Beverley listened as one who hears a clever reader intoning a strange and captivating poem. To his mind it was clear that she belonged to the Tarleton family of Virginia. Youth always concludes a matter at once. He knew some of the Tarletons. But it was a widely scattered family, its members living in almost every colony in America. The crest he recognized at a glance by the dragon on the helmet with three stars. It was not for a woman to bear. But doubtless it had been enameled on the locket merely as a family mark, as was often done in America.

"The black woman was your nurse, your mammy," he said. "I know by that and by your prayer in English as well as by your locket that you are of a good old family."

Like most southerners, he had strong faith in genealogy, and he held at his tongue's tip the names of all the old families. The Carters, the Blairs, the Fitzhughs, the Hansons, the Randolphs, the Lees, the Ludwells, the Joneses, the Beverleys, the Tarletons—a whole catalogue of them stretched back in his memory. He knew the coat of arms displayed by each house. He could repeat their legends.

"I wish you could tell me more," he went on. "Can't you recollect anything further about your early childhood, your first impressions—the house, the woman who taught you to pray, the old black mammy? Any little thing might be of priceless value as evidence."

"There is absolutely nothing more to tell," she said. "All my life I have tried to remember more, but it's impossible; I can't get any further back or call up another thing. There's no use trying. It's all like a dream; probably it is one. I do have such dreams. In my sleep I can lift myself into the air just as easy and fly back to the same big white house that I seem to remember. When you told me about your home it was like something that I had often seen before. I shall be dreaming about it next."

Beverley cross questioned her from every possible point of view. He was fascinated with the mystery, but she gave him nothing out of which the least further light could be drawn. A half breed woman, it seemed, had been her Indian foster mother, a silent, grave, watchful guardian from whom not a hint of disclosure ever fell. She was moreover a Christian woman who had received her conversion from an English speaking Protestant missionary. She prayed with Alice, thus keeping in the child's mind a perfect memory of the Lord's prayer.

"Well," said Beverley at last, "you are more of a mystery to me the longer I know you."

"Then I must grow every day more distasteful to you."

"No; I love mystery."

He went away feeling a new web of interest binding him to this inscrutable maiden whose life seemed to him at once so full of idyllic happiness and so enshrouded in tantalizing doubt. At the first opportunity he frankly questioned M. Roussillon, with no helpful result. The big Frenchman told the same meager story. The woman was dying in the time of a great epidemic which killed most of her tribe. She gave Alice to M. Roussillon, but told him not a word about her ancestry or previous life. That was all.

A wise old man when he finds himself in a blind alley no sooner touches the terminal wall than he faces about and goes back the way he came. Under like circumstances a young man must needs try to batter the wall down with his head. In Beverley's case the clash was profoundly disturbing. And now he clutched the thought that Alice was not a mere child of the woods, but a daughter of an old family of cavaliers!

With coat buttoned close against the driving wind he strode toward the fort in one of those melodramatic moods to which youth in all climes and times is subject. It was like a slap in the face when Captain Helm met him at the stockade gate and said:

"Well, sir, you are good at hiding."

"Hiding! What do you mean, Captain Helm?" he demanded, not in the mildest tone.

"I mean, sir, that I've been hunting for you for an hour and more over the whole of this town. The English and Indians are upon us, and there's no time for fooling. Where are all the men?"

Beverley comprehended the situation in a second. Helm's face was congested with excitement. Some scouts had come in with the news that Governor Hamilton, at the head of 500 or 600 soldiers and Indians, was only three or four miles up the river.

"Where are all the men?" Helm repeated.

"Buffalo hunting, most of them," said Beverley.

"What in thunder are they off hunting buffaloes for?" raged the excited captain.

"You might go to thunder and see," Beverley said, and they both laughed in sheer masculine contempt of a predicament too grave for anything but grim mirth.

What could they do? Even Oncle Jason and Rene de Ronville were off with the hunters. Helm sent for M. Roussillon in the desperate hope that he could suggest something, but he lost his head and hustled off to hide his money and valuables. Indeed the French people all felt that, so far as they were concerned, the chief thing was to save what they had. They well knew that it mattered little which of the two masters held over them—they must shift for themselves. In their hearts they were true to France and America; but France and America could not now protect them against Hamilton, therefore it would be like suicide to magnify patriotism or any other sentiment objectionable to the English. So they acted upon M. Roussillon's advice and offered no resistance when the new army approached.

"My poor people are not disloyal to your flag and your cause," said good Father Beret next morning to Captain Helm, "but they are powerless. Winter is upon us. What would you have us do? This rickety fort is not available for defense. The men are nearly all far away on the plains. Isn't it the part of prudence and common sense to make the best of a desperate situation? Should we resist, the British and their savage allies would destroy the town and commit outrages too horrible to think about. In this case diplomacy promises much more than a hopeless fight against an overwhelming force."

"I'll fight 'em," Helm ground out between his teeth, "if I have to do it single handed and alone! I'll fight 'em!"

Father Beret smiled grimly, as if he, too, would enjoy a lively skirmish, and said:

"I admire your courage, my son. Fighting is perfectly proper upon fair occasion. But think of the poor women and children. These old eyes of mine have seen some terrible things done by enraged savages. Men can die fighting, but their poor wives and daughters—ah, I have seen, I have seen!"

Beverley felt a pang of terror shoot through his heart as Father Beret's simple words made him think of Alice in connection with the Indian massacre.

"Of course, of course it's horrible to think of," said Helm, "but my duty is clear, and that flag"—he pointed to where la bannière d'Alice Roussillon

"That flag shall not come down save in full honor."

was almost blowing away in the cold wind—"that flag shall not come down save in full honor."

His speech sounded preposterously boastful and hollow, but he was manfully in earnest. Every word came from his brave heart.

Father Beret's grim smile returned, lighting up his strongly marked face with the strangest expression imaginable.

"We will get all the women inside the fort," Helm began to say.

"Where the Indians will find them ready penned up and at their mercy," quickly interpolated the priest. "That will not do."

"Well, then, what can be done?" Beverley demanded, turning with a fierce stare upon Father Beret. "Don't stand there objecting to everything, with not a suggestion of your own to offer."

"I know what is best for my people," the old man replied softly, still smiling. "I have advised them to stay inside their houses and take no part in the military event. It is the only hope of averting an indiscriminate massacre and things worse."

The curt phrase, "things worse," went like a bullet stroke through Beverley's heart. It flashed an awful picture upon his vision. Father Beret saw his face whiten and his lips set themselves to resist a great emotion.

"Do not be angry with me, my son," he said, laying a hand on the young man's arm. "I may be wrong, but I act upon long and convincing experience."

"Experience or no experience," Helm exclaimed, with an oath, "this fort must be manned and defended. I am commanding here!"

"Yes, I recognize your authority," responded the priest in a firm yet deferential tone, "and I heartily wish you had a garrison. But where is your command, Captain Helm?"

"Where is my garrison, you ask! Yes, and I can tell you. It's where you might expect a gang of dad blasted jabbering French good for nothings to be, off high gannicking around shooting buffaloes instead of staying here and defending their wives, children, homes and country! The few I have in the fort will sneak off, I suppose."

"The French gave you this post on easy terms, captain," blandly retorted Father Beret.

"Yes, and they'll hand it over to Hamilton, you think, on the same basis," cried Helm, "but I'll show you! I'll show you, Mr. Priest!"

"Pardon me, captain. The French are loyal to you and to the flag yonder. They have sworn it. Time will prove it. But in the present desperate dilemma we must choose the safer horn."

Saying this Father Beret turned about and went his way. He was chuckling heartily as he passed out of the gate.

"He is right," said Beverley after a few moments of reflection, during which he was wholly occupied with Alice, whose terrified face in his anticipation appealed to him from the midst of howling savages, smoking cabins and mangled victims of lust and massacre. His imagination painted the scene with a merciless realism that chilled his blood. All the sweet romance fell away from Vincennes.

"Well, sir, right or wrong, your duty is to obey orders," said Helm with brutal severity.

"We had better not quarrel, captain," Beverley replied. "I have not signified any unwillingness to obey your commands. Give them, and you will have no cause to grumble."

"Forgive me, old fellow!" cried the impulsive commander. "I know you are true as steel. I s'pose I'm wound up too tight to be polite. But the time is coming to do something. Here we are with but five or six men"—

He was interrupted by the arrival of two more half breed scouts.

Only three miles away was a large flotilla of boats and canoes with cannon, a force of Indians on land and the British flag flying—that was the report.

"They are moving rapidly," said the spokesman, "and will be here very soon. They are at least 600 strong, all well armed."

"Push that gun to the gate and load it to the muzzle, Lieutenant Beverley," Helm ordered with admirable firmness, the purple flush in his face giving way to a grayish pallor. "We are going to die right here or have the honors of war."

Beverley obeyed without a word. He even loaded two guns instead of one, charging each so heavily that the last wad looked as if ready to leap from the grimy mouth.

Helm had already begun, on receiving the first report, a hasty letter to Colonel Clark at Kaskaskia. He now added a few words and at the last moment sent it out by a trusted man, who was promptly captured by Hamilton's advance guard. The missive, evidently written in installments during the slow approach of the British, is still in the Canadian archives, and runs thus:

Dear Sir—At this time there is an army within three miles of this place; I heard of their coming several days beforehand. I sent spies to find the certainty—the spies being taken prisoner I never got intelligence till they got within three miles of town. As I had called the militia and had all assurances of their integrity I ordered at the firing of a cannon every man to appear, but I saw but few. Captain Buseron behaved much to his honor and credit, but I doubt the conduct of a certain gent. Excuse haste, as the army is in sight. My determination is to defend the garrison, (sic) though I have but twenty-one men but what has left me. I refer you to Mr. Wmes (sic) for the rest. The army is within three hundred yards of the village. You must think how I feel; not four men that I really depend upon; but am determined to act brave—think of my condition. I know it is out of my power to defend the town, as not one of the militia will take arms, though before sight of the army no braver men. There is a flag at a small distance, I must conclude. Your humble servant,

LEO'D HELM.

Must stop.

To Colonel Clark.

Having completed this task, the letter shows under what a nervous strain, Helm turned to his lieutenant and said:

"Fire a swivel with a blank charge. We'll give these weak kneed parlyvoos one more call to duty. Of course not a frog eater of them all will come. But I said that a gun should be the signal. Possibly they didn't hear the first one, the deaf, cowardly hounds!"

Beverley wheeled forth the swivel and rammed a charge of powder home. But when he fired it the effect was far from what it should have been. Instead of calling in a fresh body of militia it actually drove out the few who up to that moment had remained as a garrison, so that Captain Helm and his lieutenant found themselves quite alone in the fort, while out before the gate, deployed in fine open order, a strong line of British soldiers approached with sturdy steps, led by a tall, erect, ruddy faced young officer.

(To Be Continued.)