

SCENE X

(The light comes up on the Narrator.)

NARRATOR

The fighting in the back country of the Carolinas so blunted the sword of British aggression that hereafter it was no longer effective. But for many months yet it was to thrust and parry. Once again Cornwallis came northward, seeking to divide and conquer North Carolina. But this time he swung west of the Catawba, crossing it at Cowan's Ford in Mecklenburg, where General William Lee Davidson was killed by a Tory bullet, and moving on past the Yadkin at Salisbury to battle indecisively at Guilford Court House. And after many months and much marching and fighting and doubling back and pushing forward he moved into Virginia and swung eastward toward the Atlantic and after a time pushed out upon a peninsula that ran down between the James and the York to a place called Yorktown. Out in the bay lay the French, and converging upon him from all sides by land came the determined patriots.

And back in little Charlottetown, far westward from Cornwallis and his fast mounting troubles, on a day late in the fall of 1781 and some thirteen months after the British had been driven from Mecklenburg---

(The light fades upon the Narrator and comes up on the set in front of the court house and Jack's Tavern, now rebuilt. Many people are in the village today. Women are trading at the market beneath the court house, and men have congregated on the tavern porch and about the sidewalk in front. Children are playing in the street in front of Liberty Hall. Grass covers the mounds in the yard. Onto the street from the left, toward Salisbury, rides a man on a steaming horse. He comes up to the court-house, waves a paper, dismounts.

THE RIDER

The war's over! Cornwallis has surrendered. Up in Virginia,

at a place called Yorktown. It's all over!

(The people crowd about him. A man takes the paper, reads it. There is general excitement, and the children race toward the courthouse. Men and women begin shouting. Men slap each other on the back. Women hug each other. Here and there in the throng that has congregated a boy throws his arms about a girl and gives her a choking squeeze as she protests ineffectively and giggles. On the tavern step, Jethro O'Flannagan, with his left arm missing, begins dancing a jig. Someone rushed inside the tavern, brings out the one-armed banjo-picker. He sits down and starts a tune. Jethro warms up. Suddenly he pauses.

JETHRO

(Pointing with his right arm to the place where his left should be.)

Hit's wu'th leavin' this old wing at King's Mountain. Yessir! The Redcoats can have hit. Now we're free! Yessir. A free country, bowin' and a-scrapin' to nobody. Old King George, the Old Scratch take him! He aint got no holt on us'ns no more!

(He starts clogging again, and the men ringed about him pat their hands in time to the banjo. Then a man near the tavern doorway walks to the edge of the porch, holds up his hand, calls for silence. When the crowd grows quiet, he speaks.)

THE MAN

It's mighty wonderful news we have just got, friends. There'll be plenty of time for singin' and hollerin' and dancin'. But I think right now we ought to thank the Lord for the victory. I see Squire McKnitt Alexander, the ruling elder at Hopewell Church over there at the steps. I'd like for him to lead us in a word of prayer and thanksgiving.

(The crowd stands silent, and John McKnitt Alexander mounts the steps to the courthouse balcony, takes off his hat, as all the men in the crowd do also. He stands an instant surveying the people, then he speaks quietly.)

ALEXANDER

Let's bow our heads.

(The people bow reverently.)

Our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee that the long and terrible struggle is ended, and that Thou hast given us the victory. Quickly heal the wounds of war, O our Father, and give us peace. Make us to forgive and to forget the wrongs done us, and pardon the wrongs we have done, O God, and make us to love those who so recently were our enemies. And may sweet peace, O Father, descend upon our weary world, and may we all everywhere be brothers and dwell in love one with the other.

And now, Our Father, grant us Thy loving care in the building of our new nation. Grant that our leaders, our representatives in the Continental Congress, our governors throughout this land, may be led to walk in the light of Thy countenance, may be shown the way, O God, to the establishment of a new government of righteousness and freedom and peace. Help them to devise a sound structure for the country that is to be, O God our Father, and help them to establish it and set it upon its course. And may it endure, and grow strong, and become great among the nations of this earth, O Father. And grant that it shall always hold its course along the paths of righteousness, and may it always move with courage and steadfastness.

Grant, O God, that we shall live and grow, and our children after us through the long years, in wisdom and in the knowledge of Thy ways, and may we be a happy people, and industrious, and may the love of God and man light our hearts and shine forth from our countenances. And as we become strong, O Father, and increase in power and might among the nations, may we grow nobler, and more tolerant, and gentler, but may we never lack in courage, O God, to protect the weak and to fight if it need be to maintain our ways.

And grant, our Father, that Thy love and care shall always abide upon us, and those who come after us, and give us peace. For we ask it in the name of the Prince of Peace, our Blessed Saviour.

(As he ends the prayer the men replace their hats and for a moment there is silence. Then, as the people begin to break up into knots and the low buzz of talking develops, one of the men jumps up on the tavern porch, yells.)

THE MAN

The war's over, folks! Haven't you heard the news? The war's over! Looks to me like it was time everybody was singin' and hol-lerin'.

(Grabbing off his hat, waving it furiously over his head.)

Shout freedom!

(The people start yelling, and soon there is bedlam, and then from the porch they begin singing, and after a moment the whole throng joins in, men, women, children, everybody is singing, some off key, some hoarse, unmusical, but everybody singing at the top of his voice, as the light fades, and the lights on the audience come on.)

THE END