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Everett T. Tomlinson**

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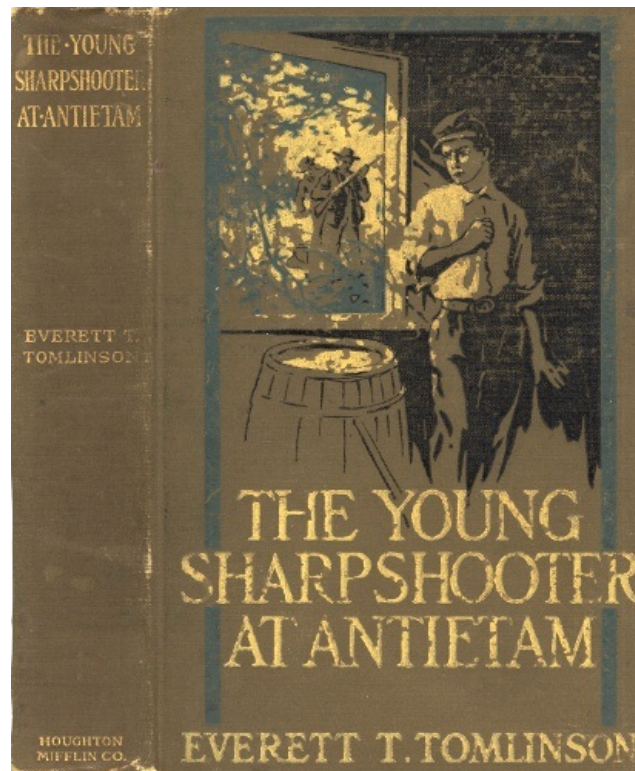
Author: Everett T. Tomlinson

Release date: April 18, 2012 [EBook #39473]

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE YOUNG SHARPSHOOTER AT
ANTIETAM ***

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**THE YOUNG SHARPSHOOTER AT
ANTIETAM**

BY EVERETT T. TOMLINSON



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1914

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Published September 1914



THEY WERE FALLING BY SCORES

PREFACE

This story has been written with no desire to revive or even to keep alive the spirit of the struggle between the States.

Nevertheless the facts which have made our history and the forces which have entered into the making of the life of our country ought not to be ignored or forgotten. The effect of the conflict was too great for that. The Civil War is now far enough away to enable us to see the heroic, dramatic, and even romantic elements that composed it; and all these, too, free from the bitterness which naturally was characteristic of the times.

To-day each side understands the other better, and with a more complete knowledge is able to see more clearly the sterling qualities of both contestants.

The appreciation of the importance of Lee's first attempt to invade the North is necessary if one is to understand the struggle which followed. The dash, spirit, and skill of the great Southern leader, as well as the energy and the daring of his lieutenants, are seen to-day more clearly than in the times when his effort was made. What the consequence would have been if General Lee had succeeded, all can appreciate. The battle of Antietam was almost a pivot of the great Civil War.

That my young readers may gain a more complete knowledge of the daring advance of the great Southern general and the result which followed when his army was turned back into Virginia, I

have written this story. My hope is that it will lead to a careful study of the conflict, and that boys, North and South alike, may be led into an increased knowledge of and interest in our common country.

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON.

ELIZABETH, NEW JERSEY.

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From drawings by George Avison

THE YOUNG SHARPSHOOTER AT ANTIETAM

CHAPTER I

THE IRISHMAN AND HIS PIG

"You're too noisy, Dennis."

"What's the harm?" replied Dennis O'Hara as he stopped a moment and looked all about him. "There are no Johnnies around here."

"You don't know whether there are or not," retorted Noel Curtis sharply, as he too glanced in either direction along the dusty road over which the two young soldiers were tramping that September day in 1862. Both were clad in the uniform of the Union army, and the manner in which they carried their rifles gave evidence of the fact that both young soldiers were well known in the army of General McClellan for their skill as sharpshooters.

"'Tis nothing I'm afraid of now," said Dennis gleefully, as he shifted from one shoulder to the other the body of a small pig which he had secured in his foraging expedition with his companions.

The day was one to stir the souls of both young men, who were thoroughly wearied by the routine of the camp life at Harper's Ferry, where they had been stationed with about eight thousand other Union soldiers. There was a haze in the distance that covered the summits of the hills and even the waters of the near-by stream seemed to be subdued as they rushed on their way to join the Potomac.

"'Tis a fine day," exclaimed Dennis; and at once he began to sing,—

"My rations are S.B.,
Taken from porkers three
Thousand years old;
And hard-tack cut and dried
Long before Noah died,—
From what wars left aside
Ne'er can be told."

"What do you mean by 'S.B.'?" laughed Noel.

"Sometimes 'tis said to mean 'salt bacon,' and then again maybe 'tis 'salt beef,' and sometimes we call it 'soaked beans.' Whatever it is I have had my fill of it. Shure, Noel, me boy, it's you and I that will be feasting ourselves on some roast pork before to-morrow mornin'."

"Look at those pickaninnies!" exclaimed Noel, as he pointed to a little hut from which a stream of black-faced urchins appeared, who were rushing to join their companions in the road and watch the two approaching Union soldiers.

"Wait 'til I sing them a song, too," exclaimed Dennis; and once more he began to sing,—

"Ole massa run, ha! ha!
De darkies stay, ho! ho!
It must be now dat de kingdom's comin'
And de year of Jubilo."

In addition to the crowd of dusky-faced children several older negroes now joined the group to watch the passing Union soldiers. The boys in blue were still such a novelty to many of the slaves that their appearance usually served to summon speedily a band of the admiring dusky spectators.

Dennis, unfamiliar with the colored people and their ways, had never ceased to express his dislike of them. Many a time in the camp when the soldier boys had wanted to have a little sport they would call upon Dennis to "cuss the niggers," by which term they described Dennis's oratorical efforts. Standing upon the head of a barrel, or mounting some box near the quarters of the sutler, with his ready tongue Dennis promptly poured forth a steady stream of almost meaningless words that were supposed to be descriptive of his feeling of antipathy toward the people for whose liberty he was fighting.

In the company of negroes at this time assembled to watch the passing of the two young soldiers there was one woman, manifestly an old field-hand, whose size was so immense as to be impressive. The admiration with which the woman gazed upon Dennis was returned in the expression of astonishment with which the young Irish soldier stared at this huge negress.

"Shure, Noel," he exclaimed to his friend in a loud whisper, "'tis not an ounce liss than four hundred pounds she weighs."

Noel laughed and did not reply as he looked again at the strange woman. Her cheeks hung down almost to her shoulders, and her immense lower lip, which appeared to be nearly an inch in thickness, and her hair, which in appearance was not unlike the tail of a horse after the animal has been feeding in some field where cockles abound, increased the weird expression with which she beamed upon the approaching boys.

All of the negroes by this time were becoming more and more excited. Their eyes seemed almost to protrude from their faces. They soon began to sing and dance, and mingled with the strange noises were the wild and weird shouts they occasionally uttered. The huge negress was the

wildest of all.

Neither of the approaching soldiers looked at the spectacle with any other thought than that of curiosity. To both of them up to the time of their enlistment a negro had been a rare sight. Since they had entered the army, of course they naturally had come frequently in contact with the dusky slaves. And the contrabands also on many occasions had flocked into the camps, confidently expecting to be sent North by their soldier friends.

Suddenly the huge negress abruptly started toward the young soldiers. Swinging her arms as she ran, she swiftly approached the boys, who had stopped abruptly when they first discovered her action.

"Bress de Lor'! Bress de Lor'! Yo's de ones we's been prayin' fo' dese fo' yeahs! Lor' bress ye, honey! I lub ye! I lub ye!" she added in her excitement, as she lunged toward Dennis, who was the particular object of her attack.

For a moment the startled young Irishman gazed in mingled disgust and fear at the huge negress, who was rapidly approaching. Then without a word of explanation Dennis O'Hara, who on the battle-field had been brave almost beyond the power of description, abruptly turned and fled from the excited negress. A wild shout from the assemblage followed his unexpected departure, and even Noel was compelled to laugh when he saw the huge woman start in swift and awkward pursuit of the fleeing soldier.

Unwilling to let go his hold upon the pig, which he had secured in his foraging, Dennis was greatly hampered in his flight. With long strides the black woman gained rapidly upon him. Once Dennis emitted a loud whoop of terror or warning, Noel was unable to decide which.

The excitement of the negroes became more marked as it was seen that the efforts of Dennis to escape were unavailing. Nearer and nearer came the excited black woman, and in a brief time she flung her great arms about Dennis, who was helpless to protect himself, as he still was unwilling to let go his hold upon his prize.

"Lor' bress ye, honey!" shouted the woman as she clasped the unwilling soldier in her arm. "Bress de Lor'! Bress de Lor'! We hab bin prayin' fo' yo' dese fo' yeahs! M—m—m—"

Her grasp evidently became more vigorous and her enthusiasm more marked as the plight of the helpless soldier became more manifest. The watching negroes, almost hilarious by this time, started toward the place where the exciting scene was being enacted.

What the outcome might be now began to trouble even Noel, who rapidly advanced to the side of his friend, and shouted to the approaching blacks, "Keep back! Keep back!"

The negroes, however, either were too excited or were unwilling at first to heed the request, and in a screaming, laughing, shouting mob they still pressed forward.

The negress, as has been said, apparently a field-hand, was possessed of great physical strength, and it was plain that Dennis was unable to protect or even release himself as long as he held to the body of the pig.

As Noel approached, Dennis shouted excitedly to him, "Take the porker, Noel, me boy! Take me gun, too! Help me out o' this!"

"Bress ye, honey! We hab bin waitin' fo' yeahs fo' yo' to come! We's been prayin' all de time and when I hear yo' singin' about 'Ole massa run, ha! ha!' and 'De darkies stay, ho! ho!' den I des know de kingdom was come shore 'nuff and de yeah of Jubilo was right yere!"

Too angry to respond, Dennis waited until Noel had relieved him of his gun and the pig, and then with one violent effort freed himself from the grasp of the excited black woman.

When she made as if she was about to approach him once more and renew her expression of delight over the coming of the boys in blue, Dennis suddenly seized the little pig that Noel was holding and swinging it with all his strength struck the woman with it upon the side of her face.

The effect of his effort, however, was plainly not more than to cause the huge mass of flesh to stop a moment, but not to abandon the efforts in which the negress was engaged. Again Dennis drew back the little pig and again struck at his tormentor. His second effort, however, like his first, was unable to check the fervor of the powerful woman. The remaining negroes now were almost upon the struggling pair. The fear in Noel's heart that some harm might come to Dennis or to himself became real.

"Stand back there!" he shouted. "Don't come any nearer!"

At his word the crowd halted and, quickly taking advantage of the interval, Noel said, "This woman says you have been praying for four years for us to come."

"Yas, suh! Yas, suh! We shore has! Dis yere is de Jubilo, shore 'nuff! Shore 'nuff! Ole massa goin' to run, and de darkies goin' to stay!"

"Do you know that song?" inquired Noel.

"We shore does! Yas, suh! Yas, suh! We knows it!"

"Then I want you to stand up by the side of the road and sing it while we march back to camp."

Laughingly the dusky crowd arranged themselves in lines along the roadside according to Noel's bidding. Even the huge negress, after some persuasion, reluctantly took her stand at the head of the line on the right.

"Now, then, everybody sing!" called Noel, after he had whispered to Dennis, "Take your gun and pig and start out of this, but don't try to be in too much of a hurry."

"All right," he called loudly, as he passed the negress. There was a laughing response and instantly Noel and Dennis, as they quickly advanced began to sing,—

"Ole massa run, ha! ha!
De darkies stay, ho! ho!
It must be now dat de kingdom's comin'
And de year ob Jubilo."

Glancing neither to the right nor left the two soldiers steadily moved forward and in a brief time passed beyond the strange assembly on the roadside.

"Is she after me, lad?" whispered Dennis loudly, glancing anxiously behind him.

"I don't think so," replied Noel, "but I shan't look back just yet. I don't hear anybody coming and they are singing like mad back there yet."

"Just listen to them, will you!" he added as there came from the crowd an increased volume of sound, which was somewhat indicative of the excitement that possessed the assembly.

"I guess we 're all right now," Noel said a few minutes later when they had turned a bend in the road and their admirers no longer were to be seen.

"Now, Noel, me boy," said Dennis, "I want ye to promise me something."

"What's that?" inquired Noel quizzically, although he was confident that he understood what the request of his companion was to be.

"I want ye to promise me that ye'll kape what happened here a sacret. 'Tis just between you and me, me boy."

"Oh, but, Dennis," suggested Noel, "think what fun the boys in the camp will miss if we don't tell them what the black woman did."

"Shure, you won't tell on me!" Dennis pleaded as he stopped a moment and gazed anxiously at his companion.

"I shall have to think about that," replied Noel mockingly.

The expression of consternation that appeared for a moment on the face of his companion caused the young soldier to laugh heartily.

"Why don't you tell them about it yourself, Dennis?" he asked abruptly.

"Niver!" replied the young Irish soldier. "'Tis one of the sacrets I shall niver tell, not aven to me mither. But I want to feel that you will help me to kape the sacret."

"I'll agree not to tell it to-night," said Noel at last.

"Well, I suppose I'll have to be contint wid that, thin," responded Dennis. "But let me tell ye wan thing, Noel Curtis. If I find the story ever does lake out, I shall know where it came from and the fellow that tells on me will want to go to the surgeon to be put together. Indade an' he will that!"

"He won't if he gets that black woman here to help him," laughed Noel. "Now, how are you going to get that pig into the camp? You know what the colonel said about foraging, and what he told us would happen to the boy who tried it, after such strict orders had been given against it."

"Shure, and I'll give the colonel a piece o' the rib o' me pig. When he once swallows that he'll forget all about his orders."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Noel good-naturedly. "But here we are almost back to camp, and you'll have a chance to try it out in a little while."

CHAPTER II

THE SUTLER'S GOODS

The appearance of the two soldiers in the camp at once attracted the attention of their comrades. It had been long since any of them had tasted fresh meat and the sight of the pig which Dennis still was carrying upon his shoulders aroused the desire of every beholder to share in the repast which was to follow. There were many laughing calls to be invited to the feast, to all of which Dennis responded good-naturedly, but without in any way committing himself unduly to the increase of the numbers of those with whom he intended to share the change in the camp diet.

"Hello, Levi," called Dennis, as he and Noel passed the sutler's tent.

Levi Kadoff, one of the sutlers, who, by some strange methods, had obtained the privilege of selling the soldiers from his stock which was displayed in a tent not far from the center of the camp, looked hastily up as he was greeted. His love for pork was not strong, but apparently was the only limit to his desires. At exorbitant prices he had been selling his wares, and he had interfered in so many ways with the camp life and had been so disagreeable to most of the soldiers that at the time he was the most detested man in Harper's Ferry. He had used every artifice in inducing the boys in blue to buy from him, and many of the sales which he made were called robbery by those who had been persuaded to buy.

"Vere you haf been?" demanded the sutler, as Dennis and Noel halted in front of him.

"Been out foraging," answered Dennis loudly. "We have a pig here. If you will come up to my tent after dark, I'll give you a slice o' spare rib."

The expression of disgust which appeared instantly upon the face of Levi caused Noel to laugh heartily, but the countenance of Dennis was unchanged, as he stared at the angry sutler.

"What's the matter, Levi?" he said. "Don't you like pork?"

Again an expression of disgust appeared upon the face of the sutler, but he made no direct reply to the question.

"How much are you charging for milk this mornin'?" inquired Dennis.

"Twenty-five cents a glass."

"Is that all?" demanded Dennis. "Shure, it was twinty cints when I left camp, and you have not put it up over five cints since the mornin'! I thought you would have it up to fifty cints shure by this time. Levi, have you a bit of a conscience at all left yet?"

"I vas all consciences," replied Levi, spreading out his hands as he spoke. "I don't think how I shall be able to do business here much longer. Dese things gets me—"

"Of course you won't do business here much longer," broke in Dennis. "You won't have to. Before you go, some of the boys will have to come down and give you a good send-off."

"No! No!" protested Levi excitedly. "They must not do dat. I haf been der very goot friend. I have made leedle, very leedle money."

"Don't be scared, Levi. We know just how much money you have made. Some of the boys have been kapin' tabs on you. If we should take whatever you have here, you would still be rich enough, and the boys would feel that they were only gittin' even with you for the way you have treated them."

The eyes of the angry sutler snapped, as he turned sharply upon the young soldier. "If I choose I can reports to der colonel vat you have been doing."

"What have I been doin'?" demanded Dennis innocently.

"You know dere vas strict orders against foraging. I think now I shall report to the colonel."

The young soldiers remained no longer at the sutler's tent.

"I believe that fellow will report you to the colonel," Noel said to his companion.

"To be shure he will. He's likely to do that, and if he does he's likely to get somethin' more."

The reports were current in the camp that orders had been reissued against any foraging on the part of any of the men.

Whether or not it was due to the feast which Dennis and Noel prepared that night when their pig was roasted, or to the monotony of the camp fare to which the soldiers still irreverently referred as "S. B.," is not known, but at all events the temptation to find fresh food, and especially fresh meat, outside the boundaries of the camp proved to be too strong for many of the boys in blue.

It was not long afterward when Dennis with others was tempted beyond his power of resistance and again was found among those who were foraging in the regions adjacent to the camp.

A dozen or more were in the company and, as the soldiers believed, through the reports of Levi Kadoff, the colonel had been informed of the escapade. Consequently when the men returned to the camp the angry colonel, taking a position near the guard, ordered the entrance of the men singly or in pairs, and then demanded of every one that he should disclose what he had obtained in this foraging, against the strict command which had been issued.

Shamefacedly and with many threats against the little sutler, the returning soldiers showed what they had secured, oftentimes through hard labor.

Meanwhile the pile upon which the colonel had commanded every soldier to cast whatever he had obtained grew steadily. Chickens, an occasional ham, various vegetables, and other articles composed the greater part of the rapidly increasing heap.

Most of those who had been engaged in the forbidden occupation had already returned to camp,

when Dennis O'Hara at last appeared. This time, however, Noel Curtis was not with his friend.

As Dennis drew near the guard he discovered the presence of the colonel, but if he was alarmed by his discovery, his feeling was not betrayed by any change in the expression of his face. And yet apparently Dennis was the most guilty of all the men. Inside his coat was something which caused the garment to protrude in such a manner as to reveal, and yet at the same time to conceal, whatever Dennis had secured.

Demurely the young Irish soldier approached the waiting colonel and, as the officer sharply ordered him to halt, Dennis and a few watching soldiers were aware that the colonel's patience was entirely exhausted. He was not only angry that his commands had been disobeyed, but manifestly the indifference of the young soldier increased his feeling of irritation.

"What have you inside your coat?" demanded the irate colonel.

"Yis, sor! Yis, sor!" retorted Dennis, saluting as he spoke.

"What have you inside your coat?" repeated the angry officer.

"Nothin' of any value, sor."

"I don't believe what you say! A man who will disobey orders will lie about his disobedience! Unbutton your coat, sir, and show me what you have!"

"Indade, sor," protested Dennis, "'tis nothin' I have which will interest the likes of you, Colonel Rathbun. 'Tis nothin' of any value at all I have."

"Unbutton your coat, sir, and throw what you have stolen on to this pile, where the rest of your thievish comrades have placed what they stole!"

"Indade, sor," protested Dennis once more, "'tis nothin' of any value. I didn't rob anybody, sor! I _"

"Do as I tell you!" demanded the angry colonel, "or I will order you to be taken to the guard-house!"

"Yis, sor! Yis, sor!" responded Dennis promptly, as he began to fumble at the buttons of his jacket.

The garment, however, had been drawn so tightly about him to cover the object he was trying to conceal that it was with great apparent difficulty he obeyed.

Watching the awkward attempts of the young Irish soldier to comply with the demand of the colonel, many of the men of the regiment were crowding about the place. Curiosity as to the prize which Dennis had secured and suspicion that his sober face belied the feeling in his heart, and the general knowledge that Dennis O'Hara was one of the worst practical jokers in the camp, combined with other motives that steadily increased the number of the spectators.

After several attempts Dennis succeeded in unbuttoning the upper buttons of his jacket, and then again he paused and facing the colonel said, "'Tis nothin' that will interest you, Colonel. I haven't taken anything of value—"

"Not another word from you, sir!" shouted the angry officer. "Do as I tell you! Unbutton your coat and show what you have stolen and throw it on the heap where the other things are piled!"

"Yis, sor! Yis, sor!" said Dennis, speaking almost sadly, as he resumed his occupation and in a brief time succeeded in unbuttoning his jacket.

As he did so a small block of wood fell to the ground. For a moment the men stared blankly at Dennis's "prize" and then broke into loud and prolonged laughter.

The colonel's face flushed slowly when he discovered the true possession of the young Irishman, and then in a good-natured way he struck the block of wood with his sword and turning to his men said, "Sold! I have been sold, and shall have to own up to it. You young rascal," he said, once more addressing Dennis, "I have half a mind to send you to the guard-house on general principles. You had no business to play such pranks as that."

"But, Colonel," protested Dennis demurely, "I didn't want to play it. I did my best not to, but you ordered me to, so you see I had to. I was just bringing in a present."

"A present?" demanded the colonel, as the men laughed again. "A present? To whom were you going to give that block of wood?"

"Shure I was going to give it to the sutler," replied Dennis. "I had an idea that it would match his head."

The boys dispersed, pleased that the colonel had been so lenient with them and that their only punishment had been the loss of the articles which they had secured in their expedition.

When the two young soldiers were again in their tent, Dennis said to Noel, "That little sutler, Levi, is to blame for all this trouble. He thought the boys would be after buyin' not so much of him. He's the first of all the men who put us on hard tack that was 'cut and dried long before Noah died.'" And Dennis began to sing noisily,—

"My rations are S.B.,
Taken from porkers three
Thousand years old;
And hard-tack cut and dried
Long before Noah died,—
From what wars left aside
Ne'er can be told."

"I'm afraid the colonel won't be so easy next time," suggested Noel.

"Don't you worry about that," said Dennis. "The next time there won't be any Levi to carry tales to him. I have got it all fixed up in me mind. We're going to make Levi a good soldier."

"You can't do that," laughed Noel, "unless you begin at his feet."

"That's where we propose to begin."

"What are you going to do?"

"Noel, me boy," whispered Dennis, "I can't tell you all the details, but we're goin' to have a sham fight here between the Forty-sixth and the Fifty-first, and I shouldn't be one bit surprised if Levi Kadoff's supplies were somewhere near the middle of the battle-ground."

Noel laughed and thought no more concerning the statement of his comrade until the following day when to his surprise he discovered that there was, indeed, to be a sham battle between some of the men of the two regiments to which Dennis had referred.

An interested spectator he watched the two regiments when they formed in line near the tent of the sutler, Levi Kadoff. Nor was he the only spectator, for near by were assembled many of the men, all apparently aware that something of unusual interest was about to occur.

At last, when everything was in readiness, the Forty-sixth charged their opponents and with little effort drove them back. The Fifty-first, however, rallied, and then began to press their foes back to their former position. In the midst of all the efforts there was wild excitement and loud cheers among the spectators, whose numbers increased with every passing moment.

When the Fifty-first re-formed, it was directly in front of Levi's tent of supplies. A few minutes later, the bugle sounded and the Forty-sixth charged again.

Down came the laughing boys like a whirlwind, every one yelling as loudly as his lungs enabled him.

Apparently the sight of the charge of the noisy soldiers brought dismay to the hearts of the re-formed regiment, and before a word had been spoken they began to fall back. The applause and laughter among the spectators increased as the howling, laughing mass of soldiers ran swiftly forward driving their "enemies" before them.

Unfortunately for the sutler, his tent and supplies were directly in the way of the retreating Fifty-first. No one afterward could explain how it had been done, but the ropes of Levi's tent somehow were cut, and in a trice the stock of the little sutler was scattered over what seemed to be a half-acre of ground. There were few of the soldiers who did not have some articles in their hands. The battle itself seemed to have been forgotten, and in a brief time all the goods had disappeared, either into haversacks or into secret pockets of the thoughtless soldiers.

Levi, almost like a madman, was fighting to save his property. At one time he seized a cheese-knife and with it strove desperately to strike some of the boys. He was quickly disarmed, however, and as he was pushed from one to another he not only found no place upon which his feet could secure a resting-place, but no other weapon came within his grasp. At last, when he was released by the howling mass of soldiers, he was at least five hundred yards from the place where his ruined store had been located.

It was manifest now that every soldier understood the purpose of the sham battle. The very location had been selected with the thought to bring dire troubles upon the unpopular sutler, who so often had taken advantage of the boys in their purchases of his supplies.

By this time, however, orders had come from headquarters which speedily dispersed the disorderly mob, and in a brief time the camp resumed its former appearance, save for the loss of the sutler's stores and tent.

It was at this time that Noel unexpectedly came upon the little sutler. The man was almost beside himself with anger and grief.

"I vill haf the law on them!" he shouted. "They shall be shot, efery one! I vill haf mine goots vonce more!"

Not untouched by the suffering of the man, Noel said to him, "I don't think the boys meant anything very bad. They thought you had been charging them too much for what they have been buying."

"I haf not! It vas cheap! It vas all cheap! But I vill tell you. Dat fellow Dennis O'Hara, he it is who has made all dese troubles. I vill gif him no rest. He shall pay me back efery cent vat I haf lost. I shall gif him no rest."

Noel laughed lightly as he turned away, not for a moment taking the threats of the angry man seriously, and if he had been told at the time that the very lives of himself and his companions would depend upon a word of the little trader, he would not have believed the prophecy.

CHAPTER III

INTERCEPTED

In spite of the strict orders which had been issued for preventing foraging, either the memory of the feast for which the pig that Dennis had secured had provided the main course, or the restlessness due to the monotony of camp life, caused the practice to be renewed by some of the more restless spirits. Among these was Dennis O'Hara.

A few days afterward Dennis said to Noel, "Come on, lad, we'll take a walk over these hills."

"What for?" inquired Noel suspiciously.

"Shure, and 'tis to see the scenery."

"I want the walk," said Noel promptly, "and if you'll promise to behave yourself and not get either of us into trouble with any of your pranks, I'll go with you."

Accordingly, early in the afternoon leave was obtained and the two young soldiers departed from the camp at Harper's Ferry.

As yet they had no fear of an immediate approach of the Confederates. It was well known that General Lee, after his success in preventing General McClellan and his great army from advancing up the Peninsula to take Richmond, and his success in the second battle of Bull Run, or Manassas, had decided to cross the Potomac into Maryland. General Pope had been relieved of his command and General McClellan had been reinstated as the leader of the Northern armies.

The action of General Lee in deciding to invade the North produced a consternation that was followed almost by a panic. There were expectations that if he was successful he might not only take Washington, the capital of the nation, but also that he might move against Philadelphia and other Northern cities.

The soldiers of the Southern army were following Lee with a devotion and enthusiasm that at the time were without a parallel in the armies of the North. General McClellan doubtless was a more able engineer than General Lee, but his lack of prompt decision and quick action was known to his opponent, for both were graduates of West Point. Either his knowledge of the lack of decision on the part of General McClellan, or his desire for the armies of the North to withdraw from the vicinity of Richmond, because its defenders might not be able to withstand a well-directed and concerted attack, or both reasons, may have influenced him in his daring, not to say dangerous, attempt.

It was not until later in the war that a man was developed who commanded the confidence of the North and the enthusiastic loyalty of the Northern troops.

At this time, in 1862, there were divisions and jealousies among the men and almost a total lack of preparation among the bodies of troops.

With McClellan in command again there was a prompter action on his part than had been manifest throughout his Peninsula campaign. It was a critical time for his army and himself, and a time of peril for the cities of the North not far from the border.

Early in the preceding spring Noel and Frank Curtis, twin brothers, whose home had been on the shores of the far-away St. Lawrence, had enlisted, and had been assigned to the army of McClellan. Since they had been little fellows they had been familiar with the use of the rifle and had acquired such skill that both, soon after they had joined the army, were assigned to the sharpshooters.

In the battle of Malvern Hill, Noel had been wounded and sent home for a time. His brother Frank also had been home on a furlough. At the beginning of the fall campaign, Noel, now having recovered from his wound, and Frank were both ordered to rejoin the army.

For some reason, which Noel did not fully understand, his brother had been assigned to a different corps, while he, together with eight thousand of his comrades, had been assigned to the holding of Harper's Ferry. Another small division had been stationed at Martinsburg and at Winchester.

It was not known among these garrisons that General Lee had expected, upon his advance into Maryland, that these troops would quickly be withdrawn. It is now understood that General McClellan had written General Halleck to recall these men and attach them to the Army of the Potomac; but Halleck had decided to retain the garrisons in the Valley, and his decision has been sharply criticized on the ground that he violated every principle of sound strategy.

Among the friends that Frank and Noel had made there was young Dennis O'Hara, a bright,

happy young Irishman, about twenty years of age, just two years older than the twin brothers.

The friendship had been strengthened and the intimacy increased after the brothers had been separated. Dennis and Noel now were not only tent-mates, but almost inseparable companions.

As yet there had been slight call for their labors at Harper's Ferry. It was not known that the Confederate army was near, and in their sense of security most of the men were becoming somewhat careless in the observance of their duties.

"There's one place," said Dennis, when the two young soldiers had gone a mile or more from their quarters, "where I don't want to go to-day."

"Where's that?"

"'T is where that fat nager woman lives."

"But she said she was one of the best friends you had."

"'Friends!'" snapped Dennis. "'Friends! I think she's the first cousin, and maybe she's the sister, of ould Satan himself. You don't catch me goin' anywhere near that place again. If she thinks I came down here to set such naggers as she free, she's very much mistaken. No, sor! Niver again! If she should run after me any more, she'll only reach me through me dead body."

"But suppose, Dennis," laughed Noel, "that you found another pig somewhere. Which would you do, drop the pig or keep off the fat darky?"

"I'd keep off the darky, anyway, though I don't think I should let go me pig. 'T was good of you, Noel, to give me your word that you would niver tell anybody in the camp about it."

"About what?" inquired Noel innocently.

"About what took place the other day when that nager woman chased me."

"When did I promise?"

"Shure, you promised right there where we were whin I got away from her," said Dennis, as he stopped abruptly and looked into the face of his companion.

"But I don't remember making any such promise," said Noel slowly.

"Indade, an' you did," declared Dennis. "You gave me your word, and your word is better nor your bond. You haven't breathed a word of it to a livin' soul."

"How do you know I haven't?"

"Because if you had whispered it even to the sutler 't would have been all over the camp in no time. I knew I could rely on you, me boy."

"But I tell you," protested Noel, "I don't remember making any such promise."

"You shure did, and if you didn't you'll give it to me now."

"How do you know I will?" protested Noel, whose opportunities of teasing his joke-loving tent-mate were not numerous.

If there was any mischief in the camp every one by common consent declared that Dennis O'Hara had a share in it, if he was not the prime mover. But like all practical jokers, Dennis, so fond of playing pranks upon others, was usually easily angered when he himself was made the victim of the pranks.

"Shure, Noel," he begged, "you'll give me your promise now? Just think what it would mane for me. Ugh!" he added, as he closed his eyes and shuddered at the recollection of the "attack" of the huge field-hand.

"But, Dennis," protested Noel, "she was simply trying to show her love for you. She said she had been waiting years for you to come down here. Indeed, she declared that with you here the year of Jubilee had nothing to offer."

"She didn't!" spoke up Dennis promptly. "Indade, an' she said nothin' of the kind! If you won't mind, Noel," he added, "I think I'll make a deetour about that cabin yonder," as a little log cabin in the distance was seen.

"What's the matter now, Dennis?" laughed Noel. "You aren't afraid there will be more field-hands there?"

"I don't feel like takin' great chances. I tell you, Noel, one such chase is enough to last a man a lifetime."

"I don't know, Dennis, whether or not we had better go much farther," said Noel, hesitating as he stood on the hillside and looked anxiously about him. "We must be five or six miles from camp now and we ought to get back long before sunset."

"What's scarin' ye, Noel?" demanded Dennis.

"Nothing is scaring me," answered Noel; "but I don't want to get a reprimand for being late in the

camp. We wouldn't get leave to be away again very soon if we did."

"There are no Johnnies around here, anyway."

"You don't know that," said Noel positively.

"We haven't seen any."

"That doesn't mean that General Lee has not sent some division over this way. He has a trick of doing that, you know, and making his men show up where they aren't always expected."

"I don't mind the Johnnies," said Dennis boldly, "if we can only keep away from the naggers. Did you mind, lad, the cockle-burrs that were in the wool of that ould field-hand that tried—"

Dennis stopped abruptly, and turning sharply listened to the sounds which had apparently come from the valley below them.

"What's that?" he whispered.

"That sounded like a rifle shot," said Noel seriously. "I tell you, Dennis, we must get back to camp. I don't want to take any chances of being cut off, and it would be mighty easy for some Johnnie to get between us and the picket. I don't like the sound of that shot."

"No more do I," agreed Dennis. "I'm with you, lad, we'll start for the camp."

More anxious than either of the young soldiers was willing to admit to his companion, Noel and Dennis started hastily down the hillside, on their way back to the garrison at Harper's Ferry.

Even thoughts of foraging apparently were ignored or forgotten by Dennis. Success had not crowned their efforts that day. Not a pig had been seen, and if there were any chickens in the region they had been successfully hidden by their owners. A few withered beets and a bunch of onions comprised the entire stock which Dennis had secured with all his efforts.

"Look yonder, will ye!" exclaimed the excited young Irishman in a loud whisper, pointing as he spoke to a small body of men in gray who could be seen not far away in the road before them.

"We'll have to hide," whispered Noel. "It may be that they have seen us already, but if they haven't we might stand a chance of getting past them. Come on!" he added as he seized his companion by the arm and drew him to the roadside.

The discovery which the two young soldiers had made was doubly threatening because the road now was not near any woods.

The partly cleared fields were inclosed by rude fences of rails. Hastily leaping over the fence, Noel and Dennis crouched on the ground behind the rails.

Before they had taken their position Dennis whispered hoarsely, "They have seen us, lad. There must be twinty men in that band. If we try for the woods yonder, they'll get us both."

"We'll have to stay right where we are, Dennis, and do the best we can to defend ourselves."

"The odds are only tin to one," said Dennis, chuckling as if the fact was more of a joke than a peril. "They're comin', too," he added as he pointed toward a small body of men who could be seen advancing up the side of the hill.

CHAPTER IV

THE V IN THE FENCE

The prophecy of Dennis that a small body of men were approaching up the winding road was in part fulfilled.

The men advanced until both the crouching soldiers were able to see distinctly that they were clad in the uniform of gray. This fact confirmed their suspicions that somehow the small body of men had come between them and the camp at Harper's Ferry. Just what this meant or how much it implied, neither was able to conjecture.

The afternoon sun was low in the western sky. As Noel glanced behind him he became aware of this fact, and with it also came a hope that if the advancing party might be kept off until the sun had set, the darkness would provide a shelter under which he and his companion might be able to retrace their way to camp.

"They're stoppin', lad!" whispered Dennis excitedly.

"So they are," replied Noel "If they will only stay there we may be able to get away from here after all."

"But they have seen us," protested Dennis.

"I know it," answered Noel. "But they may not be able to see us now."

"There's one thing," said Dennis; "they don't know how many there are here. If they have seen only two, it may be they think we're part of a big company. We'll do all we can to lave them believe that. We don't want any closer acquaintance with any of thim Johnnies."

It was manifest that the party had halted in the road, and whether or not there was any prospect of an advance was something which the boys could not determine.

Behind him Noel saw that the field sloped towards some woods that were not more than one hundred yards away.

Once within the shelter of the trees, safety for a time at least might be secured, but in passing across the open field, even on the slightly sloping ground, they would be exposed to the fire of the men in the road.

Suddenly Dennis exclaimed, "Look yonder, me boy! Is that a spade, or do me eyes deceive me?"

Glancing quickly at the corner in the fence Noel saw a spade resting upon the ground, where it plainly had been abandoned by some one who had been repairing the fence.

"Be careful, Dennis. You'll be seen if you try to get that."

"Niver fear, me lad. That spade is worth its weight in gold, and I'm the boy that is goin' to try for it."

Instantly acting upon his own suggestion Dennis crawled slowly through the grass and stubble and carefully attempted to gain the implement.

Noel meanwhile anxiously watched his friend, fearful every moment that the report of guns in the distance would be heard. His fears, however, were relieved when in a few minutes Dennis returned with the spade.

"There, now!" he exclaimed. "We'll be ready for the Johnnies in a jiffy. Just watch me!"

It was marvelous to see what he was able to accomplish with his spade and still without exposing himself to the possible fire of the enemy, who were not moving from the position where they had halted some distance up the road.

As soon as a slight excavation had been made, both Noel and Dennis leaped into it. A few fence rails were also secured and piled upon the fence in front of them.

"You see now," said Dennis, "we're ready for almost any kind of an attack."

Noel smiled, though he made no reply. The full seriousness of the peril in which he and his companion now found themselves was plain. They were confronted by a band which had seen them scurrying across the road, and though the gray-clad soldiers had halted some distance down the road the young soldier was aware that they knew of the presence of the two boys in blue. Why they had not advanced he did not understand.

He was afraid to make the attempt to gain the woods in his rear, as he believed his enemies were still watchful and that any effort to escape would meet with a quick fire.

Meanwhile Dennis had succeeded in digging a ditch along the two sides of the V-shaped rail fence.

"There," he exclaimed, with a sigh of relief. "That will keep out the Johnnies, I'm thinkin'."

"Not very long," said Noel quickly.

"But they don't know how many there are of us," declared Dennis. "If they try to attack us there will be a couple of thim what shurely will nade the sarvices of the surgeon."

"We may need the services of the undertaker."

"Not yet, sor!" said Dennis with a laugh.

It was apparently impossible for the young Irish soldier to realize the seriousness of the position in which he and his comrade now found themselves.

"We'll wait a while, anyway," said Noel, "before we do anything. If they don't attack us, we'll not make any trouble for them."

"I'm not so shure o' that," said Dennis.

"We won't yet, anyway," said Noel quietly, fearful that his impulsive friend, if the attack should be delayed, would become impatient and with difficulty would be held back from firing at the men who were so near.

Glancing again at the band of Confederates, Noel was still more puzzled by their inactivity. Apparently they had broken ranks and were sitting or lying about on the ground near the road, though guards had been stationed in front and rear.

The moments dragged slowly on, and the confidence of Noel that an attack was not to be made upon them gradually became stronger.

The afternoon sun now was not more than a half-hour above the horizon. If they should be left

free for another hour, he was hopeful that they might make their way to the near-by woods and by a wide detour be able to return to the camp at Harper's Ferry.

"Shure!" said Dennis, after a few more minutes had elapsed, "we can't lave the Johnnies like this."

"You had better let sleeping dogs alone," warned Noel.

"Shure, an' I will that," said Dennis. "I'm not goin' to harm any one of thim. They seem to me to be aslape and I want to give thim somethin' to wake 'em up."

"What are you doing?" demanded Noel, as his companion drew an empty cartridge from his box and filled it with powder from his flask.

"I'm riggin' up somethin' to wake up thim boys," replied Dennis soberly.

Noel said no more and continued to watch his companion, who, after the shell had been filled with powder, adjusted the percussion cap in such a manner that it was placed upon the powder and within the covering.

"There's one of thim," exclaimed Dennis, looking with pride at his workmanship. "Now I'll make another one."

A second "shot" like the first was soon made, and then, handing one to Noel, Dennis proceeded very carefully to place his own in the muzzle of his gun.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Noel. "That isn't much more than a blank cartridge you have got there."

"Niver you mind that," said Dennis confidently. "We'll start these fellows on the run."

"It depends upon which way they run," again said Noel. "We don't want them coming in our direction."

"I'm not so shure about that," said Dennis, whose respect for the enemy had fallen because of the long silence which had prevailed after their arrival, "I'm not so shure of that," he repeated. "'Most anything is better than nothing. Now, then, Noel," he explained, "you see that big oak tree just beyond the place where the Johnnies are lyin'?"

"Yes," replied Noel, as he glanced at the huge tree in the distance.

"Do you think you could hit it?"

"A blind man could do that," said Noel.

"Well, then, I'll fire and then you fire."

"At the tree?" demanded Noel in surprise.

"That's it. That's it, exactly."

"What good will that do? It will only expose us and our shots won't do any damage."

"We'll see about that in a minute or two," laughed Dennis. "When these strange bullets of ours strike the tree they are goin' to make that percussion cap explode and then the powder will go off and there will be a big noise right behind the Johnnies. They'll think somebody's firin' at thim from the other side."

"That's no joke, Dennis," said Noel positively. "If we do what you say, they will think they are being attacked on the other side, and if they retreat they will come straight toward this place where we are now."

"Shure, but they won't retreat," said Dennis. "It's positive I am that they will be puttin' straight for the place where they think these guns are bein' fired."

"Then that will give us a chance to get away."

"Which may be right, my boy."

"Yes, I am right," said Noel hesitatingly. "Although I confess I don't like your scheme very much."

"We'll not fire together," said Dennis. "I'll fire first, then you fire directly after me. Be sure you don't miss that tree."

Dennis raised his gun to his shoulder, took careful aim and fired. After a brief interval Noel followed his example, though his better judgment still protested against the action as perilous.

True to the aim of the young soldiers the strange shots struck the tree just as Dennis had believed they would. An explosion followed each shot that was so loud that even the report of the guns from the V along the line of the rail fence sounded feeble.

In a moment the little Confederate band was thrown into confusion, as the men hastily arose and glanced in consternation first up the road and then in the opposite direction. They had heard the report of the guns of the two young soldiers, but, as Dennis had prophesied, the louder reports had come after the caps had been exploded when the great oak tree had been struck by the

strange missiles.

Eagerly Noel peered between the rails to discover in which direction the little band would start.

The consternation and confusion apparently lasted only a moment. In a brief time the men formed and at the word of their leader started hastily up the road in the direction of the hiding-place of Noel and Dennis.

CHAPTER V

THE PLAN OF GENERAL LEE

In order to understand more clearly the predicament in which the two young soldiers found themselves at the close of the preceding chapter, it is necessary for us to review briefly the events which led up to that time after the second battle of Bull Run when the Union forces again were defeated. The failure of General Jackson to strike the troops of General Pope on their line of retreat had enabled the latter with his men to regain the shelter of the fortifications at Washington.

Meanwhile the Confederate commander, Lee, gave his troops rest only for a day. As has been said, he was aware that it was impossible for him at this time either to invest or to attack the lines of Washington. In spite of his success he was convinced that only two courses of action were open to him. One of these was to remain in Virginia and try to defend the capital of the Confederate States from possible attacks by his enemies, and the other plan was to cross the Potomac and enter Maryland. There he might strike, or at least threaten to strike, some of the Northern cities that were not far from the border, and prevent General McClellan from carrying out his cherished desire to attack Richmond.

Besides, General Lee was aware that, if he merely tried to defend the capital of the rebellion, it would leave his enemy with full power to assume the offensive and make attacks wherever it was decided, after the spirits of his army had been restored and the ranks once more had been filled.

There were many who believed that General Lee displayed great keenness of vision when he decided to enter Maryland with his army. Such an act on his part would enable the distressed farmers of the South to gather their crops and harvests. Especially was this true in the beautiful and fertile Valley of the Shenandoah.

In addition to these advantages, the presence of the Confederate army in Maryland would bring many recruits, it was believed, and at the same time would confuse the Northern army by the possibility of the trouble that might be created there. And every day of delay was of especial advantage to the Confederates, who were working zealously to erect and complete the fortifications of their capital.

Another thought that is said to have been in the mind of Lee was that the people of the North, if the war should be transferred to their territory, would thus obtain a more intimate knowledge of its horrors, and this personal experience would arouse a desire to bring the contest to a close. Indeed, it is said that General Lee was confident at this time that he could accomplish the end of the struggle, which now had been fiercely fought for nearly a year and a half.

General Lee's first plan was to move rapidly into southern Pennsylvania, and by compelling his enemies to follow him, as he was confident they would do, he would draw them so far away from any defenses such as Pope had recently secured in Washington after the second battle of Bull Run, that if he should then plan for a battle it would be impossible for McClellan's troops to escape surrender as well as defeat. So confident were the Southern leaders now that they were filled with the thought that if the desire for peace could be strengthened in the North by a battle fought on Northern soil, and at the same time if the powers of Europe should agree to secure their cotton from the Southland, the results at the same time would put added pressure upon the Government at Washington and terminate the bloody struggle.

Keen as was the plan of General Lee, he was aware that his army was in no condition for an enlarged or energetic campaign. No small part of his men, as they marched over the sandy soil, were leaving bloody marks of their bare feet. It had been impossible to provide many of his soldiers with shoes. The provisions, too, were not sufficient, and in the days that had followed the battle many had been suffering from disease. As a consequence it is said, by those who are competent to judge, that not more than fifty-five thousand men were in the army of the brilliant Southern general when he crossed the Potomac River.

Much as the men were suffering, the animals of the camp were in no better condition. The horses were weakened by lack of food and by the hardships of the recent days. As if these facts were not sufficient to make the general hesitate, it is said that his supplies of ammunition also were deficient, and that he was as seriously troubled by this last fact as by both of the others combined.

But, like every successful man, General Lee decided not to think so much of what he did not have as of what he did have. Whatever might befall his attempt, he was confident that he would be

able to make the Northern armies remain so long and so far from the protection of their defenses that he could draw out the campaign and there would be no fresh attempt to take Richmond before the following spring. This opportunity, as we know, would be seized by the defenders of Richmond to strengthen their defenses.

At this time Lee was not expecting to receive any reinforcements, as the campaigns in Tennessee and Kentucky demanded all the men that could be spared.

Between the 4th and 7th of September (1862) the Confederate troops were crossing the Potomac. On the last-named day General Jackson occupied Frederick city and speedily was followed by another division. Then the dashing cavalry of Stuart spread out in the State in such a manner that most of the attempts of the Union generals to gain information concerning the plans of their enemies were frustrated.

Meanwhile, as we know, the Federal soldiers were holding three fortified places in or near the Shenandoah Valley which was the chief reliance of General Lee for his supplies. About eight thousand men had been stationed at Harper's Ferry, and there also were small garrisons at Martinsburg and at Winchester.

As has been said, General McClellan urged General Halleck to recall these men and attach them to the Army of the Potomac. This is exactly what General Lee believed would be done, because it was what he himself would have decided upon if he had been in his opponent's position.

When General Halleck decided to leave these garrisons in the Valley, Lee instantly decided that they must be taken, and he believed also that they could be captured easily.

It was essential for the plans he had formed that his own communications with his base of supplies should not be threatened by such a large garrison as had been placed in Harper's Ferry.

Acting promptly, as he usually did, General Lee now decided to divide his army and reunite the divisions west of the mountains before a decisive battle could be fought.

With this purpose in his mind the commander of the Confederate troops issued his orders on the 9th of September, and on the following day General Jackson, in command of three divisions, after he had crossed the mountains, was to ford the Potomac at some place west of Harper's Ferry and then move upon the little garrison at Martinsburg.

His companion, General McLaws, with two divisions was to take possession of the heights which overlooked Harper's Ferry and the Potomac, while another division under General Walker was to cross the Potomac east of Harper's Ferry, and secure the Loudon Heights. This last-named position would enable the Confederate soldiers to command Harper's Ferry from the east bank of the Shenandoah. By this plan the little body of troops in Harper's Ferry would be surrounded and absolutely cut off from every hope of escape because General Jackson, just as soon as he had obtained possession of Martinsburg, was to march swiftly toward Harper's Ferry and block every road that led westward.

CHAPTER VI

LONG JOHN

Startled by the change in the attitude of the band of Confederates, Noel in a loud whisper said to Dennis, "Come, we must get out of this right away!"

"Not yit, sor," said Dennis.

"But we must!"

"Not before I drop one of the Johnnies."

"Don't do that!" cried Noel, as he grasped the barrel of his companion's gun. "Don't do it! We must n't let them know any more about us than they do now. We've got to take our chances and run down the hill to the woods! I don't believe they will follow us if we once can get inside the border. It's going to be a hard chase for us, though, to cover those yards ahead of us. I would give every dollar I own if I was only there."

"Niver you fear me, lad. 'Fortune favors the brave.' Have you niver heard that?"

"I have," answered Noel, as he glanced again at the men who were seen in the distance. "The sooner we start the better. Come on, Dennis!"

Acting upon his own suggestion, the young soldier led the way, and crouching low ran swiftly toward the shelter of the woods. His heart seemed to be beating so loudly and rapidly as almost to interfere with his efforts. He was afraid, but his fear only served to increase his speed.

Part of the distance had been covered before the flight of the two young soldiers was discovered by their enemies. At the sight there was a loud cry which served to increase the speed of both fugitives.

"Spread out!" whispered Dennis hoarsely. "Spread out!"

Instantly acting upon the suggestion, as far as it was possible for two to "spread out," Noel ran swiftly toward a low oak tree, which stood on the border of the woods, while his companion with equal speed was striving to gain the shelter of another tree, the name of which Noel did not know, which stood conspicuously about twenty yards distant from the one that he was seeking.

Before the boys could gain the shelter, the report of guns was heard, but fortunately neither of the young soldiers was hurt.

To Noel it seemed as if the few intervening yards were almost endless. His feet seemed to be held back, as if heavy weights were attached to them. His feeling was not unlike that which he had experienced when he had suffered from an attack of nightmare.

In spite of these things, however, both young soldiers were making excellent time, and in a brief interval successfully gained the refuge they were so eagerly seeking.

Instantly dodging behind the protecting tree, Noel peered out at the approaching men. The dusk was rapidly deepening, and the outlines of the approaching band could be only indistinctly seen.

He was tempted to act upon the suggestion which Dennis had made and fire at his enemies, but his fears for his own safety were so strong that he hesitated. In a brief time he decided to abandon the attempt, in order not to reveal his exact hiding-place.

Strong in the hope that the men would not venture to follow within the woods, Dennis crept speedily toward the tree which his comrade had gained, and for a moment was startled when he beheld a man also approaching him. It proved, however, to be Noel, and then, acting upon a common impulse, both turned and ran farther within the sheltering woods.

As they advanced, their progress became more difficult. The ground beneath their feet was soft and yielding. It was manifest that they were approaching a swamp.

Noel wondered if his enemies were aware of the character of the land. If they were the pursuit might be continued, as they would be certain to catch the fugitives between the swampy ground and the border where they had entered.

"Here!" suddenly called Dennis; "here's a road." As he spoke the young Irishman ran swiftly toward what seemed to be a road, as he had said, and as Noel followed him he soon discovered that Dennis was correct. A rough and partly decayed corduroy road had been made years before, but now it provided no very secure footing. Though they were unaware where the road might lead, both entered upon it and even increased the speed at which they were running.

Not a word was spoken until several minutes had elapsed, and then to the consternation of both, a man was seen not far before them, who plainly was approaching.

Abruptly leaping from the road into the swampy ground at its side both boys strove to hide themselves behind the protecting vines and trees. Only a few moments had passed, however, before they were aware that the approaching stranger was a negro. He was of unusual height and his long strides were indicative of his haste. As the black man came still nearer, Noel thought he never had seen a taller man. In the dusk his long figure appeared to rise almost to the lower branches of the overhanging trees.

Lost as they were, or at least ignorant of the region, Noel suddenly decided to hail the approaching negro.

"Sambo, is that you?" he said as the negro came opposite the place where he was hiding.

Instantly the negro halted, and even in the dim light his terror was manifest to the young soldier.

"No, suh! No, suh! I isn't Sambo. I'se Long John."

"Is there anybody with you?"

"No, suh! No, suh! I'se all alone."

Confident that he might rely upon the statement, Noel instantly returned to the corduroy road and approached the waiting black man. To Noel the eyes of the startled negro seemed almost to protrude like saucers. For an instant it was plain that he was tempted to flee from the spot, but as he glanced behind him, Noel suspected that he was in greater fear of what threatened from that direction than he was at the discovery of the strangers who had hailed him.

"Who's yo'? Who is yo' all?" he asked, unable to prevent his teeth from chattering as he spoke.

"We are a couple of Union soldiers, Long John, and we want your help."

"Yas, suh! Yas, suh! Bress de Lor'! I'se heerd a heap 'bout yo' all. Dey say yo' hab hawns. Ole mass' done say dat yo' be'rd com' clar down to heer." As he spoke the negro placed one of his big hands upon his right hip. "Dey shorely is so feared o' yo' dat if dey heer yo' name er hundred miles away, dey's scared des' de same."



"DEY SAY YO' HAB HAWNS"

In his dilemma Noel turned once more to the colored man and hastily said, "Where are you going?"

"Noware. Noware, suh."

"But the rebel soldiers are ahead of you."

"Dey's mo' o' 'em behind me," declared Long John promptly.

"Do you know the way out of this swamp?"

For a moment the tall negro gazed intently down at Noel. In spite of his indifference, Long John was possessed of more intelligence than a first impression warranted. Noel was made somewhat uneasy by the intentness of the negro's inspection.

Apparently satisfied by what he had discovered in his own way, Long John said, "Yas, suh! I reckon I knows dis yeah swamp."

"Do you know where this corduroy road leads?" Noel inquired, as he pointed in the direction from which the negro had come.

"Yas, suh!"

"How long is it? How far shall we have to go before we can be out on the firm road again?"

"I reckon it's a right sma't way," replied Long John slowly. "And if dere's some ob the rebel sojers up ahead, dere's certainly mo' ob dem back yonder," he added, nodding his head to emphasize the strength of his conviction as he spoke.

"Have you seen any?" inquired Noel, as he once more glanced behind him to discover whether or not there were any signs of continued pursuit.

"Yas, suh! I'se done seen some."

"How many are there?"

"I reckon dere's a right sma't lot ob dem."

"Are they infantry or cavalry?"

"Yas, suh."

"Which are they?" demanded Noel.

"Dere's some sojers on horseback. I see Massa Little Ben Fowler—"

"Are there twenty of them?" broke in Noel impatiently.

"Yas, suh."

"Where are they?"

"Dey's right by de end on de cord'roy road. I reckon dey was goin' toe follow me, but dey all des' shouted and laughed. Dey say I can beat de Yanks at runnin'."

"Dennis," said Noel, turning to his companion, "don't you believe that these men have been stationed there to cut off anybody who might come through here on this road?"

"That's it, me lad! Yis, sor! That's it," replied Dennis.

"Then we can't go ahead and we can't turn back. We're caught right here between these two bodies. What can we do, Dennis?"

"I reckon I know what yo' all 'll have to do," spoke up Long John in a whisper, as he spoke peering intently in the direction from which the two young soldiers had recently come.

Noel glanced in the direction indicated by the negro and in a brief time he, too, was convinced that some men were approaching. Even Long John was alarmed, and for a moment appeared to be on the point of darting into the swamp.

CHAPTER VII

CAUGHT

Sharply bidding the black man remain where he was Noel again peered into the road behind him and listened intently. There was no disguising the fact that men were approaching. Doubtless a part of the force which had been stationed in the road were aware of the corduroy way and had ventured to follow the fugitives, confident that they could find no escape from the place.

The venture on the part of the Confederate soldiers was one that tested their courage. The darkness had deepened, and it was well-nigh impossible to distinguish the body of a motionless man from the trunk of one of the near-by trees. There were strange noises in the swamp, too. There was the flapping of unseen wings and the scurrying and calls of unseen birds, but in spite of all these things there was no doubt now in the mind of Noel Curtis that some men were approaching from the rear.

"Dat's de only way," whispered Long John excitedly. "Dere's no oder way ouden de swamp. We des' got toe go back. Maybe Massa Little Ben Fowler isn't dere any mo' now."

Influenced by the positive manner of the grotesque negro, without a protest both Noel and Dennis followed him as he led the way in the direction from which he himself recently had come.

Striving to move noiselessly, at the same time the young soldiers did their utmost to advance rapidly. Occasionally some decayed log broke under their feet, but there was no other sound to reveal their presence.

Repeatedly the three fugitives glanced behind them, and then fearful of what might be before them glanced frequently in that direction. Long John was the only member of the band who apparently was unmoved by the excitement, a fact which was difficult for Noel to understand, inasmuch as when first he had seen the tall, awkward slave, it was the terror of the black man at his unexpected presence that had most impressed him. The flight had continued not more than ten minutes before the young soldiers arrived at the end of the road.

"There's somebody here," whispered Noel, as he grasped Dennis by the arm and all three fugitives halted.

"Yis, sor, that's true for shure," replied Dennis in a whisper so loud that Noel warningly again grasped his arm.

It was too dark to enable the boys to determine just how many were in the waiting band. It was believed, however, that there were at least twenty. Perhaps there was another little force also approaching. The two boys in blue were caught between the two bands, and their only way of escape was through the swamp. A hasty inspection, however, convinced both boys that escape in that way was impossible. Even in the dim light they were able to see the water which covered the soft ground, and it was plain that if either of them should step upon the perilous footing he might be in greater danger than he would be compelled to face if he should be caught between the two little bands of their enemies.

Abruptly the lanky negro broke in upon the silence by calling loudly, "Is dat yo', Massa Little Ben Fowler?"

There was silence for a moment, and then the reply came from some one whom the boys could not distinguish from the body of the men. "Is that yo' all, Long John?"

"Yas, suh. Yas, suh."

"Are yo' alone?"

"No, suh. No, suh. Dere's two gen'lmen with me."

"Bring them out."

"Yas, suh. Yas, suh," repeated Long John, though he made his way so speedily to the more solid road that under other circumstances Noel might have laughed.

As it was, however, both boys were aware, or at least they now suspected, that the negro had been sent out by the rebels either to gain information or to serve as a decoy for any of the stragglers.

There was, however, apparently no way of escape. In front of them was the band of which Little Ben Fowler undoubtedly was a member; while from behind was approaching part of the force which had followed them into the swamp after the two young soldiers had gained the corduroy road.

Noel heard a smothered exclamation of anger from Dennis and he knew that the feeling of his companion was not unlike his own. However, it was impossible now, after the loud warning which Long John had given, for them to expect to escape.

Suddenly some one called to them from the border of the swamp, "Come out of there, Yanks! There isn't any use in trying to get away. The corduroy is the only safe spot you'll find on either side of the road; so come out and give yourselves up."

"All right," responded Noel, although, as he spoke, Dennis grasped him roughly by the shoulder as if he was protesting against the surrender.

"You keep still, Dennis," whispered Noel to his companion. "You leave this to me and I'll see what can be done. We can't get away, and we might as well make the best of a bad bargain. We're coming," he again called aloud.

"Don't try any of your Yankee tricks here," called the voice which had spoken before.

Noel made no response, and in silence the two young soldiers advanced and in a brief time found themselves in the presence of a score of men. They saw that every one was clad in uniform, but it was impossible at first to determine to which side the men belonged. However, Noel was convinced that the words of Long John had explained who the men were, and in spite of the treachery of the negro he at once decided that he and Dennis must give themselves up.

"Who are you, Yanks?" demanded a man, speaking in a voice which the boys recognized as the one by which they had been addressed before. "Step up yere and give an account of yo'selves."

Obediently, Noel and Dennis advanced, and even in the dim light they were able to see that the man who addressed them wore the uniform of an officer.

"We are two boys who belong to one of the New York regiments."

"Glad to see you," said the young officer laughingly. "I wish you were back home where you belong, but as you're down here, I'm glad you met us. We'll see that you go with the rest of the Yanks, and that you don't do any more damage to our country. I'm surprised the Yankee soldiers don't fight better."

The tone in which the officer spoke was almost bantering. Noel's anger was aroused, but by an effort he restrained himself and said in a low voice, "You talk very bravely! You'll get over your surprise pretty soon."

"It will have to be 'pretty soon,' I reckon," said the officer good-naturedly. "The Yanks have been running so fast and so far that they haven't gotten their breath yet. About all we have to do nowadays is to chase the Yankee soldiers. They didn't make a stand at Manassas either time. They ran from General Lee on the Peninsula, and now, though they have been running after him up here, they will dodge and run in the other direction the minute he turns around."

Noel Curtis was unable to reply to the bantering of his captor. It was true that thus far in the struggle the Army of the Potomac had not covered itself with glory. In Tennessee and Kentucky, too, at the time, the Federal forces were meeting with disaster after disaster, and to many of the faint-hearted supporters of the North it seemed almost as if the end had come.

"We sure are going to march straight to Philadelphia, and then you won't be able to stop us before we get into New York and Boston. If we ever get inside Boston, we'll show some of those fellows a trick or two that will teach them some things they don't know now. If it hadn't been for that city I don't believe there would have been any war."

"You don't?" demanded Noel, and in spite of his predicament, he was interested in what the young officer was saying.

"No, sir! No, sir! There certainly would not have been any war. The trouble was that Boston thought she not only could attend to her own business, but that she could direct the business of all the rest of us. It's a great thing, my son, for a man or for a city to be able to mind its own business. That's what I say; the cocksureness of the Yanks is so great that they think they can tell all the rest of the world how to act."

Noel was listening only in part to the words of the leader of the little band, from which already

wild thoughts of escaping had presented themselves.

As neither of the young soldiers had been asked to give up his gun, there were thoughts in Noel's mind of suddenly darting to one side of the road and trying to flee before the men were aware of his attempt. But the folly of such an effort was so marked that Noel abandoned every such suggestion.

"You'll come with us," said the young officer at last, his voice still not unfriendly.

Under other circumstances Noel knew that he would have been strongly attracted to the young officer, whom Long John had called "Massa Little Ben Fowler."

That officer now turned to three of his men, and in a voice so low that Noel was unable to hear what was said gave them instructions as to what was to be done with the prisoners. Then, turning once more to the young soldiers, the leader said, "We'll have to have yo' guns, Yanks. Yo' all are our prisoners, yo' know, and I cannot permit yo' to retain yo' weapons. Yo' 'll follow these men," he added, indicating the three who had been detailed for the duty, "and they'll take yo' where yo' all will be safe for the night, anyway. The rest of us will stay right yere by the corduroy road and see if we can't catch some more Yanks in our trap."

Without a word Noel and Dennis, obediently giving up their rifles, turned and followed the men who had been detailed to conduct them to what the young officer had described as a "place of safety."

CHAPTER VIII

UNDER GUARD

Directly back to the road over which the young soldiers had come their conductors led the way. Both Noel and Dennis were silent, and the disappointment which had seized upon the young Irishman was so manifest that even in the dim light Noel was aware of the depression of his comrade.

Deprived of their weapons and conducted by three armed men, there was no chance likely to be given for escape, although wild thoughts of trying to break away were still in the mind of each of the prisoners.

Not a word was spoken by their guard until about a quarter of a mile had been covered, when one of the Confederates halting, said to the boys, "We'll turn in here."

As he spoke he pushed some bushes apart, and in a brief time Noel was able to see that a corduroy path, or roadway, narrower than the one over which they recently had come was before him. One of the guards now advanced, while the other two took a position in the rear, and as soon as the directions were given the entire band began to make its way over the rough pathway.

Once more silence returned, not to be broken until what Noel assumed must have been a half-mile had been covered and again they were approaching more solid ground.

A rough stretch of land lay before them, which was without trees and apparently without a roadway. Without hesitation their conductors at once led the boys across the intervening sandy stretch and soon arrived at a low house, whose walls gleamed almost ghostly in the moonlight. Whitewash had been applied to the exterior of the rude building and also had been used upon the farm buildings and the fences that inclosed them.

Advancing to the low, covered piazza, which extended across the entire front of the house, the approach of the band was speedily discovered by the inmates, and in a moment a dozen or more soldiers came running out of the building.

Noel was able to see that every one was clad in the Confederate uniform and also was armed. At first the house seemed too small to contain so many men, but when several more emerged from the interior he suspected that there might be accommodations in the little building which did not appear upon the surface.

"Here we are, Captain!" called one of the leaders. "We've got two."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, sir. But we'll soon have more. We've got a trap down in the Hedge Swamp road. It's the only way the men can get through the swamp, and we have stationed a few of the cavalry at the farther end. Some of the boys are on the watch on the other side of the swamp, and are doing their best to drive what Yankees there may be hiding anywhere around here on to the corduroy road and then they feel safe to leave them. The poor fools keep right on the road and run directly into the trap Lieutenant Fowler set fo' them. He is waiting there with about twenty men."

"Is this the first batch you have taken?"

"Yes, sir. We have sent out Long John to help draw the Yankees into the trap."

The Confederate officer was unaware of the gleam which appeared for a moment in the eyes of Dennis, and he said lightly, "We'll be ready for all you can bring us, Tom. We'll put these two fellows in the pen until we have enough to make it worth while to send them on to Libby."

As he heard the name of the well-known prison in Richmond, Noel's heart was heavy. Stories were current of the sufferings of the Union prisoners who had been confined in the famous old warehouse, which had been transformed early in the war into a prison for the Northern soldiers. There had come many a tale of daring attempts to escape as well as of the almost indescribable sufferings of its inmates. Perhaps it was all a part of the struggle, and yet with the bitterness of the time so keen, few were in a condition to look with calmness upon the sufferings of the prisoners of either side in the struggle.

To be sent to Libby Prison! For a moment Noel's thoughts ran back to his home on the banks of the far-away St. Lawrence. He could see the little house sheltered by the overhanging maples. There were the red barns just beyond, and for an instant Noel seemed to catch a glimpse of the line of cattle slowly moving up the lane toward the barnyard. In the distance occasional glimpses of the waters of the St. Lawrence, gleaming in the light of the afternoon sun, were had. His mother was moving quietly about the kitchen preparing the evening meal. Frank was lying as he was, when he had last seen him, on the couch in the room where his mother was busy. His father, perhaps, was singing at his task as he milked the cows. Even the thought of the stirring words and tunes which his father best loved to sing failed now to find any response in the mind of Noel. It was one thing to sing of the glory of war, but it was another and far different thing to be held as a prisoner in southern Maryland and to be threatened with confinement in the old prison-house at Richmond.

However, there was no possibility of evading, at least for the present, the problem which must be confronted. Soon both Noel and Dennis were searched and every loose possession was taken from them, to be held until such a time as the war should cease or the prisoners should be exchanged. There was another alternative in the thoughts of Noel, but he did not refer to it. What that was became manifest after several days had elapsed.

As Noel now glanced about him he was able to discover that very few negroes were in the house. He was eager to discover the presence of Long John, but he soon concluded that the treacherous black man had retraced his way over the corduroy road, and doubtless now was trying to lead some others of the unfortunate Union soldiers into the same trap in which he and Dennis had been caught.

A half-hour after they had entered the house, Noel and Dennis were conducted to a room on the first floor and thrust into it. The evening was warm and the door was left open, but the guard was stationed directly in front of it, so that any attempt on the part of the prisoners to escape would be instantly known.

Noel looked cautiously out of the window in the room, and was aware that a full guard had been established to patrol the place. At least four of the Confederate soldiers were assigned to this task, and each one was responsible for only one side of the house.

The guard that was inside and had charge of the door was good-natured and looked at his Yankee prisoners with undisguised interest. It was plain that he did not have any fear of the young prisoners attempting to escape. Such an effort would be worse than useless, for at least twenty men were in the band, and the prisoners themselves now were unarmed.

"Whar yo' from?" inquired the guard.

"From New York State," answered Noel quietly.

"I always heard that was a right sma't State. How many Yanks might there be in it?"

"Enough to put an end to this war if they all would turn out," said Noel.

"That can't be so, sir," said the guard solemnly.

Noel in the dim light looked more closely at the soldier. He was more than usually stout and his good nature was apparent, not only in the tones of his voice, but in the friendly way in which he regarded his charges.

"Daggone! I don't believe the Yanks can fight, and yet I saw one the other day who was a great sight and had all gone to pieces."

"Who was he? What about him?" inquired Noel, aware that he was expected to follow up the implied question of the good-natured guard.

"Why, he had lost one hand; one leg had been shot away; he had only one eye; he had broken some bones, and a part of his liver had been cut out of him, and yet he was ready to fight to the last."

"I should n't think he would know who he was," said Dennis. "Faith! An' ye say he had only one arm, one leg, one eye? An' how about his ears?"

"They were both all right," replied the guard. "His nose looked, though, as if he dragged it along the ground."

"How did it all happen?" inquired Noel.

"Why, he had been in two battles, and the surgeons had been at work at him. What our men did not do the surgeons thought they would finish. The poor chap had to leave the army, but he was game all the way through. What do you suppose will happen to him in the Resurrection?"

"I haven't looked quite as far ahead as that," said Noel.

"'Tis strange," broke in Dennis, "how much a man can lose of himself, and still be the same man. Faith! I wouldn't know, if I lost me arm and me leg and me head and me eyes, whether I was Dennis O'Hara or somebody else."

"The fellow was game all through, as I said," continued the guard. "I'm a sharpshooter," he added abruptly.

"Are you?" inquired Noel quickly, though he endeavored to conceal his interest in the simple statement. Did the man know anything concerning the skill of Dennis and himself with the rifle? His gun, of which Noel had been exceedingly proud, had been taken from him. Whether or not the guard had any suspicions concerning his skill, the fact remained that without any kind of a weapon those suspicions mattered little.

"Yes," continued the guard. "I was in the pit firing at some Yanks over there on the Peninsula one time last June. There was a fellow firing away at me, and he was so good that he made me keep out of sight, too, most of the time. I thought I had him at the same minute when he thought he had me. We fired at the same time, and what do you think happened?"

"You both missed?" suggested Dennis.

"No, we didn't; at least both of us didn't miss. The strangest thing happened."

"What was it?" inquired Noel, apparently still more eagerly.

"Why, would you believe it?" said the soldier, "the bullet of that Yankee sharpshooter had gone right down the muzzle of my gun. It struck perfectly square and went into the muzzle the whole length of it."

"And did your bullet do the same thing with his rifle?" inquired Dennis solemnly.

"I don't know. I never have heard. I did not know but that you might have heard something about the affair and could tell me what happened to that Yank. Were you ever down on the Peninsula?"

"Yes, sor," said Dennis promptly.

"Maybe you were down there helping McClellan get away as fast as his legs could carry him. You made good time!" laughed the guard.

"Faith, and we did," said Dennis, "but not as good as we might have made if the Johnnies had followed us up. They were so afraid that we would turn on them and take their little tin capital away from them that they ran as fast as they could go back to Richmond."

"We weren't running in that direction," said the soldier, unmoved by the bantering of Dennis. "Don't forget about Manassas. And now we have all yo' Yanks bottled up right here in Maryland."

"How's that?" asked Noel.

"Why, we'll soon have the garrisons of Harper's Ferry, Martinsburg, and every other body except McClellan's army, and we have thrown out Stuart's cavalry so that there won't be a Yank able to get through either way. It won't do him any good even to try."

"Wait a little while before you say that," suggested Noel, aware that Dennis was pulling him by his sleeve.

"Whist," whispered Dennis in one of his most penetrating tones. "Don't talk anymore with the Johnnie. I have something to say to ye that is of a good deal more importance."

"I'm not interested," replied Noel. "I haven't had any supper, and I'm hungry, and I want to sleep. Are we going to be fed here?" he asked, turning to the guard.

"I reckon you will be. When I am relieved I'll see what can be done."

Conversation for a time ceased between the prisoners and their guard, but the excitement of Dennis was not to be repressed.

When at last he had induced his companion to withdraw from the door, he drew him into one corner of the room and renewed his whispering. At his companion's request his voice at last was lowered so that the guard was unable to hear what was said, and then, in spite of his weariness, in a moment Noel was eagerly listening to what the young soldier was telling him.

CHAPTER IX

THE PLOT

"Whist!" said Dennis. "I'm tellin' ye, lad, we must get out o' this place."

"That's very easy to say."

"Faith, and it's almost as aisy to do."

"Don't talk so loud, Dennis."

"'T is only whispering I am."

"Yes, but you're whispering like a steam-engine letting off steam."

In the dim light the actions of the young soldiers were not clearly seen by the good-natured guard. In spite of the easy-going manner of the Confederate in charge of them, Noel was aware that the utmost care must be used. The man himself had said that he was one of the sharpshooters, and that he would quickly act if an attempt to break away was made, he had no doubt.

"'T is silent entirely I am," said Dennis, for a moment dropping his voice lower. "But have you noticed what there is in the wall above us?"

"No," replied Noel. "What is it?"

As he spoke he looked quickly in the direction indicated by his companion, but his action was abruptly ended when Dennis roughly seized him by the shoulder and said almost savagely, "What are you doin', lad? Don't look there, whatever else you do! Kape your eyes on the floor. Now, listen to what I am sayin' to ye. In the ceilin' there's a small slide, leastwise I think it's a slide, though I'm not sure. It may be a trapdoor that will lift up or somethin' of that kind."

"Yes! Yes! Go on," said Noel eagerly, as his companion stopped a moment.

"Me own thought," continued Dennis, after he was satisfied that the two prisoners were not observed by their guard, "is that it won't be long before we'll have a chance to go up into that loft. We'll push back the door, or the slide, or whatever it is, and if we can do that without makin' any disturbance, we'll drop it back into place and hold it so that nobody can get up there. Probably they won't think we have gone up above, anyway." Dennis laughed lightly as he spoke.

"Just where is that door, Dennis?" inquired Noel.

"Shure, and it's right above your head."

"How are we going to get through it? I mean how will you open it?"

"That remains to be seen," answered Dennis, "but it's shure I am that it will be aisy."

"But how will you do it?" demanded Noel once more.

"When the time comes," said Dennis, "I'll inform you, but for a spell we'll have to be careful not to wake the suspicions of the guard."

Walking abruptly from his companion, Dennis approached the soldier and said lightly, "Aren't you goin' to feed your prisoners pretty soon? Why, 't is night comin' on and we haven't had a bite of any kind since mornin'."

"I'll see what can be done when I'm relieved," said the soldier. "Now don't talk to me any more and be on your good behavior, too. I don't think it will be wise for you and the other Yank to do much whispering, either. I'm always afraid of Yanks when they get off in a corner, especially if it's in the dark."

"All right," laughed Dennis. "I'll put the lad over in the other corner of the room and I'll stay right here by you."

"I don't care where you stay if you'll only keep still. You mustn't talk to me, because if you do you are likely to get both of us into trouble. When we get the room full of Yanks, then we'll enforce a little different discipline."

It was dark when the guard was relieved, but soon after his place had been taken by one of his companions he returned with some corn-bread and some "coffee" made of toast. Humble as the fare was, it was eagerly received by the young prisoners, and when the scanty meal was ended Dennis said to the guard, "Shure, and you 're goin' to give us a blanket or somethin' to sleep on, aren't ye?"

"Don't speak to me!" ordered the soldier.

"All right for yez," said Dennis good-naturedly. "If we have to slape on the floor, we might as well begin to learn how to do the trick now as any time. Come on, Noel," he called to his companion.

Convinced that their actions were keenly watched by the guard, Dennis simply dropped upon the floor and bade his companion take his place beside him. "'Tis hard slapin' here, Noel," he whispered, "but I'm thinkin' that it won't be long that we'll have to tarry here. I'll tell ye a bit more about me plans now."

"Don't let the guard hear you whispering," warned Noel.

"Niver a bit," said Dennis, his voice becoming so piercing that Noel seized his companion's arm

as a warning.

"I'm that still," continued Dennis, "that I can hear the mice holdin' a pow-wow down under the floor. Now listen to me, lad. We can't do anything to-night, but if the Johnnies don't put too many men in here with us, it may be that to-morrow night or the night after that we can begin our escape."

"How?" inquired Noel eagerly.

"Well, I was tellin' ye about the trapdoor, or the slide. I'm a bit fearful o' this fellow on guard now, so that we won't try that out to-night, but lave it to some other time. And I'm hopin' that to-morrow night will be the darkest ever known. I'll get you to hold me up on your shoulders, and then if you brace yoursilf against the wall, I'll see if the door cannot be pushed back. I fancy that will be all we'll be able to do the first night, but if I find that the thing works, then within a night or two we can try it over again, and I'll push the door back with me hands and then I'll climb up and hide in the loft."

"And leave me down in the room below, I suppose?"

"Not a bit of it, lad! Not a bit of it! I'll take hold of your hands and lift you clear up where I am. Then we'll let down the door, and put it back in its place and put a bar across it, or hold it with our hands, so that no one can get up there, though I'm thinkin' no one will ever suspect us of havin' gone up through the roof."

"What good would it do you to be in that room instead of in this?" inquired Noel. "You won't be able to get away."

"Indade, an' I will, if the night is dark enough," said Dennis. "Did you notice the magnolia tree growin' close to the side of the house?"

"Which side?"

"The one toward the barn."

"No. What about it?"

"Well, it's growin' close up, right under the eaves of the house. 'T is big enough and strong enough to hold a man, and if the night is as dark as we hope it will be, we'll slide out of the window, for there is a window right by the tree, and if we are still enough we'll be able to slip down it without disturbin' anybody."

"I'm afraid the loft will be the first place the men will search after they find we are gone."

"Don't you belave it!" whispered Dennis positively. "I've got a bit o' string in me pocket, an' if I can find a small sthick I'll fix the window in the room here so that the sthick will let down the window an' in the racket they will think we have gone straight through the bars."

Dubious as Noel was about the outcome of the proposed plan of escape, he nevertheless was inclined to share in this project of his companion. Whatever might be the peril, and that it would not be slight he was well aware, it was to be preferred to being sent to Libby Prison.

Outside the windows were heavy oak bars that could neither be broken nor removed. If the window was raised, so confident were the soldiers in charge that their prisoners would not be able to escape, it might be lowered in such a manner as Dennis had described, and the clatter which would surely follow might distract the attention of the guard if the loft once could be gained by the two soldiers.

The "sthick" to which Dennis had referred might be tied by a string that he would attach to it and then drawn up to the loft before the door was replaced, and before the guard was fully aware of what had occurred.

The same night two more prisoners were received and were placed in the room in which Dennis and Noel were confined. The men, however, were strangers to the boys, and Dennis declared that they could not be sharers in his project unless the attempt necessarily should be delayed several days. By that time they might be able to learn more of the character of their fellow prisoners.

There were thoughts at times in Noel's mind that it might be well for him or his companion to make the first attempt to escape alone. The peril was so great and the chance of success so slight that to him it seemed to be folly to divide the risk. If success should crown the efforts of one, it would be a small matter for the other to follow. The thought, however, that it would be impossible for any one without aid to secure an entrance into the loft caused him to banish the suggestion from his mind. By common consent the two new prisoners slept on the opposite side of the room.

Dennis and Noel had retained the place which they at first took for their resting-place, directly beneath the slide in the ceiling.

"To-night we must make a try of it," whispered Dennis on the evening which followed the arrival of their companions. "I'll see what can be done with that door, anyway."

There was no light in the room, but the dull glow that came through the door opening into the hallway enabled them to see that the guard was sitting quietly in his chair in a position from

which he could, if necessary, see much that was occurring within the room.

Cautiously withdrawing from the direct line of vision, Dennis and Noel crawled nearer the wall. Dennis had removed his shoes before either of the boys had stretched themselves on the floor for the night. Not a word was spoken. Acting promptly Noel braced himself against the side wall and assisted his companion to mount to his shoulders.

Dennis, who was a powerful lad, at once scrambled to the position, and, hesitating only an instant to discover whether or not his action had been seen, cautiously lifted his hands and tried the slide in the ceiling directly above him.

In a moment the two young soldiers again took their position upon the floor, each greatly excited and both relieved when after a few moments had passed they were convinced that their actions had not been seen by the guard.

"'T is all right, Noel," whispered Dennis. "The door up there slides back. I can slide it open without any trouble. Now if we can find a piece of sthick, we'll rig our trick for to-morrow night."

It was difficult for Noel, throughout the hours of the following day, to repress the excitement under which he was laboring. His uncertainty at times and his fears lest the guard should discover their attempts almost caused him to decide to protest against the adventure. The thought, however, of what freedom would mean was sufficiently strong to overcome his fears and every time his decision became stronger.

With Dennis, there was no hesitation. Indeed, it almost appeared as if the perilous attempt had no danger at all for the young Irish soldier. He watched the clouds and beamed upon his companion when the guard was changed, and said, "It looks like we're goin' to have a big rain to-night. It's too early for the equinox, but I reckon we all will have to take it when it comes. I reckon, too," he added, "that we all shan't stay here much longer. We'll be sending you Yanks on to Richmond to join your friends."

The prophecy of the guard in part was fulfilled as the day drew to its close, and when the light disappeared the rain was falling heavily.

CHAPTER X

INTO THE STORM

When darkness fell over the land the violence of the storm increased. The whistling of the wind and the swaying of the branches could be heard within the building.

"This is just what we want," whispered Dennis.

"Yes," replied Noel, though his fears were not allayed by the confidence of his comrade. "You must wait a while, Dennis," he added.

"Indade, and I'll wait," replied the young Irishman. "We want to be shure that every wan is aslape before we begin."

As the hours passed and the fierceness of the storm increased, and the sound of the pelting raindrops was heard as they struck the sides of the building, the monotony of it all served as an inducement for sleep. It was not long before the sounds which came from their fellow prisoners convinced both the young soldiers that the men were sleeping soundly. The guard in the hallway was plainly within sight seated in a chair which was tipped back against the wall. A lighted candle was shining in each end of the hall, and though the light was dim every movement of a person near by could be plainly seen.

Fortunately the light of the candles did not fall directly upon the ceiling in the room where the prisoners were confined.

"It must be eliven o'clock," whispered Dennis. "Don't you think so, Noel?"

"Yes."

"It's time for us to begin."

"Yes," again assented Noel.

"Kape still now, while I take off me shoes again. You'd better take yours off, too."

"We'll want them if we ever get out of this place," suggested Noel.

"That's right. Shure we will. You'll have to pass them up to me after I have climbed into the loft."

Noel made no further protests, and Dennis at once prepared to carry out the plan which he had so carefully devised.

Silently both young soldiers removed their shoes, and then, without delaying a moment, as soon as Noel had braced himself against the side of the wall, Dennis clambered to his shoulders and

then waited a brief instant to discover whether or not the guard was aware of any unusual activities among his prisoners.

The silence was unbroken, and Dennis, as soon as he was convinced that the suspicions of their guard had not been aroused, slowly and cautiously began to slide back the opening into the loft.

More time was consumed in this endeavor than either of the boys had expected. Several times the door seemed to stick in its place, and only by the utmost care was the young Irishman able to push it past the obstacle without making any noise. At last, however, his effort was crowned with success and a narrow opening above him was cleared.

To Noel, who was upholding his burden, the efforts of his friend appeared to be unduly prolonged. It seemed to him that he could not longer maintain his position and that he must let Dennis fall to the floor.

Aware, however, that such an action on his part would certainly arouse the guard, he braced himself once more and did his utmost to stand steadily in his place.

His relief was great when Dennis, firmly grasping with a hand each side of the floor above him, quickly raised himself and crawled into the loft. Noel instantly stooped and taking the heavy shoes held them toward the ceiling.

In the darkness it was with difficulty that Dennis at last was able to see and seize them, and then, as soon as he had placed them carefully on the floor of the loft, he reached down to grasp the uplifted hands of Noel.

Securing a firm hold upon each of Noel's wrists, Dennis, bracing himself, slowly and steadily lifted his companion. In a brief time Noel was able to grasp the sides of the floor and thereby assist his companion. The slightest noise might mean the death of either of the escaping soldiers, and yet, dire as was the peril, Noel's heart seemed somehow almost to be numb at the time. He did not even consider the possibility that confronted him. His main endeavor was to clamber into the loft noiselessly and thereby avoid arousing the Confederate guard.

At last Noel was standing beside Dennis, and with the utmost caution the latter at once pushed back the slide into its place.

The falling of the raindrops on the roof, which was directly above them, helped drown any noise that the guard might make below. The whistling of the wind as it swayed the branches of the near-by tree was weird. Even the beating of their hearts seemed to sound so loudly that each was able to share in his companion's feelings.

Both young soldiers were listening intently for any disturbances that might be made in the room below them. A faint light entered the room through the one window, which was near the tree. This, however, was sufficient, after the lapse of a few minutes, to enable both boys dimly to discern the outlines of the room in which they were standing.

"Whist!" whispered Dennis. "They haven't heard us. 'T is a fine day for us."

"Wait," said Noel.

"No, I'm not goin' to wait," retorted Dennis. "What we want to do is to lave at once. The more we wait, the longer we'll have to stay. Every minute here means a month in Libby Prison."

The window was closed, but one of the small panes was broken, and without much difficulty the boys succeeded in removing the sash.

A heavy downpour of rain and a fresh shriek from the storm served to cause both boys to pause once more and listen for further sounds of discovery from the room below. Apparently, however, their escape had not as yet been discovered, and eagerly both prepared to descend by the way of the tree to the ground.

In order to gain a more secure foothold and at the same time avoid making any noise, each of the boys had tied his shoes together and hung them about his neck.

Dennis first peered out of the window, and when he withdrew his head he whispered to Noel, "I cannot see the guard anywhere. I guess the Johnnies don't like the rain and have gone in out of the wet."

Noel was too excited to respond to the suggestion and eagerly said, "Go on, Dennis! Go ahead! Don't wait a minute."

"Here I go, then!" said Dennis, as, leaning from the window, he grasped the extended branches of the tree which reached to within a few inches of the side of the house.

Noel breathlessly watched his companion, at the same time seeking to discover whether the descent of Dennis was known to any one below. The young soldier had no conception of the minutes that passed, but it seemed to him a long time before the young Irishman at last disappeared from sight, evidently having successfully gained the ground.

Without hesitating longer, Noel instantly prepared to follow. As he seized the extended branch his hands for a moment slipped, and it was only with difficulty that he retained his hold and prevented himself from falling to the ground. The branch creaked ominously and the alarm of the

young soldier was increased by his fear that it would fail to sustain him. Noel was strong and nimble, however, and soon secured a firmer grip, and convinced that his departure from the building as yet had not been discovered, he rapidly made his way to the ground, and then without delaying a moment ran swiftly in the direction of the barn.

All the time he was fearful of a shot from the guard in or about the house. Perhaps fear gave him additional speed. At all events, in a brief time he gained the shelter he was seeking, and at once, keeping well within the lee of the barn, peered anxiously at the place from which he had fled.

The noise of the storm was the only sound to be heard. The faint light that was shining from the window of the hall where the guard had been stationed was the only bright spot in the midst of the surrounding darkness. There were no indications of pursuit and no sound which indicated that his flight had become known.

But where was Dennis? For the first time Noel became aware that he and his friend had not made any plans as to their meeting in case both were successful in escaping from the house.

Eagerly the boy looked all about him, but there was no sign of his friendly comrade. For a moment Noel was undecided. Should he remain where he was and wait the possible coming of Dennis? Or should he at once depart from the place, now that he had succeeded in gaining the shelter of the barn, and strive to make his way as best he might to the road which joined the one that led through the swamp?

Noel Curtis was too highly wrought up to hesitate long. Safely making his way toward the opposite side of the barn, he then started swiftly in the direction in which the longed-for road was to be found. He had only a faint recollection of the direction, however, and the night was too dark to enable him to discover any familiar signs.

Before he had fled twenty yards he was drenched with the downpour. That fact, however, was of minor consequence, and in his eagerness, although he frequently was slipping and sliding as his feet failed to gain a firm foothold in the slippery mud, it was not long before Noel found himself at the place he was seeking. He had believed that no guard would be stationed there in such a night. Not only was the storm so violent as to make it well-nigh impossible for a man and his horse to remain outside, but the darkness would enable any Northern soldiers who might have crossed the corduroy road to escape the vision of the waiting Confederate.

Noel's surprise and pleasure were great when he discovered that the road over which he was running was a plank road. When he had fled about one hundred yards, almost breathless he halted to discover whether or not there were any signs of pursuit.

Convinced that his escape as yet was unknown, the lad seated himself on a plank in a small bridge and donned the shoes which he had been carrying about his neck. Then he resumed his flight through the driving storm.

CHAPTER XI

NICK

The brief respite had so restored the strength of the young soldier that he ran swiftly over the loose planks until he had gone several yards from the place where he had stopped.

Compelled then to slacken his pace, he glanced anxiously about him as he moved on through the unfamiliar country. The storm was still severe, though heavy, broken clouds now were to be seen in the darkened sky.

Noel was fleeing through a country with which he not only was not familiar, but which also provided many perils of its own. Fortunately, as he believed, there were few people whom he was likely to meet at such a time and in a pouring rain. The thought of Stuart's cavalry, however, caused him to be doubly watchful, for he knew of the report that horsemen had been thrown out to intercept any stragglers that might be striving to make their way to the army of General McClellan.

An hour or more elapsed, and as yet Noel had not discovered any one on the old roadway. Once when he had passed a humble cabin the barking of the dogs had caused him to hesitate. He was defenseless and was unaware of the sympathies of the inmates of the little house. The uncertainty, however, caused him to resume his flight, although he still was ignorant of his destination.

His chief thought was that, by placing the greatest possible distance between him and the enemies whom he had left behind him, he might then be able to obtain help or find a place in which he could hide throughout the day and resume his flight when night again came. Even in his alarm and perplexity, he smiled as he recalled the statement of Dennis, when the young Irishman had outlined his plan for escape, "that he didn't know where he was going, but he knew he wanted to go there mighty quick, and he wanted to go mighty bad."

The night now was almost gone. Noel was aware of this from the slight change that appeared in

the eastern sky. There was as yet no promise of the passing of the storm, though its violence had markedly decreased.

It was strange, the young soldier thought, that all through the hours of his flight he had not discovered any of his enemies. At that moment, however, Noel saw coming from a lane at the left of the road a man who was carrying a burden in each hand. Around his neck hung a yoke the cords of which were attached to bundles.

It was too dark to enable Noel to determine whether or not the man was a soldier. He halted abruptly, and, prepared to flee instantly if occasion should demand, eagerly watched the approaching stranger. As yet he apparently was unaware of the presence of Noel in the road. Suddenly, however, he glanced in the direction of the young soldier.

The man's alarm was so manifest at his discovery that under other circumstances Noel would have laughed heartily. The light was sufficiently strong to enable him to see now that the man was not a soldier, and a moment later, when the stranger spoke, the young soldier's fears were relieved when it became manifest that he was a negro.

"Who dat? Who dat?" asked the colored man as he stopped abruptly.

"Where did you come from?" demanded Noel, striving to speak sternly.

"Yas, suh! Yas, suh!" replied the negro. "Is yo' all come from—" Whatever the place from which the negro thought he came, he did not complete his sentence, and consequently Noel was left in ignorance.

"Who lives here?" demanded Noel.

"Massa Hilton."

"Is he home?"

"No, suh. Yas, suh. I don' jest 'member whether he's home or not," stammered the negro.

Noel's experiences with Long John had made him somewhat suspicious of the colored people of the region. He decided that he would be extremely cautious, and at once said, "In which direction are you going?"

"Yas, suh! Yas, suh!" replied the negro.

"Come on, then," said Noel. "I'm going in the same direction."

The colored man hesitated a moment, and then as he moved nearer he was convinced that he did not need to fear the young stranger and obediently joined him.

As soon as they had advanced beyond the point in the road which hid the little house from their sight, Noel turned to his companion and said, "What are you doing—leaving home at this time of night?"

"I don' lib dar," replied the negro promptly. "I b'long to Massa Frost."

"Where does he live?"

"Fo' or five miles up yonder," replied the negro, pointing ahead of him as he spoke.

"What are you doing down here, and what are you leaving at this time in the night for?"

"Is yo' all a Union sojer?" asked the negro abruptly.

"Do I look like it?"

"Yas, suh; though yo' clothes is so covered with mud I dess can't tell 'xactly what you are."

"What would you say if I was?"

"I want to know whether yo' is or yo' isn't befo' I answers dat ar question."

"All right," laughed Noel, who was convinced now that in no event should he have to fear his colored companion.

The house had been safely passed and the negro apparently was inoffensive and harmless. Noel was still watchful for the appearance of any of Stuart's men, for whom he entertained a feeling of most wholesome respect.

"What's your name?" he asked again as he turned to his companion.

"Yas, suh! Yas, suh!" replied the negro. "My name's Nick."

"Are you related to 'Nicodemus, a slave, of African birth,' and did you call your friends to 'meet you down by the swamp and wake you up for the great jubilee'?" The young soldier was speaking in apparent seriousness and his companion stopped abruptly and stared at the man who had asked him these strange questions.

"No, suh," he said. "I never kno' nuthin' 'bout no swamp. Wha's dat yo' all is tellin' 'bout anyway?"

In a low voice Noel began to sing the song which was familiar even in his far-away home on the

St. Lawrence,—

"Nicodemus, the slave, was of African birth,
And he died years ago very old.
Wake me up was his plea—"

"Yas, suh," said the negro, "but it's not dis yere Nick. Dat's some oder Nick. I know milliums of darkies named Nick."

"Nick," demanded Noel abruptly, "do you know any men around here who are friends of the Union?"

"Yas, suh. I sho'ly does," replied the negro, so promptly that the young soldier at once decided that he might rely upon his friendship.

"Are any of the men at home now?"

"Yas, suh. Yas, suh. Massa Hilton, back yonder; I reckon he mought be er Union man."

"Is your master?"

"Yas, suh. Massa Hilton's brother Sam, he's fo' de South. I reckon it almost comes to blows when dey talks about de war."

"Isn't either of them in the army?"

"Yas, suh; Massa Sam Hilton, he's in de 'fed'ate a'my."

"But this Mr. Hilton who lives back in the house we passed, he's not a soldier, you say?"

"No, suh. No, suh."

"You're sure he's a good friend of the Union men?"

"He sho'ly am."

"Then I'm going back there," said Noel, stopping as he spoke and turning abruptly about.

Nick in surprise also stopped and looked at his companion. "Is yo' all a Union sojer?"

"I am, and I want to go where I can find somebody who will be good to me for a day or two. You say you're sure Mr. Hilton will be glad to see me?"

"I can't jes' say as how he will be glad to see yo'," replied the negro, shaking his head slowly.

"But you said he would," interrupted Noel.

"No, suh; 'scuse me. What I done say was dat he would be good to yo'. I don' know as Massa Hilton will be *glad* to see a Union sojer des' now."

"Why not?"

"Dar's some special reasons what I don't recomember," replied Nick, speaking in such a manner that Noel's suspicions again were aroused.

"But you say he's a Union man?"

"Yas, suh. Yas, suh, he sure am."

"Why won't he be glad to see me?"

"I done tell yo', suh, des' now dat dere's all dis yere trouble what am goin' on. I reckon dey isn't nobody what's glad to have a sojer come to his house des' now."

"Oh, I see," said Noel slowly; "but if I do come he will take care of me for a day or two? Then I'm going back there. What have you got in your bundle, Nick?"

"Nothin' much. Des' some stuff what Massa Frost done tol' me fo' toe git at Massa Hilton's."

"Why do you call for it in the night? Why don't you go out in the daytime?"

"I'se feared some of the sojers mought see me if I start after sunup—"

"You're more afraid they will take away from you what you have in those bundles."

"Dere ain't nuthin' in dis yere bundle. I mus' be goin' on," Nick added excitedly. "I mus' git toe Massa Frost's befo' sunup."

"Well, good luck to you," laughed Noel. "I hope you won't fall in with any of Stuart's cavalry, and I hope a good deal more that I shan't, but I'm going back to that house."

The young soldier was aware that he was incurring great risk in his venture, but he was wet and weary, and it had been long since he had tasted food. He might be hidden about the place somewhere and fed for a day or two, when matters might so shape themselves that he would be able to join the main army of McClellan, which he knew could not be very far away.

Acting at once upon his decision, Noel rapidly retraced his steps and soon arrived at a place from

which he was able to see the house and the few low outbuildings that were in the rear. He stopped a moment and listened intently. The rain had almost stopped, though the air was heavy with mist. Not a sound broke the silence.

Cautiously approaching the house, Noel turned from the roadside and started toward the building. He was watchful, for not only was there peril from men who might be within, but also from the huge dogs which he knew were common in the region.

When at last he approached the grounds of the house he stopped once more and again listened intently. Still the silence was unbroken and there was no appearance of danger.

He decided to go to the door, which he believed would be in the rear of the house and that opened into the kitchen. Perhaps he might there find a shelter or some place of refuge which would protect him in a measure from the night. If such a place should be found, he planned to wait there until daylight before making his presence known to the inmates of the house.

To his great delight Noel discovered a lean-to or shed in the rear of the house. The floor was of brick, and though it was too dark to enable him to see what was inside, the fact that no dogs had challenged his coming encouraged him to enter. Stepping inside, he turned to look once more out into the night and make certain that his movements had not been seen.

The young soldier was startled when, appearing around the corner of one of the low buildings, he saw a man, who in the dim light seemed to loom head and shoulders above the height of an ordinary human being. At first Noel almost believed that it was the negro, Long John, by whom he had been led into the trap set by the Confederate soldiers. Certainly the man was as tall as the negro, but there was something in his movements which convinced the watching boy after a brief interval that this man was not colored.

Suddenly it occurred to him that the proprietor of the place, the man of whom Nick had spoken as "Massa Hilton," might be the one who was approaching, though why he should be out of the house at such a time and in such a night the lad could not understand. Boldly advancing from his hiding-place, Noel approached the startled stranger, and in a low voice hailed him.

CHAPTER XII

THE GIANT

"Who's that? Who's that?" demanded the man in a voice which did not betray any alarm. Indeed, the huge form seemed to loom even larger before Noel in the dim light. It was plain that the man was not in any fear, and his deep, guttural voice produced a peculiar effect upon the listening young soldier.

Noel glanced hastily about him, somehow fearful now of others approaching from the barns. He had heard numerous stories concerning the bowie-knives with which it had been reported many of the Southern soldiers were armed. To the imagination of the young soldier not only did the size of the man who had halted before him seem to increase, but now he was fearful of enemies approaching from the rear. With all his heart he wished that he had never listened to the words of Nick. In his alarm it seemed almost as if his cap was being lifted by his hair and cold chills were passing up and down his spine.

The strange man slowly advanced, and in a manner which still betrayed more of curiosity than of fear came closer to the frightened young soldier and looked intently into his face.

"Who are you, sir?" he demanded coolly. "What are you doing out here at this time of the night?"

"That's just what I was going to ask you," spoke up Noel, determined to be as bold as circumstances permitted.

"Oh!" the giant replied in unchanged tones. "I thought I heard some disturbance among the cattle and I came out to see if anything was wrong."

When the man spoke, he advanced as if he was about to pass the young soldier and enter the house. He was walking with a slow, calm, and almost measured stride.

He had, however, gone but a few yards before he halted once more, and turning again toward the young soldier remarked in an indifferent way, "'T is a pretty evening, sir."

Noel was well aware that the evening was being far from "pretty." The darkness still was intense and the dampness which had followed the storm had produced a chill under which the lad was shivering.

Taken aback by the cool assurance of the giant, when the man resumed his walk, he had advanced halfway to the house before Noel again hailed him. "Look here, my friend," he called; "I'm sorry to detain you, but the captain might wish to see you."

"Well?" inquired the giant in a drawling tone.

"Who lives in this house?" demanded Noel.

"I do."

"Is this house frame or brick?"

"I don't know why it concerns you, but it's a frame house, not a brick."

"Are you the owner of this house?"

"I reckon I am."

"What are you doing out here this time of night?"

"I told you, sir, that I went out to quiet a disturbance among the cattle."

"Can you tell me where Mr. Hilton lives?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where does he live?"

"He lives here."

"Are you Mr. Hilton?"

"I reckon that's what my neighbors sometimes call me."

"Are you a Union man?"

"How does that concern you?" demanded the man, still without betraying any signs either of fear or interest.

"Because I'm a Union soldier myself."

Still the interest of the man apparently was not aroused. Calmly he asked, "And what may you want of me if you're what you say you are?"

"If you'll take me into the house I'll explain to you." Noel glanced about as he spoke, for the fear of men stealing upon him through the darkness was still strong upon him.

"I reckon we can talk where we are," said the man at last.

"Well," said Noel, determined, now that he had revealed his identity, that he would venture to tell the rest of his story. "I came through the valley from Harper's Ferry and was taken prisoner by some of the Johnnies, but managed to get away. I have been traveling all night long and am soaked through and tired and hungry, and if you're what I understand you are, a friend of the Union cause, I hope you'll take me into your house and let me dry my clothes and give me something to eat—"

"And bring a dozen bands of Confederates around me like hornets," broke in the man, though still he was not excited and was speaking in the calm, deliberate tones which he had before used. "I have had trouble enough with my secesh neighbors. How do I know who you are or that you are what you tell me you are?" he demanded once more.

"You can see for yourself when we go where there is a light."

"I reckon you can come in," said the man at last; and eagerly Noel followed him as he led the way into the house.

As soon as they entered, the stranger seated himself near the door and bade Noel take a chair near him. A candle had been lighted and placed upon a rude table, and its beams enabled the young soldier to see more clearly the strange man before him. In spite of his apparent indifference Noel was suspicious that he was more excited than he cared to have his visitor know.

"What's all this rumpus?"

Noel looked up as he heard the words shrilly spoken and saw a woman standing in the doorway of a room which adjoined the kitchen.

"Who's this yo' have brought home, Jim?" she asked of Noel's host. Her words plainly were disturbing. She was a short, stout woman. Her hair was hanging down her back, and around her shoulders was a shawl which reached almost to her knees.

Startled as Noel had been by the sound of her voice, he hastily concluded, as soon as he was aware of the response which the tall man made to her words, that if he was supposedly the head of the house, evidently she controlled the head.

"That's just like yo'," she said tartly. "I've got all the mouths I want to feed now, and yo' keep bringing people in here—"

"Sh-h-h, Sairy Ann. This yere man is a Union soldier—"

"How do yo' know he is?"

"He told me so."

"Yo' can't believe everybody," said the woman. "Ever since all this trouble with the secesh began,

nobody can trust his best friend. If I had my way about it, I would put somebody in command of the Union soldiers that would do something. They wouldn't be runnin' at Bull Run the way they did, and I reckon Pope led the way, too, and probably made better time than any of them. Before McClellan gets his eyes open, I reckon the whole o' Maryland and Harper's Ferry, too, will run to join Lee's army. Pretty kind of men we have fighting for the Union! How do yo' know he is a Union soldier?" she repeated.

"If you'll hold the candle you can see for yourself, if there's any of the cloth of my uniform that will show through the mud," said Noel good-naturedly.

In spite of her apparent harshness, the young soldier was convinced that she was not so unfriendly as her words at first implied.

Taking him at his word, the woman advanced, and holding the candle above her head looked keenly at the intruder. "Yo' don't look so dreadful deceitful," she admitted, "but a body never can tell. Fine feathers sometimes make fine birds, and maybe yo' put on those clothes because yo' want to get into our house. Jim has the name of being a friend of the Union, but he's just about as lively as McClellan. I had to make him go out to see what was the matter with the cattle. They are all right, are they, Jim?" she demanded, turning once more to the man who plainly was her husband.

"Yas, Sairy Ann," he replied; "I reckon they got a bit restless endurin' the storm."

"Yo' didn't see any signs of men being around?"

"This is the only man I saw."

"Well, they will be here pretty quick, I reckon," she declared. "If the secesh find out that there is a cow left on the place they will come for it. I reckon they have been here already. Jim isn't much of a protection, except to look at," she added, turning again to her visitor.

Under other circumstances Noel would have laughed at her words, for the huge Jim plainly was in full subjection to the little woman who was talking so volubly.

"What did yo' stop here for?" she abruptly demanded.

"I have been running almost all night," explained Noel, "and I found a negro out here. He said that Mr. Hilton was a friend of the Union. I thought morning would be here pretty soon and I didn't know just where to go. I'm a stranger in this part of the country."

"Whare yo' from?" asked the woman.

"New York State."

"I reckon that's a right sma't way from here. Well, I won't turn yo' out if yo' are the first cousin to Beelzebub such a night as this. Are you hungry?"

"I am. But I won't disturb you. If you'll let me lie down here on the floor, I'll wait until you have your breakfast."

"Yo'll do nothin' of the kind," said the woman brusquely.

"Do you want me to leave now?"

"Who said anything about your leavin'?" she demanded sharply.

"I did," said Noel.

"Well, I'm goin' to dry yo' out first. Yo' 're one mass of mud from head to heels. Yo' all go into that room," she added, pointing as she spoke to another little room that opened out of the kitchen, "and put your clothes outside the door. I reckon I'll have to bake 'em, before I ever can get 'em clean."

The woman's friendliness was so manifest that in spite of his suspicions Noel promptly decided to obey.

"Don't yo' be afraid," continued the woman, when Noel at last had carried out her directions, and had thrown his soaked and muddy uniform outside the door, as she had suggested. "I'm goin' to look out for yo'. Yo' aren't much more 'n a baby, anyway. I wonder that your mother should ever let yo' come so far away from home. Much good yo' can do, fighting these secesh! Now, yo' get into bed and when I have your breakfast cooked I'll set it here by the door. Yo' can help yourself then, and after yo' have had all yo' want, yo' get back into bed an' stay there until I tell yo' to get up. I'm thinkin' the bed is about as safe a place as yo' can find in these days. It's been nothin' but soldiers marchin' up and down, back and forth, in and out, to and fro, for the past week! They seem to be goin' about like old Satan and roarin' like a lion seekin' whom they may devour."

The tall host whom Noel had followed into the house had remained seated near the door throughout the interview. In spite of his indifferent manner, the young soldier was startled when several times he was suspicious that the man was listening for the approach of some one. He glanced frequently toward the door, and there was an air of anxiety or expectation in every movement he made. However, Noel had been so tired and now was so refreshed by the simple food which the woman soon provided for him that he dismissed his fears from his mind and soon was sleeping soundly.

He was awakened by the sound of voices in the adjoining room. It was daylight now and his bedroom was flooded with sunshine. It was, however, the conversation in the kitchen that chiefly interested the young soldier, and in a brief time he was keenly excited by what he heard. He looked about the room for his uniform, but it was nowhere to be seen.

Meanwhile from the parts of the conversation which he overheard, he was convinced that the visitor was a soldier in the Confederate army.

CHAPTER XIII

FRIENDS OF THE UNION

Noel's excitement gave place to alarm as he listened to the conversation in which the two men were engaged.

The lack of his uniform prevented him from trying to leave his room, and as yet he was uncertain whether or not the visitor even was aware that a young soldier of the Union was in the house.

For a time Noel listened intently, striving to discover something which would give him the information he desired; but the words of the visitor, whose part in the conversation was much greater than that of his tall host, did not imply that he was suspicious.

There were moments when snatches of the conversation almost convinced Noel that the man was a spy. It was plain that he was more or less familiar with the conditions existing in the Union army, but how he had obtained such detailed information was something the listening young soldier was unable to explain.

"Where is McClellan now?" inquired Jim.

"Up near Frederick City."

"What's he doin' there?"

"What has he been doin' ever since he has been made commander?" laughed the visitor. "He's waitin', that's what he is, and if he keeps it up a little longer he won't have any more waitin' to do."

"Why not?"

"Because our army will snap him up between its jaws. I reckon there weren't many men in the whole army of General Lee who thought it was a good thing to divide his forces as he did when he sent McLaws and Walker after Martinsburg and Harper's Ferry. Why, man alive, Lee split his army right in two, and then put a good bit of distance between the two parts! If McClellan knew enough about it, and if he is very much of a general he would know, he would throw his whole force against either of these divisions and smash it to pieces, before the other could come to its help. As it is, he's still tryin' to make up his mind, I reckon, and the result is that he's goin' to be caught between these two divisions just like a mouse is caught between the jaws of a cat. We have got him just as shore as you are born."

"I don't believe it," said Jim slowly.

"It doesn't make any difference whether you believe it or not, that's what's going to happen," laughed the visitor.

"Now you say that Stuart's cavalry has been thrown out in such a way that little Mac can't get any information about what Lee's plans are?"

"That's true enough, and yet, if McClellan had even a few men like those that are gettin' information for General Lee, he ought to know about it."

Noel fancied he could detect an importance in the words just spoken which confirmed him in his belief that the man in the other room was a spy from Lee's army. His excitement increased as his conviction gained in power, and he almost groaned as he realized how helpless he was. Deprived of his uniform, without any weapon of defense, he was powerless to interfere with the man or his plans.

"I reckon Little Mac will give a good account of himself befo' long," said Jim positively.

"He'll have to make haste about it, then. He left Washin'ton with an army of nearly eighty-five thousand men. He ought to do something with such a body as that. Why, only last night, if he had made a night march, he mought have got in possession of both Gaps—"

"What Gaps?"

"Why, Crampton's Gap and Turner's. He's lost his chance, though."

"You know a right sma't lot, don't you?" inquired Jim.

"That's my business."

"Well, I haven't any curiosity about this thing," said Jim, shaking his head slowly as he spoke. "I'm satisfied to stay right here and be true to the old flag. There comes Sairy Ann," he added, as Noel heard the sounds of the voices of women approaching from the stairway, which the night before he had seen was on the opposite side of the room. It was manifest now that Sairy Ann also had her visitor, and as the two women entered the room both men became silent.

"I done tole yo' how it is," Sairy Ann was saying. "I've said to yo' many times, 'Liza, that I wouldn't stand for no sech foolishness. I don' like the secesh. I never did and I never shall, and if yo' 're determined to be secesh yourself, then yo' 'll have to take the consequences! I don't mind tellin' yo' all as how I hev made my will."

"Hev ye?" inquired the other woman, the tones of her voice implying that she was at once deeply interested.

"Yes, I hev, and instead of leaving yo' all the money I promised yo', I've willed yo' a pair o' my shoestrings."

"I don' believe yo' hev done any sech thing, Sairy Ann!" protested the other woman.

"I don't care whether yo' believe it or not. That's jest exactly what I hev done. I hev set it down pertic'lar,—'To my oldest sister, 'Liza, I give, bequeath and leave and likewise devise one pair of shoestrings.'"

"Well, I'd rather hev a pair of shoestrings and be loyal to my State than I would to hev all your money and be a Yank."

"Of course, *you* would, 'Liza," snapped Sairy Ann. "That's because yo' don't know no mo'. If yo' knew mo', yo' wouldn't talk sech nonsense."

Whether or not the woman's argument was deemed sufficient, at all events the conversation abruptly ceased when the visiting man said, "Now, I hev come fo' yo' yere, 'Liza, and I don't intend to stay very long. You hev got to make up your mind right sma't whether yo' 're goin' to come with me, or whether yo' 're going to stay here with your sister."

"That's right," sobbed Eliza. "That's right. First Sairy Ann picks on me and then my own husband he picks on me, too. I'm jest distracted. I don't want to stay and I don't want to go."

"Yo' 're as bad as McClellan," broke in her husband. "I've come ten miles out o' my way just toe get yo' and take yo' home, if yo' don't want toe stay yere. If yo' think yo' 'll be safer along with these Yankee sympathizers, why jes' say so and stay yere. It doesn't matter very much toe me either way. The only Yanks I can put up with are Jim and Sairy Ann, and I wouldn't put up with them very long if we all weren't members of the same family."

"I expect to be shot by the secesh, anyway," broke in Sairy Ann, "and I hope yo' 'll go because I don't want to get shot by any o' my folks."

"We're goin' toe go," said the man.

To Noel's great relief preparations for departure were at once made.

It was not until the man and his wife had left, however, that the mistress of the house brought the waiting young soldier his uniform. Tossing it inside the room, she called out in a voice, which in spite of its sharpness was not unfriendly, "There's yer soldier clothes. Yo' all can put them on and come out and get your breakfast."

Only a brief time had elapsed before the summons had been obeyed by Noel, and refreshed by the rest of the night and the clothes which Sairy Ann had made thoroughly presentable, he entered the kitchen.

The tall form of the gaunt head of the house seemed to Noel to be even taller than when he had first seen it in the dim light of the preceding night. The expression of the man's face was so doleful that the young soldier felt a fresh sympathy for the sharp-toned woman for whom her husband's slow and undecided ways were a constant source of irritation. As for Sairy Ann herself, Noel saw that her hair was of the tinge which is sometimes associated with certain warlike propensities and also that she was cross-eyed. Indeed, the young soldier decided that never before had he seen any one whose eyes to all appearances might each serve the duty and the place of the other. He was uncertain when she spoke to him whether or not she was looking at him, and he was somehow aware that the woman was keenly aware of the impression which she made upon him.

However, his feeling of hunger was now supreme, and as soon as he was bidden to take his place at the table, he began to do ample justice to the simple fare which was provided. The manifest curiosity of the woman was to have no occasion for gratification until the meal was more than half done. Then, unable longer to restrain her feelings, she abruptly inquired, "Now, then, what yo' all doin' here?"

"Just now I'm doin' my best to get ready to leave."

"Did yo' all hear any voices this mornin'?" inquired Jim slowly.

Aware that the interest of the woman in his reply was keen, Noel said, "Why, I heard some talk. Was there anything of special interest?"

"Naw. I reckon nothin' what would be interestin' to yo' all," said Jim.

"Hey!" exclaimed Sairy Ann suddenly. "Here comes the Jew peddler. He was here day before yesterday. I told him then I didn't want anything, and I don't see what for he comes around here pestering us again."

Noel looked up quickly as she spoke, and saw the peddler standing in the doorway of the kitchen.

Instantly he recognized the trader as Levi Kadoff, the sutler whose experiences in the camp had been of such a trying nature that he had departed with many threats for the mischievous soldiers who had tormented him.

He was positive that the peddler also recognized him, although not a word was spoken by either.

Entering the room, Levi whiningly begged the woman to make some purchases.

"I don't want nothin'," declared Sairy Ann. "I told yo' so yesterday and day befo' when yo' were here. Yo' ought to take better care of yo'self than to be here where there's so many soldiers so near. Suppose yo' got caught right in the middle of the fight?"

"Dere vill be no fight," said Levi positively.

"How do yo' know there won't?"

"Because dere vill not be any."

"But how do yo' know?" protested the woman.

"Dot is vat der men says."

"What men?"

"All kinds of men. Now, please, mine goot voman, let me show you vat fine spectacles that I have?"

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Sairy Ann, abruptly rising from her seat and facing the little peddler. "Yo' ain't gettin' personal, be ye? What makes yo' think I need glasses?"

"Spectacles is all der styles now. I sells more glasses to young vimmins than I do to der old vimmins."

Appeased by the explanation, the hostess resumed her seat, and a few minutes later, when the little Jew displayed certain ribbons in his wares, Sairy Ann hesitated and was lost, much to the disgust of the elongated Jim. She invested some "real Yankee money" in several strips of bright yellow ribbon, doubtless selecting this particular color because she fancied it would match both her hair and her eyes, for now Noel was aware that even her eyes shared in the tawny color of her hair and skin.

By the time the trading was completed, Noel had finished his breakfast and was eager to be gone. He was desirous also of having some conversation with Levi, when later the little peddler, after one searching glance at the face of the young soldier, left the place and Noel abruptly decided to go with him.

Thanking his hostess for her kindness in receiving and caring for him, he shook hands with her and her husband and taking his cap left the house.

Calling to Levi to wait for him to join him, he soon was in the road where the sutler was standing. Advancing to his side, Noel prepared to accompany the little peddler on his way, a decision which within a short time he had cause deeply to regret.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SUTLER AS A GUIDE

"Vat you do here?" inquired Levi suspiciously as the two departed down the road.

"That's just what I was going to ask you."

"You see. You see for yourself," repeated the sutler, pointing as he spoke to the pack which he was carrying upon his back.

"What have you in that pack?"

"Somedings to sell."

"What?"

"Many dings."

"I shouldn't think you would have anybody to sell these things to, now that both armies are so near."

"It is von beeg drouble," said Levi, shaking his head. "Dere vas no chance. Eferybody cares not for mine laces—"

"Laces! I should think this would be the last place in the world where you could sell such things as that," broke in Noel. "What do people down here want of laces, especially when they are likely to be caught between the two armies any time?"

"I lose money efery day," said Levi, disconsolately.

"Why do you stay, then?" demanded Noel. "If you cannot make any money, you certainly don't stay here for pleasure, do you?"

"But," protested Levi, spreading both hands as he spoke, "a man has to live, ain't it?"

"Levi, I believe you have lots of money," said Noel soberly.

"Nein! No! Not von penny."

"Then how can you live if you are losing money every day? You must have something on which to draw."

"But I must live," protested Levi. "I must get some money. Perhaps I don't got it to-day, maybe I gets it to-morrow."

"Where have you been, Levi, since you left camp?"

"I haf been just vere you sees me. I haf been to efery house, but nobody buys mine laces. I dinks vot I haf to go North pretty soon. Nobody here has any money."

"Have you seen anything of Stuart's cavalry?"

The quick side glance which Levi gave him, although the eyes of the little Jew were instantly turned away again, was not lost upon Noel. Always suspicious of the little sutler, he had now become sure that there were more than suspicions upon which his fears rested.

"Who vas Stuart's cavalry?"

Noel laughed, but did not reply to the question.

"Haf you seen somedings of dot Irishmans?" inquired the peddler.

"What Irishman?"

"Dot young Irishmans vot tormented me. He upsets mine tent. He makes der poys turn over mine trunks. He steals vot is mine, vot is mine!"

The fierce anger of the little Jew was almost pathetic, and despite his declaration, Noel was aware that much justice, perhaps, was in his complaint, in spite of the fact that he had charged the boys of the regiment exorbitant prices for his poor and cheap supplies.

"Do you mean Dennis O'Hara?" asked Noel quickly.

"Dat vas it. Dat vas his name,—Dennis. Haf you seen him maybe?"

"No, I haven't. Have you?"

"How should I see him?" inquired Levi. "I haf leave der camp. I haf nodings more to do mit der soldiers. I goes now from house to house."

"Have you seen him?" again asked Noel.

"I'm telling you," protested the sutler. "I don't go vere de Yankee soldiers be."

"If you don't look out the Yankee soldiers will come where you are."

Noel spoke indifferently, but he was keenly watching the face of his companion. The quick, shifting glance which Levi instantly gave him somehow served to strengthen the conviction in the heart of the young soldier that the little peddler was playing a suspicious if not a double part.

"You didn't tell me," he said, "whether or not you have seen Dennis O'Hara anywhere."

"I vould like mooch to see him. I vould like to see him mit a rope around his neck. I vould like to be der von to pull on der rope. I vill do so to him," he added in his excitement, as he stretched forth both hands and pulled vigorously upon an imaginary rope.

"Here, where are you going?" demanded Noel abruptly, as his companion turned from the road to enter a lane which led toward a house partly concealed by magnolia trees far back from the road.

"To der house," answered Levi. "To der beeg house."

"Why are you going in there?"

"I vill sell somedings."

"It doesn't look as if anybody is home," suggested Noel.

The young soldier was striving to lead his companion on and draw from him information which he

suspected the little Jew possessed. As he spoke he was keenly observant of the house and grounds, but as yet had not seen any signs of life about the place.

"Der vas only vimmins dere."

"How do you know?"

"Because I vas dere de oder day. Dey vas tolt me dey vill buy somedings ven I comes back. So now I'm comes back and I shall sell somedings."

"You say there are no men there?"

"Der men vas all gone mid der army."

"Which army?"

"How should I know?" demanded the peddler irritably. "I sells to der vimmin."

"Do you want me to go with you?"

"Yes. You come. It vill interest der vimmins. You come mit me and I vill go on mit you and show you der way to Frederick City."

Noel was unarmed, but he saw no reason to doubt the words of his companion. If the place was deserted by the men he would be in no danger, and, on the other hand, he might be able to obtain some food, even if the women were sympathizers with the Southern cause. He was aware that from many such people the sight of a man clad in the uniform of the Union army was not likely to bring a cordial response. On the other hand, he was unknown, and it might be that he could obtain food and supplies that would help him through the day. He was confident that if he went much farther on his way, he might have experiences that would compel him to remain in hiding part of the time.

Slowly the two young men approached the great house. The house itself was not so large, but the expression was one which was applied to many homes, perhaps to distinguish the dwelling-place of the master from the quarters of the negroes.

As he drew near, Noel saw in the rear of the house the quarters of the servants. There were little huts that had been whitewashed, and about the place were several little pickaninnies, whose presence indicated that some of the blacks at least were at home.

The approach of the boys was apparently unobserved, and even when they followed the winding pathway toward the rear of the house no one greeted them.

Suddenly, however, Noel stopped, and looked in consternation at the sight before him. Tied to the hitching-rail in the rear of the house he saw a half-dozen horses.

Every horse was saddled and bridled, and in an instant Noel was aware that he had come upon a small band of cavalry.

Startled as he was by his discovery he instantly stopped and, after listening intently, turned back over the road which he and Levi had come. As he did so, Levi suddenly dropped his pack and seizing the young soldier by his coat began to shout in his loudest tones.

Frightened by the unexpected attack, Noel struck desperately at his tormentor, and did his utmost to free himself. The little Jew, however, apparently unmindful of the blows, clung desperately to his coat, and before Noel was able to escape he saw a half-dozen men run out of the house and start swiftly toward him.

One glance was sufficient to convince the desperate boy that he was in the presence of some of the rebel cavalry. The men were armed, while he himself was powerless to make any defense.

"What's this, Levi?" demanded the leader.

"Who is this man with you? Didn't I tell you not to let any one come here?"

"Dis man is von Union soldier. He helps tear mine tent. He vas von vat steals mine goots. He vas bad. I dinks dat you vill be glad to haf a Yankee soldier here, maybe?"

"We'll take all the Yanks we can lay our hands upon," said the man with a laugh.

It was plain that he was relieved by the discovery that there was only one soldier near and he only a boy. The impression, however, produced on Noel's mind by the action of the man was that there were Union soldiers not far away. And yet, he thought bitterly, what advantage would that be to him now? He was here, helpless to defend himself and really a prisoner in the hands of the rebel cavalry. There were momentary visions of Libby Prison, which he knew was the destination of most of the Union soldiers taken by the Confederates in their recent campaigns.

The leader now turned to one of his men and good-naturedly said, "Tom, we don't want to take this fellow into the house. I am afraid he would scare the babies. I'll leave him out here with you. Don't let him get away from you."

It was useless to protest, and Noel obediently followed his guard as he led the way to the rear of the house near the place where the horses were tied. The young soldier looked hastily about him to discover what had become of the little sutler, but could not see him anywhere. Levi must have

entered the house, he concluded.

Noel's thoughts were bitter as he recalled how easily he had been trapped. The sutler, without doubt, was in the employ of the Confederates. Whether or not he had been, at the time when he held his place in the Union camp at Harper's Ferry, Noel had no means of knowing; but it was plain that he himself had been led by his guide into a place from which apparently there was no escape.

When the soldiers reentered the house Noel seated himself on the ground with his back against the post that upheld the rail to which three of the horses were tied. In spite of his fear he looked with interest at the mounts of the men. Every horse manifestly was fleet-footed, and in better condition than one naturally would expect such horses to be at such a time.

Little black faces began to appear, as the pickaninnies, led on by their curiosity, slowly and cautiously advanced from their quarters to discover for themselves what the meaning of the excitement was. At another time Noel would have been interested, but now he gave slight heed to his approaching visitors.

About fifteen feet from the place where he was seated there was a row of beehives. The warmth of the September day had caused the busy little creatures to resume their labors of the summer.

The sight of them recalled to the mind of the troubled boy the beehives near his father's house and his thoughts naturally wandered from bees to the people who were in the far-away home. He wondered if Frank had yet returned to the army. He had been assigned to a different corps, and it might be that he already was with McClellan. Would he see him at Frederick City? The question received its own answer when Noel glanced about him and saw the guard and the horses waiting for their riders. There was slight prospect that he would see his brother very soon. Libby Prison doubtless was to be his destination.

A half-hour had elapsed since Noel's arrival, and in spite of his fear the droning of the bees sounded so monotonously in his ears that it would not have been difficult for him to close his eyes and fall asleep.

Abruptly he sat erect and, facing his guard said, "How long are these men going to be here?"

"I reckon yo' 'll have to ask the lieutenant, sir."

"How long have they been here?"

"I can't just say, sir."

"Do you know where they are going?"

"No, sir, I don't."

"Do you know what they will do with me?"

"I reckon I might suspect, sir. There have been a right sma't lot of Yanks who have had free transpo'tation to Richmond. I reckon there will be some mo', and it may be yo' will have a chance to ride along with them, sir. It won't cost you a cent, sir. No, sir, not one cent."

"Do you belong to Stuart's cavalry?" asked Noel.

"I wonder what's the matter with the Yanks. They seem to be so full of questions that the minute one of them opens his mouth they begin to pop out the way corn pops in a popper."

Noel abruptly ceased his questioning, but, as he glanced once more about the quarters, suddenly a scheme suggested itself to him, by which he might be able to escape from his captors. If the plan was to be tried, he must act at once, he decided, and, striving not to arouse the suspicions of the guard, he slowly arose.

CHAPTER XV

WARLIKE BEES

Slowly, and striving to appear indifferent, although he was keenly observant of every action of his guard, Noel began to pace back and forth behind the row of horses. He was well aware that, in spite of the apparent carelessness of his guard, he was watching his every action. Any attempt on the part of the young prisoner to escape would at once bring a shot from the soldier.

However, the guard did not interfere with the actions of his prisoner, and a half-dozen or more times Noel slowly paced back and forth as if he was simply striving to relax his muscles and was ignoring his surroundings.

Not more than twenty feet away from the rail was the row of beehives to which reference has been made. Several times the young prisoner stopped and watched the busy little insects that were buzzing about the hives. Glancing each time at the guard, he was convinced that any suspicions of any plan his charge might have in mind as yet had not been aroused. Apparently the

soldier was so confident in his ability to meet any sudden act that some of the time he was not even looking at the young prisoner.

Noel's excitement became keener. He glanced toward the house to see whether or not any of the Confederates who had entered were now to be seen. Slowly he turned his head and looked once more at his guard. The man was seated on the grass, and still to all appearances was indifferent to the actions of his charge.

Suddenly Noel stumbled over the projecting root of a huge magnolia tree and fell directly against the nearest hive in the row. With both hands he struck and with such force that it was thrown against the hive next to it.

"Better look out there!" called the guard, when Noel arose. "Some of those bugs 'll bite you, if you don't watch out!"

Whether or not the "bugs would bite," the anger of the bees instantly became manifest. In clouds they poured forth from the hives and the sounds of their buzzing became louder.

Darting in every direction they soon discovered the disturber of their dwelling-places, and, aware of their intentions, Noel hastily ran toward the guard and the rail to which the horses were hitched. To all appearances he had done this simply to avoid the pursuit of the little tormentors. That he was acting on design, the guard did not even suspect. The cloud of bees, however, did not all abandon the pursuit, and as Noel halted near the horses, the furious little insects, without rhyme or reason, began an attack upon the innocent animals.

Pandemonium instantly followed. The horses were rearing, plunging, squealing, and kicking in every direction. The actions seemed to incite the attacking insects to still greater anger. Nor was the guard himself free from the onslaught. With muttered exclamations of anger and pain, he was striving to ward off the little pests from his face or prevent them from stinging him on his hands and wrists.

Noel was doing his utmost to bear up under the suffering he himself was compelled to undergo. One bee had stung him on the very tip of his nose. Another had attacked him under his right eye, while still another had inserted his sting near a corner of the young soldier's mouth.

Noel could feel his face swelling, but he heroically strove to bear his suffering, and, although he did his utmost to drive away his tormentors, he nevertheless was relying upon the very attack that had been made to assist him in the plan which he had formed.

In the midst of the confusion one of the horses broke loose, and with many snorts of fear and rage started swiftly toward the lane.

The example was contagious and a moment later two more horses freed themselves by breaking the straps by which they were tied and followed in the direction in which the leader had disappeared.

"Catch them! Catch them! Help me! Catch them!" called the guard excitedly. "Why don't somebody come out of the big house? I can't do everything myself! Help me! Never mind the stings! Don't let those horses get away! Rouse yourself, Yank!"

"I'll do my best," called Noel loudly, as he seized the bridle of one of the remaining horses and apparently strove to quiet the terrified animal.

The horse with which Noel was struggling was the one in the line which he had noted as being undoubtedly the swiftest and best of them all.

"Whoa, there! Keep quiet! Be still, can't you?" he called as he slapped the plunging horse on its neck and then on its flank as if he was protecting it from the angry bees. Meanwhile, however, Noel had untied the horse and was holding the animal by its bridle.

At that moment some of the Confederate soldiers, who had entered the house, appeared at the door. Noel glanced anxiously at the men and then looked at the guard, who was doing his utmost to prevent one of the remaining horses from escaping.

The moment for which he had been waiting had arrived, the young soldier decided, and whatever he did he must do instantly. There was no time to be lost.

Looking once more toward the house, he saw the men call to those who still were inside, and then turn as if they were about to run swiftly to the place where the commotion was occurring. A single glance at the guard showed him that the man's rifle had been laid upon the grass and that he was still struggling with one of the frantic animals. Pulling upon the bridle of his horse Noel quietly had worked the animal away from its companions. His horse had been squealing and kicking more frantically than any of the others. To all appearances Noel was having a severe struggle to prevent him from breaking away and running in the direction in which the other horses had disappeared.

The shouts of the men, who now were advancing from the house, increased the confusion. Doubtless they were unaware of the source of the trouble and might visit their anger upon him, thought Noel.

The time, however, did not permit of delay. He had now worked his horse nearer the corner of the house. Suddenly the young soldier, placing one foot in the stirrup, leaped lightly into the

saddle, and shouting into the ears of his horse, turned around the corner of the house before the startled band were fully aware of what had taken place.

The bees were no longer in pursuit. The terrified animal, however, was still making many frantic leaps, and Noel was compelled to exert the utmost of his strength to retain his seat. His disappearance was followed by a shout from the man, and only a brief time elapsed before, glancing behind him, he saw that two of the men were mounted and now were in swift pursuit.

His hopes now were dependent upon the speed of his horse and the possible inability of his pursuers to shoot.

"Stop, you Yank!" called one of them. "Stop where you are! Stop, or we'll shoot!"

Bending low upon the neck of his horse, Noel gave no heed to the demands and continually urged the beast into greater efforts. With long and powerful leaps the horse was bounding forward. The entrance from the lane into the highway was now only a few yards distant. Out in the road, Noel saw the horses which had already broken their halters and had fled when the bees first had attacked them. He would have been glad to secure either of them, but now his main purpose was to escape, and success depended much upon the endurance of the horse he was riding.

As yet the men behind him had not shot at the escaping young soldier. Grimly Noel thought they were more fearful of injuring the horse than they were of harming him. However, there was inspiration in the thought that thus far he had succeeded, and almost with a feeling of rejoicing he turned into the road and urged his terrified steed into still more frantic efforts. The pursuit was not abandoned, and he was aware that the mounted Confederates evidently were as determined as was the fleeing young soldier.

The speed of the running horse increased under the continued demands of his rider. It was a powerful animal on which he was mounted, as Noel was now aware, and if his endurance was equal to his strength there was a possibility of escaping from the region.

A glance behind him showed that he was gaining upon his two pursuers, a fact which was as manifest to them as it was to him. Suddenly one of them fired. Noel heard the bullet as it whistled above his head.



NOEL HEARD THE BULLET AS IT WHISTLED PAST

The pursuit, however, was not abandoned, and, leaning forward, Noel drew himself closer to the neck of his panting steed, and then as he looked hastily behind him he saw that both men were again about to fire.

CHAPTER XVI

A HELPER

The moment was critical in the flight of the young soldier. It seemed to him as if his heart for a moment almost ceased to beat. Resolutely he leaned still farther forward on the neck of the running horse, and shouting into the ear of the animal caused the frightened beast to bound to the opposite side of the road just as both of his pursuers fired.

Grateful as soon as he was aware that neither he nor his horse had been hit, the young soldier gave his undivided attention for a moment to controlling the terrified steed.

Noel's long experience on his father's farm on the banks of the St. Lawrence River, where he and his brother Frank many a time as little lads had ridden the colts bareback, now came in good stead. The saddle was uncomfortable, but he had no difficulty in retaining his seat.

In a brief time the nervous animal once more was under control and was speeding forward at a pace which the rider was confident would soon leave his pursuers far behind him.

In his flight Noel hastily glanced over his shoulder to discover whether or not the Confederate soldiers had abandoned the chase, or were still determined to overtake him.

He plainly saw that they were not gaining upon him, although they still held doggedly to the pursuit. Just why they should do this, now that several miles had been covered, the young soldier was unable to understand, nor was it until afterward that he came to know the reason why the men, in spite of their failure to gain upon him, were unwilling to turn back.

Noel was unarmed. His rifle had been taken from him when he had first been made prisoner. Although he had a place, as we know, among the sharpshooters of McClellan's army, it had not been until after his return from his furlough that he had found himself fully able to do the required work.

Now with all his heart he longed for a rifle. If it were only in his hands he was convinced that the two men who were so doggedly hanging to the pursuit would abandon their efforts.

The mud in places in the road was thrown up in lumps by the hoofs of his horse as he thundered on his way. As yet the animal was not displaying any marked signs of distress, and in the hope of wearing out his pursuers, Noel still kept him at his full speed.

The splotches of mud and the heat of the warm September day soon made the appearance of the young rider as distressing as that of the animal upon which he was mounted. The great black flanks of the latter were now reeking with sweat and discolored by the red-brown mud of the road. As far as Noel himself was concerned, his most intimate friend might have had difficulty in recognizing, in the perspiring, dirt-covered young soldier the Noel Curtis whom they had known. Streams of perspiration had poured down his face and left furrows in the coating of Maryland mud and dirt. The exertion was telling upon the rider as well as upon the horse, and he was well aware that such violent efforts could not long be continued.

Glancing once more anxiously behind him, Noel was unable to see his pursuers. He was aware, however, that it was only the bend in the road that hid them from his sight and that not yet was he freed from his peril.

Slackening the pace at which he was riding, the young soldier removed his coat and folding it placed it in front of him on the pommel. The relief was instant and again speaking encouragingly to his horse, which now was breathing loudly, he continued his flight.

It became manifest in a brief time that the pursuit was still maintained, although the distance between the young soldier and the two Confederates comparatively was unchanged. Why they should continue to follow him became increasingly a perplexing problem. There were no prospects of his being overtaken, and now that five or six miles must have been covered in his flight Noel was unable to understand why the men did not turn back and join their comrades. He himself was not of sufficient value to warrant their severe labors. Of that fact he was well assured. Why, then, did they still follow him?

The mystery was unsolved, but there was no delay on the part of the young soldier to meditate long upon possible explanations. The fact remained that he was in a country with which he was unfamiliar, mounted upon the back of a horse with whose ways he was unacquainted, although he was aware of his many excellent points, and was being pursued relentlessly by two men who doggedly held to their task.

Suddenly Noel, as he emerged from a small body of woods, beheld a group of men directly in the road before him and not distant more than fifty yards. Glancing keenly at the bank he saw that the men were repairing a bridge over a little stream. A second look convinced him that the men were all clad in the uniform of the Confederate soldiers.

For a brief moment Noel's courage seemed to depart. He could not turn back without running directly into his enemies, while if he advanced it was equally plain that there were many more still to be passed.

Unaware of the perplexing thoughts of his rider, his horse did not relax his speed and with long

and steady lopez was still advancing. Whatever the young soldier was to do must be done quickly.

Almost before he was aware of what occurred Noel found himself close upon the band. His coat, as has been said, was discolored and his trousers were so covered with mud that their original color, in a measure, at least, was concealed.

Suddenly the young soldier decided to try to make his way through the band. He recalled an incident which he had read in the life of Mad Anthony Wayne, who, with his men, in the swamp near Yorktown, found himself face to face with a division of red coats that far outnumbered his followers. The consternation produced by the discovery was banished as Mad Anthony resolutely called to his men and dashed forward. The daring man was relying upon the fact of his bold advance to convince the enemy that there must be more men behind him. No man in his senses would ever think of attacking such a superior force. After the British lines had broken and fled, Mad Anthony turned and said to one of his comrades, "The best way to overcome any difficulty is to drive straight through it." This incident came back to Noel's mind as the trees and fields seemed to be racing past him.

His confident approach, too, for he was waving his hand as he drew nearer, seemed to confuse the band of Confederates. Instead of forming across the road and stopping his flight, they divided and did not even question him, although his appearance must have been such as to arouse their curiosity at least.

Only partly checking the speed of his horse, Noel leaned low on his neck and as he drew near the men, he shouted, "Don't stop me, boys! How far ahead is the captain?"

Even as he asked the question Noel was aware that his own apparent confidence had had its effect, for the men drew back from the roadside, and one of them in reply to his query, shouted, "I reckon he's about three miles up the road, sir."

"Good! That's fine!" shouted Noel in response. "There's some men coming behind me and they'll stop to give you their message. They have a word for you."

The ruse had succeeded, and the young soldier had accomplished more than in his excitement he had dared to hope. He knew that his pursuers in a very short time would be informed of his bold trick and perhaps would be more determined than ever to secure him. But for a time, at least, he had not been checked in his flight and he was not without hope also that the two mounted men might be delayed long enough by the band, through which he had successfully made his way, to enable him to gain still more.

Noel had not advanced far beyond the sight of the bridge before his sudden feeling of exhilaration vanished. He had been astonished at the very success of the trick he had played. It was his first lesson that if a man is to succeed he must be bold.

His rejoicing now abruptly departed, when, running and breathing heavily, his horse suddenly stumbled and fell in the road. The young soldier had been riding with too loose a rein and his moment of elation had made him somewhat careless of the need of constant attention to his steed.

Fortunately Noel was able to free his feet from the stirrups and was not caught by the body of the horse as he fell. He was thrown to one side of the road, but although he was bruised and for a moment almost stunned by the sudden fall, he quickly rose.

Quick as his action was, however, that of his horse had been quicker. After two efforts the fallen animal at last succeeded in leaping to his feet, and, disregarding the frantic calls of its recent rider, started forward, running even more swiftly than when he had been carrying the young soldier.

In the midst of the fresh trouble which had arisen, Noel was aware that his pursuers in a brief time would be upon him. Instantly turning to one side of the road where some large trees were growing he darted into their midst and soon discovered one tree sufficiently large to enable him to hide behind it.

Scarcely had Noel succeeded in gaining his hiding-place before he heard the sound of the approaching horsemen. Instead of two horses now, however, there were five. The ruse which he had used upon the men at the bridge had been discovered, and doubtless chagrin was added to the natural desire to retake the daring man who had escaped through their midst.

Would they pass the place or would they discover the mark in the road left by his horse when it fell? Upon the decision of this question much of his success depended. Breathlessly Noel watched the pursuing soldiers, and a great sigh of relief escaped his lips when he saw that they had not even glanced at the spot where the accident had befallen him.

He deemed it unwise now to resume his flight in the road. He decided that he would make his way from tree to tree, and as he peered out at the road, which he could see extended far in the distance, he was rejoiced to discover that the woods also spread out far on either side. His plan was not to reenter the road until he had gone a distance which would be sufficient to insure his safety from discovery by the men who had recently passed him in their wild chase.

By this time the afternoon sun was low in the western sky. Not a mouthful of food had passed the lips of the young soldier since his early breakfast at the house of Jim and Sairy Ann. His

strenuous efforts also had wearied him, and thirst, as well as hunger, was now making its demands felt.

An hour had elapsed when Noel, from another hiding-place far up the road, saw the band of five returning. He was positive that he recognized them as his recent pursuers from the fact that one of the horses was strangely marked, a fact which he had noticed when he had first discovered the animals tied to the rail in the rear of the house to which the treacherous Levi had conducted him.

When at last the band had passed beyond his sight, and Noel, with fresh courage, was about to reenter the road, he was startled when he saw a young colored man approaching from the direction in which the riders had disappeared.

Loud and long sang the negro and repeated the same stanza of the song until Noel, who was interested as the black man came nearer, almost felt that in spite of his difficulties he would join in the tune,—

"Then I sot right down and felt very blue—
Glory hallelujah, bress de Lord!
Says I, O Lord, what shall I do?
Glory hallelujah, bress de Lord!"

When the young black man came opposite the place where Noel was hiding, the latter suddenly decided to hail him.

"Hello!" called the young soldier.

The negro stopped abruptly and peered about him in a manner which betrayed to Noel that in intelligence he seemed to be far above the most of his race.

"Who dat callin' me?" inquired the negro.

"I am," said Noel, as he stepped forth from his hiding-place.

The young soldier now was in his shirtsleeves, his coat having been lost when he had been thrown from his horse. His uniform was so discolored by mud that it was impossible for an observer to determine to which side he belonged. However, convinced that his plight was so distressing that he must trust some one, Noel had decided that he would cast in his lot with the negro, and trust him to provide some way of escape.

"Have you seen any Union soldiers around here?" he called as he came nearer.

Before he replied, the negro looked quickly into the face of Noel, and then with a smile said, "No, suh. I wish I had. I would like toe be inside the Union lines at dis bery minute. I reckon, too, yo' all would like toe be in there, too."

"That's what I would!" said Noel enthusiastically. "And you'll have to show me how to get there."

The black man hesitated a moment, and then said cordially, "The bes' thing fo' yo' will be fo' me toe take yo' all toe Aunt Katie."

"Aunt Katie?" inquired Noel, as he glanced once more apprehensively up and down the road. "Aunt Katie? Who is she?"

"Yo' come er long wif me and I'll done show yo'," replied the negro.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GUEST ROOM

The young negro at once led the way from the road, evidently fearing more for the safety of his companion than for his own.

Noel followed obediently and did not speak until his guide had led him far within the sheltering woods that were growing on each side of the road.

The young soldier was not yet altogether convinced that his companion was to be relied upon. His experience with Long John had made him suspicious of the blacks. Throughout his boyhood he had never seen a colored man, and it had not been long before the time of his enlistment when he had beheld one for the first time.

The action of the powerful young negro with whom he was journeying, however, in a measure relieved his fears, and his plight was so desperate that he was aware that he must trust somebody for help. Night would soon be at hand and in the darkness his perils might be greatly increased.

At last, when a quarter of a mile or more had been covered by Noel and his companion, the young soldier stopped, and said, "What's your name?"

"Nigger Sam."

"Did you ever hear of Long John?"

"Yas, suh!" replied Sam, glancing suspiciously at his companion as he spoke. "What fo' yo' ask 'bout Long John?"

"I saw him back yonder."

"What fo' yo' see him?"

"Why, he led me into a trap. I thought I could trust him, but he took me along a corduroy road to the very place where a lot of the rebel soldiers were stationed."

"Yas, suh! Yas, suh!" said Sam, manifestly relieved. "Dat's des' what Long John is er doin'. He's playing tricks on the Yankee soldiers all de time. Little Ben Fowler des' used him lak I use de decoy when I shoots ducks."

"How do I know you are not another one like Long John?"

"Because I'se a Yankee."

"You're a what?" demanded Noel.

"I'se workin' wif de Yankees. I des' made up my mind dey was de bes' friends what I got. When a lot ob men leave home and come 'way off down yere jes' toe set de niggers free, I done make up my min' dat I'd des' do all I could fo' 'em."

"Where are you going now?"

"I reckon I'm goin' toe tote you toe Aunt Katie's."

"You know I'm a Union soldier, don't you?"

"I reckon I does. Leastwise I suspected so when I first heerd yo' talk. If yo' all will tell me how yo' says de word ob dat animal what gibes milk, den I'll sho'ly know."

"What do you mean?" inquired Noel sharply.

"I mean dat animal what we spell c-o-w. How yo' all done say dat name?"

Noel laughingly pronounced the word, and instantly his dusky companion was satisfied with the claim which the young soldier had made.

"Yas, suh. Yo' all sho'ly is er Yankee. What I cain't understan', suh, is what yo' all is doin' yere. The nearest place war dey is any Union sojers is Frederick."

"How far is that from here?"

"Not so very far, but I reckon hit's too far away fo' yo' all toe try fo' toe git dere to-night. De sojers is scourin' de country an'—"

"Do you mean Stuart's cavalry?"

"Yas, suh, and some mo' men besides dem. Hit's gittin' dreadfully hard toe find yo' way in times like dese."

"Where are you going now?" suddenly Noel inquired.

"I'se goin' toe take yo' all toe Aunt Katie's an'—"

The young negro hesitated and again searchingly looked at his companion.

"What's the trouble?" inquired Noel quickly. "Are you afraid of me?"

"No, suh, I isn't 'fraid," grinned the negro. "Sho'ly not as long as I hab a frind lak dis wif me," he added as he drew from a pocket inside his coat a long narrow knife which was at least ten inches in length. "Dis yere," grinned Sam, "is one ob de bes' friends what I got."

"What is it?" inquired Noel, extending his hand as he spoke.

"No, suh. I don' let dis friend of mine eber go out ob my hands. Not eben fo' Gene'al Bu'nside."

"Where is General Burnside?" asked Noel.

"I reckon he isn't far 'way from Frederick City."

"Are you going to see him?" demanded the young soldier, suddenly inspired by a new thought.

"Well, suh, I cain't jes' say 'bout dat," replied Sam as he thrust his knife back into its receptacle. "I mought and then again I moughtn't."

"I believe you're going there," said Noel sharply.

"Dat's des' as may be," again responded Sam. "I mought and den I moughtn't. Now, we hab been talkin' here long er 'nuff. If we all is goin' toe get yo' toe Aunt Katie's we mus' be movin' along. I haven't much time to stay yere any longer."

"How far is Aunt Katie's from here?"

"Not so very far," again responded the negro. "But I des' cain't lose de time."

"Where did you come from?" abruptly inquired Noel.

"I des' came from down de road a spell."

"And you say you're going to Frederick City to report to General Burnside?"

"No, suh. No, suh. I didn't say any such thing," replied Sam with a grin. "I des' said that I mought see him."

"I believe you're taking word to him from some one down in this part of Maryland."

Sam grinned, but made no reply.

The practice of using the blacks as spies or as means of obtaining information was more prevalent than the young soldier was aware. Some of the black men were keenly intelligent, and their stealthiness enabled them to avoid many dangers to which the white soldiers were often exposed. It was plain, too, that Nigger Sam, as he called himself, was thoroughly familiar with the region; and he had said and done enough to cause his companion to suspect that the purpose of his journey was more than had appeared upon the surface.

Conversation ceased when the journey was resumed. Weary as Noel was by the experiences of the day, it was with difficulty that he was able to keep up with his companion, who swiftly led the way through the field and across the occasional swamps.

The sun had disappeared from sight and darkness was creeping over the land when at last Noel and his black guide arrived on the border of a long stretch of woods.

"Yo' all stay right yere, suh," said Sam, "while I done go toe see if Aunt Katie will take yo' in fo' de night."

"I don't want to stop at Aunt Katie's," declared Noel. "I want to go with you. I'm sure you're on your way to Frederick City—"

"Hush!" said Sam sternly. "Yo' all don't know who may be hidin' in dese yere trees."

The negro spoke in a whisper, but it was manifest to his companion that his fears had been aroused and perhaps not without reason.

"Yo' all do des' what I says toe yo'," continued Sam. "Set right yere behin' dis yere tree while I go toe see if Aunt Katie kin take yo' in fo' de night."

There was nothing else to be done except to obey the directions of Sam. Reluctantly Noel seated himself on the ground behind one of the large trees, and the negro at once started across the field that intervened between the woods and the little cabins, a faint outline of which could be seen in the distance. Doubtless the little whitewashed structures were the quarters of the negroes of the large plantation, Noel concluded.

The weary young soldier leaned forward and watched the departing Sam as long as he could be seen. In a brief time the young negro passed beyond the nearest of the cabins.

A half-hour or more elapsed before Sam returned. Noel's anxiety meanwhile had been increasing, and he was on the point of departing from the vicinity, as he had become fearful that his guide might play him false and report him to his enemies instead of to the colored woman to whom he had referred as the friend of escaping whites and blacks alike.

The dim outlines of the approaching guide soon became more clearly defined, and it was with a feeling of relief that Noel heard Sam say, "Hit's all right, suh. Aunt Katie done say as how she will take yo' in. Dere's one white man dere now, but she done say she can always find room fo' one mo'."

When the two men approached the humble cabin, which Sam explained was Aunt Katie's abode, there were no lights to be seen, and consequently, when the black woman whispered to the guide, Noel was unable to distinguish her face.

The whispering between the two continued several minutes, and then Sam once more turned to Noel, who had been bidden to enter the cabin and seat himself on a rude bench near the rear door, and said, "Is yo' all hongry."

"Yes, I'm hongry," whispered Noel. "But never mind that. What I want is to find some place where I shall be safe; that is, if you 're not going to take me with you to—"

Noel abruptly ceased when he felt the grip of his companion on his arm and was aware that he must not speak aloud concerning any of the men or places he was seeking.

"Aunt Katie will feed yo' all an' then show yo' whar yo' kin stay 'til mo'nin'. Yo' do des' what she done tells yo' toe do."

"I shall," whispered Noel; for his confidence in his dusky friends had now been fully restored. He could not explain the change in his feelings, but it had been manifest by the very tones of Aunt Katie's voice that she was one upon whom he might depend.

"Yas, suh," continued Sam. "Maybe I'll done see yo' all some time soon."

Unaware of the direction in which Sam had departed, Noel's attention and efforts were soon devoted to the corn-bread and molasses which his sable hostess speedily provided.

Watchful as Noel was, his hunger nevertheless was so keen and he was so busily engaged in the task of disposing of Aunt Katie's viands, that the occasional chuckle of the black woman was wonderfully comforting. She seldom spoke, but the young soldier was aware that his hostess was a woman of ample proportions and capable of exerting herself physically if occasion should require in a manner that would portend no good for her enemies.

"Yo' all come 'long wid me and I'll take yo' toe de gues' room," said Aunt Katie calmly, when her visitor's hunger had been appeased.

Puzzled by her words, Noel nevertheless followed the woman as she led the way outside the little cabin. He was mystified by her actions and was wondering where the "gues' room" might be. However, he wisely held his peace, and cautiously following Aunt Katie soon was conducted to a large stack of cornstalks standing near a corner of the barn.

Here the black woman stopped and, keenly peering about her to make sure that their actions were not observed, turned to Noel and whispered, "Inside dat er stack is whar yo' all is toe go. Dere am plenty ob room in dere. Yo' all will find another sojer in dere, too, I reckon. I'll show yo' all how yo' git in. Come er 'long."

Near the ground on the farther side of the stack Noel crawled into the opening which Aunt Katie disclosed. In spite of the darkness he was aware that the ground within was covered with cornstalks and that it was possible for him to stand erect. Instantly he concluded that the stack was more or less of a deception and was designed merely to cover and conceal a small room.

His thoughts, however, were speedily interrupted by the voice of the other occupant. In amazement Noel listened, scarcely daring to credit the evidence of his own ears, and then convinced that he was not mistaken, he instantly crawled toward the place from which the voice had come.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FIRE

"Dennis! Dennis! Is that you?" whispered the young soldier, as he gained the place where the other occupant of the hiding-place was seated.

"Shure, and it's Noel! It's Noel, me lad!" exclaimed Dennis in high glee.

"Hush! Don't talk so loud, Dennis! Somebody will hear us. What are you doing here? Where did you come from? Are you going to try to go on to the army to-night? Who brought you here? How long have you been here?"

"Listen to the lad!" exclaimed Dennis, delightedly, in one of his loudest whispers.

Noel was more afraid of Dennis when he whispered than he was when he spoke in a low tone. Accordingly he grasped his comrade's arm and said, "Don't make so much noise, Dennis."

"Noel's the lad for me! He can ask more questions in a minute than any man from the old sod could ask in five. Well, lad, I have been here about two hours."

"Where did you come from?"

"You'll have to ask the people what brought me. I can't tell you, I'm shure. I niver was in such a country and I hope I'll niver be again. I wasn't so troubled about mesilf as I was about you, Noel, me lad. Tell me about yoursilf."

"Hush!" repeated Noel. "Be still!" he whispered excitedly. "Do you hear those voices?"

"Shure, I hear them."

"Well, keep still and see if we can find out what they are saying."

It was plain to both the listening young soldiers that a man, who, from his tones and speech was undoubtedly white, was talking to a negro lad standing near the stack within which the two young soldiers were hiding.

In a moment Noel recognized the voice of the little negro lad as that of the son of Aunt Katie. The little urchin, not more than ten years of age, had impressed the young soldier by the intensity with which he had looked at him from the time of his arrival until he was conducted by Aunt Katie to the place of his concealment.

Noel grasped fiercely the arm of Dennis as he heard the man outside ask, "Have you seen any Yanks around here?"

"No, suh! No, suh!" said the small negro. "I ain't seen no Yankees aroun' hyer."

"You are sure, are you?" repeated the man, not ill-naturedly.

"Yas, suh. Yas, suh."

"Do you think you would know a Yank if you should see one?"

"I shore would," replied the dusky child confidently. "Yo' all done tole us dat de Yanks hab hawns. I ain't seen nary a man wif hawns 'round yere."

"Have you looked for them?" laughed the man.

"Yas, suh."

"Well, if you find any you must be sure to report to me. Sometimes you have to look right smart to find the horns on some of the Yankees."

"Does dey grow right out of dere haid like dis?"

"That's what they do, and their horns are sharp, too."

"Glory!" exclaimed the little negro. "I reck'n I don't want to see no Yanks wif hawns. Is yo' all thinkin' dat dey is comin' yere sometime?"

"I think some of them have been here."

"What dey wan' hyer?"

"You ask Aunt Katie about that. I reckon she knows more about it than I do. Are you sure, Little Jake, you haven't seen any Yankees that didn't have any horns?"

"How would I know dey was Yankees if dey didn't hab any hawns? Yo' all don' tole us dat de Yankees hab hawns, so when I sees a man what I don' know I allus looks to see if he hab any hawns."

"If he does have horns, then you make up your mind he is a Yankee, do you?"

"Yas, suh. Dat's what yo' all don' tole us, so I looks fo' de hawns."

"Well, the next time you find anybody in Aunt Katie's cabin whom you don't know, you come and tell me, whether he has horns or not. I'm expecting somebody to be in her cabin pretty soon. You're sure, are you, there isn't anybody there now?"

"Yas, suh. You come 'long wif me," said the negro lad confidently, "and I'll show yo' all dat dere ain't nobody in dat cabin 'tall, 'ceptin' mammy."

"I'll take your word for it. Now, Little Jake, don't you forget to come straight to the big house and tell me if you ever find any strangers there, whether they have horns or not."

The conversation ceased, and with a sigh of relief Noel turned once more to Dennis and said, "When do we move from here?"

"About midnight."

"Is Sam going to be our guide?"

"I don't know whether he is or not, but Aunt Katie told me that somebody would come for us about that time."

"Do you know how far the Union lines are from here?"

"No, I don't," replied Dennis. "I think the best thing we can do is to lie down here on these cornstalks and take a nap."

"But you haven't told me where you came from nor how you got here."

"'Tis a long story, lad, and I'm afraid to tell you here for fear somebody outside will hear our voices."

"All right," responded Noel. "You can tell me after we leave. I think we'd better do what you say."

Accordingly the boys stretched themselves on the earth which was covered with cornstalks and in a few moments both were sleeping soundly.

Just how long Noel had been asleep he did not know, but he was awakened by a vague feeling of uneasiness. Somehow he felt as if he were being smothered, and for a brief time he was unable to decide just where he was or why he was there.

The voice of Dennis in a hoarse whisper recalled to him the incidents which had preceded the finding of the shelter within the strange hiding-place.

"What's that?" whispered Dennis.

Noel saw that his Irish friend was alarmed, although as yet he was unable to determine the cause.

"What is what?" responded Noel.

"'Tis smoke, I tell you!" said Dennis once more. "This place is on fire."

"You have been dreaming," protested Noel, although even as he spoke he was aware of the odor of burning wood.

"If I have been dreaming, I'm awake now," declared Dennis. "And the only thing for you and me to do is to get out of this place."

"It isn't midnight yet."

"It's time to get up. The sooner we get out of here the safer it will be for us both."

All this time Noel was sharing the alarm of his comrade. Not merely was there an odor of burning wood, but there was no concealing the fact that smoke was penetrating their hiding-place.

To add to his alarm, at that very moment there were sounds of men running about near the shack, and then abruptly above the noise was heard the voice of some one shouting, "Fire! Fire!"

The danger of meeting the owner of the plantation was not so great in the mind of the young soldier at the time as that of being burned or suffocated in the place where he and Dennis had been concealed.

"Come on, Dennis! Come on!" he called in a low voice, as instantly he crawled toward the opening.

The place, however, had been closed after the entrance of the two boys and in the darkness it was impossible at first for Noel to find the exit. By this time his fears had been greatly increased and the sounds of confusion outside were much more alarming.

Men were shouting and running about, and in the midst of it all were heard the screams of the terrified children.

"Lad," whispered Dennis, "we can't wait to find the door. We must make a break for it anywhere we can." As he spoke the young Irishman threw himself with all his strength against the side of the little room.

Instantly the partition gave way and to the consternation of Noel the entire structure collapsed. Both boys were buried beneath the cornstalks, but it was only the work of a moment for them to free themselves.

As they leaped to their feet they discovered that one of the little whitewashed cabins, which they had seen the preceding evening, was on fire. Surrounding it were crowds of colored people, and among them Noel saw a tall white man, who he instantly concluded was the man whose voice had been overheard by him and Dennis. Without question the man before him was the owner of the plantation and the one who had warned Aunt Katie's little boy against the "terrible Yankees with hawns."

Fortunately the collapse of the rude structure, within which a hiding-place had been made for the escaping soldiers, apparently was not noticed by the people on the plantation. It was evident by this time that only the little cabin was doomed and that the fire without difficulty would be prevented from spreading to the adjoining buildings. Men in lines were passing buckets of water from hand to hand and the flames promised to be under control in a brief time.

Convinced that there was no immediate danger now to be feared from the spread of the fire, Noel turned to Dennis and in a low voice said, "We must get away from this place before that chap sees us."

Even as he spoke, however, the man turned and instantly discovered the presence of the two young soldiers.

As he advanced toward them both boys turned and fled from the place, running swiftly, and hoping that the surrounding darkness would soon hide them from the sight of the man whom they believed to be a friend of the Confederate cause.

Unmindful of the direction in which they were running Noel and Dennis fled at their highest speed, keeping well together until they came to what seemed to be an abandoned cabin on the border of the plantation.

"We'll stop here and abide until mornin'," suggested Dennis, who was laboring hard and breathing heavily under the exertion.

"No! No!" replied Noel. "We must not stop a minute. The only hope we have is in getting as far away from the plantation as possible in the shortest time."

"I can't go any farther," said Dennis; "I'm winded."

"What's that?" demanded Noel suddenly as he turned and looked toward the plantation, which now was far behind them, but from which the glow of the fires still could be faintly seen.

"'Tis nothin', lad. What is it you think you hear?"

"I thought I heard the dogs. If they set the dogs on us, we shall have more troubles than we ever had before, Dennis," said Noel, speaking rapidly and excitedly.

"I can't help it if they do set the dogs on us," muttered Dennis sturdily. "I can't go any farther. My wind is gone, and my side is thumpin' as if—"

"Here!" said Noel excitedly; "here's a well! I don't know whether there's any water in it or not, but the thing for you to do is to hide there. You can do it," he added abruptly as he stretched himself on the ground and, peering into the depths, found that the old well was lined with rough stones that projected unevenly from the sides. "Go down a few feet and wait until the excitement is over."

"Will you come with me?"

Noel hesitated and then said, "No, I'll not stay here. There will be more danger if both of us try to hide in the same place. I'll keep on, and after a while you follow me and I'll be on the lookout for you, and not very far ahead."

"See that you are," said Dennis, as he at once prepared to make his descent into the forbidding hole which his companion had discovered.

Without waiting to discover what success attended his comrade's efforts, Noel Curtis instantly turned and resumed his flight.

CHAPTER XIX

AT THE FORK

Noel ran swiftly forward in the darkness until at last he was compelled to stop to recover his breath. As he looked behind him he saw that the fire on the plantation manifestly was dying down. There was one spot of dull red yet to be seen against the dark horizon, but the flames had ceased.

For a moment he was tempted to turn and bid Dennis join him in his flight; but his uncertainty as to the exact direction in which to return to the old well, and his confidence that somehow the young Irish soldier would be able to make his way through the surrounding difficulties caused him to decide to continue his own flight.

The young soldier soon found himself in a road with which he was, of course, unfamiliar. He also was ignorant alike of the location of his friends and his enemies. For a brief time Noel tried to discover some signs which would indicate the presence or the passing of bodies of troops, but his efforts were unavailing, and at last he turned to his left and started resolutely along the roadway.

Frequently the young soldier stopped to convince himself that he was in no immediate peril. To his listening ears, however, no sounds of danger came. The silence of the night was unbroken, and from the occasional plantations not even the dogs betrayed any alarm at his passing.

Two hours or more had elapsed, and Noel now was beginning to feel the effects of his labors. Only in a general way did he know where he wanted to go, but his very ignorance had strengthened his nervous fear and he increased his efforts to make haste.

Suddenly the young soldier was aware that a dense fog was settling over the land. Almost like raindrops the heavy mist rested upon his face and clothing. He was able to see but a short distance before him. What fears or hopes might be concealed by the enfolding mist he did not know, but his senses were alert, and he was keenly watchful as he moved forward in the darkness.

He had not advanced far, however, when he came to a fork in the road. Almost at right angles a road branched which plainly was traveled as frequently as the one over which he had journeyed. Near the fork the young soldier discovered a little cabin, about which he was striving to make some investigations that would enable him to decide which road to follow. The little building was near the side of the road, and as Noel saw it he abruptly halted and listened intently for any sounds that might betray the presence of people within it.

It was almost morning by this time, and though the fog was not scattered, the light of the coming day presented a new aspect to his surroundings. Cautiously the young soldier approached the little cabin. The door was open, and as he came nearer he saw that there was no window in the room. Apparently the place was deserted.

At last with renewed caution Noel approached the door and hastily glanced within the building. In spite of the darkness he was convinced that he was the only one in the place. His impression was strengthened when he entered and found that apparently the room had not been occupied for a long time.

So tired was Noel by the efforts which he had made in his flight that the place appeared almost inviting. At all events, it was quiet and peaceful and he flung himself on the ground and soon was sleeping soundly.

The young soldier was awakened suddenly, and as he opened his eyes, at first he was unable to say where he was. Rays of the early sunlight were streaming through the open spaces in the

walls, but stronger than the impression produced by the morning was that of the sounds which he heard from the road.

It was plain that horses and men were outside the building, and if he could judge from the noise there were many of both.

Alarmed as Noel was by what he heard, he nevertheless quickly arose and cautiously looked through the place where the window had been.

The sight which greeted his eyes was one which might well have startled a bolder man than the young soldier. A troop of cavalry had halted at the fork in the road and were preparing their breakfast. There were at least fifty men in the band, and from their actions Noel concluded they were in no immediate fear of discovery or attack. The men were not noisy, but they were joking with one another, and plainly were interested in the preparations which were being made for their morning meal. Indeed, the odor of the bacon which was being broiled over the several fires which had been kindled, made him aware that he, too, had eaten little since he had fled from his pursuers early the preceding day.

Occasional words were overheard, and it was not difficult for the young soldier to conclude that the men before him belonged to a troop of Stuart's cavalry, and that apparently they were in no immediate fear of the Federal troops.

As the young soldier looked about him in the morning light he saw that the building in which he had slept was old and dilapidated. One corner of the roof had fallen, and the place was so small that no one passing would believe that many could be concealed within its walls. At all events, its appearance of desolation undoubtedly was his strongest protection, he thought. Not one of the cavalymen would think of inspecting a place around which the bushes and weeds were growing and within which no one was likely to seek refuge.

His admiration for the men before him became stronger as he continued to watch their activities. Not only were they well trained, but their horses were wonderful animals. Some of them showed the effect of the labors of the campaign, but it was clear that both men and horses made up a carefully selected body.

Noel, as has been said, was peering anxiously from one corner of the little window. An exclamation of surprise almost escaped his lips when suddenly he discovered two men approaching from the branch road, and he was convinced that one was Levi, the former sutler in the camp at Harper's Ferry, and the other was the husband of Sairy Ann's sister.

It became evident to the young watcher that the arrival of both men was expected. At all events, an orderly ran forward to meet them, and it was plain from the conversation which followed that neither of the newcomers was a stranger to him.

Noel's desire to see and hear more became intense. Soon after the arrival of the sutler and his companion, patrols were established in the three roads. The chief comfort that Noel had at the time was the conviction that his hiding-place, in view of the interest which the arrival of the two men had created, was not likely to receive the attention of the cavalymen.

Except for a few faint snatches of the conversation of the soldiers, Noel, despite his efforts, still was unable to overhear much of what was said.

Occasionally words came to him, but for the most part they were meaningless. The impression, however, which he received was that the newcomers had brought information which was considered of importance, for the men soon were hastily preparing to leave the place, although they had not yet finished their breakfast.

By this time the fog largely had been burned away by the rays of the rising sun. When a few minutes later the bugle sounded, the men mounted their horses and in a body departed swiftly, leaving behind them both Levi and his strange companion, whom Noel had first seen in the house of the elongated Jim, the husband of Sairy Ann.

The two men sat on the ground near one of the fires which was still burning, and over it was some of the food still cooking which the soldiers had abandoned in their sudden departure. The conversation between the two could be overheard more plainly, and as Noel listened his interest became more intense.

"Here, don't yo' all want some of this yere bacon?" inquired Levi's companion.

"I do not eat bacon."

"Why don't you eat it?"

"Because it vas unclean."

"It's as clean as anything you're likely to get in the next week or two," laughed the man. "Now, then, Levi, what did you find out?"

"Just vat I tells you."

"Yo' 're perfectly sure about that, be yo'?"

"Yes," snapped Levi. "Now you tells me vat you haf found."

"Not very much. I was back here on the major's plantation, and he said there were some Yanks at the nigger hut last night, but that they couldn't find any trace of them this mo'nin'. One of the cabins burned up last night, and the major thinks the men got away while all hands were busy puttin' out the fire."

"How many did you say der vas?" inquired Levi.

"How many of what?"

"How many Yankees vere dere. How many got away?"

"I don't know anything about that. I heard the major say he was sure two, anyway."

"Yah, I knows dose men, I vas sure. Dey are de two men what robbed me of mine goots. Dey push over mine tent. Dey say I charge too mooch. Dey steals mine goots. Dot is vy I am no more some Yankee."

"A Yankee!" exclaimed his companion as he threw back his head and laughed loudly. "A Yankee! Yo' 're about as much Yankee as yo' are nigger."

"Not too far, mine friend. Not too far. You forget dot the brains of the Confederacy is Jew brains —"

"That's a good one! That's a good one!" broke in Levi's companion. "Now, then," he added more soberly, "are yo' all comin' on with me, or am I goin' with yo' all? The captain said yo' all were to come with me. Do yo' know where we're goin'?"

"I know vere ve vas going to try to go," said Levi. "Ever since dose men push over mine tent and steals mine goots, I—"

"Well, if we're going, why don't we start? I have had all I want to eat," broke in the other man.

Noel could see that neither of the men was clad in the uniform of the Confederate army. His suspicions were confirmed that both were being used by the rebel troops to secure information concerning the presence and the actions of McClellan's army.

Noel was desirous of hearing the men speak more concerning their immediate plans, but, although it was plain that neither was suspicious that any one was near, almost instinctively they both lowered their voices whenever they spoke concerning the immediate task which confronted them.

An interruption was provided, however, by Noel himself. A sudden impulse to sneeze became almost uncontrollable. In spite of his efforts to repress the impulse Noel soon found that he was unable to do so, and after several attempts a prolonged and agonizing sound came from the hut, which instantly caused the two men outside to leap to their feet and gaze anxiously at the little building.

CHAPTER XX

THE STACK OF STRAW

The little sutler was unarmed, but his companion carried a rifle, which Noel had no difficulty in concluding was of unusual excellence. Grasping the weapon in his hand, the man instantly stood leaning forward prepared for the appearance of an enemy from the place from which the unexpected sound had come.

The action caused Noel at once to draw farther back from the window, although he still was watching the movements of his enemies outside. The expression of consternation that appeared on their faces, as well as the manifest fear of Levi, at another time would have caused the young soldier to laugh heartily. As it was, however, unarmed, and wearied by the labors of the preceding night, and facing one, at least, who would not hesitate to use his rifle, there was no expression of mirth on the young soldier's face.

"Vat's dat?" Noel heard Levi demand of his companion. The expression of alarm on the face of the little sutler became more marked and he glanced fearfully about him as if the sound might be repeated from some other direction.

"Why don't yo' all go into the shanty and find out what it is?" drawled Levi's companion.

"I haven't any gun."

"Well, I shan't let yo' have mine. I should not dare to trust myself a minute here with my gun in your hands. Bad enough to be shot by the Yanks, but if I should be hit by one who is neither fish, fowl, nor good red herring, I think I would feel worse about it."

"You go and see who vas in dere."

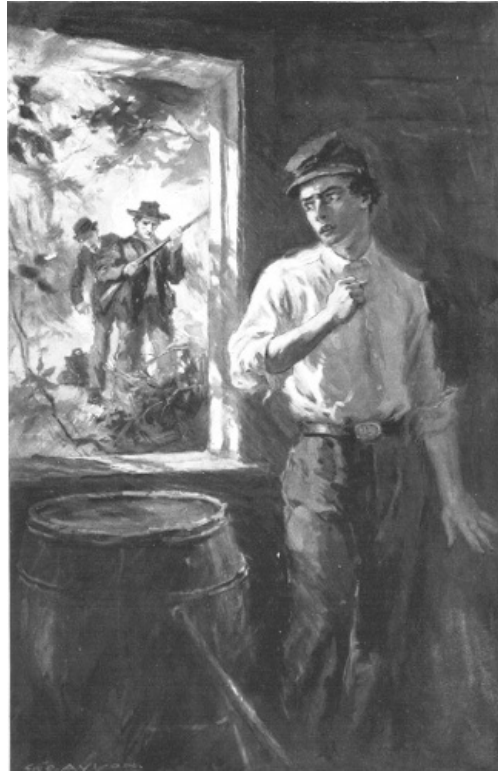
"I'm a-goin' to," said the man in a low voice. "That's just what I'm thinkin' of. I reckon yo'll find it's some nigger who's crawled in there and gone to sleep."

As if in answer to the implied question there came at that moment from the hut a sound not unlike the sneeze which had preceded it. This time, however, the report was suddenly broken as if the guilty party had stifled the rising sounds.

Terrified as Noel was by the action over which he had no control, the young soldier nevertheless peered quickly from the corner of the window at his enemies, whose consternation, he saw, was much more marked at the repetition.

Both men were keenly observant of the little building, and it was manifest now that Levi's companion was no longer hesitating.

Advancing boldly several yards nearer the little building he stopped and in a loud voice said, "Who's in there? Come out and show yourself!"



"WHO'S IN THERE?"

As no response was given his hail, the man waited a brief time and then repeated his summons.

"Come along out o' that! It will be easier for yo' now than it will be if I come in there toe get yo'. It's either fo' yo' toe come out yo'self, or be dragged out by some one else."

Noel was preparing to obey the command when to his surprise he was suddenly aware that both men outside were no longer looking toward the building, but were eagerly watching somebody or something down the road. Almost instinctively the young soldier followed their action, and his fears were increased when he saw approaching from the distance a body of troops. It was impossible, from the place where he was watching, to determine whether the men belonged to the Confederate army or to his own. There were several horses in the band, but whether or not it was a cavalry troop that he saw he was unable to determine.

The men were approaching steadily, and Noel, aware that the attention of Levi and his comrade had been diverted, at least for the moment, suddenly darted through the little door, and without once glancing behind him, at full speed started to cross the open field in the rear of the hut.

He knew he would not long be hidden from the view of the men, but every yard he gained not merely provided an additional incentive for effort, but increased his possibility of escaping.

Without once glancing behind him Noel ran at his utmost speed, leaping over the low rail fence as he came to the border of the field and then heading directly for a stack of straw which stood in the middle of the neighboring field.

As he drew near the weather-beaten pile of straw and glanced behind him, it seemed to him that some of the men had started in pursuit.

He was, however, not positive, but his fears were sufficient to cause him to run quickly to the opposite side of the stack and when he was once more beyond the vision of his enemies he hastily climbed the heap which was not more than fifteen feet in height.

The task was difficult because it was well-nigh impossible for him to gain any firm foothold, but at last he succeeded and did not cease his endeavors until he had gained the summit of the pile. Once there he hastily tore the straw apart, which to his surprise was somewhat loose, and burrowing into the depths soon made a hiding-place large enough to receive him.

Noel's next effort was to tear away the straw which prevented him from obtaining a view of the field over which he had fled, and when he had succeeded in obtaining a peep-hole he saw that his fears were confirmed and that some of the men were approaching from the road.

It was impossible for the troubled boy to know whether the approaching men were searching for him or were planning to pass his hiding-place without giving him any heed. The men were coming in an orderly manner, holding well together, and there were many things to make the excited young soldier hope that he was not the object of their search.

Tremblingly he watched the men as they came nearer and nearer, and when at last a part of the body halted and began an inspection of the straw-stack in which he was hiding, his alarm became great.

In the midst of these men he saw the little sutler, Levi, who was pointing excitedly, first, back toward the road from which they had come, and then toward the intervening distance between the place where he was standing and a house far away.

In response to his appeals a hasty search of the straw-stack was made, the soldiers moving in opposite directions until they had encircled the place. An investigation then was made around the bottom of the pile, apparently no one thinking of looking to the top where the young soldier was concealed. It was evident that the men were in haste and in spite of Noel's fear he was hopeful that they would not remain long.

His expectation was fulfilled, for, after the soldiers had circled the stack and some of their number had tried to discover any possible hiding-places around the base of the pile, the leader shouted, "Come on, boys! We must not waste any more time here. We shan't get to the Gap before every Yank has surrendered."

Noel was afraid to lift his head far above the place where he was concealed. Nevertheless, when he heard the sounds of the hoofs of the departing horses, he did venture to look out on the scene before him.

In a body the soldiers were speeding swiftly across the intervening field without once glancing behind them. So interested was Noel in the sight that the presence of the little sutler, for the moment, was forgotten. Levi was not with the soldiers, and when Noel once more drew down into his place of concealment his thoughts were chiefly concerned with the departing enemy.

For a time the young soldier remained quietly in his hiding-place, peering out through the peep-hole he had formed between the straws. He was watching the road near the place where the little hut in which he had hidden was standing. All the time he was fearful of the coming of more men.

His fears were not without foundation, for within a few minutes another band was seen approaching.

Tremblingly the boy watched them as they rode swiftly down the road, but as they did not halt at the fork a feeling of intense relief swept over his heart. It was manifest now that the men who had investigated the straw-stack had turned aside from the regular course which the main body was following.

The thought caused Noel once more to look in the direction in which the men had disappeared. He was unable to discover their presence, however, even the distant house toward which they had been speeding now being to all appearances as harmless as the little cabin in which he had sought refuge.

As we know, Noel's coat was gone and the remaining parts of his uniform had been so discolored by his flight along the muddy roads that he was not without hope that even if he were discovered his clothing would not betray him. The boy was hungry and intensely thirsty. His mouth was parched, and at the time it almost seemed to him that he could endure his torment no longer.

The nearest place where he was likely to obtain relief was the farmhouse in the distance toward which the investigating party had fled. Noel convinced himself that he would incur no risk if he should follow in the same direction, for doubtless the soldiers would not remain about the place; at least, their conversation implied that they were in haste to arrive at some "Gap." The location of any such place was entirely unknown to him.

After he had waited several minutes more, Noel finally decided that he could endure his sufferings no longer. His eyes, ears, and nose seemed to be filled with the dust that had accumulated for months in the neglected stack. His muscles were cramped and sore from remaining so long in one position, as he had not dared to move, for fear of causing some of the straw to slide from its place.

At last he decided that he would attempt to find relief at the far-away house. Slowly and cautiously he climbed from the hole in the stack, frequently pausing to look up and then down the road and make sure that his actions were not observed. As soon as he was convinced that the road was free from his enemies he quickly slipped over the side. As he struck the ground an

exclamation escaped him when his fall was broken by the body of a man directly beneath him.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CARPET-BAG

Noel was conscious of a low cry from the man upon whom he had fallen, and then instantly each savagely clutched the other. There was a struggle, which was short and violent, and Noel found himself holding to the ground the body of Levi, the sutler.

"Father Abraham!" ejaculated Levi. "Father Abraham! Let me up! Let me up!"

The surprise of Noel, when he discovered who his captive was, did not detract from his inclination to laugh as he heard the exclamations of the little sutler.

Without rising and still holding his prisoner fast to the ground, Noel said, "What are you doing here, Levi?"

"You vill let me up and I vill leave so quick you shall not see me."

"Before you go I want to know what you're doing here. Were you spying on me?"

"Not von leedle bit. I deed not know you vas here. Father Abraham! Vot a pinch you gif mine arm!"

"You want to be thankful it was only your arm, Levi. Now you tell me what you were doing here!"

"I vas chust stopping for to see vich vay the men vas going."

"What men?"

"Der men vot vas soldiers for the Johnnie Rebs."

"Did you find any of them?"

"Yes, I see some going up mit der road. Dey vas all gone, and den I starts for der house over yonder for to sell somedings vot I carry in mine bag."

"I believe you knew I was here all the time."

"Nefer did I know you vas here. Father Abraham! I wish you vere not here now. If you vill be gone I too vill go so fast you shall not see me in two minutes."

Aware of the perils which recently had threatened him, Noel was not inclined either to prolong the interview or to compel his prisoner to remain longer on the ground. Grasping the little sutler by his shoulder Noel quickly yanked him to his feet, but without relaxing his grasp.

"Levi, what have you got in that bag?" he demanded.

"Somedings vot I sells to the vimmins ven der men vas gone off to the var. Dot vos all. You shall belief mine vord. I chust carry somedings vat cannot be had ven the armies vas so near by."

"Let me see what you have," suggested Noel, as, compelling his prisoner to advance with him he moved toward the bag which Levi had left on the ground near the base of the straw-stack.

"No, I shall not do so!" screamed the little sutler. "You shall not open mine bag. It vas mine."

Noel's suspicions, greatly increased by the manifest alarm of the sutler, were almost strong enough to induce him to send his prisoner away and appropriate the bag. From the expressions he already had heard, he was aware that Levi was playing a dual part, or at least he believed him now to be in the employ of the Confederates.

Before he acted, however, he turned once more to his prisoner and said sharply, "How long since you have been inside our lines?"

"I do not go in der lines of der Yankees," protested Levi. "Dey vas steal mine goots. Dey vas take vat vas not theirs. I lose more nor two hundred dollars ven you and dot Dennis tear mine tent and tip ofer mine goots."

The expression of hatred which appeared upon the sutler's face when he referred to Dennis strengthened the conviction in the heart of Noel that his prisoner certainly did not entertain any cordial feelings for the boys in blue.

Noel, boylike, unmindful of the justice of the little sutler's complaints, was greatly angered at the treachery of his comrade.

"How long since you have been in the Confederate lines?" he demanded sharply.

"I do not go dere either. I have tolt you vat mine peesness vas. I sells mine goots to the peoples vat may be at home."

"All right, then," said Noel. "You let me see what is in your bag, and I'll believe you."

"I shall not trust von Yankee soldier!" screamed Levi. "You shall not open mine bag. I haf already had mine droubles mit der Yankees. Dey tears mine tent and tips ofer mine goots and steals vot vas mine. I shall not open mine bag for you yet von leedle bit."

"Too bad," said Noel, more soberly. "Then I shall have to open it myself, I suppose."

"No! No!" screamed Levi in tones still shriller. "Father Abraham! Father Abraham! I shall call for some helps!"

"Levi," said Noel abruptly, "I think I shall send you away and take your bag myself."

"You shall not do so!" protested the sutler noisily. "You shall not take mine bag! It vas mine, I dells you! It vas not yours. You shall not have it."

"Then let me see what there is in there."

"If I open mine bag von leedle bit, you vill take vot is not yours. I haf known you. You are von of dose Yankee soldiers. Dey tears mine tent and tips ofer mine goots and takes vat vas not theirs. I shall not give you von chance, not even one leedle bit of a chance."

"I'm sorry," said Noel, "but I'm afraid, then, that I shall have to take it myself." As he spoke Noel moved as if he was about to seize the bag, and instantly the little sutler, rushing savagely upon him, began to kick and strike, and before Noel was prepared to resist the sudden onslaught Levi bit him severely on the hand.

Aroused by the sudden attack and maddened by the pain which Levi's bite had caused, Noel flung the little sutler far from him and eagerly watched him as he rolled over upon the ground.

Almost as nimbly as a monkey the sutler leaped to his feet, and instead of trying to run from the place started once more fiercely at his enemy.

Noel was prepared for the attack now, and as Levi ran savagely upon him he thrust out his right foot and, at the same time giving him a hard push, sent him once more sprawling upon the ground. This time he did not wait for the sutler to recover from his fall but at once advanced and seized his carpet-bag.

The sight of his possessions in the hands of Noel again proved too much for Levi's feelings. In a thin, piping voice he screamed, "Father Abraham! Father Abraham! You shall not steal from mine bag. It vas not yours. You vas like some of dose Yankee soldiers. Dey tears mine tent and tips ofer mine goots and takes vot vas not theirs. I shall shoot!"

Startled by the threat, Noel glanced keenly at Levi, who was almost beside himself with rage, to see if any weapons were upon his person. He had not thought of the sutler as one who would carry firearms of any kind. The man was undersized and was lacking in physical strength. Noel had never thought of him other than as a weakling and one who might obtain his way by deception rather than by force. The thought that he might be armed was startling, and before the man could act Noel leaped forward and, seizing him again, threw him upon the ground, where he satisfied himself that no pistols were in his possession.

"You go back from here the way you came," ordered Noel as he swung his prisoner in his arms and, giving him a violent push, sent him in the direction he had indicated.

But Levi was not to be so easily turned aside from his purpose. Once more he leaped toward his tormentor, who now had taken the carpet-bag in his hands and stood facing him. Screaming, chattering, lamenting, Levi would have been a pathetic object under other circumstances. But Noel was so thoroughly convinced that in the bag which he held in his hands he would find something of value to the leaders of his army that he was determined now to investigate the contents and compel the little Jew to give it over.

Levi's screams of impotent rage and his childish attempts to compel Noel to relax his hold upon the bag were alike without avail. At last the young soldier said more sternly to the angry sutler, "Levi, if you know when you are well off you'll leave this place as I told you. Now, go!"

There was something in Noel's voice that caused Levi to heed the command. Tears were coursing down his cheeks and his two little fists were working very much after the manner of a pump-handle when he saw the expression on the face of his captor, and, aware that further efforts would be useless, he abruptly turned away and, without once glancing behind him, sped swiftly toward the fork in the road from which he had come.

For a brief time Noel watched the man as he sped across the field, and then suddenly, aware that his own problems were sufficient to demand his entire attention, he turned toward the house in the distance.

He had expected to learn from Levi the direction in which the Union troops might be found, but his sudden determination to investigate the carpet-bag, as soon as he discovered that it was not heavy, had changed his plans. Levi was gone and if he possessed the desired information he had taken it with him.

And yet Noel Curtis was aware that his own predicament was such that if other bodies of the Confederate cavalymen should soon pass along the road, Levi would be able to inform them of

what had occurred. If his suspicions were correct, that the contents of the carpet-bag were of considerable value, there would be an added incentive for the little sutler to rescue them.

Perhaps Noel's decision to start toward the house which he saw in the distance was formed simply because it was the only place within sight which indicated the presence of people. His own plight now was such that he keenly felt the need of food and drink. No little streams were near him, and as for food there were no indications that the shallow soil itself had produced any of late.

His determination once fixed, Noel, with the carpet-bag firmly grasped in his hand, moved swiftly across the field toward the distant house.

Twice he stopped and looked back to see whether or not Levi had held to his course. Once he saw the little sutler, but he was moving steadily toward the fork in the road. The second time Noel looked he was unable to see the man anywhere. Concluding that Levi had sought the little building in which he himself had found shelter a short time before, Noel's efforts increased, and he ran swiftly toward the place he was seeking.

When Noel drew nearer the house he was aware of the aspect of neglect and even of dejection that was manifested by every living object within his sight. The two dogs, which came out of the building as soon as they were aware of his approach, were mangy and spiritless. Even the few chickens in the yard seemed to be affected by the general air of desolation. The fence was broken in many places, the gate was lying flat upon the ground, and as for paint or whitewash, it had been long since the house or barns had seen anything of that kind.

The young soldier halted a moment to make certain that no enemies were near the plantation. Satisfied that his fears for the time were without foundation, and still holding firmly to the carpet-bag which he had taken from the little sutler, Noel boldly approached the kitchen door. His purpose now was merely to obtain food, and then to push forward on his way to rejoin the army from which he had been separated so long.

Advancing boldly, he rapped loudly upon the door, which sagged like everything else about the place. All these things were forgotten, however, when he looked into the face of the person who answered his summons.

CHAPTER XXII

A MYSTERY

Before him stood the sister of Sairy Ann, whom he had heard the latter address as 'Liza Jane. That her sympathies were not with the side for which he was fighting Noel well knew, but his great fear as he saw the woman was that her husband might not be far away.

Noel recalled the contempt with which Sairy Ann had referred to her sister as one of the "secesh," and, in spite of his alarm at the discovery of her presence, he smiled as he recalled the sharp declaration of Sairy Ann that in her will she had left her shoestrings to her "beloved sister, 'Liza Jane."

Before he spoke Noel quickly decided that he would try to find out whether or not the woman recognized him. He did not believe that she had seen him when he had been in her sister's house, and yet it was impossible for him to determine whether his confidence was well founded or not.

To all appearances no man was near. What he had taken for the "big house" of a plantation when he had seen the place in the distance, he now saw was only a bare habitation, and the "plantation" had decreased to a few uncultivated and unfruitful acres. The appearance of the woman herself was not unlike that of her surroundings.

"Well," demanded Eliza Jane, "who be yo'? Whar do yo' all come from? What be yo' all doin' here?"

"Is your husband at home?" inquired Noel.

"No; he ain't to home. What do yo' want toe see him fo'?"

"Oh, I don't want to see him; I just wanted to know whether he was here or not. In fact I don't want to see anybody just now," continued Noel, smiling in such a way that the suspicions of the questioner were apparently relieved in part.

"Has Levi been here lately?" asked Noel abruptly.

"Maybe he has and maybe he hasn't," said the woman. "I can't keep track of Sam Tolliver's doin's. He has all kinds of men here. Who is Levi?"

"Why, he is a little sutler that used to be in the Yankee army and now is doing what he can for—"

"I reckon he's been here," spoke up the woman promptly. "What might yo' all want o' him?"

"I don't want anything of him just now," said Noel, his face again lighting up with the smile which

won him friends on every side. "What I want now is something to eat. I'm as hungry as a bear and almost as thirsty as I am hungry. Can you help me? I shan't be able to pay you—"

"Who said anything about payin'?" broke in the woman. "I ain't got much fo' toe eat, but I reckon pa't of what I has is fo' yo' all. Come in and set ye down at the kitchen table and I'll see what I can do fo' yo'."

Too hungry and thirsty to delay, Noel promptly accepted the invitation, and after he had washed his face and hands, he eagerly took his place at the table as the woman directed.

The young soldier was well aware that he was in the midst of perils. If the husband of his hostess should return or Levi should come, his position was not one to be envied. Not that he was afraid of either of the men in a personal encounter; but he was unarmed, while the man whom Eliza Jane had called Sam Tolliver was doubtless thoroughly armed and desperate. Besides, if he was playing the part which Noel suspected, and was obtaining information concerning the plans and movements of the Federal troops and reporting the knowledge to the leaders of the Confederates, he was well aware that the man was one to be feared.

Noel's meditations were interrupted by the approach of his hostess who placed some corn-bread and a small jug of molasses upon the table before him.

"'Tis about the best pore folks can have these days," she said. "I don't know how I happened to save that ther' molasses, but Sam never likes his co'n-bread unless he can po' molasses over it, and we had a barrel put in the cellar before the Yanks started all this trouble."

"I don't want to rob you," said Noel.

"Who said anything about yo' robbin' me? I reckon I haven't got much that would pay any robber toe take. If yo' all don't like that molasses, why, jest say so."

"I do like it," said Noel, "and I am grateful to you for giving it to me."

Without further delay the young soldier at once began his breakfast, all the time aware that the woman was watching him with an expression which gave evidence that her feeling was more than mere hospitality.

Finally, unable to resist her curiosity longer, she broke in: "What pa't of the No'th do yo' all come from?"

"How do you know I am from the North? What makes you think that?"

"Jest as soon as I heard yo' all talk," said the woman, "I knew yo' was a Yank. Strange how queer th' Yanks talk."

Noel laughed and did not give expression to his own feeling that the dialect that he had heard in the South had impressed him much the same way as his hostess had been impressed by the voices and words of the Northern soldiers.

"I reckon," she continued, "that yo' all are one of McClellan's men, though what yo' all are doin' over yere is more than I can understand. Yo' all are not looking fo' my man, Sam, are yo'?"

"I assure you that I am not," said Noel promptly. And the young soldier spoke honestly, for of all men Sam Tolliver was the one he least desired to see at the time.

"Run away from the army?" inquired the woman.

"No."

"Well, then, what are yo' all doin' out yere? I see yo' ain't got no coat, but in spite of the dirt I can see that yo' pants is the same as all th' Yankee soldiers wear."

"How far is the Northern army from here?" inquired Noel, without answering her question.

"That's more than I can say. Sometimes they say it's in one place and then again they say it's in 'nother. If Sam was here he could tell yo'. Sam knows more than any man I ever see."

Noel did not explain his suspicions that Sam's knowledge included some things which he knew and some things which he did not know.

"I don't suppose you see very much of him now," he said aloud.

"Not as much as I used toe," said the woman, "though befo' the war Sam used to go out with houn' dogs and be gone days at a time huntin' rabbits. He was a pow'ful good shot."

"He must have kept you pretty well supplied with rabbits," suggested Noel.

"Sometimes he did and sometimes he didn't," replied Eliza Jane. "Sometimes the pesky little varmints would get away befo' Sam had a chance toe fire. They seemed toe know that he was a dead-sure shot."

Noel's suspicions as to the prowess of the wonderful Sam once more were not voiced. He was content if only the woman would feed him and permit him to depart without further trouble.

"Sam says," continued the woman, whose readiness to talk was manifest, "that there isn't goin' toe be much left o' the Yanks pretty quick. He thinks there is goin' toe be some fightin' befo' long

and the Yanks will get whipped worse 'n they were at Manassas. I would jes' like toe see my sister, Sairy Ann. I wonder what she'll think of the secesh then. She can keep her old shoestrings if she wants 'em! You know she's my own sister and she's worth a lot of money. Befo' the war she had nigh on toe two hundred dollars. Think of Sairy Ann leaving me in her will nothin' but her shoestrings! I believe she joined the Yanks jest a purpose so she could turn ag'in her own relations. Shoestrings!" snapped the woman, whose recollection of her sister's generosity renewed her feeling of anger.

By this time Noel's hunger had been appeased in a measure and he was eager to be gone. Before he arose from his seat at the table he turned again to his hostess and said simply, "Do you know where the Northern army is?"

"I done tole yo'," she replied tartly, "that sometimes 'tis said toe be in one place and sometimes in another."

"Where is it reported to be now?"

"I can't say. Now, if Sam was home—"

Without waiting for further enlightenment as to the knowledge and ability of the missing Sam, Noel said, "Well, if you cannot tell me where the army is, you can tell me the road to take."

"No, I can't. Yo' all might take mos' any road an' the first thing yo' know yo' would run right into McClellan's troops, an' then ag'in yo' might run intoe General Lee's."

"At all events," said Noel, "I'm grateful to you for your kindness to me. You have taken me in, and though I was a stranger—"

"But I ain't been entertainin' no angel unawares," snapped the woman. "You don't look to me very much like a angel, with that mud on yo' pants. I am thinkin', too," she added, as she glanced out of the window, "that it might be well fo' yo' toe start right soon, that is if yo' 're goin' toe go."

"What's the trouble?" demanded Noel, leaping to his feet and running to the side of the woman, where he looked anxiously out of the window.

The statement of Eliza Jane was correct, for a small body of men was moving in an orderly manner up the road. Noel watched them with keen interest, and at first was unable to determine to which side in the conflict they belonged.

His interest changed to alarm when he saw the men abruptly halt, and then, at the command of their leader, turn into the yard leading directly to the house.

The woman by his side had not spoken, but when she exclaimed, "Them's Yanks," Noel also made the discovery at the same moment. The approaching men belonged to his own army, and in the thought of being once more among his friends and comrades the heart of the young soldier suddenly was lightened. Rushing to the door he ran across the yard to meet the boys in blue.

To his consternation as he drew near, he discovered that Dennis was among the number, and also that he was a prisoner. Just what this meant, Noel was unable to conjecture, but his interest in his comrade was speedily banished when to his amazement he saw Levi, the little sutler, also in the company, talking eagerly to the captain and pointing excitedly toward Noel as he spoke.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GUARD-HOUSE

The subject concerning which the little sutler and the captain were conversing soon became manifest to Noel. The officer turned sharply to him, and as he did so the young soldier was no longer able to discover the presence of Levi in the band.

"There's no use in your trying to get away now," exclaimed the officer.

"Get away!" responded Noel, astounded by the suggestion. "That's the last thing in the world I want to do! I have been looking for you or some of the boys in blue for more than—"

"That's a likely story!" interrupted the young captain. "You can explain that to the colonel after we are back in the lines."

"I'm perfectly willing to explain it to the colonel," declared Noel. "And I'll explain it to you now."

"There's no use in that. I'm afraid your explanations won't do you any good."

"What do you think I am?" demanded Noel angrily.

All the men in the band now were listening intently, and Noel was aware that he was under a cloud that might not easily be dispelled.

"I know what you are. You are a deserter."

In spite of the charge Noel laughed, but he was sobered instantly when he saw that every man before him firmly believed him to be what the officer had charged.

"I'm no deserter!" declared Noel hotly. "I happened to be outside the lines at Harper's Ferry and the Rebels took me. I have been doing my best to get to the army ever since."

"You look as if you had been trying," sneered the officer. "Come on. There's no use in talking any more. You come with us and we will turn you over to the colonel."

"Is that man a deserter, too?" inquired Noel as he pointed to Dennis.

"He is. 'Birds of a feather flock together,' I guess that's why we found two of you to-day. There must be a baker's dozen of them altogether. I don't know what will be done with you, but I can tell you one thing, you aren't going to lie on any bed of roses to-night after we get back."

"What makes you think I'm a deserter?" said Noel persistently.

"I don't 'think'; I know. We have absolute proof. Your name is Noel Curtis, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied the young soldier in surprise.

Instantly, however, he concluded that Levi must have revealed his name and the source of the officer's knowledge, therefore, was not unknown.

"We cannot stay here any longer," continued the officer emphatically. "Take your place in the ranks with your friend. Do you know who he is?"

"Indeed, I do!" said Noel, somewhat defiantly. "He and I both belong to the sharpshooters of the —th. You ask Colonel Crawford about us and he'll tell you all you want to know. 'Deserters'! Why, man, we 're no more deserters than you are. We have been trying ever since we left Harper's Ferry—"

"You don't seem to have made very good time even if you did try," sneered the officer again. "Your story sounds fine, but when the colonel listens to what you have to say and then compares your story with the one Levi has to tell, he may have something to say about it himself."

Apparently it was useless longer to try to persuade the captain. When Noel saw the expression on the face of Dennis and was aware that the young Irishman also had failed to plead his cause successfully, he was somewhat heavy-hearted.

"I'll go with you," he said quietly.

"That's mighty good of you," laughed the officer. "You might take your place in there with the other deserter and we'll try to see to it that you don't get very far away again. My advice to you is not to try any more of your tricks."

For a moment Noel looked steadily into the eyes of the sneering young officer. He was furiously angry, and withal was more seriously troubled than he was willing to acknowledge even to himself. Because the men under whom he had served were not now in the vicinity it would be difficult for him to find any one who could recognize him. His father had once met General Hooker, a fact which Mr. Curtis frequently enlarged upon in talks with his boys, but even if admittance could be had into the presence of the general, which was not at all probable, it would not identify the young soldier who was charged with deserting.

Obediently Noel advanced to take the place which had been assigned to him, and as he did so he glanced back at the house, and saw Eliza Jane standing in the doorway and watching with manifest interest the activities of the soldiers whom she professed to hate.

Noel was quite certain that he had a momentary glimpse of Levi standing behind the woman, but of this he could not be positive, as the face speedily vanished and did not again appear. At all events, the treacherous little sutler was not to accompany the men on their way back to camp and, fearful alike of his absence and presence, Noel was in dire straits when at last the command to advance was given and by the side of Dennis he obediently fell into step and marched with the men.

A sound like distant thunder caused Noel to look up hastily. He had heard the sound several times, but as the sky was clear and there were no thunder clouds anywhere to be seen, he had been somewhat puzzled by the rumbling in the distance.

"I guess the boys are up and at it ag'in," suggested Dennis in one of his hoarse whispers.

Startled by the suggestion, Noel glanced sharply at his companion and said, "Fighting?"

"That's what it sounds like."

"Silence in the ranks!" ordered the captain sharply, and both young soldiers became silent as the little band marched forward.

The threatening sound was occasionally repeated, and then after a half-hour or more had elapsed it died away and was not heard again. Ignorant of its cause, Noel's fears were not relieved. The suggestion of Dennis that the sounds came from cannon was undoubtedly correct, and in that event an engagement not far away was even now taking place.

Puzzled as well as alarmed, it was not difficult for the young soldier to decide that the two armies now must be near each other. He had no knowledge of the region through which he was moving, the only place of which he had heard in the vicinity being Frederick City. Just where this was situated, and what the sympathies of its inhabitants were, he did not know.

Noel was aware also that his companion was manifestly in very low spirits. Never before had he seen Dennis so cast down. The sight was depressing, and in spite of his efforts to convince himself that his fears were groundless Noel's confidence was rapidly vanishing as the men advanced.

How far away the main body was lying was another matter of which he was in ignorance.

Refreshed by the food that Eliza Jane had served him he was in better condition to endure a long march, if such a demand should be made upon him, than he had been at any time since he had escaped the attack at Harper's Ferry. It was the unconcealed depression of Dennis that influenced him now.

When he had first been charged with being a deserter he had looked upon the matter as a joke. He was fearful by this time, however, as has been said, that with his friends all in another division of the army or prisoners of the Confederates, it might be impossible for him to prove his identity, at least for a time.

That he was then a regularly enrolled sharpshooter, and in his small way had done faithful service in the Peninsula campaign, was true. But could he convince the captain that his record was clean?

There was no delay in the march. When two hours had elapsed, Noel was surprised to find that they were approaching a camp. This camp, however, was so manifestly only a temporary affair that he easily conjectured that the men practically were under marching orders. Perhaps they had come a considerable distance that very day.

Without waiting for any instructions the young captain directed that Noel and Dennis should be sent to the guard-tent, into which both were somewhat roughly thrust.

To Noel's surprise he found within the tent a half-dozen unfortunate men, and in a brief time, from the confessions which followed, he was aware that every one there was facing a charge of desertion. Indeed, one of the men was describing the treatment which was measured out to those who had deserted from the ranks.

"Most generally," he was saying, "if a man deserts, and is caught again, they make him serve out all the original time of his enlistment without any pay or allowance."

"For instance," suggested another man, "if a soldier has enlisted for four years and deserts at the end of six months, if they should catch him they would bring him back and make him serve three years and six months more without pay, would they?"

"That's it," said the first prisoner. "Sometimes they send the deserters off to Dry Tortugas."

"They might as well banish them from everywhere as to send them there."

"That's right."

"Where is this Dry Tortugas you're talking about?" inquired another.

"It's a group of islands that belong to the United States down near the entrance to the Gulf of Mexico. It's about one hundred and twenty miles southwest of Cape Sable."

"And where is Cape Sable?"

"That's the southern part of Florida. Where is your geography, man? These islands of the Dry Tortugas are very low and swampy, and they are covered with mangrove bushes."

"What are they?"

"Oh, they are something like the banana. Sometimes the deserters there are made to serve a term of years with ball and chain."

"What do you think is going to happen to us?"

"That's not easy to tell. There have been so many men trying to get away that I'm afraid that it will go hard with us."

Noel was listening intently to the conversation, but its effect upon him was not so marked as it was upon Dennis. The fear in the heart of the young Irishman was great, if it could be estimated by the expression which appeared upon his face.

CHAPTER XXIV

A FRUITLESS INTERVIEW

As conversation ceased for a time Noel and Dennis withdrew to a part of the tent where they were by themselves. The face of every man in the tent betrayed his feeling of anxiety. Even Noel, the youngest of the soldiers, was becoming alarmed at the outlook. Far removed from his own regiment, among those who were strangers to him and who knew nothing of his record or even of his presence in the army, the young soldier desperately tried to think of some one to whom he might appeal for aid.

If he had been left free to follow his own wishes he would immediately have sought the colonel and stated his case to that officer. As it was, however, he was not only prevented from seeing the leader, but also was in a position in which his statements would not be accepted without further proof. His anger at the little sutler, who had brought the trouble upon him, became keener, but his very helplessness tended only to increase his anxiety.

The anxiety of the young prisoners would have been much greater if they had known that at this very time Harper's Ferry was about to be taken and the soldiers of the garrison made prisoners. The two great divisions of the Southern army, as we know, had been planning to cross the mountains and reunite at Hagerstown or Boonesborough.

General Jackson, energetic and prompt, successfully carried out the task which had been assigned to him. Indeed, he was as prompt in his actions as was his great commander. On the first day of his advance he marched fourteen miles and that same night decided to cross the Potomac River. The following day he was only four miles west of Martinsburg, and in the morning when he moved upon the little place, to his surprise he found that the garrison already had abandoned the post.

The general quickly resumed his march and on the following day, after his troops had covered more than sixty miles in the four days, he came within sight of the Federal forces.

There was a slight delay now, but on the 13th of September General McLaws reached the hills known as Maryland Heights and at the same time General Walker, who was meeting with no resistance at all, occupied Loudon Heights above Harper's Ferry.

All that night General Jackson was awake, receiving frequent reports from both of his subordinates, and before the morning came he had made all his plans for a combined attack upon Harper's Ferry by all the divisions under his command.

Right at the angle formed by the junction of the Potomac and the Shenandoah Rivers lies Harper's Ferry. To the south were heights which were strongly held by the Union troops. It was in the afternoon of September 14, when at the command of General Jackson the Confederate batteries began to pour a heavy artillery fire upon the Union troops on the heights, and when night fell he had worked his army into such a position that it really commanded both flanks of the Bolivar Heights where these Union soldiers were stationed.

The following morning there was a brief interval of quiet and then General Jackson prepared to assault the heights. But before the attempt was made the Union garrison capitulated.

Not only were more than twelve thousand prisoners secured (for the garrisons which had been stationed at Winchester and at Martinsburg had retired previously to Harper's Ferry), but there also were seventy-three great guns and something like thirteen thousand small arms that became the prizes of the victors.

"Whist!" whispered Dennis, speaking for the first time since the boys had been consigned to the guard-tent. "'Tis a black day for us, I'm thinkin'. 'Tis a foine way, too, to treat the boys that niver thought of desartin'."

"We'll get out of this all right," said Noel, speaking with a confidence he was far from feeling. "They'll have to find out first whether or not we're really deserters before they punish us."

"If I had that little spalpeen, Levi, here, I'd get some satisfaction, anyway! What for do you suppose he told the captain that we were deserters?"

"There's fifty dollars reward offered to any one who will help in the return of a deserter; at least, that's what I have been told," said Noel.

"That explains it, thin," said Dennis confidently. "That explains it all. For fifty dollars that Levi would sell his mother and his whole family."

"Fifty dollars is a good deal of money, Dennis."

"So it is. So it is," acknowledged the young Irish soldier, "but it's a lot more than Levi is worth."

"How much more?"

"Just fifty dollars, to a cint."

The attempt to speak lightly of their troubles, however, was almost pathetic. Both boys were exceedingly anxious and their feelings were not relieved by the manifestly increasing fears of their companions.

It was now early in the afternoon and the guard as yet had not come with their food. Noel had decided that he would await the coming of this man and beg him to obtain permission for him to see the colonel. The boy felt that, if only he could be admitted to the presence of that officer, he

would be able to state some things which would lead to the prompt release both of himself and his companion.

There was a long interval, however, before a soldier came to bring their dinner, if hard-tack and water could be dignified by such a term. Neither Dennis nor Noel ate of the food thus provided. Not only were their appetites gone, but their anger had increased as they thought of the way in which they were being treated after their difficult and perilous services all through the campaign on the Peninsula.

The feeling of Dennis frequently found voice in his expressions of anger and disgust. Noel, however, was more controlled in his manner and seldom spoke except in reply to the questions of his comrade.

Noel eagerly had begged the soldier who had brought their dinner to report to the colonel that one of the men was innocent and most earnestly begged permission to explain to him how he had been falsely accused.

He was by no means confident that the soldier would bear his request to the colonel and still less was he hopeful that the colonel would grant him an interview.

He was, therefore, the more surprised when an hour later an orderly came to the tent and said, "Who is the man that asked to see the colonel?"

Instantly three of the inmates replied that they had made this request. To the surprise and consternation of Noel Curtis the orderly simply said, "There will be time for only one and he will have to be quick. I don't see why the colonel waits, anyway. The only place for a deserter is at the end of a rope that's tied so that his feet will be about three feet above the ground. That's the way one of the deserters was served this morning."

"What!" demanded Noel, his face turning pale in spite of his effort to be calm. "Do you really mean to say that a deserter was hanged to-day?"

"That's exactly what I mean to say," said the soldier lightly. "So many men have tried to break loose lately that it has been decided to use stricter measures. Perhaps they will be better to you, though, and instead of hanging you, they will just let you be shot. That's a better way. Leastwise, that's what I would want if I had to take my choice."

"I'm the one," said Noel hastily, "who sent word to the colonel asking for permission to see him."

"He isn't the man!" shouted the other three in unison; and each added, "I'm the man!"

"How will I ever know?" said the orderly as he gazed in confusion first at one prisoner and then at another.

"I'll tell you," suggested Noel. "Ask each man to tell how he sent his message, and the one that gives it right is to be the one who shall have a chance."

"Good!" said the orderly. "How did you send word?" he asked, turning to Noel as he spoke.

"Ask these other men first," suggested Noel. "I was the last one to put in a claim that I had sent word, so let me be the last one to explain how I sent it."

"All right. Now, go ahead, you tell how you sent your word," the orderly demanded as he looked keenly at the oldest of the trio.

"I don't just remember," stammered the soldier. "It seems to me I sent a letter."

"That's what I did, too," said the second. "I wrote a note and sent it by one of the boys."

"And how did you get word to him?" the orderly inquired as he turned to the third man.

"I give it up. I'll own up, too, that I didn't send any word at all, though I wanted to. Perhaps I took the wish for the deed."

"Now explain how you sent your message," said the soldier as he again turned to Noel.

"I sent it by the man who brought us our dinner to-day."

"That's right. You're the boy. You come with me."

Without any delay Noel was conducted by the orderly to the tent of the colonel, and soon was admitted.

He remained standing near the table upon which the officer was writing. The colonel did not even glance at his visitor for a time as he continued his task. At last, however, he looked up and said abruptly, "Well, what is it?"

"I have come to tell you," said Noel, somewhat embarrassed in spite of his determination to be self-controlled, "that I have been accused of being a deserter."

"Oh, you're the man who sent word by Dan Tague."

"I don't know the man's name," said Noel respectfully.

"Well, he brought your message. And you say you are not a deserter?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you cannot prove it?"

"I can and I will if you'll give me a little time."

"But I have positive information here," said the colonel, taking a paper from his pocket, "that you *are* a deserter. It states that you and another man named Dennis O'Hara both deserted at Harper's Ferry and were discovered not far from here this morning by Captain Blowers."

"I don't know the captain's name, Colonel," said Noel. "I did not desert at Harper's Ferry. I was outside the lines—"

"What were you doing outside the lines?" interrupted the colonel.

"I was foraging."

"Was any one with you?"

"Yes, sir. Dennis O'Hara."

"Ah, ha! Then the story is true that you both were outside the lines?"

"Yes, sir! that's true, although it isn't true that we deserted."

"To what regiment do you belong?"

"To the —th."

"To which company?"

Noel gave the number of his company.

"Who was your colonel?"

"Colonel Crawford."

"That's correct," said the officer. "All these things tally. I have a statement here that you and— your name is Noel Curtis, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I have a statement here that Noel Curtis and Dennis O'Hara, both belonging to Company — of the —th regiment deserted just before the attack on Harper's Ferry."

"Colonel, may I ask you who made that statement?"

"The sutler is the one who informed us."

"Did any one else tell you?"

"I think so. I haven't all the papers here and I have no time to go into details about this. Have you served long?"

"We enlisted last spring, my brother and I. We were both in the Peninsula campaign. My brother was sick and went home on a furlough."

"Where is your home?"

"In New York State, on the border of the St. Lawrence River. My brother and I were both sharpshooters."

The colonel smiled incredulously as he looked at the young soldier, but all he said in reply was, "I have nothing but your unsupported word for this, while I have the testimony of others against you. The fact that you were outside the lines at Harper's Ferry is against you, and it's just about as black when Captain Blowers reports that he was informed by reliable witnesses that you are a deserter and were seen several times skulking about the region. We are compelled to make examples of these men right now, or we shan't have anybody left to stand against Lee. You'll have to find better reasons for convincing me than you have given this afternoon."

"Will you make some investigations, Colonel?"

"No, not now. There is no time. Do you hear those guns?" he demanded as the roar of distant cannon was heard. "We may be ordered to advance at any time. Meanwhile I must give my men a good lesson, and I cannot do it in a better way than by making an example of such men as you."

"Don't you believe what I have told you?"

"I don't," said the colonel tartly. "Your story is just about as plausible as the one young Naylor told me before I had him hanged."

Noel's face became pale as he heard the statement lightly repeated by the colonel that some one had been hanged that very day for desertion. He was aware, however, from the attitude of the officer and the abrupt manner in which he turned again to his writing that there was little use in trying further to plead his cause. Turning about, Noel, still under the guard of the orderly, left the tent and was conducted back to the place where he had been confined with his companions.

CHAPTER XXV

THE EXECUTION

Depressed as Noel was by his recent interview with the colonel, he nevertheless was surprised when he approached the tent to find that the guards had been changed. The young soldier was not yet aware that when deserters were put under guard certain selected men were stationed with loaded muskets about the tent of those who had been condemned. Every two hours the guard was relieved.

Nor was any soldier ever compelled to stand guard over a deserter from his own company or regiment. Naturally it was very difficult for one comrade to be compelled to enforce so severe a rule as that which was applied to men who deserted, when the guilty comrade, perhaps, was a schoolmate, a relative, or even a brother. Besides, there was the continual fear of the officers that if such men were placed in charge there would naturally be the danger of a plot or a plan for the escape of those who were condemned. It was for this reason that Noel and Dennis, in any event, would have been assigned to a guard-tent in some company in which they were not likely to have any acquaintances, or even any friends among its members.

As soon as Noel entered the tent, Dennis was aware from the expression of his face that his mission had not been successful.

"What is it, lad?" he whispered as he drew the young soldier to one side.

Noel shook his head as he replied, "The colonel wouldn't believe a word."

"The colonel is as bad as that little spalpeen, the sutler!"

"I wouldn't mind it so much," said Noel, "if they would first really find out what the truth of the charge is, but it seems that they have taken the word of Levi, and now anything we can say doesn't seem to count for much against it."

"But they'll give us a trial. They'll hold a court-martial before anything is done," protested Dennis.

"I hope so," said Noel. "I don't know how it will be held, or how fair a show we'll have. It's the only square way, though, and if it's possible I am going to try to make an appeal. I have thought of sending for the chaplain. I think he might be able to do something for us if any man in the regiment can."

"Who is the chaplain?"

"I don't know who he is, but we'll be able to find that out later."

A low conversation which followed between the inmates of the tent revealed the fact that several of the men already had been tried and condemned by court-martial for desertion. Every one was bitter against those who had passed sentence upon him. Noel was surprised to find that the men were all claiming, what he himself had asserted as the cause for the mistake in his arrest, that some one had brought a false charge against them.

Not unnaturally both the young soldiers were depressed when darkness came on, and Noel was unable to sleep. Mortified by the charge as well as anxious, he lay with wide-open eyes staring in the dim light at the top of his tent and wondering what the following day would bring forth. The sound of guns in the distance, the restlessness that was manifested among the soldiers, the evident interest with which the colonel was reading some dispatches that he had received, as well as the severity with which the so-called deserters were being treated, all combined to make the young soldier confident that stirring action was speedily expected.

The following morning dawned wonderfully clear. When Dennis awoke the sun was shining brightly and the morning air was soft and still.

When the boys first arose they were startled at the presence of two ambulances in front of their tent. In each of these ambulances there was a rough coffin of wood. That these gruesome objects should have been brought to the place where the prisoners under the charge of desertion were confined at first had not been suggestive to Noel. He was soon aware, however, what the explanation was, and his face became pallid when he heard two of his companions ordered to advance and each man to take his seat on a coffin. A detail of soldiers had been assigned to draw these two ambulances and in solemn silence were awaiting the coming of the condemned men.

Noel Curtis shuddered when one of the prisoners, stepping lightly into the ambulance, seated himself upon the long box, and, rapping upon the wood, turned to some of the watching soldiers and flippantly said, "Boys, can't you put some shavings or something a little softer in my box? It looks as if it might be a pretty hard nest to rest in."

Instead of laughter or applause greeting his coarse remarks, the silence and disgust of the assembled soldiers seemed to react with solemn force upon the condemned man. At last the word was given and the cavalcade departed, leaving the remaining prisoners in the guard-tent dumb with the horror of the event.

Difficult as Noel Curtis had found it, in his previous experiences in the campaign on the Peninsula, to control his feelings when he found that he was actually shooting at a human being, that experience was by no means equal to the suffering which he now was undergoing.

There might be some justification for men making targets of one another when some great issue had been raised, but the young sharpshooter was now fully aware that war was no holiday game. His heart rebelled against many of the things which he saw, and yet the supreme issue of it all and the fact that war had been declared and accepted, and that there was no relief or release until one side or the other in the great conflict had won its victory, could not be ignored.

His thoughts now were centered upon the men who had been taken away from the tent for their execution. The presence of the detail implied that both men were to be shot, a method of execution not quite so revolting as that by hanging.

Some of the men under sentence in the guard-tent seemed to be dumb with fear, while others more stolidly expressed their complaints over the outcome of the court-martial which had been held for the two condemned men the preceding day.

Several times when shots were heard near the place where the division was in camp, Noel fancied that the report was that of the guns of the men who had been detailed to shoot the two deserters.

In his interview with the colonel the young soldier had been informed that desertion was becoming so frequent in the army at this time that orders for the sternest measures to break it up had been issued. No man now might expect any mercy who should flee from his post of duty.

Sometimes homesickness had been the cause of the men leaving their comrades. The thoughts or recollections of family and friends in the far-away North had produced a longing in the midst of the monotony of the camp work and of the army life that had been too strong for some to resist. Others, however, had become tired of the service when the novelty of the first days was gone and had fled simply to evade the difficulties and drudgery which are a part of the campaign of any army. Whatever the cause may have been, the fact could not be denied, and Noel Curtis understood fully the reasons for the sterner measures which now were being used. Perhaps they might be justified, he thought, although the unspeakable horror which had appeared in the expression on the faces of the two condemned men, when at last they were taken from the tent, was something which he was positive he never would be able to forget.

Somehow the morning passed. The guards were changed more frequently, and it was evident to the waiting men that they had not been forgotten in the midst of the excitement of the army in the knowledge that the enemy was not far distant.

"I thought you were going to send for the chaplain?" suggested Dennis to Noel when an hour or more had elapsed.

"So I am," said Noel promptly. "I had not forgotten it. It doesn't seem to me, though, that any man will be able to help us much, when the colonel is not willing even to hear what we have to say for ourselves. It seems to me that they ought to give us credit first of all for being honest. But his plan apparently is to believe a man guilty and then let him prove his innocence, if he is able."

"Niver you fear, lad. The chaplain will be able to help us out."

"We'll ask to see him, anyway," said Noel.

Accordingly, when the guard next was called, Noel succeeded in attracting the attention of the sergeant and made known his desire to receive a visit from the chaplain. Such a visit, he was aware, was permitted, and he was not without hope that the coming of this man might be of assistance to him and his hardly beset comrade.

Nearly an hour elapsed before the chaplain appeared. He was a young man, and in his face there appeared an expression of friendliness. Noel was drawn to him at once, even before he heard the somewhat abrupt and loud tones of his voice.

"What can I do for you?" asked the chaplain, not unkindly, as he entered the tent and was informed that Noel was the inmate who had requested the visit.

"I wanted to see you and tell you my story," said Noel quietly. "I am here under a false charge."

The interest of the chaplain instantly became less keen, as Noel discovered to his dismay.

"That's what every man says," responded the chaplain quietly.

"Well, it's true in my case. Did those poor fellows who were taken out this morning say they were not to blame?"

"They surely did," said the chaplain. "I wish I was able now to forget the horror of that scene. A hollow square was formed and the two coffins were placed in the open part. I shall never forget the moment when the adjutant-general stepped out into a position a little in front of the center of the square. He's a strong man and not much given to sentiment, but his voice trembled, although it was clear and strong, when in the presence of all the soldiers he read the finding of the court-martial."

"It must have been hard for the men who had been detailed," suggested Noel in a low voice.

"It was. You understand, however, that the guns used by the provost guard on occasions like that are always loaded by men who have been appointed for that special purpose. It never would do in the world to let the soldiers load their own guns."

"Why not?"

"Why, it's more than likely that they would use blank cartridges. No one wants to be responsible for the death of a man even if he is under sentence. That's the reason why the guns never are loaded by those who are to do the shooting. However, they all know that a blank cartridge has been placed in one of the guns, but they are never told which one it is. This plan makes every man believe that his gun contained the blank cartridge and that it was not his shot which killed the prisoner. While the adjutant-general was reading the finding of the court-martial the two men had to stand up. As soon as the officer had finished reading, both men were ordered to kneel on their coffins and a paper heart was pinned on the coat of each."

"What is a 'paper heart?'" asked Noel.

"Why, it's just a quarter of a sheet of ordinary notepaper. It's white, you know, and provides a mark for the men who are usually selected because they are good shots. One of these poor fellows, after he had been blind-folded, shouted, 'Boys, shoot me here,' as he put his hand upon his heart. 'Don't make any mistake, either!' I don't know whether the rest of the men heard the final order of the provost guard or not. His voice sounded to me as if it might have been a quarter of a mile away, it was so indistinct, but somehow he managed to call out—'Ready!' 'Aim!' 'Fire!'"

"Did they find the paper hearts?" inquired Noel, almost in a whisper.

"Yes, both the poor fellows fell forward on their faces and never breathed again."

Dennis O'Hara, who had been listening to the words of the chaplain, although he had not taken part in any of the conversation, could restrain his fears no longer.

"But, yer Riverence," he said, "why should they treat an innocent man like that? I'm tellin' ye that we're the most loyal boys in Little Mac's army. We're both sharpshooters and we both did our part down on the Peninsula. Now to be set up here and shot down like a couple of dogs! Why, instead of desartin', we just were doin' our best to escape from the Johnnies. 'Tis pretty hard! The colonel won't listen to a word! We can prove it to him, everything we say."

"Is that so?" inquired the chaplain, turning to Noel for confirmation.

"It is, sir," replied Noel.

"I don't know that anything can be done," said the chaplain. "It would be horrible to make such a mistake as that. You are entitled to a trial, anyway. Where is the man who made the charges against you?"

"I don't know," said Noel, "but I don't think he's here. My belief is that he is a spy, anyway, and part of the time is in the other army."

"Let me take the number of your company and regiment and I shall very gladly see what can be done. I don't want you to build your hopes too high, but you may rest assured that I shall do for you all that is in my power."

As soon as their visitor had jotted down in his notebook the few facts and figures which he asked for, he at once left the tent.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TEST

The sufferings of Noel and Dennis were increased by the feeling of suspense which followed the departure of the chaplain. Rumor had been busy in the camp and had reached even the men in the guard-house concerning the execution of the deserters and the penalty which now might be visited upon the men who were still under guard.

The feeling in the heart of Dennis was more one of anger than of alarm. With Noel, however, uncertainty and fear combined to make the young soldier much cast down. When Dennis occasionally tried to arouse his spirits, the effort of the young Irishman was so manifest that the effect sometimes was the exact reverse of what he had intended.

More and more Noel became alarmed as the hours passed. When the chaplain returned, as he did a few hours later, not even his cheery words could disguise the fact that as yet he had not received any information concerning the two young sharpshooters which would justify the colonel in making an exception of their cases.

When Noel awoke early the following morning he was surprised to find Dennis already busily engaged in writing a letter. And such a letter!

When Noel drew near, he saw that Dennis had taken sheets of foolscap, cutting them lengthwise

and had pasted the half-sheets together so that he had a continuous roll that must have been at least thirty feet in length.

"What are you doing?" demanded Noel in surprise.

"Shure, lad, and I'm writin' a letter."

"But to whom are you writing such a letter as that? Do you write on both sides of the paper? It would take more money than you have saved in a month to pay the postage. What are you trying to do, anyway, Dennis?"

"Shure, lad," said Dennis quietly, "I had a letter from me sister in which she says as how I have niglicted the family and niver write a word, so I'm goin' to sind her one letter that she can't say is too short. I'm gettin' near the end of it, though. If you'll wait a minute, lad, I'll read to you the last sintence."

Before Noel could protest Dennis began glibly, "And now, me dear Bridget, I can tell you that I am very happy because the assurance is dawning upon me mind that I am gettin' near the end of my paper. I have only to say that after I have been through the regular number of pitched-battles and hair-breadth escapes and have walked a few hundred miles and chased the Johnnies up and down the hills, perhaps by that time I shall have come really to the ind of this letter and be able to sign me name. If you still think that I'm not writin' long enough letters to you and to mother and the girls, I'll come home just as soon as our business at the front is finished, and from the appearances at the prisent time somethin' is going to happen before I shall have a chance to sign my name."

Dennis looked up from his paper and said, "There, lad, I'm not explainin' to thim what it is that may happen. It'll be time enough for thim to find out that when they have to. But what do you think of me epistle, anyway?"

"Very good."

"What there is of it," replied Dennis, smiling in spite of the fears which held him.

"It's a sort of last will I'm writin', too," added Dennis. "I niver have written a will whin I was goin' into battle the way some o' th' boys do, but whin I have to face the sintence of bein' shot as a desarter, which I niver was, and if the Saints will presarve me, I niver shall be—"

"I heard of a woman back here," broke in Noel, "who made a will and left her shoestrings to her sister."

"Bedad," said Dennis, "I niver thought o' that. 'Tis a good suggestion! I'm goin' to leave mine to Levi Kadoff. There ought to be enough of them to hang him with. Faith, and if I had him here now —"

The conversation of the two young soldiers was interrupted once more by the return of the chaplain. Still he had not received any information and the messenger, who he assured the boys had been dispatched, had not as yet returned.

In spite of the desire of the good man to encourage the boys, and his apparently unshaken confidence that in the end all would be well, the feeling of uncertainty and injustice still possessed both Noel and Dennis. They had been forgotten, they assured themselves, by the men who knew them best and at such a time as this could bring them aid. Of what good was it that they had been selected for positions of danger and had been among the sharpshooters, doing their part in holding back the enemy around Williamsburg and at Malvern Hill?

Even if the desire had been in the minds of the young soldiers, the opportunity to escape was gone. The guard was changed every hour now, and there was no question that the muskets of the marching soldiers were loaded. There was no blank cartridge here.

Noel's strong desire was to receive word from those who knew him. But just where that division of the army now was located he did not know, nor was he positive that there would be an opportunity in the presence of threatening events for an investigation to be made which would relieve him from the charge which was hanging over him.

A third visit from the chaplain still failed to bring the desired news. The depression of the boys was so manifest that the chaplain apparently made a special effort to cheer them.

"There was a little fellow back here near the colonel's tent who somehow made me think of you two boys. You have told me about the little sutler. Let me see, what did you say his name is?"

"Levi. Levi Kadoff," answered Noel.

"Well, this little fellow by the colonel's tent may be the same one. He was a little Jew, who had been shot. A ball had just grazed the tips of two of his fingers and he was howling so loudly that I think you might have heard him here, if you had listened."

"Was he yelling with pain?"

"Oh, no!" laughed the chaplain. "He was crying for a pension. In fact, he was screaming for one. Yes, he wanted two pensions. When I saw him he was holding up the two fingers that had been scratched, and was whining, 'Oh, Scheneral! Oh, Scheneral! how much pensions I gets for heem?'"

I dink I gets two pensions, maybe. One for each finger vat I lose.' A lot of the boys had gathered around the little fellow and they were having a good time as they listened to his complaints."

"Did he say where he was when he was shot?"

"No, I didn't hear anything about that."

"Maybe he is Levi. If he is, and you'll bring him here, Dennis and I soon can tell. Did he have shining black eyes?"

"Yes."

"And curly black hair?"

"Yes."

"And did he weigh about ninety pounds?"

"Not more than that."

"Well, that's Levi; that's Levi, all right," broke in Dennis. "Just bring him here to me, and I'll make him forgit his fingers and his pinsions."

"You may make him forget his fingers, but you never can make him forget his pensions," laughed the chaplain. "That seemed to be the chief thing in his mind. I think I'll try to find out if his name is Levi Kadoff."

"If it is," suggested Noel, "bring the fellow here, but don't tell him what you are bringing him for or that we are here."

"I'll see what I can do," said the chaplain, and a moment later he departed from the tent.

The fact that the kind-hearted officer had made three visits that day to the boys showed his interest in their welfare, but somehow Noel was unable to shake off his conviction that their friend was powerless to aid them. Accordingly he was surprised when an hour afterward the chaplain returned.

"No word yet," he said quietly, as he smiled and shook his head, "but I have some other good news for you. You understand there is nothing to back up the statement which you have made that you were sharpshooters in the Peninsula campaign. Personally, I believe what you tell me. I have at last secured permission for you both to go with an orderly and four men to a place outside the camp where you may show what skill you possess."

"That's the way to talk," spoke up Dennis quickly. His hope had now returned with full force. Indeed, as he afterward explained, he looked upon their discharge as already having been accomplished.

To Noel, however, the privilege was not one which was unmixed with anxiety. In his own skill, in his quiet way, he felt confident, but to make such skill a test of the truth of what he had spoken was another matter. A gun with which he was unfamiliar would be thrust into his hands and the very excitement of the test of itself might be sufficient to prevent him from doing himself full justice.

The chaplain, aware of what was passing in the mind of the young soldier, smiled encouragingly and did not speak.

Dennis, whose joy rapidly increased, had now arrived at a point where his enthusiasm seemed to pass all bounds.

"I'll tell you what to do, yer Riverence," he said to the chaplain. "Just put Noel and me tin yards apart. Let one of us fire and then the other and you'll find Noel's bullet lodged in the barrel of my gun and my bullet in his. That is, if we don't fire at the same time. If we should fire at the same minute the bullets would meet midway and you wouldn't find anything but two flattened pieces of lead."

"Do you often have an experience like that?" inquired the chaplain with a smile.

"Oh, yis, very oftin," answered Dennis solemnly. "Sometimes Noel says to me, 'Dennis, me boy, I'm a bit tired this mornin'. Just put a bullet in my gun, please'; and it's easier to shoot one in than it is to have to go through the whole process o' loadin'."

The chaplain said no more, but at once conducted the two young soldiers to the guard which was waiting outside the tent.

No word was spoken as the little band fell in, and at the word of the orderly started in the direction which to Noel's surprise led over the way by which he had come when he had been brought to the camp. As yet he had not been able to obtain from Dennis a connected story of the mishaps of the young Irish soldier, nor of the way by which he had avoided his enemies and at last had been taken as a deserter and confined in the guard-tent.

Noel somehow believed that not even Dennis would have been able to escape from the well in which he had been hidden unless he had received help from outside. But to all inquiries Dennis made evasive replies, and Noel was still unable to understand the mystery with which he had

shrouded his doings.

The little band now was on the borders of the place where the division was encamped. The entire region was unfamiliar to Noel, but as he glanced at a low house on the side of the road over which they were passing he was startled when he beheld Levi standing by the little cabin. The little sutler's fingers were bandaged, and as Noel recalled the story which the chaplain related to him and the pleadings of the little Jew for two pensions because he had received a wound in the tips of two fingers, he smiled in spite of the seriousness of the errand upon which he and his companion were going.

Suddenly Levi recognized the two young soldiers in the midst of the little band, and with a scream of rage instantly started toward them.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SHARPSHOOTERS

"I shall see dem hanged," screamed the little sutler; "I shall see dem hanged. Dey steals mine goots. Dey tip ofer mine tent. I shall see dem hanged."

Levi's voice, usually shrill, in his rage now became almost a childish treble. Even his wounded fingers were forgotten for the moment, and he was gesticulating with both hands.

"Shure," exclaimed Dennis, pretending to have difficulty in recognizing the little Jew, "shure, 'tis Levi! My friend, it's lucky for you it's not cold here. You talk so much wid your hands they might be frozen stiff."

Unmindful of the declaration, Levi became still more excited and his hands were moving still more rapidly.

"Yah, I shall see you hanged!" he shouted. "You shall no more steal mine goots! It shall cost you more nor you vould haf paid for mine goots, vot vas so cheap. You shall no more tip ofer mine tent!"

"Levi," said Dennis solemnly, "how many pinsions are you drawin'?"

"I draw no pensions yet," shrieked Levi.

"I understand," said Dennis, "that you are trying to draw two pinsions, one for the scratch you got on each finger."

"I did not scratch mine finger. I haf been shot mit der fingers. I shall draw more pensions, but I shall have mooch joy in seeing you hanged."

The soldiers, under whose charge the boys were being conducted to the place where they were to display their skill with the rifles, were laughing heartily at the impotent rage of the little sutler.

Dennis, in spite of his bantering, did not betray a trace of a smile on his face. As solemnly as if the errand upon which he was going was the sole purpose in his mind, he looked reprovingly at Levi as if his heart was moved by sorrow more than by anger.

"Are you coming with us, Levi?" he inquired.

"Yah, I vill surely come. I shall mit great pleasure see you hanged. You shall no more tip ofer—"

"I say, sergeant," said Dennis, "what are we to have for a target?"

"I don't know," replied the soldier good-naturedly. "We'll find something."

"If you haven't any target ready, I would like to suggest one."

"What is it?"

"I think it would be a great scheme to have this little sutler come along with us and stand him up at a distance of seventy-five yards. Noel, here, can clip one ear an' thin I'll take the other. Thin we'll cut off a part of his nose, though he will have enough left even thin to satisfy any two or three living men—"

A cry of rage, not unmingled with fear, from Levi, interrupted the young Irishman.

"I shall not be von target! you shall be von target!"

"Yes; but, Levi," suggested Dennis, "think what it will mean for you! If Noel cuts off one ear, there's another pinsion. That will be pinsion number three. If I trim your other ear, that will be pinsion number four, and if both of us cut down your nose a little that will be worth more yet. Why, Levi, you'd be a rich man before you would be able to get home. Of course, there may not be very much of you left, but what there is will have a good time to the end of your days."

Perhaps it was the expression which Levi discovered on the faces of the soldiers that caused him to halt abruptly. At all events, he stared for a moment at the young sharpshooters, and then, as

the soldiers laughed loudly, he turned quickly and without once glancing behind him ran from the place.

Even the chaplain had not been unmoved by the bantering of Dennis. He was proving himself a friend, indeed, to the two boys, and it had been largely through his solicitation that the opportunity had been gained for them to show whether or not their claims to have been sharpshooters in the Peninsula campaign were trustworthy.

"There comes that little spalpeen ag'in!" cried Dennis suddenly, as he looked back and saw that Levi was following discreetly in the distance. "'Tis well for him he stays behind us, though I think I could put me gun over me shoulder and shut both eyes and not miss the little rascal."

Noel had not taken any part in the badgering of Levi. He was far too anxious concerning his own safety. It is true he was not without hope that before he should be tried by the court-martial his statements concerning his enlistment and service would be obtained and verified and he would be free. But there was so much confusion in the army, and the presence of the enemy was so well known, that he understood an advance was to be speedily ordered, and at such a time it was inevitable that some mistakes should be made and certain duties should be neglected. The greatest danger was that in the midst of such confusion it would be impossible for him to free himself from the charge of desertion which had been brought against him.

At last a position outside the camp was gained, where the little company halted. An improvised target was made of an old and battered white hat which was found in a corner of the fence, whither it had been driven at some time by the wind. This hat was securely fastened to a stake which was driven into the ground at a distance of seventy-five yards from the place where the two young soldiers were stationed.

"Who shall shoot first?" inquired Dennis, who was carefully examining the rifle which had been placed in his hands.

"If you don't care, I should like to," said Noel.

"Go ahead, me lad," assented Dennis. "They won't have the execution until I'm ready to go along with ye."

Noel found the rifle which had been given him a trifle heavier than the one to which he had been accustomed. It was a little more difficult for him to raise it to his shoulder and gain the sight which he desired. However, after testing his gun several times and looking carefully to its loading, he abruptly raised the rifle to his shoulder and apparently without taking careful aim fired at the target in the distance.

"Hold on!" called Dennis, when some of the young soldiers started toward the hat. "Wait until I have my shot."

"If one of you hits the hat, we shall not be able to tell which one did it unless we examine it after each shot," suggested one of the soldiers.

"Just wait a minute," called Dennis, "and you'll see two holes. That will mean that both of us hit it."

Good-naturedly the men consented, and Dennis, whose methods were far different from those of his comrade, brought his gun to his shoulder and took long and careful aim before he fired.

In a moment a part of the little band started swiftly toward the hat, and their exclamations of surprise were loud and many when they discovered that Dennis's promise had been fulfilled. Two balls had pierced the crown of the hat within an inch of each other.

"Just put up that hat again," said Dennis. "And if you like, Noel and me will put some eyes and ears on the old hat until it will look as if some old man's face was peering out of it. This is just to show you that there wasn't any luck in it," he added, as he turned quickly to Noel, who was about to fire the second time.

Again the report of the rifle rang out, and then Dennis speedily followed the example of Noel. When the hat was examined two more holes were found in the crown each about an inch from the place which had marked the spot where the preceding bullets had hit the mark.

"I guess the boys are all right," said the orderly.

"Wait a minute," said Dennis. "We have made a square there now, haven't we?"

"Yes," replied the soldier.

"Well, with three more shots Noel and I will turn the square into a circle and cut out a round piece of the old hat itself."

The suggestion of the young Irishman was followed, and true to his word when three more shots had been fired by each it was discovered that a circle in the crown had been completed by the bullets.

"If the rest of your story is as true as the part which has to do with your shooting, then I guess both you boys are all right," said the orderly cordially. "We haven't a better shot in our regiment."

"Shure, you haven't," said Dennis heartily. "Didn't I tell you that Noel was the best shot in Little

Mac's army? Now, if you'll just say the word, sergeant, I would like to have him turn around and fire at the ground under the foot of that little Jew. He paid the piper and he ought to have his dance."

Every man in the group at once turned to look at Levi Kadoff, who in spite of his fears had been creeping nearer, and as the voice of Dennis had not been either low or soft, the effect was magical. Levi prepared to depart without further delay.

Turning to the orderly Dennis said, "Take my gun, sergeant, and just let me catch the little spalpeen, will ye?"

As the chaplain nodded assent in response to the implied question of the sergeant, Dennis laughingly started in swift pursuit of the sutler.

For one moment Levi stared blankly at the approaching young Irishman. Manifestly what he saw was not pleasing, for with a shriek he turned and at his utmost speed tried to escape from the place.

His efforts, however, availed little, for with his longer strides Dennis swiftly gained upon his victim, and in a brief time laid his heavy hand upon the shoulder of the screaming, shrieking Levi. Kicking and striking like an angry child, the sutler did his utmost to break the firm hold which his captor secured upon him. Apparently unmoved and unmindful, Dennis dragged his helpless prisoner back to the place where the soldiers were awaiting him.

"Now, then," said Dennis when he had rejoined his comrades, "we'll make the little spalpeen speak up. What for did you say that Noel and me was disarters?"

"Because you vas deserters!" shouted Levi. "You steals mine goots, you tips ofer mine tent, you—"

"There! there! That will do," said Dennis soothingly. "I'm thinkin' what you need is what Paddy gave the drum."

Helpless in the powerful grasp of Dennis, Levi still shrieked and protested. But in spite of all his efforts, Dennis, seating himself upon a stump, stretched Levi across his lap and soundly spanked him.

When this task had been completed, the howlings of Levi were redoubled. Apparently irritated by the failure of the little sutler to profit by his experience, Dennis lifted his victim from the ground and shook him. As he did so a paper fell to the ground from Levi's pockets, at the sight of which the excitement of the little sutler instantly increased.

"And what's that?" said Dennis as he roughly pushed Levi from him and picked up the paper, which he discovered was an envelope containing a letter.

"It was not for you," screamed Levi. "It vas mine! It vas mine! You steals mine goots. You tips ofer mine tent, but you shall not haf mine letter. It vas from mine moder."

"Wait a minute and I'll see whether it's from your mither or from General Lee," said Dennis tauntingly, as he drew forth the paper from the envelope.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PRESIDENT'S ACTION

An expression of surprise appeared upon the face of Dennis which quickly changed to one of consternation. Every one in the little band was silent, watching the young Irishman. What at first had been looked upon simply as a rough and not altogether good-natured joke, now seemed to be taking upon itself certain other phases that interested every one present. Even Levi was speechless in his rage. Several times he made as if he was about to flee from the spot, but every time he came back, either fascinated by the action of Dennis, or eager to secure the paper which the young Irishman was holding in his hand.

"Here, sergeant," said Dennis at last, "I think 'tis likely this is for you."

"What is it?" replied the officer as he advanced.

"It looks as if it might be mighty important. 'Tis my opinion that the little spalpeen has been seein' some things he ought not to see and is reportin' what no Johnnie ought to know. Just look at that, will ye!" and Dennis placed the tip of his huge forefinger upon some figures which were written upon the paper.

Taking the sheet from Dennis's hand the sergeant looked keenly at it, and in a moment it was seen that he was as startled and alarmed as had been the young Irish soldier.

Turning quickly about, he saw that Levi manifestly was aware of what was going on in the mind of the officer and was stealthily working toward the woods in the distance.

"Stop that fellow!" ordered the sergeant. "Don't let him get away, not for a minute!"

"Shall we try to catch him?" inquired Noel.

"No, there will be men enough without you. You go after him," he added, turning to some of the others in the band.

Instantly obeying the command a half-dozen men started in swift pursuit of the little sutler, who now was running at his utmost speed. The pursuit was not long continued, however, for just before Levi gained the refuge of the woods he stumbled and fell to the ground. Before he could rise his pursuers were upon him, and in spite of the efforts of the biting, kicking, striking, howling little sutler he was picked up bodily and carried back to the place where the other members of the band were awaiting their return.

"I suspect," said Dennis, as he tauntingly grinned at the helpless prisoner, "that the little spalpeen has some other papers somewhere about him. Maybe he has put them in the heel of his boot. 'Tis my opinion that he ought to be searched from head to feet."

"We'll attend to that," said the officer, as he thrust into his pocket the letter which Dennis had secured and at once gave the word to return to the camp.

It was manifest to Noel that the test which had been made of the skill of himself and Dennis, had been a source of deep satisfaction to the chaplain, who now was advancing by his side. Naturally the officer did not make any comment, but his face was beaming, and it was plain that he was almost as pleased as were the boys themselves.

When the party arrived at the guard-tent, and Dennis was free to express his opinions once more, he was not slow to embrace the opportunity.

"'Tis no use at all, at all," he said, "in kapin' Noel and mesilf here. Think of a little spalpeen like Levi Kadoff comin' into the camp and gettin' all he wants to find out and goin' back with it among the Johnnies!"

"That's what he was doing," said Noel. "I wondered what Levi could have to do with Sairy Ann's brother-in-law. He made no bones of the fact that he was a spy, but I never suspected Levi of doing anything of the kind from his own wish. We knew he would sell anything he possessed, whether it was information or clothes, but I never believed that he would go back and forth between the armies and carry news from one to the other."

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the little imp had been bringing information here, too."

"Of course he has!" said Noel. "He got paid at both ends of the journey and he wasn't very slow to make much of the chance. I wonder how much he had."

"He hasn't had as much as he will get!" said Dennis positively. "Just listen to that, will ye!"

The roar of great guns in the distance again was distinctly heard, and so threatening was the sound that it did not seem possible to the startled listeners that the men who were engaged in the combat could be far away.

"Listen to that!" repeated Dennis. "That means that we're goin' to be busy just as soon as they take us out of this guard-house."

"I think I would rather be there than here," said Noel, "although I confess that ever since Malvern Hill I have not been eager to go into the sharpshooters' pit."

"You'll be in no sharpshooters' pit here. They don't know enough to count you for what you're worth. If we're fortunate enough iver to get back to the —th, where we belong, there we'll pass for just exactly what we are. The most I want here is just to get out of the guard-tent. I think I can take care of the rest of it mesilf."

The conversation of the young soldiers continued in spite of the repeated sounds of the distant firing. Two hours or more had elapsed, and still no word was brought them, nor had the chaplain returned. Eagerly the boys had talked over the possibilities of Levi being a spy, Dennis firmly contending that there was not "spunk enough in the little spalpeen to do anything for himself." Noel, however, claimed that the former sutler was not without a form of courage of his own.

"There comes the chaplain," said Dennis, after a few minutes more had elapsed. "From the look of him I think he has got something he would like to say to us."

Nor was the young Irishman disappointed. When the chaplain entered the tent his face was beaming and his satisfaction over what he was about to say was so manifest that every one of the inmates was confident good news of some kind had been brought.

"We have just heard from Washington!" said the chaplain eagerly. "We sent a message to President Lincoln informing him just what had been done here,—the number of deserters, who had been hanged, and who had been shot, and how many were on hand, and asked what we should do next."

"Did you tell him about us?" broke in Dennis.

"Yes, we told him about you and the others, too."

"Well, what word did you get? Why don't you out with it, yer Riverence?"

The kind-hearted chaplain laughed and said, "I was just about to say, when you interrupted me, that after we had sent our message to Washington we did not expect to receive word in reply so soon. But the message has just come that the President has received our communication and—"

"The Saints preserve us!" broke in Dennis. "Won't you please tell us what's happened?"

"That's what I am telling you," continued the chaplain. "If you wouldn't interrupt me so frequently you would find out what I have come to say."

"Well, tell us, then!" said Dennis. And although every inmate was silent, the face of every one gave evidence of the eagerness with which he was waiting for the visitor's word.

"We have just received our message," began the chaplain once more, "and I confess that I have a feeling toward the President such as I never cherished before."

"But what did he say?" broke in Dennis.

"Be silent and I'll explain," said the chaplain. "We were not looking for an answer for several hours yet, but to our surprise the messenger has returned and has brought us word that President Lincoln has decided to—"

As the chaplain paused again, Dennis impatiently broke in, "For the love of the Saints in heaven tell us what he has decided to do! I can't stand much more o' this. It isn't the spache we want. It's to know what the Prisident said."

"He has decided to pardon every one of you."

A shout went up from the guard-tent. In their enthusiasm several were for leaving the place at once.

"Hold on," warned the chaplain. "I have no right to let you go. I was permitted to come and bring you the word. You will have to wait until orders come from the colonel before you will be free. It won't hurt you very much to wait a little while because you know you will not have to stay long. It's a great message and I'm glad I am the one to bring it to you. Are you pleased, both of you?"

"In course I'm pleased," said Dennis.

"And how is it with you, Noel?" asked the chaplain keenly as he turned to the other young soldier.

"I didn't want any 'pardon'," declared Noel quietly. "I haven't done anything for which I ought to be pardoned. I have been charged with being a deserter, by a man whose word was taken instead of ours, and, too, he is now said to be a spy. I don't feel like taking a pardon because I haven't done anything which deserves a pardon."

"Don't be foolish, lad," suggested the chaplain. "This matter will all be straightened out. If there is time you may be sent back to the division where you belong, but if there isn't and we have to advance now, there will be plenty of work for you to do before many hours have passed. Don't stand on a little thing like that."

"I don't want to," said Noel, "and perhaps I shall not stay in the guard-tent. I am not made of the stuff of which they used to make martyrs. I appreciate what President Lincoln intended to do, but at the same time I don't want to stay here as one who has been pardoned for something which he never did."

"That will be fixed all right," said the chaplain soothingly. "And just as soon as you receive word from the colonel that you are free, I hope you won't stay here any longer."

"Niver a bit will we stay here any longer," declared Dennis. "You watch me, if you want to! You'll see some dust, but not me nor me feet when I get word to lave this tent."

True to the promise of the chaplain, word was brought in a brief time that a message from the President had been received and that all the deserters had been pardoned on the condition that every man should resume his place in the army and do his duty.

Nor had they been long released before another and more startling experience came. The heavy firing of cannon in the distance had now increased, and it was manifest throughout the camp that preparations for an advance were rapidly being made.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE BATTLE

Noel Curtis was standing in front of the colonel's tent listening to the word of that anxious officer, who in response to the request of the chaplain was showing the young soldiers the pardon received from the President.

It was in Noel's mind to inquire concerning the fate of Levi. His own feeling about accepting the pardon which had been offered was unchanged, but in company with Dennis he had gone to the colonel's tent at the suggestion of the chaplain, and with interest was listening to the words of

that officer.

Suddenly the clatter of hoofs was heard, and as the men turned sharply about to ascertain the cause, they saw an orderly approaching with the information that the division at once was to advance.

Hastily positions were assigned to Dennis and Noel, who were to report with one of the New York regiments, and the marching orders speedily put other thoughts from their minds.

Almost before the men realized what had taken place, they found themselves marching along a dusty road with the air cool and the confidence of the leaders manifest in many ways that appealed to the boys in blue. Naturally there were rumors of the battle which was expected, but so many similar reports had been current that some of their power to arouse the interest of the army was gone.

Several times the excitement of the advancing troops was increased by the sight of little squads of rebel prisoners that had been taken by the cavalry skirmishing in advance.

One picture appealed with special force to Noel. The horses of the officers of late had fared poorly at the hands of the quartermaster, and now, as the troops halted near a barn, Noel saw several of the half-starved animals within the building enjoying the first oats they had received for days.

As Noel glanced behind him he saw a long column of troops winding around the summit of the mountain over which he and his comrades had just passed. The muskets of the men were glistening in the sunlight. The lines resembled a mighty coil of armed men extending far down the side of the mountain. Indeed, far beyond the place where Noel was standing, it could be seen, and was lost to view only by the winding of the road in the distance. It was the finest view of a marching army he had ever had.

In the loft of the barn were a score or more of Confederates. Some of these unfortunate men were sick, others had been wounded in the recent cavalry skirmishes, and had been left by their comrades as they had fallen back before the advance of the boys in blue. A guard or two was attending to their wants, but every man as he peered out of the windows seemed wan and pale, and the marks of the many privations and the heavy fatigue to which they had been exposed were plain on every side.

The farmer, near whose barn the line had halted, explained that a large body of the rebels had passed his house not long before. The men were ill-clothed and seemed to be in want, he explained. The report of the man, however, did not deceive any of the Yankee soldiers. They were well aware that the "Johnnies" were fierce fighters, and in spite of their scarcity of food and clothing were standing up bravely and persistently. It was Dennis one time who made the remark that "these men might not be inspired of God, but they certainly were possessed of the devil."

Neither of the young soldiers dreamed of the fearful events which were soon to follow. Whether prejudice or ignorance, truth or falsehood, were behind the struggle, there was no question about the tremendous earnestness of both armies.

The Union army, when it entered the little city of Frederick, was surprised as well as delighted at the ovation which it received from many of the people. Shouts and songs and cheers greeted their arrival and continued during their march through the city.

In the doorways of some of the houses girls and young women stood with pails of clear, sparkling water. Many of these enthusiastic girls held glasses in their extended hands inviting the thirsty and dust-covered soldiers to drink.

It was Dennis who said glibly to Noel, when a halt was made beyond the limits of the town, "I can't for the life of me tell what made me so thirsty this afternoon. I think I must have stopped a dozen times for a drink of water."

"Yes, I noticed it," said Noel demurely. "I have never seen anything like this dust. No, and it doesn't seem as if the dust was all that was new, either."

"There's one thing I don't see, though," said Dennis.

"What's that?"

"I don't see any of the big bugs, like the others, standing in the doorways and giving water to our boys as they passed."

"I'm not surprised at that. I don't suppose the people who have money or own slaves can be very enthusiastic over our coming down here to set their slaves free or destroy their property."

"Indade, and I niver once thought o' that," said Dennis.

Near sunset the army halted again, and, wearied by their long march, many of the men flung themselves upon the dust-covered grass by the roadside or underneath the projecting branches of some large trees, and sought a short respite from their labors.

The day was Sunday the 14th of September, 1862. To Noel, his thoughts at such a time naturally recalled the manner in which the day was spent in his far-away home. There all was peace and quiet. About him now, however, were armed men and officers riding past and cannon were being

dragged up the dusty road. All these things presented a striking contrast to his vision of peace and quiet.

Noel saw that every one of his comrades was sleeping, not even being aroused by the passing of a body of cavalry or by the stamping of the horses of their officers.

He, too, was about to place his knapsack upon the ground for a pillow when, glancing up the road, to his surprise he saw Dennis running toward him, dragging in his hand a large fallen branch of a tree.

That the young Irishman was about to perpetrate some prank Noel was convinced. Dennis was simply irrepressible. The fatigues of the day, or the thoughts of the battle, in which it was commonly believed the army was about to enter, did not seem to check the exuberant spirits of Dennis O'Hara.

As he approached the place where Noel was seated, suddenly the young Irishman swiftly entered the road and, stamping loudly upon the ground, began to run close to the place where many of the soldiers were sleeping.

Adding to the confusion, Dennis began to shout, "Whoa! Whoa, there! Whoa!" He did not check his own advance, however, and running swiftly, dragged the branch he was carrying over the bodies and faces of some of the sleeping men.

Instantly every one of the soldiers who had felt the touch of the sweeping branch or heard the sound of Dennis's voice sat erect, and then, convinced that a body of horsemen were trampling upon them, quickly leaped to their feet and ran from the place. In spite of their weariness a shout greeted the prank of Dennis and caused the young Irishman to laugh loudly.

"They make me think," said Dennis, "of the old sport who took his gun and traveled two days over the brakes and ferns and up and down the mountains huntin' for a bear. Just at the close of the second day he found the footprints of the old fellow and pretty soon afterward he heard a growl from a rocky ledge that was too close to him for comfort. The man stopped and scratched his head, and turnin' to his brother, who was close behind him, he said, 'Now, look out! These tracks are gettin' a little fresh! I believe I don't want any bear after all, so I'll go back home.' It's a lot of brave men we have been hearin' talk about comin' up to the front and drivin' the Johnnies through every gap in these mountains, but whin a poor harmless boy comes along and shakes a branch of a tree over thim, they are all so scared they don't even stop to find out whether 'tis a Yank or a Reb that's chasin' thim."

It was not long before the march was resumed. The turnpike over which the soldiers moved was broad and smooth, and as the men passed through the rolling country its contrast with that which they had seen in their campaign in the Peninsula was marked by every one.

At the next halt the chaplain, who had proved himself such a warm friend to both of the young soldiers, approached the place where the two boys were seated by the roadside.

"That's General Burnside and his staff over yonder," he explained to Noel. "General Hooker is to lead our division."

"There's going to be a battle surely, isn't there?" inquired Noel.

"I think there is no doubt of it," replied the chaplain, "and I have a strange feeling about this engagement. I know I shall be shot."

"Nonsense!" protested Noel.

"But I shall be. I was shot when I was on the Peninsula almost the first chance I got. I was only slightly wounded there, but this time I shall be killed. I know it."

"Shure, 'tis only a foolish notion that's got into your head," protested Dennis. "Get rid of it, yer Riverence! Cheer up! Shure, you'll come out all right."

"I wish I might think so. If I fall I shall fall doing my duty."

"Niver a doubt about that. Every man of us knows that you won't be shot in the back."

The kind-hearted man soon passed on, but the impression he had made upon the mind of Noel was one which the boy was unable to shake off. He, too, was fearful of the coming contest. He was doing his utmost to repress the feeling and was striving hard to hold himself to the line which had been mapped out for him.

Apparently there were no rebel battalions now threatening the passage. No cannon warned the advancing army from the narrow entrance between the hills which they were approaching. These hills on either side of the pass now were crowned with the glories of the approaching sunset. A few clouds were seen in the sky, and in the distance occasional quick rushes of smoke-puffs arose just above the trees and then the sight was followed by the sound of a heavy boom.

Far to the left there were other puffs, and as they were faintly seen in the distance there were quick responses from the Union artillery.

"Shure," muttered Dennis, "the artillery is beyond and with the help of the infantry they'll drive the Johnnies out o' the way."

A rattle of musketry only faintly heard confirmed the words of the young Irish soldier.

Above them and beyond were forests. Unseen foes without doubt were lurking within the shelter of the great trees. Even now the opposing armies might be preparing to rush madly against each other. Somehow the smooth white turnpike began to lose its peaceful aspect in the eyes of Noel Curtis.

The toiling soldiers, climbing a steep ascent now, were soon aware that between them and the main ascent of South Mountain was an extensive valley.

There were sharp calls from the officers, the line of march was changed from the open turnpike, and the men approached a cornfield upon the hillside.

In the midst of the passage through the field suddenly the great guns of the Confederates opened upon the line with solid shot. Down the hill dashed the army, then swiftly crossing the little valley, began the steady climb of the mountain-side.

A few yards from the base of the mountain was a fence. Below the fence the ground was cleared, while above it the face of the mountain was covered with rocks and trees.

Steadily and surely the boys in blue advanced, and when they had arrived within fifty yards of the place they were seeking, a rapid fire of musketry was opened upon them by the Confederates, who lay concealed behind the fence.

Bullets whistled about their ears. There were shouts and calls from the leaders and loud and prolonged cheers from their willing followers. With a wild shout the men dashed forward. Indeed, their course was almost upward, so steep was the ascent. Volley after volley was poured in upon them, but as yet the brave boys did not heed them and still rushed madly forward.

The Confederates, astonished by the recklessness and the apparent disregard of their bullets, began to give way. Successfully the advancing soldiers gained the fence and then instantly sprang over it. To their surprise, however, their enemies re-formed among the rocks and renewed the fight with unshaken determination.

It was at this time that the chaplain, who had shown his friendship for the boys, accompanied by a young lieutenant, was just springing over the fence when a bullet struck him and he fell back upon the ground.

CHAPTER XXX

THE FOLLOWING DAY

To the horror of the young soldier he saw that the chaplain was lifeless. The expression upon the face of the dead man was as peaceful as that of one who has fallen asleep in his own home.

The strange declaration which the chaplain had made, that he expected to fall in the fight into which he was about to enter, came back to Noel now and strongly impressed him. It was strange, he thought, that such a premonition should have taken hold upon a man who was so sane and thoughtful.

There was little time, however, for consideration of matters of sentiment. The struggle was not yet ended, and it was plain that the Confederates desperately were holding their ground.

Meanwhile the success which had been won stimulated the Union soldiers, and with shouts and shots they again pressed forward.

Not far before him Noel saw a line of men in gray who were loading and firing steadily, and soon afterward he saw the line begin to waver. Directly in front of his own regiment the men gave way, and several companies from the right pressed forward at one side and in this manner became separated from the regiment itself.

Looking hastily behind him, Noel saw that he and his companions were thirty or forty paces in advance of the main line and now were within twenty or thirty steps of the Confederate soldiers who were on their left. It was plain, too, that the Southern soldiers were not as yet aware of the approaching force.

In a brief time, however, they were dropping as grain falls before a sickle. As Noel watched them a great wave of pity rushed over him. He saw that they were falling by scores.

Suddenly, at the extreme end of the line, he saw a tall man in gray hastily loading his gun. There was no regular command to fire now, and instantly, hardly daring to hope that he was in time, Noel raised his gun to his shoulder and fired. He saw the soldier pitch forward and fall into a crevice between the rocks.

Unable to stop, step by step Noel Curtis with his companions pushed up the steep side of the mountain. It was a marvelous sight to see the determination of the boys in blue and the steady resistance which their opponents offered in such a place.

There was a halt made soon, and then Noel ran swiftly to the place where he had seen the man, at whom he had fired, fall.

When the young soldier arrived at the crevice, he saw the wounded soldier sitting erect, and somehow a feeling of gratitude swept over Noel's heart that the man was not dead.

"Are you wounded?" he inquired hastily, as he stopped a moment.

Without speaking the man mournfully nodded his head in reply. Noel saw that there was a wound in the neck of the soldier and also one in his arm.

"Same bullet," said the Confederate briefly. "I was just ramming a bullet home and had my arm reaching out this way." As he spoke, he rose to his feet and Noel was delighted to find that he was able to walk.

"You understand," said Noel, "that you are a prisoner?"

"I reckon I do," said the Confederate.

"I'll find some one to take charge of you and take you to the rear, where you will be out of danger and where the surgeon can attend to you."

"That's good of you. I reckon you don't know who I am."

The man's face was discolored by smoke and powder, but as he spoke Noel instantly recognized him as the husband of Sairy Ann's sister.

There was no time, however, for further conversation, and as soon as he saw that the prisoner had been placed in charge of one of the boys, Noel threw himself upon the ground and crawled back among the rocks to a position where he was about fifteen paces in advance of his company. His intention now was to act as a sharpshooter, although he had received no orders to that effect.

Cocking his gun he rose abruptly from his position behind the rock, and there, directly in front of him and not ten paces away, he beheld a grim rebel just bringing his gun to aim. His dark eyes seemed to flash fire as they scowled fiercely from beneath the broad brim of a large, ugly hat. He was aiming directly at the young soldier, too, and there was slight chance of escape.

It was impossible for Noel to take careful aim under such circumstances. More quickly than ever before he brought his gun to his shoulder and blazed away, as it seemed to him almost at random, and then dropped instantly behind the protecting rock. He hardly dared to breathe during the excitement. Every part of a second seemed like a long time. There was a fear that the fire of the rebel would reach him before he could gain the protection of the rock, and, just as Noel dropped, the bullet tipped the edge of the stone above his head.

Step by step the enemy now were retiring. Without venturing from the position of safety which he had found, Noel waited until his line advanced.

The enemy still were falling back and the boys in blue still pressed steadily forward. More prisoners were secured and were regularly being conducted to the rear. The bodies of those who had fallen and the wounded were lying among the rocks.

For the first time Noel became aware that night was almost at an end. A feeling of indescribable weariness swept over him. Even the bodies of the fallen men, some of which were within ten feet of the place where he was standing, seemed to be vague and unreal.

The hospitals had been established about halfway down the hill. To them the wounded wherever they were found were still being carried. Gradually the sound of the guns off to the left had been dying away. Ricketts's men were holding the fence, while the regiment in the midst of which Noel Curtis and Dennis had been struggling was resting on its arms. No mounted orderlies could be found, as they had all been withdrawn to other parts of the army. Such horses as were left were secured by being tied to the trees.

After the necessary dispositions for the night had been made, the men, wrapped in their cloaks or having donned their heavier coats, in utter weariness threw themselves upon the ground.

Noel was far from feeling easy in his mind. With his comrades he was fearful that the enemy might make a night attack and was afraid of what might follow in the darkness and confusion.

The issue of the battle on the left was still uncertain and with this feeling of uneasiness still prevalent throughout the regiment the men sought to rest.

In spite of the excitement through which they had passed and in spite of the near-by presence of the dead, not many minutes elapsed before everything was forgotten and every man was asleep.

Awake early the following morning, Noel was surprised to find that his nearest sleeping comrade was Dennis. He had seen but little of the young Irishman thus far in the engagement and, indeed, he had seldom thought of his friend.

Discovering that Dennis was awake, Noel in a low voice said to him, "Dennis, how is it that any of us are left alive?"

"Indade, 'tis a wonder," answered Dennis.

"Not so great, after all," remarked another soldier who was lying near the boys and had heard Noel's question. "The waste of ammunition in a battle is something marvelous. Our colonel told us that it takes almost a man's weight in lead to kill one soldier."

"It doesn't seem so," said Noel thoughtfully, "when you hear the volleys shrieking above your head or flying close to your ears, and when men, all excited and anxious, are trying to fire just as fast as they are able. It doesn't seem possible that so many can come alive out of a fight."

"You must not forget," said the soldier, "that most of the men make no pretense at taking aim."

"And I guess," suggested Dennis, "that most of them don't. They act like they were aiming at nothin' and trying to hit it."

"It is strange," said Noel, "how still the wounded men were. I didn't hear many who were groaning or making any cry. The most of them were either limping off, or being carried to the rear, or they were lying down where they fell, all quiet and still."

"The worst shock I got," suggested Dennis, "was when I stumbled over the bodies of some of the dead boys. That shook my nerves and made me tremble like a leaf."

By this time the army was stirring once more and preparations for the approaching day were being made. The great matter for rejoicing with Noel and Dennis was the fact that there had been no attack by the enemy during the preceding night.

Hasty arrangements were made for the burial of the dead. The young soldier was marvelously impressed by the peaceful expression of most of the upturned faces which he saw.

The first question among the living, however, was, "Where is the enemy?"

In front of the fence which General Ricketts's troops were still holding there was no sign of the Confederates. Indeed, a strange, almost unnatural, silence rested over the entire region. The little stretch between the men and the cornfield seemed to be entirely free from the presence of soldiers. There was a slight mist resting on the mountain-side and through this could be dimly seen the fallen dead of the enemy.

With others Noel had been designated to care for the bodies of his comrades who had been killed in the fight. As he was moving about among the rocks and stumps, suddenly, a slight, boyish form without any weapon and clad in the customary gray uniform of the Confederate soldiers, was seen by Noel kneeling over the body of a fallen man. To his inexpressible horror Noel saw that the man was using his knife and trying to remove a ring from the finger of the dead soldier.

Startled by the approach of Noel, the man suddenly looked up, and, instantly rising, said quickly, "Don't shoot! Don't shoot me! I was your prisoner."

The feeling of rage and disgust which had seized upon Noel's heart quickly gave way when to his surprise he saw that the approaching man was none other than the little sutler, Levi Kadoff.

CHAPTER XXXI

ANTIETAM

Startled as Noel Curtis was by the sight of the little sutler, whom he believed to be true to neither side, his feeling speedily gave way to a great rush of anger. Almost unmindful of what he was doing, Noel rushed upon Levi and seizing him by his shoulders shook the little sutler until both he and his prisoner were nearly breathless.

"You rascal! You little villain! What do you mean by this work? It's bad enough for you to be false to the living, but when you try to rob the dead! I'll try to see that you receive your just deserts!" shouted Noel.

"But—"

"Don't talk!" roared Noel, again shaking his prisoner. "What are you doing here? How did you come?"

Unmindful of the fact that Noel had forbidden his prisoner to speak, and yet at the same time had told him he must explain his presence and actions on the battle-field, he glared into the face of the breathless and frightened Levi in a manner that increased the latter's terror.

"I'll tell you," shouted Noel, "what I'm going to do with you! I'm going to turn you over to the boys after I have told them that you were trying to cut the ring from the finger of one of the dead soldiers! I'll leave you with them. I guess they'll know what to do with you."

"Oh, do not! Please do not! Dey will be very angry mit me."

"Do you really think so? Maybe so. At all events, I'll turn you over and we'll see what comes."

Securing a firmer hold upon the shoulder of his little prisoner, Noel speedily withdrew from the place and soon placed the miscreant in the hands of the proper authorities.

Only a partial explanation was given by the young soldier, and as he hastened back to his place on the field his anger against the little sutler soon was in a measure forgotten in the task that still confronted him.

The division in which Noel and Dennis were fighting was on the flank of the Union army. Because of this fact they were not among the first to start in pursuit of the Confederates that Monday morning. It was necessary for the greater part of the army to cross South Mountain by one road, the turnpike.

Noel, who had been greatly depressed by the struggle through which he had gone the preceding day, was surprised to find that Dennis and many of his comrades were highly elated. They had succeeded in driving the rebels from the strong position which they had held on South Mountain, and up its steep and rocky sides they had forced their way against fearful odds. If they could do so well where rocks and steep ascents had to be overcome, what might they not be able to do in the valley beyond the mountain?

A spirit of confidence at this time, indeed, of overconfidence, as later events proved, possessed the soldiers. They had jumped to the conclusion already that General Lee had been beaten, and therefore the overwhelming defeats suffered by the Union army at Bull Run now were balanced.

The rejoicing which had come to the army was modified somewhat when the men found that no response was given to their inquiry as to the whereabouts of the enemy. They were not aware that the Confederates at this time had withdrawn beyond South Mountain.

In the task in which Noel had been engaged he had discovered how closely together the desperate charges had brought the men of the two contending armies. There were cases where not more than ten paces intervened between the fence and the place where some of the poor fellows were lying in their last sleep.

In the presence of such scenes the bitterness of the struggle was almost forgotten, and the eyes of the dead, that were staring upward so fixedly in the gray of the morning hour, neither expressed nor aroused any emotion except sorrow.

Unaware of the cause, the young soldier's feelings were somewhat numb from the tension of the preceding hours. Even Levi now was almost forgotten and the husband of Sairy Ann's sister had faded from his thoughts.

At last about ten o'clock, after many protests and much growling on the part of the boys in blue over what they were pleased to call an unnecessary delay, orders were received for the division to be marched toward Boonesborough.

Noel and Dennis were marching side by side, but the most of their comrades were unknown.

As the men advanced, Noel saw that the turnpike far ahead was filled with troops, artillery and wagons that were hurrying up the pass. The fields on either side were white with army wagons and far down the road that extended toward Frederick City a moving, living, advancing tide of men was pushing steadily forward.

Suddenly some one broke into a song, and in a moment "Maryland, My Maryland" was taken up by the soldiers, although the words frequently changed to suit the feelings of the different singers. Even Noel, heavy-hearted as he was, smiled as he heard Dennis shouting, "My Maryland," with special emphasis upon the "My."

"Dennis, what are you doing?" inquired Noel as the line halted for a brief respite.

"Singin', sor."

"You call that singing, do you?"

"Shure, and what is it, if it isn't singin'?"

"That's what I wanted to find out. That was the reason why I asked my question. If you call it singing, why, I suppose I shall have to take your word for it."

"'Tis a beautiful country," said Dennis as he surveyed the scene which extended far on either side. Fertile fields and a rolling plateau that terminated in the distant hills appeared doubly beautiful in the soft light of that September day.

At their next halt, which was at the home of a family that proved to be loyal to the Union cause, the good woman of the house brought forth all the food she possessed and divided it among the soldiers.

Laughingly she was telling some of the boys in blue of one of her own relatives who had been in her home two days before the battle of South Mountain. Apparently all that he feared was that the demoralized army of the North, which had been driven from the Peninsula and out of Virginia, could not now be induced to enter into a contest.

"We are going to wipe them out this time, once and for all," the man had said. "And then for Philadelphia and New York! These Yankees will find out for the first time what war means when we get into their country! As for Maryland, we'll lose the last man before we'll retreat."

Before day broke that morning this woman had been aroused by a band of half-starved and

weaponless men, clad in suits of ragged gray who stopped near her residence begging for food. A panic apparently had seized upon the men. She had heard one of these soldiers say that if he could only be taken prisoner he would be happy. In this crowd she had discovered the relative who confidently and positively had foretold the dire results of the coming battle for the Yankees.

"Why, John, is that you?" she had inquired. "I thought you were going to Philadelphia."

"It's no use talking about that, aunt," he replied foolishly. "We have been badly whipped, and I don't know where a single man or a single gun of my battery can be found to-day."

At this time a small body of men was seen approaching bearing a flag of truce. At its head rode a Confederate surgeon in a gray uniform which had been highly ornamented. On the end of a stick, which he held high, was a white handkerchief. The surgeon was accompanied by four soldiers carrying a blood-stained stretcher, while in charge of the little band was one of the boys in blue. Upon its arrival the leader requested to see the ranking official.

In response to his expressed wish the surgeon was taken to General Hooker and by him was granted permission to secure and bear off the body of one of the rebel colonels, who supposedly had fallen in the fight.

The long waiting by the division continued. Hunger as well as thirst now tormented the men. When the division at last moved forward, it was discovered that the advance then was to be to Keedysville, about six miles distant.

The little hamlet presented a strange appearance upon the arrival of the soldiers. The few stores and hotels were filled to overflowing with men clad in uniform. When night fell it seemed as if the train of wagons that steadily was moving past was almost unending. On the following day, when the men reached Keedysville, their progress was halted by a counter-current of cavalry and artillery moving to the right of what later proved to be a great battle-field.

At this time no one seemed to be positive as to just the position the enemy were occupying. Many of the boys in their enthusiasm believed that they had fled across the Potomac. Such opinions, however, were met by those who believed that the armies were on the eve of a desperate conflict.

When daylight came the following morning (Wednesday September 17, 1862), a frequent discharge of artillery, apparently about two miles to the right, soon gave place to a roar that was incessant, and then every one in the army knew that a battle already was beginning. The straggling little village was filled with orderlies and officers rushing hither and thither on various duties.

The division advanced until it was on the east side of the Antietam Creek. Beyond, were the enemy, flanked by the Potomac River. It seemed at first like an unfavorable position and one filled with deadly peril for the men in gray.

At this time Noel was not able to see any indication of a hidden force in the fields and woods opposite the position where his division had taken their stand. As yet, too, very few missiles had come as far as the place which he and his comrades were occupying. Ambulances could now be seen carrying off the more desperately wounded, or on their way back to the field for their new freights of agony.

The fighting seemed to be going on mostly on the right. The roar of the artillery and of the infantry became louder and more terrifying. As Noel advanced with his comrades he passed improvised hospitals sheltered in a little valley. Farmhouses and barns were all occupied now, and still the stretcher-bearers brought in from the front a constant and fresh addition of suffering men.

It was no time for faint-heartedness, however. Into the smoke and the din of battle, out of which the bleeding forms had come, Noel and Dennis must enter.

So many were the stragglers from the field that the cavalry was brought up and stationed on the Hagerstown Turnpike and with drawn sabers prevented the withdrawal of any more.

On his right Noel saw troops drawn up in line of battle. On his left were other troops in a grove near the road. To his surprise as they advanced he saw some of the troops apparently falling back. A cry passed through the ranks that General Hooker, who was in command of the division, had been wounded and that the right wing had been compelled to fall back. There were rumors also that the enemy far outnumbered the right wing and that there was great danger also for the left.

Beyond all that, Stonewall Jackson, a name that every Yankee soldier had come to respect, had sheltered his reserves behind some rocky ledges and had thrown up long lines of fence-rail breastworks.

A feeling of intense and bitter disappointment now took possession of the Union men. The division was sent ahead and drawn up in line of battle on both sides of the Hagerstown Turnpike. It seemed at that moment as if the Confederate soldiers were about to break through the army of the North and repeat the successes which they had won on the field of Bull Run.

One of the batteries in Noel's division had lost thirty-eight officers and men and twenty-eight horses. Two of his comrades had tried to appease their desperate feeling of hunger by a hoe-cake which they had taken from the haversack of a dead rebel soldier. One general in the division had

leaped forward in a critical moment and personally sighted the guns when the enemy was almost upon him. Another general, of a different division, had ordered his brigade to advance, but he himself had remained behind.

Apparently matters once more were moving well, but just as Dennis and Noel were pushing with their comrades into some woods, they found themselves with others confronted by fresh troops who instantly stopped them with volleys so terrible that a retreat was unavoidable. Neither Noel nor Dennis knew at this time that the battle of Antietam really was nearly over. As yet, to both boys there seemed to have been set only the first act of the tragedy.

On the left the din of battle had long been heard and out in front the cannon thundered, and every moment an attack was expected on the division where Noel and Dennis were.

The cavalry now rested upon the ground in long lines. Its ranks were somewhat broken and thin. Steadily in their rear, the various reserves were being stationed to aid in resisting the attack which was expected. The men of each brigade in turn were stacking their arms and then were lying down.

CHAPTER XXXII

CONCLUSION

Meanwhile the infantry, expecting the attack, rested on the ground in long lines. They were broken lines at the very best, and whenever Noel and Dennis glanced about them each felt a pang when he saw how many of the regiments, now gathered about the torn and bullet-riddled colors, were thin. At times, squads of men on the borders of the woods were seen, who were doubtless rebel pickets or persons who were curious, like some of the Yankee soldiers.

The captain walked down the lines in which Noel and Dennis were numbered. One of the men, holding up a large piece of pork on his sword, said, "Look here, captain! This is the allowance of pork for my men. I guess I shall have to eat it all, as I am the only one left."

At such a time many wild rumors have full swing. About four o'clock General McClellan, with his staff, rides along the lines and is greeted with great enthusiasm by his men. The report now is that the Union soldiers have been partly successful, the Confederates having been driven back, although they are still holding firmly the new position which they have taken.

An orderly stops for a word with Dennis and Noel. He shows a loaf of bread which he has obtained from a near-by farmhouse and a little piece of butter which he ingeniously has put in a hole cut in the loaf. All three, upon their comrade's invitation, sit down to enjoy the rare treat. The pleasure is increased by a cup of coffee, for the men now have been permitted to light fires by which to cook their rations. It looks very much as if the fighting for the day, at least, is ended.

Suddenly, about five o'clock, as abruptly as thunder is heard under a clear sky, a volley of shot and shell begins to strike or pass over and about the place where the men are gathered.

Before the officers are fairly able to mount their horses the thirty great guns, which have been waiting for this opportunity for hours, begin to sweep the woods and the cornfield with their deluge of shot and shell. The roar of the artillery soon is almost deafening. The thirty guns are being discharged one by one as rapidly as the men are able to load them. The little hillside actually shakes under the force of the shots. Dennis murmurs, "Faith! 'Tis not only the hill, but the whole planet that's shaking like a leaf now."

It is supposed that the fire of the rebels is introductory to an attack by their infantry. In view of this fact, the troops in front are notified to hold themselves in readiness, while those in the rear are called upon to fall in and to take their arms and advance closely to the crest of the hill and also to lie down there and to be ready for action at any moment. All the reserves are prepared and ready. The wagons now are drawn by galloping horses. The right wing is believed to be ready.

General Meade, who, after the wounding of General Hooker, succeeds to the command of the corps, rides up to the crest of the hill on which Noel and Dennis are stationed and studies the position of the batteries of the enemy almost as coolly as if he were at a review. Already there is a bullet-hole in his cap, but the quietness of the great leader in the midst of the confusion and peril is most impressive. He gives his orders to make ready for the storm.

Noel saw shots strike so close to his own comrades as to fling the dust over them. The heavy cannonading by the enemy continues for at least ten minutes, and it is with a great feeling of relief that Noel, as he glances about him, is unable to see that any men had been killed or wounded. Such artillery firing at long range is terrific to hear, but is seldom fatal.

Later it was learned from some of the prisoners that General Jackson's plan had been to attack with his infantry after the heavy cannonading. Just before sunset was his favorite hour for such an order. The tremendous fire of the Union batteries, however, plainly showed him how well prepared his enemies were, and in a brief time his cannon ceased to play and the Union guns also became silent.

Fighting by the right wing ceased when the cannonading stopped. When the officers were convinced that there had been an end to the immediate attempt, they permitted every man to bring from the neighboring farms bundles of straw with which beds were made, and, still in line of battle, all soon stretched themselves upon these improvised resting-places.

The weary gunners tried to make themselves comfortable alongside their guns. The pickets were standing, with every sense alert, close to the rebel lines, and prepared to give instant warning should a night attack by the Confederates be attempted. Not an officer removed even his sword. The horses, tied to near-by fences, were standing saddled and ready for instant use.

There was no tree above the heads of Noel and Dennis, and as they lay looking up at the stars, for the first time in twenty-four hours the tired boys were able to think of the experiences they had undergone. Within a space of four square miles two hundred thousand men were lying. Some of them were stiff and stark and with sightless eyes were looking up into the pitying heavens. Some were stretched on beds in the improvised hospitals or lying wounded and bleeding under the trees. Others, even in their sleep, are clasping the deadly weapons with which on the morrow they are expecting to renew the awful scenes of the day.

It was long before daylight the following morning when the little hill upon which Noel and Dennis had been sleeping was alive with men preparing their simple breakfasts and getting ready for the fighting of the coming day.

Somehow there was a feeling of confidence among the soldiers that the day was to be marked with victory. They now had every opportunity to drive the rebels into the Potomac, or perhaps to capture their entire army.

But when sunrise came and hour after hour passed without any orders to advance, gradually a feeling of bitter disappointment took possession of the men. The day dragged on, the batteries still remained in position, and the infantry still were resting on their arms. In the position held by the enemy silence brooded throughout the day. It was nearly dark when orders came to be ready for action at sunrise on the morrow.

With such information the growlers ceased their complaints and there was a common hope that the enemy would not escape.

"'Tis only put off one day," said Dennis. "We'll either drive the Johnnies into the Potomac or carry them with us back to Washington."

The following day the men were aroused at three o'clock in the morning. There was no haste in the orders or in the movements of the men. They ate their breakfast and drank their coffee, and then all made ready for battle. But again the hours passed and there was no decisive action. At eight o'clock it was learned that the Confederates had slipped away and had withdrawn across the Potomac, and doubtless by this time were safely in Virginia.

The river into which the Union soldiers had believed they would drive their enemies had now become the best defense of Lee's army. The battles of South Mountain and Antietam were robbed of any decisive significance. It is true that Lee's advance into the North was blocked, and that he was compelled to turn back to defend the rebel capital, but he had shown his skill by successfully evading his foes and at the same time protecting his army as he withdrew.

The following day was Sunday. All signs of storms had passed, and not since the Union army had departed from Washington had finer marching weather been seen.

The sound of distant cannonading once more revived the hope that General McClellan would follow the retiring Confederates and that another battle would soon be fought. The roar of the great guns, however, was merely a harmless artillery duel across the river.

The hours of the long day dragged on and still the men were not ordered to advance. The lack of action was beginning to tell strongly upon their spirits and there were many complaints to be heard now on every side over the meaningless, or at least the misunderstood, delay.

It was eleven o'clock at night before it was reported that orders had been received for the corps to advance to Harper's Ferry the following day. But the following day came and went, and in turn was followed by other days until a month had passed and the advance still was postponed. The battle-field was still the scene of the camp, and it was only after some time had elapsed that the soldiers understood that they had been left to help guard the Potomac so that General Lee might not attempt to cross it again and try another battle.

The terrible excitement and fatigue, the privations and the continued strain upon the nerves and feelings of the men were followed now by a calm and monotony that was most deadly. Once a week each soldier was on guard, taking his turn as a sentinel. Part of each day was given to drill. At sunset there was a brief parade, but the rest of the day was largely his own.

Because of such conditions the soldiers were exposed to many temptations, and in spite of the sorrow which followed the battle of Antietam there were many pranks being played.

One day, which was unusually warm, Noel had been sent to the quartermaster's office on some errand for his colonel. He was standing behind an improvised desk and consequently was partly hidden from the sight of any one who entered.

In the midst of his task of copying certain details which his colonel desired he was startled by the

sound of a familiar voice. Without being seen he peered from behind his stand and saw that Levi Kadoff had entered the quartermaster's place.

"Ish dis de quartermaster's office?" inquired the sutler timidly.

"It is," replied the officer in charge.

"Vell, Mr. Quartermaster, I chust got mine sutler's goots and I vant von place vere I shall sell dose dings to the soldiers. You gife me von place, hey?"

"It is against my orders, sir, to give permission to anybody to put up tents or houses for the sale of goods of any kind."

"I vill not take mooch room for dese leedle dings," pleaded Levi.

"Come back and see me later."

"Ven I comes?"

"About an hour."

"Vell, captain, I comes chust as you say. I send you some of mine fine goots."

True to his word not long afterwards a basket, with a card attached bearing the following address, was received,—

*"To Captain Vesh,
Qr. Maister."*

Levi had departed before Noel had been able to make any protest. Confident that he would return, however, he explained to Captain Vesh what Levi's former dealings had been and also expressed his surprise that the little sutler had not been hanged.

In a brief time Levi again appeared, and as he entered the office he said smilingly, "Vell, captain, I comes to look at dot leedle place vot ve spoke about dis morning."

"What place, sir?"

"Vy, dot place vat you give me to put up von leedle dent vere I sells mine goots."

"You must be mistaken, sir. I told you distinctly that we did not grant any such privileges."

"Vell, now, captain, look at dis. Dis morning I sends you von fine basket which costs me sixteen dollars mit de wholesale."

"You thought you would bribe me, did you?" replied the quartermaster in apparent anger. "Now, I'll give you two hours to get out of this place."

As Levi turned to depart, he obtained a glimpse of Noel's face and fled precipitately.

Nor was Noel afterward able to learn the fate of the little sutler. Apparently each side had taken him as friendly to itself, or else the crafty little trader had persuaded both that the charges against him were untrue. Whether he was hanged as a spy, shot as a deserter, or was able to continue his nefarious trading with the soldiers was a mystery which never was made clear.

The husband of Sairy Ann's sister, Noel later discovered among the wounded prisoners, and in return for the help which he himself had received, he was able in many ways to aid the wounded man.

The continually repeated question among the men, "When do we move?" was not answered until a month or more had elapsed. Then, when the army was moved to Harper's Ferry, Noel there learned that his brother Frank had been among the prisoners taken by the Confederates and sent to Libby Prison. Disheartening as the information was, it did not decrease the interest of Noel when late in October his division was ordered to move toward Virginia.

It was plain now that the campaign was to be transferred again to the State in which Noel and Frank had had their first experiences in the army. The enthusiasm of Dennis was great, and in his loudest tones he joined in the song of the men when they departed from Harper's Ferry,—

"John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave,
His soul is marching on."

The boys in blue were somewhat cast down, but not despairing. The Union army had outnumbered the Confederates nearly two to one in the recent battle of Antietam.

Among the subordinate Union commanders there had been great energy displayed, but no one was able to escape the conclusion that on the Federal side the battle had been badly fought and many great opportunities had been neglected.

In the battle of Antietam the Federals had lost more than twelve thousand men and their enemies ninety-five hundred. All the troops of the latter had been engaged in the fight, but only about two thirds of the Union army had seriously entered into the struggle.

In a measure the friends of the Union were content that Lee's threatening invasion of the North

had been thwarted. The great Southern general had fought a pitched battle, but had not destroyed his foe. There was no escape, however, from the conclusion that Lee's plan to invade the North had failed, and that the struggle now was to return to Virginia soil, a fact which Dennis O'Hara and Noel Curtis and his brother soon were to learn.

THE END

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