

## Alice of Old Vincennes

By Maurice Thompson

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FATHER BERET was thinking of Alice. His brain, playing double, calculated with lightning swiftness the chances and movements of that whirlwind rush of fight, while at the same time it swept through a retrospect of all the years since Alice came into his life. How he had watched her grow and bloom; how he had taught her, twined her mind and soul and body to high things, loved her with a fatherly passion unbound, guarded her from the coarse and lawless influence of her surroundings. Like the tolling of an infinitely melancholy bell, all this went through his breast, and brain, and, blending with a furious current of whatever passions were deadly dangerous in his nature, swept as a storm bearing its awful force into his sword-arm.

The Englishman was a lion, the priest a gladiator. The stars aloft in the vague, dark, yet splendid, amphitheater were the audience. It was a question. Would the thumbs go down or up? Life and death held the chances even; but it was at the will of Heaven, not of the stars. "Hoc habet" must follow the stroke ordered from beyond the astral clusters and the dusky blue.

Hamilton pressed, may rushed, the fight with a weight and at a pace which could not last. But Father Beret withstood him so firmly that he made no farther headway; he even lost some ground a moment later.

"You damned Jesuit hypocrite!" he snarled; "you lowest of a vile brotherhood of liars!"

Then he rushed again, making a magnificent show of strength, quickness and accuracy. The sparks hissed and crackled from the rasping and ringing blades.

Father Beret was, in truth, a result, and as such a zealot; but he was not a liar or a hypocrite. Being human, he resented an insult. The saintly spirit in him was strong, yet not strong enough to breast the indignation which now dashed against it. For a moment it went down.

"Liar and scoundrel, yourself!" he retorted, hoarsely forcing his words out of his throat. "Spawn of a beastly breed!"

Hamilton saw and felt a chance power over the spirit of the old priest's movements. Instantly the sword leaping against his own seemed endowed with subtle cunning and malignant treachery. Before this it had been difficult enough to meet the fine play and hold fairly even; now he was startled and confused; but he rose to the emergency with admirable will power and cleverness.

"Murderer of a poor orphan girl!" Father Beret added with a hot concentrated accent; "death is too good for you."

Hamilton felt nearer his grave than ever before in all his wild experience, for somehow doom, shadowy and formless, like the atmosphere of an awful dream, enlisted those words, but he was not weakling to quit at the height of desperate conflict. He was strong, expert, and game to the midline of his heart.

"I'll add a traitor Jesuit to my list of dead," he panted forth, rising yet again to the extremest tension of his power.

As he did this Father Beret settled himself as you have seen a mighty horse do in the home stretch of a race. Both men knew that the moment had arrived for the final act in their impromptu play. It was short, a duel condensed and crowded into fifteen seconds of time, and it was apid beyond the power of words to describe. A bystander, had there been one, could not have seen what was finally done or how it was done. Father Beret's sword seemed to revolve—it was a halo in front of Hamilton for a mere point of time. The old priest seemed to crouch and then make a quick motion as if about to leap backward. A wrench and a snap, and something violently jerked from a fanning, went by Hamilton over Father Beret's head to stick in the ground ten feet behind him. The duel was over, and the whole terrible struggle had occupied less than three minutes.

With his wrist strained and his fingers almost broken, Hamilton stumbled forward and would have impaled himself had not Father Beret turned the point of his weapon aside as he lowered it.

"Surrender, or die!" he muttered, with petulant accent: "why don't you kill me out, Father?"

The level rapier now reinforced the words. Hamilton let the breath go noiselessly from his mouth and waved his hand in token of enforced submission.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" he demanded after a short pause. "You seem to have me at your mercy. What are your terms?"

Father Beret hesitated. It was a question difficult to answer.

"Give me your word as a British officer that you will never again try

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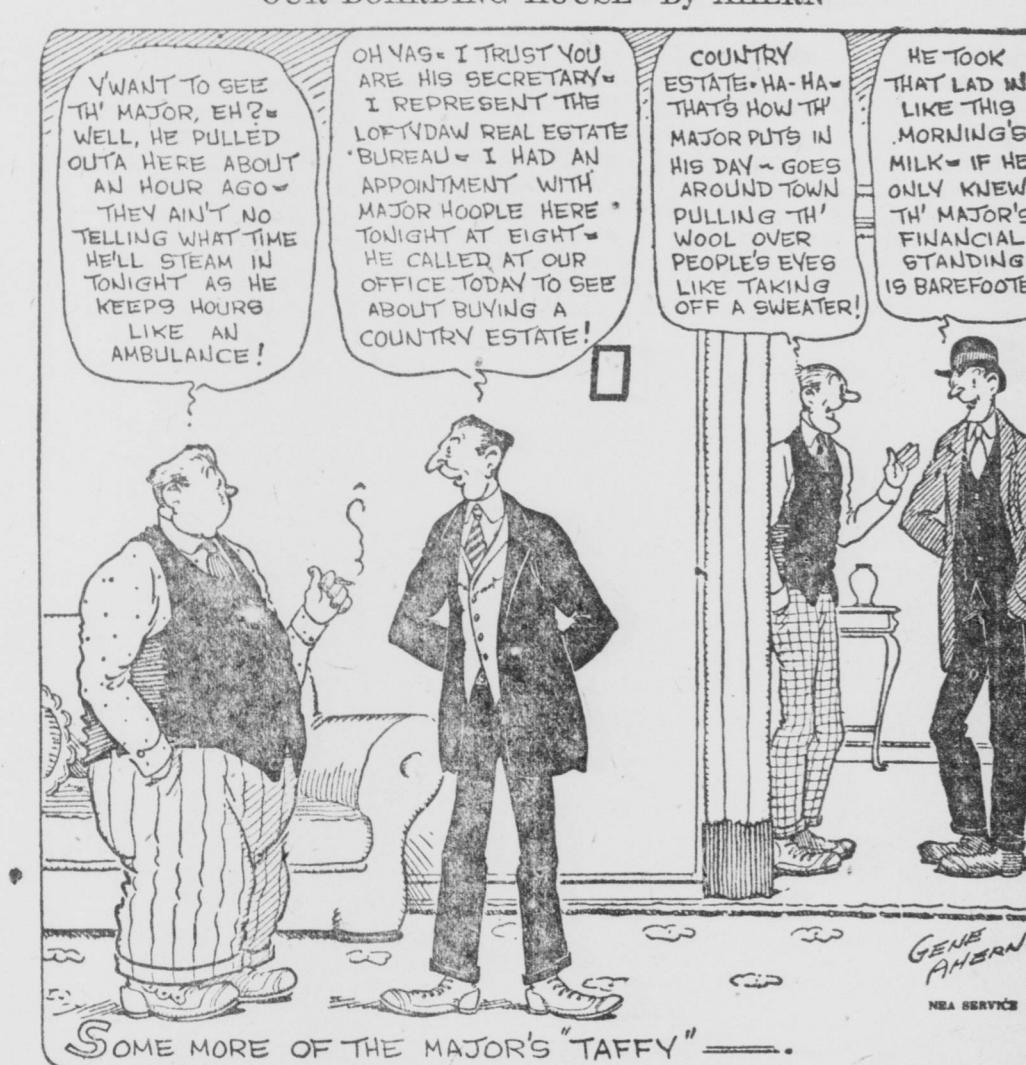
THE OLD HOME TOWN—By STANLEY

OUR BOARDING HOUSE—By AHERN



SAM PECK'S SON, ROGER MET THE MAN ON MAIN STREET TODAY WHO SOLD HIS FATHER SOME STOCK IN A CHINESE OIL WELL, TEN YEARS AGO—

STANLEY



HE TOOK THAT LAD IN LIKE THIS MORNING'S MILK—if he only knew th' major's financial standing is barefooted!

GENE AHERN NEA SERVICE

SOME MORE OF THE MAJOR'S "TAFFY"

he feel greedy and in a hurry. The first spoonful, a trifle bitter, was not so pleasant at the beginning, but a moment after he swallowed it, a hot prickling set in and seemed to dart through him from extremity to extremity. While speaking he brought the hot bowl to Farnsworth and set it on the pedestal before him, then fetched a big horn spoon.

The fragrance of pungent roots and herbs, blended with a savory waft of buffalo meat, greeted the Captain's sense, and the anticipation itself cheered his aching throat. It made

Beret, that makes it so searching and refreshing?" he demanded, when the bowl was empty.

Father Beret shook his head and smiled drolly.

"That I cannot divulge, my son, owing to a promise I had to make to the aged Indian who gave me the secret. It is the elixir of the Miami. Only their consecrated medicine men hold the recipe. The stimulation is but temporary."

Slowly, as he ate, the taste grew more agreeable, and all the effects of his debauch disappeared. It was like magic; his blood warmed and glowed, as if touched with mysterious fire.

"What is this in this soup, Father

Just then some one knocked on the door. Father Beret opened it to one of Hamilton's aides.

"Your pardon, Father, but hearing Captain Farnsworth's voice I made bold to knock."

"What is it, Bobby?" Farnsworth called out.

"Nothing, only the Governor has been having you looked for in every nook and corner of the fort and town. You'd better report at once, or he'll be having us drag the river for your body."

"All right, Lieutenant, go back and keep mum, that's a dear boy, and I'll shush into Colonel Hamilton's audience before many minutes."

The aide laughed and went his way whistling a merry tune.

"Now, you are sure to get per cent in advance," said Farnsworth dryly, shrugging his shoulders with undissembled dread of Hamilton's wrath. But the anticipation was not realized. The Governor received Farnsworth stiffly enough, yet in a way that suggested a suppressed desire to avoid explanations on the Captain's part and a reprimand on his own. In fact, Hamilton was hoping that something would turn up to shield him from the effort of his terrible Allo's white face had impressed it indelibly on his memory, so that the discomfited aide thought of it. He had a slow, numb conscience, lying deep where it was hard to reach, and when a qualm somehow entered it, he endured in secret what most men would have cast off or con-

sumed. He was haunted, if not with remorse, at least with a dread of something most disagreeable in connection with what he had done. He was afraid to converse with Farnsworth lest he should come up for discussion; consequently their interview was curt and formal.

(To Be Continued)