AT SENECA CASTLE

CHAPTER I

A PETION FOR AID

"WHO comes there?"

"Halt!"

The question and the command following it were the most welcome words I had ever heard.

They came to me out of the darkness of a raw cold night in the latter part of April, 1779, and almost immediately upon hearing them, I sank down upon my knees, unable longer to stand upright. For five days and nights I had been striving to reach the point where I might hear these words, and I had pictured to myself just what I would reply, and how I would carry myself as I approached the sentry and gave my answers. Always, my pictures had been cast as coming to reality in the broad light of day, and over and over again I had practised the bringing of my right hand to my coonskin cap in respectful salute, my body erect, as though

there was naught to fear, while in as firm and as strong a voice as one of my years could summon, I would reply —

"A friend, who brings important news."

But here I was, worn in body, tattered of clothing, weak from fasting; and when the welcome summons came, my strength failed utterly, and had I attempted to speak, my words must have ended in a sob.

The night was intensely dark, and the keen wind swept over the wide stretch of flat land, driving before it a sleety rain laden with hard pellets of ice and snow that cut my face and hands like the prick of thorns. The day had been dull, stormy and cold; and twice I had lost my way and gone miles in the wrong direction. When night closed down I didn't know whether I was pursuing the right trail or not; but I continued to face the wind, which was drifting in from the ocean some leagues distant, and which I knew must eventually bring me to a settlement, or village, or to the headquarters of the army that I sought. Hours ago, it seemed, I had seen a faint glimmer of light, and upon beholding it, I had spurred myself to greater exertion. Soon the light dis-

appeared, and I believed that I had entered upon a depression in the marshy plain and would discover the welcome sign when I came again to higher ground. Then, I think for the hundredth time since dark, I fell into a pool half covered with ice, into which I sank nearly to my knees. I had waded out and was stamping my feet upon the firm bank to rid them and my legs of the mud and water that clung to them, when the sentry's call came to me, and I knew that my long search was at an end.

I could not see the soldier through the darkness; nor for several moments after his challenge did he move or make a sound. The poor man did not know at what instant a rifle would blaze out and the flash would carry a leaden bullet to his heart; or, perhaps, concealed foes rise from the bushes near at hand and bear him down in captivity. Finally his voice came again, as if uttered between set teeth.

"Who's there? Speak, or I fire!" he said. The danger in which I stood aroused me to some sort of action.

"Hold!" I cried in a voice filled with alarm, "I am a friend."

"Advance and give the word."

"I have no word," I replied. "I come with tidings to General Washington."

"Remain where you are, or I fire," responded the soldier, and almost immediately he blew a sharp blast on a shrill whistle. This was answered from some distance at the right, and soon I heard the tramp of men approaching.

"Guard!" called the sentry as the men approached, and when they had come up, he pointed out the place where I still crouched. I spoke again, saying that I was a friend who desired to be taken to the commander, and then four soldiers came to my side. One of them took my rifle from my almost nerveless grasp, two others seized my arms, and between them I was hurried forward. Not a hundred yards away we passed another sentry, and soon thereafter turned the corner of an embankment and stockade, and I saw before me a large number of tents, in several of which there were lights. One of these we entered, and a young officer who sat writing upon a chest on which burned several candles, turned with a look of curiosity.

My captors saluted him, and the one who

carried my rifle briefly reported the circumstance of my discovery. The officer brought forward one of the candles and surveyed me from head to foot.

"Who are you?" he demanded, when he had finished his inspection.

"Henry Cochrane of Wyoming," I answered.

He started, and held the candle nearer my face. "How came you here, and why?" he inquired, very sharply.

"In what camp am I?" I asked of him, looking full in his face. My courage began to return, once I was in the light and sheltered from the wind.

The officer smiled. "You cannot be accustomed to seeing the soldiery," he said, rather pleasantly, "or you would know without asking."

"I know only the Iroquois, the British Rangers, and the poor settlers whom they murder," I told him.

His manner toward me softened. "This is the headquarters of the American Army, General George Washington commanding," he answered. "There is no other camp near Middle Brook, and if you are in search of those

whom we call our enemies, you have fallen into error."

"I am in search of General Washington," I declared, "and I have walked a long distance to find him. My report must be made only to General Washington."

"The General is engaged upon pressing matters and may not be able to see you for some time," said the officer, whose name I later learned was Jehial Tone, a lieutenant, who was attached to a New Jersey regiment.

Lieutenant Tone did not appear to be more than three or four years my senior, and I was now approaching my nineteenth birthday. I recall that I marvelled somewhat over his youthful appearance, and as I knew little about grades of rank, I thought it most strange that so young a man should be holding a position which at that time I regarded as one not far inferior to that of the General-in-Chief.

"In that case, my errand must await his leisure," I replied, for I was determined to carry my message to the commander in person.

Lieutenant Tone nodded pleasantly and resumed his writing. The soldiers who had brought me to his tent retired, and only the

sentry who had accomplished my capture remained.

While we are awaiting permission to appear before General Washington, I will take occasion to introduce myself and make known my errand.

My name, as you know, is Henry Cochrane, and my home was in Wyoming, Pennsylvania. When I was fifteen years of age I was captured by the Indians, and I resided in the home of the Senecas about four years, learning their games and woodcraft, and participating in their sports, hunts, and war expeditions, and taking an Indian name.

At the time of the Wyoming massacre, the summer previous to the opening of this story, I had discovered my mother and sister, and succeeded in rescuing them and carrying them to a place of safety.[1] Thence, in a few months we returned to Wyoming, along with other settlers who believed that the Indians had been satisfied with the plunder and shedding of blood of the year before, and would leave us peacefully to till the ground and rear our homes.

[1] See *The White Seneca*.

But in this we reckoned incorrectly, for throughout the fall and winter there had been numerous small raids, and not only had some of our people been taken away into captivity, but there had been several deaths from the violence of our foes. Our fort, which had been reconstructed, was surrounded by about two hundred and fifty Indians in March, and for several days we feared attack and another fearful massacre. Finally, however, they had retired, after burning several cabins, driving away a number of our cattle and putting the settlement under great terror.

Early in the present month of April, a detachment of our local militia under Major Powell, making a reconnaissance up the river, had been surrounded by Indians, and six of our people were killed.

At various times through the winter and early spring had we sent petitions to the Continental Congress, setting out the great suffering to which we already had been put, and explaining the peril in which we now stood.

It may be that the Continental Congress did not have power to send us immediate aid. The frontier was a long one, and from Virginia to

the St. Lawrence River there arose from a hundred settlements calls for help. All through the forests moved bands of Indians, — often accompanied by a few British Rangers and more frequently by a number of colonists who still espoused the cause of England, — and scarcely a night passed that was not lighted up by the fires of burning cabins, or was not made hideous by the cries of the pursued and the derisive shouts of the pursuers. The demands upon Congress were many, and there was not much with which to do. Still, we at Wyoming thought that in view of the fearful experience we had undergone we ought now to receive protection.

Following the surprise of Major Powell's force and the killing of six of his men, it was deided to make an appeal for help to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army in person. Upon a canvass of our settlement, it was finally decided to commit to my keeping a statement and petition from the inhabitants of the Wyoming Valley, to be supplemented by such information as General Washington might ask me to give.

The season was a late one, and snow still

clung to the woods and mountains, while cold, sleety rains were almost constant. I could not, therefore, make rapid progress, but I had pressed forward as fast as possible under the circumstances. Swollen streams and rivers caused greatest delay, but I had crossed them at last and now awaited permission to plead the cause of the people of Wyoming to the great leader of the Continental Army.