CHAPTER XX

THE CAMPAIGN ENDS

"*If I am obliged to storm, you may depend upon such treatment as is justly due to a murderer. And beware of destroying stores of any kind, or any papers or letters that are in your possession; or of hurting one house in the town. For, by Heaven! if you do, there shall be no mercy shown you.*

"*To Lieutenant-Governor Hamilton.*"

So read Colonel Clark, as he stood before the log fire in Monsieur Bouton's house at the back of the town, the captains grouped in front of him.

"Is that strong enough, gentlemen?" he asked.

"To raise his hair," said Captain Charleville.

Captain Bowman laughed loudly.

"I reckon the boys will see to that," said he.

Colonel Clark folded the letter, addressed it, and turned gravely to Monsieur Bouton.

"You will oblige me, sir," said he, "by taking this to Governor Hamilton. You will be provided with a flag of truce."

Monsieur Bouton was a round little man, as his name suggested, and the men cheered him as he strode soberly up the street, a piece of sheeting tied to a sapling and flung over his shoulder. Through such humble agencies are the ends of Providence accomplished. Monsieur Bouton walked up to the gate, disappeared sidewise through the postern, and we sat down to breakfast. In a very short time Monsieur Bouton was seen coming back, and his face was not so impassive that the governor's message could not be read thereon.

"'Tis not a love-letter he has, I'll warrant," said Terence, as the little man disappeared into the house. So accurately had Monsieur Bouton's face betrayed the news that the men went back to their posts without orders, some with half a breakfast in hand. And soon the rank and file had the message.

"*Lieutenant-Governor Hamilton begs leave to acquaint Colonel Clark that he and his garrison are not disposed to be awed into any action unworthy of British subjects.*"

Our men had eaten, their enemy was within their grasp, and Clark and all his officers could scarce keep them from storming. Such was the deadliness of their aim that scarce a shot came back, and time and again I saw men fling themselves in front of the breastworks with a war-whoop, wave their rifles in the air, and cry out that they would have the Ha'r Buyer's sculp before night should fall. It could not last. Not tuned to the nicer courtesies of warfare, the memory of Hamilton's war parties, of blackened homes, of families dead and missing, raged unappeased. These were not content to leave vengeance in the Lord's hands, and when a white flag peeped timorously above the gate a great yell of derision went up from river-bank to river-bank. Out of the postern stepped the officer with the faded scarlet coat, and in due time went back again, haughtily, his head high, casting contempt right and left of him. Again the postern opened, and this time there was a cheer at sight of a man in hunting shirt and leggings and coonskin cap. After him came a certain Major Hay, Indian-enticer of detested memory, the lieutenant of him who followed — the Hair Buyer himself. A murmur of hatred arose from the men stationed there, and many would have shot him where he stood but for Clark.

"The devil has the grit," said Cowan, though his eyes blazed.

It was the involuntary tribute. Lieutenant-Governor Hamilton stared indifferently at the glowering backwoodsmen as he walked the few steps to the church.

Not so Major Hay. His eyes fell. There was Colonel Clark waiting at the door through which the good Creoles had been wont to go to worship, bowing somewhat ironically to the British General. It was a strange meeting they had in St. Xavier's, by the light of the candles on the altar. Hot words passed in that house of peace, the General demanding protection for all his men, and our Colonel replying that he would do with the Indian partisans as he chose.

"And whom mean you by Indian partisans?" the undaunted governor had demanded.

"I take Major Hay to be one of them," our Colonel had answered.

It was soon a matter of common report how Clark had gazed fixedly at the Major when he said this, and how the Major turned pale and trembled. With our own eyes we saw them coming out, Major Hay as near to staggering as a man could be, the governor blushing red for shame of him. So they went sorrowfully back to the gate.

Colonel Clark stood at the steps of the church, looking after them.

"What was that firing?" he demanded sharply. "I gave orders for a truce."

We who stood by the church had indeed heard firing in the direction of the hills east of the town, and had wondered thereat. Perceiving a crowd gathered at the far end of the street, we all ran thither save the Colonel, who directed to have the offenders brought to him at Monsieur Bouton's. We met the news halfway. A party of Canadians and Indians had just returned from the Falls of the Ohio with scalps they had taken. Captain Williams had gone out with his company to meet them, had lured them on, and finally had killed a number and was returning with the prisoners. Yes, here they were! Williams himself walked ahead with two dishevelled and frightened *coureurs du bois*, twoscore at least of the townspeople of Vincennes, friends and relatives of the prisoners, pressing about and crying out to Williams to have mercy on them. As for Williams, he took them in to the Colonel, the townspeople pressing into the door-yard and banking in front of it on the street. Behind all a tragedy impended, nor can I think of it now without sickening.

The frightened Creoles in the street gave back against the fence, and from behind them, issuing as a storm-cloud, came the half of Williams' company, yelling like madmen. Pushed and jostled ahead of them were four Indians, decked and feathered, the half-dried scalps dangling from their belts, impassive, true to their creed despite the indignity of jolts and jars and blows. On and on pressed the mob, gathering recruits at every corner, and when they reached St. Xavier's before the fort half the regiment was there. Others watched, too, from the stockade, and what they saw made their knees smite together with fear. Here were four bronzed statues in a row across the street, the space in front of them clear that their partisans in the fort might look and consider. What was passing in the savage mind no man might know. Not a lip trembled nor an eye faltered when a backwoodsman, his memory aflame at sight of the pitiful white scalps on their belts, thrust through the crowd to curse them. Fletcher Blount, frenzied, snatched his tomahawk from his side.

"Sink, varmint!" he cried with a great oath. "By the etarnal! we'll pay the H'ar Buyer in his own coin. Sound your drums!" he shouted at the fort. "Call the garrison fer the show."

He had raised his arm and turned to strike when the savage put up his hand, not in entreaty, but as one man demanding a right from another. The cries, the curses, the murmurs even, were hushed. Throwing back his head, arching his chest, the notes of a song rose in the heavy air. Wild, strange notes they were, that struck vibrant chords in my own quivering being, and the song was the death-song. Ay, and the life-song of a soul which had come into the world even as mine own. And somewhere there lay in the song, half revealed, the awful mystery of that Creator Whom the soul leaped forth to meet: the myriad green of the sun playing with the leaves, the fish swimming lazily in the brown pool, the

doe grazing in the thicket, and a naked boy as free from care as these ; and still the life grows brighter as strength comes, and stature, and power over man and beast ; and then, God knows what memories of fierce love and fiercer wars and triumphs, of desires gained and enemies conquered, — God, who has made all lives akin to something which He holds in the hollow of His hand ; and then — the rain beating on the forest crown, beating, beating, beating.

The song ceased. The Indian knelt in the black mud, not at the feet of Fletcher Blount, but on the threshold of the Great Spirit who ruleth all things. The axe fell, yet he uttered no cry as he went before his Master.

So the four sang, each in turn, and died in the sight of some who pitied, and some who feared, and some who hated, for the sake of land and women. So the four went beyond the power of gold and gewgaw, and were dragged in the mire around the walls and flung into the yellow waters of the river.

Through the dreary afternoon the men lounged about and cursed the parley, and hearkened for the tattoo, — the signal agreed upon by the leaders to begin the fighting. There had been no command against taunts and jeers, and they gathered in groups under the walls to indulge themselves, and even tried to bribe me as I sat braced against a house with my drum between my knees and the sticks clutched tightly in my hands.

"Here's a Spanish dollar for a couple o' taps, Davy," shouted Jack Terrell.

"Come on, ye pack of Rebel cutthroats !" yelled a man on the wall.

He was answered by a torrent of imprecations. And so they flung it back and forth until nightfall, when out comes the same faded-scarlet officer, holding a letter in his hand, and marches down the street to Monsieur Bouton's. There would be no storming now, nor any man suffered to lay fingers on the Hair Buyer.

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I remember, in particular, Hamilton the Hair Buyer. Not the fiend my imagination had depicted (I have since learned that most villains do not look the part), but a man with a great sorrow stamped upon his face. The sun rose on that 25th of February, and the mud melted, and one of our companies drew up on each side of the gate. Downward slid the lion of England, the garrison drums beat a dirge, and the Hair Buyer marched out at the head of his motley troops.

Then came my own greatest hour. All morning I had been polishing and tightening the drum, and my pride was so great as we fell into line that so much as a smile could not be got out of me. Picture it all : Vincennes in black and white by reason of the bright day ; eaves and gables, stockade line and capped towers, sharply drawn, and straight above these a stark flagstaff waiting for our colors ; pigs and fowls straying hither and thither, unmindful that this day is red on the calendar. Ah ! here is a bit of color, too, — the villagers on the side streets to see the spectacle. Gay wools and gayer handkerchiefs there, amid the joyous, cheering crowd of thrice-changed nationality.

"*Vive les Bostonnais! Vive les Américains! Vive Monsieur le Colonel Clark! Vive le petit tambour!*"

"*Vive le petit tambour!*" That was the drummer boy, stepping proudly behind the Colonel himself, with a soul lifted high above mire and puddle into the blue above. There was laughter amongst the giants behind me, and Cowan saying softly, as when we left Kaskaskia, "Go it, Davy, my little gamecock !" And the whisper of it was repeated among the ranks drawn up by the gate.

Yes, here was the gate, and now we were in the fort, and an empire was gained, never to be lost again. The Stars and Stripes climbed the staff, and the folds were caught by an eager breeze. Thirteen cannon thundered from the blockhouses — one for each colony that had braved a king.

There, in the miry square within the Vincennes fort, thin and bronzed and travel-stained, were the men who

had dared the wilderness in ugliest mood. And yet none by himself would have done it — each had come here compelled by a spirit stronger than his own, by a master mind that laughed at the body and its ailments.

Colonel George Rogers Clark stood in the centre of the square, under the flag to whose renown he had added three stars. Straight he was, and square, and self-contained. No weakening tremor of exultation softened his face as he looked upon the men by whose endurance he had been able to do this thing. He waited until the white smoke of the last gun had drifted away on the breeze, until the snapping of the flag and the distant village sounds alone broke the stillness.

"We have not suffered all things for a reward," he said, "but because a righteous cause may grow. And though our names may be forgotten, our deeds will be remembered. We have conquered a vast land that our children and our children's children may be freed from tyranny, and we have brought a just vengeance upon our enemies. I thank you, one and all, in the name of the Continental Congress and of that Commonwealth of Virginia for which you have fought. You are no longer Virginians, Kentuckians, Kaskaskians, and Cahokians — you are Americans."

He paused, and we were silent. Though his words moved us strongly, they were beyond us.

"I mention no deeds of heroism, of unselfishness, of lives saved at the peril of others. But I am the debtor of every man here for the years to come to see that he and his family have justice from the Commonwealth and the nation."

Again he stopped, and it seemed to us watching that he smiled a little.

"I shall name one," he said, "one who never lagged, who never complained, who starved that the weak might be fed and walk. David Ritchie, come here."

I trembled, my teeth chattered as the water had never made them chatter. I believe I should have fallen but for Tom, who reached out from the ranks. I stumbled

forward in a daze to where the Colonel stood, and the cheering from the ranks was a thing beyond me. The Colonel's hand on my head brought me to my senses.

"David Ritchie," he said, "I give you publicly the thanks of the regiment. The parade is dismissed."

The next thing I knew I was on Cowan's shoulders, and he was tearing round and round the fort with two companies at his heels.

"The divil," said Terence McCann, "he dhrummed us over the wather, an' through the wather; and faix, he would have dhrummed the sculp from Hamilton's head and the Colonel had said the worrd."

"By gar!" cried Antoine *le Gris*, "now he drum us on to Detroit."

Out of the gate rushed Cowan, the frightened villagers scattering right and left. Antoine had a friend who lived in this street, and in ten minutes there was rum in the powder-horns, and the toast was "On to Detroit!"

Colonel Clark was sitting alone in the commanding officer's room of the garrison. And the afternoon sun, slanting through the square of the window, fell upon the maps and papers before him. He had sent for me. I halted in sheer embarrassment on the threshold, looked up at his face, and came on, troubled.

"Davy," he said, "do you want to go back to Kentucky?"

"I should like to stay to the end, Colonel," I answered.

"The end?" he said. "This is the end."

"And Detroit, sir?" I returned.

"Detroit!" he cried bitterly, "a man of sense measures his force, and does not try the impossible. I could as soon march against Philadelphia. This is the end, I say; and the general must give way to the politician. And may God have mercy on the politician who will try to keep a people's affection without money or help from Congress."

He fell back wearily in his chair, while I stood aston-

ished, wondering. I had thought to find him elated with victory.

"Congress or Virginia," said he, "will have to pay Monsieur Vigo, and Father Gibault, and Monsieur Gratiot, and the other good people who have trusted me. Do you think they will do so?"

"The Congress are far from here," I said.

"Ay," he answered, "too far to care about you and me, and what we have suffered."

He ended abruptly, and sat for a while staring out of the window at the figures crossing and recrossing the muddy parade-ground.

"Tom McChesney goes to-night to Kentucky with letters to the county lieutenant. You are to go with him, and then I shall have no one to remind me when I am hungry, and bring me hominy. I shall have no financier, no strategist for a tight place." He smiled a little, sadly, at my sorrowful look, and then drew me to him and patted my shoulder. "It is no place for a young lad,—an idle garrison. I think," he continued presently, "I think you have a future, David, if you do not lose your head. Kentucky will grow and conquer, and in twenty years be a thriving community. And presently you will go to Virginia, and study law, and come back again. Do you hear?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"And I would tell you one thing," said he, with force; "serve the people, as all true men should in a republic. But do not rely upon their gratitude. You will remember that?"

"Yes, Colonel."

A long time he paused, looking on me with a significance I did not then understand. And when he spoke again his voice showed no trace of emotion, save in the note of it.

"You have been a faithful friend, Davy, when I needed loyalty. Perhaps the time may come again. Promise me that you will not forget me if I am — unfortunate."

"Unfortunate, sir!" I exclaimed.

"Good-by, Davy," he said, "and God bless you. I have work to do."

Still I hesitated. He stared at me, but with kindness.

"What is it, Davy?" he asked.

"Please, sir," I said, "if I might take my drum?"

At that he laughed.

"You may," said he, "you may. Perchance we may need it again."

I went out from his presence, vaguely troubled, to find Tom. And before the early sun had set we were gliding down the Wabash in a canoe, past places forever dedicated to our agonies, towards Kentucky and Polly Ann.

"Davy," said Tom, "I reckon she'll be standin' under the 'simmon tree, waitin' fer us with the little shaver in her arms."

And so she was.