

Montcalm would never let his earths be stopped so easily, and to pile defences on the ridge was simply to build himself into a trap. A good half of the officers maintained that there would be no fighting.

Well, fighting or no, some business was in hand. Here was the battalion in motion; and, to leave the enemy in no doubt of our martial ardour, here were the drums playing away like mad. The echo of John's feet on the wooden bridge awoke him from these vain shows and rattlings of war to its real meaning, and his thoughts again kept him solemn company as he breasted the slope beyond and began the tedious climb to the right through the woods.

The scouts, coming in one by one, reported them undefended: and the battalion, though perforce moving slowly, kept good order. Towards the summit, indeed, the front ranks appeared to straggle and extend themselves confusedly: but the disorder, no more than apparent, came from the skirmishers returning and falling back upon either flank as the column scrambled up the last five hundred yards and halted on the fringe of the clearing. Of the enemy John could see nothing: only a broad belt of sunlight beyond the last few tree trunks and their green eaves. The advance had been well timed, the separate columns arriving and coming to the halt almost at clockwork intervals; nor did the halt give him much leisure to look about him. To the right were drawn up the Highlanders, their dark plaids blending with the forest glooms; and, in the space between, Beaver had stepped forward and was chatting with their colonel. By-and-by the dandified Gage joined them, and after a few minutes' talk Beaver came striding back, with his scabbard tucked under his armpit, to be clear of the undergrowth. At once the order was given to fix bayonets, and at a signal the columns were put in motion and marched out upon the edge of the clearing.

There, as he stepped forth, the flash of the noonday sun upon lines of steel held John's eyes dazzled. He heard the word given again to halt, and the command "Left, wheel into