

Alice of Old Vincennes

By Maurice Thompson

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BEGIN HERE
ALICE and JASON were the foster children of GASPARD ROUSSILLON, who, in the absence of a military commander, was regarded as chief of Vincennes in its early history.

Alice was admired by RENE DE RIVILLE, a handsome youth, who told her it was his dream to marry her, but she knew that he loved MABEL ANDERSON BOURGIER, her best friend. FATHER GIBAUT, arrived from Kaskaskia with the news that France and the American soldiers had made common cause against the British in the great Revolutionary War, of which the people of Vincennes neither knew the cause nor cared about the outcome.

Roussillon was summoned to the river house for news of great importance. GREAT movements in the affairs of men are like tides of the seas which read and affect the remotest and quietest nooks and inlets, imparting a thrill and a swell of the general movement. Father Gibault brought the wave of the American Revolution to Vincennes. He was a simple missionary, but he was, besides, a man of great worldly knowledge and personal force. Col. George Rogers Clark made Father Gibault's acquaintance at Kaskaskia, when the fort and its garrison surrendered to his command, and, quickly discerning the fine qualities of the priest's character, sent him to the post on the Wabash to win over its people to the cause of freedom and independence. Now was the task assigned to him, as Father Gibault probably well knew before he undertook it.

A few of the leading men of Vincennes, presided over by Gaspard Roussillon, held a consultation at the river house, and it was agreed that a mass meeting should be held, bringing all of the inhabitants together in the church for the purpose of considering the course to be taken under the circumstances made known by Father Gibault. Uncle Jason constituted himself an executive committee of one to stir up a noise for the occasion.

It was a great day for Vincennes. The volatile temperament of the French frontiersmen bubbled over with enthusiasm at the first hint of something new and revolutionary in which they might be expected to take part. Without knowing in the least what it was that Father Gibault and Uncle Jason wanted of them, they were all in favor of it at a venture. Rene de Riville, being an active and intelligent young man, was sent ahead through the streets to let everybody know of the meeting. In passing he stepped into the cabin of Father Beret, who was sitting on the loose puncheon floor, with his back turned toward the entrance and so absorbed in trying to put together a great number of small paper fragments that he did not hear or look up. "Are you going to the meeting, Father?" Rene bluntly demanded. In the hurry that was on him he did not remember to be formally polite, as was his habit.

The old priest looked up with a startled face. At the same time he swept the fragments of paper together and clutched them hard in his right hand. "Yes, yes, my son—yes, I am going, but the time has not yet come for it, has it?" he stammered. "Is it late?"

He sprang to his feet and appeared confused, as if caught in doing something very improper.

Rene wondered at this unusual behavior, but merely said: "I beg your pardon, Father Beret, I did not mean to disturb you," and went his way. Father Beret stood for some minutes as if dazed, then squeezed the paper fragments into a tight ball, just as they were when he took them from under the floor some time before Rene came in, and put it in his pocket. A little later he was kneeling, as we have seen him once before, in silent yet fervent prayer, his clasped hands lifted toward the crucifix on the wall. "Jesus, give me strength to hold on and do my work," he murmured beseechingly, "and oh, free they poor

servant from bitter temptation." Father Gibault had come prepared to use his eloquence upon the excitable creoles, and with considerable cunning he addressed a motley audience at the church, telling them that an American force had taken Kaskaskia and would henceforth hold it; that France had joined hands with the Americans against the British, and that it was the duty of all Frenchmen to help uphold the cause of freedom and independence.

"I come," said he, "directly from Colonel George Rogers Clark, a noble and brave officer of the American Army, who told me the news that I have brought to you. He sent me here to say to you that if you will give allegiance to his government you shall be protected against all enemies and have the full freedom of citizens. I think you should do this without a moment's hesitation, as I and my people at Kaskaskia have already done. But perhaps you would like to have a word from your distinguished fellow-citizen, Monsieur Gaspard Roussillon, speak to your friends, my son, they will be glad to take counsel of your wisdom."

There was a stir and a craning of necks. M. Roussillon presently appeared near the little chancel, his great form towering majestically. He bowed and waved his hand with the air of one who accepts distinction as a matter of course; then he took his big silver watch and looked at it. He was the only man in Vincennes who owned a watch, and so the incident was impressive. Father Gibault looked pleased, and already a murmur of applause went through the audience. M. Roussillon stroked the bulging crystal of the time-piece with a circular motion of his thumb and bowed again, clearing his throat resolutely, his face growing purplish above his beard.

"Good friends," he said, "what France does all high-class Frenchmen applaud." He paused for a shout of approbation, and was not disappointed. "The other name for France is glory," he added, "and all true Frenchmen love both names. I am a true Frenchman!" and he struck his breast a resounding blow with the hand that still held the watch. A huge horn button on his buckskin jerkin came in contact with the crystal, and there was a smash, followed by a scattered tinkling of glass fragments.

All Vincennes stood breathless, contemplating the irreparable accident. M. Roussillon had lost the effect of a great period in his speech, but he was quick. Lifting the watch to his ear, he listened a moment with supercilious dignity, then slowly elevating his head and spreading his free hand over his heart he said:

"The faithful time-piece still tells off the seconds, and the loyal heart of its owner still throbs with patriotism."

Uncle Jason, who stood in front of the speaker, swung his shapely cap as high as he could and yelled like a savage. Then the crowd went wild for a time.

"Vive la France! A bas l'Angleterre!" Every body shouted at the top of his voice.

"What France does we all do," continued M. Roussillon, when the noise subsided. "France has clasped hands with George Washington and his brave compatriots; so do we." "Vive Zhorzh Vashington!" shrieked Uncle Jason in a piercing treble, tipping and shaking his cap needlessly under M. Roussillon's nose.

The orator winced and jerked his head back, but nobody saw it, save perhaps Father Gibault, who laughed heartily. Great sayings come suddenly, unannounced and unexpected. They have the mysterious force of prophetic accident combined with happy economy of phrasing. The southern blood in M. Roussillon's veins was effervescing upon his brain; his tongue had caught the fine freedom and abandon of inspired oratory. He towered and glowed; words fell melodiously from his lips; his gestures were compelling, his visage magnetic. In conclusion, he said:

"Frenchmen, America is the garden-spot of the world and will one day rule it, as did Rome of old. Where freedom makes her home, there is the centre of power!" It was in a little log church on the verge of a hummock overlooking a marshy wild meadow. Westward for two thousand miles stretched the unbroken prairies, woods, mountains, deserts reaching to the Pacific; southward for a thousand miles rolled the green billows of the wilderness to the warm Gulf shore; northward to the pole and eastward to the thin fringes of settlements beyond the mountains, all was houseless solitude.

If the reader should go to Vincennes today and walk southward along Second St. to its intersection with Church St., the spot then under foot would probably be very near where M. Roussillon stood while uttering his great sentence. Mind you, the present writer does not pretend to know the exact site of old St. Xavier Church. If it could be fixed beyond doubt the spot should have an imperishable monument of Indiana stone.

When M. Roussillon ceased speaking the audience again exhausted its vocal resources; and then Father Gibault called upon each man to come forward and solemnly pledge his loyalty to the American cause. Not one of them hesitated. Meantime a woman was doing her part in the transformation of Post Vincennes from a French-English plot to a full-fledged American fort and town. Madame Godere, finding out what was about to happen, fell to work making a flag in imitation of that under which George Washington was fighting. Alice chanced to be in the Godere home at the time and joined enthusiastically in the sewing. It was an exciting task. Their fingers trembled while they worked, and the throat, heavily coated with beeswax, squeaked as they drew it through the cloth.

DOINGS OF THE DUFFS—



OUT OUR WAY—By WILLIAMS



THEM DAYS IS GONE FOREVER—



THE OLD HOME TOWN—By STANLEY

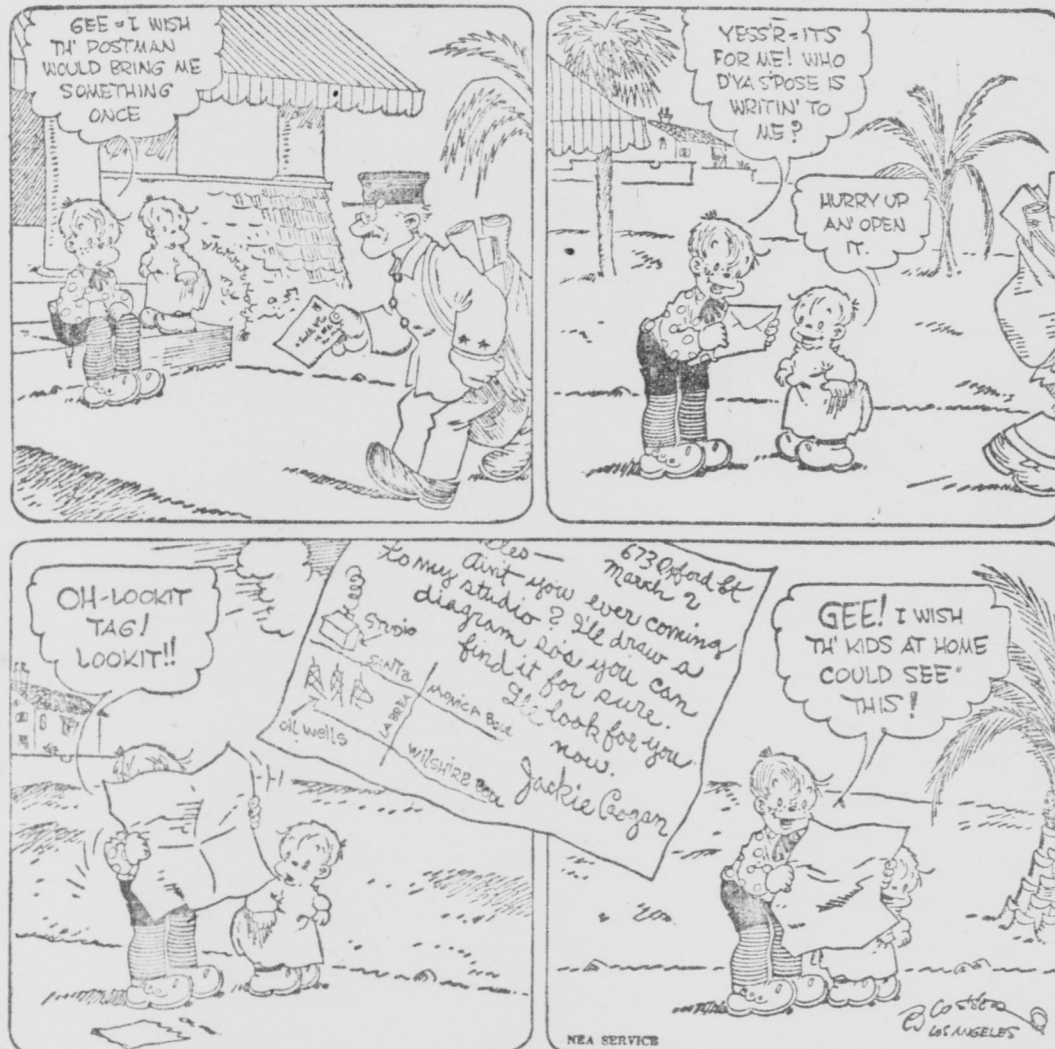


walking, leaning on the staff he mopped his face with a blue handkerchief. "Voilà!" she cried, "vive la république Américaine!" She lifted the staff and let the flag drop over her head to foot. "Give it to me," said Rene, holding forth a hand for it, "and I'll run to the fort with it." "No," said Alice, her face suddenly lighting up with resolve. "No, I am going to take it myself" and without

Her Main Thought



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS—By BLOSSER

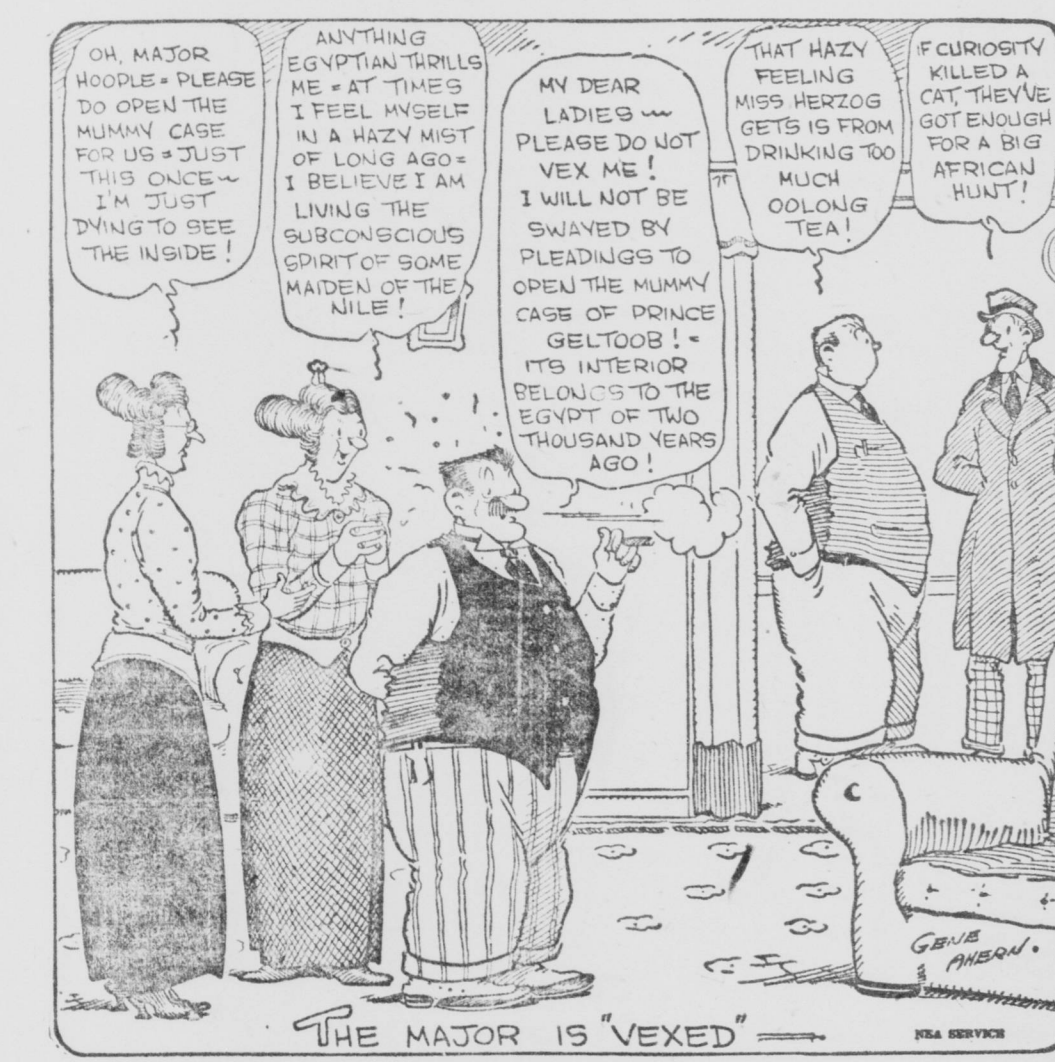


Vanquish This On Your Violoncello



—By AL ROSEN

OUR BOARDING HOUSE—By AHERN



THE MAJOR IS "VEXED"

she appeared on the roof, still accompanied by Rene, and planted the staff in a crack of the slabs, where it stood bravely up, the colors floating free. (To Be Continued.)

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