

! Tention
A Story of Boy-Life During the
Peninsular War

George Manville Fenn

Chapter One.

To Save a Comrade.

A Sharp volley, which ran echoing along the ravine, then another, just as the faint bluish smoke from some hundred or two muskets floated up into the bright sunshine from amidst the scattered chestnuts and cork-trees that filled the lower part of the beautiful gorge, where, now hidden, now flashing out and scattering the rays of the sun, a torrent roared and foamed along its rocky course onward towards its junction with the great Spanish river whose destination was the sea.

Again another ragged volley; and this was followed by a few dull, heavy-sounding single shots, which came evidently from a skirmishing party which was working its way along the steep slope across the river.

There was no responsive platoon reply to the volley, but the skirmishing shots were answered directly by crack! crack! crack! the reports that sounded strangely different to those heavy, dull musket-shots which came from near at hand, and hardly needed glimpses of dark-green uniforms that dotted the hither slope of the mountain-side to proclaim that they were delivered by riflemen who a few minutes before were, almost in single line, making their way along a rugged mountain-path.

A second glance showed that they formed the rear-guard of a body of sharpshooters, beyond whom in the distance could be made out now and then glints of bright scarlet, which at times looked almost orange in the brilliant sunshine—orange flashed with silver, as the sun played upon musket-barrel and fixed bayonet more than shoulder-high.

The country Spain, amidst the towering Pyrenees; the scarlet that of a British column making its way along a rugged mule-path, from which those that traversed it looked down upon a scene of earthly beauty, and upwards at the celestial blue, beyond which towered the rugged peaks where here and there patches of the past winter's snow gleamed and sparkled in the sun. Strategy had indicated retreat; and the black-green, tipped at collar and cuff with scarlet, of England's rifle-regiment was covering the retiring line, when the blue-coated columns of the French General's division had pressed on and delivered the wild volleys and scattered shots of the skirmishers which drew forth the Sharp, vicious, snapping reply of the retreating rearguard.

"At last!" said one of the riflemen, rising from where he had knelt on one knee to take cover behind a bush, and there stand driving down a cartridge with a peculiarly sharp, ringing sound of iron against iron, before finishing off with a few heavy thuds, returning the bright rod to its loops, and raising the pan of the lock to see that it was well primed with the coarse powder of the day.

"Yes—at last!" said his nearest comrade, who with a few more had halted at a subaltern's command to wait in cover for a shot or two at their pursuing foe. "Are going to hold this place?"

"No," said the young officer. "Hear that, my man?" For a note or two of a bugle rang out sweet and clear in the beautiful valley, suggesting to one of the men a similar scene in an English dell; but he sighed to himself as it struck him that this was a different hunt, and that they, the men of the —th, the one rifle-regiment of the British Army, were the hunted, and that those who followed were the French.

A few more cracks from the rifles as the retreat was continued, and then the French musketry ceased; but the last of the sharpshooters obtained glimpses of the blue coats of the French coming quickly on.

"Have you sickened them, my lads?" said the young officer, as he led his men after the retreating main body of their friends.

"NO, Sir," said the young private addressed; "they seem to have lost touch of us. The mule-track has led right away to the left here,"

"To be sure—yes. Then they will begin again directly. Keep your face well to the enemy, and take advantage of every bit of cover.—Here, bugler, keep close up to me."

The sturdy-looking boy addressed had just closed up to his officer's side when, as they were about to plunge into a low-growing patch of trees, there was another volley, the bullets pattering amongst the branches, twigs and leaves cut from above the men's heads falling thickly.

"Forward, my lads—double!" And the subaltern led his men through the trees to where the mountain-side opened out a little more; and, pointing with his sword to a dense patch a little farther on, he shouted, "Take cover there! We must hold that patch.—Here, bugler!— Where's that boy?"

No one answered, the men hurriedly following the speaker at the double; but the young private who had replied to the subaltern's questions, having fallen back to where he was running with a companion in the rear, looked over his shoulder, and then, startled by the feeling that the boy had not passed through the clump, he stopped short, his companion imitating his example and replying to the eager question addressed to him:

"I dunno, mate. I thought he was with his officer. Come on; we don't want to be prisoners."

He started again as he spoke, not hearing, or certainly not heeding, his comrade's angry words—

"He must be back there in the wood."

Carrying his rifle at the trail, he dashed back into the wood, hearing, as he ran, shouts as of orders being given by the enemy; but he ran on right through the clump of trees to where the mule-path meandered along by the edge of the precipice, and lay open before him to the next patch of woodland which screened the following enemy from view.

But the path was not unoccupied, for there, about fifty yards from him, he caught sight of his unfortunate young comrade, who, bugle in hand, was just struggling to his feet; and then, as he stood upright, he made a couple of steps forward, but only to stagger and reel for a moment; when, as his

comrade uttered a cry, the boy tottered over the edge of the path, fell a few yards, and then rolled down the steep slope out of sight.

The young rifleman did not stop to think, but occupied the brief moments in running to his comrade's help; and, just as a volley came crashing from the open wood beyond the path, he dropped down over the side, striving hard to keep his feet and to check his downward progress to where he felt that the boy must have fallen. Catching vainly at branch and rock, he went on, down and down, till he was brought up short by a great mossy block of stone just as another volley was fired, apparently from the mule-track high above him; and half-unconsciously, in the confusion and excitement of the moment, he lay perfectly still, cowering amongst the sparse growth in the hope that he might not be seen from the shelf-like mule-track above, though expectant all the while that the next shot fired would be at him,

But, as it happened, that next shot was accompanied by many more; and as, fearing to move, he strained his eyes upward, he could see the grey smoke rising, and hear the sound of a bugle, followed by the rush of feet, and he knew that, so far, he had not been seen, but that the strong body of the enemy were hurrying along the mule-track in full pursuit of his friends,

"Just as if I had been running," muttered the young rifleman; and he stole his left hand slowly upwards, from where he was lying in a most awkward position, to rest it upon his breast as if to check the heavy beating of his heart.

"Ah!" he panted at last, as with strained eyes and ears he waited for some sign of his presence behind the advancing enemy being known, "Where's that boy?" he muttered hoarsely; and he tried to look about without moving, so as not to expose himself to any who might be passing along the rocky ledge.

The next minute the necessity for caution was emphasised, for there was a hoarse command from somewhere above, followed by the heavy tramp of feet which told only too plainly that he was being cut off from his regiment by another body of the enemy.

"I couldn't help it," he said. "I couldn't leave that poor fellow behind."

He had hardly uttered this thought when, apparently from just beyond the rugged mass of stone which had checked his descent, there came a low groan, followed by a few words, amongst which the listener made out, "The cowards!"

"That you, Punch?" whispered the young rifleman excitedly.

"Eh, who's that?" was the faint reply.

"Hist! Lie still, I'll try and get to you directly."

"That you, Private Gray?"

"Yes, yes," was whispered back, and the speaker felt his heart leap within his breast; "but lie still for a few moments,"

"Oh, do come! I'm—I've got it bad."

The young private felt his heart sink again as he recalled the way in which the boy had staggered and fallen from the edge of the track above him. Then, in answer to the appeal for help, he passed his rifle over his body, and, wrenching himself round, he managed to lower himself beyond the mass of rock so as to get beneath and obtain its shelter from those passing along the ledge, but only to slip suddenly for a yard or two, with the result that the shrubs over which he had passed sprang up again and supplied the shelter which he sought.

"Punch! Punch! Where are you?" he whispered, as, satisfied now that he could not be seen from above, he raised his head a little and tried to make out him whom he sought.

But all was perfectly still about where he lay, while the sound of musketry came rolling and echoing along the narrow ravine; and above the trees, in the direction in which his friends must be, there was a rising and ever-thickening cloud of smoke.

Then for a few minutes the firing ceased, and in the midst of the intense silence there arose from the bushes just above the listener's head a quick twittering of premonitory notes, followed by the sharp, clear, ringing song of a bird, which thrilled the lad with a feeling of hope in the midst of what the moment before had been a silence that was awful.

Then from close at hand came a low, pitiful groan, and a familiar voice muttered, "The cowards—to leave a comrade like this!"

Chapter Two.

Poor Punch.

Private Gray, of his Majesty's —th Rifles—wrenched himself round once more, pressed aside a clump of heathery growth, crawled quickly about a couple of yards, and found himself lying face to face with the bugler of his company.

"Why, Punch, lad!" he said, "not hurt much, are

"That you, Private Gray?"

"Yes. But tell me, are you wounded?"

"Yes!" half-groaned the boy; and then with a sudden access of excitement, "Here, I say, where's my bugle?"

"Oh, never mind your bugle. Where are you hun?" cried the boy's comrade,

"In my bugle—I mean, somewhere in my back but where's my instrument?"

"There it is, in the grass, hanging by the Cord."

"Oh, that's better," groaned the boy "I thought all our chaps had gone on and left me to Clie."

"And now you see that they hav'n't," said the boy's companion. "There, don 't try to move. We mustn't be seen."

"Yes," almost babbled the boy, speaking piteously, "I thought they had all gone, and left me here. I did try to ketch up to them; but—oh, I am so faint and sick that it's all going round and round! Here, Private Gray, you are a good chap, shove the cord over my head, and take care the enemy don't get my bugle. Ah! Water—water, please! It's all going round and round."

Penton Gray made no effort now to look round for danger, but, unstopping his water-bottle, he crept closer to his companion in adversity, passed the strap of the boy's shako from under his Chin, thrust his cap from his head to lie amongst the grass, and then opened the collar of his coatee and began to trickle a little water between the poor fellow's lips and sprinkled a little upon his temples.

"Ah!" sighed the boy, as he began to revive, "that's good! I don't mind now."

"But you are hurt. Where's your wound?" said the young private eagerly.

"Somewhere just under the shoulder," replied the boy. "'Tain't bleeding much, is it?"

"I don't know yet.—I won't hurt you more than I can help."

"Whatcher going to do?"

"Draw off your jacket so that I can see whether the hurt's bad."

"'Tain't very," said the boy, speaking feebly of body but stout Of heart. "I don't mind, comrade. Soldiers don't mind a wound.—Oh, I say!" he cried, with more vigour than he had previously evinced.

"Did I hurt you?"

"Yes, you just did. Were you cutting it with your knife?"

"NO," said his comrade with a half-laugh, as he drew his hand from where he had passed it under the boy's shoulder. "That's what cut you, punch," and he held up a ragged-looking bullet which had dropped into his fingers as he manipulated the wound.

"Thought you was cutting me with your knife," said the boy, speaking with some energy now. "But, I say, don't you chuck that away; I want that.—What did they want to shoot me there for—the cowards! Just as if I was running away, when I was only obeying orders. If they had shot me in front I could have seen to it myself.—I say, does it bleed much?"

"No, my lad; but it's an ugly place."

"Well, who wants it to be handsome? I ain't a girl. Think you can stop it, private?"

"I think I can bind it up, Punch, and the bleeding will stop of itself."

"That's good. I say, though, private—sure to die after it, ain't I?"

"Yes, some day," said the young soldier, smiling encouragingly at the speaker; and then by the help of a shirt-sleeve and a bandage which he drew from his knapsack, the young soldier managed pretty deftly to bind up his comrade's wound, and then place him in a more comfortable position, lying upon his side.

"Thank ye!" said the boy with a sigh. "But, I say, you have give it me hot."

"I am very sorry, boy,"

"Oh, never mind that, but just wipe my face; it's all as wet as wet, and the drops keep running together and tickling."

This little service was performed, and then the boy turned his head uneasily aside.

"What is it, Punch?"

"That there bullet—where is it?"

"I have got it safe."

"That's right. NOW, where's my bugle?"

"There it is, quite safe too."

"Yes, that's right," said the boy faintly. "I don't want to lose that; but— Oh, I say, look at that there dent! what'll the colonel say when he sees that?"

"Shall I tell you, punch?" said the young man, who bent over him, watching every change in his face.

"Yes—no. I know: 'Careless young whelp,' or something; and the sergeant—"

"Never mind the sergeant," said the young sharpshooter. "I want to tell you what the colonel will say, like the gentleman he is."

"Then, what'll he say?" said the wounded lad drowsily.

"That he has a very brave boy in his regiment, and— poor chap, he has fainted again! My word, what a position to be in! our fellows will never be able to get back, and if I shout for help it means hospital for him, prison for me. What shall I do?"

There was nothing to be done, as Pen Gray soon realised as he lay upon his side in the shade of the steep valley, watching his wounded comrade, who gradually sank into the sleep of exhaustion, while the private listened for every sound that might suggest the coming on or retreating of the French troops. His hopes rose once, for it seemed to him that the tide of war was ebbing and flowing lower down the valley, and his spirits rose as the mountain-breeze brought the sounds of firing apparently nearer and nearer, till he

felt that the English troops had not only rallied, but were driving back the French over the ground by which they had come. But as the day wore on he found that his hopes were false; and, to make their position worse, fresh troops had come down the valley and were halted about a quarter of a mile from where he and his sleeping companion lay; while, lower down, the firing, which had grown fiercer and fiercer, gradually died out.

He was intently straining his ears, when to his surprise the afternoon sun began to flash upon the weapons of armed men, and once more his hopes revived in the belief that the French were being driven back; but to his astonishment and dismay, as they came more and more into sight, a halt seemed to have been called, and they too settled down into a bivouac, and communications by means of mounted men took place between them and the halted party higher up the valley; the young rifleman, by using great care, watching the going to and fro unseen.

Evening was coming on, and Pen Gray was still watching and wondering whether it would be possible to take advantage of the darkness, when it fell, to try and pass down the valley, circumvent the enemy, and overtake their friends, when the wounded boy's eyes unclosed, and he lay gazing wonderingly in his comrade's eyes.

"Better, Punch?" said Pen softly.

"What's the matter?" was the reply; and the boy gazed in his face in a dazed, half-stupid way.

"Don't you remember, lad?"

"No," was the reply. "Where's the ridge?"

"Over yonder. Somewhere about the mouth of the valley, I expect."

"Oh, all right. What time is it?"

"I should think about five. Why?"

"Why?" said the boy. "Because there will be a row, are we here?"

"Waiting till you are better before trying to join our company."

"Better? Have we been resting, then, because my feet were so bad with the marching?"

Pen was silent as he half-knelt there, listening wonderingly to his comrade's half-delirious queries, and asking himself whether he had better tell the boy their real position.

"So much marching," continued the "and those blisters. Ah, I remember! I say, private, didn't I get a bullet into me, and fall right down here? Yes, that's it. Here, private Gray, what are you going to do?"

"Ah, what are we going to do?" said the young man sadly. "I was in hopes that you would be so much better, or rather I hoped you might, that we could creep along after dark and get back to our men; but I am afraid—"

"So'm I," said the boy bitterly, as he tried to move himself a little, and then sank back with a faint groan. "Couldn't do it, unless two of our fellows got me in a sergeant's sash and catTied me."

"I'd try and carry you on my back," said Pen, "if you could bear it."

"Couldn't," said the boy abruptly. "I say, where do you think our lads are?"

"Beaten, perhaps taken prisoners," said Pen bitterly.

"Serve 'em right—cowards! To go and leave us behind like this!"

"Don't talk so much."

"It will make you feverish; and it's of no use to complain. They couldn't help leaving us. Besides, I was not left."

"Then how come you to be here?" said the boy sharply.

"I came after you, to help you."

"More Old stupid you! Didn't you know when you were safe?"

Pen raised his brows a little and looked half-perplexed, half-amused at the irritable face of his comrade, who wrinkled up his forehead with pain, drew a hard breath, and then whispered softly, "I say, comrade, I oughtn't to have said that there, ought I?"

Pen was silent.

"You saw me go down, didn't you?"

Pen bowed his head.

"And you ran back to pick me up? Ah!" he ejaculated, drawing his breath hard.

"Wound hurt you much, my lad?"

"Ye—es," said the lad, wincing; "just as if some one was boring a hole through my shoulder with a red-hot ramrod,"

"Punch, my lad, I don't think it's a bad wound, for while you were asleep I looked, and found that it had stopped bleeding."

"Stopped? That's a good job; ain't it, comrade?"

"Yes; and with a healthy young fellow like you a wound soon begins to heal up if the wounded man lies quiet,"

"But I 'm only a boy, private."

"Then the wound will heal all the more readily."

"I say, how do you know all this?" said the boy, looking at him curiously.

"By reading."

"Reading! Ah, I can't read—not much; only little words. Well, then, if you know that, I have got to lie still, then, till the hole's grown up. I say, have you got that bullet safe?"

"Oh yes."

"Don't you lose it, mind, because I mean to keep that to show people at home. Even if I am a boy I should like people to know that I have been in the wars. So I have got to lie still and get well? Won't be bad if you could get me a bundle or two of hay and a greatcoat to cover over me. The wind will come down pretty cold from the mountains; but I sha'n't mind that so long as the bears don't come I shall be all right, so you had better be off and get back to the regiment, and tell them where you have left me. I say, you will get promoted for it."

"Nonsense, Punch! What for?"

"Sticking to a comrade like this, I have been thinking about it, and I call it fine of you running back to help me, with the Frenchies coming on, Yes, I know, Don't make faces about it. The colonel will have you made corporal for trying to save me."

"Of course!" said Pen sarcastically. "Why, I'm not much Older than you—the youngest private in the regiment; more likely to be in trouble for not keeping in the ranks, and shirking the enemy's fire."

"Don't you tell me," said the boy sharply. "I 'll let the colonel and everybody know, if ever I get back to the ranks again."

"What's that?" said Pen sharply. "If ever you get back to the ranks again! Why, you are not going to set up a faint heart, are you?"

"Tain't my heart's faint, but my head feels sick and swimmy. But, I say, do you think you ought to do any more about stopping up the hole so as to give a fellow a chance?"

"I'll do all I can, Punch," said Pen; "but you know I'm not a surgeon."

"Course I do," said the boy, laughing, but evidently fighting hard to hide his suffering. "You are better than a doctor."

"Better, eh?"

"Yes, ever so much, because you are here and the doctor isn't,"

The boy lay silent for a few minutes, evidently thinking deeply.

"I say, private," he said at last, can't settle this all out about what's going to be done; but I think this will be best."

"What?"

"What I said before. You had better wait till night, and then creep off and follow our men's track. It will be awkward in the dark, but you ought to be able to find out somehow, because there's only one road

all along by the side of this little river. You just keep along that while it's dark, and trust to Iuck when it's daytime again. Only, look here, my water-bottle's empty, so, as soon as you think it's dark enough, down you go to the river, fill it, and bring it back, and I shall be all right till our fellows fight their way back and pick me up."

"And if they are not able to—what then?" said Pen, smiling.

"Well, I shall wait till I get so hungry I can't wait any longer, and then I will Cry chy-ike til! the Frenchies come and pick me up. But, I say, they won't Stick a bayonet through me, will they?"

"What, through a wounded said Pen angrily. "No, they are not so bad as that."

"Thank ye! I like that, private. I have often wished I was a man; but now I'm lying here, with a hole in my back, I'm rather glad that I am only a boy. Now then, catch hold of my water-bottle. It will soon be dark enough for you to get down to the river; and you mustn't lose any time. Oh, there's one thing more, though. You had better take my bugle; we mustn't let the enemy have that. I think as much of my bugle as Bony's chaps do of their eagles. You will take care of it, won't you?"

"Yes, when I carry it," said Pen quietly.

"Well, you are going to carry it now, aren't you?"

"No," said Pen quietly.

"Oh, you mean, not till you have fetched the water?"

Pen shook his head.

"What do you mean, then?"

"To do my duty, boy."

"Of course you do; but don't be so jolly fond of calling me boy. You said yourself a little while ago that you weren't much older than I am. But, I say, you had better go now; and I suppose I oughtn't to talk, for it makes my head turn swimmy, and we are wasting time; and—oh, Gray," the boy groaned, "I—
—I can't help it. I never felt so bad as this. There, do go now. Get the water, and if I am asleep when you come back, don't Wake me so that I feel the pain again. hands first, and say good-bye. "

The boy uttered a faint cry of agony as he tried to stretch out his hand, which only sank down helplessly by his side.

"Well, good-bye," he panted, as Pen's dropped slowly upon the quivering limb. "Well, why don't you go?"

"Because it isn't time yet," said Pen meaningly, as after a glance round he drew some of the overhanging twigs of the nearest shrub closer together, and then passed his hand across the forehead, and afterwards held his wrist.

"Thank you, doctor," said the boy, smiling.

"That seems to have done me good. Now then, aren't you going?"

"NO," said Pen, with a sigh.

"I say—why?"

"You know as well as I do," replied Pen.

"You mean that you won't go and leave me here alone? That's What you mean."

"Yes, Punch; you are quite right. But look here. Suppose I was lying here wounded, would you go off and leave me at night on this cold mountain-side, knowing how those brutes of wolves hang about the rear of the army? You have heard them of a night, haven't you?"

"Yes," said the boy, shudderingly drawing his breath through his tightly closed teeth. "I say, comrade, What do you want to talk like that for.

"Because I want you to answer my question:

Would you go off and leave me here alone?"

"No, I'm blessed if I would," said the boy, speaking now in a voice full of animation. "I couldn't do it, comrade, and it wouldn't be like a soldier's son."

"But I am not a soldier's son, Punch."

"No," said the boy, 'Sand that's What our lads say. They don't like you, and they say— There, I won't tell you what."

"Yes, tell me, punch. I should like to know."

"They say that they have not got anything else against you, only you have no business here in the ranks."

"Why do they say that?"

"Because, when they are talking about it, they say you are a gentleman and a scholar."

"But I thought T was always friendly and sociable with them."

"So you are, private Gray," cried the boy excitedly; "and if ever I get back to the ranks alive I'll tell them you are the best comrade in the regiment, and how you wouldn't leave me in the lurch."

"And I shall make you promise, Punch, that you never say a word."

"All right," said the boy, with a faint smile, "I'll promise. I won't say a word; but," he continued, with a shudder which did not conceal his smile, "they will be sure to find it out and get to like you as much as I do now."

"What's the matter, Punch?" said Pen shortly.

"Cold?"

"Head's hot as fire, so's my shoulder; but every-where else I am like ice. And there's that swimming coming in my head again—I don't mind. It's all right, comrade; I shall be better soon, but just now—just now—"

The boy's voice trailed off into silence, and a few minutes later young Private Penton Gray, of his Majesty's newly raised —th Rifles, nearly all fresh bearers of the weapon which was to do so much to win the battles Of the Peninsular War, prepared to keep his night-watch on the chilly mountain-side by stripping off his coatee and unrolling his carefully folded greatcoat to cover the wounded lad. And that night-watch was where he could hear the howling and answering howls of the loathsome beasts that to him to say: "This way, comrades: here, and here, for men are lying wounded and slain; the watch-fires are distant, and there are none to hinder us where the banquet is spread. Come, brothers, come!"

Chapter Three.

Where the Wolves Howl.

"Ugh!" A long, shivering shudder following upon the low, dismal howl of a wolf.

"Bah! How cold it is lying out here in this chilly wind which comes down from the mountain tops! I say, What an idiot I was to strip myself and turn my greatcoat into a counterpane! No, I won't be a humbug; that wasn't the cold. It was sheer I should have felt just the same if I had had a blanket over me. The brutes! There is something so horrible about it. The very idea of their coming down from the mountains to follow the trail of the fighting, and hunt out the dead or the wounded who have been forgotten or have crawled somewhere for Shelter,"

Pen Gray lay thinking in the darkness, straining his ears the while to try and convince himself that the faint sound he heard was not a movement made by a prowling wolf scenting them out; and as he lay listening, he pictured to himself the gaunt, grisly beast creeping up to spring upon him.

"Only fancy!" he said sadly. "That wasn't the breathing of one of the beasts, only the wind again that comes sighing down from the mountains—I wish I was more plucky."

He stretched out his hand and laid his rifle amongst the shrubs with its muzzle pointed in the direction from whence the sighing sound had come.

"I'll put an end to one of them," he muttered bitterly, "if I don't miss him in the dark. Pooh! They won't come here, or if they do I have only to jump up and the cowardly beasts will dash off at once; but it is horrid lying here in the darkness, so solitary and so strange. I wouldn't care so much if the Stars would

come out, but they won't to-night & To-night? Why, it must be nearly morning, for I have been lying here hours and hours. And how dark it is in this valley, with the mountains towering up on each side. I wish the day would come, but it always does seem ten times as long when you are waiting and expecting it. It is getting cold though. Seems to go right through to one's bones—Poor he continued, as he stretched out one hand and gently passed it beneath his companion's covering. "He's warm enough. No—too hot; and I suppose that's fever from his wound. Poor chap! Such a boy too! But as brave as brave. He must be a couple of years younger than I am; but he's more of a man. Oh, I do wish it was morning, so that I could try and do something. There must be cottages somewhere—shepherds' or goat-herds'—where as soon as the people understand that we are not French they might give me some black-bread and an onion or two."

The young soldier laughed a soft, low, mocking kind of laugh.

"Black-bread and an onion! How queer it seems! Why, there was a time when I wouldn't have touched such stuff, while now it sounds like a feast. But let's see; let's think about what I have got to do. As soon as it's daylight I must find a cottage and try to make the people understand what's the matter, and get them to help me to carry poor punch into shelter, another night like this would kill him— I don't know, though. I always used to think that lying down in one's wet clothes, and perhaps rain coming in the night, would give me a cold; but it doesn't. I must get him into shelter, though, somehow. Oh, if morning would only come! The black darkness makes one feel so horribly lonely.—What nonsense! I have got poor punch here. But he has the best of it; he can sleep, and here I haven't even closed my eyes. Being hungry, I suppose—I wonder where our lads are. Gone right off perhaps. I hope we haven't lost many. But the firing was very sharp, and I suppose the French have kept up the pursuit, and they are all miles and miles away."

At that moment there was a sharp flash with the report of a musket, and its echoes seemed to be thrown back from the steep slope across the torrent, while almost simultaneously, as Gray raised himself upon his elbow, there was another report, and another, and another, followed by more, some of which seemed distant and the others close at hand; while, as the echoes zigzagged across the valley, and the lad stretched out his hand to draw himself up into a sitting position, oddly enough that hand touched something icy, and he snatched it back with a feeling of annoyance, for he realised that it was only the icy metal that formed his wounded companion's bugle, and he lay listening to the faint notes of another instrument calling upon the men to assemble.

"Why, it's a night attack," thought Pen excitedly, and unconsciously he began to breathe hard as he listened intently, while he fully grasped the fact that there were men of the French brigade dotted about in all directions.

"And there was I thinking that we were quite alone!" he said to himself.

Then by degrees his short experience of a few months of the British occupation on the borders of Portugal and Spain taught him that he had been listening to a night alarm, for from out of the darkness came the low buzz of voices, another bugle was sounded, distant orders rang out, and then by degrees the low murmur of voices died away, and once more all was still.

"I was in hopes," thought Gray, "that our fellows were making a night attack, giving the enemy a surprise. Why, there must be hundreds within reach. That puts an end to my going hunting about for help as soon as the day breaks, unless I mean us to be taken prisoners, why, if I moved from here I should be seen—Asleep, punch?" he said softly.

There was no reply, and the speaker shuddered as he stretched out his hand to feel for his companion's forehead; but at the first touch there was an impatient movement, and a feeling of relief shot through the lad's breast, for imagination had been busy, and was ready to suggest that something horrible might have happened in the night.

"Oh, I do wish I wasn't such a coward," he muttered. "He's all right, only a bit feverish. What shall I do? Try and go to sleep till morning? What's the good of talking? I am sure I couldn't, even if I did try."

Then the weary hours slowly crept along, the watcher trying hard to settle in his own mind which was the east, but failing dismally, for the windings of the valley had been such that he could only guess at the direction where the dawn might appear.

There were no more of the dismal howlings of the wolves, though, the scattered firing having effectually driven them away; but there were moments when it seemed to the young watcher that the night was being indefinitely prolonged, and he sighed again and again as he strained his eyes to pierce the darkness, and went on trying to form some plan as to his next movement.

"I wonder how long we could lie in hiding here," he said to himself, "without food. Poor punch in his state wouldn't miss his ration; but by-and-by, if the French don't find us, this bitter cold will have passed away, and we shall be lying here in the scorching sunshine—for it can be hot in these stuffy valleys—and the poor boy will be raving for water—yes, water, who was that chap who was tortured by having it close to him and not being able to reach it? Tantalus, of course! I am forgetting all my classics. Well, soldiers don't want cock-and-bull stories out of Lempriere. I wonder, though, whether I could crawl down among the bushes to the edge of the torrent and fill our water-bottles, and get back up here again without being seen. But perhaps, when the day comes, and if they don't see us, the French will move off, and then I need only wait patiently and try and find some cottage—Yes, What is it?"

He raised himself upon his arm again, for Punch had begun to mutter; but there was no reply.

"Talking in his sleep," said Pen with a sigh.

"Good for him that he can sleep! Oh, surely it must be near morning now!"

The lad sprang to his knees and placed one hand over his eyes as he strained himself round, for all at once he caught sight of a tiny speck as of glowing fire right overhead, and he stared in amazement.

"Why, that can't be daylight!" he thought. "It would appear, of course, low down in the east, just a faint streak of dawn. That must be some dull star peering through the clouds. Why, there are two of them," he said in a whisper; "no, three why, it is day coming!" And he uttered a faint cry of joy as he crouched low again and gazed, so to speak, with all his might at the wondrous scene of beauty fanned by the myriad

specks of orange light which began to spread overhead, and grow and grow till the mighty dome that seemed supported in a vast curve by the mountains on either side of the valley became one blaze of light.