

BOOK III

LOUISIANA

CHAPTER I

THE RIGHTS OF MAN

WERE these things which follow to my thinking not extraordinary, I should not write them down here, nor should I have presumed to skip nearly five years of time. For indeed almost five years had gone by since the warm summer night when I rode into New Orleans with Mrs. Temple. And in all that time I had not so much as laid eyes on my cousin and dearest friend, her son. I searched New Orleans for him in vain, and learned too late that he had taken passage on a packet which had dropped down the river the next morning, bound for Charleston and New York.

I have an instinct that this is not the place to relate in detail what occurred to me before leaving New Orleans. Suffice it to say that I made my way back through the swamps, the forests, the cane-brakes of the Indian country, along the Natchez trail to Nashville, across the barrens to Harrodstown in Kentucky, where I spent a week in that cabin which had so long been for me a haven of refuge. Dear Polly Ann! She hugged me as though I were still the waif whom she had mothered, and wept over the little presents which I had brought the children. Harrodstown was changed, new cabins and new faces met me at every turn, and Tom, more disgruntled than ever, had gone a-hunting with Mr. Boone far into the wilderness.

I went back to Louisville to take up once more the struggle for practice, and I do not intend to charge so

much as a page with what may be called the even tenor of my life. I was not a man to get into trouble on my own account. Louisville grew amazingly; white frame houses were built, and even brick ones. And ere Kentucky became a State, in 1792, I had gone as delegate to more than one of the Danville Conventions.

Among the nations, as you know, a storm raged, and the great swells from that conflict threatened to set adrift and wreck the little republic but newly launched. The noise of the tramping of great armies across the Old World shook the New, and men in whom the love of fierce fighting was born were stirred to quarrel among themselves. The Rights of Man! How many wrongs have been done under that clause! The Bastille stormed; the Swiss Guard slaughtered; the Reign of Terror, with its daily procession of tumbrels through the streets of Paris; the murder of that amiable and well-meaning gentleman who did his best to atone for the sins of his ancestors; the fearful months of waiting suffered by his Queen before she, too, went to her death. Often as I lighted my candle of an evening in my little room to read of these things so far away, I would drop my *Kentucky Gazette* to think of a woman whose face I remembered, to wonder sadly whether Hélène de St. Gré were among the lists. In her, I was sure, was personified that courage for which her order will go down eternally through the pages of history, and in my darker moments I pictured her standing beside the guillotine with a smile that haunted me.

The hideous image of that strife was reflected amongst our own people. Budget after budget was hurried by the winds across the sea. And swift couriers carried the news over the Blue Wall by the Wilderness Trail (widened now), and thundered through the little villages of the Blue Grass country to the Falls. What interest, you will say, could the pioneer lawyers and storekeepers and planters have in the French Revolution? The Rights of Man! Down with kings! General Washington and Mr. Adams and Mr. Hamilton might sigh for them, but they were not for the free-born pioneers of the West. *Citizen*

was the proper term now, — Citizen General Wilkinson when that magnate came to town, resplendent in his brigadier's uniform. It was thought that Mr. Wilkinson would plot less were he in the army under the watchful eye of his superiors. Little they knew him! Thus the Republic had a reward for adroitness, for treachery, and treason. But what reward had it for the lonely, embittered, stricken man whose genius and courage had gained for it the great Northwest territory? What reward had the Republic for him who sat brooding in his house above the Falls — for Citizen General Clark?

In those days you were not a Federalist or a Democrat, you were an Aristocrat or a Jacobin. The French parties were our parties; the French issue, our issue. Under the patronage of that saint of American Jacobinism, Thomas Jefferson, a Jacobin society was organized in Philadelphia, — special guardians of Liberty. And flying on the March winds over the mountains the seed fell on the black soil of Kentucky: Lexington had its Jacobin society, Danville and Louisville likewise their patrons and protectors of the Rights of Mankind. Federalists were not guillotined in Kentucky in the summer of 1793, but I might mention more than one who was shot.

In spite of the Federalists, Louisville prospered, and incidentally I prospered in a mild way. Mr. Crede, behind whose store I still lived, was getting rich, and happened to have an affair of some importance in Philadelphia. Mr. Wharton was kind enough to recommend a young lawyer who had the following virtues: he was neither handsome nor brilliant, and he wore snuff-colored clothes. Mr. Wharton also did me the honor to say that I was cautious and painstaking, and had a habit of tiring out my adversary. Therefore, in the early summer of 1793, I went to Philadelphia. At that time, travellers embarking on such a journey were prayed over as though they were going to Tartary. I was absent from Louisville near a year, and there is a diary of what I saw and felt and heard on this trip for the omission of which I will be thanked. The great news of that day which concerns the world — and

incidentally this story — was that Citizen Genêt had landed at Charleston.

Citizen Genêt, Ambassador of the great Republic of France to the little Republic of America, landed at Charleston, acclaimed by thousands, and lost no time. Scarcely had he left that city ere American privateers had slipped out of Charleston harbor to prey upon the commerce of the hated Mistress of the Sea. Was there ever such a march of triumph as that of the Citizen Ambassador northward to the capital? Everywhere toasted and feasted, Monsieur Genêt did not neglect the Rights of Man, for without doubt the United States was to declare war on Britain within a fortnight. Nay, the Citizen Ambassador would go into the halls of Congress and declare war himself if that faltering Mr. Washington refused his duty. Citizen Genêt organized his legions as he went along, and threw tricolored cockades from the windows of his carriage. And at his glorious entry into Philadelphia (where I afterwards saw the great man with my own eyes), Mr. Washington and his Federal-Aristocrats trembled in their boots.

It was late in April, 1794, when I reached Pittsburg on my homeward journey and took passage down the Ohio with a certain Captain Wendell of the army, in a Kentucky boat. I had known the Captain in Louisville, for he had been stationed at Fort Finney, the army post across the Ohio from that town, and he had come to Pittsburg with a sergeant to fetch down the river some dozen recruits. This was a most fortunate circumstance for me, and in more ways than one. Although the Captain was a gruff and blunt man, grizzled and weather-beaten, a woman-hater, he could be a delightful companion when once his confidence was gained; and as we drifted in the mild spring weather through the long reaches between the passes he talked of Trenton and Brandywine and Yorktown. There was more than one bond of sympathy between us, for he worshipped Washington, detested the French party, and had a hatred for "filthy Democrats" second to none I have ever encountered.

We stopped for a few days at Fort Harmar, where the Muskingum pays its tribute to the Ohio, built by the Federal government to hold the territory which Clark had won. And leaving that hospitable place we took up our journey once more in the very miracle-time of the spring. The sunlight was like amber-crystal, the tall cottonwoods growing by the water-side flaunted a proud glory of green, the hills behind them that formed the first great swells of the sea of the wilderness were clothed in a thousand sheens and shaded by the purple budding of the oaks and walnuts on the northern slopes. On the yellow sandbars flocks of geese sat pluming in the sun, or rose at our approach to cast fleeting shadows on the water, their *honk-honks* echoing from the hills. Here and there a hawk swooped down from the azure to break the surface and bear off a wriggling fish that gleamed like silver, and at eventide we would see at the brink an elk or doe, with head poised, watching us as we drifted. We passed here and there a lonely cabin, to set my thoughts wandering backwards to my youth, and here and there in the dimples of the hills little clusters of white and brown houses, one day to become marts of the Republic.

My joy at coming back at this golden season to a country I loved was tempered by news I had heard from Captain Wendell, and which I had discussed with the officers at Fort Harmar. The Captain himself had broached the subject one cool evening, early in the journey, as we sat over the fire in our little cabin. He had been telling me about Brandywine, but suddenly he turned to me with a kind of fierce gesture that was natural to the man.

"Ritchie," he said, "you were in the Revolution yourself. You helped Clark to capture that country," and he waved his hand towards the northern shore; "why the devil don't you tell me about it?"

"You never asked me," I answered.

He looked at me curiously.

"Well," he said, "I ask you now."

I began lamely enough, but presently my remembrance of the young man who conquered all obstacles, who com-

pelled all men he met to follow and obey him, carried me strongly into the narrative. I remembered him, quiet, self-contained, resourceful, a natural leader, at twenty-five a bulwark for the sorely harried settlers of Kentucky; the man whose clear vision alone had perceived the value of the country north of the Ohio to the Republic, who had compelled the governor and council of Virginia to see it likewise. Who had guarded his secret from all men, who in the face of fierce opposition and intrigue had raised a little army to follow him—they knew not where. Who had surprised Kaskaskia, cowed the tribes of the North in his own person, and by sheer force of will drew after him and kept alive a motley crowd of men across the floods and through the ice to Vincennes.

We sat far into the night, the Captain listening as I had never seen a man listen. And when at length I had finished he was for a long time silent, and then he sprang to his feet with an oath that woke the sleeping soldiers forward and glared at me.

"My God!" he cried, "it is enough to make a man curse his uniform to think that such a man as Wilkinson wears it, while Clark is left to rot, to drink himself under the table from disappointment, to plot with the damned Jacobins—"

"To plot!" I cried, starting violently in my turn.

The Captain looked at me in astonishment.

"How long have you been away from Louisville?" he asked.

"It will be a year," I answered.

"Ah," said the Captain, "I will tell you. It is more than a year since Clark wrote Genêt, since the Ambassador bestowed on him a general's commission in the army of the French Republic."

"A general's commission!" I exclaimed. "And he is going to France?" The nation which had driven John Paul Jones from its service was now to lose George Rogers Clark!

"To France!" laughed the Captain. "No, this is become France enough. He is raising in Kentucky

and in the Cumberland country an army with a cursed, high-sounding name. Some of his old Illinois scouts—McChesney, whom you mentioned, for one—have been collecting bear's meat and venison hams all winter. They are going to march on Louisiana and conquer it for the French Republic, for Liberty, Equality—the Rights of Man, anything you like."

"On Louisiana!" I repeated; "what has the Federal government been doing?"

The Captain winked at me and sat down.

"The Federal government is supine, a laughing-stock—so our friends the Jacobins say, who have been shouting at Mr. Easton's tavern all winter. Nay, they declare that all this country west of the mountains, too, will be broken off and set up into a republic, and allied with that most glorious of all republics, France. Believe me, the Jacobins have not been idle, and there have been strange-looking birds of French plumage dodging between the General's house at Clarksville and the Bear Grass."

I was silent, the tears almost forcing themselves to my eyes at the pathetic sordidness of what I had heard.

"It can come to nothing," continued the Captain, in a changed voice. "General Clark's mind is unhinged by—disappointment. Mad Anthony¹ is not a man to be caught sleeping, and he has already attended to a little expedition from the Cumberland. Mad Anthony loves the General, as we all do, and the Federal government is wiser than the Jacobins think. It may not be necessary to do anything." Captain Wendell paused, and looked at me fixedly. "Ritchie, General Clark likes you, and you have never offended him. Why not go to his little house in Clarksville when you get to Louisville and talk to him plainly, as I know you can? Perhaps you might have some influence."

I shook my head sadly.

"I intend to go," I answered, "but I will have no influence."

¹ General Wayne of Revolutionary fame was then in command of that district.

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE ABOVE THE FALLS

IT was May-day, and shortly after dawn we slipped into the quiet water which is banked up for many miles above the Falls. The Captain and I sat forward on the deck, breathing deeply the sharp odor which comes from the wet forest in the early morning, listening to the soft splash of the oars, and watching the green form of Eighteen Mile Island as it gently drew nearer and nearer. And ere the sun had risen greatly we had passed Twelve Mile Island, and emerging from the narrow channel which divides Six Mile Island from the northern shore, we beheld, on its terrace above the Bear Grass, Louisville shining white in the morning sun. Majestic in its mile of width, calm, as though gathering courage, the river seemed to straighten for the ordeal to come, and the sound of its waters crying over the rocks far below came faintly to my ear and awoke memories of a day gone by. Fearful of the suck, we crept along the Indian shore until we counted the boats moored in the Bear Grass, and presently above the trees on our right we saw the Stars and Stripes floating from the log bastion of Fort Finney. And below the fort, on the gentle sunny slope to the river's brink, was spread the green garden of the garrison, with its sprouting vegetables and fruit trees blooming pink and white.

We were greeted by a company of buff and blue officers at the landing, and I was bidden to breakfast at their mess, Captain Wendell promising to take me over to Louisville afterwards. He had business in the town, and about eight of the clock we crossed the wide river in one of the barges of the fort and made fast at the landing in the Bear Grass. But no sooner had we entered the town