

ALICE of OLD VINCENNES

By MAURICE THOMPSON

Copyright, 1960, by the BOWEN-MERRILL COMPANY

(Continued.)

CHAPTER XIX. THE ATTACK.

It has already been mentioned that Indians arriving singly or in squads to report at Hamilton's headquarters were in the habit of firing their guns before entering the town or the fort, not only as a signal of their approach, but in order to rid their weapons of their charges preliminary to cleaning them before setting out upon another scalp hunting expedition. A shot, therefore, or even a volley, heard on the outskirts of the village was not a noticeable incident in the daily and nightly experience of the garrison. Still, for some reason, Governor Hamilton started violently when just after nightfall five or six rifles cracked sharply a short distance from the stockade.

He and Helm, with two other officers, were in the midst of a game of cards, while a kottle, swinging on a crane in the ample fireplace, sang a shrill promise of hot applejack toddy.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Farnsworth, who, although not in the game, was amusing himself with looking on. "You jump like a fine lady! I almost fancied I heard a bullet hit you."

"You may all jump while you can," remarked Helm. "That's Clark, and your time's short. He'll have this fort tumbling on your heads before day-light of tomorrow morning comes."

As he spoke he arose from his seat at the card table and went to look after the toddy which, as an expert, he had under supervision.

Hamilton frowned. The mention of Clark was disturbing. Ever since the strange disappearance of Lieutenant Barlow he had nursed the fear that possibly Clark's scouts had captured him and that the American forces might be much nearer than Kaskaskia. Besides, his nerves were unsteady, as they had been ever since the encounter with Father Beret, and his vision persisted in turning back upon the accusing cold face of Alice, lying in the moonlight. One little detail of that scene almost maddened him at times. It was a sheeny, crinkled wisp of warm looking hair looped across the cheek in which he had often seen a saucy dimple dance when Alice spoke or smiled. He was bad enough, but not wholly bad, and the thought of having darkened those merry eyes and stifled those sweet dimples tore through him with a cold and rasping pang.

"Just as soon as this toddy is properly mixed and tempered," said Helm with a magnetic jocosity beaming from his genial face. "I'm going to propose a toast to the banner of Alice Rousillon, which a whole garrison of British braves has been unable to take!"

"If you do I'll blow a hole through you," said Hamilton in a voice fairly shaken to a husky quaver with rage. "You may do a great many insulting things, but not that."

Helm was in a half stooping attitude with a fiddle in one hand, a cup in the other. He had met Hamilton's glowering look with a peculiarly innocent smile, as if to say: "What in the world is the matter now? I never felt in a better humor in all my life. Can't you take a joke, I wonder?" He did not speak, however, for a rattling volley of musket and rifle shots hit the top of the clay daubed chimney, sending down into the toddy a shower of soot and dirt.

In a wink every man was on his feet and staring.

"Gentlemen," said Helm, with an impressive oath, "that is Clark's soldiers, and they will take your fort, but they ought not to have spoiled this apple toddy."

"Oh, the devil!" said Hamilton, forcibly resuming a calm countenance. "It is only a squad of drunken Indians coming in. We'll forego excitement. There's no battle on hand, gentlemen."

"I'm glad you think so, Governor Hamilton," Helm responded, "but I should imagine that I ought to know the crack of a Kentucky rifle. I've heard one occasionally in my life. Besides, I got a whiff of freedom just now."

"Captain Helm is right," observed Farnsworth. "That is an attack."

Another volley, this time nearer and more concentrated, convinced Hamilton that he was indeed at the opening of a fight. Even while he was giving some hurried orders to his officers a man was wounded at one of the port-holes. Then came a series of yells, answered by a ripple of sympathetic French shouting that ran throughout the town. The patrol guards came straggling in, breathless with excitement. They swore to having seen a thousand men marching across the water covered meadows.

Hamilton was brave. The approach of danger stirred him like a trumpet strain. His fighting blood rose to full tide, and he gave his orders with the steadiness and commanding force of a born soldier. The officers hastened to their respective positions. On all sides sounds indicative of rapid preparations for the fight mingled into a confused strain of military energy. Men marched to their places, cannon were wheeled into position, and soon enough the firing began in good earnest.

Late in the afternoon a rumor of Clark's approach had gone abroad through the village, but not a French lip breathed it to a friend of the British. The creoles were loyal to the cause of freedom; moreover, they cordially hated Hamilton, and their hearts beat high at the prospect of a change in masters at the fort. Every cabin had its hidden gun and supply of ammunition despite the order to disarm issued by Hamilton. There was a hustling to bring these forth, which was accompanied with a guarded yet irrepressible chattering, delightfully French and infinitely volatile.

"Tiens, je vais frotter mon fusil! J'ai vu un singe!" said Jacques Bourcier to his daughter, the pretty Adrienne, who was coming out of the room in which Alice lay.

"I saw a monkey just now. I must rub up my gun!" He could not be solemn, not he. The thought of an opportunity to get even with Hamilton was like wine in his blood.

If you had seen those hardy and sneaky Frenchmen gliding in the dusk of evening from cottage to cottage, passing the word that the Americans had arrived, saying airy things and pinching one another as they met and hurried on, you would have thought something very amusing and wholly sound was in preparation for the people of Vincennes.

There was a current belief in the town that Gaspard Rousillon never missed a good thing and always somehow got the lion's share. He went out with the ebb to return on the flood. Nobody was surprised, therefore, when he suddenly appeared in the midst of his friends, armed to the teeth and emotionally warlike to suit the occasion. Of course he took charge of everybody and everything. You could have heard him whisper a bow shot away.

"Taisons!" he hissed whenever he met an acquaintance. "We will surprise the fort and scalp the whole garrison. Aux armes! Les Américains viennent d'arriver!"

At his own house he knocked and called in vain. He shook the door violently, for he was thinking of the stores under the floor, of the grimy bottles, of the fragrant Bordeaux. Ah, his throat, how it throbbed! But where was Mme. Rousillon? Where was Alice? "Jean! Jean!" he cried, forgetting all precaution. "Come here, you scamp, and let me in this minute!"

A profoundly impressive silence gave him to understand that his home was deserted.

"Chiff! Frightened and gone to stay with Mme. Godeere, I suppose, and I so thirsty! Bah! Hum, hum! Apres le vin la bataille. Ziff!"

He kicked in the door and groped his way to the liquor. While he hastily swigged and smacked he heard the firing begin with a crackling, desultory volley. He laughed jovially there in the dark, between drafts and deep sighs of enjoyment.

"Et moi aussi," he murmured, like the vast murmur of the sea, "I want to be in that dance! Pardonnez-mesieurs. Moi, je veux danser, s'il vous plait!"

And when he had filled himself he plunged out and rushed away, wrought up to the extreme fighting pitch of temper. Diaboli! If he could but come across that Lieutenant Barlow, how he would smash him and mangle him! In magnifying his prowess with the lens of imagination he swelled and puffed as he lumbered along.

The firing sounded as if it were between the fort and the river, but presently when one of Hamilton's cannon spoke M. Rousillon saw the yellow spike of flame from its muzzle leap directly toward the church, and he thought it best to make a wide detour to avoid going between the firing lines. Once or twice he heard the whine of a stray bullet high overhead. Before he had gone very far he met a man hurrying toward the fort. It was Captain Francis Maisonneville, one of Hamilton's chief scouts, who had been out on a reconnaissance and, cut off from his party by some of Clark's forces, was trying to make his way to the main gate of the stockade.

M. Rousillon knew Maisonneville as a somewhat desperate character, a leader of Indian forays and a trader in human scalps. Surely the fellow was legitimate prey.

"Ziff! Diable de gredin!" he snarled, and leaping upon him choked him to the ground. "Je vais vous scalper immédiatement!"

Clark's plan of approach showed masterly strategy. Lieutenant Bailey, with fourteen regulars, made a show of attack on the east, while Major Bowman led a company through the town, on a line near where Main street in Vincennes is now located, to a point north of the stockade. Charleville, a brave creole, who was at the head of some daring fellows, by a brilliant dash got position under cover of a natural terrace at the edge of the prairie opposite the fort's southwestern angle. Lieutenant Beverley, in whom the commander placed highest confidence, was sent to look for a supply of ammunition and to gather up all the Frenchmen in the town who wished to join in the attack. Uncle Jason and ten other

available men went with him. They all made a great noise when they felt that the place was completely invested. Nor can we deny, much as we would like to, the strong desire for vengeance which raised those shouting voices and nerved those steady hearts to do or die in an undertaking which certainly had a desperate look. The thought was tremendously stimulating.

Beverley, with the aid of Uncle Jason, was able to lead his little company as far as the church before the enemy saw him. Here a volley from the nearest angle of the stockade had to be answered, and pretty soon a cannon began to play upon the position.

"We kin do better some's else," was Uncle Jason's laconic remark, flung back over his shoulder as he moved briskly away from the spot just swept by a 6 pounder. Come this yer way, lieutenant. I hyer some o' the fellers a-talkin' loud jes' beyant Legrace's place. They ain't no sort o' sense a-tryin' to hit anything a-shootin' in the dark now."

When they reached the thick of the town there was a strange stir in the dusky streets. Men were slipping from house to house, arming themselves and joining their neighbors. Clark had sent an order earlier in the evening forbidding any street demonstration by the inhabitants, but he might as well have ordered the wind not to blow or the river to stand still. Uncle Jason knew every man whose outlines he could see or whose voice he heard. He called each one by name:

"Here, Roger, fall in! Come, Louis, Alphonse, Victor, Octave—venez ici, here's the American army, come with me!" His rapid French phrases leaped forth as if shot from a pistol, and his shrill voice, familiar to every ear in Vincennes, drew the creole militiamen to him, and soon Beverley's company had doubled its numbers, while at the same time its enthusiasm and ability to make a noise had increased in a far greater proportion. In accordance with an order from Clark they now took position near the northeast corner of the stockade and began firing, although in the darkness there was but little opportunity for marksmanship.

Uncle Jason had found Citizens Legrace and Bosseron, and through them Clark's men were supplied with ammunition, of which they stood greatly in need, their powder having got wet during their long watery march. By 9 o'clock the fort was completely surrounded, and from every direction the riflemen and musketeers were pouring in volley after volley. Beverley with his men took the cover of a fence and some houses sixty yards



Leaping upon him, he choked him to the ground.

from the stockade. Here to their surprise they found themselves below the line of Hamilton's cannon, which, being planted on the second floor of the fort, could not be sufficiently depressed to bear upon them. A well directed musket fire, however, fell from the loopholes of the blockhouses, the bullets rattling merrily against the cover behind which the attacking forces lay.

Clark, in passing hurriedly from company to company around the line, stopped for a little while when he found Beverley.

"Have you plenty of ammunition?" was his first inquiry.

"A mighty sight more 'n we kin see to shoot with," spoke up Uncle Jason. "It's a right smart o' durn burn foolishness to be wastin' it on nothin'; seems like to me 'at we'd better set the dastard fort afire an' smoke the skunks out!"

"Speak when you are spoken to, my man," said the colonel a trifle hotly, and trying by a sharp scrutiny to make him out in the gloom where he crouched.

"Ventrebien! I'm not askin' you, Colonel Clark, nor no other man, when I shill speak. I talks whenever I gits ready, an' I shoots jes' the same way. So ye'd better go on 'bout yer business like a white man! Close up yer own whooper jawed mouth ef ye want anything shet up!"

"Oh, is that you, Jason? You're so little I didn't know you! Certainly, talk your whole under jaw off for all I care," Clark replied, assuming a jokey tone. Then, turning again to Beverley: "Keep up the firing and the noise. The fort will be ours in the morning."

"What's the use of waiting till morning?" Beverley demanded with impatience. "We can tear that stockade to pieces with our hands in half an hour."

"I don't think so, Lieutenant. It is better to play for the sure thing. Keep up the racket, and be ready for 'em if they rush out. We must not fail to capture the hair buyer general!"

Beverley submitted to Clark's plan with what patience he could, and all night long fired shot for shot with the

best riflemen in his squad. It was a fatiguing performance, with apparently little result beyond forcing the garrison now and again to close the embrasures, thus periodically silencing the cannon. Toward the close of the night a relaxation showed itself in the shouting and firing all round the line. Beverley's men, especially the creoles, held out bravely in the matter of noise, but even they flagged at length, their volatility simmering down to desultory bubbling and half sleepy chattering and chaffing.

Beverley leaned upon a rude fence and for a time neglected to reload his hot rifle. Of course he was thinking of Alice—he really could not think in any other direction; but it gave him a shock and a start when he presently heard her name mentioned by a little Frenchman near him on the left.

"There 'll never be another such a girl in Post Vincennes as Alice Rousillon," the fellow said in the soft creole patois. "And to think of her being shet like a dog!"

"And by a man who calls himself a governor, too," said another. "Ah, as for myself, I'm in favor of burning him alive when we capture him. That's me."

"Et moi aussi," chimed in a third voice. "That poor girl must be avenged. The man who shot her must die. Holy Virgin, but if Gaspard Rousillon were only here!"

"But he is here. I saw him just after dark. He was in great fighting temper that terrible man. Out, but I should not like to be Colonel Hamilton and fall in the way of that Gaspard Rousillon!"

"Morbien! I should say not. You may leave me out of a chance like that. I shouldn't mind seeing Gaspard handle the governor though. Ah, that would be too good! He'd pay him up for shooting Mike, Alice."

Beverley could scarcely hold himself erect by the fence. The smoky, foggy landscape swam round him heavy and strange. He uttered a groan, which brought Uncle Jason to his side in a hurry.

"Qu'avez-vous? What's the matter?" the old man demanded with quick sympathy. "Hev they hit ye? Lieutenant, air ye hurt much?"

Beverley did not hear the old man's words, did not feel his kindly touch.

"Alice, Alice!" he murmured. "Dead, dead!"

"Ya-as," drawled Uncle Jason. "I hearn about it soon as I got later town. It's a sorry thing, a mighty sorry thing. But maybe I won't do a little somethin' to that!"

Beverley straightened himself and lifted his gun, forgetting that he had not reloaded it since firing last. He leveled it at the fort and touched the trigger. Simultaneously with his movement an embrasure opened and a cannon flashed, its roar flanked on either side by a crackling of British muskets. Some bullets struck the fence and flung splinters into Uncle Jason's face. A cannon ball knocked a ridge-pole from the roof of a house hard by and set it whirling through the air.

"Ventrebien—et apres? What next? Better knock a feller's eyes out!" the old man cried. "I ain't a-doin' nothin' to ye!"

He capered around rubbing his leathery face after the manner of a scolded monkey. Beverley was struck in the breast by a flattened and spent ball that glanced from a fence picket. The shock caused him to stagger and drop his gun, but he quickly picked it up and turned to his companion.

"Are you hurt, Uncle Jason?" he inquired. "Are you hurt?"

"Not a bit; jes' skeert mos' into a duck fit. Thought a cannon ball had knocked my whole dang face down my throat! Nothin' but a handful o' splinters in my poety countenance, makin' my head feel like a porcupine. But I sort o' thought I heard somepin' give you a diff."

"Something did hit me," said Beverley, laying a hand on his breast, "but I don't think it was a bullet. They seem to be getting our range at last. Tell the men to keep well under cover. They must not expose themselves until we are ready to charge."

The shock had brought him back to his duty as a leader of his little company, and with the funeral bell of all his life's happiness tolling in his agonized heart he turned afresh to directing the fire upon the blockhouse.

About this time a runner came from Clark with an order to cease firing and let a returning party of British scouts under Captain Lamothe re-enter the fort unharmed. A strange order it seemed to both officers and men, but it was implicitly obeyed. Clark's genius here made another fine strategic dash. He knew that unless he let the scouts go back into the stockade they would escape by running away, and might possibly organize an army of Indians with which to succor Hamilton. But if they were permitted to go inside they could be captured with the rest of the garrison. Hence his order.

A few minutes passed in dead silence. Then Captain Lamothe and his party marched close by where Beverley's squad was lying concealed. It was a difficult task to restrain the creoles, for some of them hated Lamothe. Uncle Jason squirmed like a snake while they filed past all unaware that an enemy lurked so near. When they reached the fort, ladders were put down for them and they began to clamber over the wall, crowding and pushing one another in wild haste. Uncle Jason could hold in no longer.

"Yai Yai Yai!" he yelled. "Look out! The ladder is a-fallin' wi' ye!"

Then all the lurking crowd shouted as one man, and sure enough, down came a ladder—men and all in a crashing heap.

"Silence! Silence!" Beverley commanded, but he could not check the wild jeering and laughing which the

bruised and frightened scouts hastily erected their ladder again, fairly tumbling over one another in their haste to ascend, and so cleared the wall, falling into the stockade to join the garrison.

"Ventrebien!" shrieked Uncle Jason. "They've gone to bed, but we'll wake 'em up at the crack o' day an' give 'em a breakfast o' hot lead!"

Now the fighting was resumed with redoubled spirit and noise, and when morning came, affording sufficient light to bring out the bead sights on the Kentucky rifles, the watchless marksmen in Clark's band forced the British to close the embrasures and entirely cease trying to use their cannon, but the fight with small arms went merrily on until the middle of the forenoon.

Meantime Gaspard Rousillon had tied Francis Maisonneville's hands fast and hard with the strap of his bullet pouch.

"Now, I'll scalp you," he said in a rumbling tone terrible to hear. And with his words out came his hunting knife from its sheath.

"Oh, have mercy, my dear M. Rousillon!" cried the panting captive. "Have mercy!"

"Mercy! Yes, like your colonel's; that's what you'll get. You stand by that forban, that scelerat, that bandit, and help him. Oh, yes, you'll get mercy! Yes, the same mercy that he showed to my poor little Alice! Your scalp, monsieur, if you please. A small matter; it won't hurt much!"

"But, for the sake of old friendship, Gaspard, for the sake!"

"Ziff! Poor little Alice!"

"But I swear to you that I—"

"Tout de memo, monsieur, je vals vous scalper maintenant."

In fact, he had taken off a part of Maisonneville's scalp when a party of soldiers, among whom was Maisonneville's brother, a brave fellow and loyal to the American cause, were attracted by his cries and came to his rescue.

M. Rousillon struggled savagely, insisting upon completing his cruel performance, but he was at last overpowered, partly by brute force and partly by the pleading of Maisonneville's brother, and made to desist. The big man wept with rage when he saw the bleeding prisoner protected. "Eh bien! I'll keep what I've got," he roared, "and I'll take the rest of it next time."

He shook the tuft of hair at Maisonneville and glared like a mad bull.

Two or three other members of Lamothe's band were captured about the same time by some of the French militiamen, and Clark when on his round cheering and directing his forces discovered that these prisoners were being used as shields. Some young creoles, gay with drink and the stimulating effect of fight, had bound the poor fellows and were firing from behind them. Of course the commander promptly put an end to this cruelty, but they considered it exquisite fun while it lasted. It was in broad daylight, and they knew that the English in the fort could see what they were doing.

"It's shameful to treat prisoners in this way," said Clark. "I will not permit it. Shoot the next man that offers to do such a thing."

One of the creole youths, a handsome, swarthy Adolphe in buckskin, tossed his shapely head with a debonaire smile and said:

"To be sure, mon colonel. But what have they been doing to us? We have amused them all winter. It's but fair that they should give us a little fun now."

Clark shrugged his broad shoulders and passed on. He understood perfectly what the people of Vincennes had suffered under Hamilton's brutal administration.

At 9 o'clock an order was passed to cease firing, and a flag of truce was seen going from Clark's headquarters to the fort. It was a peremptory demand for unconditional surrender. Hamilton refused, and fighting was fiercely resumed from behind rude breastworks meantime erected. Every loophole and opening of whatever sort was the focus into which the muzzling backwoods rifles sent their deadly bullets. Men began to fall in the fort, and every moment Hamilton expected an assault in force on all sides of the stockade. This, if successful, would mean inevitable massacre. Clark had warned him of the terrible consequences of holding out until the worst should come. "For," said he in his note to the governor, "if I am obliged to storm, you may depend upon such treatment as is justly due to a murderer."

Historians have wondered why Hamilton became so excited and acted so strangely after receiving the note. The phrase "justly due to a murderer" is the key to the mystery. When he read it his heart sank and a terrible fear seized him. "Justly due to a murderer!" Ah, that calm, white, beautiful girlish face, dead in the moonlight, with the wisp of shining hair across it! Such treatment as is justly due to a murderer! Cold drops of sweat broke out on his forehead and a shiver went through his body.

During the truce Clark's weary yet still enthusiastic besiegers enjoyed a good breakfast prepared for them by the loyal dames of Vincennes. Little Adrienne Bourcier was one of the handmaidens of the occasion. One brought to Beverley's squad a basket, almost as large as herself, heaped high with roasted duck and warm wheaten bread, while another girl bore two huge jugs of coffee, fragrant and steaming hot. The men cheered then lustily and complimented them without reserve, so that before their service was over their faces were glowing with delight.

And yet Adrienne's heart was uneasy and full of longing to hear something of Rege de Bonville. Surely some one

of her friends must know something about him. Ah, there was Uncle Jason! Doubtless he could tell her all that she wanted to know. She lingered after the food was distributed and shyly inquired:

"Hain't seed the scamp," said Uncle Jason, only he used the patois most familiar to the girl's ear. "Killed an' scalped long ago, I reckon."

His mouth was so full that he spoke mumblingly and with utmost difficulty. Nor did he glance at Adrienne, whose face took on as great pallor as her brown complexion could show.

Beverley ate but little of the food. He sat apart on a piece of timber that projected from the rough breastwork and gave himself over to infinite mis-



"What's the matter? Hev they hit ye?"

ery of spirit, which was troubled when he took Alice's locket from his bosom only to discover that the bullet which struck him had almost entirely destroyed the face of the miniature.

He gripped the dentured and twisted case and gazed at it with the stare of a blind man. His heart almost ceased to beat and his breath had the rustling sound we hear when a strong man dies of a sudden wound. Somehow the de-facement of the portrait was taken by his soul as the final touch of fate, signifying that Alice was forever and completely obliterated from his life. He felt a blur pass over his mind. He tried in vain to recall the face and form so dear to him; he tried to imagine her voice; but the whole universe was a vast hollow silence. For a long while he was cold, staring, rigid. Then the inevitable collapse came, and he wept as only a strong man can who is hurt to death, yet cannot die.

Adrienne approached him, thinking to speak to him about Rene, but he did not notice her, and she went her way, leaving beside him a liberal supply of food.

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, "began 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 arsy 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're done enough."

Hamilton whistled 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 coaling 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 whirled through an aperture and howled 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."

"Mettay?" Hamilton demanded.

"Not just that. They say they do