



BRIGHT  
*to the*  
WANDERER

BRUCE LANCASTER



# BRIGHT TO THE WANDERER

BY BRUCE LANCASTER

*AN ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS BOOK*

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY · BOSTON

1943

**COPYRIGHT 1942, BY BRUCE LANCASTER**

**ALL RIGHTS RESERVED, INCLUDING THE RIGHT  
TO REPRODUCE THIS BOOK OR PORTIONS  
THEREOF IN ANY FORM**

**PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**BRIGHT TO THE WANDERER**

*For My Wife*

JESSIE PAYNE LANCASTER

*to whom both book and author  
owe a debt far beyond the limits  
of words*

## *Foreword and Acknowledgment*

THE whole story of the Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837 may not be told in a single volume. This book attempts to set out only those things which a given family in Toronto—the Stensroods—might conceivably have experienced in those days when the future of all Canada—and indirectly of all North America—was cast. Readers, particularly those in Canada, will realize that many facets exist which could not be touched upon. A family or an individual, living in the Huron Tract, about Niagara, or near the Thousand Islands, while caught up in the same stream, would have been subjected to different influences and been reacted on by different forces than those which are set forth here as peculiar to one group or one locality.

The main course of events, as set down in the chronicles of the times, has been closely followed, although minor liberties have been taken with certain movements of historical characters. As to the interpretation of events, that is a matter of opinion. This work was undertaken without any preconceived ideas or theories and its completion reflects the impression left on me by the writings of the times and later studies.

There are many acknowledgments to be made. The principal one, which can only be an understatement no matter how often it may be made, or at what length, will be found in the dedication.

North of our border, there are many people to whose thought, understanding, and co-operation this book owes much.

William Arthur Deacon, of Toronto, first suggested the setting, gave unstintingly from his own wide knowledge, recommended sources, put us in touch with other authorities on Canadian history, life, and lore.

Charles W. Jefferys, Royal Canadian Academy, of York Mills, Ontario, gifted artist and tireless scholar, put at our disposal his great knowledge, unwritten, written, painted, and sketched. When we returned to Cambridge, he sent, in answer to my incessant questions, a stream of notes, suggestions, and observations.

Charles R. Sanderson, Chief Librarian of the Toronto Public Library, was unsparing of his time, thought, and encouragement. His fine staff was co-operative and helpful.

I am also indebted to Professor W. B. Kerr, of the University of Buffalo, for much material generously sent me out of his valuable researches, and to Professor Fred Landon and Mr. J. J. Talman of the University of Western Ontario for data which I could not otherwise have found.

On our own side of the border, the Harvard College Library has provided a rich source of Canadiana and has always been ready with suggestions and recommendations.

The title of this book I owe to Melville Fuller Weston, of Cambridge, who allowed me to borrow the line from one of his fine poems.

And to Chester Kerr, Director of the Atlantic Monthly Press, is due a special tribute for constant encouragement during the writing and for the ablest of editorial guidance when the completed draft was presented.

B. L.

*Cambridge, Massachusetts*  
*January, 1942*

## CONTENTS

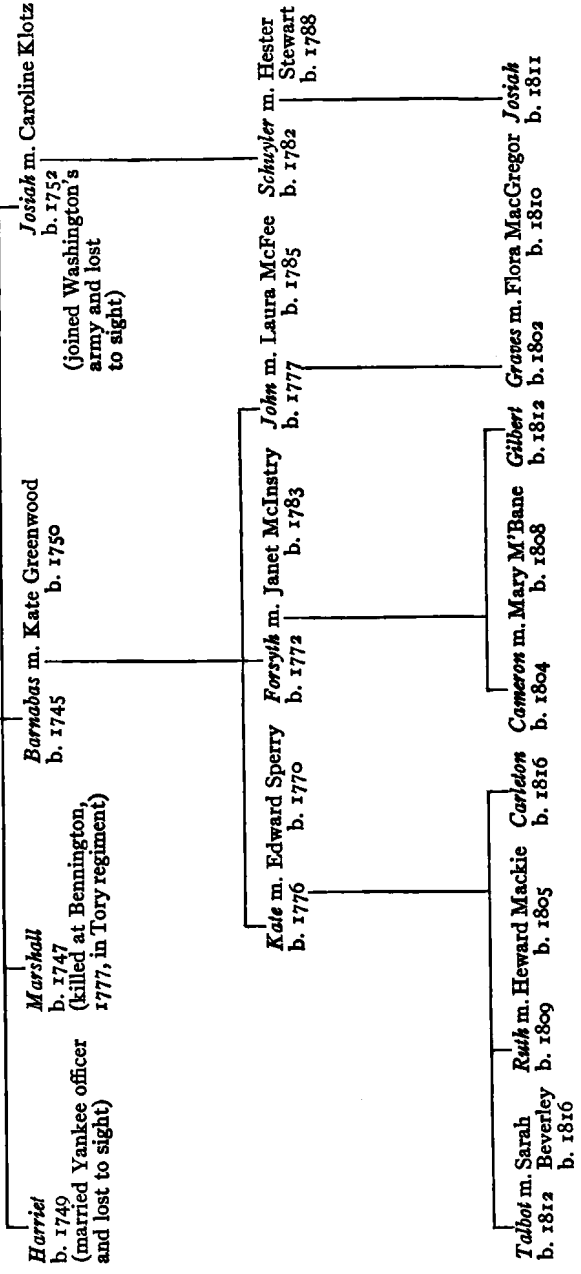
I	Flight — 1781	3
II	Toronto — 1835	26
III	The Compact Branch — 1835	39
IV	The Country Branch — 1835	47
V	Young Gilbert (I) — 1835	56
VI	Young Gilbert (II) — 1835	70
VII	Nipigon Lodge — 1835	86
VIII	Justice — 1835	109
IX	Betrothal — 1836	125
X	The Tried Reformer — 1836	139
XI	Hospital — 1836	148
XII	Tryst — 1836	166
XIII	Doc Richland — 1836	173
XIV	Return — 1837	182
XV	William Lyon Mackenzie — 1837	194
XVI	Reform — 1837	214
XVII	Eve of Storm — 1837	227
XVIII	Pikes of Rebellion — 1837	233
XIX	First Blood — 1837	254
XX	Montgomery's Farm (I) — 1837	268
XXI	Montgomery's Farm (II) — 1837	281
XXII	Nipigon Lodge — 1837	293
XXIII	Flight — 1837	308



XXIV	Buffalo — 1837	327
XXV	Navy Island — 1837	335
XXVI	Toronto — 1837	349
XXVII	Reunion — 1838	358
XXVIII	Capture — 1838	373
XXIX	Justice — 1838	387
XXX	Quebec — 1838	404
XXXI	Escape — 1838	411
XXXII	Doc Richland — 1838	430
XXXIII	Albany — 1840	439
XXXIV	Nipigon Lodge — 1840	446

**BRIGHT TO THE WANDERER**

*Gilbert Stenswood* m. *Elizabeth Collinge*  
b. 1716 b. 1725



*Flight — 1781*

THE gale seemed to pause for breath and falling snow eddied aimlessly among the wet boles of the forest. Then it struck with renewed fury, drove the sharp flakes whistling out of the west, drilled them against the black trees, spread them in a hard powder over the ruts of the wilderness trail, whirled them spattering over the sullen waters of Champlain that tossed dully, lead under a leaden sky. Gilbert Stensrood bent his gray head to the blast, gripped his staff tighter in mittened fingers, and tried to spread the slack of his coat over the shoulders of his wife, who plodded painfully beside him. She looked up, wan face wet with snow, and forced a smile. "Don't, Gil. You need it. I'm warm in my shawl. And the bundle—" she moved her elbows under the green and red plaid and a shapeless mass shifted—"the bundle helps keep out the cold."

He frowned, heavy eyebrows snow-cruled, started to protest. Then her slight body wavered and she stumbled against him. He threw an arm about her. "Here, here! Time to rest."

Gray eyes looked up at him, compressed lips quivered. She shook her head. "We *must* keep going. We must."

His arm tightened. "We can't keep going if we don't rest. Beth, your lips are blue."

"I'm all right. If I could just catch my breath. If—"

But Gilbert was already striding away through the ankle-deep snow, solid legs sturdy in gray wool stockings. The capes of his green coat flapped and heaved to the gale as he tore branches in splintering wreckage from a low pine and threw them hissing onto the dry snow, banked others against the lichened shelter of a great rock. "Sit here in the lee, Beth." His voice echoed flatly in the shifting white curtain. "That's it. Pull your shawl tighter."

He knelt by her, slid the cords of the bundle from her shoulders, rubbed her thin hands, frail in their wool coverings, blanketed her snugly in the heavy folds of the shawl. She leaned back against a padding of boughs, her feet, huge in their burlap wrappings, black against the snow. "Oooh! It's good! Just to rest my back against something." She threw back the cowl of her plaid, brushed snow from her mass of soft dark hair, gray-streaked. Then she closed her eyes.

Gilbert ducked through a sling that held an oblong leather box about his neck. His burden thudded solidly on the boughs as he studied his wife, steel-blue eyes troubled. "Beth, you'd better try my boots again. That sacking's nearly —"

Eyes still closed, she shook her head. "No good. They gave me blisters. Not healed yet." She huddled the shawl closer about her. "Any sign of the others?"

He peered south down the vista of broken snow and pitiless, naked trees. "Trail's empty. They can't be far behind, though. We'll wait till they catch up." He turned his hawklike nose toward his wife. "Feeling better?"

She nodded. "My legs feel as if they were melting. But they don't get stiff the way they did." She drew her delicately marked eyebrows together. "Gil — how much food have we left?"

He scabbled in the snow with his staff. "Two — maybe three days, if we're careful." Then the lines about his firm mouth and chin softened. "But we won't need that much, I'm sure. We're bound to come on a post any time now. Might even run onto one today." He drew a deep breath. "Then we'll be all right." His staff prodded again, struck against a buried log. "H'm, more corduroy. We must be walking on one of the roads that Burgoyne built in '77."

She opened her eyes, then closed them wearily. "If he *only* had —"

There was a short nod. "If — but we're not talking about that."

She rode over his interruption. "Then it wouldn't have happened." Her voice quivered. "Oh, Gil, *why* did they have to do it? You didn't deserve it. You've always been —"

Gently he stroked her hand, brushed snow from her knees. "Just as soon as we reach a post, it'll be all over — all over. Just —" He raised his head, the motion sending a thin cascade of snow from his cocked hat. "Listen!"

Through the weaving palls of white came a slow, measured clomp-clomp, storm-muffled. He struggled stiffly to his feet. "A sleigh, or we'd hear the wheels bumping."

In the half-light a bulk showed in irresolute outlines, grew solid, grew larger. He made out a plodding horse, a high-piled sleigh, a hunched figure scuffing by it. He held up his hand as the shapes drew nearer and a man, his battered hat bound down by a dirty cloth, stared through storm-reddened eyes and growled: "What you want?"

"Have you seen —"

There was a gasp from under the sodden felt. "God damn! It's the Judge!" A torn mitten jabbed at the ragged hat brim. "My duty to you, sir. Ain't seen you good in this light an' anyways wasn't expectin'—" Then pent-up amazement burst through respect. "What you doin' way up here, sir? An' your lady!" He jabbed at his hat again. "Settin' in the snow! What — what you *doin'* here?"

The other smiled wryly. "The same thing you are."

Mittened hands worked in perplexity. "But you! Everybody knowed Judge Stensrood! Ain't you got that carriage? Where's the black man that used to drive you to Albany?"

Again the wry smile. "Where's your big wagon? Where are those bays you bought last year?" With his staff Gilbert pointed at the rickety sleigh with its roof of canvas, at the wheezing, bony horse that slumped in the shafts, head down to the storm.

Red eyes stared, a wide mouth gaped. "Well — so that's a fac'! So that's a fac'! I wouldn't a believed it if I ain't seen it. No, sir! That I wouldn't."

"Hmph. You and I've seen a lot of things in the past five years we wouldn't have believed without seeing." He turned toward the rock. "Beth, my dear, you remember Tom Fulton? From Glens Falls way?" Fulton bobbed his head. "Tom, you didn't see my son on the trail, did you?"

"Mister Barnabas? That I didn't. No one but some poor folk. The man was pullin' a hand sled an' his woman was carryin' a bundle an' they had one shaver ridin' on the sled an' two walkin'."

Gilbert spoke quickly. "That was Barnabas. Our food and bedding are on the sled."

"Food? For the seven of you? An' beddin'?" Fulton dove at the tattered canvas that stretched over the splintery sides of the sleigh.

There were subdued clucks and squawks that were suddenly cut through by the cry of an awakening baby and the muffled, angry voice of a woman. Then broken boots treaded the air as Fulton's ample posterior hunched backward from under the canvas. Stifled words sifted out into the bitter air: "But I tell you it's him. Him an' his lady. Ain't he saved our farm for us?" There was a tired assent and Fulton tramped proudly back, a sacking-wrapped bundle in his arms.

"We're movin' faster'n you an' you *ain't* got enough for seven. No, you ain't. I got ample. Just me an' Samantha an' little Tom." He thrust the bundle at the Judge. "No, I ain't wantin' thanks. An' I'd be proud could I ask you to ride with us. But the missus is ailin' an' everything we've got's heaped on the sleigh an' the horse about beat. I'd be proud. You done things for poor folks all your life an' now poor folks got a chance to do something for you, an' high time, I say." He ducked his head to Beth, shouted to his horse, who, with twitching ears, flopped his flat hoofs on through the snow in unfathomable indifference. By a bend in the trail, Fulton turned, called: "I'll speak the first post I come to. Likely they'll send horses for folk like you."

Gilbert watched the sleigh work out of sight, then pitched the sacking onto the snow. "Bacon! That much more for the children." He sat down beside his wife. "There goes another good man."

She opened her eyes. "Why did he give it to you?"

"Because he's a good man." His mouth set. "Yes, a good man. I watched him take bad land and make a good farm out of it." He shrugged. "Well — *he's* gone."

"I don't remember him."

"No reason why you should. Back in '68 — no, it was '70 — I helped him prove his title against forged papers and a good deal of undue influence. He kept the farm. Now —" He shrugged again, stared at the fresh ruts that cut away to the north.

She made a helpless gesture. "You did so much good in the Valley. How could Valley men have —" She started, stared south through the flakes that were driving less fiercely now. Two black figures wavered and shifted. She leaned forward eagerly. "There they are!"

Through the thinning fall the figures drew nearer — a tall, wide-shouldered man in a long, caped overcoat, straining at the tongue of

a hand sled, a slimmer figure by his side, back bowed by a sagging bundle while one free hand steadied a little form perched on the high-piled sled. Behind, two children wrapped beyond recognition stumbled dully on, heads jerking and hands clutching at cords fastened to the load.

Gilbert clumped heavily to meet them. The toiling man looked up unsmiling, then ducked his head and increased his pace, clots of snow flying before him. His labored voice sounded thin in the forest hush. "Hello, Father. You and Mother rested? I want to push on."

A shrill treble cry broke out. The child slid from the load, ran on stumpy legs calling: "It's Grampa!" The two behind the sled, a thin boy and his round-faced sister, dropped their cords and shuffled stiffly to him, looking up in mute, bewildered inquiry. Shrilly the smallest piped: "We almost home? Want to feed my rabbits."

Gilbert's mouth softened. He picked him up and set him on his shoulder. "Almost home, John." Then he gravely studied the shawled woman, noting the dark-circled eyes, cheeks grayish under the false flush of the cold. "Sure you don't want to rest, Kate?"

She shook her head, pretty in spite of weariness. "I don't dare. When I stop, my feet ache so. We gave the children a long rest at noon." She settled a wool scarf about the neck of the child on Gilbert's shoulder. "And John's been riding most of the way. Oh—" her voice grew solicitous as Beth crunched toward them over the snow—"you ought to have rested till we caught up. You were so tired yesterday."

Beth laughed. "I had to come and see my little man." She held out her arms and John wriggled to her from Gilbert's shoulder, sturdily shod feet drumming against her bundle.

Barnabas, panting, narrowed his deep-set gray eyes. "Mother—not John and all that load."

She rubbed her cheek against the boy's. "I'd carry two of him." She looked down at the other children. "Forsyth, you've been watching little Kate?"

Forsyth frowned at his sister from the immeasurable height of his nine years. "She wants to walk all the time. Just because she's a year older than John she thinks she's too big to ride."

A snub nose wrinkled over the edge of a fur collar. "I *am* too big.



Father can't pull John *and* me." She tossed her head and a sodden doll whose arms were tied about her neck bobbed wildly. "An' besides we're almost home, aren't we, Grampa?"

From Beth's arms John chorused, "Almost home. Want to feed my rabbits."

His mother cut in quickly. "Grampa knows when we'll get there. Just you keep warm and don't worry about home." Her mouth tightened. She found Forsyth's eyes on her in troubled query. Gilbert coughed, then said shortly, "Better move. Day's getting on."

Barnabas nodded, tugged at the tongue, arms straining out behind his back. Gilbert plodded to the rock, caught up the leather box and Tom Fulton's bacon, wedged them under the canvas cover. "There. Want me to haul, Barney?"

"I'm in the swing of it." His face, a younger replica of his father's save for the eyes, jutted into the storm as his neck and shoulders settled to the pull of the sled. Gilbert fell into step with him. Slowly they padded on, talk scant and sparing.

"See Tom Fulton? He passed you back there."

"A sleigh went by. Didn't look up."

"Gave us a slab of bacon."

"That'll help."

"A lot. How did you catch up with us so quickly?"

"Hitched onto a sleigh back there."

"Whose?"

"Don't know. Took us a few miles, then turned off on that west trail."

"H'm, not sure that's safe, trusting yourself to a stranger. We've come a long way, what with that cart and the sloop up the lake. But you can't tell, even up here. If that man spread the word and people took after us, mounted—" The wrinkles deepened about his mouth.

"Had to take the chance. Worried about Kate. Hasn't enough clothes."

"Only the children have. Thank God, they'll be able to keep warm. I still don't see how you got through with their extra things, even to little Kate's doll. Wood keeping dry?"

"Have to watch. And the bedding. Snow cakes on the runners. Works up under the canvas. Why couldn't that damned sloop