

ALICE of OLD VINCENNES

By MAURICE THOMPSON

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(CONTINUED).

CHAPTER XX. ALICE'S FLAG.

Governor Hamilton received the note sent him by Colonel Clark and replied to it with curt dignity, but his heart was quaking. As a soldier he was true to the military tradition, and nothing could have induced him to surrender his command with dishonor.

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

"Very brave words," said Helm when Hamilton read the note to him, "but you'll sing a milder tune before many minutes or you and your whole garrison will perish in a bloody heap. Listen to those wild yells! Clark has enough men to eat you all up for breakfast. You'd better be reasonable and prudent. It's not bravery to court massacre."

Hamilton turned away without a word and sent the message, but Helm saw that he was excited and could be still further wrought up.

"You are playing into the hands of your bitterest enemies, the frog eaters," he went on. "These creoles, over whom you've held a hot poker all winter, are crazy to be turned loose upon you, and you know that they've got good cause to feel like giving you the extreme penalty. They'll give it to you without a flinch if they get the chance. You've done enough."

Hamilton whirled about and glared ferociously.

"Helm, what do you mean?" he demanded in a voice as hollow as it was full of desperate passion.

The genial captain laughed as if he had heard a good joke.

"You won't catch any fish if you swear, and you look blasphemous," he said with the lightness of humor characteristic of him at all times. "You'd better say a prayer or two. Just reflect a moment upon the awful sins you have committed and"—

A crash of coalescing volleys from every direction broke off his levity. Clark was sending his response to Hamilton's lofty note. The guns of freedom rang out a prophecy of triumph, and the hissing bullets clucked sharply as they entered the solid logs of the walls or whisked through an aperture and bowled over a man. The British musketeers returned the fire as best they could, with a courage and a stubborn coolness which Helm openly admired, although he could not hide his satisfaction whenever one of them was disabled.

"Lamothe and his men are refusing to obey orders," said Farnsworth a little later, hastily approaching Hamilton, his face flushed and a gleam of hot anger in his eyes. "They're in a nasty mood. I can do nothing with them. They have not fired a shot."

"Mutiny?" Hamilton demanded.

"Not just that. They say they do not wish to fire on their kinsmen and friends. They are all French, you know, and they see their cousins, brothers, uncles and old acquaintances out there in Clark's rabble. I can do nothing with them."

"Shoot the scoundrels, then!"

"It will be a toss up which of us will come out on top if we try that. Besides, if we begin a fight inside, the Americans will make short work of us."

"Well, what are we to do, then?"

"Oh, fight, that's all," said Farnsworth apathetically, turning to a small loophole and leveling a field glass through it. "We might make a rush from the gates and stampede them," he presently added. "Then he uttered an exclamation of great surprise."

"There's Lieutenant Beverley out there," he exclaimed.

"You're mistaken; you're excited," Hamilton half sneeringly remarked, yet not without a shade of uneasiness in his expression. "You forget, sir."

"Look for yourself. It's easily settled." And Farnsworth proffered the glass. "He's there, to a certainty, sir."

"I saw Beverley an hour ago," said Helm. "I knew all the time that he'd be on hand."

It was a white lie. Captain Helm was as much surprised as his captors at what he heard, but he could not resist the temptation to be annoying.

Hamilton looked as Farnsworth directed, and, sure enough, there was the young Virginian Lieutenant standing on a barricade, his hat off, cheering his men with a superb show of zeal. Not a hair of his head was missing, so far as the glass could be relied upon to show.

Oncle Jazon's quick old eyes saw the gleam of the telescope tube in the loophole.

"I never could shoot much," he muttered, and then a little bullet sped with absolute accuracy from his reputable looking rifle and shattered the object lens just as Hamilton moved to withdraw the glass, uttering an ejaculation of intense excitement.

"Such devils of marksmen!" said he, and his face was haggard. "That infernal Indian lied."

"I could have told you all the time that the scalp Long Hair brought to you was not Beverley's," said Helm indifferently. "I recognized Lieutenant Barlow's hair as soon as I saw it."

This was another piece of offhand romance. Helm did not dream that he was accidentally sketching a horrible truth.

"Barlow's!" exclaimed Farnsworth.

"Yes, Barlow's, no mistake!"

Two more men reeled from a port-hole, the blood spinning far out of their wounds. Indeed, through every aperture in the walls the bullets were now humming like mad hornets.

"Close that port-hole!" stormed Hamilton. Then turning to Farnsworth he added: "We cannot endure this long. Shut up every place large enough for a bullet to get through. Go all around, give strict orders to all. See that the men do not foolishly expose themselves. Those ruffians out there have located every crack."

His glimpse of Beverley and the sinister remark of Helm had completely unmanned him before his men fell. Now it rushed upon him that if he would escape the wrath of the mad-dened creoles and the vengeance of Alice's lover he must quickly throw himself upon the mercy of Clark. It was his only hope. He chafed inwardly, but bore himself with stern coolness. He presently sought Farnsworth, pulled him aside and suggested that something must be done to prevent an assault and a massacre. The sounds outside seemed to forebode a gathering for a desperate rush, and in his heart he felt all the terrors of awful anticipation.

"We are completely at their mercy; that is plain," he said, shrugging his shoulders and gazing at the wounded men writhing in their agony. "What do you suggest?"

Captain Farnsworth was a shrewd officer. He recollected that Philip Dejean, justice of Detroit, was on his way down the Wabash from that post and probably near at hand with a flotilla of men and supplies. Why not ask for a few days of truce? It could do no harm and if agreed to might be their salvation. Hamilton jumped at the thought and forthwith drew up a note which he sent out with a white flag. Never before in all his military career had he been so comforted by a sudden cessation of fighting. His soul would grovel in spite of him. Alice's cold face now had Beverley's beside it in his field of inner vision—a double assurance of impending doom, it seemed to him.

There was short delay in the arrival of Colonel Clark's reply, hastily scrawled on a bit of soiled paper. The request for a truce was flatly refused, but the note closed thus:

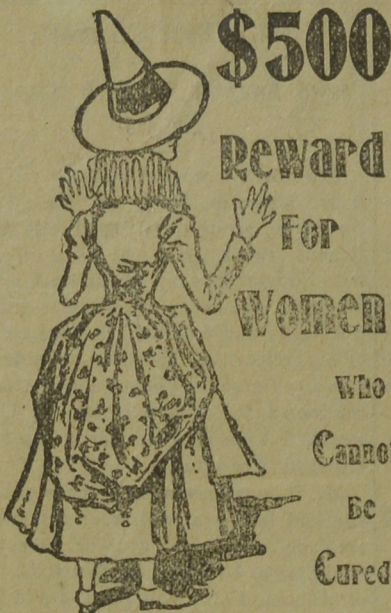
"If Mr. Hamilton is Desirous of a Conference with Col. Clark, he will meet him at the Church with Capt. Helms."

The spelling was not very good, and there was a redundancy of capital letters, yet Hamilton understood it all, and it was very difficult for him to conceal his haste to attend the proposed conference. But he was afraid to go to the church—the thought chilled him. He could not face Father Beret, who would probably be there. And what if there should be evidences of the funeral? What if?—He shuddered and tried to break away from the vision in his tortured brain.

He sent a proposition to Clark to meet him on the esplanade before the main gate of the fort, but Clark declined, insisting upon the church. And thither he at last consented to go. It was an immense brace to his spirit to have Helm beside him during that walk, which, although but eighty yards in extent, seemed to him a matter of leagues. On the way he had to pass near the new position taken up by Beverley and his men. It was a fine test of nerve when the lieutenant's eyes met those of the governor. Neither man permitted the slightest change of countenance to betray his feelings. In fact, Beverley's face was as rigid as marble; he could not have changed it.

Father Beret was indeed present at the church, as Hamilton had dreaded, and the two duellists gave each other a rapier-like eye thrust. Neither spoke, however, and Clark immediately demanded a settlement of the matter in hand. He was brusque and imperious to a degree, apparently rather anxious to repel every peaceful advance.

It was a laconic interview, crisp as



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autumn for. ter as gall berries. Colonel Clark had no respect whatever for Hamilton, to whom he had applied the imperishable adjective "hair buyer general." On the other hand, Governor Hamilton, who felt keenly the disgrace of having to equalize himself officially and discuss terms of surrender with a rough backwoodsman, could not conceal his contempt of Clark.

The five men of history, Hamilton, Helm, Hay, Clark and Bowman, were not distinguished diplomats. They went at their work rather after the hammer and tongs fashion. Clark bluntly demanded unconditional surrender. Hamilton refused. They argued the matter. Helm put in his oar, trying to soften the situation, as was his custom on all occasions, and received from Clark a stinging reprimand, with the reminder that he was nothing but a prisoner on parole and had no voice at all in settling the terms of surrender.

"I release him, sir," said Hamilton. "He is no longer a prisoner. I am quite willing to have Captain Helm join freely in our conference."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

How to Ward Off an Attack of Rheumatism.

"For years when spring time came on and I went into gardening, I was sure to have an attack of rheumatism and every attack was more severe than the preceding one," says Jos. McDonald, of Ma, Ligan county, West Va. "I tried every thing with no relief what ever, until I procured a bottle of Chamberlain's Pain Balm, and the first application gave me ease, and before the first bottle was used I felt like a new person. Now I feel that I am cured, but I always keep a bottle of Chamberlain's Pain Balm in the house and when I feel any symptoms of a return I soon drive it away with one or two applications of this liniment. For sale by all druggists."

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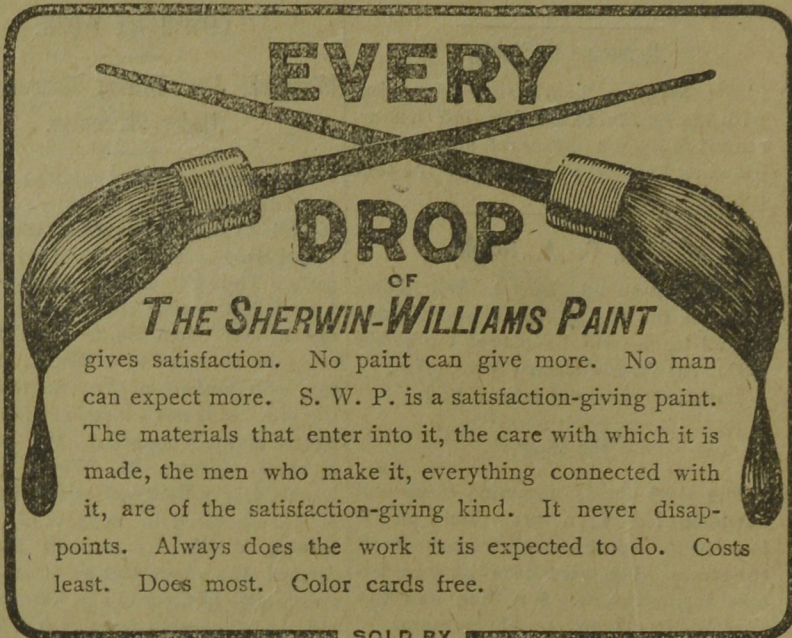
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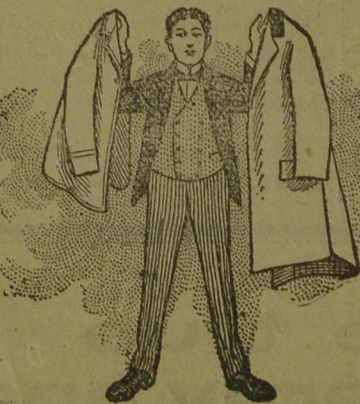
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