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# **The Tree of Appomattox**

Joseph A. (Joseph Alexander) Altsheler

# Imprint

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## FOREWORD

"The Tree of Appomattox" concludes the series of connected romances dealing with the Civil War, begun in "The Guns of Bull Run," and continued successively through "The Guns of Shiloh," "The Scouts of Stonewall," "The Sword of Antietam," "The Star of Gettysburg," "The Rock of Chickamauga" and "The Shades of the Wilderness" to the present volume. It has been completed at the expense of vast labor, and the author has striven at all times to be correct, wherever facts are involved. So far, at least, no historic detail has been challenged by critic or reader.

More than half a century has passed since the Civil War's close. Not many of the actors in it are left. It was one of the most tremendous upheavals in the life of any nation, and it was the greatest of all struggles, until the World War began, but scarcely any trace of partisan rancor or bitterness is left. So, it has become easier to write of it with a sense of fairness and detachment, and the lapse of time has made the perspective clear and sharp.

However lacking he may be in other respects, the author perhaps had an advantage in being born, and having grown up in a border state, where sentiment was about equally divided concerning the Civil War. He was surrounded during his early youth by men who fought on one side or the other, and their stories of camp, march and battle were almost a part of the air he breathed. So he hopes that this circumstance has aided him to give a truthful color to the picture of the mighty combat, waged for four such long and terrible years.



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P. G. T. BEAUREGARD, Southern General.  
WILLIAM L. YANCEY, Alabama Orator.  
JAMES A. GARFIELD, Northern General, afterwards President of  
the United States.

And many others

**IMPORTANT BATTLES DESCRIBED IN THE CIVIL WAR SERIES**

**BULL RUN KERNSTOWN CROSS KEYS WINCHESTER PORT  
REPUBLIC THE SEVEN DAYS MILL SPRING FORT DONEL-  
SON SHILOH PERRYVILLE STONE RIVER THE SECOND  
MANASSAS ANTIETAM FREDERICKSBURG CHANCEL-  
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CHICKAMAUGA MISSIONARY RIDGE THE WILDERNESS  
SPOTTSYLVANIA COLD HARBOR FISHER'S HILL CEDAR  
CREEK APPOMATTOX**

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## CHAPTER I

### THE APPLE TREE

Although he was an officer in full uniform he was a youth in years, and he had the spirits of youth. Moreover, it was one of the finest apple trees he had ever seen and the apples hung everywhere, round, ripe and red, fairly asking to be taken and eaten. Dick Mason looked up at them longingly. They made him think of the orchards at home in his own state, and a touch of coolness in the air sharpened his appetite for them all the more.

"If you want 'em so badly, Dick," said Warner, "why don't you climb the tree and get 'em? There's plenty for you and also for Pennington and me."

"I see. You're as anxious for apples as I am, and you wish me to gather 'em for you by making a strong appeal to my own desires. It's your clever New England way."

"We're forbidden to take anything from the people, but it won't hurt to keep a few apples from rotting on the ground. If you won't get 'em Pennington will."

"I understand you, George. You're trying to play Frank against me, while you keep yourself safe. You'll go far. Never mind. I'll gather apples for us all."

He leaped up, caught the lowest bough, swung himself lightly into the fork, and then climbing a little higher, reached for the reddest and ripest apples, which he flung down in a bountiful supply.

"Now, gluttons," he said, "sate yourselves, but save a lot for me."

Then he went up as far as the boughs would sustain him and took a look over the country. Apple trees do not grow very tall, but Dick's tree stood on the highest point in the orchard, and he had a

fine view, a view that was in truth the most remarkable the North American continent had yet afforded.

He always carried glasses over his shoulder, and lately Colonel Winchester had made him a gift of a splendid pair, which he now put into use, sweeping the whole circle of the horizon. With their powerful aid he was able to see the ancient city of Petersburg, where Lee had thrown himself across Grant's path in order to block his way to Richmond, the Southern capital, and had dug long lines of trenches in which his army lay. It was Lee who first used this method of defense for a smaller force against a larger, and the vast trench warfare of Europe a half century later was a repetition of the mighty struggle of Lee and Grant on the lines of Petersburg.

Dick through his glasses saw the trenches, lying like a brown bar across the green country, and opposite them another brown bar, often less than a hundred yards away, which marked where the Northern troops also had dug in. The opposing lines extended a distance of nearly forty miles, and Richmond was only twenty miles behind them. It was the nearest the Army of the Potomac had come to the Southern capital since McClellan had seen the spires of its churches, and that was more than two years away.

Warner and Pennington were lying on the ground, eating big red apples with much content and looking up lazily at Mason.

"You're curving those glasses about a lot. What do you see, Dick?" asked Pennington at length.

"I see Petersburg, an old, old town, half buried in foliage, and with many orchards and gardens about it. A pity that two great armies should focus on such a pleasant place."

"No time for sentiment, Dick. What else do you see?"

"Jets of smoke and flame from the trenches, an irregular sort of firing, sometimes a half-dozen shots at one place, and then a long and peaceful break until you come to another place, where they're exchanging bullets."

"What more do you see, Brother Richard?"

"I see a Johnny come out of his trench hands up and advance toward one of our Yanks opposite, who also has come out of his trench hands up."

"What are they trading?" asked Warner.

"The Reb offers a square of plug tobacco, and the Yank a bundle of newspapers. Now they've made the exchange, now they've shaken hands and each is going back to his own trench."

"It's a merry world, my masters, as has been said before," resumed Warner, "but I should add that it's also a mad wag of a world. Here we are face to face for forty miles, at some points seeking to kill one another in a highly impersonal way, and at other points conducting sale and barter according to the established customs of peace. People at home wouldn't believe it, and later on a lot more won't believe it, when the writers come to write about it. But it's true just the same. What else do you see from the apple tower, Brother Richard?"

"A long line of wagons approaching a camp some distance behind the Confederate trenches. They must be loaded pretty heavily, because the drivers are cracking their whips over the horses and mules."

"That's bad. Provisions, I suppose," said Warner. "The more these Johnnies get to eat the harder they fight, and they're not supposed to be receiving supplies now. Our cavalry ought to have cut off that wagon train. I shall have to speak to Sheridan about it. This is no way to starve the Johnnies to death. Seest aught more, Brother Richard?"

"I do! I do! Jump up, boys, and use your own glasses! I behold a large man on a gray horse, riding slowly along, as if he were inspecting troops away behind the trenches. Wherever he passes the soldiers snatch off their caps and, although I can't hear 'em, I know they're cheering. It's Lee himself!"

Both Warner and Pennington swung themselves upon the lower boughs of the tree and put their glasses to their eyes.

"It's surely Lee," said Warner. "I'm glad to get a look at him. He's been giving us a lot of trouble for more than three years now, but I think General Grant is going to take his measure."

"They're terribly reduced," said Pennington, "and if we stick to it we're bound to win. Still, you boys will recall for some time that we've had a war. What else do you see from the heights of the apple tree, Dick?"

"Distant dust behind our own lines, and figures moving in it dimly. Cavalry practicing, I should say. Have you fellows fruit enough?"

"Plenty. You can climb down and if the farmer hurries here with his dog to catch you we'll protect you."

"This is a fine apple tree," said Dick, as he descended slowly. "Apple trees are objects of beauty. They look so well in the spring all in white bloom, and then they look just as well in the fall, when the red or yellow apples hang among the leaves. And this is one of the finest I've ever seen."

He did not dream then that he should remember an apple tree his whole life, that an apple tree, and one apple tree in particular, should always call to his mind a tremendous event, losing nothing of its intensity and vividness with the passing years. But all that was in the future, and when he joined his comrades on the ground he made good work with the biggest and finest apple he could find.

"Early apples," he said, looking up at the tree. "It's not the end of July yet."

"But good apples, glorious apples, anyhow," said Pennington, taking another. "Besides, it's fine and cool like autumn."

"It won't stay," said Dick. "We've got the whole of August coming. Virginia is like Kentucky. Always lots of hot weather in August. Glad there's no big fighting to be done just now. But it's a pity, isn't it, to tear up a fine farming country like this. Around here is where the United States started. John Smith and Rolfe and Pocahontas and the rest of them may have roamed just where this orchard stands. And later on lots of the great Americans rode about these parts,

some of the younger ones carrying their beautiful ladies on pillions behind them. You are a cold-blooded New Englander, Warner, and you believe that anyone fighting against you ought to burn forever, but as for me I feel sorry for Virginia. I don't care what she's done, but I don't like to see the Old Dominion, the Mother of Presidents, stamped flat."

"I'm not cold-blooded at all, but I don't gush. I don't forget that this state produced George Washington, but I want victory for our side just the same, no matter how much of Virginia we may have to tread down. Is that farm house over there still empty?"

"Of course, or we wouldn't have taken the apples. It belongs to a man named Haynes, and he left ahead of us with his family for Richmond. I fancy it will be a long time before Haynes and his people sleep in their own rooms again. Come, fellows, we'd better be going back. Colonel Winchester is kind to us, but he doesn't want his officers to be prowling about as they please too long."

They walked together toward the edge of the orchard and looked at the farm house, from the chimneys of which no smoke had risen in weeks. Dick felt sure it would be used later on as headquarters by some general and his staff, but for the present it was left alone. And being within the Union lines no plunderer had dared to touch it.

It was a two-story wooden house, painted white, with green shutters, all closed now. The doors were also locked and sealed until such time as the army authorities wished to open them, but on the portico, facing the Southern lines were two benches, on which the three youths sat, and looked again over the great expanse of rolling country, dotted at intervals by puffs of smoke from the long lines of trenches. Where they sat it was so still that they could hear the faint crackle of the distant rifles, and now and then the heavier crash of a cannon.

Dick's mind went back to the Wilderness and its gloomy shades, the sanguinary field of Spottsylvania, and then the terrific mistake of Cold Harbor. The genius of Lee had never burned more brightly. He had handled his diminishing forces with all his old skill and resolution, but Grant had driven on and on. No matter what his losses the North always filled up his ranks again, and poured forward munitions and supplies in a vast and unbroken stream. A

nation had summoned all its powers for a supreme effort to win, and Dick felt that the issue of the war was not now in doubt. The genius of Lee and the bravery of his devoted army could no longer save the South. The hammer strokes of Grant would surely crush it.

And then what? He had the deepest sympathy for these people of Virginia. What would become of them after the war? Defeat for the South meant nearer approach to destruction than any nation had suffered in generations. To him, born south of the Ohio River, and so closely united by blood with these people, victory as well as defeat had its pangs.

Warner and Pennington rose and announced that they would return to the regiment which was held in reserve in a little valley below, but Dick, their leave not having run out yet, decided to stay a while longer.

"So long," said Warner. "Let the orchard alone. Leave apples for others. Remember that they are protected by strict orders against all wandering and irresponsible officers, but ourselves."

"Yes, be good, Dick," said Pennington, and the two went down the slope, leaving Dick on the portico. He liked being alone at times. The serious cast of mind that he had inherited from his famous great grandfather, Paul Cotter, demanded moments of meditation. It was peaceful too on the portico, and a youth who had been through Grant's Wilderness campaign, a month of continuous and terrible fighting, was glad to rest for a while.

The distant rifle fire and the occasional cannon shot had no significance and did not disturb him. They blended now with the breeze that blew among the leaves of the apple trees. He had never felt more like peace, and the pleasant open country was soothing to the eye. What a contrast to that dark and sodden Wilderness where men fought blindly in the dusk. He shuddered as he remembered the forests set on fire by the shells, and burning over the fallen.

A light step aroused him and a large man sat down on the bench beside him. Dick often wondered at the swift and almost noiseless tread of Shepard, with whom he was becoming well acquainted. He was tall, built powerfully and must have weighed two hundred

pounds, yet he moved with the ease and grace of a boy of sixteen. Dick thought it must come from his trade.

"I don't want to intrude, Mr. Mason," said Shepard, "but I saw you sitting here, looking perhaps too grave and thoughtful for one of your years."

"You're most welcome, Mr. Shepard, and I was thinking, that is in a vague sort of way."

"I saw your face and you were wondering what was to become of Virginia and the Virginians."

"So I was, but how did you know it?"

"I didn't know it. It was just a guess, and the guess was due to the fact that I was having the same thoughts myself."

"So you regard the war as won?" asked Dick, who had a great respect for Shepard's opinion.

"If the President keeps General Grant in command, as he will, it's a certainty, but it will take a long time yet. We can't force those trenches down there. Remember what Cold Harbor cost us."

Dick shuddered.

"I remember it," he said.

"It would be worse if we tried to storm Lee's lines. After Cold Harbor the general won't attempt it, and I see a long wait here. But we can afford it. The South grows steadily weaker. Our blockade clamps like a steel band, and presses tighter and tighter all the time. Food is scarce in the Confederacy. So is ammunition. They receive no recruits, and every day the army of Lee is smaller in numbers than it was the day before."

"You go into Richmond, Mr. Shepard. I've heard from high officers that you do. How do they feel there with our army only about twenty miles away?"

"They're quiet and seem to be confident, but I believe they know their danger."

"Have you by any chance seen or heard of my cousin, Harry Kenton, who is a lieutenant on the staff of the Southern commander-in-chief?"

Shepard smiled, as if the question brought memories that pleased him.

"A fine youth," he said. "Yes, I've seen him more than once. I'm free to tell you, Lieutenant Mason, that I know a lot about this rebel cousin of yours. He and I have come into conflict on several occasions, and I did not win every time."

"Nobody could beat Harry always," exclaimed Dick with youthful loyalty. "He was always the strongest and most active among us, and the best in forest and water. He could hunt and fish and trail like the scouts of our border days."

"I found him in full possession of all these qualities and he used them against me. I should grieve if that cousin of yours were to fall, Mr. Mason. I want to know him still better after the war."

Dick would have asked further questions about the encounters between Harry and the spy, but he judged that Shepard did not care to answer them, and he forbore. Yet the man aroused the most intense curiosity in him. There were spies and spies, and Shepard was one of them, but he was not like the others. He was unquestionably a man of great mental power. His calm, steady gaze and his words to the point showed it. No one patronized Shepard.

"I should like to go into Richmond with you some dark night," said Dick, who hid a strong spirit of adventure under his quiet exterior.

"You're not serious, Lieutenant Mason?"

"I wasn't, maybe, when I began to say it, but I believe I am now. Why shouldn't I be curious about Richmond, a place that great armies have been trying to take for three years? Just at present it's the center of the world to me in interest."

"You must not think of such a thing, Mr. Mason. Detection means certain death."

"No more for me than for you."