enced by Beverley, he in turn found a new light suffusing his nature, and he was not unaware that it came out of her eyes, her face, her smiles, her voice, her soul. It was the old, well known, inexplicable, mutual magnetism which from the first has been the same on the highest mountain top and in the lowest valley. The queen and the milkmaid, the king and the hind may come together only to find the king walking off with the lowly beauty and her fragrant pail, while away stalks the lusty rustic, to be lord and master of the queen. Love is love, and it thrives in all climes, under all conditions.

There is an inevitable and curious protest that comes up unbidden between lovers; it takes many forms in accordance with particular circumstances. It is the demand for equality and perfection. Love itself is without degrees—it is perfect—but when shall it see the perfect object? It does see it, and it does not see it, in every beloved being. Beverley found his mind turning, as on a pivot, round and round upon the thought that Alice might be impossible to him. The mystery of her life seemed to force her below the line of his aristocratic vision, so that he could not fairly consider her, and yet with all his heart he loved her. Alice, on the other hand, had her bookish ideal to reckon with, despite the fact that she daily dashed it contemptuously down. She was different from Adrienne Bourcier, who bewailed the absence of her untamable lover; she wished that Beverley had not, as she somehow viewed it, weakly surrendered to Hamilton. His apparently complacent acceptance of idle captivity did not comport with her dream of knighthood and heroism. She had been all the time half expecting him to do something that would stamp him a hero.

Counter protests of this sort are never sufficiently vigorous to take a fall out of love; they merely serve to worry his temper by lightly hindering his feet. And it is surprising how love does delight himself with being entangled.

Both Beverley and Alice day by day felt the cord tightening which drew their hearts together—each acknowledged it secretly, but strove not to evince it openly. Meantime both were as happy and as restlessly dissatisfied as love and uncertainty could make them.

Amid the activities in which Hamilton was engaged—his dealings with the Indians and the work of reconstructing the fort—he found time to worry his temper about the purloined flag. Like every other man in the world, he was superstitious, and it had come into his head that to insure himself and his plans against disaster he must have the banner of his captives as a badge of his victory. It was a small matter; but it magnified itself as he dwelt upon it. He suspected that Alice had deceived him. He sharply questioned Father Beret, only to be half convinced that the good priest told the truth when he said that he knew nothing whatever on the subject beyond the fact that the banner had mysteriously disappeared from under his floor.

Captain Farnsworth scarcely sympathized with his chief about the flag, but he was nothing if not anxious to gain Hamilton's highest confidence. His military zeal knew no bounds and he never let pass even the slightest opportunity to show it. Hence his persistent search for a clew to the missing banner. He was no respecter of persons. He frankly suspected both Alice and Father Beret of lying. He would himself have lied under the existing circumstances, and he considered himself as truthful and trustworthy as priest or maiden.

"I'll get that flag for you," he said to Hamilton, "if I have to put every man, woman and child in this town on the rack. It lies, I think, between Miss Roussillon and the priest, although both insistently deny it. I've thought it over in every way, and I can't see how they can both be ignorant of where it is, or at least who got it."

Hamilton, since being treated to that wonderful blow on the jaw, was apt to fall into a spasm of anger whenever the name Roussillon was spoken in his hearing. Involuntarily he would put his hand to his cheek and grimace reminiscently.

"If it's that girl, make her tell," he savagely commanded. "Let's have no trifling about it. If it's the priest, then make him tell, or tie him up by the thumbs. Get that flag, or show some good reason for your failure. I'm not going to be baffled."

The captain's adventure with Father Beret came just in time to make it count against that courageous and bellicose missionary in more ways than one. Farnsworth did not tell Hamilton or any other person about what the priest had done to him, but nursed his sore ribs and his wrath, waiting patiently for the revenge that he meant soon to take.

Alice heard from Adrienne the story of Farnsworth's conduct and his humiliating discomfiture at the hands of Father Beret. She was both indignant and delighted, sympathizing with Adrienne and glorying in the priest's vigorous pugilistic achievement.

"Well," she remarked, with one of her infectious thrills of laughter, "so far the French have the best of it, anyway! Papa Roussillon knocked the Governor's cheek nearly off, then Rene cracked the Irish corporal's head, and now Father Beret has taught Captain Farnsworth a lesson in fisticuffs that he'll not soon forget! If the good work can only go on a little longer we shall see every English soldier in Vincennes wearing the mark of a Frenchman's blow." Then her mood suddenly changed from smiling lightness to almost fierce gravity, and she added:

"Adrienne Bourcier, if Captain Farnsworth ever offers to treat me as he did you, mark my words, I'll kill him—kill him, indeed I will! You ought to see me!"

"But he won't dare touch you," said Adrienne, looking at her friend with round, admiring eyes. "He knows very well that you are not little and timid like me. He'd be afraid of you."

"I wish he would try it. How I would love to shoot him into pieces, the hateful wretch! I wish he would."

The French inhabitants all, or nearly all, felt as Alice did; but at present they were helpless and dared not say or do anything against the English. Nor was this feeling confined to the creoles of Vincennes; it had spread to most of the points where trading posts existed. Hamilton found this out too late to mend some of his mistakes; but he set himself on the alert and organized scouting bodies of Indians under white officers to keep him informed as to the American movements in Kentucky and along the Ohio. One of these bands brought in as captive Colonel Francis Vigo of St. Louis, a Spaniard by birth, an American by adoption, a patriot to the core, who had large influence over both Indians and creoles in the Illinois country.

Colonel Vigo was not long held a prisoner. Hamilton dared not exasperate the creoles beyond their endurance, for he knew that the savages would closely sympathize with their friends of long standing, and this might lead to revolt and coalition against him—a very dangerous possibility. Indeed, at least one of the great Indian chieftains had already frankly informed him that he and his tribe were loyal to the Americans. Here was a dilemma requiring consummate diplomacy. Hamilton saw it, but he was not of a diplomatic temper or character. With the Indians he used a demoralizing system of bribery, while toward the whites he was too often gruff, imperious, repellant. Helm understood the whole situation and was quick to take advantage of it. His personal relations with Hamilton were easy and familiar, so that he did not hesitate to give advice upon all occasions. Here his jovial disposition helped him.

"You'd better let Vigo return to St. Louis," he said. They had a bowl of something hot steaming between them. "I know him. He's harmless if you don't rub him too hard the wrong way. He'll go back, if you treat him well, and tell Clark how strong you are here and how foolish it would be to think of attacking you. Clark has but a handful of men, poorly supplied and tired with long, hard marches. If you'll think a moment you cannot fail to understand that you'd better be friends with this man Vigo. He and Father Gibault and this old priest here, Beret, carry these Frenchmen in their pockets. I'm not on your side, understand; I'm an American, and I'd blow the whole of you to kingdom come in a minute if I could; but common sense is common sense all the same. There's no good to you and no harm to Clark in mistreating, or even holding the prisoner. What harm can he do you by going back to Clark and telling him the whole truth? Clark knew everything long before Vigo reached here. Old Jazon, my best scout, left here the day you took possession, and you may bet he got to Kaskaskia in short order. He never fails. But he'll tell Clark to stay where he is, and Vigo can do no more."

What effect Helm's bold and apparently artless talk had upon Hamilton's mind is not recorded; but the meager historical facts at command show that Vigo was released and permitted to return under promise that he would give no information to the enemy on his way to Kaskaskia.

Doubtless this bit of careless diplomacy on the Governor's part did have a somewhat soothing effect upon a large class of Frenchmen at Vincennes; but Farnsworth quickly neutralized it to a serious extent by a foolish act while slightly under the influence of liquor.

He met Father Beret near the Roussillon place, and feeling his ribs squirm at sight of the priest, he accosted him insolently, demanding information as to the whereabouts of the missing flag.

A priest may be good and true—Father Beret certainly was—and yet have the strongest characteristics of a worldly man. This thing of being bullied day after day, as had recently been the rule, generated nothing to aid in removing a refractory desire from the priest's heart—the worldly desire to repeat with great increment of force the punch against Farnsworth's lower ribs.

"I order you, sir, to produce that rebel flag," said Farnsworth. "You will obey forthwith or take the consequences. I am no longer in the humor to be trifled with. Do you understand?"

"I might be forced to obey you, if I could," said the priest, drawing his robe about him; "but, as I have often told you, my son, I do not know where the flag is or who took it. I do not even suspect any person of taking it. All that I know about it is the simple fact that it is gone."

Father Beret's manner and voice were very mild, but there must have been a hint of sturdy defiance somewhere in them. At all events, Farnsworth was exasperated and fell into a white rage. Perhaps it was the liquor he had been drinking that made him suddenly desperate.

"You canting old fool!" he cried "don't lie to me any longer; I won't have it. Don't stand there grinning at me. Get that flag, or I'll make you."

"What is impossible, my son, is possible to God alone. Apud homines hoc impossibile est, apud Deum autem omnia possibilia sunt."

"None of your Jesuit Latin or logic to me—I am not here to argue, but to command. Get that flag. Be in a hurry about it, sir."

He whipped out his sword, and in his half drunken eyes there gathered the dull film of murderous passion.

"Put up your weapon, captain; you will not attack an unarmed priest. You are a soldier, and will not dare strike an old, defenseless man."

"But I will strike a black-robed and black-hearted French rebel. Get that flag, you grinning fool!"

The two men stood facing each other. Father Beret's eyes did not stir from their direct, fearless gaze. What Farnsworth had called a grin was a peculiar smile, not of merriment, a grayish flicker and a slight backward wrinkling of the cheeks. The old man's arms were loosely crossed upon his sturdy breast.

"Strike if you must," he said very gently, very firmly. "I never yet have seen the man that could make me afraid." His speech was slightly sing-song in tone, as it would have been during a prayer or a blessing.

"Get the flag then!" raged Farnsworth, in whose veins the heat of liquor was aided by an unreasoning choler.

"I cannot," said Father Beret.

"Then take the consequences!"

Farnsworth lifted his sword, not to thrust, but to strike with its flat side, and down it flashed with a noisy whack. Father Beret flung out an arm and deftly turned the blow aside. It was done so easily that Farnsworth sprang back glaring and surprised.

"You old fool!" he cried, leveling his weapon for a direct lunge. "You devilish hypocrite!"

It was then that Father Beret turned deadly pale and swiftly crossed himself. His face looked as if he saw something startling just beyond his adversary. Possibly this sudden change of expression caused Farnsworth to hesitate for a mere point of time. Then there was the swish of a woman's skirt; a light step pattered on the frozen ground, and Alice sprang between the men, facing Farnsworth. As she did this something small and yellow—the locket at her throat—fell and rolled under her feet. Nobody saw it.

In her hand she held an immense horse pistol, which she leveled in the captain's face, its flaring, bugle shaped muzzle gaping not a yard from his nose. The heavy tube was as steady as if in a vise.

"Drop that sword!"

That was all she said; but her finger was pressing the trigger and the flint in the backward slanting hammer was ready to click against the steel. The leaden slugs were on the point of leaping forth.

"Drop that sword!"

The repetition seemed to close the opportunity for delay.

Farnsworth was on his guard in a twinkling. He set his jaw and uttered an ugly oath; then quick as lightning he struck sidewise at the pistol with his blade. It was a move which might have taken a less alert person than Alice unawares; but her training in sword play was ready in her wrist and hand. An involuntary turn, the slightest imaginable, set the heavy barrel of her weapon strongly against the blow, partly stopping it, and then the gaping muzzle spat its load of balls and slugs with a bellow that awoke the drowsy old village.

Farnsworth staggered backward, letting fall his sword. There was a rent in the clothing of his left shoulder. He reeled; the blood soun out; but he did not fall, although he grew white.

Alice stood gazing at him with a look on her face he would never forget. It was a look that changed by wonderful swift gradations from terrible hate to something like sweet pity. The instant she saw him hurt and bleeding, his countenance relaxing and pale, her heart failed her. She took a step toward him, her hand opened, and with a thud the heavy old pistol fell upon the ground beside her.

Father Beret sprang nimbly to sustain Farnsworth, snatching up the pistol as he passed around Alice.

"You are hurt, my son," he gently said; "let me help you." He passed his arm firmly under that of Farnsworth, seeing that the captain was unsteady on his feet.

"Lean upon me. Come with me, Alice, my child, and I will take him into the house."

Alice picked up the captain's sword and led the way.

It was all done so quickly that Farnsworth, in his half dazed condition, scarcely realized what was going on until he found himself on a couch in the Roussillon home, his wound (a jagged furrow plowed out by slugs that the sword's blade had first intercepted) neatly dressed and bandaged, while Alice and the priest hovered over him busy with their careful ministrations.

Hamilton and Helm were, as usual, playing cards at the former's quarters when a guard announced that Mademoiselle wished an audience with the Governor.

"Bring the girl in," Hamilton said, throwing down his cards and scowling darkly.

"Now you'd better be wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove," remarked Helm. "There is something up, and that gunshot we heard a while ago may have a good deal to do with it. At any rate, you'll find kindness your best card to play with Alice Roussillon just at the present stage of the game."

Of course, they knew nothing of what had happened to Farnsworth; but they had been discussing the strained relations between the garrison and the French inhabitants when the roar of Alice's big mouthed pistol startled them. Helm was slyly beating about to try to make Hamilton lose sight of the danger from Clark's direction. To do this he artfully magnified the insidious work that might be done by the French and their Indian friends should they be driven to desperation by oppressive or exasperating action on the part of the English.

Hamilton felt the dangerous uncertainty upon which the situation rested; but, like many another vigorously self-reliant man, he could not subordinate his passions to the dictates of policy. When Alice was conducted into his presence he instantly swelled with anger. It was her father who had struck him and escaped; it was she who had carried off the rebel flag at the moment of victory.

"Well, miss, to what do I owe the honor of this visit?" he demanded with a supercilious air, bending a card between his thumb and finger on the rude table.

She stood before him tall and straight, well bundled in furs. She was not pale; her blood was too rich and brilliant for that, but despite a half smile and the inextinguishable dimples, there was a touch of something appealingly pathetic in the lines of her mouth. She did not waver or hesitate, however, but spoke promptly and distinctly.

"I have come, monsieur, to tell you that I have hurt Captain Farnsworth. He was about to kill Father Beret, and I shot him. He is in our house and well cared for. I don't think his wound is bad. And—" here she hesitated at last and let her gaze fall—"so here I am." Then she lifted her eyes again and made an inimitable French gesture with her shoulders and arms. "You will do as you please, monsieur; I am at your mercy."

Helm was astounded. Helm sat staring phlegmatically. Meantime Beverley entered the room and stopped hat in hand behind Alice. He was flushed and evidently excited; in fact, he had heard of the trouble with Farnsworth, and seeing Alice enter the door of Hamilton's quarters he followed her in, his heart stirred by no slight emotion. He met the Governor's glare and parried it with one of equal haughtiness. The veins on his forehead swelled and turned dark. He was in a mood to do whatever desperate act should suggest itself.

When Hamilton fairly comprehended the message so graphically presented by Alice, he rose from his seat by the fire.

"What's this you tell me?" he blurted. "You say you've shot Captain Farnsworth?"

"Oui, monsieur."

He stared a moment, then his features beamed with hate.

"And I'll have you shot for it, miss, as sure as you stand there in your silly impudence ogling me so brazenly!"

He leaned toward her as he spoke and sent with the words a shock of coarse, passionate energy from which she recoiled as if expecting a blow to follow it.

An irresistible impulse swept Beverley to Alice's side, and his attitude was that of a protector. Helm sprang up.

A lieutenant came in and respectfully, but with evident overhaste, reported that Captain Farnsworth had been shot and was at the Roussillon place in care of the surgeon.

"Take this girl into custody. Confine her and put a strong guard over her."

In giving the order Hamilton jerked his thumb contemptuously toward Alice, and at the same time gave Beverley a look of supreme defiance and hatred. When Helm began to speak he turned fiercely upon him and stopped him with:

"None of your advice, sir. I have had all I want of it. Keep your place, or I'll make you."

Then to Beverley:

"Retire, sir. When I wish to see you I'll send for you. At present you are not needed here."

The English lieutenant saluted his commander, bowed respectfully to Alice and said:

"Come with me, miss, please."

Helm and Beverley exchanged a look of helpless and inquiring rage. It was as if they had said: "What can we do? Must we bear it?" Certainly they could do nothing. Any interference on their part would be sure to increase Alice's danger, and at the same time add to the weight of their own humiliation.

Alice silently followed the officer out of the room. She did not even glance toward Beverley, who moved as if to interfere and was promptly motioned back by the guard. His better judgment returning held him from a rash and futile act, until Hamilton spoke again, saying loudly as Alice passed through the door.

"I'll see who's master of this town if I have to shoot every French hoyden in it!"

"Women and children may well fear you, Colonel Hamilton," said Beverley. "That young lady is your superior."

"You say that to me, sir!"

"It is the best I could possibly say of you."

"I will send you along with the wench if you do not guard your language. A prisoner on parole has no license to be a blackguard."

"I return you my parole, sir; I shall no longer regard it as binding," said Beverley, by a great effort holding back a blow. "I will not keep faith with a scoundrel who does not know how to be decent in the presence of a young girl. You had better have me arrested and confined. I will escape at the first opportunity and bring a force here to reckon with you for your villainy. And if you dare hurt Alice Roussillon I will have you hanged like a dog!"

Hamilton looked at him scornfully, smiling as one who feels safe in his authority and means to have his own way with his victim. Naturally he regarded Beverley's words as the merest vaporings of a helpless and exasperated young man. He saw very clearly that love was having a hand in the affair, and he chuckled inwardly, thinking what a fool Beverley was.

"I thought I ordered you to leave this room," he said with an air and tone of lofty superiority, "and I certainly mean to be obeyed. Go, sir, and if you attempt to escape, or in any way break your parole, I'll have you shot."

"I have already broken it. From this moment I shall not regard it. You have heard my statement. I shall not repeat it. Govern yourself accordingly."

With these words Beverley turned and strode out of the house, quite beside himself, his whole frame quivering.

Hamilton laughed derisively, then looked at Helm and said:

"Helm, I like you; I don't wish to be unkind to you; but positively you must quit breaking in upon my affairs with your ready-made advice. I've given you and Lieutenant Beverley too much latitude, perhaps. If that young fool don't look sharp he'll get himself into a beastly lot of trouble. You'd better give him a talk. He's in a way to need it just now."

"I think so myself," said Helm, glad to get back upon fair footing with the frascible Governor. "I'll wait until he cools off somewhat and then I can manage him. Leave him to me."

"Well, come walk with me to see what has really happened to Farnsworth. He's probably not much hurt and deserves what he's got. That girl has turned his head. I think I understand the whole affair. A little love, a little wine, some foolishness, and the wench shot him."

Helm genially assented; but they were delayed for some time by an officer who came in to consult with Hamilton on some pressing Indian affairs. When they reached the Roussillon place they met Beverley coming out; but he did not look at them. He was scarcely aware of them. A little way outside the gate, on going in, he had picked up Alice's locket and broken chain, which he mechanically put into his pocket. It was all like a dream to him, and yet he had a clear purpose. He was going away from Vincennes, or at least he would try, and woe be to Hamilton on his coming back. It was so easy for an excited mind to plan great things and to expect success under apparently impossible conditions. Beverley gave Jean a note for Alice; it was this that took him to the Roussillon place. And no sooner fell the night than he shouldered a gun furnished him by Madame Godere, and guided by the woodman's fine craft stole away southward, thinking to swim the icy Wabash some miles below, and then strike across the plains of Illinois to Kaskaskia.

It was a desperate undertaking; but in those days desperate undertakings were rather the rule than the exception. Moreover, love was the leader and Beverley the blind follower. Nothing could daunt him or turn him back until he found an army to lead against Hamilton. It seems but a romantic burst of indignation, as we look back at it, hopelessly foolish, with no possible end but death in the wilderness. Still there was a method in love's madness, and Beverley, with his superb physique, his knowledge of the wilderness and his indomitable self-reliance, was by no means without his fighting chance for success.

CHAPTER XII.

MANON LESCAUT, AND A RAPIER THRUST.

Beverley's absence was not noticed by Hamilton until late on the following day, and even then he scouted Helm's suggestion that the young man was possibly carrying out his threat to disregard his parole.

"He would be quite justified in doing it; you know that very well," said Helm with a laugh, "and he's just the man to undertake what is impossible. Of course, however, he'll get scalped for his trouble, and that will cost you something, I am happy to say."

"It's a matter of small importance," Hamilton replied; "but I'll wager you the next toddy that he's not at the present moment a half mile from this spot. He may be a fool, I readily grant that he is, but even a fool is not going to set out alone in this kind of weather to go to where your rebel friends are probably toasting their shins by a fire of green logs and half starving over yonder on the Mississippi."

"Joking aside, you are doubtless right. Beverley is hot-headed, and if he could he'd get even with you devilish quick; but he hasn't left Vincennes, I think. Miss Roussillon would keep him here if the place were on fire!"

Hamilton laughed dryly. He had thought just what Helm was saying. Beverley's attentions to Alice had not escaped his notice.

"Speaking of that girl," he remarked after a moment's silence, "what am I to do with her? There's no place to keep her, and Farnsworth insists that she wasn't to blame." He chuckled again and added:

"It's true as gospel. He's in love with her, too. Seems to be glad she shot him. Says he's ashamed of himself for ever suspecting her of anything but being a genuine angel. Why, he's got as flabby as a rabbit and mumbles like a fool."

"Same as you or I at his age," said Helm, taking a chew of tobacco. "She is a pretty thing. Beverley don't know his foot from his shoulder-blade when she's anywhere near him. Boys are boys. I'm a sort of a boy myself."

"If she'd give up that flag I'd let her go," said Hamilton. "I hate like the devil to confine her; it looks brutal and makes me feel like a tyrant."

"Have you ever happened to notice the obvious fact, Governor Hamilton, that Alice Roussillon and Father Beret are not all the French in Vincennes?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I don't for a moment believe that either the girl or the priest knows a thing about where that flag is. They are both as truthful and honorable as people ever get to be. I know them. Somebody else got that flag from under the priest's floor. You may depend upon that. If Miss Roussillon knew where it is she'd say so, and then dare you to make her tell where it's hidden."

"Oh, the whole devilish town is rotten with treason; that's very clear. There's not a loyal soul in it outside of my forces."

"Thank you for not including me among the loyalists."

"Humph, I spoke of these French people; they pretend to be true, but I believe they are all traitors."

"You can manage them if you try. A little jolly kindness goes a long way with 'em. I had no trouble while I held the town."

Hamilton bit his lip and was silent. Helm was exasperatingly good tempered and his jocularity was irresistible. While he was yet speaking a guard came up followed by Jean, the hunchback, and, saluting, said to Hamilton:

"The lad wants to see the young lady, sir."

Hamilton gazed quizzically at Jean, who planted himself in his habitual attitude before him and stared up in his face with the grotesque expression which seems to be characteristic of hunchbacks and unfledged birds—the look of an embodied and hideous joke.

"Well, sir; what will you have?" the Governor demanded.

"I want to see Alice, if you please."

"What for?"

"I want to give her a book to read."

"Ah, indeed. Where is it? Let me see it."

Jean took from the breast of his loose jerkin a small volume, dog-eared and mildewed, and handed it to Hamilton. Meantime he stood first on one foot, then the other, gnawing his thumb nail and blinking rapidly.

"Well, Helm; just look here!"

"What?"

"'Manon Lescaut.'"

"And what's that?"

"Haven't you ever read it?"

"Read what?"

"This novel—'Manon Lescaut.'"

"Never read a novel in my life. Don't expect to."

Hamilton laughed freely at Helm's expense, then turned to Jean and gave him back the book.

It would have been quite military had he taken the precaution to examine between the pages for something hidden there, but he did not.

"Go, give it to her," he said, "and tell her I send my compliments, with great admiration of her taste in literature." He motioned the soldier to show Jean to Alice. "It's a beastly French story," he added, addressing Helm; "immoral enough to make a pirate blush. That's the sort of girl Mademoiselle Roussillon is!"

"I don't care what kind of a book she reads," blurted Helm; "she's a fine, pure, good girl. Everybody likes her. She's the good angel of this miserable froghole of a town. You'd like her yourself, if you'd straighten up and quit burning tow in your brain all the time. You're always so furious about something that you never have a chance to be just to yourself or pleasant to anybody else."

Hamilton turned fiercely on Helm, but a glimpse of the captain's broad good humored face heartily smiling dispelled his anger. There was no ground upon which to maintain a quarrel with a person so persistently genial and so absurdly frank. And, in fact, Hamilton was not half so bad as his choleric manifestations seemed to make him out. Besides, Helm knew just how far to go, just when to stop.

"If I had got furious at you every time there was overwhelming provocation for it," Hamilton said, "you'd have been long since hanged or shot. I fancy that I have shown angelic forbearance. I've given you somewhat more than a prisoner's freedom."

"So you have, so you have," assented Helm. "I've often been surprised at your generous partiality in my case. Let's have some hot water with something else in it, what do you say? I won't give you any more advice for five minutes by your watch."

"But I want some advice at once."

"What about?"

"That girl."

"Turn her loose. That's easy and reputable."

"I'll have to, I presume; but she ought to be punished."

"If you'll think less about punishment, revenge and getting even with everybody and everything, you'll soon begin to prosper."

Hamilton winced, but smiled as one quite sure of himself.

Jean followed the soldier to a rickety log pen on the farther side of the stockade, where he found the prisoner restlessly moving about like a bird in a rustic cage. It had no comforts, that gloomy little room. There was no fireplace, the roof leaked, and the only furniture consisted of a bench to sit on and a pile of skins for bed. Alice looked charmingly forlorn peeping out of the wraps in which she was bundled against the cold, her hair fluffed and rimpled in shining disorder around her face.

The guard let Jean in and closed the door, himself staying outside.

Alice was as glad to see the poor lad as if they had been parted for a year. She hugged him and kissed his drawn little face.

"You dear, good Jean!" she murmured, "you did not forget me."

"I brought you something," he whispered, producing the book.

Alice snatched it, looked at it, and then at Jean.

"Why, what did you bring this for? you silly Jean! I didn't want this. I don't like this book at all. It's hateful. I despise it. Take it back."

"There's something in it for you, a paper with writing on it; Lieutenant Beverley wrote it on there. It's shut up between the leaves about the middle."

"Sh-s-sh! Not so loud; the guard will hear you." Alice breathlessly whispered, her whole manner changing instantly. She was trembling and the color had been whisked from her face, as the flame from a candle in a sudden draught.

She found the note and read it a dozen times without a pause, her eyes leaping along the lines back and forth with pathetic eagerness and concentration. Presently she sat down on the bench and covered her face with her hands. A tremor first, then a convulsive sobbing, shook her collapsed form. Jean regarded her with a drolly sympathetic grimace, elevating his long chin and letting his head settle back between his shoulders.

"Oh, Jean, Jean!" she cried at last, looking up and reaching out her arms; "O Jean, he is gone! He is gone!"

Jean stepped closer to her while she sobbed again like a little child.

She pulled him to her and held him tightly against her breast while she once more read the note through blinding tears. The words were few, but to her they bore the message of desolation and despair. A great, haunting, hollow voice in her heart repeated them until they echoed from vague distance to distance.

It was written with a bit of lead on the half of a mildewed fly leaf torn from the book:

"Dear Alice: I am going away. When you read this, think of me as hurrying through the wilderness to reach our army and bring it here. Be brave, as you always have been; be good, as you cannot help being; wait and watch for me; love me, as I love you. I will come. Do not doubt it; I will come, and I will crush Hamilton and his command. Courage, Alice dear; courage, and wait for me. Faithfully ever, BEVERLEY."

She kissed the paper with passionate fervor, pouring her tears upon it in April showers between which the light of her eyes played almost fiercely, so poignant was her sense of a despair which bordered upon desperation. "Gone, gone!" It was all she could think or say. "Gone, gone!"

Jean took the offending novel back home with him, hidden under his jerkin; but Beverley's note lay upon Alice's heart, a sweet comfort and a crushing weight, when an hour later Hamilton sent for her and she was taken before him. Her face was stained with tears and she looked pitifully distressed and disheveled, yet despite all this her beauty asserted itself with subtle force.

Hamilton felt ashamed looking at her, but put on sternness and spoke without apparent sympathy:

"Miss Roussillon, you came near committing a great crime. As it is, you have done badly enough; but I wish not to be unreasonably severe. I hope you are sorry for your act and feel like doing better hereafter."

She was trembling, but her eyes looked steadily straight into his. They were eyes of baby innocence, yet they irradiated a strong womanly spirit just touched with the old perverse, mischievous light which she could neither banish nor control. When she did not make reply, Hamilton continued:

"You may go home now, and I shall expect to have no more trouble on your account." He made a gesture indicative of dismissal; then, as she turned from him, he added, somewhat raising his voice:

"And further, Miss Roussillon, that flag you took from here must positively be returned. See that it is done."

She lifted her head high and walked away, not deigning to give him a word.

"Humph! what do you think now of your fine young lady?" he demanded, turning to Helm with a sneering curl of his mouth. "She gives thanks copiously for a kindness, don't you think?"

"Poor girl, she was scared nearly out of her life," said Helm. "She got away from you like a wounded bird from a snare. I never saw a face more pitiful than hers."

"Much pity she needs, and greatly like a wounded bird she acts, I must say; but good riddance if she'll keep her place herself hereafter. I despise myself when I have to be hard with a woman, especially a pretty one. That girl's a saucy and fascinating minx and as dangerous as twenty men. I'll keep a watch on her movements from this on, and if she gets into mischief again I'll transport her to Detroit or give her away to the Indians. She must stop her high-handed foolishness."

Helm saw that Hamilton was talking mere wind, vox et praeterea nihil, and he furthermore felt that his babbling signified no harm to Alice; but Hamilton surprised him presently by saying:

"I have just learned that Lieutenant Beverley is actually gone. Did you know of his departure?"

"What are you saying, sir?"

Helm jumped to his feet, not angry, but excited.

"Keep cool; you need not answer if you prefer silence or evasion. You may want to go yourself soon."

Helm burst out laughing, but quickly growing serious, said:

"Has Beverley been such a driveling fool as that? Are you in earnest?"

"He killed two of my scouts, wounded another, and crossed the Wabash in their canoe. He is going straight toward Kaskaskia."

"The idiot! Hurrah for him! If you catch your hare you may roast him, but catch him first, Governor!"

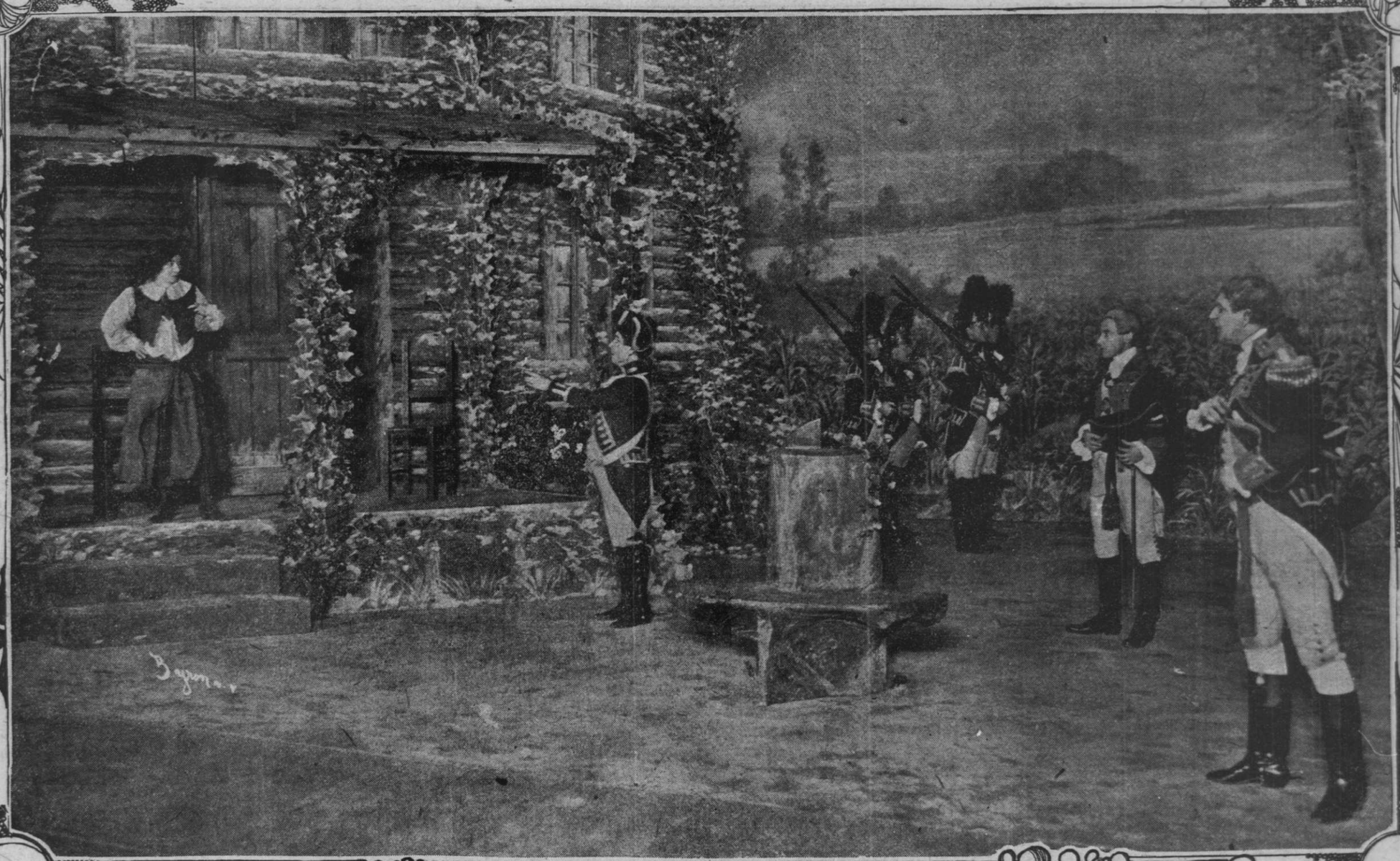
"You'll joke out of the other corner of your mouth, Captain Helm, if I find out that you gave him aid or countenance in breaking his parole."

"Aid or countenance! I never saw him after he walked out of this room. You gave him a devil of a sight more aid and countenance than I did. What are you talking about! Broke his parole! He did no such thing. He returned it to your fairly, as you well know. He told you he was going."

"Well, I've sent twenty of my swiftest Indians after him to bring him back. I'll let you see him shot. That ought to please you."

"They'll never get him, Governor. I'll bet high on him against your twenty scalp-lifters any day. Fitzhugh Beverley is the best Indian fighter, Daniel Boone and Simon Kenton excepted, in the American colonies."

On her way home Alice met Father Beret, who turned and walked beside her. He was so overjoyed at her release that he could scarcely speak, but held her hand and stroked it gently while she told



"LET'S HAVE NO FURTHER WORDS. GO AND GET THE FLAG MADEMOSIELLE."