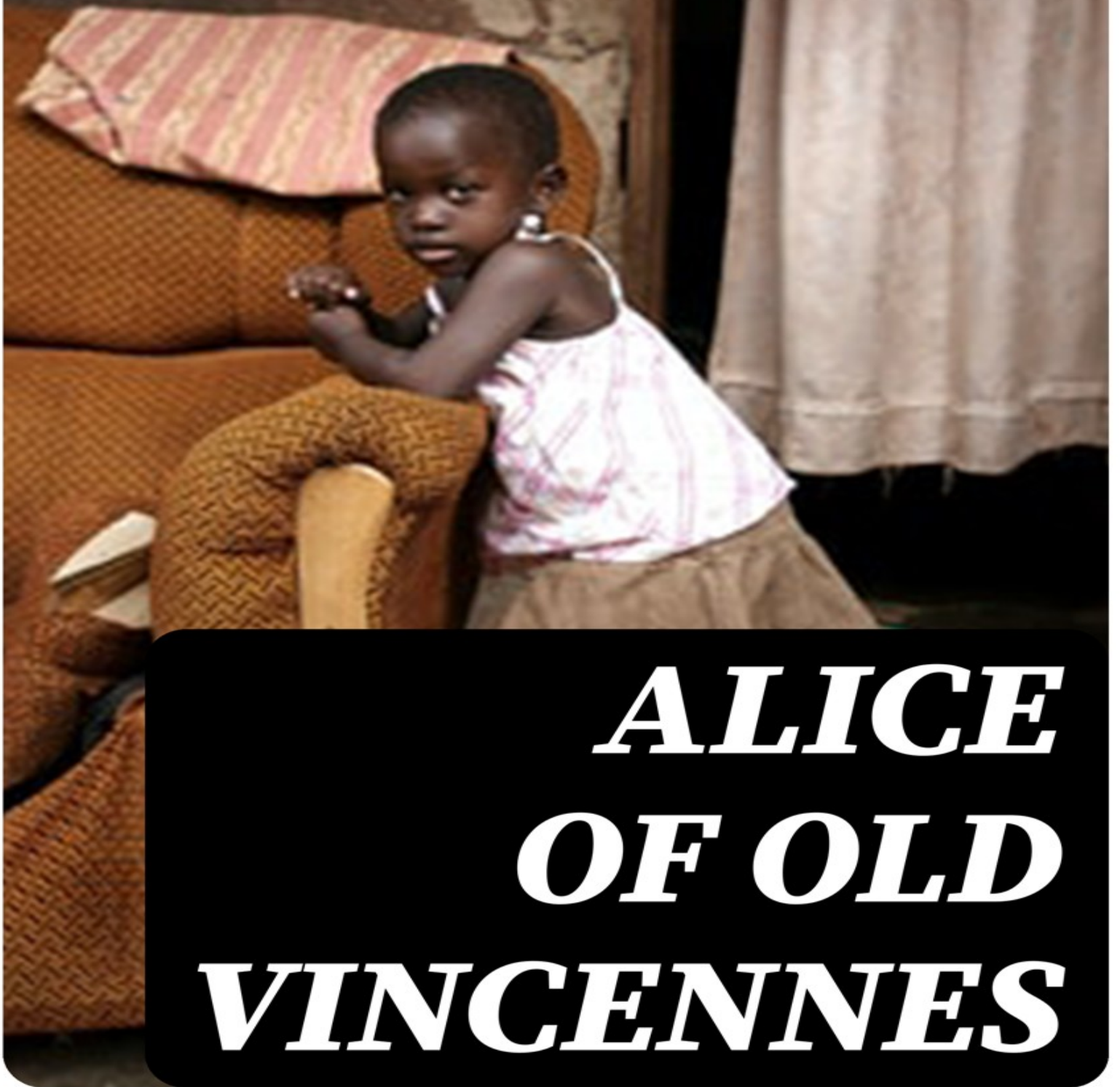


***MAURICE
THOMPSON***



***ALICE
OF OLD
VINCENNES***

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Alice of Old Vincennes

EAN 8596547241423

DigiCat, 2022

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AND SO IT ENDED

PREFACE

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To M. PLACIDE VALCOUR
M. D., Ph D., LL. D.

MY DEAR DR. VALCOUR: You gave me the Inspiration which made this story haunt me until I wrote it. Gaspard Roussillon's letter, a mildewed relic of the year 1788, which you so kindly permitted me to copy, as far as it remained legible, was the point from which my imagination, accompanied by my curiosity, set out upon a long and delightful quest. You laughed at me when I became enthusiastic regarding the possible historical importance at that ancient find, alas! fragmentary epistle; but the old saying about the beatitude of him whose cachinations are latest comes handy to me just now, and I must remind you that "I told you so." True enough, it was history pure and simple that I had in mind while enjoying the large hospitality of your gulf-side home. Gaspard Roussillon's letter then appealed to my greed for materials which would help along the making of my little book "The Story of Louisiana." Later, however, as my frequent calls upon you for both documents and suggestions have informed you, I fell to strumming a different guitar. And now to you I dedicate this historical romance of old Vincennes, as a very appropriate, however slight, recognition of your scholarly attainments, your distinguished career in a noble profession, and your descent from one of the earliest French families (if not the very earliest) long resident at that strange little post on the

Wabash, now one of the most beautiful cities between the greet river and the ocean.

Following, with ever tantalized expectancy, the broken and breezy hints in the Roussillon letter, I pursued a will-o'-the-wisp, here, there, yonder, until by slowly arriving increments I gathered up a large amount of valuable facts, which when I came to compare them with the history of Clark's conquest of the Wabash Valley, fitted amazingly well into certain spaces heretofore left open in that important yet sadly imperfect record.

You will find that I was not so wrong in suspecting that Emile Jazon, mentioned in the Roussillon letter, was a brother of Jean Jazon and a famous scout in the time of Boone and Clark. He was, therefore, a kinsman of yours on the maternal side, and I congratulate you. Another thing may please you, the success which attended my long and patient research with a view to clearing up the connection between Alice Roussillon's romantic life, as brokenly sketched in M. Roussillon's letter, and the capture of Vincennes by Colonel George Rogers Clark.

Accept, then, this book, which to those who care only for history will seem but an idle romance, while to the lovers of romance it may look strangely like the mustiest history. In my mind, and in yours I hope, it will always be connected with a breezy summer-house on a headland of the Louisiana gulf coast, the rustling of palmetto leaves, the fine flash of roses, a tumult of mocking-bird voices, the soft lilt of Creole patois, and the endless dash and roar of a fragrant sea over which the gulls and pelicans never ceased their flight, and beside which you smoked while I dreamed.

MAURICE THOMPSON.
JULY, 1900.

ALICE OF OLD VINCENNES

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CHAPTER I

UNDER THE CHERRY TREE

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Up to the days of Indiana's early statehood, probably as late as 1825, there stood, in what is now the beautiful little city of Vincennes on the Wabash, the decaying remnant of an old and curiously gnarled cherry tree, known as the Roussillon tree, le cerisier de Monsieur Roussillon, as the French inhabitants called it, which as long as it lived bore fruit remarkable for richness of flavor and peculiar dark ruby depth of color. The exact spot where this noble old seedling from la belle France flourished, declined, and died cannot be certainly pointed out; for in the rapid and happy growth of Vincennes many land-marks once notable, among them le cerisier de Monsieur Roussillon, have been destroyed and the spots where they stood, once familiar to every eye in old Vincennes, are now lost in the pleasant confusion of the new town.

The security of certain land titles may have largely depended upon the disappearance of old, fixed objects here and there. Early records were loosely kept, indeed, scarcely kept at all; many were destroyed by designing land speculators, while those most carefully preserved often failed to give even a shadowy trace of the actual boundaries of the estates held thereby; so that the position of a house or tree not infrequently settled an important question of property rights left open by a primitive deed. At all events the Roussillon cherry tree disappeared long ago, nobody

living knows how, and with it also vanished, quite as mysteriously, all traces of the once important Roussillon estate. Not a record of the name even can be found, it is said, in church or county books.

The old, twisted, gum-embossed cherry tree survived every other distinguishing feature of what was once the most picturesque and romantic place in Vincennes. Just north of it stood, in the early French days, a low, rambling cabin surrounded by rude verandas overgrown with grapevines. This was the Roussillon place, the most pretentious home in all the Wabash country. Its owner was Gaspard Roussillon, a successful trader with the Indians. He was rich, for the time and the place, influential to a degree, a man of some education, who had brought with him to the wilderness a bundle of books and a taste for reading.

From faded letters and dimly remembered talk of those who once clung fondly to the legends and traditions of old Vincennes, it is drawn that the Roussillon cherry tree stood not very far away from the present site of the Catholic church, on a slight swell of ground overlooking a wide marshy flat and the silver current of the Wabash. If the tree grew there, then there too stood the Roussillon house with its cosy log rooms, its clay-daubed chimneys and its grapevine-mantled verandas, while some distance away and nearer the river the rude fort with its huddled officers' quarters seemed to fling out over the wild landscape, through its squinting and lopsided port-holes, a gaze of stubborn defiance.

Not far off was the little log church, where one good Father Beret, or as named by the Indians, who all loved him,

Father Blackrobe, performed the services of his sacred calling; and scattered all around were the cabins of traders, soldiers and woodsmen forming a queer little town, the like of which cannot now be seen anywhere on the earth.

It is not known just when Vincennes was first founded; but most historians make the probable date very early in the eighteenth century, somewhere between 1710 and 1730. In 1810 the Roussillon cherry tree was thought by a distinguished botanical letter-writer to be at least fifty years old, which would make the date of its planting about 1760. Certainly as shown by the time-stained family records upon which this story of ours is based, it was a flourishing and wide-topped tree in early summer of 1778, its branches loaded to drooping with luscious fruit. So low did the dark red clusters hang at one point that a tall young girl standing on the ground easily reached the best ones and made her lips purple with their juice while she ate them.

That was long ago, measured by what has come to pass on the gentle swell of rich country from which Vincennes overlooks the Wabash. The new town flourishes notably and its appearance marks the latest limit of progress. Electric cars in its streets, electric lights in its beautiful homes, the roar of railway trains coming and going in all directions, bicycles whirling hither and thither, the most fashionable styles of equipages, from brougham to pony phaeton, make the days of flint-lock guns and buckskin trousers seem ages down the past; and yet we are looking back over but a little more than a hundred and twenty years to see Alice Roussillon standing under the cherry tree and holding high a tempting cluster of fruit, while a very short, hump-backed

youth looks up with longing eyes and vainly reaches for it. The tableau is not merely rustic, it is primitive. "Jump!" the girl is saying in French, "jump, Jean; jump high!"

Yes, that was very long ago, in the days when women lightly braved what the strongest men would shrink from now.

Alice Roussillon was tall, lithe, strongly knit, with an almost perfect figure, judging by what the master sculptors carved for the form of Venus, and her face was comely and winning, if not absolutely beautiful; but the time and the place were vigorously indicated by her dress, which was of coarse stuff and simply designed. Plainly she was a child of the American wilderness, a daughter of old Vincennes on the Wabash in the time that tried men's souls.

"Jump, Jean!" she cried, her face laughing with a show of cheek-dimples, an arching of finely sketched brows and the twinkling of large blue-gray eyes.

"Jump high and get them!"

While she waved her sun-browned hand holding the cherries aloft, the breeze blowing fresh from the southwest tossed her hair so that some loose strands shone like rimpled flames. The sturdy little hunchback did leap with surprising activity; but the treacherous brown hand went higher, so high that the combined altitude of his jump and the reach of his unnaturally long arms was overcome. Again and again he sprang vainly into the air comically, like a long-legged, squat-bodied frog.

"And you brag of your agility and strength, Jean," she laughingly remarked; "but you can't take cherries when they are offered to you. What a clumsy bungler you are."

"I can climb and get some," he said with a hideously happy grin, and immediately embraced the bole of the tree, up which he began scrambling almost as fast as a squirrel.

When he had mounted high enough to be extending a hand for a hold on a crotch, Alice grasped his leg near the foot and pulled him down, despite his clinging and struggling, until his hands clawed in the soft earth at the tree's root, while she held his captive leg almost vertically erect.

It was a show of great strength; but Alice looked quite unconscious of it, laughing merrily, the dimples deepening in her plump cheeks, her forearm, now bared to the elbow, gleaming white and shapely while its muscles rippled on account of the jerking and kicking of Jean.

All the time she was holding the cherries high in her other hand, shaking them by the twig to which their slender stems attached them, and saying in a sweetly tantalizing tone:

"What makes you climb downward after cherries. Jean? What a foolish fellow you are, indeed, trying to grabble cherries out of the ground, as you do potatoes! I'm sure I didn't suppose that you knew so little as that."

Her French was colloquial, but quite good, showing here and there what we often notice in the speech of those who have been educated in isolated places far from that babel of polite energies which we call the world; something that may be described as a bookish cast appearing oddly in the midst of phrasing distinctly rustic and local,—a peculiarity not easy to transfer from one language to another.

Jean the hunchback was a muscular little deformity and a wonder of good nature. His head looked unnaturally large, nestling grotesquely between the points of his lifted and distorted shoulders, like a shaggy black animal in the fork of a broken tree. He was bellicose in his amiable way and never knew just when to acknowledge defeat. How long he might have kept up the hopeless struggle with the girl's invincible grip would be hard to guess. His release was caused by the approach of a third person, who wore the robe of a Catholic priest and the countenance of a man who had lived and suffered a long time without much loss of physical strength and endurance.

This was Pere Beret, grizzly, short, compact, his face deeply lined, his mouth decidedly aslant on account of some lost teeth, and his eyes set deep under gray, shaggy brows. Looking at him when his features were in repose a first impression might not have been favorable; but seeing him smile or hearing him speak changed everything. His voice was sweetness itself and his smile won you on the instant. Something like a pervading sorrow always seemed to be close behind his eyes and under his speech; yet he was a genial, sometimes almost jolly, man, very prone to join in the lighter amusements of his people.

"Children, children, my children," he called out as he approached along a little pathway leading up from the direction of the church, "what are you doing now? Bah there, Alice, will you pull Jean's leg off?"

At first they did not hear him, they were so nearly deafened by their own vocal discords.

"Why are you standing on your head with your feet so high in air, Jean?" he added. "It's not a polite attitude in the presence of a young lady. Are you a pig, that you poke your nose in the dirt?"

Alice now turned her bright head and gave Pere Beret a look of frank welcome, which at the same time shot a beam of willful self-assertion.

"My daughter, are you trying to help Jean up the tree feet foremost?" the priest added, standing where he had halted just outside of the straggling yard fence.

He had his hands on his hips and was quietly chuckling at the scene before him, as one who, although old, sympathized with the natural and harmless sportiveness of young people and would as lief as not join in a prank or two.

"You see what I'm doing, Father Beret," said Alice, "I am preventing a great damage to you. You will maybe lose a good many cherry pies and dumplings if I let Jean go. He was climbing the tree to pilfer the fruit; so I pulled him down, you understand."

"Ta, ta!" exclaimed the good man, shaking his gray head; "we must reason with the child. Let go his leg, daughter, I will vouch for him; eh, Jean?"

Alice released the hunchback, then laughed gayly and tossed the cluster of cherries into his hand, whereupon he began munching them voraciously and talking at the same time.

"I knew I could get them," he boasted; "and see, I have them now." He hopped around, looking like a species of ill-formed monkey.

Pere Beret came and leaned on the low fence close to Alice. She was almost as tall as he.

"The sun scorches to-day," he said, beginning to mop his furrowed face with a red-flowered cotton handkerchief; "and from the look of the sky yonder," pointing southward, "it is going to bring on a storm. How is Madame Roussillon to-day?"

"She is complaining as she usually does when she feels extremely well," said Alice; "that's why I had to take her place at the oven and bake pies. I got hot and came out to catch a bit of this breeze. Oh, but you needn't smile and look greedy, Pere Beret, the pies are not for your teeth!"

"My daughter, I am not a glutton, I hope; I had meat not two hours since—some broiled young squirrels with cress, sent me by Rene de Ronville. He never forgets his old father."

"Oh, I never forget you either, mon pere; I thought of you to-day every time I spread a crust and filled it with cherries; and when I took out a pie all brown and hot, the red juice bubbling out of it so good smelling and tempting, do you know what I said to myself?"

"How could I know, my child?"

"Well, I thought this: 'Not a single bite of that pie does Father Beret get.'"

"Why so, daughter?"

"Because you said it was bad of me to read novels and told Mother Roussillon to hide them from me. I've had any amount of trouble about it."

"Ta, ta! read the good books that I gave you. They will soon kill the taste for these silly romances."

"I tried," said Alice; "I tried very hard, and it's no use; your books are dull and stupidly heavy. What do I care about something that a queer lot of saints did hundreds of years ago in times of plague and famine? Saints must have been poky people, and it is poky people who care to read about them, I think. I like reading about brave, heroic men and beautiful women, and war and love."

Pere Beret looked away with a curious expression in his face, his eyes half closed.

"And I'll tell you now, Father Beret," Alice went on after a pause, "no more claret and pies do you get until I can have my own sort of books back again to read as I please." She stamped her moccasin-shod foot with decided energy.

The good priest broke into a hearty laugh, and taking off his cap of grass-straw mechanically scratched his bald head. He looked at the tall, strong girl before him for a moment or two, and it would have been hard for the best physiognomist to decide just how much of approval and how much of disapproval that look really signified.

Although, as Father Beret had said, the sun's heat was violent, causing that gentle soul to pass his bundled handkerchief with a wiping circular motion over his bald and bedewed pate, the wind was momentarily freshening, while up from behind the trees on the horizon beyond the river, a cloud was rising blue-black, tumbled, and grim against the sky.

"Well," said the priest, evidently trying hard to exchange his laugh for a look of regretful resignation, "you will have your own way, my child, and—"

"Then you will have pies galore and no end of claret!" she interrupted, at the same time stepping to the withe-tied and peg-latched gate of the yard and opening it. "Come in, you dear, good Father, before the rain shall begin, and sit with me on the gallery" (the creole word for veranda) "till the storm is over."

Father Beret seemed not loath to enter, albeit he offered a weak protest against delaying some task he had in hand. Alice reached forth and pulled him in, then reclosed the queer little gate and pegged it. She caressingly passed her arm through his and looked into his weather-stained old face with childlike affection.

There was not a photographer's camera to be had in those days; but what if a tourist with one in hand could have been there to take a snapshot at the priest and the maiden as they walked arm in arm to that squat little veranda! The picture to-day would be worth its weight in a first-water diamond. It would include the cabin, the cherry-tree, a glimpse of the raw, wild background and a sharp portrait-group of Pere Beret, Alice, and Jean the hunchback. To compare it with a photograph of the same spot now would give a perfect impression of the historic atmosphere, color and conditions which cannot be set in words. But we must not belittle the power of verbal description. What if a thoroughly trained newspaper reporter had been given the freedom of old Vincennes on the Wabash during the first week of June, 1778, and we now had his printed story! What a supplement to the photographer's pictures! Well, we have neither photographs nor graphic report; yet there they are before us, the gowned and straw-capped priest, the fresh-

faced, coarsely-clad and vigorous girl, the grotesque little hunchback, all just as real as life itself. Each of us can see them, even with closed eyes. Led by that wonderful guide, Imagination, we step back a century and more to look over a scene at once strangely attractive and unspeakably forlorn.

What was it that drew people away from the old countries, from the cities, the villages and the vineyards of beautiful France, for example, to dwell in the wilderness, amid wild beasts and wilder savage Indians, with a rude cabin for a home and the exposures and hardships of pioneer life for their daily experience?

Men like Gaspard Roussillon are of a distinct stamp. Take him as he was. Born in France, on the banks of the Rhone near Avignon, he came as a youth to Canada, whence he drifted on the tide of adventure this way and that, until at last he found himself, with a wife, at Post Vincennes, that lonely picket of religion and trade, which was to become the center of civilizing energy for the great Northwestern Territory. M. Roussillon had no children of his own; so his kind heart opened freely to two fatherless and motherless waifs. These were Alice, now called Alice Roussillon, and the hunchback, Jean. The former was twelve years old, when he adopted her, a child of Protestant parents, while Jean had been taken, when a mere babe, after his parents had been killed and scalped by Indians. Madame Roussillon, a professed invalid, whose appetite never failed and whose motherly kindness expressed itself most often through strains of monotonous falsetto scolding, was a woman of little education and no refinement; while her husband clung

tenaciously to his love of books, especially to the romances most in vogue when he took leave of France.

M. Roussillon had been, in a way, Alice's teacher, though not greatly inclined to abet Father Beret in his kindly efforts to make a Catholic of the girl, and most treacherously disposed toward the good priest in the matter of his well-meant attempts to prevent her from reading and re-reading the aforesaid romances. But for many weeks past Gaspard Roussillon had been absent from home, looking after his trading schemes with the Indians; and Pere Beret acting on the suggestion of the proverb about the absent cat and the playing mouse, had formed an alliance offensive and defensive with Madame Roussillon, in which it was strictly stipulated that all novels and romances were to be forcibly taken and securely hidden away from Mademoiselle Alice; which, to the best of Madame Roussillon's ability, had accordingly been done.

Now, while the wind strengthened and the softly booming summer shower came on apace, the heavy cloud lifting as it advanced and showing under it the dark gray sheet of the rain, Pere Beret and Alice sat under the clapboard roof behind the vines of the veranda and discussed, what was generally uppermost in the priest's mind upon such occasions, the good of Alice's immortal soul,—a subject not absorbingly interesting to her at any time.

It was a standing grief to the good old priest, this strange perversity of the girl in the matter of religious duty, as he saw it. True she had a faithful guardian in Gaspard Roussillon; but, much as he had done to aid the church's work in general, for he was always vigorous and liberal, he

could not be looked upon as a very good Catholic; and of course his influence was not effective in the right direction. But then Pere Beret saw no reason why, in due time and with patient work, aided by Madame Roussillon and notwithstanding Gaspard's treachery, he might not safely lead Alice, whom he loved as a dear child, into the arms of the Holy Church, to serve which faithfully, at all hazards and in all places, was his highest aim.

"Ah, my child," he was saying, "you are a sweet, good girl, after all, much better than you make yourself out to be. Your duty will control you; you do it nobly at last, my child."

"True enough, Father Beret, true enough!" she responded, laughing, "your perception is most excellent, which I will prove to you immediately."

She rose while speaking and went into the house.

"I'll return in a minute or two," she called back from a region which Pere Beret well knew was that of the pantry; "don't get impatient and go away!"

Pere Beret laughed softly at the preposterous suggestion that he would even dream of going out in the rain, which was now roaring heavily on the loose board roof, and miss a cut of cherry pie—a cherry pie of Alice's making! And the Roussillon claret, too, was always excellent. "Ah, child," he thought, "your old Father is not going away."

She presently returned, bearing on a wooden tray a ruby-stained pie and a short, stout bottle flanked by two glasses.

"Of course I'm better than I sometimes appear to be," she said, almost humbly, but with mischief still in her voice and eyes, "and I shall get to be very good when I have

grown old. The sweetness of my present nature is in this pie."

She set the tray on a three-legged stool which she pushed close to him.

"There now," she said, "let the rain come, you'll be happy, rain or shine, while the pie and wine last, I'll be bound."

Pere Beret fell to eating right heartily, meantime handing Jean a liberal piece of the luscious pie.

"It is good, my daughter, very good, indeed," the priest remarked with his mouth full. "Madame Roussillon has not neglected your culinary education." Alice filled a glass for him. It was Bordeaux and very fragrant. The bouquet reminded him of his sunny boyhood in France, of his journey up to Paris and of his careless, joy-brimmed youth in the gay city. How far away, how misty, yet how thrillingly sweet it all was! He sat with half closed eyes awhile, sipping and dreaming.

The rain lasted nearly two hours; but the sun was out again when Pere Beret took leave of his young friend. They had been having another good-natured quarrel over the novels, and Madame Roussillon had come out on the veranda to join in.

"I've hidden every book of them," said Madame, a stout and swarthy woman whose pearl-white teeth were her only mark of beauty. Her voice indicated great stubbornness.

"Good, good, you have done your very duty, Madame," said Pere Beret, with immense approval in his charming voice.

"But, Father, you said awhile ago that I should have my own way about this," Alice spoke up with spirit; "and on the strength of that remark of yours I gave you the pie and wine. You've eaten my pie and swigged the wine, and now —"

Pere Beret put on his straw cap, adjusting it carefully over the shining dome out of which had come so many thoughts of wisdom, kindness and human sympathy. This done, he gently laid a hand on Alice's bright crown of hair and said:

"Bless you, my child. I will pray to the Prince of Peace for you as long as I live, and I will never cease to beg the Holy Virgin to intercede for you and lead you to the Holy Church."

He turned and went away; but when he was no farther than the gate, Alice called out:

"O Father Beret, I forgot to show you something!"

She ran forth to him and added in a low tone:

"You know that Madame Roussillon has hidden all the novels from me."

She was fumbling to get something out of the loose front of her dress.

"Well, just take a glance at this, will you?" and she showed him a little leather bound volume, much cracked along the hinges of the back.

It was Manon Lescaut, that dreadful romance by the famous Abbe Prevost.

Pere Beret frowned and went his way shaking his head; but before he reached his little hut near the church he was laughing in spite of himself.

"She's not so bad, not so bad," he thought aloud, "it's only her young, independent spirit taking the bit for a wild run. In her sweet soul she is as good as she is pure."

CHAPTER II

A LETTER FROM AFAR

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Although Father Beret was for many years a missionary on the Wabash, most of the time at Vincennes, the fact that no mention of him can be found in the records is not stranger than many other things connected with the old town's history. He was, like nearly all the men of his calling in that day, a self-effacing and modest hero, apparently quite unaware that he deserved attention. He and Father Gibault, whose name is so beautifully and nobly connected with the stirring achievements of Colonel George Rogers Clark, were close friends and often companions. Probably Father Gibault himself, whose fame will never fade, would have been to-day as obscure as Father Beret, but for the opportunity given him by Clark to fix his name in the list of heroic patriots who assisted in winning the great Northwest from the English.

Vincennes, even in the earliest days of its history, somehow kept up communication and, considering the circumstances, close relations with New Orleans. It was much nearer Detroit; but the Louisiana colony stood next to France in the imagination and longing of priests, voyageurs, coureurs de bois and reckless adventurers who had Latin blood in their veins. Father Beret first came to Vincennes from New Orleans, the voyage up the Mississippi, Ohio, and Wabash, in a pirogue, lasting through a whole summer and far into the autumn. Since his arrival the post had

experienced many vicissitudes, and at the time in which our story opens the British government claimed right of dominion over the great territory drained by the Wabash, and, indeed, over a large, indefinitely outlined part of the North American continent lying above Mexico; a claim just then being vigorously questioned, flintlock in hand, by the Anglo-American colonies.

Of course the handful of French people at Vincennes, so far away from every center of information, and wholly occupied with their trading, trapping and missionary work, were late finding out that war existed between England and her colonies. Nor did it really matter much with them, one way or another. They felt secure in their lonely situation, and so went on selling their trinkets, weapons, domestic implements, blankets and intoxicating liquors to the Indians, whom they held bound to them with a power never possessed by any other white dwellers in the wilderness. Father Beret was probably subordinate to Father Gibault. At all events the latter appears to have had nominal charge of Vincennes, and it can scarcely be doubted that he left Father Beret on the Wabash, while he went to live and labor for a time at Kaskaskia beyond the plains of Illinois.

It is a curious fact that religion and the power of rum and brandy worked together successfully for a long time in giving the French posts almost absolute influence over the wild and savage men by whom they were always surrounded. The good priests deprecated the traffic in liquors and tried hard to control it, but soldiers of fortune and reckless traders were in the majority, their interests taking precedence of all spiritual demands and carrying

everything along. What could the brave missionaries do but make the very best of a perilous situation?

In those days wine was drunk by almost everybody, its use at table and as an article of incidental refreshment and social pleasure being practically universal; wherefore the steps of reform in the matter of intemperance were but rudimentary and in all places beset by well-nigh insurmountable difficulties. In fact the exigencies of frontier life demanded, perhaps, the very stimulus which, when over indulged in, caused so much evil. Malaria loaded the air, and the most efficacious drugs now at command were then undiscovered or could not be had. Intoxicants were the only popular specific. Men drank to prevent contracting ague, drank again, between rigors, to cure it, and yet again to brace themselves during convalescence.

But if the effect of rum as a beverage had strong allurements for the white man, it made an absolute slave of the Indian, who never hesitated for a moment to undertake any task, no matter how hard, bear any privation, even the most terrible, or brave any danger, although it might demand reckless desperation, if in the end a well filled bottle or jug appeared as his reward.

Of course the traders did not overlook such a source of power. Alcoholic liquor became their implement of almost magical work in controlling the lives, labors, and resources of the Indians. The priests with their captivating story of the Cross had a large influence in softening savage natures and averting many an awful danger; but when everything else failed, rum always came to the rescue of a threatened French post.

We need not wonder, then, when we are told that Father Beret made no sign of distress or disapproval upon being informed of the arrival of a boat loaded with rum, brandy or gin. It was Rene de Ronville who brought the news, the same Rene already mentioned as having given the priest a plate of squirrels. He was sitting on the doorsill of Father Beret's hut, when the old man reached it after his visit at the Roussillon home, and held in his hand a letter which he appeared proud to deliver.

"A batteau and seven men, with a cargo of liquor, came during the rain," he said, rising and taking off his curious cap, which, made of an animal's skin, had a tail jauntily dangling from its crown-tip; "and here is a letter for you, Father. The batteau is from New Orleans. Eight men started with it; but one went ashore to hunt and was killed by an Indian."

Father Beret took the letter without apparent interest and said:

"Thank you, my son, sit down again; the door-log is not wetter than the stools inside; I will sit by you."

The wind had driven a flood of rain into the cabin through the open door, and water twinkled in puddles here and there on the floor's puncheons. They sat down side by side, Father Beret fingering the letter in an absent-minded way.

"There'll be a jolly time of it to-night," Rene de Ronville remarked, "a roaring time."

"Why do you say that, my son?" the priest demanded.

"The wine and the liquor," was the reply; "much drinking will be done. The men have all been dry here for some time,

you know, and are as thirsty as sand. They are making ready to enjoy themselves down at the river house."

"Ah, the poor souls!" sighed Father Beret, speaking as one whose thoughts were wandering far away.

"Why don't you read your letter, Father?" Rene added.

The priest started, turned the soiled square of paper over in his hand, then thrust it inside his robe.

"It can wait," he said. Then, changing his voice; "the squirrels you gave me were excellent, my son. It was good of you to think of me," he added, laying his hand on Rene's arm.

"Oh, I'm glad if I have pleased you, Father Beret, for you are so kind to me always, and to everybody. When I killed the squirrels I said to myself: 'These are young, juicy and tender, Father Beret must have these,' so I brought them along."

The young man rose to go; for he was somehow impressed that Father Beret must wish opportunity to read his letter, and would prefer to be left alone with it. But the priest pulled him down again.

"Stay a while," he said, "I have not had a talk with you for some time."

Rene looked a trifle uneasy.

"You will not drink any to-night, my son," Father Beret added. "You must not; do you hear?"

The young man's eyes and mouth at once began to have a sullen expression; evidently he was not pleased and felt rebellious; but it was hard for him to resist Father Beret, whom he loved, as did every soul in the post. The priest's

voice was sweet and gentle, yet positive to a degree. Rene did not say a word.

"Promise me that you will not taste liquor this night," Father Beret went on, grasping the young man's arm more firmly; "promise me, my son, promise me."

Still Rene was silent. The men did not look at each other, but gazed away across the country beyond the Wabash to where a glory from the western sun flamed on the upper rim of a great cloud fragment creeping along the horizon. Warm as the day had been, a delicious coolness now began to temper the air; for the wind had shifted into the northwest. A meadowlark sang dreamingly in the wild grass of the low lands hard by, over which two or three prairie hawks hovered with wings that beat rapidly.

"Eh bien, I must go," said Rene presently, getting to his feet nimbly and evading Father Beret's hand which would have held him.

"Not to the river house, my son?" said the priest appealingly.

"No, not there; I have another letter; one for M'sieu' Roussillon; it came by the boat too. I go to give it to Madame Roussillon."

Rene de Ronville was a dark, weather-stained young fellow, neither tall nor short, wearing buckskin moccasins, trousers and tunic. His eyes were dark brown, keen, quick-moving, set well under heavy brows. A razor had probably never touched his face, and his thin, curly beard crinkled over his strongly turned cheeks and chin, while his moustaches sprang out quite fiercely above his full-lipped, almost sensual mouth. He looked wiry and active, a man not

to be lightly reckoned with in a trial of bodily strength and will power.

Father Beret's face and voice changed on the instant. He laughed dryly and said, with a sly gleam in his eyes:

"You could spend the evening pleasantly with Madame Roussillon and Jean. Jean, you know, is a very amusing fellow."

Rene brought forth the letter of which he had spoken and held it up before Father Beret's face.

"Maybe you think I haven't any letter for M'sieu' Roussillon," he blurted; "and maybe you are quite certain that I am not going to the house to take the letter."

"Monsieur Roussillon is absent, you know," Father Beret suggested. "But cherry pies are just as good while he's gone as when he's at home, and I happen to know that there are some particularly delicious ones in the pantry of Madame Roussillon. Mademoiselle Alice gave me a juicy sample; but then I dare say you do not care to have your pie served by her hand. It would interfere with your appetite; eh, my son?"

Rene turned short about wagging his head and laughing, and so with his back to the priest he strode away along the wet path leading to the Roussillon place.

Father Beret gazed after him, his face relaxing to a serious expression in which a trace of sadness and gloom spread like an elusive twilight. He took out his letter, but did not glance at it, simply holding it tightly gripped in his sinewy right hand. Then his old eyes stared vacantly, as eyes do when their sight is cast back many, many years into the past. The missive was from beyond the sea—he knew