

SCENE III

(His Excellency William Tryon, Governor of the Province of North Carolina, the Governor's friend, Mr. James McNeill of Cross Creek, and Colonel Moses Alexander of the Mecklenburg militia are standing upon the small porch of the courthouse, as a company of militiamen, Captain James Jack at their head, marches up from the right. In center, between the courthouse and Jack's Tavern, the Governor's ornate coach, pulled by two horses in resplendent harness, waits. The coachman drowzes on the seat, and inside the coach, watching the soldiers with evident interest, are two fashionably dressed young girls. The soldiers halt, come to a ragged attention. They are hardy fellows, but their uniforms are nondescript. Most of them are wearing coonskin caps and hunting shirts and carrying muzzle-loaders.)

COLONEL MOSES ALEXANDER

Captain Jack, Dismiss your company.

CAPTAIN JACK

(Saluting)

Fall out!

(The men break ranks. Several walk away behind Ochiltree's store, some cross in front and disappear at left, several stalk up the steps into the tavern.)

COLONEL MOSES ALEXANDER

(To the Governor)

Your Excellency might like to have a look at the muster rolls.

If you gentlemen will just step inside the courthouse - -

(He steps back and the two visitors precede him through the door. The drummer boy, about fourteen, and a tall, thin fellow, clamber up the bank from the road to the narrow sidewalk, cross it, and sit down on the tavern porch near the right end. The tall man begins untying the rawhides of his shoes, pulls them off. The boy, David Barksdale, watching him, laughs.)

DAVID

Feet hurtin', Jethro?

JETHRO

(Who has been running his forefinger between each pair of toes and whisking it in front of his nose.)

Dad burn my hide, Davy, I aint never walked so fur to git nowheres in all my borned days. What's the need o' all this confounded drillin'? Don't take no drillin' to learn us to th'ow hot lead at them there Regerlators.

(He leans over, taps David in the chest.)

I aint so sure that they aint in the right anyway.

(Governor Tryon and Mr. McNeill, with Colonel Alexander behind them, come out through the courthouse doorway.)

COLONEL ALEXANDER

Yes, that's what I thought the muster rolls would show, Your Excellency. About fourteen hundred militiamen from all the settlements round about, of which some nine hundred are here today. But we aren't yet supplied for the march to Hillsboro, and it will take us another week or so to get ready.

GOVERNOR TRYON

Very well, Colonel. Select one third of the men you have, equip them with powder and balls, and provisions. The court sits at Hillsboro late in September, and today, I believe, is the twenty-third. So you'll have only a month to get ready and make the march to Hillsboro.

(The Governor reaches into his plum-colored coat and brings forth an ornate silver snuff box. With white forefinger and fat thumb he inserts a pinch of snuff into his right nostril, then his left. This done, he sneezes, three times from his right nostril, three times from his left. Having finished with this formality, he probes into the lace at his wrist and pulls forth a dainty handkerchief, with which he dabs decorously beneath his nose to rid

himself of the few particles of snuff that have remained despite his sneezing. From the tavern porch, all the while, Jethro and David have been watching intently. Jethro nudges David in the ribs, points discreetly to the Governor, but says nothing. The Governor turns again to Colonel Alexander.)

GOVERNOR TRYON

For men of a backwoods settlement unused to the profession of arms, your men show good training, Colonel. I shall expect them to acquit themselves well in event of trouble at Hillsboro.

COLONEL ALEXANDER

Those Regulators seem to be spoiling for a fight, don't they, Your Excellency?

GOVERNOR TRYON

I'm afraid so, Colonel. They have no respect for the royal authority. Every day they grow more brazen. They are continually spouting that the agents of the provincial government deny them justice. If they had justice, Colonel --

(Suddenly he turns his head, as he is seized with a paroxysm of sneezing. Then, red-faced, he turns again to Colonel Alexander.)

If they had justice, they'd be served with a healthy helping of powder and balls, and it's my feeling that nothing short of that will instill into their insubordinate hides a proper respect for the King and His Majesty's representatives in this province. I trust that I can rely upon the loyalty of the militia from Mecklenburg.

COLONEL ALEXANDER

We believe in law and order, Your Excellency.

GOVERNOR TRYON

I am glad to hear you say so, Colonel. Mecklenburg has already shown me much consideration. You have named the principal street of your charming village for me.

(Patronizingly, he indicates the street with a sweep of his arm.)

As you doubtless hoped such action upon your part would prompt me to do, I shall recommend to the General Assembly that it grant Charlottetown papers of incorporation.

(He laughs, the trace of a sneer in his tones.)

Of course, Colonel, I don't believe naming this street for me will serve long to memorialize my name, for you must admit that Charlottetown as towns in this province go is a very small place.

COLONEL ALEXANDER

You are right, sir, but we hope to grow larger, and some day even to challenge Salisbury.

GOVERNOR TRYON

(Laughing.)

You'll never be as large as Salisbury, Colonel. But I appreciate your good intentions nevertheless. And I want from this backwoods country spirited troops who aren't afraid of a little smoke and the smell of gunpowder, but I'll countenance no insubordination. Mr. McNeill --

(He faces the visitor from Cross Creek.)

soldiers are meant to obey, and nothing more. They have no business thinking for themselves. That's where much trouble arises. And, sir, it is the same way with the citizens of a province. Their only duty is to work hard and pay their taxes

promptly, and obey without question the authorities His Majesty has appointed to rule them.

(McNeill nods gravely, and Tryon turns to Colonel Alexander.)

We have come upon bad days, Colonel. People in these modern times have little regard for their betters, don't even venerate their government. Why, I'd hardly succeeded Governor Dobbs three years ago when a gang of ruffians at Wilmington, angry because an English ship had arrived with stamp paper aboard, threatened to burn down my house over my head. And the next spring, when I had a whole ox barbecued and provided liquor and beer by the barrels and invited them to partake of my refreshments, the unprincipled barbarians poured out the liquor and beer and threw the ox in the river. And when I asked the General Assembly for ten thousand pounds more -- we didn't get but five thousand at the start -- to finish the Governor's Palace at New Bern, they argued and debated the need for the palace, and villified me no end!

(Tryon turns to McNeill.)

Mr. McNeill, I believe the spirit of sedition is worse in the coast country than it possibly could be here in the backwoods.

MR. MCNEILL

I certainly trust so, Your Excellency. And I should see to it, sir, that it did not develop to such an extent in this back country.

(He pauses. There is a moment of awkward silence.)

COLONEL ALEXANDER

(Bowing.)

Your Excellency, Mr. McNeill, permit me to suggest,



gentlemen, that you must be somewhat weary after reviewing the militia. I suggest that we step over to the tavern for a bit of refreshment. Old Pat Jack's got a name in this part of the country for his West Indian rum, or maybe you'd like a mug of stewed wine. Got claret and Madeira in it and it's good and hot--

(Colonel Alexander smiles broadly)

and potent, too. Around here in Mecklenburg we take our Presbyterianism and our liquor both pretty strong.

(He bows, points toward the doorway.)

Our hats, I believe, are inside.

(The three disappear inside the courthouse, Tryon first, then McNeill, Alexander last. All the while from the tavern porch, while he has been cleaning his musket with a large soiled cloth, Jethro has been watching the Governor. As His Excellency goes into the courthouse, Jethro jumps to his feet, leaving the musket on the porch floor. For the benefit of David and one or two others who have gathered at the porch, he begins to mimic Governor Tryon. Having pulled from his hunting shirt an imaginary snuff box, he proceeds to imitate the Governor's sniffing the snuff up his nostrils. Then he sneezes loudly, and the soldiers guffaw. Having finished his sneezing, he pulls the cleaning rag from a sleeve and fastidiously brushes beneath his nose.)

#### JETHRO

Sniffin' snuff up'n his nose.

(Sarcastically.)

Not even dippin' hit like the wimmen fokes does.

(Carefully, he pushes the soiled cloth up his sleeve, then fastidiously pats the imaginary lace at his wrist.)

By gum, I'll bet anybody here a half-Joe he's got lace on his drawers.

(As the crowd guffaws again, Jethro comes to the

edge of the porch, draws stiffly erect, as if reviewing the militia, then he takes out once more the imaginary snuff box, goes through the Governor's ritual of sniffing and sneezing. He is in the middle of a tremendous sneeze when the Governor, Mr. McNeill, and Colonel Alexander come from the courthouse and start down the steps on the side next to the tavern. The girls in the carriage, too, have been watching Jethro and are convulsed at his antics. They are laughing as the three men walk down the steps from the courthouse porch and cross toward the tavern. Mr. McNeill walks a few steps to his left to the carriage.)

MCNEILL

Ladies, we are just going to step into the tavern for a moment.

(One of the girls--they have just seen him--points toward Jethro, laughing. She is Mr. McNeill's daughter, Elizabeth.)

ELIZABETH

Father, he's wonderful! Just watch him. He's the funniest man I ever saw in my life!

(McNeill rejoins the Governor and Colonel Alexander, and they walk up the incline to the sidewalk and step up on the tavern porch. Jethro is in the throes of a renewed series of sneezings when he turns at the approach of the three men and looks squarely into the face of the Governor.)

GOVERNOR TRYON

(Angrily, his face flushed.)

Who is this insolent fellow?

COLONEL ALEXANDER

(Appearing to think that the Governor is only feigning annoyance.)

Step over this way, Jethro. The Governor wants to meet you.

(Jethro, still somewhat taken aback, walks over, leaving his musket and shoes.)

Governor, this is Jethro O'Flannagan. He's a little Irish, as you've already judged, I'low, and he's a first rate militiaman, and a good citizen. He lives up in the Hopewell community on John McKnitt Alexander's land, and he's one of McKnitt's main men. He's never had any trouble with the law, as far as I've heard tell, except a little run-in about his marriage papers. Isn't that right, Jethro?

JETHRO

Yes, Colonel. The only trouble I've had was with McCulloh and Frohock. And I didn't let that trouble me - not fer long.

GOVERNOR TRYON

(Scowling.)

How was that? Speak up, man!

JETHRO

Well, sir, Frohock he tried to charge me too much for a set o' marriage licenses. They was supposed to cost eighteen shillin' and he wanted three pound.

GOVERNOR TRYON

Did you pay him three pounds?

JETHRO

No, sir.

GOVERNOR TRYON

Well, how much did you pay him?

JETHRO

Nothin'. I didn't git no papers.



GOVERNOR TRYON

You mean to tell me that you didn't get married rather than pay three pounds for a marriage license when you thought it should cost only eighteen shillings?

JETHRO

Well, sir, I guess it's accordin' to the way you figure it. Molly and me figures we's married, I guess.

GOVERNOR TRYON

How could the minister marry you without a license?

JETHRO

Well, sir, didn't any. 'Twon't no preacher handy if we'd had them licenses. And if'n it had been, he'd wanted another pound to do the hitchin'.

GOVERNOR TRYON

(Sneering.)

So you just started living together without benefit of clergy?

JETHRO

Well, sir, I don't know 'bout the benefit, but we started livin' together. Molly she was right smart anxious, and I wasn't what you'd say holdin' back none, neither. So we took to keepin' house, and we sorter figure we's married. Anyway, we got nine chaps. And I don't run around none with no other wimmen.

GOVERNOR TRYON

(Straightening the lace at his wrist)

I shouldn't think you'd have time to.

(He turns, walks into the tavern, with McNeill and Colonel Alexander following. Jethro walks back toward the end of the porch, where the loungers, grinning, are awaiting him.)

JETHRO

Well, I'll be dad-burned if'n he don't beat all. Pink coat, yaller britches --

(He gestures to describe the Governor's clothing) silk stockin's. More lace on his shirt 'n on a woman's hoop-petticoat. And sniffin' snuff up'n his nose.

(One of the men comes up to the edge of the porch, raises his hand as if to remonstrate.)

THE MAN

You'd better not talk so loud, Jethro. That there fellow might hear, and have you whupped. I heard tell he had a fellow down in the coast country gived five hundred lashes.

JETHRO

(sarcastically)

This here ain't no coast country. This here's Mecklenburg.

THE MAN

Yeh, but yore skin ain't no thicker'n hit is down there. That there Tryon's a rough fellow when you git his dander up, hear tell. He's the Big Wolf o' the Cherokees, they say.

JETHRO

He kin be the Big Painter and cattymount and Tager and polecat too if'n he wants to be. I ain't afeared o' him.

(As he is talking the Negro coachman, summoned by one of the girls, climbs down, receives her instructions, and comes across to the tavern

porch. He speaks to David, who picks up his drum and goes back with the Negro to the carriage, and he and the two girls talk as he stands at the carriage door. The group about the tavern porch have been watching. Jethro inclines his head in David's direction.)

First thing he knows he'll be wearin' pink coats and sniffin' snuff up'n his nose, and totin' wimmen's han'kercheefs. Be so fancy that Alexandriana won't be a fittin' place fer him to live at no more, and Mr. Mac and Mis' Jeanie'll be too plain fokes fer him to stay with.

(Jethro stretches his neck in a long stare toward the boy and the two girls.)

Cain't say as I blame him, though. Them's plumb fine-looking gals, pretty as my ol' hound Ring's new pups.

(Jethro's audience guffaws at his crude wit. He sits down on the edge of the porch and is putting on his shoes when Governor Tryon, Mr. McNeill, and Colonel Alexander come out through the tavern door. The Governor is talking with Colonel Alexander.)

#### GOVERNOR TRYON

You say, then, Colonel, there's no general disaffection? That seems to be the impression I get. Your man of the unlicensed large family -

(He nods toward Jethro, who is tying his rawhide laces.)

is the only one in his class with whom I have had the privilege of conversing during my visit to your country. I trust he is not representative of the people in his class --

(Suddenly he sees David down by the carriage, talking with the girls. He flushes quickly.)

Boy! You, drummer-boy!

(He shouts angrily at David.)

Come here! Come, here I tell you!

COLONEL ALEXANDER

Your Excellency, this boy meant no harm. He's a fine young man --

GOVERNOR TRYON

(Ignoring Colonel Alexander, and glaring at David, who has come up on the porch and is facing him calmly.)

Why do you have the insolence to force yourself upon the young ladies of my party? Don't you know your place, boy?

DAVID

(Eyeing the Governor evenly.)

The ladies sent the Negro for me to show them my drum, sir.

GOVERNOR TRYON

McNeill, if this is the truth you should teach your daughter with whom to associate.

(He points toward the group at the end of the porch.)

Get over there with your class. And stay with them. perhaps should have you lashed for your impertinence. Common soldiers must learn to associate with their equals.

(David stands an instant, eyeing the Governor, then he walks toward Jethro.)

COLONEL ALEXANDER

The boy lives in the home of one of the finest men in all the back country, Your Excellency, the crown surveyor, John McKnitt Alexander of Hopewell --

GOVERNOR TRYON

(Interrupting)

He does have spirit.

COLONEL ALEXANDER

We have spirit in the back country, Your Excellency. Sometimes, I fear, Your Excellency does not understand us, or the rest of the citizens of the Province of North Carolina.

GOVERNOR TRYON

I understand, Colonel, that I was sent to this province to rule it in the name of His Majesty. This I will do so long as I hold the office of Governor, and as long as I hold the office I will brook no insubordination.

(The Governor turns to McNeill.)

If we are to reach Major Phifer's today, McNeill, we must be going.

(He turns again to Colonel Alexander, smiling coldly.)

Good-day, Colonel--

(He bows, offers his hand.)

you may depend upon me for the charter of Charlottetown, and I in turn shall expect this county's aid in putting down this damnable rebellion in the Alamance section.

(They shake hands and Colonel Alexander accompanies them down the steps to the carriage, which they enter. The Colonel bows low as the carriage moves off, left, walks up the courthouse steps, goes inside. One of the girls leans from the carriage, waves to David. He waves, a bit sheepishly. Jethro, seeing him, laughs and shakes a finger at the drummer boy.)

(As the carriage passes from sight off left, Jethro breaks into a merry clog. The loungers crowd up to the edge of the porch.)

LOUNGER

Give us a song, Jethro. Make us up a song about the Guv'ner.

JETHRO

(Stopping)



I got to be gittin' back up to Alexandriana. Time I git there the stock'll be almighty hongry fer they supper.

LOUNGER

Aw, you got time for a little song.

(To one of the other men.)

Run inside and git Elam to fetch his banjo. He's the best dad-blamed banjo-picker in Ameriky.

(The man goes inside the tavern, returns with a one-arm man wearing an apron. He's carrying his banjo.)

ELAM

What'll it be this time, Jethro?

JETHRO

These here fellers wants me to sing 'em a piece 'bout old Tryon. I aint got much time, but knock me off a little tune, Elam, somethin' pretty spry-like.

(Elam strikes a cord. Jethro stands a moment, his hand to his forehead. Then he drops his hand, grins, begins:)

JETHRO

(singing)

Old Tryon he's a right smart dudish man,  
Wears a pink coat and yaller britches;  
Some day he'll bend too low, I'll vouch,  
An' them britches will need some stitches.

(He breaks into clogging, and the loungers howl their approval, urge him to sing another verse.)

JETHRO

(Singing)

Old Tryon he's a fair, reasonable man,  
And all he ever axes,  
Is for fokes to bow low to him and the King,  
And don't complain 'bout payin' they taxes.

(He stops, and the crowd shouts for more.)

JETHRO

Old Tryon he's a bold talkin' man,  
Claims he's jes' itchin' fer a fight;  
But when somebody mentions them Regerlators,  
He all of a sudden turns mighty white.

(Once again the loungers about the porch yell for more. This time David joins in with several lusty thumps on his drum in tune with Elam's banjo.)

JETHRO

Old Tryon he barbecued them fokes an ox,  
And filled the beer kags full to the kiver;  
But them fokes they busted the beer kags up,  
An' th'owed his ox in the river.

(Jethro starts clogging, suddenly stops, and begins another verse:)

JETHRO

Old Tryon he come way over to Mecklenburg,  
If'n I tell you diffe'nt I'm a liar;  
But if'n he gits any help out o' Mecklenburg,  
The Old Scratch aint got no fire.

(He clogs a few steps, stops. The crowd insists on another verse.)

JETHRO

Boys, me an' Davy's got to be gittin' back to Alexandriana.  
Mr. Mac'll think I done got on a spree an' been put in jail.

(The crowd continues to yell for another verse.)

JETHRO

Well, jes' one more.

(He looks toward David, grins, and begins:)

Old Tryon he come to Mecklenburg,  
Two purty gals ridin' in his carriage;  
And if'n little Davy don't quit messin' round,  
He'll plum' likely git catched in marriage.

(As he clogs and the loungers shout their approval, the light fades and goes out and the sound dies into silence.)