

CHAPTER IX.

ON MONMOUTH PLAIN.

"Wut's words to them whose faith and truth
On war's red techstone rang true metal;
Who ventured life and love and youth
For the great prize o' death in battle?"

—LOWELL.

AND it was June-time, too, in the far-off New Jersey country across which an army, glittering with scarlet and steel, took its way. Slowly it moved, for with it went a wagon-train conveying many of the refugees from the evacuated city of Philadelphia, people who could not crowd into the transports that went by sea, but who feared to meet the incoming Americans and so sought safety in New York. Children and delicately reared women slept in army tents, or sat in their coaches all day, listening to the crunching of the wheels in the sand and looking back through the slowly increasing distance to the horizon, behind which lay the deserted city where pleasure had held high carnival during the months just passed. And with them they carried everything that could be packed into coach or hidden in wagon; and though they went with the semblance of victory and almost of pleasure-seekers, it was a sad procession; for who could say when or upon what terms they might ever see their old homes again? Often Clinton looked back impatiently at the crawling train, for he had not liked to be so hampered, and yet had been quite as unwilling to abandon these people to the revenge they imagined awaited them.

Almost before they had lost sight of the spires of the city, Arnold, with braying bugles, marched his column down the echoing streets, and set up the standard of the republic where late the British lion had wooed the wind.

For nearly a week that long train crept on its way, held back by its own cumbersome weight and the varying roughness of the route. And ever on its flank hung the lean but resolute army of the Continentals, waiting and longing for a chance

to strike. All the suffering of Valley Forge was to be avenged. Every wrong they had sustained was whispering at their ears and tugging at their memories; every dead comrade seemed calling out to them for retribution through the sunshine or the midnight silence. And it should be theirs; the utmost atonement that arms, nerved with patriotic and personal vengeance, could achieve, should be claimed—if only the hour would come. But still that long train moved onward, and there came no word to fight.

Then, from out the blue sky-reaches of that June-time dawned Monmouth day.

"We are to fight at last!"

And every man in that thin, dishevelled line felt his heart throb with the exultation of action long desired and long delayed. Every man but one, and he the one on whom rested the responsibility of the attack.

"Anybody but Lee!" Dunn had said with a groan, when he heard who was to lead the attacking column. And Richard, having gone with him to report some scouting work to the council of officers, and recalling Lee's fierce opposition to any plan for battle, groaned too.

"His envy of General Washington and his imprisonment among the British have made him half Tory. He is the senior officer, it is true, but if he had only persisted in his first refusal to lead the division and left it to La Fayette!"

But in Richard's thoughts there was no time for doubt when, in the brilliant light of the next morning, he swept with his column toward the scarlet line that marked Clinton's post. It was his first real battle, for compared with this the engagements under Sumter had been but skirmishes; and the frenzy of the fight was upon him. "For home and Joscelyn!" had been the war-cry he had set himself, thinking to carry into the hottest of every fray the memory-presence of the girl whom he loved. But when the test came she was forgotten, for after he had conquered a fleeting wish to turn and seek shelter from the blazing musketry ahead, a wild, unreasoning delirium seized upon him, and