

THE WOMAN WHO BLAZED THE WAY

How Her Courage Met Difficulties of a Seemingly Impossible Flight

By AGNES C. LAUT

HERE is probably no prouder claim among American citizens to-day than belonging to the F. F. V.'s—being a descendant of the First Families of Virginia; but a lot of mushy, maudlin sentiment has got mixed up with the modern idea of those grand dames who presided over the households of the Old Dominion. People who trace their lineage back to the Old Dominion will draw forth from their family stores little old-fashioned morocco-bound household expense books with inventories of mahogany furniture and teakwood cabinets shipped up from the West Indies; of old silver sent out from London; and of laces and silks brought from the Continent in the Master's own tobacco sloops of a value exceeding all the slaves on the old plantation. Then they will lead you across to the family portraits where you can see how the ivory faced beauties must have looked in these laces and silks, and can construct for yourself a mental picture of luxury lolling in satins and slippers beneath punka fans of wild turkey tails wielded by pickaninnies servile as Turkish mutes.

That picture is all very well as far as it goes; but it doesn't go far enough. It's the *thing* all right, but it's the *thing* with the iron extracted—which brings up the old explanation of why the diamond is better than the charcoal, though they are both the very same thing.

Very grand and gracious were these early dames; so grand and proud and unbending they would have boxed your ears if they had caught you reclining to lean on the back of a chair, though it was permissible to loll if you did it gracefully to show off your hands and your slippers and your gowns. These parts of the picture no one denies; but the one thing that made these women different from any other beautiful women done up in the luxury and the trappings of good breeding, the thing that put iron in their courage and gave the glint of the diamond to their brilliancy, the thing that gave the wings of daring, the unerring instinct of high flight, to their spirit—that thing we have forgotten altogether in our mental picture of their past; and the result is very much the same as when Bridget thinks she can transmogrify into a lady by putting on airs and a dress.

What that thing is, I'm not going to name. You can read this life and then you can guess it. But I'm fairly sure if that thing had not gone down in the blood and the character of Virginia and Kentucky and Tennessee and Ohio, the F. F. V.'s would have become a tawdry myth like any other tinsel sold for gold, or veneer for mahogany.

It was in the early days—twenty years before the Revolution. Boone had not yet gone west of the Blue Ridge. In fact, he could not have been more than twenty years of age. Braddock, the British general, was swaggering and blustering and bullying his way down the Monongahela; and the French from Quebec with their Indian friends were lying in wait; and all the tribes of the Ohio were in the pay of France and swarming in the passes of the Alleghanies and the Blue Ridge like harrier hawks.

But these things did not disturb the gay life of the Old Dominion. From the James to the St. Lawrence seemed such a far call, no one guessed that the war could invade the homes of Virginia. Nearly a hundred thousand people now the Old Dominion numbered. Families had pushed far from the sea-coast up the James and the Roanoke over the Blue Ridge into the beautiful valleys within the shadows of the Alleghanies and the Cumberlands. Long, low rambling log houses went up as if by magic on the mountain streams, with slave quarters to rear; and presently cotton and tobacco fields were waving in the little clearings; for with the help of the slaves, these pioneers made quicker progress towards comfort than pioneers in the North. In fact, it was one of these settlers west of the Blue Ridge that began shipping cotton abroad at this time, and so laid the foundations of the great banking house of Brown, Shipley, and of the great cotton commerce of America.

Life was not so bare of the graces and joys of living up in the valleys between the Blue Ridge and the Cumberlands as elsewhere among the pioneers of America. Men prospered fast enough to enjoy life in the *Now* and not in the *Next*; and the big Fall Hunts marked the joy of the year at its zenith as they do to this day. By September all invitations had been sent out. A month later came twenty or thirty guests with bedding, cook, wines, string of

dogs, and among numerous coloured servants, some who could play banjo and fiddle. Day after day to the winding of the hunter's horn and baying of the eager hounds at day dawn the pleasure-seekers would set off to hunt till five in the afternoon. A different lot of dogs was used each day, thus keeping all fresh. Dinner was served early, soon as the guests could change their hunting suits, the ladies doffing riding costumes for those silks and laces and ample skirted gowns we see in the old becurled portraits to-day, the gentlemen putting off hunters' green for a change of high chokers, silk waistcoats and knee-buckled breeches, the hair or wig tied short at the neck. Then dinner of game with big apple dumplings and wine would be served by the blacks with music by Sambo. I don't need to add that there were high play and deep drinking after dinner till the tall cuckoo clock in the walnut case at the end of the central hall sang out the hour for apple-jack toddy and for the hunters to go to bed. One can guess there was sound sleep in the high poster mahogany beds with eider-down quilts and goose feather mattresses literally in hills and valleys from pillows to foot pan. And while the masters were following their pleasure inside, outside back at the slave quarters banjos were twangling round a bonfire at a husking bee or a roasting of the day's hunt for the help. One day the pack would follow the scent of a fox; another day would be given to deer hunting. Then there was always a turkey shoot. Old flint locks were the weapons used, so that we need not expend too much sympathy on the quarry. The man who got a deer with an old flint lock deserved it. Ordinarily the hunting lasted ten days—long enough jollification to provide happy memories till the next re-union and meat for a winter.

"It won't keep," remarked a new-comer about piles of venison brought in.

"Then *jerk* it as the Indians do," answered the southerner, meaning dry it and smoke it in strips like pemmican. As it cost a shilling to send a letter to the eastern settlement each plantation of the upper valleys had to be an independent establishment. On each farm were usually a blacksmith, a carpenter, a shoe maker and servants who understood spinning, beside the regular field labourers.

SUCH was the life in the upper valleys; and it was over these valleys that the hostile Shawnees of the Ohio, bribed by France to stem the tide of English settlement, circled at the mountain passes like harrier hawks. Danger from the Indians? Nonsense! With General Braddock marching north with the biggest army of regulars ever sent to America! One can hear the soft-voiced laugh of incredulity from the haughty faces in those old portraits.

Among the planters who had moved from the eastern settlements to the upper valleys were Thomas Ingles, a wholesale merchant with three sons, and the Drapers, with like family of sons and daughters who settled on New River near Blackburg and Smithfield, on what has ever since been known as Draper's Meadows. These were the first two families to settle west of the Alleghanies. A little north, near what are now called the New White Sulphur Springs, was Adam Harmon's plantation; but one can guess that the planter's pace beat the hoof from house to house along the narrow wilderness trail following the river bottoms, for Mary Draper becomes noted in the valley for her fearless horsemanship. Before she was eighteen she could mount any horse unaided and master him unsaddled and unbridled. That of itself tells you of something in her makeup besides a good pose for a portrait. And William Ingles must have been a bit of a dare-devil wilderness rider also, for the two youngsters had married and set up a plantation of their own at Ingles or English Ferry before either husband or wife was twenty-one.

The next five years saw two boys added to the youthful Ingles family. Then suddenly rumours of Indian war and French invasion west of the great blue ridged mountains disturbed the peace of the upper valleys. And Braddock went blustering north with his regimental bands playing jigs for his ponderous provision wagons to dance to on a wilderness road never meant for other than moccasined travel. Virginia merchants with traders in the west country sent out messengers to call them back and met them with convoys of protection be-

yond the gaps in the mountains. On the second week in July of 1755, Col. Patton, of Augusta County, Virginia, had come to the upper valley to meet some of his men from the mountains. He paused with his black servants for Sunday at the Draper Meadows. Dinner over, the blacks had wandered to the fields, the gentlemen gone strolling and the women of the households retired from the day's heat. Col. Patton hadn't disguised the fact that he considered the mountain gaps pretty dangerous spots just then—he was frankly uneasy about his men, and no doubt called the young Ingles family's attention to the fact that the Harmon store houses up at the Springs had been repeatedly raided of their furs.

HOW and when did it happen? There is no authentic record left; but the eagle eyes watching at the mountain gaps had seen Patton come in with fresh horses and ammunition and provisions for his absent traders. From the fields, young William Ingles saw smoke suddenly burst from the buildings on his plantation. Instantly and instinctively he knew what he dared not let himself think. He hallooed for the scattered servants and dashed like a madman for his home. What he dared not think took visual form across his path. Colonel Patton lay dead on the ground. The bodies of Mrs. George Draper and her children had been thrown across the trail. Other bodies there were, but of these he had no thought; for the Shawnee warriors had rounded up Patton's horses; loaded with plunder and tied to the horses were persons being carried off captive; Leonard, a neighbour, Mrs. Betty Draper, his wife's sister-in-law, and—his heart stood still—on a third horse was strapped his own young wife with her two baby boys clinging in her arms. Young Ingles was unarmed; but before he could collect his senses a score of painted Shawnees had caught sight of him and came down the trail with a whoop. Ingles dodged for hiding in the woods of the river. Arrows sang past his ears. Old flint locks crashed fire and missed aim. Amid peppering of bullets, he heard the shout of a fellow in close pursuit. Zig-zagging Indian fashion and dodging into the thick matted forest, William Ingles thought to throw the fellow off his track when one foot caught in a root and down he floundered full length with a crash into a tangle of ferns and cane-brake. He had only time to crouch close beneath the broad girth of a fallen tree-trunk when a naked form leaped through the foliage, went over the log at a bound and off down to the river in hot pursuit. William Ingles did not wait for the enemy's return. He doubled back on his tracks like a harried hare and circled another way for the river that tells no tales of tracks. But what of his girl wife and the other prisoners?

To ascend the mountain gaps at any time was hard travelling; but to ascend them at a gallop strapped to a saddleless horse with two babies in arms along a trail that ran so close to the river cliffs one mis-step would send horses and riders to instant death, was an experience to bring out the yellow streak, if there was an atom of it in a woman's nature. Something in Mary Ingles' horsemanship or in her fearless bearing aroused the Shawnees' admiration and kept their hands off her. Perhaps the fact that she was high-spirited and well-born excited the rascals with prospects of big ransom money when the prisoners were delivered by treaty over to the French. That the young mother expected another member added to her family almost at once did not mend matters; but it would have mended them less to show the white feather. If any woman on earth ever had a right to feel sorry for herself, Mary Ingles had, but she wasn't. She was too busy keeping those two baby boys from falling out of her arms.

Crossing New River at English Ferry, captors and captives turned their faces squarely towards the setting sun. "As the sun went down," wrote Mr. Draper, a descendant of those settlers of the upper valleys, "the long shadows of the mountains coming out as if to meet them used to terrify the captives." But into the chill folds of the long purple shadows noiseless but for the roar of the mountain brooks, passed Mary Ingles and her companions. Rifted shafts of sunlight aslant the blue, and deepening shadows but emphasized the loneliness, the darkness, the solitude of the enfolding forests. She must have realized where they were being led, this daughter of the wilderness pioneers. It was down New River across the Great Flat Top Range down to the Kanawha, the wilderness trail of the savages of Virginia to the great Shawnee town opposite the Scioto on the Ohio—the same trail that Capt. Ab. Wood's explorers had followed away back in the seventies of the preceding century, when he discovered the overland route to the Ohio and the Mississippi. Indeed, that same discovery