

"Why," exclaimed John Duff, "why, Johnny Saunders here can tread it in the dark like the road to the grog-shop."

John Saunders, loose-limbed, grinning sheepishly, shuffled forward, and Clark shot a dozen questions at him one after another. Yes, the trail had been blazed the Lord knew how long ago by the French, and given up when they left Massacre.

"Look you," said Clark to him, "I am not a man to stand trifling. If there is any deception in this, you will be shot without mercy."

"And good riddance," said John Duff. "Boys, we're Rebels now. Steer clear of the Ha'r Buyer."

## CHAPTER XIII

## KASKASKIA

FOR one more day we floated downward on the face of the waters between the forest walls of the wilderness, and at length we landed in a little gully on the north shore of the river, and there we hid our boats.

"Davy," said Colonel Clark, "let's walk about a bit. Tell me where you learned to be so silent?"

"My father did not like to be talked to," I answered, "except when he was drinking."

He gave me a strange look. Many the stroll I took with him afterwards, when he sought to relax himself from the cares which the campaign had put upon him. This night was still and clear, the west all yellow with the departing light, and the mists coming on the river. And presently, as we strayed down the shore we came upon a strange sight, the same being a huge fort rising from the waterside, all overgrown with brush and saplings and tall weeds. The palisades that held its earthenwork were rotten and crumbling, and the mighty bastions of its corners sliding away. Behind the fort, at the end farthest from the river, we came upon gravelled walks hidden by the rank growth, where the soldiers of his most Christian Majesty once paraded. Lost in thought, Clark stood on the parapet, watching the water gliding by until the darkness hid it, — nay, until the stars came and made golden dimples upon its surface. But as we went back to the camp again he told me how the French had tried once to conquer this vast country and failed, leaving to the Spaniards the endless stretch beyond the Mississippi called Louisiana, and this part to the English. And he told me likewise that this fort in the days of its glory had been called *Massacre*, from



a bloody event which had happened there more than three-score years before.

"Threescore years!" I exclaimed, longing to see the men of this race which had set up these monuments only to abandon them.

"Ay, lad," he answered, "before you or I were born, and before our fathers were born, the French missionaries and soldiers threaded this wilderness. And they called this river 'La Belle Rivière,' — the Beautiful River."

"And shall I see that race at Kaskaskia?" I asked, wondering.

"That you shall," he cried, with a force that left no doubt in my mind.

In the morning we broke camp and started off for the strange place which we hoped to capture. A hundred miles it was across the trackless wilds, and each man was ordered to carry on his back provisions for four days only.

"*Herr Gott!*" cried Swein Poulsson, from the bottom of a flatboat, whence he was tossing out venison fitches, "four day, und vat is it ve eat then?"

"Frenchies, sure," said Terence; "there'll be plenty av thim for a season. Faith, I do hear they're tinder as lambs."

"You'll no set tooth in the Frenchies," the pessimistic McAndrew put in, "wi' five thousand redskins aboot, and they lying in wait. The Colonel's no vera mindful of that, I'm thinking."

"Will ye hush, ye ill-omened hound!" cried Cowan, angrily. "Pitch him in the crick, Mac!"

Tom was diverted from this duty by a loud quarrel between Captain Harrod and five men of the company who wanted scout duty, and on the heels of that came another turmoil occasioned by Cowan's dropping my drum into the water. While he and McCann and Tom were fishing it out, Colonel Clark himself appeared, quelled the mutiny that Harrod had on his hands, and bade the men sternly to get into ranks.

"What foolishness is this?" he said, eying the dripping drum.

"Sure, Colonel," said McCann, swinging it on his back, "we'd have no heart in us at Kaskasky widout the rattle of it in our ears. Bill Cowan and me will not be feeling the heft of it bechune us."

"Get into ranks," said the Colonel, amusement struggling with the anger in his face as he turned on his heel. His wisdom well knew when to humor a man, and when to chastise.

"Arrah," said Terence, as he took his place, "I'd as soon l'ave me gun behind as Davy and the dhrum."

Methinks I can see now, as I write, the long file of woodsmen with their swinging stride, planting one foot before the other, even as the Indian himself threaded the wilderness. Though my legs were short, I had both sinew and training, and now I was at one end of the line and now at the other. And often with a laugh some giant would hand his gun to a neighbor, swing me to his shoulder, and so give me a lift for a weary mile or two; and perchance whisper to me to put down my hand into the wallet of his shirt, where I would find a choice morsel which he had saved for his supper. Sometimes I trotted beside the Colonel himself, listening as he talked to this man or that, and thus I got the gravest notion of the daring of this undertaking, and of the dangers ahead of us. This north country was infested with Indians, allies of the English and friends of the French their subjects; and the fact was never for an instant absent from our minds that our little band might at any moment run into a thousand warriors, be overpowered and massacred; or, worst of all, that our coming might have been heralded to Kaskaskia.

For three days we marched in the green shade of the primeval wood, nor saw the sky save in blue patches here and there. Again we toiled for hours through the coffee-colored waters of the swamps. But the third day brought us to the first of those strange clearings which the French call prairies, where the long grass ripples like a lake in the summer wind. Here we first knew raging thirst, and longed for the loam-specked water we had scorned, as our tired feet tore through the grass. For Saunders, our



guide, took a line across the open in plain sight of any eye that might be watching from the forest cover. But at length our column wavered and halted by reason of some disturbance at the head of it. Conjectures in our company, the rear guard, became rife at once.

"Run, Davy darlin,' an' see what the throuble is," said Terence.

Nothing loath, I made my way to the head of the column, where Bowman's company had broken ranks and stood in a ring up to their thighs in the grass. In the centre of the ring, standing on one foot before our angry Colonel, was Saunders.

"Now, what does this mean?" demanded Clark; "my eye is on you, and you've boxed the compass in this last hour."

Saunders' jaw dropped.

"I'm guiding you right," he answered, with that sullenness which comes to his kind from fear, "but a man will slip his bearings sometimes in this country."

Clark's eyes shot fire, and he brought down the stock of his rifle with a thud.

"By the eternal God!" he cried, "I believe you are a traitor. I've been watching you every step, and you've acted strangely this morning."

"Ay, ay," came from the men round him.

"Silence!" cried Clark, and turned again to the cowering Saunders. "You pretend to know the way to Kaskaskia, you bring us to the middle of the Indian country where we may be wiped out at any time, and now you have the damned effrontery to tell me that you have lost your way. I am a man of my word," he added with a vibrant intensity, and pointed to the limbs of a giant tree which stood at the edge of the distant forest. "I will give you half an hour, but as I live, I will leave you hanging there."

The man's brown hand trembled as he clutched his rifle barrel.

"'Tis a hard country, sir," he said. "I'm lost. I swear it on the evangels."

"A hard country!" cried Clark. "A man would have to walk over it but once to know it. I believe you are a damned traitor and perjurer, — in spite of your oath, a British spy."

Saunders wiped the sweat from his brow on his buckskin sleeve.

"I reckon I could get the trace, Colonel, if you'd let me go a little way into the prairie."

"Half an hour," said Clark, "and you'll not go alone." Sweeping his eye over Bowman's company, he picked out a man here and a man there to go with Saunders. Then his eye lighted on me. "Where's McChesney?" he said. "Fetch McChesney."

I ran to get Tom, and seven of them went away, with Saunders in the middle, Clark watching them like a hawk, while the men sat down in the grass to wait. Fifteen minutes went by, and twenty, and twenty-five, and Clark was calling for a rope, when some one caught sight of the squad in the distance returning at a run. And when they came within hail it was Saunders' voice we heard, shouting brokenly: —

"I've struck it, Colonel, I've struck the trace. There's a pecan at the edge of the bottom with my own blaze on it."

"May you never be as near death again," said the Colonel, grimly, as he gave the order to march.

The fourth day passed, and we left behind us the patches of forest and came into the open prairie, — as far as the eye could reach a long, level sea of waving green. The scanty provisions ran out, hunger was added to the pangs of thirst and weariness, and here and there in the straggling file discontent smouldered and angry undertone was heard. Kaskaskia was somewhere to the west and north; but how far? Clark had misled them. And in addition it were foolish to believe that the garrison had not been warned. English soldiers and French militia and Indian allies stood ready for our reception. Of such was the talk as we lay down in the grass under the stars on the fifth night. For in the rank and file an empty stomach is not hopeful.



The next morning we took up our march silently with the dawn, the prairie grouse whirring ahead of us. At last, as afternoon drew on, a dark line of green edged the prairie to the westward, and our spirits rose. From mouth to mouth ran the word that these were the woods which fringed the bluff above Kaskaskia itself. We pressed ahead, and the destiny of the new Republic for which we had fought made us walk unseen. Excitement keyed us high; we reached the shade, plunged into it, and presently came out staring at the bastioned corners of a fort which rose from the centre of a clearing. It had once defended the place, but now stood abandoned and dismantled. Beyond it, at the edge of the bluff, we halted, astonished. The sun was falling in the west, and below us was the goal for the sight of which we had suffered so much. At our feet, across the wooded bottom, was the Kaskaskia River, and beyond, the peaceful little French village with its low houses and orchards and gardens colored by the touch of the evening light. In the centre of it stood a stone church with its belfry; but our searching eyes alighted on the spot to the southward of it, near the river. There stood a rambling stone building with the shingles of its roof weathered black, and all around it a palisade of pointed sticks thrust in the ground, and with a pair of gates and watch-towers. Drooping on its staff was the standard of England. North and south of the village the emerald common gleamed in the slanting light, speckled red and white and black by grazing cattle. Here and there, in untidy brown patches, were Indian settlements, and far away to the westward the tawny Father of Waters gleamed through the cottonwoods.

Through the waning day the men lay resting under the trees, talking in undertones. Some cleaned their rifles, and others lost themselves in conjectures of the attack. But Clark himself, tireless, stood with folded arms gazing at the scene below, and the sunlight on his face illumined him (to the lad standing at his side) as the servant of destiny. At length, at eventide, the sweet-toned bell of the little cathedral rang to vespers, — a gentle message of

peace to war. Colonel Clark looked into my upturned face.

"Davy, do you know what day this is?" he asked.

"No, sir," I answered.

"Two years have gone since the bells pealed for the birth of a new nation — your nation, Davy, and mine — the nation that is to be the refuge of the oppressed of this earth — the nation which is to be made of all peoples, out of all time. And this land for which you and I shall fight to-night will belong to it, and the lands beyond," he pointed to the west, "until the sun sets on the sea again." He put his hand on my head. "You will remember this when I am dead and gone," he said.

I was silent, awed by the power of his words.

Darkness fell, and still we waited, impatient for the order. And when at last it came the men bustled hither and thither to find their commands, and we picked our way on the unseen road that led down the bluff, our hearts thumping. The lights of the village twinkled at our feet, and now and then a voice from below was caught and borne upward to us. Once another noise startled us, followed by an exclamation, "*Donnerblitzen*" and a volley of low curses from the company. Poor Swein Poulsson had loosed a stone, which had taken a reverberating flight riverward.

We reached the bottom, and the long file turned and hurried silently northward, searching for a crossing. I try to recall my feelings as I trotted beside the tall forms that loomed above me in the night. The sense of protection they gave me stripped me of fear, and I was not troubled with that. My thoughts were chiefly on Polly Ann and the child we had left in the fort now so far to the south of us, and in my fancy I saw her cheerful, ever helpful to those around her, despite the load that must rest on her heart. I saw her simple joy at our return. But should we return? My chest tightened, and I sped along the ranks to Harrod's company and caught Tom by the wrist.

"Davy," he murmured, and, seizing my hand in his strong grip, pulled me along with him. For it was not



given to him to say what he felt ; but as I hurried to keep pace with his stride, Polly Ann's words rang in my ears, "Davy, take care of my Tom," and I knew that he, too, was thinking of her.

A hail aroused me, the sound of a loud rapping, and I saw in black relief a cabin ahead. The door opened, a man came out with a horde of children cowering at his heels, a volley of frightened words pouring from his mouth in a strange tongue. John Duff was plying him with questions in French, and presently the man became calmer and lapsed into broken English.

"Kaskaskia—yes, she is prepare. Many spy is gone out—cross *la rivière*. But now they all sleep."

Even as he spoke a shout came faintly from the distant town.

"What is that?" demanded Clark, sharply.

The man shrugged his shoulders. "*Une fête des nègres, peut-être*,—the negro, he dance maybe."

"Are you the ferryman?" said Clark.

"*Oui*—I have some boat."

We crossed the hundred and fifty yards of sluggish water, squad by squad, and in the silence of the night stood gathered, expectant, on the farther bank. Midnight was at hand. Commands were passed about, and men ran this way and that, jostling one another to find their places in a new order. But at length our little force stood in three detachments on the river's bank, their captains repeating again and again the part which each was to play, that none might mistake his duty. The two larger ones were to surround the town, while the picked force under Simon Kenton himself was to storm the fort. Should he gain it by surprise and without battle, three shots were to be fired in quick succession, the other detachments were to start the war-whoop, while Duff and some with a smattering of French were to run up and down the streets proclaiming that every *habitan* who left his house would be shot. No provision being made for the drummer boy (I had left my drum on the heights above), I chose the favored column, at the head of which Tom and Cowan

and Ray and McCann were striding behind Kenton and Colonel Clark. Not a word was spoken. There was a kind of cow-path that rose and fell and twisted along the river-bank. This we followed, and in ten minutes we must have covered the mile to the now darkened village. The star-light alone outlined against the sky the houses of it as we climbed the bank. Then we halted, breathless, in a street, but there was no sound save that of the crickets and the frogs. Forward again, and twisting a corner, we beheld the indented edge of the stockade. Still no hail, nor had our moccasined feet betrayed us as we sought the river side of the fort and drew up before the big river gates of it. Simon Kenton bore against them, and tried the little postern that was set there, but both were fast. The spikes towered a dozen feet overhead.

"Quick!" muttered Clark, "a light man to go over and open the postern."

Before I guessed what was in his mind, Cowan seized me.

"Send the lad, Colonel," said he.

"Ay, ay," said Simon Kenton, hoarsely.

In a second Tom was on Kenton's shoulders, and they passed me up with as little trouble as though I had been my own drum. Feverishly searching with my foot for Tom's shoulder, I seized the spikes at the top, clambered over them, paused, surveyed the empty area below me, destitute even of a sentry, and then let myself down with the aid of the cross-bars inside. As I was feeling vainly for the bolt of the postern, rays of light suddenly shot my shadow against the door. And next, as I got my hand on the bolt-head, I felt the weight of another on my shoulder, and a voice behind me said in English:—

"In the devil's name!"

I gave the one frantic pull, the bolt slipped, and caught again. Then Colonel Clark's voice rang out in the night:—

"Open the gate! Open the gate in the name of Virginia and the Continental Congress!"

Before I could cry out the man gave a grunt, leaned his gun against the gate, and tore my fingers from the



bolt-handle. Astonishment robbed me of breath as he threw open the postern.

"In the name of the Continental Congress," he cried, and seized his gun. Clark and Kenton stepped in instantly, no doubt as astounded as I, and had the man in their grasp.

"Who are you?" said Clark.

"Name o' Skene, from Pennsylvanya," said the man, "and by the Lord God ye shall have the fort."

"You looked for us?" said Clark.

"Faith, never less," said the Pennsylvanian. "The one sentry is at the main gate."

"And the governor?"

"Rocheblave?" said the Pennsylvanian. "He sleeps yonder in the old Jesuit house in the middle."

Clark turned to Tom McChesney, who was at his elbow.

"Corporal!" said he, swiftly, "secure the sentry at the main gate! You," he added, turning to the Pennsylvanian, "lead us to the governor. But mind, if you betray me, I'll be the first to blow out your brains."

The man seized a lantern and made swiftly over the level ground until the rubble-work of the old Jesuit house showed in the light, nor Clark nor any of them stopped to think of the danger our little handful ran at the mercy of a stranger. The house was silent. We halted, and Clark threw himself against the rude panels of the door, which gave to inward blackness. Our men filled the little passage, and suddenly we found ourselves in a low-ceiled room in front of a great four-poster bed. And in it, upright, blinking at the light, were two odd Frenchified figures in tasselled nightcaps. Astonishment and anger and fear struggled in the faces of Monsieur de Rocheblave and his lady. A regard for truth compels me to admit that it was madame who first found her voice, and no uncertain one it was.

First came a shriek that might have roused the garrison.

"Villains! Murderers! Outragers of decency!" she cried with spirit, pouring a heap of invectives, now in

French, now in English, much to the discomfiture of our backwoodsmen, who peered at her helplessly.

"*Nom du diable!*" cried the commandant, when his lady's breath was gone, "what does this mean?"

"It means, sir," answered Clark, promptly, "that you are my prisoner."

"And who are you?" gasped the commandant.

"George Rogers Clark, Colonel in the service of the Commonwealth of Virginia." He held out his hand restrainingly, for the furious Monsieur Rocheblave made an attempt to rise. "You will oblige me by remaining in bed, sir, for a moment."

"*Coquins! Canailles! Cochons!*" shrieked the lady.

"Madame," said Colonel Clark, politely, "the necessities of war are often cruel."

He made a bow, and paying no further attention to the torrent of her reproaches or the threats of the helpless commandant, he calmly searched the room with the lantern, and finally pulled out from under the bed a metal despatch box. Then he lighted a candle in a brass candlestick that stood on the simple walnut dresser, and bowed again to the outraged couple in the four-poster.

"Now, sir," he said, "you may dress. We will retire."

"*Pardieu!*" said the commandant in French, "a hundred thousand thanks."

We had scarcely closed the bedroom door when three shots were heard.

"The signal!" exclaimed Clark.

Immediately a pandemonium broke on the silence of the night that must have struck cold terror in the hearts of the poor Creoles sleeping in their beds. The war-whoop, the scalp halloo in the dead of the morning, with the hideous winding notes of them that reached the bluff beyond and echoed back, were enough to frighten a man from his senses. In the intervals, in backwoods French, John Duff and his companions were heard in terrifying tones crying out to the *habitans* to venture out at the peril of their lives. Within the fort a score of lights flew up and down like will-o'-the-wisps, and Colonel Clark, standing on the steps



of the governor's house, gave out his orders and despatched his messengers. Me he sent speeding through the village to tell Captain Bowman to patrol the outskirts of the town, that no runner might get through to warn Fort Chartres and Cohos, as some called Cahokia. None stirred save the few Indians left in the place, and these were brought before Clark in the fort, sullen and defiant, and put in the guard-house there. And Rocheblave, when he appeared, was no better, and was put back in his house under guard.

As for the papers in the despatch box, they revealed I know not what briberies of the savage nations and plans of the English. But of other papers we found none, though there must have been more. Madame Rocheblave was suspected of having hidden some in the inviolable portions of her dress.

At length the cocks crowing for day proclaimed the morning, and while yet the blue shadow of the bluff was on the town, Colonel Clark sallied out of the gate and walked abroad. Strange it seemed that war had come to this village, so peaceful and remote. And even stranger it seemed to me to see these Arcadian homes in the midst of the fierce wilderness. The little houses with their sloping roofs and wide porches, the gardens ablaze with color, the neat palings, — all were a restful sight for our weary eyes. And now I scarcely knew our commander. For we had not gone far ere, timidly, a door opened and a mild-visaged man, in the simple workaday smock that the French wore, stood, hesitating, on the steps. The odd thing was that he should have bowed to Clark, who was dressed no differently from Bowman and Harrod and Duff; and the man's voice trembled piteously as he spoke. It needed not John Duff to tell us that he was pleading for the lives of his family.

"He will sell himself as a slave if your Excellency will spare them," said Duff, translating.

But Clark stared at the man sternly.

"I will tell them my plans at the proper time," he said and when Duff had translated this the man turned and

went silently into his house again, closing the door behind him. And before we had traversed the village the same thing had happened many times. We gained the fort again, I wondering greatly why he had not reassured these simple people. It was Bowman who asked this question, he being closer to Clark than any of the other captains. Clark said nothing then, and began to give out directions for the day. But presently he called the Captain aside.

"Bowman," I heard him say, "we have one hundred and fifty men to hold a province bigger than the whole of France, and filled with treacherous tribes in the King's pay. I must work out the problem for myself."

Bowman was silent. Clark, with that touch which made men love him and die for him, laid his hand on the Captain's shoulder.

"Have the men called in by detachments," he said, "and fed. God knows they must be hungry, — and you."

Suddenly I remembered that he himself had had nothing. Running around the commandant's house to the kitchen door, I came unexpectedly upon Swein Poulsson, who was face to face with the linsey-woolsey-clad figure of Monsieur Rocheblave's negro cook. The early sun cast long shadows of them on the ground.

"By tam," my friend was saying, "so I vill eat. I am choost like an ox for three days, und chew grass. Prairie grass, is it?"

"*Mo pas capab'*, Michié," said the cook, with a terrified roll of his white eyes.

"*Herr Gott!*" cried Swein Poulsson, "I am red face. *Aber Herr Gott*, I thank thee I am not a nigger. Und my hair is bristles, yes. Davy" (spying me), "I thank *Herr Gott* it is not vool. Let us in the kitchen go."

"I am come to get something for the Colonel's breakfast," said I, pushing past the slave, through the open doorway. Swein Poulsson followed, and here I struck another contradiction in his strange nature. He helped me light the fire in the great stone chimney-place, and we soon had a pot of hominy on the crane, and turning on the spit a piece of buffalo steak which we found in the larder. Nor did a



mouthful pass his lips until I had sped away with a steaming portion to find the Colonel. By this time the men had broken into the storehouse, and the open place was dotted with their breakfast fires. Clark was standing alone by the flagstaff, his face careworn. But he smiled as he saw me coming.

"What's this?" says he.

"Your breakfast, sir," I answered. I set down the plate and the pot before him and pressed the pewter spoon into his hand.

"Davy," said he.

"Sir?" said I.

"What did you have for your breakfast?"

My lip trembled, for I was very hungry, and the rich steam from the hominy was as much as I could stand. Then the Colonel took me by the arms, as gently as a woman might, set me down on the ground beside him, and taking a spoonful of the hominy forced it between my lips. I was near to fainting at the taste of it. Then he took a bit himself, and divided the buffalo steak with his own hands. And when from the camp-fires they perceived the Colonel and the drummer boy eating together in plain sight of all, they gave a rousing cheer.

"Swein Poulsson helped get your breakfast, sir, and would eat nothing either," I ventured.

"Davy," said Colonel Clark, gravely, "I hope you will be younger when you are twenty."

"I hope I shall be bigger, sir," I answered gravely.

## CHAPTER XIV

### HOW THE KASKASKIANS WERE MADE CITIZENS

NEVER before had such a day dawned upon Kaskaskia. With July fierceness the sun beat down upon the village, but man nor woman nor child stirred from the darkened houses. What they awaited at the hands of the Long Knives they knew not,—captivity, torture, death perhaps. Through the deserted streets stalked a squad of backwoodsmen headed by John Duff and two American traders found in the town, who were bestirring themselves in our behalf, knocking now at this door and anon at that.

"The Colonel bids you come to the fort," he said, and was gone.

The church bell rang with slow, ominous strokes, far different from its gentle vesper peal of yesterday. Two companies were drawn up in the sun before the old Jesuit house, and presently through the gate a procession came, grave and mournful. The tone of it was sombre in the white glare, for men had donned their best (as they thought) for the last time,—cloth of camlet and Cadiz and Limbourg, white cotton stockings, and brass-buckled shoes. They came like captives led to execution. But at their head a figure held our eye,—a figure that spoke of dignity and courage, of trials borne for others. It was the village priest in his robes. He had a receding forehead and a strong, pointed chin; but benevolence was in the curve of his great nose. I have many times since seen his type of face in the French prints. He and his flock halted before our young Colonel, even as the citizens of Calais in a bygone century must have stood before the English king.

The scene comes back to me. On the one side, not the warriors of a nation that has made its mark in war,