

MUNROE KIRK

AT WAR WITH PONTIAC;
OR, THE TOTEM OF THE
BEAR: A TALE OF
REDCOAT AND REDSKIN

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Kirk Munroe

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CHAPTER I

TAWTRY HOUSE

A glorious midsummer day was drawing to a close; its heat had passed; the tall forest trees, whose leaves were pleasantly rustled by the cool breeze of approaching night, flung a bridge of tremulous shadows across the surface of Loch Meg, and all nature was at peace. The tiny lake, though bearing an old-world name, was of the new world, and was one of the myriad forest gems that decked the wilderness of western New York a century and a half ago. It was embraced in a patent recently granted by the English king to his well-approved servant Graham Hester, whose bravery and wounds had won for him an honorable retirement, with the rank of major in a Highland regiment, ere he was forty years of age. Being thus provided with an ample estate, Major Hester, with his young wife and half a dozen trusty followers, left the old world for the new, and plunged into its wilderness. Though somewhat dismayed to find his property located a score of leagues beyond that of his nearest white neighbor, the major was at the same time gratified to discover in that neighbor his old friend and comrade, William Johnson, through whose diplomacy the powerful Iroquois tribes of the Six Nations were allied to the English and kept at peace.

On a crest of land overlooking and sloping gently down to the blue lakelet which Major Hester had named in honor of his wife, he erected a substantial blockhouse of squared timbers. Behind it were ranged a number of log outbuildings about three sides of a square, in the centre of which was dug a deep well. Having thus in a time of peace prepared for war, the proprietor began the improvement of his estate with such success that, within three years from the felling of the first tree, several acres of gloomy forest were replaced by smiling fields. A young orchard was in sturdy growth, a small herd of cattle found ample pasturage on the borders of the lake, and on all sides were evidences of thrift and plenty.

The military instinct of the proprietor caused all forest growth to be cleared from a broad space entirely around the rude fortress that held his life's treasures; but within the enclosure he left standing two superb oaks. These not only afforded a grateful shade, but gave a distinctive feature to the place that was quickly recognized by the surrounding Indians. Thus they always spoke of it as the house of the two trees, or two-tree house, a name that soon became "Tawtry House," under which designation it was known from the unsalted seas to the tide waters of the distant Shattemuc.

Tawtry House not only offered a ready welcome and bountiful hospitality to the occasional hunter, trader, or traveller tempted by business or curiosity into that wild region, but to the Indians who still roamed the forest at will and had established one of their villages at no great distance from it. With these, by the exercise of extreme firmness and an inflexible honesty, Major Hester succeeded in maintaining friendly relations, in spite of their jealousy of his presence among them. At the same time, his wife, through her gentleness and ready sympathy in their times of sickness or distress, gained their deep-seated affection.

Although the Iroquois were thus at peace with their English neighbors, there was a bitter enmity between them and the French settlers of Canada, who had espoused the cause of their hereditary foes, the tribes dwelling along the St. Lawrence and on both shores of the great fresh-water lakes. Most prominent of these were the Ottawas, Hurons or Wyandots, Ojibwas and Pottawattamies, who were allied in a defensive league against their powerful enemies. Their ancient hatred of the Iroquois,

animated by the traditions of generations, was ever fanned into a blaze by Jesuit priests eager for the triumph of their faith, French traders anxious to monopolize the immensely profitable fur business of the new world, and French soldiers determined at any cost to extend the empire of their king. Thus, on one pretext or another, war parties were constantly coming and going, destroying or being destroyed, and it well behooved the adventurous frontier settler to intrench himself strongly behind massive timbers and stout palisades.

Under these conditions and amid such scenes, in the year 1743, when Tawtry House was still sweet-scented with odors of the forest from which it had been so recently hewn, was born Donald Hester, as sturdy a young American as ever kicked in swaddling clothes, and the hero of this tale of the forest.

On the midsummer evening with which our story opens, Major Hester and his wife walked, hand in hand, beyond the palisades of their fortress home, enjoying the marvellous beauty of their surroundings and talking of many things. Already had this wilderness home become very dear to them; for, representing years of toil and privation as it did, it was their very own and the heritage of their boy, now two years of age, who toddled behind them in charge of a ruddy-cheeked Scotch nurse. While they rejoiced over what had been accomplished, they planned for the future, and discussed the details of many projected improvements. At the outlet of the lake a grist-mill should be built, and the low lands beyond should be drained to afford increased pasturage for their multiplying herd.

As they talked there came a sound from the forest depths that caused them to pause and listen. Borne faintly on the evening breeze, was a distant firing of guns, and they fancied that it was accompanied by a confusion of yells from human throats.

"Oh, Graham! what can it mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Hester, as she clasped her husband's arm and glanced instinctively back, to make sure of the safety of her child.

"Nothing that need alarm you, my dear," answered the major, reassuringly. "It is only a token of some jollification among our Indian friends: a war dance, or a scalp dance, or the advent among them of a new lot of wretched captives, or something of that kind. I remember Truman mentioning, more than a week ago, that another war party had gone out. I do wish though that the Senecas would take it into their heads to move their village farther away. I used to think five miles quite a respectable distance, but now—"

"I would that this horrible fighting were ended," interrupted Mrs. Hester. "Will not the time ever come, Graham, when these poor heathen will cease from their dreadful wars, and live at peace with each other, like civilized beings?"

"Like civilized beings, my dear?" laughed Major Hester. "Yes, I think I may safely prophesy that if the time ever comes when those nations which we call civilized give over fighting, then even the red Indians may be persuaded to follow their example. As for their methods of warfare, they are but the counterparts of those practised by our own savage ancestors a few centuries ago; while in their torture of captives they are only reproducing the acts of civilized Romans, mediaeval knights, and the Holy Inquisition. It is not long since, even in England, Elizabeth Gaunt was burned to death at Tyburn for yielding to the dictates of compassion and giving shelter to a political offender; nor are the cries for mercy of the martyrs tortured at Smithfield stakes yet forgotten. The torture of New England witches is recent history, while the dismal record of devilish tortures inflicted by white men upon Indian captives is unbroken from the days of Columbus. Did not Frontenac cause an Iroquois warrior to be burned alive in order to terrorize his fellows? Did not—"

The honest major was so warmed to his subject that he might have discoursed upon it indefinitely, had he not been startlingly interrupted. He and his wife were retracing their steps toward the house, and, as before, the Scotch maid, with her toddling charge, was some paces behind them. At a wild scream from the girl those in advance turned in time to see the flying form of a young Indian, who had just emerged from the near-by forest, fall headlong at her feet. His naked body was pierced by wounds, and his strength was evidently exhausted. As he fell, a second Indian, in whose right

hand gleamed a deadly tomahawk, leaped from the woodland shadows, and, with a yell of triumph, bounded toward his intended victim. He was closely followed by two others.

As the Scotch girl stood motionless with terror, little Donald, evidently believing this to be some new form of game provided for his especial edification, ran forward with a gurgle of delight, stumbled, and fell directly across the head of the prostrate Indian. But for the child's sudden movement the keen-bladed hatchet in the hand of the foremost pursuer, already drawn back for the deadly throw, would have sped on its fatal mission.

With a cry of anguish Mrs. Hester sprang toward her baby; but quicker than she, with a leap like that of a panther, Major Hester gained the spot first, snatched up his child, and, over the body of the young Indian, sternly confronted his scowling pursuers.

CHAPTER II

THE MAJOR GAINS A FRIEND AND MAKES AN ENEMY

For some seconds the three Indians, who were panting heavily from the effect of their long chase through the forest, gazed in silence at the white man who with the child in his arms so fearlessly confronted them. Then the foremost of them, an evil-looking savage who bore the name of Mahng (the Diver), motioned the major aside with a haughty wave of the hand, saying: "Let the white man step from the path of Mahng, that he may kill this Ottawa dog who thought to escape the vengeance of the Senecas."

Without retreating an inch from his position, and still holding the little Donald, who crowed with delight at sight of the Indians, Major Hester replied:—

"Not even if the whole Seneca tribe demanded it would I allow this man to be murdered in the presence of my wife. Nor, since my child has saved his life, will I deliver him into your hands for torture. He has sought my protection, and it shall be granted him until he is proved unworthy of it. Let the sachems of your tribe lay this grievance before Sir William Johnson. If the white chief decides that the prisoner must be restored to them, and so orders, then will I give him up, but not before. Now go, ere my young men, who are already approaching, reach this place and drive you from it with whips, like yelping curs."

Being sufficiently acquainted with the English language to comprehend the purport of these remarks, the scowling savage made answer:—

"Who gave the white man the right to step between an Indian and an Indian? This land is Indian land. The long house in which the white man dwells belongs to the Indians, as did the forest trees from which it is built. If the Indian says stay, then may you stay; if he says go, then must you go. Let one of your young men but lift a hand against Mahng, and this ground that has known the tread of the white man shall know it no more forever. His house shall become a hooting place for owls, and Seneca squaws shall gather the harvest of his fields. Restore then to Mahng his prisoner, that there may be no bad blood between him and his white brother."

"Never," replied Major Hester, who was sufficiently versed in the Indian tongue to catch the general drift of these remarks.

He had hardly uttered the word ere Mahng stooped, darted forward with deadly intent like a wild serpent, and sought to bury his gleaming hatchet in the brain of his still prostrate foe.

Like a flash the major's strong right foot shot out; the heavy, hob-nailed walking-shoe caught the savage squarely under the chin; he was lifted from the ground, and, falling on his back, lay as one who is dead.

The remaining savages made as though to take instant vengeance for this deadly insult and, as they imagined, murder of their leader, but their impulse was checked by a stern command from behind. Glancing in that direction, they saw themselves covered by a long, brown rifle-barrel, held by a white man clad in the leathern costume of the backwoods. At the same time half a dozen laborers who, home-returning from the fields, had noticed that something unusual was taking place, came hurrying to the scene of disturbance. Wisely concluding that under these circumstances discretion was the better part of valor, the Senecas picked up their helpless comrade and, retreating as rapidly as their burden would permit, disappeared amid the darkening shadows of the forest.

The tableau presented at this moment by those who remained was that of the tall major standing above the prostrate form of the escaped captive, holding his laughing child in one arm while his trembling wife clung to the other. Close beside them knelt the terror-stricken maid, with her face buried in her hands, and a few paces in the rear were grouped the laborers, armed with various

implements of toil. In the foreground, Truman Flagg, the hunter, white by birth, Indian by association and education, leaned on his rifle and gazed silently after the disappearing savages. As they vanished in the forest, he remarked quietly:—

"'Twas handsomely done, major, and that scoundrel Mahng deserved all he got. But ef he's as dead as he looks, I'm fearful that kick may get you into trouble with the tribe, though he's not a Seneca by blood, nor overly popular at that."

"You know him, then?" queried the major.

"Not edzackly what you might call know him; but I know something of him."

"Very well; come up to the house and tell me what you know, while we consider this business. Some of you men carry this poor fellow to the tool-house, where we will see what can be done for him. Now, my dear, the evening meal awaits us, and I for one shall partake of it with a keener relish that this unfortunate affair has terminated so happily."

"I pray God, Graham, that it may be terminated," replied Mrs. Hester, fervently, as she took the child from its father's arms and strained him to her bosom.

The whole of this dramatic scene had transpired within the space of a few minutes, and when the men approached to lift the prostrate Indian they found him so recovered from his exhaustion as to be able to stand, and walk feebly with the aid of some support.

Major Hester's first duty, after conveying his wife and child to the shelter of the blockhouse, was to visit the guest so strangely thrust upon his hospitality and inquire into his condition. He found him lying on a pallet of straw, over which a blanket had been thrown, and conversing with Truman Flagg in an Indian tongue unknown to the proprietor. The hunter was bathing the stranger's wounds with a gentleness that seemed out of keeping with his own rude aspect, and administering occasional draughts of cool well water, that appeared to revive the sufferer as though it were the very elixir of life.

"What do you make of the case?" asked the major, as he watched Truman Flagg apply to each of the many gashes in the Indian's body a healing salve made of bear's grease mixed with the fragrant resin of the balsam fir. "Will he pull through, think you?"

"Bless you, yes, major! He'll pull through all right; for, bad as his hurts look, none of em's dangerous. They warn't meant to be. He was nighest dead from thirst. You see, he's been under torture most of the day, without nary a drop to wash down his last meal, which war a chunk of salted meat give to him yesterday evening. He'll pick up fast enough now, though. All he needs to make him as good as new is food and drink, and a night's rest. After that you'll find him ready to go on the war-path again, ef so be he's called to do it. He's the pluckiest Injun ever I see, and I've trailed, fust and last, most of the kinds there is. Ef he warn't, I wouldn't be fussin' over him now, for his tribe is mostly pizen. But true grit's true grit, whether you find it in white or red, and a man what values hisself as a man, is bound to appreciate it whenever its trail crosses his'n."

"A sentiment in which I must heartily concur," assented the major. "A brave enemy is always preferable to a cowardly friend. But is this Indian an enemy? To what tribe does he belong?"

"Ottaway," was the laconic answer.

"Ottawa!" exclaimed the major, greatly disconcerted. "Why, the Ottawas are the firmest allies of France and the most inveterate enemies of the English. Are you certain he is an Ottawa?"

"Sartain," replied the hunter, with a silent laugh at the other's evident dismay. "And not only that, but he's the best fighter and best man in the whole Ottaway tribe. They call him Songa, the strong heart, and I consate Sir William would be passing glad to exchange one hundred pounds of the king's money for his scalp to-morrow."

"Why don't you earn it, then?" asked, the other. "Surely one hundred pounds could not be gained more easily, nor is it a sum of money to be despised even by an independent American woods-ranger like yourself."

For answer the hunter rose slowly to his full height, and, holding a candle above his head, so that its light shone full on the proprietor's face, regarded him intently for a score of seconds.

"You don't mean it, Major Hester! Thank God, you don't mean it! for your face belies your words, and proves you to be an honest man," he said at length. "Ef I thought you meant what you just said, and was one to tempt a poor man to commit a murder for the sake of gold, I would never again sit at your table, nor set foot in your house, nor look upon your face, nor think of you save with the contempt an honest man must always feel for a villain."

"No, Truman. I did not mean what I said," replied the major, holding out a hand that was heartily grasped by the other. "I spoke out of curiosity to hear your reply, though I might have known it would have the ring of true steel. Now I must return to my wife, and if you will join us, after you have done what you can for this poor fellow, we will consult concerning the situation, for it is no light thing to hold Songa the Ottawa as prisoner in one's house."

CHAPTER III

TRUMAN FLAGG'S STORY

Truman Flagg was a son of one of those hardy New England families which, ever pushing into the wilderness in the extreme van of civilization, were the greatest sufferers from the forays of French and Indians, who every now and then swept down from Canada, like packs of fierce Northern wolves. In one of these raids his parents were killed, and the lad was borne away to be adopted among the Caughnawagas, who dwelt on the St. Lawrence, not far from Montreal. With these Indians he lived for several years, and having a natural taste for languages, acquired, during this time, a fair knowledge of the tongues of most of the Northern tribes, as well as a smattering of French. He also became well versed in woodcraft, and so thoroughly Indian in appearance and habit that when he was again captured by a marauding party of Maquas, or Mohawks, it was not detected that he was of white blood until he was stripped for the ordeal of the gantlet, in an Iroquois village. His identity being thus discovered, his latest captors washed from him his Caughnawaga paint, repainted and reclad him in Mohawk fashion, and treated him in all respects like a son of the tribe. Having thus exchanged one form of Indian life for another, Truman Flagg remained among the Iroquois long enough to master their languages, and receive the name of Honosagetha, or the man of much talk. Finally, he attracted the attention of Sir William Johnson, and became one of the general's interpreters, as well as a counsellor in Indian affairs. After awhile the forest ranger so fretted against the restraints of civilization and town life, as he termed that of the frontier settlement clustered about Johnson Hall on the lower Mohawk, that when Major Hester, searching for an experienced guide and hunter, offered him the position, he gladly accepted it. Since then, save when his services were required as a messenger between Tawtry House and the river settlements, he had been free to come and go as he pleased, provided he kept his employer fairly well provided with all varieties of game in its season. Thus he was able to spend much of his time in roaming the forest, passing from one Indian village to another, keeping himself posted on all subjects of interest to these wilderness communities, and ever watching, with eagle eye, over the safety of the Tawtry House inmates. He was a simple-hearted fellow, of sterling honesty, and a keen intelligence, that enabled him to absorb information on all subjects that came within his range, as a sponge absorbs water. Although of slender build, his muscles were of iron, his eyesight was that of a hawk, and as a rifle-shot he had no superior among all the denizens of the forest, white or red. During three years of mutual helpfulness, a strong friendship had sprung up between this son of the forest and the soldier, whose skilled valor on old-world battle-fields had won the approbation of a king. Now, therefore, the latter awaited with impatience the coming of the hunter, whose advice he deemed essential before deciding upon any plan of action in the present crisis.

When Truman Flagg appeared, and reported his patient to be sleeping soundly after having eaten a hearty supper, the major asked what he knew concerning the young Ottawa, and was answered as follows:—

"As fur as I kin make out, major, Mahng, the fellow you laid out so neatly awhile ago, is a Jibway, while Songa is an Ottaway, and son of the head chief, or medicine man, of the Metai, a magic circle of great influence among the lake tribes. Not long ago both Songa and Mahng courted a young Jibway squaw, who was said to be the handsomest gal of her tribe. They had some hot fights over her; but from the first she favored Songa, and so, of course, the other fellow had no show. Finally, Songa married her and carried her away to the Ottaway villages. On this, Mahng swore to be revenged on both of 'em, and as the Jibways and Ottaways is good friends, he come and jined the Senecas on purpose to get a chance at Songa. Here, seeing as he belongs to the totem of the wolf, which is strong among the Senecas, and as he isn't in noways a coward nor lacking in good fighting sense, he soon

made a name for himself as a warrior, and could raise a party agin the Ottaways any time he chose. Most of the fighting that's been going on since you came here has been stirred up by Mahng, and ef the whites gets drawed into it, it'll be his doings. With all his smartness he never met up with Songa, or leastways never got the best of him, till this last time, when, fur as I kin make out, they caught him and his squaw and their young one travelling from one Ottaway village to another. They say Songa made the prettiest fight ever was seen, killed half a dozen of Mahnga party, and held 'em all off till his squaw had made good her escape with the child. Then he give up, and they brought him in. They waited till he got well of his hurts, and then they set out to kill him by as mean and devilish a lot of tortures as ever I see."

"You don't mean to say," interrupted the other, "that you were one of the spectators at a scene of torture, and did nothing to prevent it?"

"Sartain I do, major. It's part of my business to see such things. It's also part of my business to keep the peace, so fur as I kin, betwixt Injuns and whites, which it would have been broke very sudden ef I had interfered with an Injun execution of an Injun captive. They was only acting 'cording to their light, and I acted 'cording to mine."

"I suppose you are right," assented the major, "but I am glad I was not in your place, and sorry that the savages should have had the encouragement of your presence at one of their devilish orgies."

"They've had that many a time, major, when I couldn't help myself," replied the hunter, soberly. "They didn't get any encouraging from me this day, though, for they didn't see me. I was too snugly hid for that. But to make a short story, they tormented that poor chap in one way and another until I thought he must be done for, and all the time he never uttered a sound except to jeer at 'em, nor quivered an eyelash. Once, when they saw he was nearly dead with thirst, they loosed his hands and gave him a bowl of cool spring water; but as he lifted it to his lips, they dashed it to the ground. After that they held another bowl of water close to his face, but he never gratified 'em by making a move to try and drink it."

"Finally, they made a circle of dry wood around him and set fire to it. Then I thought it was all up with the poor fellow, and his torment would soon be over. I was just saying this to myself when something swift and still as a shadder brushed past the place where I was hid. I had just time to see that it was a woman, when she cleared the woods like a flash, ran to the stake, never minding the flames more'n ef they'd been a shower of rain, and cut Songa free."

"He gave a great leap, like a deer, out of the ring of fire that was slowly roasting him, knocked down two or three warriors that stood in his path, and gained the woods, with her close beside him, almost before any one knew what had happened. A score of rifle balls whizzed after them, but they wasn't hit, and they had a clear start of a hundred yards afore the crowd took after 'em. Mahng was the only one who could keep 'em in sight, and when they separated at the foot of the lake, he taking up one side, and she the other, Mahng trailed the one he hated most, which was Songa."

"How did you happen to see all this?" inquired the major. "They must have passed from view of your hiding-place very quickly."

"Oh, I jined in the hunt, too," replied Truman Flagg. "I thought some one might find it handy to have me 'round. Besides, I was feeling cramped and in need of a bit of exercise."

"Well, it was handy to have you around," said the major, heartily, "and it will be long ere I forget the gratitude with which I saw you at that critical moment. I am thankful, too, that the poor fellow escaped and sought the refuge he did, though what I am to do with him is more than I can imagine. I wish with all my heart that he were well on his way toward the Ottawa villages. But who was the woman who rescued him so splendidly, and what do you suppose became of her?"

"He claims her as his squaw," replied the hunter, "and ef she's where I left her, she's setting watching him at this moment."

"You don't mean it! How can she be?" cried the major, jumping to his feet.

"I do mean it; and she can be beside him because I let her in myself, not half an hour ago, and locked the door after me when I come out."

"Then come with me at once, for I must go and see them," exclaimed the proprietor, starting toward the door.

"Hold a bit, major. Don' you think that maybe Songa has earned a few hours of uninterrupted rest?" asked the hunter.

"Yes, you are right, he certainly has," replied the major, as he again sank into his chair.

CHAPTER IV

ESCAPE OF THE PRISONERS

Mrs. Hester, who had been putting her child to sleep, entered the room in time to hear the conclusion of the hunter's story, which she found intensely interesting. Like her husband, she was filled with a desire to see the brave woman who, daring all for the man she loved, had, alone and unaided, saved him from a horrible fate. With him, though, she agreed that it would be cruel to disturb the much-needed and bravely earned rest of their guests. Thus it was decided that they should wait until morning before visiting those whom Fate had so strangely thrust upon their hospitality. In the meantime, were they guests or prisoners, and what was to be done with them? Long and animated was the discussion of these questions, which were finally settled by the major, who said: "They are both. For this night they are our guests. To-morrow morning I shall set a guard over them, for their protection as well as our own. Thus they will become prisoners. If by the time the Ottawa warrior is sufficiently recovered of his wounds to travel, I have received no word to the contrary from Johnson, I shall let him go, and bid him God speed. If, however, I should receive orders to continue to hold him, or even to deliver him over to his savage captors, which God forbid, I can conceive of no alternative save that of obedience."

"Oh, Graham! You wouldn't, you couldn't, deliver that splendid Indian and his brave wife to the awful fate that would await them!" cried Mrs. Hester.

"I don't think that I could give up the woman nor that I would be required to, seeing that she was not a prisoner of war; but with the man it is different. He is a chief in the tribe who have proved themselves most inveterate foes of the English, and, from what Flagg tells me, I should judge a man of extraordinary ability. His death at this time might prove the future salvation of hundreds of white men, women, and children. To allow him to escape may involve us in war. The decision either way will be fraught with far-reaching results, and I am thankful that it does not rest with me. Whatever Johnson may order in a case of this kind must be obeyed, without regard to our private views, for he is the accredited representative, in this section, of the king, God bless him, whom we are sworn to serve. At any rate, we may rest easy this night, and for two yet to come; for, even if the Senecas lay this grievance before the governor, it must still be several days ere I can hear from him."

"Oh dear!" sighed Mrs. Hester, "I suppose you are right, Graham, of course, but the contingency is too dreadful to contemplate. I believe I would even go so far as to help these poor people to escape, and so defy the governor, rather than allow them to be given up; for I know the wife will insist on sharing her husband's fate, whatever it may be."

"I don't believe you would, my dear, if you first paused to consider what effect your action might have upon the future of your own boy," replied her husband, gravely.

Before retiring for the night the major and Truman Flagg cautiously approached the tool-house, and, listening at its single open window, which was merely a slit cut through the logs at the back to serve as a loop-hole for musketry, plainly heard the heavy breathing that assured them of the safety of the prisoners. Then the major bade his companion good-night, and turned toward his own quarters. He had gone but a few steps when the hunter overtook him and handed him the key of the tool-house, saying that he should feel more at ease with it in the proprietor's possession. As they again separated, he remarked that being so very weary, he feared he should sleep late the following morning.

In spite of this, Truman Flagg was up and stirring while it yet wanted an hour of dawn. Lighting a small dark-lantern and moving with the utmost caution, he made, from various places, a collection of food, clothing, and arms.

"It's what the major in his heart wishes done, I'm sartain," he muttered to himself, "and what the madam would never forgive me ef I left undone. I could see that in her face."

Having completed his preparations, the hunter stepped lightly across the parade ground, as the major called the enclosed square, and opened the tool-house door, which he had softly unlocked, in anticipation of this time, the moment before handing its key to Major Hester. Carefully as he entered the building, its inmates were instantly wide awake and aware of his presence. With a few whispered words he explained the situation to Songa, adding that while the white chief had no authority to free a prisoner, he was unwilling that one whose life had been saved by his child should be restored to those who would surely kill him. "Therefore," continued the hunter, "he bids you make good your escape while it is yet dark, taking with you these presents. He would have you tell no man of the manner of your going, and bids you remember, if ever English captives are in your power, that you owe both life and liberty to an English child."

"To you," he added, turning to Songa's heroic wife, "the white squaw sends the greeting of one brave woman to another. She bids you go in peace, lead your husband to the lodges of his people, and restore him to the child who, but for her child, would now be fatherless."

As the young Ottawa, assisted by his loving wife, slowly gained his feet and painfully straightened his body, whose stiffened wounds rendered every movement one of torture, he answered simply:—

"The words of my white brother are good. Songa will never forget them. If all white men were like him, there would be no more fighting, for the hatchet would be buried forever."

While both the hunter and the squaw rubbed the sufferer's limbs with bear's grease, and so in a measure restored their suppleness, the latter said in a low voice, that was yet thrilling in its intensity:—

"Tell my white sister that through her words I can understand the love of the Great Spirit for his children. They have sunk deep into my heart, where their refreshing shall ever be as that of cool waters."

In the first faint flush of the coming dawn two dusky figures slipped, with the silence of shadows, from among the buildings of Tawtry House, sped across the open, and vanished in the blackness of the forest. At the same time Truman Flagg, well satisfied with the act just performed, though wondering as to what would be its results, returned to his own lodging, flung himself on his couch of skins, and was quickly buried in slumber.

He was awakened some time later by the voice of his employer, calling, "Come, Flagg! Turn out! the sun is all of two hours high, and here you are still sleeping. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

As the hunter emerged from his cabin, yawning and stretching, the major continued: "I am on my way to visit our guests, or prisoners, as I suppose we must now call them, and want you to act as interpreter. Whether guests or prisoners, we must not allow them to starve, and if they are half as hungry as I am at this moment, they must feel that they are in imminent danger of it."

The honest soldier was amazed to find the door of the tool-house unlocked, and still more so to discover that the place was empty. "What does it mean?" he cried angrily. "Have we a traitor among us? or is it witchcraft? Surely no human being, wounded so nigh unto death as was that Indian but a few hours since, could have effected an escape unaided."

"You forget that the squaw was with him," suggested the hunter.

"True; though how she could have unlocked the door passes my understanding. Are you certain that you locked it after admitting her?"

"I am sartain," replied Truman Flagg, "for I tried it afterwards."

A prolonged, though unavailing, search was made through all the buildings and the adjacent forest that morning. While it was in progress the major appeared greatly chagrined at the turn of events; but his outward demeanor concealed an inward satisfaction that he had not been obliged to abuse the laws of hospitality, by treating his guests as prisoners.

As for Mrs. Hester, she rejoiced so openly at their escape that the hunter was finally emboldened to confess to her his share in it, and deliver the message of the Indian woman.

CHAPTER V

A BABY LOST AND RECOVERED

In the scouting of that morning Truman Flagg took an active part, and he alone of all who were out discovered the trail of the fleeing Ottawas. Following it far enough to assure himself that no unfriendly forest ranger had run across it, he turned his steps in the direction of the Seneca village. Here, although he was received with a certain coolness, arising from his participation in the incident of the previous evening, no affront was offered him, and he had no difficulty in acquiring the information he desired. Thus he was able to report to Major Hester, on his return to Tawtry House, that Mahng not only lived, but was in a fair way to recover from his injury, and that by means of swift runners the grievance of the Indians had already been laid before Sir William Johnson.

This report was confirmed on the following day, by the appearance of a delegation of Seneca chiefs, who brought a note from the governor, and demanded that Major Hester deliver to them the Ottawa captive. Sir William's note, though extremely courteous, was very firm, and contained an unmistakable order for restoration to the Senecas of their lawful prisoner. It also chided the major for interfering between Indians, at a risk of disturbing the friendly relations between the English and their Iroquois neighbors.

With the reading of this note an angry flush mantled the soldier's bronzed cheeks, and he seemed on the point of expressing his feelings in forcible language. Controlling himself with a visible effort, and bidding Truman Flagg interpret his words, he replied to the chiefs as follows:—

"Brothers: I have listened to your demand and find it a just one. The talking-paper of the white chief bids me deliver to you a prisoner known as Songa the Ottawa. The orders of the white chief must be obeyed, as I would obey this one were it possible to do so, but it is not. Listen. As I walked before my lodge, a stranger, whom I had never seen, ran from the forest and fell at my feet. He was bleeding from many wounds, and exhausted from long running. An enemy followed, and sought to kill him; when my son, a little child, threw himself across the stranger's neck and saved his life. Was not that a sign from the Great Spirit that he wished the stranger to live? Could I do less than was done by that little child? You know I could not. You know that no Seneca warrior would allow a man to be killed who sought his protection in such a manner. So I lifted this stranger and took him to my lodge. At the same time I told his enemy that I would keep him until an order could be brought from the great white chief for him to be delivered up. Now you have brought that order, and, were the stranger still in my lodge, I would deliver him to you; but he is not. He left me that same night. How, I know not. He was sore wounded, and was lodged in a secure place, but in the morning he was gone. I am told that he is a medicine man of the Metai. May he not have been removed by the magic of his circle? No matter. He was here and is gone. You look to me for him, and I cannot produce him. That is all. I have spoken."

A dignified old Seneca chief arose to reply, and said; "We have heard the words of my white brother, and we believe them to be true, for his tongue is not crooked. He alone of all white men has never lied to us. He says the prisoner is gone, and it must be so. But it is not well. Our hearts are heavy at the escape of so brave a captive. What, then, will my brother give us in his place, that the heaviness of our hearts may be lifted?"

"I will give you," replied Major Hester, "two guns, and ten red blankets, twenty pounds of powder and fifty pounds of lead, one piece of blue cloth, one piece of red cloth, and five pounds of tobacco. Is it enough?"

"It is enough," answered the chief, while the eyes of his companions glistened at the prospect of this munificent present. "But," he continued, "there was a woman. What will my brother give for her?"

"Nothing," answered the white brother, promptly, "for she was not your prisoner."

"Ugh!" grunted the Indians.

"There is also Mahng," continued the savage diplomat, whose rule of action was that of his white colleagues in the same service; namely, to give as little and get as much as possible. "What will my brother give him to help the healing of his wounds?"

"I will give Mahng a handsome present whenever he shall come to receive it, that there may be no bad blood between us," was the answer; and with these concessions the Indians expressed themselves as well content.

The proprietor of Tawtry House kept his word in regard to the presents; but Mahng never came to claim those set apart for him. Instead of so doing, he sent word to Major Hester that no gift, save that of his life's blood, would ever atone for the insult of that kick, nor wipe out the enmity between them.

"So be it, then, if he will have it so," replied the soldier, with a light laugh, when this was reported to him; but his wife turned pale and trembled as she recalled the undying hate expressed by Mahng's scowling face. Nor was the Ojibwa's threat an entirely idle one, as the settlers discovered to their sorrow, when several of their cattle were killed, an outbuilding was burned, and finally the major himself had a narrow escape with his life, from a shot fired by an unseen foe. Finally, these things became so annoying that Sir William Johnson notified the Senecas to drive Mahng from their country, or hand him over to the whites for punishment, unless they wished to forfeit the valuable annual present, sent to them by their great Father of England, an instalment of which was then due.

As the Diver was by no means popular in his adopted tribe, he was promptly carried across the Niagara river, and forbidden ever to set foot on its eastern shore again, under penalty of death. Having performed this virtuous act, the Senecas moved eastward to the long council-house of the Six Nations, which was located in the country of the Onondagas, where they were to receive their presents and share in the deliberations of their confederacy.

It was two months after the incidents above described, and several weeks had passed without an Indian having been seen in the vicinity of Tawtry House. So absolutely peaceful were its surroundings that the vigilance of its inmates was relaxed, and during the daytime, at least, they came and went at will, without a thought of insecurity.

This peace was rudely broken one morning by shrill cries from the Scotch nurse maid who, an hour before, had strolled with her infant charge toward the lake. She now ran to the house in an agony of terror, and uttering unintelligible screams. It was at first believed that the child was drowned, but finally the distracted parents gleaned from the girl's half-coherent words that she had left him in safety at some distance from the shore, for a single minute, while she stepped to the water's edge for a drink. When she returned he had disappeared, nor was there any answer to her calling.

For two days search parties scoured the surrounding forest, but without avail. There was not an experienced trailer among them, Truman Flagg being with Sir William Johnson at the Onondaga council-house. Toward the close of the second day, while Major Hester and most of his men were still engaged in their fruitless search, the heartbroken mother walked listlessly to the place where her child had last been seen. She had already been there many times, unconsciously, but irresistibly attracted to the spot.

On this occasion, as she was about to turn back, there came to her ear the cry of an infant. Like a tigress robbed of her young, and with blazing eyes, the bereaved woman sprang in the direction of the sound, and in another instant her child, alive and well, was clasped to her bosom. He had been hidden beneath the low-spreading branches of a small cedar, and she snatched him from a bark cradle, exquisitely made and lined with costly furs.

Like one pursued by a great terror, she fled to the house with her precious burden, nor would she permit one to take it from her until her husband's return.

When they examined the child they found him without scratch or blemish, save for a curious and inflamed disfiguration on his left arm, just below the shoulder. Though this soon healed, it was

long before its mystery was explained; but when Truman Flagg saw it, he pronounced it to be the tattooed mark of an Indian totem.

CHAPTER VI

THE WILDERNESS

In a new country the changes effected during sixteen years are apt to be greater than those of a lifetime in long-established communities. Certainly this was the case in North America during the sixteen years immediately preceding that of 1763. The bitter fighting between England and France for the supremacy of the new world that began with the signal defeat of the English army under Braddock, in 1755, was ended four years later by Wolfe's decisive victory on the Plains of Abraham. A year later France retired from the conflict and surrendered Canada, with all its dependencies, to the English. These dependencies included a long chain of tiny forts, about some of which were clustered thrifty French settlements that extended entirely around the Great Lakes and south of them into the valley of the Ohio. Among these were Niagara at the mouth of the river of that name, Presque Isle on the site of the present city of Erie, Sandusky, Detroit, Mackinac, Fort Howard on Green Bay, and Fort St. Joseph near the southern end of Lake Michigan. While from its commanding position the most important of these forts was the first named; the largest, and the one surrounded by the most thriving settlement was at Detroit. Here the fort itself was a palisaded village of one hundred compactly built houses standing on the western bank of the Detroit river. Beyond it, on both sides for nearly eight miles, stretched the prosperous settlement of French peasants, whose long, narrow farms reached far back from the river, though in every case the tidy white houses and outbuildings stood close to the water's edge.

The English settlements at the close of the war with France had not crossed the Alleghanies, and in the province of New York the western bank of the Hudson was an almost unbroken wilderness. Through the country of the Six Nations, and by their especial permission, a military route, guarded by a line of forts, had been established, though it was clearly understood by the Indians that all these should be abandoned as soon as the war was ended. This route began at the frontier town of Albany. Here the traveller left the clumsy but comfortable sloop on board which he had perhaps spent a week or more on the voyage from New York, and embarked in a canoe or flat-boat, which was laboriously poled against the swift current of the Mohawk river. Thus he passed the old Dutch town of Schenectady, Johnson Hall and Johnson Castle, Forts Hunter and Herkimer, and at length reached the head of river navigation at Fort Stanwix. From here a short portage through the forest led him to the waters of Wood creek, where he might again embark and float with the sluggish current to the Royal Blockhouse on the shore of Oneida lake. Crossing this, and passing under the walls of Port Brewerton at the source of the Oswego river, he would descend the swift waters of that stream to Fort Oswego on the shore of Lake Ontario. From here his course in any direction lay over the superb waterways of the great inland lakes whose open navigation was only interrupted by a toilsome portage around the great cataract of the Niagara river.

Beyond these few isolated dots of white settlements and the slender lines of communication between them, the whole vast interior country was buried in the shade of an unbroken forest that swept like a billowy sea of verdure over plains, hills, valleys, and mountains, screening the sunlight from innumerable broad rivers and rushing streams, and spreading its leafy protection over uncounted millions of beasts, birds, and fishes. Here dwelt the Indian, and before the coming of the white man the forest supplied all his simple needs. Its gloomy mazes were threaded in every direction by his trails, deep-trodden by the feet of many generations, and forming a network of communication between all villages and places of importance. So carefully did these narrow highways follow lines of shortest distance and easiest grade, that when the white man began to lay out his own roads he could do no better than adopt their suggestions.

With the coming of the whites, the life of the Indian was subjected to sudden and radical changes. Having learned of the existence and use of guns, knives, kettles, blankets, and innumerable other things that appealed to his savage notions of comfort and utility, he must now have them, and for them would trade furs. So the fur traders became important features of the forest life, and their business grew to be so immensely profitable that its control was one of the prime objects for which England and France fought in America. The little forts that the French scattered over the country were only trading-posts, and at them, so long as their builders ruled, the Indians were treated with a fairness and courtesy that won their firm friendship and made them staunch allies in times of war. But when the French power was broken, and the Indians, without at all understanding why, found that they must hereafter deal only with English fur traders, all this was changed.

There was no longer a war on hand nor a rival power in the land, therefore the necessity for conciliating the Indian and gaining his friendship no longer existed. The newcomers did not care so much for furs as they did for land. For this they were willing to trade rum, but not guns, knives, powder, or bullets. These must be kept from the Indian, lest he do mischief. He no longer found in the white man a friend, but a master, and a very cruel one at that.

It was now considered good economy to withhold the presents that in war time had been so lavishly bestowed on the Indians, and the one problem that the English sought to solve was how to get rid of the undesirable red man as cheaply and quickly as possible. The little trading-posts, in which he had been made a welcome guest, were now filled with red-coated soldiers, who called him a dog and treated him as such. He became ragged and hungry, was driven from the homes of his fathers, and finally began to perceive that even the privilege of living was not to be granted him much longer. He grew desperate, and his hatred against those who had driven away his kind French friends and brought about all his present misery became very bitter. He saw plainly that if he did not drive these redcoats back to the sea whence they came, they would soon sweep his race from the face of the earth. There seemed to be only a few white men and many Indians; but while the former were united under one great leader, the latter were divided into many tribes with many little leaders. If they, too, would only find some great chief, under whom all the tribes could unite, how quickly would they wipe out the hated redcoats and teach the English to respect their rights. Perhaps as soon as they began to fight for themselves the white-coated soldiers of France would come again to help them. At any rate, certain white men told them this would happen, and they were believed. If only they could find a leader!

Gradually, but with convincing proof, it dawned upon the unhappy Indians that a great leader had arisen among them, and was ready to deal the decisive blow that should set them free. To tribe after tribe and to village after village came messengers bearing broad belts of wampum and the crimson hatchet of war. They came in the name of Pontiac, war chief of the fierce Ottawas, head medicine man of the powerful Metai, friend of Montcalm, staunch ally of the French during the recent war, and leader of his people at the battle of the Monongahela, where stubborn Braddock was slain with his redcoats, and even the dreaded "long-knives" from Virginia were forced to fly.

Far and wide travelled the messengers of this mighty chieftain, and everywhere was his war hatchet eagerly accepted. Far and wide went Pontiac himself, and wherever his burning words were heard the children of the forest became crazed with the fever of war. Finally, the fierce plan was perfected. The blow was to be struck at every British post west of Niagara on the same day. With the fall of these, the triumphant forest hordes were to rush against the settlements and visit upon them the same cruel destruction that had overtaken their own villages whenever the white man had seen fit to wipe them from his patch.

While this movement had gained ground until the fatal storm was just ready to burst, it had been conducted with such secrecy that only one white man even suspected its existence, and his name was Graham Hester.

CHAPTER VII

THE MAJOR RE-ENTERS ACTIVE SERVICE

On the breaking out of the French war, Major Hester accepted his friend's invitation to remove his family to Johnson Hall, and make that his home during the troublous times that would render Tawtry House an unsafe place of residence. This he did the more readily on account of his wife's health, which was so precarious that, while the major was confident he could defend his forest fortress against any ordinary attack, he feared lest the excitement of such an affair might prove too much for the frail woman who was dearer to him than life.

Alas for his precautions! During the wearisome eastward journey, the travellers were drenched by a fierce storm of rain and hail that was followed by a chilling wind. So furious was the tempest that it was impossible to wholly protect the invalid from it, and in less than a week thereafter the noisy bustle of Johnson Hall was silenced for an hour by her funeral. So deeply did the rugged soldier feel his loss, that he vowed he would never again set foot in the house that had been hers, and that, as soon as he could make provision for his children, he would seek in battle for the king, that reunion with his loved one that death alone could grant.

The children thus deprived of a mother's tender care were Donald, now a sturdy lad of twelve years, and Edith, a dainty little maiden two years younger. The former was wise beyond his years in forest lore, which he had eagerly imbibed from the tuition of that master of woodcraft, Truman Flag. At the same time he was sadly deficient in a knowledge of books and many other things that go to make up the education of a gentleman. Him, therefore, the major decided to send to New York to be fitted for the college then known as "King's," but afterwards famous under the name of "Columbia."

Against this decision the lad raised strenuous objections, declaring that his sole ambition was to become a soldier, and that such a one could learn to fight without the aid of books.

"True, my son, so he can, after a fashion," replied the major, gravely. "But, in the art of war, as in every other art, all our teachings come from those who have preceded us, and the most important of these are recorded in the books they have left for our consideration. Again, as the soldier of to-day is the modern representative of the chivalrous knight of olden time, he must needs be a gentleman, and an uneducated gentleman would be as sorry a spectacle as an unarmed soldier in battle. So, my dear boy, accept thy fate kindly and make a soldier's fight against the enemy named ignorance. Upon the day of thy graduation from King's College, if my influence can compass it, which I doubt not it can, a commission in one of His Majesty's American regiments shall await thy acceptance. I shall send our little lass with thee, and both she and thyself will be entertained in the household of Madam Rothsay, the widow of a dear friend of mine, who has agreed to receive you and fulfil, so far as may be, a mother's duty toward my motherless children."

The major escorted his children as far as Albany, where he embarked them, together with the Scotch nurse who had cared for both of them from their birth, on board a packet-sloop that should carry them to their new house. Having thus made provision for the welfare of his dear ones, the lonely man proceeded to fulfil the destiny he had planned by joining as a volunteer aid the army which, under General Johnson, was charged with the capture of Crown Point on Lake Champlain. In this campaign it was largely owing to Major Hester's soldierly knowledge and tactical skill that the French army, under Baron Dieskau, which had advanced as far as the southern end of Lake George, was defeated. For this victory Sir William Johnson was raised to a baronetcy and presented with a purse of five thousand pounds.

Through the war Major Hester fought with one army or another, always in the forefront of battle, as he was a leader in council; but never finding the boon of death which he craved. At length he stood with Wolfe on the lofty Plain of Abraham, and in the fall of Quebec witnessed the fatal

blow to French power in America. In all this time he had never returned to the forest house that he had last looked upon in company with his beloved wife. Whether his resolution not to visit it would have lived to the end can never be known, for in the second year of the war a marauding party from an army, which, under Montcalm, had just captured and destroyed Oswego, reached Tawtry House and burned it to the ground.

After the surrender of Canada, Major Hester visited his children in New York City. Here he found his boy, grown almost beyond recognition, domiciled in the new King's College building, then just completed, and doing well in his studies, but keenly regretting that the war was ended without his participation. The white-haired soldier also found his daughter, Edith, now fifteen years of age, budding into a beautiful womanhood, and bearing so strong a resemblance to her mother that he gazed at her with mixed emotions of pain and delight.

During his stay in the city, the major was frequently consulted upon military affairs by the English commander-in-chief, Sir Jeffry Amherst, who finally begged him to accompany the expedition which he was about to send into the far west, under the redoubtable Colonel Rogers, of ranger fame, to receive the surrender of the more distant French posts.

"Rogers is impetuous, and needs a man of your experience to serve as a balance-wheel," said Sir Jeffry. "Besides, I want some one of your ability and knowledge of Indian affairs to take command of Detroit, the principal settlement and most important trading-post in the west. So, Hester, if you will accept this duty, you will not only be serving the king, but doing me a great personal favor as well."

Willing to continue for a while longer in active service, and having no other plan, Major Hester accepted Sir Jeffry's offer, and set forth on his long journey, joining Rogers at Fort Niagara, where, with the aid of cranes and ox-teams, the rangers were laboriously transporting their heavy whale-boats over the steep portage around the great cataract.

At length the little flotilla was again launched, and as it skirted the southern shore of Lake Erie, its every movement was watched by the keen eyes of Indian scouts, concealed in dense forest coverts, and reported in detail to the chief of that country; for never before had a body of British troops ventured so far into the interior. Finally, in one of their camps the rangers were visited by an imposing array of Indian sachems, headed by the great chief himself, who demanded the reason of their presence in his country.

When Rogers, in reply, had stated the nature of his business, the chief began a speech, in which he forbade the further advance of the English. Suddenly his eye rested upon Major Hester, who had just left his tent to attend the council. The speech of the Indian came to an abrupt pause, and gazing fixedly at the white-haired officer, he inquired if he were not the chief who dwelt in the great house of the two trees in the land of the Senecas.

"I did dwell there," replied the major, greatly surprised at the question.

"Does my brother of the two-tree house wish to journey through the country of the Ottawas?" demanded the chieftain.

"Certainly, I do," was the reply.

"For peace or for war?" queried the savage, laconically.

"For peace," answered Major Hester. "The war is ended, and we do but journey to take peaceable possession of those forts which the French have given over to the English."

"Ugh! It is good! Let my white brother travel in peace, for Pontiac knows that his tongue is straight, and that what he says must be true words."

With this the haughty chieftain, followed by his savage retinue, left the camp, and not another Indian was seen until Detroit was reached, though, as was afterwards learned, a strong body of Pontiac's warriors had awaited them at the mouth of the Detroit river, and were only restrained from attacking the flotilla by their leader's express command.

Neither Major Hester nor Colonel Rogers knew what to make of this curious behavior on the part of the powerful Indian who had evidently been determined to oppose their progress. The

former could not recall ever having seen him or held intercourse with him, though, after he assumed command of Fort Detroit, Pontiac paid him frequent visits, and always evinced a strong friendship for the honest soldier, who invariably treated him and his people with consideration and fairness. Frequently, too, Pontiac complained to the major of the outrages perpetrated by other English commanders, their brutal soldiers, and the horde of reckless traders who swarmed through the country. He declared that if they were continued, the Indians would rise against their oppressors and sweep them from the face of the earth.

Fully appreciating the state of affairs, but powerless to alter it for the better, save in his own jurisdiction, Major Hester appealed to Sir William Johnson, begging him to visit the western country and use his powerful influence to quiet the growing discontent. This Sir William did with great pomp and ceremony in 1761, finding himself just in time to quell, by lavish presents and still more lavish promises, a general uprising of the Algonquin tribes. The peaceful relations thus established lasted but a short time, however, and within a year the aggressions of the whites had become more pronounced, and the situation of the Indians more desperate than ever. Pontiac had disappeared from the vicinity of Detroit, and for many months Major Hester had not seen him. At the same time he was well informed of the cruelties practised upon the natives, and foresaw that they could not much longer be restrained from retaliating in their own bloody fashion. Being unwilling to fight on the side of injustice and oppression, he at length prayed Sir Jeffry Amherst to relieve him from his command. This request was granted, and late in 1762 he was succeeded by Major Gladwyn, an officer with a brave record as a fighter and unhampered by any troublesome consideration of the rights or wrongs of Indians. Although thus relieved of his command, certain duties arose to detain Major Hester for several months at Detroit; and the momentous spring of 1763 found him still an inmate of that frontier post.

CHAPTER VIII

DONALD SETS FORTH ON A PERILOUS MISSION

No rising sun ever witnessed a fairer scene than that presented by the little wilderness settlement of Detroit on the sixth of May, 1763. All nature was rejoicing in the advent of spring and donning its livery of green. The broad river, flowing southward with a mighty volume of water from four inland seas of which it formed the sole outlet, was lined as far as the eye could reach with the white houses and fertile fields of French farmers. From these, spirals of blue smoke curled peacefully, and the voices of cattle answered each other in morning greetings. A darker mass of buildings on the western bank denoted the palisaded village in which dwelt the British garrison, their wives and children, and some fifty fur traders, with their Canadian employees. The houses within the palisades, about one hundred in number, were mostly low, wooden structures, roofed with bark or thatch. The village was square in form, and while one side opened on the river, the other three were enclosed by wooden walls, twenty-five feet in height, with log bastions at the corners, and a blockhouse over each of the three gateways. Several pieces of light artillery were mounted on the bastions, and anchored in the river lay the armed schooners *Beaver* and *Gladwyn*. At some distance from the fort, both up and down the river, rose the smoke of populous Indian villages, for all the natives of that section were in from their winter hunting, and gathered at this point for trade. Over the placid waters light canoes occasionally darted from bank to bank. A boat brigade, bound for the far north, was just starting from the fort, and the Canadian voyageurs, gay with fringes, beads, and crimson sashes, caused the morning air to ring with a tuneful chorus as boat after boat shot away and stemmed the current with lusty oars.

Not far from the point of this noisy embarkation was another, though much less ostentatious scene of departure and leave-taking. In the stern of a birch canoe, paddle in hand and evidently impatient to be off, sat one of Rogers' buckskin-clad rangers, who was about to revisit his distant New Hampshire home, for the first time in three years. Near by, on the strand, stood two men, both tall and possessed of a military bearing. One, who wore the undress uniform of an officer, was elderly and white-haired, while the other, slender, and clad much as was the ranger in the canoe, was in the first flush of splendid young manhood. As these two stood hand in hand, the younger said: "Can I not persuade you, father, even at this last moment, to change your mind and accompany us? Poor Edith will be so dreadfully disappointed."

"I fear she will, Donald," returned Major Hester, with a sad smile, "but as this life is mainly composed of disappointments, the sooner she learns to bear them with composure, the better. I had indeed looked forward to taking this journey with you, to clasping my dear girl in my arms once more, and ere the year was ended to rebuilding Tawtry House, in which to establish her as mistress. With the war ended, I fondly hoped that a certain degree of happiness were still possible to me, and looked forward to securing it by some such means as I have just outlined."

"And is it not, father?" broke in the youth, eagerly. "Surely you have done far more than your duty here, and—"

"No man has done that, Donald, so long as there remains an unperformed task for which he is fitted," interrupted Major Hester, gravely. "So long as I believe a crisis in Indian affairs to be imminent, and that by remaining here I may be able to avert it, at least until the reinforcements which it is now yours to hasten can arrive, it is clearly my duty to stay. So off with you, lad. Don't run any risks that can just as well be avoided, and don't try to avoid any that, if successfully taken, will serve to speed your errand. Farewell, my son. May God bless you and keep you and bring your enterprise to a happy termination."

After the canoe had departed, Major Hester ascended one of the water bastions, where he watched it until it became a tiny speck, and finally vanished behind the projecting land then known as Montreal point.

Donald Hester had striven so manfully with his studies that he was finally graduated from King's College, well toward the head of his class, during the previous summer. Thereupon he had been rewarded with his heart's desire, an ensign's commission in the Royal Americans. To the new and fascinating duties of his chosen profession he at once devoted himself with such ardor as to draw favorable comment from his superiors. After serving at several posts he had, to his great delight, been transferred to Detroit, where the soldier father and soldier son, each more than proud of the other, were joyfully reunited after their years of separation. Here, too, he renewed his boyhood's intimacy with forest life, and eagerly resumed his long-neglected studies in wilderness lore, and woodcraft.

Although Donald was generally liked by his brother officers, he had no taste for the dissipations with which they sought to relieve the monotony of their lives. In place of these, he chose to take gun or fishing-rod and go off on long excursions in his canoe. On one of these occasions, when far down the river and in vigorous pursuit of a wounded duck, he had the misfortune to break his only paddle short off. In a moment he was helplessly drifting with the powerful current toward the open waters of Lake Erie. In this dilemma, his only resource was to paddle with his hands, and attempt by this tedious method to force his craft to the nearest shore. While he was thus awkwardly engaged, there came it ripple of laughter from close beside him, and he started up just in time to gaze squarely into the laughing face of an Indian girl, who instantly impressed him as the most graceful creature he had ever seen. She occupied, with a girl companion, a beautifully painted and ornamented canoe, which had slipped up to him with the lightness of a thistle-down. As the young soldier caught sight of her she was in the very act of tossing a paddle into his own helpless craft.

Then the strange canoe darted away like an arrow, while the only answer to the young man's fervently expressed thanks was a merry peal of laughter, coupled with an exclamation, of which he caught but the single word "ah-mo." These were wafted back to him as the flying canoe disappeared behind the point of a small island. With a desire to learn something more of the bewitching forest maiden, who had come so opportunely to his aid, Donald urged his own craft vigorously in that direction, but when he rounded the point there was no trace to be seen of those whom he sought.

So deep an impression had the olive-tinted face, the laughing eyes, and the jetty tresses of the girl who tossed the paddle to him made upon the young ensign, that they haunted both his sleeping and his wakeful hours; but, plan as he might, he could not succeed in seeing her again, nor did his cautiously worded inquiries serve to elicit the slightest information concerning her.

Perhaps it was well for the efficiency of the service that about this time Major Gladwyn selected Donald to be the bearer of certain despatches to Sir William Johnson, concerning the reinforcements and supplies that he expected to receive by the spring brigade of boats from Niagara. Major Hester, who had intended to return East about this time, suddenly decided to remain at Detroit a while longer. He therefore intrusted a number of private despatches to the young courier, both for Sir William and General Amherst. Besides its more important despatches, Donald's canoe was freighted with a large packet of letters from members of the garrison to distant friends and loved ones. Thus it set forth on its long and perilous voyage followed by fond hopes and best wishes from every member of the band of exiles left behind.

CHAPTER IX

ST. AUBIN'S STARTLING INFORMATION

When Major Hester slowly and thoughtfully returned to his quarters after witnessing the departure of his son, he found sitting on the doorstep, and patiently awaiting his coming, a Canadian woman. Beside her stood her stolid-looking husband, whom the major recognized as a well-to-do farmer of the settlement, to whom he had granted some trifling favors while in command of the post.

"Good-morning, madame. Good-morning, St. Aubin. To what am I indebted for the honor of this early call? What can I do for you?" asked the old soldier, in answer to the humble salutations with which they greeted his approach.

"Ah! monsieur, we have come," began the woman.

"Certainment, we have come," echoed her husband.

"Jean!"

"Pardon, Marie."

"We have come with despair on account of the previous abounding kindness of monsieur, to divulge him—"

"A secret! A secret terrible!" exploded the old man, who was nervously standing first on one foot and then on the other.

"Jean!"

"Oui, Marie."

"If you have an important secret to confide, had we not better enter the house?" suggested the major, who saw from the excited earnestness of the worthy couple that something very unusual had occurred to agitate them.

They accepted this invitation, and the major finally gleaned from their combined and interjectory statements that on the previous day Madame St. Aubin, visiting the Ottawa village, had surprised a number of warriors in the act of cutting off the long barrels of their guns, until the entire length of each weapon was not more than a yard. Moreover, she had overheard an Indian who was somewhat under the influence of liquor boast that ere many days he would have English scalps with which to fringe his leggings.

"Has any one else seen these things or noted symptoms of uneasiness among the Indians?" demanded the major.

"Yes. Basil, the blacksmith, has been troubled for days by Indians begging for loans of files and saws, for what purpose they would not state."

"But why do you not carry this matter to Major Gladwyn, who is in command, instead of to me, who now possess no authority?"

"Because, monsieur, the commandant makes of us a jest and cares not to listen. Aussi, because we care not for him; but to you, monsieur, who have formerly turned many of our sorrows into joys, we wish not that harm should come. For ourselves, we have no fear. The savages will not harm the French. But for the English, whom they love not—well, there it is different."

"You think, then, that the fort is in danger?"

"Of an attack, monsieur. Yes."

"How soon?"

"Who can tell? Perhaps in one week. Perhaps even to-morrow."

"Will you come again this evening, before the gates are closed, and bring any further information you may gain during the day?"

"We dare not, monsieur. All the French are now too closely watched. This morning we sell eggs. In the evening it would be known that we had no business."

"If I leave the post an hour after sunset and walk just beyond the church, will you meet me there and deliver to me your information?"

"If it is possible, we will; for the thing that monsieur demands must be granted on account of his, oftentimes of the heart, kindness."

After the departure of these people, Major Hester thoughtfully made his way to the quarters of the commanding officer, whom he found at breakfast.

Gladwyn, though a brave man and a thorough soldier, was a high liver, inclined to dissipation, impatient of advice, and held an undisguised contempt for all Indians. To crown all, he was extremely jealous of the ascendancy over the native tribes gained by his predecessor in command, whom he cordially disliked and wished out of the way. On the present occasion he greeted him in courteous terms, but coldly and without rising.

"This is indeed an early call, major. I suppose I am indebted for the pleasure to the fact that Ensign Hester took an early departure, according to instructions, and your paternal instinct led you to speed his journey. I must confess my surprise that you did not accompany him. I suppose you are waiting for the opportunity of a more comfortable passage by schooner. For my part, I prefer the excitement of a canoe voyage; but I suppose as one grows old—"

"A soldier never grows so old as to forget his duty, Major Gladwyn," answered the elder officer, stiffly. "And I can assure you that only a strong sense of duty causes me to linger in a place where my presence is so evidently undesirable. But I have not interrupted your breakfast for the purpose of discussing personalities. I desire to lay before you a bit of information that has just come to my knowledge, regarding certain suspicious movements among the Indians, who, as you must be aware, are gathered about the post in unusual numbers. They are cutting off their gun-barrels to such a length that the weapons may be concealed beneath their blankets. I have this direct from St. Aubin, whose wife, visiting the Ottawa village yesterday, discovered its inmates to be thus engaged."

"It must have been an interesting sight," replied Gladwyn, carelessly, "but I fail to perceive what possible interest it can have for me. I suppose the rascals have learned that they can shoot just as effectively, or rather as ineffectively, with short gun-barrels as with long, and so have wisely decided to do away with useless weight. By Jove, Hester, I have laughed more than once at the shrewdness of our traders who sell cheap flint-lock muskets to the redskins for as many otter or beaver skins as can be piled between stock and muzzle, and have these trade guns built with an increased length each year. Rather clever, is it not?"

"It is a bit of infamous cheating that will sooner or later recoil on our own heads," replied the other, hotly. "But that is neither here nor there. The question is, whether or not the Indians mean to attack this post, and whether it is prepared for an attack in case they do?"

"If they only would, my dear sir, I for one should welcome it as a cheerful break in the deadly monotony of our lives in this forsaken place. As for preparations, you should be among the last to question that the troops of His Most Gracious Majesty of England are always prepared to meet any number of naked savages under any circumstances."

"That was Braddock's opinion," remarked Major Hester, grimly, "and he paid for it with his life. But granting that we are able to withstand an attack, are we prepared for a siege?"

"Oh come, major!" exclaimed Gladwyn, rather testily, "that question is rather a severe test of one's credulity. As if it were possible for a parcel of howling redskins to conduct a siege! No one knows better than you that their only method of fighting is a surprise, a yell, a volley, and then a retreat. They are absolutely incapable of sustained effort."

"Are you acquainted with Pontiac, the present war chief of the united tribes?" inquired Major Hester, coldly.

"Certainly I am, and a more conceited, ignorant, boastful, treacherous, cowardly, and utterly worthless bit of red humanity than he I have yet to meet. I have already warned him away from this

section of country, and if he persists in remaining where he is so little wanted, I shall be obliged to teach him a lesson."

"Very well, major, if these are your unalterable opinions regarding the present state of affairs, I have nothing more to say, save to wish you a very good morning," replied the elder officer, as he turned to leave. "However," he added, "I shall still consider it my duty to report any further bits of information that may come to me."

"While thanking you, I beg you not to inconvenience yourself to do so," remarked Gladwyn, frigidly, and with this the interview ended.

That evening, while a dull glow still lingered in the western sky, though the shadows of dusk were fallen on the fort and its surroundings, Major Hester passed the sentry at one of the gates and walked slowly, as though for an aimless stroll, as far as the little French-Canadian church. On reaching it he detected a dim figure in its shadow and asked in a low tone, "Is that you, St. Aubin?"

"No, monsieur," was the answer, in a girl's voice, "but I am his daughter, and am come in his place, as he is detained by company. He bade me deliver a message to you alone and then hasten back." With this the girl almost whispered in the ear of the old soldier a few words that caused his teeth to clench and his heartstrings to tighten. She had hardly concluded, when an approaching step from the direction of the fort caused her to spring aside and fly with the swiftness of a deer.

"Who goes there?" challenged Major Hester.

"Pardon me, major," answered the well-known voice of the commandant. "I had no idea I was interrupting a tête-à-tête. In fact, I did not associate you with trysts of this kind."

"That will do, Major Gladwyn," interrupted the other, sternly. "I have but this minute learned that on the morrow Pontiac, with sixty of his warriors, all having guns concealed beneath their blankets, will demand to hold a council with you. The leader will make a speech, at the conclusion of which he will present a belt of wampum. Your taking of that belt will be the signal for a general massacre of every English soul within the limits of Fort Detroit, save only the one to whom the chief has presented his calumet."

"Do you believe this cock-and-bull story, Hester?" demanded the startled commander.

"Even now is the war dance in progress," was the reply. "Listen!"

At that moment a waft of night air bore to their ears the sullen booming of distant war drums and the wild chorus of quavering yells with which the frenzied savages across the river greeted Pontiac's declaration of war against the hated English.

"By Heaven, Hester! I believe you are right," cried Gladwyn, as he listened to these ominous sounds. "At any rate, I will accept your warning, and make such preparations as will show those devils that we are not to be caught napping."

CHAPTER X

PONTIAC DECLARES WAR

Although Gladwyn caused half of his force to be kept under arms that night, and doubled his sentries, nothing occurred to disturb the settlement. In the morning, as the rising sun dispelled the fleecy mist-clouds from above the river, a fleet of canoes was seen crossing from the eastern shore. These effected a landing at some distance above the fort, and soon afterwards the wide, open common behind it was animated by the presence of hundreds of Indians. There were stately warriors in paint and blankets, young braves stripped to the waist-cloth for a game of ball, maidens whose cheeks were ruddy with vermilion, robed in embroidered and beaded garments of fawn skin, and naked children, frolicking like so many puppies. Save in the occasional scowling face and preoccupied air of some dark-browed warrior, and a slow but noticeable gathering of these near the principal gate of the fort, there was nothing to arouse suspicion or indicate that these visitors had any save the most friendly feelings toward the whites.

Pontiac having sent word to Major Gladwyn that he desired to meet the white chief in council, about ten o'clock the Indian leader and some sixty of his principal men were seen approaching in single file from the direction of the bridge across Parent's creek, a mile and a half north of the fort. As they drew near the great gateway, it was noticed that in spite of the heat of the day every warrior was wrapped to the chin in his gayly colored blanket. The faces of all were streaked with ochre, vermilion, white, and black paint, while from their scalp-locks depended plumes of eagle, hawk, or turkey feathers, indicative of their rank or prowess in battle.

As the great gate was swung open to admit this barbaric procession, they entered the fort with stately tread and in grave silence, led by the mighty chief, who, with proudly lifted head and flashing eyes, looked every inch a forest king. Suddenly he started, uttered a deep ejaculation, and half turned as though to retreat. On either side of the street down which he must pass to the council-house was drawn up a motionless line of red-coated soldiers. Above them their fixed bayonets glinted ominously in the bright sunlight. Behind them every house was closed, and at the street corners stood groups of stalwart fur traders, surrounded by their half-savage employees, all armed to the teeth. In all these rigid figures there was a grim air of determination, though no sound was to be heard save the measured throbbing of an unseen drum.

It is no wonder that Pontiac started. In a single glance he saw that he had been betrayed and that his plan was known. Still, his hesitation was but momentary and hardly noticed ere with immobile face he resumed his march toward the great council-house that stood near the water's edge, on the further side of the town. As the procession of fierce warriors, decked in the fullest glory of savage habiliment, moved slowly down the street, frightened faces gazed furtively at them from behind half-closed blinds, while the regular tap of the unseen drum seemed to assume an angrier tone, as though impatient to break forth in the furious rattle of a "charge."

In the council-house the Indians found Gladwyn and his officers seated in a semicircle at the upper end, waiting to receive them. They also noted that each of these, besides being in full uniform, wore his sword and a brace of pistols. At this additional evidence of the discovery of their design, and that they had placed themselves completely within the enemy's power, the warriors exchanged uneasy glances, and seemed inclined to make a rush for the door rather than seat themselves on the mats prepared for them.

"Why," demanded Pontiac, "do I see so many of my white brother's young men standing outside with guns in their hands?"

Gladwyn replied that it was customary for his soldiers to go through with an armed drill every day.

When the Indians were finally seated, one of them filled, lighted, and handed to Pontiac the great chief's own superb calumet. Its red stone bowl, which held a quarter of a pound of tobacco, was carved with rare skill, and its long stem was curiously inlaid with shell-work, besides being ornamented with quills and feathers. After each member of the council, white as well as red, beginning with Gladwyn, had slowly drawn a whiff from this mighty calumet, and it came again to Pontiac, he rose and said:—

"In token of the peace which I desire shall always exist between the red man and his white brother I now present this pipe to these friends, that they may keep it forever. That its message may be heard with open ears, I deliver it to the care of the oldest among you, to him whose hair is white with the wisdom of many years."

Thus saying, the chief stepped forward and laid the gorgeous calumet across the knees of Major Hester, while a grunt of approbation came from the throats of those behind him. Gladwyn, who alone of the assembled whites knew the meaning of this act, cast a startled and suspicious glance at the veteran soldier thus singled out for some other fate than death, while the recipient himself was noticeably embarrassed by the incident.

But the attention of all was immediately occupied by other things. Holding a splendid belt of wampum in his hands, Pontiac was now addressing Gladwyn with the eloquence for which he was so justly famed. He recounted the many outrages suffered by his people at the hands of the English, and especially their fur traders. Against these he demanded protection. He spoke for nearly an hour, during which time his every gesture was keenly watched by the English officers, who feared that in spite of their precautions he might still attempt some desperate move.

Pontiac was in a dilemma. It was customary at the close of a speech to present the belt of wampum, which the speaker always held, to him who was expected to reply. To omit this formality would be equivalent to a declaration of war. It had been understood that his followers were to fall upon the English officers the moment he should make this presentation, and there had been no opportunity to alter this prearranged programme. So the great chief hesitated, held out the fatal belt, and then made a motion as though to withdraw it. Gladwyn extended his hand. As he did so, there came a rattling clash of arms from a passageway at the lower end of the hall and a deafening din of drums.

Pontiac started, dropped the belt of wampum, thrust a hand within his blanket, as though to draw a weapon, reconsidered, folded his arms, and stood motionless. In an instant all was again silent, and Gladwyn rose to address the council as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

He told the Indians that he would consider their grievances, and would do all that lay in his power to afford them protection, so long as they deserved it. At the same time he threatened them with a terrible punishment should they undertake to remedy their wrongs by any act of aggression against the whites. Then he dismissed the council, and the crestfallen warriors were allowed to leave the fort. Before departing, Pontiac notified the English commander that he should come again in a few days for another talk; but Gladwyn only turned contemptuously away, without deigning a reply.

Two days later the common behind the fort was again thronged with Indians, representing four tribes, and from out the throng Pontiac again approached the gate. It was barred against him, and when he demanded admittance, Gladwyn himself replied, ordering him to begone, as neither he nor his rabble would again be received.

Furious with rage, the chief strode away, and ordered his warriors to withdraw beyond gunshot, but to see that no Englishman was allowed to leave the fort. Then launching a canoe he crossed the river to his own village, which he ordered to be removed to the western bank.

While he was thus occupied, his infuriated followers were engaged in the murder and scalping of two English families who dwelt beyond reach of the fort. That night the inmates of Detroit, armed and sleepless, listened with heavy hearts to the doleful sounds of the scalp dance, mingled with the exulting yells of the war dance, and while prepared to sell their lives as dearly as possible, wondered

how long their frail defences would withstand the fierce onset which they momentarily expected would be made against them.

Daylight found many of them, exhausted by the night's vigil, dozing at their posts. Suddenly the blood-curdling war-whoop arose from all sides at once, a rattling volley of rifle-shots pattered against the palisades, and a swarm of yelling, naked figures leaped from the surrounding obscurity. It seemed as though the impetuous assault must succeed from mere force of numbers, for the Indians were counted by hundreds, while the whites were but a handful.

CHAPTER XI

MAJOR HESTER IS TAKEN PRISONER

In spite of the apparent fury of the attack, and the expectation of the garrison that a fierce assault was about to be made on their slender defences, nothing of the kind was contemplated by the Indians. They were not trained to that form of warfare, and when they found that Gladwyn was not frightened into a surrender by noise and an exhibition of force, they contented themselves with maintaining a vigorous fire from behind barns, fences, bushes, slight ridges of earth, or any object of sufficient size to shelter them from the steady return fire of the soldiers. One cluster of buildings, within half-gunshot of the fort, sheltered a large body of Indians, who from this point of vantage directed a particularly galling fire at the loop-holes in the palisades. By it several of the defenders were wounded, until finally a cannon was brought to bear upon the hornet's nest, and a quantity of red-hot spikes were thrust into its muzzle. A minute after its discharge flames burst from the buildings, and the savages who had occupied them were in precipitate flight, followed by jeering shouts and a parting volley from the soldiers.

For six hours was this travesty of battle maintained. Then the Indian fire slackened, and finally ceased altogether. Believing the affair to be merely a temporary outbreak of a few hot-headed savages, that must quickly blow over, Gladwyn took advantage of this lull in the storm to send out two Canadians under a flag of truce to investigate the cause of dissatisfaction. At the same time he proposed, while negotiations were in progress, to secure a supply of provisions with which to stand a siege.

A gate being opened for the departure of the ambassadors, most of the Canadian inhabitants of the fort seized the opportunity to leave it, saying that they could not bear to remain and witness the approaching slaughter of their English friends.

In a short time Gladwyn's messengers returned, saying that Pontiac was willing to arrange terms, but would only do so with Major Hester, and had expressed a strong desire for a visit from that officer.

"Go back and tell him I will see him and his whole cowardly crew hanged, before I will intrust the life of a single Englishman to his treachery!" exclaimed the commander, angrily.

"Hold, Gladwyn!" protested Major Hester. "It is better that one life should be risked than that all should be endangered. Nor do I think I should be in any serious peril. I have always got along with the redskins, and have thus far found Pontiac reasonable."

"I forgot. He did present the calumet to you," replied the other, with a meaning intonation.

"Do you dare insinuate—?" began Major Hester, with a dangerous glitter in his eye.

"No, Hester. No, I do not. I am ashamed of myself and humbly apologize!" cried Gladwyn. "If you insist upon placing yourself within the power of yonder savages, I shall know that you do so from the loftiest sense of duty, with a full knowledge that you jeopardize your life, and with a courage that I fear I for one could not exhibit."

"Thank you, Gladwyn. That was said manfully and like a true soldier. I shall accept this mission because it is plainly in the line of my duty to do so. If I never return from it, I charge you to carry a father's blessing to my children."

The fine old soldier, in full uniform, was accompanied to the gateway by all the officers of the post. There every one shook hands with him, bidding him at once God-speed and farewell, while the soldiers lined the ramparts, and as he emerged from the gates saluted him with a rousing British cheer.

The major was escorted by the two aged Canadians who had been sent out in the first place, and the little party had not covered more than half the ground between the fort and Parent's creek, beyond which lay the Ottawa village, ere they were met by another Canadian running and breathless.

He implored them to turn back, saying that he had just been through the Indian village and was convinced by what he saw and heard that no Englishman could set foot within its limits and live. But Major Hester steadfastly refused to retreat, and insisted on fulfilling his mission.

At length they crossed the creek, mounted the ridge beyond, and saw outspread on its further slope the most extensive Indian village ever known to that region. The moment the hated English uniform was seen by the inmates of the many lodges, they swarmed about the ambassadors by hundreds, the men with scowling brows, the squaws and children snatching up sticks, stones, and clubs as they ran. For a moment the stout heart of the old soldier quailed, for he imagined he was to be subjected to the terrible ordeal of the gantlet.

At the same time not a trace of emotion appeared on his face, as calmly folding his arms he stepped a pace or two in front of his shrinking companions and boldly confronted the throng of yelling savages. In another moment they would have overwhelmed him. Suddenly the stately form of Pontiac appeared among the rabble, and at the sound of his imperious voice they slunk aside like whipped curs. Instantly the tumult was allayed. In the silence that followed, the great chief greeted the British officer with a grave courtesy, shook his hand, and conducted him into the village.

The Ottawa encampment was a confused assemblage of tall, cone-shaped lodges, built of slender poles supporting great sheets of bark or overlapping folds of fine matting so closely woven from rushes as to be thoroughly rain-proof. Scores of graceful birch canoes, such as the northern tribes excel in making, were drawn up on the river bank; paddles and spears leaned against the lodges, smoke-blackened kettles and other rude cooking-utensils were scattered about the smouldering fires, and a throng of wolfish-looking dogs added their discordant baying to the clamor of children.

At the council lodge, which was conspicuous from its size, Major Hester was offered a seat on one of a circle of mats. As he took it, the other mats, as well as every inch of standing-room, were immediately occupied by a throng of warriors, while the entrance was crowded by many others, all eager to catch a glimpse of the Englishman.

After the tedious ceremony of smoking the peace pipe was concluded, Pontiac delivered a short address of welcome, to which the major responded. He demanded to know the cause of the morning's outbreak, and assured the Indians that their just grievances should be remedied, provided they gave up for punishment all who had been implicated in the murders of the previous day.

The major resumed his seat upon the conclusion of his remarks, amid a profound silence that lasted for many minutes. Finally, determined to learn the worst without further delay, he again rose and said, that having no answer to his questions, he would now return to the fort and report to the white chief that his red brothers desired not peace, but war.

Upon this Pontiac signed to him to resume his seat, and turning to the two Canadians, said:—

"Go to the fort and tell Major Gladwyn that the white-haired chief will sleep among the lodges of his red brothers. Tell him that the hatchet dug up this day will not be buried so long as an Englishman remains in the land of the Algonquins. Tell him that every fort from the Thunder of Waters to the Great River has this day been cut off, so that no aid may come to him. Tell him that the soldiers of the French king are already hastening to fight beside their red brothers. Tell him that he may go now and go in peace; but if he tarries beyond the setting of another sun, the wolves of the forest shall feast on the bodies of his red-coated soldiers, while their scalps shall dry in Ottawa lodges. Go, for Pontiac has spoken."

With trembling alacrity the Canadians obeyed the mandate, and with their departure Major Hester realized that he was indeed a prisoner in the hands of a relentless foe. While wondering as to his ultimate fate, he was conducted by Pontiac to a comfortable French frame-house standing just beyond the Indian village, and informed that this was to be his lodging.

"Here," said Pontiac, "shall my brother dwell in safety; but let him not set foot outside. My young men are angry, and their guns are quick to shoot. Even in the dark their eyes are opened wide by the sight of an English scalp."

"I suppose that as your prisoner I must submit to your orders," replied Major Hester, "though why you don't put an end to this farce and kill me at once I fail to comprehend."

"Did the white-haired chief kill me when I slept in the house of the two trees?" demanded Pontiac.

"When did you ever sleep in Tawtry House? Certainly you never did with my knowledge and consent."

"Many years have passed, and there has been much fighting since that time; but surely my brother has not forgotten Songa the Ottawa?"

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