

The Sword of Antietam

A Story of the Nation's Crisis

Book 4

by Joseph A. Altsheler



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Principal Characters in *The Sword of Antietam*

Harry Kenton, A Lad Who Fights on the Southern Side.

Dick Mason, Cousin of Harry Kenton, Who Fights on the Northern Side.

Colonel George Kenton, Father of Harry Kenton.

Mrs. Mason, Mother of Dick Mason.

Juliana, Mrs. Mason's Devoted Colored Servant.

Colonel Arthur Winchester, Dick Mason's Regimental Commander.

William J. Shepard, A Northern Spy.

Daniel Whitley, A Northern Sergeant and Veteran of the Plains.

George Warner, A Vermont Youth Who Loves Mathematics.

Frank Pennington, A Nebraska Youth, Friend of Dick Mason.

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

Tom Langdon, Friend of Harry Kenton.

John Watson, A Northern Contractor.

Historical Characters in *The Sword of Antietam*

Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States.

Jefferson Davis, President of the Southern Confederacy.

Robert E. Lee, Southern Commander.

Stonewall Jackson, Southern General.

A. P. Hill, Southern General.

George B. McClellan, Northern General.

Ambrose B. Burnside, Northern General.

Turner Ashby, Southern Cavalry Leader.

J. E. B. Stuart, Southern Cavalry Leader.

Richard S. Ewell, Southern General.

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Simon Bolivar Buckner, Southern General.

Leonidas Polk, Southern General and Bishop.

Braxton Bragg, Southern General.

Don Carlos Buell, Northern General.

James Longstreet, Southern General.

P. G. T. Beauregard, Southern General.

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Chapter 1

Cedar Mountain

The first youth rode to the crest of the hill and, still sitting on his horse, examined the country in the south with minute care through a pair of powerful glasses. The other two dismounted and waited patiently. All three were thin, and their faces were darkened by sun and wind. But they were strong alike of body and soul. Beneath the faded blue uniforms, brave hearts beat and powerful muscles responded at once to every command of the will.

“What do you see, Dick?” asked Warner, who leaned easily against his horse, with one arm over the pommel of his saddle.

“Hills, valleys, mountains, the August heat shimmering over all, but no human being.”

“A fine country,” said young Pennington, “and I like to look at it, but just now my Nebraska prairie would be better for us. We could at least see the advance of Stonewall Jackson before he was right on top of us.”

Dick took another long look, searching every point in the half circle of the south with his glasses. Although burned by summer, the country was beautiful, and neither heat nor cold could take away its picturesqueness. He saw valleys in which the grass grew thick and strong, clusters of hills dotted with trees, and then the blue loom of mountains clothed heavily with foliage. Over everything bent a dazzling sky of blue and gold.

The light was so intense that with his glasses he could pick out individual trees and rocks on the far slopes. He saw

an occasional roof, but nowhere did he see man. He knew the reason, but he had become so used to his trade that, at the moment, he felt no sadness. All this region had been swept by great armies. Here the tide of battle in the mightiest of all wars had rolled back and forth, and here it was destined to surge again in a volume increasing always.

“I don’t find anything,” repeated Dick, “but three pairs of eyes are better than none. George, you take the glasses and see what you can see, and Frank will follow.”

He dismounted and stood holding the reins of his horse while the young Vermonter looked. He noticed that the mathematical turn of Warner’s mind showed in every emergency. He swept the glasses back and forth in a regular curve, not looking here and now there, but taking his time and missing nothing. It occurred to Dick that he was a type of his region, slow but thorough, and sure to win after defeat.

“What’s the result of your examination?” asked Dick as Warner passed the glasses in turn to Pennington.

“Let x equal what I saw, which is nothing. Let y equal the result I draw, which is nothing. Hence we have $x + y$ which still equals nothing.”

Pennington was swifter in his examination. The blood in his veins flowed a little faster than Warner’s.

“I find nothing but land and water,” he said without waiting to be asked, “and I’m disappointed. I had a hope, Dick, that I’d see Stonewall Jackson himself riding along a slope.”

“Even if you saw him, how would you know it was Stonewall?”

“I hadn’t thought of that. We’ve heard so much of him that it just seemed to me I’d know him anywhere.”

“Same here,” said Warner. “Remember all the tales we’ve heard about his whiskers, his old slouch hat, and his sorrel horse.”

“I’d like to see him myself,” confessed Dick. “From all we hear, he’s the man who kept McClellan from taking Richmond. He certainly played hob¹ with the plans of our generals. You know, I’ve got a cousin, Harry Kenton, with him. I had a letter from him a week ago—passing through the lines and coming in a round-about way. Writes as if he thought Stonewall Jackson was a demigod. Says we’d better quit and go home, as we haven’t any earthly chance to win this war.”

“He fights best who wins last,” said Warner. “I’m thinking I won’t see the green hills of Vermont for a long time yet, because I mean to pay a visit to Richmond first. Have you got your cousin’s letter with you, Dick?”

“No, I destroyed it. I didn’t want it bobbing up some time or other to cause either of us trouble. A man I know at home says he’s kept out of a lot of trouble by ‘never writin’ nothin’ to nobody.’ And if you do write a letter, the next best thing is to burn it as quick as you can.”

“If my eyes tell the truth, and they do,” said Pennington, “here comes a short, thick man riding a long, thick horse and he—the man, not the horse—bears a startling resemblance to our friend, ally, guide, and sometime mentor, Sergeant Daniel Whitley.”

“Yes, it’s the sergeant,” said Dick, looking down into the valley, “and I’m glad he’s joining us. Do you know, boys, I often think these veteran sergeants know more than some of our generals.”

“It’s not an opinion. It’s a fact,” said Warner. “Hi, there, sergeant! Here are your friends! Come up and make the same empty report that we’ve got ready for the colonel.”

Sergeant Daniel Whitley looked at the three lads, and his face brightened. He had a good intellect under his thatch of hair and a warm heart within his strong body. The boys, although

1 To make trouble

lieutenants, and he only a sergeant in the ranks, treated him usually as an equal and often as a superior.

Colonel Winchester's regiment and the remains of Colonel Newcomb's Pennsylvanians had been sent east after the defeat of the Union army at the Seven Days, and were now with Pope's Army of Virginia, which was to hold the valley and also protect Washington. Grant's success at Shiloh had been offset by McClellan's failure before Richmond, and the President and his Cabinet at Washington were filled with justifiable alarm. Pope was a western man, a Kentuckian, and he had insisted upon having some of the western troops with him.

The sergeant rode his horse slowly up the slope and joined the lads over whom he watched like a father.

"And what have the hundred eyes of Argus² beheld?" asked Warner.

"Argus?" said the sergeant. "I don't know any such man. Name sounds queer, too."

"He belongs to a distant and mythical past, sergeant, but he'd be mighty useful if we had him here. If even a single one of his hundred eyes were to light on Stonewall Jackson, it would be a great service."

The sergeant shook his head and looked reprovably at Warner.

"It ain't no time for jokin'," he said.

"I was never further from it. It seems to me that we need a lot of Arguses more than anything else. This is the enemy's country, and we hear that Stonewall Jackson is advancing. Advancing where, from what, and when? There is no Argus to tell. The country supports a fairly numerous population, but it hasn't a single kind or informing word for us. Is Stonewall Jackson going to drop from the sky, which rumor says is his favorite method of approach?"

2 A mythological Greek giant with 100 eyes

“He’s usin’ the solid ground this time, anyway,” said Sergeant Daniel Whitley. “I’ve been eight miles farther south, an’ if I didn’t see cavalry comin’ along the skirt of a ridge, then my eyes ain’t any friends of mine. Then I came through a little place of not more’n five houses. No men there, just women an’ children, but when I looked back I saw them women an’ children, too, grinnin’ at me. That means somethin’, as shore as we’re livin’ an’ breathin’. I’m bettin’ that we new fellows from the west will get acquainted with Stonewall Jackson inside of twenty-four hours.”

“You don’t mean that? It’s not possible!” exclaimed Dick, startled. “Why, when we last heard of Jackson he was so far south we can’t expect him in a week!”

“You’ve heard that they call his men the foot cavalry,” said the sergeant gravely, “an’ I reckon from all I’ve learned since I come east that they’ve won the name fair an’ true. See them woods off to the south there. See the black line they make ag’inst the sky. I know, the same as if I had seen him, that Stonewall Jackson is down in them forests, comin’ an’ comin’ fast.”

The sergeant’s tone was ominous³, and Dick felt a tingling at the roots of his hair. The western troops were eager to meet this new Southern phenomenon who had suddenly shot like a burning star across the sky, but for the first time there was apprehension in his soul. He had seen but little of the new general, Pope, but he had read his proclamations, and he had thought them bombastic⁴. He talked lightly of the enemy and of the grand deeds that he was going to do. Who was Pope to sweep away such men as Lee and Jackson with mere words!

Dick longed for Grant, the stern, unyielding, unbeatable Grant whom he had known at Shiloh. In the west, the Union troops had felt the strong hand over them, and confidence had

3 Forboding; threatening

4 Pompous

flowed into them, but here they were in doubt. They felt that the powerful and directing mind was absent.

Silence fell upon them all for a little space, while the four gazed intently into the south, strange fears assailing everyone. Dick never doubted that the Union would win. He never doubted it then, and he never doubted it afterward, through all the vast hecatomb⁵ when the flag of the Union fell more than once in terrible defeat.

But their ignorance was mystifying and oppressive. They saw before them the beautiful country, the hills and valleys, the forest and the blue loom of the mountains, so much that appealed to the eye, and yet the horizon, looking so peaceful in the distance, was barbed with spears. Jackson was there! The sergeant's theory had become conviction with them. Distance had been nothing to him. He was at hand with a great force, and Lee with another army might fall at any time upon their flank, while McClellan was isolated and left useless, far away.

Dick's heart missed a beat or two, as he saw the sinister picture that he had created in his own mind. Highly imaginative, he had leaped to the conclusion that Lee and Jackson meant to trap the Union army, the hammer beating it out on the anvil. He raised the glasses to his eyes, surveyed the forests in the South once more, and then his heart missed another beat.

He had caught the flash of steel, the sun's rays falling across a bayonet or a polished rifle barrel. And then as he looked, he saw the flash again and again. He handed the glasses to Warner and said quietly:

"George, I see troops on the edge of that far hill to the south and the east. Can't you see them, too?"

"Yes, I can make them out clearly now, as they pass across a bit of open land. They're Confederate cavalry, two hundred at least, I should say."

5 Large-scale sacrifice

Dick learned long afterward that it was the troop of Sherburne, but, for the present, the name of Sherburne was unknown to him. He merely felt that this was the vanguard of Jackson riding forward to set the trap. The men were now so near that they could be seen with the naked eye, and the sergeant said tersely:

“At last we’ve seen what we were afraid we would see.”

“And look to the left also,” said Warner, who still held the glasses. “There’s a troop of horse coming up another road, too. By George, they’re advancing at a trot! We’d better clear out or we may be enclosed between the two horns of their cavalry.”

“We’ll go back to our force at Cedar Run,” said Harry, “and report what we’ve seen. As you say, George, there’s no time to waste.”

The four mounted and rode fast, the dust of the road flying in a cloud behind their horses’ heels. Dick felt that they had fulfilled their errand, but he had his doubts how their news would be received. The Northern generals in the east did not seem to him to equal those of the west in keenness and resolution, while the case was reversed so far as the Southern generals were concerned.

But fast as they went, the Southern cavalry was coming with equal speed. They continually saw the flash of arms in both east and west. The force in the west was the nearer of the two. Not only was Sherburne there, but Harry Kenton was with him, and besides their own natural zeal, they had all the eagerness and daring infused into them by the great spirit and brilliant successes of Jackson.

“They won’t be able to enclose us between the two horns of their horsemen,” said Sergeant Whitley, whose face was very grave, “and the battle won’t be tomorrow or the next day.”

“Why not? I thought Jackson was swift,” said Warner.

“Cause it will be fought today. I thought Jackson was swift,

too, but he's swifter than I thought. Them feet cavalry of his don't have to change their name. Look into the road comin' up that narrow valley."

The eyes of the three boys followed his pointing finger, and they now saw masses of infantry, men in gray, pressing forward at full speed. They saw also batteries of cannon, and Dick almost fancied he could hear the rumble of their wheels.

"Looks as if the sergeant was right," said Pennington. "Stonewall Jackson is here."

They increased their speed to a gallop, making directly for Cedar Run, a cold, clear little stream coming out of the hills. It was now about the middle of the morning, and the day was burning hot and breathless. Their hearts began to pound with excitement, and their breath was drawn painfully through throats lined with dust.

A long ridge covered with forest rose on one side of them, and now they saw the flash of many bayonets and rifle barrels along its lowest slope. Another heavy column of infantry was advancing, and presently they heard the far note of trumpets calling to one another.

"Their whole army is in touch," said the sergeant. "The trumpets show it. Often on the plains, when we had to divide our little force into detachments, they'd have bugle talk with one another. We must go faster if we can."

They got another ounce of strength out of their horses, and now they saw Union cavalry in front. In a minute or two they were among the blue horsemen, giving the hasty news of Jackson's advance. Other scouts and staff officers arrived a little later with like messages, and not long afterward they heard shots behind them telling them that the hostile pickets were in touch.

They watered their horses in Cedar Run, crossed it, and rejoined their own regiment under Colonel Arthur Winchester. The colonel was thin, bronzed, and strong, and he, too, like the

other new men from the West, was eager for battle with the redoubtable⁶ Jackson.

“What have you seen, Dick?” he exclaimed. “Is it a mere scouting force of cavalry, or is Jackson really at hand?”

“I think it’s Jackson himself. We saw heavy columns coming up. They were pressing forward, too, as if they meant to brush aside whatever got in their way.”

“Then we’ll show them!” exclaimed Colonel Winchester. “We’ve only seven thousand men here on Cedar Run, but Banks, who is in immediate command, has been stung deeply by his defeats at the hands of Jackson, and he means a fight to the last ditch. So does everybody else.”

Dick, at that moment, the thrill of the gallop gone, was not so sanguine⁷. The great weight of Jackson’s name hung over him like a sinister menace, and the Union troops on Cedar Run were but seven thousand. The famous Confederate leader must have at least three times that number. Were the Union forces, separated into several armies, to be beaten again in detail? Pope himself should be present with at least fifty thousand men.

Their horses had been given to an orderly and Dick threw himself upon the turf to rest a little. All along the creek, the Union army, including his own regiment, was forming in line of battle, but his colonel had not yet called upon him for any duty. Warner and Pennington were also resting from their long and exciting ride, but the sergeant, who seemed never to know fatigue, was already at work with his men.

“Listen to those skirmishers,” said Dick. “It sounds like the popping of corn at home on winter evenings, when I was a little boy.”

“But a lot more deadly,” said Pennington. “I wouldn’t like to be a skirmisher. I don’t mind firing into the smoke and the

6 Honorable

7 Optimistic

crowd, but I'd hate to sit down behind a stump or in the grass and pick out the spot on a man that I meant for my bullet to hit."

"You won't have to do any such work, Frank," said Warner. "Hark to it! The sergeant was right. We're going to have a battle today and a big one. The popping of your corn, Dick, has become an unbroken sound."

Dick, from the crest of the hillock⁸ on which they lay, gazed over the heads of the men in blue. The skirmishers were showing a hideous activity. A continuous line of light ran along the front of both armies, and behind the flash of the Southern firing he saw heavy masses of infantry emerging from the woods. A deep thrill ran through him. Jackson, the famous, the redoubtable, the unbeatable, was at hand with his army. Would he remain unbeaten? Dick said to himself, in unspoken words, over and over again, "No! No! No! No!" He and his comrades had been victors in the west. They must not fail here.

Colonel Winchester now called to them, and, mounting their horses, they gathered around him to await his orders. These officers, though mere boys, learned fast. Dick knew enough already of war to see that they were in a strong position. Before them flowed the creek. On their flank and partly in their front was a great field of Indian corn. A quarter of a mile away was a lofty ridge on which were posted Union guns with gunners who knew so well how to use them. To right and left ran the long files of infantry, their faces white but resolute.

"I think," said Dick to Warner, "that if Jackson passes over this place he will at least know that we've been here."

"Yes, he'll know it, and besides he'll make quite a halt before passing. At least, that's my way of thinking."

There was a sudden dying of the rifle fire. The Union skirmishers were driven in, and they fell back on the main

8 Small hill

body which was silent, awaiting the attack. Dick was no longer compelled to use the glasses. He saw with unaided eye the great Southern columns marching forward with the utmost confidence, heavy batteries advancing between the regiments, ready at command to sweep the Northern ranks with shot and shell.

Dick shivered a little. He could not help it. They were face to face with Jackson, and he was all that the heralds of fame had promised. He had eye enough to see that the Southern force was much greater than their own, and, led by such a man, how could they fail to win another triumph? He looked around upon the army in blue, but he did not see any sign of fear. Both the beaten and the unbeaten were ready for a new battle.

There was a mighty crash from the hill, and the Northern batteries poured a stream of metal into the advancing ranks of their foe.

The Confederate advance staggered but, recovering itself, came on again. A tremendous cheer burst from the ranks of the lads in blue. Stonewall Jackson with all his skill and fame was before them, but they meant to stop him. Numbers were against them, and Banks, their leader, had been defeated already by Jackson, but they meant to stop him, nevertheless.

The Southern guns replied. Posted along the slopes of Slaughter Mountain, sinister of name, they sent a sheet of death upon the Union ranks. But the regiments, the new and the old, stood firm. Those that had been beaten before by Jackson were resolved not to be beaten again by him, and the new regiments from the west, one or two of which had been at Shiloh, were resolved never to be beaten at all.

“The lads are steady,” said Colonel Winchester. “It’s a fine sign. I’ve news, too, that two thousand men have come up. We shall now have nine thousand with which to withstand the attack, and I don’t believe they can drive us away. Oh, why isn’t

Pope himself here with his whole army? Then we could wipe Jackson off the face of the earth!”

But Pope was not there. The commander of a huge force, the man of boastful words who was to do such great things, the man who sent such grandiloquent⁹ dispatches from “Headquarters in the Saddle” to the anxious Lincoln at Washington, had strung his numerous forces along in detachments, just as the others had done before him, and the booming of Jackson’s cannon attacking the Northern vanguard with his whole army could not reach ears so far away.

The fire now became heavy along the whole Union front. All the batteries on both sides were coming into action, and the earth trembled with the rolling crash. The smoke rose and hung in clouds over the hills, the valley, and the cornfield. The hot air, surcharged¹⁰ with dust, smoke, and burned gunpowder, was painful and rasping to the throat. The frightful screaming of the shells filled the air, and then came the hissing of the bullets like a storm of sleet.

Colonel Winchester and his staff dismounted, giving their horses to an orderly who led them to the rear. Horses would not be needed for the present, at least, and they had learned to avoid needless risk.

The attack was coming closer, and the bullets, as they swept through their ranks, found many victims. Colonel Winchester ordered his regiment to kneel and open fire, being held hitherto in reserve. Dick snatched up a rifle from a soldier who had fallen almost beside him, and he saw that Warner and Pennington had equipped themselves in like fashion.

A strong gust of wind lifted the smoke before them a little. Dick saw many splashes of water on the surface of the creek where bullets struck, and there were many tiny spurts of dust

9 Pompous

10 Overloaded

in the road where other bullets fell. Then he saw beyond the dark masses of the Southern infantry. It seemed to him that they were strangely close. He believed that he could see their tanned faces, one by one and their vengeful eyes, but it was only fancy.

The next instant, the signal was given, and the regiment fired as one. There was a long flash of fire, a tremendous roaring in Dick's ears, then for an instant or two a vast cloud of smoke hid the advancing gray mass. When it was lifted a moment later, the men in gray were advancing no longer. Their ranks were shattered and broken, the ground was covered with the fallen, and the others were reeling back.

"We win! We win!" shouted Pennington, wild with enthusiasm.

"For the present, at least," said Warner, a deep flush blazing in either cheek.

There was no return fire just then from that point, and the smoke lifted a little more. Above the crash of the battle which raged fiercely on either flank, they heard the notes of a trumpet rising, loud, clear, and distinct from all other sounds. Dick knew that it was a rallying call, and then he heard Pennington utter a wild shout.

"I see him! I see him!" he cried. "It's old Stonewall himself! There on the hillock, on the little horse!"

The vision was but for an instant. Dick gazed with all his eyes, and he saw, several hundred yards away, a thickset man on a sorrel horse. He was bearded, and he stooped a little, seeming to bend an intense gaze upon the Northern lines.

There was no time for anyone to fire, because, in a few seconds, the smoke came back, a huge, impenetrable¹¹ curtain, and hid the man and the hillock. But Dick had not the slightest doubt that it was the great Southern leader, and he was right. It was Stonewall Jackson on the hillock, rallying his men, and

11 Incapable of being penetrated

Dick's own cousin, Harry Kenton, rode by his side.

They reloaded, but a staff officer galloped up and delivered a written order to Colonel Winchester. The whole regiment left the line, another less seasoned taking its place, and they marched off to one flank, where a field of wheat lately cut and a wood on the extreme end lay before them. Behind them they heard the battle swelling anew, but Dick knew that a new force of the foe was coming here, and he felt proud that his own regiment had been moved to meet an attack which would certainly be made with the greatest violence.

"Who are those men down in the wheat-field?" asked Pennington.

"Our own skirmishers," replied Warner. "See them running forward, hiding behind the shocks of straw, and firing!"

The riflemen were busy. They fired from the shelter of every straw stack in the field, and they stung the new Southern advance, which was already showing its front. Southern guns now began to search the wheat field. A shell struck squarely in the center of one of the shocks behind which three Northern skirmishers were kneeling. Dick saw the straw fly into the air as if picked up by a whirlwind. When it settled back it lay in scattered masses and three dark figures lay with it, motionless and silent. He shuddered and looked away.

The edge of the wood was now lined with Southern infantry, and on their right flank was a numerous body of cavalry. Officers were waving their swords aloft, leading the men in person to the charge.

"The attack will be heavy here," said Colonel Winchester. "Ah, there are our guns firing over our heads. We need 'em."

The Southern cannon were more numerous, but the Northern guns, posted well on the hill, refused to be silenced. Some of them were dismounted and the gunners about them killed, but the others, served with speed and valor, sprayed the

whole Southern front with a deadly shower of steel.

It was this welcome metal that Dick and his comrades heard over their heads, and then the trumpets rang a shrill note of defiance along the whole line. Banks, remembering his bitter defeats and resolved upon victory now, was not awaiting the attack. He would make it himself.

The whole wing lifted itself up and rushed through the wheat field, firing as they charged. The cannon were pushed forward and poured in volleys as fast as the gunners could load and discharge them. Dick felt the ground reeling beneath his feet, but he knew that they were advancing and that the enemy was giving way again. Stonewall Jackson and his generals felt a certain hardening of the Northern resistance that day. The recruits in blue were becoming trained now. They did not break in a panic, although their lines were raked through and through by the Southern shells. New men stepped in the place of the fallen, and the lines, filled up, came on again.

The Northern wing charging through the wheat field continued to bear back the enemy. Jackson was not yet able to stop the fierce masses in blue. A formidable body of men issuing from the Northern side of the wood charged with the bayonet, pushing the charge home with a courage and a recklessness of death that the war had not yet seen surpassed. The Southern rifles and cannon raked them, but they never stopped, bursting like a tornado upon their foe.

One of Jackson's Virginia regiments gave way and then another. The men in blue from the wood and Colonel Winchester's regiment joined, their shouts rising above the smoke, while they steadily pushed the enemy before them.

Dick, as he shouted with the rest, felt a wild exultation. They were showing Jackson what they could do! They were proving to him that he could not win always. His joy was warranted. No such confusion had ever before existed in Jackson's army. The

Northern charge was driven like a wedge of steel into its ranks.

Jackson had able generals, valiant lieutenants, with him, Ewell, and Early, and A. P. Hill, and Winder, and they strove together to stop the retreat. The valiant Winder was mortally wounded and died upon the field, and Jackson, with his wonderful ability to see what was happening and his equal power of decision, swiftly withdrew that wing of his army, also carrying with it every gun.

A great shout of triumph rose from the men in blue as they saw the Southern retreat.

“We win! We win!” cried Pennington again.

“Yes, we win!” shouted Warner, usually so cool.

And it did seem even to older men that the triumph was complete. The blue and the gray were face to face in the smoke, but the gray were driven back by the fierce and irresistible charge, and, as their flight became swifter, the shells and grape from the Northern batteries plunged and tore through their ranks. Nothing stopped the blue wave. It rolled on and on, sweeping a mass of fugitives before it and engulfing others.

Dick had no ordered knowledge of the charge. He was a part of it, and he saw only straight in front of him, but he was conscious that all around him there was a fiery red mist and a confused and terrible noise of shouting and firing. But they were winning! They were beating Stonewall Jackson himself. His pulses throbbed so hard that he thought his arteries would burst, and his lips were dry and blackened from smoke, burned gunpowder, and his own hot breath issuing like steam between them.

Then came a halt so sudden and terrible that it shook Dick as if by physical contact. He looked around in wonder. The charge was spent, not from its lack of strength but because they had struck an obstacle. They had reckoned ill, because they had not reckoned upon all the resources of Stonewall Jackson’s

mind. He had stemmed the rout in person, and now he was pushing forward the Stonewall Brigade, five regiments, which always had but two alternatives, to conquer or to die. Hill and Ewell with fresh troops were coming up also on his flanks, and now the blue and the gray, face to face again, closed in mortal combat.

“We’ve stopped! We’ve stopped! Do you hear it, we’ve stopped!” exclaimed Pennington, his face a ghastly reek of dust and perspiration, his eyes showing amazement and wonder at how the halt could have happened. Dick shared in the terrible surprise. The fire in front of him deepened suddenly. Men were struck down all about him. Heavy masses of troops in gray showed through the smoke. The Stonewall Brigade was charging, and regiments were charging with it on either side.

The column in blue was struck in front and on either flank. It not only ceased its victorious advance, but it also began to give ground. The men could not help it, despite their most desperate efforts. It seemed to Dick that the earth slipped under their feet. A tremendous excitement seized him at the thought of victory lost, just when it seemed won. He ran up and down the lines, shouting to the men to stand firm. He saw that the senior officers were doing the same, but there was little order or method in his own movements. It was the excitement and bitter humiliation that drove him on.

He stumbled in the smoke against Sergeant Whitley. The sergeant’s forehead had been creased by a bullet, but so much dust and burned gunpowder had gathered upon it that it was as black as the face of a black man.

“Are we to lose after all?” exclaimed Dick.

It seemed strange to him, even at that moment, that he should hear his own voice amid such a roar of cannon and rifles. But it was an undernote, and he heard with equal ease the sergeant’s reply:

“It ain’t decided yet, Mr. Mason, but we’ve got to fight as we never fought before.”

The Union men, both those who had faced Jackson before and those who were now meeting him for the first time, fought with unsurpassed valor, but, unequal in numbers, they saw the victory wrenched from their grasp. Jackson now had his forces in the hollow of his hand. He saw everything that was passing, and, with the mind of a master, he read the meaning of it. He strengthened his own weak points and increased the attack upon those of the North.

Dick remained beside the sergeant. He had lost sight of Colonel Winchester, Warner, and Pennington in the smoke and the dreadful confusion, but he saw well enough that his fears were coming true.

The attack in front increased in violence, and the Northern army was also attacked with fiery energy on both flanks. The men had the actual physical feeling that they were enclosed in the jaws of a vise, and, forced to abandon all hope of victory, they fought now to escape. Two small squadrons of cavalry, scarce two hundred in number, sent forward from a wood, charged the whole Southern army under a storm of cannon and rifle fire. They equalled the ride of the Six Hundred at Balaklava, but with no poet to celebrate it, it remained like so many other charges in this war, an obscure and forgotten incident.

Dick saw the charge of the horsemen and the return of the few. Then he lost hope. Above the roar of the battle, the rebel yell continually swelled afresh. The setting sun, no longer golden but red, cast a sinister light over the trampled wheat field, the slopes and the woods torn by cannon balls. The dead and the wounded lay in thousands, and Banks, brave and tenacious but with bitter despair in his heart, was seeking to drag the remains of his army from that merciless vise which continued to close down harder and harder.

Dick's excitement and tension seemed to abate. He had been keyed to so high a pitch that his pulses grew gentler through very lack of force, and with the relaxation came a clearer view. He saw the sinking red sun through the banks of smoke, and in fancy he already felt the cool darkness upon his face after the hot and terrible August day. He knew that night might save them, and he prayed deeply and fervently for its swift coming.

He and the sergeant came suddenly to Colonel Winchester, whose hat had been shot from his head but who was otherwise unharmed. Warner and Pennington were near, Warner slightly wounded but apparently unaware of the fact. The colonel, by shout and by gesture, was gathering around him the remains of his regiment. Other regiments on either side were trying to do the same, and eventually they formed a compact mass which, driving with all its force back toward its old position, reached the hills and the woods just as the jaws of Stonewall Jackson's vise shut down, but not upon the main body.

Victory, won for a little while, had been lost. Night protected their retreat, and they fought with a valor that made Jackson and all his generals cautious. But this knowledge was little compensation to the Northern troops. They knew that behind them was a great army, that Pope might have been present with fifty thousand men, sufficient to overwhelm Jackson. Instead of the odds being more than two to one in their favor, they had been two to one against them.

It was a sullen army that lay in the woods in the first hour or two of the night, gasping for breath. These men had boasted that they were a match for those of Jackson, and they were, if they could only have traded generals. Dick and his comrades from the west began to share in the awe that the name of Stonewall Jackson inspired.

"He comes up to his advertisements. There ain't no doubt of it," said Sergeant Whitley. "I never saw anybody fight better

than our men did, an' that charge of the little troop of cavalry was never beat anywhere in the world. But here we are licked, and thirty or forty thousand men of ours not many miles away!"

He spoke the last words with a bitterness that Dick had never heard in his voice before.

"It's simple," said Warner, who was binding up his little wound with his own hand. "It's just a question in mathematics. I see now how Stonewall Jackson won so many triumphs in the Valley of Virginia. Give Jackson, say, fifteen thousand men. We have fifty thousand, but we divide them into five armies of ten thousand apiece. Jackson fights them in detail, which is five battles, of course. His fifteen thousand defeat the ten thousand every time. Hence Jackson with fifteen thousand men has beaten our side. It's simple but painful. In time our leaders will learn."

"After we're all killed," said Pennington sadly.

"And the country is ripped apart so that it will take half a century to put the pieces back together again and put 'em back right," said Dick, with equal sadness.

"Never mind," said Sergeant Whitley with returning cheerfulness. "Other countries have survived great wars and so will ours."

Some food was obtained for the exhausted men, and they ate it nervously, paying little attention to the crackling fire of the skirmishers which was still going on in the darkness along their front. Dick saw the pink flashes along the edges of the woods and the wheat field, but his mind, deadened for the time, took no further impressions. Skirmishers were unpleasant people, anyway. Let them fight down there. It did not matter what they might do to one another. A minute or two later he was ashamed of such thoughts.

Colonel Winchester, who had been to see General Banks, returned presently and told them that they would march again in half an hour.

“General Banks,” he said with bitter irony, “is afraid that a powerful force of the rebels will gain his rear and that we shall be surrounded. He ought to know. He has had enough dealings with Jackson. Outmaneuvered and outflanked again! Why can’t we learn something?”

But he said this to the young officers only. He forced a cheerfulness of tone when he spoke to the men, and they dragged themselves wearily to their feet in order to begin the retreat. But though the muscles were tired, the spirit was not unwilling. All the omens were sinister, pointing to the need of withdrawal. The vicious skirmishers were still busy, and a crackling fire came from many points in the woods. The occasional rolling thunder of a cannon deepened the somberness of the scene.

All the officers of the regiment had lost their horses, and they walked now with the men. A full moon threw a silvery light over the marching troops, who strode on in silence, the wounded suppressing their groans. A full moon cast a silvery light over the pallid faces.

“Do you know where we are going?” Dick asked of the Vermonter.

“I heard that we’re bound for a place called Culpeper Court House, six or seven miles away. I suppose we’ll get there in the morning, if Stonewall Jackson doesn’t insist on another interview with us.”

“There’s enough time in the day for fighting,” said Pennington, “without borrowing of the night. Hear that big gun over there on our right! Why do they want to be firing cannon balls at such a time?”

They trudged gloomily on, following other regiments ghostly in the moonlight and followed by others as ghostly. But the sinister omens, the flash of rifle firing, and the far boom of a cannon were always on their flanks. The impression of Jackson’s skill and power, which Dick had gained so quickly,

was deepening already. He did not have the slightest doubt now that the Southern leader was pressing forward through the woods to cut them off. As the sergeant had said truly, he came up to his advertisements and more. Dick shivered, and it was a shiver of apprehension for the army and not for himself.

In accordance with human nature, he and the boy officers who were his good comrades talked together, but their sentences were short and broken.

“Marching toward a court house,” said Pennington. “What’ll we do when we get there? Lawyers won’t help us.”

“Not so much marching toward a court house as marching away from Jackson,” said the Vermonter.

“We’ll march back again,” said Dick hopefully.

“But when?” said Pennington. “Look through the trees there on our right. Aren’t those rebel troops?”

Dick’s startled gaze beheld a long line of horsemen in gray on their flank and only a few hundred yards away.