

ESCAPING THE MOHAWKS



ORISON ROBBINS



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ESCAPING THE MOHAWKS

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The Story of a Young Noble
of New France.

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HE SAW A GROUP OF INDIANS HACKING AT THE DOOR.
Page 195.

Escaping the Mohawks

The Story of a Young Noble of New France

By
ORISON ROBBINS

ILLUSTRATED BY
W. F. STECHER



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ESCAPING THE MOHAWKS

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PREFACE

ONE of the features that lends most charm to the short but stirring chapter that is the history of France in North America, is that of contrast. As one glances through the pages, one sees, here a black-robed priest, trained in the best schools of the Old World, sharing the discomforts and squalor of wigwam or long house with the copper-hued owners; there a courtier, fresh from the luxuries of Versailles, bending beneath his heavy pack at a portage, or blistering his hands in the day-long drive with the paddle.

New conditions in this new land moulded into strange forms the customs and institutions of the parent country. The institution of an aristocracy of birth was no exception to the rule. So we find nobles with the whine of beggars on their lips; and tenants, sturdy and self-reliant, who stood ready to buy the estates of their lords. Men rose or sank in

accordance with their ability to meet and master the hard conditions of a new life: the strong and capable survived; the weak disappeared.

It is with the nobles of New France and their life on an exposed frontier that the present story is concerned. May it throw a little light into a not well-known nook of our early American life.

ORISON ROBBINS.

Washington, D. C.

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He saw a group of Indians hacking
at the door (Page 195) . *Frontispiece*

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Escaping the Mohawks

CHAPTER I

RUNNING close-hauled on the port-tack under full sail, the French sloop of war *Superb* drove swiftly through the short, choppy seas that ran in endless succession out of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. She was not a large vessel, as ships go to-day; but her five hundred tons of wood and iron represented the skill of the finest marine architects of the early eighteenth century. Long, low of deck, with sharp keel and sharper bows, she might well have passed for one of the rakish craft that flew the Jolly Roger over the blue waters of the Caribbean, two thousand miles to the south. A second look would have corrected the mistake, however, for no free-lance of the seas could show such an air of smartness as marked every detail of the sloop. Taut rigging, shining paint, glistening brass work; all betokened the

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care of a disciplined crew under the orders of a thorough seaman.

A glance at the thick-set figure that stood on the quarter-deck, whose air of command, as well as dress, marked him as the commander of the ship, showed him to be such a seaman. Tanned to a dull red by the sunshine and storms of half a century, his skin showed in startling contrast with the white and gold of his uniform. His eyes, small and deep-set, looked from beneath white, shaggy brows, glancing alternately at the sails of his ship and at the sky and sea to windward.

With Pirard, for such was the name of the vessel's commander, stood a lad of seventeen and a man of twenty-two. The dress of the former was that of the French gentry: blue coat reaching to the knees, a long waistcoat of tan-colored velvet, knee trousers of material like the waistcoat, tan silk stockings, and black shoes with great silver buckles. A fluff of fine, white lace showed above the collar of his coat, and through the gap of his half-unbuttoned waistcoat. In

one hand he held a three-cornered black hat of fine beaver. With the other he maintained a tight hold on one of the mizzen-shrouds, to steady himself against the sharp pitching of the ship.

The lad's attire marked him as a member of the nobility of his country, and his face was in keeping with his dress. A skin of olive hue, through which showed the rich red of his pure young blood; clean-cut features, sparkling black eyes, and long, glossy black hair which fell in a tumble of natural waves and curls about his shoulders, or blew straight out in the fresh breeze; while these did not necessarily indicate noble blood, they certainly were not inconsistent with its possession.

The other man, Charles de La Motte by name, was in the white uniform of a lieutenant of the French army. Of moderate height and weight, he was typical of the class of young nobles from whom France drew the officers for her fighting forces. Equally at ease in the ballroom and on the field of battle, they met the foe, as they met the

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ladies, with smiles on their lips and jests on their tongues. Raised among the comforts, oftentimes amid the luxuries of which France boasted, no rigors of a strange clime, no fatigues of march, or toil at oar or paddle, could crush the exuberant spirit of these young soldiers.

The younger man addressed the captain of the ship: "We drive ahead fast in this wind, Mr. Captain," he said. "You told us as much as two hours ago that we were within fifty miles of the Island of Cape Breton. It seems to me we should soon see the land, especially as you say the part of the island we are approaching is covered with high hills."

"We should see the hills within an hour or two, Monsieur," answered the captain respectfully. The officer was of the common people of his land. Therefore, as was the habit of his time and country, he looked up as to a superior to one who had the right to call himself "noble."

The three relapsed into silence. The lad scanned the horizon ahead of the ship, hop-

ing to get the first glimpse of land. The captain's attention, however, was given to the northwest, whence came the motive power of the great machine under his command: the fresh breeze from the forests and mountains of Canada. Occasionally his gaze swept the sea to the east and south, and at such times a furrow of anxiety appeared in the ruddy skin of his forehead. Finally he turned again to his companions.

“Will Monsieur repeat again,” he said to the younger of them, “as nearly as he can remember, the words he heard at the Marine Office in Paris regarding the sailing of the English squadron?”

“I more than heard the words,” replied the lad. “I saw the despatch that came from one of our secret agents in England. ‘Three vessels,’ it read, ‘a sloop of war, a frigate, and a seventy-four, sailed from Southampton for the Newfoundland coast on the tenth of June.’”

“It is odd that I should have received no word of this,” said the captain, as he renewed his search of the waste of troubled waters.

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Methodical, devoted to his duty as he was, he could not conceive of a laxity in the conduct of the affairs of the Marine Office that would fail to give the commander of a warship sailing to Canada such vital information.

His young companion was better informed regarding the methods of the Admiralty.

“The note was probably put away in a pigeonhole,” he said, “and not remembered until after we had sailed.”

“No doubt Monsieur is right,” the captain replied; and he resumed his search of the horizon.

It was the middle of July, in the year 1703. France was, as usual, at war with her ancient enemy, England. Nearly a month earlier, the *Superb* had left the port of Brest, bound for Quebec, where she was to relieve a vessel of similar rating. As a man-of-war, she carried no cargo. She was without passengers as well, except for part of a company of white-coated French infantrymen under the command of De La Motte, a

meager reinforcement to the army in Canada; and, as a special favor, the lad whose acquaintance we have just made.

Louis Dupuy was the boy's name. The youngest of five children, he had been left an orphan at the age of ten. For seven years he had lived with his oldest brother on the family estate in Brittany, varying the monotony of country life with an occasional winter spent with a sister in Paris. Now he was responding to the invitation of an uncle, the Sieur Georges Dupuy, to join him on his seigniory on the Richelieu River.

For an hour the *Superb* ran on, then the cry, "Land ho!" came ringing down from aloft. The heights of Cape Breton had come into view of the lookout, perched high on the foretopgallant-yard. Half an hour later, the blue hills, thirty miles distant, could be seen from the deck.

Then another cry, "Sail ho!" sounded above the whistling and moaning of the wind in the ship's cordage.

Instantly every one on deck was alert.

"Where away?" bawled the sailing-

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master, a weather-beaten old tar who had immediate charge of the operation of the vessel.

“Two points off the port bow, sir,” came the answer, indicating a direction about twenty degrees to leeward of the line on which the vessel was running.

“Send the lookout aft,” said the captain to the master. Then, turning to his companions, he continued: “We must find out all we can about this stranger. He may be one of our three Englishmen. Any large sail in these waters must be looked upon with suspicion.”

The lookout appeared, hat in hand, but hesitated to set foot on that, to him, forbidden place, the quarter-deck. At a signal from the captain, however, he slouched forward.

“How far away is the sail you saw?” asked the officer.

“Her topmasts are showing above the water, sir,” the sailor replied.

“What sail does she carry?”

“None that I could see,” was the reply,

“except perhaps a staysail. She looked as though she might be lying-to under her lower sails.”

“How many masts has she?”

“Three.”

“Very well, my man. Here is a louis d’or for you,” said the captain, giving him a small gold coin. “Your eyes are good to make out the naked spars of a vessel fifteen miles away.”

The sailor pulled his forelock, scraped an awkward bow of acknowledgment, and departed to declare among his mates that such a fine and generous officer as Captain Pirard did not exist outside that ship, never had existed, and in all the future of the world never would exist again.

The captain, however, was thinking of other things than the effect of his generosity upon the lookout and his fellows. He stood for a moment with his head bowed in thought, then calling sharply to the sailing-master, directed him to tack. That worthy officer looked at his superior in astonishment, a feeling that was reflected in the faces of

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all who heard the captain's words. No questions were asked, however; orders are not questioned on a well-regulated man-of-war. Discipline, however, could not prevent the master from muttering to his crony, the boatswain, that it beat all that he had ever seen or expected to see, if he lived a hundred years, that such a fighter as the "old man" should run away from a strange sail without even having a look at her from the deck.

Despite the surprise that the order caused, it was carried out promptly and efficiently. Obedient to her helm, the graceful vessel swung into the wind. The heavy yards swung round, the head-sails filled, and the *Superb* heeled far to starboard. In another moment, she was off on her new course, heading almost due north.

If discipline suppressed any open expression of astonishment on the part of the officers and crew at the sudden change in the course of the vessel, it placed no such restraint upon the tongue of young Louis Dupuy. Presuming upon his rank, he addressed the captain.

“Is it customary,” he asked, “for His Majesty’s men-of-war to turn tail without finding out whether they are running from a two-decker or a fishing boat?”

The officer’s ruddy countenance flushed a deeper red at the taunt in the lad’s question. He controlled himself, however, and replied in level tones: “Monsieur is new to the ways of ships and cannot be expected to understand their actions. Fishing boats do not carry three masts, and merchant vessels do not lie-to in a fair breeze such as is blowing. Only a man-of-war, trying to maintain a station, would act as this sail does. The note you saw in Paris stated that three English ships had sailed to these waters: a sloop, a frigate, and a ship of the line. This is, no doubt, one of them.”

“Then why not run in close enough to find out if it is the sloop of war?” said Louis. “If so, it would be a fair fight for both of us.”

“The English are not likely to hunt singly,” the captain replied. “We have been seen in the past two days by half a

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dozen fishing vessels. If the English ships are patrolling these waters, they have probably had word of our arrival already. No," he continued after a moment's pause, "to engage that fellow now would be to play his own game. The *Superb* can outpoint him and outrun him, unless he is better than any English ship I have ever met. If he follows us, we will work up to windward of him, and then, if he is still alone, I promise Monsieur the *Superb* will show that she is sharp of tooth as well as fleet of foot."

That the stranger had no intention of letting the French vessel get away without a chase was evident as soon as the latter changed its course. A cloud of white canvas was spread over the hitherto bare spars, and, in less than five minutes after the *Superb* had headed northward, the Englishman, if such he should prove to be, was coursing in the same direction.

The stranger's topgallantsails—like the *Superb*, she carried no royals—were visible from the deck with the naked eye, so clear was the air from the Canadian wilds. Cap-

tain Pirard watched the three white sheets with a thoughtful countenance. Occasionally, he checked their bearing by the ship's compass. After half an hour had passed in silence, he spoke to Louis.

“We are outsailing him,” he said. “We are holding him steady as to distance, for his topsails are still out of sight, and we are sailing at least half a point nearer the wind than he is. There are still three hours of daylight. If, at the end of two hours, this fellow is still alone, the *Superb* will show her teeth.”

CHAPTER II

THE great orb of the sun, sinking in a cloudless west, glowered at the equally great orb of the moon as it rose in the cloudless east. Then, as the sun's rim touched the horizon, two cries of "Sail ho!" came almost simultaneously from aloft. Two ships had come in sight, one to the north-east, the other nearly east. They were about twenty miles away, and were heading to the west, on the opposite tack from the *Superb*.

At the appearance of these two strangers, the thoughtfulness that had marked the face of Captain Pirard since the discovery of the vessel to the southwest, deepened to a look of anxiety. He turned to Louis who, as the privileged character aboard, still shared the quarter-deck with him.

"The man who wrote the note you saw in Paris was evidently well informed," he said. "We have now accounted for all three of the English squadron. I judge, from the size

of his sails, that the fellow to the west is the sloop of war. Which of the others is the frigate, and which the ship of the line, we shall soon know."

Half an hour later, the two ships to the east were visible from the *Superb's* deck, their graceful upper sails gleaming white against the darkening sky. The more northerly of the pair still held to his western course, apparently with the intention of heading off the French ship. The other had tacked, and was running to the north, parallel to the course of the *Superb*.

"The English have sprung their trap," Pirard said after a long examination of the surrounding enemies, for enemies they were. "They have effectively blocked us in every direction except possibly one. The ship to the northeast is a frigate. If we can cross her bows unscathed, we shall have a clear path ahead of us. Then, with all our enemies behind us, we can trust to the *Superb* to show them a clean pair of heels."

The captain again relapsed into a thoughtful silence. At frequent intervals he

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studied the three strangers through a glass. At length he sent a cabin-boy in search of the sailing-master. When that worthy arrived, the commander went aside and engaged him in a long, earnest conversation. As a result, a swarm of seamen clambered up the shrouds, and, with a maze of lines, reinforced all the lighter parts of the rigging, as if to stand some unusual strain.

When this work was completed to the satisfaction of even the critical sailing-master, the call to quarters was sounded. A period of apparent confusion followed, when every person in the ship seemed to be on the run, and every tongue to be wagging. In reality, it was a period of intense, ordered activity. At its close, the twenty-two twelve-pounders on the *Superb's* main deck had been loosened from their lashings, and were loaded ready for use, the gun-crews at their sides. Magazines stood open, with powder-boys ready to carry their deadly contents to the gun-loaders. Marines, and the company of infantrymen, stood in ordered array on the quarter-deck. Topmen

were at their stations in the "tops," prepared for their double task of working the upper sails, and of pouring a fire of musketry down on an enemy's deck, if he should come to close quarters.

When the bustle and confusion of preparing the ship for action had subsided, Louis turned to Captain Pirard.

"Every one but me seems to have a duty assigned to him," he said. "I should not like to be an idler when we come into action. Have you a place for me where I can be of use?"

The captain seemed pleased with the lad's offer, but he also seemed somewhat puzzled.

"I should be pleased to use Monsieur," he said, "but just where ——" and he hesitated.

Lieutenant de La Motte, who stood at his side, hastened to relieve him of his embarrassment.

"I should be glad to have your help with my men," he said to Louis. "They are a green lot, not more than ten real soldiers in the whole forty of them. If you will take

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charge of half of them, perhaps between us we can keep them in some kind of order. Would that arrangement be satisfactory to you, Captain?"

"Entirely so," answered the officer. "If we should come to close quarters, a heavy fire of musketry might be of great help to us. I hope, however, to keep the Englishman at a distance. I judge from his size that he carries at least thirty-six guns, eighteen-pounders, no doubt. At close range, the *Superb* would be simply crushed by his fire."

With the going down of the sun, the wind, already a fresh, whole sail breeze, gradually increased in force until it became almost a gale. Under its impulse, the *Superb* and the English frigate rapidly decreased the distance between them. Both staggered under the load of canvas they carried, but as the capture or escape of the French sloop depended wholly upon the relative speed of these two enemies, neither would shorten sail.

The *Superb's* sailing-master cast many an

anxious glance at his topgallants, and at their slender masts, bending and creaking under the unusual strain. Thanks to the precautions taken in advance, however, everything held.

The frigate was not so lucky. Rising from the effect of a heavy gust that laid her over until her lee rail was almost awash, she met another tremendous blast. Before the heavy mass could yield to the pressure, the mizzen-topgallant-mast snapped short off.

Before this accident to her most dangerous opponent, it had been uncertain whether the *Superb* would win her race to the point where the courses of the two ships crossed. Now the Englishman's speed was slackened. More important still, due to the loss of his after sails, he was unable to maintain his former course, but fell off more to the south. The *Superb* would cross his bows, but by a margin of little more than half a mile.

The captain walked forward, past the gun-crews that stood waiting beside their twelve-pounders. The guns were ready for the touch of the matches that should dis-

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charge them, but so great was the heel of the vessel under the pressure of the wind, that they pointed directly into the water that foamed under the ship's rail. The greatest elevation that could be obtained, with the crude sighting devices of the time, failed to bring the pieces to bear on the fast-approaching target.

"Why so downhearted, lads?" asked the captain cheerily, as he noted a glum expression on the faces of the sturdy sailors.

"It is enough to make a gunner feel downhearted, sir," answered an old salt who had sailed for years with Captain Pirard and presumed on old acquaintanceship to answer freely. "Here we are, fast getting into position to rake this Englishman at easy range, and not a gun will bear. If we were out on the open sea, now, the roll of the ship would give us a chance for a broadside."

"Well, Jack, I will give you one shot at him," said the captain, "but make that one count. You won't get another." He turned to the junior officer who commanded the gun-crews.

“As we cross the frigate’s bows,” he said, “I will luff until everything is shaking. As the ship rights herself, fire every gun in the broadside. Aim at the rigging. I cannot give you time for a second broadside, for we must not lose our headway. See that the men all understand the arrangement, for they will have only a few seconds of time for aiming and firing.”

Night was falling fast. Already the shadows of the rigging could be traced on the *Superb’s* decks, in the moonlight that mingled with the fading twilight. The supreme test was at hand. The captain, back on the quarter-deck, made a final survey of the situation.

To the northeast was the frigate, now less than a mile away, lying far over under the increasing force of the wind, her black hull half hidden by a cloud of spray thrown off from her bows. To the east, the seventy-four had disappeared in the gathering gloom. In the southwest was the English sloop, her topgallants silhouetted against the afterglow in the sky.

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The *Superb* crossed the frigate's course. As she did so, she swung sharply into the wind. Amid a tremendous roar of slatting sails and thrashing tackle, the ship came to an even keel. Then followed an even greater roar, that of the eleven guns in her broadside. Great spikes of flame, white-hot in the half-light, leaped from the *Superb's* side, and were transformed into clouds of fleecy vapor that raced madly to leeward. Then the head of the vessel swung away from the wind, and she resumed her course, almost without loss of speed.

With a night-glass, Captain Pirard watched the effect of his fire. Three or four shot-holes appeared in the frigate's headsails, a few loose rope-ends blew straight out to leeward; then, with a crash that was heard even on the *Superb*, her foreyard gave way. A lucky shot had severed one of the braces, another had cut half through the timber itself, and the remaining wood was unable to stand the terrific strain to which it was subjected. As the frigate's great foresail and foretopsail collapsed with the yard, a trium-

phant cheer arose from the deck of the French sloop. Certainly Fortune had thus far been on the side of the *Superb*. If only she would continue to smile for another five minutes, the sloop would be safe.

Fortune is proverbially fickle. The frigate was now definitely out of the chase, but as she forged slowly ahead, she put the flying *Superb* directly under her guns. Fortunately for the latter, the range was now much greater than that at which she had fired her own broadside, but the number and weight of her enemy's guns made her position extremely dangerous. It was not so much that she was likely to be completely disabled, but with the dark sails of the English sloop still showing above the western sky line, and with the ship of the line present, though invisible, an unfortunate hit in the rigging might mean capture.

The frigate's eighteen-pounders fired as they bore on the sloop; first a bow gun, followed by three of the forward broadside guns singly, then with a tremendous crash by a dozen more. To Louis Dupuy, stand-

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ing with the men who had been assigned to his charge, this was the baptism of fire. To him, it seemed that a tornado of iron was sweeping down upon the *Superb*. A crash at his side told of a wrecked gun-carriage, great flying splinters of wood that barely missed him were thrown off from the rail, while overhead rushed a half-dozen heavy balls. It required the combination of all the lad's pride and self-control to keep from ducking, for they seemed barely to miss his head. In fact, they were as high as the maintop.

The attention of Captain Pirard was fixed on his rigging, and his ears were strained to catch the sound of impact of iron on the wooden spars. All too soon the sound came, and directly overhead. In the full-rigged ships of that time, a great lateen sail was carried on the mizzenmast, in place of the spanker of a later date. The hit was in the spar that supported this sail. Spar and sail crashed to the deck.

An instant later, the foretopgallant-sail, weakened by a shot-hole, blew to shreds.

The captain took the loss of these two sails philosophically.

“If we get off with nothing worse than this, we are lucky,” he said to Louis, whose assigned position was near him. “The wind is getting so strong that we should have had to shorten sail soon, in any case. With the lateen gone, we can’t point quite as high into the wind as we have been doing, but we will get along.”

In the time required for reloading the frigate’s guns, the *Superb* so increased the distance separating her from her powerful enemy that the latter’s second broadside fell harmlessly into the sea.

“Now we must look out for the English sloop,” said the captain. “With our loss of two important sails, she will probably overhaul us. Then we shall fight.”

The crew was now called from the guns and set to work to repair the damage to the rigging. A spare lateen yard was got up, and the sail bent to it and set. A new fore-topgallant was bent to the yard, but was not set. The main and mizzen topgallants were

furled, as well as the spritsail, a square sail carried by ships of that time under the bowsprit, in place of jibs. Relieved of the pressure of her loftiest sails, the *Superb* rode more easily, though she was still making nearly ten knots.

While the sailing-master, with a coolness and efficiency born of long experience, was making good the damage to the sloop's rigging, the captain, with his night-glass, swept the southwestern quarter of the horizon. With the falling of night, the English sloop had been lost to sight.

Two hours passed. At the end of that time, the sailing-master reported the *Superb* as again fit for fight or flight. Even the injured gun-carriage had been repaired, and the sloop could again show her full number of twenty-two teeth.

“It is time the Englishman was coming,” said the captain, somewhat anxiously. “I hope he intends to fight to-night. If he should keep on, close-hauled as he was when we saw him last, morning might find him to windward of us, for we lost a good deal of

ground while our damage was being repaired. In that case, we should be caught between the sloop and the ship of the line.”

Captain Pirard's fears were soon dispelled. A pyramid of canvas, ghostly white in the moonlight, appeared at a distance of two miles, over the *Superb's* port beam. In spite of the force of the wind, the English sloop still carried her topgallants, for only so could she hope to close with the speedy Frenchman. So, tearing through the choppy seas at a tremendous pace, the English ship bore down upon the *Superb*.

CHAPTER III

As the English sloop made clear her intent to fight, the captain of the *Superb* heaved a sigh of relief.

“Ah! Matters could not have been arranged more to my liking,” he said to his young companion. “Unless this Englishman is different from most of that race I have met, he will come down, bows on, until he gets to point-blank range. Then he will try to crush us with his broadsides. Your Briton is a brave fighter, and such tactics have won him many battles. But forewarned is forearmed, and we shall know how to deal with him. I think from his looks he is nearly a quarter heavier than we. He probably has some eighteens mixed with his twelve-pounders, and, no doubt, he carries a larger crew than we do. We must try to dismast him before he gets to close quarters.”

With these words the captain left the

quarter-deck and again inspected the gun-crews. Now a sense of elation was evident among these hardy seamen. The telling effect of their single broadside upon the frigate, with the subsequent escape of the *Superb* from her heavy antagonist, had given them an assurance that their commander, in spite of his cheering words, did not fully share. Pirard recognized that he was still fighting against heavy odds, in that the loss of one of his tall, tapering masts would be fatal. His opponent, backed by his heavy consorts, labored under no such handicap.

When the Englishman was a mile away, the *Superb* shortened sail still further until she was in battle trim, under topsails only. The English sloop took in only her topgallants, preferring to keep her lower sails set, to bring her quickly to close quarters.

At a range of half a mile, the *Superb* poured her broadside full into her enemy's bows. There was now no handicap to her gunners other than the lack of daylight. Even this was largely overcome by the brilliant moonlight. With a steady deck, and a

target glowing in the white light, there was little excuse for a miss.

The Englishman, however, was lucky, and suffered nothing from this first discharge, other than perforated sails and a few cut lines. His spars were untouched, and he continued to come on as rapidly as ever.

After the ordered discharge of her first broadside, the guns of the *Superb* were fired at will. This meant that every gun-crew was in competition with every other one, as to the number of shots it could fire. Men, stripped to the waist, checked, with block and tackle, the recoil of the heavy guns. Others thrust into the still smoking muzzles the cleansing swabs, then forced in bags of powder brought from open magazines by sweating, racing powder-boys. Then followed the round iron shot. Block and tackle again were brought into play to run the guns back into position. A blinding flash and a deafening roar were to these men only the signals for a repetition of the deadly processes.

Captain Pirard, back on the quarter-deck,

watched the effect of his fire with some anxiety. His opponent was now only a scant quarter of a mile away, and was coming on like a race-horse. At any instant the officer expected to see him swing around to a course parallel to his own. He disliked to think what the effect of the first broadside, delivered at such close range, was likely to be.

The rapid, well-directed fire of the *Superb* was beginning to tell, however. First the Englishman's spritsail-yard was shot away. A moment later it was followed by the maintopmast. Then, just as he was about to luff to bring his broadside to bear, a shot went through his mizzenmast, close to the deck. A second cut the weather mizzen-shrouds, and the mast toppled over the side.

Crippled as he now was, with the loss of half his top-hamper, but one chance of victory remained for the English commander. There was still a possibility of capturing the *Superb* by boarding. Carried on by his great courses and foretopsail, he headed straight for the French sloop, and in spite

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of the efforts of the latter to avoid contact, ran her aboard.

The impact of the collision was terrific. Louis Dupuy and the soldiers assigned to him were thrown to the deck. As they scrambled to their feet, thirty men, armed with pikes and cutlasses, dropped from the bowsprit of the English sloop to the *Superb's* quarter-deck, while half a dozen sailors ran out on the spar to lash it to their enemy's mizzenmast.

Before Louis and his little band had fully recovered their balance after the collision, the English were upon them. To the French lad, the shock of a charge was an entirely new experience. He had engaged in many friendly bouts with the sword, but they were for points, not blood. He had twice this day watched the effect of well-aimed broadsides from his own ship upon enemy vessels. But the combats of ships are impersonal, and the shots fired, deadly though they may be, are aimed, not at individuals but at machines.

Though such thoughts flashed through his

brain, Louis had not an instant to dwell upon them. A sturdy English lieutenant was almost upon him, the blade of his cutlass glistening in the moonlight. Louis barely had time to draw his sword and parry a thrust at his breast. The lad was a good fencer and, for a few seconds, was able to match his skill against his opponent's greater strength. His followers were too few, however, to withstand the superior numbers of the English, reënforced as the latter were by a steady stream of boarders that poured over their bowsprit. Such of the handful of Frenchmen as were not struck down were pressed back toward the stern of the vessel.

Louis himself was on the point of being surrounded when, with a rush like that of a powerful football team, a mass of nearly a hundred men, led by Lieutenant de La Motte, charged down the deck from forward. There was no resisting such an assault. Half the Englishmen went down and were trampled under foot. The rest, including Louis' opponent, were literally swept into the sea whence, a minute later, they could be

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seen climbing like great beetles up the side of their own vessel.

Louis almost shared the fate of the English leader. He was, indeed, carried over the rail, but he managed to get a hold with one hand on the mizzen rigging as he went over and to clamber back on deck.

Meantime, the part of the *Superb's* crew not engaged in repelling boarders was not idle. Obedient to their captain's urgent commands, they sprang into the rigging. In an instant the great fore and main courses were set. A volley of musketry swept away the English sailors who attempted to lash the ships together, and a few strokes of sharp cutlasses severed the fastenings already made. Under the impulse of her heavy load of canvas, the *Superb* drew away from her antagonist.

That antagonist was now, however, no longer to be feared. With mizzenmast and maintop-mast dragging in the water, the English sloop was out of control, and the nimble *Superb*, again under topsails, raked her at will. No attempt was made further

to cripple the rigging; that job had been well done. Instead, the heavy balls were sent the length of the Englishman's deck, overturning guns and smashing boats and rails. Showers of grape-shot followed, decimating the gun-crews and the sailors who hacked and cut at the tangled wreckage of rigging. The captain fell, the first lieutenant was swept overboard by a twelve-pound ball, and the command devolved upon the young officer who had led the boarders. Helpless in his crippled ship, but one course was open to him. The colors having already gone down with the fallen rigging, the white flag of surrender was raised. The fire of the *Superb* ceased and she ranged alongside her prize, riding easily with a backed topsail at a distance of fifty yards. Through a speaking-trumpet, Captain Pirard addressed the unfortunate English lieutenant:

“Monsieur has made a brave fight,” he said with French courtesy, “but the fortune of war was against him. Monsieur surrenders his ship and I accept the surrender, but I shall not take possession. No doubt

Monsieur's consorts will soon arrive to give him any assistance he may need. Adieu."

Much as Captain Pirard would have liked to take his prize into port, or at least to remove her crew and blow her up, he felt that he could not safely take time even to wait for a boat to bring her commander aboard to make his submission. Indeed, even as he waved his farewell, a great cloud of snow-white canvas appeared in the northeast, the English two-decker coming too late to the rescue of her consort.

Pirard again put the trumpet to his lips.

"Monsieur's consort will arrive *very* soon," he called in his most pleasant tone. "Will Monsieur extend to her commander my compliments? And again, adieu."

A hundred dark forms sprang into the *Superb's* rigging, and as a sea-gull extends her pinions, so did she spread her white sails. Then, bowing to the force of the breeze, graceful as a girl in a classic dance, she gathered way and sped quickly out of reach of her powerful, but slow new neighbor.

CHAPTER IV

ON the eastern bank of the Richelieu, the fine river that drains the great basin of Champlain and Lake George into the St. Lawrence, could have been seen, at the time of our story, a dozen or more rude farms, some fifty miles above the mouth of the river. The smaller stumps in the rough fields had been grubbed out, but the larger ones had not only defied all attempts to remove them, but by sending up new shoots from their roots, threatened to replace the losses which nature had suffered from the hands of man. Among the stumps on the largest of these farms, a variety of grains was ripening. Oats, with willowy grace, bowed their heads, as if in silent invitation to the sickle of the reaper. Wheat and barley thrust their bearded faces defiantly upward. Maize, or Indian corn, displayed, in regal splendor, feathery crowns of gold, and swelling silk-tasseled fruitage.

Extending into the water was a short,

rude wharf, consisting of a few posts and hewn timbers. From this structure a path led for a hundred yards through a field of barley to a two-story house, flanked at a distance of a hundred yards by a barn and one or two minor buildings. All were built of logs, except that the first story and ample basement wall of the house were of stone.

As we shall perhaps spend some little time in this house, it will be well to give it a second look. The first story was about twenty-five feet wide, and half again as long. The stone walls, two feet thick, were provided with a doorway in each end, and three windows on each side. Doors and shutters were of oaken planks, four inches thick. There was no glass in the windows. The second story was of hewn oak logs, seasoned to a hardness almost like that of the supporting stones. The most noticeable feature of this superstructure was that, on all sides, it projected nearly four feet beyond the first story. The whole structure was covered with a gable roof of hand-made pine shingles.

As the reader has already suspected, this structure was not only a residence but a place of defense, a little wilderness fort. Loopholes for musketry pierced the stone walls, as well as the oak floor of the projecting area. Set in the ridge of the roof were two hatchways. In the attic, beneath them, were a half-dozen barrels, kept always full of water, for use in extinguishing fires. Around the house, for a distance of a hundred yards, every tree and stump had been removed, lest it should afford shelter within musket range to a stealthy foe.

Within, as well as without, the house and its furnishings revealed its double character: a place of abode and of defense. Half of the first-floor area served at once as a living-room and dining-room for very special occasions. The remainder was occupied by a kitchen, and a bedroom for the master of the house. The second story was divided into bedrooms, while the attic served as a storeroom. The basement was used as a root-cellar, and, in times of danger, as a place of safety for the cattle not only of this, but of

neighboring farms. Over the great stone fireplace in the living-room, in fact, in every room, muskets and rifles rested on wooden pegs, while full powder-horns and bullet-pouches swung below them, ready for instant use.

The semi-military character of the house was shared by its master. As he sat in an armchair before a small fire that snapped and crackled in the fireplace, and puffed contentedly at a stone-bowled pipe of native Indian make, he seemed the embodiment of domestic comfort. However, only one leg was stretched toward the warmth of the fire. The other, from the knee down, had been left on some field of battle and had been replaced by one of wood. Moreover, a glance at the walls of the master's bedroom would have revealed, among rough garments of homespun and fur, the uniform of a captain of the famous regiment Carignan.

The occupant of the great armchair was, in fact, the *Sieur Georges Dupuy*, whose invitation had brought his nephew *Louis* from Paris to the New World. Thirty years

earlier, unfitted for active military service by the loss of his leg, he had been given by the king a grant of land on the Richelieu, together with the privileges and duties of a seignior. The privileges were few, and of little real value; but the duties were many and onerous. As the early Norman kings of England appointed "Earls of the Marches," to defend their frontiers, so did the French government in Canada most thriftily establish advanced posts of defense by placing its retired military officers on "seigniories." Here, with little or no aid from the government, the owners were required to establish and defend little communities that should serve as bulwarks to the larger towns.

Though the master of the seignior on the Richelieu combined military with domestic attributes, there was no such admixture of qualities apparent in the little lady who shared with him the comfort of the crackling fire. Though clad in simple homespun like her husband, for such was the relation of the seignior to her, Madame Lucille Dupuy showed but little the effects of long years

spent amid the hardships and deprivations of the frontier. Her face was one of peace and refinement, true expression of a noble nature within.

“I wish you would read Louis’ letter again, Georges,” the little lady said. “I think I know every word in it, but I want to hear it once more.”

The seignior, in compliance, rose, and in spite of the handicap of his wooden leg, walked spryly, without the help of a cane, to a cupboard at the side of the room. Returning with a pair of great, horn-bowed spectacles and a folded paper, he adjusted the former to his nose, and read aloud, for the tenth time, the contents of the letter. This was a note written by Louis on the slow journey by boat from Quebec to Montreal, apprising his relatives of his safe arrival in Canada. At the end was a foot-note, stating that he expected to reach the seigniory on the tenth day of August.

As the date was read, a pucker of perplexity wrinkled the brow of Madame Lucille.

“Are you sure the messenger who brought the letter doesn’t know when Louis is to leave Montreal?” she asked.

“No, Lucille,” her husband answered, “I have asked him half a dozen times, and he is certain not a word was said about the time of starting. Louis, of course, thought we would have a calendar here, and didn’t think it necessary to do more than give the date of his arrival.”

“If he had only given the day of the week instead of the day of the month,” said the woman. For a few minutes she sat in deep thought, her chin in her hand. Then her face brightened.

“I have it,” she said. “Our good priest, Father Gregory, was with us a week ago last Sunday. He said that the fifth Wednesday from that time would be the sixty-fifth birthday of his Majesty, our king. The birthday is the fifth of September. So you see, the Wednesday before that will be the twenty-ninth of August, the one before that will be the twenty-second; before that the fifteenth, and before that the eighth. That

was yesterday, because this is Thursday. So this is the ninth of August, and Louis will be here to-morrow.”

Having cleverly substituted brains for the more convenient calendars of our modern homes, Madame Lucille turned to speculations regarding the appearance, habits, and manners of her nephew, whom, of course, she had never seen. Her thoughts, and the happy chatter that accompanied them, were interrupted by the arrival of a third person.

In appearance, the newcomer was in marked contrast with the master of the house. The seignior was of large and heavy build, with a round, florid face, somewhat lengthened by a pointed gray beard that projected below his heavy mustaches. The other was of moderate height, thin almost to leanness, but with an elasticity of step that indicated unusual strength. His face was partly concealed by a light beard, jet black like his hair, in spite of the fifty years of their owner.

With the easy familiarity of one assured of his welcome, the hunter, for such he

seemed to be, placed the long rifle he carried in a corner of the room, removed his powder-horn and bullet-pouch, and hung them on a peg, then drew a chair to the fire.

“ Well, Sergeant, how was the hunting? ” asked the seignior.

“ I got two good bucks and a half-grown fawn, ” was the reply. “ They are in my canoe. I told Jacques, your man, to dress them for you. ”

At the mention of the game, Madame Lucille almost clapped her hands.

“ Sergeant, ” she said, “ I don’t know what we should do without you. You always seem to bring the solution to my problems. I told you, you will remember, some weeks ago that our nephew was coming from France to live with us. Well, he will arrive to-morrow. I want to have a real feast for him when he comes, and there isn’t a thing in the pantry but salt pork, flour, and corn-meal. Now, with the venison you brought, corn and vegetables from the garden, and berries and plums which I can get in the woods, we shall have a dinner that even a

young man fresh from court need not despise."

"Well, there will be venison enough, at any rate," replied the one who had been addressed as Sergeant. "One of those bucks must weigh nearly a hundred and fifty pounds. As for the berries and plums, I will look after them. You will have your hands full here in the house."

"Let us invite our cousins, the Sieur de La Ronde, and his wife," said the seignior. "We haven't seen them for half a year, and I have heard Madame has been none too well. A little change from their miserable existence will do her good. It is only ten miles up the river. I can get there and back in a canoe before dark."

"By all means, let us have them here," exclaimed Madame Lucille. "And we must have their bright-eyed daughter Margaret, too, so that Louis will not be lonely among so many old people. If the sergeant is willing," she continued, "I would suggest also that you take along a saddle of venison. Now that the last of De La Ronde's sons has

run away to the western lakes, I fear that there is none too much for the old people and their daughter to eat.”

The sergeant expressed his approval of this arrangement, and the little gathering broke up. Madame Lucille went to the great kitchen, where, with the help of a girl of fourteen, half-Indian, half-white, she began the preparations for the morrow's feast. The hunter departed for the woods in search of the promised fruit. The seignior looked up Jacques, and gave orders regarding the skinning and dressing of the three deer. Half an hour later, with the saddle of one of the bucks in the canoe, he was on his way up the river.

Little was there in this frontier home to suggest that its master and mistress were rated among the nobility of the province of Canada. That little consisted of the military bearing of the seignior and a certain quiet dignity on the part of his wife, neither of which could be entirely concealed by their simple and plain attire.

Nor was their lot an unusual one. Few

among the gentry of Canada could boast of wealth. Most of them, indeed, might well have envied the *Sieur Dupuy* his comfortable house, and his larder, well stocked with nourishing, if simple, food.

Most of the seigniors, like *Dupuy*, had been officers in the French regiments that formed the backbone of the Canadian military organization. Belonging to the landless part of the French nobility, they had enjoyed no income beyond their salaries as officers. Upon accepting the position of seignior, they had, as a rule, been granted a few hundred livres, the equivalent of as many dollars in our money, and had then been left to their own resources, except for rules and regulations that hampered rather than helped them.

With few tenants, with rents from these few fixed by government so low as to be valueless, the seigniors were, as a rule, dependent upon the labor of their own hands, and by inheritance and training those hands were poorly fitted for the hard toil of frontier life. So, struggling under adverse condi-

tions, cursed rather than blessed by enormous families, the seigniors, as a rule, had sunk into a condition of abject poverty that made them contemptible even in the eyes of their own tenants. Little indeed was left to them but debts, and an indomitable pride of birth and position that their poverty made into a hollow mockery.

Two circumstances had combined to maintain the Sieur Dupuy in a condition above that of most of his fellow seigniors. Together with his powerful and hardy physique, he possessed a practical mind that could accommodate itself to any condition, military or economic. In addition to this, it had been his good fortune to receive, for gallantry in action, the lifelong privilege of participation in the fur trade, a privilege that, if not used in person, could always be assigned to one of the merchants of the colony, in return for a modest sum of money or a share of the profits. Thus was Dupuy enabled to lead a life of comfort, maintaining with simple dignity his position as feudal head of his little community.

CHAPTER V

ALL at the seigniory were astir early the morning after the arrival of the messenger announcing the coming of Louis. In spite of yesterday's activities, much remained to be done to provide a reception that, in Madame Lucille's eyes, would be worthy of her nephew. So rooms must be carefully swept, the scanty furnishings of living-room and kitchen dusted or polished, as the case might be. Then, too, one of the second-floor chambers, usually set apart for the use of Father Gregory, the priest, must now be made ready for the young guest. Altogether, what with these matters and the preparation of the great dinner, which was to be served at sundown, Madame and her little half-breed helper bade fair to be in a state of nervous collapse by the time Louis should arrive.

At noon, a birch-bark canoe, speeding rapidly down the river, brought the Sieur de La Ronde, with his wife and daughter Mar-

garet. Under the skilful guidance of the girl, who sat in the stern and wielded the one paddle, the light, graceful craft shot around the end of the wharf, swung in toward the shore, then, with its momentum checked by a backward sweep of the paddle, touched the gravel of the shore with barely a perceptible sound.

De La Ronde stepped from the bow to the strand and, with a gesture that would have done credit to any young gallant at the court at Versailles, helped his wife from the canoe. Relieved of their weight, the light craft began to drift with the current, but with one stroke of the paddle, Margaret sent it well up on the bank. Then, agile as a fawn, she leaped ashore beside her parents.

These constituted an odd-looking pair. De La Ronde had once been a tall man, but worry and deprivation had bent, as well as shrunk, his once erect body. His thin face bore mustaches and a pointed beard, white like his hair. These, usually unkempt, had been trimmed and dressed for the occasion. Margaret had been the barber.

The attire of this French nobleman was as nondescript as one could have found in a beggars' lane. The long, full-skirted coat was that of a lieutenant of the French army, of a quarter century earlier date. It was faded, threadbare, and moth-eaten. Among these less honorable marks, however, was a round hole, carefully darned with material raveled from inside seams. This, in the left lapel, showed where a Mohawk bullet had found its mark. De La Ronde still carried the lead in his shoulder.

The waistcoat that had once formed part of the uniform had long since disappeared, as had the knee breeches; sacrifices to the pressing poverty of frontier life. The waistcoat had no substitute. Above the closely buttoned coat showed a rough, woolen, homespun shirt. The trousers of the uniform had been replaced by garments of deer-skin, and the stockings by leggings of the same material. Moccasins took the place of shoes.

That Madame de La Ronde was less oddly attired than her husband was due to

the fact that her faded silk dress, part of her wedding attire, covered her entire person below the shoulders. Its ample folds, designed to accommodate enormous hoops, now fell straight from the hips, for the hoops themselves were missing. Like her husband, she wore moccasins of deerskin. Her scanty white hair was uncovered, for she owned no hat, and she refused to wear the kerchief of a peasant woman.

Margaret, a supple-bodied girl of sixteen, was dressed in a simple gown of homespun. Her round, brown arms were bare. Below the short skirt of her gown showed neat deerskin leggings and moccasins, the latter decorated with spines of hedgehog dyed in brilliant colors. A tumble of dark hair framed her olive-hued face.

The *Sieur Dupuy*, attired in his old uniform in honor of the occasion, greeted his guests at the landing. For *De La Ronde* there was a hearty hand-clasp, and for *Madame*, a courtly bow. Margaret was welcomed with a bow not so formal. In addition, the seignior took one of the girl's

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shapely, brown hands in his and touched it to his lips: a tribute of maturity to the youthful beauty of which it never tires. Then, with Madame de La Ronde on his arm, Dupuy led the way through the field of barley to the house.

Five minutes after the formal greetings were over, Margaret slipped away to the kitchen, and with deft, experienced hands kneaded, and stirred, and peeled, and sliced. Nor was she the only reinforcement that came to the aid of the mistress of the house. The sergeant, returning with a basket of delicious wild plums, insisted that he should be allowed to attend to the roasting of the two legs of venison that were to constitute the principal dish of the meal.

This simple, but important operation was performed before the glowing coals in the great kitchen fireplace. A long, thin iron bar, sharp-pointed at one end, and bent into the form of a crank at the other, rested in notches in iron brackets that projected each side of the fireplace opening. The sergeant thrust this bar, or spit, lengthwise

through each of the pieces of meat, and rested it on its brackets. This brought the meat close in front of the fire. Placing a long iron pan on the hearth to catch the drip from the roast, the sergeant seated himself on a low stool, and patiently began his task of "turn-spit."

This was primitive cookery, and required constant attention, but, at the end of two hours, the venison had been roasted "to a turn" of the spit, with a perfection unattainable with modern cooking devices, except with the spit which has, after long years of disuse, again come into favor.

The conversation of the two in the living-room, and the activities of the four workers in the kitchen, were interrupted by the report of a musket-shot from down the river. The women rushed to the front of the house. The men followed more slowly, having taken time to arm themselves with the ever-ready guns. Their precautions were needless, however. Only a single canoe was in sight, a quarter of a mile below the wharf, and its occupants showed anything but a spirit of

enmity. In the bow was a half-naked Indian warrior, in the act of repeating the salute that had first been heard. Another Indian, in the stern, wielded his ashen paddle with the grace born of lifelong experience. Amidships, seated on a huge bundle of his belongings, was Louis Dupuy, in the same attire in which we first saw him, waving his hand in greeting.

It required but two or three minutes for the stalwart athletes who paddled the canoe to bring it to the landing. Greetings, embraces, introductions followed. Louis looked with curious interest into the faces of his near relatives, now seen for the first time. Interest was mixed with amusement, as, with courtly ceremony, the more distant relations, the Sieur de La Ronde and his family, were presented. Nobles in half-peasant dress were a novelty in the lad's experience. Having been presented to all the company, including the sergeant, who, to the boy's surprise, was treated by those nobles as an equal, Louis followed his hosts through the barley to the house.



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As the August sun touched the tops of the trees on the west bank of the river, throwing light and welcome warmth into the great living-room, the call to dinner was given. It was a feast worthy of the occasion. Madame Lucille had bemoaned the lack of variety of the contents of her larder. She had failed, however, to mention her garden, which was in her own particular care, and was the delight of her heart. Squashes, peas, beans, above all half-ripe ears of corn, boiled and served hot with butter from her dairy; these, with the venison, made a meal such as Louis had never before eaten.

“Auntie mine,” he said, “if the king himself were to come to Canada, he would be delighted with such a feast as you have given us.”

Madame threw up her hands with a deprecating gesture.

“It is nothing,” she said; “only the poor, simple food of the frontier. If only I could have had the spices, and the sugar, and the fine flour of France ——”

“Yes, Aunt,” Louis broke in; “if you

had had all those things you would have given me just the kind of food of which I grew tired in Paris. But who could grow tired of such venison as this, or of this delicious corn, as you call it? If I could take some of this maize, just as you have served it, back to France when I go back, and could make a present of it to the king, I should be in high favor for the rest of my life."

"But you are not going back," said his aunt warmly. "We will not let you go for a year, and after a year of Canada, no young man would wish to return to France."

"It may be so," replied Louis. "Besides, if the English continue to blockade the Gulf as closely as they do now, I might not be able to return, even if I should wish to do so."

After this remark, Louis must, of course, tell the story of the chase and escape of the *Superb*. When the name of Captain Pirard was mentioned, the elder Dupuy gave an ejaculation of astonishment.

"Captain Pirard!" He repeated the name after his nephew. "Well we remember him, don't we, Sergeant?" he said to the

hunter, who sat opposite him at the table. "As fine an officer and as true a gentleman as wears the king's uniform, even though he has no noble blood in his veins. The sergeant and I went through a hard campaign on the lakes with him."

Louis listened to his uncle in astonishment. His ideas regarding social distinctions were receiving severe and unwelcome shocks. Nobles dressed like beggars; a retired sergeant, of lowly birth, accepted as an equal by a man of rank; the captain of the *Superb*, whom he had treated none too courteously, praised as a gentleman as well as an officer; all this was very disturbing to one brought up to think that the finer qualities of mind and heart were held as a monopoly by those of gentle birth.

To the keen eyes of his uncle, the boy's open countenance revealed something of what was passing through his mind.

"Does it seem strange to you, Louis," he asked, "that I, whose lineage goes back to Charlemagne, should speak of Captain Pirard as a gentleman? I can understand

your attitude, for I held it once myself. But, in America, the old idea of severe class distinctions came to seem out of place.

“In the first place, it was impossible to maintain the Old-World practice that the gentleman should do no manual labor. On the march through the forest, every one, from the commander down, must carry burdens according to his strength. In the canoe on lake or river, there can be no idle hands; officer and private, priest and peasant; all must use the paddle while afloat, and carry at the portages. In the smaller parties, there can be no distinction, even in camp. All eat the same food, share the warmth of the same fire, and the shelter of the same tent or wigwam.

“As men, too, I have found little difference in the forest between the son of the noble and the son of the peasant. Both are equally brave in danger, and resourceful in emergencies. They have the same virtues, and the same weaknesses. So, to me, they have become, not nobles and commoners, but simply Frenchmen.”

CHAPTER VI

ON the morning after his arrival at the seigniory on the Richelieu, Louis woke at what seemed to him an early hour; for the August sun was just peeping over the woody border of the fields that surrounded the house. Going through the bundle of personal belongings that he had brought with him, he selected a brown suit of heavy woolen. It was a costume that he had used when hunting on his brother's estate in Brittany. With it, went coarse woolen stockings and heavy leather shoes.

“I must leave the other things up here in my room,” the lad said to himself as he unpacked a half-dozen suits, all as elaborate as the one he had worn on the previous day. “People here apparently live very plainly, and such suits as these would seem altogether out of place. Perhaps I shall have a chance to wear them some time at Montreal or Quebec.”

If Louis thought that his hunting suit itself would be inconspicuous in comparison with the working clothes of his relatives, he was soon undeceived. Going out the front door of the house, he spied, at a little distance, two forms, clad in peasant's smocks, with their feet encased in enormous wooden shoes. Their feet, however, numbered only three, for one of the two persons was the seignior. The other was his friend, the sergeant.

With perfect freedom of movement, his stride unrestricted by the handicap of a wooden leg, the elder Dupuy swung a keen-edged scythe in a field of ripe oats. The sergeant followed with a long-handled, wooden rake, with which he gathered the heavy grain into bundles. Then, with bands skilfully formed of the long straw, he bound these bundles almost as tightly and securely as is done by a modern harvesting machine.

Skilful and energetic as the hunter was, however, he could not keep up with the seignior, as the latter moved steadily around the margin of the decreasing area of stand-

ing grain. Long, glistening swaths lay as yet untouched by the rake; an indication not only of the seignior's skill, but of the early hour at which he had begun his day's work.

The elder Dupuy greeted his nephew with a cheery "Good morning," and stopped a moment to wipe the sweat from his brow. Then, after swallowing a great draught of water, using a hollowed-out, dried gourd as a cup, he resumed his steady march around the field.

Louis stood alone. His mind struggled to adjust itself to its new surroundings. He had, of course, not expected to find America like his native France. He had known that, though nearly a century had elapsed since Champlain first planted the French flag at Quebec, Canada was still engaged in a bitter struggle for existence. But he had not been able to realize that, in this new country, a seigniory was but a farm, the value of which had small relation to the thousands of acres of wild, unsubdued forest of which it consisted. He had known that the life of the seigniors was far from being one of ease and

luxury, but he had not expected to see one in whose veins was some of the best blood of France, attired like a peasant, and doing a peasant's work.

The boy's mind turned to the surrounding scene. How wild everything was: the half-reclaimed, unfenced fields; the rude house—half-dwelling, half-fort; the wilderness of trees, stretching, an unbroken mass of verdure, to all horizons, for even the river was but a ribbon of silver on the great garment of green! And what were to be his experiences in this wilderness? Were they to be as different from the life he had heretofore led as the wild Canadian forests were from the neatly walled fields and pastures of his native France? Time alone could tell.

Louis' meditations were interrupted by the sound of a bronze bell that swung from the top of a post, set in the back-yard of the house. It was the call to breakfast.

“Why the bell, Uncle?” asked Louis, when all were seated and awaited the appearance of the little part-Indian girl with

the boiled corn-meal and fresh milk that constituted the breakfast. "The fields are so small that a bell seems hardly necessary to send a call to any part of them."

"It does seem so, doesn't it?" answered the uncle. "But you see, only part of our work is done in the fields. Our winters are long and severe, and much wood must be cut to keep the fireplaces going during the cold months. In the early spring, too, we tap the hard maples, and make sugar and syrup from the sweet sap. By the way, Lucille, Louis hasn't tasted your syrup yet. Let him have some with his corn-meal. I think he will like it."

The maid soon appeared again with a pitcher filled with a thick, brown liquid—maple syrup. It was a delicacy even more prized in the frontier homes than it is today; for there it alone supplied the sweet that the human stomach craves. The seignior's prediction that it would appeal to his nephew's taste was fully justified. No doubt the many weeks of sea-fare, followed by the scarcely more palatable food supplied

on his journey from Quebec, had sharpened the boy's sweet tooth.

"Auntie mine," he said half seriously, "I don't pretend to know very much about the Bible, but I once heard a priest read from it about something that was sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. Do you suppose the writer could have meant this that you call maple syrup? I think it the sweetest thing I have ever tasted, and the best."

There was a merry laugh at the boy's expense, in which he himself joined; for all hearts were light in this home of simple, unpretentious comfort and abundance.

"Referring again to the bell," said the seignior, after the merriment had subsided, "my reason for sending all the way to France for it was a more serious one than simple convenience. You no doubt noticed, Louis, as you came up the river, half a dozen small farms along the eastern bank within two miles of us. There are as many more up-stream, and this house is their place of refuge in case of an Indian attack. Long, continuous ringing of the bell is the signal

that such an attack is imminent. At this signal, all the tenants rush here for shelter and protection.”

“ You speak as if this had happened more than once,” said Louis, surprised at the matter-of-fact way in which his uncle spoke. “ Do such attacks often occur? ”

Before replying, the seignior rose and led his nephew to the great fireplace.

“ Count these nicks,” he said, pointing to a row of notches cut in the edge of the mantel.

“ There are seventeen of them,” said Louis.

“ We have been attacked that many times,” continued his uncle, as the two returned to the table. “ Five times the Mohawks tried to burn the house that I first built. At last they succeeded, and we had to take to the river. They tried hard to cut us off, but there were eight good men of us, and we held them back. We lost all we had, except our lives; and one very precious life was taken. Our only child, Charles, a curly-headed boy of five, was shot.”

The seignior paused a moment as the picture of the tragedy flashed through his mind, then continued:

“There is no other place in all Canada as exposed to Indian attack as are the settlements along the Richelieu. Of all the Iroquois tribes, no other hates the French so bitterly as does the Mohawk. It was them Champlain helped a Huron war-party to defeat, nearly a century ago, and the injury has never been forgiven. For over fifty years they have waged war upon us, with only brief and uncertain intervals of peace. Every Mohawk war-party comes down Lake Champlain and the Richelieu, whether its objective is Montreal, Three Rivers, or Quebec. So, for us, there is little peace.

“Realizing that, in all likelihood, these conditions would last as long as I should live, I determined that, upon rebuilding, I would make my house as safe a refuge as my means would allow. You see what it is. Twelve times the Mohawks have come. Three times they burned our grain between the harvest and the threshing. Twice they killed all our

cattle, sheep, and hogs before we could get them to safety in the basement of the house. But never again have they been able to drive us from our home."

"How have you fared at your home?" asked Louis of the young Mademoiselle de La Ronde, who sat opposite him. "Being so near, you must be exposed to the same dangers as my aunt and uncle."

"Yes," the girl answered. "There is no difference, except that we haven't a block-house like this. When there is an alarm, we take to the river or to the woods if we have time, and come here for protection. Six times within my memory our house has been burned down, and all we had destroyed, except what we could carry with us."

"Aren't you frightened when an alarm comes?" asked Louis. The calmness with which these people discussed raids by savages, sudden flights, and destruction of homes, amazed him. "Why, in France," he went on, "if a girl of your age should so much as meet one of the Indian warriors painted as I saw some of them in Montreal,

she would promptly fall in a faint, and would be in bed for a week."

"I can't say that I ever enjoyed the experience," replied the girl. "Of course, when we are warned in time, it is simply a matter of hurrying to the canoe and speeding down-stream as fast as we can go. But when a dozen of the savages pounced upon us without warning last year, I confess I was scared."

"Her fright didn't prevent her from doing a man's task in helping her father hold off the savage crew until we could come to their aid," said the elder Dupuy. "And when we arrived, the six Mohawks that were left were avoiding her side of the house as they would a pestilence."

"You use a gun, then?" asked Louis.

Her father answered the question.

"Margaret was eight years old when she first fired my musket," he said. "At ten, she bagged her first deer. A year later, she killed a bear that had climbed a tree in our front yard. I was not at home, but her mother told me what happened. Of course,

she couldn't hold the heavy gun for such a shot, but a high stump served her for a rest. The bear fell at the report of the gun, and never moved after he struck the ground. The bullet had gone through his brain."

"Would you like to see my gun?" asked Margaret. Like her father, she had come armed from her home.

Without waiting for a reply, the girl ran up the stairs to the room she had occupied the night before. In a moment she had returned with her gun in her hand. The very manner in which she held the piece denoted her perfect familiarity with it.

Louis, whose life on a country estate had accustomed him to firearms, recognized at a glance that the girl held one of the best that the skilled French gunsmiths could produce. It was a rifle, made somewhat shorter and lighter than an army musket, that it might not overtax the strength of its young owner. So perfect, however, was the distribution of its weight, and so fine the workmanship on barrel and stock, that a harder hitting, or more accurate rifle was not to be found in all

Canada. In addition, as became a gun meant for the use of a charming young girl, it was as beautiful as the artistry of France could make it. The metal work was, of course, dull finished—no shining metal could be allowed in the woods, to catch the eye of hidden foe or watchful game—but the stock, extending well toward the muzzle, was of San Domingo mahogany, rose-colored and dull-lustered. Inlaid in fine script in a golden-colored wood, in the side of the stock, was the name of the owner, MARGARET.

“It was a present to me from my brother, Vincent. He does not live at home now. He is in the fur trade.”

Margaret spoke with some embarrassment, for like his three older brothers, and like scores of other sons of Canadian seigniors, Vincent de La Ronde, disgusted with the drudgery and poverty of existence on his father's so-called estate, had quit it for a life which he considered more suited to his rank. He had become one of the *coureurs de bois*, that band of adventurers, brave but lawless, that traded, and fought, and explored for

its own illicit profit, and, incidentally, for the glory of France.

“When he came home for a few days last winter,” Margaret continued, “he brought me this for a birthday present. Would you like to try it?”

“Yes, indeed,” replied Louis. “But let me get the rifle I bought in Paris just before I started for Canada. We shall see which has the better gun, and which is the better shot.”

CHAPTER VII

THE rifle that Louis brought down from his room was an excellent piece, a little longer and heavier than Margaret's. Both were, of course, flint-locks, and muzzle-loaders; the accepted style of the time.

The mark selected was a black knot, two inches in diameter, on the whitened trunk of a dead old elm. The range was fifty paces. Louis was a good marksman, and placed the three bullets that he was to fire within three inches of the center of the knot.

Margaret followed. She raised her gun somewhat slowly, and fired as the sights bore on the mark. The bullet cut the edge of the knot.

“Fine,” cried Louis, and the girl answered with a merry laugh of triumph, as she proceeded to reload her gun. No less skill was shown in this process than had been exhibited in the firing. A quick motion brought her powder-horn to her lips. Extracting the

stopper with her teeth, she filled the charger attached to the horn, and emptied it into the still-smoking barrel of the gun. The round, leaden bullet followed, wrapped in a small patch of thin buckskin. This was forced down by the iron-shod ramrod. Before driving the bullet home, however, the girl lifted the gun, threw it on its side, and hit the breech of the barrel a light blow with her hand. This shook a small quantity of powder from the barrel, through the vent, into the pan. This operation saved the time that otherwise would have been required for priming. The bullet was now pressed hard home.

“No wonder your gun shoots well, with such loading,” exclaimed Louis. “I try to get my lead rammed down hard, but I never heard of using a patch of leather to hold it.”

“Our woodsmen all use them,” the girl replied. “They tell me it not only holds the bullet hard down on the powder, but it serves to prevent the fire, or smoke, or whatever it is that drives the bullet out, from leaking past it.”

As Margaret finished speaking, she fired again, and again she hit the mark. This time it was a perfect bull's-eye.

“Finer still,” shouted Louis after locating the hit. “You have me beaten already,” he continued as he returned to the side of the girl, who had her gun reloaded by the time he reached her. “Now, your next shot will be for a prize. If you can place the third shot so that its hole joins that of the second, you win a horn of powder, and lead enough for a hundred bullets.”

“Do you mean it?” asked the girl, her eyes glistening. “I should like to win such a prize. Ammunition is so scarce here that I felt guilty in firing three times at a mark. But now,” she laughed a merry little laugh, “well, I think you have lost your powder and lead already.”

And so it proved. When Louis examined the stump for the trace of the bullet, he could find none.

“Either you missed the stump altogether, or you put the bullet squarely on top of one of the others,” he called.

Margaret joined him, and examined the wood carefully.

“I know I didn’t miss the stump,” she said. “I couldn’t do that at such a short distance. The bullet hit in one of the five holes that were already there. Ah! It did hit the right one. See, the hole in the middle of the knot is just a little longer up and down than it is sidewise. The third bullet is on top of the second one. You will see when we cut out the bullets.”

“But why cut them out?” asked her companion. “I don’t need proof that you have won. Now that you have pointed it out to me, I can see the mark of your third shot.”

“Oh, it isn’t that,” said Margaret. “Of course, you would believe me. But we mustn’t waste the lead.”

Lightly the girl ran off to the house. In a minute she was back, with a keen-edged axe in her hands. Refusing Louis’ offer to take it from her, she swung the tool around her head, and brought it down against the stump with a force that buried the edge more than an inch in the wood. A dozen strokes ex-

tracted the battered spheres of the precious lead.

“ You lose the three you fired, too, Mr. Wasteful,” Margaret cried, as she picked them up and put them in her pocket. “ That will teach you your first lesson in Canadian woodcraft: *don't waste lead.*”

“ Shall we put the guns up, now? ” asked Louis. The value of ammunition in this remote district began to impress itself upon him, and he did not care to suggest further target-shooting.

“ Oh, I am rich, now that I have won your prize, and I will try one more shot if the chance comes. Your uncle is nearly through cutting that field of oats. Many times it happens that rabbits are caught in the standing grain by the reapers. As the men work around and around the field, the rabbits retreat toward the center. Then, when they see that their last shelter is about to disappear, they bolt for the woods. They make fine targets.”

“ Do you mean that you could get them with a rifle? ” asked Louis in astonishment.

“I have hit hares as they ran, but always with a shotgun.”

“A shotgun!” exclaimed the girl. “What is that?”

“Don’t you have them here?” asked Louis. “It is much the same as a smooth-bore musket, but lighter. And instead of one large ball, it shoots a spoonful of small lead.”

“Oh, yes! I remember now that Father told me he used that kind of a gun in France,” replied Margaret. “I shouldn’t like one. When you shoot at a rabbit with a rifle, you match your skill against his speed, and he has a fair chance to get away. But to shoot at him a charge of shot that scatters around like a handful of peas thrown against a wall,—that seems just like butchering him.”

Louis laughed.

“You wouldn’t think it butchery if you had watched some sportsmen I have seen in France,” he said. “If they got one hare in ten, they thought they were wonderful shots. Well, I have a double-barreled shotgun up

in my room that is pretty good, but I won't get it out now. I want to see you get a rabbit on the run with a rifle."

"I didn't say I would get him on the run," replied the girl. "I said he would make a good target. But your uncle is nearly through with this field. We must hurry if I am to get my chance at the rabbit, if rabbit there is in the grain."

The little patch of oats still standing was about sixty yards from the forest that marked the northern limit of the fields. Margaret took her stand within twenty feet of where the sturdy seignior was to make his last cut. Steadily the swinging scythe mowed down the heavy grain; then, with a rustle of dry straws, a little brown-gray form rushed across the stubble toward the woods.

When the rabbit was within a dozen yards of the bushes that lined the edge of the forest, Margaret whistled shrilly. In spite of the fears that possessed him, the little rodent stopped in his tracks, and sat up. Instantly the sharp bark of the rifle rang out,

and the rabbit rolled over, shot through the head.

“ You see it wasn’t necessary to shoot at him running,” said Margaret.

“ I should like to have seen you try it, though,” replied Louis. “ I can’t believe you could do it once in a dozen times.”

“ I certainly shall not try it a dozen times. It is bad enough to waste a whole charge on one little rabbit that could have been caught just as well in a trap. But if there is another one in what is left of the oats, I shall try another shot. I don’t say I will get him, for a running rabbit is harder to hit than a flying bird; he bobs up and down so, as he runs.”

By this time the rifle was loaded again, and the seignior, who had entered heartily into the sport, resumed his work with the scythe. As he was beginning his last swing, two more rabbits broke simultaneously for the bushes. Terrified by the report of the rifle, they had remained in the grain, crouched to the earth, until the reaper was almost upon them.

Almost instantly Margaret's rifle rang out, and one of the rodents toppled over.

"Quick! Your rifle," cried the girl. Thrusting her empty gun into Louis' hands, she seized the weapon he held out to her.

If the second rabbit was not breaking all forest records for speed, it was not for lack of earnest effort. With ears flat on his neck, he sped over the stubble with the enormous leaps of his kind. But, as he rose on his last leap, he crumpled into a furry ball.

"Bravo," shouted Louis, swinging his hat around his head in excitement. "No wonder when the Iroquois attacked your house, they kept away from your side of it. Why, that last shot was for a full fifty yards. And to hit a rabbit running as that fellow was, and with a rifle ——"

Lacking words adequately to express his feelings, Louis ran and picked up the three dead rabbits. The second one killed, like the first, had been shot fairly through the head, the third one through the body.

Margaret looked a little disappointed as she examined her third victim.

“Here in the woods, we don’t like to hit a small animal in the body,” she said. “It spoils the meat. I didn’t think I would miss the head at that range. Now, may I try your gun at a still target?”

In reply, Louis reloaded his rifle, and handed it to her. Selecting a mark about fifty paces away, Margaret aimed with unusual care, and fired. The bullet hit two inches directly below the mark.

“Ah, now I feel better,” the girl said. “You have a good rifle, and it shoots true to the aim, but it is not so finely sighted as mine. I drew down to a fine sight on the rabbit, so, of course, the bullet went low.”

“Well,” said Louis, “I see I have something to learn about shooting a rifle. I had never thought of using one except for big game, and for that it doesn’t require much skill. To stand under cover, and shoot deer at close range as they are driven past your post; bah,—that, to me, is the real butchery. I never could stomach much of it, though it is considered a sport fit for kings.”

“What do you mean,—stand and let the deer be driven past you?” exclaimed Margaret. “I should like to see any one try to drive our Canadian deer.”

“Oh, those deer are only half wild,” replied Louis, “and the beaters can herd them along like so many sheep. Killing them is poor sport.”

“We find plenty of use for all our skill here, when we go after deer,” said the girl. “Of course, when we simply ambush a trail, and see the deer before they get our scent, it is easy. But when one comes unexpectedly upon a deer in the woods, it requires a quick eye and a true aim to bring him down before he disappears among the trees.”

“I hope you will learn the trick, Louis,” said the seignior, who had finished his task, and stood listening to the conversation of the young people. “It may never matter particularly whether or not you can hit a running deer, but out here on the frontier we must always expect an Indian attack, and an Indian is usually almost as hard to hit as a bounding rabbit.”

CHAPTER VIII

“Now that we have had our fun, let’s get these oats raked up and shocked,” said Margaret. She ran to the house and reappeared with a rake in place of her rifle. She proved to be no less capable as a reaper than as a marksman. With long, quick strokes, she drew the heavy grain to her, then bound it into bundles with as much skill as the sergeant had shown.

Louis looked on helplessly. Utterly ignorant of the technique of the farm, he hesitated to offer his assistance in the work, and thus expose his awkwardness. On the other hand, he did not like to stand idle and watch a girl of his own rank work. Margaret, with quick intuition, read his thoughts, and her eyes twinkled.

“Come, Mr. Noble,” she said laughingly. “Help me set up these bundles. Everybody works in Canada, you know, and this is your chance to begin to learn how.”

With a sense of real relief, Louis accepted the invitation. Following Margaret's instructions, he picked up two of the bundles of grain, and set them firmly on their butts on the ground. The girl set up two more. All four were so placed that the butts were slightly apart, while the tops were in contact. In this way each bundle braced the others and prevented the whole pile from collapsing. A half dozen more bundles were placed around the first four.

"Now for the cap-sheaves," cried the girl. Picking up a large, well-made bundle, she spread its top into the form of a wide fan, and put it on top of the shock. Another similar cap-sheaf was placed on top of the first. The two completely covered the heads of the standing bundles.

"That will shed the rain, you see," said Margaret, as the operation was completed. "The whole shock will keep dry and sweet until it can be hauled to the threshing floor."

After assisting in setting up a dozen shocks, Louis was told by his fair instructor to try to make one alone. After one or two

failures, he succeeded in creating a fairly good shock. Thanks to brains and the ready adaptability of youth, in the course of half an hour he became almost as skilful as the girl herself.

“Now, I call that pretty good,” Louis said with real enthusiasm, stepping back to survey a particularly good piece of work. “But what do you suppose my old chums in France would say to see me harvesting like a peasant?”

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than Louis would have given much to recall them. His companion’s erect figure stiffened, and a crimson flush spread over her brown face. She glanced at her simple homespun flock, and her brown arms, now reddened by the coarse straw she had been handling.

“They would probably not laugh any harder at your doing a peasant’s work, than at your associating with a peasant girl,” she said, a little bitterly.

Louis dropped the two sheaves he held in his arms. Going up to Margaret, he took

her hand as he said earnestly: "I didn't mean to hurt you, and I didn't mean that there is any disgrace in doing this kind of work. I think I am a good deal of a Canadian already, for I confess I am rather proud to be able to do it."

The boy's frankness cured the hurt.

"I think we shall make you altogether a Canadian soon," she said. "But you see, we work here, not so much because we like to do it, but because we would rather work than go hungry. It would be fine if we had a hundred tenants on our estate, and all of them were required to till our fields, as is done in France. But with only three tenants, and an income from the whole of them of only six chickens and a bushel of corn each year, with no labor furnished,—well, I have been hungry for a week at a time, and I don't like the feeling; I had rather help in the fields, and have at least a cake of corn-bread each day."

"Are you and your parents alone?" asked Louis.

"Yes," replied Margaret. "One at a

time my four brothers have all gone to the woods, and one at a time word has come of the death of the first three, in fights with the Indians, or through drowning in the treacherous streams. Vincent alone is left, and he rarely visits us."

"And the work?" the lad asked with some hesitation, as he wished to avoid hurting the girl again.

"Father does what he can," Margaret answered. "Perhaps he does more than he should, for he says his heart is very weak. Mother is busy in the house, so a good part of the work in the field comes to me."

A sense of loyalty to her home caused the girl to tell but half the truth. As a matter of fact, her father, in spite of a slight weakness of the kind mentioned by his daughter, found himself well able to tramp for miles in the woods on hunting trips, and his wife was usually as able-bodied as he. Neither, however, had ever lost the pride of birth, and of their former associations. The mother had declared frankly, when first brought to her wilderness home, that she would starve

before she would labor like a peasant woman. Nothing had ever moved her from this position; cold, hunger, the loss of all in the Indian attacks: these had left her resolution unchanged. She would spin and weave, and, if need be, prepare the simple meals of the household. Beyond that, she would do nothing.

“What crops have you this year?” asked Louis. He was already beginning to talk like a farmer.

“Oh, this year we are fortunate,” answered Margaret. “That good man, your uncle, drove his team of oxen all the way to our farm, to do our plowing, so now we have nearly ten acres of grain: corn, barley, and wheat.”

“That was a long walk for a man with a wooden leg,” said Louis. “I don’t see how he could do it. I believe I heard that it is nearly ten miles.”

“Oh, he didn’t walk,” the girl answered with a laugh. “He rode one of the oxen. I think you would have laughed, too, to see him. But no captive lady of the story-books

was ever gladder to see her knight as he came to the rescue, than was I to see your uncle on old Star, as he called the ox."

"Age has had its turn, and youth will be served," cried Louis. "My uncle helped with the planting. I claim the right to a part in the harvesting. I will get the seignior to show me how to use that wicked-looking implement he calls a scythe. I am pretty good with a sword; perhaps that will help me with the other weapon. Then, if I may, I will go over to your house and show you my skill."

For such a brief instant that it escaped Louis' notice, Margaret hesitated to accept the offer. It was not that she did not want him to come. Her young nature, cramped and starved for lack of comradeship, craved the opportunity of associating with one of her own age. The thought that had flashed through her mind was of the conditions Louis would find in her home: the utter poverty, which made the proud name of the family seem a hollow mockery. Quick as the thought itself, however, came the realization

that Louis must know sometime of these conditions, and that the sooner he knew, the sooner the hurt to her pride would be over.

“I should like to have you come,” she said. She smiled as she spoke, but the smile was a little forced. “Father and Mother will be glad to welcome you.”

“Fine,” said Louis. “I heard your father say you three are to go home this afternoon. This is Saturday. Next Wednesday I shall come.”

As no priest was regularly stationed at the seignories on the Richelieu, no religious services were held on the following day. To pass the idle hours, Louis told his relatives, eager for news from France, of experiences at home and at Paris, even at the king’s court itself, where the lad had once appeared.

“Ah, you spoke to his Majesty, then!” exclaimed the good woman as Louis told this part of his story. “How short a time it seems since we were presented to him, Georges,” she said to her husband. “It was just before we left France for Canada,” she went on, addressing her nephew. “The

king gave a reception to the officers of the regiment Carignan on the eve of their departure. Of course, their wives were there, too. His Majesty seemed to think we women were doing a wonderful thing to accompany our husbands to what he called the wilds of America. I remember how like a king he was, in looks and in manner. He said some things to some of us about our looking nice, too," the little old lady said archly. "Well, Georges," she continued, with just a suspicion of a sigh, "if he saw us now in our buckskin and homespun, instead of in silks and velvets, I am afraid he would have no compliments for us."

"Perhaps not," answered her husband; "still, I am told that nothing the king has ever undertaken lies nearer his heart than his province of Canada. And if he were to come here and find us faithfully doing our little part in furthering his plans for establishing a New France in the wilderness, he might generously say, as did the nobleman in the story of old, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'"

“ I haven’t the slightest doubt he would,” said Louis. “ In fact, I may say he has done so already. My presentation at court occurred after I received your invitation to come to Canada. I was presented by the Minister of Marine, who, as you know, is in charge of Canadian affairs. He told his Majesty that I was about to visit the Seignior Dupuy, whose home was on the Riche-lieu.

“ ‘ Dupuy,—Dupuy, I don’t seem to remember the name,’ the king said. ‘ I thought I had seen the names of all the seigniors in Canada on the lists of those asking for annuities, or pensions, or other favors. But I don’t remember seeing the name Dupuy there.’

“ ‘ For the simple reason that it was not there, your Majesty,’ replied the Minister, who seemed to have a surprising knowledge of the affairs of the province. ‘ Dupuy, without requesting it, was granted the right to trade in furs, when he lost a leg in action. His name has never appeared on a petition asking for aid.’

“ ‘ I wish I had a thousand such seigniors in Canada,’ said the king. Then he turned to me. ‘ Young man,’ he said, ‘ I understand you are about to visit this Sieur Dupuy, your uncle. Take to him and to Madame Dupuy the commendation of their old king for service faithfully performed. And for yourself, if you care to serve me, remember that you can do it in no better way than by simply following your uncle’s example.’ ”

For several minutes the three sat in silence, for the old people were deeply touched by the thought that the king, loyalty to whom was almost like a religion to them, had taken notice of their simple, but faithful, lives. Finally Madame Lucille rose, and going to her husband’s side, she lifted one of his large, calloused hands and held it between her two brown, withered ones.

“ I think you were right, Georges,” she said, and her eyes shone with happy tears. “ If he were here, he would forget about the homespun and the wooden shoes, and remember only the long years of faithful service.”

CHAPTER IX

ON Monday morning Louis made known to his uncle his desire to learn the use of a scythe.

“Why, you are not intending to become a farmer, are you?” asked the seignior in some surprise.

“No,” replied Louis. “I don’t know yet what I shall do when I am older. But it seems to me it will do no harm to learn something about farming. Besides, I expect to help Margaret de La Ronde with her harvesting in a few days, so I should like to learn more about that kind of work in advance.”

The seignior looked at Louis appreciatively. “I am glad you are going to help her,” he said. “That girl is a jewel, if the good Lord ever made one; but I can’t say as much for any of the rest of them, even though they are my cousins. But then, they are no worse than scores of other French of

good family who are stranded here in Canada. Too proud to work and too poor to live without working, their only thought seems to be to beg a living from the governor, and, through him, from the king. It would be far better for the province if they could all be shipped back to France in return for half as many good, sturdy peasants."

His uncle now showed Louis how to swing the scythe; then after a few moments of practice, how to sharpen the long, curved blade with a whetstone. The boy was soon able to do both these tasks with some proficiency.

"All right, now," said his uncle. "You may start in on this field of barley. Watch out for hidden stumps, and keep the blade away from your feet, and you'll do. The sergeant will bind up after you, while I rake."

With a sense of real pleasure, the boy began his task. In fine condition as he was, the work, at first, seemed light. After fifteen minutes, however, his muscles, unaccustomed to real toil, began to feel the

strain, while the perspiration rolled from his brow in great beads. At the end of half an hour, it seemed as if he simply must stop for rest. The August sun, hot in a cloudless sky, beat upon his head, and it seemed as if his aching arms could hardly swing the heavy scythe another stroke. But his uncle, old man that he was, had, while harvesting the oats in the previous week, made his steady rounds hour after hour, only stopping for an occasional drink of cold water.

“I won’t stop until he asks me to,” said the weary lad to himself, and he started his third round of the little field. At the end of this round, his uncle came up to him.

“You had best not do any more now,” he said, as he noted the boy’s hot, flushed face, and his lagging stroke. “Too long a trick at first makes sore muscles and blistered hands. You swim, don’t you?” he continued, with apparent irrelevance.

“Yes, indeed,” answered the boy.

“Well,” his uncle went on, “I suggest that you go over into the shade of those woods.” He pointed to the forest that edged

the fields. "Cool off for a while, then take a dip in the water."

Soon Louis was in the woods, and almost as soon in the stream. His uncle's advice to cool off in the shade was, of course, disregarded. For half an hour, he sported like a fish in the luxurious coolness of the water. Then, quickly dressing, he went back to the field and offered to take the scythe again. But his uncle would not allow it.

"A little at a time," he said. "A half-hour this afternoon and a little more tomorrow, and you will be ready to attack Margaret's wheat."

Early on Wednesday, Louis, armed with his rifle, started for the home of the Seigneur de La Ronde. He had not, as yet, mastered the art of handling a canoe, so the river route was not available to him. However, as the trail that connected the homes of the settlers along the Richelieu followed the course of the river, there was no danger that he would lose his way.

For nearly three hours the boy walked leisurely, usually in the trail. At times he

lost the path, but always by keeping near the bank of the river, he regained it. It was an experience new in his life. The forests to which he had been accustomed in France consisted of little areas covered with half-grown trees, all under the care and oversight of the foresters. So precious was fuel in that country that scarcely a dead twig was allowed to go to waste. Here nature alone ruled. Great oaks and elms, more sturdy than their neighbors, spread their canopies of leaves over immense areas, and used their monopoly of sunshine to achieve even greater strength and size. In the shade of these mighty monarchs, younger and weaker trees died, or eked out a scanty subsistence. Like heirs apparent, they waited in the shadow for the fall of their lords. And, like other monarchs, the kings of the forest, in time, fell. As Louis followed the winding trail, he saw their corpses. Some, newly dead, lay stark on the black earth. Over others, longer fallen, a kindly nature had thrown a mantle of mossy green, beneath which their dust was gradually being

returned to the dust from whence it had sprung.

At length the light shone through the trees ahead, and Louis found himself at the edge of a clearing. It extended for perhaps a quarter of a mile back from the river, and was somewhat less in width. Near the river bank was a substantial log house of two stories, with two or three small outbuildings.

A sturdily-built man, in smock and wooden shoes, harvested a field of barley. He did not lack for assistance. Two boys, and as many girls, raked and bound the heavy grain. When these helpers caught sight of the stranger, a shout went up, and the house and outbuildings poured out the rest of the family. It was like the letting out of a country school. Not less than ten children trooped, or were carried, across the fresh-cut stubble. At the head of the band was the mother, a young woman of thirty-five.

The husband and father of this typical Canadian family stopped his work, and,

leaning on the snathe of his scythe, awaited Louis' approach. He returned the lad's greeting.

"I take it you are the nephew of the Sieur Dupuy," he said. "I had heard that your uncle expected you soon. I am glad to meet you."

Louis took the man's extended hand. He was surprised, however, and it must be confessed, a little nettled, at the man's manner. Not a trace was there of the obsequiousness of the peasant toward one of high rank, to which Louis was accustomed. There was nothing disrespectful in the man's attitude; he simply acted as if he had met another fellow-creature who was neither better nor worse than he himself, which was the case.

"Yes, I am Louis Dupuy," replied the lad. "And your name,"—his tongue had almost phrased the usual addition—"my good man," but somehow such an expression, with its implication of inferiority on the part of the person addressed, did not seem to fit itself to this sturdy, independent farmer.

“ I am Baptiste Perrot,” he replied.

“ Are you a tenant of my uncle’s? ” Louis asked.

“ No,” Baptiste replied. “ If this land has any owner besides myself, it is the Sieur de La Ronde. His home is in the next clearing up the river, about a mile from here.”

“ That is where I am going,” said Louis. “ I suppose the trail is along the river, as it has been so far.”

“ Yes,” said the farmer. “ You can’t miss it. And if you should scare up a deer on the way,” he called as Louis moved away, “ you had best shoot it, and carry it along with you, unless you don’t care if you go hungry.”

Louis made no reply to this gibe, but it continued running through his thoughts for the rest of his journey. The world seemed topsy-turvy. In France, it had not been unusual for him to see peasants whose faces showed signs of deprivation and hunger, but their lords never lacked for the necessities or comforts of life. But here, a tenant, with a brood of a dozen or more fat, healthy chil-

dren, made sport of the poverty of his feudal chief.

After the remark of Baptiste Perrot, Louis did not expect to find in the homestead of De La Ronde much that would suggest a manorial estate. Nevertheless, what he actually saw came as a shock to him. At some time in the past, probably when he had the assistance of his sons, De La Ronde had made a clearing that covered some thirty acres. All attempts to cultivate so large a field, however, had long since been abandoned, and more than half the area was fast being reclaimed as a forest by jealous Mother Nature. A third of the tract was under rude cultivation.

The house that stood in the midst of the ripening grain was little better than a hovel. Apparently discouraged by the repeated destruction of his home by the Indians, De La Ronde had built the rudest kind of a log cabin. Of one room, with a dirt floor and a thatched roof of oat-straw, the cracks between the logs filled with clay, it represented the minimum protection with which a white

family could live in the severe climate of the St. Lawrence basin.

As Louis found his way along a winding path that led through the grain to the house, the girlish figure of Margaret appeared at the cabin door. Louis greeted her at a distance with raised hat and a bow, which was answered by the girl with a wave of the hand. Her parents then joined her, and the three united in welcoming their young guest.

The furnishings of the cabin were as rude as the structure itself. A fireplace of sticks plastered with mud at one end, a low shelf made of hewn planks that served as a table, three stools, and as many pallets of sticks built against the wall,—this was all. Not even the usual spinning wheel and loom were here. Destroyed with the latest predecessor of the cabin, poverty had prevented their replacement.

Margaret placed one of the stools for the guest. Mixed emotions brought a flush to her face that heightened her natural beauty. For many, many months the dread monotony of her life had been unbroken, save

for the rare visits of Father Gregory, the priest. Day after day she had toiled in the fields or in the house, her sole companions two querulous old people whose only mental occupation was the finding of new causes of complaint against their unhappy lot. Now, within the week, she had had the joy of the days spent in the quiet refinement and cheerful atmosphere of the Dupuy home, and the perhaps greater joy of finding there so congenial a spirit as Louis. And now he was her guest.

The poverty of her home pained her, and was perhaps mostly responsible for the flush on her face. But Margaret was a sensible girl. Without reasoning the thing out, she felt that even in this abject poverty, there was nothing of which she herself need be ashamed. She had stood loyally by her parents, while her brothers had deserted them. Thanks to her efforts, a harvest was about to be gathered that would provide at least bread for the coming year. She could say to herself that she had done what she could.

CHAPTER X

THE formality of greetings over, Louis proposed that he and Margaret get to work at once on the field of barley, which was already overripe.

“But surely we cannot allow one brought up as has been the young *Sieur Dupuy*, and who is our guest, to work in the fields like a peasant. It is unthinkable.”

It was *Madame de La Ronde* who spoke. Louis turned to her in some surprise.

“I had understood that your daughter expected to harvest the grain alone, madam,” he said.

“Oh, but that is different,” replied the woman. “Margaret was brought up in Canada. She has never known anything but the fields and the woods. But you, *Monsieur*; you have lived, as had I until I was older than you, in beautiful France, and in surroundings of refinement. I have never been able to bring myself to do such labor,

and we must not allow our distinguished guest to do so."

Louis had no great liking for such labor himself, but the attitude of this woman was even less to his mind. His answer was courteous, but it was brief, and very much to the point.

"I had never supposed, madam," he said, "that the blood of a De La Ronde was any less noble than that of a Dupuy; and I have always held that it was the duty of a gentleman to carry the burden, if one must be borne, rather than to shift it to a woman."

The face of the Sieur de La Ronde flushed.

"Those are the words of a real gentleman," he said, and his voice had in it the whine of a beggar who praises one from whom he hopes to receive alms. "It cuts me to the heart to see my Margaret, my only daughter, laboring early and late at work so unfitted to her gentle birth. How tragic it is that I, who would gladly work like an African slave to spare her, must sit in idleness while she toils. It is my heart. A single hour in the fields endangers my

very life. And if I should go, who then would care for my dear wife and child?"

Louis could scarcely conceal his disgust at the words and the manner of this nobleman of France. From remarks dropped by his aunt, he had a pretty accurate understanding of the character of Margaret's parents. What he now heard confirmed the impressions he had received. Not trusting himself to answer his host, lest his disgust show itself in his words, he turned to Margaret.

"If you will get your scythe," he said, "we will get to work."

The girl turned to him with a dismayed look.

"I haven't any scythe," she said. "I am sorry. I had expected to borrow one from Baptiste Perrot. He had two; but yesterday he broke one of them by hitting a hidden stump. So I have only a sickle. And it is so slow and tiresome bending over all day to use a sickle."

Never having learned by experience the truth of Margaret's remark, Louis answered lightly that he didn't think it mattered much,

for if the sickle was slower, it was also lighter to handle.

Two hours later, when the call to dinner came, Louis had changed his mind regarding the relative merits of the two tools. His right hand was blistered from gripping the handle, his arm was lame, and his back,—well, it took him at least two minutes to straighten up after he had quit work. He knew, too, that if he spent the afternoon with the sickle, he would be so lame next day that he would hardly be able to work at all. And, as a result of his two hours of toil, not over a quarter of an acre of grain had been cut.

“This won’t do at all, Margaret,” he said. “At this rate, it will take us a month to get through with your harvest. And my back feels as if it never would get straight again. My uncle has three scythes. I saw them hanging in his shed. And his rakes are much lighter than yours. Let’s put off our harvesting until to-morrow. This afternoon we will go to my uncle’s in the canoe, and to-morrow, bright and early, we will come

back with some good tools. We will make up in half a day for the time lost.”

The prediction of the farmer Perrot that Louis would suffer for lack of food in the cabin of De La Ronde was not fulfilled. As before intimated, the seignior's heart trouble, though so serious when work in the fields was concerned, did not interfere at all with the hardly less severe toil of the hunt. In fact, the gentleman had been known to follow a wounded deer on the full run for half a league, without suffering any apparent harm. The excitement of the chase, no doubt, furnished the stimulant necessary to cause the weak organ in his chest to function temporarily in a perfectly normal manner.

In this instance, Margaret had suggested that a good deer would be most acceptable in replenishing an almost empty larder. Her father had accepted the suggestion of a hunt with alacrity. Helping himself liberally to the powder and lead that Louis had given Margaret, for his own supply was nearly exhausted, he started out early on the

day before the expected arrival of the guest. With the skill of long experience added to a keen relish for the sport, he had soon bagged a fine buck and a doe. By two o'clock, he was back at his own landing with the two carcasses in his canoe. Shortly after, Margaret had the meat of the doe drying in the sun, for future use, while the buck was being cut up preparatory to meals for hungry reapers.

“Do you paddle a canoe?” asked Margaret as the two walked down to the landing, half an hour after a really delicious dinner of roast venison had ended.

“No,” said Louis. “I never was in one until I made the trip from Montreal here. And, of course, I could not delay the two Indians that brought me by having them teach me how to use a paddle. Besides,” he added laughingly, “the little craft seemed so frail and unsteady when compared with the boats I had been accustomed to in France, that I was well satisfied to sit just as still as I could, right in the middle of the canoe.”

Margaret's musical laugh answered that of the lad.

"You have probably got over your fear of tipping over by this time," she said, "for you must have come through some rough water, unless the St. Lawrence was quieter than it usually is."

"Oh, it was rough enough," Louis replied. "A stiff breeze came up the river as we paddled from Montreal to the Richelieu, and as the tide and current both ran in the opposite direction, it kicked up a nasty, choppy sea. But I found this didn't trouble the canoe at all. It was so light, it simply danced over the tops of the waves. And can't those Indians use their paddles?"

"I never saw an Indian that wasn't an expert with a canoe," Margaret answered, "especially those that live along the St. Lawrence, and have canoes of birch-bark. Sometimes the Mohawks use heavier canoes made of elm-bark. Of course, these are more clumsy, but that isn't the fault of the paddlers. All Indians are skilful with a canoe," the girl went on, "but when it comes

to shooting a difficult rapid, I had rather trust myself to the paddle of your uncle's friend, the sergeant, than to that of any Indian I ever saw."

"Is he so wonderful?" asked Louis. "He is so quiet about the house and at his work, that I had scarcely paid any attention to him."

"Your uncle says there is not a man between here and the great prairies that they say lie far beyond our five great lakes, who is better with a rifle, a paddle, or as a guide and scout in the woods, than the sergeant."

"My uncle said 'a man,'" answered Louis. "If the sergeant can drop a bouncing rabbit any more neatly with a rifle than you did, he must be a wonder."

The girl concealed her appreciation of the compliment with a little laugh.

"I *was* lucky that day," she said. "I don't always get them when they are running. But about canoeing. If you will kneel in the bow after I shove off, I will give you your first lesson."

Louis was clumsy enough with his paddle

when he first attempted to use it, but he soon overcame his awkwardness sufficiently to be of some use in driving the boat forward. After a mile of this, Margaret suggested that the two change places. This gave Louis the task of steering as well as propelling the light craft. Light as a bubble, supported almost entirely by the broad middle portion of its length, the lad found it almost as difficult to keep it to anything near a straight course as if it had been a wash-tub. Margaret, however, showed him how to neutralize the turning effect of his stroke by a twist of the blade in the water. Then the zigzags began to straighten out, and, before long, the canoe was speeding swiftly down the stream.

“There, I think that was pretty good, ‘don’t you?” asked Louis, when a run of a mile between two bends of the river had been made with scarcely a crook in the course. The boy had checked his steering by keeping his companion’s head in line with a lofty elm on the farther bank beyond the bend ahead.

“It was much better,” replied the girl a little quizzically. “You splashed with your paddle only six times in the mile.”

“Did I splash?” replied Louis. “I didn’t notice it. I didn’t splash you, did I?”

Margaret laughed again.

“You couldn’t hurt this old homespun frock with a little water,” she said. “When you attended the great balls in Paris, and danced with the fine ladies, did they clatter their heels on the polished floors?”

“Of course not,” replied Louis, surprised at the question. “A well-bred young woman makes no noise as she moves. That would not have been good form.”

“That is just the expression I wanted,” said Margaret. “A well-trained woodsman makes no noise as he moves. In the forest, the snapping of a dead stick may reveal one’s presence; in a canoe, a single splash of the paddle may do the same. The result may be hunger from failure in the hunt, or death at the hands of a lurking foe. It isn’t good form to make a noise in the woods.”

“Whew, what a lot I have to learn,” said

Louis; “to swing a scythe instead of a sword, to shoot flying game with a rifle in place of my old shotgun, to paddle a feather-weight canoe instead of rowing a boat, to keep still as a mouse in the forest when there is no one within ten miles to hear you. Why, that is the very time when I should like to kick up my heels and yell. Say, Margaret, haven’t you ever stood on the bank of the river, and shouted so as to hear the echoes on the other side of the valley?”

“Yes, I have done it at home,” Margaret replied. “It didn’t make any difference there if a Mohawk did hear. He would know where we were, anyway. But I knew a boy who tried it on a hunting trip once. He didn’t come back.”

“How am I to learn all these things people out here know?” said the boy. “It seems I must go to school all over again, and I thought I was through.”

“Some things, I can teach you,” Margaret answered. “Your uncle says I know more about the woods than most men. It may be I do, for I have always loved them, and the

beasts and the birds that live in them. But, of course, we can't go off on long hunting trips together, and that is the way really to learn woodcraft. I think the best thing would be for you to get the sergeant to take you with him on one of his trips. He always goes up the river in the fall, when the deer are at their best, and gets meat for the winter."

"I shall do that," said Louis enthusiastically. "I am sorry, though, you can't go."

"That's what comes of being a girl," answered Margaret somewhat ruefully. "But then, when the fall work is done, Father and I go hunting, too, so it isn't so bad."

Next morning, now supplied with tools fitted to their work, Margaret and Louis returned to the former's house. Thanks to his uncle's good scythe, a quarter of Margaret's six acres of small grain was cut by nightfall. Three days more finished the job.

CHAPTER XI

THE late summer and autumn days passed very quickly to Louis, for they were filled to the brim with activity. Not only was the boy busy, but it seemed as if almost every day brought a new experience.

First, there was the completion of harvest for his uncle and Margaret. It was nearly the first of October before the maize, or Indian corn, was cut, and shocked. Then the great, golden ears had to be broken from the stocks and stripped of husks: a process that meant days of lame wrists for the young harvester. The small grain, too, was hauled in to the threshing floor, and there beaten with flails to separate the kernels from the chaff. Lastly, hogs belonging to his uncle were half chased, half enticed from the woods to be marked and released again, or butchered for winter use.

More enjoyable than these occupations was the training with rifle and canoe.

Active as he was in brain and hand, Louis quickly acquired a fair mastery of these two essentials of frontier life. Then, when the harvesting was all done, he went with the sergeant for a hunting trip up the Richelieu to Lake Champlain. This journey was not without its dangers, for Mohawk incursions were a possibility at any time. No untoward incident happened to the hunters, however. At the end of two weeks, they were back home, their canoe well filled with the smoked flesh of a dozen deer and two or three black bears.

To Louis, the experience of this trip was invaluable. Living, as he and the sergeant must, under the strain of the consciousness that at any moment they might meet the ferocious Iroquois, the suggestions and warnings of the older man drove home with a force they could not possibly have had in less dangerous surroundings. Louis was not as yet a skilled woodsman; only years spent in the forest could give him that rating. He was, however, a lad whom a woodsman could trust as a companion on the hunt,

and, if need be, even on the war-path. He could paddle a canoe swiftly and with little noise; he could thread his way silently through the mazes of the forest; he could find his way by the stars, by the course of streams, and by the mosses on trees. Perhaps most important of all, he had learned to put in practice the lesson Margaret had tried to impress upon his mind, that noise in the forest, when unnecessary, is inexcusable.

November had come with the return of the two hunters, and November along the St. Lawrence and its tributaries usually means winter. By the middle of the month, heavy snows covered the ground. This brought to Louis another new experience. One morning, after a heavy fall that brought the snow to a depth of more than a foot, Margaret appeared in the Dupuy clearing, swinging lightly over the glittering white surface on a pair of Indian snow-shoes.

The girl was now a not infrequent visitor at the seigniorage. During her childhood, she had accepted the poverty of her home as

a matter of course. Now that she was beginning to use her reason, she saw that the extreme abjectness of this poverty was not all due to circumstances, and her heart rebelled against a life so utterly devoid of all that was refined, or even comfortable. From this state of discontent, her only relief was found in the quiet refinement and the simple courtesy that marked the Dupuy home.

The fact that a lad of her own age lived there did not lessen the attractiveness of the place. Louis frequently spent a day at her home, but neither found this as pleasant as when Margaret accepted Madame Lucille's standing invitation to be her guest.

"Borrow the sergeant's snow-shoes, and I will teach you how to use them," she called, as she came within ear-shot.

"I shall be glad for the lesson," Louis answered, "but I don't need to borrow. I hired Dumont to make me a pair of snow-shoes, and he completed them only yesterday. So, you see, you are just in time for the first lesson."

Louis disappeared in the house. A few

minutes later he came out, dressed for outdoors, and with his new snow-shoes under his arm. The healthful, outdoor life of the past three months had given the lad a clearness of eye and skin, and an erectness of stature which are Nature's rewards for those who live near to her. He was dressed still in the plain woolen suit which he had chosen when he first came to the Richelieu, with a cap of beaver-skin added.

If the three months had produced a marked change in Louis' appearance, they had done no less for Margaret. She had not changed physically. Life in the woods had made her perfect in this regard; there was nothing to improve. The change in the girl was in her attire. Not that new garments had been purchased. There were no shops on the frontier, even had there been money for purchase, which there was not. But with the assistance of the skilful hands of Madame Lucille, Margaret had remade the two dresses she possessed into really attractive garments. In addition, with a motherly tact that could not cause offence, Madame

had given the girl good woolen material for a suit for outdoor winter wear.

“ I have had it around for all of ten years, my dear,” she said. “ My husband brought it from Montreal one fall when we expected to spend some months in town. But I had a bad fall that winter, and we couldn’t go, so I never made the goods up. I have been fighting the moths away from it all this time. I shall never use it, so it might as well go where it will do some good.”

So the suit was made. Madame Lucille called her nephew into conference when the style was to be decided upon. Louis was asked to describe, to the best of his ability, garments of this type which he had seen in France. The boy, of course, could tell little of the details, and what he did tell was so contradictory that his aunt could get no help from him. Then Louis remembered that a book he had brought with him had some pictures of young women in it. The book was five years old, but it helped, and with this assistance to her natural good taste, the problem in design was solved. Leggings of

the same material, supplementing the short skirt, completed the costume, except that the sergeant added a round cap of muskrat-skin. It was this suit that Margaret wore as she and Louis started for a meadow for the lesson in snow-shoeing.

As always with a beginner, Louis was as clumsy as a boy with his first pair of skates. The great frames, four feet long and over a foot wide, fastened to his feet only through the flexible webbing, simply would not go where they should. Many a tumble did the lad get, but, fortunately, without suffering a sprain. Gradually he attained to a little more skill, and, at the end of half an hour, he was able to move ahead steadily at a rather slow walk.

“Lesson’s over,” said Margaret, taking off her snow-shoes. “Let’s walk back to the house.”

“Oh, don’t quit so soon,” said Louis. “I’m just getting the hang of these big baskets. Let’s take a little run in the woods.”

“And be unable to walk for a week,”

answered the girl. "Did you ever hear of *mal de raquette*? No? Well, it's the name the *voyageurs* give to what happens to your ankles if you use snow-shoes too long before you get used to them. Don't get it. I had it once, and it wasn't pleasant."

"I suppose it is something like the soreness one feels after skating for the first time," answered Louis. "Well, if we can't go to-day, stay over with us a day and we will go to-morrow morning. We —— Hello! Who's this coming out of the woods? Nobody from around here, I am sure."

As the lad spoke, two dark figures emerged from the shadow of the forest to the north. One was that of a heavily-built man of moderate height, dressed in a black gown that reached to the ground, or rather to the snow. Over this, he wore a coat of raccoon-skin. On his head was a large black hat; on his feet, snow-shoes. His round face was half concealed by a scanty beard, grizzled like the hair that showed beneath the brim of the hat.

The companion figure was taller and

slighter. It was dressed in the garb of the wilderness: tunic, leggings, and moccasins of deerskin. On the head was a fur cap. The smooth skin of the face was that of a youth of twenty.

As Margaret noted the strangers, a cry of recognition came from her lips.

“It is Vincent, my brother,” she said, “and the man with him is Father Gregory.”

Without waiting to put her snow-shoes on again, the girl raced through the snow to the newcomers. Vincent, she greeted with a kiss and a bear-like hug. For the priest, there was a courtesy. Then, laughing and chattering, with an arm around each, she led them back across the field to where Louis still stood.

As the three approached, the lad noted with interest the faces of the two men. Both were reddened by exposure to wind, and heat, and cold. Both had blue eyes, that showed in striking contrast with their skins. These organs of the older man shone with the clear light of an honest nature, modestly conscious of its own rectitude. Little

wrinkles around the eyes, however, revealed a kindliness of disposition that could be tolerant of lapses of such rectitude on the part of another.

A glance into the countenance of the younger man showed, even to the inexperienced Louis, a very different character. The face indicated a generous nature, but the blue eyes met his either with a bold stare, or with a shifty glance. Both gave the impression that the man had something to conceal, something that he did not wish his associates to know. About the mouth, there were lines and curves, even so early in life, that revealed clearly what the eyes tried vainly to hide: a life of dissipation.

Louis returned the salutations of the pair, and all four went to the house. Before they reached it, the great oaken door was flung wide open by the elder Dupuy.

“Welcome, Father Gregory,” he cried. “Most welcome to the Richelieu. It is many a week since you last said mass under this roof. A little longer stay, and we should all have turned into heathens. And

you, Vincent; we are glad to welcome you back to the Richelieu."

As soon as the travelers had removed their outer garments, they were given seats before the crackling fire in the great fireplace.

"What word from the west, Vincent?" asked the host, as he stirred the fire to even greater activity.

"Little that is good," was the answer. "The English with their cheaper supply of goods outbid us French, and more and more of the furs that once came to Montreal now find their way to Albany. And now that war is on again and the Iroquois have taken up the hatchet against us, of course, no French trader is safe on Lake Ontario. But we managed to get six canoe-loads of good beaver-skins down the Ottawa and safe into the Montreal storehouse."

No embarrassing details were asked of the young man. All present, except Louis, knew that the trade in which he was engaged was illegal. In fact, the young man had joined himself to that great unorganized

band of *coureurs de bois*, which embraced in its membership the greater part of the Frenchmen to be found west of Montreal. Though legally outlaws, these men had fled to the forest, not because of crimes committed, but for the sake of adventure, and to escape the poverty and the restrictions of life in the settlements. Once freed from the conventions of society, however, they had, with few exceptions, cast off all restraints of law, and of religion. Their morality was that of the Indians with whom they lived, and whose customs and even clothing they frequently adopted.

The seignior turned to the older of his new guests, and inquired regarding his parish. This comprised a district of hundreds of square miles. All the settlements along the Richelieu, and those on the south bank of the St. Lawrence, for twenty or more miles each side of the mouth of the former stream, were included in Father Gregory's charge. In answer to the question, the priest replied:

“Matters are not so bad as one might

fear, nor so good as I could wish. Thank God, we have not been molested by the Mohawks this year, and the people have got their grain safe in their bins. But the war keeps things unsettled. So many of our ships have been intercepted by the English that the cost of articles from France is prohibitive to our farming people. Then the young men are restless. The call of the woods and the lakes seems irresistible to them.”

“Yes,” said the seignior, “it is hard to keep the boys at home, and I am not surprised that it is so when a single canoe-load of furs, such as Vincent has just helped bring in, is worth as much as the whole crop of one of our farms. The fur-trade is a gamble, but those who win, win heavily. Well, I see that Madame Lucille has dinner ready,” he added, rising and tapping the ashes out of his pipe into the fireplace. “Perhaps you are not sorry, for a winter walk in the woods means a good appetite.”

CHAPTER XII

FOR the first few minutes at the table, a hum of conversation filled the room, each person talking to his nearest neighbor. Then, above the hum, sounded the treble of Margaret's voice.

“Oh, Madame Lucille,” she cried excitedly, “listen to what Vincent has just told me. I have an invitation to go to Montreal this winter. You know that I have a distant relative there, Madame Prevost, whose husband is in the service of the Intendant. She has invited me to spend two whole months with her. And that isn't all. This dear, good brother of mine,”—to the innocent girl, her brother's good qualities loomed large, while his weaknesses were hidden from her—“Vincent, knew that I should want clothes for such an event, and his pack is full of nice things for me. Oh, I could give him a hundred kisses for the message he brought, and for his thoughtfulness.”

“I, too, bring an invitation,” said Father Gregory. “It is for Monsieur Louis. Lieutenant de La Motte, who came over in the same ship with him last summer, unites with the other officers of his regiment in asking that he join their mess for some weeks this winter. I met the lieutenant in Montreal, in October. When he heard that my parish was on the Richelieu, he asked me to be the bearer of his message.”

“Oh, then we can go together, Louis,” said Margaret.

The lad looked a little doubtful. “That would be a pretty long journey afoot, wouldn’t it?” he asked.

“Long! No,” replied Margaret. “It isn’t more than thirty miles. When you get used to your snow-shoes, we can easily do it in a day. Oh, I know what you are thinking of,” she continued. “You came by canoe from Montreal, and that route is a long one. You see the St. Lawrence runs just a little east of north from Montreal to the mouth of the Richelieu. The Richelieu runs almost due north from here; so, while

it is nearly a hundred miles to Montreal by river, it is less than a third as far by land."

There were now more busy hours for Madame Lucille and Margaret, and consultations with Louis, and even with Father Gregory, to determine the style of the new garments. At the end of a month, all was ready for the journey.

The two young people were not to go alone. At the suggestion of Madame Lucille, the sergeant, Dumont, was to act as a guide, and as a kind of male chaperon. Winter had now fully come. The snow, two feet deep, was of a clear whiteness, for there was neither dust nor smoke to mar its perfect purity. The air, on the morning of the start, possessed the crispness that comes only with intense cold combined with low humidity; a crispness that caused the accompanying cold to be almost unnoticed.

Margaret and Louis carried only their rifles. These indispensable weapons could not be left behind, even on a holiday journey. The sergeant, however, in addition to carrying his rifle, pulled a large but light

sled. On this, were the suits and dresses of the young people, that, once in town, were to transform them into the likeness of city dwellers. All three of the travelers were, of course, on snow-shoes, the long, narrow kind made especially for forest journeys.

It was a merry journey. There was, of course, no trail. Any that may have existed had been obliterated by the heavy mantle of snow that covered the ground. Dumont, however, had no need of landmarks for guidance. He knew the direction of his goal, and with unerring instinct, like a wild animal of the forest, he held his course toward it.

The past month had been spent by Louis largely on his snow-shoes, that he might be prepared for this journey. He had acquired a very fair amount of skill in the use of these implements, indispensable in the forest. He found now, however, in spite of his rather strenuous training, that he had difficulty in keeping up with the sergeant, though he traveled light, while the guide pulled a loaded sled. Such a thing as

fatigue seemed to be unknown to the latter's tough sinews. Repeatedly Louis, as well as Margaret, offered to relieve him of his load, but he declined. It was nothing, he said, and he thought they would make better progress as they were.

Noting the long, unwearied stride of the sergeant, his young companions were forced to the same conclusion, for their own legs were beginning to feel the effects of the swift pace.

At intervals of about two hours, the leader stopped for a ten-minute rest, lest his companions should grow leg-weary. A longer halt was made at noon while the luncheon they had brought with them was eaten. To Louis' surprise, the food, bread and meat, which had been carried on the sledge, was frozen stiff.

“Why, I didn't think it was cold at all,” he exclaimed, as he forced his teeth into a chunk of frosty meat. “I have been perfectly warm all the way. Well, the meat tastes good after such a walk, even if it is icy.”

The lad felt a little stiff when Dumont got up to resume the journey, but the soreness soon wore off.

The short winter day came to a close, and the end of the journey was not yet in sight. For a time, the three journeyed on in the twilight, but soon it became too dark to travel comfortably among the trees.

“ We will rest for a while,” said Dumont. “ We have about five miles more to go. The moon will be up in an hour; then we will finish our journey.”

A fire was built, and by its most acceptable warmth the remains of the luncheon were thawed out and eaten. Soon a glow shimmered through the naked branches of the trees, followed by the silvery whiteness of the moon’s orb. Then little patches of light began to appear on the surface of the snow, and soon the forest was as light as in the twilight that had just gone.

When the journey was resumed, it was at a more leisurely pace than had been set during the daytime. Falls in the half light would have been more than probable if any

attempt had been made to hurry, and falls might have meant injury. As it was, two hours brought the party to the eastern bank of the St. Lawrence.

As the three moved out of the shadows of the forest, a little gasp of surprise and appreciation came from Margaret's lips.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she almost whispered, not expecting or wishing an answer.

It was indeed a beautiful sight, both above and around the travelers. The full moon and the stars glowed in the black sky like electric beacons. Ahead lay the broad river, now ice-bound and blanketed with snow that glistened in the frosty air. Beyond the ice-plain rose the huge bulk of Mount Royal. Seemingly at the base of the mountain, though in reality nearly two miles from it, twinkled the lights of the town.

An hour later, the three travelers had reached their various destinations: Margaret, the luxurious home of Madame Prevost; Louis, the room of Lieutenant de La Motte; the sergeant, the home of one of his numerous cousins.

CHAPTER XIII

“A LETTER for Monsieur Louis Dupuy.” So announced the buxom matron with whom Louis, as the guest of Lieutenant de La Motte, had lodged for now over three weeks.

The lieutenant, who had received the missive from his hostess, smiled quizzically at his guest as he examined its exterior.

“Tinted and perfumed stationery, sealing wax imprinted with an R, and feminine handwriting,” he said. “Really, Louis, you must read this aloud.”

Louis flushed slightly at his companion’s banter, but he took it in good part. He broke the seal on the paper, and glanced at its contents.

“Certainly,” he said, “for you are as much concerned as I. It is a note from my cousin, Mademoiselle de La Ronde, written for her hostess, Madame Prevost. It is an invitation to both of us to attend a reception and ball to be given in honor of the gover-

nor of the colony. It will be at the Prevost home, and will be given on New Year's night."

"A ball, and in Montreal," cried the lieutenant. "Well, that is luck, for of all the somber, dead towns it was ever my fortune to be quartered in, Montreal is the worst. What between the Sulpitian priests who own the town, and the Jesuits who think they own the province, we are kept as sober as an English Puritan. I wonder that Madame Prevost has had the nerve to plan such a thing as a ball."

"I have seen her but once," replied Louis, "but she struck me as a most determined sort of person. She is very nice, and very cordial. I suspect, however, that she usually has her way when she wills it."

"We'll hope she will have it this time," said De La Motte. "My feet are simply aching to get on a dancing floor again. Six long months it has been since you and I left Paris, and not even the tiniest little party have I seen. Sometimes, I get out here in the middle of the floor all alone and dance

the *Courante*, for my legs simply must loosen up.”

Louis laughed at the gay young lieutenant. “I should think your legs would have had sufficient exercise in hopping over the mud-puddles of Montreal streets,” he said, “to say nothing of holding you up on the heaving deck of the *Superb*.”

“Perhaps so, as far as mere exercise is concerned,” replied the lieutenant. “But you know that is only a small part of the charm of the dance; the music, the lights, the beautiful women, the whispered nothings ——”

“Enough, enough,” cried Louis. “If you go on this way, you won’t be able to wait even the week until New Year’s Day. Now, as seasoned Parisians, let us give these good people of Montreal a little surprise. You have heard of the minuet, the new dance that has just come out. Did you learn the step?”

“Yes indeed,” answered De La Motte. “I took some lessons in it in preparation for one of the court receptions, and as luck

would have it, I have the score of some music for it with me. Do you know the dance?"

"Well enough to go through it," said Louis. "What do you say to my proposing to Madame Prevost that she and my cousin, with you and me, dance it at her ball? You will be able to teach our two partners, and can take the roughness out of my step."

"With all my heart," answered the lieutenant, "and I don't doubt that Madame will be delighted with your proposition. It will be a fine feather in her cap to put on something that is, as yet, hardly known in Paris itself, outside the court circles. And now another matter, not so important as a ball, of course, but not to be overlooked, occurs to me. The colonel of our regiment told us this morning of a projected expedition to bring the sting of war to our Puritan friends of New England. After some persuading, he consented to let me take part in it, and as I thought you might like to go along as a volunteer, I got his consent to that also. After all, it didn't take a great deal of persuasion to get the appointments, for after

a show of willingness to go, the other officers seemed not at all displeased to have me insist upon my need of the experience of such a trip."

Louis laughed.

"Perhaps the fact that they have already had the experience has something to do with this attitude," he said. "When I was hunting along Lake Champlain last fall, my guide pointed out to me some high mountains far to the southeast. Beyond these, he said, is the valley of a large river, called by the English the Connecticut, which flows into the ocean, or a sound, not far from the old Dutch town of New Amsterdam. The frontier settlements of New England are in that valley. It will be a long winter march to the nearest of them. But I am glad to have the invitation to go with you," the lad continued. "The people among whom I have lived on the Richelieu have suffered much from the hands of the Mohawks, the allies of the English. I should like to have a chance to strike back for them."

New Year's Day came, crisp, bracing. It

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was cold, so cold that the iron-shod sleighs creaked and squeaked as they slid over the hard-packed snow in the streets, and the breath of the oxen that drew them froze in their nostrils. Little attention was paid to the temperature, however, by the merry throng that found its way to the home of Madame Prevost. An abundance of the finest furs protected them on the way; while, within, roaring fires in huge fireplaces dispelled every trace of winter's cold.

The company that enjoyed the warmth of these fires was representative of the political and social leaders of this remote French possession.

Before one great fireplace, surrounded by satellites, stood the governor of the province, the principal guest of honor. Not often was Montreal honored with the presence of this chief magistrate, Vaudreuil, the immediate representative of the great Louis. Quebec was his capital, and seldom did he leave it to visit the rival town.

In another room, in the center of a group of men, stood the intendant of the province,

Champaign. It was not by mere chance that a considerable distance separated him from the governor. His office required of him to spy upon the acts of his nominal superior, and to report his observations to the French court. Under such circumstances it was not to be expected that much cordiality should exist between the two officials. In fact, in Canada, governor and intendant were almost invariably at swords' points.

Great merchants of the town were among the guests, men whose fortunes rose and fell with the fur-trade upon which the colony lived. Almost equally dependent were they upon the good-will of the intendant, whose arbitrary decrees, which none short of Paris might question, made or broke them.

Scattered here and there about the rooms were half a dozen men whose sunburned countenances seemed strangely out of keeping with the silks and laces of their costumes. Some of these were officers of frontier garrisons, enjoying a winter in civilization between summers spent in the western wilder-

ness. Others were leaders of irregular bands of adventurers and traders, looked upon with disfavor by the government, yet indispensable to it in its dealings with the Indians.

The attire of the company bespoke the exigencies of life in a remote corner of the world in a time of war. Many brilliant costumes were there, fresh from the hands of the skilled tailors and dressmakers of Paris. The owners of these were classed among the fortunate ones whose credit was good in France, and whose consignments had passed through the cordon of English cruisers.

Other costumes were a compilation of garments of various ages and conditions, remnants from previous seasons. Little was thought of these inconsistencies of attire, however. "It is the war," was the universal and accepted explanation. Besides, in the unstable state of affairs in the colony, prosperity was as uncertain as the running of goods through the blockade, so it was the part of wisdom, even in the most fortunate, to be sparing of criticism.

Inconsistencies, even crudities of attire, did not affect the enjoyment of the ball by these pleasure-loving people. Unlike the case in the New England of that time, restrictions upon their amusements were not self-imposed. They were, therefore, resented, and now that one of their social leaders had dared disregard them, her guests were in a humor to enjoy themselves without stint. Games of a dozen varieties were under way at the same time, accompanied by a volume of chatter that would have done credit to a monkey cage, or to a modern house-party. Refreshments as varied as the games did not lessen the joviality of the players.

Finally came the dances, and as a climax, the minuet. As Louis went with Margaret through the steps and bows of this most graceful of all dances, it seemed impossible that the fairy-like figure before him was the same creature whom he had first seen in homespun and buckskin on the Richelieu. To his masculine eyes, any little shortcomings in the style of her costume were lost,

and he saw only a girlish face of exquisite beauty above the graceful curves and folds of her shimmering silks.

That Margaret herself was supremely happy, no one who noted her shining eyes and the light laughter on her lips could doubt. Dismal days of deprivation on the Richelieu were forgotten, or served only as a dark setting for the glittering jewel of present happiness. The girl danced beautifully. To inborn grace of movement were added the suppleness and strength of muscle that came from free and natural living. The compliments on her performance that came from the lips of her male partners in the minuet were no mere idle words.

When the rounds of applause that followed the conclusion of the dance had subsided, La Motte turned to Louis.

“I was speaking to the governor a few minutes ago,” he said. “I told him of your offer to accompany us on our expedition. He said he should like to see you after the dance.”

As Louis approached the governor, that

official eyed him with the keenness of one whose business it was to analyze the characters of all with whom he came in contact. Little did the governors of Canada have upon which to rely to carry out the policies and instructions of the French court, other than the resources of their own hearts and brains. Spied upon and harassed by their intendants, often opposed by the clergy, practically defied in the execution of the laws by the great traders and the outlaws of the lakes, they bore almost alone the burden of the defense of the colony, and of the extension of French influence to the remote regions of the west. Under such circumstances, loyal supporters were invaluable, and if the face of even a very young man bore marks of a character that could be relied upon to give itself in unselfish service to the colony and to its king, such a man was not to be lightly passed by.

The cordiality of his greeting indicated that Vaudreuil hoped to find in Louis such a character. After returning the young man's bow, the governor extended his hand.

Louis gripped it with a grasp that made the official wince.

“You have a strong hand for a gentleman,” he said, but not unkindly. “Where did you get your blacksmith grip?”

He raised the lad's hand to inspect it. Louis flushed a little. The few weeks of idleness in Montreal had been all too short a time to erase the tan and the callouses that had come with the hard work of the summer and autumn. His hands were clean; constant attention had assured that. Otherwise, they would have done credit to the son of a peasant.

In spite of embarrassment, the governor's question must be answered. Louis determined to answer it frankly.

“I spent the autumn and part of the summer with my uncle, the *Sieur Georges Dupuy*, at his home on the *Richelieu*,” he said. “There was much work to do and few hands to do it; so I tried to do my share. I suppose swinging a scythe and husking corn have strengthened my hands.”

“In Paris, such an admission would have

convicted you of a heinous social crime," the governor answered with a smile. "Here, I will only say that I wish more of our sons of good families were as willing to harden their hands with the scythe and the spade as they are with the rifle and the paddle. They would make my problems much easier of solution. But Georges Dupuy," the official continued; "that name sounds familiar to me, though I am sure I never met your uncle. Ah! I have it. I believe La Motte said you came over with him in the *Superb*. The commander of that vessel, Captain Pirard, is an old friend of mine. He told me about you, and mentioned having served with your uncle in an expedition against the Iroquois a number of years ago. Fine fellow, Pirard; one of the best officers in his Majesty's navy.

"Well," he continued, "La Motte tells me you are to go with him on this little excursion of ours against the Puritans. It will be a hard trip, but you seem fitted for it. It is necessary that we do something to keep our Abnaki Indians stirred up against the

English. A number of them will go along with you. Their losses will embitter them against our enemies. Do you use snowshoes?"

"I came from the Richelieu to Montreal on them in one day," answered Louis briefly. His mind was on the glimpse he had just had of the policy of the French government in its war with the English colonies. He half regretted that he had asked to go with the expedition, one that was meant to bring death and destruction to simple, innocent villagers in order that their savage foes might be stirred to even greater excesses of cruelty. But he had volunteered to go, and he would not back out.

Three days after the ball, Margaret and Louis brought their visit to an end. As soon as it was light on the river, they and the sergeant, Dumont, began their thirty-mile journey homeward. The start was brisk enough, but before five miles had been passed, both the young people were lagging far behind their guide.

"I don't know what is the matter with

me," said Margaret. "I don't seem to have any strength in my legs, and I am all out of breath. I never felt so in my life."

Louis stopped and laughed.

"Now you know how I felt last summer," he said, "when I first tried to use my uncle's scythe. A month of idleness will soften the hardest of muscles; except," he added, glancing enviously at the sergeant as he plodded steadily on, dragging his sledge; "except those of Dumont. He must have changed his into steel once for all, so nothing affects them now."

When the sergeant noted the difficulty his young companions had in keeping up with his swift stride, he changed it to a slow walk, and insisted that, once an hour, they take off their snow-shoes and rub their feet and ankles vigorously.

"We won't get home very early," he said, "but a late supper is better than the cramps."

As darkness settled over the forest the sound of rushing water came to their ears.

"Why, we must be out of our way," said

Louis. "These must be the rapids of the Richelieu, and they are fully ten miles below my uncle's farm."

"The sergeant never loses his way," answered Margaret. "I hadn't thought to suggest it, but he has brought us to the river while it was daylight. Now we can easily travel on the ice of the river by the light of the stars. How stupid of me not to think of it, too; but I haven't been thinking of much of anything lately except that delightful ball."

CHAPTER XIV.

ONLY three weeks after the return of Margaret and Louis from Montreal was the time set for the departure of the winter expedition from that town. Warned by the painful cramps that kept him awake most of the night following his return to the Dupuy home, Louis determined to be fully ready for his next journey. Part of every day was spent in the woods, and by the end of three weeks, he was fit for anything that might come.

As the Dupuy estate lay in the direct route from Montreal to the headwaters of the Connecticut River, it had been arranged that it should be one of the stopping-places for the expedition. The exact date for the start was unknown at the time Louis left Montreal, and there had been no means of communication since then. About the end of January had been fixed as the probable date.

The expected passage of the force through the frontier community was an event of the first importance. For weeks, little else was talked of; its size, guesses regarding which ran so high as to cover all the able-bodied men in Canada; its leadership; its purpose, which Dame Rumor said included certainly the conquest of all New England and possibly the rest of the English provinces. Conceptions of geography were very vague on the Richelieu, though hardly more so than in official circles in Quebec and Montreal.

At last, after a week of anxious expectation, came definite word of the approach of the expedition. A lad of fourteen, from one of the farms down the river, was seen speeding on his snow-shoes over the snow-covered surface of the stream. When a half-mile away, he began to shout his message.

“The soldiers, the soldiers,” he cried. “They are coming up the river.”

Louis, who happened to be outside the house, guessed the nature of the message, though he could not understand the words. With a whoop of excitement he bounded

into the kitchen where his aunt was baking great quantities of bread, in anticipation of the coming of the expected guests.

“They are coming, Auntie,” he shouted; “they are coming.”

“Did you see them, Louis?” Madame asked. “How many of them are there?” Like an officer in charge of the commissary, her first thought must needs be whether she had made adequate preparation to supply the demands of the military stomachs.

An hour later, around a distant bend of the river, appeared a score of dark, scattered dots, which gradually resolved themselves into the skin-clad forms of Indian warriors. They were scouts preceding the main body of the expedition. Then a dark mass of men came in sight.

Fifty Canadians and French, and a hundred Indians constituted the force; not enough to conquer provinces, but sufficient to bring terror to unprotected frontier settlements. In addition, another hundred Abnaki were to be picked up on the Connecticut.

Remarkable as it may seem, the Indians who had come from Montreal were Iroquois. Persuaded and cajoled by the arts of diplomacy, they had agreed to forget their traditional hatred of the French. They had even been induced to leave their own people, and to establish the town of Caughnawaga, on the St. Lawrence, a little above Montreal. Here they lived under the eye, though not under the power, of their white neighbors; useful, but uncertain allies. Not to be trusted to serve against the English of New York, with whom, in fact, they kept up an illicit but profitable traffic in furs, they were always ready to strike the more distant New England settlements, for that, too, was profitable.

All the occupants of the house were gathered in front of it as the scouts came across the snow-covered fields from the river bank. Margaret, too, was there, on one of her frequent visits. Suddenly the girl gave a little exclamation of alarm. She turned to the seignior.

“They are Mohawks,” she said, hardly

above a whisper. "I know them by the decorations on their leggings."

"Is she right, Sergeant?" asked Dupuy of his friend who stood beside him. "My eyes are not good enough to distinguish the marks at this distance. If it is a hostile band, we are trapped."

"Margaret is right," answered Dumont, "they are Iroquois, and mostly Mohawks, but the guns they carry were not made in England. These are Indians from Caughnawaga, unless my eyes deceive me. No doubt they are friendly, though I can't say that I like to have a band of Mohawks around, even as friends."

The manner of the newcomers soon dispelled any doubts as to the nature of their intentions. Dupuy, who spoke the Iroquois tongue, greeted them with the usual salutation, "Ugh." Reply was made in like form. Then the Indians gathered in a group to await the arrival of the main body.

The Mohawks possessed a strange fascination for Margaret. Since her earliest childhood, the name of this tribe had stood

in her mind as a symbol of all that was hateful in man. Now, as she looked at the group of Indians, she felt the same instinctive repulsion that one feels in the presence of even a harmless snake; an illogical repulsion perhaps, but one indelibly stamped in our being by the dreads and sufferings of thousands of barefooted ancestors. The imprint on her mind and soul of agonizing hours, when as a little girl she had endured the terror of Indian attacks, would never be effaced. As a Christian, she might forgive; as a reasoning being, she might school her mind to forget; but, in spite of all, a Mohawk would be to her, to the end of her days, an object of loathing. So did the terrible experiences of the frontier affect not only this sweet, high-minded girl, but thousands of other girls, and boys, too, whose fortune it was to be reared on the American sector of the far-flung battle-line of civilization.

If the Mohawks were objects of intense interest to the little group of whites, the latter and their surroundings were not less so to the band of savages. The dark faces, still

smear'd with the paint of the war-dance that had preceded the start of the expedition, remained impassive, but the beady eyes took in every visible detail of the house and out-buildings, as well as of their occupants.

The chief in command of the party of scouts was tall and powerfully built, as suited the leader of a band of stalwart athletes. He was young for his position, probably not more than thirty years of age, but his face indicated the qualities of mind that fitted him for the headship of his savage crew. Aggressiveness was there, combined with the cunning and cruelty that constituted the principal stock in trade of the Indian warrior. The outstanding feature of his countenance, however, was a livid scar, the trace of a knife-cut, that ran from the right eye to the mouth. In the healing, the mouth had been distorted, and now was fixed in a hideous grin that gave the whole face a look of diabolical ferocity. It was a face that, seen once, would never pass from memory.

With an apparent desire to show friend-

liness toward the one who was to be temporarily host to him and his mates, this chief advanced toward the group that still stood at the door of the house. As he stepped forward, Louis heard a suppressed exclamation at his side. It came from Margaret, who gripped his arm nervously.

“ I know that man,” she whispered. “ He was leader of the band that attacked our house two years ago.”

The near approach of the Mohawk prevented further conversation. The chief addressed the elder Dupuy in broken French, supplemented by words from his own language.

“ Ugh,” he said, repeating the former greeting. “ My name Fighting Wolf. Your name? ”

“ My name is Dupuy, Georges Dupuy,” was the answer. “ I am glad to welcome you to my home, Fighting Wolf.”

So said the seignior, but there was little warmth in the welcome. The memory of the seventeen attacks, to which the speaker had been subjected by the Mohawks, was still

vivid. However, the blunt sensibilities of the savage were not disturbed by any lack of friendliness on the part of his host.

“Me know this house,” he said. “Me here two summers ago. Then fight for English king. Now no like English. Fight for French king.” Then, pointing to Margaret who stood near the seignior, he continued with a grin that his disfigurement turned into a hideous leer, “She your daughter?”

“No,” replied Dupuy. “She is the daughter of a neighbor and cousin who lives in the last house up the river.”

A gleam of intense interest shot from the Mohawk’s eyes.

“She girl who fought Iroquois two summers ago?” he asked. “One girl, one woman, one man in little house? Me in that war-party.”

The Mohawk’s admission, or statement rather, for there was no apology in word or manner, that he had taken part in the most recent attack upon the Richelieu settlement was too much for the composure of the seignior, for he was a Frenchman with a

Frenchman's quick temper. His face reddened at the words of the Indian, and his voice was thick with anger as he replied:

"She is the girl, and if her father had drawn as true a bead as she, few of your cowardly crew would have gone back to your filthy lodges on the Mohawk."

Meager as was his knowledge of French, there could be no doubt that Fighting Wolf fully understood the meaning of the seignior's words. His face darkened with anger, all but the great scar which glowed vivid red.

"Me fight you once," he said with a vicious snarl. "Me come again, fight you, burn your house. Then take girl away to Mohawk lodge."

With this threat, Fighting Wolf rejoined his band, and, without waiting for the arrival of the main body, led the way to a bivouac in the forest.

As the buckskin-clad forms disappeared among the dark trunks of the trees, the seignior turned a troubled face to his friend, the sergeant.

“A hasty word, and foolishly spoken,” he said in self-reproach. “Still, an open enemy is perhaps less dangerous than a pretended friend, and there is no question now where this Fighting Wolf stands. Well, we must keep a sharp lookout or he will burn us out before he and his band get away from here.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE approach of the main body of the expedition prevented further conversation. First came the Indians, four score of them, all Iroquois. Like their predecessors, the scouts, they were dressed in winter costumes of soft, tanned deerskin, crudely tailored, but comfortable. Fur caps, fur-lined mittens, and moccasins protected their extremities from the danger of frost-bite.

The fifty whites who followed the Mohawks were dressed not unlike their savage associates, except that perhaps half of them wore coats and trousers of woolen. The rest, *coureurs de bois* from the western lakes and forests, were as like the Indians in their attire as they were in heart and actions.

All, whites and Indians alike, were on snow-shoes, and a third of their number drew long, light sledges, partly loaded with food and ammunition. The arms of the band consisted solely of the rifles and muskets on their shoulders. Their beds were

their blanket rolls. Of tents and artillery, there were none.

“Greetings, friend Louis.” It was the voice of Lieutenant de La Motte that spoke, though Louis might have had difficulty in recognizing at a glance the face and form of his friend, disguised as they were by the unfamiliar garb.

“Greetings,” said the officer again, as he approached and took his friend’s hand. “And Mademoiselle de La Ronde,” he continued, turning to Margaret with a bow, the grace of which might have seemed a bit incongruous with his rough garb and snowshoes, and the heavy rifle in his hand. But La Motte could not have appeared ungraceful in any costume.

The leader of the expedition was now presented, Hertel de Rouville. With him, were his four brothers. These five, with La Motte, were invited into the house. The remaining whites were given quarters in the outbuildings. The Indians, whom Dupuy did not feel that he could trust in his buildings, found shelter in the forest.

The loyalty of the seignior and his good wife to their king, which for many years had found no adequate means of expression, now manifested itself in unbounded hospitality toward that king's servants. Food of every variety possible on the frontier satisfied the keen hunger of the more favored guests. A young steer and half a dozen hogs were slaughtered for the benefit of their white followers and of the Indians, while Madame Lucille's loaves and cakes were distributed generally and generously.

To the sergeant had been assigned the task of carrying food to the Iroquois. On his return, he sought out the seignior.

"We might as well have saved half those hogs we killed," he said, a note of disgust in his voice. "It seemed to me when I was picking them out that not all the hogs were in the pen. When I got to the camp of Fighting Wolf and his band, they were already having a feast at your expense. They had stolen and killed four of your best hogs."

Dumont had not whispered this bit of information. His words were heard by all the

guests present. On hearing them, Lieutenant de La Motte turned to his commander, De Rouville.

“This is an outrage,” he said. “To think that our Indians should plunder our host’s pens, after the generous treatment he has given us. I trust the guilty ones will be punished, and severely.”

De Rouville, who sat beside the fire smoking, answered composedly and without taking his pipe from between his teeth.

“Indian allies on the war-path are never punished,” he said. “Besides, the loss of the four hogs is of no consequence to our host. I have with me an order from his Excellency, the intendant, requiring the Sieur Dupuy to furnish us with necessary supplies for our journey. I shall deduct the four hogs from the amount called for, so the loss will be no loss at all.”

“An order from the intendant.” Dupuy repeated the words. His face was grave. He had never before suffered from the exactions of the arbitrary Canadian government; his isolated situation had protected him.

But he knew well from hearsay how harsh those exactions could be. "May I see the paper?" he asked.

The document was produced. It was in the form of a requisition upon the seignior. It required him to furnish the expedition with twenty hogs, six cows or steers, and a thousand pounds of grain or the equivalent in meal. Payment was to be made at specified rates, ruinously low, by an order on the French treasury.

As Dupuy read, his face became more and more serious.

"His Excellency, the intendant, seems to be well informed regarding my affairs, Monsieur de Rouville," he said with a touch of bitterness in his voice. "When this requisition is filled, my bins, my pens, and my stalls will all be empty. A raid by the Mohawks would have been less disastrous to me than the visit of my friends, for Monsieur, no doubt, knows that years will pass before payment is made."

The officer bowed his agreement.

"His Excellency is, no doubt, well in-

formed regarding the affairs of all Canadians of rank," he said. "In your case, a little discreet questioning of your friend Dumont supplied the detailed information desired."

As De Rouville spoke, Dupuy recovered his composure.

"Gentlemen," he said, "though this order comes as a surprise to me, and its terms seem harsh, I shall obey as a loyal subject of our gracious king. When these supplies have been furnished, I shall be not only without food for my family, but all my animals for breeding and for working my farm will be gone. But I have profited by the bounty of the king, and it shall not be said that I withheld aught that I possessed from his service. I shall be glad to assist you in any way in preparing the supplies for transportation. My mill is available for grinding the grain into flour, and my ovens for making the flour into bread."

For three days the expedition remained on the Dupuy estate, busy with its final preparations for the long journey across the

mountains. On the third day, its force was increased by a dozen tenant farmers, half of the man-power of the Richelieu settlement. These unhappy men were not volunteers. They had been chosen by lot, were forced to serve almost without pay, and were, in addition, required to furnish their arms and a large part of the food for their subsistence. So were the forces raised that, for half a century, enabled sparsely settled Canada to resist the vastly superior numbers of her English neighbors.

Among the conscripts from the Richelieu was the farmer Baptiste Perrot, De La Ronde's tenant. As the expedition formed for its start, the entire band of Perrots, with the mother at the head, stood in the snow watching. The children were gay and excited, but the mother's eyes were red with weeping, for hers was the greatest sacrifice of all.

Louis bade farewell to his relatives in the house. After a kiss on his aunt's cheek, and another on Margaret's hand, he turned to his uncle.

“I was told by De La Motte of the demands made upon you by the intendant,” he said. “May I ask if you have made any arrangements to carry you over the months before next harvest?”

“I shall buy food,” was the reply. “I have a little money in the house, and, in any case, I believe my credit is good with my neighbors. The harvests were good this year, and I shall have no difficulty, I think, in obtaining enough for our needs.”

“I brought a hundred livres from Montreal,” replied Louis, “and I have credit for five thousand with a merchant there. I should be glad to leave an order on him with you.”

“I thank you for the offer, but there will be no need, I think,” said his uncle. “I suggest, however, that you take the hundred livres with you. You may be able to do much good with them.”

The arrival of the French officers to bid their hosts good-bye interrupted the conversation, and prevented Louis from asking just the meaning of his uncle’s last sentence.

The commander, De Rouville, shook Dupuy's hand cordially.

“I bid good-bye, I am sure, to a most loyal subject of the king,” he said, “and, in appreciation of that loyalty, I have exercised my discretion in carrying out the intendant's order for supplies. I have taken but three-fourths of the grain and hogs, and half the cattle called for. That will leave breeding and work animals, and food enough for the winter and spring. The king will not suffer, for your hogs and cattle were so much larger and fatter than I had anticipated that we have all the supplies we can well carry. Again, I bid you adieu.”

CHAPTER XVI

THE easiest route from the Richelieu to the English settlements on the lower Connecticut would have been over the length of Lake Champlain, thence almost directly across the Green Mountains to their destination. The necessity of making a junction with a band of Abnaki, however, forced the adoption of a longer and much more difficult route: almost due east a hundred miles to the Connecticut, then down the crooked course of that river a distance twice as great.

During the two days' journey from Montreal to the Richelieu, the order of march had been established. The first to leave the bivouac was a party of twenty Canadians, headed by one of the Rouville brothers. These men carried no burdens except guns and blankets, and axes. Their duty was to cover the day's march by the middle of the afternoon, then to prepare a

camp for themselves and the slower-moving main body.

This procedure would, of course, have been impossible in the vicinity of an enemy, but the mountainous district between the Richelieu and the Connecticut was, at that day, truly "No Man's Land." Not even Indians were to be found in winter in these inhospitable wastes, unless it were a wandering band of Algonquins, seeking desperately to stave off starvation by hunting and trapping. The camps built were most primitive. Two or three bark shelters for the sick, if such there were, beds of spruce boughs, and an abundance of firewood; such were the means by which these hardy men of the North combatted the rigors of their winters.

Following the advance party came the Iroquois, fully armed with guns, tomahawks, and knives of European manufacture. Bows, and weapons of stone were now almost never seen among the warriors of the Five Nations. Rival traders, English and Dutch on one hand, French on the other, were only too anxious to supply the savages

with the white man's destructive weapons. As the Indians dragged their own provisions, their progress was no more rapid than that of the whites who followed.

For the first day or two after leaving the Richelieu, the route led over the flat plains bordering that river, and progress was easy, but in the mountains, barely ten miles a day could be made. Steep, treacherous, snow-covered slopes, separated only by narrow, brush-filled ravines, made the task of dragging the now heavily-laden sledges almost an impossible one. Frequently, the trails had to be cut through the brush for almost the entire distance traveled in a day, as surveyors now find it necessary to cut lines of sight through timbered country.

Difficult as it was to drag the sledges by hand, to abandon them was impossible. The expedition would have faced starvation in a week, if forced to depend upon hunting. As it was, the demand of more than a hundred and fifty healthy stomachs, ravenous from strenuous toil in almost Arctic cold, cut dangerously deep into the supply of provisions.

When, after ten days, the Connecticut was reached, less than half of the food supply remained.

Joining the reinforcement of Abnaki on the Connecticut, the expedition began the descent of that stream, traveling easily over the snow-covered ice. Progress might now have been rapid, except that the threatened failure of provisions made hunting imperative. With customary improvidence, the Abnaki allies had brought only supplies enough to last until the arrival of the main body. In addition, it was impossible to prevent the Indians, both Iroquois and Abnaki, from gorging themselves as long as food was to be had. The whites might have been put on short rations, but such a course with the Indians would have disrupted the expedition at once.

At last, toward the end of February, signs of civilized occupation began to appear along the banks of the river in the form of cleared patches of land, now abandoned by their owners. On some were charred ruins of houses and barns, mute testimonials of

the ruthlessly savage warfare that desolated the frontier. An abandoned town, Northfield, on the river bank, offered a night's shelter, but not the food of which the expedition was now in sore need.

A half-day's journey brought the band to the mouth of the Deerfield River, flowing into the Connecticut from the west. At another half-day's distance up the stream lay the objective, the town of the same name. At nightfall, camp was made in the forest, at a point within two miles of the village.

Many an uncomfortable night in the open, in driving snowstorm, or the intense cold that followed, had been spent by Louis since the departure from the Richelieu, but none that equaled this. The air, though still, was cold with the hard, biting cold of a northern winter. That, of itself, he was accustomed to, but, on this night, no fires were allowed, lest the presence of an enemy should be revealed to the sleeping village. Worse even than the lack of heat, was the gnawing hunger in his vitals.

Three days before, the last of the supplies

had been divided, officers, men, and Indian allies sharing alike. A scant pound of meat and a handful of bread comprised the allotment to each man, this to last until success should open the stores of the town, or defeat should doom the expedition to death from starvation.

The fatigue of the march brought Louis a few hours of fitful sleep, but long before the breaking of the late dawn he was awake, chilled through and through in the blanket which was his only shelter. Fearing lest he should actually be frozen if he lay longer, he got up, and, still wrapped in his blanket, began to pace back and forth beneath the leafless trees. Another blanketed form appeared in the dim starlight, then another and another until the entire force of whites were on their feet, stalking like hooded monks among the black tree-trunks. Only the Indians, tough as the four-footed denizens of the forest, remained asleep.

As one of these ghostly figures stumbled over a half-buried log, an ejaculation revealed it to be the lieutenant, De La Motte.

Glad to have company in his misery, Louis joined his friend.

“I am more than half frozen,” the lad said, his chattering teeth verifying his words. “Let’s walk back along the track we came here on. The snow seems to be hard enough to hold us there. Unless I can get some blood flowing in my hands and feet, I am afraid I shall lose them.”

For a half-hour the two young men walked as briskly as the darkness would allow, then, having generated a little warmth under their wrappings of blanket, they began their return at a slower pace.

Suddenly Louis stopped and turned to his companion. “Tell me, La Motte,” he said, “did those farmers whose burned homes we passed yesterday and to-day, ever harm our Canadian settlers?”

“Not that I ever heard about,” replied the lieutenant.

“Have they sent their Indians to murder our people and destroy their little homes?” persisted Louis.

“I think not,” was the reply. “In fact,

the Indians of this region seem to be on the side of the French.”

“Then I shall have nothing to do with killing them and burning their homes,” replied the lad. “I will go with the attacking party, for I don’t wish to be thought a coward, but I shall not fire a shot unless in self-defense, or to help a friend.”

“I feel pretty much as you do, Louis,” replied La Motte. “I should have a good deal more stomach for the fight if it were against the Dutchmen of Albany, who have been backing the Iroquois against us for a hundred years. But, of course, as an officer, I must lead my men in the attack. And in your case, while we may not need your help in fighting, for we probably outnumber the English four to one, I would suggest that you keep with the main body. In spite of all the fine things said about our Christian Indian allies, I know and you know that they are still savages. It may be that, if you are at hand, you may be able to help us few officers to restrain somewhat their savagery.”

“ I shall be glad to do it,” said Louis with a feeling of relief. In fact, the expedition in which he was engaged was becoming less and less to his liking. He could not help thinking that he and his associates were now playing toward the English settlers the detestable part which the Iroquois had played toward his own kin on the Richelieu. But if he should incur the dangers of the assault, not to destroy but to save,—the knight errantry that is in every boy responded to the appeal of such a part.

CHAPTER XVII

AN hour before dawn, word came to form for the attack. Snow-shoes were to be left behind. Alternate thawing and freezing had formed a crust on the three-foot depth of snow, sufficient to hold a man's weight without them. Packs, too, were left at the camp. Carrying only their rifles, the hardy warriors, white and red, moved swiftly forward through the forest and over the bare fields.

This was the kind of warfare to which the redmen, and to a scarcely less degree their white allies, had been born and bred. The rigorous discipline of custom, more rigid than that of a martinet, held them to a silence almost absolute. From the swiftly-moving mass not a sound came to betray their approach even to the watch-dogs of the town, save only the soft crunching of frozen snow beneath deerskin moccasins. Even this was varied by intervals of silence through occasional halts, that a wakeful sen-

tinel might confuse it with the breathing of the night air through the pines. So, like a procession of vengeful ghosts, the attackers moved through the gray quarter-light upon their prey.

Little danger was there that the approach of the French and Indians would be detected. True, rumors had come to the English of a threatened attack upon the Connecticut settlements, and a little force of twenty volunteers—farm-boys, not soldiers—had been sent from the older settlements to Deerfield.

Before winter had supposedly made impossible a descent from the distant Canadian settlements, many families had found refuge within the palisade that enclosed a dozen or more houses in the center of the town. But now that the rivers were frozen, and the forest trails deep with snow, confidence had come that the attack, if made, would be postponed until spring at least. Families had returned to their homes, and the discipline of the garrison, never rigid, had almost vanished. Now, as their as-

sailants swept silently over the snow-covered meadows toward the doomed town, citizens and soldiers slept, all unconscious of danger, in their warm feather-beds.

Louis, rifle in mittened hand, walked with La Motte at the head of the score of Canadians of whom the lieutenant was in command. As he emerged upon the meadows, his eyes, though accustomed to the deeper gloom of the forest, could distinguish little save the great bulk of Sugar Loaf, looming black against a drab eastern sky. As the party advanced, however, the sky grew brighter, objects began to take form on and beyond the meadows; gaunt, ragged forms of deadened trees, and haystacks, white with their covering of snow. Then the large wooden houses of the town appeared, stretching in a long double row along a single street.

Silently, the assailants moved past the most northerly structures. Their object was to gain possession, by surprise, of the palisade that surrounded an area of perhaps four

city squares in the heart of the town. This was done with ridiculous ease. Recent heavy snows, drifted almost to the top of the eight-foot wooden wall, had not been removed. The palisade hardly checked the speed of the attack.

Now that silence was no longer necessary, the horrible war-cry broke from a hundred Indian throats, and a rush was made for the doors of the houses. Most of these gave way, leaving the occupants of the houses to the scant mercy of their foes. In the heat of the attack, many lives were sacrificed, but the object of the raid was prisoners, not blood, for prisoners meant ransom money. But resistance or attempted flight brought death.

Not all the houses, however, were entered without resistance. As Louis stood near the palisade which he had climbed, he saw a group of eight or ten Indians hacking at the stout oaken door of a large, near-by house.¹

¹In a museum at Deerfield, the door of this house, cut through by the hatchets of the Indians, can still be seen. One of the large houses passed by the assailants of the town, as they rushed toward the palisade, is still standing.

At length a hole, as large as a man's head, was made in it. Shots through the opening were followed by screams of women. Then, having unbarred the door, the Indians rushed in.

Helpless to interfere, Louis had started to move away when he heard the quick pattering of a child's bare feet on the frozen snow. Turning, he saw a little flaxen-haired girl of six, clad only in a white woolen nightgown, speeding toward him from the rear of the house. No cry came from her white lips, but the terrified stare of her blue eyes was more eloquent than shrieks or moans. An instant later, the powerful form of an Iroquois followed her from behind the house. No second glance was required for Louis to recognize the hideous, scarred countenance of Fighting Wolf, and no second glance at the Mohawk's face and at the bloody tomahawk in his hand was needed to show that the little girl fled from death, not captivity.

The child reached the lad's side, and, almost convulsed with terror, clung to his garments. Instinctively, Louis threw his rifle

to the ready. At the threat the Indian stopped running, but continued his advance at a walk.

“Stop!” he had shouted. He had no intention of letting the powerful savage get to close quarters with him.

Fighting Wolf obeyed the command, for the tone in which it was given showed the speaker to be in earnest, and no Indian, however brave, cared to face the threat of a cocked rifle. The look on the Mohawk’s face showed, however, that but for the fact that Louis had “the drop” on him, the tomahawk might have found another victim than the helpless child.

The Indian spoke, using the little French he had been able to acquire.

“Girl mine,” he said. “My prisoner. I take away.” Then, as an afterthought, he added, “Me not hurt her.”

For an instant, Louis pondered the chief’s words. He realized that interference with the undisputed right of an Indian ally to a prisoner he had taken, might have serious consequences, especially when that ally was

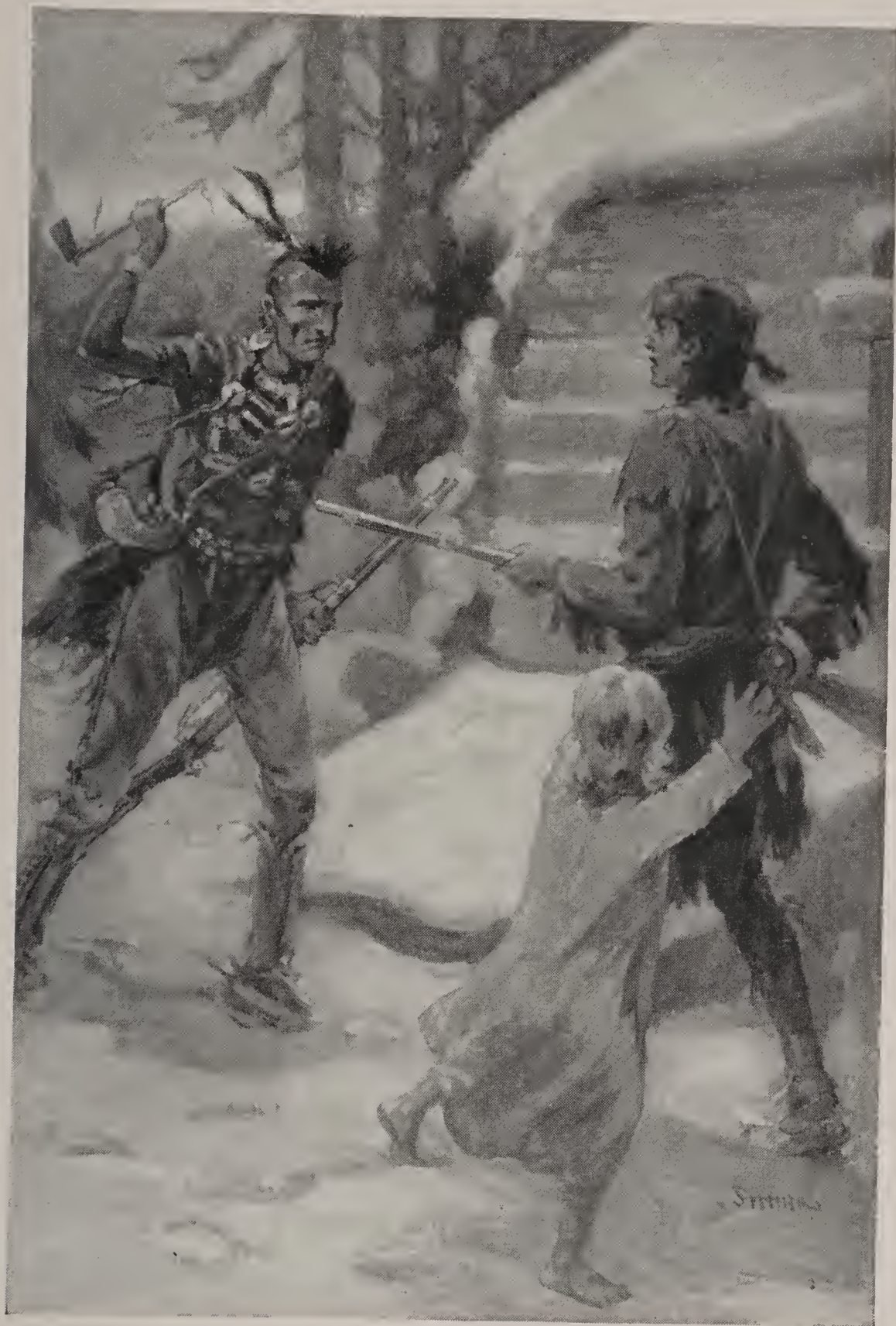
so important a person as Fighting Wolf. It was entirely possible, too, that the Mohawk really meant no harm to the child, that she would be carried with other prisoners to Canada and there held for ransom. Louis opened his mouth to parley further, but the look of hatred and vengeance he encountered as he looked again at the Indian's face made him close it with a snap.

“The girl is my prisoner, not yours,” he said finally. “I have her under my hand, while you simply chased her. She is mine, and I shall protect her.”

Louis almost quailed before the flame of bitter hatred that flashed across the Indian's face. Then, quick as a steel spring, the bloody tomahawk was raised and sent flying at the head of the child.

“Fighting Wolf no want prisoner,” the Mohawk cried, this time truthfully. “Fighting Wolf fight for scalps and to kill, not for money.”

By a quick parry with his gun-barrel, Louis luckily deflected the keen little axe, and it buried itself harmlessly in the snow.



“STOP!” THE LAD SHOUTED.—Page 197.

With another hideous grimace of hatred, Fighting Wolf walked away to resume his murderous work against the helpless villagers. Louis picked up the trembling child and carried her into the house.

The intensity of the attack was now waning. No attempt was made to disturb the southern part of the town where a palisaded house, the home of the militia commander, gave promise of a stiff resistance. Within the main palisade, all the houses had been entered except one. Here barricaded windows, bullet-proof walls, and a handful of resolute defenders had served to discourage the assailants, and they had sought easier conquests.

Bands of Indians now began to bring in their booty of prisoners: men, women, and children. Some were fully dressed; most shivered in their night clothing. All were bound with the small ropes that had been brought from Canada in anticipation of just such use. Altogether, more than a hundred of the three hundred inhabitants of the little town were captured.

The villagers had paid heavily for their Indian-like failure to guard against a surprise attack, but their assailants had not come off scathless. A score of still forms on the snow, among them two or three Frenchmen, told how well the English had fought when they had a chance. More to be pitied than the dead were the scores of wounded, Rouville, the leader, among them. Without shelter, without medical supplies, they must face a month's journey through the wintry wastes, back to their Canadian homes.

Fearing an attack by forces from the villages to the south, the French and their allies hastened their preparations for departure. Cattle and hogs were shot and hastily butchered. Flour from the houses, maize and wheat from cribs and granaries, together with the fresh meat, were hastily packed for carrying. Clothing and blankets seized in the various houses were distributed among the prisoners to prevent them from freezing.

The winter sun, giving light but little heat, was barely an hour high above the tree-

tops when the greater part of the French and Indians started on their return journey. There was little in their appearance to suggest a victorious band. A quarter of the number wore bandages. A score hobbled painfully over the hard surface of the snow. These were the "walking wounded." A dozen more, harder hit, had been placed in an ox-sled and were being dragged by as many of their more fortunate comrades.

Scattered among the French and Indians, each under the charge of his captor and owner, were the English prisoners. Now that the heat of the attack was past, they were in little danger, as long as they were able to keep up with their captors.

It was well that the French and their allies had not delayed their departure, unless they desired to engage in a fruitless fight. As it was, stragglers who had remained behind to plunder were attacked by the infuriated English, reinforced from neighboring towns, and driven pell-mell across the meadows toward their friends.

When Louis carried the little English girl into the house from which she had escaped, he found there half a dozen women and children, already prisoners of the Indians. At his request, one of the women was allowed to dress the child. Warm clothing, a coat and cap of beaver-fur, knitted woolen mittens, fur-lined moccasins, and, lastly, a heavy blanket; with these Louis felt that even so young a child was well prepared for the long journey that lay ahead of her.

The thought occurred to the lad to set the girl free, but he rejected it at once. Although the main body of his companions was about to begin its retreat, plunderers still roamed through the town, and frequent shrieks of women and children told how lust for slaughter overcame, in Indian hearts, the desire for gain. Then, too, as long as Fighting Wolf was in the town, there could be no safety for the child. Louis must take her with him.

As soon as the girl was ready, she and Louis joined the band that was already leaving the town. Recent days of semi-starva-

tion reminded the lad that he must now see that two stomachs were kept reasonably full. There was but one source of supply, the booty that had been collected. The lad was fortunate in securing two large hams and perhaps thirty pounds of flour. So, with the hams tied together and dangling like saddlebags from his neck, the flour in a bag under one arm, his rifle under the other, and his little prisoner hanging to the tail of his deer-skin tunic, the boy began his homeward march.

Attempts on Louis' part to converse with his companion were a failure. He did learn that her first name was Mercy, but, beyond that he could not go, for he knew no English. In fact, his attempts to make the child understand the French names of familiar objects awakened only wonderment in her mind that a white person should be so silly as not to call things by their well-known English names. She had seen Indians, of course, who did not know such names, but how one could be a white person, and almost grown up, and not know that snow was

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snow, and that a coat was a coat, was a thing beyond comprehension. But then, he had a kind face, and he had made that terrible Indian who chased her let her alone, so she didn't mind if he hadn't yet really learned to talk.

CHAPTER XVIII

CAMP was made on the first night of the return journey, nearly twenty miles up the Connecticut. The sharp reaction of the English after the first surprise was past, and the arrival of reinforcements from other towns, were sufficient to indicate the danger to the French of remaining near the scene of the morning's battle. With the wounded and the newly-acquired stock of provisions on their sledges, progress had been rapid over the hard snow-crust.

Louis had provided a seat for Mercy on the sledge which he himself helped to pull. As the spirits of the child rose in reaction after the terrible events of the morning, she began to look upon the journey as something of a holiday outing. Child-like, she even played that the four hard-working men who tugged at the sledge's trace were her horses, and the rough sledge a luxurious gilt-trimmed sleigh.

To the other prisoners, however, especially to those whose masters were Indians, the day was anything but a holiday. The old and the feeble, the sick, the little children; all must keep up the killing pace set by the French leaders. When a captive lagged, a significant gesture on the part of his captor toward the ever-ready tomahawk spurred him on. The Indians did not desire to lose any of their prisoners, for ransoms were high, but if the captive could not reach Canada where he could be sold,—well, scalps also had a money value.

The camping place was on a deserted farm. The farmhouse itself, which somehow had escaped the torch of the raiders who had driven out or killed the occupants, was given over to the badly wounded. The rest found shelter, as best they might, under the pines. Great fires, fed by dead trees from the partly-cleared fields, gave light for the construction of rude shelters and beds of pine-boughs. This work done, a meager dinner was eaten. Though there was abundance of food for the present, the experience

of the past weeks had impressed even the Indians with the necessity of spreading the supply over as many meals as possible.

Louis and his little prisoner had just begun to eat when they were joined by the lieutenant, De La Motte. The two friends had not seen each other since the beginning of the morning's conflict. The officer, who carried his dinner in his hand, sat down beside Louis, and without a word devoured the small piece of broiled ham, and the even smaller fragment of bread which constituted his meal. Louis, thankful that his own dinner was not interrupted, did likewise. In fact, both the young men were so hungry from their long period of semi-fasting, and from the driving march in the cold, that for the moment nothing much seemed of importance except to get food into their empty stomachs. To his surprise, Louis found his teeth snapping through the tender meat like the jaws of an angry wolf. In two minutes the food was gone, to the smallest crumb of bread and the last taste of grease that could be sucked from his fingers.

“I want more dinner,” said Louis, when he had swallowed the last morsel.

“So do I,” answered La Motte. “I am so hungry that I am tempted to eat my leather belt. It would, at least, taste something like food. But if I eat more to-day, I shall be even hungrier to-morrow, for I shall have no dinner at all. Now, let’s forget about it. Any hurts from the Yankees’ bullets?”

“No,” answered Louis. “I didn’t get into the fighting. How about you?”

“Just a graze in my left side,” answered the lieutenant. “One of the English women dressed it for me, and it is very comfortable. The same woman nursed one of our officers who is really badly hurt. I call that a Christian act, even if the woman is a heretic, for I was told that her husband, her son, and a grandson had all been killed in the attack on the town. I understand our leader gave orders that she should be left behind with her friends, and as I have not seen her on the march, that was probably done. But how about this little lady? Did you decide to do some capturing of your own, after all?”

Louis told the lieutenant of his rescue of the child from death at the hand of Fighting Wolf. As he listened, La Motte looked as grave as was possible for him.

“Blocking a chief like Fighting Wolf, even in such a villainous act, may prove serious,” he said. “I have been among these Caughnawaga Iroquois enough to know that they are like spoiled children. The English and we French have been bidding against each other so long for their friendship, that they have a most exalted idea of their own value.”

The conversation was interrupted by the approach of one of the English prisoners, a tall, muscular man in the attire of a New England preacher: black coat and knee trousers, black hat and woolen stockings. On seeing him, Mercy sprang to her feet, and, spreading the skirt of her little coat, courtesied. The stranger acknowledged the salutation with a pat on the head.

“I am sorry to see you here, Mercy,” he said. “But do you know this farm where we are camped?”

“I know,” replied the child, a look of wonderment in her eyes. “It is my home, where I lived once with my papa and mamma. But where are Papa and Mamma?”

“You will see them sometime, Mercy, dear,” replied the minister, his eyes moistening.

The man then addressed Louis and La Motte, speaking fair French.

“My name is Williams, John Williams,” he said. “I am, or was, the minister in Deerfield. May I ask whether you have this child in your possession?”

Louis repeated the story he had just told La Motte of the rescue of the little girl.

“According to the rules of frontier warfare,” he concluded, “the girl is my prisoner, and I intend to hold possession of her until she is restored to her relatives, or is otherwise safely disposed of.”

“Thank God she, at least, is not in the hands of the savages,” said the minister. “I would I could say the same about my own children. Two were slain in my home, five are prisoners of the Indians.

“Regarding little Mercy Hapgood,” he continued, “it is not likely that relatives will search for her. As she has just said, though you may not have understood, the farm where we are camped is her old home. Here lived James Hapgood with his wife and six children. Mercy was next to the youngest. Two years ago next summer, the house was attacked by a band of your French Indians, as hundreds of others have been. The entire family was killed except little Mercy, then barely five years old. In the confusion of the attack, she crawled under a bed in a dark corner and was not found by the Indians. Fortunately the house was not burned, and the next day we found her, still under the bed, white, trembling, speechless with terror, but unharmed. Since then she has been the guest of Deerfield, where she has been welcomed in turn at every fireside.”

“Since no relatives have claimed the girl in these two years,” Louis said, “I suppose there is little likelihood that any would seek her in Canada. In that case, I shall try to arrange for her adoption into a good

family, or to have her admitted to a convent school.”

Williams was a Puritan. Tender and affectionate in his attitude toward individuals, he was as hardened steel in matters affecting his religious convictions. While speaking of little Mercy, his face was gentle as that of a child, but at the mention of a convent school his jaw set, and hard, deep lines appeared about his lips and eyes.

“A convent,” he said, and his voice was hard as he repeated the, to him, hated word. “As God is my witness, I had rather your gun-barrel had not deflected the hatchet of the Iroquois, and that Mercy had gone innocent to her Maker, than that she should have been spared only to become a nun.”

“Come, come, my good sir,” interposed La Motte. “Our convent schools are not as bad as all that. They are full of girls as sweet and innocent as your little friend here, and the sisters in charge are as full of real charity as the good woman in Deerfield who dressed my wound this morning. Why, my dear sir,” the lieutenant continued whimsi-

cally, "you will not have been a year in Canada before you will be a robed and shaven priest yourself."

If the minister's face had been hard before, it now became as adamant.

"It ill behooves one to boast before the test," he said, "but if I know my own heart, no torture that even these hell-hounds, your French Indians, could invent could force me to that step. Aye, if I thought my tongue would ever speak the word of consent, I would at this moment tear it from my mouth."

La Motte was somewhat taken aback by the effect of his jest upon the Puritan.

"We have no intention of burning you at the stake to convert you to our way of thinking," he said. "We have a problem before us that to my mind is much more serious: to get these scores of prisoners safely to Canada. If they were captives of the French only, there would be little difficulty, except for the hardships of the journey. But how can we persuade these wild Indians to act like human beings?"

At the mention of the prisoners, Williams' face softened again.

"May the God of us all give you wisdom," he said. "As for me, I am now only a helpless slave to my two Indian masters."

At this moment a French soldier brought word to Louis that the commander, De Rouville, desired to see him.

"It may be in connection with Fighting Wolf," La Motte said. "If you wish, I will go with you."

"I wish you would," answered Louis. "And I shall take Mercy also. I am afraid to let her be out of my sight for a minute until this matter is settled."

De Rouville was found sitting before a fire with his back against the trunk of a pine. His white face and a bandaged arm told of the wound he had received in the battle. Seated around the fire were a number of other officers. Outside the circle stood the tall, erect form of Fighting Wolf. When Louis met the fierce glance of the Mohawk's eye, he had no doubt regarding the reason for his summons.

De Rouville lost no time in preliminaries.

“Monsieur Dupuy,” he said, “our ally, Fighting Wolf, says that you took from him, and are now holding, an English girl whom he had captured. He says he demanded her return and that you refused to give her up. What have you to say?”

“I have the girl in my possession,” replied Louis. “That is true, and here she is.”

All eyes turned to the face of the child, which, at the sight of Fighting Wolf, had again gone white.

“It is also true,” Louis continued, “that I refused to give her up to the Iroquois. It is not true that I took her from him. She was fleeing from his murderous tomahawk when she saw me, and ran to me for protection.”

“Fighting Wolf’s story is the same as yours,” said the leader, “but he says that, before you saw the girl, he had captured her and some others, and that while he was binding the other prisoners, she darted out of the house. Do you know this to be untrue?”

Louis stood silent. He did not doubt

that the story of the Mohawk chief was a lie, but of himself he had no way of proving it to be such. But Mercy could be her own witness.

“ I have no means of knowing what went on in the house,” he said finally. “ Let the little girl speak for herself.”

“ Does she speak French?” asked De Rouville.

“ No,” Louis said, “ but there is a minister among the captives who does. I will bring him.”

In a few minutes the lad returned with Williams, and, through him, Mercy told her story.

“ I was staying in Goodman Sheldon’s house,” she said. “ I had been living with him for two or three weeks. I slept in a trundle-bed in the big room down-stairs. This morning—it was this morning, wasn’t it?—it seems so long ago. This morning I heard shots, and some terrible yelling. I knew it was Indians, for it sounded just as it did that other time when the Indians came to our house. I think they must have taken

Papa and Mamma away then, for I haven't seen them since. Anyway, I was sure it was Indians, so I hid behind the trundle-bed under the big bed, just as I did before.

“Pretty soon I heard a sound like hatchets chopping at the front door. Then I saw the sky through a little hole in the door. The hole got bigger, and I saw an Indian's head. Then some one reached through the hole and unbarred the door, and the Indians came in. Some of them opened the back door, and other Indians came in that way. With the doors open, it wasn't dark where I was, so when I thought no one was watching, I slipped out from under the bed and ran for the back door. This Indian,” she pointed at the Wolf, “saw me and chased me, but I got outdoors. Then I saw this man,” and she touched Louis' sleeve, “and he made the Indian stop.”

The child told her story with a simplicity and directness that carried conviction of its truth even through the medium of an interpreter. Fighting Wolf sensed the effect upon the French officers.

“Girl tell lie!” he shouted angrily. “I take girl prisoner; then when I tie other prisoners, she run away.”

De Rouville made no answer, but turned to his brother officers.

“It is a question of which story is true,” he said, “that of this little girl, or that of Fighting Wolf. For myself, I believe the girl is telling the truth, and the Mohawk lying, but there is no proof one way or the other. It might be good policy to let Fighting Wolf have the girl, and so save all possibility of trouble, but if I decide he is lying to get her, I shall block him. I will not give that child up to be murdered, as I believe she would be, unless he can prove that she is his by the rules of our warfare. Will you back me in this stand?”

There was a general murmur of agreement.

“May I ask the plaintiff in this trial a question?” asked La Motte.

The request was granted.

“You say you were busy binding your other prisoners when the girl ran away from

you," he said to the Mohawk. "Where are your other prisoners? I did not see any with you on the march. Produce your prisoners, that we may hear their story."

The face of Fighting Wolf changed. Like many another liar, he had not thought his story through to the end and was trapped, for, true to his boast, he had taken scalps, not prisoners. He realized that his case was lost. With a glare of hatred that encompassed the whole group, but dwelt with particular malevolence upon Louis and La Motte, he turned and strode away to his own band.

"We have made an enemy of the Wolf," said De Rouville, when the tall form of the Mohawk had disappeared among the trees. "We shall all need to be on the lookout for treachery. Especially, La Motte, must you and your friend be on your guard, not only for the sake of this child, but for your own, for if I know Indian nature, the Mohawk will try to wreak his vengeance upon all three of you."

CHAPTER XIX

FOR a week or more after the attack upon Deerfield, the returning war-party maintained the fast pace it had set on the first day's march. There was need for speed. Always there was the threat of hunger even to starvation to spur lagging feet. Then there was the possibility that, at any time, an early thaw would break up their best road, the frozen surface of the river. Day by day the heat from the climbing sun increased, and, frequently, snow-shoes were left off, and the party marched ankle-deep in water and slush that covered the ice of the river.

The hardships of the march under these conditions were severe. Without exception, the French and Indians wore moccasins of deerskin. This soft leather, which when dry was remarkably tough and durable, was of little value when water-soaked. Feet were, of course, so chilled in the icy water as to be numb to all feeling, even from the frequent

cuts and bruises due to jagged fragments of ice piercing worn-out moccasins.

Even the blazing camp-fires failed to restore the marchers to their wonted cheerfulness. The chill was indeed taken out of numb feet, but it was followed by aches and burnings equally as painful. In addition, there was the incessant gnawing of unsatisfied hunger that made men irritable even toward their best friends. Under such circumstances, as soon as camp had been made, food was prepared and was eaten while wet feet and clothing were drying. Moccasins were patched, or replaced with wrappings of cloth or skins, preparatory for the next day's journey. Then the weary travelers forgot their hunger and pain in sleep.

If the swift march tried almost to the limit the endurance of hardened Indians and frontiersmen, the effect upon the captive women and children may best be imagined. Day by day, their number decreased. Utter exhaustion, a fall on the slippery ice of the river, failure to respond to the command to push on, a swift but merciful blow of a tom-

ahawk; such was the tale whispered nightly among the miserable captives to account for the absence of a relative or neighbor.

In addition to his share of the hardships of the march, Louis carried the responsibility of protecting his little charge against harm at the hands of Fighting Wolf. For him to guard her day and night was impossible. La Motte offered to share in the task, but, even so, the burden was too great.

“I must try to get another person to share the watching with us, La Motte,” he said, after he and the lieutenant had each sat awake half the night to guard against a treacherous attack. “What with the fatigue of the march and the warmth of the fire, I just couldn’t keep awake last night. Half a dozen times I caught myself nodding, and I might as well be asleep as in that condition, for all the good I should do as a sentinel. I shall look up Baptiste Perrot, a tenant of Margaret’s father. It may be I can hire him to share the watch with us.”

During the noon rest on that day, Louis found the peasant farmer.

“ I will do as you ask for fifty livres, paid in advance,” Perrot said, when the request for his help was made.

Louis was somewhat surprised that, under the circumstances, the man, himself a father, should drive so hard a bargain, but he consented to the terms and paid the money.

“ That seems a pretty big price to ask a neighbor for sitting up a third of the night for a few weeks, doesn't it? ” Perrot said.

Louis made no answer, and the peasant continued.

“ I have need for the money. Near me on the march to-day was an Abnaki Indian who has as a prisoner a little boy, only four years old. I was told his father was killed at Deerfield. His mother gave out on the march to-day. You know what that meant. So the little chap is now an orphan. The Indian has no sledge, and he soon got tired of carrying the child, who naturally could not walk fast enough or far enough to keep up with the party. He was offered to me for fifty livres, but, of course, I did not have the money. I got the Abnaki to let me carry

the boy. I should be glad to continue to do so, but the Indian will soon be going off to the east to Acadia. I am afraid the boy would not last long after that. Now I shall buy him, and make him one of my own family."

"You have a good many children of your own already, haven't you?" asked Louis. "Will it not be a burden to support another?"

"I have only fourteen," said Perrot, "and as four of them are old enough to help on the farm, we get along very nicely. No, the boy will not be a burden, and I will bring him up to be a good subject of our French king."

Before the afternoon start was made, La Motte had obtained permission for Perrot to accompany him and Louis for the rest of the trip back to the Richelieu. In fact, the man was made a kind of orderly to the lieutenant, and thus was relieved of the usual duties as scout and sentinel.

A sledge was now assigned to the especial use of Louis and La Motte. On it were

placed the personal effects of the two, together with Perrot's pack, and a proper share of the supply of provisions. In the midst of the bundles, warmly wrapped in blankets, sat the two children.

Charley, the boy was called, and as Charles was as good a French name as it was English, Charley he remained. Like Mercy, he was a fair-haired, ruddy-cheeked child. He was too young for the terrible events of the past days to have done more than fill his mind with wonderment. The tragedy of the strange happenings was lost upon him.

Perrot and Louis were the team that for the most part drew the sledge, with La Motte helping as often as his duties would permit. A light rope, thirty feet long, the ends tied to the fronts of the two runners, served as traces. In the bight of the rope, fifteen feet from the sledge, was Louis' place. The line was passed over the back of his neck and under his armpits, in the way known to all boys who own sleds. A cross-line between the traces, ten feet from the sledge, provided the same simple but efficient kind of harness

for Perrot. And so, yoked together by a common humanity, the proud young noble and the sturdy peasant dragged their living load through the slush and over the jagged ice of the Connecticut.

De Rouville, the commander of the expedition, was a man thoroughly versed in the ways of the woods and its inhabitants. To that fact, he owed his command. To such a man there would be no uncertainty regarding the frailty of the bonds that held his Iroquois allies to the French cause. The hatreds of a hundred years of hostility had been temporarily overcome by the blandishments of French emissaries and the offer of material advantages. But the Iroquois of Caughnawaga were never out of touch with their brothers on the Mohawk, and they well knew that the latch-strings of their former English allies were always out. Nor would their welcome be less warm if, in returning to their former home, they brought with them a goodly number of French scalps.

When told of the arrangements for safeguarding Mercy against the vengeance of

Fighting Wolf, De Rouville saw in them a means of dealing with the threat of treachery that might endanger his whole white force. Knowing the point where the blow, if struck, would surely come, the problem of warding it off was simplified.

Twenty-five men, Canadians accustomed to the emergencies of frontier warfare, were assigned to the task of guarding the little English girl and her two friends. By day, they were to march in a ring surrounding the sledge in which Mercy rode. At night, their bivouac was to be about hers.

After some two weeks of travel, a large stream was seen, White River, breaking through the mountains to the west and flowing into the Connecticut. Though there were still several hours of daylight, camp was made, for here the expedition was to begin to break up.

The provisions were practically exhausted. From now on, food must be secured by hunting, and hunting by a number of small bands would be far more effective than by one large company. Part, at least,

of the Iroquois were to ascend the valley of the White River toward Lake Champlain. The French and the Abnaki were to continue up the Connecticut, dispersing, however, in small parties.

In the bustle of making camp, Louis found himself for a moment beside the commander, De Rouville.

“To-night is a critical night for you and your charge, perhaps for us all,” said the officer. He then told of the arrangements for breaking up the allied force.

“Fighting Wolf has delayed his blow,” De Rouville continued. “It may be, he will not strike, for he must have observed the precautions we have taken. Or it may be, he has waited to reach this tributary of the Connecticut so as to have available a direct line of retreat to his old home beyond Lac St. Sacrement,” as the French called Lake George. “In any case, he must have planned the blow to come to-night, if at all, for to-morrow his path and ours separate. But do not worry. I think I have a little surprise in store for Fighting Wolf.”

CHAPTER XX

THE delay on the part of Fighting Wolf, in seeking revenge for the grievances which he fancied he had suffered, was not due to any lessening of the bitterness which he nursed in his heart. On the contrary, his savage wrath had grown from day to day until it encompassed all things French. It would now be satisfied only with the destruction of the entire band of Frenchmen.

This widening of Fighting Wolf's enmity gave Louis and his charge at least temporary security. Had the Mohawk so desired, no precautions could have prevented him and his immediate followers from bringing about their destruction, either on the march or in the darkness of the bivouac. But such an attack must have been followed by immediate flight to the woods, and Fighting Wolf's plans for a revenge of a wider scope would have been frustrated.

The chieftain was of a nation of politi-

cians. In the rude statecraft of the wooded wilderness, no other Indian people could match the Iroquois. Astute policy, even more than hard fighting, had made the Five Nations dread masters from the rock-bound coast of New England to the wooded shores of Lake Michigan. Along with the savage ferocity of his people, Fighting Wolf had inherited, also, their shrewdness. In battle or in council, he was equally formidable.

The Mohawk's first step was to make sure of his own followers, the score of warriors who had selected him as their chief for the expedition. Here, he experienced no difficulty. Such was the ascendancy of his strong, aggressive character over these men that, without exception, they agreed to cast their lot with him.

With the remainder of the Iroquois, the task was less easy. Here, the Wolf encountered the envy and jealousy of rival chieftains, as well as the inertia that tends to withstand all suggestion of change. But, day by day, through reminders of their inherited hostility for the French, of fancied

personal grievances, and, above all, of the cheapness and abundance of the goods of English and Dutch traders on the Mohawk, the loyalty of his fellow-tribesmen to the Great White Father was undermined and threatened with collapse.

The efforts of Fighting Wolf were not confined to those of his own tribe and nation. To make certain the success of his schemes, he desired the assured neutrality, if not the active assistance, of the band of Abnaki, equal to the Iroquois of the expedition in numbers, if not in fighting quality. But here the Mohawk met racial hatred, even more pronounced than that of his own people for the French.

For generations the Abnaki, together with all their Algonquin cousins, had trembled under the tyranny of the Five Nations, but, with the growth of the power of the French, to whom they looked as protectors, had come some degree of security against the exactions of their harsh masters. The Abnaki were willing to work with the Iroquois under French leadership, though it was like asking

the fox to live in the same kennel with the hounds; but to turn against their white protectors, or to leave them to the wrath of the Iroquois, their own oppressors,—the answer was so decisive that the Wolf saw that he must reckon on the Abnaki as active enemies.

Meantime, the French leader was not asleep. Through the Abnaki, and half a dozen Iroquois who had withstood the wiles of the Wolf, he was kept apprized of the progress of the latter's scheme. Enlisting the services of a dozen frontiersmen, well versed in the working of the Indian mind, he proceeded to block the plans of the Mohawk.

In the first place, the loyalty of the Abnaki was made doubly sure, and their effectiveness increased, by gifts of ammunition and guns. To this very practical measure, were added liberal promises of future gifts and honors.

Promises were resorted to, also, as well as fiery denunciations of their former English friends, in dealing with the three or four-

score Iroquois who were not of the Wolf's band. Most effective, however, were scarcely veiled threats that their friends and relatives in the town of Caughnawaga would be considered as hostages for their good behavior. As usual with Indians, this threat proved effective. Pledges of continued loyalty were made, with an evident sincerity that satisfied the French leaders.

Assured that he now had the situation well in hand, De Rouville proceeded to carry out the plan he had evolved for dealing with his insubordinate ally. Shortly after the stop was made at the mouth of the White River, Fighting Wolf was asked to appear before the commander.

Disquieted though he was at this unexpected turn of events, the Mohawk could not well disregard the summons. He went, but he went fully armed, and accompanied by his score of armed followers. What he saw, as he approached the fire before which de Rouville was standing, was not reassuring. Back of the officer were twenty armed Frenchmen, and as the Wolf and his com-

panions seated themselves in response to a gesture of the commander, thirty more appeared in the woods on either hand. Worse still, the Abnaki, a hundred strong, followed the Frenchmen and took post in the rear of the Iroquois.

Fighting Wolf looked in vain for the fellow-tribesmen whom he thought he had won to his cause. De Rouville's implied threat of reprisals had been effective. These Iroquois, in order to be clear away from any possible trouble, had broken up into a dozen small parties and were scouring the neighboring hills for game.

The French now completely controlled the situation. If so minded, de Rouville might easily have destroyed the entire band of Iroquois. In fact, some of his younger associates urged that course as a warning to the rest of the fickle allies at Caughnawaga. But the French leader was wise in Indian ways. He knew that any punishment short of death could be explained away to the Wolf's fellow-tribesmen, and would probably be approved as being only the Mo-

hawks' just deserts. But let an Iroquois ally fall by a French bullet, even as a penalty for foul treachery, and the whole town of Caughnawaga was likely to go over to their former English friends, that blood might be paid for with blood. The punishment must be such that none might say it was unjust, and yet it must render Fighting Wolf ineffective to do harm.

A long silence followed the slight rustle of moccasins on the snow, as the Abnaki took their position behind the Iroquois. If there was apprehension in the minds of the latter at sitting with their backs to a hundred of their hereditary enemies, it showed in not so much as the quiver of an eyelid. Stolid, silent, with eyes fixed on the snow in front of them, the Iroquois waited for the French leader to break the silence.

At length De Rouville spoke, using the deliberate, solemn manner of an Indian orator.

“When the war-dance was held before we left Montreal,” he said, using the tongue of the Iroquois, that all his hearers of that race might fully understand his words, “when

the war-dance was held, none leaped so high nor shouted so loudly as Fighting Wolf. His love for the Great Father across the salt water was so great, he said, that he could not be happy until his hatchet had struck the Great White Father's English enemies. I believed the words of Fighting Wolf, and I made him chief of my scouts.

“ But an evil spirit has come to dwell in the heart of the Wolf. No longer does he shout for love of the French. Instead, he goes about among my Iroquois and Abnaki friends, trying to persuade them to take up the hatchet against their white brothers. Such are not the deeds of one who loves the Great White Father.

“ I have pondered long what punishment our Father across the seas would have me inflict upon his rebellious son. And because the Father loves all his children, I have decided that he would have none of them punished. Only would he recall the gifts that he has made to the rebellious ones.

“ When we left Montreal, all my Iroquois friends were given new rifles, and full bullet-

pouches and powder-horns. Their old guns, which they themselves had bought, were left at home, for the great king does not wish his children to use up their own possessions in his service.

“But now the hearts of Fighting Wolf and of those who follow him have turned away from the service of the White Father, so they may no longer use his gifts. They desire to return to the English. They may go, for the Father would have none serve him unwillingly, but the guns they carry belong to the king. They must be left behind.”

The French leader paused that the full import of his words might be gathered by his hearers. To be set adrift in the snowy wilderness, scores of leagues from home, without guns, or even bows and arrows, meant but one thing,—death through slow starvation. A sentence to immediate execution would have been more merciful. Looks of grim satisfaction appeared upon the dark faces of the listening Abnaki, as those among them who had understood the words

of De Rouville gave their meaning to the rest. At last their hated masters were to feel the lash of a master of their own.

But among the Iroquois themselves, not a line of their impassive faces betrayed fear or even concern regarding the dreadful sentence pronounced upon them. Warriors who had been trained from infancy to bear the unspeakable sufferings of Indian torture without a moan were not likely to show weakness at the thought of hunger in the woods.

De Rouville, however, had no intention of executing to the full the just sentence he had pronounced. Nothing was to be gained by the death of a handful of Mohawks. Much good might result from the effect upon the Iroquois people as a whole of undeserved clemency. He continued his harangue.

“ Such is the sentence that comes from the mind of the Great White Father. It is just. But the heart of the Father is very tender, even toward such of his children as are unworthy. He will not do harm, even to those who turn against him. There-

fore, that I may do his will, I will allow the Wolf and his followers four rifles and as many horns of powder and pouches of bullets, that they may get food for themselves on their journey.

“The sun is yet two hours above the tree-tops,” De Rouville continued, “and the trail to the long-houses of the Mohawks is open. Let Fighting Wolf and his band follow it.”

No alternative to submission was open to the Iroquois. After a moment's conference among themselves, all but four laid down their rifles upon the snow. Then, without a word to their former allies, the band rose and filed off up the frozen surface of White River.

CHAPTER XXI

THOUGH Fighting Wolf and his band had been permitted to go their way to their old homes on the Mohawk without molestation, they were not allowed to go without observation. Half a dozen French scouts, as skilled in woodcraft as the Indians themselves, hung, silent and invisible, on the flanks of the Iroquois band.

When night fell, the scouts made their camp in a gully, safe from observation. At the first sign of dawn, they were again in position, watchful lest the Iroquois should delay their departure, and seek to join their fellow-tribesmen who had remained loyal to the French.

Apparently Fighting Wolf had decided not to neglect the opportunity of escape from the consequences of his treachery to his allies. With the break of day, he and his band were on their snow-shoes, and, by noon, had covered fully twenty additional miles of

their homeward journey. At this point the French scouts left them, and returned to the Connecticut.

The day had been spent by the main force in hunting, but with little result. A dozen squirrels and twice as many rabbits were divided among more than two hundred and fifty hungry people; scarcely more than a taste to each.

On the following morning the band broke up into fragments. In no other way could starvation be avoided, for the little army must now "live on the country." The remaining Iroquois followed Fighting Wolf up White River to find their way through the mountains to Lake Champlain, and thence to their homes near Montreal. The Abnaki continued their course up the valley of the Connecticut, heading for Acadia. The French were to follow the Connecticut for some distance. Then they, too, would endeavor to find their way through the snowy defiles of the Green Mountains to the valley of the Richelieu.

The allies were thus separated, first into

two, then into three groups, but each of these groups was itself divided into little parties of a dozen or less which traveled and hunted independently. It was every man for himself, or, at least, every party for itself.

No attempt was made by the leaders to form the various parties. The Indians went off by themselves, taking with them their English captives. The French chose their partners, took their share of the meager supplies, and departed.

Perhaps because life was sweet, and because every additional mouth in a party, other than those of hunters, made the hope of preserving it less bright, none of the French attached themselves to the little group that had undertaken to care for Mercy and little Charley. Louis, La Motte, and Perrot continued to be the sole "horses" in the team that Mercy drove.

A very serious consultation was held by the three on the eve of the resumption of the journey. March was now half gone, but a belated cold wave had brought back the tem-

perature of January. Again the snow was firm and dry under the snow-shoes, and again great fires were necessary to make camping in the open endurable.

But fuel was abundant. Perrot had taken upon himself the task of providing it, and his skill with the axe assured a plentiful supply. Wrapped in blankets spread on a soft couch of pine boughs, the two children slept in the warmth of the fire, unconscious of the anxious words of their elders.

“I am not a woodsman.” It was La Motte who spoke. “I must trust you two to guide us through the maze of mountains that we crossed between the Richelieu and the Connecticut. I shall try to do my part on the march and in hunting, but I confess that, unless the sun is shining, I have little idea whether we are going north or south, east or west. But I got some information that may be of value from one of our men who took part in a previous raid down the Connecticut.

“The man said that about two days’ march above here we come to a series of

three great bends in the river, all in a distance of five or six miles. Then, about five miles above the last of these, two large streams, small rivers in fact, flow into the Connecticut, one from the east and one from the west. Their mouths are not far apart.

“A day’s journey up the stream that comes from the west is a lake, two or three miles long, then a high ridge. Some ten miles from the lake is a river that runs into Lake Champlain.

“ ‘It is a long journey down the river to the lake,’ the man said, ‘and a hard one, but there is no easier route.’

“So now you have your chart and your course,” the lieutenant continued. “I fear I should not be able to follow it myself, but perhaps you two can do it.”

“I do not claim to be much of a woodsman,” said Perrot. “I can use an axe, and I can shoot fairly well, but nearly all of my time has been spent on the farm. I am not at all sure that I could find my way alone in strange woods and mountains.”

“Well, Louis,” said La Motte, “the

process of elimination seems to say that you are to be the leader of this party of five. Can you conduct us back to your good uncle's cheery fireside?"

Louis was a bit aghast at the thought of assuming responsibility for the safety of the little band, two hundred mountainous, snow-covered miles from home. There seemed to be no alternative, however, so he answered as bravely as he might.

"I wish some one older and more experienced could lead us," he said. "I haven't spent much time in the woods, and then I was not alone. But the sergeant was a good instructor, and he made me take the lead on the trail a number of times. I found that I had no difficulty in keeping my directions straight. I don't know just why it was, but somehow I always seemed to know in what direction I was going. The sergeant said I possessed a 'gift.' He had it himself, and he said it was worth more in the woods than all the compasses ever made. From your description of the route, La Motte, I think it will not be hard to find. Our great task,

of course, will be to get food enough along the way to give us strength to follow it."

So it was agreed that in all questions of the march, Louis' word should govern.

Then came the matter of subsistence. The supplies on hand were almost negligible: a pound or two of flour, and as much ham.

"We shall have to trust to our guns," said La Motte. "Possibly we may run across some moose or deer. If we could get just one moose, or three or four deer, I believe we should be safe. Otherwise, the squirrels and rabbits will have to feed us. I wish I could exchange this rifle for my good shotgun that I left in Paris. Hitting a squirrel or a bounding rabbit with a rifle is something beyond me, I fear, even if the penalty for missing is a harder stomachache."

"My gun is a smooth-bore musket," said Perrot. "I haven't any small shot for it, but by flattening bullets by beating them on a stone, I can cut them up into little slugs that will do very well for small game. I have done that before, when I ran out of shot."

CHAPTER XXII

DAYBREAK now came at too early an hour for rising. Louis opened his eyes as the gray light filtered through the leafless branches of the trees under which he slept; then he turned over for two hours' more sleep.

It was not refreshing, sound slumber, however. Long continued hunger disturbed the lad's rest. Visions of food flashed through his mind: banquets in Paris, feasts in his uncle's home, and at camp-fires in the woods. Yet, though food in abundance seemed to be before him, always, just as he began to eat, the vision vanished.

At length the hungry boy woke fully. The scent of food was strong in his nostrils. Surely this could not be only the effect of his last vision.

Rolling over and kicking off his blanket, Louis saw the sturdy form of Perrot bent over a large pan that hissed and sputtered

in the heat of the camp-fire. A slight trace of smoke from the dish revealed it as the source of the appetizing odor.

Springing to his feet and peering over Perrot's shoulder into the pan, Louis saw that it was filled to the top with great sections of fish, browning in the heat.

"Why, Perrot!" the lad cried. "Where did it come from?"

Perrot pointed to the middle of the river. There a hole two feet in diameter showed in the ice. Perrot had risen at daybreak, cut the hole with an axe, and, after an hour's wait in the intense cold of early morning, had caught a ten-pound pickerel.

The peasant's fishing had not stopped as he prepared his catch for his hungry companions. Laid over the hole Louis saw a branch of a tree, half as thick as his wrist, from which the twigs had not been trimmed. Even as he looked the branch moved with a sudden jerk, then it began to bend and spring as if some unseen force were endeavoring to draw it into the water.

Running to the hole, Louis found the

force, a beautiful twelve-pounder, another pickerel, tugging and plunging at the end of the line that was attached to the branch. Then with the inconsistency of his kind, the fish suddenly stopped fighting. Louis pulled him gently to the surface, and with a quick jerk, landed him on the ice. Now that it was too late, the surprised fish renewed its struggles, but the lad soon put an end to them and carried his prize to the camp.

“We won’t need to worry about lack of food if we can get a couple of such fish as these every day,” said Louis as he came up to the fire. “I am so hungry, though, that it seems to me I could eat the whole of one myself,” he added, as he squatted on the ice and began to clean the fish he had just caught. It did not occur to the lad to leave this menial and not very pleasant task to Perrot. The leaven of democracy, native to the frontier, was beginning to reach the very heart of the young noble.

“I have always found winter fishing very uncertain,” Perrot answered. “On some

days, the fish bite well. At other times, I have tried for a week without getting any. So perhaps we had best keep that second fish for to-morrow."

Strengthened by a pound of the delicious meat to each of the elders, and as much as they could eat to the children, the party was under way by seven o'clock.

"We have what we might call full rations for to-day and to-morrow," said Louis to La Motte, as they slipped into the simple harness of the sledge. "I think we should drive ourselves hard and try to reach the two rivers that you spoke of by to-morrow night. I don't want to be caught on the Connecticut in a thaw, and I suppose one is likely to come at any time now. If the ice should break up, it would probably take us a week to pull the sledge over the hills a distance that we could cover in two days on the ice, and a week's delay might be most serious to us. When once we get off the main river, I suppose the chance of an early breaking up of the ice will be less."

Louis had reason to urge speed upon his

companions. The biting north wind that had accompanied the cold wave had ceased, and as the sun came above the eastern hills, a gentle breeze from the south began to rustle the long needles of the pines. In it was an indescribable mildness, sure harbinger of an early thaw.

In an hour the snow was soft, and by noon, water and slush three inches deep covered the ice. Progress was difficult, but the urgent need of haste spurred on the marchers.

Camp was made on the west bank of the river, lest a possible breaking up of the ice should cut the travelers off from their route to Champlain. When morning came, the ice was still in place.

The thaw had now set in in earnest. All night long the woods had been filled with its sounds: the rustle of settling snow, the quick rush as a spruce sapling threw off the white burden that had bowed it to the earth. Then, from under the white mantle of snow, came a muffled murmur and gurgle as the brooks resumed their age-long song.

From the river came sounds less musical, though not more portentous: the cracking of breaking ice. Then a ribbon of clear water showed along the bank of the river.

There was now no delay for a comfortable time for starting. Wakened at dawn by the watchful Perrot, a hasty breakfast was swallowed by the party. The march was resumed before the sun appeared. Conditions were better than on the previous day, for the surface water had disappeared through the cracks, as buoyancy raised the now free ice. Over the rough surface, honeycombed by the warmth of the sun, the marchers hurried on in their race with time.

The river was no longer the safe, firm path over which the French and their allies had marched in confidence on their southward journey. For a fortnight, the gradually warming waters had eaten at the under surface of the ice. The cold wave had checked the progress of disintegration, but now that the warmth of the air had come to aid that of the water, dissolution was quick.

No stop was made at noon. The children

ate their fragments of cold fish as they rode; the men ate theirs walking. Minutes were too precious to be lost, for the ice still offered an open road to the north; the hills, covered with wet, clinging snow, were almost impassable.

Had any of the men of the party been raised along rivers that flowed to the south, they would have been forewarned regarding the actions of such a stream as the Connecticut. But Louis and La Motte had lived among the north-flowing streams of northern France, while Perrot's experience was with the St. Lawrence and the Richelieu. None of them thought of danger from the rear; their thoughts and their eyes were fixed upon the goal ahead: the mouth of the river flowing from the west, five miles beyond the great bends of the Connecticut.

The sun was two hours high when the first of the three bends appeared, a mile away, ending a nearly straight reach of four or five miles. Louis gave a shout of joy.

“We shall make it, La Motte,” he cried. “There are still nearly three hours of day-

light, and our goal should not be more than ten miles away. We will have ——”

The sentence was cut short by a cry from Perrot.

The breaking up of the ice on the Connecticut had been under way for two weeks or more. Beginning on the lower reaches of the river, the process had worked rapidly northward. Checked by the cold of the past two or three days, it had since resumed its course with increased swiftness. Hour by hour, it gained upon the travelers who, in their ignorance, looked ahead for danger, not suspecting the approach of a silent foe from the rear. And now, at last, the foe struck.

As Perrot called to his companions, he pointed a hundred feet ahead. There his eye had caught the first appearance of a crack in the ice, a long, dark line that extended far to the right and left. As he looked, the crack was transformed to a ribbon of open water.

Instantly, the three men leaped ahead to

reach the gap while it might yet be passed. But the current of the swollen river was too swift, and, in half a minute, a ten-foot reach of dark water barred their escape.

Blocked in front, the team of men swerved to the left. Twenty feet of open water now separated the ice from the shore, but possibly it was shallow enough for wading. But, before the edge of the ice could be reached, the whole floating mass was broken up by the surging current. So rotten was the ice that few pieces more than a rod square remained.

“We must get on separate floes,” cried Louis. “Perrot, will you take the sledge and the three guns? La Motte, if you will carry the boy, I will take Mercy. We may have to swim for it.”

Throwing their rifles and ammunition on the sledge, the young men seized the children. Even as they did so, the floe on which they stood broke into three pieces. Perrot leaped ahead with the sledge to another block of ice. Louis and La Motte found temporary security on floes not more than a

dozen feet square. Then all three worked their way gradually, as best they might, from block to block toward the shore.

By this time, the floating ice had attained the full speed of the current. With their increased velocity, the floes divided until each of the three men found himself separated, by wide lanes of open water, from his comrades.

For half an hour this continued; then a slight bend of the river to the left caused the ice to move slowly toward the western bank. Anxiously the three watched the slow narrowing of the strips of water. The action of the currents had now brought the three loaded floes in line abreast. Perrot, with the sledge, was nearest the shore, La Motte was separated from him by only ten feet of open water. Louis was fifty feet farther from land.

Passing the bend, Perrot's and La Motte's floes were driven rapidly to shore. With a shout of exultation, the peasant leaped the last few feet of open water, following the sledge which he had thrown ahead of him.

Two minutes later, a similar shout came from La Motte as he also gained solid ground. Then, leaving Charley with the sledge, the two men followed Louis down-stream.

Meantime, the floe on which Louis stood with Mercy had likewise been carried shoreward. Little by little, the spaces separating it from other floating masses closed up. The current was swift, however, and carried the lad and his companion quickly toward the bend in the shore line. Once past this point, the centrifugal force that had caused the shifting of the ice toward the western bank would be lost, and again the eddies of the main current would cause the floating blocks of ice to separate. Louis realized this, without analyzing the causes. He watched the narrowing lanes of water between him and the next floe shoreward anxiously. From twelve feet wide, it became ten, then eight, and finally, after a long wait, six.

Taking Mercy in his arms, the lad backed to the far edge of his ice-cake to get as long a run as possible for his leap. He should span at least ten feet in his jump, for he did

not dare trust the rotten ice nearer than two feet from its edge. Alone, the leap would have been easy, but, with the dead-weight of a forty-pound child in his arms, he knew that all his strength would be required to land safely.

Louis did not make ten feet in the jump, but he did reach the edge of the adjacent floe. As he had feared, the ice broke under his feet, but, with a desperate lunge, he threw himself and the child prone on the surface of the floe. Both were bruised, and Louis was wet nearly to the waist, but they were temporarily safe.

This floe was larger than the one just left; it measured nearly fifty feet across, and extended to within that distance of the now receding shore. Between were two smaller cakes.

Louis saw that, unless he were to face the tremendous risk of being carried for an indefinite distance down the river on his dissolving support, he must act at once. With a leap, he landed on one of the small floes. A moment later, he reached the other, but

the treacherous ice broke under his weight, and the lad, with his clinging burden of humanity, plunged into the icy water.

Louis could swim, but unfortunately he had never trained himself to support another in the water. The best he could now do was to gain one of the fragments of the broken floe and cling to it with one hand, while with the other arm he held the little girl above water.

Chilled as he was by his successive duckings, Louis could not have held long to his support, but of this there was no need. The instant he saw the lad in the water, Perrot plunged in to the rescue. A dozen strong, steady strokes carried him to Louis' side.

"Can you swim in alone?" he asked. Louis nodded his head; his jaws were so set by the chill of the water that he could not speak.

Treading water, Perrot shifted the shivering form of the little girl to his broad back.

"Now, you go ahead, and swim with all your might," he said to Louis. "I will follow."

The chill of the icy water was fast numbing the boy's faculties, but, with an effort, he struck out for the shore. His usually strong strokes were slow and uncertain, and half-way to land his right leg was doubled up with a cramp. But when within a rod of the bank, La Motte reached out to him with a long stick. Grasping it with one hand, the lad was drawn ashore. Perrot followed a moment later.

With Mercy in his arms, La Motte ran for the sledge. Perrot and Louis followed as fast as their clinging, water-soaked clothing would allow. When they arrived, La Motte had already stripped the girl of her wet garments and wrapped her in a warm blanket. Louis and Perrot needed no urging to do the same for themselves. Meantime, La Motte gathered fuel and started a fire. In its glow, chilled bodies regained their normal heat, and blood began again to circulate through numb fingers and toes.

As it would require hours for the saturated garments to dry, thought of further progress on that day was abandoned. The



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usual shelter and beds of pine-boughs were made. To the unaccustomed hands of La Motte fell the task of stripping the young pines of their flexible, needle-covered branches and of cutting down small trees for the shelter, as well as searching out dry wood for the fire. The extremely simple temporary attire of Louis and Perrot, a blanket wrapped about the body, did not permit them to be of much assistance to their comrade.

For dinner, the last of the pickerel that Perrot had caught was eaten. The children then quickly fell asleep in their warm, soft bed.

CHAPTER XXIII

FOR a long time, Louis and his companions gazed thoughtfully into the fire. The mind of each was busy with the problems of subsistence on the journey to the still-distant Richelieu. But it was contrary to the nature of La Motte to sit long in gloom. He broke in upon the silence with a laugh.

“ I must have seemed anything but heroic to you to-day, Louis,” he said, “ to help you out of the water with a stick, as one might a drowning puppy. But it seemed to me that a dry craven might be of more use just then than a wet hero.”

“ The stick was as welcome to me as ever lance of belted knight was to a hard-pressed comrade in arms,” answered Louis. “ I never before knew how cold water could be, nor how the chill of it could sap one’s strength. But now that that is over, I seem to feel all the better for it.”

“The fact that you have had a bath and a good rub-down may account for it,” answered his companion, a bit drily. “Our toilet accommodations, since leaving your good uncle’s house, have not been such as to encourage frequent bathing. I have heard that Russians sometimes bathe through a hole in the ice, but I never heard of a Frenchman doing it, unless he fell in by accident, as you did. So now, Mr. Leader, what are your plans for getting us to the estate of the Seignior Dupuy, where I can get a bath without resorting to such heroic measures?”

“There seems to be but one thing to do,” answered Louis. “The river ice is gone for good. Whether the tributary river you mentioned is still frozen over, is questionable. It seems to me, we might as well break away from the Connecticut and follow a straight course to the northwest. We may strike the lake you told us of. At least, we will be heading toward the lower part of Lake Champlain. What do you think, Perrot?”

“We will gain nothing by following the river,” answered the farmer. “We would lose distance by following its bends, and, after this thaw, we could not expect to catch fish for our support. We might as well strike a straight course for home, and depend on our guns for food.”

As La Motte had no better suggestion to make, the overland route, difficult as it must be, was decided upon.

For three days, the party struggled over the hills of the rugged basin of the Connecticut. Progress was extremely slow and difficult. The melting snow clung to the snow-shoes and made them so heavy that legs cramped under the strain of lifting them. It packed under the rough, unshod runners of the sledge until they ploughed their way through the snow instead of gliding over it. Perhaps worst of all, it frequently gave way over streamlets in the bottom of ravines, and plunged the travelers into a foot or more of ice-cold water.

Six miles a day was good progress under such circumstances. Such distance was at-

tained only at the cost of utter exhaustion, little relieved by the scanty allowance of fish left from Louis' catch, for no game had been encountered.

As the sun touched the trees on the afternoon of the fourth day, a break appeared in the monotonous gray and green of the forest, and soon an ice-covered lake came in sight.

“You guessed well, Louis,” said La Motte appreciatively, as he saw the pond. “Half the time I haven't had any idea which way we were going, but this must be the lake we were looking for.”

It was dark when the lake was reached. Camp was made on the south shore; a supperless camp, however, for all but the children. To them, a morsel of fish and bread was given.

“Thank God we have had food for the youngsters, at least,” said La Motte when the even breathing of the children in their spruce bed showed them to be fast asleep, “and there is enough left to carry them over to-morrow. What we shall give them after

that, I am sure I don't know. The game seems to have deserted these hills altogether. I have seen nothing but one little rabbit in the three days since we left the Connecticut, and he was off like a flash before I could even aim at him."

Daybreak gave an opportunity to examine the lake. Except for a margin of water of varying width, it was covered with ice: the gray, rough-surfaced ice of spring. Perrot scanned the adjacent shore line, or as much of it as he could see. As he was doing so, he was joined by Louis.

"Do you think there is any chance of getting fish from the lake?" asked the lad. "That seems to be our only hope for food, and we can't keep on long without something to eat."

"I don't believe there is any chance of getting fish to bite with the water and ice in this condition," answered Perrot. "But we may be able to get one some other way. Do you see that cove a mile or so to the west, where the edge of the ice is a hundred yards or more from the shore? The pickerel may

be spawning there. If so, I think I can get some of them.”

“ But how would you catch them if, as you say, they won’t bite? ” asked Louis. “ We haven’t a spear or a net. I have heard of Indians catching fish with their hands; whether they can actually do it, or whether it is only another of the wonderful stories they like to tell about their own exploits, is more than I know. At least I am sure I should starve to death before I could learn to feed myself that way.”

“ If I see one not too far away, I can shoot it,” said Perrot. “ I have done it many times in flooded marshes along the Riche-lieu.”

“ Shoot them! ” said Louis in amazement. “ How could you shoot fish that are under water unless you were right over them? Do you mean that they leap out of the water and you hit them in the air? I doubt if even my cousin Margaret could do that.”

Perrot laughed.

“ I am no such marksman as Mademoi-selle de La Ronde,” he said. “ No, this kind

of shooting requires little but a willingness to get your feet and legs wet. You simply shoot at the water above the fish. Then, if he is not too far away, he floats to the surface belly up, and you get him."

"But what makes him float up?" persisted Louis who was plainly a little skeptical as to the truth of the farmer's words.

"I am sure I don't know," answered Perrot. "It may be that the jar of the explosion, or of the shot hitting the water, or both combined, stuns him."

An hour later, the cove which Perrot had seen was reached. As he had thought, a broad belt of shallow water, not more than three feet deep, separated the ice from the shore.

"Let us stop here for a while," said Perrot. "If the fish are spawning, we shall soon see signs of them."

His companions were more than willing to comply with the suggestion. Lack of food was taking heavy toll of their strength. Already, though he had marched only a mile, Louis felt a lassitude like that which

follows long illness. Muscles that should have carried him with a full, easy stride almost refused to respond to the orders of his brain. Even his mind failed to act with its usual keenness. Like an over-worked beast of burden, the lad plodded over and through the sodden snow, pulling his load by leaning his weight against the trace which, in turn, kept him from falling. At the words of Perrot he stopped, threw off the trace, and sank listlessly upon the trunk of a fallen tree. Louis was about spent.

La Motte was in little better condition than his younger companion, but the reserve strength of Perrot, accumulated through long years of strenuous toil, was not yet exhausted. In fact, since leaving camp, to the farmer had fallen almost the entire work of dragging the sledge. Louis and La Motte had been able to do little more than go through the motions of pulling.

For a quarter of an hour, nothing on the glassy surface of the water gave a sign of life beneath it.

“They don’t seem to be spawning,” said Perrot at length, keen disappointment in his voice. “I am afraid we shall have to go on and trust to our guns to feed us.”

Another ten minutes the little party waited, reluctant to give up even what began to seem a forlorn hope. Silence very like that of despair settled over the group. Even the children stopped their usual careless chatter, as their exclamations and questions failed to elicit responses from their elders.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a shout from Perrot.

“There they are,” he said. “A ripple! I see a ripple on the surface of the water.”

He pointed toward a spot a hundred yards to the west. There the smooth, dark surface of the lake was broken by a swirl of water, that spent itself in a series of circular wavelets. Perrot did not wait for a second indication of the presence of the coveted fish. Running along the shore to a point opposite the spot where the sign had been seen, he waded into the ice-cold water.

Reaching a point where the water was up to the middle of his thigh, Perrot's motions became very cautious, lest the sound of a splash should alarm his prey. Suddenly the watchers on the shore saw another swirl, twenty feet ahead of the hunter, or rather fisher. Instantly Perrot fired, then rushed to the place where his bullet had hit the water. He picked up a pickerel, not less than thirty inches long, and another, and another. The great fish were as dead, stunned by the shot, but their captor hurried them ashore, where a knife-thrust made sure of them.

Perrot lost no time listening to the congratulations of his companions. More swirls indicated the presence of more fish, and after a run of a hundred yards along the shore to restore the circulation to his benumbed legs, he was after them. In the course of an hour, he secured no less than two dozen fine pickerel.

Meanwhile, La Motte and Louis had not been idle, and by the time their companion had concluded his cold work, breakfast was

waiting for him and them. It was a simple meal, just broiled fish without even salt to give it flavor. But never was Parisian dinner eaten by the two young men with such gusto. An entire fish, weighing not less than twelve pounds, disappeared as if by magic. Even then Louis craved more, but his stomach simply had no more room.

For an hour after eating, the three men sat in silence around the fire. Like a snake that has swallowed a frog, they gave the entire energy of their beings to the assimilation of the enormous quantity of food they had swallowed. Gradually, however, normal circulation to their brains was restored and, with it, came thoughts and plans regarding the future.

“Somehow we must make these fish feed us for the rest of our journey,” said Louis, the first to speak. “There are enough to give us one a day for at least three weeks. By that time, we should reach my uncle’s home. But how can we preserve them so long, now that the days are so warm?”

“I think our warm spell of weather is

about to end," said Perrot. "Last night, as the sun set, I saw the sun-dogs, and that means cold weather."

"Sun-dogs," repeated Louis in surprise, "what in the world are they, and what have they to do with the weather?"

"Sun-dogs are two glowing spots in the sky, just above the horizon, one on each side of the setting sun," answered the peasant. "You may not have them in France, but we see them in America almost every year. And when they come, whether it is fall or spring or winter, cold weather always follows."

"I hope you are right," answered Louis. "I thought I had had my fill of cold weather for one winter, but if a cold wave will preserve our fish and also freeze this slush we have been walking in, it is welcome."

The atmospheric condition that had produced the phenomenon observed by Perrot soon brought the expected change in the weather. Before noon the wind, which for days had blown steadily from the south, veered to the northeast. Soon snow began

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to fall, in great heavy flakes that floated lazily down like feathers from the breast of a white duck.

Gradually the slush, so trying to the travelers, was buried under the soft new snow. Sledge and snow-shoes again functioned normally, as the party continued its journey through the woods and over the hills that skirted the lake.

It was well that traveling conditions were improved, for the sledge was no longer light. Not less than two hundred pounds of the newly-caught fish had been loaded on it. This, with the weight of the two children, of blankets and guns and ammunition, made a load that, at times, taxed the strength of the "team." But that "team" now worked with a will. No longer did the unspoken dread of starvation combine with actual lack of food to sap the strength of heart and muscle. In spite of the weight of the sledge and the ruggedness of the path, mile after mile was covered, and, when camp was made, it was on the western slope of the ridge that divided the tributaries of the lake

they had left from the waters that flowed into Lake Champlain.

The snowfall, which had continued heavily all the afternoon, now diminished as the wind shifted to the northwest.

“We shall need a warm camp to-night,” said Louis, as he brought in a load of dry branches for firewood. “Your friends, the sun-dogs, seem to have told the truth, Baptiste,” he continued, addressing Perrot. “And we are so near the top of the ridge that we shall have little protection from the wind.”

And a warm camp was made. In the bottom of a ravine, dense-foliaged little spruces, piled thick over a frame of pine saplings, let hardly a zephyr reach the warm couches of spruce-boughs, though a bitter, biting northwester roared through the tree-tops.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ALL the next day the gale continued, with a swiftly dropping temperature. Again the snow was hard and crisp, and the heavy sledge slid easily over its surface. Twelve more miles were covered before the gathering dusk gave warning that another shelter must be built.

The route now followed was down the valley of a large creek that flowed to the southwest. Mile by mile, the size of the stream increased until it began to merit the name of river.

On the third day after leaving the lake, the travelers came to another little river flowing from the south. Fortunately for their comfort, the cold had been severe enough to provide a bridge of ice, and the new stream was crossed dry-shod.

Hardly had the forest on the farther side been entered before La Motte, who was leading, stopped with an exclamation of surprise.

“Look!” he said excitedly. “There is the track of a sledge. And here are moccasin prints in the snow, a lot of them. A large party must have passed here since the snow-storm.”

Throwing off their traces, the men examined the tracks carefully. At length, Louis spoke.

“There is no doubt that a large party has passed here recently,” he said. “They are headed down-stream, as we are. Whether they are whites, or Indians, or both, I am sure I don’t know. If our friend, the sergeant, were here, I suppose he could tell us that, but I confess that, to me, all tracks look pretty much alike.”

“This is probably one of the parties that took the route up the White River,” said La Motte. “They probably are friends, but if they should prove to be Fighting Wolf and his band, I am afraid our scalps would not stay on our heads long after we were seen. Perhaps we had better keep out of sight.”

“We have at least the advantage of being behind,” Louis answered, “and of not

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having to use our guns to get food. We can follow the trail of this party until we have a chance to find out who they are, for we shall see them first.”

Had Louis been more skilled in matters pertaining to the forest, he would have realized that, in all probability, the strangers were maintaining themselves by hunting, and would, therefore, be scattered over a wide area. The course he proposed was full of danger, in case they proved to be enemies.

But fate was kinder than the young woodsman was wise. In the middle of the afternoon, smoke was seen rising above the trees, half a mile down the river. As the party stopped, with the intention of reconnoitering before advancing further, a call sounded from the forest in their rear. Turning, Louis saw four Indians, all armed, advancing along the trail. There was no time to seize the guns from the sledge. The party was completely at the mercy of the newcomers. Thoughts of violence were far from the minds of the Indians, however, as they uttered guttural exclamations of greet-

ing. And as they came nearer, their stumbling steps and shrunken features told the tale of starvation.

When the four Indians reached the sledge, they threw their guns upon it and sank down in the snow. Holding out his hands in piteous appeal, one said, in broken French: "Food—please—we starve."

Relieved beyond measure that the trap into which he had led his friends had proved to be harmless, Louis quickly produced one of the now hard-frozen pickerel. With an axe, he chopped it into thick slices. Ravenously the Indians devoured the icy food. When the last morsel had disappeared, they rose and led the way toward the still visible smoke.

The party to which the four hunters belonged had well-nigh succumbed to starvation. Of the ten men who composed it, but four awoke that morning with strength even to attempt the toil of the hunt. For five days, they had had not a morsel of food. This, of itself, would not have been sufficient to exhaust the vitality of the hardy Indians,

had they not been already weakened by the scanty rations of the preceding month.

While the hunters wandered fruitlessly through the bleak forest, their companions in camp lay listlessly before the fire. No attempt had been made even to provide shelter from the bitter cold. Nature had reached its limit. Like stricken beasts of the woods, they lay on the snow, almost without thought, awaiting the end.

That end would have come quickly had it not been for the one English prisoner in the party. Williams, the minister, was not less hardy than the toughest of his captors, and his strength had not been taxed by long weeks of deprivation. Moreover, there was in the man an indomitable spirit that his less highly developed companions did not possess. They had fought the battle for life valiantly until they thought it lost, then lay down to die. He refused to accept defeat. Though weak as a child, and terribly emaciated, he had succeeded in getting enough wood to keep the fire going, and had even begun the construction of a little shelter.

As he saw the tall form of Williams bent over the fire which he replenished, Louis gave a shout of recognition.

“La Motte, it is our old friend, the minister,” he said. “So this must be one of our own parties that followed after Fighting Wolf up the White River. Well, I am glad it is not that of the Wolf. I don’t believe even starvation would tame him. Like a real wolf, he would be even more dangerous just because he was hungry.”

Now that it was no longer needed, the strength of will that had sustained the minister collapsed. Sinking beside the little fire, he held out his hands with a piteous moan.

“Food,” he whispered hoarsely. “Give me a little food, or I die.”

Again was frozen fish eagerly devoured by white man and Indians alike; by only four of the five Indians, however. One gaunt form, curled up for warmth like a sleeping dog, responded not to the offer of food. Help had come too late.

While La Motte and Baptiste carried the dead Iroquois into the forest, Louis re-

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plenished the fire and soon had a pan full of pickerel frying over it. In a kettle, he heated the ice-cold river water. The combination of the warm, easily-digested food, and of warm drink, together with the heat of a now roaring fire, worked marvels in the sufferers. Two hours after the meal was finished, a huge Mohawk, leader of the party, rose, stretched himself, and announced his readiness to resume the journey.

On the following day, anxiety regarding the now fast-dwindling supply of food was set at rest. An old bull moose and his following of two cows, were tracked for miles through the forest, and finally slain. Part of the meat, an enormous quantity, in fact, was eaten at once; part was allowed to freeze; and part, to be used in warmer weather, was cut in strips and cured before the fire.

Having now no delays due to hunting for subsistence, the combined parties made rapid progress. Continuing down the little river, now not so very little, Lake Champlain was reached in a week. Another week brought

them to the outlet of the lake into the Richelieu. Here the parties separated. The Iroquois and their prisoner struck overland to Montreal, while Louis and his companions followed the course of the Richelieu. Two days later, they were under the hospitable roof of the Seignior Dupuy.

CHAPTER XXV

IT was the middle of May. Soft spring breezes had finally melted the deepest banks of snow in the most shady ravines. Brooks ran full and merrily among banks of cowslips and violets, while robins and wrens busily prepared summer homes for anticipated families.

On the Dupuy farm, spring ploughing and seeding kept the men busy from dawn to dark. The women interspersed gardening with the necessary household tasks, not to the advantage of the latter, but much to the future benefit of the larder.

On a bench beside the door, absorbing the welcome sunshine, sat Margaret de La Ronde with the newest member of the Dupuy family, little Mercy. The seignior, following the promptings of his own generous heart no less than the suggestion of his good wife, had adopted the little Puritan orphan as his own daughter.

Margaret, who from her earliest memories, had desired a little sister, had taken the stranger to her heart. During the wet, dismal weeks following the breaking up of winter, she had taught Mercy to speak French intelligibly, but with an accent that added charm to her simple sentences. Nor had the teaching been altogether done by the older girl. Margaret picked up half a hundred words and phrases of English, while Mercy's chatter gave her a glimpse of a life very different from her own.

Even at her age, the English habit of industry had been instilled in Mercy's mind. On this particular morning, she was busy upon a sampler which she had started two weeks earlier. As a base, she used a piece of homespun linen. Madame Lucille had also supplied enough thread for the lettering.

"There," said the younger girl, holding up her work for inspection. "The last letter of the alphabet is done. Now show me how to spell my new name. Of course, I can spell 'Mercy,' but I never can remember how the letters come in 'Dupuy.'"

“Wait a minute and I will show you,” Margaret said.

Running into the house, she soon came back with a piece of charcoal from the hearth.

“This will do for a pencil,” she said, “but what shall we use to write on? There doesn’t seem to be an extra piece of paper or even a smooth piece of wood around the whole house.”

The girl looked around somewhat hopelessly, for smooth surfaces of any kind were a rarity on frontier farms. Then her eye lightened.

“I have it,” she said, “we will use a muskrat-skin.” Stretched inside out over light sticks of wood bent into the shape of hairpins, a score of skins of the little animals were hung on pegs in the side of the house, curing in the sun. The smooth inner skin was dry and hard. Taking one of them from its peg, Margaret printed on it the words, “Mercy Dupuy.”

“There,” she said. “Now you won’t get it wrong. When I come back next Sunday,

you must have it all done. Then we will get Louis to make a frame, and the sampler will be just like those you told me about that you saw in Deerfield.”

An hour later, Margaret was in her canoe speeding up-stream to her home.

In mid-forenoon of the following day, spring activities were at their height. In the fields, the sergeant smoothed the rough furrows with ox team and drag. Louis and his uncle followed after with hoes and bags of seed-corn, planting the yellow grains that promised to multiply even beyond the scriptural hundred-fold. In the garden near the house, Madame Lucille and her half-breed helper prepared beds of softest loam for the seeds of beets and onions, of peas and beans, seeds which little Mercy proudly dropped or poked into place.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a cry from the forest to the south. Then a lad of ten darted from among the trees.

“The Mohawks,” he shouted, when still two hundred yards from the seignior.

The two words were enough. By magic, the elder Dupuy was transformed from a humble farmer to a feudal chieftain, responsible for the defense of his family and his tenantry.

“Quick, Louis,” he commanded, “take both hoes and corn-bags. Run to the house and get your rifle and mine, and the sergeant’s. Don’t forget the powder-horns and bullet-pouches. Then ring the alarm bell. Dumont and I will drive the hogs and calves into the basement of the house.”

Louis needed no urging to put him at top speed on the short run to the house. But the excited lad acted no more quickly than did his relatives. Even as he darted into the farmhouse, Madame Lucille and her maid, by closing and bolting doors and oaken shutters, transformed it into a fortress. As he emerged with the weapons, hoofs clattered down the lane that led from the pens to the basement of the house, and by the time the first note of the warning bell had sounded, the animals were in safety.

The seignior and Dumont, now armed, set

to work to carry as much of the contents of granaries and cribs as possible to the shelter of the house. When Louis had finished ringing out the alarm, he joined his uncle in this salvage work.

“How about the cattle in the woods, Uncle?” he asked, as he came up to his perspiring relative. “Would you like to have me try to drive them in for you? If I can get them in before the Mohawks come, we shall be just that much better off. If not, I can stay in the forest until the Indians have left.”

“That was well spoken, boy,” the seignior responded heartily. “But there is no need to run the risk of going into the woods. All our animals are trained for this emergency. They will soon be coming in of themselves.”

Even as Dupuy spoke, the lowing of cattle in the margin of the forest announced their approach. A minute later two cows, all that the Deerfield expedition had left to the seignior, broke from the woods, and dashed madly for the barn. In another minute they, too, were safe under the house.

“How in the world do you make even your cattle understand that an enemy is coming?” asked Louis, as his uncle closed the basement door on the cows.

“Salt does the trick, lad,” answered the seignior. “We won’t take time to watch her, but by this time your aunt is giving to each animal a quart or so of salty earth that we get at a deer-lick near here. After this has been done two or three times, the cattle know that the ringing of the alarm means salt for them. Then they come in at the sound of the bell as fast as the most timid peasant girl.”

So promptly had the well-ordered arrangements of the seignior been carried out that not ten minutes had elapsed between the first alarm and the closing of the door on the last cow to enter the basement. For another ten minutes, the work of securing the grain and hay went forward in silence. Then came the rush of Dupuy’s tenants for safety in the little citadel.

All came by canoe, for not only was such means of transport the quickest; it also was

by far the safest, for if the refugees had found the fort already invested by the foe, two minutes would have put them in the comparative safety of the woods beyond the river.

In the canoes were all the movable effects of the tenants: tools, dishes, bedding, clothing. Seated on and among the bundles were the numerous progeny of the peasants, varying in number from five to fifteen, according to the ages of the parents.

No time was lost in unloading the canoes. As each little craft came to the landing, it was run up on the shore, clear of the water. Its owners then lifted it bodily to their shoulders and carried it into the basement of the house. Canoe, cargo, and crew were thus made safe at once.

Half an hour after the alarm was given, all the families that lived on the Dupuy seigniory were safe. As the grain and fodder had, by this time, been carried into the basement of the house, the seignior had leisure to look about him. No sign was there as yet of the presence of an enemy in

the surrounding forest. As the bustle of preparation died down, the wonted silence settled over the woods; silence broken only by the coarse calls of a flock of crows that flapped their way over the newly-plowed fields.

Summoning the lad who had given the alarm, Dupuy obtained the details of his morning's experience. He was one of the numerous flock of Baptiste Perrot. Shortly after breakfast, he had driven his father's cows to the woods to pasture. Boylike, he had not hastened his return. When, an hour later, he reached the edge of the woods that surrounded his father's fields, he noticed a heavy mass of smoke above the trees to the south. Such a smoke at this time of the year could mean but one thing, a burning building. The fire might be accidental, but was more likely the work of Indians.

The boy darted forward to give the alarm, but as he cleared the bushy fringe of the field, a sight met his eyes that, for a moment, held him motionless in terror. Then, true to his frontier instinct, he dropped to the

ground and crawled to a stump from which he could see without danger of discovery.

What transpired on the little clearing was enough to shake the nerves of a person much older than this little lad, for, from the woods and across the fields south of the farm buildings, rushed a score of painted Indians.

They were met by the fire of a half-dozen guns from the house, which caused them to seek shelter behind the stumps of the field. Their first attack had failed. Warned by the smoke to the south, Perrot had gained the shelter of his solidly-built house with the whole of his family, except the one boy in the woods. As he had arms enough for all his older children, as well as for himself and his wife, the task of the Mohawks was not likely to be an easy one.

Realizing that he could best help his family by carrying news of the attack to *Sieur Dupuy*, the lad left his hiding-place and ran as fast as his little legs would carry him to the seigniory.

CHAPTER XXVI

“Do you think we should try to get help to Perrot?” asked Dupuy of his friend, the sergeant, when the lad completed his story.

“It would be a foolish thing to do,” answered Dumont decisively. “We have not more than fifteen men here who could go. If twenty Indians made the attack on Perrot’s house, there are probably several times that many in their entire band, for they would almost surely split into several parties in attacking the outlying farms. They will come together when they try to destroy us.”

“Of course, you are right,” answered Dupuy. In fact, it was the generous heart rather than the wise head of the seignior that had prompted the words. “Perrot has done us a good turn, though,” he went on. “He has checked the approach of the Mohawks and given us time to get ready for them. I wish we could help him.”

As Dupuy ceased speaking, a call sounded through the stillness; a long-drawn halloo, followed by what seemed a name. The location of the sound was uncertain. All strained their ears for a repetition. A moment later it came.

“It is from the west bank of the river,” said the sergeant. “That is an old trick of the Mohawks. They hope to get some one to put out in a canoe so that they can pick him off from the shore.”

“It seemed to me the name was that of La Motte,” said Louis, who stood near. “And I thought the voice sounded like his.”

“Did you expect him at this time?” asked Dumont.

“No,” answered Louis, “still, it seemed like his voice.”

Again the call came, this time very clearly.

“I believe the lad is right, Sergeant,” said the seignior. “It surely sounds like La Motte’s name and voice.”

“It may be so,” Dumont answered, “but it is a risky thing to try to get him across the

river. We cannot expect the Mohawks' attack to be delayed much longer."

"I will go for him," said Louis. "There is no sign of the Indians yet, and if they should attack before I get back, La Motte and I will stay on the other side of the river."

"Go quickly then," said his uncle. "Dumont will help you carry a canoe to the river. If we see anything to indicate that the Mohawks are at hand, we will fire a gun to warn you. And take three or four paddles. La Motte may not be alone, and a difference of a few seconds' time on the return trip may mean much."

Two minutes later, Louis was driving at top speed across the river, and, in another minute, was gripping the hand of La Motte.

The latter was not alone. A strapping Indian warrior, six feet tall, and built like a Greek statue, stood by his side.

"We must hurry back," said Louis, as he released his friend's hand. "But who is your companion?"

"He is a Huron who has been my guide

from Montreal," answered the lieutenant. "But why hurry, and why the question?"

"A big band of Mohawks is in the neighborhood, and has attacked the house of our friend Perrot," replied Louis. "I shouldn't care to have an Iroquois in the house just now, no matter how many times he had sworn allegiance to our king. But a Huron should be glad of a chance to even up old scores."

"No 'doubt, he would fight," said La Motte, "though, from all I hear, the Hurons haven't had much spirit since they were scattered by the Iroquois half a century ago. But if you know of the Mohawk invasion, my trip was for nothing, for that was what I came to warn you of. Word of it came through Mohawk smugglers of Caughnawaga."

"You came too late to warn us but, I hope, not too late to help us fight them," answered Louis, as he shoved the canoe from the shore.

Propelled by three sets of strong arms, the little craft fairly shot over the water. It

had not covered half the distance to the other shore, however, before the sound of the discharge of a rifle came from the house.

“Hurry, hurry,” said Louis tensely. “That must be the gun my uncle said he would fire if the Mohawks were seen.”

Though the water was foaming under the bow of the canoe, the craft seemed to Louis as sluggish as a floating log. At length, though, it grated on the strand. No attempt was made to carry it to the house, but, as a precaution against the Mohawks turning it to account, it was shoved out into the current.

As the three darted for the shelter of the blockhouse, a volley of musketry came from that structure. It was, of course, not directed at them, rather at nearly two score of dark figures, fantastic in war-paint and feathers, that had just come within rifle-shot to the south.

Little damage was done by the fire, for the darting, leaping forms were harder to hit than so many bounding deer. The answer to the volley came not from the guns of the

Mohawks, but from their throats: a yell of exultation as they saw Louis and his two companions.

A dozen of the savages rushed forward to intercept the three; the rest dropped behind stumps and opened a covering fire upon the house. It was an even race as regards distance, but the Mohawks ran over newly-ploughed ground, while their prospective victims had the advantage of a firm, beaten path. Perhaps, too, the fear of capture, with its terrible consequences, was an even sharper spur than the desire for scalps. At any rate, the three reached the blockhouse five yards ahead of their pursuers.

The door opened in the nick of time, and the Huron, Louis, and La Motte darted through the opening in order. The heavy door was slammed shut behind the lieutenant, but, before the bars could be replaced, the impact of half a dozen heavy bodies forced it open again.

With a shout of savage exultation, the twelve Iroquois pressed into the doorway. They were met by as many Frenchmen,

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almost the entire force of defenders other than the women and children. Little use was there now to man the loopholes. If the defense of the doorway failed, nothing else mattered.

Interpreting correctly the cessation of the fire that had come from the house, the entire band of Mohawks left the shelter of tree or stump and swept forward to have a hand in at the finish.

Meantime, a terrible struggle was waged at the open door. The assailants used knives, and tomahawks, and stone war-clubs with an effectiveness bred of lifelong training. They were met with weapons even more effective, that the seignior's forethought had provided for just such an event: woodsmen's axes, in hands that knew their use. Under these heavy, keen-edged tools, a dozen Mohawks went down like cattle in the slaughtering pen, blocking the doorway with their bodies. For a moment, the attack was checked. Assailants and defenders, breathless from the struggle, glared at each other through the half-filled opening. Then

sounded the voice of the seignior, calling apparently to some one on the floor above.

“The water, Lucille,” he shouted, “the water.”

The defense of frontier houses against the attacks of the wild inhabitants of the forest was not unlike that of medieval castles. In both cases, lack of artillery forced the attacking party to depend for success upon assault, destruction by fire, or starvation of the garrison. The last-named method was seldom resorted to by the Indians. Defense against them resolved itself, therefore, into frustrating sudden and unexpected attacks, and of quenching fires on the shingled roofs of the houses.

The wise forethought that had provided water for putting out fires had not overlooked the value of the same element in defense against assault. When the first alarm was given, the half-breed maid had been set to work heating cauldrons of water over the kitchen fire. The moment had now come for its use. As the Mohawks, at least a score in

number, pressed forward to what they meant should be the final assault, a loose plank in the floor of the projecting second story was lifted quietly from its place, directly over their heads. Then, from the hands of half a dozen peasant women, acting under the direction of the quiet-mannered mistress of the house, as many buckets of boiling water were dashed upon the heads of the unsuspecting enemy.

The effect was comparable to that of a blast of grape-shot, or of a modern machine gun, upon a compact mass of fighters. Half a dozen Iroquois, gasping for breath and writhing in pain, sank to the ground, where their tortured bodies received a second and fatal drenching. Three or four others crawled slowly and painfully away, seeking shelter in which to die. The remainder, smarting from burns, but not disabled, ran to the protection of the forest.

The defenders lost no time in clearing the doorway of the bodies that cumbered it, and closing and double-barring the door. Then they took stock of their losses. These were

serious. Three Frenchmen lay dead on the floor. With them was the Huron, La Motte's guide. The Indian had proved a better fighter than the lieutenant had thought. Racial hatreds, pent up since boyhood, had at last found a vent, and the Huron had attacked the destroyers of his nation with the fury of a wildcat. Three of them went down under his tomahawk; then he succumbed to a score of wounds.

Of the dozen Frenchmen who were left, not more than half were unhurt. Two were so badly wounded that, to them, death was a matter of hours. The seignior, whose sturdy frame had been foremost in the defense, had miraculously escaped serious injury, though a knife-thrust in the thigh and a deep cut from a hatchet in the heavy muscles of his left shoulder would have been thought such by most men. Louis, La Motte, and the sergeant all smarted from cuts and bruises, but were not disabled.

The women of the garrison now assumed a rôle more congenial than that of scolding the assailants. Their hands, deft and gentle

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in spite of years of hard toil, staunching bleeding wounds, then applied healing salves and soft, linen bandages. The badly wounded men were placed in beds in the care of one of the younger girls. The women then resumed their assigned posts, to help further in the defense.

CHAPTER XXVII

“Do you think the Mohawks are through?” Louis asked his uncle, as the latter emerged from his bedroom where his wounds had been dressed; and joined him at a loophole. The older man was pale from loss of blood, but his step was firm and his eye bright.

“I fear not, Louis,” he said. “The fellows who made the assault have probably had enough, for I doubt if many of them got away without a taste of your aunt’s cooking.” The old man laughed grimly at his own jest. “But we have seen nothing of your old enemy, Fighting Wolf,” he continued, “and I can’t believe he would fail to have a hand in a raid on this settlement. He seems, from what you told me of your winter journey, to have a grudge to settle with you, as well as with Margaret and me. If he is alive, we shall hear from him.”

“What do you suppose has happened to Margaret?” asked Louis. “As the Mo-

hawks came from the south, I fear she and her family had no warning of their approach."

"One can never be sure what a kind Providence may have ordered, but I fear much that all of that family are dead or prisoners of the Indians," answered the seignior solemnly. "Perrot's boy saw a smoke to the south. That could only be my cousin's house, and the chance of escape from a surprise attack was very small."

As the seignior finished speaking, a chorus of yells burst from the woods that bordered his fields. First came howls of dismay, as a newly-arrived band of Indians saw and heard of the havoc wrought among their associates by the French. Then followed a series of yells, the vindictiveness of which blanched the faces of the women in the house, and even sent a chill through the blood of the sturdiest of the men. It was the terrible war-cry of the Iroquois announcing their determination to exact blood for blood, life for life, the agony of torture for the sufferings of their comrades.

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The activities of the Mohawks now began to show the effects of real leadership. Fighting Wolf was in command. The stubborn defense of his home by Baptiste Perrot had given him and half his force a busy two hours. No amount of bravery and determination, however, could long hold a simple farmhouse against forty well-armed Indian warriors. Baptiste and three of his children had been struck down by bullets as they stood at loopholes. Then a savage assault, and the all too common story of a frontier family wiped out of existence. The escape of the lad who had brought the warning to the seignior only balanced the loss of the little adopted English boy, Charley; for, in their blood-lust, the Mohawks made no distinction of race, or age, or sex.

In their new disposition, twenty Iroquois spread themselves over the black surface of the fields and meadows. Thanks to the precautions taken by Dupuy, no shelter was available for them within a hundred yards of the house. Beyond this limit, however, stumps and a few blackened logs dotted the

ground, and, from behind them, came a long-range, but still dangerous, fire.

Another band, of about equal strength, now took possession of the empty barns and storehouses. These structures had been loopholed for defense, but no men could be spared to man them. In the shelter of these buildings, the Iroquois made their final preparations for the destruction of the block-house.

It was inevitable that the Indians should now resort to the use of fire. The stone walls of the house were impregnable to assault, except at the door-openings, and sad experience had taught the danger of being caught under the overhanging second story. Realizing these facts as well as the assailants themselves, Dupuy sent Louis and La Motte to the stations in the attic from which they could, if need be, throw water on the shingle roof.

As he passed through the attic rooms to his new position, Louis noticed that he walked on earth, not on wood. His curiosity aroused, he investigated with his toe, and

found that the heavy planks of the floor were covered with about three inches of dirt.

“More of my uncle’s foresight,” said the lad to himself. “No wonder the Mohawks have not often been able to drive him from his estate.”

The earth-covered floor was, in fact, the seignior’s last defense against his savage enemies, and their no less savage ally, fire. Upon it, he had staked his life and that of those who looked to his courage and skill for safety.

The two young men arrived at their stations none too soon. Even as Louis lifted the trap-door to which he had been assigned, a sharp “swish,” followed by a thud, told of the arrival of a fire-arrow.

Special equipment for throwing fire-brands had been brought on their expedition by the Iroquois. Half a dozen powerful bows had been provided with a liberal supply of unusually long arrows. From their English allies, a small amount of wire had been procured with which to attach the brands to the arrows.

The single arrow was followed by a dozen others, all shot from behind the shelter of the barns. There was no possible way to reach the senders; all that could be done was to extinguish the fires that were started, before they could spread enough to be dangerous.

To do his work effectively, Louis stood upright on the top step of the stairs up which he had climbed to the trap-door. Immediately the Mohawks opened upon him with a heavy fire, not only from the barns but, it seemed to him, from behind every stump and log within range. It did not need the vicious spitting of bullets on the roof to warn him that his work could not be done in that way. Thereafter, he kept as much as possible under cover, wetting a large part of the roof by throwing water through the hatchway, and only occasionally sticking out his head to note conditions.

The attention of both Louis and La Motte was naturally given to the side from which the arrows came. By accident or intent, however, three of the blazing missiles were shot so high that they landed on the farther

side. Here they flared and sputtered unnoticed and undisturbed. Two burned themselves out harmlessly; the third blazed for a time, died down, flared up for a moment, then expired. Between two shingles, however, appeared a tiny flame, hardly visible in the light of the sun. For a moment it, too, flickered, as if about to die out. But the shingles were dry, and the flame spread, still unnoticed.

Soon there came to Louis' ears, even above the continuous sound of rifle fire, a crackling that grew quickly into a roar. Then, through the open trap-door, a blast of smoke, hot and stifling, smote him in the face. Disregarding the bullets that continued to hum over the hatchway, he sprang to the top of the stairs. A glance at the blazing roof showed that it was now too late to check the flames. Already the shingles were aflame over a quarter of the sloping area; even the heavier planks underneath were burning fiercely.

An outburst of triumphant yells mingled with the reports of guns as Louis appeared

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again above the roof; yells that had been suppressed lest they should call the attention of the defenders to the spread of the flames.

Further exposure of himself was useless, and the lad, sick at heart, again found shelter in the attic. It seemed to him to matter little, however, whether or not the Mohawks' bullets found their mark. Escape from the burning building was impossible, and the end might as well come from a rifle-ball as from suffocation in the flames. And how could he face his uncle with the tale of the disaster his carelessness had brought?

As the lad's foot touched the earth-covered floor, La Motte rushed to his side.

"Quick," he said, "tell the seignior the roof is all ablaze. The fire started behind me, and I didn't see it until it was too late to stop it. But I will try to check it here while you get help."

Relieved, even at such a moment, at the thought that he was not alone to blame for the catastrophe that threatened, Louis sprang down the stairs. A moment later he

reappeared, followed by his uncle. Then up the three flights of stairs that led from the basement, a bucket-brigade was formed, embracing every person in the building not needed at the loopholes, and large enough to handle a bucket.

Steadily water began to pass from the well in the basement to the seignior and his two helpers in the attic. No energy was wasted in fighting the fire in the roof; instead, the attic floor with its earth covering was so thoroughly wet that water ran in streams to the floor below.

By the time the layer of earth had been thoroughly saturated, flames were pouring into the attic through a dozen holes in the roof sheeting. When the supporting rafters began to blaze, the seignior and his assistants descended to the floor below.

“We can do little now,” he said, “but to wait for the fire in the roof to burn itself out, and pray that the earth covering of the floor may prevent it from spreading to this story.”

The sound of firing had now ceased.

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Little use was there for the assailants to waste ammunition upon victims apparently devoted to a death far more cruel than lead could bring. But more terrifying than the roar of rifles was that of the burning roof, punctuated as it was by the sound of falling timbers, as beam after beam burned through. Then, with a crash that shook the building to its stone foundation, the heavy roof-tree came down.

An avalanche of burning brands that came down the attic stairs was quickly quenched; then the seignior mounted the steps. Bucket after bucket was passed to him. With these, he succeeded in extinguishing the burning fragments of timber over a little area around the stairway opening. Then, with the assistance of Louis and La Motte, the flames were fought back, little by little, until they were confined to the top logs of the sides of the house. Fully a quarter of an hour was required to bring the fire in these under control, for it had penetrated deeply into the sound wood and burned with the heat of a blast furnace.

During the fight against the fire, the three men were in full view of Mohawks who watched from the edge of the forest. By crouching low, however, and keeping away from the edges of the floor on which they worked, they were out of sight of all their enemies within rifle range. The savages, enraged at the miscarriage of their murderous plans, poured a heavy fire at and over the house, but their bullets buried themselves in the walls or whistled harmlessly overhead. The Mohawks had lost their fight.

Balked in their main purpose, the Indians vented their rage upon such property as they could reach. A dozen bands set out through the woods to destroy the deserted homes of the tenants. Others ranged the woods in search of the cattle pasturing there. Those who remained made a bonfire of the barns and other buildings that had been their shelter.

Like little children, these Mohawks squatted just out of range to enjoy the fascinating, though terrible, spectacle of the burning buildings. Then, when the last

blazing wall of logs had crashed to the ground, they disappeared with a yell into the forest.

The savages were out of sight but a few minutes, however. When they reappeared, they were laden with bundles of various sizes, the booty of the raid: clothing, guns, kettles, and the meat of slaughtered animals. Thus burdened, they marched along the border of the forest toward the river.

To the watchers in the blockhouse, the retreat of the Mohawks was like the passing of a nightmare. To most of them, the raid meant the loss of all they possessed, except the little they had brought in their canoes. Months of hard labor and years of deprivation would be required to replace what a day had destroyed. But the Indians had been powerless to destroy their seeded fields, and, for this blessing, they were truly thankful.

As the band of Mohawks approached the boat-landing, a flotilla of heavy elm-bark canoes, each paddled by one warrior, appeared up the river. Soon the entire band

had embarked and had disappeared to the south.

The occupants of the blockhouse were too wise in the ways of Indians to relax their vigilance in the slightest because of the departure of the canoes. Their fighting men were too few in number to allow even of the sending out of scouts. They must simply outwait Indian patience or run the risk of an attack by parties that might have been left in ambush.

For hours the forest lay in dead silence. Not even the warning chatter of a squirrel or the cry of a jay indicated the presence of man or beast under its cover. But, as the sun touched the tops of the elms on the western bank of the Richelieu, a chorus of yells of anger and disappointment came over the black fields to the house, and twenty stalwart Mohawks rose from the bushes that bordered the clearing.

No burden of booty had been left to hamper the movements of this band, and as they moved toward the river, the craft that came to meet them were of the finest type of

birch-bark canoe. It was a band of fighters, the chosen companions of the fighting chief of the expedition.

That chief now revealed himself, and no spy-glass was required to enable the watchers in the blockhouse to pick the distorted countenance and athletic frame of Fighting Wolf from among his followers.

Louis Dupuy, watching from a second-story loophole, was the first to identify his old enemy.

“There he is,” he shouted to La Motte who stood at the next loophole. “The big fellow who has just come through the bushes. I knew the old rascal must have had a hand in this matter, though I hadn’t had a glimpse of him before.”

“I see him,” answered the lieutenant, “and you are right. But who is that just coming out of the bushes? He doesn’t look much like a Mohawk.”

“A Mohawk!” exclaimed Louis. “La Motte, it is Margaret!” It was indeed the form of Louis’ cousin that stumbled over the clods in the wake of the chief.

For hours the girl had lain, bound hand and foot, under the trees that bordered the fields, hearing the sounds of the conflict as it raged around the blockhouse, but helpless to aid her beleaguered friends except with her prayers. Her ears, trained by harsh experience, told the story of attack and defense almost as well as eyes could have done. Intermittent reports of guns from various quarters said that the sharpshooting Mohawks were being held in check; the crackle of flames, followed by triumphant yells, blanched her cheeks as if she herself were in the burning building; the hiss of water on flaming brands, followed by heavy fire from assailants and defenders, was to her a vivid story of victory.

While the heart of the brave girl rejoiced at the escape of her friends from destruction, she could not conceal from herself that their successful defense only added to the peril of her own situation. And she well knew what Indian cruelty and revenge could do to their victims.

Whatever might be the ultimate intention

of the Mohawks toward her, they evidently meant no present harm. For the whole of the afternoon Margaret lay unmolested, suffering only from the tightness of her bands and from the clouds of mosquitoes that swarmed upon her. Then, when the attempt at an ambush was given up, her feet were unbound and she was bidden to rise. As a precaution against any attempt to get away, one end of a long thong of rawhide was tied around her neck. The other end, Fighting Wolf fastened to his own belt. He evidently intended to run no risk of an escape. Thus led, like a haltered beast, her ankles and feet stiff and numb from long binding, Margaret stumbled after her captor to the waiting canoes.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IT was a sober group of victors that gathered about the fireplace in the seigniorage on the evening following the battle. The excitement of conflict was passed. Wounds that had gone unnoticed during the heat of the battle now smarted and burned. Deeper still was the hurt from the loss of friends, for faces long familiar on the seigniorage would be seen no more. On many, too, the burden of replacing houses and cattle destroyed by the marauders was already beginning to press.

Louis' mind was intent upon the fate of his cousin. In fact, he had already suggested to his uncle that a party be organized to follow her captors before nightfall. The seignior had disapproved of the plan.

“The Mohawks will be on the watch for pursuers,” he said. “La Motte was probably recognized by some of them who were with you on last winter's expedition, and

they would, naturally, expect a French officer to be followed by French troops. That may be the reason for cutting their siege short. There have been times when they have cooped us up for a week. No, you had best wait until to-morrow, when we shall see what has become of my cousins and of the Perrots. Then we will try to think of some way to help poor Margaret."

There was little hopefulness in the seignior's tone or words. Sad experience with the fate of unfortunates who had fallen into the clutches of the vengeful Iroquois left him little ground for hope regarding his niece.

Louis, with less experience, was more optimistic. "There *must* be some way to help her," he said. "I would be willing to run any risk to do it."

"I know you would, Louis," the seignior replied. "But how could you possibly get Margaret out of the hands of such a force as Fighting Wolf has with him?"

"I don't know," answered the lad. "It may be that nothing at all can be done, but

somehow I feel that I must make the attempt."

During the conversation, the sergeant had sat in silence on a near-by bench. Now he arose and walked to Louis' side.

"If the lad wishes to follow the trail of the Mohawks, I will go with him," he said.

Louis was a little surprised, not at the offer of assistance, but at the fatherly tone with which the usually cold Dumont spoke of him. As a matter of fact, Louis' actions during the day, in getting La Motte across the river and in exposing himself without stint on the roof of the house, had won the older man's heart.

Of resentment, because of the familiar tone used by the sergeant, Louis had none. His old-world prejudices and pride of birth had now completely disappeared, forgotten amid the pressure of experiences in which a man was of value solely because of what he had within him in muscle, in heart, and in brain. Rejoiced to have the approval of such a man as Dumont, Louis shook his hand warmly.

“ I hoped you would go with me,” he said. “ I believe if any one in Canada can rescue Margaret, you can. But are two enough for such a trip? Should we not have at least three? ”

“ It would be much better to have at least three,” replied Dumont.

“ I should like to be the third.” It was La Motte who spoke. The lieutenant had sat in silence before the fire, but had not missed a word of the conversation.

No reply was made at once to the lieutenant’s offer. It was apparent that it did not meet with the full approval of the older men. At length the seignior spoke.

“ I know of no more delicate task that can come to a man,” he said, “ than to follow a war-party in the attempt to rescue a prisoner. On an ordinary journey through hostile territory, a man risks only his own life. If he blunders, he pays. But, in a case like this, a false move, a misstep, a splash of a paddle, may bring destruction, not only to the careless one, but to the very person he is trying to help.”

“ I realize all this,” answered the lieutenant, “ and I know I am not much of a woodsman. Nevertheless, I must, in some way, attempt to assist your niece. If the sergeant decides that I should not go with him, I will go alone.”

The seignior was surprised at the evident feeling in the heart of the young man. Before he could reply, however, Dumont answered the lieutenant.

“ I shall be glad to have you with us,” he said. “ I know nothing of your skill in the woods, though the journey of last winter should have taught you something of life in the forest. But your heart seems to be in this matter, and that, sometimes, means more than skill or experience. Louis is already a good woodsman. We two can take care of the pinches, if need be, and your strength will be of use at other times.”

Louis was rejoiced to have the company of his friend on the perilous journey that lay before him. He knew the loyalty of La Motte’s heart, and trusted to it to supply any lack in woodcraft. In fact, however, as

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he knew, the lieutenant was a much better woodsman than his own words would imply. Of unusually keen mind and observant nature, he had come back from Deerfield well fitted to care for himself amid the dangers of the forest.

“Do you agree with my uncle that we should wait until to-morrow before starting?” Louis asked Dumont. The lad could hardly bring himself to postpone the journey for so long.

“I fully agree,” answered the sergeant. “The Mohawks will keep together, at least until they get well away from French territory. That means they cannot travel fast, for their canoes are slow, good as they are. We shall have no difficulty in overhauling them. They are, no doubt, camped now somewhere along the Richelieu. If we should attempt to pass them to-night, we should be detected at once. By to-morrow night, they should be on Lake Champlain. You noticed, perhaps, that the moon is in its last quarter. By starting early to-morrow afternoon, we should reach Champlain by

dark. Then we will get as far south on the lake as we can before the moon rises. Of course, we may blunder upon their camp, but I think the chances are good that, by keeping away from shores and islands, we can avoid them. When it begins to get light, we will camp at some spot that gives a view of all the channels of the lake. This, we will repeat every night. In this way, we should be able to keep in touch with the Iroquois, without much risk of being seen."

The seignior expressed his hearty approval of Dumont's plan, and the sergeant departed to gather a supply, sufficient for many weeks, of hard bread, jerked venison, and dried fruits.

In the forenoon of the following day, two canoes left the seigniory, bound up-stream. One, especially selected for speed, contained the newly-formed rescue party; the other carried the seignior and two of his sturdy tenants.

An hour brought the party to the farm of Baptiste Perrot. Even before they landed, the sad story of the utter destruction of a

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frontier home was clear to them. A rectangle of white ashes, from which a thread of blue smoke still rose, marked the site of the house. Whitened bones that crumbled to dust at a touch showed, here and there, the relics of its defenders. Half-burned outbuildings, and the offal of slaughtered cattle completed the scene of desolation.

At the clearing of De La Ronde, the destruction had been less complete. Only some outbuildings had been destroyed by fire. The squalid shelter which served as a home still stood, though no smoke came from the chimney of mud and sticks, for the house was tenantless.

Here the attack had been a complete surprise. No intimation of danger had come to the De La Rondes until the war-cry of the Mohawks rose from the forest. It was followed by the rush of two dozen savages across the narrow strip of field to the house. Having no possibility of defense against such a force, the family made for the landing, in the faint hope of escaping by water. But when still a hundred feet from the

canoe, ten or twelve Mohawks rose from hiding behind stumps and logs near the waterfront.

Completely trapped, the four refugees, for Vincent de La Ronde was still with his parents, dropped behind such shelter as they could find. The two men and Margaret opened fire with their rifles. The bullets found victims, but the rush of the Mohawks was not stayed. Thirty of them surrounded the little group, not firing, for they were intent upon prisoners.

Indolent and shiftless as De La Ronde and his son were in the ordinary affairs of life, they had in them the blood of a long line of fighting ancestors, and they met the attack of the Iroquois as valiantly as crusader ever sustained infidel onset. With clubbed rifles they smashed down the guards of the savages. When gun-stocks shattered, they fought with the heavy iron barrels. But such a contest could last but a minute. Tomahawk and knife soon did their deadly work, not only upon the two men, but upon the wife and mother, who was sacrificed to

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the rage which resistance had roused in the breasts of the assailants. Margaret, helpless after the discharge of her rifle, was seized by the Mohawk leader, the cruel-faced Fighting Wolf.

To Dupuy and the sergeant, the story of destruction was told by what they saw in the little clearing, almost as plainly as if related in words. The unburned house, the blood-stained and trampled earth of the field; to men experienced in the savage life of the frontier, the tale was complete.

By mid-afternoon, Louis and his two companions had bidden good-bye to the seignior and had set off on their long journey to the south. The river was smooth, and the day just cool enough to invite them to put forth their strength at the paddles. Consequently, the sun had not yet touched the trees that overhung the west banks before the river widened out before the travelers into the broad expanse of Lake Champlain. A fireless camp was made, and a hearty, but cold, supper eaten, to prepare the travelers

for many hours of hard labor, for, before the moon should rise, they must pass the Iroquois.

During the trip up the Richelieu, Dumont, who sat in the stern of the canoe, had watched with surprise the skill with which La Motte used his paddle. Scarcely a ripple was formed on the smooth surface of the water as the wide blade of wood sank and rose, sank and rose, in perfect time with the paddle of Louis Dupuy, who sat in the bow. With a Frenchman's quick adaptability, the lieutenant, in a few days of practice at Montreal, had acquired a skill little inferior to that of the Indian who instructed him.

Now, as the trio awaited the coming of twilight before starting up the lake, Dumont questioned the officer regarding his experiences with the Deerfield expedition, and on the various hunting trips with which he had broken the monotony of life at Montreal. Before the conversation ended, the sergeant had come to the conclusion that, instead of being something of a burden, as he had an-

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anticipated, La Motte would be of real value in the solution of his difficult problem.

Trusting that the Iroquois encampment was many miles from the northern end of the lake, the start for the night's journey was begun soon after the sun had set, when there were still two hours before real darkness would come. Without incident the party toiled steadily at the paddles, as, gradually, the afterglow in the western sky swung toward the north, and, as gradually, faded from a glorious combination of pinks and blues to a somber gray.

As long as daylight lasted, the three men talked freely, and Louis and La Motte lightened their toil with story and jest, and quick repartee. But when darkness had settled over the lake, all conversation ceased, lest the still night air should carry even the most subdued tone to listening hostile ears. So, for mile after mile, the canoe sped on, silent as the night itself.

Suddenly Louis stopped the steady swing of his paddle and lifted the blade in the air as a warning signal. Then he pointed with

it to a spot which a sailor would have said was off the starboard bow. There his eye had for an instant caught what he thought was the glow of fire, just a point of light against the black mass of forest that rose from the edge of the water, half a mile away.

The canoe was allowed to drift slowly ahead, while all eyes searched the shore. Nothing was to be seen, however. The movement of the canoe had brought between it and the light, if light there was, some concealing obstruction. Dumont was on the point of resuming the journey when again the glow appeared. Only for a moment was it visible, but it left no doubt that it came from burning coals; that Louis had not been deceived, as the sergeant had thought possible, by a phosphorescent glow of rotting wood.

In lowest whispers, Dumont now consulted with his two companions regarding the course to be pursued. There could be little doubt, he said, that the fire came from the encampment of the Mohawk band which they were following. Having now located

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the enemy, it would be comparatively easy and safe to maintain touch with him by keeping on a few miles up the lake, and there camping on some high point from which his movements on the morrow could be observed.

There was a chance, however, that, by going in close to the Iroquois camp, some means of rescuing Margaret could be found. In such a course there was some risk, not to themselves, for they could easily elude pursuit in the darkness, but to their hope of a rescue, which would be thwarted if the Indians were once placed on their guard. His own opinion was that they should go in close enough to the shore to see, at least, how Margaret was treated, and how closely her captors kept watch over her. Even if a rescue were not now possible, such information might be invaluable in some future attempt.

The sergeant's recommendation suited the mood of his young companions, and preparations were made to carry them out. Louis and La Motte silently laid aside their paddles and took their rifles, repriming the guns lest the dampness of the night air might have

made them unreliable. In case of an attempted rescue, it was arranged that Dumont should go ashore alone, covered by the guns of his two companions.

If the course of the canoe had heretofore been silent as that of a bird of the night, it now became like that of a floating spirit as it moved under the slow impulse of Dumont's paddle. But the sergeant would not trust unnecessarily, even to his great skill, in a match with the keen ears of an Indian warrior. A gentle breeze, scarcely more than a zephyr, blew toward the shore. Taking advantage of this, Dumont paddled to a point opposite the encampment, then let the light craft drift slowly shoreward.

The camp was now in plain view. A dozen points of light indicated as many smoldering fires. Occasionally, a fitful flare of flame lighted up the surrounding trees, and showed in silhouette the canoes pulled up along the shore. As the distance decreased, the Mohawks themselves could be seen, wrapped in their light deerskin blankets, and stretched at length before the fires.

With anxious eyes, the three men sought for the homespun dress of Margaret among the skin-clad forms. For a time, the search was in vain, then one of the sleepers, a little apart from the rest, partly threw off its blanket and exposed a cloth-covered shoulder. It was Margaret.

The canoe was now within a hundred yards of the shore, still drifting slowly before the breeze. By a prearranged signal, Dumont indicated that a rescue would be attempted, and the three waited in tense silence for the moment when they could undertake it. Now the shore was but two hundred feet away, now a hundred. It seemed to Louis his nerves must snap under the strain of waiting, when suddenly the tall form of a warrior rose from behind the silhouette of a canoe. It was joined by another, both black against the faint glow of the fires. The Mohawks, usually careless in the matter of watchfulness at night, were apparently taking no chances of surprise while still in enemy territory, and the two men had been posted as sentries. Uncon-

scious, evidently, of the nearness of enemies, the two watchmen moved toward one of the fires, either to replenish it, or to seek its warmth, for the night was cold.

The situation of the three Frenchmen was now critical. So near were they to the shore that the slightest flare of the fires must have revealed the white bark of their canoe. Fortunately for them, the two sentries contented themselves with warming their hands before the smoldering embers, and though one of them faced the lake, and seemed to be looking directly at the canoe, the nearer glow of the coals blinded him to the faint reflection of light from the little craft.

Through Louis' mind now flashed the warning words of his uncle, that in the attempt to help one whom the Indians had taken captive, the slightest slip may work irretrievable harm. Only by chance, or the workings of a benevolent Providence, had he and his companions escaped a situation that would have wrecked all hope of a rescue. Even now, nothing but supreme skill on the part of the sergeant could prevent disaster.

The sergeant, however, was equal to the situation. Silently he swung the canoe around until only its stern was visible from shore. Then, with slow and measured strokes, into which he put the full strength of his sinewy arms, he drove the craft away from the perilous shore. Only when he had gone a full mile did he relax his caution, and allow his companions to resume their paddles.

CHAPTER XXIX

To Margaret, the events of the past two days had been like the disturbed fancies of a troubled dream. So many times had she escaped the clutches of the Iroquois, in the repeated attacks upon her home, that it seemed almost impossible that she was, at last, a prisoner in their hands. The sudden assault, the vain rush for the canoe, the quick death of her relatives; all these had left her brain in such a whirl that she hardly noticed that she herself, securely bound, was led away a captive.

During the long day's journey in a canoe, however, she had time to think calmly about her situation. That her friends would attempt to rescue her, she did not doubt, and she realized that such an attempt must necessarily be made at night. She resolved, therefore, that under no circumstance would she allow herself to go to sleep when the Mohawk camp was in darkness; if an attempt at rescue were made, she would be ready.

After the first day of her captivity, Margaret had not been bound, except that, at night, a long thong of rawhide, tied securely around her neck, was attached to the belt of one of Fighting Wolf's trusted followers.

As this savage was a healthy animal who ate heartily and consequently slept heavily and long, Margaret lay through the nights undisturbed.

Analyzing the situation much as the elder Dupuy had done, she entertained little hope of a rescue at the first night's camp. In fact, on that night she did not attempt to keep awake. On the second night of her captivity, however, all her senses were on the alert for some indication of the coming of her friends. Fortunately, her guardian chose a resting place near the beach, and she was able to lie in such a position as to watch the dark surface of the lake without turning her head.

For hours the girl lay thus, hoping to detect some sign of the coming of rescuers; hoping, yet dreading, for she knew that sentries had been posted and she feared the

would-be rescuers would come only to their own destruction.

As the hours passed, the long strain of looking intensely at nothing began to tell, and in spite of Margaret's resolution, she occasionally caught herself dozing. As she opened her eyes after one of these brief "cat naps," her faculties keen from the momentary relaxation, she thought she detected a slight blur of light against the black background of the night. Then, as the minutes passed, the blur took form, and she recognized the outlines of a canoe. Under the circumstances, she could not doubt that it contained friends.

In an agony of suspense, the girl watched the drifting craft. As the only signal she dared give, she tossed her arm as if in restless sleep. Then she lay still, expecting at any moment the discharge of the sentries' guns. When the canoe turned, and like a spirit passed away into the darkness, a flood of thanksgiving filled her heart. She knew that she was being sought and that the searchers were on their guard.

Again on the following night just before dawn, the canoe appeared, like a phantom craft drifting in toward shore. And again Margaret tossed her arm in recognition. But now she waved her arm in such a way as to indicate that the watchers in the canoe should depart. She hoped in this way, not only to warn her friends that it was dangerous to land, but to establish a simple code of communication.

For four nights was this scene repeated, as the Mohawks leisurely made their way up Lake Champlain. Then came the hard, rough portage up the rapids at Ticonderoga. Launching again upon the placid waters of Lake George, the war-party divided. The greater part, those in elm-bark canoes, broke up into small hunting parties, *cached* their heavy craft, and disappeared among the fastnesses of the Adirondacks. Fighting Wolf and his select band of fighters, with their prisoner, kept on in their birch canoes toward the portage to the Hudson River, near the southern end of the lake.

As the hours of the forenoon passed, Mar-

garet sensed that all was not well in the minds of her savage associates. She knew that provisions had run low, for the voracious appetites of the Mohawks had already consumed the supplies obtained on the Richelieu. But lack of a breakfast could not account for the extreme depression evident in the faces and bearing of the Indians. Little by little, however, from such remarks as she was able to understand, she gathered that one of the Iroquois, a popular chieftain, was ill.

Among these ignorant children of nature, illness was invariably ascribed to the malice of evil spirits. No natural causes whatever were recognized. As a matter of fact, the ailing chieftain, Growling Bear, had so gorged himself on the abundance of fresh meat obtained in the raid, that even his cast-iron digestive apparatus had rebelled. He was suffering from a severe attack of indigestion.

Heartless though the Iroquois were in dealing with their enemies, they had all the sympathy of the children that they were to-

ward those of their own tribe. The troubles of Growling Bear became the troubles of the whole band. Many and grotesque were the propositions made for his relief from the intense pain in his inwards. At length it was decided that the most hopeful suggestion was that for a feast on bear-meat. Possibly the patient's name suggested the remedy, also the fact that he belonged to the clan of the bear, and had an image of this animal tattooed on his breast. Being so much of a bear himself, it was probably thought that the spirits of the bears his friends would eat, would befriend him, and relieve him in his distress.

In a "medicine" feast such as was proposed, however, no half-way measures would be effective. In order that the desired result might be attained, every participant, every member of the band, must gorge himself to the uttermost limit of his capacity; bear-meat must be consumed by the hundreds of pounds. And, of course, it was necessary, first, to get the bears. Half the party, accordingly, disembarked at noon, and spread-

ing out over a front of a mile along the eastern shore of the lake, combed the woods for the desired game. Shouts and the reports of rifles resounded among the hills, and soon a band of a dozen Indians appeared on the shore, carrying, slung from poles, a mother bear and her two cubs. This was a good start, but more bear-meat would be required to insure the effectiveness of the feast. Fortunately, this was forthcoming shortly before sundown in the person of a huge male.

Preparations for the feast were now rushed with all possible speed, and, before nightfall, great joints and slabs of the rich, oily meat were roasting over masses of glowing coals. Two hours later, the feast was in full progress.

Half an hour sufficed to satisfy the cravings of even the empty stomachs of Indians. But this was only the beginning of the feast. Pound after pound in addition was forced down unwilling throats until nature began to rebel. Then, after a short but necessary delay, the process of stuffing was resumed, the feasters being encouraged to even

greater extremes of self-sacrifice by the groans of the sufferer, who, as yet, had found no relief.

Margaret, tied as usual to her guard, after eating moderately of the nourishing food, watched the progress of the feast. Her heart was heavy. The unwonted watchfulness of her captors had made any attempt at rescue hopeless. Now the long journey over the two lakes was nearly over. In another day, she would be beyond the great stretch of neutral territory that lay between the St. Lawrence and the Hudson, and in the land of the Mohawks. Once there, rescue would be almost impossible and she must prepare to meet whatever fate the desires or enmity of Fighting Wolf had in store for her. But as the feasters, one by one, reached a stage where no inducement could get another ounce of food down their throats, and lay back in their places in heavy slumber, a ray of hope came to her mind. If all the Iroquois should get in this condition and the white, silent canoe should again appear, she might escape.

With eager eyes, the girl watched the diminishing number of feasters. Her own guard had long since succumbed, as had fully two-thirds of his companions. Now but three were left, now two, now one. But that one was Fighting Wolf. Anxiously Margaret had watched her captor for signs of failing capacity. To her dismay, she found that the Wolf was making only a pretence of eating, that the great quantities of meat that had been offered him had largely been stuck away under the blanket that was spread over his lap. Fighting Wolf was as alert as ever.

Sick at heart, the girl lay back upon her blanket and turned her eyes toward the lake, whence alone could come help. Her half-formed resolve, that in case the canoe did not appear, she would take advantage of the half-dead condition of the feasters and flee to the woods, must be abandoned.

Hour after hour Margaret watched, straining her eyes until they throbbed in their sockets as she attempted to pierce the darkness. At last she thought she saw the

now-familiar blotch of light. In another minute, she was sure the canoe had come. Then, as a flare of light came from the dying fire, she waved her arm, this time as a signal to come. A moment later the little craft touched the shore and three shadowy forms emerged from it.

Margaret now acted quickly. Silently she slipped from her blanket and to the side of her sleeping guard. In another instant she had possessed herself of his hunting knife, and of her own rifle which he had carried since her capture. A slash with the knife severed the thong that bound her to the Mohawk, and she sprang to her feet. The slight noise made by the girl in her movements had not gone undetected, however, and, as she rose, she faced the Wolf. The savage was on his feet, but as he had not drawn knife nor tomahawk, the girl had an advantage over him, for she held her keen weapon ready for the throw. Her rifle was useless, for the flint had been removed.

For an instant the Wolf stood still, then with a yell to arouse his sleeping mates, he

leaped to one side and seized his tomahawk from his belt. At the movement, Margaret threw, but only grazed a shoulder. With another yell, the savage raised his tomahawk over the now unarmed girl. The little axe fell, but it fell harmless, for as the Wolf raised his arm, three rifle shots rang out and he sank, writhing in death agony, to the ground.

A scene of utter confusion followed. The Mohawks, roused by the noise of the conflict, but stupid from gluttony, seized their guns. Forms of friends, half-seen in the gloom, were fired upon. The fire was returned, and soon the score of savages divided into two yelling bands that shot more or less harmlessly at each other from behind the cover of trees and fallen logs. Before the sounds of this fight among friends died away, Margaret and her three rescuers were far out on the lake, leaving on the strand the half-dozen canoes of the Iroquois, so slashed and broken as to render pursuit impossible.

It is ten years later. Again, on the

Dupuy seigniory, all is happy bustle, for a wedding feast is under preparation. At high noon the ceremony itself had been performed. Louis Dupuy had knelt before the altar with his uncle's ward, the fair-haired Mercy, and Father Gregory had pronounced them man and wife.

As the June sun touched the tree-tops across the Richelieu, the feast began. An even dozen were at the table. At the head was the elder Dupuy, now white of hair and beard, but still ruddy of face and erect of stature. At the other end was Madame Lucille, a little more frail than when we first saw her, but with the sweet peacefulness of her face unchanged by the years. Father Gregory had the place of honor at the host's right hand. Next to him was Louis, with his bride. Beyond the girl sat the sergeant.

On the other side of the table was a whole family. La Motte, now a seignior, in the uniform of a captain of the colonial troops, was separated from his wife, Margaret, by four little La Mottes whose plump cheeks told of the prosperity that their father's

energy and ability had brought to the old De La Ronde estate, his wife's dowry.

When the feast was over and the last toast had been drunk, the elder Dupuy rose to his feet.

“ If I were an Indian orator,” he said, “ I should say that eleven years ago my heart went to dwell with my nephew Louis, whom I wished to succeed me in the possession of this estate. But, a year later, part of my heart was given to the little English girl who became my adopted daughter. I also wished her to be my heir. Now the two parts of my heart are reunited. Both Louis and Mercy have become not only my heirs, but my children, and I am happy.”

Then turning to his nephew, he continued: “ It is many years, Louis, since I first struck an axe into a tree on this estate, to make a home for my wife and child. Through all those years I have held it against drought and storm and insect pest, and the horrible menace of the Mohawk. This task I now resign to you, for you have proved yourself worthy. As I learned, so have you, that

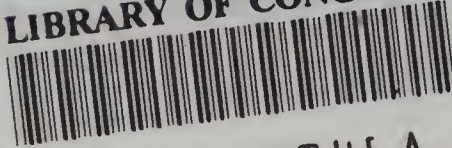
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while rank is honorable, so also is honest toil, and that the worth of a man consists not in an inherited name, but in quality of heart and mind and body: the lesson that this America of ours teaches to those who will learn of her.”

THE END

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