That "Finished Scoundrel"-Gen. James Wilkinson

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

OU probably have never heard of the Battle of La Colle Mill which was fought 120 years ago this month just across the Canadian border from Rouses Point, N. Y. In that respect you're not much different from most of your fellow-country-

men, for this battle has never yet been considered important enough to win a place in our school histories. And even if you have read about it elsewhere, it's not likely that you care particularly to remember the story of that engagement. For it was just another in the long series of failures and disasters, brought about by blundering American generals, which makes the military history of the War of 1812, with but one or two exceptions, such dreary reading for those Americans who like to think that we, as a nation, have been uniformly successful in every war we have waged.

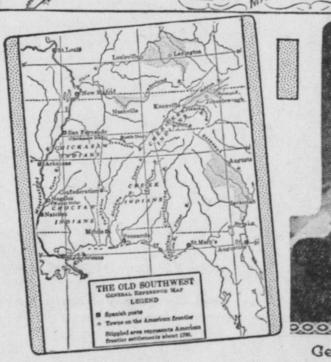
No, the Battle of La Colle Mill was not the sort of affair to foster much pride in the history of American arms, In it an army of some 4,000 Americans was held at bay by only 200 British until red-coated reinforcements came up, bringing their numbers up to about 1,000 men. But







La Colle Mill and Block-house





Gen. Horatio Gates

even then, outnumbered four to one as they were, those stubborn Englishmen not only held their own, but after two hours' fighting forced the 4,000 Americans to retreat with a loss of 13 killed, 128 wounded and 13 missing, as compared to the British loss of 11 killed, 46 wounded and

four missing.

In thus indicating that the Battle of La Colle Mill was an ignominious defeat for the American arms, let it not be supposed that our soldiers were less brave than the British. Throughout the battle both officers and men displayed a gallantry and a desperate valor worthy of the best traditions of the American fighting man. But again it was a case of a b'undering commander whose incompetence set at nought their heroic efforts. He was Gen, James Wilkinson, who allowed himself to be "outsmarted" by the commander of the enemy and was the victim of a stratagem as old as the history of warfare.

In the midst of the assault on the stone mill, which gave the battle its name, there came from the woods nearby the sound of a bugle. By some strange process of reasoning, the American commander decided that he was about to be cut off by a superior force of the enemy and he immediately ordered a retreat. So one blast of a bugle, the clever stratagem of a quick-witted British officer, turned what might easily have been an American victory into a disgraceful defeat-disgraceful, not to the American troops, but to their leader.

Lossing, in his gossipy, rambling "Pictorial Field Book of the War of 1812," devotes two pages to this engagement and ends his account thus: "With the discreditable affair at La Colle Mill, the military career of General Wilkinson was closed." And in that sentence lies the importance of what a later historian has called "the insignificant little battle at La Colle Mill." For, no matter how insignificant it may have been as a military engagement, the fact that it wrote "Finis" to the opportunity for mischiefmaking by one of the most amazing characters in American history makes it an outstanding event in the annals of our nation.

Of this man John Randolph of Roanoke, who hated him and who, incidentally, was one of the best haters of all time, once said "Wilkinson is the most finished scoundrel that ever lived; a ream of paper would not contain the proofs." Even though the waspish Randolph didn't believe that the proof could be contained in a ream of paper, a modern biographer has proved that it can be done pretty well in a 300-page book and, taking Randolph's characterization for his title, he proceeds to do it. He is Royal Ornan Shreve and the book is "The Finished Scoundrel," published recently by the Bobbs-Merrill company.

Indicative of what the book contains is the sub-title: "General James Wilkinson, sometime Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the United States, who made intrigue a trade and treason a profession," and in the first chapter you "Meet General Wilkinson" and there begin reading "the story of an amazing career; of one of the most weird and impossible characters that ever strutted his little hour on the stage of a nation; of a man who was without doubt the most clever and persistent, if not the most dangerous, of that small company for whom history reserves the infamous name of Traitor." Born in Tidewater, Md., in 1757 he was a scion

of the lesser landed gentry with sufficient income to give him a good education. At the age of fifteen he was sent to Philadelphia to study medicine with an uncle and there was every indication that he was destined for a career of alleviating human distress instead, as it turned out, of adding to the sum total of human distress.

At the outbreak of the Revolution he "put by pill-box and lancet" and, as a "gentleman volunteer," headed north toward the siege of Boston. In the camp at Cambridge his "ingratiating manners, pleasing and plausible address, education above the average of young gentlemen of the time, knowledge of drill and discipline beyond that of rustic militia officers" soon won him a captaincy in the army.

It is probable that in the camp at Cambridge Wilkinson made the acquaintance of two men with whom his name was to be linked in the future-their names to be besmirched while he, equally if not more guilty, was to have his name whitewashed. One was Benedict Arnold, then a colonel, and the other was Aaron Burr, also a gentleman volunteer.

From that time on Captain Wilkinson is much in evidence in the history of the Continental army. He is sent on the expedition to Canada under General Sullivan to support Arnold and quite by chance, rather than by his ability, saves Arnold from disaster as the latter retreats before the advance of Sir Guy Carleton, Next we find the young captain with Gates, who has been placed in command of the Northern army, "pandering to the vanity" of Gates, who makes Wilkinson a member of his staff. Forgetting his friendship for Arnold, Wilkinson "goes over horse, foot and dragoons to Gates; shares thereafter his jealousy and deprecation of Arnold." Thus Wilkinson first appears in his characteristic role of double-crosser.

Next he is with Washington at the splendid victory at Trenton. Then he is at Princeton, at Valley Forge, and at Morristown, becomes involved in the Conway cabal against Washington and again does some double-crossing of his fellow-conspirators, including his friend, Gates, although this time, it must be admitted, his betrayal of the plot was more or less unintentional and came about while he was under the influence

of liquor. By this time he was a brevet brigadier-general, albeit over the protest of some 47 colonels who were more worthy of the promotion than he. After the winter at Valley Forge he resigned from the army. But 18 months later he was back on the payroll again as clothier-general for the army, a post which he held until the end of the war and which, for a wonder, he handled

without becoming involved in any shady deals. After the war he was a member of the Pennsylvania legislature, then finding himself in financial straits, he started for the Kentucky frontier to recoup his fortunes. There he rapidly rose to prominence, helped in the development of the new state and became involved again in his favorite occupation-that of intrigue-this time in the famous Spanish Conspiracy which is still a confused and unsolved mystery, although decuments have been found in the Spanish archives

which seem to prove that Wilkinson was an agent of the king of Spain, paid by him to influence Kentucky to secede from the Union and become a Spanish ally,

If he was in the pay of Spain it evidently wasn't enough to support his family for he went back into the American army, was advanced to colonel and within a year to the rank of brigadler-general and in 1796 he became commander of the army.

Then followed that amazing period in his career when, holding the highest military office in the land, he was still, there is good reason to believe, in the pay of Spain. Soon afterwards he was involved in the Burr conspiracy. Like the Spanish Conspiracy the Burr plot is still something of a mystery with many angles as yet unexplained. Recent historical research has uncovered evidence which indicates that Wilkinson, instead of Burr, was the arch-conspirator and that Burr was only the tool of the unscrupulous commander-in-chief. According to one theory Wilkinson was Jefferson's secret agent all along. giving Burr enough rope with which to hang himself before exposing the plot. According to another, Wilkinson used Burr for his own ends, then double-crossed him at the last to save his own skin.

In the light of his past career, it would seem reasonable to believe that Wilkinson was up to his old tricks-playing both ends against the middle and quite capable of betraying anyone to further his own ambitious projects. But whatever the truth of the matter, the fact remains that although Wilkinson narrowly missed indictment on a charge of treason he managed to come through the whole affair without bearing his just share of the disgrace that engulfed poor Aaron Burr and continued on his way of playing a part in important historical events.

As commander of the army he sent Lieutenant Pike off upon the exploring expeditions that won fame for that young officer. He was one of the commissioners who received the Louisiana Purchase from the French and at the outbreak of the War of 1812 he won a bloodless victory by capturing Mobile and ousting the Spanish garrison there. Then he went north to the Canadian border to add to his laurels, but succeeded only in wrecking what little military reputation he had left,

Still the stormy petrel of the army, he became involved in a series of jealousies and bickerings with other American generals who were, if anything, more incompetent than he. The result was the utter failure of his proposed expedition to capture Montreal, an expedition which had every prospect of success had it been carried through intelligently.

In March, 1814, he launched another campaign to "vindicate" himself, "But Instead of success and vindication, he achieved only inglorious defeat in the insignificant battle of La Colle Mill." That was the end of James Wilkinson, He was relieved of his command and ordered to Washington under arrest to await court-martial. "The wait was long. The harassed administration attempting to wage war without money, without ships, almost without soldiers, and with generals who achieved disaster with monotonous regularity, had not time to waste on the trial of one of its failures." Perhaps if he had been tried it would have been with the usual result. For during his career he had been before three courts of inquiry on charges ranging all the way from neglect of military duty to treason and each time he had managed to escape with a coat of white-

Instead of being tried he was allowed to slip quietly into obscurity. He spent the next few years writing his "Memoirs," a voluminous and verbose alibi for all the things that had ever been charged against him, and managing his plantation on the Mississippi below New Orleans. Then we find him in Mexico City also adjusting claims of American citizens entrusted to him and in trying to obtain a grant of land on what is now the site of Galveston, Texas, from the Spanish "in recognition of services rendered"!

He died in 1825 and was buried beneath the Church of San Miguel in the Mexican capital. The exact site of his grave is unmarked and unknown-an appropriate end, perhaps, to the man who received so much from his country

and gave so little in return. 6 by Western Newspaper Union,

Fifty Famous Frontiersmen

ELMO SCOTT WATSON

Rising Wolf, White Blackfoot

THE blood of French nobility and of English aristocracy flowed in his veins. He was fair-haired and blue eyed and white-skinned, but to this day he is revered among the Blackfeet Indians as "Rising Wolf," one of their own greatest and best-loved. Hugh Monroe was his name and he was born at Three Rivers, Quebec, in 1798, the son of Capt. Hugh Monroe of the British army in Canada and Amelle de la Roche, daughter of a noble family of French emigres.

When but sixteen years of age he persuaded his parents to let him enter the service of the Hudson's Bay com pany, the lords of the empire of fur and that spring he started west with a flotilla of their canoes. The next year he was at Mountain Post on the Saskatchewan. Around the fort were camped thousands of Blackfeet, come there to trade for the white man's goods. But as yet the company had no Blackfeet interpreter and the H. B. C. factor at the post, impressed with the intelligence of young Monroe, detailed him to live and travel with the Pikuni (Piegan) tribe of the Blackfeet until be should learn their language and be able to influence them to return to Mountain Post each year to do their

Young Monroe succeeded beyond the wildest hopes of the H. B. C. factor. The first thing he did, quite by chance, made a deep impression upon the Indians. He lighted the medicine man's pipe of tobacco by holding a burning glass, concealed in his hand, over it and the Blackfeet, awe-stricken by his apparent link with their great deity, the sun, thereafter regarded him as "great medicine." Later he strengthened the bond by marrying Sinokapi. or Fox Woman, the daughter of Lone Walker, a great chief of the Pikuni.

During his long years with the Hudson's Bay company and later with the American Fur company, for which he became post hunter at Fort Benton in Montana and as a free trapper, Monroe extended his influence over the Blackfeet to other tribes as well until he was probably the best-known and best-liked white man among the tribes of the Northern Plains.

Rising Wolf and Fox Woman were the parents of two sons and two daughters John, Francois, Lizzie and Amelia. The latter married Thomas Jackson, a Virginian, and they had two sons, Robert and William Jackson. Monroe had a great deal to do with the training of these two grandsons who became noted as scouts for Gen. Coargo A Custor and Con Note Miles in the Sioux war of 1876-77.

"The Father of Oklahoma" ONSIDER the paradox of Capt. David L. Payne. He was the "father of Oklahoma," yet he was a native of Indiana; he was given his first name because of an event which took place in far-away Texas; he died and is buried in Kansas, which state has steadfastly resisted attempts to remove his body to Oklahoma; and the latter state has given him no official recognition beyond naming one of its original counties after him.

Born in Fairmont, Ind., December 30, 1836, his mother, who was a first cousin of Davy Crockett, named him David in honor of the frontier-relative who had died gloriously at the fall of the Alamo a few months before. At the age of twenty-one Payne moved to Kansas and took up a claim near Atchison. He served in the Civil war in the Fourth Kansas regiment until 1863 when he was discharged. Then he became a member of the state legislature and postmaster at Fort Leavenworth.

In 1867 he was elected captain of a Kansas cavalry troop formed to fight the Indians and campaigned actively in the western part of the state. During the next two years be served with Gen. George A. Custer and his Seventh cavalry and, as the boon companion of the famous Callfornia Joe and actor in many a hairbreadth escape from death, won great renown as the "Scout of the Cimar-

The year 1870 found him back in politics again, as a member of the state legislature of Kansas, as an unsuccessful candidate for the state senate in 1872 and finally as doorkeeper of the house of representatives in Washington where he remained until 1879. During his service as a scout for Custer, Payne had seen for himself the richness of the land in Oklahoma and in Washington he made the discovery, as he believed, that the lands in the western part of Indian territory, which had been ceded by the Creek Indians to the government for occupation by the other Civilized Tribes and by freedmen, in reality belonged to the public lands of the United States.

So Payne became the first "Oklahoma boomer" and the leader of no less than six of the eight expeditions of homeseekers, all of which tried to settle there and were expelled from the disputed territory by federal troops. Payne died sudenly in Well-Ington, Kan., November 27, 1884-"poisoned by his enemies," so his friends declare-five years too soon to see the realization of his dream of "the home of the red man" opened to white settlement,

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IN MUSIC, TOO

A planist of exceptional ability was visiting an Indiana city and was asked to play for the pupils of a junior high school.

The children were thoroughly appreciative and spent some time after the concert in discussing the art and the selections that had been played. "Miss S-- puts so much expres-

sion in her music," said one. "Yes, she certainly puts the right expression in," said another, "but the thing that interested me most was her wonderful technocracy,"-Indianapolis News.

Here's a Laugh

The pretty girl sat in the corner of the compartment next to her young man, her niece on her knee. The train dashed into a tunnel, and suddenly the other passengers heard the little girl exclaim: "Kiss me, too, Auntie Violet!"

"Mavis," said Aunt Violet, quickly, "you should say 'Kiss me twice.' Kiss me two is not good grammar."

Interrupted

Prisoner-Judge, I don't know what

Judge-Why, how's that? Prisoner-I swore to tell the truth, but every time I try, some lawyer objects.-Labor.

STILL IN THE BLACK



"How can she marry him, knowing that he's dissipated?" "But his fortune isn't."

Roll Call

Barrister - How many children have you?

Man-Let's see-Tom, Bill, Nelly,

Small Boy at the Back of the Court -Don't forget me, father.-Bexhill Guide.

Consolation

Author-Did you see Whittler's criticism of my latest novel? It was awful! He gave it a terrible hammering.

Friend-Oh, don't worry about him. He hasn't an idea in his head. He just says what everybody else is saying .- Moustique.

Turkey's Many Names

When you want turkey in France, you ask for "dindon"or "coq d'Inde"; in Germany, "trutt hahan"; and in Spain, "pavo," Over here it's "bring on the bird," or the gobbler."-Pathfinder Magazine.

Gure for Extravagance

"Are you saving any money since you started your budget system?" "Sure. By the time we have balanced it up every evening it's too late to go anywhere."--Christian Regis-

Power of Print

"Why did you throw the pot of geraniums at the plaintiff?" "Because of an advertisement." "What advertisement?" "Say it with flowers."

He Draws "So arguments between you and

your wife usually end in a draw?" "Yes, I draw the check."

