

CHAPTER XV

DAYS OF TRIAL

BUT I was not immediately to take up the study of French. Things began to happen in Kaskaskia. In the first place, Captain Bowman's company, with a few scouts, of which Tom was one, set out that very afternoon for the capture of Cōhos, or Cahokia, and this despite the fact that they had had no sleep for two nights. If you will look at the map,¹ you will see, dotted along the bottoms and the bluffs beside the great Mississippi, the string of villages, Kaskaskia, La Prairie du Rocher, Fort Chartres, St. Philip, and Cahokia. Some few miles from Cahokia, on the western bank of the Father of Waters, was the little French village of St. Louis, in the Spanish territory of Louisiana. From thence eastward stretched the great waste of prairie and forest inhabited by roving bands of the forty Indian nations. Then you come to Vincennes on the Wabash, Fort St. Vincent, the English and Canadians called it, for there were a few of the latter who had settled in Kaskaskia since the English occupation.

We gathered on the western skirts of the village to give Bowman's company a cheer, and every man, woman, and child in the place watched the little column as it wound snakelike over the prairie on the road to Fort Chartres, until it was lost in the cottonwoods to the westward.

Things began to happen in Kaskaskia. It would have been strange indeed if things had not happened. One

¹The best map which the editor has found of this district is in Vol. VI, Part 11, of Winsor's "Narrative and Critical History of America," p. 721.

hundred and seventy-five men had marched into that territory out of which now are carved the great states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, and to most of them the thing was a picnic, a jaunt which would soon be finished. Many had left families in the frontier forts without protection. The time of their enlistment had almost expired.

There was a store in the village kept by a great citizen, — not a citizen of Kaskaskia alone, but a citizen of the world. This, I am aware, sounds like fiction, like an attempt to get an effect which was not there. But it is true as gospel. The owner of this store had many others scattered about in this foreign country: at Vincennes, at St. Louis, where he resided, at Cahokia. He knew Michilimackinac and Quebec and New Orleans. He had been born some thirty-one years before in Sardinia, had served in the Spanish army, and was still a Spanish subject. The name of this famous gentleman was Monsieur François Vigo, and he was the Rothschild of the country north of the Ohio. Monsieur Vigo, though he merited it, I had not room to mention in the last chapter. Clark had routed him from his bed on the morning of our arrival, and whether or not he had been in the secret of frightening the inhabitants into making their wills, and then throwing them into transports of joy, I know not.

Monsieur Vigo's store was the village club. It had neither glass in the window nor an attractive display of goods; it was merely a log cabin set down on a weedy, sun-baked plot. The stuffy smell of skins and furs came out of the doorway. Within, when he was in Kaskaskia, Monsieur Vigo was wont to sit behind his rough walnut table, writing with a fine quill, or dispensing the news of the villages to the priest and other prominent citizens, or haggling with persistent blanketed braves over canoe-loads of ill-smelling pelts which they brought down from the green forests of the north. Monsieur Vigo's clothes were the color of the tobacco he gave in exchange; his eyes were not unlike the black beads he traded, but shrewd and kindly withal, set in a square saffron face that had the contradiction of a small chin. As the days

wore into months, Monsieur Vigo's place very naturally became the headquarters for our army, if army it might be called. Of a morning a dozen would be sitting against the logs in the black shadow, and in the midst of them always squatted an unsavory Indian squaw. A few braves usually stood like statues at the corner, and in front of the door another group of hunting shirts. Without was the paper money of the Continental Congress, within the good *tafia* and tobacco of Monsieur Vigo. One day Monsieur Vigo's young Creole clerk stood shrugging his shoulders in the doorway. I stopped.

"By tam!" Swein Poulsson was crying to the clerk, as he waved a worthless scrip above his head. "Vat is money?"

This definition the clerk, not being a Doctor Johnson, was unable to give offhand.

"Vat are you, choost? Is it America?" demanded Poulsson, while the others looked on, some laughing, some serious. "And vich citizen are you since you are ours? You vill please to give me one carrot of tobacco." And he thrust the scrip under the clerk's nose.

The clerk stared at the uneven lettering on the scrip with disdain.

"Money," he exclaimed scornfully, "she is not money. *Piastre* — Spanish dollare — then I give you carrot."

"By God!" shouted Bill Cowan, "ye will take Virginny paper, and Congress paper, or else I reckon we'll have a drink and tobacco, boys, take or no take."

"Hooray, Bill, ye're right," cried several of our men.

"Lemme in here," said Cowan. But the frightened Creole blocked the doorway.

"*Sacré!*" he screamed, and then, "*Voleurs!*"

The excitement drew a number of people from the neighborhood. Nay, it seemed as if the whole town was ringed about us.

"*Bravo, Jules!*" they cried, "*garde-tu la porte. À bas les Bostonnais! À bas les voleurs!*"

"Damn such monkey talk," said Cowan, facing them suddenly. I knew him well, and when the giant lost his

temper it was gone irrevocably until a fight was over. "Call a man a squar' name."

"Hey, Frenchy," another of our men put in, stalking up to the clerk, "I reckon this here store's ourn, ef we've a mind to tek it. I 'low you'll give us the rum and the 'baccy. Come on, boys!"

In between him and the clerk leaped a little, robin-like man with a red waistcoat, beside himself with rage. Bill Cowan and his friends stared at this diminutive Frenchman, open-mouthed, as he poured forth a veritable torrent of unintelligible words, plentifully mixed with *sacrés*, which he ripped out like snarls. I would as soon have touched him as a ball of angry bees or a pair of fighting wildcats. Not so Bill Cowan. When that worthy recovered from his first surprise he seized hold of some of the man's twisting arms and legs and lifted him bodily from the ground, as he would have taken a perverse and struggling child. There was no question of a fight. Cowan picked him up, I say, and before any one knew what happened, he flung him on to the hot roof of the store (the eaves were but two feet above his head), and there the man stuck, clinging to a loose shingle, purpling and coughing and spitting with rage. There was a loud gust of guffaws from the woodsmen, and oaths like whip-cracks from the circle around us, menacing growls as it surged inward and our men turned to face it. A few citizens pushed through the outskirts of it and ran away, and in the hush that followed we heard them calling wildly the names of Father Gibault and Clark and of Vigo himself. Cowan thrust me past the clerk into the store, where I stood listening to the little man on the roof, scratching and clutching at the shingles, and coughing still.

But there was no fight. Shouts of "*Monsieur Vigo! Voici Monsieur Vigo!*" were heard, the crowd parted respectfully, and Monsieur Vigo in his snuff-colored suit stood glancing from Cowan to his pallid clerk. He was not in the least excited.

"Come in, my frens," he said; "it is too hot in the

sun." And he set the example by stepping over the sill on to the hard-baked earth of the floor within. Then he spied me. "Ah," he said, "the boy of Monsieur le Colonel! And how are you called, my son?" he added, patting me kindly.

"Davy, sir," I answered.

"Ha," he said, "and a brave soldier, no doubt."

I was flattered as well as astonished by this attention. But Monsieur Vigo knew men, and he had given them time to turn around. By this time Bill Cowan and some of my friends had stooped through the doorway, followed by a prying Kaskaskian brave and as many Creoles as could crowd behind them. Monsieur Vigo was surprisingly calm.

"It make hot weather, my frens," said he. "How can I serve you, messieurs?"

"Hain't the Congress got authority here?" said one.

"I am happy to say," answered Monsieur Vigo, rubbing his hands, "for I think much of your principle."

"Then," said the man, "we come here to trade with Congress money. Hain't that money good in Kaskasky?"

There was an anxious pause. Then Monsieur Vigo's eyes twinkled, and he looked at me.

"And what you say, Davy?" he asked.

"The money would be good if you took it, sir," I said, not knowing what else to answer.

"*Sapristi!*" exclaimed Monsieur Vigo, looking hard at me. "Who teach you that?"

"No one, sir," said I, staring in my turn.

"And if Congress lose, and not pay, where am I, *mon petit maître de la haute finance?*" demanded Monsieur Vigo, with the palms of his hands outward.

"You will be in good company, sir," said I.

At that he threw back his head and laughed, and Bill Cowan and my friends laughed with him.

"Good company — *c'est la plupart de la vie,*" said Monsieur Vigo. "*Et quel garçon* — what a boy it is!"

"I never seed his beat fer wisdom, Mister Vigo," said Bill Cowan, now in good humor once more at the prospect

of rum and tobacco. And I found out later that he and the others had actually given to me the credit of this coup. "He never failed us yet. Hain't that truth, boys? Hain't we a-goin' on to St. Vincent because he seen the Ha'r Buyer sculped on the Ohio?"

The rest assented so heartily but withal so gravely, that I am between laughter and tears over the remembrance of it.

"At noon you come back," said Monsieur Vigo. "I think till then about rate of exchange, and talk with your Colonel. Davy, you stay here."

I remained, while the others filed out, and at length I was alone with him and Jules, his clerk.

"Davy, how you like to be trader?" asked Monsieur Vigo.

It was a new thought to me, and I turned it over in my mind. To see the strange places of the world, and the stranger people; to become a man of wealth and influence, such as Monsieur Vigo; and (I fear I loved it best) to match my brains with others at a bargain, — I turned it all over slowly, gravely, in my boyish mind, rubbing the hard dirt on the floor with the toe of my moccasin. And suddenly the thought came to me that I was a traitor to my friends, a deserter from the little army that loved me so well.

"*Eh bien?*" said Monsieur Vigo.

I shook my head, but in spite of me I felt the tears welling into my eyes and brushed them away shamefully. At such times of stress some of my paternal Scotch crept into my speech.

"I will no be leaving Colonel Clark and the boys," I cried, "not for all the money in the world."

"Congress money?" said Monsieur Vigo, with a queer expression.

It was then I laughed through my tears, and that cemented the friendship between us. It was a lifelong friendship, though I little suspected it then.

In the days that followed he never met me on the street that he did not stop to pass the time of day, and ask me

if I had changed my mind. He came every morning to headquarters, where he and Colonel Clark sat by the hour with brows knit. Monsieur Vigo was as good as his word, and took the Congress money, though not at such a value as many would have had him. I have often thought that we were all children then, and knew nothing of the ingratitude of republics. Monsieur Vigo took the money, and was all his life many, many thousand dollars the poorer. Father Gibault advanced his little store, and lived to feel the pangs of want. And Colonel Clark? But I must not go beyond the troubles of that summer, and the problems that vexed our commander. One night I missed him from the room where we slept, and walking into the orchard found him pacing there, where the moon cast filmy shadows on the grass. By day as he went around among the men his brow was unclouded, though his face was stern. But now I surprised the man so strangely moved that I yearned to comfort him. He had taken three turns before he perceived me.

"Davy," he said, "what are you doing here?"

"I missed you, sir," I answered, staring at the furrows in his face.

"Come!" he said almost roughly, and seizing my hand, led me back and forth swiftly through the wet grass for I know not how long. The moon dipped to the uneven line of the ridge-pole and slipped behind the stone chimney. All at once he stopped, dropped my hand, and smote both of his together.

"I *will* hold on, by the eternal!" he cried. "I will let no American read his history and say that I abandoned this land. Let them desert! If ten men be found who will stay, I will hold the place for the Republic."

"Will not Virginia and the Congress send you men, sir?" I asked wonderingly.

He laughed a laugh that was all bitterness.

"Virginia and the Continental Congress know little and care less about me," he answered. "Some day you will learn that foresight sometimes comes to men, but never to assemblies. But it is often given to one man to

work out the salvation of a people, and be destroyed for it. Davy, we have been up too long."

At the morning parade, from my wonted place at the end of the line, I watched him with astonishment, reviewing the troops as usual. For the very first day I had crossed the river with Terence, climbed the heights to the old fort, and returned with my drum. But no sooner had I beaten the retreat than the men gathered here and there in groups that smouldered with mutiny, and I noted that some of the officers were amongst these. Once in a while a sentence like a flaming brand was flung out. Their time was up, their wives and children for all they knew sculped by the red varmints, and, by the eternal, Clark or no man living could keep them.

"Hi," said one, as I passed, "here's Davy with his drum. He'll be leadin' us back to Kaintuck in the morning."

"Ay, ay," cried another man in the group, "I reckon he's had his full of tyranny, too."

I stopped, my face blazing red.

"Shame on you for those words!" I shouted shrilly. "Shame on you, you fools, to desert the man who would save your wives and children. How are the redskins to be beaten if they are not cowed in their own country?" For I had learned much at headquarters.

They stood silent, astonished, no doubt, at the sight of my small figure a-tremble with anger. I heard Bill Cowan's voice behind me.

"There's truth for ye," he said, "that will slink home when a thing's half done."

"Ye needn't talk, Bill Cowan; it's well enough for ye. I reckon your wife'd scare any redskin off her clearin'."

"Many the time she scart me," said Bill Cowan.

And so the matter went by with a laugh. But the grumbling continued, and the danger was that the French would learn of it. The day passed, yet the embers blazed not into the flame of open mutiny. But he who has seen service knows how ominous is the gathering of men here and there, the low humming talk, the silence when a

dissenter passes. There were fights, too, that had to be quelled by company captains, and no man knew when the loud quarrel between the two races at Vigo's store would grow into an ugly battle.

What did Clark intend to do? This was the question that hung in the minds of mutineer and faithful alike. They knew the desperation of his case. Without money, save that which the generous Creoles had advanced upon his personal credit; without apparent resources; without authority, save that which the weight of his character exerted,—how could he prevent desertion? They eyed him as he went from place to place about his business,—erect, thoughtful, undisturbed. Few men dare to set their will against a multitude when there are no fruits to be won. Columbus persisted, and found a new world; Clark persisted, and won an empire for thoughtless generations to enjoy.

That night he slept not at all, but sat, while the candles flickered in their sockets, poring over maps and papers. I dared not disturb him, but lay the darkness through with staring eyes. And when the windows on the orchard side showed a gray square of light, he flung down the parchment he was reading on the table. It rolled up of itself, and he pushed back his chair. I heard him call my name, and leaping out of bed, I stood before him.

"You sleep lightly, Davy," he said, I think to try me.

I did not answer, fearing to tell him that I had been awake watching him.

"I have one friend, at least," said the Colonel.

"You have many, sir," I answered, "as you will find when the time comes."

"The time has come," said he; "to-day I shall be able to count them. Davy, I want you to do something for me."

"Now, sir?" I answered, overjoyed.

"As soon as the sun strikes that orchard," he said, pointing out of the window. "You have learned how to keep things to yourself. Now I want you to impart them to others. Go out, and tell the village that I am going away."

"That you are going away, sir?" I repeated.

"That I am going away," he said, "with my army, (save the mark!), with my army and my drummer boy and my paper money. Such is my faith in the loyalty of the good people of these villages to the American cause, that I can safely leave the flag flying over their heads with the assurance that they will protect it."

I stared at him doubtfully, for at times a pleasantry came out of his bitterness.

"Ay," he said, "go! Have you any love for me?"

"I have, sir," I answered.

"By the Lord, I believe you," he said, and picking up my small hunting shirt, he flung it at me. "Put it on, and go when the sun rises."

As the first shaft of light over the bluff revealed the diamonds in the orchard grass I went out, wondering. *Suspecting* would be a better word for the nature I had inherited. But I had my orders. Terence was pacing the garden, his leggings turned black with the dew. I looked at him. Here was a vessel to disseminate.

"Terence, the Colonel is going back to Virginia with the army."

"Him!" cried Terence, dropping the stock of his Deckard to the ground. "And back to Kaintuckee! Arrah, 'tis a sin to be jokin' before a man has a bit in his stummick. Bad cess to yere plisantry before breakfast."

"I'm telling you what the Colonel himself told me," I answered, and ran on. "Davy, darlin'!" I heard him calling after me as I turned the corner, but I looked not back.

There was a single sound in the street. A thin, bronzed Indian lad squatted against the pickets with his fingers on a reed, his cheeks distended. He broke off with a wild, mournful note to stare at me. A wisp of smoke stole from a stone chimney, and the smell that corn-pone and bacon leave was in the air. A bolt was slammed back, a door creaked and stuck, was flung open, and with a "*Va t'en, méchant!*" a cotton-clad urchin was cast out of the house, and fled into the dusty street.

Breathing the morning air in the doorway, stood a young woman in a cotton gown, a saucepan in hand. She had inquisitive eyes, a pointed, prying nose, and I knew her to be the village gossip, the wife of Jules, Monsieur Vigo's clerk. She had the same smattering of English as her husband. Now she stood regarding me narrowly between half-closed lids.

"*A la bonne heure! Que fais-tu donc?* What do you do so early?"

"The garrison is getting ready to leave for Kentucky to-day," I answered.

"*Ha! Jules! Écoute-toi! Nom de dieu!* Is it true what you say?"

The visage of Jules, surmounted by a nightcap and heavy with sleep, appeared behind her.

"*Ha, c'est Daveed!*" he said. "What news have you?"

I repeated, whereupon they both began to lament.

"And why is it?" persisted Jules.

"He has such faith in the loyalty of the Kaskaskians," I answered, parrot-like.

"*Diable!*" cried Jules, "we shall perish. We shall be as the Acadians. And loyalty—she will not save us, no."

Other doors creaked. Other inhabitants came in varied costumes into the street to hear the news, lamenting. If Clark left, the day of judgment was at hand for them, that was certain. Between the savage and the Briton not one stone would be left standing on another. Madame Jules forgot her breakfast, and fled up the street with the tidings. And then I made my way to the fort, where the men were gathering about the camp-fires, talking excitedly. Terence, relieved from duty, had done the work here.

"And he as little as a fox, wid all that in him," he cried, when he perceived me walking demurely past the sentry. "Davy, dear, come here an' tell the b'ys am I a liar."

"Davy's monstrous cute," said Bill Cowan; "I reckon he knows as well as me the Colonel hain't a-goin' to do no such tomfool thing as leave."

"He is," I cried, for the benefit of some others, "he's

fair sick of grumblers that haven't got the grit to stand by him in trouble."

"By the Lord!" said Bill Cowan, "and I'll not blame him." He turned fiercely, his face reddening. "Shame on ye all yere lives," he shouted. "Ye're making the best man that ever led a regiment take the back trail. Ye'll fetch back to Kaintuck, and draw every redskin in the north woods suckin' after ye like leaves in a hurricane wind. There hain't a man of ye has the pluck of this little shaver that beats the drum. I wish to God McChesney was here."

He turned away to cross the parade ground, followed by the faithful Terence and myself. Others gathered about him: McAndrew, who, for all his sourness, was true; Swein Poulsson, who would have died for the Colonel; John Duff, and some twenty more, including Saunders, whose affection had not been killed, though Clark had nearly hanged him among the prairies.

"Begob!" said Terence, "Davy has infloence wid his Excellency. It's Davy we'll sind, prayin' him not to lave the Frinch alone wid their loyalty."

It was agreed, and I was to repeat the name of every man that sent me.

Departing on this embassy, I sped out of the gates of the fort. But, as I approached the little house where Clark lived, the humming of a crowd came to my ears, and I saw with astonishment that the street was blocked. It appeared that the whole of the inhabitants of Kaskaskia were packed in front of the place. Wriggling my way through the people, I had barely reached the gate when I saw Monsieur Vigo and the priest, three Creole gentlemen in uniform, and several others coming out of the door. They stopped, and Monsieur Vigo, raising his hand for silence, made a speech in French to the people. What he said I could not understand, and when he had finished they broke up into groups, and many of them departed. Before I could gain the house, Colonel Clark himself came out with Captain Helm and Captain Harrod. The Colonel glanced at me and smiled.

"Parade, Davy," he said, and walked on.

I ran back to the fort, and when I had gotten my drum the three companies were falling into line, the men murmuring in undertones among themselves. They were brought to attention. Colonel Clark was seen to come out of the commandant's house, and we watched him furtively as he walked slowly to his place in front of the line. A tremor of excitement went from sergeant to drummer boy. The sentries closed the big gates of the fort.

The Colonel stood for a full minute surveying us calmly, — a disquieting way he had when matters were at a crisis. Then he began to talk.

"I have heard from many sources that you are dissatisfied, that you wish to go back to Kentucky. If that be so, I say to you, 'Go, and God be with you.' I will hinder no man. We have taken a brave and generous people into the fold of the Republic, and they have shown their patriotism by giving us freely of their money and stores." He raised his voice. "They have given the last proof of that patriotism this day. Yes, they have come to me and offered to take your places, to finish the campaign which you have so well begun and wish to abandon. To-day I shall enroll their militia under the flag for which you have fought."

When he had ceased speaking a murmur ran through the ranks.

"But if there be any," he said, "who have faith in me and in the cause for which we have come here, who have the perseverance and the courage to remain, I will reënlist them. The rest of you shall march for Kentucky," he cried, "as soon as Captain Bowman's company can be relieved at Cahokia. The regiment is dismissed."

For a moment they remained in ranks, as though stupefied. It was Cowan who stepped out first, snatched his coonskin hat from his head, and waved it in the air.

"Huzzay for Colonel Clark!" he roared. "I'll foller him into Canady, and stand up to my lick log."

They surrounded Bill Cowan, not the twenty which

had flocked to him in the morning, but four times twenty, and they marched in a body to the commandant's house to be reënlisted. The Colonel stood by the door, and there came a light in his eyes as he regarded us. They cheered him again.

"Thank you, lads," he said; "remember, we may have to whistle for our pay."

"Damn the pay!" cried Bill Cowan, and we echoed the sentiment.

"We'll see what can be done about land grants," said the Colonel, and he turned away.

At dusk that evening I sat on the back door-step, by the orchard, cleaning his rifle. The sound of steps came from the little passage behind me, and a hand was on my head.

"Davee," said a voice (it was Monsieur Vigo's), "do you know what is *un coup d'état*?"

"No, sir."

"Ha! You execute one to-day. Is it not so, Monsieur le Colonel?"

"I reckon he was in the secret," said Colonel Clark. "Did you think I meant to leave Kaskaskia, Davy?"

"No, sir."

"He is not so easy fool," Monsieur Vigo put in. "He tell me paper money good if I take it. *C'est la haute finance!*"

Colonel Clark laughed.

"And why didn't you think I meant to leave?" said he.

"Because you bade me go out and tell everybody," I answered. "What you really mean to do you tell no one."

"*Nom du bon Dieu!*" exclaimed Monsieur Vigo.

Yesterday Colonel Clark had stood alone, the enterprise for which he had risked all on the verge of failure. By a master-stroke his ranks were repleted, his position recovered, his authority secured once more.

Few men recognize genius when they see it. Monsieur Vigo was not one of these.