

Stepping forward, he grasped them each by the hand, and, despite training, joy shone in their faces, while a long-drawn murmur arose from the assemblage. But Clark did not stop there. He presented them to Captain Bowman and to the French and Spanish gentlemen present, and they were hailed by their own kind as chiefs of their nation. To cap it all our troops, backwoodsmen and Creole militia, paraded in line on the common, and fired a salute in their honor.

Thus did Clark gain the friendship of the forty tribes in the Northwest country.

CHAPTER XVIII

“AN’ YE HAD BEEN WHERE I HAD BEEN”

WE went back to Kaskaskia, Colonel Clark, Tom, and myself, and a great weight was lifted from our hearts.

A peaceful autumn passed, and we were happy save when we thought of those we had left at home. There is no space here to tell of many incidents. Great chiefs who had not been to the council came hundreds of leagues across wide rivers that they might see with their own eyes this man who had made peace without gold, and these had to be amused and entertained.

The apples ripened, and were shaken to the ground by the winds. The good Father Gibault, true to his promise, strove to teach me French. Indeed, I picked up much of that language in my intercourse with the inhabitants of Kaskaskia. How well I recall that simple life,—its dances, its songs, and the games with the laughing boys and girls on the common! And the good people were very kind to the orphan that dwelt with Colonel Clark, the drummer boy of his regiment.

But winter brought forebodings. When the garden patches grew bare and brown, and the bleak winds from across the Mississippi swept over the common, untoward tidings came like water dripping from a roof, bit by bit. And day by day Colonel Clark looked graver. The messengers he had sent to Vincennes came not back, and the *coureurs* and traders from time to time brought rumors of a British force gathering like a thundercloud in the northeast. Monsieur Vigo himself, who had gone to Vincennes on his own business, did not return. As for

the inhabitants, some of them who had once bowed to us with a smile now passed with faces averted.

The cold set the miry roads like cement, in ruts and ridges. A flurry of snow came and powdered the roofs even as the French loaves are powdered.

It was January. There was Colonel Clark on a runt of an Indian pony; Tom McChesney on another, riding ahead, several French gentlemen seated on stools in a two-wheeled cart, and myself. We were going to Cahokia, and it was very cold, and when the tireless wheels bumped from ridge to gully, the gentlemen grabbed each other as they slid about, and laughed.

All at once the merriment ceased, and looking forward we saw that Tom had leaped from his saddle and was bending over something in the snow. These chanced to be the footprints of some twenty men.

The immediate result of this alarming discovery was that Tom went on express to warn Captain Bowman, and the rest of us returned to a painful scene at Kaskaskia. We reached the village, the French gentlemen leaped down from their stools in the cart, and in ten minutes the streets were filled with frenzied, hooded figures. Hamilton, called the Hair Buyer, was upon them with no less than six hundred, and he would hang them to their own gateposts for listening to the Long Knives. These were but a handful after all was said. There was Father Gibault, for example. Father Gibault would doubtless be exposed to the crows in the belfry of his own church because he had busied himself at Vincennes and with other matters. Father Gibault was human, and therefore lovable. He bade his parishioners a hasty and tearful farewell, and he made a cold and painful journey to the territories of his Spanish Majesty across the Mississippi.

Father Gibault looked back, and against the gray of the winter's twilight there were flames like red maple leaves. In the fort the men stood to their guns, their faces flushed with staring at the burning houses. Only a few were burned,—enough to give no cover for Hamilton and his six hundred if they came.

But they did not come. The faithful Bowman and his men arrived instead, with the news that there had been only a roving party of forty, and these were now in full retreat.

Father Gibault came back. But where was Hamilton? This was the disquieting thing.

One bitter day, when the sun smiled mockingly on the powdered common, a horseman was perceived on the Fort Chartres road. It was Monsieur Vigo returning from Vincennes, but he had been first to St. Louis by reason of the value he set upon his head. Yes, Monsieur Vigo had been to Vincennes, remaining a little longer than he expected, the guest of Governor Hamilton. So Governor Hamilton had recaptured that place! Monsieur Vigo was no spy, hence he had gone first to St. Louis. Governor Hamilton was at Vincennes with much of King George's gold, and many supplies, and certain Indians who had not been at the council. Eight hundred in all, said Monsieur Vigo, using his fingers. And it was Governor Hamilton's design to march upon Kaskaskia and Cahokia and sweep over Kentucky; nay, he had already sent certain emissaries to McGillivray and his Creeks and the Southern Indians with presents, and these were to press forward on their side. The Governor could do nothing now, but would move as soon as the rigors of winter had somewhat relented. Monsieur Vigo shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. He loved *les Américains*. What would *Monsieur le Colonel* do now?

Monsieur le Colonel was grave, but this was his usual manner. He did not tear his hair, but the ways of the Long Knives were past understanding. He asked many questions. How was it with the garrison at Vincennes? Monsieur Vigo was exact, as a business man should be. They were now reduced to eighty men, and five hundred savages had gone out to ravage. There was no chance, then, of Hamilton moving at present? Monsieur Vigo threw up his hands. Never had he made such a trip, and he had been forced to come back by a northern route. The Wabash was as the Great Lakes, and the forests grew

out of the water. A fox could not go to Vincennes in this weather. A fish? Monsieur Vigo laughed heartily. Yes, a fish might.

"Then," said Colonel Clark, "we will be fish."

Monsieur Vigo stared, and passed his hand from his forehead backwards over his long hair. I leaned forward in my corner by the hickory fire.

"Then we will be fish," said Colonel Clark. "Better than food for the crows. For, if we stay here, we shall be caught like bears in a trap, and Kentucky will be at Hamilton's mercy."

"*Sacré!*" exclaimed Monsieur Vigo, "you are mad, *mon ami*. I know what this country is, and you cannot get to Vincennes."

"I *will* get to Vincennes," said Colonel Clark, so gently that Monsieur Vigo knew he meant it. "I will *swim* to Vincennes."

Monsieur Vigo raised his hands to heaven. The three of us went out of the door and walked. There was a snowy place in front of the church all party-colored like a clown's coat, — scarlet capotes, yellow capotes, and blue capotes, and bright silk handkerchiefs. They surrounded the Colonel. *Pardieu*, what was he to do now? For the British governor and his savages were coming to take revenge on them because, in their necessity, they had declared for Congress. Colonel Clark went silently on his way to the gate; but Monsieur Vigo stopped, and Kaskaskia heard, with a shock, that this man of iron was to march against Vincennes.

The gates of the fort were shut, and the captains summoned. Undaunted woodsmen as they were, they were lukewarm, at first, at the idea of this march through the floods. Who can blame them? They had, indeed, sacrificed much. But in ten minutes they had caught his enthusiasm (which is one of the mysteries of genius). And the men paraded in the snow likewise caught it, and swung their hats at the notion of taking the Hair Buyer.

"'Tis no news to me," said Terence, stamping his feet on the flinty ground; "wasn't it Davy that pointed him

out to us and the hair liftin' from his head six months since?"

"Und you like schwimmin', yes?" said Swein Poulsson, his face like the rising sun with the cold.

"Swimmin', is it?" said Terence; "sure, the divil made worse things than wather. And Hamilton's beyant."

"I reckon that'll fetch us through," Bill Cowan put in grimly.

It was a blessed thing that none of us had a bird's-eye view of that same water. No man of force will listen when his mind is made up, and perhaps it is just as well. For in that way things are accomplished. Clark would not listen to Monsieur Vigo, and hence the financier had, perforce, to listen to Clark. There were several miracles before we left. Monsieur Vigo, for instance, agreed to pay the expenses of the expedition, though in his heart he thought we should never get to Vincennes. Incidentally, he was never repaid. Then there were the French — yesterday, running hither and thither in paroxysms of fear; to-day, enlisting in whole companies, though it were easier to get to the wild geese of the swamps than to Hamilton. Their ladies stitched colors day and night, and presented them with simple confidence to the Colonel in the church. Twenty stands of colors for 170 men, counting those who had come from Cahokia. Think of the industry of it, of the enthusiasm behind it! Twenty stands of colors! Clark took them all, and in due time it will be told how the colors took Vincennes. This was because Colonel Clark was a man of destiny.

Furthermore, Colonel Clark was off the next morning at dawn to buy a Mississippi keel-boat. He had her rigged up with two four-pounders and four swivels, filled her with provisions, and called her the *Willing*. She was the first gunboat on the Western waters. A great fear came into my heart, and at dusk I stole back to the Colonel's house alone. The snow had turned to rain, and Terence stood guard within the doorway.

"Arrah," he said, "what ails ye, darlin'?"

I gulped and the tears sprang into my eyes; whereupon

Terence, in defiance of all military laws, laid his gun against the doorpost and put his arms around me, and I confided my fears. It was at this critical juncture that the door opened and Colonel Clark came out.

"What's to do here?" he demanded, gazing at us sternly.

"Savin' your Honor's prisence," said Terence, "he's afeard your Honor will be sending him on the boat. Sure, he wants to go swimmin' with the rest of us."

Colonel Clark frowned, bit his lip, and Terence seized his gun and stood to attention.

"It were right to leave you in Kaskaskia," said the Colonel; "the water will be over your head."

"The King's drum would be floatin' the likes of him," said the irrepressible Terence, "and the b'ys would be that lonesome."

The Colonel walked away without a word. In an hour's time he came back to find me cleaning his accoutrements by the fire. For a while he did not speak, but busied himself with his papers, I having lighted the candles for him. Presently he spoke my name, and I stood before him.

"I will give you a piece of advice, Davy," said he. "If you want a thing, go straight to the man that has it. McChesney has spoken to me about this wild notion of yours of going to Vincennes, and Cowan and McCann and Ray and a dozen others have dogged my footsteps."

"I only spoke to Terence because he asked me, sir," I answered. "I said nothing to any one else."

He laid down his pen and looked at me with an odd expression.

"What a weird little piece you are," he exclaimed; "you seem to have wormed your way into the hearts of these men. Do you know that you will probably never get to Vincennes alive?"

"I don't care, sir," I said. A happy thought struck me. "If they see a boy going through the water, sir—" I hesitated, abashed.

"What then?" said Clark, shortly.

"It may keep some from going back," I finished.

At that he gave a sort of gasp, and stared at me the more.

"Egad," he said, "I believe the good Lord launched you wrong end to. Perchance you will be a child when you are fifty."

He was silent a long time, and fell to musing. And I thought he had forgotten.

"May I go, sir?" I asked at length.

He started.

"Come here," said he. But when I was close to him he merely laid his hand on my shoulder. "Yes, you may go, Davy."

He sighed, and presently turned to his writing again, and I went back joyfully to my cleaning.

On a certain dark 4th of February, picture the village of Kaskaskia assembled on the river-bank in capote and hood. Ropes are cast off, the keel-boat pushes her blunt nose through the cold, muddy water, the oars churn up dirty, yellow foam, and cheers shake the sodden air. So the *Willing* left on her long journey: down the Kaskaskia, into the flood of the Mississippi, against many weary leagues of the Ohio's current, and up the swollen Wabash until they were to come to the mouth of the White River near Vincennes. There they were to await us.

Should we ever see them again? I think that this was the unspoken question in the hearts of the many who were to go by land.

The 5th was a mild, gray day, with the melting snow lying in patches on the brown bluff, and the sun making shift to pierce here and there. We formed the regiment in the fort, — backwoodsman and Creole now to fight for their common country, Jacques and Pierre and Alphonse; and mother and father, sweetheart and wife, waiting to wave a last good-by. Bravely we marched out of the gate and into the church for Father Gibault's blessing. And then, forming once more, we filed away on the road leading northward to the ferry, our colors flying, leaving the weeping, cheering crowd behind. In front of the tall men of the column was a wizened figure, beating madly on

a drum, stepping proudly with head thrown back. It was Cowan's voice that snapped the strain.

"Go it, Davy, my little gamecock!" he cried, and the men laughed and cheered. And so we came to the bleak ferry landing where we had crossed on that hot July night six months before.

We were soon on the prairies, and in the misty rain that fell and fell they seemed to melt afar into a gray and cheerless ocean. The sodden grass was matted now and unkempt. Lifeless lakes filled the depressions, and through them we waded mile after mile ankle-deep. There was a little cavalcade mounted on the tiny French ponies, and sometimes I rode with these; but oftenest Cowan or Tom would fling me, drum and all, on his shoulder. For we had reached the forest swamps where the water is the color of the Creole coffee. And day after day as we marched, the soft rain came out of the east and wet us to the skin.

It was a journey of torments, and even that first part of it was enough to discourage the most resolute spirit. Men might be led through it, but never driven. It is ever the mind which suffers through the monotonies of bodily discomfort, and none knew this better than Clark himself. Every morning as we set out with the wet hide chafing our skin, the Colonel would run the length of the regiment, crying:—

"Who gives the feast to-night, boys?"

Now it was Bowman's company, now McCarty's, now Bayley's. How the hunters vied with each other to supply the best, and spent the days stalking the deer cowering in the wet thickets. We crossed the Saline, and on the plains beyond was a great black patch, a herd of buffalo. A party of chosen men headed by Tom McChesney was sent after them, and never shall I forget the sight of the mad beasts charging through the water.

That night, when our chilled feet could bear no more, we sought out a patch of raised ground a little firmer than a quagmire, and heaped up the beginnings of a fire with such brush as could be made to burn, robbing the naked thickets. Saddle and steak sizzled, leather steamed and

stiffened, hearts and bodies thawed; grievances that men had nursed over miles of water melted. Courage sits bet on a full stomach, and as they ate they cared not whether the Atlantic had opened between them and Vincennes. An hour ago, and there were twenty cursing laggards, counting the leagues back to Kaskaskia. Now:—

*"C'était un vieux sauvage
Tout noir, tout barbouilla,
Ouich' ka!
Avec sa vieill' couverte
Et son sac à tabac.
Ouich' ka!
Ah! ah! tenaouich' tenaga,
Tenaouich' tenaga, ouich' ka!"*

So sang Antoine, *dit le Gris*, in the pulsing red light. And when, between the verses, he went through the agonies of a Huron war-dance, the assembled regiment howled with delight. Some men know cities and those who dwell in the quarters of cities. But grizzled Antoine knew the half of a continent, and the manners of trading and killing of the tribes thereof.

And after Antoine came Gabriel, a marked contrast—Gabriel, five feet six, and the glare showing but a faint dark line on his quivering lip. Gabriel was a patriot,—a tribute we must pay to all of those brave Frenchmen who went with us. Nay, Gabriel had left at home on his little farm near the village a young wife of a fortnight. And so his lip quivered as he sang:—

*"Petit Rocher de la Haute Montagne,
Je vien finir ici cette campagne!
Ah! doux échos, entendez mes soupirs;
En languissant je vais bientôt mourir!"*

We had need of gayety after that, and so Bill Cowan sang "Billy of the Wild Wood," and Terence McCann wailed an Irish jig, stamping the water out of the spongy ground amidst storms of mirth. As he desisted, breathless and panting, he flung me up in the firelight before the eyes of them all, crying:—

"It's Davy can bate me!"

"Ay, Davy, Davy!" they shouted, for they were in the mood for anything. There stood Colonel Clark in the dimmer light of the background. "We must keep 'em screwed up, Davy," he had said that very day.

There came to me on the instant a wild song that my father had taught me when the liquor held him in dominance. Exhilarated, I sprang from Terence's arms to the sodden, bared space, and methinks I yet hear my shrill, piping note, and see my legs kicking in the fling of it. There was an uproar, a deeper voice chimed in, and here was McAndrew flinging his legs with mine:—

"I've faught on land, I've faught at sea,
At hame I faught my aunty, O;
But I met the deevil and Dundee
On the braes o' Killiecrankie, O.
An' ye had been where I had been,
Ye wad na be sae cantie, O;
An' ye had seen what I ha'e seen
On the braes o' Killiecrankie, O."

In the morning Clark himself would be the first off through the gray rain, laughing and shouting and waving his sword in the air, and I after him as hard as I could pelt through the mud, beating the charge on my drum until the war-cries of the regiment drowned the sound of it. For we were upon a pleasure trip—lest any man forget,—a pleasure trip amidst stark woods and brown plains flecked with ponds. So we followed him until we came to a place where, in summer, two quiet rivers flowed through green forests—the little Wabashes. And now! Now hickory and maple, oak and cottonwood, stood shivering in three feet of water on what had been a league of dry land. We stood dismayed at the crumbling edge of the hill, and one hundred and seventy pairs of eyes were turned on Clark. With a mere glance at the running stream high on the bank and the drowned forest beyond, he turned and faced them.

"I reckon you've earned a rest, boys," he said. "We'll have games to-day."

There were some dozen of the unflinching who needed not to be amused. Choosing a great poplar, these he set to hollowing out a pirogue, and himself came among the others and played leap-frog and the Indian game of ball until night fell. And these, instead of moping and quarrelling, forgot. That night, as I cooked him a buffalo steak, he drew near the fire with Bowman.

"For the love of God keep up their spirits, Bowman," said the Colonel; "keep up their spirits until we get them across. Once on the farther hills, they cannot go back."

Here was a different being from the shouting boy who had led the games and the war-dance that night in the circle of the blaze. Tired out, we went to sleep with the ring of the axes in our ears, and in the morning there were more games while the squad crossed the river to the drowned neck, built a rough scaffold there, and notched a trail across it; to the scaffold the baggage was ferried, and the next morning, bit by bit, the regiment. Even now the pains shoot through my body when I think of how man after man plunged waist-deep into the icy water toward the farther branch. The pirogue was filled with the weak, and in the end of it I was curled up with my drum.

Heroism is a many-sided thing. It is one matter to fight and finish, another to endure hell's tortures hour after hour. All day they waded with numbed feet vainly searching for a footing in the slime. Truly, the agony of a brave man is among the greatest of the world's tragedies to see. As they splashed onward through the tree-trunks, many a joke went forth, though lips were drawn and teeth pounded together. I have not the heart to recall these jokes,—it would seem a sacrilege. There were quarrels, too, the men striving to push one another from the easier paths; and deeds sublime when some straggler clutched at the bole of a tree for support, and was helped onward through excruciating ways. A dozen held tremblingly to the pirogue's gunwale, lest they fall and drown. One walked ahead with a smile, or else fell back to lend a helping shoulder to a fainting man.

And there was Tom McChesney. All day long I watched him, and thanked God that Polly Ann could not see him thus. And yet, how the pride would have leaped within her! Humor came not easily to him, but charity and courage and unselfishness he had in abundance. What he suffered none knew; but through those awful hours he was always among the stragglers, helping the weak and despairing when his strength might have taken him far ahead toward comfort and safety. "I'm all right, Davy," he would say, in answer to my look as he passed me. But on his face was written something that I did not understand.

How the Creole farmers and traders, unused even to the common ways of woodcraft, endured that fearful day and others that followed, I know not. And when a tardy justice shall arise and compel the people of this land to raise a shaft in memory of Clark and those who followed him, let not the loyalty of the French be forgotten, though it be not understood.

At eventide came to lurid and disordered brains the knowledge that the other branch was here. And, mercifully, it was shallower than the first. Holding his rifle high, with a war-whoop Bill Cowan plunged into the stream. Unable to contain myself more, I flung my drum overboard and went after it, and amid shouts and laughter I was towed across by James Ray.

Colonel Clark stood watching from the bank above, and it was he who pulled me, bedraggled, to dry land. I ran away to help gather brush for a fire. As I was heaping this in a pile I heard something that I should not have heard. Nor ought I to repeat it now, though I did not need the flames to send the blood tingling through my body.

"McChesney," said the Colonel, "we must thank our stars that we brought the boy along. He has grit, and as good a head as any of us. I reckon if it hadn't been for him some of them would have turned back long ago."

I saw Tom grinning at the Colonel as gratefully as though he himself had been praised.

The blaze started, and soon we had a bonfire. Some had not the strength to hold out the buffalo meat to the fire. Even the grumblers and mutineers were silent, owing to the ordeal they had gone through. But presently, when they began to be warmed and fed, they talked of other trials to be borne. The Embarrass and the big Wabash, for example. These must be like the sea itself.

"Take the back trail, if ye like," said Bill Cowan, with a loud laugh. "I reckon the rest of us kin float to Vincennes on Davy's drum."

But there was no taking the back trail now; and well they knew it. The games began, the unwilling being forced to play, and before they fell asleep that night they had taken Vincennes, scalped the Hair Buyer, and were far on the march to Detroit.

Mercifully, now that their stomachs were full, they had no worries. Few knew the danger we were in of being cut off by Hamilton's roving bands of Indians. There would be no retreat, no escape, but a fight to the death. And I heard this, and much more that was spoken of in low tones at the Colonel's fire far into the night, of which I never told the rank and file, — not even Tom McChesney.

On and on, through rain and water, we marched until we drew near to the river Embarrass. Drew near, did I say? "Sure, darlin'," said Terence, staring comically over the gray waste, "we've been in it since Choosd'y." There was small exaggeration in it. In vain did our feet seek the deeper water. It would go no higher than our knees, and the sound which the regiment made in marching was like that of a great flatboat going against the current. It had been a sad, lavender-colored day, and now that the gloom of the night was setting in, and not so much as a hummock showed itself above the surface, the Creoles began to murmur. And small wonder! Where was this man leading them, this Clark who had come amongst them from the skies, as it were? Did he know, himself? Night fell as though a blanket had been spread over the tree-tops, and above the dreary splashing men could be heard calling to one another in the darkness.

Nor was there any supper ahead. For our food was gone, and no game was to be shot over this watery waste. A cold like that of eternal space settled in our bones. Even Terence McCann grumbled.

"Begob," said he, "'tis fine weather for fishes, and the birrds are that comfortable in the threes. 'Tis no place for a baste at all, at all."

Sometime in the night there was a cry. Ray had found the water falling from an oozy bank, and there we dozed fitfully until we were startled by a distant boom.

It was Governor Hamilton's morning gun at Fort Sackville, Vincennes.

There was no breakfast. How we made our way, benumbed with hunger and cold, to the banks of the Wabash, I know not. Captain McCarty's company was set to making canoes, and the rest of us looked on apathetically as the huge trees staggered and fell amidst a fountain of spray in the shallow water. We were but three leagues from Vincennes. A raft was bound together, and Tom McChesney and three other scouts sent on a desperate journey across the river in search of boats and provisions, lest we starve and fall and die on the wet flats. Before he left Tom came to me, and the remembrance of his gaunt face haunted me for many years after. He drew something from his bosom and held it out to me, and I saw that it was a bit of buffalo steak which he had saved. I shook my head, and the tears came into my eyes.

"Come, Davy," he said, "ye're so little, and I beant hungry."

Again I shook my head, and for the life of me I could say nothing.

"I reckon Polly Ann'd never forgive me if anything was to happen to you," said he.

At that I grew strangely angry.

"It's you who need it," I cried, "it's you that has to do the work. And she told me to take care of you."

The big fellow grinned sheepishly, as was his wont.

"'Tis only a bite," he pleaded, "'twouldn't only make me hungry, and " — he looked hard at me — "and it might

be the savin' of you. Ye'll not eat it for Polly Ann's sake?" he asked coaxingly.

"'Twould not be serving her," I answered indignantly.

"Ye're an obstinate little deevil!" he cried, and, dropping the morsel on the freshly cut stump, he stalked away. I ran after him, crying out, but he leaped on the raft that was already in the stream and began to pole across. I slipped the piece into my own hunting shirt.

All day the men who were too weak to swing axes sat listless on the bank, watching in vain for some sight of the *Willing*. They saw a canoe rounding the bend instead, with a single occupant paddling madly. And who should this be but Captain Willing's own brother, escaped from the fort, where he had been a prisoner. He told us that a man named Maisonville, with a party of Indians, was in pursuit of him, and the next piece of news he had was in the way of raising our despair a little. Governor Hamilton's astonishment at seeing this force here and now would be as great as his own. Governor Hamilton had said, indeed, that only a navy could take Vincennes this year. Unfortunately, Mr. Willing brought no food. Next in order came five Frenchmen, trapped by our scouts, nor had they any provisions. But as long as I live I shall never forget how Tom McChesney returned at nightfall, the hero of the hour. He had shot a deer; and never did wolves pick an animal cleaner. They pressed on me a choice piece of it, these great-hearted men who were willing to go hungry for the sake of a child, and when I refused it they would have forced it down my throat. Swein Poulsson, he that once hid under the bed, deserves a special tablet to his memory. He was for giving me all he had, though his little eyes were unnaturally bright and the red had left his cheeks now.

"He haf no belly, only a leedle on his backbone!" he cried.

"Begob, thin, he has the backbone," said Terence.

"I have a piece," said I, and drew forth that which Tom had given me.

They brought a quarter of a saddle to Colonel Clark,