

CHAPTER I

DRY GOODS—AND WET GOODS

IT was nearing noon of Tuesday, February 6th, 1816. The coach-sleigh driver on the regular stage line from Canandaigua, New York, through Rochester, Lockport and Lewiston to Niagara Falls, was ruminating why anyone wished to go to the Falls, especially in winter time. Now, in the summer it was different: you could stage it to Buffalo direct. True, there was no road from Buffalo to the Falls; but you could sail down the river in jig time to Fort Schlosser, not much more than a mile above the Falls. And if you wished to go to Lewiston, the County Seat, you could get off the boat at Black Rock and drive over Military Road. That road had been open for fifteen years. The national politicians said that they had built it for military purposes—as a quick route from Fort Niagara on Lake Ontario to Lake Erie; that they would build a fort at Black Rock, and that the two forts would protect the whole Niagara peninsula. The road would insure quick communication between the two forts. But what had become of the project to build the Black Rock fort? Within forty years the country had fought two wars with the nation on the far side of the river, and another might begin any day. Anyway, whether the fort be built or not, that was the best way to come to Niagara in the summer.

“But in the winter, it is different: you just have to come this way, because you can’t get from Buffalo to Black Rock when the river’s frozen, or choked with ice cakes big as yonder hill. Still, this road is not so bad, except when the snow is deep; and it will be better after we have reached Lewiston Heights. Then we’ll be on Portage Road—a mighty good road for more than a hundred years. All the travelers from the west to the east take that one to Lewiston where you have

your baggage inspected if you're going to Montreal. No, Sir; the customs house is no longer at Fort Niagara: hasn't been for the last five years. And there's another reason why Portage Road is so popular: half way between Lewiston and the Falls is a fine little tavern where we can warm up a bit. We'll be there by noon."

When the travelers alighted at the tavern they found the place alive with farmers who would have intense scruples about allowing their Saturday shopping to interfere with their Saturday "schnapps," or about departing without imbibing, too, the last bit of news. News was slow in reaching these regions in those days. It would be weeks a-coming from Europe to Montreal, New York or Philadelphia; more weeks before it struck the small towns in western New York; and many more days before it reached the villages and farms. In the absence of telegraph, these wayside inns were the radio broadcasting stations for the region, and every farmer would be the loud speaker when he should canter up his own driveway at dusk. In these inns he would load up with news and whiskey, and scurry home to deliver to his wife at least the news.

Eight months previously to the date mentioned above had been fought the battle of Waterloo. They would know of that; but it would be news to learn that the English had escorted Napoleon to St. Helena, and had requested him to worry not about suitable obsequies: there was no one whose funeral they would more willingly attend. But would he promise to be a good little boy, and not flirt with French ships in the offing? That was the burning question among these farmers. Some would be willing to wager that he would be back in Paris within two years and enjoy many another "Hundred Days," and that when he would have whipped all Europe for having made him play in his rocky back yard in the southern seas, he would come over to Mexico, and make her stop her civil war that now had been raging for six years.

"Why, the English are not strong enough to make a man

like that behave. Perry is not so great as Napoleon, maybe; but look at what Perry did to them out there on Lake Erie only three years ago. Shucks! We could get up a regiment of schoolboys and whip them. Why, it was only four years ago when the little boys of Lewiston had built toy forts on the river; and when they had shot mud balls from wooden cannons at the British ships, didn't those ships turn tail and make for the open lake? Yes, sir, our boys can whip them."

A general laugh would follow; and if a stranger with a sense of humor would remark, "And last October four years at Queenstown, look what we did to them!" the laugh would trail off into an embarrassing silence till some one would say, "Well, that was different."

They would be rather shy in discussing the battle of Queenstown. Some of them had fought in it—almost. They had worn the uniform of the militia, and at peep of dawn had stood on Lewiston wharf as the Regulars from the Fort in a dozen boats pushed off with muffled oars to bayonet the British from the Heights. The soldiers in single file scaled the rock, and three times pushed the British back. But then General Brock from Fort George swooped down upon them. Him they killed, but his numbers overwhelmed them. The half-breed Brant with five hundred Mohawks, brandishing their tomahawks and shouting their war whoops, danced in to avenge their fallen General. When the Americans fell back, staggering upon the dizzy precipice, an American officer gazed into the river, and hoisted the white flag; but Captain Wool, though wounded, struck it down: they would not surrender. They must either lunge to death upon the British bayonets, or leap to death into the flood. They that would not leap must fight till General Van Rensselaer should cross to Lewiston with the wounded and return with the militia. There on the wharf at Lewiston the militia are begging to be led into the fray, and are threatening that unless their pleas be heard they will return to their homes. But when Van Rensselaer lays the wounded upon the wharf, and to the

militia cries, "Cross, men!" they look into the bleeding faces of the dying that twitch and scream in agony, and bravery oozes from them with their sweat. Fifteen hundred able-bodied men tremble while their comrades are hewn to pieces on the Heights; and they say that they must obey the Constitution of their State, and the Constitution forbids their fighting outside its borders.

And fourteen months afterwards, when one night the Colonel of the Fort had gone to Buffalo, and the Captain to his home near Lewiston, the British Colonel Murray crossed the river to the Fort, found the gates wide open and the pickets asleep. He signaled General Riall to cross with his red war dogs. They burned, pillaged, scalped and massacred. Where were the brave militia then? The bravest were the women: they thought of the safety of others. They remembered in their flight to bring along not only muskets for their scampering husbands, but also milk bottles for their suckling babes. True, the British were cruel, but the Americans were cowardly. However, not all the Yanks yelped and fled. Many of them barked back with jaws turned north while the pack fled south, and protected the rear of the refugees till they had gained Lewiston Heights. Thence they looked down upon their village, and saw by the flames of their homes the red men kneeling to scalp the dead. And when a few months hence they had returned from the Genesee Valley they had to chase the wolves and wild cats from the embers of their village before they could build again. Naturally, these farmers and villagers were somewhat bashful of their prowess shown in the war of 1812.

The talk in the tavern would gracefully swerve from the cruelty of the Indian to the cunning of the Catholic—the latter was a never-failing source of conversation. They might disagree on the relative merits of Washington and Napoleon, but there was a solace in the unanimity of opinion regarding the Indian and the Catholic: the only good one was the dead one. Were not the Catholics plotting to hand over the nation

to the Pope? Their state made a mistake when thirty-two years ago it repealed the law of death for the priest. England had made a mistake when it had allowed freedom of worship to the Quebec Catholics. If she did not watch out there was danger of that man O'Connell compelling her some of these days to allow the Catholic even to vote. The Pope must be using him for this purpose. Meanwhile, they in this country must be ever ready to hinder that church from getting a strangle hold here. The Catholics don't amount to much now, but patriotism must see that they shall never amount to more.

And, mistake not, these farmers were honest in their convictions. They would almost have shivered had they known that in the country, outside the Louisiana purchase of twenty-three years previous, there were a hundred thousand of these plotters, one sixth of whom were in and around New York City. But that would make little difference, because there were only four or five priests in the City; and the priests were the chief plotters: most of the laity were only dupes. "Kill the priests, and the church will die!" That was the real solution. These honest men had done their duty, without having had to resort to capital punishment.

"Look at Lewiston! The priest Watteaux had begun the parish there almost a hundred and forty years ago; and where is it now? All the priests had come from France through Canada—all except the last one; and most of them had come with the troops. While here they had entangled the whites and the Indians in the meshes of their belief. That last one was that Irishman, Edmund Burke from Kildare. He had come with the English soldiers from Detroit, and had held on for two years, giving the Mass service and everything. But he left twenty years ago when the English evacuated the Fort. And why did the English hold the Fort for thirteen years after the treaty of peace? Yes, they offered one excuse after another; but, I bet you, the real reason was that the Pope told him to stay till we had elected a Catholic President. Bet you, too, the Pope told him to make England more agreeable to the

Catholic soldiers, or means would be taken to prevent them enlisting any more. What reason have I for thinking that? Why, because when that priest Burke left, did he not write from across the river to the Bishop in Quebec and complain that the Catholic soldiers were compelled to attend Protestant services? Did he not say that seventy-five per cent of the soldiers were Catholics? Now, suppose that the Pope would say to them, 'Don't you join any more!' Do you think that England would like to lose so many of her fighters? But now he is gone, and we've had no Catholic church for twenty years, and we're not going to have—ever. No, we have no Protestant church here, never had. Well, one started up last year; but that's nothing. We don't need any when there is no Catholic one; and we're going to see that no Catholic one starts. If any priest comes to this region we are going to vote that he be put in one of those steam contraption boats that Fulton used to sail up the Hudson, nine years ago, from New York City to Albany. It was like a big duck with a stomach full of hot cinders. Only we are going to head it the other way—east instead of north. They are saying that one of these days those steam things are going to cross the ocean. The fools! Well, we'll give them part of their cargo; and we won't insure it, either."

These honest farmers would have felt dismayed had they known that eight years before, in Baltimore, a Mrs. Seton, a convert to the faith, had started the parochial school system; and that in little more than a century 25,000 priests would be ministering to more than 20,000,000 Catholics who would be sending more than 2,000,000 children to nigh 10,000 Catholic schools, academies and colleges; that many staunch Protestant thinkers would consider the Catholic church one of the strongest bulwarks of the nation against its greatest dangers; and that on the day whereon we have pictured their fancied conversation, a young native American measuring muslin in his father's store in Baltimore would be the one to help build upon the site of this very tavern,

a seminary for the training of priests for centuries to come.

The clerk in the dry goods store was a fussy little fellow, no bigger than Napoleon. No doubt he envied Napoleon's freedom on St. Helena. The latter could wander almost all over the rock, and could view the infinite expanses of the sea; but the clerk was imprisoned in a "cell" fifty by sixty feet, with bars of flannels and gingham rising to more than twice his height. Like Napoleon in his student days of engineering he had dreams of some great work ahead, but knew not what it might be. He had the brain of a genius, too, but naught whereon to use it. It required no great intellect to learn the best way to wash a woolen blanket, or to keep a print from "running." And what was the use of having an iron will like the Master General when there are no subjects to bend to it? He had ambitions, but no fresh air that they could breathe. In his demeanor there was a seriousness that whispered of dreams he knew not what, of conquests he knew not where. Voraciously and intently he read books that provoked reason to labor rather than imagination to wander. He even taught French in a local school for a while. Customers must have judged him, at times, of trying to ape the "highbrows." His father recognized the boy's bent for system and organization, and must have encouraged him: the recognition drove him to take an interest in the work. And he certainly was a worker; always busy, and happiest when he had too much work to do and too little time wherein to do it. And like most busy little lads, he had an air of self-importance and a quick temper that sometimes gave a great battle to his iron will. He was resentful of any show of patronage or superiority, especially from anyone bigger than he. He spoke not so much as he thought; but when he lost his temper he was like Vesuvius in action. Words shot out—quick, hot, blistering words that like lava scorched anyone in their path. And if the lava ignited the anger of a six-foot customer, the store in fifteen minutes would look like the ruins of Pompeii. Prudence and suavity

he learned in maturity, but fearlessness attended him from youth to age. For, though he was born in Conevago, Adams County, Pennsylvania, and had been in Baltimore fourteen years, his parents had come from Ireland; and he always retained an Irishman's love for an argument.

Yet, withal, he was a likable lad, with an engaging air, very polite, a body well knit, physically fit, even handsome. We can imagine him with a pencil behind his ear, his hands upon the counter, leaning forward to a customer, and biting off with a winsome smile, "Yes," "No," "Anything else?" as though he had but just one minute to spare, and was so glad to share it. Or we can imagine him short-stepping it through the store, his coat tail flying, his thumbs snapping against his forefingers, and his lips humming the "Yankee Doodle." His courteous, serious and independent ways won the mothers' hearts in his section of the city. They would lecture their daughters that he had a future; but the daughters would be just as well contented with his present: let the future take care of itself. He was very popular with the younger set, and at parties would listen to toasts drunk in his honor, and would look into the yearning eyes of many generous daughters who were willing to share their own future with his. It seems, strange though it be, that some of these generous hearts "proposed" to him. Proposed through their mothers? Perhaps. But maybe these daughters needed no maternal agency in Baltimore, 1816: it was a leap year. However it may have been, the young social Napoleon of his set, found in Baltimore no "Waterloo." After two years there he trekked it with his seven sisters and two brothers to Louisville, untrammelled with the soft chains of matrimony. Yes, he had a future; but neither he nor anyone else knew what it should be.

And on the very noonday when this youth was measuring gingham prints for giggling girls, it was 5.00 p. m. in France. On the deck of a storm-tossed boat nearing Bordeaux, a young Italian priest, twenty-eight years of age, peered into the dusk

and wondered if they should make port tonight. The storm seemed subsiding. He had embarked from Ostia, Italy, more than three weeks before. The distance was only about two thousand miles around Spain; but the storms had taken them in almost every direction except the one most desired. In fact, many times they thought they were going in the direction least desired. Some days after they had landed they learned that of the twenty-one ships that had tried to make the ports of southern France that night nineteen had foundered. But on this February 6th, the Italian was not worrying about other boats. He felt that he had acted more wisely had he accompanied his superior over the Alps to Bordeaux: safer to be lost in the snow than in the sea. The superior had been his professor in Rome, and had often told him to learn English, that he would need it some day. And now, four years after ordination, what with preparing sermons and giving more than two score missions, he had learned not a word. But neither had the superior. Both needed it now. However, they could both study it in Bordeaux, where they would have to stay for a few months. Had the superior arrived in Bordeaux? Was he worrying about the ship's safety?

In the Archiepiscopal Palace the superior seemed more interested in sermons than in ships. He was explaining to the Prelate the wonderful outpouring of piety on the preceding March 24th, Good Friday, in Rome when he had conducted the "Three Hours' Agony" devotion, and had preached on the "Seven Last Words." Yes, he would strongly advise His Grace to inaugurate the devotion in the Cathedral next April 12th.

While the superior was waxing eloquent on the "Three Hours' Agony" in Bordeaux, a young boy, fifteen years of age, in the college of Verriere, on the Loire, was bending over his desk, undergoing a half hour's agony in unraveling the puzzles of Euclid. And in Fermanagh, Ireland, another agony had lately finished. A woman came out of a cabin,

tightened her shawl about her breast, and to another woman entering she sympathetically whispered, "It's a boy, God bless him!"