

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-quallee-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

gait across the open space toward the glaxis. He thanked heaven that Mrs. MacLeod was ill in her bed, although he had some twenty minutes ago been sending to her through her husband expressions of polite and heartfelt regret and sympathy.

"Why, I hardly thought Mrs. MacLeod was well enough to take a walk," he observed to the sentry. Daniel Eske naturally supposed that Mrs. MacLeod had slipped out before he had gone on duty, having just been sent to the relief of the previous sentinel. Stuart went down to the embrasure, assisted the supposed lady to her feet as she slipped through, and ceremoniously offered her his arm as she was about to plunge down the steep interior slope in a very boyish fashion. They found Demeré in the great hall, and both officers read the brief official dispatch with countenances of dismay.

"This says that you can explain the details," said Demeré, with dry lips and brightly gleaming eyes.

"Oh, yes," said Hamish. "All the time that I was at Fort Prince George the commandant was writing letters to Governor Bull—for Lyttleton has been appointed to Jamaica—and hustling off his expresses to South Carolina. He sent three, and said if he heard from none by return he would send more."

For this was the appalling fact that had fallen like a thunderbolt,—Colonel Montgomery had with his command quitted the country and sailed for New York. His orders were to strike a sudden blow for the relief of Carolina and return to head-quarters at Albany at the earliest possible moment. No word of the grievous straits of the garrison of Fort Loudon had reached him. He had, indeed, advanced from Fort Prince George, which he had made the base of his aggressive operations against the Cherokees, but not for the relief of Fort Loudon, for neither he nor the commandant of Fort Prince George knew that that post was in danger. The overtures to the Cherokees for peace having proved fruitless, Colonel Montgomery had sought to make peace by force. In pursuance of this further effort he pushed forward with great energy and spirit, but encountered throughout disasters so serious as to cripple his enterprise, culminating finally in a result equivalent to a repulse. The Indians, in the skulking methods peculiar to their warfare, harassed his march, hanging upon the flanks of the main body, and firing in detail from behind trees and rocks, from the depths of ravines and the summits of hills of the broken, rugged wilderness. Never did they present any front that it was possible to charge and turn. The advance-guard, approaching through a narrow valley, the town of Etchoee, which the

Indians had abandoned, fell into an ambushade of considerable strength, and there he lost Captain Morrison of the Rangers, and ten or twelve men who fell at the first fire. The vanguard, discouraged, began to give way, when the light infantry and grenadiers were detached for its support. They succeeded in locating the chief strength of the Cherokees sufficiently to drive the savages back, despite the disastrous results of their scattered fire. The main body, coming up, encamped near Etchoee, on a level space which proved, however, to be commanded by eminences in the vicinity. Thence the Indians poured destructive volleys into the British ranks, and only after repeated charges the soldiers succeeded in dislodging them. Impetuously attacked on the flank, the Cherokees suffered severely at the hands of the Royal Scots before being able to get out of their reach. The terrible aspect of the painted savages, and their nerve-thrilling whoops with which the woods resounded, failed also to affect the courage of the wild Highlanders, and all the troops fought with great ardor. But Colonel Montgomery deemed it impossible to penetrate further through the wilderness, hampered as he was by seventy wounded men whom he could not leave to the mercies of so savage an enemy, by the loss of many horses, by the necessity — which was yet almost an impossibility — of carrying a train of cattle and other provisions

with him in so rugged, trackless, and heavily wooded a region, and relinquished the attempt, thinking the terrible losses which the Indians had sustained would prove sufficient punishment and dispose them to peace. He was even compelled to sacrifice a considerable portion of his stores, throwing away bags of flour in large numbers in order to effect the release of the packhorses to transport his wounded. His dead he sunk heavily weighted into the rivers, that the bodies might not be dragged from their graves and scalped by the Indians. His return march of sixty miles to Fort Prince George, which was accomplished with great regularity, was marked by the same incidents that had characterized his advance, — the nettling fire of the masked enemy, the futile response, and the constant loss of men and horses.

And so he was gone, and all the hopes that had clustered about his advance had gone with him! To Fort Loudon remained only two remote chances, — that Governor Bull of South Carolina might be able to act on the belated information and send out an expedition of relief; yet this was to the last degree improbable, since the province, after its first expensive expedition against the Cherokees, had been compelled to appeal for its own protection to the British commander-in-chief, the militia being practically disabled by the ravages of smallpox. But

even at the best could such an expedition reach them in time? The other possibility of succor lay in Virginia, and it was obvious wisdom to embrace both chances. Stuart knew that Demeré's quill, scraping over the paper, was fashioning the appeal to the royal governor of that province, even while Hamish was still speaking, and he, himself, wrote supplemental letters to other persons of note, that the news of their desolation, failing to carry in one direction, might be spread in another.

"Now, Hamish," he said, smiling behind the candle as he held the wax in it for the seal, "can you do as much again?"

"Where? When?" demanded Hamish, in surprise.

"To Virginia. To-night."

Hamish's eyes stretched very wide. "You won't wait for Governor Bull? The officers at Fort Prince George said they would lay their lives that Governor Bull would respond."

"We must try Virginia, too. My boy, we are starving. To-morrow we begin to eat the horses, — then there may be a dog or two."

Hamish rose precipitately. "Where is Sandy? Where is Odalie?"

Stuart pushed him back into his chair, sternly giving him to understand that the only possible hope of saving their lives was to get away as

quickly as might be with the dispatches for Virginia.

"Without seeing Sandy and Odalie?" said Hamish, his lip quivering.

"We have not the time to spare. Besides, would they let you risk it again, even for them?"

And Hamish was suddenly diverted to telling of his risks, of all the escapes, by flood and fell, that he had made; — how often he had been shot at from ambush; how he had swum rivers; how he had repeatedly hidden from the Indians by dropping himself down into the hollows of trees, and once how nearly he had come to getting out no more, the place being so strait that he could scarcely use his constricted muscles to climb up to the cavity that had let him in. He had not so much trouble on the return trip; Ensign Milne had procured for him a good horse, and a rifle—he had had a brace of pistols—the horse was a free goer—as fresh now as if he had not been a mile to-day.

"And where is he now?" asked Demeré, a look of anxiety on his face.

"At MacLeod Station, hitched there with a good saddle on him and saddle-bags half full of corn."

"Come, Hamish," said Stuart, rising, "you must be off; some Indian might find the horse."

Hamish's eyes filled with tears, — to leave Odalie

and Sandy without a word! He could not endure for the men to see these tears, although they thought none the less well of him for them.

"Let me drop a tear in farewell for Odalie," he said, trying to be very funny, brushing his right eye with his right hand. "And for Sandy," his left eye with his left hand. "And Ffine," his right eye with his right hand. "And the cat," his left eye with his left hand.

There could be nothing unmanly or girlish in this jovial demonstration!

"Come, you zany!" exclaimed Stuart, affecting to think these tremulous farewells very jocose.

"Yes," said Demeré, seriously, "we do not know how soon the Indians may discover our use of that passage,—up to this time it has been our only hope."

Hamish gathered up his calash, and the precise Demeré assisted him to adjust it and his disordered dress more after the manner in which Odalie wore it. Hamish, as directed, took Stuart's arm as they went out, his eyes still full of tears, and for his life he could not control the tremor of emotion, not of fear, in the fibers of his hand, which he was sure the officer must note. But Stuart's attention was fixed on the skies. It was later than in those days when Odalie was wont to keep tryst with Choo-quallee-qualoo, now nearly a month ago. Still he

fancied that in the afterglow of the sunset the Indians might discern the color and the style of the costume. Now and then a ball flew from the cannon to the woods, to clear the forest of too close observers,—whatever risk there was must needs be dared. The cannoneers summoned to this queer duty looked at "Mrs. MacLeod" curiously, as she slipped through the embrasure and made her way with a swinging agility down the slope amongst the fraises and then off through the gloaming at a fresh, firm pace. Then they gazed at Stuart, who presently bade them cease firing, and they had no excuse to wait to see her return. A queer move, they thought it, a very queer move!

Hope had grown so inelastic because of the taut tension to which its fine fibers had been subjected, that Stuart felt a thrill of merely mechanical apprehension when the next day Daniel Eske, the young soldier, came in, desiring to make a special report to him. While on guard duty he had heard a deep subterranean explosion, which had been reported to the officer of the day. Later, Choo-quallee-qualoo had come, waving her flag of truce, and after waiting vainly for Mrs. MacLeod, she had ventured up the slope of the scarp, knowing full well that she was safe under that white flag. She had brought a bag of beans, which she had given him,—he bit his lip and colored with vexation,

consciously ridiculous in speaking of his feminine admirer to his superior officer,—and he had taken the opportunity to ask some questions about affairs outside the fort, upon which she detailed that an Indian—it was Savanukah—had seen Mrs. MacLeod, as he thought, enter the subterranean passage that used to lead to MacLeod Station. At first he had considered it a slight matter, since the Carolinian's French wife had come so often to talk to Choo-qualee-qualoo. But it somehow flashed into his mind how this woman had walked,—with what a long stride, with what strength, and how fast! And suddenly he realized that it was a man, despite the full skirts and flutterings of capes and calash. So Savanukah ran swiftly to his boat and pulled down the river, and made MacLeod Station just in time to see a youth, arrayed in buckskins, issue from the cave and mount a tethered horse. Savanukah fired at him, but without effect, and the young man wheeled in his saddle and returned the fire with such accuracy that even at the distance and in the twilight the ball, although nearly spent, struck Savanukah in the mouth with such force as to knock out a tooth. Then the boy made off with a tremendous burst of speed. And the gray gown and the calash which the youth had worn were found inside the passage. And great was the wrath of Willinawaugh! He

had blown up with powder both ends of the passage,—like thunder, *een-ta-qua ros-ke*,—use could no more be made of it. But some were sorry, wishing the paleface to return by that way, so that he might be stabbed in the dark windings of the passage. This was impossible now, Choo-qualee-qualoo said, for the spring had burst forth, forced in a new direction, and was flooding all that part of the slope, flowing outside instead of within, and Willinawaugh could not now change its disposition if he would.

Stuart breathed more freely. If Hamish should return alone, which God forbid, and not with an armed force, the external changes wrought at MacLeod Station would preclude his effort to enter into the cavern, and force him to devise some other method of approach. He wondered at Willinawaugh—to destroy so promising a trap! But rage may overpower at times the most foxy craft.

The dull days, dragging on, seemed each interminable, while the beleaguered garrison watched the impassive horizon and awaited developments, and hoped against hope. The wonted routine came to be abridged of necessity; the men on their reduced fare were incapable of drill duty; the best hope was that they might make shift to stand to their arms should a sudden attack require the exertion of all their reserve force in the imminent peril of their

lives. The diet of horse-flesh proved not only unpalatable but insanitary, perhaps because the animals had thus far shared the physical distresses of the siege, and were in miserable plight, and there were as many men on the sick list as the hospital could accommodate; this misfortune was mitigated to a degree when Choo-qualee-qualoo brought another bag of beans to the hero of the long-range flirtation, and he generously offered to share the food with his fellow-sufferers. Odalie suggested its devotion to hospital uses; and a few days of a certain potage which she compounded of the beans and her economic French skill, and administered with her own hands to the invalids, with her own compassionate smiles, and with a sauce of cheering words, put a number of the stouter fellows on their feet again.

The efforts to amuse and entertain had given way under the stress of a misery that could form no compact with mirth, but from time to time the officers made short spirited addresses to the troops to animate and encourage their hope, and continue to the utmost their power of resistance. And the exhalation of every sigh was with a thought of South Carolina, and the respiration of every breath was with a prayer toward Virginia.

As the number of horses had greatly diminished, and the discovery was made that certain lean dogs

had gone to the kitchen on an errand far different from the one that used to lure them to the pots, about which they had been wont to greedily and piteously snuff and whine, the quiescent waiting and reliance on the judgment and the capacity of the commandant to extricate the garrison from this perilous plight gave way anew. Criticisms of the management grew rife. The return of Hamish MacLeod, at the moment when starvation seemed imminent, and his instant departure at so great a peril, for the circumstances of his escape had been learned by the soldiers from the confidences of Choo-qualee-qualoo to young Eske, who was always free with his tongue, implied that Hamish's earlier mission had failed, and that no troops were now on the march to their succor. They, too, had seen the capering Indian in the red coat of an officer of rank, the lace cravat of a man of quality which Choo-qualee-qualoo flourished, and they deduced a shrewd surmise of Montgomery's repulse. The men who had earliest revolted against the hardships now entertained rebellious sentiments and sought to foster them in others. Although, as ringleaders in the food riot, they had been summarily placed in irons, their punishment had been too brief perhaps for a salutary moral effect. Demeré's severity was always theoretical, — a mental attitude one might say. The hardship of adding shackles to the agonies of

slow starvation so preyed upon his heart that he had ordered the prisoners released before a sober reflection had done its full work. The exemplary conduct, for a time, of the culprits had no sufficient counterpart in chastened hearts, for they nourished bitterness and secretly agitated mutiny.

The crisis came one morning when the meager supply of repulsive food had shrunk to the scope of a few days' rations, the quantity always dwindling in a regularly diminishing ratio; it had recently barely enabled the men to sustain the usual guard duty, and they lay about the parade at other times, or at full length on the porches of the barracks, too feeble and dispirited to stir hand or foot without necessity. Corporal O'Flynn, one of the few officers fit for duty, with a shade of pallor on his face a trifle more ghastly than that of starvation, reported that five men had failed to respond to roll-call, and upon investigation it was found that they had burrowed out of the fort in the darkness, seeking to desert to the enemy, but their intentions being mistaken, or their overtures scorned, they had been stabbed and scalped at the edge of the forest, and there their bodies were visible in the early rays of the sun.

"May become unpleasant when the wind shifts," remarked Stuart easily, and without emotion apparently, "but we are spared the duties of punishing deserters according to their deserts."

Demeré's face had shown a sudden nervous contraction but resumed its fixed reserved expression, and he said nothing.

Corporal O'Flynn's report, however, was not yet exhausted. He hesitated, almost choked. The blood rushed so scarlet to his face that one might have wondered, at the show it made, that he had so much of that essential element in circulation in his whole thin body. He lifted his voice as if to urge the concentration of Stuart's attention which seemed so casual — he had it the next moment.

"I feel like a traitor in tellin' it, sor," said O'Flynn, "I'm just one of the men meself, an' it breaks me heart intirely to go agin 'em with the officers. But me duty as a soldier is to the commandant of the fort, an' as a man to the poor women an' childer."

He choked again, so reluctant was he in unfolding the fact that this was but the first step, providentially disastrous, of a plan by which the fort and the officers were to be abandoned, the rank and file determining to throw themselves on the mercy of the savages, since even to die at their hands was better than this long and futile waiting for succor. Through Choo-qualee-qualoo some negotiations with the enemy had been set on foot, of which O'Flynn was unaware hitherto, being excluded from their councils as a non-commissioned officer, but after the result