

## CHAPTER XVI

### DAVY GOES TO CAHOKIA

I SHOULD make but a poor historian, for I have not stuck to my chronology. But as I write, the vivid recollections are those that I set down. I have forgotten two things of great importance. First, the departure of Father Gibault with several Creole gentlemen and a spy of Colonel Clark's for Vincennes, and their triumphant return in August. The sacrifice of the good priest had not been in vain, and he came back with the joyous news of a peaceful conquest. The stars and stripes now waved over the fort, and the French themselves had put it there. And the vast stretch of country from that place westward to the Father of Waters was now American.

And that brings me to the second oversight. The surprise and conquest of Cahokia by Bowman and his men was like that of Kaskaskia. And the French there were loyal, too, offering their militia for service in the place of those men of Bowman's company who would not reënlist. These came to Kaskaskia to join our home-goers, and no sooner had the hundred marched out of the gate and taken up their way for Kentucky than Colonel Clark began the drilling of the new troops.

Captain Leonard Helm was sent to take charge of Vincennes, and Captain Montgomery set out across the mountains for Williamsburg with letters praying the governor of Virginia to come to our assistance.

For another cloud had risen in the horizon: another problem for Clark to face of greater portent than all the others. A messenger from Captain Bowman at Cohos came riding down the street on a scraggly French pony, and pulled up before headquarters. The messenger was

Sergeant Thomas McChesney, and his long legs almost reached the ground on either side of the little beast. Leaping from the saddle, he seized me in his arms, set me down, and bade me tell Colonel Clark of his arrival.

It was a sultry August morning. Within the hour Colonel Clark and Tom and myself were riding over the dusty trace that wound westward across the common lands of the village, which was known as the Fort Chartres road. The heat-haze shimmered in the distance, and there was no sound in plain or village save the tinkle of a cowbell from the clumps of shade. Colonel Clark rode twenty paces in front, alone, his head bowed with thinking.

"They're coming into Cahokia as thick as bees out'n a gum, Davy," said Tom; "seems like there's thousands of 'em. Nothin' will do 'em but they must see the Colonel,— the varmints. And they've got patience, they'll wait thar till the b'ars git fat. I reckon they 'low Clark's got the armies of Congress behind him. If they knowed," said Tom, with a chuckle, "if they knowed that we'd only got seventy of the boys and some hundred Frenchies in the army! I reckon the Colonel's too cute for 'em."

The savages in Cahokia were as the leaves of the forest. Curiosity, that mainspring of the Indian character, had brought the chiefs, big and little, to see with their own eyes the great Captain of the Long Knives. In vain had the faithful Bowman put them off. They would wait. Clark must come. And Clark was coming, for he was not the man to quail at such a crisis. For the crux of the whole matter was here. And if he failed to impress them with his power, with the might of the Congress for which he fought, no man of his would ever see Kentucky again.

As we rode through the bottom under the pecan trees we talked of Polly Ann, Tom and I, and of our little home by the Salt River far to the southward, where we would live in peace when the campaign was over. Tom had written her, painfully enough, an affectionate scrawl, which he sent by one of Captain Linn's men. And I, too, had written. My letter had been about Tom, and how



he had become a sergeant, and what a favorite he was with Bowman and the Colonel. Poor Polly Ann! She could not write, but a runner from Harrodstown who was a friend of Tom's had carried all the way to Cahokia, in the pocket with his despatches, a fold of nettle-bark linen. Tom pulled it from the bosom of his hunting shirt to show me, and in it was a little ring of hair like unto the finest spun red-gold. This was the message Polly Ann had sent, — a message from little Tom as well.

At Prairie du Rocher, at St. Philippe, the inhabitants lined the streets to do homage to this man of strange power who rode, unattended and unafraid, to the council of the savage tribes which had terrorized his people of Kentucky. From the ramparts of Fort Chartres (once one of the mighty chain of strongholds to protect a new France, and now deserted like Massacre), I gazed for the first time in awe at the turgid flood of the Mississippi, and at the lands of the Spanish king beyond. With never ceasing fury the river tore at his clay banks and worried the green islands that braved his charge. And my boyish fancy pictured to itself the monsters which might lie hidden in his muddy depths.

We lay that night in the open at a spring on the bluffs, and the next morning beheld the church tower of Cahokia. A little way from the town we perceived an odd gathering on the road, the yellowed and weathered hunting shirts of Bowman's company mixed with the motley dress of the Creole volunteers. Some of these gentlemen wore the costume of *coureurs du bois*, others had odd regimental coats and hats which had seen much service. Besides the military was a sober deputation of citizens, and hovering behind the whole a horde of curious, blanketed braves, come to get a first glimpse of the great white captain. So escorted, we crossed at the mill, came to a shady street that faced the little river, and stopped at the stone house where Colonel Clark was to abide.

On that day, and for many days more, that street was thronged with warriors. Chiefs in gala dress strutted up and down, feathered and plumed and blanketed, smeared

with paint, bedecked with rude jewellery, — earrings and bracelets. From the remote forests of the north they had come, where the cold winds blow off the blue lakes; from the prairies to the east; from the upper running waters, where the Mississippi flows clear and undefiled by the muddy flood; from the villages and wigwams of the sluggish Wabash; and from the sandy, piny country between the great northern seas where Michilimackinac stands guard alone, — Sacs and Foxes, Chippeways and Maumies and Missesogies, Puans and Pottawattomies, chiefs and medicine men.

Well might the sleep of the good citizens be disturbed, and the women fear to venture to the creek with their linen and their paddles!

The lives of these people hung in truth upon a slender thing — the bearing of one man. All day long the great chiefs sought an audience with him, but he sent them word that matters would be settled in the council that was to come. All day long the warriors lined the picket fence in front of the house, and more than once Tom McChesney roughly shouldered a lane through them that timid visitors might pass. Like a pack of wolves, they watched narrowly for any sign of weakness. As for Tom, they were to him as so many dogs.

"Ye varmints!" he cried, "I'll take a blizz'rd at ye if ye don't keep the way clear."

At that they would give back grudgingly with a chorus of grunts, only to close in again as tightly as before. But they came to have a wholesome regard for the sun-browned man with the red hair who guarded the Colonel's privacy. The boy who sat on the door-step, the son of the great Pale Face Chief (as they called me), was a never ending source of comment among them. Once Colonel Clark sent for me. The little front room of this house was not unlike the one we had occupied at Kaskaskia. It had bare walls, a plain table and chairs, and a crucifix in the corner. It served as dining room, parlor, bedroom, for there was a pallet too. Now the table was covered with parchments and papers, and beside Colonel Clark sat a grave gentle-



man of about his own age. As I came into the room Colonel Clark relaxed, turned toward this gentleman, and said:—

“Monsieur Gratiot, behold my commissary-general, my strategist, my financier.” And Monsieur Gratiot smiled. He struck me as a man who never let himself go sufficiently to laugh.

“Ah,” he said, “Vigo has told me how he settled the question of paper money. He might do something for the Congress in the East.”

“Davy is a Scotchman, like John Law,” said the Colonel, “and he is a master at perceiving a man’s character and business.”

“What would you call me, at a venture, Davy?” asked Monsieur Gratiot.

He spoke excellent English, with only a slight accent.

“A citizen of the world, like Monsieur Vigo,” I answered at a hazard.

“*Pardieu!*” said Monsieur Gratiot, “you are not far away. Like Monsieur Vigo I keep a store here at Cahokia. Like Monsieur Vigo, I have travelled much in my day. Do you know where Switzerland is, Davy?”

I did not.

“It is a country set like a cluster of jewels in the heart of Europe,” said Monsieur Gratiot, “and there are mountains there that rise among the clouds and are covered with perpetual snows. And when the sun sets on those snows they are rubies, and the skies above them sapphire.”

“I was born amongst the mountains, sir,” I answered, my pulse quickening at his description, “but they were not so high as those you speak of.”

“Then,” said Monsieur Gratiot, “you can understand a little my sorrow as a lad when I left it. From Switzerland I went to a foggy place called London, and thence I crossed the ocean to the solemn forests of the north of Canada, where I was many years, learning the characters of these gentlemen who are looking in upon us.” And he waved his arm at the line of peering red faces by the pickets. Monsieur Gratiot smiled at Clark. “And

there’s another point of resemblance between myself and Monsieur Vigo.”

“Have you taken the paper money?” I demanded.

Monsieur Gratiot slapped his linen breeches. “That I have,” and this time I thought he was going to laugh. But he did not, though his eyes sparkled. “And do you think that the good Congress will ever repay me, Davy?”

“No, sir,” said I.

“*Peste!*” exclaimed Monsieur Gratiot, but he did not seem to be offended or shaken.

“Davy,” said Colonel Clark, “we have had enough of predictions for the present. Fetch this letter to Captain Bowman at the garrison up the street.” He handed me the letter. “Are you afraid of the Indians?”

“If I were, sir, I would not show it,” I said, for he had encouraged me to talk freely to him.

“Avast!” cried the Colonel, as I was going out. “And why not?”

“If I show that I am not afraid of them, sir, they will think that you are the less so.”

“There you are for strategy, Gratiot,” said Colonel Clark, laughing. “Get out, you rascal.”

Tom was more concerned when I appeared.

“Don’t pester ’em, Davy,” said he; “fer God’s sake don’t pester ’em. They’re spoilin’ fer a fight. Stand back thar, ye critters,” he shouted, brandishing his rifle in their faces. “Ugh, I reckon it wouldn’t take a horse or a dog to scent ye to-day. Rank b’ar’s oil! Kite along, Davy.”

Clutching the letter tightly, I slipped between the narrowed ranks, and gained the middle of the street, not without a quickened beat of my heart. Thence I sped, dodging this group and that, until I came to the long log house that was called the garrison. Here our men were stationed, where formerly a squad from an English regiment was quartered. I found Captain Bowman, delivered the letter, and started back again through the brown, dusty street, which lay in the shade of the great forest trees that still lined it, doubling now and again to avoid an idling



brave that looked bent upon mischief. For a single mischance might set the tide running to massacre.

I was nearing the gate again, the dust flying from my moccasined feet, the sight of the stalwart Tom giving me courage again. Suddenly, with the deftness of a panther, an Indian shot forward and lifted me high in his arms. To this day I recall my terror as I dangled in mid-air, staring into a hideous face. By intuition I kicked him in the stomach with all my might, and with a howl of surprise and rage his fingers gripped into my flesh. The next thing I remember was being in the dust, suffocated by that odor which he who has known it can never forget. A medley of discordant cries was in my ears. Then I was snatched up, bumped against heads and shoulders, and deposited somewhere. Now it was Tom's face that was close to mine, and the light of a fierce anger was in his blue eyes.

"Did they hurt ye, Davy?" he asked.

I shook my head. Before I could speak he was at the gate again, confronting the mob of savages that swayed against the fence, and the street was filled with running figures. A voice of command that I knew well came from behind me. It was Colonel Clark's.

"Stay where you are, McChesney!" he shouted, and Tom halted with his hand on the latch.

"With your permission, I will speak to them," said Monsieur Gratiot, who had come out also.

I looked up at him, and he was as calm as when he had joked with me a quarter of an hour since.

"Very well," said Clark, briefly.

Monsieur Gratiot surveyed them scornfully.

"Where is the Hungry Wolf, who speaks English?" he said.

There was a stir in the rear ranks, and a lean savage with abnormal cheek bones pushed forward.

"Hungry Wolf here," he said with a grunt.

"The Hungry Wolf knew the French trader at Michilimackinac," said Monsieur Gratiot. "He knows that the French trader's word is a true word. Let the Hungry

Wolf tell his companions that the Chief of the Long Knives is very angry."

The Hungry Wolf turned, and began to speak. His words, hoarse and resonant, seemed to come from the depths of his body. Presently he paused, and there came an answer from the fiend who had seized me. After that there were many grunts, and the Hungry Wolf turned again.

"The North Wind mean no harm," he answered. "He play with the son of the Great White Chief, and his belly is very sore where the Chief's son kicked him."

"The Chief of the Long Knives will consider the offence," said Monsieur Gratiot, and retired into the house with Colonel Clark. For a full five minutes the Indians waited, impassive. And then Monseieur Gratiot reappeared, alone.

"The Chief of the Long Knives is mercifully inclined to forgive," he said. "It was in play. But there must be no more play with the Chief's son. And the path to the Great Chief's presence must be kept clear."

Again the Hungry Wolf translated. The North Wind grunted and departed in silence, followed by many of his friends. And indeed for a while after that the others kept a passage clear to the gate.

As for the son of the Great White Chief, he sat for a long time that afternoon beside the truck patch of the house. And presently he slipped out by a byway into the street again, among the savages. His heart was bumping in his throat, but a boyish reasoning told him that he must show no fear. And that day he found what his Colonel had long since learned to be true — that in courage is the greater safety. The power of the Great White Chief was such that he allowed his son to go forth alone, and feared not for his life. Even so Clark himself walked among them, nor looked to right or left.

Two nights Colonel Clark sat through, calling now on this man and now on that, and conning the treaties which the English had made with the various tribes — ay, and French and Spanish treaties too — until he knew them all



by heart. There was no haste in what he did, no uneasiness in his manner. He listened to the advice of Monsieur Gratiot and other Creole gentlemen of weight, to the Spanish officers who came in their regimentals from St. Louis out of curiosity to see how this man would treat with the tribes. For he spoke of his intentions to none of them, and gained the more respect by it. Within the week the council began; and the scene of the great drama was a field near the village, the background of forest trees. Few plays on the world's stage have held such suspense, few battles such excitement for those who watched. Here was the spectacle of one strong man's brain pitted against the combined craft of the wilderness. In the midst of a stretch of waving grass was a table, and a young man of six-and-twenty sat there alone. Around him were ringed the gathered tribes, each chief in the order of his importance squatted in the inner circle, their blankets making patches of bright color against the green. Behind the tribes was the little group of hunting shirts, the men leaning on the barrels of their long rifles, indolent but watchful. Here and there a gay uniform of a Spanish or Creole officer, and behind these all the population of the village that dared to show itself.

The ceremonies began with the kindling of the council fire, — a rite handed down through unknown centuries of Indian usage. By it nations had been made and unmade, broad lands passed, even as they now might pass. The yellow of its crackling flames was shamed by the summer sun, and the black smoke of it was wafted by the south wind over the forest. Then for three days the chiefs spoke, and a man listened, unmoved. The sound of these orations, wild and fearful to my boyish ear, comes back to me now. Yet there was a cadence in it, a music of notes now falling, now rising to a passion and intensity that thrilled us.

Bad birds flying through the land (the British agents) had besought them to take up the bloody hatchet. They had sinned. They had listened to the lies which the bad birds had told of the Big Knives, they had taken their

presents. But now the Great Spirit in His wisdom had brought themselves and the Chief of the Big Knives together. Therefore (suited the action to the word) they stamped on the bloody belt, and rent in pieces the emblems of the White King across the water. So said the interpreters, as the chiefs one after another tore the miniature British flags which had been given them into bits. On the evening of the third day the White Chief rose in his chair, gazing haughtily about him. There was a deep silence.

"Tell your chiefs," he said, "tell your chiefs that tomorrow I will give them an answer. And upon the manner in which they receive that answer depends the fate of your nations. Good night."

They rose and, thronging around him, sought to take his hand. But Clark turned from them.

"Peace is not yet come," he said sternly. "It is time to take the hand when the heart is given with it."

A feathered headsmen of one of the tribes gave back with dignity and spoke.

"It is well said by the Great Chief of the Pale Faces," he answered; "these in truth are not the words of a man with a double tongue."

So they sought their quarters for the night, and suspense hung breathless over the village.

There were many callers at the stone house that evening, — Spanish officers, Creole gentlemen, an English Canadian trader or two. With my elbow on the sill of the open window I watched them awhile, listening with a boy's eagerness to what they had to say of the day's doings. They disputed amongst themselves in various degrees of English as to the manner of treating the red man, — now gesticulating, now threatening, now seizing a rolled parchment treaty from the table. Clark sat alone, a little apart, silent save a word now and then in a low tone to Monsieur Gratiot or Captain Bowman. Here was an odd assortment of the races which had overrun the new world. At intervals some disputant would pause in his talk to kill a mosquito or fight away a moth or a June-bug, but



presently the argument reached such a pitch that the mosquitoes fed undisturbed.

"You have done much, sir," said the Spanish commandant of St. Louis, "but the savage, he will never be content without present. He will never be won without present."

Clark was one of those men who are perforce listened to when they begin to speak.

"Captain de Leyba," said he, "I know not what may be the present policy of his Spanish Majesty with McGillivray and his Creeks in the south, but this I do believe," and he brought down his fist among the papers, "that the old French and Spanish treaties were right in principle. Here are copies of the English treaties that I have secured, and in them thousands of sovereigns have been thrown away. They are so much waste paper. Gentlemen, the Indians are children. If you give them presents, they believe you to be afraid of them. I will deal with them without presents; and if I had the gold of the Bank of England stored in the garrison there, they should not touch a piece of it."

But Captain de Leyba, incredulous, raised his eyebrows and shrugged.

"*Por Dios,*" he cried, "whoever hear of one man and fifty militia subduing the northern tribes without a *piastre?*"

After a while the Colonel called me in, and sent me speeding across the little river with a note to a certain Mr. Brady, whose house was not far away. Like many another citizen of Cahokia, Mr. Brady was terror-ridden. A party of young Puan bucks had decreed it to be their pleasure to encamp in Mr. Brady's yard, to peer through the shutters into Mr. Brady's house, to enjoy themselves by annoying Mr. Brady's family and others as much as possible. During the Indian occupation of Cahokia this band had gained a well-deserved reputation for mischief; and chief among them was the North Wind himself, whom I had done the honor to kick in the stomach. To-night they had made a fire in this Mr. Brady's flower-

garden, over which they were cooking venison steaks. And, as I reached the door, the North Wind spied me, grinned, rubbed his stomach, made a false dash at me that frightened me out of my wits, and finally went through the pantomime of scalping me. I stood looking at him with my legs apart, for the son of the Great Chief must not run away. And I marked that the North Wind had two great ornamental daubs like shutter-fastenings painted on his cheeks. I sniffed preparation, too, on his followers, and I was sure they were getting ready for some new deviltry. I handed the note to Mr. Brady through the crack of the door that he vouchsafed to me, and when he had slammed and bolted me out, I ran into the street and stood for some time behind the trunk of a big hickory, watching the followers of the North Wind. Some were painting themselves, others cleaning their rifles and sharpening their scalping knives. All jabbered unceasingly. Now and again a silent brave passed, paused a moment to survey them gravely, grunted an answer to something they would fling at him, and went on. At length arrived three chiefs whom I knew to be high in the councils. The North Wind came out to them, and the four blanketed forms stood silhouetted between me and the fire for a quarter of an hour. By this time I was sure of a plot, and fled away to another tree for fear of detection. At length stalked through the street the Hungry Wolf, the interpreter. I knew this man to be friendly to Clark, and I acted on impulse. He gave a grunt of surprise when I halted before him. I made up my mind.

"The son of the Great Chief knows that the Puans have wickedness in their hearts to-night," I said; "the tongue of the Hungry Wolf does not lie."

The big Indian drew back with another grunt, and the distant firelight flashed on his eyes as on polished black flints.

"Umrh! Is the Pale Face Chief's son a prophet?"

"The anger of the Pale Face Chief and of his countrymen is as the hurricane," I said, scarce believing my own



ears. For a lad is imitative by nature, and I had not listened to the interpreters for three days without profit.

The Hungry Wolf grunted again, after which he was silent for a long time. Then he said :—

“Let the Chief of the Long Knives have guard to-night.” And suddenly he was gone into the darkness.

I waded the creek and sped to Clark. He was alone now, the shutters of the room closed. And as I came in I could scarce believe that he was the same masterful man I had seen at the council that day, and at the conference an hour gone. He was once more the friend at whose feet I sat in private, who talked to me as a companion and a father.

“Where have you been, Davy?” he asked. And then, “What is it, my lad?”

I crept close to him and told him in a breathless undertone, and I knew that I was shaking the while. He listened gravely, and when I had finished laid a firm hand on my head.

“There,” he said, “you are a brave lad, and a canny.”

He thought a minute, his hand still resting on my head, and then rose and led me to the back door of the house. It was near midnight, and the sounds of the place were stilling, the crickets chirping in the grass.

“Run to Captain Bowman and tell him to send ten men to this door. But they must come man by man, to escape detection. Do you understand?” I nodded and was starting, but he still held me. “God bless you, Davy, you are a brave boy.”

He closed the door softly and I sped away, my moccasins making no sound on the soft dirt. I reached the garrison, was challenged by Jack Terrill, the guard, and brought by him to Bowman’s room. The Captain sat, undressed, at the edge of his bed. But he was a man of action, and strode into the long room where his company was sleeping and gave his orders without delay.

Half an hour later there was no light in the village. The Colonel’s headquarters were dark, but in the kitchen a dozen tall men were waiting.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE SACRIFICE

So far as the world knew, the Chief of the Long Knives slept peacefully in his house. And such was his sense of power that not even a sentry paced the street without. For by these things is the Indian mind impressed. In the tiny kitchen a dozen men and a boy tried to hush their breathing, and sweltered. For it was very hot, and the pent-up odor of past cookings was stifling to men used to the open. In a corner, hooded under a box, was a lighted lantern, and Tom McChesney stood ready to seize it at the first alarm. On such occasions the current of time runs sluggish. Thrice our muscles were startled into tenseness by the baying of a hound, and once a cock crew out of all season. For the night was cloudy and pitchy black, and the dawn as far away as eternity.

Suddenly I knew that every man in the room was on the alert, for the skilled frontiersman, when watchful, has a sixth sense. None of them might have told you what he had heard. The next sound was the faint creaking of Colonel Clark’s door as it opened. Wrapping a blanket around the lantern, Tom led the way, and we massed ourselves behind the front door. Another breathing space, and then the war-cry of the Puans broke hideously on the night, and children woke, crying, from their sleep. In two bounds our little detachment was in the street, the fire spouting red from the Deckards, faint, shadowy forms fading along the line of trees. After that an uproar of awakening, cries here and there, a drum beating madly for the militia. The dozen flung themselves across the stream, I hot in their wake, through Mr. Brady’s gate, which was open; and there was a scene of sweet tranquillity