight, and would shut out too those cries which had stirred her imagination into such life. She walked angrily to the hearth and banked the coals for the last time, firmly resolved to go to bed and sleep. The clock ticked away loudly and clearly, as if to show its triumph over the battle, which was now gone, while it ticked on.

But the cry of anguish from the field reached her there; fainter, more muffled, but not to be mistaken. Whether it came through the glass or how else, she knew not, but she heard it—a cry to her, a cry that would reach her even in bed and would not let her sleep. It was as if her own son had been crying to her for help, for water. She threw up the window again, and looked toward

the battlefield. The air was filled with the cries of the wounded like the chorus of the lost, but of the field itself she could see nothing. The night had darkened fast, and the ground on which the men had fought was clothed in a ghostly vapor. The burnt trees were but a faint tracery of black, and the wind had ceased, leaving the night hot, close, and breathless. The fine ashes from the fire no longer fell, and the air was free from them, but it was thick and heavy, and the repellent smell of human flesh lingered. It was a terrible night for the wounded. They would lie on the ground in the close heat and gasp for air, which would be like fire to their lungs.

The little clock struck midnight with a loud, emphatic tang, each stroke echoing and reminding her that it was time to go.

The two buckets filled with water, which she had brought to save her house from fire, still stood by the window. She put the drinking-gourd into one of them, lifted both, and passed out of the house. She was a strong woman, and she did not stagger beneath the weight of the water. This, she knew, was what they would want most; for in

all that she had ever heard of battlefields the cry for water was loudest. Yet all her pity in that moment was for one—not one of those who lay there, but her own boy on that other battlefield. She saw only him, only his face; like a girl's it had always looked to her, with its youthful flush and the fair hair around it. It was he, not the others, who was taking her out on the field, and she walked on with straight, strong steps, because he led her.

The mists and vapors seemed to drift away as she approached the battlefield, and the trees, holding out their burnt arms, rose distinct and clear from the darkness. The cries of the wounded increased, and were no longer a steady volume like the moaning of the wind; but she could distinguish in the tumult articulate sounds, even words, and they were always the same—the cry for water rising above all others, just as she had been told. She reached the ground over which the fire had swept. Some clusters of sparks, invisible from the window, lingered yet in the clefts of roots and rocks, and glimmered like marsh lights.

The strange repellent odor that reminded her of the drippings of a slaughter-house attacked her with renewed strength. She turned a little sick, but she conquered her faintness and went on. Wisps of smoke were still drifting about, and she stumbled on something and nearly fell; but she saved the precious water, and saw that her foot had struck against a cannon-ball, which lay there, half buried in the earth, spent, after its mission. To her eyes the earth upon it was the color of blood, and giving it a look of repulsion she passed on. She saw two or three rifles upon the ground, abandoned by their owners; and here was a broken sword, and there a knapsack, still full, which some soldier had thrown away. Under the half-burned trunk of a tree was something dark and shapeless, and charred like the tree; but she knew what it was, and after the first glance kept her head turned away. She passed more like it, but all were motionless, for the fire had spared nothing over which it had gone.

The smell of roasted flesh was strong here, but the silence appalled her. All the cries came from the further part of the field, and around her no

voice was raised. The figures, half hidden in the dark, did not stir. The trees waved their burnt arms, and gave forth a dry, parched sound when a whiff of wind struck them, like the rustle of a field of dead broom sedge.

She crossed the strip over which the fire had swept and burned out everything living, and entered the red battlefield beyond. It was lighter here, for there were fewer trees and the moon had cleared somewhat. She saw many figures of men: some motionless as they had been in the burnt woods; others twisting and distorting themselves like spiders on a pin; and still others half sitting or leaning against a stone or a stump, and trying to bind up their own wounds. The cries were a medley, chiefly groans and shrieks, but sometimes laughter, and twice a song. She had never seen ground so torn, for here the battle had trod to and fro in all its strength and ferocity. Three or four trees, cut down by cannon-balls, had fallen together, their boughs interlaced, and a hole in the earth showed where a huge shell had burst. Some sharp pieces of the exploding iron had been driven into a neighboring tree, and a

little further on a patch of bushes had been mowed down like grass in a hayfield.

A man, shot in the legs, who had propped himself against a rock, saw the water that she carried, and cried to her to come to him with it. He damned her from a full vocabulary because she did not make enough haste, and when she came tried to snatch the gourd from her hand. But with her stronger hand she pushed his away, and made him drink while she held the gourd. He was young, but it did not seem strange to her to hear such volleys of profanity from one who had the splendor of youth, for her older sons had been of his kind. She left him cursing her because she did not give him more water, and went on; for the face of her boy was still leading her, and the one she left was not like his.

The field extended further than she could see, but all around her was the lament of after-the-battle. Lights trembled or glimmered over the field; the surgeons and soldiers holding them were seeking the wounded, and she saw that some wore the blue and others the gray. Such a shambles as this was the only place in which they

could meet like brethren, and here they passed each other without comment; nor did they notice her, save one, an old man with the shining tools of a surgeon in his hand, who gave her an approving nod.

She heard a moan which seemed to come from a little clump of bushes spared by the cannonballs. A man—a boy, rather—with the animal instinct, had crawled in there that he might die unseen. He was in delirium with fever, and cried for his mother. The widow's heart was touched more deeply than before, for it was to such as he that her boy's face was leading her. She took him from out the bushes, stanchd his wounds, and gave him of the cold water to drink. The fever abated, and his delirious talk sank to a mere mutter, while she stood and watched until one of the wagons gathering up the wounded came by; then she helped put him in, and passed on with the water to the others. She was eager to help; it was true pity, not a mere sense of duty, for she was now among the boys, the slender lads of eighteen and seventeen and sixteen; and very many of them there were, too, and she knew that

her own boy had called her to help these. They lay thick upon the ground—children they seemed to her; yet this war had such in scores of thousands, who went from the country schoolhouses to the battlefield.

Most of them were dead: sometimes they lay in long rows, as if they had been made ready for the grave; sometimes they lay in a heap, their bodies crossing; and here and there lay one who had found death alone. But amid the dead were a few living, and the widow's hands grew tenderer and more gentle as she raised their heads and let them drink. The water in her buckets was three fourths gone, and she was very careful of it now, for a little might mean a life.

The vapors still hung over the field, and the thick, clammy air was often death to the wounded who could not breathe it. The widow wished more than once for a little of the water, herself, but there were others who needed it far more, and she went on with her work among the boys. She thought often, as she looked at the white young faces around her, of that slaughter of the innocents of which the Bible told, and it seemed

to her that this was as wicked and fruitless as that.

The lights were growing fewer, and the carts with the wounded rumbled past her less often; the cries, a volume of sound before, became solitary moans. The darkness, cut here and there by the vapors, hid most of the field, and she was forced to search closely to tell the living from the dead. She was tired, weary in bone and sinew, but the face of her boy led her on, and, while any of the living remained there, she would seek. She stumbled once, in the darkness, on a dead body, and, springing back with a shudder when she felt the yielding flesh under her feet, walked on into a little hollow.

She heard a boy groan—very feebly, but still she could not mistake the sound for any of the fancied noises of the battlefield; and then the same faint voice calling his mother. She had heard other boys, on that night, calling for their mothers, but there was a new tone in this cry. She trembled and stood quite still, listening for the groan, which came again, feebler than before. It was so faint that she could not tell from what

point it came, and all the shadows seemed to have gathered in the hollow. If she had only a light! She saw one of the lanterns glimmering far off in the field, but even if she obtained it she might not be able to find the place again. She advanced into the hollow, bending down low and searching the thick weeds and tangled bushes with her eyes. One of the buckets she had left behind; the other yet contained a gourdful of water, and she preserved it as if it were so much gold, now more jealously than ever.

She saw nothing. The place was larger than she had thought, and was thick with vines and weeds and heaped-up stones. She stumbled twice and fell upon her knees, but each time she held the water so well that not a drop was spilled. She stood erect again, listening, but hearing nothing. She called aloud, saying that help was there, but no answer came. Her heart was beating violently, but she neither wept nor cried aloud, for she was a woman of strength, and had always been of few words and less show.

Where she stood was the lowest point of the battlefield, and was on its outer edge. It was

likewise the darkest spot, and the remainder of it seemed to curve before and above her in a great dusky amphitheatre, broken faintly by a few points of light where the lanterns burned. She saw the formless bulk of a single cart moving slowly. In a little while the field would be abandoned to her and the dead.

She turned and continued the search, feeling her way through the mass of vegetation, and listening for the guiding groan. Again she stopped, and her heart was in the grip of fear lest she should not find him. She bent her ear close to the ground, and then she heard a cry so faint that it was but a sigh. She pushed her way through some bushes, and there he lay, his back against a rock, his white girlish face with its circle of fair hair turned up to the sky. The eyes were closed, and the chest seemed not to move. A great clot of blood hung upon his left shoulder and made a red gleam against the cloth of his coat.

Let it be said again that she was not a woman who showed her emotions, though at that first glance her face perhaps turned as white as his. She set the bucket down, knelt at his side, and,



A battlefield Nurse

putting her face close to his, found that he was not dead, for she felt his breath upon her lips. She raised the head a little, and a sigh of pain, scarcely to be heard, escaped him. She poured some of the water, every drop more precious now than ever, into the gourd, and moistened his lips, which burned with the fever. Then she raised his head higher and dropped a little into his mouth. He sighed again, and his eyelids quivered and

were lifted until a faint trace of the blue beneath appeared; then they closed. But she poured water into his mouth and down his throat a second time, and she could feel that pulse and breathing were stronger.

The blood was clotted and caked over his wound, but with wisdom she let it alone, knowing that there was no better bandage to stop the flow. She wet his hands and his face with water and gave him more to drink, and saw a trace of color appear in his cheeks. His eyes opened partly two or three times, and he talked, but not of anything she knew, speaking in confused words of other battlefields and long marches; and before a sentence or its sense was finished another would be begun. She wanted no help; she looked around in jealousy lest another should come, and saw how small was the chance of it. The last cart had disappeared from the field, so far as she could see; she could count but four lights, and they were far off. In that part of the field, she, the living, was alone with the dead and the boy who hung between life and death.

Never had she felt herself more strong of body

and mind, more full of resource; never had she felt herself more ready of head and hand. She gave him the last of the water, and saw the spot of color in his cheek, which was not of fever, grow. Then she lifted him in her arms, and began to walk with her burden across the battlefield. She looked at the wound, and seeing no fresh blood knew that she had not strained it open in lifting. With that she was satisfied, and she went on with careful step.

She felt her way through the roughness of the hollow, where the bushes and the weeds clung to her dress and her feet and tried to trip her; but she thrust them all aside and went on toward the house. She passed out of the hollow, and into the space which had received the fall sweep of the cannon-balls and bullets.

The field was clothed in vapors which floated around her like little clouds. The white faces of the dead looked up at her, and she seemed to be going between rows of them on either side.

She walked on with sure and steady step, not feeling the weight in her arms and against her shoulder, unmoved by the ghastly heaps and the

dead faces. She reached the burnt ground, where the little patches of fire that she had seen as she passed the other way had ceased to burn, but the smoke was still rising and the ground was yet warm. She feared that the smoke would get into his throat and choke down the little life that was left. So she ran, and the burnt arms of the trees seemed to wave at her and to jeer her, as if they knew she would be too late. She stumbled a little, but recovered herself. The boy stirred and groaned. She was in dread lest the rough jolt had started his wound, but her hand could not feel the warmth of fresh blood, and, reassured, she hastened through the burnt strip and toward home.

The house was silent and dark; apparently, no one had noticed the log cabin, its secluded position and the clump of woods perhaps hiding it from men whose attention had been devoted solely to the battle. She pushed open the door, and entered with her helpless burden. Some coals still glowed on the hearth, and threw out a warm light which bade her welcome. She put the boy on the bed, and covered the coals with ashes, for

it was hot and close in the house. Then she lighted the piece of candle, and setting it where it could serve her with its light, and yet not shine into his eyes, she proceeded with her work.

Women who live such lives as hers must learn a little of all things, and she knew the duties of a surgeon. Twice she had bound up the wounds of her husband, received in some mountain fray. She undressed the young soldier, and as she did so she noticed the scar of a year-old wound under the shoulder—a wound that might well have been mortal. The bullet of to-night had gone almost through, and she could feel it against the skin on the other side. She cut it out easily with the blade of a pocket-knife, and put it in the cupboard. Then she bound up the wound the late bullet had made when it entered, leaving the congealed blood upon it as help against a fresh flow, and sat down to wait.

He was still talking, saying words that had no meaning, and threw his arms about a little; but he was stronger, and she hoped, though she knew, too, that he trembled on the edge.

She sat for a long time watching every

movement, even the slightest. The little clock ticked so loudly that she thought once of stopping it; but the sound was so steady and regular that it lulled them, the boy as well as herself, and she let it alone.

He became quieter and grew stronger, too, as she could tell by his breathing, and slept. She spread a sheet over him, and opened the window that a little air might enter the close, warm room. She stood there for a while and looked toward the battlefield, but she could see nothing now to tell her of the combat. The vapors that floated over it hid it and all its rain.

The wind rose, stirring the hot, close air and cooling the night. It whistled softly through the trees and among the hills, but it did not bring the smell of battle. That had vanished with the combat that had been so unreal itself, as she looked at it from her window. Now she could not see a human figure nor any sign of war. The cabin was just the same lone cabin among the hills that it had always been. She went outside and made the circuit of the house, but there was nothing for eye or ear to note. The night was

darkening again, the wind had blown up clouds which hid the face of the moon, and but a few stars twinkled in the sky. The air felt damp, and scattered drops of rain whirled before the wind which was whistling, far off, as it drove away through the hills.

She went back into the house—for she could not leave the boy more than a minute or two—and found that he was sleeping well. She prepared some stimulants, and put them where they would be ready to her hand. Then she made over all her arrangements for the morrow, for two instead of one, and placed everything about the house in order, that it might put on its best look in the daylight. She finished her task, and sat down by the bed. Presently the sufferer began to talk of battle and strive to move, thinking he was in action on the field again. When she felt of his wrist and forehead, she saw that the fever was rising, and she thought he was going to die. She did all that her experience told her, and waited. Her bitterness came back, and she called them fools and barbarians once more; she was a fool herself to have had pity upon them.

The boy's wild talk was all of war. She followed him through march and camp, skirmish and battle, charge and retreat, and saw how they had taken their hold upon him, and what courage and energy he had put into his part. In half an hour he became quieter, and the fever sank. A cannon-shot boomed among the hills—so far away that the sound was softened by the distance. But it echoed long; hill and valley took it up and passed it on to farther hill and valley; and she heard it again and again, until it died away in the farthest hills like the last throb of a distant drumbeat. It was as if it had been a minute gun for the dead, and she went in terror to the bed; but the boy was not dead. He had passed again from delirium to sleep, and, fearing everything now, she went outside to see if the cannon-shot, by any chance, foretold a renewal of the battle; but it must have been a stray shot, for, as before, nowhere could she see a light, nowhere a living figure, nor could she hear any sound of human beings. The air was cooler, and, shivering, she went back into the house.

Presently the drops changed to steady rain,

which beat upon the windows; but it was peaceful and sheltered in the little house, and as she looked out at the rain, dashed past by the wind, there was a softness in her heart. The rain ceased after a while, and the trees and bushes dripped silver drops. The boy stirred; but it was some thought in his sleep that made him stir, not fever. She looked at him closely. His breathing was regular and easy, and she knew that he would live.

Going once more to the window, and with eyes to the skies, she gave her wordless thanks to God.

A broad bar of light appeared in the east. The day was coming.



The Stroke of Midnight

The battle trod to and fro in the darkness and the whirling snow; tiny blue flames, nearly smothered by the night and the melting flakes, shot up from the half burned houses, flickered awhile and then went out, to be succeeded by others as feeble; rifle shots rattled in irregular volleys, and the smoke from the gun muzzles increased the obscurity which was scarcely broken by the flashes from the weapons and the faint light of the smoldering timbers.

The wind with an edge of ice whirled here and there and impartially drove gusts of snow into the faces of the combatants, but could not dim their rage. Passion and courage were equal in each, and though the main battle had passed on their own little corner of the struggle was as important to them as the fate of great armies, and neither would yield the ground which had already become where they fought a slippery mire of red

mud and snow.

Fleming, the First Lieutenant, was shouting to his men and gesticulating with his sword, broken at the point by a rifle ball, though he had never noticed it. The big flakes struck in his eyes and blinded him at times, but he fought on, encouraging his soldiers, struggling through the mire, and watching the combat as best he could by the feeble light of the burned buildings. The difficulties of the battlefield, the snow, the darkness, the fierce resistance of the enemy, his inability to drive them back, filled him with the unreasonable rage of youth. A man who despised oaths he began to use them with rapidity and unction and was unconscious of doing so. But his soldiers needed no spur from their commander. Evans, the Second Lieutenant, a year younger than himself—Fleming had reached the honorable age of 20—was by his side, firing with his pistols at the flitting black forms that opposed them, and around the two Lieutenants fought a little band of splashed and begrimed men with a courage and energy equal to those of their leaders.

A wall of a house fell on a bed of live coals and the timbers blazed up with sudden vividness, cutting through the darkness and casting a distorting light over the snow, the ruined village and the fighting men.

Fleming paused for a moment to grasp his field of battle by the new light that had come. The flames magnified some objects, diminished others and made the whole unreal and fantastic. The forms of his enemies wavered as the flames flickered and grew to gigantic size, the bloody spots on the snow spread and united, and the scorched rafters of an abandoned house made an ugly black tracery in the sky. In the momentary stillness that had seized them all Fleming heard the sputtering of the snowflakes as they fell in the flames.

Being able now to see his battlefield, the Lieutenant knew that the little church which stood somewhere to his right was its key, and, shouting to his men to follow, he rushed forward that he might seize it at once and cut off his enemy.

The soldiers fired a volley and dashed toward

the church, but the leader of the hostile band was as quick of eye and as ready of action as Fleming, and when the Lieutenant and his men entered one door of the church their antagonists dashed in at the other.

Fleming's wrath flamed to its highest pitch. It seemed a personal injustice to himself that his foe should be so stubborn and so prompt, and his resolve to overcome him grew with his anger. He stopped just outside the door, and his men gathered around him. The room was dim, but Fleming saw the outlines of the benches and at the far end the pulpit. The building, until then outside the line of battle, seemed to have been untouched. The light from the blazing house flared in at the window and fell across the faces of his enemies, who were entering at the farther door. Neither side gave a thought to the character of the place, but both knew that a fierce struggle was sure to follow for the possession of so strong a fort as a brick building, and they prepared at once for the issue. Three or four of the heavy wooden benches, which served as pews hastily thrown together, made a good breastwork, and

standing behind it Fleming and his men waited to see what the enemy would do.

The hostile leader waited, too, perhaps with the same, purpose, and again the building was silent. The fallen wall was burning finely and the light from it now shone through the window with a steady radiance and drove the dusk from the room.

Fleming listened intently and heard nothing from without. The battle, save for his own part in it, seemed to have ended or to have gone faraway. The snow, driven against the window panes, gleamed red in the light of the flames, and the wind increased in violence. All this was but the affair of a moment, and then Fleming turned the full attention of eye and ear to his enemy. That the two little bands had been left to fight their battle alone was no inducement to him to draw away from the conflict; rather it increased his desire to triumph, for the field was now wholly his own. Evans whispered to him that they must rush the rebels and Fleming, nodding his head, gave a quick command to the men, who leaped over the hasty fortification that they no longer

desired and rushed upon their enemies, the Lieutenants, as always, at their head.

Fleming knew that it was a bold plan allied to rashness, but he trusted that success would come from its suddenness and that he would be upon his antagonists before they could recover from their surprise and



Wild rush

shoot down his men. A few swift steps took him across the room. He was filled with a fierce exultation, for he believed that he was about to triumph, but even in the wild rush of the moment and with a mind concentrated upon the impending struggle, he observed the room again, the rows of wooden benches, the aisles, the pulpit at the far end, the stairway that led to the second floor, and the light through the window flaring redly over everything. Then the wild rush carried his little band upon the enemy, and, as he had hoped, the surprise of the sudden movement made its success.

A few scattering shots that went wild were fired at them, and then they were over the

benches and in the midst of the triumphant combat. Fleming was burning with the battle fever, and again he began to shout to his men and utter oaths of which he was unconscious, striking with his sword and calling at times upon his antagonists to yield.

He found that he was opposed by soldiers as valiant as his own. Beaten by numbers, those who were not wounded or taken by force refused to surrender, and wheeling about as if by a sign from their leader rushed up the stairway, which began almost at their feet, and sought refuge and a second defense on the next floor.

Disappointment now mingled with Fleming's anger, but neither emotion caused him to forget for the moment his military prudence. Hastily dispatching a few of his men to keep watch at the windows outside and prevent escape there, he sprang up the stairway with the others in quick pursuit of the fugitives. Rage and excitement blinded him to the danger of shots from above, and Evans, as eager as himself, pressed on by his side, while the men crowded close after, the wooden stairway giving a dull echo under their

footsteps.

The light from the flames of the burning village did not reach the second floor, and Fleming stood for a moment or two trying to accustom his eyes to the dusk. As the pupils distended he saw the last of the fugitives disappearing in a small room, and then he heard the slamming of the door and noises which indicated preparations for defense. A little gray haired man in civilian's attire and with a face of fright sprang from a dark corner where he had been crouching and darted to a window, at which he pulled vainly with trembling fingers as if he would open it and spring out.

Fleming looked quickly about that he might seize the salient points of this last battlefield. He paid no attention to the civilian, supposing him to be the sexton or some one else in charge of the building who had hidden there in fright while the fight was going on below. As his men paused with him to await his orders he felt for a sudden moment the solemn stillness of the place and its character, but the silence was quickly interrupted by a beating on the door of the room in which the

fugitives had taken refuge, and he knew that they were breaking loopholes for their rifles. At the sound his passion, which had died for an instant, flamed up again, and he hastily drew his men to a far corner where the rifle barrels, even when thrust through the holes in the door, could not secure their range. Then while he whispered with Evans and the two tried to decide what would be best to do in the doubtful situation the curious silence which had in it so much that was solemn and impressive fell again over the place.

The defenders had broken the holes in the door and were motionless and silent, awaiting the advance of their assailants, who still stood in their corner hesitating. Only faint gleams of light came through the panes, but the eyes of the soldiers became accustomed to the dusk. The gray haired little man had ceased his efforts to open the window and stood with his back to it, his face expressing his fright and horror at what had happened and what was about to happen.

Fleming heard the ticking of a clock somewhere over his head, but he did not look up to see. In his indecision his eyes wandered to the

civilian, and he was amused at the old man's fright. But, then, he had no business there and must take his chances. The fight could not pause for him. Yet the wrinkled face and the pinched features attracted and held Fleming's eyes, and he wondered in a vague way what the man would do—whether he would crouch again in the corner or make another effort to escape by the window. The man's eyes met his own and stared into them with a gaze that seemed to the young Lieutenant to be full of reproach and upbraiding.

Fleming could not account for the influence of this stranger, and the sudden strength of the gaze that met his own and held him back from his purpose, for the figure of the old man was not commanding, and his fright was obvious. He was about to order him down the stairs, but at the moment the civilian raised himself up and his eyes grew bolder.

Fleming with the quickness of intuition saw that this old man whom he had despised felt one of those sudden inspirations of courage which sometimes come even to cowards. He saw the expansion of the figure, the brightening of the

eye, the look that was prophetic, and again he paused as he was about to give a command.



Stop!

“Stop!” said the old man in a firm voice, raising his hand and pointing an accusing finger at Fleming.

The Lieutenant hesitated and looked at him in wonder.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“Stop, I say!” repeated the old man.

Fleming laughed and with contempt. He had thrown off the momentary influence of the accusing look, and his mind returned with full force to his original purpose, the destruction of the rebels who had intrenched themselves in the room.

“Out of the way!” he exclaimed angrily. “We’re going to storm that room in there, and we will not be responsible for stray bullets.”

The old man did not shrink back at the officer’s emphatic command. His eyes were shining with a feverish excitement and his

courage seemed to grow as the fever rose.

“Stop, I tell you again!” he shouted. “This is murder that you and those in that room, too, are bent upon!”

“It is war!”

“It is not war! The battle is over, and you fight here without purpose! What is the possession of this church to either of you? And to fight, too, at such a time!”

Fleming looked scornfully at the old man, who yet held his attention and impressed him.

“At such a time?” he repeated. “It’s true that it’s night, and the snow is falling, but we’re not parlor soldiers to seek our tents because of a winter night.”

“It’s more than a winter night!” said the old man sternly, raising his accusing finger and pointing it at Fleming. “Listen!”

The unseen clock overhead began to strike, and Fleming and his men, awed despite themselves by the old man’s manner, counted the strokes under their breath. One, two, three, they counted, and on up to twelve, standing in silence and

making no movement, as if some new power possessed them. Nor did any sound come from the room in which their enemies lay, and Fleming believed that they, too, had been listening to the old man's words. Then he grew angry at himself and sought to shake off the spell.

“Did you hear that?” asked the old man.

“Yes, I heard it,” said Fleming, “and I heard nothing but a clock striking midnight.”

“But what a midnight!” exclaimed the other. “And do you know what morning has begun?”

“How should I know?” asked Fleming. “How can any man who has been marching and fighting and skirmishing for weeks keep track of time?”

“This is the night of the 24th of December, and it's Christmas morning now,” cried the old man, “the night when Christ was born and came into the world to preach forgiveness and to teach men to love one another! I've rung that morning in with this bell every year for the last thirty years, and I came here to-night to do it again, though you've followed me and fought in the church itself. Stand back, I tell you! You shall not fight

here with the bells of Christmas morning ringing in your ears. God would strike you dead for it.”

It seemed to Fleming that the man’s manner now had the dignity and force that we ascribe to the Hebrew prophets of old. His littleness had disappeared, he showed no semblance of fear, and his eyes blazed with the force of the spirit that was in him.

The notes of the bell rose far above the whistle of the wind, and even in the presence of those who carried arms in their hands to kill, told of peace on earth and good will to men. The sanguinary scenes of the night passed out of Fleming’s mind for a moment, and in their place he saw the peaceful Christmas morning of his childhood. Then he looked weakly at Evans, as if he would seek counsel from his second in command.

“Lower your weapons!” cried the old man, who never ceased his ringing. “I tell you again that God will strike you dead if you fight in His house at such a time. What a sacrilege, and you but boys!”

The fever in Fleming's veins was dying. He looked at his men and saw that the lust of combat was passing from them. In his ears rang the joyful note of the bell telling him that Christ was born, and had come on earth to teach peace and good will among men. He turned his eyes from his men to those of the sexton, who pulled the rope with regular and rhythmic stroke, and they fell before the gaze of the old man.

"And you propose to fight here!" flamed out the old man. "You should be down on your knees and thank God that you are alive this Christmas morning. Listen to my bell! It is declaring peace, and no other voice shall be heard in this place."

The last touch of the battle fever passed from Fleming's veins, but he looked questioningly at the door behind which his enemies had fortified themselves. The old man's eyes followed his.

"They, too, shall put down their guns while the Christmas bell is ringing," he cried. "Come out! These men give their promise that they will not fire upon you."

"Yes, we promise," said Fleming mechanically,

his mind still wandering back with the notes of the bell to other Christmas mornings.

“There is nothing to fight for here, anyway,” said Evans in a low tone.

“Not now at least,” replied Fleming in the same tone.

The door in front of them was opened, and their enemies, gun muzzles down, came slowly out. Fleming and Evans saluted them with military courtesy.



Salute

“About face!” said Fleming to his men.

Then with their Lieutenants at their head the little band marched down the stairway and through the church and out into the snow and past the smoldering embers of the houses to their camp. And above them and around them the clear notes of the bell were proclaiming that Christ was born on earth and peace and good will should reign among men.



The Fate of the Gun

The sun sent down sheaves of fiery rays and the soldiers behind either line of earthworks sought to shelter themselves alike from the burning heat and the bullets of the enemy. They did not know which they dreaded the more.

“My, how hot it is!” said Helm, taking off his cap and wiping his forehead.

“Yes, but if you were to stick your head up above the earthwork there you’d find it a good deal hotter,” said Willard.

“The Yankee sharpshooters, you mean,” replied Helm. “There’s a fellow over there a little bit to our right who never misses. He clipped off my finest lock of hair, the one my sweetheart at home used to say became me so well, and made a red streak right across the top of my head. Say, how that fellow can shoot!”

Helm puckered up his lips and emitted a low

whistle of admiration. Then his eyes wandered to the dismantled gun lying midway between the lines, its wheels shot off, its caisson smashed to pieces, but its mighty bronze barrel intact and ready again for death and destruction if mounted once more.

“It’s a pity we can’t get that gun,” said Helm. “Put new wheels on it, give it a caisson, and it would be a wonder.”

“There’s no doubt of it,” said Willard, “but how to get it, that’s the rub, and it’s bothering us Johnnies just as much as it is the Yankees over there.”

These two divisions of the hostile armies had been face to face for days neither able to advance and both refusing to retreat. Three days before, one side had run forward a great gun in a bold attempt to break through the line of the enemy, but the gun’s squad was annihilated almost instantly by the rifle fire, and the gun itself was dismounted by the shells of a sheltered battery. The victors did not dare go forth to secure the splendid gun, knowing that they in their turn would be swept out of existence by hostile fire.

So there it lay midway between them, neither side able to secure it and both coveting it with all the ardor of veterans.

Helm doffed his cap and wiped his hot face once more. "How the sun burns!" he repeated.

"So it does," said Willard, "but I believe they've gone to sleep over there in the Yankee lines."

"Gone to sleep! Gone to sleep!" exclaimed Helm scornfully. "You just stick your head above the earthwork and the sharpshooter down there a little to the right will show you whether or not they've gone to sleep."

"I've a good notion to do it," said Willard.

"See here now, Willard," exclaimed Helm. "Don't you be a fool! I know it's silly of me, but I value your worthless life. I don't want to lose a friend. How would you know anyway whether they are asleep or not if you got killed? If you are bent on it, why don't you put your cap on your ramrod and stick it just above the parapet? Then you'll see if our friend the sharpshooter isn't awake."

Willard lifted the cap on the ramrod a few inches above the earthwork, where it would look from the hostile line like a human head thrust up carelessly. Not a sound came from the northern earthwork. No rifle cracked; there was no flicker of smoke.

“They’re asleep,” repeated Willard, “and I’ll prove it. Here goes my real head.”

He thrust his face above the earthwork and stood there staring at the northern lines. He was in plain view—brow, eyes, every feature. Usually at such a sight the whole northern earthwork would have flamed into fire with the zeal of the sharpshooters. Now the dead silence of the morning was unbroken. Not a rifle muzzle was thrust into view.

Helm was amazed. “What does it mean, Billy?” he said to Willard.

The low, mellow note of a trumpet came from the northern lines. It was a signal, a musical note breathing of peace, and its soft echoes floated far away, repeating themselves among the sunny hills.

“They want to talk to us!” exclaimed Helm. “I wonder what’s up.”

The soft note of the trumpet came again, and then an officer in the uniform of a colonel appeared on the northern earthwork, waving a small white flag. A southern colonel rose up near Helm and Willard to respond and lifted a signal to advance.

The northerner leaped down boldly and came across the open space between the two lines that had been aptly named “The Plain of Death.” As he advanced he passed the fallen gun, halted there a moment, stroked the polished barrel and then walked on.

After the first signal both earthworks were lined with hundreds of heads. They popped up suddenly, and every pair of eyes gazed curiously at the northern colonel who walked so lightly across “The Plain of Death,” and on all their heads the sun blazed down.

“A fine fellow,” said Helm to Willard, nodding toward the northern colonel who had crossed “The Plain of Death,” the southern colonel

advancing to meet him. They saluted politely, and the southern colonel stood waiting and inquiringly. The northerner looked up at the long row of sunburned faces regarding him with so much curiosity and smiled. The men grinned back.

“Do you boys know what day this is?” he asked.

“I know it’s a mighty hot day and that’s all I do know,” replied the southern colonel. “The last date I remember was the 14th of May, and I’ve lost all track of time since then; can’t catch up to save me.”

“We’re better off than you are.” said the northerner. “We’ve got an almanac in our camp, and one of our men got to looking at it last night. He made an important discovery. Say, can’t you guess what day this is?”

“Not if my life was at stake.”

“Well, it’s the Fourth of July.”

A low whistle ran along the line of the southern earthwork.

“Yes, it’s the Fourth of July,” repeated the

northerner, “and whether you succeed in going out of the Union or whether we succeed in keeping you in, the Fourth of July was for both of us, and it will still be for both of us. It’s where we both got our start, and we can never change that, can we?”

“I reckon you’re right,” said the southerner.

“I reckon I am,” said the northerner, “and, it being the Fourth of July and such a hot day, too, I thought we might as well skip the fighting until tomorrow and just make a sort of Fourth of July picnic of it.”

“I reckon you’re right.” said the southerner again.

“I reckon I am,” said the northerner “and, while we’re about it, why not do the thing up brown and have some sort of a celebration—fireworks for instance?”

“I don’t know how to have fireworks unless we take to shooting at each other again,” said the southerner grimly.

“Oh, no,” replied the northerner; “there’s a much better way than that.” He turned and waved

his hand toward the center of “The Plain of Death.” “You see the gun lying there? Well, you are not able to take it.”

“Nor are you.”

“Exactly. That is why I speak of the gun. A good many lives have been lost by both of us in the effort to take that gun, and if it stays there more will be lost. It’s no use to anybody there, and still nobody can take it away. Now, I propose that we cram that barrel full of everything, including a good lot of powder, set a fuse and let her rip. It will be the biggest Fourth of July bomb ever set off, and it will save both of us a lot of hard fighting that can’t profit either. What do you say?”

Before the southern colonel could reply a wild cheer rose from the southern earthwork. The men had heard, and they approved. The southerner smiled. “Good enough,” he said. “Let the boys have their fun and we’ll share it.”

The signals were hoisted and in an instant “The Plain of Death” was covered with ragged men in blue and ragged men in gray, pushing and

shoving like boys, exchanging jokes and comparing notes. Then they rolled that cannon up into the most conspicuous place and stuffed its mighty throat to the very muzzle with inflammables and explosives. Helm and Willard working with the foremost.



A wild cheer rose

Then the northern colonel set the fuse and the southern colonel shouted, “Scatter, boys for your lives!” and they raced toward the earthworks for shelter. The southern colonel, standing erect took off his cap, whirled it around his head and shouted; “Now, boys, all together! Hip! Hip! Hurrah! Hurrah for the Fourth of July!”

The mighty cheer swelled from hundreds of throats in both earthworks, and when it died an intense stillness settled over “The Plain of Death.” The slow burning fuse was near its end.

The next instant a sheet of flame shot up, the

mighty mass of metal seemed to leap into the air, the earth shook with a terrific explosion, and the greatest Fourth of July bomb ever set off had been exploded!



The Retreat of the Ten

They stopped at noon beside a shallow brook, more mud than water, to rest, and to eat a little of the cold food in their knapsacks. When the brief meal was ended, Chilton, the Kentuckian, strolled out on the prairie and looked about him.

Except the horses, his was the only upright figure within the circle of the horizon. Far off to the left were patches of squat, thorny bushes, and nearer by ran a fringe of ragged and desolate weeds. Overhead burned a coppery sun, swinging low, and the chief impression upon his mind was that of desolation and loneliness.

“Have I been fighting four years for this?” murmured Chilton.

His eyes followed the circle of the horizon, but everywhere he saw the same—the rolling brown plains, the scanty grass, the desolate weeds and thorn-bush, all shriveling in the fierce rays of the

sun. Then he walked back to the brookside.

“How far is it to the border, Chilton?” asked Hicks, the oldest of the party, a thick-set Mississippian of fifty.

“Bloodgood says we ought to make it in three days of hard riding, and he knows the country.”

“So we can,” said Bloodgood, the Texan, “if the horses don’t give out. Texas is a big state and it has good country and bad. This isn’t part of the good.”

“I should think not,” said Chilton, looking again at the sweep of desolation about them. “Let the Yankees have it and welcome, for they’ll take it anyhow. Everything’s Yankee now from the St. Lawrence to the Rio Grande.”

Young Hicks stirred in his sleep and rolled over, where the sun had a fair aim at his face. Old Hicks, his father, put the boy’s broad-brimmed hat over his eyes, and, protected from the glare, he slept peacefully on.

The Dupuy brothers, the South Carolinians, rose and began to buckle the girths of their horses. McCormick, the Florida cracker, a long,

thin, yellow man, followed them, and the bustle of the start began.

“Wake the boy,” said Chilton. “We’d better be going.”

“It’s time to mount again, Frank,” said old Hicks, shaking his son, “and then ho for Mexico!”

“Hurrah for Mexico!” said the boy, with enthusiasm, “and may the deuce take this country, since we couldn’t keep the Yankees out of it! I We’ll never live on this soil or under the Yankee flag again! Let’s take an oath on it, pledge our faith to one another. No, let’s sign an agreement.”

The proposal was boyish like the proposer, but it found favor with the sullen and defiant temper of the men.

“Good enough,” said Chilton. “I have a notebook and the stub of an old lead pencil, and I guess they’ll do.”

So he drew up a rude statement that the undersigned had served four years in the Confederate army, and, being still loyal to their

cause, refused to live in the Yankee republic. Moreover, they took an oath to do all they could to break it up. Then they swore and signed, the whole ten, the boy first and Chilton last. Chilton folded the paper carefully and put it in an inside pocket of his waistcoat, where he also carried a little purse of American gold.

Then they mounted their horses and rode on. The formal oath of renunciation pleased them and soothed their sullen and angry tempers. These men, one of them fifty years old, began to build air-castles—castles in Mexico.

“If enough of the old Confederates would only go down there,” said Taylor, the Georgian, “we might establish, with the start that the country already has, a power which would offset that of the Yankees.”

“It’s not impossible,” said Chilton, meditatively. “We are not the only Southerners on the way to Mexico, and as we succeed others will be drawn after us. In a year or two we ought to have at least fifty thousand Confederates about us, and we’ll be enough to run things. We’ll establish a new power, a great empire, in

Mexico.”



Bloodgood Leads

Their spirits swelled so high that they broke into a gallop, Bloodgood, the Texan, in the lead, as he was to be the guide to the frontier. They rose from the prairie rather late the next morning. The day was gray and not promising. Young Hicks noticed a raw damp in the air that made him shiver. They ate breakfast, and, mounting, refreshed themselves with a gallop, and then built more castles in Mexico. But the gray in the air thickened into a mist, and the sun looked pale and sick. Young Hicks shivered and wrapped his army blanket around his shoulders.

The cold increased rapidly and the wind began

to blow. It raised clouds of dust and sand which turned into curious shapes, and, whirling after one another across the plain, passed out of sight. The horses snorted with fright and cold. The Ten rode in a close huddle, men and horses rubbing against one another, for the sake both of comradeship and of prudence. They came to a low hill which bore a patch of dwarfed trees and interlacing thorn-bushes, and behind it they found some shelter from the storm, now sweeping the prairie with all the fury of a simoom in the Sahara. The sand and dust were driven before the wind in thick clouds, but most of it passed over their heads now, though it made a whistling and shrieking noise like the sound of flying bullets in battle. The cold was bitter and reached the bone. Rain began to fall, but soon changed to showers of hail which beat upon the men and cut their faces. It was as dark as night.

They remained silent, shivering in their wet clothes, until the norther began to abate. The whistle and shriek of the wind died, the air ceased to be a compound of sand and dust, and the sun, breaking a way at last through the clouds, poured

a flood of light over the earth which melted the sheets of hail and turned the temperature in an hour from midwinter to midsummer.

“This is bad on those who have fresh-cured wounds,” said Old Hicks to Chilton. He looked anxiously as he spoke at Young Hicks, whose face was pinched and white.

“The boy will stand it all right,” said Chilton, confidently. “He’s a tough sapling, he is.”

Old Hicks seemed to be reassured somewhat, and the Ten rode on. The sunshine was bright enough, and the air warm enough, but Young Hicks was strangely quiet. Presently his teeth began to rattle together.

“He has a chill, a bad one,” said Old Hicks to Chilton.

“Then we must stop and doctor him; it’s the wet clothes,” replied Chilton.

They built a fire of dead bushes, fallen last year, which they coaxed into a blaze, but it did no good; the boy was in the grip of a chill of the very strongest kind, and following the usual course, the icy cold of his body soon began to

change to a heat equally fierce.

“We’ve got to camp,” said Chilton to the others. “We can’t go on with the boy in this fix.”

The lad’s fever rose so high that he became delirious, and talked about his home in northern Mississippi which he had not seen in three years.

“Who’s there?” asked Chilton of Old Hicks—meaning the place of which the boy talked.

“Nobody but the old lady.”

“The old lady?”

“Of course, you don’t know—his grandmother, I mean, his mother’s mother. His mother died when he was born, and the old lady raised him. She’s up there now, spry and stout, if she is seventy. It’s up in the hills; not much of a place, but the house is clean and warm, and there’s plenty of green grass, and a spring of cool water running out of the hill back of the house. The old lady wrote me that the war hadn’t touched it.”

“We’ll find better in Mexico,” said Chilton, stoutly.

Bloodgood, the Texan, who had gone for an

antelope, came back in an hour, without the game but with something very much more surprising—a party of ranchmen who had been selling cattle on the Mexican border and were now returning northward with their profits.

They traveled in comfortable style and had a wagon loaded with provisions, to which they invited the Ten to help themselves. They produced, too, some quinine from their medicine-chest, with which they dosed Young Hicks, and said he would be all right next day.

The two parties became so fraternal that they pitched their camp together for the night. The leader of the ranchmen, a big, brown-faced man named Allen, offered to take charge of the camp until morning, and Chilton, being weary, was content, and sought sleep, which he soon found. He was awakened once in the night by the sound of men talking, so he thought, but he was so sleepy that it was merely a vague impression, and he closed his eyes again in a moment.

The ranchmen said they would start first in the morning, as they were traveling in a hurry, and when Chilton arose a half dozen of them and the

wagon were disappearing over a swell of the earth.

“We’ll eat our breakfast as we go along,” said Allen. “Good-by!”

“We’ll do the same,” said Chilton, and he and his comrades mounted their horses and rode in the other direction. He was silent for half an hour, thinking, and then he said, suddenly:

“How’s the boy?”

There was silence for at least a minute, and then everybody looked at Old Hicks. The man was fifty years old and brown, but a flush came in his face.

“Allen said it wasn’t right for the boy to go on with us,” he answered, apologetically. “Besides, he was talking a lot about the old lady and the place back there on the hill. Well, he’s in the ranchmen’s wagon, lying very comfortable on some bags of meal, going north.”

“But he swore,” said Chilton.

“It don’t count; he’s under twenty-one,” replied Old Hicks, guiltily.

The Nine rode on in silence.

Chilton presently pulled out the piece of paper which contained the agreement and scratched out Young Hicks's name.

"What are you doing?" asked Carter, the Tennessean.

"I'm keeping our names out of bad company," replied Chilton.

Old Hicks heard him, but said nothing, though the flush came again to his face.

Chilton, Bloodgood and others began to discuss the country, which had improved somewhat, but seemed very unfamiliar to Bloodgood. He believed they had wandered from the right direction, and when he examined a rude map which he carried, he was convinced of it.

"There's nothing to do," he said, "but to ride southward, and if we keep going we're sure to come to the Rio Grande at last."

Water was necessary for the night's camp, but they saw none; and taking the most conspicuous mound he could find as a center of operations, Chilton sent every man off from it in a direct line,

like the spokes radiating from the hub of a wheel, each to return at the end of an hour to the hub. He did not find any, but as he rode back toward the mound at the end of an hour, Carter, coming from the west, hailed him with a shout of triumph, and Chilton's mind was at rest.

“It runs out of a hillside not more than two miles from here,” said Carter.

All the others had failed, but Carter's discovery was enough.

“Hello!” Chilton suddenly exclaimed in surprise; “there are only eight of us!”

Each man looked over the little party, and then all said as if by one impulse:

“Old Hicks!”

“What's that bit of white on the hill there?” asked Carter.

Paul Dupuy dismounted and picked up a scrap of paper, held in place by a thorn.

“There's writing on it,” he announced.

“What does it say?” asked Chilton.

““Luck be with you,”” read Dupuy.



A scrap of paper

Chilton rode back a little distance in their path on the plain, and saw mixed with the hoof-prints those of one horse going in the other direction.

“He’s gone, boys; we won’t see him anymore,” said Chilton, when he came back.

“I suppose that a man has to look after his son,” said Taylor, the Georgian, to McCorinick.

It was a snug little place that Carter had found, a tiny rivulet spouting out of a hillside and trickling away across the prairie. After all, men and horses, had drunk from the stream, the men tethered the horses in the green grass by the waterside.

As usual, they set a watch, which Paul Dupuy was to keep the first half of the night, and Taylor the second half. It was past one in the morning when Paul Dupuy awakened Taylor and called upon him to take the relief.

“Not a bad spot, eh, Paul?” said Taylor, the Georgian, to Dupuy. “If this hill were a little higher and there were a few more trees, it might pass for a patch of North Georgia, where I used to live.”

“We’re going to build an empire in Mexico, and you won’t see Georgia any more,” replied Dupuy.

“That’s true,” replied Taylor. “I never had much in Georgia, anyway. It was a two-roomed log house, and about twenty acres, I guess. There were ten acres more, but I’d been lawing over it

and the case wasn't settled. That ten acres was claimed by Bill Moore, my neighbor, the meanest man that was ever born, and he went to law. The case had been going on ten years, when he enlisted in the Yankee army and I joined the rebs."

"What became of him?" asked Dupuy.

"Why, he went back there, of course," replied Taylor, "for he was too mean a man to get killed. And—thunderation! he'll be winning that ten-acre suit while I'm off building empires in Mexico." He said not another word, but taking his rifle in hand, began his duties of sentinel and strode up and down, his eyes somber.

Chilton was first to awake, the light of a brilliant morning sun shining on his eyes.

"Up, boys!" he shouted, and then added: "Hey there, Taylor, all quiet through the night? Here, what the devil has become of Taylor? Why, the man's gone!"

"His horse is gone, too," said Bloodgood.

Chilton swore.

"What's this?" called Kidd, pointing to a tree.

Cut rudely in the soft bark of a tree with the keen point of a knife were some words. Chilton read them aloud:

“Gone to win that ten-acre case.”

He looked around for a meaning, and seeing the light of understanding on Paul Dupuy’s face, said, loudly and sharply:

“Well?”

Dupuy told the story of the ten-acre suit as he had heard it, for the first time, from Taylor the night before.

The brief breakfast was eaten in silence, and then they left the place, the horses turning reluctant eyes toward the green grass and fresh water. After the noon halt, Kidd, the Arkansan, rode up by the side of Chilton, who was in the lead, Chilton liked the man, who was the wildest and roughest of all the party, but who had a certain air of gaiety and humor about him. He came from a frontier portion of Arkansas near the Choctaw line, and throughout the war had been a valiant, even rash soldier.

“Will these Mexicans fight?” he asked Chilton.

“I don’t want to be any emperor over people who haven’t got sand.”

“Pretty well,” replied Chilton. “My father was in the Mexican war and I’ve heard him talk about ’em. I guess if they’re well led, they’ll stand up.”

“There’s a crowd of fellows up in Arkansaw I’d like to have down there with us,” said Kidd, reflectively.

“They’d fight, I suppose,” said Chilton, with a smile.

“Fight!” replied the Arkansan, responding readily to the intended provocation. “I reckon they would! That’s what they’ve been raised on. Why, Chilton, I fought in the feud with the Jewells before I was fourteen years old, and kept on fighting in it until the war came up and both sides went to that; and I reckon if I was back in Arkansaw I’d be fighting in it again, for the Jewells will begin just where they left off, sure!”

He stopped short, kicked his horse in the side, and swore one of his choicest oaths.

“What’s the matter, Kidd?” asked Chilton.

“To think of it!” burst out the Arkansan. “The

feud will be raging more than ever because of its four years' rest, and me, the best fighting-man the Kidds have got, down in Mexico two thousand miles from the scenes of slaughter, building up a throne or some such fool thing for myself! Why, it's cowardice, rank treason in me!"

"Kidd, what do you mean? What are you talking about?" exclaimed Chilton, stopping his horse and reining him across the path.

"I mean that I'm going to ride straight to Arkansaw!" said Kidd, also stopping his horse. "To Jericho with Mexico and all Mexicans! Do you think they can fight that feud there in Arkansaw without me? If you do, I don't. Good-by. Don't any of you boys try to stop me, because it isn't well for friends to quarrel and hurt one another!"

He waved his hand to his comrades and rode on the back track, the figure of the horse and man growing smaller and smaller until it became a mere black mark against the horizon, and then nothing.

"We are only six now," said Carter, presently;

“but at any rate, we are six men loyal and true.”

They began to talk again of the Rio Grande, which they hoped to reach in a day or so, and they built new castles in Mexico until they stopped for the night. After supper, McCormick produced from his saddle-bags an old and battered little accordion with which he could produce the semblance of a tune or two. With the darkness and the lone prairie as a background adding to the music a certain weirdness and a touch of softness which it had not, the effect was not so bad. Felix Dupuy was lying on his blanket, the light from the camp-fire flickering faintly over his face. He and his brother were of a Huguenot family of Charleston, many generations on American soil, but still French in looks from head to heel, slim, dark and neat. Felix was the youngest of the Ten, next to Young Hicks, and the cracked music of the old accordion seemed to make him forgetful of the prairie. His brother, two years older, was watching him closely, but said nothing until the end of the fifth tune.

“We’ve danced by that many a time in old

Charleston, eh, Felix?” said Paul.

“That’s true,” said Felix, “but those good old times can’t come again. The Yankees have Charleston now.”

“But the same people that built up Charleston before will have to build it up again,” said Paul. “The dancing and the music will go on just as they did before the war. Maybe they are going on this very minute. It would be fine, Felix, to walk there again on the old Battery in the cool of the evening with the sea-breeze on your face, and see the pretty girls in white dresses with the red roses in their hair.”

Chilton and Carter kept the watch that night, and when the first bar of sunlight shot up in the east, the six arose and ate their breakfast, all talking freely except Felix Dupuy, who seemed abstracted and gloomy. Then five of them rode briskly away to the south, but Felix Dupuy, the sixth, rode in the other direction.

“Look at Felix Dupuy!” said Bloodgood.

“He’s left us!”

“Is your brother crazy?” Chilton asked of Paul

Dupuy.

“Felix was thinking too much about Charleston last night,” replied Paul, his voice full of excuse for his brother, “and he is really out of his head, like a man with a fever. If one were to talk with him sensibly, his mind would clear up and he’d come back.”

“Then try it,” said Chilton.

Paul put his horse to the gallop and the others remained where they were, watching the experiment. Paul rapidly overtook Felix, who seemed not to hear the galloping hoofs behind him. Chilton liked the spirited way in which the elder brother pursued the younger.

Paul rode up beside Felix and the two began to talk earnestly, as the others could tell by the motions of their heads, but the brothers, still talking, rode on, side by side, never looking back until their figures grew misty on the horizon.

“Thunderation!” exclaimed Carter. “They’ve both gone!”

That was the last word spoken for many hours. At the noon halt, they saw a herd of antelope on

the horizon, and it occurred to all four that fresh meat would be a good thing to have. McCormick wished the honor of shooting the antelope, and they agreed that he should get the game.

He rode away in a direction somewhat to the right of the herd. McCormick was a saturnine man. His was a solitary nature. He had lived before the war far down on the Florida peninsula, on a spot of sand among the swamps, where he could bask in the warm sunshine through winter and summer alike.

That was the life that suited McCormick, who was created for a Robinson Crusoe, and when he rode off after the antelope the sun that blazed down on him seemed to him to be the same sun that he had known in Florida. He had a little hut there on the sand-spit in which he kept his guns and ammunition and skins and other small property. He had nailed up the door when he went off to the war, and as the hut stood in the wilderness, he had no doubt it was there waiting for him just as he had left it.

The wind was singing a strange tune in the blood of McCormick. He knew all the intricate

country around that home of his in the Florida marshes. In a neck of woods between two swamps an old panther roamed at nights. McCormick believed him to be the biggest of his kind in Florida, and four times he had shot at him and missed. Then the war came.

“After I’ve become a great man in Mexico, I’ll go back and see that little hut of mine and shoot that panther,” he said, unconsciously speaking aloud.

He passed over a swell of earth, and it was time to dismount and stalk the antelope. He did not dismount.

“I think I’ll go and see that hut now, and get that panther,” he said. “As well as I can make out, that house of mine in Florida is some thousands of miles east of here, slightly by north.”

He rode east slightly by north.

Chilton, Carter and Bloodgood waited a long time for the return of McCormick, or some evidence that he was still stalking the game. But the sound of no rifle-shot came to their ears; the antelope, though only dim figures against the

horizon, seemed undisturbed and grazed peacefully. The three looked at one another with suspicion.

“Let’s see what has become of McCormick,” said Carter.

They rode toward the swell of earth beyond which he had disappeared, and there Bloodgood, who was an old plainsman, dismounted and examined the soft soil.

“He never left his horse’s back,” he announced, “and here goes his trail, to the east and straight away from the antelope.”

It was sufficient. Bloodgood remounted his horse and the Three continued their journey southward, silent and sad.

About the middle of the afternoon, Bloodgood checked his horse and, pointing over the prairie, announced briefly that men were coming. The others were less used than he to the plains, and for a minute or two could see nothing; then they descried dimly moving figures.

“They are Indians coming our way,” said Bloodgood.

The Indians rose fast from the plain as they were approaching at a half gallop. They were all warriors, at least twenty in number, gay with paint, gaudy feathers and bright blankets. Bloodgood uttered a joyful shout, and spurred his horse forward to meet the leader of the band, a large Indian with a fine presence and the features of an old Roman, to whom he gave welcome by the name of Red Dog. Red Dog knew Bloodgood, too, at once, and shook hands with him in the American fashion. Then they talked, and white and red camped together.

“Old Red Dog tells me,” said Bloodgood to Chilton, “that he’s started with this band on the biggest hunting-trip of his life. These men are picked warriors and hunters of the Comanche nation, and they are going to make a complete circuit after the buffalo through northern and western Texas and then into New Mexico to Santa Fé, where they’ll sell the hides.”

Chilton happened to be looking the other way then, and he did not see that Bloodgood’s eyes were glistening. He said it was time for white men and red to part and go their ways, and

shaking hands again, they mounted their horses. The Indians turned their faces toward the northwest, formed a kind of hollow square, and Bloodgood was in the center of it.

“Bid your white brother farewell,” said Red Dog, with gravity and dignity, to Chilton and Carter. “He goes with us and his heart goes with us, too.”

“It is true,” called out the Texan, “but wherever you go, boys, I wish you luck.”

The chief said something to his warriors. They burst into a long and thrilling whoop, shook their rifles, waved their lances and dashed off in a wild gallop toward the northwest, the Texan as joyous as any in the wild band.

“Well,” said Chilton, looking at his comrade, “it is only you and I, Carter, Kentucky and Tennessee.”

They rode into the south, sitting erect in their saddles, their faces defiant. About dusk, they selected a camp in a little grove. The night came on, thick and dark, but the fire was a red beam in its center, and the two men sitting beside it

basked in its gladness and glow.

“I’ll take a last look at the horses to see that they’re all right,” said Chilton, “and then I think we’d better roll up in our blankets and go to sleep.”

He walked toward the horses, and three yards from the fire the darkness swallowed him up. He was invisible to Carter, but looking back, Chilton could see the red gleam of the coals and the dim figure of Carter sitting beside them. He saw the Tennessean take something out of his coat and look at it a long time. When he put it back, Chilton returned to the fire.

“Carter,” he said, and his voice was stern, “I’m ashamed of you, to be looking at a picture that way! You, with four years of desperate war just behind you and a greater career just before you, to be giving way to sloppy sentiment!”

“I’m not ashamed of myself,” said Carter.

“Where does she live?” asked Chilton.

“In Nashville; I knew her there before the war.”

“That was four years ago.”

“But I saw her there just before the battle with Thomas.”

“I guess she has married some other fellow by this time.”

“I guess not; I know she hasn’t.”

There was a strong suggestion of defiance in the Tennessean’s manner, and Chilton did not deem it wise to say more.

When they saddled their horses the next morning, Carter held out his hand.

“Good-by, Chilton,” he said. “Let’s part friends.”

“Going to see her, I suppose?” said Chilton.

“Yes,” replied Carter; and there was in his voice a note of defiance.

“I don’t think it’s more than one day’s ride to Mexico,” said Chilton, not taking the offered hand.

“But it’s very many days’ ride to Nashville,” said Carter, “and I must start early. See here, Chilton, we’ve been comrades in war a long time and we don’t want to part enemies, now that we

have peace.”

Chilton yielded, and shook the offered hand, though reproach was in his eye.

They mounted and rode away in opposite directions, Carter to the north and Chilton to the south. Chilton never looked back. After a while, he took out a sheet of paper and tore it up; he did not want his name to be beside the others.

When Chilton said that Mexico was not more than a day's ride away, he made his time allowance too large, for by four o'clock in the afternoon he saw a yellow streak on the horizon. The streak broadened into a bar, and then became a wide, shallow river of muddy water which he knew was the Rio Grande. Beyond that yellow river lay the Mexico which was to be the scene of his triumphs. He felt emotion and urged his horse into a trot.

In half an hour he was beside the bank of the yellow stream, and two miles down he saw a tiny steamer about the size of a launch bearing the American flag. Some customs duty, thought Chilton, for smugglers were thick along the

frontier.

The river was too deep to ford, but he saw a few adobe huts near by and a large skiff tied to the bank. Two Mexicans came to his hail at one of the huts and began to prepare the boat, when he showed them a small gold coin. One of them pointed to the little steamer still plainly visible on the river.

“The Yankees!” he said, in fair English.

“Yes; what business have they around here?” asked Chilton.

“None,” replied the Mexican. “But they come, without it. We do not like them; they are cowards, robbers.”

“What’s that?” asked Chilton, sharply.

The second Mexican repeated the words of the first, and Chilton, flushing with anger, shouted, “Take it back, you liar!”

The Mexican drew a knife. Chilton, with a swift blow, struck him on the wrist, and the knife flew into the air. The second man came to the assistance of his comrade, but a fist driven into his face by

the powerful
arm of
Chilton sent
him head
over heels.
He sprang
lightly to his
feet and the
two ran
away.
Chilton
looked at
their flying
forms and
rubbed his
head
thoughtfully.



A fight

“Thunderation!” he said. “After fighting four years against the Yankees, here I am, fighting for them!”

He mounted his horse and, riding to the highest point of the bank, gazed long at the Mexican shore.

“Well, it doesn’t look like a very good country,

anyway,” he said, at length.

Turning his horse, he rode due north.



● Credits

"The Break of Day"

Munsey's Magazine, September, 1895.

"The Sharpshooter"

Published in *The Cosmopolitan, A Monthly Magazine*, Volume 21, Issue 2, June 1896.

"The Sharpshooter" was subsequently printed in *The Star* newspaper, September 5, 1896, Christchurch, New Zealand. The text obtained from *The Star* was used to produce the story here.

"At the Cannon's Mouth"

Published in two installments in *The Hartford Courant*, in 1897 on January 13 and 14.

"After the Battle"

Lippincott's Monthly Magazine, March 1898.

"Guard No. 10"

Munsey's Magazine, September 1898 by Frank A. Munsey, Publisher.

"At the Twelfth Hour"

The Atlantic Monthly, October 1898, by
Houghton, Mifflin and Company.

"The Stroke of Midnight"

The Record-Union newspaper, Sacramento,
CA, December 11, 1898.

"The Fate of the Gun"

The Florida Star, July 4, 1902, Titusville,
Florida.

"The Retreat of the Ten"

The Cosmopolitan magazine, November
1904.

