ROBERT
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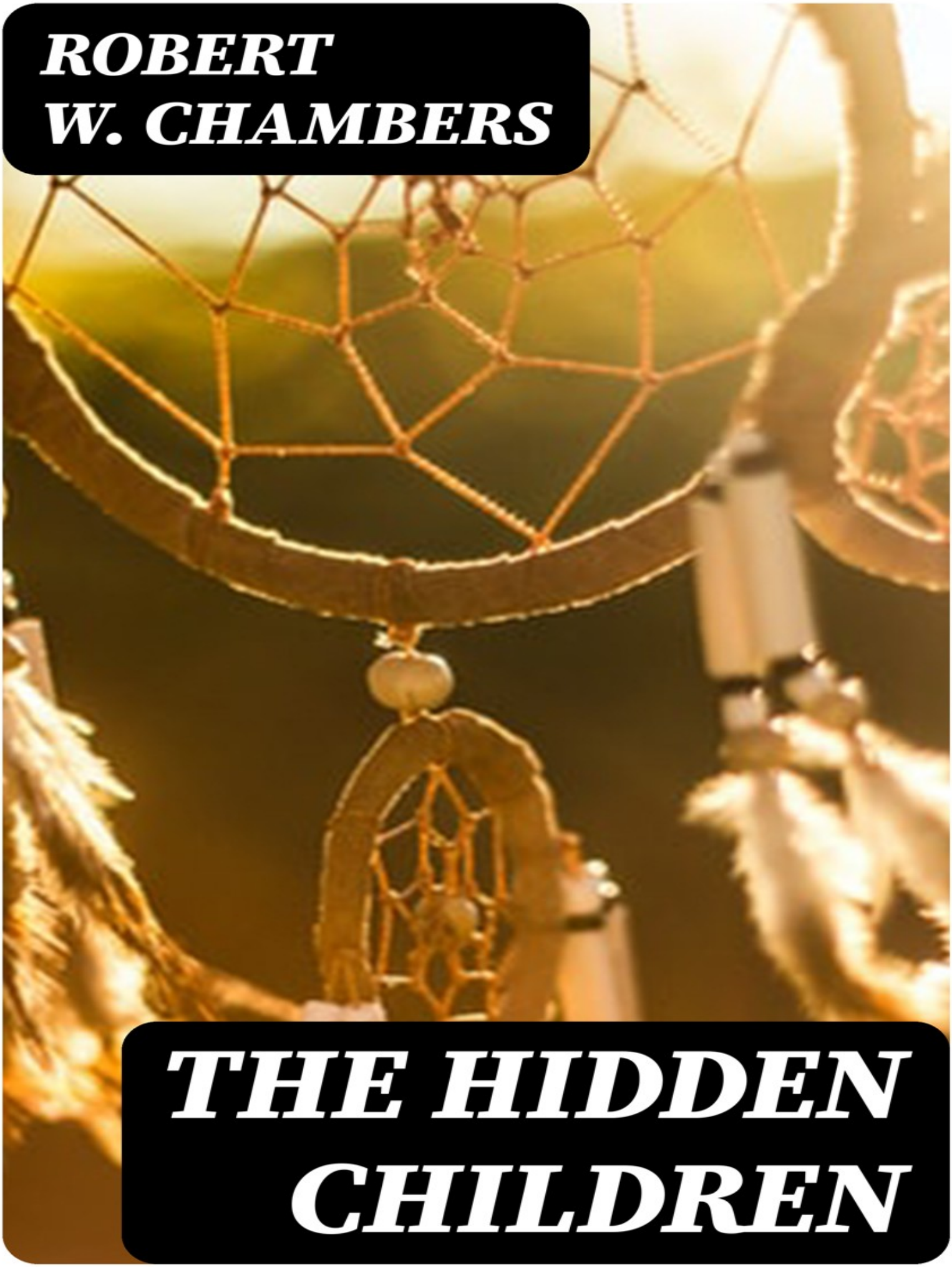

THE HIDDEN CHILDREN

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The Hidden Children

EAN 8596547051701

DigiCat, 2022
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CHAPTER I

THE BEDFORD ROAD

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In the middle of the Bedford Road we three drew bridle. Boyd lounged in his reeking saddle, gazing at the tavern and at what remained of the tavern sign, which seemed to have been a new one, yet now dangled mournfully by one hinge, shot to splinters.

The freshly painted house itself, marred with buckshot, bore dignified witness to the violence done it. A few glazed windows still remained unbroken; the remainder had been filled with blue paper such as comes wrapped about a sugar cone, so that the misused house seemed to be watching us out of patched and battered eyes.

It was evident, too, that a fire had been wantonly set at the northeast angle of the house, where sill and siding were deeply charred from baseboard to eaves.

Nor had this same fire happened very long since, for under the eaves white-faced hornets were still hard at work repairing their partly scorched nest. And I silently pointed them out to Lieutenant Boyd.

"Also," he nodded, "I can still smell the smoky wood. The damage is fresh enough. Look at your map."

He pushed his horse straight up to the closed door, continuing to examine the dismantled sign which hung motionless, there being no wind stirring.

"This should be Hays's Tavern," he said, "unless they lied to us at Ossining. Can you make anything of the sign, Mr.

Loskiel?"

"Nothing, sir. But we are on the highway to Poundridge, for behind us lies the North Castle Church road. All is drawn on my map as we see it here before us; and this should be the fine dwelling of that great villain Holmes, now used as a tavern by Benjamin Hays."

"Rap on the door," said Boyd; and our rifleman escort rode forward and drove his rifle-butt at the door, "There's a man hiding within and peering at us behind the third window," I whispered.

"I see him," said Boyd coolly.

Through the heated silence around us we could hear the hornets buzzing aloft under the smoke-stained eaves. There was no other sound in the July sunshine.

The solemn tavern stared at us out of its injured eyes, and we three men of the Northland gazed back as solemnly, sobered once more to encounter the trail of the Red Beast so freshly printed here among the pleasant Westchester hills.

And to us the silent house seemed to say: "Gentlemen, gentlemen! Look at the plight I'm in—you who come from the blackened North!" And with never a word of lip our heavy thoughts responded: "We know, old house! We know! But at least you still stand; and in the ashes of our Northland not a roof or a spire remains aloft between the dwelling of Deborah Glenn and the ford at the middle fort."

Boyd broke silence with an effort; and his voice was once more cool and careless, if a little forced:

"So it's this way hereabouts, too," he said with a shrug and a sign to me to dismount. Which I did stiffly; and our

rifleman escort scrambled from his sweatty saddle and gathered all three bridles in his mighty, sunburnt fist.

"Either there is a man or a ghost within," I said again, "Whatever it is has moved."

"A man," said Boyd, "or what the inhumanity of man has left of him."

And it was true, for now there came to the door and opened it a thin fellow wearing horn spectacles, who stood silent and cringing before us. Slowly rubbing his workworn hands, he made us a landlord's bow as listless and as perfunctory as ever I have seen in any ordinary. But his welcome was spoken in a whisper.

"God have mercy on this house," said Boyd loudly. "Now, what's amiss, friend? Is there death within these honest walls, that you move about on tiptoe?"

"There is death a-plenty in Westchester, sir," said the man, in a voice as colorless as his drab smalls and faded hair. Yet what he said showed us that he had noted our dress, too, and knew us for strangers.

"Cowboys and skinners, eh?" inquired Boyd, unbuckling his belt.

"And leather-cape, too, sir."

My lieutenant laughed, showing his white teeth; laid belt, hatchet, and heavy knife on a wine-stained table, and placed his rifle against it. Then, slipping cartridge sack, bullet pouch, and powder horn from his shoulders, stood eased, yawning and stretching his fine, powerful frame.

"I take it that you see few of our corps here below," he observed indulgently.

The landlord's lack-lustre eyes rested on me for an instant, then on Boyd:

"Few, sir."

"Do you know the uniform, landlord?"

"Rifles," he said indifferently.

"Yes, but whose, man? Whose?" insisted Boyd impatiently.

The other shook his head.

"Morgan's!" exclaimed Boyd loudly. "Damnation, sir! You should know Morgan's! Sixth Company, sir; Major Parr! And a likelier regiment and a better company never wore green thrums on frock or coon-tail on cap!"

"Yes, sir," said the man vacantly.

Boyd laughed a little:

"And look that you hint as much to the idle young bucks hereabouts—say it to some of your Westchester squirrel hunters——" He laid his hand on the landlord's shoulder. "There's a good fellow," he added, with that youthful and winning smile which so often carried home with it his reckless will—where women were concerned—"we're down from Albany and we wish the Bedford folk to know it. And if the gallant fellows hereabout desire a taste of true glory—the genuine article—why, send them to me, landlord—Thomas Boyd, of Derry, Pennsylvania, lieutenant, 6th company of Morgan's—or to my comrade here, Mr. Loskiel, ensign in the same corps."

He clapped the man heartily on the shoulder and stood looking around at the stripped and dishevelled room, his handsome head a little on one side, as though in frankest admiration. And the worn and pallid landlord gazed back at

him with his faded, lack-lustre eyes—eyes that we both understood, alas—eyes made dull with years of fear, made old and hopeless with unshed tears, stupid from sleepless nights, haunted with memories of all they had looked upon since His Excellency marched out of the city to the south of us, where the red rag now fluttered on fort and shipping from King's Bridge to the Hook.

Nothing more was said. Our landlord went away very quietly. An hostler, presently appearing from somewhere, passed the broken windows, and we saw our rifleman go away with him, leading the three tired horses. We were still yawning and drowsing, stretched out in our hickory chairs, and only kept awake by the flies, when our landlord returned and set before us what food he had. The fare was scanty enough, but we ate hungrily, and drank deeply of the fresh small beer which he fetched in a Liverpool jug.

When we two were alone again, Boyd whispered:

"As well let them think we're here with no other object than recruiting. And so we are, after a fashion; but neither this state nor Pennsylvania is like to fill its quota here. Where is your map, once more?"

I drew the coiled linen roll from the breast of my rifle shirt and spread it out. We studied it, heads together.

"Here lies Poundridge," nodded Boyd, placing his finger on the spot so marked. "Roads a-plenty, too. Well, it's odd, Loskiel, but in this cursed, debatable land I feel more ill at ease than I have ever felt in the Iroquois country."

"You are still thinking of our landlord's deathly face," I said. "Lord! What a very shadow of true manhood crawls about this house!"

"Aye—and I am mindful of every other face and countenance I have so far seen in this strange, debatable land. All have in them something of the same expression. And therein lies the horror of it all, Mr. Loskiel God knows we expect to see deathly faces in the North, where little children lie scalped in the ashes of our frontier—where they even scalp the family hound that guards the cradle. But here in this sleepy, open countryside, with its gentle hills and fertile valleys, broad fields and neat stone walls, its winding roads and orchards, and every pretty farmhouse standing as though no war were in the land, all seems so peaceful, so secure, that the faces of the people sicken me. And ever I am asking myself, where lies this other hell on earth, which only faces such as these could have looked upon?"

"It is sad," I said, under my breath. "Even when a lass smiles on us it seems to start the tears in my throat."

"Sad! Yes, sir, it is. I supposed we had seen sufficient of human degradation in the North not to come here to find the same cringing expression stamped on every countenance. I'm sick of it, I tell you. Why, the British are doing worse than merely filling their prisons with us and scalping us with their savages! They are slowly but surely marking our people, body and face and mind, with the cursed imprint of slavery. They're stamping a nation's very features with the hopeless lineaments of serfdom. It is the ineradicable scars of former slavery that make the New Englander whine through his nose. We of the fighting line bear no such marks, but the peaceful people are beginning to—they who can do nothing except endure and suffer."

"It is not so everywhere," I said, "not yet, anyway."

"It is so in the North. And we have found it so since we entered the 'Neutral Ground.' Like our own people on the frontier, these Westchester folk fear everybody. You yourself know how we have found them. To every question they try to give an answer that may please; or if they despair of pleasing they answer cautiously, in order not to anger. The only sentiment left alive in them seems to be fear; all else of human passion appears to be dead. Why, Loskiel, the very power of will has deserted them; they are not civil to us, but obsequious; not obliging but subservient. They yield with apathy and very quietly what you ask, and what they apparently suppose is impossible for them to retain. If you treat them kindly they receive it coldly, not gratefully, but as though you were compensating them for evil done them by you. Their countenances and motions have lost every trace of animation. It is not serenity but apathy; every emotion, feeling, thought, passion, which is not merely instinctive has fled their minds forever. And this is the greatest crime that Britain has wrought upon us." He struck the table lightly with doubled fist, "Mr. Loskiel," he said, "I ask you—can we find recruits for our regiment in such a place as this? Damme, sir, but I think the entire land has lost its manhood."

We sat staring out into the sunshine through a bullet-shattered window.

"And all this country here seems so fair and peaceful," he murmured half to himself, "so sweet and still and kindly to me after the twilight of endless forests where men are done

to death in the dusk. But hell in broad sunshine is the more horrible."

"Look closer at this country," I said. "The highways are deserted and silent, the very wagon ruts overgrown with grass. Not a scythe has swung in those hay fields; the gardens that lie in the sun are but tangles of weeds; no sheep stir on the hills, no cattle stand in these deep meadows, no wagons pass, no wayfarers. It may be that the wild birds are moulting, but save at dawn and for a few moments at sundown they seem deathly silent to me."

He had relapsed again into his moody, brooding attitude, elbows on the table, his handsome head supported by both hands. And it was not like him to be downcast. After a while he smiled.

"Egad," he said, "it is too melancholy for me here in the open; and I begin to long for the dusk of trees and for the honest scalp yell to cheer me up. One knows what to expect in county Tryon—but not here, Loskiel—not here."

"Our business here is like to be ended tomorrow," I remarked.

"Thank God for that," he said heartily, rising and buckling on his war belt. He added: "As for any recruits we have been ordered to pick up en passant, I see small chance of that accomplishment hereabout. Will you summon the landlord, Mr. Loskiel?"

I discovered the man standing at the open door, his warn hands clasped behind him, and staring stupidly at the cloudless sky. He followed me back to the taproom, and we reckoned with him. Somehow, I thought he had not expected to be paid a penny—yet he did not thank us.

"Are you not Benjamin Hays?" inquired Boyd, carelessly retying his purse.

The fellow seemed startled to hear his own name pronounced so loudly, but answered very quietly that he was.

"This house belongs to a great villain, one James Holmes, does it not?" demanded Boyd.

"Yes, sir," he whispered.

"How do you come to keep an ordinary here?"

"The town authorities required an ordinary. I took it in charge, as they desired."

"Oh! Where is this rascal, Holmes?"

"Gone below, sir, some time since."

"I have heard so. Was he not formerly Colonel of the 4th regiment?"

"Yes, sir."

"And deserted his men, eh? And they made him Lieutenant-Colonel below, did they not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Colonel—of what?" snarled Boyd in disgust.

"Of the Westchester Refugee Irregulars."

"Oh! Well, look out for him and his refugees. He'll be back here one of these days, I'm thinking."

"He has been back."

"What did he do?"

The man said listlessly: "It was like other visits. They robbed, tortured, and killed. Some they burnt with hot ashes, some they hung, cut down, and hung again when they revived. Most of the sheep, cattle, and horses were driven off. Last year thousands of bushels of fruit decayed in

the orchards; the ripened grain lay rotting where wind and rain had laid it; no hay was cut, no grain milled."

"Was this done by the banditti from the lower party?"

"Yes, sir; and by the leather-caps, too. The leather-caps stood guard while the Tories plundered and killed. It is usually that way, sir. And our own renegades are as bad. We in Westchester have to entertain them all."

"But they burn no houses?"

"Not yet, sir. They have promised to do so next time."

"Are there no troops here?"

"Yes, sir."

"What troops?"

"Colonel Thomas's Regiment and Sheldon's Horse and the Minute Men."

"Well, what the devil are they about to permit this banditti to terrify and ravage a peaceful land?" demanded Boyd.

"The country is of great extent," said the man mildly. "It would require many troops to cover it. And His Excellency has very, very few."

"Yes," said Boyd, "that is true. We know how it is in the North—with hundreds of miles to guard and but a handful of men. And it must be that way." He made no effort to throw off his seriousness and nodded toward me with a forced smile. "I am twenty-two years of age," he said, "and Mr. Loskiel here is no older, and we fully expect that when we both are past forty we will still be fighting in this same old war. Meanwhile," he added laughing, "every patriot should find some lass to wed and breed the soldiers we shall require some sixteen years hence."

The man's smile was painful; he smiled because he thought we expected it; and I turned away disheartened, ashamed, burning with a fierce resentment against the fate that in three years had turned us into what we were—we Americans who had never known the lash—we who had never learned to fear a master.

Boyd said: "There is a gentleman, one Major Ebenezer Lockwood, hereabouts. Do you know him?"

"No, sir."

"What? Why, that seems strange!"

The man's face paled, and he remained silent for a few moments. Then, furtively, his eyes began for the hundredth time to note the details of our forest dress, stealing stealthily from the fringe on legging and hunting shirt to the Indian beadwork on moccasin and baldrick, devouring every detail as though to convince himself. I think our pewter buttons did it for him.

Boyd said gravely: "You seem to doubt us, Mr. Hays," and read in the man's unsteady eyes distrust of everything on earth—and little faith in God.

"I do not blame you," said I gently. "Three years of hell burn deep."

"Yes," he said, "three years. And, as you say, sir, there was fire."

He stood quietly silent for a space, then, looking timidly at me, he rolled back his sleeves, first one, then the other, to the shoulders. Then he undid the bandages.

"What is all that?" asked Boyd harshly.

"The seal of the marauders, sir."

"They burnt you? God, man, you are but one living sore! Did any white man do that to you?"

"With hot horse-shoes. It will never quite heal, they say."

I saw the lieutenant shudder. The only thing he ever feared was fire—if it could be said of him that he feared anything. And he had told me that, were he taken by the Iroquois, he had a pistol always ready to blow out his brains.

Boyd had begun to pace the room, doubling and undoubling his nervous fingers. The landlord replaced the oil-soaked rags, rolled down his sleeves again, and silently awaited our pleasure.

"Why do you hesitate to tell us where we may find Major Lockwood?" I asked gently.

For the first time the man looked me full in the face. And after a moment I saw his expression alter, as though some spark—something already half dead within him was faintly reviving.

"They have set a price on Major Lockwood's head," he said; and Boyd halted to listen—and the man looked him in the eyes for a moment.

My lieutenant carried his commission with him, though contrary to advice and practice among men engaged on such a mission as were we. It was folded in his beaded shot-pouch, and now he drew it out and displayed it.

After a silence, Hays said:

"The old Lockwood Manor House stands on the south side of the village of Poundridge. It is the headquarters and rendezvous of Sheldon's Horse. The Major is there."

"Poundridge lies to the east of Bedford?"

"Yes, sir, about five miles."

"Where is the map, Loskiel?"

Again I drew it from my hunting shirt; we examined it, and Hays pointed out the two routes.

Boyd looked up at Hays absently, and said: "Do you know Luther Kinnicut?"

This time all the colour fled the man's face, and it was some moments before the sudden, unreasoning rush of terror in that bruised mind had subsided sufficiently for him to compose his thoughts. Little by little, however, he came to himself again, dimly conscious that he trusted us—perhaps the first strangers or even neighbours whom he had trusted in years.

"Yes, sir, I know him," he said in a low voice.

"Where is he?"

"Below—on our service."

But it was Luther Kinnicut, the spy, whom we had come to interview, as well as to see Major Lockwood, and Boyd frowned thoughtfully.

I said: "The Indians hereabout are Mohican, are they not, Mr. Hays?"

"They were," he replied; and his very apathy gave the answer a sadder significance.

"Have they all gone off?" asked Boyd, misunderstanding.

"There were very few Mohicans to go. But they have gone."

"Below?"

"Oh, no, sir. They and the Stockbridge Indians, and the Siwanois are friendly to our party."

"There was a Sagamore," I said, "of the Siwanois, named Mayaro. We believe that Luther Kinnicut knows where this

Sagamore is to be found. But how are we to first find Kinnicut?"

"Sir," he said, "you must ask Major Lockwood that. I know not one Indian from the next, only that the savages hereabout are said to be favourable to our party."

Clearly there was nothing more to learn from this man. So we thanked him and strapped on our accoutrements, while he went away to the barn to bring up our horses. And presently our giant rifleman appeared leading the horses, and still munching a bough-apple, scarce ripe, which he dropped into the bosom of his hunting shirt when he discovered us watching him.

Boyd laughed: "Munch away, Jack, and welcome," he said, "only mind thy manners when we sight regular troops. I'll have nobody reproaching Morgan's corps that the men lack proper respect—though many people seem to think us but a parcel of militia where officer and man herd cheek by jowl."

On mounting, he turned in his saddle and asked Hays what we had to fear on our road, if indeed we were to apprehend anything.

"There is some talk of the Legion Cavalry, sir—Major Tarleton's command."

"Anything definite?"

"No, sir—only the talk when men of our party meet. And Major Lockwood has a price on his head."

"Oh! Is that all?"

"That is all, sir."

Boyd nodded laughingly, wheeled his horse, and we rode slowly out into the Bedford Road, the mounted rifleman

dogging our heels.

From every house in Bedford we knew that we were watched as we rode; and what they thought of us in our flaunting rifle dress, or what they took us to be—enemy or friend—I cannot imagine, the uniform of our corps being strange in these parts. However, they must have known us for foresters and riflemen of one party or t'other; and, as we advanced, and there being only three of us, and on a highway, too, very near to the rendezvous of an American dragoon regiment, the good folk not only peeped out at us from between partly closed shutters, but even ventured to open their doors and stand gazing after we had ridden by.

Every pretty maid he saw seemed to comfort Boyd prodigiously, which was always the case; and as here and there a woman smiled faintly at him the last vestige of sober humour left him and he was more like the reckless, handsome young man I had come to care for a great deal, if not wholly to esteem.

The difference in rank between us permitted him to relax if he chose; and though His Excellency and our good Baron were ever dinning discipline and careful respect for rank into the army's republican ears, there was among us nothing like the aristocratic and rigid sentiment which ruled the corps of officers in the British service.

Still, we were not as silly and ignorant as we were at Bunker Hill, having learned something of authority and respect in these three years, and how necessary to discipline was a proper maintenance of rank. For once—though it seems incredible—men and officers were practically on a footing of ignorant familiarity; and I have

heard, and fully believe, that the majority of our reverses and misfortunes arose because no officer represented authority, nor knew how to enforce discipline because lacking that military respect upon which all real discipline must be founded.

Of all the officers in my corps and in my company, perhaps Lieutenant Boyd was slowest to learn the lesson and most prone to relax, not toward the rank and file—yet, he was often a shade too easy there, also—but with other officers. Those ranking him were not always pleased; those whom he ranked felt vaguely the mistake.

As for me, I liked him greatly; yet, somehow, never could bring myself to a careless comradeship, even in the woods or on lonely scouts where formality and circumstance seemed out of place, even absurd. He was so much of a boy, too—handsome, active, perfectly fearless, and almost always gay—that if at times he seemed a little selfish or ruthless in his pleasures, not sufficiently mindful of others or of consequences, I found it easy to forgive and overlook. Yet, fond as I was of him, I never had become familiar with him—why, I do not know. Perhaps because he ranked me; and perhaps there was no particular reason for that instinct of aloofness which I think was part of me at that age, and, except in a single instance, still remains as the slightest and almost impalpable barrier to a perfect familiarity with any person in the world.

"Loskiel," he said in my ear, "did you see that little maid in the orchard, how shyly she smiled on us?"

"On you," I nodded, laughing.

"Oh, you always say that," he retorted.

And I always did say that, and it always pleased him.

"On this accursed journey south," he complained, "the necessity for speed has spoiled our chances for any roadside sweethearts. Lord! But it's been a long, dull trail," he added frankly. "Why, look you, Loskiel, even in the wilderness somehow I always have contrived to discover a sweetheart of some sort or other—yes, even in the Iroquois country, cleared or bush, somehow or other, sooner or later, I stumble on some pretty maid who flutters up in the very wilderness like a partridge from under my feet!"

"That is your reputation," I remarked.

"Oh, damme, no!" he protested. "Don't say it is my reputation!"

But he had that reputation, whether he realised it or not; though as far as I had seen there was no real harm in the man—only a willingness to make love to any petticoat, if its wearer were pretty. But my own notions had ever inclined me toward quality. Which is not strange, I myself being of unknown parentage and birth, high or low, nobody knew; nor had anybody ever told me how I came by my strange name, Euan Loskiel, save that they found the same stitched in silk upon my shift.

For it is best, perhaps, that I say now how it was with me from the beginning, which, until this memoir is read, only one man knew—and one other. For I was discovered sleeping beside a stranded St. Regis canoe, where the Mohawk River washes Guy Park gardens. And my dead mother lay beside me.

He who cared for me, reared me and educated me, was no other than Guy Johnson of Guy Park. Why he did so I

learned only after many days; and at the proper time and place I will tell you who I am and why he was kind to me. For his was not a warm and kindly character, nor a gentle nature, nor was he an educated man himself, nor perhaps even a gentleman, though of that landed gentry which Tryon County knew so well, and also a nephew of the great Sir William, and became his son-in-law.

I say he was not liked in Tryon County, though many feared him more than they feared young Walter Butler later; yet he was always and invariably kind to me. And when with the Butlers, and Sir John, and Colonel Claus, and the other Tories he fled to Canada, there to hatch most hellish reprisals upon the people of Tryon who had driven him forth, he wrote to me where I was at Harvard College in Cambridge to bid me farewell.

He said to me in that letter that he did not ask me to declare for the King in the struggle already beginning; he merely requested, if I could not conscientiously so declare, at least that I remain passive, and attend quietly to my studies at Cambridge until the war blew over, as it quickly must, and these insolent people were taught their lesson.

The lesson, after three years and more, was still in progress; Guy Park had fallen into the hands of the Committee of Sequestration and was already sold; Guy Johnson roamed a refugee in Canada, and I, since the first crack of a British musket, had learned how matters stood between my heart and conscience, and had carried a rifle and at times my regiment's standard ever since.

I had no home except my regiment, no friends except Guy Johnson's, and those I had made at College and in the

regiment; and the former would likely now have greeted me with rifle or hatchet, whichever came easier to hand.

So to me my rifle regiment and my company had become my only home; the officers my parents; my comrades the only friends I had.

I wrote to Guy Johnson, acquainting him of my intention before I enlisted, and the letter went to him with other correspondence under a flag.

In time I had a reply from him, and he wrote as though something stronger than hatred for the cause I had embraced was forcing him to speak to me gently.

God knows it was a strange, sad letter, full of bitterness under which smouldered something more terrible, which, as he wrote, he strangled. And so he ended, saying that, through him, no harm should ever menace me; and that in the fullness of time, when this vile rebellion had been ended, he would vouch for the mercy of His Most Christian Majesty as far as I was concerned, even though all others hung in chains.

Thus I had left it all—not then knowing who I was or why Guy Johnson had been kind to me; nor ever expecting to hear from him again.

Thinking of these things as I rode beside Lieutenant Boyd through the calm Westchester sunshine, all that part of my life—which indeed was all of my life except these last three battle years—seemed already so far sway, so dim and unreal, that I could scarce realise I had not been always in the army—had not always lived from day to day, from hour

to hour, not knowing one night where I should pillow my head the next.

For at nineteen I shouldered my rifle; and now, at Boyd's age, two and twenty, my shoulder had become so accustomed to its not unpleasant weight that, at moments, thinking, I realised that I would not know what to do in the world had I not my officers, my company, and my rifle to companion me through life.

And herein lies the real danger of all armies and of all soldiering. Only the strong character and exceptional man is ever fitted for any other life after the army becomes a closed career to him.

I now remarked as much to Boyd, who frowned, seeming to consider the matter for the first time.

"Aye," he nodded, "it's true enough, Loskiel. And I for one don't know what use I could make of the blessings of peace for which we are so madly fighting, and which we all protest that we desire."

"The blessings of peace might permit you more leisure with the ladies," I suggested smilingly. And he threw back his handsome head and laughed.

"Lord!" he exclaimed. "What chance have I, a poor rifleman, who may not even wear his hair clubbed and powdered."

Only field and staff now powdered in our corps. I said: "Heaven hasten your advancement, sir."

"Not that I'd care a fig," he protested, "if I had your yellow, curly head, you rogue. But with my dark hair unpowdered and uncurled, and no side locks, I tell you, Loskiel, I earn every kiss that is given me—or forgiven.

Heigho! Peace would truly be a blessing if she brought powder and pretty clothing to a crop-head, buck-skinned devil like me."

We were now riding through a country which had become uneven and somewhat higher. A vast wooded hill lay on our left; the Bedford highway skirted it. On our right ran a stream, and there was some swampy land which followed. Rock outcrops became more frequent, and the hard-wood growth of oak, hickory and chestnut seemed heavier and more extensive than in Bedford town. But there were orchards; the soil seemed to be fertile and the farms thrifty, and it was a pleasant land save for the ominous stillness over all and the grass-grown highway. Roads and lanes, paths and pastures remained utterly deserted of man and beast.

This, if our map misled us not, should be the edges of the town of Poundridge; and within a mile or so more we began to see a house here and there. These farms became more frequent as we advanced. After a few moments' riding we saw the first cattle that we had seen in many days. And now we began to find this part of the Westchester country very different, as we drew nearer to the village, for here and there we saw sheep feeding in the distance, and men mowing who leaned on their scythes to see us pass, and even saluted us from afar.

It seemed as though a sense of security reigned here, though nobody failed to mark our passing or even to anticipate it from far off. But nobody appeared to be afraid of us, and we concluded that the near vicinity of Colonel Sheldon's Horse accounted for what we saw.

It was pleasant to see women spinning beside windows in which flowers bloomed, and children gazing shyly at us from behind stone walls and palings. Also, in barnyards we saw fowls, which was more than we had seen West of us—and now and again a family cat dozing on some doorstep freshly swept.

"I had forgotten there was such calm and peace in the world," said Boyd. "And the women look not unkindly on us—do you think, Loskiel?"

But I was intent on watching a parcel of white ducks leaving a little pond, all walking a-row and quacking, and wriggling their fat tails. How absurd a thing to suddenly close my throat so that I could not find my voice to answer Boyd; for ever before me grew the almost forgotten vision of Guy Park, and of our white waterfowl on the river behind the house, where I had seen them so often from my chamber window leaving the water's edge at sundown.

A mile outside the town a leather-helmeted dragoon barred our way, but we soon satisfied him.

We passed by the Northwest road, crossed the Stamford highway, and, consulting our map, turned back and entered it, riding south through the village.

Here a few village folk were abroad; half a dozen of Sheldon's dragoons lounged outside the tavern, to the rail of which their horses were tied; and we saw other men with guns, doubtless militia, though few wore any fragment of uniform, save as their hats were cocked or sprigged with green.

Nobody hailed us, not even the soldiers; there was no levity, no jest directed toward our giant rifleman, only a

courteous but sober salute as we rode through Poundridge town and out along the New Canaan highway where houses soon became fewer and soldiers both afoot and ahorse more frequent.

We crossed a stream and two roads, then came into a street with many houses which ran south, then, at four corners, turned sharp to the east. And there, across a little brook, we saw a handsome manor house around which some three score cavalry horses were picketed.

Yard, lawn, stables and barns were swarming with people —dragoons of Sheldon's Regiment, men of Colonel Thomas's foot regiment, militia officers, village gentlemen whose carriages stood waiting; and some of these same carriages must have come from a distance, perhaps even from Ridgefield, to judge by the mud and dust that clotted them.

Beyond the house, on a road which I afterward learned ran toward Lewisboro, between the Three Lakes, Cross Pond, and Bouton's, a military convoy was passing, raising a prodigious cloud of dust. I could see, and faintly hear, sheep and cattle; there was a far crack of whips, a shouting of drovers and teamsters, and, through the dust, we caught the sparkle of a bayonet here and there.

Somewhere, doubtless, some half starved brigade of ours was gnawing its nails and awaiting this same convoy; and I silently prayed God to lead it safely to its destination.

"Pretty women everywhere!" whispered Boyd in my ear. "Our friend the Major seems to have a houseful. The devil take me if I leave this town tomorrow!"

As we rode into the yard and dismounted, and our rifleman took the bridles, across the crowded roadway we

could see a noble house with its front doors wide open and a group of ladies and children there and many gentlemen saluting them as they entered or left the house.

"A respectable company," I heard Boyd mutter to himself, as he stood slapping the dust from hunting-shirt and leggings and smoothing the fringe. And, "Damme, Loskiel," he said, "we're like to cut a most contemptible figure among such grand folk—what with our leather breeches, and saddle-reek for the only musk we wear. Lord! But yonder stands a handsome girl—and my condition mortifies me so that I could slink off to the mews for shame and lie on straw with the hostlers."

There was, I knew, something genuine in his pretense of hurt vanity, even under the merry mask he wore; but I only laughed.

A great many people moved about, many, I could see, having arrived from the distant country; and there was a great noise of hammering, too, from a meadow below, where, a soldier told us, they were erecting barracks for Sheldon's and for other troops shortly expected.

"There is even talk of a fort for the ridge yonder," he said. "One may see the Sound from there."

We glanced up at the ridge, then gazed curiously around, and finally walked down along the stone wall to a pasture. Here, where they were building the barracks, there had been a camp; and the place was still smelling stale enough. Tents were now being loaded on ox wagons; and a company of Colonel Thomas's regiment was filing out along the road after the convoy which we had seen moving through the dust toward Lewisboro.

People stood about looking on; some poked at the embers of the smoky fires, some moused and prowled about to see what scrap they might pick up.

Boyd's roving gaze had been arrested by a little scene enacting just around the corner of the partly-erected barracks, where half a dozen soldiers had gathered around some camp-women, whose sullen attitude discouraged their gallantries. She was dressed in shabby finery. On her hair, which was powdered, she wore a jaunty chip hat tied under her chin with soiled blue ribbons, and a kerchief of ragged lace hid her bosom, pinned with a withered rose. The scene was sordid enough; and, indifferent, I gazed elsewhere.

"A shilling to a penny they kiss her yet!" he said to me presently, and for the second time I noticed the comedy—if you choose to call it so—for the wench was now struggling fiercely amid the laughing men.

"A pound to a penny!" repeated Boyd; "Do you take me, Loskiel?"

The next moment I had pushed in among them, forcing the hilarious circle to open; and I heard her quick, uneven breathing as I elbowed my way to her, and turned on the men good-humoredly.

"Come, boys, be off!" I said. "Leave rough sport to the lower party. She's sobbing." I glanced at her. "Why, she's but a child, after all! Can't you see, boys? Now, off with you all in a hurry!"

There had evidently been some discipline drilled into Colonel Thomas's regiments the men seemed instantly to know me for an officer, whether by my dress or voice I know