ished as Fifine herself, — all grim, charred ashes; and poor Dill's cabin! — he knew by this time that Dill was dead, very dead, or he would have come back to them. The fields, too, that they had sown, and that none would reap, trampled and torn, and singed and burnt! Hamish gave but one sigh, bursting from an overcharged heart; then he was away at full speed in the darkness that was good to him, and the only friend he had in the world with the power to help him and his.

Captain Demeré that night was more truly cheerful than he had been for a long time, despite his usual port of serene, although somewhat austere, dignity.

"The boy has all the homing qualities you desired in an express," he said to Stuart. "He will come back to his brother's family as certainly as a man with wife and children, and yet in quitting them he leaves no duty to devolve on others."

"Moreover," said Stuart, "we have the satisfaction of knowing that he safely reached the mouth of the underground passage without detection. He could not have found the place in a dark night. In the moonlight he would have been seen, and even if we had protected his entrance by a cannonade, and cleared the woods, his exit at the other end of the passage would have been intercepted. Disguised as Mrs. MacLeod, seeking to meet Choo-

qualee-qualoo in bold daylight, he passed without a suspicion on the part of the Indians. And we know that the exit of the passage at MacLeod Station is fully three miles in the rear of the Indian line. I feel sure that the other two expresses never got beyond the Indian line. This is the best chance we have had."

"And a very good chance," said Demeré.

Stuart could but laugh a little, remembering that Demeré had thought the plan impracticable, and, although there was no other opportunity possible, had protested against it on the point of danger involved to Mrs. MacLeod. Stuart, himself, had quaked on this score, and had seized on this ingenious device only as a last resort.

"Mrs. MacLeod is fine timber for a forlorn hope," he said reflectively.

The matter had been so sedulously guarded from the knowledge of the garrison, save such share as was of necessity divulged to the men who fired the guns, the young sentinel, and Corporal O'Flynn, — and even they were not aware that there had been a sortie of any other person than Mrs. MacLeod, — that Hamish's absence passed unnoticed for several days, and when it was announced that he had been smuggled out of the fort, charged with dispatches to Colonel Montgomery, no one dreamed of identifying him with the apparition in the gray

gown whom the gunners had seen to issue forth and return no more. Even Corporal O'Flynn accepted the statement, without suspicion, that Captain Stuart had let Mrs. MacLeod in at the sally-port. These excursions, he imagined, were to secure information from Choo-qualee-qualoo.

The announcement that an express was now on the way was made to encourage the men, for the daily ration had dwindled to a most meager portion, and complaints were rife on every hand both among the soldiery and the families of the settlers. A wild, startled look appeared in many eyes, as if some ghastly possibility had come within the range of vision, undreamed-of before. The facts, however, that the commandant was able to still maintain a connection beyond the line of blockading Cherokees, that Hamish had been gone for more than a week, that decisive developments of some sort must shortly ensue, that the officers themselves kept a cheerful countenance, served to stimulate an effort to sustain the suspense and the gnawing privation. Continual exertions were made in this direction.

"Try to keep up the spirits of the men," said Demeré to O'Flynn one day.

"I do, sor," returned O'Flynn, his cheek a trifle pale and sunken. "I offer meself to 'm as an example. I says to the guard only to-day, sor, says I,—'Now in affliction ye see the difference betune

a person of quality, and a common spalpeen.' An' they wants to know who is this person of quality, sor. And I names meself, sor, being descended from kings of Oirland. An', would ye belave me, sor, not one of them bog-trotting teagues but what was kings of Oirland, too, sor."

Corporal O'Flynn might have thought his superior officer needed cheering too, for the twinkle in his eye had lost none of its alluring Celtic quality.

The distressing element of internecine strife and bickerings was presently added to the difficulties of the officers, who evidently faced a situation grievous enough in itself without these auxiliary troubles. Certain turbulent spirits opined loudly that they, the humbler people, had advantage taken of them,—that the officers' mess was served in a profusion never abated, while the rest starved. Captain Stuart and Captain Demeré would not notice this report, but the junior officers were vehement in their protestations that they and their superiors had had from the beginning of the scarcity the identical rations served out to the others, and that their gluttony had not reduced the general supply. The quartermaster-sergeant confirmed this, yet who believed him, as Mrs. Halsing said, for he carried the keys and could favor whom he would. That he did not favor himself was obvious from the fact that his once

red face had grown an ashen gray, and the cheeks hung in visible cords and ligaments under the thrice-folded skin, the flesh between having gradually vanished. The African cook felt his honor so touched by this aspersion on his master's methods that he carried his kettles and pans out into the center of the parade one day and there, in insubordinate disregard of orders, cooked in public the scanty materials of the officers' dinner. And having thus expressed his indignant rage he sat down on the ground among his kettles and pans and wept aloud in a long lugubrious howl, thus giving vent to his grief, and requiring the kind offices of every friend he had in the fort to pacify him and induce him to remove himself, his pans, and his kettles from this unseemly conspicuousness.

At the height of the trouble, when Stuart and Demeré, themselves anxious and nervous, and greatly reduced by the poor quality and scarcity of food, sat together and speculated on the problem of Montgomery's silence, and the continued absence of the express, and wondered how long this state of things could be maintained, yearning for, yet fearing the end, — talking as they dared not talk to any human being but each to the other, — Ensign Whitson burst into the room with an excited face and the news that there had been a fight over in the northeast bastion at the further side of the terrepleine.

Captain Stuart rose, bracing his nerves for the endurance of still more.

"A food riot? I have expected it. Have they broken into the smoke-house?"

Whitson looked wild for one moment. "Oh, no, sir, — not that! — not that! Two Irishmen at fisticuffs, — about the Battle of the Boyne! — Corporal O'Flynn and a settler."

For the first time in a week Stuart laughed with genuine hilarity. "Mighty well!" he exclaimed. "Let us settle the important questions between the Irish Catholics and the Irish Protestants before we go a step further!"

But Demeré was writhing under the realization of a relaxed discipline, although when O'Flynn presented himself in response to summons he was so crest-fallen and woe-begone and reduced, that Demeré had not the heart to take summary measures with the half-famished boxer.

"O'Flynn," he said, "do you deem this a fitting time to set the example of broils between the settlers and soldiers? Truly, I think we need but this to precipitate our ruin."

Stuart hastily checked the effect of this imprudent phrase by breaking in upon a statement of Corporal O'Flynn's, which seemed to represent his right arm as in some sort a free agent, mechanically impelled through the air, the hand in a clinched

posture, in disastrous juxtaposition with the skulls of other people, and that he was not thinking, and would not have had it happen for nothing, and —

"But *is* the man an Irishman?" asked Stuart. "He has no brogue."

"Faith, sor," said the repentant O'Flynn, glad of the diversion, "he hits loike an Oirishman, — I don't think he is an impostor. My nose feels rather limber."

O'Flynn having been of great service in the crisis, they were both glad to pass over his breach of discipline as lightly as they might; and he doubtless reaped the benefit of their relief that the matter was less serious than they had feared.

The next day, however, the expected happened. The unruly element, partly of soldiers with a few of the settlers, broke into the smoke-house and discovered there what the commandant was sedulously trying to conceal, — *nothing!*

It stunned them for the moment. It tamed them. The more prudential souls began now to fear the attitude of the officers, to turn to them, to rely again upon their experience and capacity.

When the two captains came upon the scene, Demeré wearing the affronted, averse, dangerous aspect which he always bore upon any breach of discipline, and Stuart his usual cool, off-hand look as if the matter did not greatly concern him, they

listened in silence to the clamor of explanations and expostulations, of criminations and recriminations which greeted them. Only a single sentence was spoken by either of them, — a terse low-toned order. Upon the word, Corporal O'Flynn with a squad of soldiers rushed briskly into the crowd, and in less than two minutes the rioters were in irons.

"Jedburgh justice!" said Stuart aside to Demeré, as they took their way back across the parade. "Hang 'em first, and try 'em afterward."

The bystanders might argue little from Demeré's reticent soldierly dignity, but Stuart's ringing laugh, as he spoke aside to his brother officer, his cheerful, buoyant, composed mien, restored confidence as naught less than the sound of Montgomery's bugles outside the works might have done. Doubtless he was apprised of early relief. Surely he did not look like a man who expected to live on horse-flesh in the midst of a mutinous garrison, with the wild savages outside, and within that terrible strain upon the courage, — the contemplation of the sufferings of non-combatants, the women and children, who had entered into no covenant and received no compensation to endure the varying chances of war.

Yet this prospect seemed close upon him before that day was done. The orderly routine had slipped again into its grooves. The hungry men, brisk, spruce, were going about their various military

duties with an alacrity incongruous with their cadaverous aspect. The sentinels were posted as usual, and Captain Stuart, repairing according to his wont to a post of observation in the block-house tower of the northwest bastion, turned his glass upon the country beyond, lowered it suddenly, looking keenly at the lens, as if he could not believe his eyes, and again lifted it. There was no mistake. On the opposite side of the river, looking like some gigantic monkey capering along on a pair of thin bare legs, was a stalwart Indian, arrayed for the upper part of his person in a fine scarlet coat, richly laced, evidently the spoil from some British officer of high rank. Perhaps no apparition so grotesque ever sent a chill to so stout a heart. Stuart was no prophet, quotha. But he could see the worst when it came and stared him in the eyes.

CHAPTER XI

STUART and Demeré argued the matter in their secret conclaves. Both admitted that although Montgomery had had only four or five men killed, among them no officers, on his first expedition, he might have again taken the field, and this was as they hoped. He was advancing; he must be near. The trophy of the fine red coat meant probably that he had lost an officer of value; — perhaps meant less — the personal disaster of the capture of baggage or the necessity of throwing it away. Montgomery had advanced, — that was indubitable. Nevertheless, — and perhaps it was the lowering influence of the scanty fare on which they had so long subsisted, — both officers dreaded the suspense less than the coming disclosure.

Stuart felt all his nerves grow tense late one day in the red July sunset, when there emerged from the copse of pawpaw bushes, close to the river where Odalie had once been wont to repair to talk to Choo-qualee-qualoo, a tall form, arrayed in a gray gown, a trifle ill-adjusted, with a big red calash drawn forward on the head, that walked at a somewhat slashing