

troops. The natural strength of our position was manifested at a glance; a high grassy ridge steep to the south, with a stream in front, and but little cover up the sides. It seemed made for a battlefield. The weak point was the gap; the ground at the junction of the railways and the roads immediately at the entrance of the gap formed a little valley, dotted, as I have said, with buildings and gardens. This, in one sense, was the key of the position; for although it would not be tenable while we held the ridge commanding it, the enemy by carrying this point and advancing through the gap would cut our line in two. But you must not suppose I scanned the ground thus critically at the time. Anybody, indeed, might have been struck with the natural advantages of our position; but what, as I remember, most impressed me, was the peaceful beauty of the scene—the little town with the outline of the houses obscured by a blue mist, the massive crispness of the foliage, the outlines of the great trees lighted up by the sun, and relieved by deep blue shade. So thick was the timber here, rising up the southern slopes of the valley, that it looked almost as if it might have been a primeval forest. The quiet of the scene was the more impressive because contrasted in the mind with the scenes we expected to follow; and I can remember, as if it were yesterday, the sensation of bitter regret that it should now be too late to avert this coming desecration of our country, which might so easily have been prevented. A little firmness, a little provision on the part of our rulers, even a little common sense, and this great calamity would have been rendered utterly impossible. Too late, alas! We were like the foolish virgins in the parable.