

WITH LA SALLE THE EXPLORER



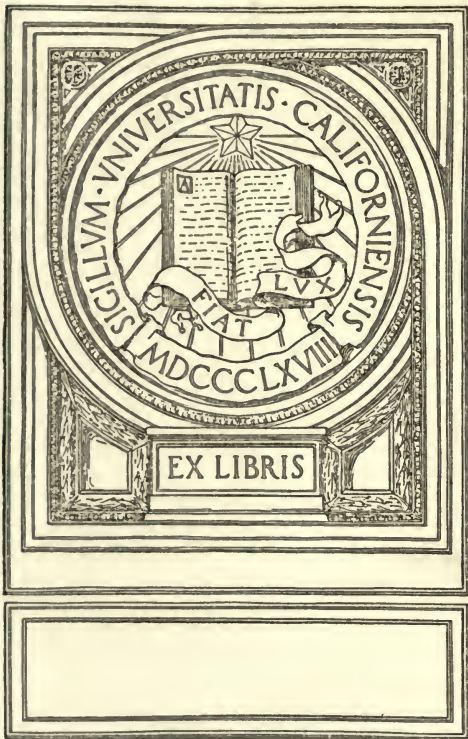
In the name of the most high,
mighty, invincible and victorious
Prince, Louis, the Great

VIRGINIA WATSON






• Henry Pitz. •





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WITH · LA · SALLE
THE · EXPLORER

BY · VIRGINIA · WATSON
ILLUSTRATIONS 
BY · HENRY · C · PITZ



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ILLUSTRATIONS

<p>“In the name of the most high, mighty, invincible and victorious Prince, Louis, the Great”</p>	<p><i>Frontispiece</i></p>
<p>La Salle answered, “That were indeed possible if you are old enough to know what you really desire.”</p>	<p style="text-align: right; margin-right: 20px;">Facing Page</p> <p style="text-align: right;">16</p>
<p>For three days they sailed onward</p>	<p>102</p>
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WITH LA SALLE THE EXPLORER

CHAPTER I

AT THE KING'S COURT



IT was early spring, but the air was warm, and the trees and hedges in the vast grounds of the King's palace at Versailles had already fully unfolded their leaves. Even the blossoms of the horse chestnuts, white and pink, stood erect as the King's guards themselves; and the golden oranges hanging on the dwarfed bushes in their earthenware pots on the Orangerie terrace seemed to announce themselves as the forerunners of the fruit harvest that later would fill the gardens surrounded by their high sun-warmed walls.

It was after dinner, and the King and the Court, heavy with the languor of the spring afternoon, were resting for an hour or so. There was little life to be seen, except for the musketeers at their posts and the gardeners with their tools who were clipping, planting, and smoothing the walks, and every now and then a lackey hurrying on his way from one wing of the palace to another.

But Raoul de Larnac did not find his surroundings dull. When one is twelve and on a holiday little is needed for happiness. Even though one wore the black robe of a seminarist, it could be unbuttoned and held up to permit running. And Raoul, glancing about first carefully to see that there was no one looking on who would censure such undignified action in a future priest, took to his heels and sped down one of the long cross avenues, chasing a royal greyhound who was overjoyed at having a boy to play with. Then there was the wide basin of the fountain to pace slowly around, that he might make his comrades' eyes widen when he went back to school with the unbelievable girth of it. Perhaps the fountain might play that evening, one of the gardeners had said, and that was one of the sights of the world!

It was all so wonderful, thought Raoul, this

perfect garden where no leaf grew out of place, where no one wore a faded garment, where no poverty or unhappiness was to be seen. He had heard men tell how many workmen had labored for years to transform a waste into this splendor, and the thousands of livres it had cost; but this meant nothing to him who had little to do with money. The ease, the warmth, the richness, the absence of all that was harsh, did him good after the long months in the bare, cold cloisters of his school. He sat idle and happy on a stone seat in the sunshine, his head resting against a hedge so tall and thick that it was not possible to see over or through it. He wondered what it would be like to live here as much of the time as did Gervais; but he knew that if he could choose he would prefer to be a soldier like René, his other brother.

While he was reflecting a little sadly that the choice in deciding his future had not been left to him, he heard steps and voices on the other side of the hedge. It gave him a curious pleasure to listen to the firm tread of feet which stopped when they came opposite to him. Doubtless, he thought, the two men had seated themselves on a bench placed in a position similar to his own.

“There will be many dangers,” he heard one

of the men say. The voice was calm and deep, and the boy imagined that it must belong to some great noble; he recognized in it the tone of men who make themselves obeyed.

“Dangers!” the other exclaimed. “Would you insult me? What else have I known all my life, and am I one to be frightened by a word?”

Though the words of the speaker were French and well pronounced, the intonation was foreign—Spanish or Italian, judged Raoul.

“I meant not to reflect upon your courage, Sir,” answered the Frenchman; “that no man in the world might do. But it seems only right that before you agree to this undertaking you should be told of conditions which are different from any that exist in Europe. The Indians’ method of warfare is cruel and treacherous; there are trackless forests which awe even the bravest men, wild beasts and hunger, cold such as you cannot dream of here, and the silence of virgin deserts.”

“What you tell me, Monsieur, adds only to my desire to accompany you,” said the foreigner. “I have no great love for old ways, old wars and old men who must sit at warm fire-sides. There will be novelty, if not glory and gold to be won.”

“Then let it be as you will,” the Frenchman exclaimed heartily, “and in truth, Monsieur, I rejoice to welcome you as a comrade.”

Raoul heard the two palms as they came together cementing the alliance, and then he listened in absorbed attention while the two discussed further plans for their expedition, the ship and provisions to be secured, the funds to be raised, the men who should be chosen in France or beyond the seas, and above all, the importance of the royal sanction. The boy did not stop to think whether he had a right to listen to a conversation which was not intended to be overheard—his whole imagination was fired by the words and names that were so strange to him. They carried his thoughts far away, they made him forget the gray walls of his school, and seemed to beckon him as the sunset glow in the western sky always seemed to call him when he had watched it from the cliffs of his Brittany home.

But there came an end to his daydreams. The voices ceased and once again he heard the firm tread on the walk. When it had died away he looked about for something to do. Hearing the sound of a fife, he hurried to the next cross path, and in the distance saw a body of the King's musketeers marching towards the palace. He

was near enough to admire their bright-colored uniforms and shining accoutrements.

“Should I have been one of them if I were the eldest?” he asked himself but did not answer.

The garden was now astir with gay life. On the terraces sauntered ladies and gentlemen; down the stairways they trailed their silken skirts, smooth hands touching the arabesques of the carved balustrades as they descended, or waving painted, tinselled fans before the faces of their cavaliers in silken garments of bright hues, red-heeled buckled shoes and curled wigs falling over their shoulders. They strolled through every avenue, bits of color more brilliant than butterflies. Music came gently from hidden arbors, and sedan-chairs borne on the shoulders of sturdy grooms carried to farther points of the garden belles too languid or dowagers too advanced in years to walk that distance.

Raoul, by no means the only black robe among all the bright ones, looked on in wonder. Not since he had last seen a Pardon in his native province had he beheld so many people in one place; and then in Brittany it had been a religious festival which brought the folk together, while here it was the gaiety of the King's court.

"Should I have been a courtier?" again he questioned himself.

He listened to the conversation of some of the groups that passed him, and though he knew none of the faces and few of the names he heard, he realized that he was in the company of some of the men who were making the court of Louis the Fourteenth, "the Sun King," renowned and envied throughout all Europe. These were writers, he had been told at school, whose learning and eloquence had never been equaled, and statesmen and churchmen and men of the robe who helped the King to govern France and to make his might feared in all the world.

"Should I have been a writer?" he asked again, and this time answered himself without hesitation. He was sure that he could never have been writer, lawyer, financier, even if he had not been born a noble.

He felt suddenly lonely. There was no one he knew in all this assembly except his two brothers, and he did not care to trouble them until the hour came when they had promised to station him so that he could see the King as he returned from supper. He sauntered down a path which led him away from the laughing, jesting, disputing groups, to none of which did

he belong. After some minutes' walk he found himself at the edge of a narrow artificial stream that wound its way through green banks and on which a couple of white swans were sailing slowly back and forth. Here Raoul sat down and, because he was lonely and felt out of place and at odds with fate, he took a kind of savage pleasure in throwing with all his strength the stones he picked out of the gravelled walk at the hedge on the other side of the stream, at the posts to which a float for disembarking was attached, and at tree trunks behind him. He found a certain satisfaction in this exercise; it made him think of the games he used to play with the fisher children on the rocks near the castle at home. Not since he had left there had anyone cared how hard and how far he could throw. And his thoughts now found their way to the family chapel in the castle, with the recumbent statues of some of his ancestors before the altar, and the little votive ship of silver his greatuncle, who loved the sea, hung up in gratitude for his life which had been saved when the fishing boat had been thrown by a great tempest on the rocks that sawed her in two. He recalled his own fervor in prayer. To all his family, as to all Bretons, religion was a big part of life. He must not forget this, he said to himself; yet he

added in thought, "a big part, yes, but I do not want to give to it all my life."

He continued his stone-throwing even while he was thinking, stooping down every now and then to replenish his ammunition which he held in his left hand. Having exhausted all the other targets, he tried the swans, their wide white backs offering a tempting mark. Each time, though, they escaped, until just as they were coming to a turn in the stream he succeeded in hitting the tail of one of them, which encouraged him. He endeavored to allow for the motion of the bird and aimed his stone at the very edge of the turn. He had been so intent that he had not noticed the sound of approaching voices. The stone shot forth just as a barge turned the corner, and hit sharply the arm of a gentleman who was leaning back against a crimson cushion. Raoul saw him start angrily; in one glance the boy took in the carved and gilded tritons and mermaids that were wreathed about the bow and sides of the barge, the bright shirts of the rowers, the short painted oars that almost touched the banks on either side of the narrow waterway, the silken flag with the Fleur-de-lis hanging from the staff in the stern, and the terrified expression on the faces of the barge's occupants, who did not at first understand whence

had come the missile which had so disloyally touched the arm of his Majesty, King Louis!

Raoul did not need to be told who it was. Though he had never seen the King, his features were familiar from pictures, statues and coins. He was too frightened to move or to speak. Stories he had heard of men who had languished in prison for years for crimes attempted against the King's person flashed through his mind.

A whistle blown from the barge brought a guard running from some nearby post in one of the avenues. At a word shouted from the boat, he laid his hand heavily on Raoul's shoulder. In the meantime the barge had pulled up to the float, and after the rowers had sprung on it, the King, followed by half a dozen gentlemen, stepped from the boat and then to the sward.

"Was it you who flung the stone?" questioned angrily the oldest and sternest of the courtiers, whose whole aspect and tone proclaimed the man of law. Raoul's "yes" was almost inaudible, and it was scarcely spoken before another of the courtiers exclaimed:

"Pardon, Sire, but it is my brother. I pray you to forgive his offense for the sake of the loyalty I bear you."

King Louis looked at Raoul and then at his brother. Then he spoke and his manner and

words conveyed to the boy an impression of offended majesty which made him feel that he could never bear to have the King look at him again; and to Gervais de Larnac the same words and tone were the expression of an unhopèd-for measure of royal clemency.

“It would be strange, *Sieur de Larnac*,” said Louis, “if a child’s heedlessness could make us forget the services his family has rendered the Crown. Let him go free,” he commanded the guard. “And, gentlemen, now dispose of your time as you will since the Count of Savoie has an audience with us. We will see you later in the evening.”

The gentlemen bowed low while Louis of France, the greatest king in the world, walked majestically up the avenue. Then they scattered in different directions, with different purposes.

Raoul still stood motionless, his head bent. Gervais de Larnac spoke in a quiet voice that yet was full of anger: “I brought you here for your pleasure, Raoul, and because I had planned for your future with the hope that the King might some time be aware of your existence and that it might come about that he would give you some rich benefice so that you

might become a great churchman. Now you have spoiled this plan, even if you have not injured me in his eyes, for kings do not like to be hit, even if it be by heedless children. Come," he continued as Raoul did not speak, "come to my room and remain there until I send you back to-morrow to your school."

He took Raoul by the arm and started towards the palace. One of the King's guests on the barge who had walked ahead now stopped for them. "Monsieur de Larnac," he said, "pardon me if I am interfering with family discipline, but I crave your permission to hold a short conversation with your brother. Will you leave him to me awhile?"

De Larnac smiled. He was in reality a very agreeable person except when he had reason to fear that his prospects at court might be injured. The other's manner made him realize that he might be considered to be attributing too much importance to a boy's awkwardness.

"I grant your request with all my heart, Monsieur de La Salle," he answered. "There will be no dungeon here, though Raoul may consider his school one to-morrow. I have so far forgiven him that I will even permit him to see all that he may of the ceremonies of the evening, pro-

vided," here he turned to his brother, "that you do not let His Majesty catch another glimpse of you."

After this he strolled off, humming the tune of a new madrigal, his brown hair curling in perfection, his short mustache high up under the nostrils in the latest fashion, and his red-heeled shoes, his satin doublet and full trousers of sage green and his cream-colored laces, as much a part of the landscape as if the head gardener had planted him and watched him grow.

Raoul would have liked to accompany him; he did not know what this stranger wanted and would have been glad to escape. But the man led the way without speaking to a small arbor or garden house built in the form of a round classic temple, and seating himself on one of the three marble steps which led up to it, motioned the boy to sit beside him.

"Do not fear that I have aught to ask of you," he said. "It was the sight of your black robe which brought back my own youth, for I too wore one for years and like you, looked forward to a life in the priesthood."

Raoul knew that he had heard this firm voice before, yet could not place it.

"I have a great devotion to the Church," con-

tinued the man, "and I have known many splendid priests, but I was not meant to be one. You are of Brittany, though, and you Bretons are more religious than we of Normandy. Did you chose your vocation yourself?"

"No," answered Raoul; "there was nothing else. My parents are dead; my eldest brother René is a soldier, and our small estate is only large enough to support him and my brother Gervais, whom you know. And besides, the De Larnacs have always given a son to the Church."

"And you plan to be a great churchman?" continued the man. "Perhaps this visit to the court—is it your first?" (the boy nodded)—"has awakened in you the ambition to become a court preacher, to make the King and his nobles listen to your impassioned words; perhaps even to become a great cardinal like Mazarin or Richelieu, and to rule France. There are many kinds of ambition," he added thoughtfully.

"No," said Raoul. "I am not fitted for such a life. I wish there were brave deeds required of a priest as in the old days of the martyrs."

"Have you never heard of the bravery and sufferings of the missionaries who have gone to the New World in order to save the souls of the Indians?" asked the man.

The word "Indians" cleared up suddenly in Raoul's brain the dim associations he had with his companion's voice. Now he knew that this man was one of the two he had overheard talking behind the hedge.

"Oh, tell me of them," he begged, "tell me of life in New France. Forgive me that I listened when you and the foreigner were discussing your plans this afternoon. I could not leave, I was so eager to hear them."

"There is nothing to forgive," the other answered, "and now there is no longer need to keep silence about our plans. The King has graciously granted all that I have asked. Our expedition is assured, and Henri de Tonty, whom you heard, a brave and generous Italian who lost his hand by a grenade in the wars with Sicily, goes with me."

"Oh, if I were a man and a soldier," exclaimed Raoul, clasping his hands around his knees and pulling on them until the knuckles cracked, "I would plead with you so that you would have to take me. Tell me, Seigneur de La Salle,—for 'tis so you are called, is it not?—is there no place in the King's province overseas for one who would learn to be a missionary? I would fain save heathen souls, and since I have

been listening to you I have made up my mind that it is not as an abbé or a bishop that I shall serve the Church, but as a missionary. Yet, how can I wait to see the woods and Indians whereof you tell until I have studied so many years here in school? Is there no seminary yonder where they would train me?"

This was doubtless the longest speech the boy had ever in his life made to one of his elders, but his eagerness gave him courage. Suddenly he saw clearly what he wanted to do, and he felt that he *must* make the other understand and help him. La Salle reflected awhile and then answered: "That were indeed possible if you are old enough to know what you really desire and if your brothers and your teachers would give their consent."

"Will you not speak for me, Sir?" Raoul's eyes were as beseeching as those of a dog. "I know not in truth why you have been so kind as to waste on a lad in disgrace an hour you might be spending with the greatest in the land; but if you would only go further in your kindness and help me to begin the vocation I feel is mine!"

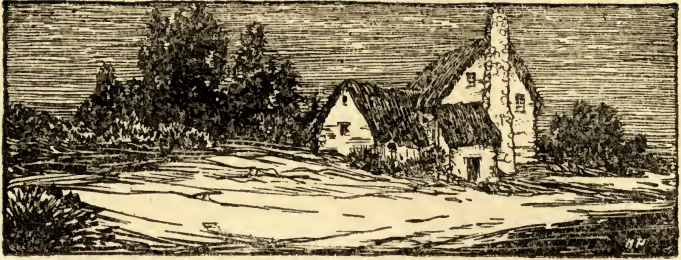
"I scarce know why I did seek you out," answered La Salle, "except that the sight of your melancholy face and your black robe made



LA SALLE ANSWERED, "THAT WERE INDEED POSSIBLE IF YOU ARE OLD ENOUGH TO KNOW WHAT YOU REALLY DESIRE."



me think of my own childhood. You seemed to me like a spring bubbling up in a marshy spot, choked with stones and leaves, and I felt a strange urge to see if I could not clear a bed for the stream to flow through. Somehow you reminded me of a river's beginning, and rivers and their wanderings have always held my fancy." He brought back his thoughts that seemed suddenly to have journeyed far, and continued: "If you desire, I will speak to your brothers and will tell them that, should they be disposed to grant your request, it would give me pleasure to take you with me to Canada and to see you transferred to a school there where you can be prepared for the life you say that you have chosen. Come," and he rose to avoid the gratitude the boy was trying to put into words, "come, or I shall be late for His Majesty's table, to which he has graciously bidden me this evening. And you must not fail to see all the splendor of the ceremonies. The picture of it all is pleasant to think about when I am alone in the wilderness. Weigh it all well, lad, the ease here that can be yours if you will, against the privations, the dangers, the martyrdom, perchance, of the life yonder."



CHAPTER II

QUEBEC

VERSAILLES and its summer glories had faded into the past, and sometimes Raoul wondered if what he had seen there had not been a dream. Even the memory of France was becoming blurred—his surroundings were so different in this New World that the ocean seemed to have cut him off from his old life.

“Waste not so much time at yon window, Raoul,” Father Hippolyte said, tapping the boy on the shoulder. “I’ll warrant you cannot recite the psalm I gave you in penance for yesterday’s idleness.”

“I would,” exclaimed Raoul, “that zeal were all that a missionary required, and that I did not have need to study so long before I set out to follow humbly in the steps of Father Jogues and Father Raymbault, of whose splendid deeds among the savages you have told me.”

“If they had not spent so many hours in study, do you think they could have converted the Indians?” questioned the priest. “Remember, boy, your ambition must not be to save the souls of the heathen only, but to advance the power of our Order. There is no place among the Jesuits for a fool or for one who will not learn. See, therefore, that you waste no more time in gazing out of windows at scenes that are new to you. Indians, trappers, soldiers, even the Governor himself, should be as nothing compared with your breviary or Lives of the Saints. ’Tis by concentration only that your errant mind will be brought to discipline, and not until that is as trained as a steed to harness will we let you go forth to train others.”

When Father Hippolyte had left, Raoul endeavored to obey his command and to keep his mind upon the Latin words. But a bugle call from without drew him once again to the window. A troop of soldiers was passing; the brisk Canadian autumn wind blew their flag so that it flapped in the face of the standard-bearer and reddened the cheeks of men who had lately landed from France and were not yet grown accustomed to the sharpness of air on the exposed cliff. When they had passed Raoul still stood gazing there out at the view which so fas-

minated him. By craning his neck, he could see a number of buildings of the upper part of Quebec; the Castle of St. Louis, from which floated the Royal Standard of France, the Fort, the Hôtel Dieu and the Court House. Below him was the river and beyond, on the other side, the dark woods which he had beheld in his dreams that day in Versailles. The corridors of the seminary here differed little from his school corridors in France; the daily routine of lessons and prayers was much the same, and he was disappointed to discover that he was almost as far from the free adventurous life of the frontier as when he first heard of it the day he listened to La Salle and Tonty. But when he was allowed to go out into the bustling life of Quebec, or when he looked down on it from the window, he was content. He was the only boy of his age in the school; the other students being much older and graver, and as he had no companions, he had much time for thought. There were hours when he was almost happy alone in the chapel, when his fancy would picture St. Stephen in his martyrdom or other saints who had suffered and died for the faith. He would wonder whether he too would be brave if a similar fate should be his, and his heart would beat with a delicious

fear. Heaven seemed at times near to the lonely boy, and very real.

Yet these hours were rarer than the other hours of restlessness, of a kind of mute rebellion against his semi-imprisonment. He wondered what had become of La Salle, who had bidden him farewell as soon as their voyage was over and he had placed his young charge safely in the hands of the head of the seminary. Was it likely, he questioned himself, that he would ever see him again, at least before he was grown? He would give so much to know what he was doing, and to know more of what he hoped to do; for though he had had little talk with him on ship-board, Raoul had only to look at him to be certain that there was some deep purpose which underlay all his actions. One of the older students had said of him: "All he wishes is to make a fortune out of pelts; that is the desire of every settler." But Raoul's lip had curled in scorn for one who could read no farther beneath the surface. He knew that La Salle was a dreamer even as he himself was. But what his dream was—that he still waited to learn.

The sound of footsteps made him turn hurriedly from the window and pick up his book which had been lying forgotten on the stone floor for the past half hour, and his lips were re-

citing the psalm when Father Hippolyte re-entered the corridor. With him was another priest, who wore a heavy mantle and carried in his hand a case filled with medicines and surgical appliances.

“Can you manage a boat, Raoul?” asked Father Hippolyte. “Père Antoine is called to attend one of our tenants in the woods who has been injured. There is no one here who is free to accompany him to-day, so if you can help him with the boat you may go.”

“I am a Breton, Father,” answered Raoul proudly, “and I have pulled a boat since I was five.”

“Then go and get ready; and forget not to take your warm cape,” the priest commanded, “for the evenings now are cold and perchance you will have to spend the night in the forest.”

Raoul was overjoyed to escape out of doors and at the chance of nearing the wilderness which had called him so long. He did not even mind hurrying through the streets in which at another time he would have been so eager to loiter. There was so much to be seen: soldiers off duty swaggering about, gentlemen talking together outside of the Castle, Ursuline nuns in their high-peaked headgear, and here and there a few ladies and children. As they descended

the steep street to the lower town the crowd was even more varied. There were merchants bargaining with trappers and Indians for skins of beaver and fox, their shoulders piled high with pelts already purchased. Here were fishermen with strings of fish swinging from their poles, and farmers from the banks of the St. Charles with baskets of pearly onions and golden maize. It was difficult to realize, thought Raoul, remembering some of the facts that he had been told, that this important, active city of Quebec had been founded only sixty years before by the great Champlain.

When they reached the river's edge Père Antoine spoke for the first time: "Go into yonder cabin and tell Xavier, the boatman, that I am waiting."

Raoul entered the low hut, that smelled strongly of fish and tobacco, and was obliged to rouse the sleeping boatman.

"I will go," he answered drowsily, "but only part of the way, for I must be back here two days from now. From then on you and the Father must manage alone. You look a husky lad, if you are a priestling, and it will do you good to be working your arms as well as bending your knees forever in the chapel."

While he was holding the boat for the priest

to enter Raoul gazed at it in amazement. It was a canoe, and he had never seen one close by, though from the window he had watched them pass on the river. Its birchbark sides were so thin that he feared to punch a hole in them with his foot, and he stepped into it as gingerly as a cat into a puddle. The paddle which Xavier handed him before he himself sprang lightly into the stern was unlike any oar he had ever handled. The river was so wide and so rapid that it seemed to him as if so frail a craft could never make its way through all the rough water. But the training of a sailor came to his aid, and by turning every now and then to Xavier, Raoul was soon able to dip his paddle in rhythm with the boatsman's. He was too much occupied with his work to notice his surroundings. The exercise and the fresh air set his veins a-tingle, and he was happier than he had been for many a day.

After a number of hours they turned into a narrower river. They rested for part of the night, then when the moon rose went onward again. All around were trees, golden and red, of every shade. Here and there a clearing showed tilled fields and a hut, and once a saw-mill that was almost barricaded by logs awaiting its knife. Xavier would call out the names

of the owners, and would break the silence with song, songs of the woods, songs of soldiers, love songs of France, new songs that were to be old songs a century or more later. Raoul too would have liked to sing, but when once he joined in the chorus, Père Antoine's voice rose, chanting a hymn, and Raoul stopped, conscious that for a future priest he had been indulging in unseemly behavior. Now and then Xavier would call out some instruction to him regarding his management of the paddle, and after a while he made Raoul take his place in the stern and pilot the canoe

It was an hour before sunset that they stopped. "I must return now, reverend Father," said Xavier, bringing the canoe inshore. "I have business this night that cannot be neglected." He drew from a loosely constructed shed a smaller canoe and motioned to the others to step into it. "This will take you the rest of the way to Jean Dubois. The stream is not heavy now and you should reach there before dark. Only forget not the rapids half way up and keep well to the right bank. They are very dangerous otherwise."

Raoul would gladly have taken his place in the stern, but Père Antoine waved him to stay where he was, and they set off in silence. The

canoe was lighter than Xavier's boat but their progress was much slower. Raoul could see that the priest was little of a boatman and that he was not able to keep the canoe to a steady course. Once he ventured to suggest that they get out and carry the canoe when they approached the rapids, but Père Antoine bade him be silent. He longed to ask questions about the country they were journeying through, whether it was safe from Indian raids, whether there were wild beasts in its forests, and many other things he was curious about. He saw, however, that the priest's thoughts were far away, that his lips were moving in prayer, and that he was scarcely conscious of his surroundings.

This was evidently the reason why, when they approached the rapids, Père Antoine did not remember to follow Xavier's instructions to keep to the right bank. Suddenly the bow of the boat was twisted sharply about, and though Raoul, seeing the danger in which they were, bent all his strength to pull it back towards the bank, it was too late. The rushing white water was upon them and it tossed the canoe on to a sharp rock in midcurrent that gashed a long rent across its side. The two occupants were borne by the rapids against the rocks over which it threw them. Raoul struggled to keep up, for

he had always been at home in the water; but his force was not equal to the combat. Just before his head was pummeled against a boulder and he lost consciousness, he stretched out his hand to try to catch the long robe of Père Antoine as it floated past him.

It was almost dark when Raoul opened his eyes and tried to recall what had happened. His head felt very heavy and he had no inclination to move. After a while he put out his hand and touched the sharp points of pine needles. The roar of the rapids told him that he was not far from the river. He was conscious that he was very cold and that, in addition to being wet, he had not many clothes on. The rocks and rapids had stripped him of his robe and his stockings. A sudden light in front of him made him start. Someone was building a fire, and against the last glow that lingered in the sunset sky he saw a figure stooping over a flame of twigs which blazed up brightly. The thought of the warmth made him eager to rise, but he felt too sore and bewildered. Then he remembered the canoe, Père Antoine, the rapids and the cruel rocks. He did not know whether he might have escaped them only to encounter worse dangers. He had heard so many tales of savages that the thought

of them came quickly to his mind. However, he decided, no matter what might be going to happen he must get warm first, so he rose slowly and painfully and made his way towards the now roaring fire. To his astonishment as he approached it, he saw that the figure stooping to pick up more sticks to feed it was that of a girl, and a white girl at that. He was tempted to run. He had scarcely spoken to a girl in his life. There had been no sister in his home, and of course no woman in his life since he entered his school. But it was too late; she had turned and seen him and now came running towards him.

“Come,” she cried, “and get warm. I meant to rouse you as soon as I had the fire burning, but you did not wait for me.”

Raoul came as close to the flame as he could get, conscious at the same time of its delicious warmth and of his own shoeless, stockingless condition. It seemed discourteous not to speak, so he forced himself to ask: “Can you tell me how I happen to be alive? Is Père Antoine also saved?”

“So it was he?” the girl cried out. “I saw a white face and a long black robe go down below there into the lower rapids, and no man can live through them. You were tossed by an eddy on

to the beach and I pulled you up to the bank, and when I had discovered that you were not dead I knew that you would perish unless you could get warm soon. Is it better now?"

Raoul nodded. "How did you happen to be here?" he asked.

"It was my father who sent to the seminary for a priest to come to dress his wound. I thought I would go to the landing so as to show the Father the shortest way to our house, and then as I was walking I saw your canoe and what happened. I am Denise Dubois."

The firelight played on her brown hair and sturdy little body, and repeated its own tones in her russet gown and bright red knitted worsted stockings. The spot was so lonely and she so small that Raoul could not help exclaiming: "And do you not fear to roam the woods thus at night? Are there not savages and wild beasts in its depths?"

She laughed. "No, I have no fear; see, here is my good knife." And she pulled a big case knife from her "nun's pocket" beneath her skirt and opened it with a look of pride. But quickly her expression changed as she saw that Raoul was trembling with cold. "Come," she said; "take my hand and run. It will be better for

you to get under cover now, and moreover, my mother will be worrying."

Raoul experienced a certain boyish reluctance to entrust himself to a girl's guidance, but he knew that without it he would have been completely lost. They ran through a bit of the forest, then through open land where he could see dim forms of stacked cornshucks, over a little bridge beneath which whirled a swift narrow stream, and then the light from a window shone through the chinks of the palisade. As Denise flung open the heavy oaken door Raoul saw into a large room with a huge fire burning on the deep hearth. Hams and sausages and ropes of onions dangled from the dark beams overhead, and bright pewter vessels shone on the shelves of the dresser; a spinning-wheel stood in the corner, and two large dogs lay before the fire; and everywhere, on chairs and stools, were people, so many he couldn't at first count them.

"Where is Père Antoine?" asked a woman anxiously.

"He is drowned, my mother," answered Denise. "And this, his companion, barely saved his life. He has need of warmth and food."

No further questions were asked or words wasted. Mother Dubois kicked the dogs gently to make them resign their places to the stranger.

Raoul, after bowing to her, accepted the stool she placed for him and soon was drinking a bowl of hot soup which with a long ladle she drew from a pot on the fire. While he drank he listened to Denise's account of the accident, and gradually he made out that all those present were members of her family: an old grandfather still hale and hearty, two young aunts, Mère Dubois, three small boys younger than Denise, and an older brother of about seventeen. And, in an alcove he had not first noticed, lay Jean Dubois, whose leg had been nearly severed by his own ax.

It was a homelike scene and Raoul, though his head and back still ached, now that he was warmed and fed, could enjoy it. It reminded him of some of the farmhouses he had often visited in Brittany, where, as one of the young noblemen from the castle, he had always been welcome.

"What is the news in Quebec, young sir?" called Jean, his voice strong indeed for a wounded man.

Raoul approached his bed and sitting by his side, told him the odds and ends of news which had come to his ears.

"The fathers at the seminary hold this land," said the honest habitant, "and I must pay them

each year in rent some bags of meal and fish. It is little yet that one can grow in fields where one must carry gun as well as hoe, yet I have not failed to harvest enough each year to feed all these hungry mouths, have I, Rosette?" he asked his wife.

"We have prospered indeed, my man," she answered, and her tone spoke of quiet affection as she leaned over and rearranged the covers. "You must perforce now content yourself with my ministrations since good Père Antoine, God rest his soul, is gone. It is well that the leg had begun to mend just after we sent for him."

"Are there savages nearby?" questioned Raoul, when she had gone back to her spinning-wheel. "I am but lately come from France, and in truth I will confess that I have great curiosity about this new land."

"Jacques can tell you tales all day long of the Indians," declared Denise, who was lying on the floor, her head on the back of one of the dogs.

"Oh! yes, if you want to hear them," assented her older brother. He then began to relate stories of Indian raids, of the massacre at Ville Marie, and told of his own experiences with Indians as traders of furs, and even of his visit to one of the distant missions to the Hurons. Raoul

listened eagerly, and when a log shot out a spark with a loud report he jumped nervously.

"He thinks the redmen are without," laughed Denise.

"'Tis no matter to laugh at, foolish child," said her mother, "though, praise God, we are spared that horror. But no more to-night, Jacques, the young seigneur must go to bed."

Though Raoul had said nothing of himself except that he was studying to be a priest, Rosette's intuition had told her that he was a noble. She bade Jacques make room for him on his own pallet, and before she went to bed herself she tiptoed to the side of the sleeping boys to throw an extra coverlet over their guest.

And when her mother and all the rest were asleep, Denise crept from her bed and went to a small hole which had been bored by the side of the front door, and peered out into the moonlit night, to assure herself that the Indians, about whom she had laughed in the daytime, were not now prowling around the house.

The two days which followed were the happiest Raoul had known for many a month. Clothed in jacket and hose which Jacques had long outgrown, but which the thrifty Rosette was keeping for the babies to grow into, he explored the habitant's farm and its surroundings.

Jacques and Denise made him free of their own rich knowledge of birds and beast. He fished and threw stones with no robe to cumber him, and he ate with a boy's appetite, forgetting the abstinence enjoined at the seminary.

Jacques promised to take Raoul back to Quebec as soon as his father was able to be on his feet again, for it would not do to leave the farm without an able-bodied man. Raoul was glad the kindly habitant's wound was improving, still he could not help hoping that it would not be too rapid a recovery. He had grown accustomed now to Denise's companionship. She was so like a boy in her direct, simple ways, that he was no longer shy with her.

"Come," she said to him the third morning of his stay. "I'll show you a fox's den where there may be some little foxes."

"Where are you bound?" called out Jacques as he saw them skirting the maize field beyond the house.

"To the cave on the hill yonder," she called back.

"Let that be the limit," commanded her brother. "I heard from Paul Lafitte that some Iroquois had been reported skulking up the river. We're not at war with them, you know," he continued, in answer to Raoul's questioning look,

“nevertheless there’s no time when a handful of them mightn’t raise a nice little war of their own against us. Remember, Denise—no farther.”

The two had climbed nearly to the top of the hill before they came to the den. Its entrance in summertime had been almost concealed by the thick bushes which grew before it. Now the first heavy frost had stripped the crimson leaves of the sumac and left merely a lattice of branches. The two children crouched down and peered in. It was a shallow cave, and the eyes of the red vixen looked almost into their own, so that they instinctively drew back in fear of what she might do to protect the little balls of fur that cuddled against her.

“I must show that to Jacques to-morrow,” said Denise, leaning in again as far as she dared, “so that he can set a trap near for the father fox. He’ll make me a fine cap for the winter.”

The word “winter” brought Raoul back to reality, to the life he had almost forgotten in his three days of freedom. “In what direction is Quebec?” he asked. “Again I am stupid, and have lost the points of the compass; the trees are so thick.”

“Let’s climb to the top of the hill and then I’ll show you—and also where the new habi-

tant's house is to be. I do hope he has children of my age to play with."

The summit was an exposed spot and no trees grew there. Raoul felt as if the hill must be like the one he had read of in the Bible from which Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. Only here there were no kingdoms; it was mostly forests that lay below them, with here and there a clearing where smoke rising from a chimney testified to the home of a habitant, or a stream that ran to join the river. Denise pointed out the spot where the canoe had sunk, and Raoul said an inward prayer for Père Antoine's soul. The farmhouse of the Dubois, large as it was, looked like a toy thrown down and forgotten in the forest. Yet to Denise it was all her world, the only world she knew, and to Raoul it was strangely dear. Neither thought of what it represented—an outpost of France's empire.

Suddenly, to Raoul's amazement, Denise disappeared down the far slope of the hill, and before he could call out to ask what had tripped her, he felt a clutch at his own ankles and he was dragged, feet foremost, down into the thicket. He could not see what or who had hold of him, until a large red hand came from behind and bound a strip of soft deerskin over his mouth.

Denise, he discovered, was being silenced in the same manner. Then their captors no longer made any attempt to conceal themselves. They were two braves, one perhaps ten years older than the other. Raoul guessed, from what Jacques had told him of the Iroquois band, that they must belong to that nation which had so often warred with the French and invaded their territory.

The older Indian motioned, and the children followed in the footsteps of the younger brave, down the hill which now rose between them and the house, and into the dense forest beyond.





CHAPTER III

BUILDING THE *GRIFFIN*

“**I** PROPHESED to you truly, friend Tonty, did I not, that day at Versailles?” asked La Salle, as he and his companion stood at the doorway of the rough cabin below the mountain ridge at Lewiston. “I told you that if you came with me on this expedition you would encounter cold, Indians and many dangers; but I forgot to include in them the treachery of one’s own men.”

He turned away before Henri de Tonty could answer him, as if ashamed of this unusual outburst; and the Italian, understanding his passion for reticence, made no comment on his speech.

“What will you do now, Sieur de La Salle?” he asked some minutes later when his silence had reassured his commander. “With a wrecked ship and your stores and ammunition gone, your

plans for a post on the river here are completely destroyed."

"I will build another ship," said La Salle, "and at once. Come back with me here to the portage, and I will point out where and why it is of such importance that we hold this point, in order that our great adventure may not be jeopardized for lack of a strong base in our rear."

To Tonty, brave and cheerful as he was, the situation looked almost desperate. The ship which had borne the supplies for the great expedition had been wrecked because the pilot had disobeyed the orders of La Salle, and only a small proportion of its fittings and ammunition had been saved; La Motte, La Salle's lieutenant, who should have had everything in readiness for La Salle's arrival, had not known how to keep his men in order, even if he were not guilty of stirring them up to revolt, and now, half-blinded by the snow, had been obliged to return to Fort Frontenac; and, in addition to all these troubles, the money gathered by La Salle with so much difficulty was almost exhausted. The glamour of the expedition which had shone for Tonty since his first talk with La Salle in France, was indeed dimmed. The reality was so gray, so cold, so forlorn, that he wondered how his heart could ever have beat with such excite-

ment at the plan. His impetuous southern temperament had been chilled by all the misfortunes which at the very outset had overtaken them.

As he strode along behind the Frenchman on the narrow path of hard packed snow, and looked up at the low-hanging, heavy snow-filled skies, he could not help asking himself whether they had not both been misled by the will-o'-the-wisp of an impossible dream. His loyal nature did not for a second suggest that he should desert La Salle, even if this should be the case; he had given his word and he would never turn back, though the dream should lead them into a morass where they must perish. Nevertheless, he longed for some assurance that he was wrong, that the flame of enthusiasm at which his spirit had taken fire, still burned. And, as if he felt this need, La Salle slowed his step and waited for his companion to catch up with him.

"The path is wider here," he said, "and there is no danger that either of us will disappear into the drifts, as did Father Hennepin yesterday."

A grim smile showed his enjoyment at the picture his memory painted, of the priest, impeded by his robe, struggling to extricate himself from the soft newly fallen snow.

"Like a black crow in a goodwife's kneaded dough," he added.

"It is a dreary scene, Friend Tonty," he continued as they strode along now side by side; "but it is only one step in a long journey which shall lead us to fame, and perchance to riches. My thoughts have taken this journey so many years that they cannot be halted at one stage of it, no matter how dangerous or troublesome it may prove; they *know* that the end shall be reached and they cry out to me to hasten onward. If only I had men all like you, we had been half way there by now."

"But I too have doubted," confessed Tonty, unwilling to sail under false colors.

"What matters your doubt," exclaimed La Salle, "since it does not stay your hands, your feet nor your spirit from aiding me? I would I could find more such doubters."

The warmth of his words cheered Tonty as if the sun had begun to shine again. He did not speak, but laid his iron hand affectionately on his companion's arm. La Salle continued:

"And if you still doubt I do not blame you, for I have enough conviction for two. Shall I tell you how long I have planned this quest of mine, and how I know that I am the one man who can carry it out? It is for me because I

have felt the call of it; no other man had heard it, and no other man can follow unless I lead. Before I first left France, thirteen years ago, when I was only three and twenty, I knew that my fortune awaited me in the new world, and that it was not to be merely that of a fur trader who would grow rich and sit at ease in Quebec. So when the Fathers of St. Sulpice, knowing that there must be watchdogs about their flock to protect it from the savages, granted me my seigneurie above the Falls near Ville Marie (Montreal), I accepted the trust gladly. I chose hardy men for my settlement. I divided my land into portions which I rented to each of them for six deniers and three fat capons a year; I built a house for myself and storehouses and a chapel, erected palisades about them, all for protection against the Indians, and I bought and sold furs, and attended to the welfare of my colony. Was that not a life busy enough for any man, Tonty?"

"You did not find it so," answered the Italian.

"You are right," went on La Salle. "Do you know the name I gave my seigneurie?"

"I have heard men call it 'La Chine'," replied Tonty, his eyes following a fox that was scur-

rying along the bank above them; "but I know not why."

"*China* was to be my goal," his friend explained. "In the long days when I gazed westward beyond the lake and the forests, and in the nights when I dreamed in front of my blazing hearth, I kept thinking of how I might reach the far kingdoms of Cathay that lay somewhere to the west of us, and open to France the way to trade with them for their fabulous riches. So I called my place 'La Chine' as a symbol of my hopes."

He paused for a moment to decide which of the two paths branching before him he should follow.

"During one of those long winters some Seneca Indians, drawn by curiosity, I believe, came to La Chine and spent several months within our boundaries. I welcomed them, for I was ever eager to learn another Indian dialect. And when we hunted or when we sat about our fires they would talk and tell of the deeds of their warriors and their hunters. One day when the snow was beginning to thaw they spoke of a great river which flowed through their country. Once, they said, some of their tribe had set out in their canoes to follow it to its mouth. For eight moons, said their chief, they had been

borne on its waters until they reached a great gulf, the 'Vermilion Sea,' I believe it must be, from whence China—as I reckoned on a rough map I drew with a stick in the snow—could not be a far distant voyage. I have told you already, Tonty, how I made up my mind, how I sold La Chine to procure money for my search for the way to the real China. I bought four canoes, and having laid in many supplies, I set forth with the fourteen men I paid to go with me. And with my expedition went one fitted out by the Jesuits, so that in all we were twenty-four men and seven canoes."

Tonty had listened eagerly to La Salle's account. The Frenchman lived so much in the future that it was generally difficult to get him to talk of what he had done in the past. Even now, Tonty perceived that his thoughts were growing tired of their backward journey. So he spurred them on with the question: "And then what happened?"

"We traveled many days," continued La Salle, "slept among Indians, reached Lake Ontario, were in constant danger from the hostile tribes, and at last, when I had secured a guide, I came to a river which the Indians call the Ohio, and descended it until our passage was barred by a great fall. Another wide river I followed

the next year, but whether it was the one the Senecas spoke of I cannot tell until we have explored it farther. It is for you and me to decide, Friend Tonty. That river calls to me day and night."

"Why did you not go on at that time?" the Italian queried.

"I had many enemies then as now," answered La Salle, "who scoffed at me as a dreamer or as a sordid trader who risked the lives of Frenchmen to make himself rich. I was forced to wait, and the long months and years have been slow, but now at last the day has come, and I shall not let my spirit be troubled by any setbacks. We shall . . ."

He was interrupted by a man who hastened towards them on snowshoes. "Seigneur," he called, "the men have reached the plateau and are waiting for you to point out the spot where they are to begin."

La Salle's whole expression changed from the half dreamy, fixed gaze of the enthusiast to that of the wide-awake man of practical affairs. He quickened his step, crying: "Come, Tonty, let us hasten!"

There was no further talking now; the three climbed the steep sides of the mountain, up which the workmen, laden with tools and such

provisions and material as had been saved from the wreck, had mounted an hour before. As they neared the summit they could hear, even beyond the sound of the men's voices, a dull roar as of far-off cannon.

"The Great Falls of Niagara—a league away"—panted La Salle, breathless with his hasty climb, in explanation to Tonty's quick gesture of astonishment.

Just ahead of them was a black-robed figure, bent beneath a load attached to his back. They called out a greeting as their more rapid strides overtook Father Hennepin, sturdy traveler though he was, burdened by his neatly fitted, portable altar. A huge fire was sending its flames leaping straight upward into the still air, igniting some branches of spruce or the dried oak leaves from which the snow had been blown. About the fire stood all of the men of the expedition waiting for La Salle's command to start work on the first ship ever built by white men on the Great Lakes. With one quick glance, La Salle swept the spot. The frozen mouth of the stream which emptied into the larger river, he saw, was perfectly adapted to his needs, and there was enough timber in the forest to build navies for all Europe. He motioned to the ship's captain, Maître Moyse, and within five

minutes the cheerful ring of the axes awakened every fox, wildcat and deer within a league, and rejoiced the hearts of La Salle and Tonty. Before nightfall there was cleared in the dense forest a space large enough for the two Mohegan hunters to build wigwams, wherein La Salle and his men slept comfortably. Though it was the season when there was little to fear from the Iroquois, who were busy with winter hunting, La Salle set sentries on both sides of the camp, and during the night made the rounds himself to see that they had not fallen asleep and frozen to death.

A day or two later the keel of the *Griffin*, the name La Salle had already chosen for the vessel that was so necessary to the success of his plans, was ready to be laid. In addition to the Frenchmen who stood about, their sullen faces pinched with lack of food, showing little sign of sharing their leader's enthusiasm, was a group of Indians, Senecas, braves and squaws. The building of "the big canoe," they felt, boded no good to their people. "What do they want amongst us?" they asked one another. "Those Frenchmen will cross the lakes in their canoe and trade with our enemies. They will perhaps build more strong wigwams and palisades here where we hunt and fish . . . let us destroy

their canoe before even it is built . . . let us frighten them that they will go away and never return."

La Salle was aware that the Senecas were angry and resentful, but he thought it wiser to pay no attention to them. Maître Moyse stood waiting for the ceremony of the hammering of the first bolt. La Salle took the hammer from his hand and handed it to Father Hennepin.

"Nay, Commander," the priest declined, "it fits not with the modesty of my religious profession. Do you yourself begin the good work and I will pray for its success."

So La Salle swung his arm with a mighty effort that seemed to have back of it all his passionate hopes, and the bolt went true to its place.

Brandy was served out to the men in celebration of the day, and some of the Indians, whose tribe had already learned from traders a taste for "firewater," were given small measures of it. Tonty, to whom the scene had all the interest of novelty, watched the savages as they began to show the influence of the beverage. Some uttered cries that were so like those of animals in distress that he could scarcely keep from laughter; others began to dance, hopping slowly from one foot to the other. One of them, a brave of

middle age, whom earlier in the day Tonty had noted as one of the most talkative, the one most disturbed by the building of the ship, now showed the greatest signs of intoxication. He reeled from side to side, lurched against the tree trunks and white men, and almost fell over the huge piles of felled lumber. Yet as he observed him, Tonty came to the conclusion that the cause of his behavior was not liquor. "He is feigning drunkenness," he cried, but La Salle, whom he thought still at his side, had moved away to point out to Maître Moyse a tree he thought suitable for the mast. "He is up to some deviltry," he continued to himself.

But before Tonty could decide what the brave intended to do, the Seneca had reeled towards the blacksmith, who was heating iron in a small forge. The Indian pulled his tomahawk from beneath his cape and lifted it to brain the Frenchman. Luckily the blacksmith heard Tonty's horrified outcry in time, and lifting up a bar of red hot iron in his pincers, he fenced with it, warding off the tomahawk. Father Hennepin, who was nearest by, rushed to the rescue. His only weapons were words, but they were in the Indian's own language.

"What!" he cried, "you, a Seneca warrior, are not brave enough to kill a foe on the warpath,

but must bolster up your woman's spirit with firewater before you dare lift your war club. Shame on you and on your tribe!"

The rough Father's rebuke was effective. Though the Indian was not guilty of the offense of drunkenness, it had been decided among them that he was to feign drunkenness while he killed one of the white men and so, if this deed did not frighten the invaders away, his tribe could say that it was the firewater which was responsible for what he had done. Now he drew back in assumed shame, and shortly afterwards the disappointed Indians stole away to their own village. Though the Frenchmen expected another attack, and though the Indians sought for an opportunity to destroy the ship or to kill its builders, La Salle's precautions made this impossible.

Father Hennepin now set up his altar, said mass, and all sang the chants in celebration of the day's work and what it signified.

A few days later the white hull of the *Griffin* shone between the dark tree trunks like some strange new monster of the forest. La Salle rested his hand lovingly on its smooth sides as he said to Tonty:

"I hate to leave my *Griffin*, Tonty, but I leave her to you, who will take the best of care of her. I would not go but that it is only

by going I can further our plans. I must show the men I shall take with me where to build the blockhouses to protect our station, and then I must journey back to Fort Frontenac to gather new supplies, since we cannot do without them to take the place of those that were sunk with the ship. You will not lose faith, Tonty, will you? I will return; even death could not stay me until we have found our river."

"Fear not for me, my friend," Tonty answered. "I doubt no more. Your *Griffin* shall be full grown when you return, and her jaws ready for the food you bring her."

Nevertheless, it was with a certain wistful glance that the next morning the Italian beheld La Salle depart. He set briskly to work to drive away his feeling of loneliness and the sound of the hammers stirred him soon to cheerfulness.

La Salle made all speed he could, and having shown his carpenters where to build the blockhouses, continued on his way with only two men. Over the frozen surface of Lake Ontario a dog drew the sled on which the three rode by turns. But the ice was roughened by the wind and the going was slow. The small supply of parched corn they were able to carry was exhausted, and still, according to La Salle's calculations, there

were two days' journey between them and Fort Frontenac. He knew that he himself could go without, but he dreaded the reproachful glances of his men.

As they journeyed, sometimes on the ice, sometimes turning into the forests along the banks, La Salle was conscious of a feeling of unaccustomed loneliness and sadness. It was not hunger, not the wide wastes of the white lake, not even the difficulties behind and before him, which were responsible for it.

"If only I had a son!" His sudden ejaculation surprised himself. For the first time he had put into words the need of some personal affection in his life. He shook his head as if to dismiss the thought and forced himself to recall with gratitude Tonty's loyalty, but did not wholly succeed in stifling this new craving for the love of someone younger than himself who would look up to him, and to whom he too could look for sympathetic understanding of his ambitions.

"I wonder," he said aloud as he strode ahead to mark the path, "how my young priestling in Quebec comes on. That was a youth to make a father proud. If he were not wearing the black robe I would gladly take him with me. I could

tell that in him was the same dreamer stuff out of which God fashioned me. I might have made a man and an explorer of him, if he had not been eager to die a martyr.”





CHAPTER IV

CAPTIVES

RAOUL and Denise were indeed weary before their captors permitted them to rest. They had come many miles from the fox's den, and Raoul was ashamed to note that he was limping while the girl still walked with a springy though slow step.

"It is because your shoes were not made for such traveling," she explained. "If they do not mean to kill us immediately, I will ask them to fashion you a pair of moccasins so that you can walk more easily."

They had thrown themselves down on the moss in the depth of the forest where the Indians had halted for the night. The two braves had evidently decided that they were not yet far distant enough from the habitant's house, and did not light a fire. They took from their wallets some pieces of dried venison and some parched

corn, and after eating a portion, threw the rest into Denise's lap. The children could not swallow the meat, but they chewed enough of the corn to pacify somewhat the craving of their stomachs.

"These are Senecas," said Denise after some memory had come to her of words her father had once spoken. "They wear their hair just a little different from the manner of the Mohawks, the Cayugas, the Oneidas or the Onondaguas the other tribes which make up the Iroquois, or the Five Nations, as they call themselves."

"Are all of them enemies of the French?" asked Raoul, who, though he shuddered at their aspect, could not take his eyes from his captors.

"They are allies of the English and at times they fight us, and always, even in times of peace, stray bands of Iroquois rob and burn and kill in our land."

"What do you think they mean to do with us?" queried Raoul.

He had crawled a few feet away to a rivulet where he filled his hands and drank. He imagined no woodland creature could have been more silent than he, yet both Indians turned their heads and observed him gravely until he had seated himself again by the side of Denise.

"I cannot tell," she answered after reflecting.

"I do not see why they did not kill us at once. We are not rich folks' children—at least I am not," she corrected herself—"and so their taking us would not be a matter of sufficient cause to start up warfare, if that were what the Senecas desired. They have no grudge against my father, for he has never had any dealings with the Iroquois. It may be," she said with a shudder, "that they will take us to their village to torture us at some feast of their demons."

Martyrdom was nearer to Raoul now than when he had dreamed of it in France or within the seminary at Quebec, but he did not welcome it as he had dreamed of doing. Then he had seemed to see it at the end of many years when his hair should be gray. He too shuddered as he recalled some of the stories Jacques Dubois had related.

"Is there any chance, think you, that we might escape to-night?" he whispered, forgetting that their captors could not understand French.

"Not while there are two of them," she sighed, throwing herself back wearily on the ground. "Indeed, I am afraid there is no chance at all, and God knows what will become of us."

She buried her face in the dried leaves and Raoul could hear her muffled sobs. He had almost forgotten that she was a girl. During the

past few days he had accepted her leadership and still relied upon her superior knowledge of Indian ways. She had been so brave, so hardy, so uncomplaining, that he was surprised by this outburst. All the chivalry in him was aroused by her need. He leaned over and patted her shoulder, saying softly. "Don't cry, Denise, I will take care of you. Don't let them hear you."

His tone rather than his words comforted her. Neither of them was amused at the impossibility of a defenseless boy's getting the better of two Seneca braves. Both children were trembling with fright but both tried valiantly to conceal their terror. They talked in whispers and agreed that each should keep awake part of the night, so that even if no chance for escape should come, their fate, whatever it might be, would not fall upon them in sleep. The night was cold, and at Denise's suggestion, they gathered armfuls of leaves, which were luckily quite dry, and Raoul covered Denise with them, and then, lying down between her and their captors, pulled up as many over his own legs as he could reach. He was to watch the first part of the night, but soon after Denise had fallen asleep his eyes closed and he too lost consciousness.

He was awakened by a hand on his shoulder. He sprang up startled. It was dawn. The

younger Indian pointed to Denise, and Raoul leaned over and called to her. She too could scarcely keep from crying when she saw the Indians. At the command of the other Seneca, the two children took their places between the braves and were glad to walk briskly to warm their legs cramped with the cold of the night. Now and then the Indians called out a word, but for the most part the little procession moved in silence.

“Can you understand what they say?” asked Raoul.

“Many of the words,” she answered. “I used to talk with some of the hunters who came to trade with father, and their language is not very different. They say they will stop for food when the sun is up an hour.”

It was beside a stream that they made their halt for breakfast. The younger Seneca, Red Wing, pulled a sinew line and a bone hook from his wallet, and almost before the bait touched the water, there was a large pike flapping on the rocky beach.

“Build a fire and cook it, squaw child,” he commanded. Denise lost no time in gathering bits of twigs together. But she could not light it, and Red Wing, with a look of disdain, took a pointed stick and twirled it rapidly about in a

rotten log until a spark came. Raoul looked on with great interest, forgetting for a moment their danger in this bit of woodcraft.

Old Wolf and Red Wing devoured the fish and bits of dried venison, and when they had finished tossed what was left to the children, who did not complain of a lack of ceremony or lack of plates, or even of salt. They ate their food almost as greedily as had the savages. It might be they were to be killed within an hour, but at any rate, all they could think of for the moment was their hunger.

Before they had finished the Indians were off again, and Raoul and Denise hurried along, keeping their last piece of venison to chew on as they went.

"Can you tell which way we are going?" asked Raoul after they had been walking an hour or more.

"Southward," she answered without hesitation.

"How do you know?" he asked, ashamed that he must confess to her his ignorance, but eager to learn what she could teach him.

"By the trees. See the moss, that keeps them warm on the side where they face the north wind."

It was noon when they came out from the for-

est to the bank of a river. Red Wing, like a pointer that finds his way direct to a fallen bird, made straight through underbrush that seemed impenetrable to a hidden canoe. He carried it down to the water.

“Enter,” he ordered, and Raoul and Denise, abandoning now the hope which had kept them up all that day that Jacques Dubois and other habitants might be following after to rescue them, stepped into the boat. The two Indians at the bow and stern took the paddles and the canoe traveled faster than any boat Raoul had ever seen, though the Senecas seemed to be making no great effort. Not until nightfall did they halt, when there was more venison and parched corn. Raoul and Denise slept not more soundly, but more comfortably, as the warmth of the fire Red Wing lighted was very grateful. Again Raoul tried to keep awake, but the long journey in the open air had made him sleepy, and the fact that two days had gone by and they were still alive assured him that their captors had evidently no intention of killing them immediately.

The next day was much like the foregoing, except that their journey was broken by certain portages. The Senecas carried the canoe on their heads and Raoul and Denise, finding in

certain sunny spots some wild grapes still untouched by the frost, plucked and ate them as they went along, glad to vary the monotony of their diet.

“What can they want with us?” again Denise put the question they had asked each other fifty times since their captivity began.

“How would it do to ask them?” suggested Raoul. “To-night when we make camp put the question to them. I would gladly do it, Denise, if I but spoke their tongue. I have listened to them to-day and I have caught the words for ‘fish,’ ‘canoe,’ ‘hurry’.”

Denise promised, and that night when Raoul, proud of his success in lighting the fire, was helping Red Wing to broil the trout he had just caught, Denise bravely faced Old Wolf who was resting against a tree trunk.

“What do you plan to do with us, warrior of the Senecas?” she asked. “There is neither glory to be gained by slaying children nor wampum to be earned.”

Though she trembled inwardly as the brave’s imperturbable gaze rested upon her, the girl did not show it, and Raoul, who had left the fire to stand beside her to share whatever danger her bold words might call down, imagined that the Indian was not displeased at the spirit she

showed. But the Seneca did not answer. He rose, approached the fire, seized one of the trout and began eating it, and the baffled children could find nothing better to do than follow his example.

If it had not been for the uncertainty and anxiety, Raoul would have enjoyed these days that followed—the long, quiet hours on rapid rivers or in the silent forest, the joy of rest at night, the zest for food, the freedom of body and mind unharassed by the minute rules of his school and seminary life. He liked too to talk to Denise, who in her few years had accumulated what seemed to him a vast store of knowledge about birds and beasts, weather and the ways of the winds. She was so generous too in the way she imparted it, never seeming conscious of any superiority over him. Many times at night before she fell asleep, or in the daytime when the Indians were not near enough to overhear, he heard her choke back a sob. Then he would comfort her with words or a clasp of his hand. In low tones as they lay at the bottom of the canoe he would tell her stories of his boy life in Brittany, of his school, of his brothers, and of the old castle. But best of all she liked to hear of Versailles, the great palace, and of the King as he

had seen him in all his magnificence, surrounded by his courtiers.

“And you hit His Majesty?” she would exclaim in horror. “I should think you would have been frightened to death.”

He told her too of his meeting with La Salle and how it was he who had been the cause of his leaving old France for New France. Denise had heard much talk, she told him, among the habitant neighbors of that seigneur whom the Governor, Count Frontenac, had delighted to honor. And Denise on her part talked of her home, of her father and mother, of her brothers, of the dog, of her chickens, her rabbit, lovingly, sadly, as if she had been parted from them for years. Yet even her thoughts of home did not keep her from delighting in any sudden new sight, an eagle that dived down not far from them and then soared up again with a silver fish in his claws; a young bear cub shoved by his mischievous brother, whom they caught sight of rolling head-foremost down a smooth rock to a sandy beach below, or a strange brilliant flower in a swamp.

And all the time they talked of the possibility of making an escape. By day they knew that there was no chance. They decided that they must make an attempt soon if they would hope

to find their way back through the forest. They had of course no boat and their only plan was, if they managed to get away, to follow the course of the rivers. Every night Raoul would practise getting up as noiselessly as he could, and then when a grunt from the Indians showed that they were aware of his movements, he would stamp about as if he had risen only in order to stretch his legs or to warm himself.

One night to his astonishment he succeeded better. There was no sound from the Senecas, so he crept off a number of paces until he felt that he was safely out of hearing and tried in the dim moonlight to discover in which direction lay the north. When he had satisfied himself that he knew he crept back, his heart beating with excitement.

The next morning when they were in the canoe he told Denise. "We must try to-night," he added, "if everything goes well. I believe that they have no idea that we shall attempt to escape and so do not think it necessary longer to watch us. Even in these few days I have learned much, and I think we can find our way and can keep alive on the fish I can catch with the extra hook and line Red Wing dropped and I found yesterday. Are you willing to try, Denise?"

“Indeed, yes,” she replied heartily. “We shall do our best and the saints will help us.”

Their resting place that evening was well adapted to their scheme. It was up a slight hillock above the river where the pine forest was freer of underbrush than they had seen it before, and a waterfall, very noisy for its height, helped dull all other sounds. Raoul studied his surroundings carefully and laid out in his mind the exact direction they would take, choosing even the particular trees which were to serve him for landmarks in the first faint light of the moon when he meant to start.

There was no trouble that night in keeping awake. He listened to every sound, to the quiet breathing of Denise and to the muttered words of the Senecas before they went to sleep, and to the blessed gurgling and splashing of his friend, the waterfall. It was perhaps an hour later when he touched Denise, who awoke instantly. There was no need of any word; it had all been arranged beforehand. They both began to crawl slowly and silently forward on their faces, stopping every second to listen. It was almost dark, with just enough light to distinguish the outlines of the trees. The waterfall's splash seemed to fill all the forest. Slowly and surely the children had entered the fringe of pines

which bordered their camp, and after another pause during which Raoul strained his ears, he rose to his feet. Denise followed his example and then, putting down each foot carefully so that it would not dislodge a twig or stone, they hurried on as best they might.

At last they were far enough away to run.

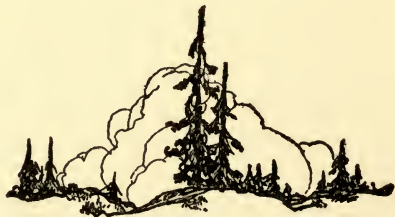
“Now!” whispered Raoul. They started off, their hearts beating with excitement and wonder at their escape.

“What is that?” cried Denise in a low voice as she ran, and Raoul looked up and saw in front of them the dim figure of a man who stood there waiting. He made a quick decision—better to go on and face this one man, whoever he might be, than return to their two captors. He caught hold of Denise’s hand and sped onward, trying to swerve to the right. But there was a quick spring and the man’s arm encircled them both like an iron hoop.

“Did you think Red Wing’s ears were dulled by the waterfall?” asked the Seneca ironically. “Think you that Old Wolf and he have not listened each night to your clumsy feet? If you are to be an Indian you must learn to walk more warily, or even the deaf grandmothers in the lodges will call out to know what the clamor means.”

Denise's shock had been so great that she could not keep back the tears. They fell all the way to the camp as she and Raoul walked dejectedly ahead of Red Wing, who did not even deign to hold them. Old Wolf sat up as they approached but said nothing. The moonlight was now brighter and Raoul noticed that the older brave nodded to his nephew. Red Wing took Denise by the shoulder firmly but not roughly, and sat her down on the pine needles nearer Old Wolf than she had lain the earlier part of the evening. Then, leaving Raoul standing, he went back into the trees and cut a thick knotted twig from a low-hanging branch. Raoul knew what was coming and knew that there was no escape. Red Wing took his fish line and bound the boy's hands to a tree trunk. After he had unbuttoned his coat and shirt and drawn them from his shoulders, he brought down his stick upon the boy's bare back. The blow was so severe and the pain so sharp, that an involuntary cry burst from Raoul's lips. Then he recovered his self-control, and though the blows fell without intermission, the only cries to be heard were those of Denise as she begged Old Wolf to command Red Wing to cease the punishment. But still the stick came down time after time, until Raoul had fainted.

The Seneca untied him and threw himself down by the side of his uncle. Neither made any objection when Denise wet her handkerchief at the waterfall and bathed Raoul's face until he recovered consciousness. Then she laid it on his quivering back. After an hour or more during which she renewed constantly the wet compress and tried to comfort him with words, the two fell asleep. When they awoke in the morning, except for the pain, it seemed as if nothing had happened. The Indians spoke no word of resentment or warning. When they had eaten Raoul walked slowly and painfully to the canoe, thankful at least that their method of travel that day spared him further exertion.





CHAPTER V

IN A SENECA LODGE

FOR three months Raoul and Denise had been prisoners in the Seneca town near the borders of Lake Ontario. After the flogging Old Wolf and Red Wing were not harsh to them. The Indians knew that there would be no further attempt to escape, and during the rest of the journey, and now in the town, the children were as free to go and come as any of their companions. Raoul and Denise too knew that there was no longer a chance of their ever finding their way back to Quebec, and there were moments when the memory of the seminary and of the habitant's home grew dimmer to them. They were no longer anxious about their immediate future. They were certain that their lives were safe; there was food in abundance, and except for the occasional spiteful act of some Indian

boy or girl, they were kindly treated. Old Wolf, whose only son had been killed in a foray with the Illinois five years before, had lived since then in a lodge alone with his squaw. She listened to his commands on his return, took the white boy and girl into her lodge, showed them where their *abbinos* (special seats) would be about the fire of her brave, and bidding them sit down and eat a bowl of succotash, went out. When she returned she had two bundles of clothes in her arms.

"Put them on," she said to Denise, motioning Raoul to go outside, and when the white-faced little squaw-child came out in deer-skin and embroidered moccasins, her hair braided and hanging over her shoulder, he went in to transform himself just as completely.

"I like these clothes better than the old ones," he said as he rejoined her; "they are so light and so comfortable. With your dark hair, Denise, it won't take long until the sunburn makes you look a regular Indian. My fair hair still keeps me French."

"We must make the best of it," she answered. "The squaw seems kind, and soon I will make her tell us why we are here."

Very quickly they learned Indian ways.

There were two reasons for their doing so, one the natural imitative instinct of childhood, the other their belief that it would please their captors. Yet the Senecas seemed not to desire the change to take place too soon. Old Wolf and other braves would question Raoul about the ways of the French. He had already learned to understand almost all that was said to him if it were not spoken too fast, and he could reply haltingly. The Indians were never tired of getting him to tell of the ship which had brought him over the great waters, of all that he knew of the training of soldiers, of the food the French ate, of the great village and the big lodge where dwelt the French king, bigger and more gorgeous even than the abode of Onontio, as the Indians called the Governor of New France. They crowded around to watch the boy when he cut with Denise's knife a pen from a wild goose quill and dipping it in paint, wrote strange signs on a piece of birchbark.

"What does it mean?" they would ask, and he would say: It means that I, Raoul, caught five fish to-day and that Old Wolf ate them all."

Then they would laugh and a day or two later would bring back the birchbark to him to see if it still said the same.

The medicine men talked much with him, ask-

ing many questions about how the French invoked the spirits and how they persuaded them to send rain or plenty of game. Raoul thought to himself that now had come the chance to do the missionary work to which he had dreamed of devoting his life; but he could not manage to find words nor the exact ideas with which to make Christianity comprehensible to his hearers. But perhaps, he consoled himself, he would be more successful when he knew the Indian tongue more fully. He was almost ashamed to confess to Denise that he was not always unhappy in captivity.

“If I could be sure,” he admitted, “that when spring comes we could return to Quebec, I should enjoy this winter spent among the savages.”

“It is better for you,” Denise said pouting, “than it is for me. You are a future brave and I shall be only a squaw. I must sew deerskins and cook and grind corn while you make arrows and listen to the stories of the warriors.”

“But the squaws are not unkind to you when you are alone with them?” he queried as they walked down the hard-packed snow path through the center of the town.

“Nay, they are kind enough except that they will finger my hair and my clothes when old Sun

Cloud brings them out for inspection. I have had to show them how to put them on, but Sun Cloud makes me take them off immediately, and in truth, Raoul, it seems to me too that in the matter of comfortable and warm apparel the Indians are wiser than white folks."

"And have you learned anything of the reason why we were brought here?" he asked. "Has not Sun Cloud let slip a word when you were working together? Or is she afraid of Old Wolf and dare not speak?"

"I do not think she fears him," answered Denise when they had stopped to throw nuts after a squirrel scurrying over the snow. "I do not believe that the squaws are as afraid of the braves as the braves pretend to believe them. Yesterday she poured the broth from the kettle on the ground when Old Wolf complained that it was not strong enough, and he did not even scold, though he had to go without his dinner. I think she started to tell me the truth the other day, but she stopped and mumbled: 'You are too young'. Perhaps she would tell you if you asked."

This Raoul intended to do as soon as he found an opportunity. It came a day or two later when he shot his first turkey and brought it back

proudly to the lodge and handed it to Sun Cloud to cook.

“Your bow has shed its first blood,” she said in praise as she took it from him. “Your arm grows stronger every dawn and the day is not far distant when the young squaws will call out as you return from the hunting or the warpath, ‘Ralo is a strong brave!’ ”

“Nay, Sun Cloud,” he protested, “I am no Seneca to dwell always among you. My people and those of Red Cheek live far to the northward. When spring comes we must set out on our journey to them.”

He spoke purposely with a confidence he did not feel. Somehow, he knew that the present conversation would explain why they had been carried off.

“Sit down,” commanded Sun Cloud as she herself took a seat on the thick bearskin before the fire, and began to pluck the feathers from the turkey’s breast. “It is well that you should know why you are here and why you will stay with us and become a Seneca. I will tell you the very truth, for my lips are too old to form lies. And when the questions in your mind are settled, your thoughts will grow quiet as does a stream when a rock which makes it angry is taken out and thrown on the land. When you

know you will be proud and glad that Old Wolf and Sun Cloud have brought you to their lodge."

Raoul made no attempt to contradict her; he was too eager to hear what she had to tell him.

"Once," she continued, "the Senecas were the greatest in number of all the Five Nations who dwell in the Long House. But they have fought many battles and many braves have not come home, and the tribe has dwindled. Even when the papooses come to the young squaws most of them are girls. The chiefs have talked this over at many council fires, and the medicine men have made incantations and have questioned the gods and besought them not to let the Senecas grow so weak that their enemies may overwhelm them. At last the Great Chief, fourscore and ten years old, who dwells this winter farther south some thirty leagues from here, heard the spirits speak. They told him that the tribe needed new strength, new wisdom, new medicine. 'What is stronger than the Indian's medicine?' asked the other chiefs of him. 'The white man's medicine,' he replied. Then he told them what the spirits had revealed to him. They must secure a white youth, they said, and train him in all the ways of the Senecas and yet must not let him forget altogether the ways of his own people. Later when he was grown a man and had proved him-

self worthy on the warpath and wise in council, he should be revered as the first chief of the Senecas and lead them to victory against their enemies. He would take an Indian maiden for his squaw and there would be strong boy papooses in his lodge. So it was that each man of the tribe was instructed to bring back the first white boy he could capture. Several were unlucky," she said, pausing slightly; "their arrows killed the boys they would have captured alive. Old Wolf and Red Wing brought with them more than the game they set out to hunt, not only a buck but a roe deer. Red Cheek too will make her home in a Seneca lodge with a Seneca brave to call her squaw. And so shall the medicine of the white man be added to the medicine of the red man, and the Senecas shall once again be the strongest and the wisest of the Five Nations."

Raoul did not speak when she had finished talking. But his silence did not offend her; it was the response any Indian boy would have made to her speech. She was certain his mind was filled with pride at the thought of the great destiny which awaited him. That is, so she thought for a moment until, as by a sudden insight, she guessed what the shadow on his face meant.

"Regret not your people, Ralo," she en-

treated; "we will be your people now and before many moons you will forget that you ever had another wigwam." When he shook his head emphatically and she saw his eyes flash, she warned him: "Think not that you can escape. You are like a young bird on a string. So long as you stray not too far no harm will come to you; but if you seek to break the string you will suffer so that the beating Red Wing gave you on the trail will seem like a spring shower. And it would hurt Sun Cloud to see you suffer," she added in a gentler tone.

Raoul rose and left the wigwam to hunt for Denise, to tell her what he had learned. She was cracking nuts with a group of girls, but came when he whistled.

"At least we may be thankful that they do not mean to kill us, Raoul, and perhaps something will happen so that we shall be rescued," she comforted.

Already, childlike, she was accustoming herself to her surroundings, and though she had grumbled at a girl's life in an Indian lodge, she was really not far from content. Raoul did not wish to sadden her with the despair that overwhelmed him now that he realized the fate that was in store for them, and the slight chance he

could see that they would ever get back among French people.

The days went by and the feast of Christmas, he felt certain, must have been passed by several weeks. There were many moments when he forgot that he was a captive, and took enjoyment in the games of lacrosse and other amusements of his Indian comrades. But there were also many hours when he would wander apart in the forest and wonder whether ever in the years to come he would dare to try to escape and where he could go if he did. He and Denise had decided that this would be impossible until they were older and stronger to dream of making their way to New France, even if they could succeed in getting away. There were times when he would sit perfectly motionless, his eyes fixed, and the thick forest around him would disappear and he would see again the rocky shores of his Breton home so distinctly that he could count the slits in the turret of the old castle. The Indians when they came upon him at such times would be careful not to disturb him. "He is listening to the spirits," they said; "he will indeed be the great chief our tribe has need of." At other times the boy saw, though dimly veiled as in a sea mist, wide level plains filled with strange beasts, and always towards the horizon shone the

waters of a great river. He did not even wonder what this might mean. He was a Breton and all his people believed in dreams and visions and half-seen glimpses of the future; but he did not speak of them. It was as if he had grown years older than Denise, and he realized that from now on it was he who must decide for her and protect her if need were.

One day when the sun had shone warmly and the melting snow spoke of spring that was to come though winter was not yet gone, Raoul sat on the sandy beach of the lake. The sun glistened so on the frozen surface that it dazzled his eyes and he was suddenly blinded. After a while the blackness vanished, and then he saw another expanse of frozen lake, but narrower and with higher banks. Over this surface he saw three figures toiling wearily. One of them turned so that his face was plainly visible and he heard him say: "If Raoul de Larnac were but with me."

Again he looked and there was nothing before him but the wide space of diamond-flashing ice hummocks and in the distance the dark open waters of the lake. Raoul rose and shook himself and then walked to and fro, thinking and planning how he should do what he knew he must do. When it was plain to him he strolled back to the town with an exaggerated air of careless

good humor, and joined the boys who were playing with the dogs.

“To-morrow I shall go forth to hunt a deer,” he said, when they had tired of teaching the yelping animals to jump and to fetch the arrows they shot; “it is time indeed that I show I can bring back real game. I have taken a vow that after to-morrow’s sunrise I will not eat until I have killed a deer.”

His comrades applauded his resolution. Some boasted that they had already brought back venison to their mothers; others proclaimed their intention of doing the same before long. Luckily none offered to accompany Raoul. He had counted on the Indian custom which sent the hunters out alone instead of in company. He found Denise baking corncake on the stones in front of the lodge and sat down beside her.

“How funny you look,” she said, smiling up at him from the ashes, “as if you were just waked out of a sleep. What have you been doing?”

“Do not cry out or let any sound of astonishment call attention to us,” he warned. “The time has come for us to make our escape, Denise.”

“And how should that be?” she asked. “What

has changed since we last spoke of the hopelessness of such an attempt?"

"Nothing that I can explain," he admitted, "and yet I know that the time has come. If I could tell you you would not understand, Denise, for you are not of Brittany; but we *know* that we can trust to dreams, or visions, or to experiences such as I have had this day. I have told you strange tales, you will remember, of curious happenings in my country; of women who have heard the voices of their fisher husbands as they were drowning scores of miles away; of warnings and blessings promised by unseen presences; of men who at times have seen what took place at home while they were at the wars. In this same mysterious way *I saw to-day the figure and face of Chevalier La Salle* of whom I have so often spoken to you, and he turned and said: 'If Raoul de Larnac were but with me.' I know that this sight was permitted me because I am meant to find him. I have been thinking and planning ever since, and if you will be ready to do as I say, we can escape to-morrow."

Denise had listened with keen interest but had been careful not to make any sudden start which might betray them to any of the Indians who were passing back and forth. She had contin-

ued to bake her cakes until all the corn was used up. She did not laugh at Raoul's statement; she did not doubt it in the slightest.

"I too believe that you are right," she said, "though I cannot understand how such things may come to pass. And I believe too that you will succeed this time, but I know also that I should never live to reach home. I am not weak or afraid of the forest, dear Raoul, but I see you have grown so much stronger in these months that now you can travel much more rapidly alone, and so you must go without me."

"That I will not," he cried passionately. "Do you think that I would desert you? If I should be such a craven all of my ancestors would disown me and I could never hold up my head again."

"Listen, Raoul," she pleaded. "It will be for me that you go. If we both believe that Seigneur La Salle may be reached by you in a few days, or even more, then if you do not set out in search of him, to tell him that a French girl is held in captivity by the Senecas, so that he and his men will return with you to free me, what other chance will ever come to us? The Senecas are not now at war with the French, and so if the Seigneur will come and demand my release, I think Old Wolf would not dare refusè."

Though influenced by her reasoning, Raoul was not yet satisfied. Again he begged her to accompany him or he declared that he would stay behind; but at last she brought him to her way of thinking—that it was for her that he would run the chance of many deaths, from the Indians, from cold, from starvation, or other dangers of the trackless forests.

“I shall not be in any danger,” she added as a final argument. “I shall be well cared for. Already Old Wolf and Sun Cloud treat me as their daughter.”

Now that his going was decided they talked of all that they could do. Denise promised to fill an extra wallet with food as well as the one he was to take with him when he started off the next morning to shoot his first deer. She would slip out after dark and leave it at the edge of the village where he could pick it up in the morning.

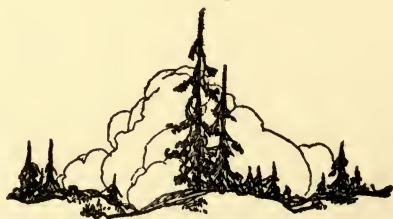
“Bethink you, Denise, how greatly I am changed from the helpless boy you befriended a few months ago. Now I have learned how to live in the forest, how to kill game, how to make a fire and where to take shelter. Nor shall I ever forget that it was you who were my first teacher. Think,” he continued as they rose to go inside the wigwam, “how happy your family will be when I bring you back to them.”

Old Wolf made no objection when Raoul told of his intention to go forth the next morning to slay his deer. Instead the chief handed the boy a bigger bow than the one he had given him on his arrival.

“If you can bend it it is yours,” he said. It took all of Raoul’s strength, but finally he succeeded. The chief looked pleased and showed him how firmly the bow was made. Then Sun Cloud brought him a beaded bag for his arrows.

At dawn Raoul kissed Denise as she stood in the opening of the wigwam. “Goodbye, Denise,” he said, “and keep up your heart. I will soon be back for you.”

And Denise peered after him through the heavy white mist until he was lost to sight.





CHAPTER VI

RAOUL'S FIRST DEER

LA SALLE, lightheaded from a forty-hour fast, his eyes dazzled by the constant glare of the ice, his ears singing with weakness, could not believe that it was French words he seemed to hear shouted by a boy in Indian clothes who was running towards him over the lake from the southeast. And when he had bade his men halt the sledge and the boy had caught up with them, La Salle thought his weakened condition must have affected his brain, because the Indian lad wore the features of the young student he had first met in the King's garden at Versailles.

"It is I, Seigneur La Salle," cried Raoul as well as he could for panting. "I heard you call me and I came. Four days I have sought you, never doubting that I should find you in the end and that you would help me."

La Salle only half comprehended the boy's

words and he did not attempt to explain them. His eyes were fastened on the hind quarter of a deer which was slung over his shoulder. Raoul understood his glance and exclaimed:

“My first deer! I slew it three days ago. Will you eat?” And not waiting for an answer, he climbed up the low bank, found some twigs, and soon the venison was roasting over a bright fire. The strength of the Frenchmen revived at the mere sight and smell of the coming dinner. They left the sledge and, seating themselves before the fire, ate ravenously of the meat and of some bits of Denise’s corn cakes that were still left in Raoul’s wallet.

“You were indeed starving,” he said. “I thank heaven my arrow found that deer, for I have seen no other since. And now, Seigneur, while you eat will you give ear to my need and that of a French maiden who is looking eagerly each hour for your aid?”

“A French maiden?” exclaimed La Salle, now himself again. “Is there one near?”

Raoul told in a few words of how he had left Quebec with Père Antoine, of his stay at the home of the Dubois, of how he and Denise had been captured, of their journey through the forest and on the rivers, of their first attempt to escape and its consequences, and of how Denise

had persuaded him four days before to leave her and go in search of help.

La Salle did not stop to ask more about the curious belief of the boy that he had called him. "In truth," he thought to himself, "it must have been just when I was thinking so intently about him that my spirit cried out to him."

"Tell me," he asked, "how you escaped. It is growing dark, and we must wait for daylight before setting out across the lake to rescue your little friend. So there is time to spare in which to listen to your adventures."

Raoul heaped up a pile of wood and then began: "There's little enough to tell. No one imagined that I should be such a fool as to try to find my way alone so many leagues; and indeed I had been one had I not known I must find you here. And so they did not stay me when I set forth to hunt, and doubtless even now they believe that I have died from cold or some accident, rather than that I have run away. I set forth at dawn four days ago. I had not planned in which direction to strike out, therefore I was content to follow the tracks of a deer. It was a young buck," he explained proudly, "and on our way back I will show you where I have hidden the rest of his fine carcass. I think Red Wing would not disdain such a quarry. He led me far

but I was not weary. I came up to him at last when he was breaking the ice over a stream in order to drink. My arrow hit him in the back of his neck, and an hour later I supped upon him."

"Well done, young priestling!" cried La Salle.

"I did not fear to sleep," continued Raoul; "I knew that I should not be expected back that night. So when I found a cave I made a fire in it and slept warm and comfortably. The next morning I cut off the hind quarters of my deer and set forth, chosing to walk northward, I scarce knew why. Before noon I heard men's voices. I could not tell whether they might be from the village in search of me. The falling snow covered my footsteps, and I dropped behind a tree stump and piled the snow about me until I was all but covered with it. The strangers soon came abreast of me. Five there were of them, Indians I had never seen. They were not trying to walk quietly as they would have done if they were on the warpath. It seemed rather, I thought, that they were bent on some mission which might be peaceful. They came from the opposite direction from that I had come, but when they passed I could not tell whether they went on to the village or not. For one moment I thought they had discovered me; one of them

stopped and looked in my direction and my heart beat rapidly, Seigneur. Then I breathed again, for they went on, but I did not dare stir for a long while for fear that they might come back, and I was almost frozen. That night I feared them and that Old Wolf had sent in search of me, so I could not make a fire or sleep. I walked all night, finding a way somehow through the dark forest until in the morning I came out of it and found myself on the borders of the lake. In my dream I had seen you on the opposite shore, and so I set out to cross the lake. I ate some of the food in my wallet, rested for an hour, and went on. I scarce remember when I slept and waked during that day and night. It was noon to-day when I saw you far ahead, and though I ran as fast as I could, the distance would not lessen. But at last—you know, Seigneur.”

“It is truly a marvel, lad, I cannot seek to fathom,” La Salle said stirring the fire with his boot, “our meeting thus. We will talk of its strangeness another time, but now tell me, can you find to-morrow the way back by which you came? Though I have urgent need to press on to Fort Frontenac, it is a still more urgent duty to rescue the little lass.”

“I can find the way,” declared Raoul, “and we shall return much more rapidly than I came; for

we can follow the opposite shore of the lake until we reach the village without need to wander through the forest. But I would, Seigneur, that you had a greater force with you."

"I shall not need them," La Salle asserted. "The Iroquois at this moment are not ready to go on the warpath against the French, and the Senecas, your captors, know that their confederate tribes would disown their act should they injure me who am high in the favor of Onontio, as they call his Excellency, the Governor. Nor will they dare refuse to surrender to me two French children. So fear not, Raoul, you and Denise shall be back in our land before the week is over."

The boy was nodding with weariness, and soon was fast asleep. In the morning after another meal of venison, they started, following Raoul's lead. As he had said, the way proved much shorter than his journeyings in pursuit of the deer, and in three days and a half they were within sight of the point beyond which lay the village. Raoul rejoiced to think how happy Denise was soon to be. He ran eagerly ahead, rounded the point and turned towards the village. A cry of astonishment burst from him—not a soul was to be seen, not a curl of smoke rose above a lodge, not even a dog barked as the

strangers walked cautiously through the center of the village.

"What is it?" asked La Salle, when he had peered into one or two of the wigwams and found them empty not only of their owners, but of all their belongings. "What does it mean?"

"I do not know," replied Raoul dully, his brain trying vainly to puzzle out the cause.

Through every lodge went the four, but found nowhere a sign of human life. The fires were cold and there was an absence of any appearance of a struggle. In Old Wolf's lodge Raoul discovered a good store of corn and some dried meat, and there they ate and slept warmly that night, the three men taking their turns at keeping watch. When they looked out the next morning the ground was white with newfallen snow. La Salle shook his head. "We have now lost all trace of them," he said.

But Raoul would not believe this. He searched the ground all about the lodge, circling around like a dog. It was hours before he was forced to admit that the storm had indeed blotted out every mark of the Senecas' departure, for he felt certain that they could not all have been killed without leaving some trace. "I am sure," he said, "that those Indians who passed me had

something to do with this, though I don't know whether they were friends or foes."

"I too am minded to think so," said La Salle. "Perchance they were the bearers of some tidings of a great council of the Five Nations to which your friends were bidden; perhaps they plan to invade New France again. It must have been an urgent call. Therefore the only course for us now is to hasten to Fort Frontenac where news may await us."

"But, Seigneur," pleaded Raoul, his eyes full of tears, "you will not desert Denise!"

La Salle laid his hand on the boy's shoulder and said gently: "We can serve her best by going, Raoul. We might wander here for a fortnight, turning in every direction and never finding a trace, or if we found the trail, might not be able to come up with them. Whereas at the Fort we shall in all likelihood hear some word. Then I will get the Governor to send messengers to the Iroquois demanding the release of the little maiden. There is no other way, lad, or I would take it."

Raoul could not answer. He was choking at the thought of little Denise's despair when she found herself carried away where he could not reach her. "Why did I leave her?" he cried out, as once again he ran to the end of the village in

a vain hunt for a clue. "Far better if I had stayed, both of us prisoners together."

Yet he made no further remonstrance; he could see the uselessness of searching longer—the blanket of snow had done its work too well. Next morning they packed the stores of venison and corn on the sledge and set off on the crusted snow. The sky was brilliantly blue, and had it not been for his sorrow and anxiety about Denise, Raoul would have been happy to be alive and in motion.

La Salle's regret that he had not been able to take back the little French maiden was great, but he was never a man to dwell upon disappointments. His thoughts now sped swiftly forward to Fort Frontenac, to what he must accomplish there, and then still farther forward, to his great expedition. His body was strengthened and refreshed by food and rest, and he was so absorbed in the future that he had almost forgotten how these had come to him. Etienne and Robert too were in a jolly mood and made merry at each other's mishaps when the sledge struck a stone and rolled over, spilling its contents. Raoul could not escape the general mood. He found himself humming a fishing song he had not heard for years. Every now and then he would fix his eyes on La Salle and wonder just

what it was about him that made him so different from every other man he had ever known. He knew only that he longed to serve him; service was all the gift he had to bestow upon anyone, and he pondered what form he could give to his loyalty.

And so it was a shock when the Seigneur, who had suddenly remembered his existence, said: "I will see, Raoul, that you shall not have long to wait at the Fort. Etienne shall accompany you back to Quebec. The good fathers at your seminary doubtless have long believed you dead. How rejoiced they will be to see you again!"

"Must I go back?" cried Raoul. "Oh, Seigneur, send me not back. I cannot be a priest."

"Are you in earnest?" asked La Salle, gazing fixedly at him. "Do you know what you say? Is this a sudden whim, the outcry of a boy when the holidays are over that he will not go back to school? Or, tell me, boy, is it perhaps a deeper feeling? I too was once intended for the priesthood. I was even known as Brother Robert Ignace; but I found I had not the vocation. So if you have truly given this grave matter careful consideration, I would listen to you understandingly. It is a great life, that of a priest; greater still the life of a missionary such as you

wished to be; yet not all men are fitted for it. I was not. Speak," he commanded.

"I have thought, Seigneur. This is no sudden whim. From the moment I found myself free of the black robe my spirit rose free." Raoul spoke quickly, his fists clenched with emotion. "Let me stay with you, Seigneur! Else why should I have heard your call, and why should I have come to you straight as a bird to its nest? What I do, provided I shame not our name, matters nothing to anyone. Send me not back to the seminary. Let me go with you when you go and stay with you when you stay!"

The recollection of his own repressed boyhood spoke to La Salle in Raoul's voice. To refuse him would be like denying his own claims to the freedom to live the life he craved. Yet he was not sure that the boy was old enough to realize what he asked.

"Hearken, lad," he said. "I will not say nay to you altogether. Your years are yet too few to comprehend the magnitude of the work that lies ahead of me. For those who choose to follow me must bear great hardships, exertions and disappointments; perchance a fortune will reward them, but more likely penury. Had I sought riches for myself I should have stayed contentedly at my seigneurie, where I was sure

of twenty-five thousand livres a year. There must pass some weeks at least before my affairs can be straightened out. During that time you may stay with me and consider whether there will not be some other life, here or in France, which you would prefer. And during these weeks I shall observe you more carefully to see whether you have in you the stuff of which explorers are made. Until the day before I plan to start back speak no more to me of this; then we shall decide!"

Raoul was content with this encouragement, and when they arrived at Fort Frontenac and after La Salle had assigned him quarters, and had sent by his brother, L'Abbé Cavelier, news to the seminary of Raoul's story, he seemed to forget the boy, who was free to occupy his time as he liked. Raoul's first thought was to obtain news of the Senecas, and he questioned everyone, Frenchmen and Indians, if there were any word of movements of the Iroquois. Nothing had been heard, and even though La Salle applied directly to Governor Frontenac, there was no explanation of the mystery and no hope of solving it at present. Raoul wrote a long letter to Père Dubois, telling him everything which had passed since he and Denise had been carried off, suggesting that he take the letter to the Gover-

nor and beseech him to send to the chiefs of the Five Nations, bidding them restore the French maiden they had stolen or fear his displeasure.

It was a very tangled state of affairs which La Salle found on his arrival. From the beginning of his enterprise men had shaken their heads and called it a fool's expedition. Was not the world large enough already, they asked, without spending livres and lives in trying to add to the lands of the King? And why should La Salle believe himself picked out by fate to do what no one else could accomplish? So when the news leaked through of the wreck of his supply ship, those who had lent him money in the hope of gaining fortunes, hypnotized by his eloquence for an hour from their usual caution, grew frightened and determined to get back all they had ventured. These creditors, Migeon, Charon, Giton and Peloquin, hastened to seize the vast stores of furs which belonged to La Salle, and all his other property. La Salle saw that there were only two things to do: either to let it all go to his creditors, or to waste a long time in Montreal and Quebec endeavoring by legal means to get some of it back. He chose the first. He was too eager to return to Tonty to remain away a day longer than need be. Yet it was not until the end of July that his new

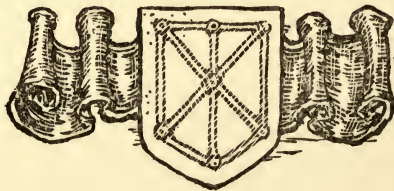
stores were got together, and he was ready to set out. Three friars were to accompany him, eager to begin their missionary work among the Indians.

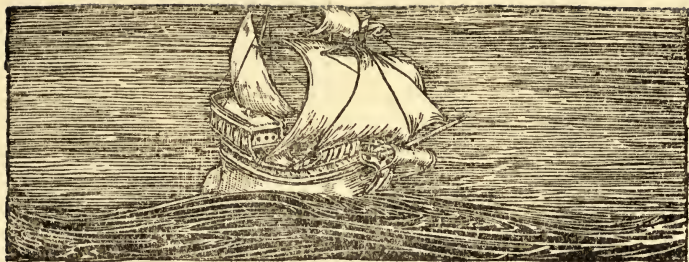
The day before his departure he sent for Raoul. "What is your decision?" he asked curtly, determined not to let his own hope that the boy might go with him influence Raoul's choice.

"I would go with you, Seigneur," Raoul replied, "if you will take me. There is nothing I desire so much."

He stood there quivering with eagerness, wondering what the silent observation to which he knew he had been subjected for weeks had led to.

"Very well," said La Salle, more pleased than he could understand his being. "Go to Etienne and tell him to fit you out properly in clothes and equipment."





CHAPTER VII

THE *GRIFFIN* SPREADS HER WINGS

SOME week later the *Griffin* sat the water as lordly as ever the heraldic beast after which she was named surmounted a proud baron's coat-of-arms. And Tonty's glance when he surveyed her was as filled with pride as if he were a mother and she his child. La Salle, who had listened intently to all the mishaps and hardships his lieutenant had suffered during his absence, did not fail to give him due praise for the completion of the vessel despite the efforts the Indians had made to burn her on the stocks. At last, after so many months of delay, the time had come to set forth in her. It was with genuine gratitude to heaven for what had been accomplished and forgetfulness of all the setbacks, that La Salle ordered a *Te Deum* to be sung as he marshaled his forces aboard. The solemn words

of the great Latin hymn of thanksgiving were started by the priests and caught up by such of the men as were familiar with them. Raoul's voice rang out above all the others; and the Indians who had gathered on the bank to gaze at the strange scene, listened in delighted wonder.

"A white thrush," exclaimed one of the Seneca squaws, pointing to him. Curiously enough, she had chanced upon the same name which had been bestowed on him by the Senecas in old Wolf's village. Reports of "the White Thrush's" singing later penetrated to Denise in her captivity, so that at last she was certain that Raoul was still alive.

The *Griffin*, which had been laden with the precious stores brought back by La Salle from Fort Frontenac the day before, was now warped out from the shore; the gaping Indians saw the white sails unfold, then—a flash from the iron nose of the cannon in the stern and thunder was let loose without the help of the clouds. They shrieked and ran or flung themselves flat upon the ground; and by the time they had discovered that none of them was killed, the wind from the east had tautened the sails and the *Griffin* was speeding through the waters of Lake Erie.

"Here sailed never ship before!" said La Salle to Tonty while they both stood in the bow. "Had

God himself known how fair a thing a ship is he would have set Adam and Eve on one instead of in a garden."

Tonty, looking at his commander, watched his nostrils dilate as if they would drink in all the freshness of the great lake, and the sparkle of his eyes from which had vanished all the gravity and the sadness of the past month. "It is as if he were born again," he said to himself.

This was better, thought Raoul, than the Senecas' canoe on the St. Laurence. Here he was free, and there was even more to be seen. For three days they sailed onward, the breeze behind them never dying down, and the spirits of all on board as high as the wind. They saw no human beings; their course was too far from shore for them to fall in with any Indian canoes.

On the fourth day the lake came to an end and they passed through a narrow strait between meadows. The wind had now left them and the legs of all were cramped for the earth. So they jumped ashore and hunted for game. Raoul was lucky enough to shoot a wild swan with his bow, and some of the men had little difficulty in killing bears, which showed so little timidity that they neither ran nor charged when the muskets were pointed at them.

Now the *Griffin* stuck her beak northward in-

to a smaller lake, so bright in the August sunshine that they gave it the name of Sainte Claire. Again through a narrow strait, and the great lake of the Hurons seemed to Raoul to stretch before them to the very end of the world.

“How can the earth bear so much water?” he asked Father Hennepin. “Why does it not rot out the very foundations of the globe?”

“And put out the fires of Hell?” suggested the priest, laughing loudly at his own joke. “That will not come to pass, at least not until the heathen here have been converted.”

The pilot looked up at the gathering clouds in the northwest and shook his head, as he said to Etienne: “I am a salt-water sailor, and I do not pretend to know the ways of these inland seas, but if they are governed by the winds as is the ocean, then, beshrew me, if a tempest is not upon us before the hour is over.”

And trusting to the similarity of winds and waves everywhere, fresh or salt, he gave orders to reef the sails and to make all things fast. The tempest was upon them before his orders had all been carried out; the waves, as if they, like the Indians, resented the intrusion of this new craft, seemed determined that it should sail over them no longer. They dashed the *Griffin* about



FOR THREE DAYS THEY SAILED ONWARD.

so mercilessly that the seams strained and took in water until the hull was all awash.

La Salle, the last to believe in their danger, was too clear-eyed to deny it now. "Men," he cried out, "pray! no brave man shames his valor by petitions to God and the saints."

He dropped to his knees, as did all but the pilot, who called out angrily: "If you had left me on the ocean where I belong I should not now be forced to drown ignominiously in this *fresh* water. Such a death for a sailor!"

But no one paid attention to him. Father Hennepin and the other friars prayed loudly, as if they feared that in the noise of the tempest their prayers might not reach the ears of heaven.

"Blessed St. Anthony of Padua, pray for us," they besought. "Save us and we will build thee a chapel, for we have chosen thee as the patron of our great enterprise."

Whether the saint heard or whether the lake and the winds grew weary of their anger, at last the waves subsided, the clouds broke and soon the *Griffin's* white plumage was spread out again and she leaped forward westward, until at length she came to rest at Michillimackinac.

Raoul gazed in astonishment at the trading post and missionary station of the Jesuits which spread out before him. The long voyage out of

sight of any other human beings than his own party had made him feel that they had left all Frenchmen behind and that, in the future, conditions would be different from any known to the rest of the world. Now he saw the familiar Cross on the chapel and the black robes of the Jesuits as they walked about the palisaded post or out to the wigwams of the Ottawa Indians not far off.

The shot with which the *Griffin* announced her arrival sent the Indians running terror-stricken to the woods, and the Frenchmen down to the shore. As he looked down upon them, Raoul noticed many scowls on the faces of the priests and on some of the *coureurs de bois*.

"They seem not over pleased to see us," he remarked to Etienne.

"They love not our commander," the soldier explained. "They fear he is come to take from them their profitable traffic in furs."

If La Salle too saw the shallowness of the welcome accorded him, he did not let it be noticed. He had dressed in his best coat and doublet and had thrown over his shoulders a cloth mantle, scarlet as the sun which hung above them in an autumn haze, and all bordered with gold. This splendor impressed the Indians, who followed him and his men as they marched, muskets over

the shoulder, to the little chapel, there to return thanks for their safe arrival. Then the savages jumped into their canoes and swarmed about the *Griffin*, touching her sides and looking up in wonder at the sails and in wholesome awe at the cannon.

For some weeks La Salle rested at Michillimackinac, during which time he arrested certain of his men whom he had sent on the year before to make preparations for his coming. Not only had they not done what he had ordered, but they had traded off his stores to their own advantage and had disloyally roused up Indians and voyageurs against La Salle. Some of these disloyal men had fled to the forests and could not be reached, but the others La Salle sent back in Tonty's command to the Falls of Sainte Marie.

Raoul was not old enough to realize all the intrigues which made La Salle's heart sore, and delayed him in his search for the great river. The boy spent much of his time with the traders, who took him with them to Indian villages nearby, or to traps of their own where they caught the animals whose precious pelts found their way to Quebec and then across the seas to keep warm the bodies of French men and women. He saw them counted out by the thousands: pelts of bears, their dried noses still sticky with honey;

white fox, red fox, gray fox, martin, beaver, otter, mink, and those of "the children of the devil," as the Indians called the skunk.

But he was glad when they set sail once again, on the other great lake of which he had heard the Indians tell—Lake Michigan. This time the men La Salle had sent in advance had proved faithful, and there was a large store of furs awaiting him. He decided quickly: he would send them back on the *Griffin* to pay his creditors, and he and the fourteen men who remained with him would be content to go on in canoes until the *Griffin* should return. They packed themselves and their stores into four large canoes and started on their southward journey.

Raoul was stepping into the canoe with Father Hennepin when La Salle motioned to him to enter his own. This was the first time since they had left Fort Frontenac that the Seigneur had shown any particular interest in the boy. He had given him orders on the *Griffin* and at Michillimackinac as he gave them to all of his men, but there had been no word of praise or blame for the way he carried them out. Raoul sometimes wondered whether it was indeed true or a dream that La Salle had twice, at Versailles and in the deserted Seneca village, confided in him so fully. He longed for a word

of simple companionship, for he missed Denise more than he was aware; but the friars were cold to him because they disapproved of his leaving the seminary, and the other men, with the exception of Etienne, considered him still too much of a child. Now that La Salle had bidden him stay near him Raoul was content. Perhaps he would find the way to be of some small service to the man who now represented all he most admired.

Several times that afternoon the boy caught the grave eyes fixed on him, and he wondered what they read in his face. Once La Salle bade him take a paddle, and though his back and arms grew weary, he would not stop when one of the men offered to replace him. He had an idea that La Salle meant to test him in various ways, and that perhaps this was the test of his strength and endurance. He was right. La Salle was uncertain whether Raoul were indeed strong enough to stand all the hardships which must be looked for on their expedition.

Just when Raoul felt that in another moment he would fall over the gunwale from exhaustion, La Salle called out: "Take the paddle, François, and pull with all your might. The storm will break in a moment!"

It had come up very quickly with the oncoming night. The heavy clouds made the water

still darker, but La Salle could discern that the other canoes, even more heavily laden than his own, were in greater danger.

“Keep calling out to them, Raoul,” he ordered, “that they may not get separated from us and lost in the darkness.” And in addition to doing this, Raoul crawled into the bow where he could see farthest and kept crying out the way to keep the canoe headed. His childhood on the Breton coast had made him more at home in a boat than any of the others.

At last, when the canoe was soaked by the rain, yet still kept afloat by what seemed a miracle each moment, Raoul spied the beach before him. He called out quickly how and where the boat could best be brought in, forgetting in his excitement that he was daring to give orders in La Salle’s presence. When they were safely ashore and the other canoes, with many narrow escapes, had followed them, the Seigneur said: “We owe our safety to you, Raoul. You are a good sailor.”

It was well that his words warmed the boy’s heart, for it was all that was warm that terrific night. They sought such shelter as they could find in the forest; but the rain, the wind and the drenched ground made a fire impossible. The next day brought little improvement, except

that with the daylight their spirits rose. They ate the corn they had with them, as there was no chance of securing any game while the storm lasted. Five days it raged until they felt, as Etienne expressed it, "like Father Noah in his Ark, only more lonely, for the beasts are lacking."

When the storm subsided at last they set off once again to the southward; but the spirits of the lake were still not done with the trespassers, and time and time again storms sprang up suddenly and the canoes were barely saved. Once the aged Father Gabriel nearly drowned when the boat was almost swamped while being beached and those in it had to jump overboard to lighten her. Father Hennepin pulled him up on his younger back, and the two missionaries laughed loudly and bravely at the thought of the sight they must present to their companions.

"God be praised! We shall eat now," exclaimed Etienne, who had been reconnoitering and found that there was an Indian village not far from the shore. "'Tis indeed time, for we are little better than skin and bone."

"We know not how they may receive us," warned La Salle; "so you must go prepared for anything. Be armed for war, but carry a peace pipe along."

Etienne, François and Raoul were selected to go to get the supplies. "I think they are frightened away," said Raoul when they had come to the lodges and found no one there. It recalled to him the sight of the Seneca village when he had gone back to free Denise, and his heart was heavy at the thought of her. They entered cautiously, but no one opposed them. They found corn and other food and helped themselves.

"Let them not complain that Frenchmen are thieves," said François as he laid on the ground some beads and small mirrors which La Salle had brought for barter with the Indians.

As they descended the hill Raoul saw that La Salle and his men were almost surrounded by savages. He could hear his commander haranguing them and enough of his words came to him for him to realize that the Indians, uncertain of the Frenchmen's intentions, were ready any second to fit arrows to the bows they held. He seized the peace pipe François had tucked under his arm to leave his hands free for carrying the food, and brandishing it like a weapon before him, ran rapidly down the hill, shouting in the Seneca tongue as he ran, and hoping that it would be understood: "Behold! we come in peace, brothers!"

The Indians caught sight of him and cried out in joy: "Peace then, brothers; we will share our food with you."

Thus another danger passed, but new ones followed. The storms continued, and starvation threatened several times. Sometimes as they journeyed on, they bought food from the Indians on the shore; once they were lucky enough to find the carcass of a deer which the wolves had half devoured. Once the Outagamis stole from them at night and La Salle, knowing that his prestige would suffer if he allowed this to pass, bravely advanced with his eleven men against one hundred and twenty savages and persuaded them to pay for what they had taken. It was November before they reached the end of the lake, at the mouth of the river of the Miamis. Here La Salle determined to wait for Tonty.

Etienne, who had been with La Salle ever since he had first been granted his Seigneurie at La Chine, did not hesitate to speak plainly to his commander whenever he thought it necessary. Now he sought him as he sat beside a fire which Raoul was feeding with driftwood.

"Seigneur," he said, "it is but right that you should know what the men are saying—though I would have you be sure that I echo not their words. They declare that they will not stay here

where the waters are freezing and where the fierce winds will soon be sweeping down the frozen lake. They say that you must push on now to the villages of the Illinois where the Indians can give us shelter and food."

La Salle did not hesitate with his reply. "Go back to them, Etienne, and say that it is I, not they, who give commands on this expedition. Let them push on if they will; here will I stay with the friars until Tonty joins us. Let them leave me if they will, and you too, Etienne, and you too, Raoul, make your choice."

"Seigneur!" cried Raoul, springing from his knees. "You do not believe I would desert you?"

"Nay, I do not think that," said La Salle, a slight smile in the corner of his lips, "and I suppose, Etienne wishes me to say the same to him."

When the others heard La Salle's message they grumbled and cried out that they would freeze and starve if they stayed. Nevertheless, they were well aware that they could not go on to the Illinois alone, so they remained; and during their waiting for Tonty La Salle kept them so busy building a fort on an elevation at the

river's mouth (now the St. Joseph) that they were too warm to freeze, and luck with their guns put an end for the present to all fear of starvation.





CHAPTER VIII

AMONG THE ILLINOIS

IT was La Salle himself who first caught sight of Tonty returning, and he welcomed him heartily.

“It does me good to see you, friend,” he exclaimed, shaking him vigorously by the shoulders. “There were a thousand deaths I pictured you dying when you came not. But you are grown so thin and look so weary! And where are the rest of your men?”

“We had not food enough for all,” replied the Italian as he sat down and drank eagerly the hot venison broth which Raoul had hastened to bring him; “and so I was forced to leave half of them thirty leagues behind to hunt for game while we pushed on, knowing how anxiously you must be awaiting us.”

“Then to-morrow, when you have rested and eaten, it will be best for you, who alone know

the way, to return with provisions for them and bid them hasten hither," said La Salle. "We must delay no longer."

Tonty did not complain, though he might have considered himself entitled to a longer rest. Taking two men with him and as much food as they could carry in the canoe, he was off at dawn the next day.

A few days later he returned a second time, ravenous and sad with the tale of further misfortunes: of how he had tried to bring his boat ashore in a storm and it had upset, spilling out their guns and food, so that they were forced to return to the fort or die of slow starvation on their diet of acorns. La Salle's determination to wait a little longer was rewarded, for the rest of the men Tonty had left behind, with the exception of two who had deserted, straggled wearily into the fort a few days later.

One of the men who came with Tonty, called Duplessis, weakened by his privations and disappointed that La Salle had not spent the time of waiting in gathering a store of skins, from the proceeds of which he hoped to gain a goodly share, showed his displeasure openly, and remarked to everyone that he regretted he had not been as wise as his companions who had deserted. As a punishment, La Salle bade him do extra

work in loading the canoes for the journey and threatened to leave him behind if he did not keep silence. No more of his complaints were heard, but Raoul, who slept in his hut at night, often caught the sound of angry mutterings.

As the month of December opened La Salle regretfully announced: "We can wait no longer for the *Griffin*. Where has our fine bird flown? I would we knew, but we must go on without her."

The thirty-three men, Frenchmen, Canadians and the Mohegan Indian, La Salle's guide, took their places in the eight canoes that were filled to the danger point with food, goods and ammunition. Though the world was a dreary one through which they went, gray sky, gray river, and a line of dark forests against the horizon bordering the flat land which stretched to the river, the hearts of all were lightened with their movement and the knowledge that once again they were on their way in search of fame and fortune. Raoul was again ordered into the same canoe with La Salle. He performed the same kind of work as did the men, but La Salle saw that he undertook no more than was fit for a boy's strength. He spoke to him but seldom. Raoul often dreamed of wonderful conversations he would like to hold with him, yet when

they were alone he had never the courage to begin them. His hope was that some day he might be able to show, if not by word, then by deed, how strong was his affection and loyalty to his commander.

"It should be near here," commented La Salle, looking anxiously across the meadows in the distance towards the flash of water under a sudden burst of winter sunshine, "the portage to the river of the Illinois. I will jump out and go yonder to the woods and see."

"May I come too, Seigneur?" asked Raoul.

"Nay," replied La Salle as he leaped ashore; "go and bid Tonty wait here until I return."

As the hours wore on and there was no sign of La Salle, Tonty could not conceal his anxiety. He ordered everyone ashore, had fires built both for warmth and to serve as a beacon, and then as night fell, he bade two or three sentries fire their guns at intervals. Raoul could not sleep and begged Tonty to allow him to set off in search of La Salle, but Tonty wisely refused to permit any search to be made before daylight.

When he entered the woods La Salle believed that the portage could not be more than half an hour distant. He set out lustily, singing as he went, in the direction he thought to find it.

When he came out of the wood on the other side he discovered that for once his strong sense of direction had failed him, the falling snow had made it difficult to see far in advance. A large swamp opened before him, unfrozen and impassable. There was nothing to do but to go around it, and still singing, as was his wont at times when alone, he turned back into the forest. At last he was forced to confess to himself that he was lost; nevertheless, he did not despair of soon finding either the portage or the camp. Night had come and he thought how anxious Tonty must be. He had walked steadily for hours, but he dared not rest.

At last the trees thinned ahead of him and he caught the faint gleam of the river. A few steps farther on there shone the glow of a fire. Sure now that he had come out near his men, he fired his gun.

"Tonty keeps a bad watch!" he cried out when there was no answering signal. He ran forward, and to his amazement, when he reached the fire, there was no sign of his companions, but in the grass, close to the smoldering logs, an impression showing some man had been lying there.

"Hola!" he cried in the Iroquois tongue, "where art thou, friend?" There was no re-

sponse, so he voiced his question in the tongue of the Miamis, then of the Pottawattamies, and, one after the other, in all the Indian languages he knew. "Well then," he said aloud in French, "if thou hast no need of thy bed, I have, and many thanks for the fire."

He gathered more wood and threw it on the blaze and picked up armfuls of crackling bushes with which he encircled his bivouac to announce the approach of any footstep. Then he lay down as calmly as he would have done in his own room at Fort Frontenac and soon was asleep.

He did not see the Indian, who had crept to peer at him, draw his knife to stab the white man to the heart; nor did he feel him as he hesitated and finally glided away, convinced that the Frenchman's medicine was indeed stronger than the medicine of the Indian, or he would never sleep so soundly.

La Salle woke late next morning and, in spite of hunger, stiffness and the uncertainty of his whereabouts, he was happier than he had been for many a day. Here, in the silence of the forest, his anxieties dropped away from him. He felt young, strong, equal to everything. He laughed as he walked along to see two opossums hanging heads down from the branch of a small

oak. He picked up a stick and smote them a tremendous blow, and when they were dead he hung them by their tails to his belt. Thus decorated, he walked along the river bank, knowing that soon now he must fall in with his companions.

At four that afternoon they saw him coming and cried out in welcome and relief. Soon the 'possums were spilling their fat into the fire and Beaver Tail, the Mohegan hunter, at La Salle's command, divided their meat so that everyone had a portion. Beaver Tail explained that he had been off hunting when La Salle set out in search of the portage. When morning came he could lead them to it without delay.

Raoul's anxiety during La Salle's absence had been greater than that of any of the others, because in addition to the anxiety he shared with them, he was worried by the feeling of some impending peril which for days had given him no peace. He did not know from what direction he expected the danger to come, but in his broken dreams at night and half-dreams during the day it was always the Seigneur over whom it hung. When he did not return from the forest Raoul had caught a sneering smile on the lips of Duplessis, and the boy wondered whether he might have anything to do with his command-

er's absence. He did not let the man out of his sight that night; but La Salle's story of his wanderings proved that his suspicion had been unfounded.

The next morning the contents of the canoes were distributed among the men, the canoes themselves being carried on their heads. Led by Beaver Tail, they started to traverse the five miles to the next portage. La Salle followed behind the Mohegan; then came Etienne, then François and then Raoul, and behind them the rest of the party, with Tonty at the rear.

Raoul caught sight of a number of strange skulls and bones scattered over the plain wherever the wind had blown away the snow.

"They are too big for deer," he said perplexedly when he had run to the top of a hillock to observe them better.

"They belonged to creatures called 'buffaloes'," explained Etienne. "They are said to be as thick as ants farther down the river. We'll have sport enough shooting them and good meat a-plenty."

When Raoul again looked ahead of him, he was surprised to see that Duplessis now walked before Etienne. Once again his vague suspicion was aroused. He ran ahead with another question to Etienne, and after the man had an-

swered, Raoul slipped naturally into the file ahead of him. Now nothing in the desolate landscape took his gaze from Duplessis. He could hear the man muttering angrily to himself, though in a tone so quiet that it did not reach the ears of La Salle just ahead. They now came to a turn in the trail, so that those in the rear for one moment would be out of sight of the ones who were around the corner. Raoul felt that the time which he had dreaded had come. He ran lightly around the curve and, though his feet seemed to him lead-shodden, he rushed up to Duplessis just in time to knock up the gun which he was pointing directly at La Salle's back.

Its report was the first intimation La Salle had of his danger. He turned and saw in an instant what had happened. The rear division hastened up, and Duplessis and Raoul were surrounded.

"What has happened?" they cried excitedly. "Did your gun burst?"

"I saw him aiming at the Seigneur," Raoul explained, without saying anything about how he had suspected Duplessis; "and I knocked the gun from his hand."

"'Tis a pity you did not turn it on the traitor's heart," cried Etienne, and Beaver Tail fin-

gered the knife in his belt as if it longed for a certain scalp lock.

Duplessis stood trembling and looked bewildered like one awakened suddenly from sleep. Father Hennepin took him aside, and soon afterwards came to La Salle to report that Duplessis had confessed that the evil spirit which he had harbored for days had now left him entirely and that he besought La Salle for forgiveness.

“Your penitent may be telling the truth or it may be a lie, Father,” said La Salle; “but it is best to act as if we believed him, since we have no jail here. I will leave it to you to give him such penances and fastings as you see fit.”

Then he bade Beaver Tail start on again and called Raoul to his side.

“You have put me in your debt, lad,” he said, laying his hand on his shoulder, “as you did before on Lake Erie. I do not think his bullet would have killed me, for my work is not yet done, but I am pleased that it was you who sent it in a different direction.”

Raoul’s happiness at these words was like that he had dreamed of knowing some day. La Salle continued: “Are you still glad to be with this expedition, to wander still for many months in search of my river, or do you wish you were

back in the Seneca lodge with the little maiden?"

"There is nothing in the world I would rather do than go with you, Seigneur," Raoul replied; "and yet there are times when I feel as if I had deserted Denise. Think you we shall ever hear of her again? Not an Indian have we passed that I have not asked for news of the Five Nations, in the hope that I might gain some clue."

Though La Salle had no belief that the child was still alive, he promised that whenever possible he would make enquiries about her.

"Here is the river Theakiki!" cried Beaver Tail, pointing to a slow running current between rushes and leafless bushes, scarcely wider than hundreds of the pools in the swampy land through which it meandered. Once again the canoes were afloat and before nightfall the river of the Illinois (the Theakiki) had widened and deepened and flowed more rapidly. "*Rivière Divine*" La Salle called it.

It was a bleak country through which they passed now day after day. Sometimes in the distance a glow of fire or smoke betrayed the Indian hunters. Beaver Tail had little luck, and the fare of all was scant.

"Look!" cried Raoul, one day when they were near the verge of starvation. "See yonder that great beast caught in the swamp!"

"Buffalo!" yelled Beaver Tail, springing ashore and shooting two arrows, which found their mark. The huge creature struggled a few seconds longer before he expired. Obeying Beaver Tail's orders, they managed to fasten a rope securely about the carcass, upon which twelve men pulled until they had dragged the buffalo to firm ground, where they cut it up and feasted heartily.

One day they saw an Indian town of between four or five hundred lodges, completely deserted. "They are off on their winter hunt," explained Beaver Tail, and Raoul could not help wondering whether a like cause might not have accounted for the deserted village of the Senecas when he and La Salle had gone to rescue Denise.

"These Illinois tribes when we do find them are not likely to treat us kindly," said François who was making a pair of moccasins for himself according to the Mohegan fashion Beaver Tail had shown him. "We shall have trouble yet, and Raoul, here, will be crying for his mother."

Raoul started to reply angrily, but Etienne took his part: "Let the lad alone, François. I'll wager you were less of a man than he at his age."

"We've no use for children," growled François. "He holds us back, and we might have missed this storm if he had not fallen ill yesterday."

It was true that Raoul had been overcome with a sharp fever the day before, and one of the friars who acted as physician to the expedition said that a day's rest was absolutely necessary for him. So La Salle sent some of the men out to shoot ducks while they waited. Raoul knew that François, who had always shown him ill will, was glad of another excuse to find fault with him. He made up his mind that some day the voyageur should acknowledge that he had done far more to help than to hinder the expedition.

It was a day or two after they had celebrated New Year as best they could that the river widened out to a lake the Indians called Pimitoui (now Peoria).

"See!" pointed Beaver Tail, "smoke! There are many lodges."

La Salle quickly made his preparations. The river, he saw, had narrowed again, and the wigwams of the Illinois lined both banks. "We shall be ready for them if they wish war," he said. "Tonty, take you the right bank and

train your guns on them, and I will see to the left bank."

The paddles were dropped, and the small cannon and muskets bristled over the sides of the eight canoes as the stream bore them rapidly into the camp.

For a few seconds Raoul's heart was beating loudly and every moment he awaited a whizzing of arrows. But the loud cries from the Indians were those of surprise and excitement, rather than the war-whoop, he discovered. They had been taken so unexpectedly that, though a few ran for their weapons, most of them stood waiting to see what the white men would do.

"Watch!" whispered Etienne to Raoul. "The Seigneur will once again prove himself the leader we know him to be. He has no fear, and it is the knowledge of this which makes the Indians respect him. There is no other man living, not Count Frontenac himself, who can handle the redskins as he can. Watch!"

La Salle gave a word of command and then sprang on the shore. Though Raoul's shoulder blades already seemed to feel an arrow, he followed with the rest of the men and stood with them when they halted, each making sure that his gun was ready to use.

“He does not seek to make friends,” whispered Etienne again. “He knows, lad, how much it is to our advantage to let them take the first step.”

And indeed, seeing that the French commander stood still as a stone, the Indians saw that they must act. Two chiefs brought forward a peace pipe and another called out to the young warriors on the opposite bank not to shoot the arrows they had already notched. La Salle, now certain that they desired peace, handed his musket to Beaver Tail, and taking a calumet from him, walked towards the chiefs.

Now all was changed. The Indians threw down their bows and, shouting cries of welcome, crowded about the French and led the way to the guest wigwam, where a feast was hurriedly prepared.

“This bear’s meat is good,” admitted Etienne to Raoul, “and so is this corn cake; but I declare I would prefer to find my own mouth than to have a dirty savage shove them to my teeth in his fists.”

Raoul, knowing more of the Indian ways, thanked his host for his hospitality when a particularly fine morsel was placed on his tongue, and the Indian started at the sound of the Sen-

eca words the boy used, though he seemed to understand them.

La Salle now distributed among the chiefs tobacco and shining hatchets, and then rose to make his speech. His usual reserve, which his enemies called coldness and pride, always left him when he treated with the Indians. He knew instinctively, as no other man of his day, unless it were Count Frontenac, how to approach them, how to touch their feelings and to make them do his will.

“My friends,” he began, “we thank you for your food; yet it is not the first time that we have eaten corn from the lodges of the Illinois. When we were starving we entered your lodges, for we knew that no man of your nation would ever fail to give food to hungry travelers. But we found your hearthfires cold and your squaws absent. Nevertheless, like squirrels who lay by nuts for the winter, they had laid by stores of corn and dried meat. These we took and ate. We left behind presents in their stead, but if your squaws ask for more I will see that they are satisfied, for I, La Salle, am a friend to the Indians and would not despoil them of a grain of their corn.”

There was a murmur of approval but it was not intended as an interruption.

“I am come,” continued La Salle, “to tell you that we are journeying to the great river which flows to the great waters far off in the south, where we shall find food and goods. With these we will gladden the hearts of the Illinois and brighten their wigwams. We come too to defend you against your enemies. We are at peace with the Iroquois, the Five Nations; but should they take the warpath against you, we, the French, will fight with you. See, our guns which spit fire and death. They shall be for your safety as are your own bows if you will give us a piece of land where we may make a home for them and surround them with palisades. I will build too a great canoe, as much larger than your war canoes as an oak is greater than an alder bush. In this we shall travel swiftly down the great river and back again. But,” he said, pausing a moment, “if you desire not to be friends with La Salle and will not help him build his canoe and his fort, then will he pass on to the Osages, who will be greedy to receive the goods we shall bring back with us, and who will be glad to sleep peacefully, knowing that the arrows of their foes will not trouble them while Frenchmen watch.”

“Nay! Go not to the Osages,” said a chief as

La Salle sat down. "We are your friends, and your plans shall be our plans."

The other chiefs echoed his words and declared that the French chief had only to speak to have what he willed. Now that this was settled, there was more feasting and dancing, until Raoul fell asleep from the heat and weariness.





CHAPTER IX TREACHERY

PERHAPS because of his deep sleep earlier in the evening, Raoul found himself strangely wakeful towards morning, in the lodge which he shared with half of the Frenchmen. It was so stiflingly hot from the big fire still burning in the center that he crept over his sleeping companions and went outside for a breath of air. The crispness of the snow underfoot and the bright stars above seemed to him far more desirable than the crowded wigwam. Fearing no harm from the Indians, he strolled quietly through the village. As he came opposite the guest lodge where they had been feasted that afternoon, he heard a voice inside and caught the words "Frenchmen" and "Iroquois." He knew that a meeting at this time of night would never be held except for some unusual cause, and he determined to find out what it betokened.

He drew carefully into the shadow and threw himself down on his stomach. He crept closer to the lodge, and after fingering the bark covering, was successful in finding a spot where it did not quite lap. He put his eye to the hole and could see all the chiefs in council, even Omawha, whom La Salle had delighted by the gift of two hatchets and three knives. They were smoking solemnly, eyes and ears fixed on an Indian who was standing before them. Raoul saw that he was of a different tribe, and later he heard one of the Illinois call him Monso, the Mascoutin. With him were six strange Indians who bore some knives and kettles which they could have secured only from Frenchmen. These were evidently presents to the Illinois.

Raoul felt certain that what was being said within the lodge was of vital importance to La Salle and the expedition, and he wished with all his heart that his commander were there to listen to the speeches. He acknowledged to himself that he was afraid to stay where he was; if there were indeed plotting against the Frenchmen going on and he were discovered, his fate would be a terrible one. He trembled to stay—but he stayed, trembling. He heard Monso say how he had been sent by certain of the French far away at Quebec, who had the good of their Illi-

nois brothers at heart, and with presents that he might prove to them this friendship. He had come to warn them, he said, against this man La Salle. "He is a spy of the Iroquois," he declared, "and he goes down the Great River in order to bribe the tribes to the west and south to make war against you, so that between those tribes and the hog-eating Iroquois you Illinois shall be crushed as a squaw crushes maize between two stones. If you would not perish thus, be sure then—so council you your friends who send these presents—that you do not let this spy and his men pass onward."

Raoul could see that Monso's words had made a distinct impression and the chiefs, speaking slowly one after another, promised to heed the warning and to find a way to put obstacles in the path of the Frenchman. Then Monso and his men rose and went quietly out of the lodge and hurried away out of the village, so that by morning there might be no sign of their presence. Raoul crept back cautiously, fearfully, on his stomach, until he dared get up and run. Then he made for the lodge where he knew he would find La Salle. He touched him gently on the arm, not even waking Tonty who slept near. He whispered what he had heard and seen.

“So mine enemies found me out even here!” exclaimed La Salle bitterly. “Yet shall they not triumph over me. Once again thanks, my lad. It is another service you have rendered me. Go back now”—he went to the opening and peered out to see if anyone were near—“it were better that no one should even know that we have spoken together.”

In the morning Omawha stood at the opening of La Salle’s lodge. When the Frenchman had greeted him and bade him enter, he told him of Monso and what had been said at the council the night before. “This,” he said gravely, “I tell you because you are my friend.”

La Salle thanked him and gave him a string of beads for his squaw, but did not say that he had known this before.

When La Salle and Tonty sallied forth from their lodge they affected to believe that all was well; that the Illinois were ready to fulfil their promises of the day before. But the manner of the Indians was so different, almost hostile, that Tonty remarked it, and La Salle explained the cause.

That afternoon one of the chiefs, Nicanopé, invited them to a big feast at his wigwam. He did not say that his tribe would not help the Frenchmen on their way to the Great River, but

he said that he felt it right to warn them of the great dangers before them if they persisted in traveling down the river.

“There are man-eating alligators and other terrible beasts which will not let you pass; there are whirlpools so strong that no canoe can live through them; and even should you escape these dangers, the banks are lined with savage tribes so fierce that all other tribes dread them, and against their poisoned arrows nothing can avail.”

La Salle's voice was low and troubled as he said to Tonty: “I would that none of my men understood the Indian tongue. Those that understand are translating for the others, and look, how they are affected by what they hear.” Then he rose and turned to the chiefs and said:

“I thank you for your warning given to me in friendship; yet if in truth there be these dangers awaiting us, so much the greater will be the honor of our journey; and no Frenchman ever fears anything that may threaten. But, my friends, perchance it is that you have not known the real truths about the river; have not the Illinois listened to lies? Do they think that La Salle slept while Monso crept through the dark last night to lie to you that we were spies of the Iroquois? He knows where lie hidden the presents which

Monso gave you as a reward for trying to frighten us!"

Even the stolidity of the Indian nature was not complete enough to enable them to listen unmoved to these words. Their faces showed their amazement, though they sought to hide it. They did not understand how the French leader could have discovered so much.

La Salle continued: "If Monso had spoken the truth, would he show his face only in the dark? If I were a spy of the Iroquois, would it not have been easy for me to have slain you while your young braves were away on the hunt? Have we brought harm to you, or bright hatchets and sharp knives such as your stone hammers cannot fashion? If you do not desire our friendship say so without fear, but if you be our friends go fetch this lying Monso and I will show you that he speaks not the truth."

The Indians had listened with deep interest to the Frenchman's speech, and some of them were convinced, and the others thought it at least well to appear so. Therefore the feast was resumed and good feeling seemed to reign. But La Salle was not sure of their intentions and took pains to guard his men.

That night there was another secret meeting, but this time it was not the Indians, but certain

of the Frenchmen, who met together to declare that they would not risk their lives further by accompanying a madman into such dangers as the Indians had pictured. Then they stole silently out of the village and started back north, to a world and men that were familiar to them.

“Tonty!” exclaimed La Salle when he learned the next morning of these desertions, “this reality is worse than any imaginary danger. I fear not death; I cry not when I am hungry, cold or weary, but now indeed must I complain of the evil which has befallen me—that my men in whom I trusted have deserted me!”

He called the others together and said that if there were any among them who still feared to accompany him he would allow them to return to Canada as soon as the winter was over.

“Whom can I trust?” he asked Tonty bitterly.

Raoul longed to tell him how the desertion of the others had made his own loyalty the stronger, as if he would make up for the shortcomings of those who had left, but he could not find courage to put his thoughts into words. That noon it was the boy's duty to fetch La Salle's dinner from the lodge, just across the street which ran down the center of the village, where the squaws cooked all the food for the white guests. A savory portion of venison was poured into a

large gourd and, because it was hot to hold, Raoul laid it down by the entrance of the lodge while he went back to get another gourd of fish which a second squaw handed him.

“I never tasted better venison in my life,” commented La Salle when Raoul had brought it to him, for like all the others in the expedition since they left Fort Frontenac, he had usually had far more appetite than food to satisfy it. But not half an hour later he was seized with terrible cramps and his face was twisted with pain.

“I am poisoned, Tonty,” he cried; “they have poisoned me!”

Raoul was in front of the lodge when Tonty rushed out and bade him fetch Etienne as swiftly as possible. The burly voyageur was soon there, and Tonty left him to watch La Salle while he prepared a drink with a precious powder which had been given him in Italy as an antidote for poison. The two men hung anxiously over La Salle to await the results. Before long they were relieved to discover that the cramps were disappearing and that their leader’s body was growing less rigid.

While Raoul stood outside the lodge, not knowing what had happened, believing that it

was only some matter of every-day orders for which Etienne was wanted, an Indian strolled by, snapping his fingers at his dog who kept jumping up in the air in recognition of his master's notice. The man seemed to pay no attention to the white boy, yet as he passed he repeated in a low voice the words: "White Thrush, White Thrush."

Raoul started, for this name was that by which he had been known to the Senecas as well as that of "Ralo," and he glanced quickly at the Indian to see if he were a member of that tribe. But his leggings and the way he wore his hair proclaimed an Illinois. Yet he felt sure that the Indian had spoken the words with design. He started to run after him, his heart beating with excitement at the thought that perhaps he might hear some news of the Senecas and of Denise. Then he remembered that this was not the way to gain what he wanted from an Indian, so he stood still and let the man pass on. A few moments later, as if moved by mere curiosity, he strolled down the village, stopping to look in at the lodges where braves and squaws were sitting around the fires, but never allowing the man ahead to get out of sight. He followed until he entered the edge of a wood which almost bordered the river, where snow-covered ever-

greens imposed an effective barrier between it and the village. Here he found the Indian seated on a rock, cuffing his dog good naturedly. He did not even look up as Raoul approached and asked:

“You are no Seneca?”

“Can White Thrush not see,” he answered, “that I am an Illinois?”

“Yet you are speaking in the Seneca tongue,” said the bewildered boy.

“I have friends in the tribe,” he explained.

“Tell me,” cried Raoul, “the news you bear of them, since you call me by the name they gave me. What befell the family of Old Wolf and Red Wing?”

“Was there no other name you have not spoken?” asked the Indian, now looking squarely into Raoul’s face.

“In truth, I do desire news of the French maiden who abode in the lodge of Old Wolf,” he answered. “Have you news of her for me? Be quick; I have waited so long for it.”

“I have no news,” the Indian said, rising and walking towards the village.

“But you brought not White Thrush here for naught,” protested Raoul; and he would have liked to cry with disappointment.

“If you would meet those who have news of your friends you must travel farther. Yonder towards the north,” he pointed, “there are those you may meet and question ere the Sun sleeps.”

He walked away, snapping his fingers at his dog, back to the village, while Raoul ran in the opposite direction, in haste to learn of Denise and to get back to La Salle.

When La Salle came to himself again out of the depths of agony, he saw about him the anxious faces of Tonty, Etienne and François. They brightened as his eyes opened and smiled wanly at them.

“They did not kill me,” were his first words; “but to think that it should have been one of my own men, one with whom I have shared dangers in the wilderness and broken bread, who desires my death! It cuts me to the heart, my friends. Who can it be and wherefore?” Then he sank back on the skins they had laid out for him, weakened by the exertion of talking. Tonty thought it his duty, now that La Salle was out of danger, to waste no more time in searching for the man who had done the dastardly deed. So taking Etienne with him, he bade François watch the Seigneur.

Soon La Salle’s native vigor began to assert

itself and he sat up. François came and crouched down on the floor beside him.

"Would you know," he said, "whom to suspect, look to the one who brought you food."

"What, Raoul!" cried La Salle. "Be not a fool, François. As soon suspect an angel as that lad."

François did not attempt to remonstrate. He spoke quietly as if only thinking aloud: "No one else handled the gourd from the minute the squaw filled it from the kettle from which we all ate until it reached your mouth."

"Cease," commanded La Salle. "I will not listen to such words. Thrice the lad has done me great service; why should he seek now to kill me? You are jealous, François, because I love him."

La Salle had hit the truth. Until the coming of Raoul, François had been the youngest member of the expedition, the son of one of La Salle's tenants at La Chine, he had made much of the sturdy, brave boy, and had taken him on many journeys and hunting trips. He had found him zealous and eager to serve him, but black-tempered and remorseless as a savage, and jealous of favor which his Seigneur showed to others.

"You are jealous, François," La Salle re-

peated. "That flatters me, but I will not permit your jealousy to injure another. You will see that the real criminal will soon betray himself, and you will live to see Raoul grow into a man we shall all be proud of. Breathe not a word of your unjust suspicions to anyone, and in particular not to the boy."

He spoke sharply in the voice of command which even François knew could not be disputed. Nevertheless, he could not help replying: "I shall have no chance of saying anything to him; you will see that he will not return to be caught."

La Salle was angry at this persistence but said nothing more. His mind kept going over, one by one, the members of his party. Sadly he confessed to himself that there were not more than half a dozen of whose innocence he could be sure. Tonty and Etienne returned no wiser than they went.

"Where is Raoul?" asked La Salle as evening came.

No one could tell; no one had seen him since noon. The following day there was no sign of him, nor the day after that. Then an Indian who returned from the hunt related that he had met several Frenchmen traveling northward and with them was a boy.

"The traitors!" cried La Salle, "and Raoul

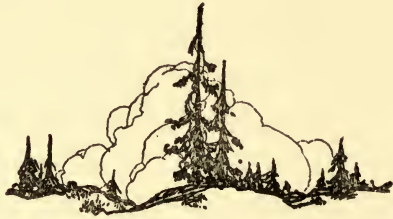
with them! I had not believed the lad would desert me if my guardian angel had foretold it. I had thought him one who could be trusted to the utmost. But this wilderness is a stronger poison than that given to me. It kills loyalty!"

Though he was forced to admit Raoul's treachery in deserting him, he would not believe that it was he who had sought to take his life, and he waited for the future to disclose the criminals. As soon as the snow thawed he and Father Hennepin set forth for the site of the fort the Illinois had promised to permit them to build.

"We will call it Fort Crève-cœur" (Fort Breakheart, near the site of the present city of Peoria), declared La Salle; "yet mine is not yet broken in spite of all our disasters."

The latest of these disasters was his conviction that the *Griffin* was really lost. He was never to learn what had really been her fate. When he reluctantly became convinced that the vessel would not return, he realized that, since there was no chance of the supplies on board her ever reaching him, he must once again return to Fort Frontenac to secure others. He sent Father Hennepin to explore the river Illinois to the

mouth, and leaving Tonty and the rest of the party in the village, he set off with Beaver Tail and four others once again on the long journey back to Montreal.





CHAPTER X

TONTY IN DANGER

WHEN Raoul had run for half an hour northward along the trail he caught sight of the blaze of a fire and of the five or six figures bending over it. Now for the first time it came to him how unwise he had been to leave the village without telling anyone of where he was going, or without knowing whom he was seeking. For a moment he thought of turning back, but the possibility that in a few moments he might gain news of Denise, even at cost of danger to himself, made him go on. To his amazement as he approached the group he heard French words and saw that it was not Indians, but Frenchmen who had been warming themselves—the very men who had deserted!

They looked up and called to him; made place for him before the fire and put a piece of freshly-cooked turkey in his hand.

“Welcome, *White Thrush!*” they cried, smiling. “Forgive us for our ruse, but we were cer-

tain that your curiosity would bring you to us, for you have talked so much about your captors that we knew all about your adventures.”

“Have you in truth no news of the Senecas for me?” cried Raoul, his disappointment almost choking him.

“None, save that perchance you may find them if you throw in your lot with us.”

“What are you doing here?” Raoul demanded, a note of authority ringing in his voice which to the deserters seemed an echo of La Salle’s. “Do you not know that the Seigneur is awaiting you?”

“He is no longer our Seigneur,” answered a tall *coureur de bois*. “We are our own lords now, and we will no longer waste our days and endanger our lives hunting for some river that belongs to the devil. We know where fortunes can be made nearer at home.”

Raoul started to cry out his opinion of this treachery, but Poiret waved his hand to silence him, and a smile broke over his face, so jolly that it was difficult for the boy to consider him a traitor while he looked at it.

“Let that be,” said Poiret softly as if soothing an angry child. “We know that we are naughty boys who have run away, but that won’t make us go back again. We have other plans

—we are bound north, and we shall pick out a nice little country which the Jesuits haven't yet combed for converts and pelts; and we and all those who like to join us shall hunt for martins and foxes, and all the nice little beasties the good God gave warm coats to. And we shall skin them and sell them to the Iroquois; and our friend La Salle, or even the Governor himself, won't be able to prevent it. And we shall grow rich and buy ourselves seigneuries too, if it likes us."

He recited this as glibly as if it were something he had learned by heart, and his companions nodded in assent and clapped their hands.

"What have I to do with such cowards and slothful men as you," asked Raoul scornfully, "who prefer to break faith in order to make a fortune? Why did you bring me here; you could never imagine that I would become one of you?"

"Who wants a baby?" sneered one who had not spoken before.

"The *baby* can read and draw up letters and write down accounts, which is more than any of us can do, Antoine," commented Poiret soothingly, and turning to Raoul, he clapped him on the shoulder: "That is why we need you, lad, when we trade with the Dutch and the English.

Don't get angry but think what a life it will be for you. If you love the woods, as we all do, there will be days and nights of trapping and shooting; if you wish money the pelts will bring it to you; and if you are ambitious, who knows—you are a noble—but that when you grow up we may choose you to rule us."

"It is little you know of nobles," said Raoul disdainfully, "if you think that they desert their leaders in the face of danger. I will waste no more time with you," and he jumped up and started to run back in the direction he had come, suddenly realizing how long he had been gone.

"Not so quick, young Hothead!" cried Poiret, catching hold of his jacket as he passed. "Do you imagine that you are going back to tell La Salle our whereabouts and our plans? If you will not join us voluntarily you must at least bear with our company until we are many leagues from here."

Raoul looked around at the men to see whether they were supporting Poiret's words. There was no sign of dissent; indeed, the expression on their faces was so sinister that he turned from them to the smiling Poiret.

"We have no desire to harm you, lad," he said, and Raoul knew that he spoke the truth as far as his own intentions were concerned; "but

neither can we let you harm us, so you will not be allowed out of our sight."

There was no use pleading, and nothing to do but to follow when Poiret gave the order to set off. That night several more deserters joined them. As they tramped northward Raoul's heart was heavier than it had been even when he was the captive of the Senecas and not knowing whether the savages meant to torture and kill him. Now he was in no real danger, but he could think of nothing save what La Salle would be thinking of his disappearance. Would he believe that he too had deserted him, that he had turned away from sharing his dangers and hardships? He was almost wild at this possibility.

For several days he trudged along, speaking to no one, though Poiret tried often to rouse him. All the time he watched in vain for an opportunity to escape, but every one of the men had made himself his jailer, and there was not a minute of the day that some eyes were not on him. At night Poiret made him sleep between him and Antoine, and every time he moved one of them was sure to wake up. But it would be during the night, he knew, that he must make his escape, if at all, and he recalled the night when he and Denise had thought to evade Red Wing.

The fatigue of three days' almost uninterrupted travel at last made Poiret sleep heavily, and the knowledge that they had come so far induced him to believe that the boy would not dream of trying to find the way back alone to the Illinois village. Raoul, always on the lookout for an opportunity, noticed that Antoine, still sleeping, had rolled over near the warmth of the fire and left a free space of ground between him and Poiret. The careless deserters had set no guard, so Raoul rose and, creeping gently as an Indian, wound his way between them, and by the time day dawned he was several miles away.

An ankle twisted in a fall on a frozen pond hidden by thick snow delayed him; he saw no game and moreover had no method of killing if he had seen it. Warmth at night at least was his; where there was dry wood he no longer needed a tinder-box to set it ablaze. But it was a wan, hungry boy who limped into the Illinois village at last, his heart beating at the thought of the meeting with the Seigneur. The Indians stared at him but said nothing as he made for La Salle's lodge. He found Tonty inside.

"Where is the Seigneur?" he asked as the Italian cried out in amazement:

"You?"

"The Seigneur?" he repeated.

"He is gone, back to Fort Frontenac," Tonty replied.

"Gone!" Raoul ejaculated as if he could not comprehend the meaning of the word. "Gone! What did he think of me?"

And Tonty told him all; how La Salle believed that he had deserted him; how François had accused him of having poisoned his master. Raoul was so overwhelmed by this additional disaster that he could not speak for a moment. At last he asked:

"Did he believe that?"

"That you had poisoned him? No," the Italian answered. "He declared, and I agreed with him, that it was impossible to conceive you a murderer."

"It was Duplessis, I believe," Raoul remarked after thinking awhile. "I read again the signs of guilt in his face when we were together there in the woods. He must have poured the poison into the food during the one moment I left the gourd at the opening of the wigwam."

Tonty questioned him about the deserters; so Raoul related all that had happened from the moment the Indian had spoken the words "White Thrush," and Tonty, whose generous

heart pitied the boy's distress, sought to console him.

It was a day or two later that two of the men returned with a message to Tonty from La Salle—that he should make a stronghold of the great cliff above the Illinois village, near the mouth of the Vermilion river, about which they had often spoken together as a natural fortification of unusual value. So the Italian, leaving most of his command at the village, set off with the others. While he was gone the malcontents, freed from the stern rule of La Salle and Tonty, talked openly of their discontent, of how, even if they should survive the dangers of the expedition, their wages would never be paid since La Salle was bankrupt. Raoul was troubled by this, but there was nothing he could do. And one morning when he awoke he found that the wigwams where the Frenchmen had been lodged were empty of themselves, of the food, ammunition and all the other stored supplies. While he stood there in dismay he was joined by young *Sieur de Boisrondet*, whom Tonty had left in command during his absence.

"They too have deserted us," exclaimed the young noble. "How many of us are left?"

"There are the two friars," Raoul answered,

“and two more men who are faithful—six in all.”

De Boisrondet lost no time in hastening to the rock, and soon Tonty, having sent four of those who were with him to speed with the news to La Salle, returned to the village.

“What is this written on the side of our poor ship?” he queried as he examined the hull of the successor of the *Griffin* which was destined never to be completed.

“‘We are all savages,’” read Raoul. “They have burned the words in as a message to us. I wonder if they have joined the others. Poiret probably knew that they were coming and waited for them. But what shall we do now, Sieur Tonty? Shall we go back to the rock and fortify ourselves?”

Tonty did not reply for some time. It was indeed difficult to know what could be done to make themselves safe among a people none too friendly towards them. At last he said:

“We have no force to oppose to theirs, therefore we must trust them nor ever let the savages believe we fear them. Are you man enough to play your part, Raoul?”

“I will do my best,” he replied.

Tonty made as plausible an explanation as he could to the Illinois of the actions of the desert-

ers. Soon the braves who had been absent on the spring hunt returned to the village, eight thousand of them, Raoul counted. The spring melted into a hot summer, and now the cool winds of autumn would soon be blowing, yet, still there was no news from La Salle. Tonty and his five companions had no lack of food or shelter; the two friars had endeavored to begin their missionary work, but they had not yet learned to speak the Illinois' tongue sufficiently well. Yet though the days passed quietly enough and the attitude of their Indian hosts had not changed, the Frenchmen were conscious that they were distrusted, that the chiefs could not understand why they had come in the first place nor why they now remained.

This quiet life soon came to an end. Raoul and Tonty were together in the lodge now occupied by all of the Frenchmen when they heard terrific cries outside. Before they could get out to find the cause, the lodge flap was pulled back and there streamed in as many Indians as the place would hold. They shrieked, shook their clubs at Tonty and cried out words which he could not altogether understand, but of which Raoul called out the meaning to him.

“They say their scouts have brought word that an Iroquois war party is upon them, and

they hold us responsible for stirring up their ancient foes."

Tonty did not need to have explained the danger of his position, but he showed no sign of fear. "We are friends, friends of the Illinois," he kept saying calmly. But the Illinois were only partly convinced; they seized the precious forge and other stores which the deserters had not carried off, and threw them into the river. Then knowing that Tonty could not escape and that there was little time to lose, they rushed out to prepare for the Iroquois' attack.

"They are carrying off their squaws and children to an island down the stream," reported Raoul standing in the entrance and listening to all that was going on. "They will leave some of the braves to defend them. They think that the Iroquois will attack to-morrow."

That night Tonty and his little band watched the great fires that had been lighted along the river and listened to the din of rattles and cries of the excited braves as they danced the war dance. One of the boys, Water Rat, who was about Raoul's age and who had been friendly with him in many ways, hunting and trapping and fishing, came by to display proudly his paint and the new war club he had been allowed to assume.

"We shall kill you to-morrow," he announced cheerfully, "if we find that in truth you have leagued with our enemies."

"The Illinois are cowards," mocked Raoul in return; "perchance there will be none of you left to kill us."

In the morning the scouts returned to say that the foe was encamped in the forest along the Aramoni river. They had caught sight of one of them clothed in French garments, and they thought it was La Salle. Once more they rushed to Tonty's lodge to charge him with the treachery of his commander.

"Your scouts have weak eyes," shouted Tonty, calm in demeanor though tomahawks were brandished over his head and might descend any moment. "They cannot tell a Frenchman from an Iroquois. Would your chiefs have proof that we are your friends? Then will we go with you and fight by your side."

Once again Raoul saw the intrepid Italian's courage and resourcefulness save them. Most of the Indians seemed pacified and the others had no time to argue, for the drums told them the Iroquois were upon them. Tonty and the five Frenchmen followed to the shore and saw the Illinois' war canoes filled with braves, shrieking and shooting with bows and guns, headed

for the other shore, where on the plain below the enemy was massing.

“The odds are against the Illinois,” exclaimed Tonty to de Boisrondet. “They will be overcome shortly and all of us will perish with them unless something be done.” He pondered a moment, then he turned to Raoul and said: “Get me a string of wampum.”

Luckily Raoul knew where the Illinois kept the precious wampum belts and he knew also which ones were borne by peace envoys. He rushed to the lodge that was now unguarded, picked out one from the case of bearskin and hurried back.

“Remain here,” commanded Tonty. “I and the Sieur de Boisrondet will do that which our duty demands, desperate chance though it be.”

But Raoul disobeyed and followed them to the other shore. Water Rat’s older brother, who had just returned from bearing a message to the island where were the squaws, was jumping into a canoe. Raoul told him what he guessed of Tonty’s intention, and the young brave allowed him to cross with him. Once on the other side, the two joined Tonty and de Boisrondet, and there was no time to find fault with the boy for his disobedience. The arrows and shot whistled before them.

“Go back to the foot of the hill,” commanded Tonty, and the three this time did as they were bid. They watched Tonty as he strode forward alone, weaponless, holding out the wampum.

“They breed men in Italy!” exclaimed de Boisrondet in admiration of his courage. “No wonder their ancestors, the Romans, conquered the world.”

“But see,” cried Raoul, “they have surrounded him; they are dancing and firing and shrieking so that I cannot tell what has happened. I will climb up into this tree so that I can see farther.”

A minute later he called down: “A brave has jabbed Tonty’s side with a knife . . . Will he fall? . . . No, he puts his hand to the wound, but he is talking. The Iroquois point to his ears, and I think they mean he must be a Frenchman because they are not pierced for rings. No wonder they first believed him to be an Illinois. In these Indian garments we all look like them, except for the absence of paint.”

“It is quieter now,” said de Boisrondet as a lull in the fighting followed. “Can you hear what Tonty is saying?”

“Yes!” replied Raoul. “He shouts out, though the blood is flowing from his mouth, that the Illinois are now the children of the King

of France, even as are the Iroquois, and that Onontio—you know so they call the Governor—will be very angry if they fight each other.”

“The saints have mercy and protect us!” de Boisrondet cried, “an Iroquois is waving Tonty’s hat in the air. The Illinois will think he is killed and that the combat cannot be stopped.”

And so in truth it happened. The fighting began, more fiercely than before, and the Iroquois, instead of listening to Tonty, threatened to kill him. Raoul saw with horror that one of them had hold of Tonty’s scalp lock and was brandishing the knife around. He could hear Tonty’s firm words even while death was so near, saying that the Illinois had twelve hundred warriors and that sixty Frenchmen were waiting in the village to join him if need be. Finally, however, these words and the advice of one of the chiefs who had long been friends with La Salle, influenced them. They agreed that Tonty should go back to the Illinois as peace-maker.

“He has succeeded!” exclaimed Raoul, tumbling down from the tree and running to meet him as he returned, bleeding but triumphant.

But, alas, the peace was not to endure; the Iroquois were prepared to break the treaty as soon as they found a favorable opportunity, and Tonty, who refused to be fooled by their soft

words and their gifts, asked them the direct question—when they meant to go and leave the Illinois alone. The Iroquois chiefs grew angry, and Tonty departed from the council lodge. He realized that he had done all any man could do in his endeavors to make friendly neighbors of ancient foes, so he slipped away at night with Raoul, Membré, Boisrondet and two others, and paddled rapidly up the river.

The Illinois, believing the Iroquois intended to turn over a new leaf, had unwisely separated into their different tribes. The Iroquois, taking advantage of this, attacked one of them—the Tamaroas—and a fearful massacre of the women and children took place, the horrible proofs of which La Salle was to come across later on.





CHAPTER XI

HUNTING AND TRAPPING

IT was good, thought Raoul about six weeks later, as he sat before the fire of his lodge scraping a pelt, to be among friends once again, to have one's stomach filled and one's scalp tight on one's head. The Pottawattamies were friends of La Salle, and Raoul liked to listen when the old chief talked of the Frenchman and said that he knew only three great captains in the world: Frontenac, La Salle and himself. Now that he was in safety, he shuddered at the memory of all he had gone through since the day Tonty, carrying the wampum, had tried to make peace between the Illinois and the Iroquois. While he was passing from one danger to another, enduring hardship after hardship, he had been either too excited or too numbed with fatigue, cold and hunger to look back to the woes of yes-

terday or forward to the strain of to-morrow.

Now, with the heat of a blazing fire enveloping him, he shivered, thinking of the thirty-five days of bitter cold during which they had traveled northward on land or over the frozen surface of Lake Michigan, until they reached the hospitable Pottawattamies at Green Bay, who welcomed and sheltered the forlorn five: Tonty, de Boisrondet, Father Membré, Renault and himself; for Father Ribourde had strolled away from them one day and had been scalped by a wandering band of Indians. Father Hennepin had left them some time before to explore the Illinois and had had many strange adventures which cannot be related here. He recalled their slipping away from the village of the Illinois, when the treaty Tonty had succeeded in making between the Illinois and the Iroquois came to a sudden end, and the Frenchmen found themselves suspected by both tribes; the time when de Boisrondet was lost for several days; their long tramp along the borders of the bay, and finally, when Tonty was ill and all of them starving, their arrival at their quiet winter haven.

Now that their own troubles were over they had time to worry about La Salle and to wonder why they had not heard something about his movements. Raoul's anxiety was even greater

than that of the others, for he suffered continually at the thought that La Salle believed him to be a deserter.

He brooded over this in spite of Tonty's advice, but at last he hit upon an activity which would help him pass the time and which consoled him with the knowledge that he was doing something for the man he so respected. He knew that the great expedition could not succeed without money, and that La Salle had spent all he owned and had mortgaged his property and had borrowed from friends and relations. He knew too that the great source of revenue in New France was furs, necessary coverings for men against the rigors of the Canadian winters and a rich ornamentation for the belles at the Court of King Louis. He had seen the great stone storehouses at Fort Frontenac and at Ville Marie piled to the top of their dark interiors with evil-smelling, precious pelts.

He had heard men tell that the regulation of the traffic in furs troubled the governor and even the royal ministers across the sea; that some of the men and some of the religious houses were allowed to trade in them with the Indians, and that others were shut off from this manner of making a fortune. He had listened to the *cour-*

eurs de bois when they boasted of the way they had outwitted those in authority by disposing at good figures of the skins won by their own guns and traps. He knew that some of the bloody warfare between the different Indian tribes was caused by the refusal of certain tribes to allow others to hunt or to trade in what they considered their own territories. So skins were to him, as to all in New France, a kind of currency; and he determined that while waiting for La Salle he would get together as much of these riches as possible.

One of the Pottawattamie hunters, Black Duck, was starting out one afternoon to set his traps. Raoul watched him with interest as he entered the forest. Then, urged by a sudden impulse, he ran after him.

“Let me go with you,” he begged.

Black Duck nodded and seemed pleased to have the company of the French lad. They talked as they went, and Raoul enquired if there was a great number of animals to be caught near the village.

“There are enough for all our own bodies and coverings for our lodges,” the Indian replied. “If Black Duck wants more, skins for barter, skins to pile up, many skins like snowflakes, he knows a place.”

"Where?" asked Raoul.

"Black Duck knows, but Black Duck won't tell," was all the answer he got. But presently the Pottawattomie, kneeling down on the snow in front of a trap he was baiting for a fox, looked over his shoulder, his small, good-natured eyes half closed, and asked: "Would white boy like to go there with Black Duck?"

Raoul did not waste time in settling this matter. On their return to the village he asked Tonty for permission to accompany Black Duck on a fortnight's hunting trip. Tonty consulted the chief, of whose friendship he could not doubt.

"It is good," he replied, "let him go. Black Duck is my brother's son. He is good. The boy is old enough to kill deer for his own leggings."

So Raoul, clad now as warmly as his companion and carrying bow, arrows, a hatchet and a knife, set off delightedly. Black Duck, a man of about fifty, was as quick and active as Raoul, and of much greater endurance. He showed Raoul how to manufacture the traps he used, some small ones for rabbits and squirrels, and larger ones for foxes, mink, beaver and otter. They traveled fifteen to twenty miles a day, Raoul judged; and though to him there was no sign of a trail, the Indian rarely hesi-

tated. Sometimes he shot a deer, sometimes smaller beasts, an opossum, or perhaps a duck or a wood pigeon. An hour or more before sunset they would stop and quickly picking out the best spot, Black Duck would bait his traps. Then followed supper, a nodding over the huge fire and then sleep under the stars until dawn. The traps were then visited and emptied; never was one found empty, except once or twice when its occupant had succeeded in springing it.

"A bear!" sniffed Black Duck one morning as he pointed to the broken trap and some footprints in the snow.

Each day farther from the village the evidences of game increased. Everywhere were little tracks crisscrossing the white surface, and here and there bits of furs and spots of red showed where some hungry animal had made a meal off a small victim. All along the trail Black Duck made caches for what his traps and bow had brought him; sometimes he skinned the beasts when they had need of food and buried the pelts. Raoul had grown quite expert in helping, and now made and set his own traps and cached his booty. He had not been as successful with his bow; often he missed what he aimed at, and Black Duck would laugh with amusement.

“Hold it so,” he then explained, “not let it quiver. Wait till arm is firm as rock before you pull cord.”

And when Raoul did bring down a pigeon and at last a deer the Indian’s kindly face shone with satisfaction.

“Will be great hunter some day,” he promised.

In six days, after traveling nearly eighty miles, according to Raoul’s calculation, they reached their destination.

“The beasts come here to get warm,” explained Black Duck, pointing to a large dark pool that yawned through all the white of the landscape. Behind them was the forest through which they had come, and sloping down from it to a small frozen river below, was an almost open field. Just where it joined the forest was the pool.

“Put your hand in,” commanded Black Duck, and when Raoul knelt down and did so he jumped back in astonishment, for the water was warm.

“Spirits of animals dead make pool warm for their brothers so they won’t die in winter,” was the Indian’s explanation.

All about were tracks large and small. Raoul, who could now distinguish the prints of the ani-

mals from one another, noticed those of a bear cub. Black Duck went off into the forest to cut wood for the many additional traps they would need, and Raoul, concealing himself behind a rock between the crevices of which he could see the pool, waited. The wind was blowing from the river towards him, so he knew that any creatures coming from that direction could not scent him. Soon he heard the crying of some small animal, and after looking around, discovered a dark object on the edge of the forest. It was a bear cub which seemed to have cut his foot on a jagged branch of a tree that had been shivered and broken by a summer thunderbolt.

Raoul watched to see what would happen. He half hoped and half feared that the mother bear would hear the crying and come to the aid of her young. Soon he caught sight of her lumbering up from the river, where she had broken the thin ice along the edge and pulled out a fish. He felt for his bow, but something withheld him from shooting; he didn't know whether it was fear or pity for the cub. The old bear soon reached it and began licking the wounded paw. Then she gave the cub a gentle blow with her own huge brown leathery paw and started it towards the pond. She guided it to the edge and make it dip the wounded member into the warm

water, and the cub seemed to appreciate the comfort it gave.

Raoul was so amused at watching this scene that he forgot all caution and came out in front of the rock to see better. The mother bear suddenly lifted her head, sniffed the air, then turned and started for him before he could realize that he was even in danger. His first thought was for his bow, but when he started back for it he tripped on a frozen ridge of the rock. His heart sank as he heard the bear behind him, near enough for her panting to be distinctly audible. He jumped to his feet but knew that there was no hope of outrunning the creature, awkward as it seemed to be. He prayed that Black Duck would appear and cried out on the chance that his call might reach him. But there was no time—the great brown beast was now not more than ten feet away. He pulled out his knife; at least he could try to defend his life. The bear reared; it seemed as if a dark mountain were about to descend upon him. He thrust out the knife, blindly . . . it struck something, and something tore his shoulder, and then all was darkness. . . .

When he regained consciousness he heard Black Duck saying: "He has slain a bear! A bear which would do honor to a great chief!"

Raoul got painfully to his feet, and there in the reddened snow beside him, lay the beast. The Indian felt of Raoul's shoulder, and with a gesture not unlike that of the mother bear with her cub, shoved him to the pond, and pulling up the deerskin shirt, made him stoop down while he bathed his lacerated skin in the warm water.

Later, when stiff but proud, Raoul was eating some of the bear's meat, Black Duck laid on his knees a perfect skin of a white fox.

"Never has Black Duck seen a finer," he said smoothing it out. "It is fit for the little white maiden, who will make herself a cap and moccasins of it. Ever since she said kind words to me last summer and made the Pottawattamie hunter welcome in the lodge of the Senecas, I have looked for a fitting gift to bring her. She too was once French, she told old Black Duck when she laughed with him."

"A French maiden in the lodge of the Senecas!" cried Raoul, forgetting the pain of his wound and the pride of his exploit in this news, "tell me—where is she?"

So Black Duck told how the summer before, when he had wandered with his pelts to dispose of them to the Miamis, who in turn would barter them to voyageurs, he had come across a village of the Iroquois, of the Seneca tribe. At

first he had been afraid to advance, but a little girl had run out and had led him by the hand to the lodge of the chief, Old Wolf, who for the child's sake had received him in a friendly fashion.

"What were they doing there so far from their own lands?" Raoul questioned eagerly, "and are they there now?"

"Black Duck knew not why they came and he knows not where they journeyed. All he knows is that some day he will see the little maiden again and that he will give her this fox skin."

Raoul was long silent. He was too familiar with the habits of the Indians to believe that, even though Black Duck might lead him to the exact spot, he would find the Senecas still there. He could not set off to hunt for them, for then should La Salle return and find him gone, he would indeed be justified in calling him a deserter. The knowledge that Denise was alive and evidently well cared for was at least a great relief.

"Black Duck," he begged, "listen to what I say and swear by your medicine that you will serve me, even as I would serve you, now that we are friends."

The Indian looked up and a smile softened the lines of his mouth which was often stern. "I

am your friend," he said, "and what is mine, meat, bow, cunning, strength, endurance, is yours."

"Did you ever hear the Senecas speak of White Thrush," asked Raoul, smiling his thanks. "Of a French boy captive?"

"Yes," replied Black Duck, his eyes suddenly lighting with understanding. "And you are White Thrush?"

So Raoul told him his story, of his capture and of his escape, of his search for Denise and of his failure to get news of her.

"What I ask of you," he continued, "is that you will try to find her for me, then tell her of me, where I go and how I will come for her on my return from the great expedition. If it be possible, send word of her to meet me somewhere."

"Black Duck is a good hunter," the Indian answered proudly, "and he will follow the trail of the Senecas for White Thrush."

For nearly a week the two shot and snared game and packed the pelts until their loads were almost as heavy as they could carry. Then they started back on their way to the lake, stopping to gather all the skins they had cached at different spots. Raoul would have been sorry to end this life in the woods, which suited him

better each day, but he hoped that on his return he might find that La Salle had arrived or that there was news of him.

All the mission was astounded at the results of his hunting, but he was disappointed—there was no news yet of the Seigneur. Weeks went by and Raoul's store of pelts increased to double its size; spring came and Tonty determined to go to Fort Michillimackinac, believing it would be at that point where La Salle would ultimately search for them.

So the little party bade farewell to the Pottawattamies who had been so good to them, Black Duck alone accompanying them part of the way, as he was bound westward to dispose of his skins.

It was nearly June when an Indian canoe brought word that La Salle was only a day's journey behind him. Raoul thought he should never live through the day, and as soon as dawn broke he went to the shore of the lake to watch. At last far in the distance he caught sight of the canoes, and he called loudly to Tonty and Friar Membré. When La Salle stepped ashore tears were in the eyes of all, and he embraced Tonty and the friar, kissing first one cheek and then the other, again and again.

“I had not thought ever to behold you alive,” he cried.

Then he caught sight of Raoul whom emotion and shyness had kept in the background.

“Raoul!” he cried in great surprise, “and have I indeed done you wrong in my heart all these many months?”

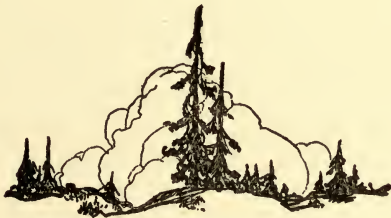
When the first excitement was over he sat down in a room of the fort and sent for the boy. He closed the door and walked up and down. “Tell me, lad, about it all,” he said, in a voice that was gentler than Raoul had ever heard it.

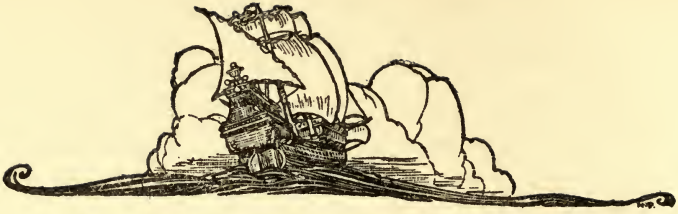
And Raoul related it all, told in actual words what he had told in his thoughts a thousand times—everything that had happened. He ended by blurting out: “You did not believe it was I who poisoned you, Seigneur?”

“Never, lad!” the man exclaimed. “Never. I beseech your pardon for the hard thoughts I had when I believed you had deserted me. It was not that I had the right to blame you if you had feared to follow my fortunes, but I was bitter because I found out how dear you were to me and because I believed I had lost you. I have no son, Raoul, and I shall never have home, wife and son. But God has sent you to take the place of one, if you will.”

Raoul was not ashamed that his tears fell on

the Seigneur's hand as he kissed it. After they had been silent, and after they had talked—both silence and talk equally a pledge of the new bond between them—Raoul proudly took La Salle out to see the skins he had gathered together for him.





CHAPTER XII

SWIFT FOX

IT was a balmy evening when La Salle, seated on a grassy slope at Michillimackinac overlooking the lake, recalled for Tonty, de Boisrondet, and Raoul all that had happened to him since he had left them in the village of the Illinois.

Your great poet, Dante, Tonty," he said, putting his hand on the head of the boy who lay at his feet, "has declared that there is no greater sorrow than recalling happy days when one looks back on them through present despair. It seems to me he might also have said that there is no greater happiness than looking back when happy upon past troubles. You remember, friends, when I set off how urgent was our need to replace the supplies lost in the *Griffin*. So though the thaws of approaching spring greatly increased the difficulty of the way, interrupted as it was everywhere by marshes and rivers, to

say nothing of the length of the journey, which is about five hundred leagues in a direct line, and the danger of meeting Indians of four or five different nations, through whose country we were to pass, as well as an Iroquois army, which we knew was coming that way; though we must suffer all the time from hunger; sleep on the open ground, and often without food; watch by night and march by day, loaded with baggage, such as blanket, clothing, kettle, hatchet, gun, powder, lead, and skins to make moccasins; sometimes pushing through thickets, sometimes climbing rocks covered with ice and snow, sometimes wading whole days through marshes where the water was waist-deep or even more, at a season when the snow was not entirely melted—though I knew all this, it did not prevent me from resolving to go on foot to Fort Frontenac, to learn for myself what had become of my vessel, and bring back the things we needed.”*

“Yet you did not succeed in learning what had in truth befallen the vessel?” asked de Boisron-det.

“Nay, I saw it not attested by a notary, but I am certain the good craft was scuttled by the same men who helped build her, traitorous de-

* These words are taken from one of La Salle's own letters.

serters that they were," exclaimed La Salle, and continued: "We traveled on snowshoes, by sledges or canoes according to the state of the ground, but it was always hard going. At one time a body of Indians came upon our trail, though it was in a land where few Indians go, as it is claimed by no nation and each fears the other there. They believed us to be Iroquois, so we drew Iroquois drawings and signs on the rind of trees from which we stripped the bark, and we burned the grass to cover our tracks. But it would be wearisome for you to listen to all our hardships and for me to recount the days of travel and of sickness. At length, after sixty-five days, I saw before me the walls of Fort Frontenac and that night slept, not more soundly, but more comfortably, on mine own bed."

"Did you rest there long?" questioned Tonty, "after the most arduous journey surely ever undertaken by a white man in this new country?"

"I found no good news there to bid me be a laggard," answered La Salle; "my creditors had sought to strip me bare, and I hastened perforce to Ville Marie to procure the supplies we needed. Men said I could not get them, that no one would advance more money to me; yet I managed, and was back within seven days at Fort Frontenac.

How could I rest, knowing that you waited for me?"

Perhaps never before in his life had La Salle felt himself so understood as now by his three sympathetic listeners. He was warmed by their interest as they were warmed by the late spring sunshine. "Then," he continued, "as I was about to start came your letter, Tonty, telling me of the desertion of my men at Fort Crève-cœur—rightly was it named! This was not all—two faithful habitants hurried to tell me that these same deserters, joined by others, had stolen the furs which I had left stored here at Michillimackinac, destroyed the fort on the St. Joseph river, and that, after separating, some to take their booty to the Dutch at Albany, the others were on their way to kill me."

"What did you do?" asked Raoul, bending his head back that he might look into La Salle's face.

"I went to meet them," was the answer. "I waited with trusty men at a bend in the bay, and when they turned it, my guns, pointed at them, bade them surrender. Two only were killed, the others I brought back as prisoners to Fort Frontenac."

"And then," queried de Boisrondet, "then surely you had time to rest and to sleep and to

eat good food cooked by French hands and to look at white faces and not always on those of the redskins?"

"How could I rest, man," asked La Salle almost angrily, "when I thought of you waiting for me in the midst of the savages? Small was your force, I knew. Had I known what had happened to you, how you were reduced, my heart would have been sadder still; but even then I could have made no greater speed. Twenty-five men and a great quantity of stores went with me when, early in August, I started westward again. There is no need to tell of the journey. We passed by here, and when I found no news of you, Tonty, I thought you must be still where I had parted from you. Yet I feared, for there were rumors that the Iroquois meant to attack the Illinois."

"They did," assented Raoul grimly, talking to himself.

"I pushed ahead with half my men," continued La Salle, "down to the river of the Illinois, and there on the plains I beheld such a sight as I believe no white man ever saw before. Everywhere, like sheep in a meadow at home, were buffaloes—such masses of them that I almost thought we must have died and come to the In-

dians' 'happy hunting ground.' You should have seen them, Raoul; such great beasts, the big shaggy bulls, the cows and the clumsy calves. They paid no attention to us but we could not pass by such a feast. We shot at them for three whole days, and the bulls now grew savage and made the hunt dangerous. Twelve of them we killed, beside other game, and I thought how glad Tonty and all of them will be of this fresh meat."

He stopped and the memory of the disappointment and the anxiety which had met him where he had hoped to feast with his friend overwhelmed him once more. Then he went on:

"When there was no sign of you or sign of any gun or fortification on the Rock of St. Louis, I knew that something terrible had befallen. When we came to the village of the Illinois where we had left you, there was naught but silence and blackened grass. Then when we landed, dreading to find trace of you, horror awaited us—wolves and buzzards alone were alive in a field of human bones. The Iroquois had torn open the graves of their foes, and never have my eyes seen such things as they then looked on. Yet I forced myself to examine the skulls, wondering each step whether the hair would tell me some awful story of my friends."

Unconscious of what he was doing, he leaned over and stroked Raoul's sunburned locks affectionately, as if to reassure himself.

"Once again I split up my force and with four men continued down the river in search of you. At Fort Crèvecoeur I found our helpless unlaunched vessel and on its planks scrawled the words, 'we are all savages'."

"Aye, that were they!" exclaimed Tonty; "that was the insolent message they left when they deserted us."

"Still we went on," said La Salle, "and I saw everywhere signs of Iroquois deviltry. I will not keep the lad awake with horrors by telling you all I beheld, of men and women half charred, still bound to the stakes where they had been tortured. We followed the river until we came to where it joined the great river of my dreams, of which I have spoken so often, and I could see the yellow glow of the Mississippi which, please God, we shall soon explore together. On our way back we saw a comet in the heavens, and I wondered if you too were looking at it as free men or in captivity. I picked up the men I had left near the burned village, and we continued northward, looking eagerly for the first clue of you. And what do you think it was? A piece of wood we found *cut by a saw*;

so we praised the saints, knowing that you had escaped alive." La Salle bowed his head for a moment and then continued: "Back through terrible cold and storms we went, and at last reached the rest of my men at Fort Miami, but they shook their heads sadly when I asked for news of you. And in sadness and bitter anxiety there I remained the long winter."

"And when spring came what did you do?" asked Tonty after he had once again related the story of their own wanderings and disappointments.

"I knew that I must make new friends and new allies among the Indians," explained La Salle. "I must band the various tribes together to stand firmly against the Iroquois. They would then protect one another, Abenakis, Mohegans, who had come from their far New England home, Shawanoes, Outagamis, Miamis and the Illinois who were returning slowly to their old home. I succeeded, going among them with wampum and with solemn words. They promised to forget their differences and to be my friends. I was blind from the snow for three days, but they boiled pine needles and bathed my eyes in this water until my sight returned. And then as great a happiness as the return of

my sight was the news that some Outagamis hunters told us that you were safe with the Potawattamies."

Now that he had finished telling of his own adventures, he questioned Tonty about how he had passed the winter. "I do not need to ask Raoul," he added, "for his pelts told me the tale of his winter hunting."

When all had heard the full story and the night was falling Tonty questioned: "And now, what are we to do now?"

"Once again must I return to Fort Frontenac for more money and more men," said La Salle. "Will you go with me, Tonty, or await me here?"

He spoke cheerfully as if the long journey, the difficult task of procuring loans and the renewed postponement of his beloved enterprise were nothing; but Tonty, though he marveled at his courage, knew better. He realized that his commander had need of company on his way. "Of a surety I go with you," he answered; "go we not all of us?"

"Nay, we leave the others here until autumn." He saw the disappointment pictured in Raoul's face, but it did not move him to change his plans. "You can help Father Membré, lad, if you will, to save heathen souls. Remember it was for this purpose you crossed the seas."

Raoul made the best of it and watched the two depart in the canoes for their thousand-mile journey. He did not follow La Salle's suggestion about teaching the Indians. He still believed it a great and sacred duty for Christians to impart the truths of their faith to the savages, but he had learned that he himself had not the gifts of a missionary. Nevertheless, he was the cause which brought many moccasined feet over the sill of the little chapel. He was glad to serve Father Membré by singing parts of the mass, and his sweet voice attracted the Indians. They had heard Black Duck call him White Thrush, and that was now the name by which he was always to be known among them. He made many Indian friends; his intimate knowledge of their ways and their language made it possible for him to enter into their life as few white men could do. "We are brothers," he said, and they knew that this was not a mere meaningless phrase, but that he considered the redmen worthy of his friendship. Like La Salle, he had the gift of insight into their pride, their hospitality and their loyalty. Like him too, he would fight them fiercely when need was, but when he could he would be friends with them.

There was a boy of his own age that winter, Swift Fox, a Huron, to whom he had seemed a

rival. Swift Fox hated him because he heard Raoul praised so often by his own tribe. Once his mother cried out to him when he returned empty-handed from the forest: "Go, learn of White Thrush how to shoot thine arrow. Then I need not go hungry to sleep." He brooded much over his jealousy and waited until he found his opportunity.

One day when Raoul was walking alone on a bluff which overhung the lake, he ran up behind him and pushed him over and laughed as he heard the body strike the water.

"Never again shall he boast of his hunting," he declared, lying flat on the rock and looking over it down into the water below. He could see Raoul come to the surface and struggle weakly. He could not know that White Thrush, who had learned to swim on the stormy Breton coast, would have thought little of his sudden bath if his head had not struck a rock on the shallow bottom. As it was, Swift Fox saw that he was drowning and he knew that there was no one else near enough to hear the faint cries for help. Suddenly something seemed to snap in the Indian boy's brain, and he discovered that he had lost his hatred of White Thrush. His one idea now was to save him. He ran hastily down the slope nearer the spot where Raoul had been

swept, and dived. Just as Raoul was sinking for the third time Swift Fox caught hold of him by his hair and swam rapidly, pulling him to the shore.

During the half hour he worked over him, staunching the blood on his head and pumping the water out of his lungs, he was amazed to discover that his hatred had given place to an almost affectionate interest in his victim and patient. When Raoul opened his eyes his first consciousness was a quick flash of memory of the time when Denise too had helped save him from drowning.

"For the sailor I believed myself to be it is rather humiliating to have to be twice saved from drowning," he thought to himself. He had not seen his assailant, but he was almost certain that it was Swift Fox who had tried to kill him. Now, however, that he owed his life to him, it was not worth while to reproach him.

"Thank you, Swift Fox," he said when at last he was able to rise. "I have often seen how strong you are, but I did not know that your strength would be for my use some day. Will you go sometime with me into the forest? I hear that no boy of your age in your tribe is so good a hunter."

"I will go with White Thrush," answered the

Indian, his eyes fixed on the ground from shame at the other's praise. Then after a struggle he lifted them and said: "I hated you, White Thrush, and sought to kill you. Now my heart is changed, and I would be your brother if you will forget."

"I remember nothing but that you jumped into the lake after me, Swift Fox," said Raoul. "We are brothers."

So from that day on the two boys were constantly in each other's company. The Indian showed the French lad where to catch the biggest, finest fish in the lake; played ball with him and taught him how to thread lacrosse crosses, and initiated him into all the methods by which he had become the leader of the boys of his village. In return, Raoul gave him a steel knife and taught him some of the tricks of trapping which Black Duck had shown to him.

With this companionship, and the interest of the coming and going of voyageurs and *coureurs de bois* at the fort, the summer days passed quickly enough, and with November came the message from La Salle that he was at Fort Miami and that Father Membré, Sieur de Boisrondet and Raoul should join him there at once.



CHAPTER XIII

THE GREAT RIVER

“**T**HIS time, please God, there will be no turning back,” exclaimed La Salle. “You read of Cæsar in school, did you not, Raoul? Well, I too have crossed my Rubicon, and neither debts nor winter, neither deserters nor hostile Indians, shall rob me this time of the fruits of my efforts.”

Tonty, Father Membré and some of the men had started off a few days before, and now in Christmas week La Salle was about to follow.

“Count me the men, Raoul,” he commanded as they waited until all the canoes, filled with stores of food, clothing, ammunition and trinkets, were tied tightly on the sledges which were to drag them over the frozen lake and rivers.

"A score have already gone with Tonty, Seigneur," and he called off the names from a small notebook. "Now come the Indians, Abenakis and Mohegans, eighteen there are of them, and the squaws and even three children," he added contemptuously.

"We were better off unencumbered with women and children," La Salle assented, "but the braves would not come without them, and perhaps the squaws may prove useful after all."

"Then there are we three, Seigneur," Raoul added, closing the notebook in which he had recorded the names of the fifty-four; "you, Etienne and I."

"Are you too glad the time has come?" questioned La Salle, fastening his snowshoe firmly, though Raoul could see that his hands were trembling, "are you glad to be going instead of remaining here to hunt with your Pottawattamie trapper?"

"You know, Seigneur," Raoul replied, his heart beating with excitement though his voice was low and quiet.

"Then forward in the name of St. Louis!" cried La Salle, striding out after the thin line of sledges already a quarter of a mile ahead, but not beyond the sound of the barking dogs and farewell cries of the Indians and white men at

Fort Miami, on the St. Joseph river, all of whom had assembled to witness the departure.

Across the lake they went and over the frozen Chicago river, till once again they found themselves on the river of the Illinois.

Raoul had now a definite duty assigned to him, and he stood one watch every night in addition to his work during the day, which was to be responsible for the contents of one of the sledge-borne canoes. Camp was made each night, the sledges drawn up in the center and huge fires lighted in a circle around to keep off wild beasts and the cold.

It was on the fourth night of their journey that Raoul's courage was tested. They had not made so many leagues as La Salle would have liked to put behind him because progress with so large a party was necessarily slow, and the lake still lay not very far in their rear. It was the second watch of the night, and Raoul was pacing up and down in the snow a few feet beyond the fire. It was so hard to stay awake that he was expending more of his attention on keeping his eyes open than on peering into the surrounding blackness, as was his duty as a sentinel. Suddenly, though he heard no sound, he was conscious that someone had approached and, turning quickly, he saw a figure not ten paces away.

He felt a thrill of fear and remorse; he knew that he should have observed the stranger sooner but there was no time to warn anyone; he must rely on himself. He had no chance to fire his gun; he heard an arrow whiz close to his ear. Unreasoning, like a watchdog, he sprang forward and grappled with the Indian and, to the surprise of both, Raoul's onslaught toppled him over into the snow.

"Yield! Yield, or I will kill you!" cried Raoul, mad with excitement.

By this time the noise of his cries had awakened Etienne, who was about to relieve him of his watch, and he came running up.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I have caught a prisoner," Raoul replied, panting.

The prisoner made no attempt to escape. Instead he preceded the two towards the fire. When the blaze lighted his face Raoul exclaimed in amazement: "Swift Fox! Is it indeed you?"

"It is your brother, White Thrush," the Huron replied. "I followed from Michillimackinac to Fort Miami and over the portage here. When I thought that White Thrush was going where I could not see him for many moons, perhaps never again, I bade my mother farewell and set out on your trail."

"But why did you shoot at me, Swift Fox?" Raoul asked, still puzzled.

"Just to frighten you, to see what you would do," the Indian boy said laughing. "My arrow was not aimed to hurt you. You have seen me shoot between two wood pigeons flying side by side without hitting either."

"I am glad you have come, Swift Fox," Raoul said. "To-morrow morning I will take you to the Seigneur, and I think he too will welcome you on the expedition. Now warm yourself and then we shall sleep."

La Salle was pleased to have another strong young Indian to go with him, one whose friendship for Raoul vouchsafed for his loyalty. The two lads worked together and shared the same fire and food. Raoul pointed out to the Huron the ruined town of the Illinois and told him the story of the Iroquois attack. By the time they had reached Lake Peoria the weather had become warmer, and a few miles beyond the ice vanished and the canoes slipped from the sledges into the water. The passing of the ice seemed a symbol of the change in La Salle's spirit. His troubles melted also; each day he rose buoyantly to the call of the quest; he encouraged the grumblers, promised success to the fainthearted, and spurred on the laggards.

He consulted oftener with the Indians, and time after time spread out on his knee, or on a stone when they rested on shore for the noon meal, the parchments on which he had drawn the course of his journey so far, and the probable points of the land ahead, as it was described to him by the Indians along the way. He knew that the entrance to the river could not be far distant.

"See!" he cried to Tonty one day almost at sunset as he pointed ahead of their swift canoe, his voice ringing out until it was echoed back, "yonder is my Great River!"

Frenchmen and Indians, who had heard rumors of the great stream which flowed for so many leagues through the lands of many tribes, gazed eagerly in the direction to which La Salle pointed. They felt the wonder of the moment, but no one, not even Raoul who came nearest to doing so, could realize what the sight meant to La Salle.

"I did not know a river could be so large and so swift," said Etienne to Raoul as later they found themselves borne along on the yellow flood of the Mississippi.

"It is wonderful, Tonty, is it not?" La Salle said the night after they had passed the mouth of the Missouri, "that we should not know what

is ahead of us. How monotonous an existence it is always to walk along highroads traversed by all the world! Had there been no new world to explore and had I been obliged to tread only in old paths, I believe I should have tried to find some way to reach the stars!"

He spoke so enthusiastically that Raoul, who was amusedly watching a squirrel approach cautiously toward the fire, was struck by his tone and words.

"He is indeed young," he explained to Swift Fox when he had repeated what he had heard. "Because he is a grown man it is natural for us to think of him as having left his boyhood far behind, but now I know there is a side of him that is as young as we are."

"He is a fine brave," the Indian assented.

Each day they swept swiftly farther southward, passing the mouth of the Ouabache river (Wabash), and a town of the Tamaroas. Little that was startling happened except that one of the men who set out one day to hunt did not return, and it was thought that he had been killed. Search parties went out and six days later he was found. He said that he had lost his way and had almost died from hunger.

"My fur cap and my coat are too warm," exclaimed Raoul one morning to Swift Fox.

“Never have I felt such a sun in this moon. The leaves are already open here, though at Michillimackinac the lake is still frozen solid, and here the ground is covered too with sprouting vines and bushes.”

“The warm air is good,” the Indian admitted, stretching himself lazily out on a little beach where they were resting. “It is better to be warm than cold.”

Day by day it grew warmer. Snow was forgotten and green vines hung down from the banks of the river as they drifted along. A thick fog one morning cut off the world all around.

“Hearken!” cried La Salle. “What is that sound to the right?”

Everyone listened and now the noise came plainly over the water.

“It is the beating of a war drum,” said Tonty, “and the cries must be those of braves dancing a war dance.”

It would perhaps have been possible to slip by under cover of the fog, but La Salle’s policy would not permit of his leaving in his rear hostile tribes or those of whose feeling he was uncertain. He ordered the canoes to make for the opposite shore, and landing all of his

party, he soon had them erecting a rough fort of logs which they had hastily cut down.

"We must expect the worst," called Etienne to his nearest neighbor as he lifted huge logs in his strong arms. "Naught is known by white men of these Indians here; but remember the tales the Illinois told us of the monsters we should find. They can't be worse though than the Iroquois, I'm thinking."

The Frenchmen, now somewhat protected by their rampart, waited for the fog to lift. When it suddenly cleared they saw the Indians on the other side gazing at them in amazement. La Salle made signs to come over and Beaver Tail, Raoul, and Swift Fox called out to them in different Indian languages that they were friends. Finally some of the Indians jumped into a canoe and paddled over part of the way.

"Take the calumet and go down to the bank," La Salle commanded Etienne. The Frenchman walked leisurely down to the river as if he were sauntering along a street in Quebec, and held out the calumet.

"They are coming ashore," Tonty exclaimed. "They have greeted Etienne as a friend. We shall not have to fight after all."

So La Salle, after a few words with them, in which they told him they were a Kappa band

of the Arkansas, gave orders to embark again in the canoes and make for the Indian village.

"I have never seen friendlier Indians," he remarked later in the day, "nor finer physical specimens than they." They had been welcomed as guests by the whole village except the squaws, who had shyly run away to hide. The Indians built huts for their visitors, brought them firewood and food. Father Membré was particularly struck with their characteristics: "They are gay, civil and free-hearted," he said to La Salle during the three days they rested among them. "The young men, though the most alert and spirited we have seen, are nevertheless so modest that not one of them will take the liberty to enter our hut. They are so well formed that I am in admiration of their beauty."*

"We must not go farther until we have secured this land to France," said La Salle to Tonty. "Come, Father, unfurl the banner and let us take possession in the King's name."

The Arkansas rushed from their huts when they caught sight of the little procession and the waving banner. They flocked to the open space where councils were held and listened in astonishment to the hymn which Father Membré and Raoul sang, and to the shouts of "Long live

*This opinion is quoted from a letter of Father Membré.

the King!" Swift Fox was scarcely less impressed at the ceremony which he comprehended only dimly.

Their hosts told them of the other tribes whose lands lay below theirs on the Great River, and of the wonderful town of the Taensas (about twenty miles from the present city of Natchez). They seemed sad when the Frenchmen departed.

As they floated along Raoul and Swift Fox amused themselves shooting their arrows at ducks and other waterfowl; and if the current were not too strong, one of them would spring overboard and bring back the quarry. When there was no game they sometimes practised aiming at trees on the bank.

"I will hit that log ahead directly in the middle," boasted Swift Fox, and drew his bow. The arrow struck the very spot at which he had aimed but, to the utter amazement of the two boys, the log lifted itself up slightly in the water and they saw that it was alive.

"It is a beast," cried Raoul. "Oh, I know, it must be an alligator of which the Kappas spoke. But is it possible they can be telling the truth when they say they are hatched from eggs like fowls?"

Soon they had become quite accustomed to the

sight of the curious creatures and had killed several of them.

Now the villages became more frequent. Tonty and Father Membré went to visit the town of the Taensas where the houses were large and square with a domed roof, and where there was a temple with a fire that was never allowed to go out. Tonty told the chief of La Salle, and the chief, perhaps actuated by curiosity, announced that he would waive his usual custom and go to see the stranger instead of waiting for him to come to him.

“They believe he is a descendant of the Sun,” explained Swift Fox, who had been talking to some of his people, while the white-clad chief, before whom walked two men carrying large white fans and another with a copper disk, talked with La Salle, who knew just how to please the chief with ceremonious greetings and presents.

Farther on, a few days later, they passed through the villages of the Natchez. Here again La Salle knew how to make friends with them, and once again he planted a cross and declared the land the property of the King of France.

“They do not know what it means,” remarked Etienne dryly; “for if they did they might not be so friendly with us. Though I admit the

Seigneur really means well by them and would not let us harm them."

Everywhere they passed, the different tribes greeted them as friends until they came opposite a village of the Oumas. Some fishermen fled when they caught sight of the white men, and when some of the Frenchmen pursued, the Indians shot at them. La Salle, realizing that this act was caused rather by the fear of a few individuals than by the policy of the whole tribe, called off his men before there was further fighting, and they continued on their way.

Raoul's own eagerness to reach the mouth of the river gave him an understanding of La Salle's deep emotion as they neared the goal for which he had toiled so many years. Though he had been glad of the companionship of Swift Fox, now he could not bear to be away from the Seigneur. Neither of them talked much, but the boy was conscious that his commander felt his silent sympathy, and that it was a comfort to him.

On the sixth of April they came to a point where three branches of the river forked.

"I will take the westernmost branch," said La Salle. "You, Tonty, the middle one, and you, D'Autray, the eastern one. We shall meet later."

Raoul, without waiting for an order, jumped into the canoe with La Salle and took a paddle from one of the Indians, feeling the need of physical action to help bring, himself, the longed-for moment more quickly. For the rest of the day they swept on through low marshes from which ducks and other birds flew up as they approached. Once Raoul caught sight of white wings flashing in the sky above him, and he wondered if he could be right in believing them to belong to a seagull.

That night it was difficult to find ground firm enough for a camp, but at last they discovered above the marshes a strip of sandy soil, dry and covered with a coarse grass. Raoul could not sleep. At dawn he got up and felt a strong breeze from the southward. He put out his tongue and felt that it was salt! He started to run with the wind in his face, and soon his ears caught the sound of a dull, regular roar.

"The sea! The sea!" he cried out as he sped on.

Then suddenly he stopped and closed his eyes until he should have decided the question that had just come to him.

"If I go on," he said, speaking out loud, "I shall see the sea in another few minutes, and I shall be the *first*. But shall I not then be rob-

bing the Seigneur? Is it not he who has this right?"

It was hard to turn back, but with eyes still closed for fear he might behold what he so longed to see, Raoul started back, the wind now behind him, and when he reached the camp, he threw himself down, and though he would not have thought it possible, soon fell asleep again.





CHAPTER XIV

THE GOAL

THE wind was still blowing when he awoke and the sun was shining in the bluest of skies. La Salle too had tasted the brine of the wind, and was as if intoxicated by it.

“Up, men,” he cried. “The sun is calling us.”

More than the sun was calling to him: all the dreams of his youth and manhood were exulting in this moment of success. All the fatigues and failures of past years, the doubts and delays, were forgotten, or rather, they were remembered only as a bitterness which made the present draught of achievement all the sweeter.

He would not wait even for food, and soon the canoes were launched and the men were pushing their way through the marshes. Within a quarter of an hour the sound of the waves was plainly audible, beating like a drum to La Salle's eager spirit. Then the reeds came to an

end and the sunshine flashed upon the endless waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The water spoke to him of achievement and promise, of what he had done and what he had still to do. He had proved gloriously, against all disbelief, the possibility of a passageway from France, via Quebec and the great inland seas, down the Father of Waters, as the Indians called his Great River, to this new southern sea. Here, safely past hostile savages, he had brought this little band of Frenchmen. Now, he believed, the way to China and Japan was half traversed. Already his imagination was actively picturing the commerce which, because of his dream, his faith and his endurance, should ascend and descend to New and Old France by the way he had cleared through forest and prairie. He felt himself uplifted as one who beholds for the first time a great land from a mountain summit.

La Salle gazed in silence as if he could never see enough. He had no words for his emotion; only his hand found Raoul's hand near and he almost crushed it with his nervous fingers. But the others were not silent: Frenchmen and Indians cried out their delight, and their shouts sent seagulls from their nests whirring into the air above them. From the distance towards the east came two echoes, so that La Salle knew

that Tonty and D'Auray had also reached their end of the journey. Soon they had all met and camped on firm ground above the water line.

"Cut down yonder tree and fashion it into a post," commanded La Salle after he had listened with a smiling face to the congratulations of his comrades. "Surely never a tree in this western world grew to such a destiny as this."

When it was cut and smoothed he bade them carve on it the Lilies of France and the words:

"Louis Le Grand, Roy de France et de Navarre, Règne; Le Neuvième Avril, 1682."

Every Frenchman stood the straighter as they sang the Latin hymns of thanksgiving, the *Te Deum*, the *Exaudiat*, and the *Domine Salvium fac Regem*. The Indians uttered whoops of joy and danced about while muskets rang out and cries of "Long Live the King!" Raoul helped La Salle to plant the post and when it was firm, the Seigneur, with his hand resting on it, called out in a loud voice, as if challenging all the other kings of the earth to witness:

"In the name of the most high, mighty, invincible, and victorious Prince, Louis the Great, by the grace of God, King of France and of Navarre, Fourteenth of that name, I this ninth day of April, one thousand six hundred and eighty-two, in virtue of the commission of his Majesty, which I hold in my hand, and which may be seen by all whom it may concern, have taken, and do now take, in

the name of his Majesty and of his successors to the crown, possession of this country of Louisiana, the seas, harbors, ports, bays, adjacent straits, and all the nations, peoples, provinces, cities, towns, villages, mines, minerals, fisheries, streams and rivers, within the extent of the said Louisiana, from the mouth of the great river St. Louis, otherwise called the Ohio . . . as also along the river Colbert, or Mississippi, and the rivers which discharge themselves thereinto, from its sources beyond the country of the Nadouessioux . . . as far as its mouth at the sea, or Gulf of Mexico, and also to the mouth of the River of Palms, upon the assurance we have had from the natives of these countries, that we are the first Europeans who have descended or ascended the said river Colbert; hereby protesting against all who may hereafter undertake to invade any or all of these aforesaid countries, peoples, or lands, to the prejudice of the rights of his Majesty, acquired by the consent of the nations dwelling herein. Of which, and of all else that is needful, I hereby take to witness those who hear me, and demand an act of the notary here present." *

"Your king has a great subject," said Tonty to Raoul when the ceremony was over. "I wonder if he will ever realize what a realm Sieur de La Salle has won for him, greater far than all of fair France. From the mountains of the east, the Alleghanies, to the mountains to the west of the Mississippi, and from this gulf north to where the Great River begins—this Louisiana of his extends. How musical is the word its

* La Salle's own words.

finder has given it. I believe his heart has repeated it to him for many years already, as a man repeats the name of the woman he loves."

The great work was done, and now all began to ask what next. There were some who were disappointed that the end of their long journey had not led them to the treasures of gold and precious jewels they had dreamed of finding, but La Salle felt that the story he had to tell was worth more than nuggets and pearls.

"We must go back," he said, "to report our discovery and to make ready for the days when traders will begin to pass back and forth. Would that our *Griffin* had not been lost. We could have loaded her with furs along the way and so have made the beginning of the commerce which shall pass over these waters."

It was indeed necessary to start at once. There was almost no food left in the canoes and the alligator meat, which was all they could shoot, was strange and unpleasant to their palates.

"Shall we stop among the Quinipissas, who proved not over friendly on our way down?" asked Etienne.

"I think we cannot wait longer for food," La

Salle decided. "The squaws and the children are already suffering."

Their fears of a hostile reception seemed unfounded. The Quinipissas at their approach came down to the river and brought them corn and other food and bade them come ashore to rest.

"Seigneur," said Raoul as they were seated beneath a widespreading live oak, watching the squaws cook the food, "trust them not over much. Swift Fox, though he understands no more of their tongue than I do, misdoubts them."

"That falls in with my own feeling," La Salle answered; "yet it was worth risking something in order to be fed. We will not enter the lodges they offer. It is so warm, we will say, that we like best to sleep out there where it is open. You, Swift Fox, Etienne, and other trusted men, will keep careful watch during the night."

It was after midnight that the two boys beheld dim figures creeping through the darkness, and gave the alarm. Muskets at once opened fire and the Quinipissas fled in terror, leaving several dead on the field. As soon as it was light La Salle gave orders to embark and they departed without further molestation.

Some of the other tribes which had greeted

them in so friendly a fashion on their way down the river had changed their attitude, and La Salle could feel that they were no longer sincere, even when they called him their friend and brought food to him.

“It is likely they have been influenced by the Quinipissas,” he suggested, “and fear us. Well, let them plan any tricks they like; they will find us ready for them.”

So whatever the plans of the Indians may have been, though their braves kept the explorers surrounded, the armed Frenchmen never gave them a chance to strike.

For several days Raoul had noted a change in the Seigneur. It seemed to him that his interest in everything about him was dulled. “I do not understand,” he said to Etienne when they had halted in the shade one noon because the sun was too hot to be borne. “Is he angry with any of us, think you, Etienne? He would not let me in his canoe this morning, and he has allowed *Sieur Tonty* to give all the orders to-day. He is like another man.”

The voyageur looked grave and was silent for a time, thinking. “He is ill, boy, with the fever,” he said. “I have seen it coming for several days. There is little enough we shall be

able to do for him, but I count on you to help me.”

That night La Salle's condition was apparent to everyone. He lay in a stupor on the rough bed of leaves covered with his coat. Everyone, Frenchmen and Indians, wondered what would become of them if he should not recover. They respected Tonty, but all, even the youngest child, knew that it was La Salle whose will kept them going and in safety.

Raoul shared the sick watches with Etienne. The helpless man to whose lips he lifted water was dearer than ever. He prayed while he watched that La Salle might soon be restored to health.

Tonty, and La Salle himself in lucid moments, knew that it was better to hasten to higher ground; so a canoe was made comfortable as it could be for the ill man, and they continued the journey. At last they reached Fort Prudhomme which they had built on a bluff on their downward journey.

“I can go no farther, Tonty,” La Salle said in a feeble voice when they had borne him ashore. “You must leave me and carry the great news to Michillimackinac. From there they will spread it over all New France. I can wait no longer to let the world know of our success.”

"Yet how can I leave you here, ill?" asked Tonty with real concern.

"I shall be better here where there are no marshes and where the air blows fresh and strong. Father Membré, Etienne and Raoul will care for me, will you not, lad?" he turned to smile at the boy, who came nearer as if to prove that he could be counted on every minute. "I will follow you as soon as I may," he continued, "and fear not for me. It is not of a fever I shall die, I am assured."

Raoul repeated these words to himself for comfort many nights when it seemed as if La Salle could not live till morning. But at last, when July was nearly over, and he had been ill for forty days, Father Membré pronounced his patient well enough to travel. So once again they set off, traveling slowly.

It was September before all of those who had taken part in the expedition met again at Michillimackinac. La Salle was still weak, but the sight of Tonty and the cool autumn winds brought the color back into his cheeks. Soon he was almost himself again and eager to begin his work in settling a colony on the Illinois river where would be the storehouse for the furs he meant to collect up and down the Mississippi. It might serve to hold the Iroquois in check,

and as he had learned that that nation was planning another raid against the western tribes, he knew he must lose no time. So once more they started off southward and before long they had chosen the spot, a steep rock on the banks of the Illinois, for their fortress, which La Salle called Fort St. Louis (near the present town of Utica, Illinois).

“There are few better natural fortifications in the world, I should say,” said Tonty as they toiled up the one hundred and twenty-five feet to the summit. “See how easy it will be to defend this ascent with a few guns, and the other side is a sheer wall down to the river.”

“It is lucky that it is so flat on top,” added La Salle; and at once gave orders to cut down the trees, and to build first a palisade and then the necessary houses.

“Now we are settled,” he said a day or two later, “and our winter’s work must be to prove to the Indians that we mean to be their friends and to protect them from the Iroquois. You, Raoul, can give me great help and render a loyal service to your King this winter and after I leave for France, by using all your knowledge of Indian ways to make them like us. We French are not like the English and the Dutch, who look down on the redmen. We have found

that they can be loyal and hospitable and that our interests can be the same."

"I shall be proud if I can serve you thus, Seigneur," Raoul answered, "but I would it were not necessary for you to go again to France, or if you must go, will you not take me with you?" he begged eagerly.

"I have talked to you, lad, as if you were my son," La Salle answered. They were standing on the edge of the cliff, looking down at the clear river below. The snow had not yet come and the forests were still red with the brilliant leaves the winds had spared. Behind them rang the cheerful sound of axes, and far off in the distance they could hear the barking of dogs in a village of the Illinois, who had come close to the new fort for protection.

La Salle continued: "I have told you something, but not all, of the new trouble my enemies have stirred up for me since the news reached them of my success. My good friend, Count Frontenac, has been recalled to France from the governorship of Canada just because he is my friend, and the new Governor, Le Febvre de la Barre, is not well disposed towards me. He is jealous of me. I have written to him, asking for his support, though I told him that I knew that my enemies would seek to

influence him against me. Therefore, when the time comes, I must go to France to defend myself against the charges of those who would injure me, and to beg the King to assist me further in the new plans I have for securing and settling the new province I have won for him."

"I understand," Raoul replied, and added rapidly, as if he feared that La Salle might answer before he had finished, "that *you* must go, but will you not let me go with you? Perhaps I may be able to serve you even in France, and perhaps it would please you to know that there was one about who would die for you."

"It pleases me much, my son," said La Salle with a rare smile. "I will take you gladly, so that when we weary of court language we can speak the tongue of the Illinois together."

"Will it be soon that we leave?" Raoul questioned joyously.

"Not for many moons yet, young warrior," replied La Salle affectionately. "I am but looking into the future."

In the months which followed Raoul lost no opportunity of making friends with the different tribes who were now settled near the fort. There were not only the six thousand or more Illinois who had returned to their old haunts, but Swanoes, Abenakis, Miamis and Chickasaws. White

Thrush was welcomed everywhere: he hunted with the hunters, trapped beasts for their pelts which he took to La Salle and gave the meat to the old squaws who had no sons to hunt for them, and played lacrosse with lads of his own age. Swift Fox was often with him, but a certain jealousy between the different tribes kept him from being as welcome a guest in strange lodges as the French boy. La Salle depended much on Raoul's reports to keep him in touch with the temper of his Indian allies. He found that month by month they grew more accustomed to look to the French for protection. When spring came they told Raoul of the rumor that the Iroquois were about to make another attack on them; so once again La Salle was forced to postpone his departure.

With La Salle's consent, Raoul was frequently absent on hunting trips and visits to the different tribes. The boy often smiled when he thought what a difference a few years had made in him since the day he was washed ashore at the Dubois farm, so ignorant of all that a man must know who was to live in the new country. Now few Indians of his age were better fitted than he to find his way through the forests, to kill what he needed for food, or to meet a welcome at the fire of a strange wigwam. It was

one day, after months had passed and the threatened attack had failed to take place, when the softly falling snow had covered all tracks, that Raoul, on the trail of a great buck, let himself be led farther than he had yet gone away from the fort. For two days he had followed the deer, keenly happy in the present and eager to match his endurance and his cunning with that of the beast, which too seemed conscious of the contest.

A faint whiff of smoke came to Raoul's nostrils. The caution which had become his second nature made him pause. He knew that there were no villages of the friendly tribes in this part of the country, and he remembered the rumors of the intended invasion by the Iroquois. He saw regretfully that the buck's tracks led to the left, while the smoke came from the right, but he decided to give up one chase for the possibility of bigger game. He was now so white with snow flakes that there was little danger of his being seen at a distance, but he lay down on the ground and slowly crawled along in the direction of the fire. As he stopped often, it was a half hour before he came in sight of it, and then he waited for the dusk before moving farther. He could now see that it was a campfire about which were grouped a dozen Indians, Iroquois braves. Their ceremonious gestures and

the pipes told him that he was witnessing some council deliberation. There was no sign of a village anywhere. Doubtless, he thought, they had come to this secret place to debate something they did not wish to discuss in a general council. He noticed that the braves were all young; perhaps they were afraid that the elders of the tribe would not approve of their plan.

When it had grown dusk Raoul once more crept forward on his stomach to within hearing distance. The stump of a fallen tree hid him completely.

"It is well," he heard one voice say, "what our brother Eagle Wing has said. We, the children of the Five Nations, are destined by the Great Spirit to rule all the land. But if we will rule we must not forget that we cannot expect to sleep in lodges and listen to the chattering of squaws. We must spend our days on the warpath."

"You speak wisely, Brown Owl," a deeper, older voice replied, "yet even the Five Nations of the Long House have not braves enough to fight every western tribe and to overcome the English settlers on the seacoast and the French who seek to build forts along the Great River. We must use our wits as well as our arrows and tomahawks, that we may not leave too many

of our warriors dead on the warpath. We must make the English and the French fight and slay each other; we must side first with the ones and then with the others, and stir up strife continually between them."

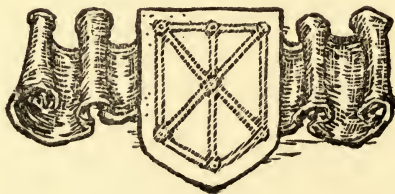
"Waste we no more time," a third voice said as he finished. "What both of our brothers have spoken is wisdom, yet we know wherefore we are here, and what we have in hand. I will speak it. There is the French man who, more than any paleface, is not only a great warrior but a leader in council, who speaks such words that our enemies, the Illinois and the western tribes listen and follow him as he wills. He has travelled to the mouth of the Great River; he has built forts on it; he is settling a colony which he means to be like the dam of the beavers to hold us back to the eastward of it. Is he not our greatest enemy, the one most to be feared?"

There was a general murmur of assent under cover of which Raoul drew a couple of paces nearer, so afraid was he that he might lose something of what was being spoken.

"Then why wait we until the beaver builds the dam," the voice continued; "have we not arrows and war clubs and has not he a scalp-lock? Let us kill him speedily, and the dam that he has begun will crumble into the water and we shall

pass westward and drive back the craven tribes which cannot stand against us save the French strengthen their arms.”

Cries of delight greeted the ending of this speech, and Raoul listened eagerly, hoping to hear the exact time and place of the deed they planned. But the main step decided, the Iroquois now broke up the council, and when they had eaten the dried meat and the parched corn they had brought with them, they wrapped themselves in their blankets and went to sleep. Then, Raoul, stiff from the cold and his cramped position, crawled cautiously away till he dared get to his feet and run to a distance he considered safe.





CHAPTER XV

THE MEDICINE BAG

RAOUL slept little that night. Many plans he made to offset the danger to his Seigneur, but the trouble was that none of them could be carried out. No matter though La Salle were warned, though he and Etienne and Beaver Tail should be always on guard against an open assault or a secret assassination, some day or some night an Iroquois arrow or tomahawk would find its mark. La Salle was sure to scorn the danger and would refuse—he knew him well—the precautions they would urge him to observe. As he lay there in the dark silence, Raoul conceived a desperate idea of creeping back to the council and sticking his knife into as many of the twelve as he could kill. But the strength and valor of even a grown man could not cope with a dozen enemies. If only, he thought, there

were an Illinois village near where he might find a party of warriors to help him! But there was nothing to be done. The snow had ceased falling and a wind had sprung up which was blowing the snow in drifts and baring the ground in spots. He made himself as comfortable as possible on the lee side of a boulder and at last, after praying the saints to show him how he might help his master, he fell asleep.

When he awoke he felt unaccountably happy, as if something pleasant had taken place in his dreams. Once or twice in his life he had experienced the same strange feeling of vivid exhilaration, and it had always come before one of his strange moments of "vision." He sat up and waited for he know not what. Then, as if someone had called him, he rose and walked without hesitation in a direction which led neither towards the council fire nor towards Fort St. Louis. For half a league he went unquestioningly, until on a slight hillock which the brisk wind had swept clear, his foot hit against something soft. He leaned down and picked up a medicine bag formed of the whole skin of an otter, the head and tail still dangling. It was old, so old that the fur had long since been rubbed away from it except in a few small patches.

It was so insignificant a possession that anyone but an Indian or one who knew Indians as Raoul did, would have thrown it away in disgust. Yet to him it was more precious than a sack of *louis d'or*, and he knew that it was the anticipation of finding it which had made him so unaccountably happy. Now the strangeness of his "vision" had passed; he was conscious of his surroundings once again and of his need to decide his future steps.

He sat down for a minute to think exactly what the possession of the medicine bag meant to him and how he could make the best use of it. He had recognized it at once as the ancient medicine bag of the Senecas which had passed into the keeping of Old Wolf. It was, he knew, a sacred relic, the exact value of which could be understood only by those who belong to the secret organization of which Old Wolf was the head. But he was aware that it was highly venerated by all the Senecas and that its magic fame had spread among other tribes of the Iroquois.

"It must be," he cried aloud, "that Old Wolf passed by here a short time ago and lost it. Or perhaps he came back to look for it and the snow had covered it up. Praise God for the wind last night! And if Old Wolf came by here, was Denise with him too?"

He would have liked to ponder more on this, but he felt need to keep his thoughts on how he could make use of his discovery to save La Salle. "Suppose," he thought as he began to form his plan, "I am mistaken and this is not Old Wolf's medicine bag after all?"

His hand explored the depths of the pouch and brought out several strange objects, bones, hairs, and then a bit of dirt-colored fabric which might once have been silk. He recalled a little red silk bow of which Denise had been so proud, the only bit of ribbon she possessed. Could it be, he thrilled at the thought, that this was it?

It was not possible to be absolutely certain that this was the medicine bag he had often seen in Old Wolf's hands, though he had slight doubt that it was; nor could he be sure that the plan his mind was revolving would succeed. If he were wrong in his guess, if he were unsuccessful in carrying out his plan, then he must pay for his mistake with his life, and La Salle too would probably soon fall a victim to Iroquois hate and cunning. Yet he must try; there was nothing else to do.

Now he started to run until he once again came in sight of the camp of the night before; then he rested to get his breath, that he might not appear to have hastened. He could see that

the braves were about to leave; already they were covering the ashes of their fire with snow. This time Raoul approached without any attempt at concealment, holding his hand before him as one who came on a peaceful mission. Already the warriors had seen him and cried out to know who he was. Raoul answered in the Seneca tongue, saying that he was a friend and had a message for them.

In spite of his peaceful aspect, the braves did not lay aside their suspicion of a ruse. Because they could see that he was French, and because they were conscious that they were plotting against a Frenchman, it seemed to them for a moment that their plans might have been discovered. Raoul, for his part, realized that his every movement, his every word, must pass a test that might prove fatal.

“Who are you and wherefore do you, a French boy, wander here in the forest?” asked one of the Iroquois when they had seated themselves gravely, Raoul taking boldly the place due to a messenger with tidings of importance.

“I am the bearer of this medicine bag,” he explained, “which is honoured in the wigwams of the Senecas and revered by all the Five Nations.”

The Indians started and gazed at the boy, but

did not attempt to take the bag out of his hands. He had discovered that they were not Senecas themselves, but Mohawks and Onondaguas. All the better, he thought, for his purpose. "Great is the medicine of him who owns it," he continued; "his wisdom and his knowledge of what the spirits ordain is recognized in all the villages of the Long House."

"Do you speak of Old Wolf?" asked one of the warriors, "and if so, wherefore do you, one of the palefaces, bear his medicine bag?"

"What other chief has a name like his?" questioned Raoul in return. "I who have dwelt in his lodge and travelled with him through the forest know that he has never yet let his medicine bag pass into the hands of another, so intimately is its medicine bound up with his spirit. Therefore, if now I who come before you hold it in my hands, are not my words to be hearkened to?"

"Old Wolf is very wise," assented one of the Mohawks, then laughed scornfully. "But even his wisdom cannot tell wherefore we are holding this council in this forest."

"Listen," said Raoul, speaking slowly and impressively: "Mohawks and Onondaguas are not painted with war paint, therefore they are not setting forth on the warpath. That much any dweller of Quebec could tell; but only those

who are wise can read your hearts and know that there is one, a Frenchman, whose death you have sworn, by tomahawk or arrow."

The result of these words was astounding. Not even the Indian features trained to repress emotion could help showing their amazement. The boy's knowledge was to them something so miraculous that they did not even seek to deny his accusation. At last an Onondagua spoke:

"Old Wolf is a wise chief, indeed, and sees far. What words of advice has he then for us?"

Raoul's heart beat rapidly at his success so far. Now came the hardest part.

"Old Wolf's medicine is a strong medicine," he assented, "and all the tribes envy the Senecas their great chief and his ancient medicine bag. Listen then to this wisdom: It is a well-thought plan you have made, and truly the death of the French chief would put an end to the hopes of the Illinois, your foes. Yet the plan must be carried out with care, says the medicine, for the Frenchman's medicine also is very strong."

"He speaks truly," exclaimed one of the braves. "Few men could have lived through all the French chief has suffered."

Raoul hastened to continue, afraid that something might break the spell: "If you seek to

slay him in the winter your arrow or your tomahawk will grow cold while his medicine grows hot and cannot harm him. If you seek to slay him in the spring moon your weapons will have only the strength of a hazel branch when it first greens; if you strike in the summer his medicine will blind you like the sun. It is only in the time when the leaves fall that his medicine leaves him bare as the trees are bare, and defenseless."

It did not seem possible to the boy that these silly words could convince these men thirsty for the blood of his beloved Seigneur. He had said "autumn" because long before that time he believed that La Salle would be on his way to France. To his relief, he saw that the Indians were impressed by what he had spoken; to them it seemed quite natural that so great a white chief should be all but invulnerable. They had no doubt that what he suggested *might* be the wisdom which would lead them to success, but Raoul was quick to feel that they were suspicious of him as the messenger of this wisdom. His heart beat and he wondered how he could convince them.

"The words sound indeed like words of good medicine, but why should our Seneca brother choose a white boy to carry them to us? Is

there no young Seneca, brave, or even lad, who could be his messenger?"

"How know we even if in truth this medicine bag be the medicine bag of which our fathers have told us? Not one of us ever beheld it before."

"How know we that he is not a spy?" cried another excitedly, jumping up and peering so savagely into Raoul's face that it took all his self-control not to shrink back.

"If he is French what does he in the secrets of the Five Nations?" cried another.

Their suspicions increased with each moment that Raoul did not reply. He could think of nothing to say or of any way by which he might *prove* that the medicine bag did in truth belong to Old Wolf. Yet he knew that if something did not happen within the next few minutes in his favor the Indians would kill him for a spy. But even this knowledge did not help him to act. It seemed to him that he had counted twelve braves in the council the night before, yet now there were only eleven. Then, between the dancing, screaming figures before him he caught sight of the missing warrior who was coming towards him. Several ducks swung across his shoulder showed that he had been chosen as the purveyor of the food for the coun-

cil's journey. Raoul was glad of any interruption, though there was little chance that it would better the situation for him. The Indians quickly explained to him Raoul's message and their suspicions, and pointed out the medicine bag the boy still held.

Spotted Deer listened gravely, and his expression quieted the others. He advanced towards Raoul, laid a reverent hand on the bag, and turned it slowly over and over.

"He speaks true words," he said at last. This is indeed the ancient medicine bag of Old Wolf, venerated by all the dwellers of the Long House. But it may be, as my brothers say, that this white boy has stolen it. I, who know the great chief, will ask him some questions."

Raoul breathed more freely that another chance had been given him. He waited anxiously until Spotted Deer asked:

"If indeed you know the lodge of Old Wolf, by what name is his squaw called?"

"She is Sun Cloud," replied Raoul.

"And what name is the one by which his nearest kin is known?"

"Red Wing." The very name brought back memories of the long journey through the forest and down the river and the thrashing the young brave bestowed on him when he and Denise tried

to escape. He could see that his answers were turning the tide in his favor.

"Yet there is one in his lodge whom Old Wolf regards even more than squaw or Red Wing," continued Spotted Deer. "If you know his lodge tell me who that is?"

The boy's mind jumped to the conclusion—this could be no other than Denise, who must have become in truth the adopted and beloved child of the Seneca.

"It is a maiden whose face is as white as mine," he answered, "who with me was taken to Old Wolf's lodge."

"He has stood the test," said Spotted Deer, turning to his companions. "I had heard that the chief had taken both a French boy and girl to be adopted and brought up in the tribe. You have listened to the stories told of her wisdom and medicine, young as she is; but little has been heard of the boy. Yet we may not doubt now that Old Wolf has chosen him wisely for his messenger."

Raoul felt a weight fall from him, and turned slowly to listen to the next speaker.

"We have hearkened to our brother and we thank him for showing us that our hearts were fearful for nothing. Let us feast this messenger, the bearer of the sacred trophy, and then

send him back to Old Wolf with the word that we will do as his medicine points out. When the autumn comes we will slay the French chief, that he may no longer protect our enemies."

Though Raoul longed to get away at once, he sat down quietly while the ducks were being cooked, and listened to the stories the braves told of the many times when Old Wolf's medicine had helped the Iroquois. He learned at last the reason of the sudden departure of the Senecas that day from their village on Lake Erie. It was because, in a general council of all the Iroquois, it had been decided that some of them must take up their position farther west to hold the Illinois in check. So the Senecas, and in particular Old Wolf, had been chosen to hold this outpost position. Raoul discovered that Denise had not been so far away from him lately as he had believed.

When the feast was over he rose and bade his hosts farewell.

"Where now is Old Wolf?" asked Spotted Deer.

"He desires that to be kept a secret for the present," answered Raoul, trusting that this would satisfy them. Luckily it did, and they allowed him to depart unmolested. Once again he was eager to set off to search for Denise,

but he knew that his duty to La Salle required him to hasten to him. He could only pray that the Indians whom he had fooled would not discover the deception until the Seigneur had left for France, but he must not tarry with his warning.





CHAPTER XVI

THE FOREST LODGE

LA SALLE laughed at Raoul's fears when he returned to the fort and laughed still more when he and Tonty had listened to the whole story the boy related. They examined the medicine bag curiously and advised Raoul to guard it carefully, because some day Old Wolf might be willing to pay highly for its return, in pelts or by the exchange of some French or Illinois prisoners.

But Etienne and Swift Fox did not laugh at the possibility of an attempt on the Seigneur's life. "If your Onondaguas and Mohawks do not catch up with Old Wolf and find out the truth, you have done a good day's work," remarked Etienne while the three were descending to the river to catch fish.

Swift Fox did not quite know what he ought to think of Raoul's strange use of the venerated

medicine bag, but he too agreed that as long as the Iroquois believed the message genuine they would obey it.

“But we must guard the great chief,” he said, “so that if they should come they may never get near enough to harm him.”

“We will be his bodyguard,” suggested Raoul, much pleased at the idea. “Let us arrange that one of us is always near him though we must not let him see that we are watching him. We can take turns.”

“Not a bad plan that,” commented Etienne. “The devils know well enough that they could scatter the rest of us easily if once they succeeded in killing the Seigneur.”

So from then on the three guarded La Salle, unaware of their vigilance. There were rumors of threatened attacks by the Iroquois, but nothing came of them. Early in the autumn La Salle, feeling he could wait no longer, decided he must soon start off on his way to Quebec to set sail for France.

Swift Fox's mother, together with many others of the Hurons, had come south to form part of the new colony. Though Swift Fox lived at the fort, he was often among his people.

“I will leave now for many days, White Thrush,” he said one morning.

“Where do you go then, Swift Fox?” Raoul asked.

“My people say I am old enough now to become a brave. I go first to fast and to listen to the Great Spirit,” the Indian youth replied.

Raoul had often heard of the tests to which the young Indians were subjected before they were admitted to the ranks of the warriors. He was eager to know more about it all, and begged Swift Fox to tell him the customs of his tribe.

“I wish I might be made a brave too,” the French boy remarked wistfully, his thoughts turning to the little chapel in the old castle in Brittany where so many of his ancestors had watched their armor the night before they were made knights. He had learned so much, done so much, since he came to Canada that he felt as if he needed to mark the entrance into the coming estate of manhood.

“Why should not White Thrush become a Huron brave also?” suggested Swift Fox with sudden enthusiasm. “The warriors of our tribe would gladly welcome him as one of them.”

“Why should I not?” cried Raoul aloud in French. “Would not the Seigneur say that this would be another bond between his Indian allies and ourselves?”

Bidding Swift Fox delay his departure a

little, he rushed into the storeroom where Tonty was superintending the stacking of ammunition and food supplies, and asked his opinion.

"I see no harm," answered the Italian after a moment's consideration. "You would be no less a loyal subject of King Louis's for being an Indian brave, and I think it would give you an added influence with our allies. But remember, it is a severe test, they say, and it would not do to undertake it and then fail and bring disgrace on yourself and on us."

La Salle, when he was told of the plan, was of the same view: Raoul might undertake the test provided he felt that he was equal to it. Raoul thanked him for his permission and took leave. He and Swift Fox clambered down the rock at its steepest slope and set out for the village of the Hurons, a day's journey away. When they reached it both lads were given a warm welcome, Raoul being well known and well liked in the tribe. He played with the dogs while Swift Fox put the question to the chief.

"It is well," nodded the older man. "White Thrush has already proved himself a hunter and a fighter. Our people will be proud to claim him. Let him fast when you fast; let him listen for the voice of the Great Spirit. It will speak to white ears as well as to red ears."

An uncle of Swift Fox, Little Lightning, went with the boys into the forest and helped them to build the two lodges near enough so that they could see each other, but too far apart for them to talk. Then he led them back to the village to the sweating-lodge, where the Indians went for the hot baths which served both medicinal and ceremonial purposes. A huge fire had heated the big stones within, and water poured on them sent up clouds of steam which almost stifled Raoul.

The brave explained: "The youth who would prove himself ready to become a warrior must show that he can stand many things, heat and cold, hunger and thirst."

Raoul determined to ask no questions, but to do whatever Swift Fox did. He threw aside his clothes when Swift Fox did and climbed after him up to a kind of shelf and sat there in silence until it seemed to him that hell itself could be no hotter. When Swift Fox jumped down at last he did the same and ran after him to the river and plunged into the icy water. The cold made him gasp for breath. Back to the sweating-lodge they ran, and this time Raoul was glad of the heat for a few moments. Again they rushed out to the shock of the river, and three times they alternated the cold and the heat.

Little Lightning, sitting before the lodge of Swift Fox's mother, watched them and seemed satisfied. He strolled up to them and when they had clothed themselves, still keeping the complete silence, left the sweating-lodge behind and escorted them to the lodges in the forest, far away from any sound of the village.

"Lie here, Swift Fox," he said, "and may your manitou appear soon to you. Forget not that the manitous of your family will help you in your fast."

Then when Swift Fox had lain down upon the mats his mother had woven especially for this great occasion, Little Lightning went back to the waiting Raoul.

"Lie here, White Thrush," he bade. "May the Great Manitou send you a vision."

Raoul too obediently lay down, and in a moment Little Lightning had departed and there was nothing to break the deep silence of the forest. It was probably the effect of his baths that made Raoul, who had intended to stay awake and to try to bring his thoughts into the channel into which he wished to direct them, soon fall asleep.

It was dawn when he awoke. The birds were twittering, the sun was throwing a first ray through the oak trees, lighting up the globes

of the acorns nearly ripe enough to fall. Raoul jumped to his feet and ran a few paces to limber his cramped legs. He wondered if Swift Fox were awake and whether he had fallen asleep as early the evening before as he had done. He looked across to the other lodge, so far away that he could just see the form of his friend dimly. He knew that he must neither go to him nor call out. Only in silence and loneliness could the test be sustained. After a few minutes he returned to his lodge and lay down on the mat again. There was plenty of time for thinking, so he let his thoughts wander where they would. First they went to Fort St. Louis, to Tonty and Etienne, even to the little puppy he had made a playmate of. Then they journeyed to France, skimming the three thousand miles in a moment. They wandered about the old château, the rocky coast of his boyhood, and then to the royal gardens at Versailles. He had a clear picture in his mind of the King as he had first seen him when he stepped majestically from his barge and of the little black-gowned lad trembling because his hand had thrown the stone that grazed the royal person.

“Was that little priestling indeed the same as this youth lying in an Indian lodge?” he asked himself, and he followed the black gown from

Versailles back to the gray corridors of his school, across the ocean, to the seminary window at Quebec, where its owner gazed longingly out at the busy life below from which he was removed. He saw it again in the Dubois farm before the fire; then a second figure, that of a dark-eyed, red-cheeked girl joined it. Then followed pictures of a canoe journeying swiftly along a great river. He saw the frozen lake where a French boy in Indian shirt and leggings brought food to the great La Salle. Until then his thoughts had traveled in order along one main road; now they began to run this way and that, oblivious of any trail, from Lake Ontario to the Gulf of Mexico, from icy plains to sun-burnt sands and misty marshes. But always, wherever they went, they obeyed three calls: one the call of loyalty to a leader, one the call of the freedom of the wilderness, and one the call of chivalry, the need to rescue a woman child from bondage.

It seemed to him that it must have been hours since he had been reliving the past, yet the sun was still only a quarter above the horizon. Little creatures of the forest were scampering about, rabbits, squirrels, muskrats, birds. He thought of his bow and arrow and how easy it would be to shoot enough for a feast. But he put away

from him the thought of food. He was not really hungry. He remembered now why he was lying there—not only to prove that he had the endurance of a man, but, as the Indians believed, that a spirit, some manitou as they called it, should reveal itself to him and in some way become a symbol of help for his future life, the life of a man into which he was now entering. He had lived too much among the Indians to find this strange. He knew that they believed in a Great Manitou, a great spirit above the earth, and also that every human being had his own special manitou which would aid him during life. Nor did he find it hard to understand that these manitous appeared to them in visions in the forms of animals, for his long days trapping in the forest with Black Duck had shown him how close the Indians seemed to their brethren, the beasts. Had he not even heard Black Duck beseech the bear he was about to kill to *allow* himself to be slain?

He did not know just what he expected, but he recalled what he had been told at home in Brittany of the vigils and prayers, and bathing and fasts a young Christian warrior once had to undergo before he could be made a knight; and it pleased him to think that what he was now enduring was not so different from the tests

of his ancestors. The forest was as silent as a chapel, and prayers of praise and thanksgiving and petitions for guidance welled up within him. Night fell before he had risen from his knees.

The next morning a sharp craving for food awoke him; his healthy young appetite was clamoring. He rose and walked about for a while, endeavoring to forget what every squirrel and bird reminded him of. He wondered if Swift Fox experienced the same gnawing. All day long as he lay on his mat looking up into the brilliant October sky, a red leaf occasionally falling at his feet, he tried to keep his thoughts away from food, but in vain. He would have welcomed even a piece of tough alligator flesh.

That night his sleep was restless and broken, and the next morning he felt faint and dizzy. How much longer, he wondered, could he hold out? By this time surely Swift Fox had had his vision, even if none had come to him; then they would have proved their endurance. Once or twice he had seen Swift Fox walking about, but there was no sign to testify that his manitou had appeared to him. That day and night his suffering was intense. With dawn came Little Lightning bringing food in gourds. The smell of it brought tears into Raoul's eyes.

"Will you eat, White Thrush?" asked the

brave. "Four days and nights you have fasted now."

"Will Swift Fox eat?" questioned Raoul.

"I will see," replied Little Lightning, going across to the other lodge. Raoul awaited his return eagerly. When he came he said: "Swift Fox has not yet seen his manitou. He will not yet break his fast. But it may be that an Indian has more endurance than a Frenchman. I will leave this broth outside your lodge and you may eat when you will."

When he was alone again Raoul was tempted. Perhaps it was the truth that Indian stomachs were different from those of the French; perhaps Swift Fox's sufferings were not equal to his own. Why should he abide by a custom of savages? If he died from starvation was he not thus deserting the Seigneur when he needed him? All these and other reasons for eating seemed right, but he only shook his head. Better to die than to fail. Yet all day long the inner struggle continued. He prayed to God and the saints for courage to endure. Much of the time now he was lightheaded and did not know where he was. A cold rain was falling and he opened his mouth unconsciously that the drops might fall on his tongue.

When he awoke again it seemed to him that

he was in the great hall of his father's castle on the Breton coast. In the colored panes of glass in the windows which looked out on the stormy waters he saw again the Greyhound that surmounted the de Larnac coat-of-arms. He was alone in the hall and he looked at the huge stone fireplace on the smoke-stained hood of which was carved the Greyhound and on the back of the oaken settle by its side. Suddenly the scene changed—he was once again in the forest. There in the distance he saw something coming through the trees, something huge and gray and swift. Its head was so high that it touched the tree tops, but Raoul could see the soft brown eyes. He was not afraid, for he knew their owner. It was the Greyhound. It stopped quickly before the lodge, its lithe beautiful flanks heaving gently from its coursing, and it spoke in a voice that was as familiar to Raoul as if he had always heard it:

“Son of the Greyhounds, you are worthy of your race. They have endured, have sped swiftly to their ends, have been true. Fear not that you will disgrace them.”

Raoul longed to reply, but he could find no words. Only a feeling of intense happiness came over him. He kept looking up into the soft

eyes of the Greyhound, which seemed so like those of his father.

On the morning of the sixth day Little Lightning, a gourd of food in each hand, found the two lads unconscious in their lodges. He roused Swift Fox by bathing his face and asked: "Will you not eat, for you have fasted long enough?"

Swift Fox opened his eyes and said in a weak voice: "I have seen my manitou. The Bear appeared and said to me that my strength should be as great as his and that my medicine should be great. I would eat now if White Thrush too will eat."

Little Lightning now aroused Raoul.

"I have seen the manitou of my ancestors," the French boy replied to his question. "He came as a Greyhound, a dog such as you know not, swift and faithful."

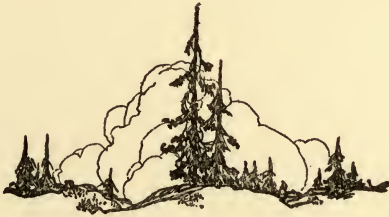
"That is well," said the warrior approvingly. "Eat, for Swift Fox too breaks his fast."

Hearing this, Raoul let himself be fed and Swift Fox finished too his share. When they were stronger Little Lightning led them back slowly to the village. The news of their long fast brought all the braves, squaws and children out to greet them. They cried out words of praise for the young braves' endurance, and when they had learned of the visions, they

bestowed on the two their new names, Strong Bear and True Dog. The chief presented them with three-pointed blankets, which only braves had the right to wear.

“Now,” he said, “you must set out on the war-path as soon as possible and win your eagle feathers.”

The next day a great feast was prepared for them, but Swift Fox, or Strong Bear, could not eat the bear steaks, as never as long as he lived might he feed on the flesh of the animal which was his manitou. And Raoul was glad to have the same excuse for refusing dog flesh.





CHAPTER XVII

KING LOUIS REMEMBERS

WHEN Raoul returned to the fort all gathered about him to listen to the account of his initiation as a brave. But to no one, not even to La Salle, did he speak of his dream, or vision, of the Greyhound. They would laugh at it, he felt sure, while to him it seemed like some strangely sweet and intimate fairy tale such as his mother had been wont to relate to him before the great hearth on winter evenings; and he could not bear to hear it ridiculed.

When he had finished talking and had shown the blanket given to him as a symbol that he had become a brave, La Salle told him that the time had come for them to sail for France. Tonty bade them farewell, and Swift Fox promised that as soon as he returned from the war trail against the Iroquois he would stay at the

fort and serve Tonty during the absence of the Seigneur.

It was with a thrill that Raoul saw once again the canoes made ready for the journey.

"How can men be content to live always in the same place?" he exclaimed to La Salle as, with paddle in hand, he put his full strength into propelling the boat through the leagues of water that stretched beyond them. "I should die as a trapped beast dies if I were shut up always in a house or a town."

"Yet who knows," replied La Salle, "if you may not change your mind when we reach Paris, and decide to abide there, leaving me to return to the wilderness alone."

But it did not need Raoul's scornful laughter to reassure him.

They had traveled many days, omitting no precautions. There were many cuts and portages known to Beaver Tail that were shorter than the regular trail, and often he piloted them by shallow streams or over rapids where no inexperienced traveler had ever dared venture. The forests were brilliant in the war paint of autumn; the persimmon trees bore the sticky, honey-sweet fruit in its puckered coverings; the chestnuts were dropping to the earth with soft thuds, advertising thus their arrival to the expect-

tant squirrels, and geese were flying southward high up in the blue sky. Raoul guided the second canoe. The stream was full of rapids, and Beaver Tail in La Salle's canoe led the way. The river forked, split by a narrow island, perhaps two or three miles long. Though the other canoe had kept to the right, Raoul, with no motive other than an instinctive youthful desire for independence, went to the left of the island, knowing that he could rejoin the other farther down.

He was alone in the boat, which was filled with supplies and ammunition. Before him rose a steep cliff, and his sense of smell, keen now as an Indian's, told him that somewhere within a mile or so, there must be a camp or a village. He noticed something white on the cliff and as it moved decided that it was probably a human being. He looked to see that his gun was in reach, but as he approached nearer he discovered that it was a woman whose white buckskin robe glistened in the sunshine. She was evidently fishing from the rock. He was almost abreast of the cliff before she heard the noise of his paddle. She lifted her head and Raoul was amazed to see that, though she was dark and tanned by the sun, her face was not that of an Indian. She glanced down at him with equal

astonishment, and just before a rapid caught the bow and threatened to upset the canoe, he recognized in this tall maiden the features of Denise.

“Denise!” he called back, but he could not turn to see whether his voice had carried to her, for one rapid after another whirled him about like a cork, requiring all his skill to keep his canoe afloat. When he reached smoother water he pulled to the shore and had jumped out when La Salle’s anxious halloo came to him from the distance. Once again he had to choose; if he went back to search for his old companion of six years ago he would fail the Seigneur to whom every day was of utmost importance. He hesitated nevertheless; then he seemed once again to see the Greyhound and to hear him say: “they sped swiftly to their ends, have been true. Fear not that you will disgrace them.” Slowly he stepped back into the boat and soon had caught up with the rest. He did not tell La Salle what had happened; he knew too well that the Seigneur, who at another time would have been keenly interested, now had no thought for anything but for the furthering of his own gigantic plans. But when he came back from France, Raoul swore to himself, nothing should prevent his setting out in search of the com-

panion of his boyhood he still felt half guilty of having deserted.

Villemarie (Montreal) and Quebec seemed to him, fresh from the forests, almost uncomfortably crowded with people, and for the first night or two he spent under cover he slept restlessly and with a sense of suffocation. He had a feeling of mental suffocation also when he learned of all the efforts La Salle had to make to settle his financial affairs, to satisfy this creditor by selling furs, and to assure that one that he had really descended the whole length of the Colbert River, as he called the Mississippi, and that a trading station had already been planted at Fort St. Louis. There was no time to spare in Quebec, but Raoul spent an hour in the gray-walled seminary, where the fathers did not hide from him their disappointment and disapproval that he had given up the life of a missionary.

La Salle breathed a long breath once they were embarked, and a still longer one when they had seen the last shores of New France sink into the sunset.

“For weeks now we shall hear no complaints, no hints of disaster, no cries for moneys,” he said to Raoul as they sat on a coil of rope in the vessel’s stern, the great sails bellying above them.

“How have you done it all?” asked Raoul. “I can understand how you have borne the fighting, the hunger when necessary, long marches and dangers even from disloyal followers; but to me worse than all these is the striving against men with ears deaf to all that is great, against misunderstandings and misrepresentations. How have you found courage to try again and again when you have lost your ships, have had your goods stolen from you, have had to meet the opposition of the Governor?”

La Salle did not take his eyes away from the gray-green waste as he answered: “You are growing up, my son. You see now that life is no broad highway, but that one must cut one’s own trail. How do I go ahead after disappointments and setbacks? Can the captain of this ship help going forward when the wind fills the sails? I too am blown by the wind of a great desire. Though I sail into strange seas, though men call me mad, I must go ahead. I have dreamed a dream and I must see it fulfilled. Not until death’s calm bids the wind cease can I drop anchor, no matter what rocks lie ahead.”

They were silent for a long time while dusk fell and the ship’s lanterns one by one were lighted. As they rose to go below to supper,

to which a cabin boy had just bidden them, Raoul said: "I pray, dear Seigneur, that the King will have willing ears for your great dream."

"He must listen to it," replied La Salle in a tone as calm as it was assured.

How delightful it was to see the French fields again, though the winter coloring was somber, and the canals, and the highways so gay with travelling folk who looked with kindly curiosity at the Seigneur and his bronze-cheeked companion. How beautiful were the long lines of poplars growing with wide spaces between them, as Raoul had not seen trees grow for many years; the little towns so bright with midday markets and perhaps a regiment in brilliant uniforms and a fanfare of brass passing through the rows of ancient dwellings, their windows shining with women's faces. The slender church towers on the hills, the terraced vineyards, the orderly farmyards—all filled Raoul with keen pleasure.

"If you are so happy now what will you be when we reach Paris?" queried La Salle.

But in Paris Raoul felt lonely and strange. He had left his master at his old lodgings in the rue de la Truanderie, and then had gone to those

of his brother Gervase. He had been greeted most kindly. His two brothers who had been expecting him, welcomed him with real affection; but after the first few hours of novelty, of asking questions, and of shaking of heads over the possibility of understanding what difference it made whether a redskin were an Illinois or an Iroquois, and an incomprehension of any life away from Paris, or France at least, Raoul felt as if he were speaking another language that no interpreter could ever make plain to them.

La Salle, knowing that waiting in ante-chambers was part of his campaign, strove for patience as if it were the fortress of an enemy which he must conquer. Yet his friends assured him, he had no right to complain, that seldom had a petitioner at court lost so little time.

"You come at the right moment," one of them declared. Seignelay's (the minister) great idea has been to build a fort on the Gulf of Mexico so that we may hold the Spaniards in check, and now that we are at war with Spain, he will be all the more willing to listen to your plans and to advise the King. You know too how the Spaniards have forbidden our ships to sail on your Gulf and how little likely the Sun King is to give up our rights in this matter."

Versailles and the court were well used to

great spectacles, to the arrival of victorious commanders bearing the standards of many battles. Nevertheless, the day when it was known that His Majesty was to receive Seigneur de La Salle, who was said to have traveled half round the world and fought his way through hosts of savages and cannibals, the courtyard, the stairways and the corridors were filled with courtiers and ladies eager to catch sight of the renowned explorer. When La Salle, accompanied by Raoul, was guided by a page through the halls to the room where Seignelay was to talk with him before the royal audience, the onlookers were disappointed. His wellmade clothes, his air of quiet grace, neither too assured nor timid, had about them no note of exotic strangeness for which they were waiting. It was rather Raoul, whose garments could not succeed in hiding the free easy carriage of the forest, who satisfied them.

“They say he is the brother of Monsieur de Larnac,” whispered one lady behind her fan as he passed by, blushing at the stare of so many eyes. “’Tis a pity his older brother has not more of his good looks.”

“Have you the memorial?” questioned Seignelay as soon as he had greeted La Salle. “It is a great project of yours, Monsieur de La

Salle, and I would have you know that I am proud to have the chance to put it before France's King."

"I thank you for your courtesy, Monsieur," La Salle replied, his heart beating swiftly with hope.

Louis the King, looking a little older in spite of rouge and wig and lace collar and fine linen and satin than the day when Raoul had seen him before, was waiting for the audience in a small room that seemed to Raoul to glow with crimson as the ruby on the royal finger. The sovereign asked many questions and showed an intelligent interest in the accounts which La Salle gave him of the descent of the Mississippi and his plans for building up the western Indians as a barrier against the Iroquois.

"Seignelay spoke of a memorial," said the King, "in which you had set forth all you desire of me."

"It is here, Sire, for him to read if you will deign to listen," replied La Salle, handing the parchment to the minister.

"It seems to me that yonder young man should have a good voice," remarked the King, who had been looking at Raoul. "If he has been taught his letters in your forest let him read it aloud to me."

Raoul took the memorial mechanically, feeling certain that his voice had left him forever. He opened the parchment and opened his mouth, but no sound came forth. The King was amused at his embarrassment and waited, smiling, until a voice that seemed to the lad to belong to someone else at last began the preamble. As he went on, the knowledge of what deeds, what hardships, what bravery and what hopes these words were expressing came to him; his voice grew stronger, and he was proudly conscious that it was he, the favored companion of the Seigneur, who was granted the privilege of bringing them to the King's ear.

He read how La Salle had made five journeys of upwards five thousand leagues, had travelled more than six hundred leagues of unknown country among unknown tribes; of how he now proposed to return by way of the Mexican Gulf and the mouth of the River Colbert to the countries he had discovered, where the Indian tribes should profit by listening to the teachings of the Gospel, and the King's glory be secured by these new provinces, rich in silver mines that the Spaniards would be unable to hold against the valor of the French. One year after reaching the mouth of the river would suffice; and for all this, all the discoverer asked was one vessel,

two hundred men with arms, munitions, pay and maintenance. He went on to read how the plan was to build some forts along the river. "Should the foreigners anticipate us," the young voice rang out, "they will complete the ruin of New France, which they already hem in by their establishments of Virginia, Pennsylvania, New England and Hudson Bay."

The King turned to whisper to Seignelay, but La Salle, eager as he was, could not judge from his countenance how he was affected by what he had heard. Then the minister motioned to Raoul to continue.

He read that the spot La Salle intended first to fortify was about sixty miles above the mouth of the river, which the French could easily defend, or from which they could make an offensive campaign. He read how the Indians loved the French and would join them against the Spaniards whom they detested. To accomplish this, La Salle said that he would send word to four hundred Indian warriors at Fort St. Louis to descend the river, and with them and the ship and the cannon for his fort and the men for which he besought the aid of the King, he would be successful, or within three years he would forfeit money and the government of the forts he might then hold.

When Raoul had finished there was silence; only from the corridors without came faint sounds of laughter and footsteps. La Salle waited. Finally Louis turned to the minister and said:

“Seignelay, I do not agree with Monsieur de La Salle.”

All the crimson of the chamber turned to black for the two whose hopes had beat so high.

“No,” continued the King, “two vessels are not enough; let us give him *four*. And, besides the men he asks for, let us send also families, that we may start at once a colony, not merely a fort.”

The two heads that had drooped now quickly straightened again, and La Salle, half incredulous, listened to the King’s promises of help.

“If you are winning me a new kingdom,” his sovereign said, “I can at least give you a handful of men and guns to hold it.”

When La Salle had thanked him and told him that he planned to leave just as soon as he could get the expedition together, the King said:

“Suppose, though, you leave your young lieutenant, who, I understand, is a brother of de Larnac. How would you like a place as lieutenant in my guards, my son? I will see that you have fighting enough.”

Raoul could not be sure whether his sovereign was in earnest or teasing him, but in either case he did not know how he ought to reply. He glanced at La Salle for aid, but he did not speak. "Sire," he stammered, "I am most grateful for your gracious kindness and the memory of it will make me fight the harder for your cause at all times. Yet, I pray you, let me fight for it in forests rather than in fields, for I have sworn to my Seigneur here that I will never leave him."

"As you will then, lad," the King replied, "but keep your scalp-lock safe from the savages. A wife will want to caress it some day."

Raoul bowed in acknowledgment of this royal pleasantry. He and La Salle were at the door and the crimson curtain was half lifted to let them pass, when the King, to whom his minister had whispered, called:

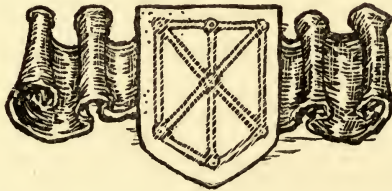
"Come back here, young sir. Are not you the lad who years ago hit my arm with a stone?"

Raoul stood before him in utter confusion. He had thought this incident forgotten, and now his thought was not so much of the consequences to himself of the King's displeasure, but of his disappointment that so great a man could harbor a grudge so long for a childish blow. He stammered an answer.

“If your arm has grown in strength since then,” Louis continued, “I pity the savages. I can feel the sting yet. But if you must hit them, here is a better weapon.”

He took from the case which Seignelay, smiling, had handed him, a pistol of ivory carved and banded with silver, and held it towards Raoul. Never had his young eyes beheld so beautiful a firearm. He took it, scarce believing it could be his, and said, as he knelt to kiss the King’s hand:

“This shall be to me always a symbol of your kindness, Sire, and I trust I may use it well against your enemies.”





CHAPTER XVIII

DISILLUSIONMENT

“IT is a God-forsaken voyage this,” exclaimed one of the men aboard the *Aimable*, as on the first day of the year 1685 the storeship of the little fleet sailed slowly along a marshy coast. “It is like a nightmare when I think of it: two months from Rochelle to that sickly isle of San Domingo, where we all but died, even the Seigneur himself; the disputes between him and old Seadog Beaujeu, whose naval dignity would not brook interference in the management of his ships; the never-dying winds; the loneliness, and all for what—yonder dreary coast!”

“I think the King will lose his money,” his companion answered, yawning. “I see no gold or silver mines here to be won; not even a savage is there to fight. I would I were back within smell of the Seine again.”

Raoul, walking the deck with Father Membré,

who had decided to return to the New World with La Salle, overheard them. He started forward to explain to them that it was too soon yet to condemn an expedition which was just begun. Then he changed his mind and shrugged his shoulders. Their words had found an echo in his spirit; he could not spur his own enthusiasm. Like them, he had been influenced by the mishaps of the voyage. He, too, had been ill, but not as La Salle had been—within close call of death. He had suffered from the difficulties which had arisen between Beaujeu and La Salle even before they set sail. He longed for the moment when they should reach their destination; trackless forests, savage Indians—anything would be a welcome change from the narrow deck of the ship where so much discontent was bottled up.

One of the four ships which the King had given, the *St. François*, had been taken by Spanish pirates, and the news of this loss of ship and provisions had caused a relapse in La Salle's illness which had nearly proved fatal. Now the *Aimable* and the *Belle* were sailing close together, and the flagship, the *Joly*, bearing Beaujeu, was somewhere in the rear, out of sight. Raoul stared at the coast before him, trying to see if there were any landmarks he could recog-

nize. He knew that La Salle had taken some kind of reckonings when he had first reached the Gulf after their descent of the Mississippi, and that, according to them, he believed that they were now nearing the mouth of the river.

La Salle now came on deck with his brother, Abbé Cavelier, and after studying the land carefully, gave orders to anchor. He sprang into the small boat with eagerness and, in company with the engineer, went ashore to explore the marshy land.

“Not yet,” he replied to Raoul when he returned to the ship, “but we cannot be far from it.” And once again they set sail westward.

Raoul did not know why it was so, but with every knot farther westward they advanced his depression increased. It was as if something were drawing him back to the east. It had been a long time since he had experienced one of his “visions,” but that night as he lay on deck, wrapped in his cloak, he seemed to see the river he had explored two years before, to follow it again mile by mile until he saw it empty far to the east of where they now were. Next morning he strove to shake off this impression, to reassure himself that the Seigneur’s reckonings were far more likely to be correct than his own strange feeling, but he did not succeed. On the

sixth of the month La Salle, who could not be made to quit the deck, cried out at the sight of yellow mud spreading out into the gulf from the shore, "Yonder is the mouth, my friends. Here we are at last!"

Still Raoul was not convinced. The picture before him was not the same as the one in his mind of the meeting of river and gulf that memorable day when their canoes had reached their long journey's end.

Since the *Joly* had still not made her appearance, La Salle would not land for fear that he might miss her. "Doubtless she has already passed us," he suggested; "we must sail on in search of her. If old Beaujeu would but keep better watch my patience would not be so tested, Raoul. But after all, he is not a bad sort of sailor, I am beginning to think."

So westward they sailed again. Once Joutel, whose father had been a gardener of La Salle's uncle, tried to land, but without success for a time, and when he did get through the breakers he came back with nothing more valuable than some wildfowl. Even some Indians who swam out to the *Aimable* could give them no information, for their tongue was unlike any Indian speech that either La Salle or Raoul was familiar with. At last La Salle, who had sailed as far

westward as the waters now known as Corpus Christi Bay, decided that the *Joly* must be behind rather than before them, and so ordered their course to be changed to the eastward.

Finally, when the fog rose, the *Joly* was sighted. When one of Beaujeu's officers came on board the *Aimable*, each side blamed the other for the separation and the anxiety of the search. There was also much dispute as to their position. Raoul discovered that one day La Salle would be certain the marshy lands before them belonged to the delta of the Mississippi, and on the next he would suggest they might as well sail a little farther in search of it. Beaujeu rejoined that his provisions were giving out, that the soldiers would soon have devoured all of them, and that a decision must be reached.

At last, one day all of La Salle's doubts seemed to lift like the fog, and he asserted that the wide opening before them was the long-sought haven, and he named it the Bay of St. Louis (Matagorda Bay).

"Here will we land," he announced to Beaujeu. "There will be a fair anchorage for the *Aimable* and the *Belle*."

"I doubt not that you know how to navigate a canoe on a river, Seigneur La Salle," the naval officer said sneeringly, "but even the King's

favor cannot make a seaman out of a landlubber. There is not water enough yonder for the ships to ride in. You will endanger them if you persist."

But La Salle did not change his orders. "Take some men, Raoul," he commanded, "and lay out a site for a camp. Cut down trees as quickly as possible, so that there may be a cleared space about to prevent Indians approaching unseen."

Now, that he was once ashore and had work to do, Raoul was able to shake off the persistent feeling that the Mississippi's mouth was to the eastward. Most of the men who were with him had never before been in a wild country and were only too willing to accept his leadership. He set some of them to felling trees and taking a few others along, went off to explore the firmer ground back of the marshes. He had had no orders to do this, but his eagerness to learn more of his surroundings spurred him on. In the distance he saw a herd of buffalo, and was explaining to his companions the nature of these beasts and how to hunt them, when a sudden shower of arrows fell amongst them. The handful of Frenchmen drew quickly together, but before they would fire the two guns they had with them, a score of Indians had run up

over the top of a sand dune and surrounded them.

"It is my fault," cried Raoul remorsefully. "I should never have led you so far."

There was no use, he saw, in trying to resist such a superior force, but he shouted to one of the other men, who had luckily lagged behind, to hasten back to the shore and notify La Salle of their capture.

The messenger came upon La Salle just as he was landing and watching the *Aimable* tack slowly to the anchorage he had assigned to her.

"Raoul let himself be ambushed!" he exclaimed disdainfully to Father Membré. "I did wrong to trust him. After all, he is but a boy in years, and I must remember may be led away by a boy's will."

Bidding all the men ashore take their arms, he hurried off, and in a few minutes saw a party of Indians ahead. They seemed undecided whether to attack or to fly, but La Salle's gesture of friendship reassured them. By means of signs and some words he had picked up since he had been exploring the gulf coast, he learned that his men had been carried farther inland. He hastened on and soon came in sight of the village.

"It looks like a colony of bee hives," one of

the men exclaimed as he came near enough to see the curious rounded huts. To his relief, La Salle heard a whistle which came from the center of the crowd filling the space between the ring of huts and knew that it was Raoul's. The Indians had arrows fitted to their bows and La Salle anticipated a severe fight before he would be able to rescue the prisoners.

Just then a cannon boomed, and at the terrific sound, coming they knew not whence, the Indians fell flat upon the earth, hiding their faces in the sand.

"We are saved," cried a Frenchman, "just in the nick of time, or some of us would have been lying as the savages lie yonder."

"*We* may be saved," La Salle admitted, "but look, the *Aimable* is lost."

Back of them they could see the gallant little ship ashore on a reef. His heart was sick at this new misfortune, but no Indian, gazing at his stern, determined face, would have guessed that any thought of weakness was harbored there. He showed no signs of displeasure or fear when, recovering from their fright, they surrounded him and brought him buffalo meat to eat. He acted to them as he always did to the savages, as if they were his friends, and his assurance and calmness overawed them. He thanked them

for the feast they offered and promised he would come to them some other day. Just now, he said, he had need of his men, whom they had seized by mistake, wrongly imagining them to be foes. And to the great astonishment of the Frenchmen, who had not expected to escape without bloodshed, the Indians made no attempt to gainsay him.

“Ah! Seigneur,” cried Raoul as they hastened back, their ears catching the cries and orders and counter-orders of the sailors who were trying to pull the *Aimable* off the reef, “what have I done? If I had not taken you away . . .”

“Much harm, Raoul,” La Salle answered sadly; “yet I, too, am guilty. Beaujeu was right; there was not water enough in the channel for the ship.”

Never had Raoul seen his Seigneur so downcast as on their short journey to the shore. He knew the great value to him of the ship and her supplies. But once on the scene, his master gave orders calmly and wisely. Since the ship herself was hopelessly lost, all attention must be paid to saving her cargo. Flour and gunpowder were of utmost importance.

“Can I trust you, Raoul, to guard the gunpowder?” he asked, and his question was the boy’s chief punishment.

When the sea rose and the waters were full of the precious stores, a band of Indians rushed down from the dunes, eager to carry away the unexpected treasures. La Salle ordered the drummer to beat an alarm and his men drove the savages off. Every now and then, though, during the night, as Raoul walked back and forth among the casks and bales, looking out that no one, red or white—for he had reason not to trust many of the expedition—removed any of the stores, he could catch a glimpse in the lantern light of La Salle as he sat among the piled-up bags and boxes. He knew that for him, too, there was no sleep, and he felt, as if with his own mind, the keenness of his master's regret. He longed to go and beg for forgiveness for his share in the disaster, but he was aware that he had no right to intrude even his remorse upon La Salle now. All he could do was to guard faithfully what had been entrusted to him. In the future he would find some way, some service, to offset the harm he had done.

When morning came La Salle looked about him to muster his colony and the store remaining. The ground where they had been forced to camp was low and marshy and, from the mists he had seen rising, he knew that it must be unhealthy. He could see that already some of the men and

women were shaking and their morose expressions showed only too plainly the state of their feeling. After a breakfast of such scraps as they could lay hands on, he ordered the men to pile the boxes and bales and the cannon and their mounts around the camp as a protection for them all, and to pen in the swine and fowls which they had brought with such care from overseas. He came across a girl crying from homesickness, and the sight of her dejected body, as she had thrown herself across a bag of flour, made him realize as he had never realized before the weight of his responsibility.

For several days he and Raoul had no words alone. The boy did his utmost to assist La Salle in his endeavors to better the condition of the colonists. He showed them how to get oysters and sought in vain to build an oven for baking; but there were no stones and no clay, and the women, protesting that such food was not fit for the pigs, boiled flour in brackish water. Many fell ill and each day several died. The Indians, growing bold, robbed some of the colonists of their blankets. Some volunteered to go after them, and though they reached the camp from which the inhabitants had fled, they were ambushed on their return and two men were killed and another wounded.

“Raoul,” commanded La Salle after this had occurred, “we must have more cannon. Will you go to Captain Beaujeu and ask him to send ashore those that are still on the *Joly*, and also the iron?”

Raoul was only too eager for this embassy. It was almost like returning home to step upon the smartly kept deck of the ship after the confusion on shore. Beaujeu, too, seemed pleased to see him.

“Tell Seigneur La Salle,” he said, “that before I sail for France I will go to Martinique if he wishes for reinforcements and provisions, and that I wish I could give him his iron, but it is impossible to unload it except in a harbor, for it is my ballast and lies under the cannon. It would take three days to get it out, which cannot be done in this place where the sea runs like mountains when the slightest winds blow outside.”

Raoul, who now, like La Salle, had overcome his first dislike to Beaujeu, thanked him for his courtesy and went back to report what he had said and returned again with La Salle’s answer that he felt he had reached the place he sought and was in a fair way of success if he could but have the cannon, cannon balls and iron stored on board the *Joly*.”



EACH MORNING LA SALLE FELT SURE HE WOULD
DISCOVER SOME MARSH.

“Do you think he has reached the mouth of the Colbert River?” asked the officer, giving Raoul a quick searching glance. “I understand that you were with him when he first explored it.”

Raoul did not answer. He felt it disloyal to breathe to another the suspicion that the Seigneur could have made a mistake.

“I understand,” Beaujeu remarked gravely. “I wish I need not leave him; but at all events, he shall have his iron if I endanger my ship by moving everything in the hold.”

It was several days later when he sailed, taking on the *Joly* only those whose spirits could not recover from their first disappointment and fear.

“My own brother would have left me, Raoul,” said La Salle as they watched the ship sail, “if I had not shamed him into staying. What, think you, would our loyal Tonty say to that? There are but a few of us here whom I can trust, lad; Moranget, my nephew, the friars, the Marquis de la Sablonnière, and our faithful Joutel.”

When the ship was out of sight he turned and his mood had changed. “Now,” he cried, “we must depend upon ourselves. Let us waste no more time. We must learn more of our surroundings. Will you come with me, lad?”

Joutel was left in charge, and the two with

several soldiers, set off to explore. Each morning La Salle felt sure he would discover some marsh which would prove to be an opening into the river, perhaps an Indian camp where he would find the friends he had made two years ago. And each night he was a little less certain. Raoul felt that he could scarcely bear to witness the growing conviction of his mistake. It was not until they returned to the camp and heard of the attacks it had suffered from Indians during their absence, that La Salle opened his heart. "I was wrong, Raoul, wrong. This is *not* our river! God knows now much farther it is behind us to the eastward. But we must find some way to reach it yet. It cannot be that my great plan is not to be successful!"



·Liotot·



CHAPTER XIX

THE FINAL EFFORT

“**H**OW long, Joutel, think you we shall have to wait for news?” queried Raoul as he stood at the older man’s side, watching the soldiers and sailors harnessed to logs they had felled and were now dragging slowly along, to be used in building the storehouse and the dwelling houses on the higher ground along the Lavaca River, whither La Salle had moved the colony temporarily until he should find the Mississippi, for which he had once again gone in search.

“It is idle to guess,” Joutel answered and interrupted himself to call out orders in several different directions. “I would the Seigneur were back, though,” he continued a moment later, “I never was born to rule a colony of homesick and bodysick men and women, and I should be glad to hand over my responsibilities to him again.”

“But you do manage the fort as if you were born to it,” Raoul insisted, “and now that all

have learned not to eat immoderately of fruits and berries there is less illness and everyone is more cheerful."

"I doubt whether the Seigneur would approve of our singing and dancing at night," Joutel remarked, shaking his head. "He is grave, you know; but I believe it is needful to do something to take our thoughts away from our disappointments and our worries."

A young girl of about ten ran by them, chasing the one precious pair of goats. Her joyous laughter, as they butted into one of the few hogs curled up in the midst of the black and white litter, brought a smile to Joutel's lips. "It is good that she at least is not wondering what is to become of us all. Even if the Seigneur does find the mouth of the Mississippi soon which, like you, I feel certain lies many leagues to the east of us, can he bring us in safety all the way north to the colony of your Indian friends, the Illinois of whom you have told me?"

"I do not know," answered Raoul. "I am now a man in years, and I fear not to fight with any man and to bear hardships, but I could not bear the burden of the Seigneur. Who else but he can tell what must be done? I would though, Joutel," he added, speaking in a lower tone, "that he had different men to serve him. There

are but few of all who came from France on whom he can rely. His own brother, Abbé Cavelier, is no help; his nephew, young Moranget, is so arrogant and hot tempered that he makes everyone angry with him, and then these, nursing their anger, hold the uncle responsible for the nephew's faults. Moreover, the *Aimable*, you and I know, did not go on on the rocks save by treachery. Those two brothers, Duhaut I do not trust. I have caught them whispering at times with the surgeon Liotot: I feel as if there were all sorts of unseen enemies about us, like the alligators that infest these marshes. If they were open enemies like the savages we have driven back from our palisades, or like the buffalo bull you killed when he came near being the end of Father Douay, I would charge straight at them."

"I think the fever has not quite left you, son," the older man said, laying his hand affectionately on Raoul's shoulder. "Tonight you must sing for us, and that will do you good, as it will us, and the girls will learn why the Indians named you 'White Thrush.'"

That night while they were singing and dancing and playing cards, forgetting for a moment that France was far away and the savages near, Raoul, who had just gone out to visit the sentries,

rushed back, calling out to Joutel: "There is a canoe yonder on the river with a white man in it."

Everyone jumped up and ran down to the bank.

"It is Duhaut," exclaimed Joutel in disappointment and amazement; "what does he here alone?"

Duhaut now sprang ashore, and to their eager questionings replied that he had loitered one day behind La Salle and the others and when he tried to overtake them had lost his way, and it was only after a month's wanderings that he had succeeded in finding the fort.

"I do not believe him," Raoul whispered to Joutel; still he listened to Duhaut's story of how some of the sailors of the *Belle* had been killed by the Indians. The feeling of anxiety which never left him for La Salle's safety was increased by Duhaut's return.

One early spring day Joutel climbed to the top of the highest house—the only point of vantage on the flat coast—and looked out over the prairie. He called down suddenly to Raoul below:

"I see a small party of white men approaching. It must be La Salle."

He hurried down and they set out to meet

them. There were hearty greetings on both sides and many questions.

"You see we are very ragged, my friends," La Salle said smiling as he pointed to their clothes. "We have had many encounters with briars and marshes, with waters and with savages, and our garments would not be allowed in the streets of Paris."

He had no words of despair for his disappointments. As soon as they were rested, he said, and had supplied themselves with ammunition, he would set forth again.

"Who is that?" he asked Joutel, eyeing sharply the back of a man who seemed to be trying to slip into the storehouse unnoticed.

"It is Duhaut," Joutel answered, and he repeated the story Duhaut had told.

"It is a lie," cried La Salle. "He deserted us for fear of the dangers that might still be ahead. He is not to be trusted but . . ."

Raoul could finish the sentence for him. He knew that he meant that Duhaut was but one of the many who would desert any moment if there were but any place where they could go.

The fatigue of his long wanderings and the news the next day that the *Belle* was either lost or that her crew had sailed for France, leaving the colony to its fate, brought back La Salle's

illness. Once again Raoul tended him lovingly, and at last the strong spirit bade the body obey and La Salle got to his feet once more.

"You will take me with you this time, Seigneur," Raoul begged. "I cannot stay behind."

"You shall go with me, son," La Salle promised. "I too have missed your company sorely. You will be my greatest aid. I know now, Raoul, that we can look for no help to come to us here. Though we stare our eyes out, they will never see a ship sailing westward to us. It is I who must *go* for succor, and you with me. We shall yet find the Mississippi, and then we shall hurry up to the Illinois and to Tonty, and we shall get men and provisions from Canada for the colony here."

It was with twenty men that La Salle set out, among them his nephew, Moranget, and his Indian hunter Nika, who had accompanied him to France; and it was with only eight of them he returned some weeks later, again unsuccessful.

"I tell you, Joutel," Raoul said that night as they sat together by the river, trying to get a cool breeze from the Gulf, "that the Seigneur is greater in adversity even than in good fortune. Had you but seen him day by day as we journeyed. We killed buffalo and carried as

much meat as we could. Old German Hiems was nearly drowned in one river we crossed and Pierre was devoured by an alligator. We entered Indian villages where sometimes we were welcomed and sometimes attacked. Once the Seigneur was swept down the river on a raft, and we thought we should never see him again. We saw the spoils of the Spaniards in the wigwams of the Cenis, and we suffered fever. But we did not find the Mississippi."

Joutel told of all that had happened during their absence from the fort. "I cannot help being glad you are back," he said. "The presence of La Salle has already heartened my flock who are so homesick and hopeless. His words, when he wills, put new life into everyone."

"We shall not stay here long though, Joutel," Raoul announced. "I know that the Seigneur is eager to be off again."

Cloth was no longer to be had to piece out torn garments, so at Joutel's suggestion, the extra canvas sails left behind by the *Belle* were cut up and hose and jerkins fashioned from them. The sight of these garments brought many smiles as La Salle and the seventeen men he had chosen for his final expedition went about bidding farewell.

"Take good care of the fort, Barbier,"

counselled Joutel as he shook hands with his comrade left in charge; "there are some amongst us I wish were to remain behind here, and I would that you could come with us in their stead."

"Have you anyone in particular in mind?" asked Barbier, and Raoul lingered to hear the answer; but La Salle, who had reached the gate in the palisades, called and they had to hurry forward and he found no time that day for further conversation with Joutel.

The party set off lustily, La Salle with hopes again high, and the others exhilarated by the briskness of the winter air and bright sunshine and the possibility of success. There was Abbé Cavelier and Friar Douay, Moranget, La Salle's nephew, German Hiems, Duhaut, Liotot, the surgeon, Nika, Beaver Tail and others. Five precious horses carried their extra supplies and goods for barter with the Indians. The poor beasts quivered with nervousness at the strange sights, sounds and odors.

Raoul, the two Indians, Nika and Beaver Tail, acted as guides. They scouted ahead, chose the best spots for camp, fished and hunted and gave warning often of approaching Indians. By means of signs and some words they had learned from these, they were informed that the Great River lay ahead of them towards the rising sun.

For some weeks they continued and each day that they toiled without success the spirit of the men became more morose, and several times Raoul came upon Liotot and Duhaut as they were talking in low tones.

“It was a few leagues from this spot, to the north, that I hid a quantity of corn and beans in a hollow tree when I passed by here last autumn,” said La Salle one evening in the middle of March. “We have indeed need of it now to replenish our bags. You, Duhaut, and you, Liotot, and Hiems, Teissier, l’Archèveque, Nika and Saget, will set off to fetch it while the rest of us wait here.”

When they had started those remaining ate their supper and made their arrangements for the night. Raoul’s spirits had sunk so low that he felt he could not sleep, and he sat crouched before the fire, his head in his hands. He felt someone sit down beside him, but he was so miserable that he did not care who it was, and did not even look up. A hand touched his head and he heard La Salle’s voice:

“Raoul, my son, what is it?”

The tenderness of the tone brought tears to Raoul’s eyes. It had been so long since the Seigneur had spoken to him intimately that he knew now that he had been hungry for his words

and companionship. He straightened himself and smiled, but his smile was a sad one.

"You are afraid, Raoul?" La Salle asked, and reproached was mingled with the tenderness. "Afraid, I mean not of any special danger, but of all the unknown before us, of what may happen."

"And are you never afraid, Seigneur?" the youth queried quickly, as if to justify himself, "afraid that the evil luck which has pursued us ever since we left France may continue? Does your mind never grow dark with fear that after all . . . after all your hopes . . . all your daring . . . all your suffering . . . you may fail in the end?"

His last words were spoken so low that they were almost inaudible, but La Salle caught them. The man did not answer; he threw some pieces of pine on the fire, and when it blazed up brightly looked searchingly into the flames, as if he would read the future there.

"The end?" he repeated after a while, "the end? . . . That is not our concern. It is what comes before the end."

The crackling of the fire was the only sound for a few moments. "And if I should fail in the end, lad," he began again; "if God wills that other hands shall build where I have laid the

foundations, have I not already done what shall never be forgotten? Have I not given France a new empire, made savage tribes her friends, conceived a great plan which shall be carried out, whether or not it be I who do it? I shall not fear, son; I shall not falter before the end, and what the end shall be lies in the hands of God."

"Forgive me, Seigneur," Raoul begged, and he did not need to say for what he asked forgiveness.

"But you, Raoul," La Salle now spoke in a different tone, "must learn not to give in weakly to moods. You have proved yourself a man in valor and endurance; you must henceforth be a man in spirit. You must not ask yourself 'what will the morrow bring forth?' You must wake each morning and say, 'I am ready for to-day.' You know that the New World asks for men of different mould than those of Europe. I think not that you regret having come to it."

"Nay, Seigneur, I could not live there again," he replied. "Whatever happens, my life shall be spent in New France, and with you. Am I not your son?"

"You have indeed been a son to me, Raoul," La Salle assented, "a son who fills me with happiness and pride. I trust that we shall work

side by side while I live, and that when I die you will carry on my work."

He was in the mood for talking, and they sat by the fire half the night, recalling many incidents of their first meeting and of the long journey down and up the Mississippi. When at last they lay down in their blankets Raoul's melancholy had vanished and he put himself to sleep by repeating the words of affection La Salle had spoken to him.

The next morning Saget returned with the message that he had found the cache, but that the provisions in it had rotted. However, they had had great luck and had killed some buffalo and were waiting for the horses to bring the meat back to camp.

"Go, Moranget," La Salle commanded his nephew, "you and Merle and Saget take the horses and hasten, for we are all waiting hungrily for the feast."





CHAPTER XX

THE PIGMIES AND THE GIANT

“IT is good to be away by ourselves,” remarked Duhaut to Liotot as they were cutting up the buffalo meat and hanging it up to dry, “good not to see the stern mouth and eyes of our commander, nor have to listen to the overbearing insolence of that sprig of a Moranget. But never mind, our time will come.”

“Hush! comrade,” warned Liotot. “You are not yet sure of the others. There’s no hurry. We may lack food and clothes in this wilderness, but of time we have enough and to waste.”

Nevertheless, Duhaut continued, but in a lower voice, “I am getting tired of waiting. I cannot bear their insolence much longer. When

we have . . . had our way," he laughed, "we can rule the colony as we will and you, a surgeon, ought to be learned enough to supply the wits while I will provide the force."

"Here comes Hiems," interrupted the surgeon; "have you sounded him?"

The German adventurer was sucking the meat from a marrow-bone still too hot for his hands to hold comfortably. He strolled lazily towards the others, but did not offer to help them in their work. "'Tis a pity we can't keep all of this meat for ourselves," he remarked, a greedy smile on his fat face. "It would fill our bellies well, but when it is divided with them back yonder there will be but a small portion for each, and we shall soon all be hungry again."

"'Twould be well an' there were fewer of us, you think?" queried Duhaut with a side-long glance.

"There's one I could do without," Heims replied, throwing the empty bone away, "and that's young Moranget. The uncle's bad enough, but the nephew's worse. He's repaid you well, Surgeon, with insults for all your care when he was ill."

"I love him not," Liotot assented dryly.

"But our dislike will not drive him from us," said Duaut, determined now to test Hiems.

"Then why not try other means?" asked the German.

The three drew closer together and, after looking about to make sure they were not overheard, began to discuss the matter. They aired all their grievances against La Salle and Moranget, and at last came to the conclusion that they would gradually win to them as many of the colonists as were disaffected and, when fit occasion should arise, they would make the two prisoners and take charge of the colony.

They had scarcely done talking when the sound of horses' hoofs brought the rest of their companions to them.

"Ho! there!" cried Moranget, riding into the open space, followed by De Marle and Saget. "Hurry and pack the meat, for by dawn we must load and start back to the camp. You don't seem to have speeded yourselves," he added contemptuously, as he sprang from his horse and examined the strips of meat hanging up to dry."

"Time enough," grunted Hiems.

"And where are the marrow-bones and the choicest bits of the meat?" questioned Moranget, making a second examination.

"Those are our own," Liotot answered, "by right of ancient woodland custom."

There was a veiled insolence in his answer

which did not escape the young nobleman. "You have no such right," he blazed out; "it is my uncle who will divide it all as he sees fit. Where is it, scoundrels?"

No one answered. He turned to Nika. "Find it, Nika, and you and Saget bring it here."

The Indian and the Frenchman returned in a few minutes, bearing a portion of the reserved dainties, and made other trips until it was all piled at Moranget's feet. There was no word of protest spoken, but on every face was a look like that of a dog that has seen his bone taken away from him and does not dare bite. Then Moranget lay down to rest while the horses were unbridled and watered and dinner was cooking.

Duhaut, Liotot and Hiems strolled off, one after the other, then l'Archivèque and all of the others, except the cook and Nika, as if moved by the same impulse.

"Why wait longer?" asked Duhaut when they were assembled a quarter of a mile off. He spoke as if he had already discussed the matter with them all, but the look in their eyes had told him what he wanted to know and that it was safe to assume that they shared his feelings. "Shall it be to-night?"

Liotot studied the ground as if it were a book, then he looked up and said: "What use in ridding

ourselves of the nephew if the uncle is left to punish us?"

"Then, in the devil's name, the uncle as well!" cried Duhaut.

When dinner was over and the fire out all was quiet in the camp and all slept except Moranget who had the first watch. When he had paced back and forth for an hour he roused Saget, who an hour later called Nika. When the Indian in his turn had called his successor and fallen asleep, the conspirators arose.

The starlight showed faintly the barrels of the muskets of those who formed a circle about the sleepers and on the axe in the hand of the surgeon, the hand which in France had used no other weapons than those of mercy.

"The Indian first," Duhaut had counselled; "he sleeps more lightly."

One blow on the head, and Nika passed from dreams of hunting to the Indian happy hunting grounds. Another blow, and Saget, La Salle's faithful servant, groaned his last. Liotot brought his axe down on the thick hair of Moranget, but whether his arm was fatigued or whether the blade turned, the blow had not the force of the first two. The young nobleman, instinctively fighting for life, sat up and cried out.

"Finish him," cried Liotot, thrusting the axe into Marle's hand. A second blow from the latter and Moranget fell back across Nika's body.

When two days had passed and Moranget had not returned, La Salle grew anxious. "Tomorrow morning we will go in search of them, Joutel," he said. "I wonder what has happened, and somehow my mind is not easy. It does not seem possible that my nephew could not find them, and he knows how urgent is our need of the meat and surely would not tarry so long unless . . . Joutel, do you think they would harm him? Have you any idea that they plot against me? I may do him wrong, yet I admit that I trust not Duhaut."

"Nor I, Seigneur," answered Joutel. "I have seen no evidence of treachery but I have often heard them complain of being found fault with, though we know how necessary that was for the sake of discipline."

"I fear Moranget is not liked by the men," La Salle remarked gravely, "and in truth I myself like not the manners of my nephew. Raoul's way is better; when he is in authority he will know well how to handle men." Then later on he added: "I am uneasy, Joutel."

When morning came La Salle changed his

mind. "You stay here, Joutel," he ordered. Father Douay will accompany me."

"I am going with you too, Seigneur," Raoul begged, but La Salle shook his head. "Nay, son, *you* will obey my command. Au revoir, Raoul, and have things ready for the feast."

Raoul watched the two and the Indian guide disappear into the forest. Then he sat there in the sunlight, the world warm and gay about him, the birds singing and the little woodland folk hurrying about their business, but a black cloud seemed to hide it all from him. He had not overheard the talk the evening before between La Salle and Joutel and did not know of their anxiety. But he felt some dire disaster was approaching and could not throw off the presentiment. Not for years had he disobeyed a command of the Seigneur and the habit of obedience was now hard to break. He rose at last, cleaned his gun, and set off, running along the trail La Salle had taken an hour before.

It was another hour before he caught sight of them. He had not the courage to face his master, and now that he saw that all was well with him, he was on the point of turning back. But he could see that the friar and La Salle were in earnest conversation and he caught a few words in the sonorous voice of the former, which

carried far through the silent forest: "God be praised for the state of grace in which you stand, Seigneur La Salle. A man who was about to die could not be more prepared than you are."

"*A man about to die!*" The words echoed in Raoul's heart like a knell, and he moved onward, far enough behind to keep the others in sight, yet with no danger that his footsteps might betray his presence to them.

As he advanced, the uncertainty of the situation weighed more and more on La Salle's mind. Bit by bit, he was remembering all the dark looks, the surly words and the discontent which had been daily increasing. A feeling of great discouragement crept over his brave spirit, a mood against which he seemed unable to struggle as he had always forced himself to struggle against depression. Never yet, he said to himself, had he failed in the end to bend men to his will. Truly then, his body must be poisoned by fever or miasma if now he could not throw off this weight of an approaching calamity. If anything had happened to his nephew, he thought; if those men whom he had always distrusted, yet whom he had been obliged to make use of, had injured or killed Moranget, he must treat them with the utmost severity. He had no thought of any fear for himself; his one thought was to

hasten for help for the men and women he had left behind him in the colony.

He hurried onward, eager now to put an end to the uncertainty—he could not be far from the place, and Raoul, too, quickened his steps in order not to widen the distance between them.

A stream came in sight and the Indian pointed out that the camp was on its opposite bank. La Salle hastened forward and caught sight of l'Archivèque, standing on the other side of the water.

“Where is Moranget?” he cried out as he approached.

L'Archivèque looked across with an insolent air as if the questioner were of no importance and replied: “Oh! wandering about somewhere. It's none of my business.”

Never before had one of his men spoken to him thus. Had he but taken time to notice, La Salle would have realized that this insolence was the very trumpet call of rebellion. “How dare you answer me in such a manner?” he called out angrily, approaching nearer to the ambush where Duhaut and Liotot were hidden. “Go at once and find my nephew and inform him that I am here.”

Raoul's ears had caught the tone, though not the words of l'Archivèque, and he knew that it

betokened something wrong. He ran forward, no longer fearing to be reproached, his one idea to be at his master's side in this moment of danger. When he was within twenty paces of La Salle he saw on the other side of the stream two musket barrels shoving aside the long grass. He stood still, paralyzed with fear at the calamity he could do nothing to avert. At the same instant he heard a report and saw the Seigneur waver and fall. Then he rushed on, his own gun pointed across the stream, but did not take time to fire in his eagerness to reach his master.

The wounded man gave a smile when he saw Raoul's face bending over him and moved the hand which had been clapped over the spot from which the blood was spurting, to clasp that of the youth.

"Seigneur!" sobbed Raoul, and kissed it, reddening his lips with its tragic moisture.

"Farewell, dear son," La Salle spoke firmly: "Hasten before they kill you also. You must live to carry on my work. You alone of all those who have been with me have had the vision to see the greatness of it."

His voice grew weaker and he gestured with his hand for Raoul to flee.

"No, no, Seigneur," he remonstrated. "I can-

not leave you now, but if I live I vow to you that I will follow as far as I may in your footsteps."

La Salle's head sank back on the strong young breast and he murmured: "Thanks, my son."

Then he was gone.

The murderers, who for a moment startled at the effect of their shot, had been gazing at the giant's deathbed, now jumped across the stream. Raoul, whose arms were still encumbered by La Salle's body, could make no resistance to the blow Liotot gave him with the butt of his gun.

Luckily for him he could not see nor hear what followed . . . the terror-stricken countenance of Father Douay beneath the veil of the thick grey moss hanging from the trees, the cries from the murderers that the friar had nothing to fear from them; the rushing together of the conspirators who, like wild beasts, flocked around their victim. Luckily he could not see Liotot as he kicked the body of the man whose greatness he could not measure, nor hear him cry out mockingly, "There thou liest, great Bashaw! There thou liest!"

Stripped and naked, they dragged the dead giant about and threw him into the bushes, granting him not even the decency of a burial. Lucky, indeed, was Raoul that he knew nothing of all this till days after, when Father Douay

and the Indian had borne him back to the camp where Joutel and Abbé Cavelier needed no more than the friar's panic-stricken face to tell them that they had lost their commander and their brother.





CHAPTER XXI

RAOUL'S DECISION

THE sunlight was creeping through the opening of the wigwam and flecking the eastern floor beneath the smoke hole. The eyes of the sick man followed it and seemed to be trying to read the shadows of leaves and branches as if they were words in a book which could tell him what he wanted to know. But he was unable to make out their message and his head sank back wearily. After a while the sunlight, striking direct upon his face, roused him again. His eyes opened and wandered about the wigwam, passing over the hearth in the centre where faggots were laid ready for the lighting, the pile of mats and skins that marked another bed such as the one he rested on, poles from which dangled strips of dried meat, and a bow and a

quiver lying on the ground. At these he looked as if they did not exist, but his eyes widened questioningly when they saw a sunbeam fall on the stock of two guns resting against one of the tree trunks which formed the frame support of the wigwam. These and the powder horn recalled something indistinct, something which he felt dimly he had known about in another life. When one didn't know anything of one's present existence, name or place, why should one's tired brain try to chase facts that hid in the past? Some vague feeling of this sort worried him, yet he still made an effort to think what those guns recalled. He sat up, though his weak body wavered from side to side and looked at them. Then he uttered a cry, for he remembered . . . a gun half hidden by long grass, a stream, and then a tall man whose body broke a flowering alder bush as it fell.

"Seigneur!" he cried, and this was the first word he had spoken for six weeks.

Bit by bit it came back to him more or less clearly that he who lay here was Raoul de Larnac, a man now. He remembered best of all the murder and the few minutes which preceded it. He remembered that he himself had been wounded, though it had been only a flesh wound, and even a day later, he had been able to walk

with a bandaged head. He remembered Joutel and Abbé Cavelier and Father Douay, and how he with them had sworn that they would escape from the murderers at the first opportunity. He felt again the thrill of horror than ran through him whenever on their long march northward he had looked at Duhaut and Liotot and l'Archivèque. He was not afraid that they might kill him, as were Abbé Cavelier and good Joutel; he was so miserable without the Seigneur that he rather hoped they would. The details of the journey were all blurred in his mind; he recalled little beyond a great feeling of effort and fatigue and a sound in his ears of constant quarreling. Then one more memory emerged distinct—of German Hiems who had quarrelled with Duhaut and killed him with a pistol shot the same moment that Liotot was killed by another of his companions. After this he remembered nothing, and his brain ached now with the strain he had put upon it.

He heard footsteps approaching, and did not know whether he ought to be frightened or glad. A tall Indian entered and smiled as he looked into the open eyes.

“The fever has left White Thrush;” he exclaimed as he laid his hand on the white man’s

forehead. Raoul tried for a moment to recollect, then said:

“Beaver Tail. Is it Beaver Tail? Where are we?”

“Safe alone in the forest,” the Indian answered. “You have been ill for over two moons now. For a time you walked along with us and we knew not that there was anything wrong with you. Later on we knew, but dared not stop or leave you. Then when Joutel and the Abbé were eager to hurry on to Fort St. Louis, I stayed behind with you because you could walk no farther.”

“Beaver Tail is a friend to White Thrush,” Raoul said, speaking slowly.

“Why not?” asked the Indian; “were you not a son to the Great Chief? He would be sad if I did not care for you until I have guided you to your own people.”

The Indian then lighted the fire, filled the gourds with meat and water and spoke no more until he had prepared a soup which he made Raoul drink. “To-morrow,” he said, “you shall have fresh meat to give you new strength. I have killed a turkey and I will sit in the sunshine and pluck it while you sleep again.”

The next day, to Raoul’s amazement, and to Beaver Tail’s delight, the invalid was able to

walk a few steps; so rapid was his recovery that it seemed as if his strength had only waited for the fever to depart that it might return with double force. But it was only his body that was strong; his spirit was still listless.

When he was strong enough to join Beaver Tail in his hunt for game the Indian asked: "Shall we not soon be journeying on, White Thrush?"

And Raoul, as if the question were too momentous to answer, replied: "I do not know. Where can we go?"

The Indian was patient. He had seen a beast that had been wounded in a trap licking a broken paw until it healed slowly, and he knew that Raoul's spirit had need of time to recover. But one day later when he had put the question and received the same answer, he said: "White Thrush is now a man, and a man is not like a papoose. He knows what trail he must follow."

"A man!" This reality came to Raoul for almost the first time. In truth, he was a man of twenty years. As long as La Salle had lived and treated him like a son he had seemed to himself but a boy whose life was regulated by another, who had no big decisions to make. Now, he realized, the time had come when he must stand alone, when there was no one living who

could direct his goings and comings. He felt suddenly cold and fearful as he had felt as a very little boy when he was left alone at night in the dark. In thought, as then in fact, he instinctively turned to his elder brothers for protection, and he wondered whether he might not be happy as they were to live in France in the gay crowd of the court.

From the boulder where he sat on the side of a hill he could look for miles over the prairie below. A herd of buffalo dashed across the plain, for what cause he could not tell. A little to his right an eagle was soaring into the clear sky and the sunshine striking his breast, turned the feathers to gold. Something seemed to break within Raoul and something new to rush in and take its place. He sprang to his feet and flung his arms above his head as if he would reach up to the eagle. Then he waved his hand to the buffalo and cried out: "Run, brothers, run. This is our world, the world of unchained beasts and of free men!"

He hastened to the wigwam where he found Beaver Tail smoking. "To-morrow morning, Beaver Tail," he said, "we shall start north. I have slept long, but now I am awake. We will follow the trail of Joutel until we find Sieur Tonty."



IN HIS NEW-FOUND STRENGTH RAOUL ENJOYED THE
DAYS OF JOURNEYINGS.

“White Thrush, the Chief, has spoken,” replied the Indian, his eyes bright with pleasure.

In his new-found strength and manhood Raoul once more enjoyed the days of journeyings, the finding the way through forests to the river; the bargaining with friendly Indians for a canoe; the movement of the boat; the river life, and the quiet companionship of Beaver Tail. They talked often of La Salle, of his greatness, which had been more patent to the Indian than to many of the colonists; of the affection he had always shown for both of them.

It was a long trip up the Great River, and sometimes it seemed to Raoul as if Fort St. Louis, where they hoped to find Tonty, must be a dream fort that retreated as fast as they advanced. Yet they were now passing many landmarks which brought back memories of La Salle.

It was a summer day when at last they saw the Rock ahead of them. At the sight of the Lilies of France, Raoul cried out in delight; the sentinel above heard him and when they landed below a crowd of Indians and Frenchmen was there to meet them. Many of them greeted Beaver Tail as an old friend, but at first no one recognized Raoul. Then Etienne, who had been looking at him searchingly, slapped him on the shoulders and exclaimed: “Is this

you, my Raoul? All ye saints! what a man!"

Raoul clasped his hand so firmly that the old woodsman almost winced. "Yes, it is Raoul, old Cooncap, and glad to see the face of a friend again. Where is *Sieur Tonty*? I would report to him at once. And is *Joutel* here and *Abbé Cavalier*? And how have you kept all these many moons since we sailed for France?"

"Have you not spoken French for so long that it is all bottled up?" exclaimed *Etienne*; "so many questions at once! You'll find *Tonty* above at the fort and *Joutel* and the *Abbé* left us in the spring to return to France, and as you see, the wolves have not eaten old *Etienne* yet."

Raoul ran all the way up the Rock, his eagerness now to see *Tonty* urging him on. The sentinel, after a glance to make sure that it was a Frenchman and no strange Indian in the buckskin garments, admitted him into the fort and told him that he would find the commander in the largest of the wooden cabins.

Tonty sat alone at a table, writing, his iron hand resting on a stack of papers. He looked up at the sound of the opening door, and rose as Raoul entered and came towards him with outstretched hands.

"Is it indeed little Raoul?" he asked, his soft deep voice full of affection. "It is good to see

you again. Joutel told me how he had had to leave you behind on the journey."

"It is indeed good to be back here, *Sieur Tonty*," Raoul remarked, seating himself in the first chair in which he had sat for many months; "yet it makes me sad, too, when every bit of ground here, every log in the forest reminds me of the *Seigneur*."

"Do you miss him then so much?" asked the Italian. "Is Raoul, the man, as loyal and devoted a follower as was Raoul, the lad, who first followed his fortunes?"

"Could I ever forget him?" Raoul replied, almost angry at the question.

"It must be a great pleasure to him to receive such affection," said Tonty wistfully. "But tell me what news you have of him now and when we may expect him here?"

"*Expect him!*" cried Raoul in amazement.

"Surely it will not be long?" said Tonty.

Raoul leaned his elbows on the table and looked across at his companion. "Do you mean," he asked, "that you have not heard?"

"Yea," answered Tonty, speaking so quickly that Raoul had no opportunity to interrupt, "I heard that my friend had sailed from France, that he had landed on the shores of the Gulf, and that his colony suffered one misfortune after

the other. I knew that he was in dire straits and in need of assistance. Could I then sit still and not go to his aid? I set forth with a party of twenty-five men and eleven Indians, and again I descended the river we three had first travelled together."

"How far did you get?" inquired Raoul.

"All the way to the Gulf, but I found no sign, though I searched long both to the east and to the west of the river."

"Nay, it was God's—or the devil's—will," Raoul explained, "that we were led far to the west of you. And then?"

"Then," answered Tonty, "after I had remained as long as I could, I wrote a letter to La Salle and left it with an Indian chief to give to the Seigneur when he should appear, and I travelled sadly northward again."

"But when Abbé Cavelier and Joutel reached here," Raoul continued, "surely they told you all that had happened?"

"They stayed with me through the winter and I was glad to hear that they had left La Salle in good health, but . . ."

"*In good health!*" shouted Raoul, "good health! Did they not tell you he was *murdered?*"

The room was suddenly quiet. The two men gazed steadily at each other, questions in both

pair of eyes. Finally Tonty said slowly: "La Salle . . . my friend . . . murdered! Ah! Raoul, say that it is your fever that makes you still delirious."

"Would God that were indeed so," Raoul groaned.

"Tell me all," begged Tonty, rising and walking around the table to the other's side. He listened in silence to the story of treachery, his sensitive mouth alone betraying his emotion.

"But what meant his brother, the Abbé, by his deception?" cried Raoul when he had finished his tragic account. "I never liked him, though he was the Seigneur's brother; but Joutel, faithful Joutel, why should he lie, too?"

"I think I understand the Abbé's reason," Tonty remarked. "He wished to get hold of what was left of his brother's possessions both here and in France before news of his death would make the creditors seize them; but I do not know why Joutel, if he were indeed the loyal man you believe him, should have shared his deceit."

"I think perhaps I can explain," said Raoul, after a little thought. "If when he arrived in France, the King should believe the Seigneur still alive, His Majesty would be more willing to send succor to him and the colony. And Jou-

tel would still have the good of the colony at heart. God knows what may have become of it by now!"

Each was lost in his sad thoughts. At last Tonty roused himself and asked: And what will you do now, Raoul—go back to France?"

Before Raoul could answer, the door opened and on the threshold stood an Indian brave, young and tall. "White Thrush!" he cried, "Swift Fox has come to greet you on your return."

Raoul's pleasure was no less than that of his old companion. So busy was he telling what had happened since they parted that he did not notice that Tonty had quitted the room, and left them alone.

"And has Swift Fox been on the warpath against the Iroquois?" he asked; and the Indian pointed to a scalp-lock at his belt. "I have kept my promise, too, White Thrush," he added. "I have served Chief Tonty and with him I journeyed down the Great River in search of you."

"That is well, my friend," remarked Raoul, observing the fine, strong body before him. "Let us go out into the air and talk. I cannot breathe long indoors."

He told the Indian the story of all that had

happened since they parted and especially of La Salle's murder, and he listened in turn to Swift Fox's narration of his first war foray and how he had won his eagle feather. Tonty joined them as they strolled along within the limits of the palisaded fort. It pleased the Italian to look at two such perfect specimens of manhood, and the memory of many famous sculptures of athletes in his own country made him wish that he were sculptor so that he could put into bronze or marble the contrast of their two types.

"What will you do now, Raoul?" he asked, "return to France? You did not answer me before."

"My lot is in the New World," Raoul answered in French, and then repeated his words in the Indian tongue for the benefit of Swift Fox. "I promised the Seigneur that I would try to do my best in building up for France the great empire he dreamed of and began."

"I am glad," Tonty exclaimed, smiling at him. "This new land has given you much; now you must pay back. But what will you do first—go to Quebec and ask the Governor for some position, or may I hope that you will remain with me?"

"If you ever have need of me, Sieur Tonty, you have only to send for me and I will come,"

Raoul replied. "But just now I am eager to undertake a quest which has been waiting for me many years. Do you recall my story of how I was carried off by the Senecas and with me a little French maiden, Denise Dubois?"

Tonty nodded. Swift Fox, though he could understand a fair amount of French, was apparently uninterested in the conversation. His thoughts were elsewhere; he seemed to be listening to some sound which the others had not caught. Raoul continued:

"I have always felt sure that the little girl must be alive. Once I heard of her through Black Duck, the Huron hunter, and once I saw her myself for an instant but could not stop. I knew that it was my duty to rescue her from captivity and take her back to her family; but my duty to the Seigneur came first. Now alas, that claims me no longer, and I shall try to find her."

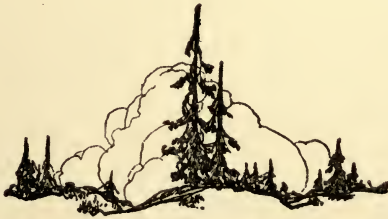
Swift Fox had become certain that the call he had heard was a human call and not that of the dog it imitated. He sprang towards the gate and a few moments later came back to Tonty and Raoul.

"The Iroquois have laid waste the villages of some of my people, several days' journey north of here, and all our tribe sets out on the warpath against them. I must join them, Chief. White

Thrush, will you not come with me? Remember, you, too, are a brave of our tribe."

"That is so, Raoul," Tonty ejaculated. "I had almost forgotten your initiation."

"I will go with you, Swift Fox," Raoul answered. "You speak the truth: I have lain in the dream lodge of the Hurons, and there my manitou spoke to me. Perhaps, too," he said, turning to Tonty, "I may hear of Denise from Iroquois captives. We will set off at once, and if Beaver Tail wishes to go with me, tell him, I pray you, to follow my trail. Farewell for a while, Sieur Tonty; you shall have news of me, and I pray that you will always bear me affection for the sake of the Seigneur who loved us both."





CHAPTER XXII

AMBUSHED

WHEN they were half down the hill Raoul remembered what he had entrusted to Tonty's care before he set sail for France with La Salle and climbed back to the Fort for it.

"See!" he cried when he had rejoined Swift Fox, who had waited for him by the river. "Here is the ancient medicine bag of the Senecas. Who knows that it may not prove valuable to me again? How long ago it was that I found it and rejoiced because I thought it might be the means of serving the Seigneur. Oh, Swift Fox, if only I could have saved him again at the end!"

That night Beaver Tail caught up with them, and the three companions, Frenchman, Mohegan and Huron, in the two days which followed until they reached the Huron village, took silent pleasure in one another's company. They spoke

seldom, not from precaution, but because they were not accustomed to the use of many words.

Their arrival at the village was the signal for rejoicings. Swift Fox had already won the name of an audacious warrior, and White Thrush was remembered for his initiation as a brave. There was feasting that night and many speeches. The evil deeds of the Iroquois were counted over and it was declared that the time had come when they should be punished.

Raoul's blood was stirred by the dances and the speeches. It was easy for him to forget that he was anything but a Huron brave. He listened while one of the chiefs, after chanting the names and exploits of many members of the war party which was to set forth, sang: "White Thrush, or True Dog, accompanies his brethren. Though his skin is white, he has lain in the lodge of the Hurons, has fasted and heard the voice of his manitou. He, too, goes forth against the hog-eating Iroquois. Let them tremble at his coming."

It was decided that the warriors were to be divided into two parties which were to approach from different sides the Iroquois bands that had come so far from their usual homes, and had laid waste the territories of the western tribes. Raoul, Swift Fox and Beaver Tail kept together on the

trail. Judging by the information brought back by scouts, it would be three days before they were likely to catch up with the foe. Raoul and Swift Fox, urged by excitement, found the pace of the party too slow. The older braves and Beaver Tail kept continually warning them to be more patient and wary.

One dawn Raoul awakened early and Swift Fox was roused by his getting up. "I can't sleep," Raoul whispered; "let us scout ahead a little and see if we can find any sign that our enemies have passed lately by this trail."

Beaver Tail opened his eyes slowly as they crept by him and said: "Come back and wait. Are ye still boys that ye do not know the wisdom of a warrior?"

"We cannot sleep, Beaver Tail," Swift Fox said laughing. "We may not know all the wisdom of old braves, but we have the valor of young ones. We do not fear to walk in any woods at dawn."

The older Indian snorted in disdain, but got up and followed them. The sun had not yet risen and the trail led through dark shadows of innumerable trees, and great masses and boulders, from which hung vines and ferns, hemmed in the trail on either side.

"Let us go back," Beaver Tail whispered.

"Here should one pass only at the brightest noon."

"If Beaver Tail is afraid," sneered Raoul, "let him turn back. We will scout to see that it is safe here for our warriors."

His words were but the ghost of a whisper, but, as if they had been a trumpet call, an arrow sped in response towards them. Straight in the heart it hit Beaver Tail, who fell across the jagged edge of a rock and then to the ground beneath it.

"Fly back!" commanded the dying man. "The Seigneur always bade me look out for you, White Thrush."

Raoul had crouched down beside him and tried to staunch the wound with moss. "Oh! Beaver Tail," he cried in remorse, "forgive me for my unkind words." He held his hand against the red flood as if he could dam it back, and though he knew and Swift Fox knew the danger of waiting longer, neither dreamed of fleeing while there was any chance of saving the Mohegan's life. When a few moments later all was over, they hurried noiselessly back on the trail by which they had come. Then the silence of the forest was broken by horrible screeches and laughter, and Iroquois poured over every rock and slid from behind every tree.

The first sensation of the two young warriors

was that of shame that they had been so careless as to walk into an ambush. Then, since there was no possibility of flight, they made ready to defend themselves. Raoul drew his sword and stood at defense, and Swift Fox, fitting stones into the thong of his sling fired them as rapidly as a cloud emits hailstones. The Frenchman's blade and the Indian's stones halted the rush of their foes for a moment, but in the next they dashed forward again and threw themselves upon the two who, unwounded, were borne down to the ground by the sheer impetus of the mass.

As the Iroquois bound their arms behind them with deer sinews, they kept up a continual stream of taunts and boasts: "So you dreamed that you could walk unheard by Iroquois ears! . . . What kind of warriors are you who have not learned that no forest is safe from Iroquois ambushes? . . . Truly the Great Spirit hath not given wisdom to the western tribes. . . . The squaws in your wigwams will wait long for your homecomings! . . . We shall see if your courage is greater than your foolhardiness when you suffer the tortures we have ready for you."

Then they danced around Raoul and peered into his face, their small, bright eyes lighted by fiendish glee. One brave called out: "Has a Frenchman no home that he dwells with red men;

have his own people cast him off that he must follow the Hurons on the war path?"

Raoul did not blanch. He knew that no matter what happened he must not show the slightest sign of fear. To his pride as a Frenchman was added the stoical endurance of an Indian brave—he must not shame either of his trainings.

He and Swift Fox walked ahead of their captors on the trail toward the east. They wondered whether the Huron war party behind them had been surrounded by others of their foes, or whether those who had ambushed them were the only Iroquois who were still so far from their main band. Raoul's thoughts were constantly with Beaver Tail; he recalled how kind he had been to him during all the years they had both served La Salle; the pride the Mohegan had taken in the lad's prowess as a hunter; the stories he had told him of bewitched beasts and old legends; and, man though he was, he felt his throat tighten when he realized that if he had followed Beaver Tail's protests, the Indian would not have been killed, and he and Swift Fox would still be free.

For three days they journeyed, passing no villages; but once they encountered another party of Iroquois with fresh scalps dangling from

their girdles, and five Illinois prisoners. The two parties now journeyed on together, and at night there was always feasting, quantities of food, that was shared generously with the prisoners. They were not physically ill-treated—that would come later—but they were taunted and told the hideous details of the torture that awaited them. Raoul had discovered that their captors were Senecas, but he had decided that he would not speak of his youthful association with their tribe, since it might anger his enemies all the more, and warned Swift Fox not to call him by the name of White Thrush, lest it should be recognized.

“The Senecas are a great tribe,” boasted a warrior one noon as he lay stretched out on the moss resting. “Even as the Five Nations are greater than all other nations, so are the Senecas greater than the Mohawks, the Onondaguas, the Oneidas, and the Cayugas. Listen, dogs of our foes, to the story of our greatness.”

Swift Fox closed his eyes and in a few minutes the sleep that he feigned came to him in earnest; but Raoul’s curiosity regarding the Senecas made him eager to hear what the brave had to say. He knew his type: he was the kind of man whom he had seen in many places, in France, as well as in the wilderness, one who was always loud in his praise of *his* country, *his* people, *his* ways.

“Among all the dwellers of the Long House,” he continued taking a long breath as if he needed extra strength to do justice to his subject, “the ones most feared by our foes and most envied by our friends are those belonging to the tribe of the Senecas. We are like foxes for spying out our enemies, like eagles swift in our swoop upon them, and our claws are sharper than those of full-grown bears, forget not, ye captives,” he warned. “And as we are invincible in war, so are we wise in council and in medicine. There is no chief like our chief, whose manitou shows him the wisdom of the Great Manitou. He speaks and we listen. ‘To-day,’ he says, ‘let us plant corn, for it will increase if tonight’s dew falls up it’; and our squaws plant and reap such plentiful harvest that no hunger comes near our lodges in the winter. He says, ‘this captive shall die at the stake and then you will eat his heart’; and we burn the Illinois, or the Huron, or the Frenchman,”—here he leered into the faces of Raoul and Swift Fox, “and eat his heart, and his strength passes into our bodies. But not only does our chief listen to the voice of his manitou, but there is another voice in his lodge, that of a prophetess, whose medicine is a wonderful medicine and whose manitou shows what things shall

strengthen the Senecas and make them more feared by their foes."

Raoul was beginning to be disappointed that he had not heard the name of the chief and did not know whether he might be Old Wolf, or whether he was dead. There was no word either of any French maiden, and he was in no position to ask information about anything. "Indeed, he thought, what use is there in my knowing? I shall be dead soon and there's an end to my quest and to La Salle's hopes for me!"

But the brave did not care whether his captives listened to what he had to say or looked as if they were a hundred leagues away. It was enough satisfaction to hear himself talk, and some of his boastings must find their way into even unwilling ears. So he continued, telling how the numbers of his tribe had increased because, when there were not enough papposes, the chief and the prophetess bade the squaws adopt some of their captives instead of killing them, and how these in course of time, when they had taken Seneca girls as their squaws, became fond of their new names and their new people.

Before he had wearied of his subject the signal was given to move on. The next morning at sunrise there came to the war parties the sound of many dogs barking. The braves shouted and

screamed with pleasure and ran ahead, and Raoul and Swift Fox felt the sunshine in their eyes as they emerged from the sombre forest and saw before them the tilled fields surrounding a palisaded town. The two friends knew they had reached the end of their journey and that in the village their terrible fate awaited them. They did not attempt to comfort or hearten each other by words, but a sympathetic glance passed between them.

The village was as swarming as an ant hill: men, squaws and children ran out of the lodges, shrieking questions. The braves threw them an answer every now and then, but would not enter into conversation until they had finished their work. Hastily, a number of poles were set up in the open space in the centre of the village, and Raoul, Swift Fox and the other captives were bound each to one of them. Then the braves sank down upon the grass to rest and looked on at the spectacle. Dancing and yelling, the stay-at-homes swarmed about the captives like gnats, and each one managed to inflict some physical discomfort, if not pain. The squaws scratched their cheeks with their nails; the children hit them with sticks, and one old warrior aimed an arrow which lodged in Raoul's shoulder. But neither he nor Swift Fox gave any sign that they had any

more feeling than the hills beyond on which their gaze rested. They knew that this was but a preliminary taste of the unpleasant things in store for them.

Yet as the crowd pressed and surged about them, Rauol was conscious of one face, that of a man who came close to him often but who never hit or otherwise molested him. He tried to recall the face and suddenly the memory came back to him—it was the countenance of Black Duck, his old friend, the trapper of Michillimackinac days. He imagined that the Indian was observing him questioningly; but just then a boy threw a rotten squash which hit his forehead, and the seeds and pulp ran into his eyes, blinding him momentarily.

All morning long the sport of baiting the prisoners continued. Songs were sung of the prowess of the Senecas and the stupidity of the ambushed. In the afternoon the amusement palled and the captives were left alone, to suffer from heat, thirst, hunger and the pin pricks of their wounds. When dark fell they were released. Raoul could not see what became of the others, but was glad to find that Swift Fox was being taken with him to the prison lodge.

Food was brought them, and not even the fatigues and trials of the day that was past, or

the knowledge of the fate before them, could keep them from enjoying it. When Swift Fox had finished eating he threw himself on the ground and was asleep within five minutes, but Raoul's temperament was different: he could *feign* indifference to torture and death and when they came meet them bravely; nevertheless, his whole being that night was swept with emotions that burned like liquid fire.

"It is all very well," he said, speaking low in French to himself as if he must hear once again the language of his home, "for me to be a friend to savages and to find much in their ways to like; but to die as one, away my own people and for a cause that is not my own—that is a sad end for a De Larnac! What would the Seigneur have said? . . . He would have chided me again for an act which was brought about by my folly."

He was overwhelmed mentally by remorse and almost suffocated physically by the air of the lodge which was securely fastened on the outside. He could hear the breathing of the guard who sat outside, and if he had harbored any idea of attempting to escape, he now put it aside. He could not sleep, and hour after hour went by filling the darkness with pictures of the years that had passed. He felt a strange kind of pity, as for some stranger, to think that the youth who

had done so much and seen so much in his twenty years was to do and see no more! He would never rescue Denise now, never take her home to her family, never help Tonty, never make a place for himself in New France.

He was sick of his own thoughts; he was almost ready to awaken Swift Fox and make him talk; he wished even that the dogs in the village would bark; even the breathing of the guard was no longer audible, and he had an idea that the Seneca had slipped farther away, perhaps to the nearest lodge, knowing that his captives could not escape. Raoul rose and tested the inside of the prison again—but there was no weak spot. Far away in the distance he heard a faint sound; he could not tell whether it was the call of some beast, the cry of a night bird or a human voice. Whatever it was, it was a relief to have the silence broken. It came nearer and now he could distinguish that it was a man singing. He could not make out the words at first, and when he did they were but those of a chant, the chant of a hunter, a monotonous refrain and repetition: “To-day a deer fell to my arrow. My bow is strong and my arm is stronger. To-day a deer fell to my arrow, a deer of the forest. My bow is strong and I am a great hunter.”

There was something soothing in the mo-

notonous tune and repetition of words, and Raoul began to feel sleepy. Now the singer was passing just outside of the lodge and the chant was interrupted, and then, to his amazement, Raoul heard the whispered words, 'White Thrush! White Thrush!'

It was Black Duck then. Black Duck was trying to discover if his impression of the afternoon had been correct.

"Yes, White Thrush. It is White Thrush!" he called out, not caring whether his gaoler heard or not. He listened eagerly for what Black Duck would say next. The interruption of the chant had lasted no more than half a minute; now the singer began again: "A deer fell to my arrow. My bow is strong and my arm is stronger." This was repeated over and over again until the voice died away in the distance. He did not know whether he had any right to the sudden hope which had come to him; but as he lay on the mat, wondering whether there was anything Black Duck—who was not a Seneca, whose own safety among the Iroquois was perhaps not assured—could do for him, he fell asleep.



CHAPTER XXIII

THE PROPHETESS

SWIFT FOX and Raoul were the two most important captives whose fate was to be deliberated that day at the council; they were braves whose names were known, though there was much speculation in regard to the Frenchman's presence among the Hurons. Raoul managed to say a few words to Swift Fox as they were taken to the lodge where the council was to be held, of what he had heard the night before; but Swift Fox agreed with him that there was little chance that Black Duck could render them any aid. They did not speak of their determination to die bravely; each would have felt it an insult to doubt for a moment that of his friend.

The council lodge was filled with Seneca braves when they were led in, and the other

captives, of lesser importance, were leaving it, some to die at the stake, others to be kept as prisoners. The two youths walked in, holding their heads high, and looked about them, a disdainful smile on their lips, testifying to their opinion of their foes.

“You will not smile much longer,” cried a young warrior, irritated by their attitude, but the chiefs bade him be silent.

Raoul’s attention, even at such a time, wandered; though they were discussing what form of death should be meted out to him, his eyes were searching for Black Duck. The lodge was so dark; the flames from the fire threw such deep shadows opposite him that it was difficult to be certain that his old friend was indeed not there. It would be unusual, he knew, for an Indian of another nation, unless an allied one, to be present at a solemn council. Then he heard Swift Fox laugh, and suddenly his brain took in the words of a Seneca chief which his ears had heard a minute before: “They are swift of foot, these young braves from the west. Let us see if they are swift enough to run unharmed through the gauntlet!”

Raoul tried to echo his comrade’s laugh, to prove his scorn of the fate which had been assigned him, but to his own ears his laugh sounded

feeble. So he lapsed into the silence of dignified acceptance.

Just then a gust of wind down the smoke hole blew the smoke and the shadows to his right, and left the faces opposite him illumined by the blaze. The face of the old chief who sat on an *albinos* higher than the others he recognized as that of Old Wolf. The well-remembered features brought back the first days in the forest, and he wondered if Red Wing were alive. It came too late now—this chance he had sought for so many years—the chance to ask Old Wolf what had become of Denise. His hand which he had raised instinctively to shade his eyes, that he might peer the better into the opposite side of the lodge, now sank to his side and touched the medicine bag which he carried hanging from his belt. The touch brought a sudden hope to him. He could feign a willingness to die, but he was eager to live, and it was possible, his heart-beats told him, that this medicine bag might save his life.

There was a pause. All had been said that was necessary to say; the ordeal of running the gauntlet was fixed for the morrow, and Swift Fox had once again laughed derisively when he was informed of it. Then Raoul spoke, holding out the medicine bag towards the fire:

“Old Wolf, Chief of the Senecas! even your

foes have heard of your medicine and of the powers of your medicine bag."

At the white youth's first gesture the old Indian's eyes fastened on the medicine bag. He did not take them away while Raoul continued:

"Has your wisdom departed from you while your medicine bag slept in the hands of your foes? Behold it once again!"

In a second he was surrounded by braves whose curiosity to satisfy themselves that this was indeed the ancient long-lost medicine bag was restrained only by their veneration for it. They did not touch it, but Old Wolf, rising slowly, came to Raoul's side, fingered it without however taking it from his belt, and then walked slowly back again to his seat. "It is the medicine bag of my ancestors," he announced.

He could, of course, have taken it forcibly from him, but Raoul knew that he would not do this. On his part he would have liked to say: "I will return you your bag if you will spare my life;" but this too would have been against Indian etiquette. He must give it as a free gift, hoping that in return he would be presented with the gift of his safety. So he said, as he detached the bag and handed it across the fire into the hands of the old chief: "Take it again, Old Wolf."

The venerable chief did not attempt to hide

his satisfaction. He felt the precious relic over and over, as if it were a child and he were assuring himself that no harm had come to it. His face softened and Raoul felt hopeful that in gratitude he would set him free. Then he saw a sudden frown replace the smile.

“It was you then,” Old Wolf exclaimed, “who gave the lying message to Iroquois braves, saying I had bidden them not slay the French leader, our great foe, until the fall. When they fell in again with me, moons later, and learned that it was no messenger of mine who had held my medicine bag, it was then too late to do the deed they had planned. So it was you?” He paused a moment, then he said: “At last my medicine is too strong for you. Take him away,” he commanded; “let us see to-morrow if he is as brave as he is audacious.”

Raoul realized that his one chance was gone, and that Old Wolf did not recognize in him the boy he had once carried off to his lodge. He decided that there was nothing to gain by recalling this fact to him; indeed, it might increase his anger when he remembered how Raoul had run away and put an end to his carefully laid plans. So he now gave up all hope of escape and walked calmly by the side of Swift Fox as

they were led back to the lodge where they were to be imprisoned until the morrow.

When they were left alone the two friends talked in undertones while they examined the lodge.

"Is there no opening there, Swift Fox?" Raoul whispered.

"I could gnaw the bark with my teeth," replied the Indian, "but it would take many hours and there are not many left to us before the sun rises. There is no escape, White Thrush."

"I would I might be alone, Swift Fox," the Frenchman spoke sadly, "since it was I who brought you to this."

"Nay, are we not brothers?" the Indian answered. "We have shared joys, now we shall share tortures."

Without more words, they threw themselves down on the mats and soon fell asleep.

Raoul was awakened by a touch on his arm.

"Come," commanded a young Seneca, whose figure was dimly visible in the darkness.

Swift Fox too was roused by the words, but when, thinking that the command was for him also, he started to rise, the Seneca motioned him to lie down again. The two prisoners grasped each other's hands in silence, not knowing if they were ever to see each other again, for this un-

expected call might mean that they were to be tortured separately before the final act came.

It was dark as the two walked between the quiet lodges, and for a moment Raoul believed it would be possible to make a dash for liberty, unbound as he was; then he realized that his freedom was only apparent, that he was surely watched by vigilant foes. At the end of the village they came to a lodge that even by the dim starlight Raoul could see was different from the others. There was an attempt at decoration, rough paintings on birchbark and skins hung down its sides. Through the chinks glowed the light of a bright fire.

“The Prophetess awaits you,” remarked his guide as he opened the flap and motioned Raoul to enter while he remained outside.

Raoul’s eyes were dazzled by the sudden light and the glitter of its flame against the shining bead work that seemed everywhere, hanging from the walls, on skins underfoot, and on the garments of the two young women who were kneeling before the fire as he entered. The older one rose and looked searchingly at him. She was tall and lithe; her dark hair fell in two braids on either shoulder, and her moccasins and her robe were of the softest doeskin. Her eyes were

dark and her skin a delicate rich tan, but she was no Indian!

Raoul's heart beat loud with excitement—could it indeed mean that at last he had found her?

Before he could master his surprise and find words, she spoke to him in the Seneca tongue: "Who are you, captive?"

"Denise!" he cried; the sound of her voice, so long unheard, had not changed as had her features, "Denise, do you not remember your old friend, Raoul?"

He spoke in French, and his words brought a strained look into the girl's face. "I do not understand you," she said, speaking in the Indian language; 'what is it you say? Are you in truth, as Black Duck believes, the boy I used to know?"

She waved her hand, and her little friend crept out of the lodge, leaving them alone. Raoul took her hand and then, in rapid Seneca, gave her the main facts of what had happened to him since they had parted, and something of his long search for her. Denise listened eagerly, but her puzzled expression showed that much of his recital was incomprehensible to her.

"Why did you and your chief wish to brave all those dangers just to reach the end of a river?" she queried. And when told of the friars who

had risked their lives to convert the Indians, she could not understand why they should wish to do this. Raoul discovered that the daughter of the French *habitant* had become in all essentials an Indian maiden, whose memories of her early life were but vague. At first her attitude towards him was very formal; she was the daughter of the chief and the respected prophetess and he the captive doomed by her father to death. But little by little, she showed more friendliness.

"Tell me," asked Raoul when, with a gesture he thought no lady of King Louis's court could have equalled, she had bidden him be seated beside her, "did Black Duck tell you who I was?"

"He came here last night," she replied, "and told me that he was now certain that the prisoner was my old comrade and the boy he had taught trapping."

"And then you decided to speak with me?" continued Raoul.

"I was curious," she answered. "If Black Duck had not talked of you every year he came to us with skins to barter, I should have believed you dead and forgotten about you."

"So you did not quite forget me?" Raoul asked.

"No, but I could not remember how you looked, and even the thought of my childhood

had grown almost as faint as the words of the tongue you spoke a moment ago."

"Have you been unhappy in these years, Denise?" he asked; "have they ill-treated you?"

"Ill-treated!" she exclaimed indignantly. "Do you not know that my word is greater than the words of the medicine men, that it is me they consult when the young men go forth upon the war-path, and when the grain is to be planted, and when weighty matters must be decided?"

Now Raoul recalled all he had heard from many tribes of the prophetess of the Senecas, and knew that Denise was speaking the truth. He himself had lived so much among Indians that this kind of fame, at which so many white men would have scoffed, was to him something real and important. He knew that often among the red men women were believed to be specially inspired by their manitous with prophecy and wisdom. In Denise's case there was also the mind of a French woman, even if only partly developed. He listened while she told him proudly how often her advice had aided the Senecas, whose triumphs were her triumphs. She spoke affectionately of Old Wolf, her foster father, and tears came to her eyes when she related the death of his squaw, Sun Cloud.

"And Red Wing?" Raoul asked; "do you re-

member the thrashing he gave me and how you bathed my back?"

"It comes back," she said, speaking slowly, "all your pain. . . all my terror. I had forgotten it all. . . How strange to be so afraid of those I love now! . . . Red Wing was slain in the fighting against the Illinois many years ago."

They talked on, each forgetting the present in recalling the past, and Denise showed growing interest in bringing it back. Suddenly, with a cry of triumph she cried out, "*père*" and "*mère*." I remember now that is how I used to call my father and mother when we lived in a big house and there were many brothers and sisters about."

She was silent and Raoul thought that there could be no pleasanter task than to help her memory to recall slowly, bit by bit, all that it had forgotten. But there was no time; he realized suddenly that there were only a few hours left until he was to die.

"You were not at the council," he said.

"No," she answered. "I like not to hear men condemned to death, and there were no other matters to be decided."

"Know you that I am to die to-morrow?" he questioned.

"Yes," she replied, "so it was decided."

Raoul could see that her answer was almost

mechanical, as if one part of her brain were absorbed by another question.

"But, Denise," he expostulated, "it must not be. I do not fear death, but now that I have found you I must take you back to your people."

"Take me away!" she cried; "leave Old Wolf and all I love!"

"But you are French, Denise; you cannot be content to live forever with Indians, to become the squaw of a brave, unless . . . unless . . ."

He stopped, overwhelmed with the possibility.

"Are you already a squaw, perchance?"

"See you not that I live in mine own lodge?" she asked proudly.

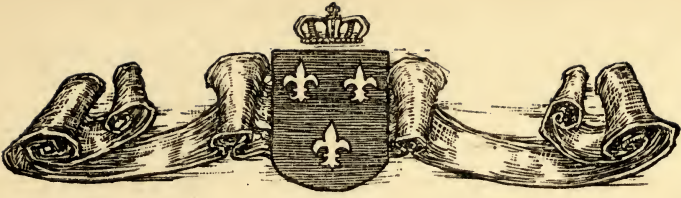
He breathed a sigh of relief. "Then, Denise, you are not bound here. I thank God that you have known protection and happiness in these long years, but think of what your mother and father have suffered in their anxiety regarding your fate. Think that you have forgotten even the God of your people; that you have no knowledge of how far the wisdom of the white man is above that of the red man; that you must often hear the whoops of the war dances, instead of the French songs of your brothers when they work and are happy . . . and are not fearing for you. Will you not come, Denise? If you will, I know

that Black Duck can find a way so that we may escape together. *Viens, chère Denise, chérie.*"

The young propheticess had stood during his pleadings, apparently unmoved. But in reality, his words had been fighting for him. The sight of a white man and the difference between him and the Indians was affecting her more and more; old memories, old thoughts, were gathering strength in her, and the French blood was clamoring for its rights. And his final French words, the terms of endearment her mother once used to her, suddenly became comprehensible.

"Yes," she said, putting out her hand which Raoul took in his own, and longed to press to his lips, "yes, I will go with you and Black Duck to the land of my people."





CHAPTER XXIV

OLD WOLF AWAKES

NO SLEEP had come to Denise that night. Now that she had promised Raoul to help him escape and to return with him to the country of the white men her wits had worked quickly, and she had soon thought out a plan. She herself was beyond suspicion; nothing she might do would be questioned by the Senecas. She had sent Raoul back to the prison lodge after he had induced her, with some difficulty, to allow Swift Fox to escape with them. For the rest of the night Denise had tossed on the mats, getting up now and then to walk back and forth, stepping carefully that she might not awaken her little friend. She could not remember that she had ever spent a sleepless night before in her life. Stories and legends came to her, of braves and hunters who had changed into beasts, and she thought that they must have experienced some of her feelings. At one moment she was a

Seneca prophetess with no ambition beyond that of her people; in the next she was conscious of a host of new desires and of old memories. More and more clearly came back to her the pictures of her home and the faces of her father and mother. Again she saw the figure and the features of the French lad who had been her companion in the first days of her captivity, though as yet she could not find a resemblance to him in the face of the man he had grown to be. Raoul, whose thoughts that night were more of the Denise of the present than of the child she had been, would have been disappointed to know how little conscious influence and impression his new estate of manhood had made on her.

Before dawn broke she had gathered together a few of her most precious belongings, bead necklaces and belts, and had tied them together in a bear skin. While it was still dark she sent her little friend for Black Duck.

"You were right, Black Duck," she said going outside to meet him; "it is White Thrush. His words have changed my heart so that I have promised to help him escape and to return to my own people, the French. I have told him that you would go with us. Have I spoken wisely?"

"I think it is wise," answered the Pottawattomie; "but how shall we get him away?"

“When the sun is up an hour,” she replied, “you will go to the prison lodge and say that I have bid you bring the two captives to Old Wolf’s lodge, as he and I desire to learn from the Frenchman where the medicine bag was found, and of the Huron some information in regard to his tribe. There is no one who will question my right to command this. You will bring them to the entrance of Old Wolf’s lodge yonder, and bid them enter silently. Old Wolf will still be asleep and we can walk out again and into the forest, and if there be any who see us go out they will think that Old Wolf has bidden me take them to a spot where my manitou in silence may speak to their manitous to learn wisdom for the great Seneca nation. Old Wolf is old and his ears are no longer keen. Not until the heat of the day is over will they come to lead the captives to the place of the gauntlet-running, and by then we must be far away. Once we are out of the village it is you who must say what trails we shall follow.”

“I would we could set off by night,” commented Black Duck, shaking his head; “even the most silent-footed beast dreads the daylight.”

“But we cannot wait,” said Denise, “and if we only succeed in getting a good start, no dwellers in other Seneca villages would dare dispute my

wishes and commands, or injure those whom I protect.”

When Black Duck had left, Denise realized that her choice was now made indeed, and that within a few moments she must bid farewell to the existence she had known for so many years. Suddenly a sharp pain caught her at the throat when she thought that never again would she see Old Wolf. He had been to her always a kind father, expending on her the quiet affection which she knew was characteristic of Indian fathers. For years now too he had shown his pride in the keenness of her wits and had often followed the measures she had advised for the guidance of the tribe, even when at first they had been opposed to his own plans. She knew that he was old, but never before had she pictured the possibility of his dying. Now that she was about to leave him she realized with a quick pang that he could not live many years longer. And she was going to leave him alone, to desert him without a word of thanks for all the love and the affection he had given her!

At least she must see his face once more. She crept into the lodge where his quiet breathing reassured her, and gazed at the stern old face with its deep wrinkles while she prayed to the Great Spirit to watch over him.

She made no noise that could have roused him, even if his deafness had not walled him in from sound, but the old chief felt a presence and opened his eyes. A smile softened his features and he said: "Red Cheek is welcome as the first bird that sings to the dawn. Has Old Wolf slept till the sun is up that she comes to wake him?"

"I was praying the Great Spirit to bless you, my father," she answered.

"The Great Spirit has given me a long life and my trail has led me whither I longed to go," said the chief who had risen and now sat beside the hearth where Denise was building a fire. "I was a great hunter, a brave mine enemies feared and whose deeds are still sung by my people. I have been a wise chief, and my lodge fire has never gone out; since Sun Cloud left me you have kept it lighted."

The caresses and kisses a European father might have given a beloved daughter were lacking, but to Denise they were all there in the tone of his last words. Her throat contracted with emotion, and had she not been trained never to weep, she would have wept now.

Yet even in the midst of her tense feeling her ears were conscious of footsteps approaching,

and she knew that they were those of Black Duck and the two captives.

"I will not steal away from him thus," she said aloud, yet not loud enough for him to hear her, forgetting that already she herself had frustrated their plan of escape.

Though Old Wolf did not hear her words, he was not blind to her agitation and distress. "What is it, my daughter?" he asked.

"I had come to bid you farewell in sleep," said Denise, still kneeling beside the fire and looking up, "because I had determined to go back to the white people; but I know now that I can never go away from you and leave your hearth unlighted."

Perhaps for the first time in his life Old Wolf expressed his affection for her with a caress. He laid his withered hand on Denise's head and let it stay there.

There was a long silence, then the old chief asked: "And who would have shown Red Cheek the way? She could not have followed the trail all alone."

"Black Duck would have been my guide," she answered, glad to be able to tell the truth which would injure no one.

This seemed to satisfy him for a moment, but after more thinking he asked: "Has Red Cheek

beheld the Illinois captives who are to die to-day?"

Denise's heart had decided—the shadowy figures of her past which the earnest voice of Raoul had made clear for an hour could not take the place so long occupied by Old Wolf. She had chosen to remain with him, but it was not until this question startled her that she realized that her choice meant the death of her old comrade and his friend. Their death—unless she could save them! There was no use now to deceive Old Wolf longer; she must tell the truth—part of it at least—and appeal to him.

"I have seen the French captive, father," she answered, "and it was the white face and the strange tongue I had forgotten which made me think that I would go back to the French. But I have said, I cannot leave you. My heart is in this lodge. If, however, it be as I believe, that you are glad to keep me here, may I not ask a boon from the chief whose hands have always been full for Red Cheek?"

"Ask," replied Old Wolf.

"Let not the blood of this white man be shed by my people," she begged.

Her words were few and quietly spoken, but the Indian felt the fervor in them. He sat in silence that was unbroken save by the soft foot-

falls without, which then stopped, telling Denise that Black Duck and the captives had arrived. It seemed to her that the lined visage grew sterner, that the mouth set more firmly, but she would not break in upon the inner council of his deliberation. At last he looked up and said: "Bring him to me."

She went outside and in a few words explained the situation, her own decision and her endeavor to save them. There was no time to attempt to change her, so Raoul, followed by the two Indians, entered the lodge with her. Old Wolf did not even look up at their entrance, but his expression gave them little cause for hope. Indeed, all realized that once the famous chief had pronounced a judgment in solemn council it would be almost impossible for him to change it if he would.

At last Old Wolf seemed to become aware of their presence and he waved his hand for them to be seated. "Bring food," he commanded Denise; "no one, not even a foe, shall stay fasting in Old Wolf's lodge."

Denise moved softly about, taking meat and corn mush from certain baskets and placing them on flat stones in the fires to heat. Then she handed the food to the four men and after it milk of walnuts and sweet locust honey-pods. Raoul's

eyes followed her movements and even at this critical moment he noted the grace with which she walked and knelt. And as his eyes followed her, so did the eyes of Old Wolf follow him, and had anyone been looking closely at Old Wolf's face he might have caught the faintest smile of satisfaction. When they had eaten in silence the chief, looking at Raoul, asked:

"Whence come you, Frenchman? Do you dwell always in the villages of the Hurons and Illinois?"

"I have no lodge, Old Wolf," answered Raoul: "I am a wanderer who has journeyed from the snows to the Great Gulf where the sands burn the feet. I have followed the trail over the wide plains where the sun sets and where the buffalo are thicker than the leaves in the forest. I have crossed the eastern waters in a canoe till, after journeying for moons, I came to the land where the Great Chief of the French has his wigwam. Scarcely for two moons together do my eyes behold the same horizon."

There might have been no one else in the lodge for all the attention the old Seneca paid them. Raoul was the sole quarry of his mind's bow.

"But a brave as young as you goes not on the trail or the war path to distant forests alone.

What was the name of the chief you followed?" he asked.

"Seigneur de La Salle," answered Raoul proudly, "the greatest chief ever white man or red man has followed in this new world. Surely the Senecas have reason not to forget the name of him whose courage and whose wisdom foiled them in injuring our allies the Illinois!"

Raoul was well aware that his words were reckless, but his life was forfeit in any case, and he would not let this opportunity pass without singing the fame of his beloved master.

"We remember," assented Old Wolf, "and we have heard that the French Chief travelled to the end of the great river. Did you go with him?"

"I was with him that day when the waters of the river came to their end in the great bay," cried Raoul fervently, beholding in his mind once again the glory of that hour.

"And now, where is the Chief?" continued the Seneca.

"He is dead," said Raoul, his voice so low, that it was his dejected attitude, rather than his words, which enlightened them.

"He was a great chief," Old Wolf remarked, nodding his head. "If Onontio had many such, the Long House of the Five Nations were in great danger. I, who was his foe, say this."

Then he added: "And whither were you bound before you foolishly joined the war path of the Hurons?"

"Back to Onontio to ask him to give me a village and a lodge where I could be a chief," Raoul replied.

"Why go you not back to the village where you dwelt before you were old enough to journey with your great chief? Can you not find the trail?"

"I came from the village of the Senecas and from the lodge of Old Wolf," cried Raoul.

The old Indian was silent. He asked no explanation of this astounding statement. All he did was to gaze calmly into Raoul's face. At last he said: "It is Ralo. Tell me how you went the day I gave you the bow and you came not back from the forest."

Raoul told him all. He had no idea whether what he related would make his foe more bitter to him or not; but in any case, the story might as well be told. He had dreamed so many years of explaining to Denise why he had seemingly not kept his promise to return to her that now he wished her to listen, no matter what happened. The night before there had been no opportunity. Old Wolf listened but in no way showed the effect this recital had upon him. When Raoul had

finished the venerable chief rose and went to the opening of the lodge, looked out, and then came back, took Denise by the hand and led her to the farther part of the enclosure. Here he bade her sit beside him and he began to speak in a voice that was audible to all, though his attention was for her alone.

“Red Cheek,” he said, “harken to Old Wolf, whose lodge you have blessed with the love of a daughter. Before many moons the manitou of the chief whose name is revered by all the Iroquois and feared by all his enemies will depart.”

Denise laid a hand on his arm impulsively, as if to stop him, but he went on:

“Does not the acorn know that when the winds of the fall blow it must drop to earth? And before Old Wolf departs, his hands will give you the boon you ask of him—these captives shall go free.”

Denise started to pour out her thanks, when he bade her be quiet and continued: “There is little time to lose. I, the Chief of the Senecas, cannot take back what I have said in solemn council, but do *you* see that these men are far from the village before the hour set for their death. And then, Red Cheek, you will follow the trail with them to the home of your people.”

Again he silenced her when she would have remonstrated. "I have lived long and I have seen trees fall that were steady, and men die who were strong, and plans fail that seemed wise. I, Old Wolf, many years ago made a good plan: I took a white maiden and a white boy that their manitous might be added to the manitous of the Senecas, to bring us more wisdom. But the boy left and the maiden—she will never mate with a Seneca brave . . . and it is best so . . . she will enter the lodge of a white man."

Denise's head was bowed to her knees and she gave no word or sign.

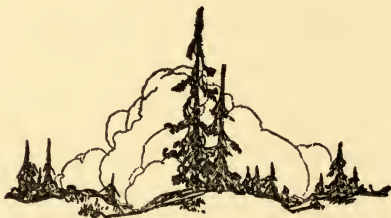
"Go!" repeated Old Wolf, and his voice was strangely gentle. "Hasten, my daughter. I know your affection for me, and that you will not forget me in the years to come. But when I am gone who would care for you as I do now, and when would another chance come for you to return to your people? Leave me now."

Denise got to her feet slowly. Then she moved about the lodge, bringing out provisions and putting them before Old Wolf. She piled up the fire high and laid more wood within his reach. It was as if she wished to show that up to the last it was her pleasure to care for him.

"I will not go!" she cried. "I will not leave you!" But even as she said this, the old chief

was leading her to the entrance. Black Duck, Raoul and Swift Fox passed out into the forest, and Old Wolf placed her hand in that of Black Duck and said: "Hasten by the short and secret trails you know."

But as they disappeared into the thickness of the woods it was upon Raoul, not Black Duck, that the Seneca's gaze was fixed.





CHAPTER XXV

THE END OF THE TRAIL

BLACK DUCK had been faithful to his trust, and he had found the shortest, safest trails and portages for the canoes which, with the aid of Raoul and Swift Fox, he had manufactured when it became safer and easier to travel by river. Once only had they been in danger from the Iroquois. They had been overtaken by some hunters who surrounded them. But Denise informed them that she was the daughter of Old Wolf and on a mission for him, and though the Iroquois could not understand why she should be in company of their foes, they did not seek to halt her.

Now the dangers lay almost all behind and the journey was nearly at an end. Black Duck's trained eye had noted that there were fewer tracks of wild animals and that consequently the forest was more often traversed by human beings.

Often, too, at nights they had caught sight of a distant fire which spoke of the presence of hunters or traders.

"You shall soon see tilled fields and white faces, Denise," said Raoul as they walked along, stooping now and then to pick a handful of late berries.

"I shall miss the forest," replied Denise. "I cannot remember when I have not been lulled to sleep by the sound of wind in the branches or birds' song between the leaves."

"You will not be far from them anywhere in New France," comforted Raoul. "Even Quebec and Villemarie are but isles in a sea of green."

"Yet I am sad that our journey is almost over," the girl continued. "In the forests I am still the Seneca prophetess, and yonder what shall I be, who cannot even speak the tongue of the white men?"

"It will not be long before it comes back to you," he said. "Already in this past moon you have remembered many words and are able to understand much that I say."

"And you will be my interpreter with my father and mother?" she asked.

"I will not leave you until you can understand them," he promised.

"It is a strange trail that we follow," reflected

Denise, "that leads us back so many years later to the point from which we started."

"It is a *blessed* trail," Raoul corrected, his eyes shining.

Swift Fox, who had been waiting just ahead for the two to catch up, caught sight of the expression in his friend's face and hurried on to join Black Duck.

"You cannot tell me much of the kind of life the women of my people lead," Denise said quickly as if she, too, had caught the gleam in Raoul's eyes and saw in it a warning to change her way. "I fear that I shall find it difficult at first—to live always in one lodge built so that I cannot hear the rain at night or see the sky through the smoke hole. Nor will my word be harkened to as the word from the spirits, and I doubt that the Governor will call me to advise him in the council."

"I scarce think so," and the two smiled at their pleasantry. "But you will be happy," he said, "in the love of those who love you."

"Yes," she assented, "I shall surely give love to my mother and father and sisters and brothers, but—" and Raoul knew that she was thinking of Old Wolf.

They walked for a while without speaking, as the trail was a narrow one, winding between

boulders and there was room for only one at a time. When the rocks were passed and he came abreast of her again, she asked:

“What is the difference between a *seigneur*, Raoul, and a *habitant*?” She spoke these words in French.

“A *seigneur* is a noble who is sometimes rich, of old name, often an officer of the King.”

“And you are a noble, Ralo?” she questioned.

“If an old name makes me one,” he admitted. “I have naught else.”

“And I am the daughter of a *habitant*,” she continued. “I remember. They come back to me, the stories my father used to tell, of how he left France because in this new world a man who was not a noble had a better chance.”

Raoul could not tell where her thoughts were tending, but he felt vaguely disturbed.

“White Thrush!” he heard Swift Fox call ahead of them. “White Thrush, come and see. There is smoke rising from the home of a white man. We have reached the end of the forest trail.”

Raoul in his eagerness had run some distance when he discovered that Denise was not at his side. He stopped and, looking back, saw that she was standing where he had left her. The sunlight had pierced through the thick greenery

above her and fell on her dark hair, reddening it as it reddened the pine trunk against which she was leaning. There was an attitude of timidity, of uncertainty, about her which went straight to Raoul's heart. All the resolutions he had made to be patient vanished. He turned and went back to her.

"Denise," he said, "I can wait no longer. I had said to myself, I will not tell my secret until I have brought her safely to her home. Then will I say, 'Denise, will you help me build the lodge for us to dwell in?' But now I see that you are sad and that you are fearing what lies ahead of you. So I can wait no longer. I ask, as an Indian asks, you to be my squaw; and as a Frenchman, I tell you that I love you, that I have loved you all these years since I lost you, though I did not know then that it was love, and I beg you to do me the honour to become my wife."

The girl had lifted up her face as he spoke and her lover saw his own brightness reflected in it. Then she let it droop and shook it slowly as she said:

"No, Ralo, it can not be. I have remembered that my father said: 'Seigneurs wed not with such we are, I am not even an Indian princess

now, and we who are French must live according to the ways of the French."

Raoul sprang forward and seized her hands which he held in a grasp so strong that it was painful, yet Denise would not have asked him to release them. "If that were necessary," he cried, "I would go back and dwell among the Indians with you as my squaw; but it need not be so. Yonder in New France we are freer than in old France, and no one, not even the Governor himself, can prevent me from making Demoiselle Denise Dubois, Madame De Larnac. Think you that I could live forever in a town, I who have slept beneath the stars most of my life? I may be a noble and I shall build me a castle somewhere with the Greyhound carved above its gate, and you and I shall live there when it pleases us; but we shall make our lodge too in the wilderness, and shall abide there and in the forts on the frontiers, and sweep down rivers in our canoes if—if . . . you love me, Denise."

"It is well," she answered simply. "I will be your squaw in the forest, Ralo; and if you build the castle I will not fear to dwell in it, wherever it be, as your wife."

Their first kiss was interrupted by Swift Fox who called again, wondering what had become of them. Raoul called back, "We are coming."

When they reached the edge of the forest they found that tilled fields and meadows adjoined it and that at their other end was a hut of stone.

“Now we part,” Black Duck announced. “I must go back. You can ask the trail from white men now, White Thrush. I must hasten westward to set my traps, or the bears and foxes will grow bold, thinking Black Duck is dead.”

“Will you not stay with us, friend?” Raoul begged. “Let us sit down here and take counsel of the future.”

They made themselves comfortable on the pine needles and Raoul continued: “Red Cheek is to be my squaw. I think that Old Wolf knew this when he let us go and that it was what he wished. And I believe too that the Seigneur would be pleased if he could but know,” he added wistfully. “I shall do what I think he would wish. I shall go to Onontio in Quebec and say to him that I beg him to ask the King to give me a seigneurie for my home. I shall call it Seigneurie De Larnac and La Salle, in memory of my master. This shall be somewhere on the borders of the wilderness, and if he will come to me, Etienne shall have a goodly home within its confines, and such other white men who love adventures and a good musket. And it shall be the home of Swift Fox” — the young brave’s eyes shone with

pleasure at this announcement — “and Black Duck whenever he comes eastward shall dwell in our lodge and feast until he himself commands him to take the trail again. It shall be a place where all the Indians who love the French shall be welcome, for do not I and my squaw speak their language and know their ways?”

A murmur of approval went up. Raoul continued: “But should I not be an ingrate if I forgot *Sieur Tonty*? I have sworn to him that when he needs me I will follow where he goes and fight those he fights. We two will remember the great dreams of our *Seigneur*. We will remember how he said that we should win an empire out of the wilderness for France. With my youth and my strength I shall bear his dreams in my mind and strive to make them come true. *La Salle* shall be our watchword. I will colonize; I will fight; I will trade. And here in this new land we shall build both an empire and men for France, and our children shall praise forever the name of *La Salle*!”





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