decorated walls about them. He, too, trod a gay measure with the fair Belinda Rush, and never looked more at ease and care-free and jovially imperious than in the character of gallant host. Even in the gray dawn as he stood at the sally-port of the fort and there took leave of the guests, as group by group departed, he was as debonair and smiling throughout the handshaking as though the revels were yet to begin.

CHAPTER VI

BREAKFAST, the rigorous cleaning of the quarters, guard mounting, and inspection, followed in their usual sequence, but the morning drills were omitted to give the opportunity to recruit from the vigils of the previous night, protracted, as the soldiers began to suspect, that they might be in readiness to respond to an onslaught of the savages. For Captain Stuart made no effort to restrain the story of the scene at the gate, since the sentries were already cognizant of it; he always saw fit to maintain before the troops an attitude of extreme frankness, as if the officers suppressed no intelligence, whatever its character, even with the intention of conducing to the public good.

In the great hall in the block-house of the northwestern bastion, when the officers were congregated about the fire, in the rude arm-chairs, and their pipes lighted, he divulged without reserve the news which the express had brought. In an instant all the garnered sweetness of the retrospect of the little holiday they had made for themselves and their co-exiles

was turned to gall. It even held bitter dregs of remorse.

"And we were dancing all the night through while you knew this horrible thing!" exclaimed Captain Demeré, his voice tense with reproach.

"Lord!—it happened three weeks ago, Paul," returned Stuart, "if it happened at all! Some of the settlers had already come. I did not feel qualified to balk the children and the young people of their enjoyment—or the elders, either. The world will go on after such tragedies. It must, you know." He pulled at his pipe, meditatively. "To have called a halt could have done those poor fellows no good," he nodded toward the south, "and might have done us incalculable harm. There had already been a demonstration of the Indians, before the express came in, because they had noticed the gathering of the guests, and I thought the settlers safer congregated in the fort until daybreak than going home scattered through the night. This is no time or place to give ceremonious deference to questions of feeling."

"Was there a demonstration of the Indians last night, Captain?" asked Lieutenant Gilmore.

Stuart detailed both occurrences at the gate. "Without the chief's guaranty I don't see how we could have let the settlers go this morning," he concluded.

Demeré frowned deeply as he sat upright in his chair and gazed at the fire.

"You have great presence of mind in these queer emergencies, John," he said. "For my life I could not have thought how to get rid of them peaceably—to offer to open the gates!"

"I can't soothe the Indians," said Ensign Whitson, with a quick flush. "My gorge rises at the very sight of them."

"If a dog licks my hand, I must needs pat him on the head," said Stuart, lounging easily among the soft rugs that covered the chair.

"But if a wolf licks your hand, sir, would you pat him on the head?" asked the ensign.

"A wolf will not lick my hand," retorted the superior officer. "Besides, my young friend, bear this in mind,—if this dog is not patted on the head, he will fly not only at my throat, but at the throat of the garrison and of the settlement as well."

There was silence for a time, while the flames of the great fire sprang elastically upward in the strong draught with an impetuous roar. The holly boughs and the banners stirred fitfully on the wall. The men's heads were surrounded by tobacco smoke. Demeré sat upright, meditative, with one elbow on the table. Stuart was lolling far back in the soft fur rugs that covered the great chair, his hat on

the floor behind him, where it had fallen off his dense, blond hair, which so much attracted the curiosity and admiration of the swarthy Indians.

"And then," he said suddenly, drawing some official letter-books and files from the table, and fluttering the pages with one hand while he held the pipe-stem with the other, "were we not admonished to be diplomatic in such matters? We had our orders to cultivate the graces of our manners! The Earl of Loudon desired that we should," and he began to read aloud, "'You can best retain our confidence by promoting, in every way in your power, the preservation of peace with the Cherokees.'"

He shoved the papers away on the table, and laughing, put the stem of his pipe between his teeth.

"Now," he said, "I am as much disposed toward peace as a man of war may decently be. I only wish my lord could have won Oconostota to his lordship's pacific way of thinking. A garrison of two hundred soldiers is not likely to prove very overbearing to a neighbor who can muster three thousand fighting men armed with British muskets. My lord's advice was timely."

He glanced with raillery at Demeré, and laughed again.

While the individual soldier is but a factor in a great machine, and moves only as one motor element

acts and reacts on another, making naught of his own volition or intelligence, it being his "to do and die," the courage and strength of character which make this abnegation of will and mind possible are the greater from the fact that the reasoning faculties cannot by the same process be annulled. He sees the convergence of the circumstances drawing to the event; whether consciously or not he deliberates upon the validity of the policy unfolded; he often goes to meet disaster, perceiving its undisguised approach from afar off. And yet he goes unfalteringly.

"When our government armed these savage fiends against the French,—civilized men and 'pale-faces' like ourselves," said Captain Demeré, "and the American colonists fought with them as allies, side by side, despite their hideous barbarities, we fell upon our own sword."

"Honors are easy," returned Captain Stuart, lightly. "Have the French armed no Indian allies? Did they not do it first?"

"We are not wont to look so far afield for our warrant," Demeré retorted testily. Then resuming: "These barbarous beasts are no fit allies for English arms. They degrade our spirit, and destroy our discipline, and disgrace our victories. I would rather suffer any honorable defeat than win through their savageries."

He was unconsciously the advance guard of that sentiment which caused the Earl of Chatham, nearly twenty years afterward, to declare in the House of Lords that it was a reflection on the honor of the nation that the scalping-knife and the tomahawk should be the aids of the British firelock and sword, and wreak their savage deeds under the sanction of the same brave banner; but even then Lord Gower was able to retort that, when still Mr. Pitt the "great Commoner," and the ruling spirit of the ministry, he, himself, had without scruple employed American savages in warfare. As yet, however, this objection was but a sensitive protest in the heart and mind of an obscure officer, the commandant of a merely temporary post on the furthest western frontier.[9]

The papers had been pushed near Demeré's elbow, and he began to look over them disaffectedly.

"Hear Governor Lyttleton," he said, and read in a tone that was itself a commentary: "'Use all means you think proper to induce our Indians to take up the hatchet. Promise a reward to every man who shall bring in the scalp of a Frenchman or a French Indian.'"

"As if one could be sure of a dead man's nationality or allegiance by seeing the hair on his scalp," said Whitson, as ever readily disgusted.

Stuart sought to take an unprejudiced view. "I never looked upon war as a pastime or an elegant accomplishment," he declared, watching the wreaths rise from the deep bowl of his long pipe. "War is war, and when we call it civilized we only mean that invention has multiplied and elaborated our methods of taking life. A commander can but use the surest means to his end against his enemy that the circumstances afford. A soldier is at best but the instrument of the times."

"And what of the torture, the knife, the fagot?" demanded Demeré, excitedly. "What do you think of them?"

"I never, dear Captain Demeré, think of them, in a garrison of two hundred men in a little mud fort on the frontier, with the Cherokees three thousand strong just outside, toward whom I have been admonished to mind my pretty manners. But since you are so keen to reason it out, I will remind you that until comparatively recently the torture was one of our own methods of punishment, or coercion, tending to the disclosure of secret conspiracies or any other little matter that the government might want to know and could not otherwise find out, and was practiced, thumb-screws, iron-boot, and all, in the worshipful presence of men of high estate — councils, commissions, and what not! Men and women — women, too! — have been

burned alive in England under due authority because their style of piety was not acceptable. They were Christians, to be sure, but not exactly the highest fashion of Christian. You will say all this was long ago. Granted! but if such practices still obtain in such an oligarchy as Oconostota's realm, — the frontier being, paradoxically, a little in the rear of the times, — should we be surprised? No! I don't think of such things. I keep my mind on the discipline of the garrison, and control my temper very nicely when in the presence of the Cherokee kings, and bless God and the Earl of Loudon for the cannon at the embrasures and the powder and ball in the magazine."

He leaned forward suddenly to examine with momentary interest the sole of his boot as he sat with his leg crossed, then with a bantering "Eh, Captain Quawl?" he glanced up with a smile of *camaraderie* at Captain Demeré as if to test the effect of his argument, and finally laughed outright at his friend's silent gravity.

Such arguments were the ordinary incidents in the great hall of the block-house of the northwest bastion. The time hung heavily on the hands of the officers of the garrison. For beyond the military routine, a little hunting and fishing, a little card and domino playing, a little bout now and again of fencing, there was naught to relieve the

monotony, for books were few and the express with mail from over the mountains infrequent, and therefore discussions in familiar conclave on abstract subjects, protracted sometimes for hours, filled the breach. Often these questions developed on paper, for a continual correspondence, as regular as might be compassed, was maintained with the officers of Fort Prince George, another frontier post, estimated as three hundred miles distant from Charlestown, yet still two hundred miles from Fort Loudon. As a matter of public policy it was deemed expedient that the commandants of the two posts should keep each other informed as to the state of the country about their respective strongholds, of the condition of the settlers, the temper of the Indians, the masked movements of French emissaries. In dearth of official intelligence, as the express necessarily went back and forth with mail and dispatches from Charlestown, the correspondence sympathetically expanded into personal interests, for the conditions surrounding both posts were in many respects similar. Fort Prince George also was a work designed with special reference to the military needs of that region and the character of its possible assailants. The defenses consisted of a rampart of clay, eight feet high, surmounted by a strong stockade, forming a square with a bastion at each angle; four small cannon were

mounted on each bastion, and a deep ditch surrounded the whole; there was a natural glacis where the ground fell away on two sides of the quadrangle and on the others a strong abatis had been constructed at a short distance from the crest of the counterscarp. Within the fort were two block-houses and barracks for a garrison of one hundred men.

The sequestered, remote situation of each post developed a certain mutual interest and the exchange of much soldierly chaff; the names and disposition of even the subalterns were elicited in this transmitted gossip of the forts; in default of news, details of trivial happenings were given, unconsciously fertile in character-drawing; jokes, caricatures, good stories, — and thus at arm's length sprung up a friendship between men who had never seen one another and who were possibly destined never to meet. Of course all this gayety of heart vanished from the paper when serious tidings or despondent prospects were at hand, but even in the succinct official statements an undertone of sympathy was perceptible, and the slightest nerve of thought, of danger, of joy, of dissatisfaction touched at Fort Loudon thrilled in kind at Fort Prince George.

The attention of the group about the fire of the officers' mess-hall had seldom been brought to

themes so grave as the news of the recent massacre, holding so definite and possible a personal concern, and after the evening of the Christmas ball life at Fort Loudon began to seem more serious and the current event to be scanned and questioned as to a probable bearing on the future.

Even Odalie's optimistic mind, forever alert to hope and fair presage, felt the influence of the atmospheric change of the moral conditions. But the fact was revealed to her in an incident sufficiently startling.

That morning after the festivity, when gayly rowing down the bleak river to MacLeod's Station, as the bend had begun to be called, she looked blithely enough over the stream's gray stretches of ruffled steel to the snowy slopes of the banks, and to the brown woods, and beyond to the dark bronze and dusky blue mountains as they stretched away in varying distance. The dull suffusive flare of carmine beginning to show above them seemed a spell to drive the day-star out of the sky, to bid the weird mists hie home with the fancies of the night, to set a wind keenly astir in a new dawn. All this she watched with eyes as clear, as soft, as confiding as if it were a May morning coming over the mountains, scattering the largesse of the spring — new life, new hopes, new strength, and all the glad inspiration of success that has a rarer,

finer flavor than the actual consummation of the triumph.

The stationers landed at the bend, and she was glad of her home as she took her way within the enclosure of the high stockade. She looked around at it, still leading the sleepy Fifine by one hand and only half hearing Hamish's enthusiastic sketches of the boys and girls in the settlement, with whom he had made fast friends. The snow was heavy on the roofs of the two log cabins and the shanty of poles that served as a barn, and lay in fluffy masses between the sharp points of the palisades and on the bare boughs of sundry great trees that Odalie had insisted should not be cut away with the rest in the enclosure or "girdled" like those outside in the field. The smoke still curled up lazily from the chimneys, and after she had uncovered the embers and donned her rough homespun dress and housewifely apron and cap, and had the preparations for breakfast well under way, she went to the door and called aloud in the crisp, chill air to "Dill," as Gilfillan was christened by Fifine, — the name being adopted by all the family, — insisting that he should not cook his own breakfast but join them.

"There are going to be 'flim-flams,'" she shouted triumphantly. Then with a toss of the head — "Short eating!"

It had chanced that one day when the lonely pioneer had dined with his fellow-stationers he had remarked approvingly of certain dishes of French cookery acquired from her Grand'maman's receipts — "I dunno what ye might call them flim-flams, Mrs. MacLeod, but they make powerful short eatin'."

He and she and Fifine had become fast friends, and it was indeed a happy chance that had thrown the lonely man into this cordial and welcoming atmosphere of home. Even his terribly ghastly head Odalie had begun to forget, so deeply did she pity him for other things, — for the loss of wife and children and friends in the terrible Yadkin massacre; for the near approach of age, — and stalwart as he was, it was surely coming on; for the distortions of his queer religion, which was so uncouth as to be rendered hardly the comfort it might have been otherwise.

"I can't see how you can mention it," she said one day, with wincing eyes, when he was telling Hamish, who manifested that blood-thirsty imagination peculiar to boys, how he was conscious throughout the whole ordeal of scalping; how the tomahawk hit him a clip; how the Indian, one whom he had trusted, put his foot on his breast for a better purchase on the knife.

"Why, Mrs. MacLeod," Dill replied, "it makes me thankful to think he took nothing but the scalp.