

The Star of Gettysburg

A Story of Southern High Tide

Book 5

by Joseph A. Altsheler



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Principal Characters in *The Star of Gettysburg*

Harry Kenton, A Lad Who Fights on the Southern Side

Colonel Leonidas Talbot, Commander of the
Invincibles, a Southern Regiment

Lieutenant Colonel Hector St. Hilaire, Second
in Command of the Invincibles

Philip Sheburne, A Southern Cavalry Leader

James Bertrand, A Messenger from the South &
Captain in the Invincibles

William J. Shepard, A Northern Spy

Arthur St. Clair, A Native of Charleston, Friend of Harry Kenton

Tom Langdon, Friend of Harry Kenton

George Dalton, Friend of Harry Kenton

Historical Characters in *The Star of Gettysburg*

Robert E. Lee, Southern Commander

Stonewall Jackson, Southern General

George B. McClellan, Northern General

Ambrose B. Burnside, Northern General

Turner Ashby, Southern Cavalry Leader

J. E. B. Stuart, Southern Cavalry Leader

Joseph Hooker, Northern General

Richard S. Ewell, Southern General

Jubal Early, Southern General

George J. Meade, Northern General

James Longstreet, Southern General

Important Battles in *The Star of Gettysburg*

Perryville

Chancellorsville

Gettysburg

Fredericksburg

Stone River

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Chapter 1

The Head of the Family

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

He showed skill and rapidity in his homely task. A shining needle darted in and out of the gray cloth, and the rent that had seemed hopeless was being closed up with neatness and precision. No one derided¹ him because he was engaged upon a task that was usually performed by women. The Army of Northern Virginia did its own sewing.

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

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

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

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

1 Laughed at or mocked

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

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

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

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

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

“I’ve no doubt it fell out that way. The same report comes from other sources.”

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

“It is fine,” said Harry, stirring comfortably on the leaves and

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

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

Harry glanced up and down the stream, and he smiled at the homely sight. Thousands of soldiers were washing their ragged clothes in the little river, and the equally ragged clothes of many others were drying on the banks or on the bushes. The sun-browned lads who skylarked² along the shores or in the water, playing pranks on one another, bore little resemblance to those who had charged so fiercely and so often into the mouths of the cannons at Antietam.

Harry marvelled at them and at himself. It seemed scarcely possible that human nature could rush to such violent extremes within so short a space. But youth conquered all. There was very little gloom in this great army, which disported³ itself in the water or in the shade. Thousands of wounded, still pale but with returning strength, lay on the October leaves and looked forward to the day when they could join their comrades in either games or war.

Harry himself had suffered for a while from a great exhaustion. He had been terribly anxious, too, about his father, but a letter written just after the battle of Perryville, and coming

2 Played

3 Diverted or amused

through with unusual promptness by the way of Chattanooga and Richmond, had arrived the day before, informing him of Colonel Kenton's safety. In this letter his father had spoken of his meeting with Dick Mason in his home at Pendleton, and that also contributed to his new lightness of heart. Dick was not a brother, but he stood in the place of one, and it was good to hear again of him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

by Lieutenant-General Thomas Jonathan Jackson, better known to his enemy as ‘Stonewall’ Jackson and to his men as ‘Old Jack.’”

“Splendid!” exclaimed Harry. “Never was a promotion better earned!”

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

“About you, Tom?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Take them mice out o’ your mouth! I know they’re there, ‘cause I see their tails stickin’ out!”

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

“Be sure you keep your gloves on or the sun’ll tan your hands!”

“Oh, my, it’s mother’s pretty boy, goin’ to see his best girl!”

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

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

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

Caswell passed out of sight, pursued by derisive⁴ comment, but his place was taken quickly by a new victim. A man of middle age, in civilian clothes, came riding slowly on a fat horse. He was a well-known sutler⁵ named Williams, and the wild lads did not confine themselves to hidden cries but rushed from the shelter of trees and bushes and held up worn articles of apparel, shouting in his ears:

4 Contemptuous mocking

5 A person who sells provisions to soldiers

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

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

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

But Williams was not disconcerted⁶. He was used to such badinage⁷. He spread out his large hands soothingly.

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

His answers pleased them, and someone called for three cheers for Williams, which were given with a will, and he rode on, unmolested⁸. But in a few minutes another and greater roar arose. Now it was swelling, continuous, and there was in it no note whatever of criticism or derision. It was made up wholly of affection and admiration, and it rolled in unceasing volume along the stream and through the forest.

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

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

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

6 Upset or perturbed

7 Teasing

8 Without interference

bushes.

“Thunderation! What a change!” exclaimed St. Clair, as he ran with the others to the edge of the road to see Stonewall Jackson, the victor of twenty battles, go past in a uniform that at first had almost disguised him from his amazed soldiers. Little Sorrel was galloping. He had learned to do so whenever the soldiers cheered his rider. Applause always embarrassed Jackson, and Little Sorrel, of his own volition⁹, now obeyed his wish to get by it as soon as possible.

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

“Never! Never!” they exclaimed in chorus.

Stonewall Jackson wore a magnificent uniform of the richest gray, with heavy gold lace wherever gold lace could be used, and massive epaulets¹⁰ of gold. A thick gold cord tied in a bow in front surrounded the fine gray hat, and never did a famous general look more embarrassed as the faithful horse took him along at an easy gallop.

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

Harry saw clearly that his commander was terribly abashed¹¹. Blushes showed through the tan of his cheeks, and the soldiers, who would not have dared to disobey a single word of his on the battlefield, now ran joyously among the woods and bushes. Harry and the other three lads, being on Jackson’s staff, hid discreetly behind the log as he passed, but they heard the thunder of the cheering following him down the road.

9 The act of choosing

10 Ornamental shoulder pieces on military uniforms

11 Ashamed or embarrassed

It was in truth a most singular scene. These were citizen soldiers, welded into a terrible machine by battle after battle and the genius of a great leader, but with their youth they retained their personality and independence. Affection was strongly mingled with their admiration for Jackson. He was the head of the family, and they felt free to cheer their usually dingy¹² hero as he rode abroad in his magnificent new uniform.

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

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

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

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

The major and Harry took the uniform and, smoothing it carefully, laid it away. But Harry, having further leave of absence, went forth and answered many questions. Was the general going to wear that uniform all the time? Would he ride into battle clothed in it? When Harry replied that, in his belief, he would never put it on again, the young soldiers seemed to feel

12 Shabby

a kind of relief. The head of the family was not going to be too splendid for them. Yet the event had heightened their spirits, already high, and they began to sing a favorite song:

*“Come, stack arms, men, pile on the rails;
Stir up the camp fires bright.
No matter if the canteen fails,
We’ll make a roaring night.
Here Shenandoah brawls along,
There lofty Blue Ridge echoes strong
To swell the brigade’s rousing song
Of Stonewall Jackson’s way.”*

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

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

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

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

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

“You’ll notice that Old Jack never appeared while we were singing,” said Langdon. “I don’t see why a man should be so

modest and bashful. Why, if I'd done half what he's done I'd ride the tallest horse in the country; I'd have one of those Mexican saddles of yellow leather studded with large golden-headed nails; the stirrups would be of gold and the bridle bit would be gold, too. I'd have twelve uniforms all covered with gold lace, and I'd have hats with gold-colored ostrich plumes waving in them after the fashion of Jeb Stuart."

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

"No, George; what was it?"

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

"And so he would," exclaimed Harry with emphasis. The great affection and admiration in which his troops held Jackson began to be tinged¹³ with something that bordered upon superstition. They regarded his mental powers, his intuition, judgment, and quickness as something almost supernatural. His great flanking movement at the Second Manassas and his arrival in time to save the army at Antietam inspired them with awe for a man who could do such things. They had long since ceased to grumble when he undertook one of his tremendous marches, and they never asked why they were sent to do a thing—they had absolute confidence in the one who sent them to do it.

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

13 To impart a trace of

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

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

“Drop the long-winded preliminaries¹⁴, then, and go ahead.”

“I got him on a wild ride with the general, General Stuart. What a cavalryman! I don’t believe there was ever such another glutton¹⁵ for adventure and battle. General Lee wasn’t just sure what McClellan meant to do, and he ordered General Stuart to pick his men and go see.

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

“What did you do after you got the remounts¹⁶?” asked Harry.

“We began to curve then. We passed a town called Gettysburg, and we went squarely behind the Union army.

14 Leading up to the main part or matter

15 A person with a great desire or capacity for something

16 A fresh supply of horses

It is mountainous and hilly country up there but good and cultivated beautifully. Those Pennsylvania Germans, Harry, beat us all hollow at farming. I'm beginning to think that slaves are not worth owning. They ruin our land."

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

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

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

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

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

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

newspaper and I'll read to you part of a poem that's reprinted in it. The poem is called 'Tardy George.' Listen:

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

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

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

"He might have got smashed himself."

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

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

Harry carefully folded up the paper and put it back in his

pocket. The contrast between these verses and the song that he had just heard ten thousand men sing, as they whirled around Stonewall Jackson's headquarters, impressed him deeply.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As they were returning to their place on the creek bank an orderly came for Harry, and he was summoned to the tent of Jackson. It was a large tent spread in the shade of an old oak, and Harry found that Captain Sherburne had already preceded him there. All signs of splendor were hidden completely. Jackson once more wore with ease his dingy old gray clothes, but the skin of his brow was drawn into a tiny knot in the center, as if he were concentrating thought with his utmost power.

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

“Thanks, sir,” said Harry.

“When can you start?”

“Within five minutes.”

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

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

had run forward in amazement:

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

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

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

“At a village called Berlin, so our spies say. You know McClellan really has some high qualities. We found a heavy reconnoitering¹⁷ force of cavalry not far in our front two or three days ago, and we did not know what it meant, but General Jackson now has an idea that McClellan wanted to find out whether we were near enough to the Potomac to dispute his passage.”

“We are not.”

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

“And we’ll see.”

“We surely will.”

17 Observing the enemy to gain information