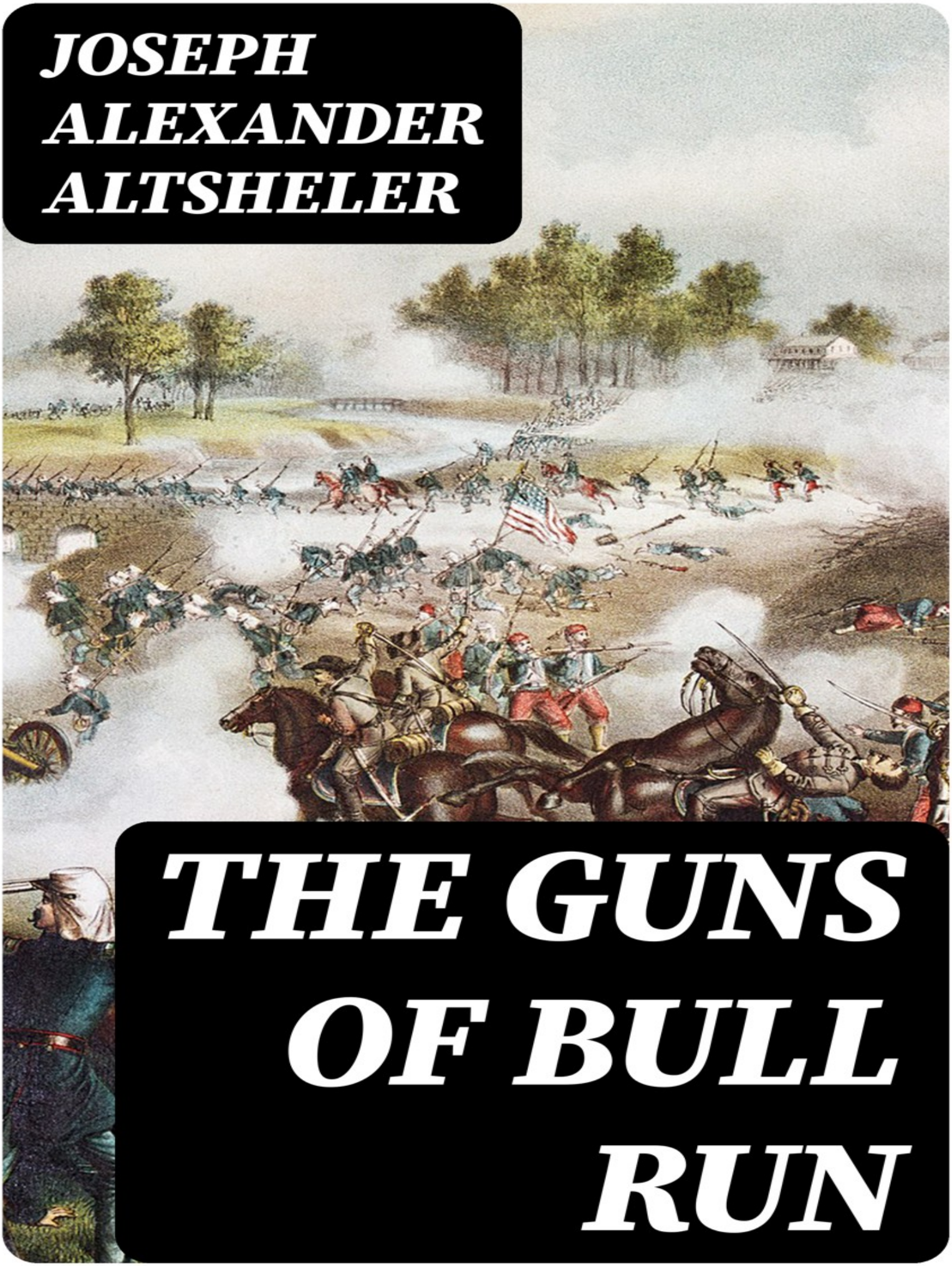
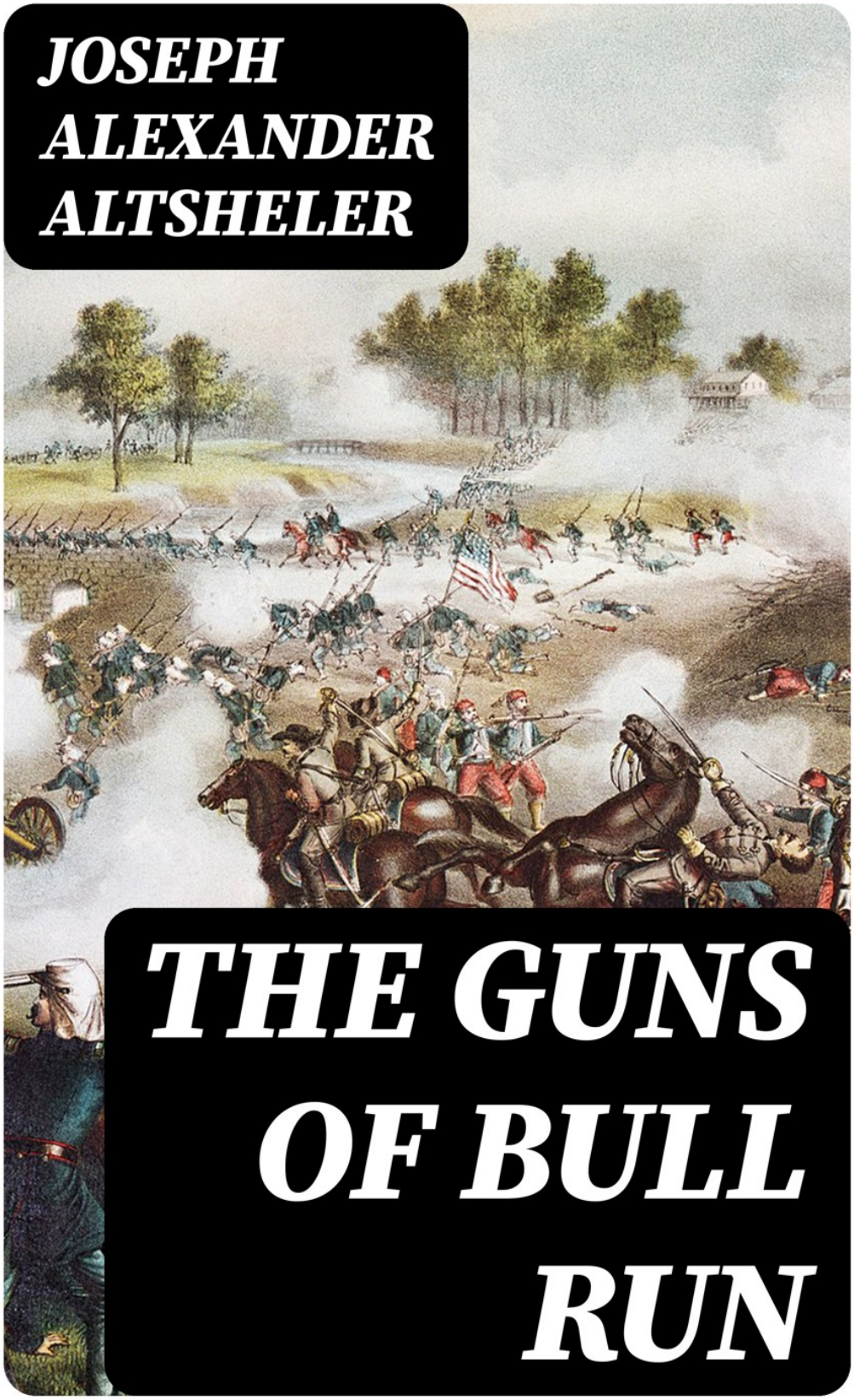
JOSEPH ALEXANDER ALTSHELER



THE GUNS OF BULL RUN

JOSEPH ALEXANDER ALTSHELER



THE GUNS OF BULL RUN

Joseph Alexander Altsheler

The Guns of Bull Run

EAN 8596547019619

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

Chapter I. News From Charleston

Table of Contents

It would soon be Christmas and Harry Kenton, at his desk in the Pendleton Academy, saw the snow falling heavily outside. The school stood on the skirt of the town, and the forest came down to the edge of the playing field. The great trees, oak and ash and elm, were clothed in white, and they stood out a vast and glittering tracery against the somber sky.

The desk was of the old kind, intended for two, and Harry's comrade in it was his cousin, Dick Mason, of his own years and size. They would graduate in June, and both were large and powerful for their age. There was a strong family resemblance and yet a difference. Harry's face was the more sensitive and at times the blood leaped like quicksilver in his veins. Dick's features indicated a quieter and more stubborn temper. They were equal favorites with teachers and pupils.

Dick's eyes followed Harry's, and he, too, looked at the falling snow and the white forest. Both were thinking of Christmas and the holiday season so near at hand. It was a rich section of Kentucky, and they were the sons of prosperous parents. The snow was fitting at such a time, and many joyous hours would be passed before they returned to school.

The clouds darkened and the snow fell faster. A wind rose and drove it against the panes. The boys heard the blast roaring outside and the comfort of the warm room was heightened by the contrast. Harry's eyes turned reluctantly

back to his Tacitus and the customs and manners of the ancient Germans. The curriculum of the Pendleton Academy was simple, like most others at that time. After the primary grades it consisted chiefly of the classics and mathematics. Harry led in the classics and Dick in the mathematics.

Bob Turner, the free colored man, who was janitor of the academy, brought in the morning mail, a dozen letters and three or four newspapers, gave it to Dr. Russell and withdrew on silent feet.

The Doctor was principal of Pendleton Academy, and he always presided over the room in which sat the larger boys, nearly fifty in number. His desk and chair were on a low dais and he sat facing the pupils. He was a large man, with a ruddy face, and thick hair as white as the snow that was falling outside. He had been a teacher fifty years, and three generations in Pendleton owed to him most of the learning that is obtained from books. He opened his letters one by one, and read them slowly.

Harry moved far away into the German forest with old Tacitus. He was proud of his Latin and he did not mean to lose his place as first in the class. The other boys also were absorbed in their books. It was seldom that all were studious at the same time, but this was one of the rare moments. There was no shuffling of feet, and fifty heads were bent over their desks.

It was a full half hour before Harry looked up from his Tacitus. His first glance was at the window. The snow was driving hard, and the forest had become a white blur. He looked next at the Doctor and he saw that the ruddy face had turned white. The old man was gazing intently at an

open letter in his hand. Two or three others had fallen to the floor. He read the letter again, folded it carefully, and put it in his pocket. Then he broke the wrapper on one of the newspapers and rapidly read its columns. The whiteness of his face deepened into pallor.

The slight tearing sound caused most of the boys to look up, and they noticed the change in the principal's face. They had never seen him look like that before. It was as if he had received some sudden and deadly stroke. Yet he sat stiffly upright and there was no sound in the room but the rustling of the newspaper as he turned its pages.

Harry became conscious of some strange and subtle influence that had crept into the very air, and his pulse began to leap. The others felt it, too. There was a tense feeling in the room and they became so still that the soft beat of the snow on the windows could be heard.

Not a single eye was turned to a book now. All were intent upon the Doctor, who still read the newspaper, his face without a trace of color, and his strong white hands trembling. He folded the paper presently, but still held it in his hand. As he looked up, he became conscious of the silence in the room, and of the concentrated gaze of fifty pairs of eyes bent upon him. A little color returned to his cheeks, and his hands ceased to tremble. He stood up, took the letter from his pocket, and opened it again.

Dr. Russell was a striking figure, belonging to a classic type found at its best in the border states. A tall man, he held himself erect, despite his years, and the color continued to flow back into the face, which was shaped in a fine strong mold.

"Boys," he said, in a firm, full voice, although it showed emotion, "I have received news which I must announce to you. As I tell it, I beg that you will restrain yourselves, and make little comment here. Its character is such that you are not likely ever to hear anything of more importance."

No one spoke, but a thrill of excitement ran through the room. Harry became conscious that the strange and subtle influence had increased. The pulses in both temples were beating hard. He and Dick leaned forward, their elbows upon the desk, their lips parted a little in attention.

"You know," continued Dr. Russell in the full voice that trembled slightly, "of the troubles that have arisen between the states, North and South, troubles that the best Americans, with our own great Henry Clay at the head, have striven to avert. You know of the election of Lincoln, and how this beloved state of ours, seeking peace, voted for neither Lincoln nor Breckinridge, both of whom are its sons."

The trembling of his voice increased and he paused again. It was obvious that he was stirred by deep emotion and it communicated itself to the boys. Harry was conscious that the thrill, longer and stronger than before, ran again through the room.

"I have just received a letter from an old friend in Charleston," continued Dr. Russell in a shaking voice, "and he tells me that on the twentieth, three days ago, the state of South Carolina seceded from the Union. He also sends me copies of two of the Charleston newspapers of the day following. In both of these papers all despatches from the other states are put under the head, 'Foreign News.' With the Abolitionists of New England pouring abuse upon all who

do not agree with them, and the hot heads of South Carolina rushing into violence, God alone knows what will happen to this distracted country that all of us love so well."

He turned anew to his correspondence. But Harry saw that he was trembling all over. An excited murmur arose. The boys began to talk about the news, and the principal, his thoughts far away, did not call them to order.

"I suppose since South Carolina has gone out that other southern states will do the same," said Harry to his cousin, "and that two republics will stand where but one stood before."

"I don't know that the second result will follow the first," replied Dick Mason.

Harry glanced at him. He was conscious of a certain cold tenacity in Dick's voice. He felt that a veil of antagonism had suddenly been drawn between these two who were the sons of sisters and who had been close comrades all their lives. His heart swelled suddenly. As if by inspiration, he saw ahead long and terrible years. He said no more, but gazed again at the pages of his Tacitus, although the letters only swam before his eyes.

The great buzz subsided at last, although there was not one among the boys who was not still thinking of the secession of South Carolina. They had shared in the excitement of the previous year. A few had studied the causes, but most were swayed by propinquity and kinship, which with youth are more potent factors than logic.

The afternoon passed slowly. Dr. Russell, who always heard the recitations of the seniors in Latin, did not call the class. Harry was so much absorbed in other thoughts that

he did not notice the fact. Outside, the clouds still gathered and the soft beat of the snow on the window panes never ceased. The hour of dismissal came at last and the older boys, putting on their overcoats, went silently out. Harry did not dream that he had passed the doors of Pendleton Academy for the last time, as a student.

While the seniors were quiet, there was no lack of noise from the younger lads. Snowballs flew and the ends of red comforters, dancing in the wind, touched the white world with glowing bits of color. Harry looked at them with a sort of pity. The magnified emotions of youth had suddenly made him feel very old and very responsible. When a snowball struck him under the ear he paid no attention to it, a mark of great abstraction in him.

He and his cousin walked gravely on, and left the shouting crowd behind them. Three or four hundred yards further, they came upon the main street of Pendleton, a town of fifteen hundred people, important in its section as a market, and as a financial and political center. It had two banks as solid as stone, and it was the proud boast of its inhabitants that, excepting Louisville and Lexington, its bar was of unequalled talent in the state. Other towns made the same claim, but no matter. Pendleton knew that they were wrong. Lawyers stood very high, especially when they were fluent speakers.

It was a singular fact that the two boys, usually full of talk, after the manner of youth, did not speak until they came to the parting of their ways. Then Harry, the more emotional of the two, and conscious that the veil of

antagonism was still between them, thrust out his hand suddenly and said:

"Whatever happens, Dick, you and I must not quarrel over it. Let's pledge our word here and now that, being of the same blood and having grown up together, we will always be friends."

The color in the cheeks of the other boy deepened. A slight moisture appeared in his eyes. He was, on the whole, more reserved than Harry, but he, too, was stirred. He took the outstretched hand and gave it a strong clasp.

"Always, Harry," he replied. "We don't think alike, maybe, about the things that are coming, but you and I can't quarrel."

He released the hand quickly, because he hated any show of emotion, and hurried down a side street to his home. Harry walked on into the heart of the town, as he lived farther away on the other side. He soon had plenty of evidence that the news of South Carolina's secession had preceded him here. There had been no such stir in Pendleton since they heard of Buena Vista, where fifty of her sons fought and half of them fell.

Despite the snow, the streets about the central square were full of people. Many of the men were reading newspapers. It was fifteen miles to the nearest railroad station, and the mail had come in at noon, bringing the first printed accounts of South Carolina's action. In this border state, which was a divided house from first to last, men still guarded their speech. They had grown up together, and they were all of blood kin, near or remote.

"What will it mean?" said Harry to old Judge Kendrick.

"War, perhaps, my son," replied the old man sadly. "The violence of New England in speech and the violence of South Carolina in action may start a flood. But Kentucky must keep out of it. I shall raise my voice against the fury of both factions, and thank God, our people have never refused to hear me."

He spoke in a somewhat rhetorical fashion, natural to time and place, but he was in great earnest. Harry went on, and entered the office of the Pendleton News, the little weekly newspaper which dispensed the news, mostly personal, within a radius of fifty miles. He knew that the News would appear on the following day, and he was anxious to learn what Mr. Gardner, the editor, a friend of his, would have to say in his columns.

He walked up the dusty stairway and entered the room, where the editor sat amid piles of newspapers. Mr. Gardner was a youngish man, high-colored and with longish hair. He was absorbed so deeply in a copy of the Louisville Journal that he did not hear Harry's step or notice his coming until the boy stood beside him. Then he looked up and said dryly:

"Too many sparks make a blaze at last. If people keep on quarreling there's bound to be a fight some time or other. I suppose you've heard that South Carolina has seceded."

"Dr. Russell announced it at the school. Are you telling, Mr. Gardner, what the News will have to say about it?"

"I don't mind," replied the editor, who was fond of Harry, and who liked his alert mind. "If it comes to a breach, I'm going with my people. It's hard to tell what's right or wrong, but my ancestors belonged to the South and so do I."

"That's just the way I feel!" exclaimed Harry vehemently.

The editor smiled.

"But I don't intend to say so in the News tomorrow," he continued. "I shall try to pour oil upon the waters, although I won't be able to hide my Southern leanings. The Colonel, your father, Harry, will not seek to conceal his."

"No," said Harry. "He will not. What was that?"

The sound of a shot came from the street. The two ran hurriedly down the stairway. Three men were holding a fourth who struggled with them violently. One had wrenched from his hand a pistol still smoking at the muzzle. About twenty feet away was another man standing between two who held him tightly, although he made no effort to release himself.

Harry looked at the two captives. They made a striking contrast. The one who fought was of powerful build, and dressed roughly. His whole appearance indicated the primitive human being, and Harry knew immediately that he was one of the mountaineers who came long distances to trade or carouse in Pendleton.

The man who faced the mountaineer, standing quietly between those who held him, was young and slender, though tall. His longish black hair was brushed carefully. The natural dead whiteness of his face was accentuated by his black mustache, which turned up at the ends like that of a duelist. He was dressed in black broadcloth, the long coat buttoned closely about his body, but revealing a full and ruffled shirt bosom as white as snow. His face expressed no emotion, but the mountaineer cursed violently.

"I can read the story at once," said the editor, shrugging his shoulders. "I know the mountaineer. He's Bill Skelly, a

rough man, prone to reach for the trigger, especially when he's full of bad whiskey as he is now, and the other, Arthur Travers, is no stranger to you. Skelly is for the abolition of slavery. All the mountaineers are. Maybe it's because they have no slaves themselves and hate the more prosperous and more civilized lowlanders who do have them. Harry, my boy, as you grow older you'll find that reason and logic seldom control men's lives."

"Skelly was excited over the news from South Carolina," said Harry, continuing the story, which he, too, had read, as an Indian reads a trail, "and he began to drink. He met Travers and cursed the slave- holders. Travers replied with a sneer, which the mountaineer could not understand, except that it hurt. Skelly snatched out his pistol and fired wildly. Travers drew his and would have fired, although not so wildly, but friends seized him. Meanwhile, others overpowered Skelly and Travers is not excited at all, although he watches every movement of his enemy, while seeming to be indifferent."

"You read truly, Harry," said Gardner. "It was a fortunate thing for Skelly that he was overpowered. Somehow, those two men facing each other seem, in a way, to typify conditions in this part of the country at least."

Harry was now watching Travers, who always aroused his interest. A lawyer, twenty-seven or eight years of age, he had little practice, and seemed to wish little. He had a wonderful reputation for dexterity with cards and the pistol. A native of Pendleton, he was the son of parents from one of the Gulf States, and Harry could never quite feel that he was one of their own Kentucky blood and breed.

"You can release me," said Travers quietly to the young men who stood on either side of him holding his arms. "I think the time has come to hunt bigger game than a fool there like Skelly. He is safe from me."

He spoke with a supercilious scorn which impressed Harry, but which he did not wholly admire. Travers seemed to him to have the quiet deadliness of the cobra. There was something about him that repelled. The men released him. He straightened his long black coat, smoothed the full ruffles of his shirt and walked away, as if nothing had happened.

Skelly ceased to struggle. The aspect of the crowd, which was largely hostile, sobered him. Steve Allison, the town constable, appeared and, putting his hand heavily upon the mountaineer's shoulder, said:

"You come with me, Skelly."

But old Judge Kendrick intervened.

"Let him go, Steve," he said. "Send him back to the mountains."

"But he tried to kill a man, Judge."

"I know, but extraordinary times demand extraordinary methods. A great and troubled period has come into all our lives. Maybe we're about to face some terrible crisis. Isn't that so?"

"Yes," replied the crowd.

"Then we must not hurry it or make it worse by sudden action. If Skelly is punished, the mountaineers will say it is political. I appeal to you, Dr. Russell, to sustain me."

The white head of the principal showed above the crowd.

"Judge Kendrick is right," he said. "Skelly must be permitted to go. His action, in fact, was due to the strained conditions that have long prevailed among us, and was precipitated by the alarming message that has come today. For the sake of peace, we must let him go."

"All right, then," said Allison, "but he goes without his pistol."

Skelly was put upon his mountain pony, and he rode willingly away amid the snow and the coming dusk, carrying, despite his release, a bitter heart into the mountains, and a tale that would inflame the jealousy with which upland regarded lowland.

The crowd dispersed. Gardner returned to his office, and Harry went home. He lived in the best house in or about Pendleton and his father was its wealthiest citizen. George Kenton, having inherited much land in Kentucky, and two or three plantations further south had added to his property by good management. A strong supporter of slavery, actual contact with the institution on a large scale in the Gulf States had not pleased him, and he had sold his property there, reinvesting the money in his native and, as he believed, more solid state. His title of colonel was real. A graduate of West Point, he had fought bravely with Scott in all the battles in the Valley of Mexico, but now retired and a widower, he lived in Pendleton with Harry, his only child.

Harry approached the house slowly. He knew that his father was a man of strong temper and he wondered how he would take the news from Charleston. All the associations of Colonel Kenton were with the extreme Southern wing, and his influence upon his son was powerful.

But the Pendleton home, standing just beyond the town, gave forth only brightness and welcome. The house itself, large and low, built massively of red brick, stood on the crest of a gentle slope in two acres of ground. The clipped cones of pine trees adorned the slopes, and made parallel rows along the brick walk, leading to the white portico that formed the entrance to the house. Light shone from a half dozen windows.

It seemed fine and glowing to Harry. His father loved his home, and so did he. The twilight had now darkened into night and the snow still drove, but the house stood solid and square to wind and winter, and the flame from its windows made broad bands of red and gold across the snow. Harry went briskly up the walk and then stood for a few moments in the portico, shaking the snow off his overcoat and looking back at the town, which lay in a warm cluster in the hollow below. Many lights twinkled there, and it occurred to Harry that they would twinkle later than usual that night.

He opened the door, hung his hat and overcoat in the hall, and entered the large apartment which his father and he habitually used as a reading and sitting room. It was more than twenty feet square, with a lofty ceiling. A home-made carpet, thick, closely woven, and rich in colors covered the floor. Around the walls were cases containing books, mostly in rich bindings and nearly all English classics. American work was scarcely represented at all. The books read most often by Colonel Kenton were the novels of Walter Scott, whom he preferred greatly to Dickens. Scott always wrote about gentlemen. A great fire of hickory logs blazed on the wide hearth.

Colonel Kenton was alone in the room. He stood at the edge of the hearth, with his back to the fire and his hands crossed behind him. His tanned face was slightly pale, and Harry saw that he had been subjected to great nervous excitement, which had not yet wholly abated.

The colonel was a tall man, broad of chest, but lean and muscular. He regarded his son attentively, and his eyes seemed to ask a question.

"Yes," said Harry, although his father had not spoken a word. "I've heard of it, and I've already seen one of its results."

"What is that?" asked Colonel Kenton quickly.

"As I came through town Bill Skelly, a mountaineer, shot at Arthur Travers. It came out of hot words over the news from Charleston. Nobody was hurt, and they've sent Skelly on his pony toward his mountains."

Colonel Kenton's face clouded.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I fear that Travers will be much too free with stinging remarks. It's a time when men should control their tongues. Do you be careful with yours. You're a youth in years, but you're a man in size, and you should be a man in thought, too. You and I have been close together, and I have trusted you, even when you were a little boy."

"It's so, father," replied Harry, with affection and gratitude.

"And I'm going to trust you yet further. It may be that I shall give you a task requiring great skill and energy."

The colonel looked closely at his son, and he gave silent approval to the tall, well-knit form, and the alert, eager face.

"We'll have supper presently," he said, "and then we will talk with visitors. Some you know and some you don't. One of them, who has come far, is already in the house."

Harry's eyes showed surprise, but he knew better than to ask questions. The colonel had carried his military training into private life.

"He is a distant relative of ours, very distant, but a relative still," continued Colonel Kenton. "You will meet him at supper. Be ready in a half hour."

The dinner of city life was still called supper in the South, and Harry hastened to his room to prepare. His heart began to throb with excitement. Now they were to have visitors at night and a mysterious stranger was there. He felt dimly the advance of great events.

Harry Kenton was a normal and healthy boy, but the discussions, the debates, and the passions sweeping over the Union throughout the year had sifted into Pendleton also. The news today had merely struck fire to tinder prepared already, and, infused with the spirit of youth, he felt much excitement but no depression. Making a careful toilet he descended to the drawing room a little before the regular time. Although he was early, his father was there before him, standing in his customary attitude with his back to the hearth, and his hands clasped behind him.

"Our guest will be down in a few minutes," said Colonel Kenton. "He comes from Charleston and his name is Raymond Louis Bertrand. I will explain how he is related to us."

He gave a chain of cousins extending on either side from the Kenton family and the Bertrand family until they joined

in the middle. It was a slender tie of kinship, but it sufficed in the South. As he finished, Bertrand himself came in, and was introduced formally to his Kentucky cousin. Harry would have taken him for a Frenchman, and he was, in very truth, largely of French blood. His black eyes and hair, his swarthy complexion, gleaming white teeth and quick, volatile manner showed a descendant of France who had come from the ancient soil by way of Hayti, and the great negro rebellion to the coast of South Carolina. He seemed strange and foreign to Harry, and yet he liked him.

"And this is my young cousin, the one who is likely to be so zealous for our cause," he said, smiling at Harry with flashing black eyes. "You are a stalwart lad. They grow bigger and stronger here than on our warm Carolina coast."

"Raymond arrived only three hours ago," said Colonel Kenton in explanation. "He came directly from Charleston, leaving only three hours after the resolution in favor of secession was adopted."

"And a rough journey it was," said Bertrand vivaciously. "I was rattled and shaken by the trains, and I made some of the connections by horseback over the wild hills. Then it was a long ride through the snow to your hospitable home here, my good cousin, Colonel Kenton. But I had minute directions, and no one noticed the stranger who came so quietly around the town, and then entered your house."

Harry said nothing but watched him intently. Bertrand spoke with a rapid lightness and grace and an abundance of gesture, to which he was not used in Kentucky. He ate plentifully, and, although his manners were delicate, Harry felt to an increasing degree his foreign aspect and spirit. He

did not wonder at it when he learned later that Bertrand, besides being chiefly of French blood, had also been educated in Paris.

"Was there much enthusiasm in South Carolina when the state seceded, Raymond?" asked Colonel Kenton.

"I saw the greatest joy and confidence everywhere," he replied, the color flaming through his olive face. "The whole state is ablaze. Charleston is the heart and soul of our new alliance. Rhett and Yancey of Alabama, and the great orators make the souls of men leap. Ah, sir, if you could only have been in Charleston in the course of recent months! If you could have heard the speakers! If you could have seen how the great and righteous Calhoun's influence lives after him! And then the writers! That able newspaper, the Mercury, has thundered daily for our cause. Simms, the novelist, and Timrod and Hayne, the poets have written for it. Let the cities of the North boast of their size and wealth, but they cannot match Charleston in culture and spirit and vivacity!"

Harry saw that Bertrand felt and believed every word he said, and his enthusiasm was communicated to the colonel, whose face flushed, and to Harry, too, whose own heart was beating faster.

"It was a great deed!" exclaimed Colonel Kenton. "South Carolina has always dared to speak her mind, but here in Kentucky some of the cold North's blood flows in our veins and we pause to calculate and consider. We must hasten events. Now, Raymond, we will go into the library. Our friends will be here in a half hour. Harry, you are to stay with us. I told you that you are to be trusted."

They left the table, and went into the great room where the fire had been built anew and was casting a ruddy welcome through the windows. The two men sat down before the blaze and each fell silent, engrossed in his thoughts. Harry felt a pleased excitement. Here was a great and mysterious affair, but he was going to have admittance to the heart of it. He walked to the window, lifted the curtain and looked out. A slender erect figure was already coming up the walk, and he recognized Travers.

Travers knocked at the door and was received cordially. Colonel Kenton introduced Bertrand, saying:

"The messenger from the South."

Travers shook hands and nodded also to signify that he understood. Then came Culver, the state senator from the district, a man of middle years, bulky, smooth shaven, and oratorical. He was followed soon by Bracken, a tobacco farmer on a great scale, Judge Kendrick, Reid and Wayne, both lawyers, and several others, all of wealth or of influence in that region. Besides Harry, there were ten in the room.

"I believe that we are all here now," said Colonel Kenton. "I keep my son with us because, for reasons that I will explain later, I shall nominate him for the task that is needed."

"We do not question your judgment, colonel," said Senator Culver. "He is a strong and likely lad. But I suggest that we go at once to business. Mr. Bertrand, you will inform us what further steps are to be taken by South Carolina and her neighboring states. South Carolina may set an example,

but if the others do not follow, she will merely be a sacrifice."

Bertrand smiled. His smile always lighted up his olive face in a wonderful way. It was a smile, too, of supreme confidence.

"Do not fear," he said. "Alabama, Mississippi, Florida and Louisiana are ready. We have word from them all. It is only a matter of a few days until every state in the lower south goes out, but we want also and we need greatly those on the border, famous states like your Kentucky and Virginia. Do you not see how you are threatened? With the triumph of the rail-splitter, Lincoln, the seat of power is transferred to the North. It is not alone a question of slavery. The balance of the Union is destroyed. The South loses leadership. Her population is not increasing rapidly, and hereafter she will merely hold the stirrup while the North sits in the saddle."

A murmur arose from the men. More than one clenched his hands, until the nails pressed into the flesh. Harry, still standing by the window, felt the influence of the South Carolinian's words more deeply perhaps than any other. The North appeared to him cold, jealous, and vengeful.

"You are right about Kentucky and Virginia," said Senator Culver. "The secession of two such strong states would strike terror in the North. It would influence the outside world, and we would be in a far better position for war, if it should come. Governor Magoffin will have to call a special session of the legislature, and I think there will be enough of us in both Senate and House to take Kentucky out."

Bertrand's dark face glowed.

"You must do it! You must do it!" he exclaimed. "And if you do our cause is won!"

There was a thoughtful silence, broken at last by Colonel Kenton, who turned an inquiring eye upon Bertrand.

"I wish to ask you about the Knights of the Golden Circle," he said. "I hear that they are making great headway in the Gulf States."

Raymond hesitated a moment. It seemed that he, too, felt for the first time a difference between himself and these men about him who were so much less demonstrative than he. But he recovered his poise quickly.

"I speak to you frankly," he replied. "When our new confederation is formed, it is likely to expand. A hostile union will lie across our northern border, but to the south the way is open. There is our field. Spain grows weak and the great island of Cuba will fall from her grasp. Mexico is torn by one civil war after another. It is a grand country, and it would prosper mightily in strong hands. Beyond lie the unstable states of Central America, also awaiting good rulers."

Colonel Kenton frowned and the lawyers looked doubtful.

"I can't say that I like your prospect," the colonel said. "It seems to me that your knights of the Golden Circle meditate a great slave empire which will eat its way even into South America. Slavery is not wholly popular here. Henry Clay long ago wished it to be abolished, and his is a mighty name among us. It would be best to say little in Kentucky of the Knights of the Golden Circle. Our climate is a little too cold for such a project."

Bertrand bit his lip. Swift and volatile, he showed disappointment, but, still swift and volatile, he recovered quickly.

"I have no doubt that you are right, Colonel Kenton," he said, in the tone of one who conforms gracefully, "and I shall be careful when I go to Frankfort with Senator Culver to say nothing about it."

But Harry, who watched him all the time, read tenacity and purpose in his eyes. This man would not relinquish his great southern dream, a dream of vast dominion, and he had a powerful society behind him.

"What news, then, will you send to Charleston?" asked Bertrand at length. "Will you tell her that Kentucky, the state of great names, will stand beside her?"

"Such a message shall be carried to her," replied Colonel Kenton, speaking for them all, "and I propose that my son Harry be the messenger. These are troubled times, gentlemen, and full of peril. We dare not trust to the mails, and a lad, carrying letters, would arouse the least suspicion. He is strong and resourceful. I, his father, should know best and I am willing to devote him to the cause."

Harry started when he heard the words of his father, and his heart gave a great leap of mingled surprise and joy. Such a journey, such an enterprise, made an instant appeal to his impulsive and daring spirit. But he did not speak, waiting upon the words of his elders. All of them looked at him, and it seemed to Harry that they were measuring him, both body and mind.

"I have known your boy since his birth," said Senator Culver, "and he is all that you say. There is none stronger

and better. The choice is good."

"Good! Aye, good indeed!" said the impetuous Bertrand. "How they will welcome him in Charleston!"

"Then, gentlemen," said Colonel Kenton, very soberly, "you are all agreed that my son shall carry to South Carolina the message that Kentucky will follow her out of the Union?"

"We are," they said, all together.

"I shall be glad and proud to go," said Harry, speaking for the first time.

"I knew it without asking you," said Colonel Kenton. "I suggest to you, friends, that he start before dawn, and that he go to Winton instead of the nearest station. We wish to avoid observation and suspicion. The fewer questions he has to answer, the better it will be for all of us."

They agreed with him again, and, in order that he might be fresh and strong for his journey, Harry was sent to his bedroom. Everything would be made ready for him, and Colonel Kenton would call him at the appointed hour. As he withdrew he bade them in turn good night, and they returned his courtesy gravely.

It was one thing to go to his room, but it was another to sleep. He undressed and sat on the edge of the bed. Only when he was alone did he realize the tremendous change that had come into his life. Nor into his life alone, but into the lives of all he knew, and of millions more.

It had ceased snowing and the wind was still. The earth was clothed in deep and quiet white, and the pines stood up, rows of white cones, silvered by the moonlight. Nothing moved out there. No sound came. He felt awed by the world

of night, and the mysterious future which must be full of strange and great events.

He lay down between the covers and, although sleep was long in coming, it came at last and it was without dreams.

Chapter II. A Courier to the South

Table of Contents

Harry was awakened by his father shaking his shoulder. It was yet dark outside, but a small lamp burned on his table.

"It is time for you to go, Harry," said Colonel Kenton, somewhat unsteadily. "Your horse, bridle and saddle on, is waiting. Your breakfast has been cooked for you, and everything else is ready."

Harry dressed rapidly in his heaviest and warmest clothing. He and his father ate breakfast by lamplight, and when he finished it was not yet dawn. Then the Colonel himself brought him his overcoat, comforter, overshoes, and fur cap.

"The saddlebags are already on your horse," he said, "and they are filled with the things you will need. In this pocket-book you will find five hundred dollars, and here is, also, an order on a bank in Charleston for more. See that you keep both money and order safely. I trust to you to spend the money in the proper manner."

Harry put both in an inside pocket of his waistcoat, and then his father handed him a heavy sealed letter.

"This you must guard with your life," he said. "It is not addressed to anybody, but you can give it to Senator Yancey, who is probably in Charleston, or Governor Pickens, of South Carolina, or General Beauregard, who, I understand, is coming to command the troops there, and whom I knew in former days, or to General Ripley. It contains Kentucky's promise to South Carolina, and it is

signed by many of us. And now, Harry, let prudence watch over action. It is no common errand upon which you ride."

The colonel walked with him to the gate where the horse stood. Harry did not know who had brought the animal there, but he believed that his father had done so with his own hand. The boy sprang into the saddle, Colonel Kenton gave him a strong grasp of the hand, undertook to say something but, as he did so, the words choked in his throat, and he walked hastily toward the house.

Harry spoke to his horse, but a hundred yards away, before he came to the first curve in the road, he stopped and looked back. Colonel Kenton was standing in the doorway, his figure made bright in the moonlight. Harry waved his hand and a hand was waved in return. Tears arose to his own eyes, but he was youth in the saddle, with the world before him, and the mist was gone quickly.

The snow was six or eight inches deep, and lay unbroken in the road. But the horse was powerful, shod carefully for snow and ice, and Harry had been almost from infancy an expert rider. His spirits rose. He had no fear of the stillness and the dark. But one could scarcely call it the dark, since brilliant stars rode high in a bright blue heaven, and the forest on either side of him was a vast and intricate tracery of white touched with silver.

He examined his saddle bags, and found in them a silver-mounted pistol and cartridges which he transferred to his belt. The line of the mountains lay near the road, and he remembered Bill Skelly and those like him. The weapon gave him new strength. Skelly and his comrades might come on any pretext they chose.

The road lay straight toward the south, edged on either side by forest. Now and then he passed a silent farm house, set back among the trees, and once a dog barked, but there was no sound, save the tread of the horse's feet in the snow, and his occasional puff when he blew the steam from his nostrils. Harry did not feel the cold. The heavy overcoat protected his body, and the strong action of the heart, pouring the blood in a full tide through his veins, kept him warm.

The east whitened. Dawn came. Thin spires of smoke began to rise from distant houses in the woods or fields. Harry was already many miles from Pendleton, and then something rose in his throat again. He remembered his father standing in the portico, and, strangely enough, the Tacitus lying in his locked desk at the academy. But he crushed it down. His abounding youth made him consider as weak and unworthy, an emotion which a man would merely have reckoned as natural.

The station at Winton was a full twenty miles from Pendleton and, with such heavy snow, Harry did not expect to arrive until late in the afternoon. Nor would there be any need for him to get there earlier, as no train for Nashville reached that place until half past six in the evening. His horse showed no signs of weariness, but he checked his speed, and went on at an easy walk.

The road curved nearer to a line of blue hills, which sloped gradually upward for scores of miles, until they became mountains. All were clothed with forest, and every tree was heavy with snow. A line between the trees showed where a path turned off from the main road and entered the