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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE KING'S WARRANT: A STORY OF OLD AND NEW FRANCE ***



"You can tell me where they are,' she said softly, but very earnestly."

THE KING'S WARRANT.

A Story of Old and New France

BY

ALFRED H. ENGELBACH,

Author of

*"Poor Little Gaspard's Drum," "Lionel's Revenge," "Two Campaigns,"
&c., &c.*

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"You can tell me where they are,' she said softly, but very earnestly."

"The fiery little king of the kitchen bounded from his chair, sprang at him, and seized him by the throat."

"Flinging away his sword, he knelt beside her."

PART I

THE TWO ORPHANS.



THE KING'S WARRANT.

THE TWO ORPHANS.

CHAPTER I.



t last England and France had formally drawn the sword which they had sheathed only eight years before at the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, and the great struggle known in history as the Seven Years' War had begun in earnest. Yet although the old countries had until now managed to abstain from a declared and open rupture in the Old World, it had for well-nigh two years past been far otherwise with their great dependencies beyond the Atlantic. There, during the years 1754 and 1755, New France and New England had already been carrying on a deadly conflict, which seemed to increase in intensity and fierceness as the months rolled on, and in which for some time the royal troops of both kingdoms had taken a prominent part, notwithstanding the nominal state of peace between the mother countries. Some short-sighted men, indeed, tried to persuade themselves of the possibility that the colonists might carry on the war on the soil of the New World, without necessarily compromising the peace of Europe; but the European powers had their own apples of discord, and the ambitious designs of the Great Frederick had now set Europe once more in a blaze.

But what was to be the issue of the struggle in America? With the history of the last hundred years open before us—with such names as those of Wolfe, Abercrombie, and Wellington; Rodney, Howe, and Nelson ever ringing now like household words in our ears—with such achievements as those of the plains of Abraham, the sand-hills of Aboukir, Waterloo, the Nile and Trafalgar ever present to our minds, we are apt enough to ignore the uncertainty which, humanly speaking, in those days hung about the result of a collision between New England and New France, backed by the power of their respective sovereign states. From the descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers might, indeed, be expected an amount of vigour, energy, and self-reliance, that must needs contribute greatly to success in such a contest; but these very qualities, so far from finding much favour with their rulers in the Old Country, were like enough to be met with jealousy and distrust, to produce coldness and estrangement, and perhaps even to weaken the support of the government in England. In addition to this, the rivalries and dissensions that were always

springing up amongst the several colonies themselves could hardly fail to interfere materially, as they had done for years past, with their cordial combination in any effort, however needful, for their common good. Canada, on the other hand, was essentially the creation of the parent State, its favoured offspring; it was unceasingly cherished and fostered as a nursery of commerce, and as the means of planting the Christian faith amongst the heathens, over which France would spread her protecting wings with the jealousy of an eagle defending its young even at the cost of its life. Yet so far as the colony was concerned that protection had been dearly bought at a cost of patronage and favouritism that had checked all healthy exertion amongst the colonists. With some bright exceptions, oppression, rapacity, and bigotry had ever characterised the ruling powers in the colony, and now that the hour of trial had come there could be little hope that the colonists of New France, however loyally disposed, could do much to help King Louis to retain this much-prized dependency of the French crown. But what of that? The French king probably cared as little for the help of his Canadian subjects as he did for the enmity of the New Englanders. Nearly fifty years had passed away since the victories of Marlborough, whilst the humiliation of Dettingen had been eclipsed by the triumph of Fontenoy. England, moreover, had but just succeeded, with no little difficulty, in putting down a rebellion at home, and Jacobite disaffection was still rife in the land—such at least might well be the French view of the English situation. In America, too, the successes of General Johnson on Lake Champlain, however substantial, could not efface the recollection of Braddock's disastrous rout at Fort Duquesne.

There were, nevertheless, some circumstances in the case which led reflecting men to think that even were the troops of France commanded by another Marshal Saxe the victory might yet be doubtful. The exploits of Anson, Hawke, Boscowen, and Warren, both previously to the peace, and now again immediately on the resumption of hostilities, had established almost beyond question England's superiority at sea, and this could scarcely fail to be of incalculable advantage in a contest which would make it necessary to transport and convey land forces to a distant theatre of war. There was, moreover, yet another circumstance that could not be put out of sight, even by those most inclined to rely on the military prestige of France, acquired in wars of the old conventional European type. Brought year by year more and more into contact with the white man, and year by year more debased by an insatiable thirst for the deadly fire-water, the American Indian had indeed gradually become less and less formidable to his foes; he was, however, by no means an enemy to be despised. Many a well-conceived plan was defeated by the sudden and murderous onslaught of a tribe whose stealthy approach had eluded all common precautions, and many an engagement which in civilised war might have had but small results, was turned into a massacre from which not one escaped to tell the tale. Even the hardy colonists, whilst they affected to despise the wild and untutored savage, felt a secret dread of him, and as for those who had come less in contact with him, the stories of the Red Indian's ruthless barbarity, blended as it was with traits of generous magnanimity, of his stoical indifference to physical suffering, and of his incredible sagacity in following up the trail of his enemies, seemed to invest him with a strange and almost supernatural power. Against such a foe mere bravery, or even the common prudence of ordinary warfare, was utterly insufficient, and the knowledge that there were a hundred red men in the ranks of the enemy entailed an amount of harassing precautions and fatigue that even the alliance of a thousand friendly Indians could do little to relieve. In the present struggle, which indeed may be said to have originated mainly in the jealous rivalry of Canada and New England to obtain monopolies of the trade with the red man, both parties were aided by many tribes of Indians. The powerful Iroquois, otherwise called the "Five Nations," with the Outagamis, the Fox Indians, and others, were for the most part allies of the English; whilst the Hurons, the Outamacs, the Morian Indians, and others, were generally found fighting on the French side.

The campaign of 1756 was opened with some inconsiderable advantages obtained by the French along the line of forts that lay between Montreal and Oswego. The erection of this latter fort, where the Onondaga river falls into Lake Ontario, had been amongst the first causes of serious enmity between the French Canadians and their New England neighbours, the latter having boldly planted this outpost right in the teeth of their rivals, for the better prosecution of their trade with the Indians—the great and ever-recurring subject of dispute. The reduction of this small stronghold was accordingly the first object of the Marquis de Montcalm, who this year took the command in Canada of the French forces, which had been largely increased by drafts from home. Fort Ontario, situated on the right bank of the river opposite to Oswego, was first attacked, and, running short of ammunition, owing to some unaccountable neglect on the part of the British, was carried in little more than twelve hours. The French artillery, and such guns as were found available in the captured fort, were then turned upon the more important stronghold of Oswego. The English commandant and many more of its brave defenders were soon killed, and on the 14th of August it fell into the hands of the French. It is to be lamented, however, that the massacre, by Montcalm's savage Indian auxiliaries, of a large number of the prisoners who had placed themselves under his protection, has cast a stain on the otherwise irreproachable character of the renowned and chivalrous commander, and tarnishes the glory of this brilliant exploit. The loss on the French side had been comparatively small, nevertheless the evening of that same 14th of August found the army surgeons busy enough, and from many a rude couch in the shed on which the wounded had been laid the doctor turned away with a shrug, which told plainly enough that all further human aid was hopeless. Such was the case with a certain Captain Lacroix, of the Regiment of Auvergne, who had at first seemed only slightly wounded; but symptoms of more serious injury suddenly became apparent, and one of his companions in arms, who now stood by his bedside, had just broken to him the intelligence that in a few hours more he would be no longer of this world.

"Yes," said the dying man, "I was afraid that it was so; and yet I hoped it might not be—for her sake, for her sake, Valricour. As for myself, what could I wish better than to die a soldier's death in the hour of victory? But my poor Marguerite! My heart bleeds for her, left so young without a father—without a friend."

"Say not so, old comrade," replied the other, scarcely able to speak for emotion. "I should be a base hound indeed if I could let such a thought embitter the last moments of an old brother officer to whom I once owed my life. Poor Marguerite shall never want a home—I swear it to you."

"I thank God! I thank God!" exclaimed the dying man, faintly, as he wrung the hand of his friend. But this effort, coupled with the sudden revulsion of feeling produced by the unexpected promise, proved too much for him, and poor René Lacroix fell back upon his pillow to rise no more.

For a brief space Valricour, and a young officer who had shared with him the task of watching by the bedside of his comrade, remained absorbed in mournful silence. It was at last broken by Valricour, who, half soliloquising, half speaking to his younger companion, sorrowfully uttered the words—

"Poor fellow! It was indeed a hard thing for him to leave her all alone and friendless here in a strange land. I could not but promise him that I would care for her, though how to set about it as matters stand is truly more than I exactly know at present. Well, we must see what can be done."

"His daughter is motherless too, is she not, my uncle?" said the young soldier.

"Yes, Isidore; she is, as he even now told us, utterly alone in the world, and penniless too, I fancy. When poor Lacroix came out with the regiment, and brought her with him, it was in the hope that he might ultimately obtain a grant of land here in New France and settle down upon it, for what little property he had was thrown away upon a worthless son, who died some little time ago."

Here M. de Valricour was interrupted by a summons to attend upon the general at headquarters. He accordingly quitted the shed, leaving to young de Beaujardin the melancholy duty of seeing their friend consigned to his last resting-place amidst the battered outworks of the stronghold which his valour had helped to conquer.

When Baron de Valricour had spoken of his friend's having come to Canada in the hope of restoring his broken fortunes, he had, in some measure at least, described his own case. Though descended from an ancient family, he had never been a very wealthy man, and the lands of Valricour yielded an income quite inadequate to keep up a state befitting the chateau of so noble a house. The baron had made matters still worse by marrying, at an early age, an imperious beauty of like noble birth, but without a dowry, whose extravagance soon plunged her husband into difficulties, which gradually increased until there remained but one chance. By means of court influence he obtained a subordinate command in the army sent out to New France. A seigneurie on the St. Lawrence might well be looked forward to as the reward of military service when the war should be happily terminated; if not, it was something to be able to reduce the great establishment which otherwise must still be kept up in France. The Baroness de Valricour had yet another hope; the same day that witnessed her union with the young baron had seen his sister united to the Marquis de Beaujardin, one of the wealthiest nobles in the west of France. The Valricours had a daughter now in her twentieth year, whilst the Beaujardins might well be proud of their son Isidore, about a twelvemonth older than Clotilde de Valricour. The marriage of these two young people would blend into one the small estate of Valricour and the magnificent heritage of the Beaujardins. This was the cherished object of Madame de Valricour's life. Unfortunately for her design she had one day spoken of it to her husband, whose pride rebelled at the idea of purchasing an advantage for himself at the price of his daughter's hand. He had, moreover, no great liking for the young marquis, who carried to excess the luxury and affected politeness then so prevalent amongst the wealthy young nobles at the French court, where he was already a favourite. These were no recommendations in the eyes of his uncle, who had fought in the last wars, and had less of the polished courtier in him than of the bluff, straightforward soldier. But Madame de Valricour had no idea of being foiled by such small obstacles. Finding that her husband had resolved on going out to New France, she left no stone unturned until she had persuaded the Marquis de Beaujardin to obtain a commission for young Isidore, in order that he might accompany his uncle.

It may be observed by the way that Isidore was not obliged to enter the army as a mere subaltern, and to work his way up through the lower grades of command. As was usual with sons of the higher and more influential nobles, he became at once what was styled colonel *en second*, a second colonelcy being specially attached to every regiment for the immediate advancement of young soldiers of his rank and condition. Madame de Valricour not only hoped that by this proceeding she might keep the young marquis from the possibility of losing his heart at Paris, but she felt assured that she would overcome Monsieur de Valricour's dislike to him. With a woman's shrewdness she perceived that underneath those courtly airs and graces, and the silly affectation of extreme politeness which then prevailed in France, Isidore had many striking qualities which a little campaigning must needs bring out, and which would soon win the heart of M. de Valricour.

Thus it came about that Isidore de Beaujardin, instead of lounging amongst the gay and courtly throng in the brilliant *salons* of Versailles, found himself threading his way on the saddest of all errands amongst ghastly and disfigured corpses in the far distant wilds of Canada.

In one respect, at all events, the designs of the baroness were in a fair way to succeed; for her husband, though there was much in Isidore's habits and behaviour that irritated him at times, was unconsciously becoming daily more and more attached to his nephew. True, Isidore's hair was always dressed to perfection; his bow—that is to say, when he was off duty—might have gained a smile of approval at the king's levée or at one of the Pompadour's receptions; his hands would scarce have disgraced a lady; and the perfumes and cosmetics he used were as choice as they were multifarious. But then the same perfection was observable in his uniform and accoutrements, and the most exacting martinet would have sought in vain to find a fault in aught that pertained to his military duties. At the close of a long day's march under the burning sun that had knocked up many an old soldier, the young marquis seemed quite cool and ready for any fresh duty, whilst his imperturbable *nonchalance*, even when leading on his men to the assault, had called forth an exclamation of surprise from Montcalm himself, who was not slow to recognise true courage whenever he met with it.

So, after liberally rewarding the soldiers who had helped him in his sorrowful task, and with a sigh of commiseration for the desolate but unknown Marguerite, the young soldier betook himself to his quarters to attend to his toilet and get rid, as far as might be, of the distasteful and offensive traces of the day's fight. He had just completed that agreeable task, very much to his own satisfaction at all events, when the orderly who had previously called M. de Valricour away, once more made his appearance and informed Isidore that the Marquis de Montcalm desired his attendance at head-quarters.



CHAPTER II.



otably short in stature and of slight figure, Montcalm had by nature an air and manner which at once powerfully impressed those who came across him, and the rapidity with which he habitually spoke tended rather to enhance the impression. He was endowed with a singular quickness of perception, an unusually retentive memory both for things and persons, and an unflinching judgment in the selection of the right man. These qualities, joined to an unvarying uprightness and a bravery of the most chivalrous character, not only won for him the esteem and affection of all who served under him, but stamped him unmistakably as one of those born to command.

When Isidore entered the shot-riddled building in which the marshal had taken up his quarters, he found him in conversation with Monsieur de Valricour. The young soldier accordingly saluted, and then remained standing near the door, whilst Montcalm, dropping his voice so as not to be overheard, concluded as follows:—

"As for me, I do not think so badly of these dandies as you do; some of them only need to have all the pains they take upon themselves directed into the proper channel to realise great things. From what I have seen of our young friend I think he is one of these; at any rate I will give him the chance." Then, turning to Isidore, he added aloud: "Monsieur de Beaujardin, I have noticed with satisfaction your courage and self-command during the assault, and have selected you for a duty of importance. You will take this despatch and deliver it, with the least possible delay, into the hands of Monsieur de Longueuil at Fort Chambly. On your way you will observe the formation

of the ground and any obstacles or facilities for the march of troops, and will take note of any appearance of an intention on the part of the enemy to throw forward advanced posts on your line of route. At Chambly you will hold yourself at M. de Longueuil's orders either to return or proceed elsewhere."

Isidore took the despatch which the general held out to him, and as the latter remained silent, he again saluted, and was turning to withdraw when Montcalm stopped him, saying—

"You seem to make very light of the matter, my young friend; but you will not find the task before you so easy an affair as dancing a gavotte or a minuet, I can tell you. Do you know that Chambly is some seventy leagues distant? How do you mean to find your way there?"

"I presume I shall be furnished with a guide, and if so, I shall trust to him for that; if not, I shall find the way as best I can."

"Yes, and get scalped by some of our red friends before you have gone a league; and then what becomes of my despatch on the king's service?"

"In that case," replied Isidore, coolly, "I shall be no longer in His Majesty's service, and be accountable to another King for having at least done my duty."

"Good," said Montcalm. "You will find that I have provided you with a guide—one in whom you may place implicit confidence. Adieu, sir."

On leaving the general's quarters Isidore was followed by Monsieur de Valricour.

"I congratulate you heartily, my dear fellow," said the baron. "Our general has evidently taken a fancy to you; only carry out this affair to his satisfaction, and the path to distinction is open to you. As for me, I am under orders to convoy the prisoners to Quebec. I am glad of it, for, in the first place, the slight wound I have received——"

"You wounded, my uncle?" exclaimed Isidore anxiously. "I hope it is really slight; you are apt to think too lightly of such a thing."

"Oh, it is only a trifle, and there will be no great fatigue on the march, as we shall probably go by water if we can find boats enough. At Quebec I can rest and take care of myself; besides, I shall thus be enabled to break the sad tidings myself to poor Marguerite, who is staying there, and take measures for sending her over to France. Aha! here is your guide; you will find him a first-rate fellow, and as true as steel. Moreover, I fancy there are not many men, red-skinned or white, who know the country you have to traverse better than our friend Jean Baptiste Boulanger, woodman, *voyageur*, trader in peltries, and everything else that can make a man at home in the backwoods."

Isidore looked at his guide, whose countenance seemed, to confirm this favourable opinion. The Canadian looked at him, though more covertly, and it must be owned that his face did not betray any evidence of a similar good opinion of the young marquis. On the contrary, it was in a rather sulky tone that, after touching his cap, the guide observed—

"Monsieur does not intend to make the journey in his uniform, and in those boots?" (The last words were especially emphasised.) "If I might be so bold, I would suggest a peasant's coat like mine, and a pair of moccasins as likely to——"

"I go as I am, Master Guide," replied Isidore curtly. "Mind your own business."

"H'm—well, perhaps you are right," said Monsieur de Valricour. "Yes, stick to the uniform; a soldier cannot well do wrong in that, when there is any doubt."

"Monsieur at least will take with him some better weapon than that small sword," urged the Canadian. "But perhaps monsieur is not used to carry a musket?"

"Yes, yes, do so, Isidore," said the baron. "Do that by all means; one doesn't know what one may come across on such a journey."

Isidore would probably have refused, but that he felt somewhat nettled at the guide's last remark, so he took a rifle from a pile of arms that stood close by. To this the baron would fain have added a knapsack, and Isidore seemed by no means disinclined to take one, as it would enable him to carry with him some articles pertaining to the toilet, which to him were rather necessaries of life than mere comforts or luxuries. Here, however, the guide again relentlessly interfered, declaring it to be worse than useless. "A light load makes a quick journey," said he; "monsieur would be glad enough to get rid of it before the end of the first day's march. My game-bag will suffice for both, and I have taken care to stock it with all that monsieur can want on such a journey." Isidore gave way, perhaps not very graciously, but a glance at the figure and equipments of Boulanger made him feel that he was in the presence of an unquestionable authority in such matters. He had indeed some slight misgivings that he had been rather hasty in the affair of the boots, and that he was likely enough ere long to envy the guide his light and roomy moccasins, to say nothing of his loose leggings and the well-worn frock of grey homespun that had evidently seen service in the woods. Even the gay wampum belt spoke of an ease and

comfort to which the young French soldier's stiff sword-belt could not pretend. In fact Jean Baptiste Boulanger, or "J'n B'tiste" as he was familiarly called, with his leathern game-bag slung over one shoulder, his long rifle over the other, and his Indian knife, with its gaudy sheath, hanging at his side was the very beau-ideal of a Canadian forester of those days, and if his features did not just then give evidence of his natural *bonhomie* and kindness of heart there was that in his sunburnt face and keen dark eyes that inspired confidence at the first glance.

These important preliminaries were scarcely settled when a hue-and-cry was heard, and no little commotion arose. It turned out that an Indian had been found huddled up, apparently asleep, in a corner of the room adjoining the one occupied by the Marquis de Montcalm himself. He proved to be not one of those acting with the French troops, but an Iroquois, and on being detected had darted through the open window, and though the alarm was instantly raised, had succeeded in baffling his pursuers and making his escape. Such incidents, however, were not so uncommon as to excite more than a passing notice, and as soon as the outcry had subsided the baron took an affectionate leave of the young envoy, who, accompanied by his guide, forthwith set out upon his journey.

The circumstances under which the travellers had commenced their acquaintance were not calculated to produce very quickly a good understanding between them. The woodsman, rough as he was, had a sensitive disposition, which chafed under the rebuff with which his well-meant advice had been met. After crossing the river and leaving Fort Ontario behind them, they plunged into the apparently trackless forest, and for some time neither of them spoke a word. Boulanger strode on, eyeing his companion askance, and possibly speculating whether the fine gentleman who had treated him so superciliously would not very soon be forced to give in, and perhaps commit to him the task of proceeding alone to their intended destination. Isidore seemed indeed scarcely the man for a task like that which lay before them. Rather under the middle height and slightly built, he had apparently been little accustomed to severe or protracted exertion, whilst everything about him bespoke the *petit maître*, if not the fop. In the meanwhile the young marquis had not given a second thought to the few words that had passed at the outset of the journey. Being habitually reserved towards his inferiors, he was content to indulge in his own meditations without caring what such a man as Jean Baptiste Boulanger might think about him. The guide, however, had no notion of being kept at arm's length by a man with whom he was to traverse those lonely woods for the next week; and as he observed the coolness, and still more the agility, with which Isidore met and surmounted some little difficulties that soon presented themselves on the way, he began to warm towards him and to feel half sorry that he should have been put to an undertaking that might prove too much for him. It was probably some feeling of this kind that at last brought out the words—

"And how far does monsieur mean to march to-night?"

"Nay, my friend," replied Isidore, "that is for you to arrange; I never interfere with the business of other people. You are the guide; you know the distance and the road. It is for you to settle the length of the stages, and where we are to encamp for the night, as I suppose, from the little I know of these parts, that we have not much chance of sleeping under a roof between this and Fort Chambly."

"Bravely spoken, monsieur!" exclaimed Boulanger, thoroughly restored to good-humour by these words. "Monsieur will pardon me for having had my misgivings as to the length of the marches that might be accomplished by—by a personage like yourself, not used to this kind of work. Well, then, I propose that we halt at midnight; that will be enough for a start, and it will bring us to good camping ground. I think we had better do the greater part of our work by night, and rest and sleep during the heat of the day. We shall do more, besides escaping notice in case there should be any scouts, either white or red, or marauding parties prowling about, as is sometimes the case near the border."

"I should have thought there was small chance of meeting any one in these interminable woods, through which, as a matter of taste, I should prefer to travel by daylight," replied Isidore. "Indeed, I am rather thankful for the bright moonlight we seem likely to have, and wish we had a few more of such open glades as the one we have just crossed; it would be more agreeable—at least to me."

They had re-entered the wood, and had not proceeded very far when they came to a spot that would have been particularly dark owing to the great size of the trees and their closeness to each other, but for the few gleams of moonlight that found their way even through the dense foliage and lighted up a branch here and there with a strange and almost supernatural brightness. Suddenly the guide stopped, and slightly raising his hand as if to keep back his companion, gazed intently for a moment at a good-sized button-wood tree that stood at a distance of about thirty yards, but somewhat out of their course. Following the direction of the Canadian's eyes, Isidore looked wonderingly at the tree, when suddenly he saw a dark shapeless object drop from one of the lower branches. He expected of course to see it lying on the ground beneath the tree, but not a trace of it was visible; it seemed as if the earth had swallowed up the big dark thing, whatever it might have been.

The guide, who had half raised his rifle, now lowered it again. "The rascal has got off this time," said he, "but who would have expected to come across a red skin hereabouts just now? Stop a bit! Depend upon it, this is the same fellow who was found skulking about the general's

head-quarters this evening. Yes, he is dogging our steps, and we shall hear more of him before we get to Chambly."

There was something about this announcement that was not at all pleasant to Boulanger's companion. He might be brave as a lion and cool enough in fair open fight, but the idea of being the object of a planned attack by Indian savages in the depths of a lonely American forest somewhat disconcerted him, and he looked rather anxiously around, as if each tree might harbour another lurking enemy.

"Nay, monsieur!" exclaimed Boulanger, "we shall not be troubled by any more of them just yet. There is not much hereabouts to tempt the red skins to come this way. That fellow was but a single scout, and he won't attack two men armed as we are; having made sure of our destination and the route we have chosen he is off by this time to join his friends, who may very likely make a dash at us two or three days hence; but Jean Baptiste is too old a hand to run into a trap with his eyes open. We will give them the slip yet by changing our route a little. We shall have to pass a small New England settlement, but——"

"An English settlement!" exclaimed Isidore, "that would surely be running into a trap, as you call it, with a vengeance."

"Not a bit," replied Boulanger; "I have been through fifty times as *voyageur*, trader, or what you will, and one of the settlers, John Pritchard, married a sister of mine, and the settlement is too near the border for them to do an ill-turn to a Canadian; still, with that uniform, it may be best for you to keep close and not show yourself, whilst I visit my old friends and lay in what is needful. We shall be safe enough. *Allons!*" So on they went.

Isidore could not fail to be struck by the unhesitating certainty with which his companion threaded the intricacies of the apparently interminable forest, through which he could detect no path or track of any kind, much less anything in the remotest degree resembling a road. There were, indeed, such things as tracks in the woods, though perhaps a league apart, but the practised eye of the Canadian forester needed none; his habits of observing every peculiarity, whether on the ground or above, enabled him to keep not only a direct course, but one which avoided any obstructions or impediments to their progress. Boulanger said that he had been used to these woods ever since he was born, some forty years since, and had lived in those parts until two or three years previously, when he had removed to the neighbourhood of Quebec with his wife, whom he called Bibi. His experience in all things pertaining to the woods had obtained for him a situation under the manager of the Royal Chase, as it was called, but he had been engaged by Montcalm, who had the gift of selecting the best man for every business, to act as one of the guides to the troops in the present campaign. After conducting Isidore to Chambly he was to have his discharge, and would be at liberty to return home; but it was plain that the last few months had revived in him a love for his old independent way of life, which doubtless contrasted strongly with his new position. It galled him to work for wages, however high, however certain, and his servitude brought him into contact with much at which his disposition revolted. So, as he told his story, he gradually grew more and more excited, declaiming hotly against the evils he had seen and heard of since he had quitted his log hut in the forest. For some little time Isidore listened with patience, or rather indifference, to his guide's indignant invectives against the various misdoings and iniquities of the creatures and underlings of the Government, and especially of those employed by Bigot, the king's intendant. At last, however, in his excitement, Boulanger began to launch out against Monsieur Bigot himself, whereupon he was somewhat sternly called to order by his aristocratic young companion, who bade him remember that it was not for such low-born fellows as he to open their mouths against the seigneurs and nobles, and least of all against the officers of His Most Christian Majesty. Had the guide been a New England colonist, rejoicing in the name of John Smith, he would probably have retorted boldly enough and held his ground, but what could be expected from Jean Baptiste the Canadian woodsman? He might have sense enough to understand the wrong-doing, and in the honest zeal of the moment he might inveigh against it, but it was not for him to set himself up against monseigneur the young Marquis de Beaujardin. There was a murmured apology, mingled with some kind of protest that it was all true, nevertheless, and then our travellers continued their journey for a while in the same unsatisfactory silence with which they had commenced it.

This state of things, however, did not continue very long. The young marquis, though he had considered it incumbent on him to rebuke a person who ventured to speak in such a way of the nobility, was not one to persist in assailing an adversary who had succumbed to him. Moreover, even his short experience of affairs in Canada told him that Boulanger had good grounds for what he said. The courtly magnificence of Versailles and the Tuileries might dazzle his understanding so far as to blind him to the existence of many crying evils in old France, but here there was nothing to gild and gloss over the corruption and mismanagement that everywhere prevailed. The shameful monopoly of all commerce by the Merchant Company; the iniquitous sale of spirits by the Government to the Indians; the rapacity exhibited in the system of trade-licences and other extortions by which the officials wrung from the humbler classes whatever could be got by fair means or by foul; to say nothing of the scandalous effrontery with which the Government itself was robbed by its own officers in every conceivable way—all these stood out in their naked deformity, and had more than once made Isidore wonder how a people thus treated could remain so generally loyal as the Canadians undoubtedly were. He was, consequently, ready enough to give his guide credit for honesty in his indignation, whilst the courtier-like habits he had already acquired in the *salons* of Paris made him appreciate the desirableness of being on fair terms with

one who held not only his comfort, but probably his life, in his hands. He accordingly took the first opportunity of dropping some remark expressive of the admiration which he really felt for the beauty and grandeur of the forest through which they were just then passing.

He had touched a chord in Boulanger's breast which was always ready to vibrate.

"Yes, monsieur," exclaimed the latter, forgetting in an instant the rebuff he had recently received; "yes, here, indeed, all is peaceful and happy, for all is as it comes to us from God's hand. The folly and wickedness of man have not yet invaded these sublime yet lovely solitudes. All things around can but remind us of the days when the world came forth from the hands of our Father, and He said it was very good. Come, monsieur, it is time we should call a halt, and take some supper; we have done very well, and made a good beginning. Let us sit down here under this noble tree, and rest and refresh ourselves."

Thereupon the travellers seated themselves, and Boulanger produced from his game-bag a plentiful supply of provisions, which soon disappeared under the keen appetites resulting from the night's march, following on a day of hard work and light rations.



CHAPTER III.



o further incident worth notice occurred either during the remainder of the night or on the two following days. Thanks to Boulanger's experience and to the genial August weather, Isidore found none of the inconveniences he had anticipated in this impromptu journey, and slept perhaps more soundly than he had ever done before during the long halts which they made in the heat of the day. On the third day, late in the afternoon, they approached the English settlement of which Boulanger had spoken.

They had reached the top of a small ridge that looked upon the clearings, the guide being perhaps a dozen yards in advance, when, just as Isidore came up to him, the Canadian turned, and grasping his arm, exclaimed, "The Indians! the Indians! Look! the Indians have been there and destroyed the place. Alas! would that this were all. I fear we may hardly hope to find one soul alive."

A single glance at the scene before them was sufficient to satisfy Isidore that his companion's supposition was only too well founded. On the extensive clearings spread out in the valley below he could plainly see the remains of the half dozen homesteads, now either mere heaps of ruins, or at best with only some portion left standing, like blackened monuments serving to mark the spots where the bright hopes and joys of the once happy little community, nay, perhaps they themselves, lay buried for ever.

"Let us go down," said Boulanger, as soon as he recovered from the first shock, "let us go down; it is not so very long since this has happened, surely they cannot all have perished—at least we may learn something as to how this came about, and if any yet survive." They descended the hill, and scarcely had the guide begun to cross the first tract of cultivated ground when the mournful expression of his face changed to one of curiosity and surprise.

"Why, what is this?" exclaimed he, pointing to a dark object that lay at a short distance from the spot. "A dead Huron, and in his war paint! Yes—and there lies another. There has been a fight

here not many hours since, and the red skins have been worsted or we should not see that sight, and yet the half dozen men belonging to the place could have been no match for them." Boulanger hurried forward, Isidore following him, and they soon came to an open spot that had served as a kind of village green, on which many articles of various kinds were strewed about. "Look here, and here!" cried he, now seizing Isidore by the arm and pointing first in one direction, then in another. Half irritated at this familiarity, half bewildered by Boulanger's words, Isidore gazed about him; but the broken musket, the extinguished camp-fire, the rudely tied up bundle of spoils, such as none but a Red Indian would prize, were to him wholly without meaning. To add to his perplexity, Boulanger, who had been scrutinising everything around them with eager curiosity, suddenly quitted his side, and vaulting over a fence, disappeared in the wood that skirted the clearing.

"Hang the fellow!" muttered Isidore. "This is a little too bad. If he expects me to follow him everywhere, he is mistaken. A pretty thing, truly, if I were to miss him and lose myself in this out-of-the-way place, I'll let him know that it is his business to attend to me instead of running about to look after dead savages, or live Englishmen either."

The guide, however, soon reappeared, saying, as he rejoined his companion, "There are red skins enough lying in the wood yonder. They must have been surprised here after a successful attack on some other place, and the people here have had little or no share in it, but have been helped by some much stronger force than they could muster. That's plain enough, at all events."

"It may be all plain enough to you," replied Isidore. "As for me, I can see there has been a fight between the white men and savages; but more than that I cannot make out, and in truth I don't see that it matters much to us, except that we are disappointed of our expected quarters for the night."

There was a look of anger not wholly unmixed with contempt on the face of the Canadian as Isidore concluded these remarks.

"Truly," said he, "I had forgotten, in my anxiety for the fate of many who were no strangers to me, that monsieur may lose his supper and his bed."

The rebuke was not thrown away. Beneath all his aristocratic pride, and the selfishness that had grown upon him, Isidore still had a heart capable of sympathy and compassion, and there was a nobleness in his nature which at once compelled him to avow his error even to so humble a companion.

"Forgive me, my friend," said he; "I have deserved your reproof. Come, let us at least see before we go further whether we can find in any of these ruined buildings something that may give us a clue to what has befallen your friends. As it is clear that the Englishmen had the best of it, perhaps we may find that the people of this place have only gone elsewhere for temporary shelter."

Boulanger was appeased in a moment; his was one of those rare dispositions with which a little kindness outweighs more than a like amount of harshness and injustice.

"Enough! enough! monsieur," said he. "That is a good old French proverb which says, 'A fault avowed is half pardoned,' though I think that 'wholly pardoned' would be better still. Let us do as you propose; afterwards we will continue our journey for a short league, so as to get away from this miserable scene, and then we will encamp for the night."

Keeping purposely away from that part of the settlement which had been the scene of the terrible tragedy, they crossed two or three of the clearings without coming upon anything worthy of notice, except that the buildings, and in many places the growing crops, had been wantonly destroyed. At length they reached the homestead which had belonged to Pritchard, Boulanger's relative. It was about half a mile from the spot where they had first come upon the settlement, and, perhaps owing to its somewhat remote position, had escaped better than the others, one-half of the house being almost uninjured. With a deep sigh Boulanger pushed open the door, but immediately started back as a man, who had been sitting there with his face buried in his hands, rose up hastily and surveyed the intruders with surprise evidently not unmingled with fear. He was soon reassured on perceiving that one of his unexpected visitors was Boulanger, who on his part was not slow to recognise his brother-in-law.

They soon learned from him that things had come to pass pretty much as Boulanger had surmised. A formidable body of Indians, numbering full a hundred warriors, had about a week previously crossed the St. Lawrence and made an incursion into the New England territory. Fortunately the settlers at Little Creek had been warned of their danger by a half-witted Indian orphan girl, on whom Pritchard had taken compassion some time before, and who had become domesticated amongst them. They fled in haste, leaving everything behind them, and the Indians having other objects in view did not turn aside to follow them; but after ravaging the place hurried on to attack a yet larger settlement, further from the border, whose inhabitants had thought themselves far removed from any such inroad. The onslaught was as successful as it was sudden. The men were for the most part absent; the settlement was sacked, the women and children were either killed or carried off as prisoners, after which the Indians turned back, and having again reached Little Creek encamped there and gave themselves up for the day to

celebrate their victory with their usual savage rites, and to indulge their greedy thirst for the fatal fire-water of their enemies. But the New Englanders had not been idly weeping over their misfortunes. Hastily collecting every man who could bear a musket, they followed up their retiring foes and came upon them in the midst of their drunken carouse. Burning with the desire of revenge, and infuriated by their recent bereavement of all they held most dear, they fell upon the almost unresisting Indians and massacred them to the last man. Then they in their turn retreated to rebuild their ruined homesteads and mourn over the dead. Some stragglers of the party had told all this to the fugitives from Little Creek, and Pritchard had ventured back to the place to make sure and report to the rest whether the coast was really clear for them to come back again. Such was the border warfare of those days.

The travellers now abandoned their intention of going further that night, as Pritchard urgently pressed them not to leave him there alone, and Isidore indeed was hardly in a condition to continue the journey. The house had not been plundered, so Pritchard was able to offer them what they needed in the way both of rest and refreshment. When their frugal meal was over it was arranged that each of them should keep watch in turn. There was indeed no likelihood that any one would come near the spot, or that they would be molested in any way, nevertheless there was something in the awful solitude of the place that seemed to create a feeling of insecurity. The first watch fell to Pritchard's lot, and Boulanger took the second. Isidore thought he had only just dozed off when the guide awoke him, and told him that it was his turn.

"Why, it is still daylight," said he, rubbing his eyes, "unless indeed—— You do not mean to say it is morning?" he added, half vexed, as the thought arose in his mind that the Canadian had compassionately allowed him to sleep on beyond this time.

"Monsieur is less used to the forest than we are," replied Boulanger, good-humouredly. "I had one spell of sleep to begin with, and another hour's rest will set me up for a week to come." So saying he stopped all further discussion by stretching himself on the floor, and apparently dropping off at once.

Isidore rose and went out; then, seating himself on a great stump that stood near the door, he gazed out upon the still and desolate landscape, which was just distinguishable in the first grey light of morning. He had become absorbed in a reverie on the events that had brought him into so strange a locality when he felt his arm lightly touched, and, looking round, beheld, to his great astonishment, a young Indian girl standing by his side. His first impulse was to start up and give the alarm to his companions; then came a feeling of shame at such an idea as he scanned the girl's face, from which one might have supposed her to be twelve or thirteen years old at most, although, judging from her stature and figure, she was probably some years older. There was, however, a strangely forlorn expression on her features that went to Isidore's heart as he looked at her. Perhaps she noticed the impression she had made upon him, for she again laid her hand upon his arm, saying, timidly, "The pale faces are very wise. Can the young warrior tell Amoahmeh where *they* are?"

This was much too mysterious for Isidore; in fact, it suggested to him at once all sorts of Indian wiles and stratagems. What if there was a whole tribe of red men in the next cover! Without more ado he called to Boulanger and Pritchard, who instantly came rushing out of the building rifle in hand.

"Hola! what have we here?" exclaimed Boulanger, looking round as if the Indian girl had suggested to him the same possibility of an Indian attack as had occurred to Isidore.

"Oh, 'tis only Amoahmeh," said Pritchard, quietly, as he recognised the cause of their alarm. "It is all right; she is the half-witted Indian girl—if she has any wits at all—of whom I was telling you. I fancy some of the red skins with whom her tribe were at war butchered all her family in bygone days, and she is always bothering one to tell her where *they* are—I suppose she means her kith and kin. I always tell her that it is of no use asking what has become of a lot of heathens like them."

"But," said Isidore, rather interested in the poor girl, "how was it she escaped when all her friends were killed?"

"Well," replied Pritchard; "perhaps she became crazy then, and was spared on that account. The red skins are queer folk, and never harm crazy people. For that matter, they might teach a lesson to some that call themselves Christians. They seem to think idiots something supernatural, and call them 'Great Medicine.'"

"Yes, that's true enough," said Boulanger; "I suppose the child has had wit enough to keep out of the way of those New Englanders, and has been hiding about in the woods during all this business. Well, if that is all, we may as well turn in again. Monsieur need have no fears," added he, addressing Isidore; "the best way is to take no notice of her. At all events, if she does skulk about, she is more likely to warn us of any danger than to bring it upon us." With these words the guide, followed by Pritchard, again entered the house, leaving Isidore alone with Amoahmeh.

During this little interlude the girl had eagerly watched each speaker in turn, apparently trying to follow what was said. It was but too evident, however, that all was a blank to her except an occasional word, at which her face would once and again lighten up with intelligence. Isidore

could not help being touched by her desolate condition, and when Pritchard and the guide had left them, he turned towards her to bestow on her a few kindly words, but Amoahmeh had timidly retreated to a little distance and had seated herself at the foot of a tree, apparently absorbed in conning over what had passed.

Let us be as tender-hearted and compassionate as we may, a pain in our little finger must still come home to us more than another's loss of a limb, at least, if there is no special link between us. Isidore's pity for the half-witted girl was presently lost sight of in what had first been only the inconvenience, but had latterly become the positive suffering inflicted on him by those unfortunate boots of his. Pride alone had restrained him from hinting at this to Boulanger during the latter part of the day's march; but he now began to have some misgivings as to whether he might not become wholly incapacitated from proceeding further unless he put his pride in his pocket and adopted the suggestions of his guide. Here was, however, a chance of temporary relief at least, as he was likely to be unmolested for a couple of hours, so he proceeded at once to divest himself of the said boots, a business that was not effected without much pain and exertion, and an unmistakable aggravation of the mischief. He was just debating with himself on the advisability of bathing his swollen ankles in a tempting stream that rippled along only a few yards off, when he was surprised to find Amoahmeh—who had been watching his proceedings with an interest of which he was wholly unconscious—kneeling before him, evidently intent on applying to the inflamed and aching joints a quantity of large green leaves which she had just gathered for the purpose.

There are probably few amongst us who have not, at one time or another, experienced that ineffably exquisite sensation caused by the sudden cessation of intense and wearing pain. For a minute or two Isidore could, only look down complacently on his ministering angel, giving forth more than one deep and long drawn sigh of relief; then naturally enough pity for her once more awoke within him, and he exclaimed, "Poor child! now this is very thoughtful of you. Really one must admit that there are some things in which even a mere savage has the advantage of us. Yes," he added thoughtfully, "I wish I could do something to lighten your troubles and hardships."

The girl looked up in his face. His words had fallen dead, but the tone in which they were spoken reached her heart.

"You can tell me where they are," she said softly, but very earnestly.

"Where they are," repeated Isidore. "Ah, well. Do you mean your father or your kindred?"

"Tsawanhonhi is in the happy hunting grounds—Amoahmeh knows that," answered the girl, quietly yet firmly. "Yes, and Wacontah is with him—I know that too. But—but the little ones, Tanondah and Tsarahes, my brothers—where are they? Oh! who will tell me where they are?"

Isidore was silent. "I suppose," thought he, "these must be the little ones that she has loved and lost; Pritchard said something of her friends having been all killed."

He looked at her sorrowfully, for the eager, inquiring face troubled him, he scarce knew why.

"The pale faces know what the Great Spirit says about all things. Will the young brave hide this from poor Amoahmeh?" said she with a yet more wistful look.

"Now what is this fellow Pritchard," said Isidore to himself, "or what am I, ay, or what is even Monseigneur the Archbishop for that matter, that we should take upon ourselves to say what a loving Father in His wisdom may choose to do with these red skins after they leave this world?"

"My good girl," he blurted out, after a short pause, "the Great Spirit has taken your little brothers, and keeps them safe enough in a place that He has made on purpose for them. The Great Spirit is a good Spirit, and you may be quite sure that He would not hurt your little brothers. You have found trouble and sorrow enough already in this world to enable you to believe that the poor little fellows may be all the better for being taken out of it."

"Ah, yes!" replied Amoahmeh, looking gratefully up in the young soldier's face, "I was sure the pale face knew where they were. But," she added earnestly, "can he tell me whether I shall see them again?"

"See them again!" rejoined Isidore, apparently somewhat puzzled for the moment. "Ah, well, I don't know why you should not. I think," he muttered, "I may go as far as that, though she is but a heathen. At all events it will be some comfort to the poor thing."

It did comfort her indeed. Perhaps she only understood it very partially, but the one absorbing uncertainty that had troubled her was cleared away. She took Isidore's hand and kissed it; no tears fell upon it—perhaps it would have been well with her could she have wept. Then she arose, and before he could call to her, she had disappeared.

With a pleasant sense of relief from bodily suffering, and with a mind not particularly pre-occupied by any anxiety, Isidore passed the remainder of his watch in recollections now of the courtly assemblages at Versailles, now of the voyage out to New France, now of the assault at Oswego, as the current of his ideas was swept hither and thither by some casual link of association, and he was only aroused from his meditations by the appearance of the guide, who

came to warn him that breakfast was ready within, and that they would have to start in a quarter of an hour so as to make good way during the cool of the morning.

As Boulanger said this his eyes lighted on the green bandages that still enveloped Isidore's ankles. The facts were of course soon told, and Boulanger was loud in his praises of the girl's thoughtfulness, though he did not disguise his fears that the resumption of the boots and a day's march in them would be a serious matter. At this juncture Amoahmeh once more made her appearance, bringing with her a pair of Indian moccasins, with leggings to match, on the manufacture of which out of materials found in one of the deserted dwellings she had been busily employed since her interview with the young soldier. Great was Boulanger's delight, while Isidore on donning the new made, and by no means unornamental moccasins, declared that nothing could be more comfortable, and that he felt able to accomplish any journey that the guide might think fit to lay out for the day. He would have expressed his thanks to the girl, and indeed he would have made her a handsome present, and bestowed on her a kind word at parting, but she was nowhere to be seen. The morning meal did not occupy much time, and after taking leave of Pritchard, Isidore and the guide set out on their day's march.



CHAPTER IV.



In quitting the clearings, Isidore and his guide once more plunged into the seemingly interminable forest, and had proceeded about half a league when Boulanger, whose eye appeared to be unceasingly on the look-out, cast a glance behind him and then came to a halt, saying, "Why, there is that girl again! What can she be up to?"

Isidore looked round, and there she was, sure enough. Amoahmeh, too, had stopped and remained standing about a hundred yards from them, but she showed no signs of wishing to avoid notice, and looked as if she only waited for them to go on in order to follow them.

"This will not do," exclaimed the guide; "she must have some object in tracking us like this. Hola! come here," he added, beckoning to her. Amoahmeh was at their side in a moment.

"What do you want? where are you going?" inquired Boulanger, sharply.

The girl looked timidly at him, then gazed for a minute in Isidore's face.

"The young brave knows where they are," said she; "I am going with him."

"With him! Nonsense," ejaculated the Canadian, "you can't go with him. Get you back, there's a good girl. Pritchard and the rest of them will be at the old place before nightfall, I daresay. You must go back to them."

The girl did not answer, neither did she manifest any disposition to do as Boulanger desired her.

"*Peste!*" said the latter. "One doesn't know how to deal with these idiots; it's of no use talking sensibly to them, and they are as obstinate as mules. Monsieur must try to make her go back. One cannot beat her, you know," he added half apologetically, as the thought of Amoahmeh's

resolutely refusing to relieve them of her company probably suggested some such extreme proceeding.

"Beat her!" exclaimed Isidore indignantly, "I should think not. My good girl, I cannot take you with me. You must go back to your friends."

She looked at him long and wistfully. At last she said, "You are my friend, you know where they are. I will go with you until we find them."

Boulanger struck the end of his rifle on the ground despair. Isidore was puzzled, but suddenly a thought struck him.

"If Amoahmeh goes with me," said he quietly, "I shall be discovered by the English, and if they find me they will shoot me."

She looked inquiringly at him as if she half understood the purport of his words.

"To be sure," interposed the guide. "Do you want him to be shot? If not, you must go back." There was a short pause; then Amoahmeh bowed her head, and crossing her hands over her bosom turned away and began to retrace her steps towards the settlement.

The young soldier made a gesture as though he would have recalled her, but Boulanger stopped him. "Let her alone, monsieur, for goodness sake. But for that lucky shot of yours we should never have got rid of her; and think, only think, monsieur, the further she had gone the more impossible it would have been for you to shake her off. Do you want her to stick to you all your life?"

Isidore admitted that the guide was right, and on they went. Yet his heart was full of pity for the poor child as he looked back and saw her stealing silently away through the wood, and he felt that he had been compelled to extinguish the ray of sunlight that had shone in upon the darkness of her soul.

The travellers halted before noon and rested for some hours. They then pursued their march until near sunset, when they came to the elevated ridges which divide the small rivers flowing northward into the St. Lawrence, from those which run southward towards the West Hudson and the Ohio. Boulanger's object was to reach a village situated amongst the numerous small lakes in this district, and obtain a canoe, by means of which he might greatly lighten the rest of their journey. The Indians were of a friendly tribe and knew him of old, so he had no fears about the reception they might give him.

"In ten minutes," said he, "we shall reach the largest lake about here, and at this season we can skirt along its banks instead of having to go over yonder hill—no light task after the close of such a march as we have had to-day." As he spoke, a form was seen bounding towards them with the swiftness of a young roe; both stopped amazed, as Amoahmeh sprang forward, and laying her hand on Boulanger's arm, pointed with the other towards the leaf-covered ground, and uttered the single word "Iroquois."

Isidore of course saw nothing, but the practised eye of the Canadian was not slow, now that his attention had been roused, to detect the trail of footsteps that had crossed their track. "The girl is right," said he, after a rapid but close inspection of them, "and take my word for it, it is the trail of our old friend of the button-tree. Yes, he has been tracking us all the way. Now, look at that! The child came upon it this morning, and has followed it; she has caught him up, and has come to warn us of——"

Here Amoahmeh placed her finger on her lips, and made a gesture of impatience.

"Right, child," said Boulanger. "To think now that a bit of a girl like this should have to teach me to keep my tongue from wagging too loud."

"But what are we to do?" asked Isidore, somewhat bewildered by all this.

"Do!" repeated the guide. "Well, we had better leave that to her. Questions would only puzzle her poor brain, whereas it is clear she has still got all the red skin's cunning, and won't let any harm befall you at any rate."

Probably Amoahmeh understood the expression of his face better than his words. At all events she took upon herself at once the office of guide, and beckoning to them to follow her turned off from the direction they had been taking and led them into the wood. In a few minutes they found themselves on the borders of a creek, scarcely a dozen yards from the point where it ran into a lake of great extent, and there, to their surprise, Amoahmeh pointed out two or three canoes which had evidently been purposely drawn up under some overhanging bushes, so as to escape the possibility of being observed either from the forest or the lake.

By this time a perfect understanding had been established between Boulanger and their new guide, and they seemed to need a few signs only to express their meaning. A good many whispers, however, were necessary in order to make Isidore crouch down in the middle of the largest canoe without upsetting the frail craft, but as soon as he had done so his companions

stepped lightly in, one at each end, and the next moment they were silently paddling out into the lake.

Again Boulanger made a sign; stealthily they paddled back, and the Canadian reached over into the other canoes in succession, and with a few strokes of his Indian knife ripped them up after a fashion that did away with all chance of pursuit from that quarter; this done, they once more regained the lake.

After pausing for a few seconds to listen, Boulanger and the girl, as if with one consent, drove the canoe close under the bushes that fringed the bank and here and there hung down and dipped their long branches in the water. Isidore's impatience and curiosity now became so great, and his sense of his own rather undignified position so galling, that he was just about to assert some kind of right to know what and whereabouts the danger might be, when he was stopped by the sound of voices upon the bank at no great distance from them. A few more strokes of the stealthy paddles and the voices were distinctly within hearing.

"And I say," exclaimed some one in English, "that I am not going to stay out here all night on such a wild-goose chase."

"Nor I," said another. "You, Master Kirby, may stop here with them that will; some of us have sorrow and trouble enough at our own doors that call us home instead of loitering here. Besides, who knows that the whole thing isn't a lie of this red scoundrel's after all?"

"You placed yourself under my orders, and I bid you stop here," replied a firm voice. "The Indian's story was clear enough as he told it at first, before you were such fools as to let him get dead drunk after his hard run. What more likely than that Oswego has been taken by that rascally Montcalm, or that he should send important despatches across country this way? I know this Indian fellow well: he is trustworthy enough when sober, and he says he not only saw the French officer and his guide start from Oswego after the disaster there, but left them not two hours ago on a path that must bring them either along here or take them over the hill, in which latter case they will fall into Tyler's hands."

As these various views and opinions were uttered the canoe was gliding along within a couple of feet of the bank, stealthily indeed and with diminished speed, lest the mere splash of the paddle should give the alarm. The bank was for the most part steep enough to afford complete concealment from any one at a short distance from the edge. It had just passed the spot, and was drawing away from the voices, when it suddenly stopped and swung round. But for a dexterous stroke of Boulanger's paddle it must have turned over, for it had come right across a long bramble that had become submerged.

"What was that?" exclaimed one of the New England men; "it sounded like a paddle."

"Sounded like a fiddlestick!" replied another; "you with your sharp ears are always hearing something that nobody else can, Master Dick."

"Well, I am not going to stop here any longer," said the first speaker. "We know that the Commandant of Fort Chambly has pushed forward detachments in this direction, and 'tis my belief that if we don't clear out, instead of shooting these Frenchmen and sending their despatches to the General at New York, we may get shot ourselves, or be taken and sent off to Montreal."

By this time Boulanger, feeling cautiously over the side, had come across the bramble that had stopped their course; his knife was through it in a moment and the canoe swung clear.

"Hush! I'll swear I heard a paddle this time, say what you like," cried the former speaker. "Run one of you to the creek and see that the canoes are all safe."

What else he may have said died away in the distance as the frail barque that carried Isidore and his companions stole swiftly away, and soon afterwards rounded a small headland and took to the open waters.

"All safe!" cried Boulanger. "Half an hour will bring us across to a point they could not reach on foot in three hours at least. We are out of rifle shot already, even if they should see us; so take it easy a little, my brave girl, whilst I look about and get my bearings all right."

Just for a moment the evening breeze wafted towards them a faint sound as of men shouting; then a shot was fired, but after that all became still. In half an hour they had crossed the lake, and on landing the guide ordered a halt and produced their supper.

"Our friends from Chambly are pretty certain to have reached St. Michel by this time if they are really moving in this direction," said Boulanger, as he shared the provisions among them. "We will rest a bit here and then push on; in any case there is, or used to be, an Indian settlement there, where we can take up our quarters for the night."

"Thank Heaven for that, on this poor child's account," replied Isidore. "From what you have told me I hope that her misfortunes will ensure her safety with any tribe of friendly Indians."

"Undoubtedly; but we will not talk of that now, nor think about it just yet, monsieur," whispered the guide, "or she will read it in our faces that we want to get rid of her, which may make the thing not quite so easy."

On starting again, to Isidore's great surprise, the guide quietly shouldered the canoe and marched off with it, though he subsequently allowed both Isidore and Amoahmeh to assist him in carrying it. A short hour's march brought them to another creek sufficiently large to float their skiff, and soon afterwards they came upon a second lake, which they traversed from end to end. Then, as they neared the shore, Isidore's ears were greeted by a well-known and most welcome sound—the challenge of a French sentinel. They had come upon the detachment sent out from Fort Chambly.

Great was the surprise of the French officer, who was in command of the little force, on seeing his friend Isidore at such a time and place and in such company. All this was of course quickly explained, and the young soldier and his guide were soon comfortably housed, but not until they had committed poor Amoahmeh, with many an expression of their gratitude for her kindly help, to the care of an Indian family, into whose wigwam she was received with all the awe that her infirmity was sure to command. It may well be believed that after such a day it was not long before all three were asleep and dreaming of old friends and old homes, either amid the grand and gloomy forests of the New World or the sunny slopes and smiling vineyards of the Old.



CHAPTER V.



At sunrise on the following morning Isidore and his guide started for Chambly. Happily, Amoahmeh was still asleep. Accustomed as she was to the woods, the great distance they had traversed on the preceding day, and perhaps the excitement she had undergone, had told on her slight frame, and nature had insisted on her claim to a longer rest than usual. What the poor child's feelings may have been when she awoke and found herself once more alone in the world who shall say? Possibly the unwonted exercise of some still active faculties the day before had dulled her sensibility, for outwardly, at least, she seemed to have forgotten all the past, and went about as though she had never known any other home, and as though the strange faces that she saw around her had looked upon her all her life. But the earnest yet plaintively uttered, "Where are they?" no longer fell from her lips. It had been answered, and amid the darkness that enveloped that young loving soul, it may well be that there was one glimmering ray of light that kept some smouldering embers of reason still alive.

Isidore's mission was completed without further adventure, and after delivering his despatches at Chambly, and reporting to the commandant the particulars he had noted on his way thither, in conformity with General Montcalm's directions, he was ordered to proceed to Quebec on another service. This journey, although of about the same length as the previous one, was a much more easy affair, and was performed by water. Boulanger, however, who was now on his way home, still acted as guide, and day by day won more and more upon Isidore by his readiness and intelligence, and probably—though the young marquis might have been unwilling to own it—by his honest frankness and his outspoken dislike of everything mean and underhand.

Even his remarks on passing events were listened to with a forbearance which they would hardly have met with from the Isidore de Beaujardin of a week ago.

In a few days Isidore and his guide reached Quebec, and there, notwithstanding the little occasional skirmishes that had taken place between them, they parted with regret, and with cordial expressions of good-will. The young soldier had had opportunity enough to see and appreciate the honest character of the Canadian, whilst the latter had been still more struck with the condescension as well as by the courage and endurance of the young noble, of whose high rank he was well aware, and whose almost necessarily courteous manner, even to his inferiors, formed a strong contrast to the overbearing and arbitrary behaviour of the Government officials with whom he generally had to deal.

Isidore's first proceeding was to report himself and deliver his despatches, on doing which he learned that although the intelligence of the capture of Oswego had arrived, no details had as yet been received, nor had his uncle, the Baron de Valricour, as yet reached Quebec. It was consequently not without hesitation that he made his way to the house of Madame de Rocheval, the lady with whom the daughter of Captain Lacroix was staying.

Isidore had never seen Marguerite Lacroix, but he took it for granted that it was she who, on his being shown into the drawing-room, rose from her embroidery frame to receive him.

"I am sorry, monsieur," said she, "that Madame de Rocheval is not at home. You have, doubtless, heard that news has been received of General Montcalm's having captured Oswego. Madame de Rocheval has a brother in one of the regiments about whom she is anxious, and my father, Captain Lacroix, who is quartered at Montreal, has not written either to me or to her for some time, so she has gone to the adjutant's office to——"

Here she paused; she would probably not have thought it necessary to offer all this explanation, but that her visitor seemed awkward and embarrassed, and she had continued speaking out of politeness. She stopped suddenly on perceiving, with a woman's quickness, that Isidore was evidently agitated or unwell.

"I beg your pardon, mademoiselle," said he, at last, but not without difficulty, "I have just come from Oswego."

"Indeed! Then you have passed through Montreal. Perhaps you have seen my father? He is very intimate with Monsieur de Valricour, who, I believe, is your uncle."

"Yes, yes, that is true, but—I had hoped that you might have already heard—that is, I did not suppose——" here Isidore stopped; and then, as he looked up and saw the half bewildered, half alarmed look that came over her face, he added, scarce audibly, "Now may God be merciful to you, my dear young lady, for the news that I bring will——"

"My father! my father!" was all that poor Marguerite could utter, as, with hands clasped together, she bent forward in an agony of suspense.

"He is at rest, my dear young lady," said Isidore, with as much calmness as he could command. "He fell in the moment of victory, as a brave soldier like him would wish to do."

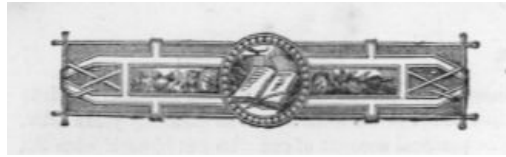
Marguerite uttered a cry that went to Isidore's heart. He stepped forward just in time, for, had he not caught her in his arms, she would have fallen to the ground insensible. At this moment they were joined by Madame de Rocheval, who had returned in haste, having heard in the town the news of Captain Lacroix's death; the fainting girl was carried to her room, and Isidore, after hurriedly explaining to Madame de Rocheval the circumstances that had brought him there, quitted the house, promising to call on the following day.

On the morrow letters arrived from the Baron de Valricour, who had come down from Oswego to Montreal, but was compelled to remain there. They contained the news of his friend's death, and also an assurance of his intention to fulfil the promise which he had given to Marguerite's father. It remained for Isidore, however, to give to the poor orphan girl that which in this direst of all trials we all so earnestly yearn after, the personal account of one who has himself seen the dear one laid to his last rest, and to present to her the little relic he had himself meant to keep in memory of his fellow-soldier—the blood-stained strip of a flag in which, by Isidore's directions, they had carried the hero to his grave.

After the lapse of another week Monsieur de Valricour was able to resume his journey and reach Quebec, when he took Marguerite under his guardianship, arranging that she should stay with Madame de Rocheval until such time as he might be able to take her to France. He brought with him Isidore's appointment as one of the aides-de-camp to General Montcalm, who, already prepossessed in his favour by his coolness and courage at Oswego, had been particularly pleased with the report he had subsequently made on the line of country between Oswego and Lake Champlain.

"How strange it is"—such was part of Isidore's musings as the next day he passed out of the old Porte St. Louis on his road to Montcalm's head-quarters up the country—"how strange it is that one should feel such regret at parting from people like Madame Rocheval and that poor girl, whom one never set eyes on till within a week or two! I daresay, too, that I shall never see them

again. It seems a pity to make friends, if only to part with them so soon, and perhaps forget them just as quickly, or at all events only to be forgotten by them."



CHAPTER VI.



Canadian winter, with the thermometer frequently standing at forty, and sometimes even fifty or sixty degrees below the freezing point of Fahrenheit, with its rivers completely blocked by ice and its fields covered by several feet of snow, puts a stop to most operations, whether mercantile or military. The winter of 1756 consequently afforded Isidore de Beaujardin, in his comfortable quarters at Montreal, complete leisure to reflect upon the incidents that had occurred during the last few months of his life, amongst which his short visit to Quebec occupied a prominent place in his reveries and meditations.

"A charming woman that Madame de Rocheval," so ran his thoughts at times, "though a little too much of a matchmaker I should say, from what I have heard of her latterly; but as my uncle says, she is not very likely to succeed so far as poor Marguerite Lacroix is concerned. Now-a-days men of any position won't marry a girl without a farthing, especially if she is not good-looking, though I certainly cannot agree with the baron or madame, who both seem to think her absolutely plain. Women, however, are never fair judges of female beauty, we all know that, though I rather wonder at my uncle's want of taste. Beautiful she certainly is not—in the sense in which I might have understood the word a twelvemonth ago; but a little wear and tear in the world makes us look below the surface. I could envy a fellow now who had such a girl for his sister; it makes a man selfish and frivolous if he has only himself to think of. I don't believe I should have been guilty of half the follies and extravagances which I am afraid I must own to if I had always had such a young loving thing at my side to lead me to better and gentler thoughts and ways. Well, I was not so favoured, so much the worse for me. By the way, I suppose that as my uncle has now entirely got over the effects of his wound, he will give up the notion of going back to France till next year. I am glad of it; for I don't think the baroness is likely to care much about having poor Marguerite Lacroix on her hands, though it will be the very thing for Clotilde, who must be moped to death in that dismal old chateau, without any one of her own age to associate with and no amusement of any kind, for they are as poor as church mice, and must find it hard enough to keep up even the small appearance they do make. I wonder when I shall go back to old France again! I thought when I left it that six months would be quite enough of this; but I really do not think it so bad after all, and now that I have got this staff appointment, why, I suppose I must make up my mind to stay, at all events for next year's campaign."

So Isidore resigned himself to his fate; nay, when it came to his turn to have the option of carrying despatches to the king in person, he actually gave up the privilege in favour of a brother officer, who had not got over his old longing to spend New Year's Day in Paris. It is not for us to say how far Colonel de Beaujardin may have been influenced by the private knowledge that General Montcalm's head-quarters were to be transferred for a time to Quebec. Such, however, was the case, and Isidore spent his New Year's Day under the hospitable roof of Madame de Rocheval.

The first two or three days that Isidore passed at Quebec were singularly happy ones. Some months had now elapsed since the death of Captain Lacroix, and Marguerite had regained much of her natural cheerfulness, which seemed all the more bright and winning for the shade of melancholy that occasionally came over her at the thought of her lonely and dependent position in the world. Isidore had few acquaintances there, and did not care to add to their number; at first his visits at the house of Madame de Rocheval were as frequent as he could decorously make them. As it happened, Marguerite was more than an ordinary proficient on the harpsichord, whilst the young marquis, who had a singularly fine voice, and had had the advantage of the best masters that Paris could boast of, sang with a taste and feeling seldom met with; and this afforded a fair excuse for prolonging his visits beyond the ordinary limits. It is like enough that, notwithstanding the vast and absolutely impassable distance which their respective positions

would have placed between them in Old France, the most noble and wealthy young Marquis de Beaujardin would have offered his hand to the penniless orphan of a man who could not write the "de" of gentle birth before his name: one untoward circumstance alone, perhaps, prevented this; Madame de Rocheval, who was very fond of Marguerite, could not help feeling what a masterly stroke it would be on her part if she could but catch for her a husband of such rank and fortune, so she at once began to do all she could to bring about the hoped-for result. Unfortunately for all parties, madame's zeal outran her usual discretion, and no sooner did poor Marguerite perceive, or think that she perceived, the covert designs of her friend than her sensitive delicacy recoiled from doing anything that might seem like aiding or abetting such a scheme. She constrained herself to assume a cold and formal manner, so unnatural to her that Isidore, as men are apt enough to do, grew vexed and annoyed at a treatment which he knew was undeserved, and soon began to think there was more affectation about Mademoiselle Lacroix than he had at first imagined. Then he, too, suddenly discovered from some little circumstance or other that he was the object of a studied scheme to make a catch of him, and this naturally irritated him still more. His pride revolted at the thought that he who had been admired and courted by the highest and the noblest even at the Pompadour's own magnificent fêtes and receptions should be entrapped by a mere matchmaker at an out-of-the-way little place like this. So he put on a rather grand and haughty air the next time he called, for which Marguerite not only thought him very silly, but even told him so. That afternoon he took his leave, alleging that he had to return to Montreal early the next morning. Yet when he had quitted the house his heart smote him, and when he passed Madame de Rocheval's the next day he stopped his cariole and went in just to ask if Marguerite had any message for her guardian, the Baron de Valricour, at Montreal. She was alone, and the fact that she had been in tears was so unmistakably apparent that Isidore was led to express a hope that no misfortune had occurred to distress her.

"I was mourning over the loss of a friend," said she; "I have so few in the world that I can scarce afford to lose one, and least of all such an one as Monsieur de Beaujardin has been to me."

Isidore felt that he had been guilty of a very mean but common fault in visiting on Marguerite the ill-humour he had felt at something, in which not she but some one else was to blame.

"Forgive me," said he, at once; "I am, indeed, ashamed to think that I behaved like a fool, or even worse, in giving just cause of offence to one who has every claim to very different treatment at my hands. I was an idiot—I was not myself, or—"

"Yes, yes, let it be so," exclaimed Marguerite, smiling through her tears and extending her hand to him. "Let it be so; you were indeed not your own self, so I will forget the stranger of yesterday, and only remember the courteous Colonel Beaujardin to whom I owe so much."

The entrance of Madame de Rocheval here brought this brief colloquy to an end, and Isidore once more bade adieu and took his departure. Perhaps he would have altered his arrangements and remained still longer at Quebec; but this he could not well do with any show of self-respect, and he was soon on his road to Montreal. It is, however, most certainly the fact that he gave up the intention, which he had formed on the previous evening, of throwing up his commission and returning to France, and he now once more made up his mind to stay in Canada, and see out the campaign of 1757.

The opening of the new year found the British Government resolved to prosecute the war in Canada with unprecedented vigour. An attack on Louisburg was to be the great feature of the campaign. Upwards of twenty thousand regular troops from England co-operating with immense levies raised in America, and large bodies of allied Indians, constituted the force to be arrayed against France in the New World, whilst a splendid fleet, counting no less than twenty ships of the line, under the command of Admiral Holborne, was to carry on the operations by sea. They made a bad beginning, however, for nearly half the year had slipped away before the fleet put to sea, and the end was a complete and disastrous failure. Owing to the incapacity of the commander-in-chief the time was simply wasted in marchings and counter-marchings, and continually embarking, disembarking, and re-embarking the troops. At sea a terrible hurricane scattered the ships, of which many were wrecked and lost, while the rest, more or less shattered, made their way back to England as they best could.

The one success of the year was gained by the French, and it was unfortunately attended by horrors that will never be forgotten. The capture of Fort William Henry, and the massacre which followed it, is an oft-told tale, to which allusion needs only to be made here so far as it bears on the fortunes of our young French soldier. Abandoned at the most critical juncture by Colonel Webb, the brave but unfortunate Munro was compelled to surrender the place to Montcalm, with the stipulation that the garrison, numbering about two thousand men, should be allowed to march out unmolested. Whilst they were doing so, however, the Indian allies of the French fell upon them with all the relentless fury of their savage race. A panic seized upon the wretched victims, and then ensued a scene of slaughter such as defies description. In vain did Montcalm interpose; the respect and even love with which the Indians had come to regard him availed nothing. At the imminent risk of his own life he rushed in and strove to stay the carnage, but to no purpose; those of the ill-fated garrison of Fort William Henry who escaped from the knives and tomahawks of their vengeful foes, found their way to Fort Edward, or some other place of safety.

In this matter the conduct of Montcalm and his officers is wholly free from blame. Many of the latter, like their chief, exposed their lives in their endeavour to save those whom they were

bound to protect as far as in them lay. Amongst the foremost of these was Isidore de Beaujardin, and at one moment his life was in the greatest peril. An English soldier who had been thrown down in the rush was just about to rise, when a gigantic Indian, yelling out the dreaded war-whoop, darted towards him. Isidore sprang between them. With a sweep of his tomahawk the maddened savage sent de Beaujardin's small sword flying into the air. The weapon of the Indian was already uplifted for the deadly stroke when a strange fantastically-dressed figure passed, noiselessly but swiftly, between the two combatants, and then the red skin fell back, the fierce expression of his face changing to one of awe, if not of terror. Then came another rush, in which Isidore received a slight wound, and then by degrees the French regulars succeeded in forcing back the Indians, but, unhappily, not until their purpose had been but too thoroughly effected.

Isidore's wound did not prove serious, and in the course of a fortnight he had nearly recovered from its effects, but he had mentioned it in a letter to his father, and the consequence was an urgent injunction, almost amounting to an order, that he should at once return home. This did not reach him, however, until near the end of October, and it is by no means improbable that he would have made his recovery an excuse for disregarding his father's wishes but for other circumstances. It had become necessary for Madame de Rocheval to visit the old country, and Monsieur de Valricour had resolved to avail himself of that opportunity to send Marguerite to France, in order that she might take up her abode under his roof and find there the home which he had promised to her dying father to provide for her. This may or may not have influenced young Beaujardin; at all events he wrote to his father a letter intimating a dutiful compliance with the order for his return, and after resigning his appointment as aide-de-camp he made his arrangements for his departure. Finding no immediate opportunity of going down from Montreal to Quebec by the St. Lawrence, he resolved to travel on horseback, and, after selecting a steady servant to accompany him, he bade adieu to his old quarters and set out for Quebec.

Of all the glories of nature on this earth there is perhaps not one so gorgeous as that expanse of wooded plain and slope and mountain, clad in the magnificently varied tints of the Canadian fall of the year, which met the eyes of Isidore when, towards the end of his journey, he reined up his horse upon an elevated spot on the banks of the St. Lawrence, a few miles above Quebec. Some three hundred feet below, the broad and noble river glided along between precipitous heights, the red-brown tint of which, interspersed with masses of clustering shrubs, glowed in the yet warm autumn sun, whilst beyond it to the south, and away for miles to the north, were spread out great undulating tracts, bounded by picturesque ranges of lofty mountains, whose waving lines no pen or pencil can adequately describe. The maple, the sumach, and many other forest trees, all changing their hues in the warm dry atmosphere peculiar to the climate, presented everywhere a combination of bright colour beyond the most fantastic flight of imagination, in which every tint, from pale sea-green to dusky olive, from palest primrose through orange and scarlet to deepest crimson, were blended together with a harmony which the hand of nature can alone produce. The utter stillness that reigned around, and the marvellous distinctness with which the most distant objects stood out through the transparent atmosphere, gave a strange and dream-like character to the scene that insensibly led him who looked upon it into that mysterious phase of mind in which we seem to be living over again some moments of a former life. Even the voice of yonder sturdy woodsman, who has just appeared above the brow of the hill, seems to set in vibration the slumbering chord of some memory of things past; yes, and he is vehemently declaiming to the comely matron who trudges beside him about the rascality of that fellow Cadet, the most rapacious of the greedy underlings of Monsieur the Intendant! Truly it is no other than our friend Jean Baptiste Boulanger, who is just hot from a visit to Quebec on some business pertaining to his craft, and whose fond and faithful Bibi has come to meet him by the way.

Isidore and his *quondam* guide were both glad to meet again. Cadet and his doings were instantly and utterly forgotten, and de Beaujardin could not help being pleased to find that the Canadian had taken so much interest in him that he already knew from the inquiries he had made all about the young soldier's movements, his wound, and other incidents of the past year. His request that Isidore would honour his humble dwelling with a visit was so pressing that the latter consented to do so, and, sending his servant forward to prepare for his arrival somewhat later at Quebec, he accompanied Boulanger and his wife to their cottage, which stood at some little distance from the road. Great was Bibi's anxiety to do honour to their noble guest, and not less great her delight at the commendations he bestowed, not only on the order and tidiness of her little *ménage*, but also on her three chubby little children, who, notwithstanding divers and sundry private injunctions to the contrary, would occasionally come to the front and gaze open-mouthed and awestruck at so uncommon a visitor. At length Isidore rose to pursue his journey; Boulanger would fain have accompanied him, but this he would not permit, and, after taking the Canadian's directions for regaining the road by a bridle path through the wood in which the cottage was situated, he bade adieu to the honest couple and galloped away.

The ground was more broken than he had expected, and he was soon obliged to rein up his horse. As he did so he thought he heard a rustling in the underwood at no great distance, but it was not until the same thing had occurred two or three times that the thought crossed his mind that some one might be following him. Yet, after all, it might be nothing more than a stray lynx or some such animal, though it seemed strange that it should move when he moved and stop when he stopped. At length he gained the road, and would probably have forgotten the incident altogether had he not accidentally cast a look behind him, when he saw a dark figure amongst the trees just at the point where he had quitted the wood. It disappeared, however, almost

instantly, leaving Isidore in some doubt whether it might not have been Boulanger, who, notwithstanding his expressed wish, might possibly have desired to see him safely on the road. At all events he saw no more of it, and riding on soon found himself once more within the great Canadian fortress.

In the evening he paid a visit to Madame de Rocheval, when he learned that that lady intended to embark for France in about a fortnight, taking Marguerite with her, and there was some talk of the possibility of his going by the same vessel. He did not remain long, however, but promised to call again the next day. On the following afternoon he paid his friends a more lengthened visit, and, at his request, Marguerite presently sat down to the harpsichord, as she had been used to do of old, to play to him some music she had recently received from France, and amongst these were some canzonets and other vocal pieces which she begged Isidore to sing.

Those who should best understand these matters say that the tenor is the most common voice with men. It may be so, but certainly the rarest of all voices met with in perfection is the tenor of that marvellous enchanting quality that thrills the very soul of the listener with its heavenly vibrations. Such a voice was that of Isidore de Beaujardin, and the instruction he had received from the best masters at Paris enabled him to use it with uncommon taste and skill. He was just concluding an air of Stradella's, in which the melody and instrumentation alike were perfect, and in which a simple yet stately grandeur alternated with the most touching plaintiveness, when he became aware that some one near to him was sobbing violently. It was not Marguerite, that was certain, though a tear did just then drop on the hand that touched the harpsichord so charmingly. He turned in some surprise, and there kneeling beside him, with her face buried in her hands, he beheld a young girl whom, although her features were concealed from him, he recognised at once; it was Amoahmeh. Even as Isidore ceased, the girl's emotion utterly overpowered her, and she burst into an uncontrollable flood of tears. Marguerite rose hastily, while at the same moment Madame de Rocheval entered the room, and with the assistance of a domestic they carried Amoahmeh to an adjoining apartment, where, as Isidore could plainly hear, the strange and distressing paroxysm continued unabated notwithstanding every effort to soothe and calm the troubled spirit.

Presently Marguerite returned. "It is a most singular thing," said she. "This poor Indian girl was found in an exhausted and fainting state on the steps of our house last evening some time after you had left. Madame de Rocheval had her brought in and attended to, but when she revived and had somewhat recovered we found that she had evidently lost her reason. 'Some one,' she said, 'had told her where they were, but that she had forgotten, and had come to pray of him to tell her once again.' We could not understand what she meant. Madame de Rocheval sent for the doctor to consult him as to what could be done for her, but we suddenly missed her, and saw no more of her until she reappeared just now in this strange way."

"Poor child!" exclaimed Isidore, greatly moved. "She is no stranger to me; indeed, once at least, if not twice, I have owed my life to her. But it is a long story, and I must not keep you from a holy duty. To-morrow you shall hear all. In the meantime I know it is not needful for me to commend this unfortunate and afflicted one to your compassionate care."

On reaching his apartments, Isidore found that a courier had just arrived from Montreal with despatches, accompanied by the most urgent orders that he should carry them to Paris without delay. A ship appointed to sail from Quebec on the following morning was even indicated to him as the one in which he was to take his passage without fail. This was particularly annoying under all circumstances, and at first Isidore was inclined to demur, or even to refuse compliance; but on a little reflection he saw that for many reasons this was not to be thought of, and he accordingly decided to carry out his orders. On the following morning he was an early visitor at Madame de Rocheval's, and his first inquiry was after poor Amoahmeh. To his amazement he learnt that the doctor who had been sent for on the preceding day had succeeded, though with much difficulty and after a long time, in allaying the girl's excitement, and that she had then dropped into a deep sleep, apparently from sheer exhaustion. She had awoke that morning calm and quiet, and the doctor, who was with her at the time, had gradually, and to his extreme astonishment, discovered that her reason, which had in fact given way two or three years previously amid the horrors of an Indian raid, had partially if not entirely returned. The strangeness of all around her and her inability to recollect any recent events had, however, plainly begun to distress her, and the doctor, fearing a relapse, had given the strictest injunctions that only one person, namely, Madame de Rocheval, should on any account be permitted to see her. With this and other precautions he was not without hope that her recovery might be ultimately insured, and he attributed it entirely to the strong emotion and subsequent revulsion of feeling caused by the power and pathos with which the young soldier had given the soul-stirring and touching melody of the great master.

It was a source of the liveliest satisfaction to young de Beaujardin to be able to look forward to Amoahmeh's complete restoration to reason, and he could only regret that he could not be allowed to see her and express his good wishes. His last hours at Quebec, however, were devoted to making arrangements with Boulanger to receive her under his roof as soon as she should be well enough to be removed, which the doctor hoped would be the case before Madame de Rocheval's departure. Finally Isidore took leave of his friends, and with the warmly expressed wish that he and Marguerite might soon meet again in Old France—a wish which she echoed with her heart, if not with her lips—he bade adieu once more to Quebec.



PART II.

THE LETTRE DE CACHET.



THE LETTRE DE CACHET.

CHAPTER I.



he pleasant spring-time had returned once more. Far away in New France the snows that had mantled the ground for months were disappearing fast. In Old France the flowers already decked the meadows and grassy banks, the blossoms had opened, and the song-birds had begun to break the dreary silence that had reigned in the hedgerows and the woods, for in those days Old France could let the little warblers sing without at once devoting them to eke out the rustic meal. Perhaps in all the west of France there was no tract of country in which this season was more peculiarly attractive, or could present a more charming landscape, than that overlooked from the terrace of the old Chateau de Valricour. It was, however, of the class not appreciated by those who hold that there is no real beauty, properly so called, except in rugged, wild, and romantic scenery. Here were no deep ravines, no dark glens, no bold scarped rocky heights or frightful precipices. Salvator Rosa would have turned away, whilst Claude would have desired to linger long to catch some new effect of bright light gradually softening away in clear yet mellowed distance. There was no eminence that could be dignified by the name of a mountain, yet there were hills in one part of the horizon, and slight undulations in the middle ground sufficient to prevent any idea of monotony. The fields were green, the trees sufficiently abundant, and a not inconsiderable stream winding about, and sometimes losing itself for a while behind a rising ground topped by a quaint old windmill, gave to the scene variety and life. Homesteads and cottages of all sorts and sizes dotted the landscape. One or two edifices there were, moreover, of more pretentious dimensions, evidently the residences of the wealthier seigneurs, whilst in the extreme distance, flanked by large patches of woodland, the eye rested on a magnificent chateau covering many and many a rood, the princely abode of the most noble and most respected Marquis de Beaujardin.

There was one circumstance, however, connected with this landscape which, although common to all parts of France in those days, played a more than usually important part in this particular district, and yet it was one which a mere stranger looking down from the terrace would never have suspected. Few of the tenements could claim to be anything better than mere farm-houses. Yet every second building you came upon was a chateau—yes, a veritable chateau, the actual abode of some seigneur of the old noblesse of France, whose name might be like enough to call up the memory of some illustrious deed done in the old chivalric days of France. The country literally swarmed with chateaux and with nobles. Do you see yon rickety, tumble-down building, scarce big enough for a good-sized family? That is the chateau of Monsieur le Comte de Joliment, not one of your new nobles, who have become such in virtue of some one or other of the

thousands of royal patent places that conferred nobility on their upstart holders as a right. No; these latter gentry have fine salaries or pensions attached to their appointments; they are comfortable enough as to means, and profess not to care about pedigree or descent, though the old nobles hold themselves aloof and look down upon them as *parvenus*. The Count de Joliment would probably prefer starving to giving up even for a fat pension his rights over the miserable remnants of the old family estates that he can still call his own. Did not one of his ancestors fight by the side of Charles Martel himself at the battle of Tours? You may almost read something of the kind in the aristocratic bearing of the old noble, though the most liberal old-clothes-man would scarcely like to give twenty francs for the whole of the count's wardrobe, including those clod-hopping boots, but excluding, of course, the somewhat antiquated rapier which his rank gives him the privilege of wearing. "How does he manage to live?" you ask. Well, it is not so easy to say, as incumbrances in many quarters swallow up every sou of the slender rental. But then the count being a noble, is free from all the heavy taxes that crush his poor and wretched tenants; his tailor's bills are nominal, and as he exacts to the last ounce the seigneurial rights payable in kind, and enjoys besides the lordly privilege of keeping pigeons and rabbits, he manages to hold body and soul together. He does not trouble himself about the muttered curses of the commoners against him and his class, or dream of their taking shape some day in the hideous cry of "Down with the aristocrats! A la lanterne!"

The same picture, with a slight alteration here and there, will do equally well for some of the count's neighbours, such as the Marquis de Marcy, the Sieur de Vallancelles, and even the noble Duke de Hautbois, who is perhaps the most hopelessly impoverished of those who may cross your path in the course of the day's walk that separates the Chateau de Valricour from that of Beaujardin. Yes, but then Madame la Duchesse can claim the privilege of sitting on a tabouret in the royal presence, that is to say she could if there were such a personage, but the Duke is not married, wisely considering, perhaps, that a dozen young dukes (for all his progeny would have a right to the title) might make the whole thing look ridiculous, so when he dies there will happily be one poor noble the less instead of a dozen more for the despised Third Estate of the realm to hate and scowl upon.

It must by no means be supposed, however, that there is no other side to this strange picture. There are hosts of noble families whose means enable them to maintain a proper state, and to keep up the dignity of their ancient houses; and this, be it remembered, is in truth their only calling, for as a class or body the nobles had no influence or power in the Government of the kingdom. Nay, there is yet another set, so splendidly, so magnificently wealthy that the mind, accustomed to the more measured and sober scale even of the most princely establishments of modern days, can scarcely picture to itself the boundless extravagance which marked those of the age of Louis the Fifteenth and his successor, until the Revolution swept them away. Some great nobles there were whose landed revenues were sufficient to enable them to live in almost royal state. Then there were some who, having no landed property to squander, flocked to Paris or Versailles, and sought and found favour at the profligate court of "His Most Christian Majesty" (as the kings of France were styled), no matter by what base and scandalous means. These were lavishly rewarded, and obtained large incomes from the enormous grants and pensions given to them as court favourites and personal attendants on the king, not merely by thousands but even by millions of francs. These profligates cared not what they spent so long as they could outdo this or that rival in extravagance, by having fifty more guest chambers in their chateaux, or fifty more horses in their stables. If a day of reckoning did thrust itself upon them it was but a question of asking for another pension in addition to those they already held, or of obtaining at a nominal price a grant of crown domains, to be sold again for hundreds of thousands of francs. Truly there was but one thing that could match the flaunting wastefulness of the reigning favourites at court, and that was the hard condition, the intolerable poverty, of the despised commonalty.

Nevertheless, whilst the greater part of the old nobility of France came unmistakably under one or other of these extreme descriptions, there were to be found, in the country districts, some who were free alike from such boundless extravagance and such abject poverty. Of this small and exceptional class the Marquis de Beaujardin was a striking example. His naturally calm and unexcitable temperament had been still further disciplined by early habits of self-command, first as a scholar and subsequently as a soldier. Slow to apprehend the bearings of questions, he seldom failed, if he had time for consideration and reflection, to arrive at a right conclusion, and then he could be not only just but generous. Thus he had long since arrived at a fair judgment of the state of things in France, and keeping aloof from the court and its intrigues, added as little as might be to the terrible burdens which the laws of the land and the existing state of society inevitably laid upon the poorer classes around him. Had he followed his own inclination, he would from choice have kept as small an establishment at Beaujardin as Madame de Valricour did from necessity, but the marchioness was far too frivolous and fond of the world to give up what she could fairly claim as suitable to their exalted position. This was not unreasonable, and to this, within limits, the marquis did not demur; so the establishment at Beaujardin was kept up in a style fairly befitting their rank, but without needless ostentation.

Perhaps the marchioness, with her childish silliness of character, might not have found it so easy to prevail over her husband's firmness and good sense in such a matter, had she not been supported and counselled by the Baroness de Valricour, of whom, to own the truth, the marquis always stood in awe. Nobody knew this better than the clever and strong-minded lady herself; for the last twenty years, indeed, she had decided most questions that arose at the Chateau de Beaujardin, although the marquis not unfrequently regretted this when it was too late for him to

recede from an over hasty concurrence. Now, however, the great aim of the baroness' life might be accomplished. Those were days when the inclinations of the persons really most interested were held of small account in family alliances, and if Madame de Valricour could only obtain a complete ascendancy over her weak sister-in-law, the success of her plan was certain. That ascendancy she had at last achieved, and the game seemed to be in her hands.

The return of Isidore to France had of course been the great event of the autumn, and the chateau had been even more than usually thronged with visitors during the six months that succeeded his arrival. Madame de Valricour had managed matters with her accustomed dexterity, and although she had not yet brought Isidore to the point of formally avowing himself as a suitor for the hand of Clotilde, she was satisfied that all was going right, and was too wary to spoil all by precipitancy. The baroness fancied she knew Isidore better even than he knew himself, and secretly rejoiced to find his visits to Valricour become more and more frequent, and his walks in the forest with Clotilde, accompanied by Marguerite for propriety's sake, more and more prolonged. At last she thought the pear was ripe, and she took a decided step in order to bring the affair to an issue. Let us see what came of it.



CHAPTER II.



hether or not there was in that part of France a more charming view than that from the terrace of the Chateau de Valricour, there certainly was not in all France on that bright May morning a more happy pair than the two young people who sat side by side, each clasping the other's hand, in one of the pleasant trellised arbours which from either end of the terrace overlooked the pleasant scene. And yet, perhaps, those who think the beautiful in nature inconsistent with strongly marked and striking features, might consider that true happiness and prosperity, so called, could not co-exist with such intense excitement and such bewildering surprise as just then rendered Isidore and Marguerite for some minutes incapable of expressing what they felt.

"I can scarcely believe it possible. O Isidore! are you quite sure that there is no strange mistake in it all?"

"Nay, read for yourself, my darling one," he replied, once more unfolding the letter which he held in his hand, and quietly withdrawing the other to point to the words that had brought out the passionate declaration he had but just made to her.

"See here! After a few lines about my uncle Valricour, this is what my father says. You do not know him as well as I do, but you see he is not one to allow any silly notions about fortune or noble descent to stand in the way of what he believes to be right."

Marguerite took the letter, and though still trembling with excitement, managed to read as follows:

"And now, my dear son, I must allude to a very different matter. Madame de Valricour writes to me that you have lost your heart, and that although for reasons, which, she says, she quite understands, you have not made it known, she thinks it time that I should intervene. I think so too; and I do so the more willingly as I doubt not that your reticence and hesitation in this matter has arisen from a natural feeling that I might be opposed to your union with one who is not your equal in point of rank, and who will not, I fancy, bring you a sou in the way of marriage portion. Well, I will ease your mind at once. To you, and therefore to me, money can be no object. As an old soldier myself I might well be content to receive as my daughter-in-law even one who could boast of no higher title than that of a brave soldier's daughter; in any case, your wife will be the Marquise de Beaujardin, so, assuming that Madame de Valricour is correct in her supposition, I see no reason why I should go out of my way to thwart a son who has ever deserved my affection, and has proved himself likewise to be worthy of the name of a good soldier."

The letter dropped from her hands. "Isidore, Isidore! what have you done?" said she in a tone

that had in it no trace of the delight he had anticipated. "O Isidore! your fond heart has blinded you. What shall I do? Isidore, you have brought ruin on your dear self, and all for me!"

Astonished and disconcerted at this unexpected outburst, Isidore would have endeavoured to calm her, but as he took her hand in his she uttered a slight cry, and on looking round he beheld Madame de Valricour standing only a few paces from them, regarding them apparently with speechless amazement.

However much the young marquis might have lost his self-possession when he and Marguerite were the only actors in the scene, the appearance of Madame de Valricour at once brought back his usual command over himself, although he certainly was somewhat puzzled at the blank expression of her face at that moment.

"I would apologise to you, my dear aunt," said he, "for allowing myself to be caught at such a very sentimental crisis, but that I know that it is to you and no one else that I owe my happiness at this moment, and——"

He stopped short, for the blank look had suddenly changed into one so fiercely angry that anything further in the way of complimentary speeches was not to be thought of, and a dead pause ensued.

"Leave us, Mademoiselle Lacroix!" cried Madame de Valricour vehemently. Marguerite hesitated, her reluctance to leave Isidore alone in so painful a dilemma, overcoming even her habitual deference to Madame de Valricour; but Isidore, who felt that he should be more free to speak or act if unembarrassed by her presence, quietly led her away from the spot. Then, after raising her hand to his lips, he returned to the baroness and addressed her thus—

"I am utterly at a loss to understand you, my aunt—you, to whom I was about to offer my warmest thanks for so kindly smoothing the way to my union with Mademoiselle Lacroix."

"I!" exclaimed the baroness, apparently forgetting her indignation for a moment in her amazement. "I! Who says this? It is false! There is some ridiculous mistake here—or rather some shameful trick. You have not dared, sir, to make the girl believe that——"

"Calm yourself, my good aunt," replied Isidore, interrupting her. "As for trick or deception, I shall not insult either you or myself by further noticing words spoken in a hasty moment. As for any mistake, you or my father must answer for that, if there is any. He tells me you have written to him on the subject, and he has expressed his approval of my choice."

"It is false, absolutely false!" exclaimed the baroness, passionately. "When—where has the marquis told you this? Show me the letter. It is a cheat which you would put both upon me and this girl. Show me the letter, I say!"

"If Madame de Valricour doubts my word," answered Isidore haughtily, "she will have to satisfy herself elsewhere. I am not in the habit of substantiating my assertions."

"I say again it is false," reiterated the incensed baroness, forgetting her usual caution. "I wrote to your father about you and Clotilde. Do you dare to tell me that he has bidden you to marry some one else? If you are not a base and unworthy trickster, then you must be the veriest idiot alive."

A single lens may not, perhaps, suffice to make an object visible, but place another in juxtaposition with it and suddenly all becomes clear and distinct. Isidore recalled the piteous words uttered by Marguerite as she dropped the letter, and the truth flashed across his mind at once.

Madame de Valricour had thrown herself into a chair as she concluded her tirade, for the collected way in which her nephew had at first listened to her, and his high and mighty air, seemed to belie any charge of duplicity at all events. But when she noticed the alarmed expression of his face, and the no less unmistakable change in his manner, she was on her feet again in a moment and was about to renew the attack, but he interrupted her.

"Pardon me, my aunt," said he, "it is worse than useless for us two to discuss this business. I am afraid I have made a mistake indeed, and one that is like enough to cause no little bitterness and trouble. Yet I do not regret it for one moment," he added, as he thought of the few loving words with which Marguerite had confessed her long-cherished affection for him. "Whatever you may think, my aunt, I have acted honestly and in good faith, and it will rest with my father to decide how all this is to end. I shall appeal to him at once. Nay, I beseech you, my good aunt," he continued, seeing the baroness about to break forth again, "let us not make things worse by useless altercation. With your permission I will relieve you of my presence, and will desire Jasmin to order our horses that I may return at once to Beaujardin."

Without giving Madame de Valricour time for any further comment, Isidore then bowed to her and withdrew.



CHAPTER III.



Isidore had scarcely quitted the terrace before he was accosted by Clotilde's maid, who begged him to come to her young mistress without delay, and he soon reached his fair cousin's boudoir. He found her trying to cheer up poor Marguerite, but not very successfully, it must be owned, for Clotilde's spirits were always of the highest, and her thoughtless raillery increased rather than allayed her friend's distress.

"Mercy on us!" she exclaimed as Isidore made his appearance. "If any one ever deserved the name of 'the knight of the rueful countenance' it is certainly my doughty cousin. Well, if men put on that dismal face when their lady-loves accept them, I shall certainly always say 'no' for their sakes, if not for my own."

"Nay, but, my dear, sweet cousin," said Isidore, "I entreat you to be serious for half an hour, or even for a few minutes, if you can. Has not Marguerite told you?"

"She has told me that you have fallen in love with her, and I suppose that mamma does not like it. I have not got further than that as yet, and I do not think that is anything so very, very awful."

"Not if that were really all, my dear cousin; but the baroness, it seems, had taken it into her head that I was in love with you. It is too absurd. Can you imagine anything so ridiculous?"

"I am infinitely obliged to you for your politeness, Monsieur de Beaujardin, in supposing it to be so very ridiculous that any one should fall in love with *me*. Why, there is my devoted cousin, the Duke de St. Menehould, who would make me his duchess any day, if I had but a million of livres for my dowry, to say nothing of the Sieur de Crillon, who declares he is dying for me, and would have married me long ago, if mamma had not made up her mind that I should have my most uncivil cousin de Beaujardin. Dear me, only think, though, how dreadful it would have been if mamma had fancied I was in love with you!"

"Do, pray, be serious," replied Isidore. "Can you not see, Clotilde, that your mother is not one to be thwarted with impunity in any scheme she has formed. This affair may, if I cannot conciliate my father, prove fatal to my whole life's happiness, and, what is infinitely worse, to dear Marguerite's also."

"Isidore! Isidore!" exclaimed the latter, passionately, "do not think of me; I am only distressed and unhappy for your sake. If I can only save you from harm, I will do anything. O Isidore! I will give up everything, even your dear self, though I shall never cease to love you."

There was a pause as Isidore put his arm around her, as if to reassure her of his steadfastness, and gently kissed her forehead. Even Clotilde was subdued.

"I am afraid that you are right, and that it is a serious business after all," said she. "Mamma is ever either a good friend or a bitter enemy; but all must depend on my uncle, so do not lose a moment, my good cousin, but be off to Beaujardin at once. In the meanwhile I will do what I can to soothe mamma and comfort Marguerite. Yes, sir, although it is so very absurd to think of any

one falling in love with me, I won't bear malice, but behave like a generous heroine to my odious rival here. There, off with you, and let us hear all about it as soon as you can."

The advice was obviously too sensible to be disregarded, and Isidore at once proceeded to summon his valet, Monsieur Jasmin, for the purpose of ordering the horses and packing up for the journey. In the corridor he came upon the very person he sought, and, perhaps somewhat curtly, gave him the needful directions.

News travels apace in such households, where there is often enough some scheming underling, who makes it his business to know everything about everybody. Monsieur Jasmin had long since satisfied himself that Mademoiselle Marguerite, and not Mademoiselle Clotilde, had won his young master's heart; he knew, moreover, that the baroness had set her heart on a union between the two families, and the rumour that there had been a scene between madame and the young marquis, and that Marguerite had fled to Clotilde's boudoir in tears, did not surprise him much. Nevertheless he affected to be astonished at so abrupt a departure, and, overdoing his part a little, as the most clever people sometimes do, he exclaimed—

"But, monsieur, it is impossible! Surely monsieur does not think of such a thing?"

Isidore had had to suppress much bitterness and vexation during his interview with the ladies; but little was needed to bring out his irritation pretty strongly, and Jasmin's opposition did it most effectually.

"Do as I bid you, insolence!" cried Isidore, turning angrily upon him, "and lose no time about it, unless you want me to chastise you for a meddling, impertinent cur." So saying he passed on, whilst the valet remained standing in the middle of the corridor chafing under this unexpected rebuff.

The very pink of courteous servility, aping to the utmost pitch the prevalent extravagance of courtesy, Monsieur Jasmin had ever been too adroit to bring on himself such a humiliation, and in the few months during which he had been in Isidore's service he had never even suspected his master to be capable of such rudeness even to a menial. He had not yet recovered from the shock when Madame de Valricour came sweeping along the corridor. He stepped back to allow her to pass, but instead of doing so, she stopped, and after looking steadily at him for a few moments, as if she were making up her mind about some contemplated step, she hastily desired him to attend her in the saloon. Jasmin bowed, and followed her.

When left to herself by Isidore, a few minutes' reflection had enabled the baroness to realise the exact position of affairs, and she had at once set about considering what course she would have to take if she would prevent her cherished scheme from being utterly overthrown. She knew Isidore's father well, and believed it quite possible that his affection for his son might outweigh any considerations founded on the mere absence of rank and fortune on the part of Marguerite, especially if he were once convinced that Isidore had plighted his word in the honest belief that he was acting in accordance with his father's wishes. Yes, that was the point she had to look to. She knew her own influence over the marquis, but it must be brought to bear strongly and without delay, and Isidore must, if possible, be prevented from forestalling her. All this was being weighed whilst her nephew was debating the matter with Clotilde and Marguerite. Having formed her resolution, the baroness had rung the bell, and ordered her coach to be got ready, saying that she desired to take an airing; she then hastened to equip herself for a journey. Coming upon Monsieur Jasmin, however, in the corridor a fresh thought struck her.

On reaching the saloon the lady paused awhile, and then addressed the valet thus—

"I have heard highly creditable accounts of the zeal and ability with which you discharge your duties, Monsieur Jasmin, and of your fidelity to your master."

The valet knew that this was not true; besides, even the overstrained euphuism of the day would not lead the proud Baroness de Valricour to speak thus to a mere valet—unless, indeed, she had some covert end in view. What did she want? That was the question.

Jasmin bowed, and answered with some common-place remark, expressing his obligations to madame for her good opinion.

"Monsieur de Beaujardin gives handsome wages, no doubt," was her next remark, "and you would not care to leave his service, I suppose?"

Jasmin certainly had no desire to exchange the liberal *ménage* of Beaujardin for the scarcely disguised poverty of Valricour, but it was second nature with him to cringe and flatter: "I could not desire to quit so noble a family, except, indeed, for the service of so exalted and gracious a personage as the Baroness de Valricour."

"That is precisely what I wish, Monsieur Jasmin," was the prompt rejoinder. "To be brief, I believe Monsieur de Beaujardin allows you fifty louis a year. For special reasons I desire to engage you in my service, and I will give you double that amount."

However tempting the offer might seem, Jasmin happened to know that those who had the honour of serving Madame de Valricour were not unfrequently put to straits, from the difficulty

of getting their wages paid at all, and at any other moment he would probably have declared that no amount could induce him to leave so noble a master as the young marquis; but he thought he saw clouds gathering over Isidore's head, and the little incident in the corridor was rankling in him.

"But, madame," said he, "what will be said abroad if I——"

"For the present, at least," replied the baroness, "I do not desire that it shall be known. You can still be valet to my nephew, and receive your wages from him too. Has Monsieur Jasmin never heard of such little arrangements in families where untoward circumstances have occurred to mar a good understanding?"

"Madame," said Jasmin, bowing, "I accept your offer. It is not for me to say more than that my doing so puts me under the necessity of carrying out, without question or scruple, any directions you may give me."

"Good," rejoined the baroness. "Monsieur de Beaujardin has offended, and even insulted me. I am going to the Chateau de Beaujardin, and I wish to reach it before he does."

Jasmin bowed again: "If monsieur's horse should unfortunately go lame," said he, suggestively, "I am afraid there will be nothing left in the stables for him to ride, if your ladyship takes the four horses."

"It is for you to see to that," replied the lady, sharply, for she did not relish the half sneer at the state of the Valricours' stables, nor the idea of Monsieur Jasmin's presuming upon his new position and becoming familiar. "For the rest," she added, "you will understand that I desire to be kept exactly informed of Monsieur de Beaujardin's movements and also those of——"

"Of Mademoiselle Lacroix," said Jasmin, filling up the pause.

"Yes; that is enough. Stay, here are twenty crowns on account of your wages."

With these words Madame de Valricour opened her escritoire and handed the money to Jasmin, who once more bowed low and retired. He had scarcely gone half the length of the corridor, however, before he was recalled by his new mistress. "There is one thing more," said she, as they re-entered the saloon; "it is a matter of much delicacy, but if I thought I could entirely rely on——"

Here the baroness stopped and seemed to hesitate. Jasmin, who under a show of servile obsequiousness noted every look, word, and gesture with unremitting keenness, thought that he detected in the lady's embarrassment an apprehension that she might compromise or commit herself too seriously by some communication she desired to make to him, and he hastened to remove her fears.

"Madame has the best security for my executing any task she may impose on me without any scruples on my part, as I have placed it in her power to deprive me at her pleasure of my engagement with Monsieur Isidore, as well as of that with which she has honoured me."

Perhaps Madame de Valricour had her own ideas as to who would lose most by an exposure of her schemes, nevertheless Monsieur Jasmin's little speech had its effect.

"In short, then," said she, "my nephew received yesterday a letter from the marquis, his father, concerning a family matter of interest to me. Monsieur Isidore has deeply offended me, and I do not choose to ask him to let me see the letter, but it is important that I should do so—in fact I wish to have this letter in my possession."

"The letter shall be in madame's hands before she leaves the chateau," replied the valet; and so ended this little supplementary conversation.

Monsieur Jasmin, who had hitherto considered Isidore's service rather a tame and monotonous one, had at last found occupation congenial to his taste, and he performed his task with the greatest readiness and ability. It was not until after the young marquis had twice ordered the horses to be brought round, and had been worked up into a state of impatience which would brook no further delay, that he was informed that his horse had gone dead lame. Determined not to be baffled in his purpose, and half suspecting that some trick was being put upon him—though his suspicion fell on the groom instead of the real delinquent—he expressed his intention of riding Jasmin's horse, and leaving that personage to follow on foot as he best could. This resolve might have answered had he acted upon it at once; but just as he was putting his foot in the stirrup the valet informed him that Mademoiselle Lacroix had a packet which she desired to send to the marquise. Should he go and ask her for it? The temptation to say a few more last words was too great. Isidore hastily re-entered the chateau, but only to hear from Marguerite that there must have been some mistake, as she had no commands at Beaujardin. In a towering rage Isidore once more descended the staircase, and on reaching the courtyard he would probably have carried out there and then his former threat of chastisement; but Monsieur Jasmin had taken good care to be absent, and his incensed master, anxious to lose no more time, was soon galloping away in the direction of Beaujardin.

He did not gallop far, however, for the horse he rode soon showed signs that something was amiss with him. Still Isidore urged him on, and the animal, which was of a noble breed, seemed to gather himself together, and for a time appeared to have recovered his powers, but it was of no use; they had gone just half-way when the creature suddenly broke down and could go no further. As he disengaged himself, Isidore muttered something not very complimentary to Monsieur Jasmin, for he began to suspect that the valet had something to do with his mishap. There was nothing for it, however, but to proceed on foot and endeavour to obtain another horse, if possible, at a farmhouse some distance further on. This he at last accomplished, but what with one delay and another it proved of no avail. When he reached the chateau, he learned that Madame de Valricour had arrived there nearly half an hour before him, and as he ascended the great staircase he met her coming down. She curtsied to him in the most polite manner, but there was an expression of triumph in her face which warned him to prepare for the worst.



CHAPTER IV.



his is an impertinence, sir!" exclaimed the marquis angrily, as Isidore, without any announcement, entered the private apartment in which Madame de Valricour had just concluded her interview.

"My father," replied Isidore firmly, "there are times and circumstances which oblige us to lay aside all ceremony. At a moment like this the last thing I could desire is to offend you, but——"

"The circumstances, sir," answered the marquis, "are such as to make any want of respect on your part an additional insult, and you are mistaken if you think that you can thus presume on the forbearance I have too blindly shown towards you."

"I will not appeal either to your forbearance or your affection, sir, though I cannot forget either," answered Isidore, "because I know that you are just now unfairly prejudiced against me by Madame de Valricour."

"How dare you say this to my face, sir!" retorted the marquis with a vehemence very unusual in him. "You should know, sir, that your aunt is one who is utterly incapable of such conduct towards any person, and your ingratitude to one who has ever been most indulgent and affectionate to you makes your proceedings even more reprehensible. Begone, sir! I will not listen to you."

"Sir, I ask no favour of your kindness, but I demand it of your sense of justice that you listen to me, and do not condemn me unheard. I do not expect to be denied, merely because I am your son, a right I believe you accord even to the meanest of your servants."

For a moment or so the marquis made no reply. However blinded he might be by his anger, he could have no plausible reason for refusing this request.

"Well, sir," said he at last, "you have liberty to speak, but have a care that you make no more insinuations against your estimable aunt, and let us have no silly sentiment. We have to do with

facts, and to these you will confine yourself. If you can disprove what Madame de Valricour alleges, so much the better for you, but that you cannot do. You have told her that I—yes, I—approved of your engaging yourself to this Marguerite Lacroix. Why, sir, if you had seen it in my own handwriting you would have hardly been justified in believing your own eyes, but you know, and knew, that I never wrote anything of the kind. I can scarcely command patience to speak of such an absurdity. Besides this, you have for a long time past been paying to your cousin a devotion so manifest that Madame de Valricour assures me it is the common talk, and I can share with her in her indignation at the humiliating position in which you have placed her unhappy daughter."

"Nay," rejoined Isidore, who felt almost inclined to laugh, notwithstanding his vexation, "this is really too absurd. I can not only vouch for it that Clotilde does not care for me, but that she knows I never dreamed of paying her any special attention. I can assure you that she is aware of the position in which Mademoiselle Lacroix and I stand in regard to each other, and heartily rejoices at it."

At this the marquis broke out more indignantly than ever. "What, sir! Do you dare to own this to my face? Your excellent aunt, though she could not altogether disguise her fears, evidently allowed her affection for you to deter her from accusing you of such effrontery, but it is now clear that there has been a secret understanding between you all to deceive her, and the falsification of my letter to you is a fitting climax to such behaviour."

"Falsification, sir!" retorted Isidore indignantly. "You are the only man living whom I would permit to use that word with impunity."

"I repeat the word," replied the marquis, sternly. "I cannot doubt, even if any other part of my letter could have been misunderstood, that I must have mentioned your cousin Clotilde's name in connection with this affair. To pretend the contrary is as impudent as it is absurd."

"It is a fortunate thing that I can at least prove to you that your letter not only did not mention my cousin's name, but that it left ample room for misconception," answered Isidore, feeling in his pocket for the all-important missive; "though I may add that to you alone, sir, would I condescend to attempt to clear myself of such an imputation."

The marquis started slightly, and regarded him with a look in which expectation seemed mingled with distrust. In vain, however, did Isidore search one pocket after another; the letter was not there.

"This is most annoying," said he at last; "I must have left it at Valricour."

"Of course," rejoined the marquis, sarcastically, "very unfortunate, indeed! Perhaps I can assist you in your search for the missing document, or at least as much of it as you incautiously and unwittingly left undestroyed." So saying he drew forth from a drawer in his writing-table and held out towards his son a small piece of paper. It was all burnt at the edges, and from the signature still just legible upon it, Isidore at once recognised it as a fragment of his father's letter to him. He might well be amazed and dumbfounded. A minute ago he had supposed the letter safe in his pocket, and relied on it for his justification; now a shred of it, charred and defaced, was produced against him, in mute but irrefragable proof that he had himself destroyed it to cover his own falsehood and deceit.

"I suppose, sir," said the marquis, "as you pretend to be so much astonished, that I must tell you that this little piece of paper was found in your chamber at the Chateau de Valricour. No, sir," he continued, more vehemently as Isidore attempted to speak, "I will not hear another word from lips already so basely, so vilely forsworn. Go! From this moment I disown you as my son. For the sake of others I will spare you any public degradation, and any punishment beyond the necessity of seeking your fortune henceforward as you best may, with no sympathy or aid from me beyond a small allowance which I shall cause to be remitted to you from time to time. For the rest, I have done with you."

The last words were scarcely uttered when Isidore found himself alone with his own reflections.





CHAPTER V.



For several days after the eventful scene at the Chateau de Beaujardin nothing particularly worth mentioning occurred either there or at Valricour; outwardly at least, matters seemed to have relapsed into their ordinary routine, just as some usually placid stream, after being swollen and agitated for a while by a sudden storm of wind and rain, subsides once more into its customary channel. The marquis, indeed, might seem somewhat more sedate and more taciturn than was his wont, and the marchioness possibly suffered herself to be looked upon by her female friends as very much to be pitied for some mysterious cause of anxiety she could not divulge for all the world. Madame de Valricour, however, betrayed not the slightest indication that anything was going or had gone wrong; on the contrary, she appeared more lively and amiable than usual, and treated Marguerite with peculiar affability and sweetness. But Clotilde, at all events, was not slow to perceive that both Marguerite and herself were watched much more closely than they had ever been before by Madame de Bleury, a decayed gentlewoman and distant relative of Madame de Valricour, who had for some years past lived at the chateau, and discharged the multifarious duties of housekeeper, chaperone, duenna, and private secretary to the baroness as occasion required. More than once during those few days Madame de Valricour went over to Beaujardin, but did not take either of the young ladies with her, a circumstance at which Clotilde chafed not a little, declaring that she was quite sure that it was neither the weather nor the distance that stood in the way, as her mother alleged, but in order that she might not come across Monsieur de Crillon, who was just then on a visit at Beaujardin.

"What should I care about him?" she would say to Marguerite. "He has become much too grand a personage at court to care about such insignificant creatures as you or I. Why, I am told he is quite the right-hand man of the king's minister, and that he is likely enough some day to rise to be one of the first officers of state; but then he has no money, and as I have not a farthing, perhaps it is no wonder that mamma is in such terrible fear of our meeting, even for one evening, at Beaujardin."

And where was Isidore all this week? If any one asked, the reply was that it was believed he had gone to Paris to pay his respects to the king, though there were some amongst the domestics at Beaujardin who smiled when they heard that, for Monsieur Jasmin was still at the chateau; it was even whispered that Isidore had once or twice been seen at Valricour whilst the baroness was away. If that lady, however, did know anything of these rumours, she took no notice of them, and bided her time.

There had been a large party at Beaujardin, at which the marquis and marchioness, whatever may have been their disquietude at heart, had treated their guests with all their wonted courtesy and attention. Nevertheless it is likely enough that long after the numerous and distinguished visitors had retired to rest, the noble host and hostess, as well as the Baroness de Valricour, who had been present, spent more than one wakeful hour. Besides them, however, there were three other persons in the chateau who sat up till a late period of the night. In a handsomely furnished and well lighted apartment at the rear of the mansion Monsieur Bouledeouloué, the steward or *maitre d'hotel*, with his special guests, Monsieur Achille Perigord, the *chef de cuisine*, and Monsieur Jasmin, the young marquis' valet, yet lingered over a flask of Chateau d'Yquem, such as all the regiments of royal butlers at Versailles could not have set before his most Christian Majesty Louis Quinze himself.

The three men were in every particular about as unlike to each other as any three men could be. The valet, who possessed an unusually good face and figure, whose costume was unexceptionable, and who had acquired to perfection the ultra-courteous manners of the time, might have passed for a nobleman anywhere except alongside of a real one. One might really have been excused for fancying him of a different race of beings from Monsieur Bouledeouloué, the shapelessness of whose huge unwieldy frame was happily rendered undistinguishable by an extravagantly full suit of the Louis Quatorze fashion. An enormous full-bottomed wig of the same period surmounted and flanked his full moon face of pasty whiteness, most like the battered and colourless visage of an old wax doll, in which a transverse slit does duty for a mouth, and whose deficiency in the article of nose is counterbalanced by great glassy eyes guiltless of a single atom

of expression. Marvellous indeed was Monsieur Bouledeoulou's stolidity in all things, and not less notable his stupidity in all but one; that one thing, however, was his business as *maître d'hotel*, in which he was unsurpassed, unrivalled. If you told him that there had been no kings of France before Louis the Fourteenth, and that his native country was an island in the Pacific, that grass grew on trees in India, and that the stars were old moons chopped up into bits, he would have stared at you and believed it all. What did he know of such things? His father and grandfather had been stewards in the Beaujardin family before he was born; from his infancy he had seen, noted, watched, talked of, cared for only what pertained to the proper regulation of the household that constituted his little world. So he grew up, and on the day on which his father, old Mathieu Bouledeoulou, departed this life, young Mathieu put on the Louis Quatorze suit and wig, and not one of the guests at the chateau could have imagined that the one functionary in the place most important to him had bequeathed to new and untried hands the post that he had filled for forty years. What of it? From that day it was with young Mathieu as it had been with old Mathieu. One glance into the brilliant saloon told him how many covers were required for supper, what wines, what viands, suited the occasion. One stately walk round the furnished table was enough for him to detect the minutest error or omission of his myrmidons. Not one of the hundreds of guests that visited the chateau crossed the great hall to whom the *maître d'hotel* was unable to assign on the spot the chamber he was to occupy, his place at table, and the degree of precedence to which he was entitled. Yes, M. Bouledeoulou was assuredly a perfect master of his business; and what is more, the scores of servants under him were all masters of theirs, for he had a most simple and summary mode of dealing with any one that was not perfectly in order. The offending party was at once summoned to the presence of Monsieur Bouledeoulou, who presented him with an order on the intendant for the wages due to him, and without a word waved his hand towards the door. Remonstrance and entreaty, or the assurance that it was a first fault, were alike in vain; a stare, a shrug, and just possibly the pithy injunction, "Go!" was the utmost they ever elicited from the *maître d'hotel*; and as their wages were high and always paid to the day, a practice by no means common in great households in those times, the cases of delinquency were few, and M. Bouledeoulou's staff, like himself, did their duty to perfection.

And Monsieur Perigord, the *chef*? Well, if Monsieur Bouledeoulou weighed twice as much as M. Jasmin, the latter certainly weighed twice as much as Monsieur Perigord. Diminutive and meagre to a degree, the master of the kitchen possessed a mighty soul, and was endowed with an energy of purpose that must have made him first and foremost in any sphere of life; but fate had ordained that he should only be the first and foremost cook in all the world, though as Beaujardin, and not Versailles, was the scene of his operations, it is only in these humble pages that his name will go down to posterity. Such was his restless vivacity, that in his ever ready denunciations of anything poor and mean, or cowardly, his shrivelled frame would quiver like a marionette on wires; he would rend in shreds his laced frill and ruffles, scattering thorn like snowflakes on the floor, and end by flinging after them his small pig-tailed queue, leaving all bare and bald a head that for colour and size might have been mistaken for an ostrich egg, but for the hawk-like beak and small fiery black eyes, that would have been ridiculous in any face but that of Monsieur Perigord.

That Monsieur Jasmin should look down with sovereign contempt on two such men—on the *maître d'hotel* for his entire absence of all sensitiveness, and on the *chef de cuisine* for his unpolished excess of it was only natural. Yet it must not be supposed that with either of them he indulged that air of supercilious patronage with which he was accustomed to treat all not absolutely above him in the social scale; it would have been simply thrown away upon the one, the other would have kicked him for it, even if he had to get upon a chair to do so. Still Monsieur Jasmin managed to maintain some kind of mysterious superiority over both, and, on the present occasion, he took care to let them know that he was the depository of a most important family secret—in fact the counsellor and confidential agent in an affair of the most vital consequence to the powers above. At first he had only dropped vague hints, but what with M. Bouledeoulou's dullness in comprehending them, and Monsieur Perigord's sudden and searching comments on them, he gradually began to let out more and more. Perhaps the Chateau d'Yquem loosened M. Jasmin's tongue, for he had latterly been staying much at Valricour, and as the wine allowed that household was of a quality and quantity that gave an additional relish to unstinted measure and a vintage of the choicest class, he became more and more communicative.

"To be sure—to be sure! It is but natural that Monsieur Isidore should marry Mademoiselle Clotilde," exclaimed the voluble little man, as Jasmin with a mysterious smile left some allusion to the subject half unsaid. "It is only what was to be expected—it could hardly be otherwise—any one could guess that. What! Have I not danced them both on my knees when they were babies, and seen them grow up together as it were hand in hand, as if they were destined from their cradles to be husband and wife? He is noble, generous, and handsome; she is witty, virtuous, and beautiful. What do you tell us of a rival—of complications—of difficulties—of a *mésalliance*?"

Again M. Jasmin smiled mysteriously; M. Bouledeoulou, collecting all his energies for the purpose, ejaculated, "Impossible!"

"Our good friend is right; it is impossible," continued Perigord vivaciously. "Who could come between them? Who else could aspire to the hand of monsieur our young marquis? Ah! my good friend, you have been dreaming of something till you have imagined it to be a reality."

Monsieur Jasmin was nettled, but he only smiled again more contemptuously, saying, "Of course, it was doubtless only a dream of mine that there is such a young lady as Mademoiselle

Lacroix."

"What! Mademoiselle Marguerite, she is a reality indeed—sensible, handsome, courageous, charitable, an angel for one in her station; but then," here M. Perigord shrugged his shoulders, "she knows well that the rank of monsieur our young marquis forbids the thought of her aspiring to his hand. Ah, no! you deceive yourself, my friend, but you cannot deceive me in such a matter."

"Indeed," replied the other, sarcastically; "and what should you say if I tell you that she has won monsieur's heart already, and that he has offered her his hand? Yes," he added, observing the effect which his words produced even on the stolid countenance of the major-domo. "Yes, and what would you say if I told you that madame the baroness, who had set her heart on the union of the cousins, has discovered all this and has appealed to monsieur the marquis himself about it?"

Monsieur Perigord could only stare at the speaker in amazement, while, strange to say, M. Bouledeouloué, with whom astonishment was an habitual and chronic state, was able to exclaim, "The world is coming to an end!"

"Absurd, ridiculous, preposterous, impossible!" cried Perigord at last, with a vehement sweep of his hand which sent a decanter and a couple of wine glasses flying off the table. "Monsieur Jasmin, your powers of invention are wonderful indeed, but I am not such a fool as to believe all this. How could you know it even if it were all true? Answer me that, my friend—answer me that!"

"But I am fool enough to believe what I know to be true," retorted the valet, forgetting his habitual caution in his irritation at M. Perigord's incredulity. "And if you wish to know how I learnt all this, permit me to inform you that madame the baroness herself was so obliging as to make me acquainted with it at interviews with which she favoured me. I can tell you more," he added, provoked by the scornful smile with which M. Perigord received these last words, and thereupon he gave forth, with a volubility that would have done no discredit to old Perigord himself, a tolerably full account of all he knew or had gathered from others respecting the affair, concluding with a supercilious intimation that he had now at madame's request taken the matter in hand, and would soon set all to rights.

"Ah, no doubt—no doubt! Madame could not have chosen a more able person for the business," cried M. Perigord, suppressing the indignation that boiled within him by an effort which could scarcely have deceived the wily valet had he been sober. "I was a fool indeed to suppose that my good friend could be mistaken in his surmises; but then I could not know that he was honoured with the confidence of madame the baroness. And yet it is a weighty matter—a maze of difficulties, a labyrinth of conflicting circumstances. If Mademoiselle Clotilde does not care for Monsieur Isidore after all, and he loves Mademoiselle Marguerite, and has actually plighted his word to her, what master-stroke of policy can even the genius of M. Jasmin devise to overcome such obstacles?"

The valet's wits were too blunted to detect the irony, but he drank in the flattery as he sipped his wine. "Bah!" replied he, "our young master can have his choice between a union with Mademoiselle Clotilde or a *lettre de cachet*; and as for pretty Mademoiselle Lacroix, as she has no particular home of her own, she ought to be grateful if we find her one in some convent where the lady superior is not too fond of letting her *protégées* gad abroad—you understand?"

"Yes; but what if she should appeal to the baron, who, as we know, pledged himself to protect the poor orphan, and should refuse to permit her to go just wherever she is bid?" As he spoke these words M. Perigord clutched the chair in which he sat as if to keep himself steady, whilst a nervous twitching seemed to convulse his lilliputian frame.

"Oh, leave that to me," rejoined the valet; "I warrant you I'll find a way when the time comes, and that will very likely be no further off than to-morrow, to tempt the silly little bird into the snare of the fowler." Saying this, the valet rose as if to depart, but at the same moment the fiery little king of the kitchen bounded from his chair, sprang at him, and seized him by the throat, exclaiming—

"Traitor! miscreant! Is this your duty, faith, and loyalty to your young master? If all men had their due your false and cowardly heart should be torn out of your bosom for daring thus to plot against a noble and beautiful young lady, whom one would think even the meanest would feel bound to help and protect."



"The fiery little king of the kitchen bounded from his chair, sprang at him, and seized him by the throat."

M. Boulederoulou rose from his chair and stood aghast, ejaculating solemnly, "It is terrible!"

"And to think that such a scoundrel should be trusted by madame the baroness! Shame upon her! It is abominable!" Saying which M. Perigord, who had by this time let go the valet's throat, snatched off his own wig and dashed it passionately on the floor. "Begone, despicable scoundrel that you are," he added, as the valet, with a malignant scowl, but without venturing to utter a word, made his way to the door. "Begone! go to madame if you like, and tell her that if old Achille Perigord can do anything to save our young master and this poor young lady from your horrible schemes he will not leave it undone, I promise you."

Having hurled this speech after his retreating foe, M. Perigord also retired, after a parting salutation to the *maitre d'hotel*, who could only answer by holding up his hands and exclaiming, "Alas! the world is coming to an end!"



CHAPTER VI.



fter the memorable interview with his father, Isidore had at first buoyed himself up with the hope that with the help Clotilde and Marguerite he might still find some way out of the difficulty; a night of anxious thought, however, convinced him that they would be powerless to effect anything, and that he must act for himself, and promptly too. He could not remain at Beaujardin, nor could he any longer accept the hospitality of the baroness. Besides, out of consideration for Clotilde he did not care to disclose to her her mother's part in the matter, whilst his pride recoiled from telling Marguerite all the humiliating incidents of the scene with his father. There could be no hope of their speedy union, or indeed of any favourable turn of affairs for some time to come, and he therefore resolved to go off straight to Paris and obtain his re-appointment to his former post in Canada; there he could communicate with his uncle, and secure his aid. He accordingly confided to a trusty messenger a note, in which he briefly informed Marguerite of the unfavourable result of his visit to Beaujardin, and of his object in proceeding to Paris, whence he promised to return without delay. He set off for that city on the following morning, and on arriving there made his application to the Minister of War; but two days elapsed before he received an answer. What was his astonishment on opening it to find that the application was refused! He was on the point of hurrying off to seek an interview with the Minister himself, when he perceived a small note, which had been enclosed with the official letter; it was in the hand of a confidential secretary whom he knew well, and ran as follows:—

"Quit Paris without an hour's delay, or you are lost. The danger also threatens a person about whom you are most concerned."

The warning came from one who would not have penned it without good grounds, and Isidore felt that it was not to be neglected for a moment. What if some mischief had already befallen Marguerite during his absence! In half an hour he was again in the saddle and on his way to Valricour.

Full of anxiety, and wholly unable to form any plan for want of information as to the nature of the impending danger, he rode on, with but scanty rest, stopping only for a few hours during each night. The road to Valricour passed close to Beaujardin, and the sun was just rising as he came to one of the side gates leading into the great gardens of the chateau. Suddenly the thought occurred to him that he would see his father once more, and make a final appeal to him. Prompt to act on his resolves, he sprang from his horse, and telling his attendant to await his return, entered the garden and made his way towards the mansion. Ah, if only his path were as clear and straight as those he was now treading—and yet the stiff formality of the vast pleasure grounds seemed hideous and hateful to him. To think that hundreds of thousands of livres should be spent on making nature as unlike to herself as possible. Here were miles of straight gravel walks and terraces, and hedges of almost incredible height, cut trimly to pattern like gigantic green walls, with prim and formal arches cut to the inch, and, for a change, long terraces with cold stone balustrades and statues, which, instead of giving life, made everything seem yet more lifeless. O for a thicket or a coppice, or a clump of tangled brambles, to show that there was some sympathy in nature with the tangled trouble of his heart! Yet the inflexible regularity of all around him produced one effect on Isidore, and led him to make up his mind on one point at least. He resolved that no consideration whatever should induce him to give up Marguerite, or to desert at such a crisis the poor girl who could have no hope but in his constancy. There were moments in which he could not help thinking that the kindest thing he could do would be to relinquish her, and thus free her at once from the persecution she had incurred. Still he clung to the notion that his father could not really intend to cast him off altogether. Yes, the marquis had been indeed harsh and angry, but it could not be denied that appearances gave him some excuse. These thoughts were passing through his mind when he noticed that some one was dogging his steps. In no mood to brook anything that looked like espionage he turned sharply on the intruder, and, to his surprise, found that it was old Achille Perigord.

"What! is it you?" said the young marquis. "What brings you here at such an hour?"

"Alas, alas! my dear young master," replied the old man, "then it is you indeed; I had hardly dared to hope for such good fortune. But there is not a moment to be lost."

"What do you mean?" answered Isidore, hastily. "What brings you here?"

"I thought I saw you in the garden as I stood at my window, almost despairing of ever seeing you again. Ah, there may yet be a chance of saving you, for you are in such danger that I shudder to think of it—you whom I have dandled on my knee—you who were always so brave and so good, and so considerate to me, and were always fighting any young malapert who laughed at old Perigord."

Isidore could not help feeling his heart yearn towards the old *chef*, who, indeed, had got him out of many a boyish scrape, and allayed the pain of many a whipping with tarts, preserves, and other delicacies.

"Yes, you used to stand my friend often enough, Monsieur Perigord," said Isidore, as the old days came vividly back to his memory, "though I am afraid your well-meant sympathy will not help me much just now. But what do you know of my troubles and my danger?"

"I know all—everything—partly from what I have picked up in various quarters, for you may easily suppose that what goes on in the salon is talked about in the kitchen, but principally from that villain, that traitor, Jasmin, who for once let his tongue run on last night, and told enough to make it certain that something terrible is impending over you, and not only over you, but also over that sweet young lady, Mademoiselle Marguerite. Yes, my dear young master," continued the old man, as Isidore gave a slight start, and regarded him with manifest anxiety, "yes, I know how matters stand between you, and that there is a plot hatching against you, in which—monsieur will excuse me if I say it plainly—madame the baroness is the chief actor, and in which she has bribed that rascal to assist her and to betray you."

Isidore gazed at him half incredulous, and yet after what he had learned at Paris, what could be more likely, considering Madame de Valricour's conduct, and the check she had received in her most cherished plans?

"And Jasmin too! Where is the scoundrel?" said Isidore, impetuously. "Is he here?"

"My good master, do not waste time on him. I tell you frankly that I fear madame is contemplating a *lettre de cachet*, it may be for mademoiselle only, but I do not believe that even you are safe from her machinations, and I have reason to believe she has influence enough at Versailles for anything."

"I am not afraid of her, Monsieur Perigord," observed Isidore haughtily. "My father would hardly stand that, although he may be angry with me, as I suppose you know, since you know so much else."

"Perhaps so, perhaps so," answered old Perigord; "but it may be done behind his back, and before he can interfere. Besides, even if monsieur is safe I do not suppose he would let Mademoiselle Marguerite run any risk of such a horrible fate if he could help it."

"You are right, my good friend," said Isidore; "I am afraid there is danger indeed, and at all events I will do what I can to avert it. I will go on at once to Valricour and warn Mademoiselle Lacroix, though as to what more I can do I am at present utterly at a loss."

"Then I will tell you," rejoined the old man. "I have a cousin at St. Sulpice—you know the place, monsieur—it is on the Paris road from Valricour, not more than four or five leagues from the chateau; he is an honest and kindly man. I will go to him to-day—it is a fête day there, and my visit will cause no surprise. I will tell him that you are coming, and I am sure he and his wife will give mademoiselle a refuge—ay, and you too, if things should come to the worst—until something can be done. He is a worthy man, and I will answer for him with my life. Now go, my dear young master, and Heaven speed you. There is no time to lose."

Isidore would have expressed his thanks to the old man for the lively interest he had shown, and for the assistance he had so promptly offered in case of need, but Perigord had already vanished. Ten minutes later the young marquis was again on horseback, and on his way to Valricour.

On reaching the chateau Isidore found his cousin and Marguerite in a state of great anxiety on account of his long absence, and what he had to tell them was not calculated to allay their uneasiness. Fortunately they were alone, as the baroness had again gone over to Beaujardin that morning, and many a plan was discussed and abandoned by turns as their vague hopes of finding some way out of the difficulty alternated with the fears to which Isidore's account of the interview with his father, of the warning received in Paris, and of the meeting with old Perigord, could not but give rise. At last it was agreed that Isidore should wait and boldly face Madame de Valricour on her return, and that the final step to be taken should depend on the clue which that interview might afford as to the precise nature of the danger and the quarter from which it was likely to come. In the meanwhile Isidore, who was well known and much liked in the neighbouring village, engaged the services of a small tenant farmer who owned a good horse and cart, in case Marguerite's immediate removal from Valricour should prove to be necessary.

It was already dusk when the distant sound of wheels was heard, and on hastening to the window they perceived the great lumbering family coach coming up the avenue. In a couple of minutes more it had stopped at the hall door, and all eyes were bent on the spot to catch a sight of the baroness. To their surprise, however, no Madame Valricour descended from the vehicle, but they noticed that in addition to madame's coachman and footman it was accompanied by one of the Beaujardin servants on horseback, a not unusual precaution when persons of note travelled after dusk, although one which the state of her household and stable mostly obliged the baroness to dispense with. The mystery was soon solved by the entrance of a servant with a note for Mademoiselle Lacroix. It was from Madame de Valricour, and was to the effect that as she had

found it impossible to return to the chateau that evening, she considered it undesirable that Marguerite should remain under her roof after what had passed, she had therefore, she added, sent the carriage to bring her to the Chateau de Beaujardin, where she would for the present remain.

More than once was this unexpected communication perused both by Marguerite and her friends, and then an animated dispute arose as to what was to be done. Marguerite, anxious only to escape from a roof under which she was in such a false position, was for setting off at once in compliance with the wishes of the baroness; Isidore, however, would not hear of her going alone, and declared that he would accompany her and make another appeal to his father.

Clotilde shook her head. "It is useless," said she; "nay, I will go further," she continued with a sigh, "I am afraid that there is more beneath this letter than we can fathom. It is not what my mother would write if this were all she meant. I will take Marguerite's place and go to Beaujardin."

"You!" exclaimed Isidore and Marguerite in a breath. "What will be the good of that?"

"At any rate," replied Clotilde, "I will try what I can do with my uncle, and I think I may do more than either or both of you just now."

"But how can I stay here?" pleaded Marguerite.

"I have not forgotten that; you can remain here no longer, and there is but one thing to be done. Isidore must take you at once and place you under the care of Greboeuf, at St. Sulpice. Ask me no questions; I have my reasons, but I cannot tell them. Alas! that it should ever fall to my lot to bid you, whom I have loved so dearly, to leave my own father's house!"

For a few minutes the two girls were clasped in each other's arms; but Clotilde soon regained her composure, and assuming as cheerful a face as she could, impressed upon her friend the necessity of carrying out her plan, which was this. She herself was to depart in the coach sufficiently disguised to pass for Marguerite; the latter, putting on Clotilde's cloak and hood, was immediately afterwards to leave the chateau with Isidore and go off to St. Sulpice. Clotilde was to let them know on the following day, through old Perigord, how matters stood at Beaujardin, so that they might act accordingly. By this time the horses had been baited, and all being now arranged, Isidore took down his cousin and hurried her into the vehicle, which started off at once.

Not a little perplexed and anxious at the turn things had taken, Clotilde leaned back in the comfortable coach and called to mind the various incidents of the day. At first her cheek flushed with indignation at the thought of her mother's conduct towards one whom hospitality and the commonest feeling of pity should have protected from such treatment. To think that it was her own mother! Clotilde covered her face with her hands and gave way to her tears. She was, however, not one of those who fold their hands and let circumstances overmaster them. She had by nature both the wit and the courage that can turn things to the best account; quickly drying her tears, therefore, she set herself to consider how she might take advantage of this unexpected visit to Beaujardin. She could not but fear that the baroness intended to carry off Marguerite to some safe place, where there would be no means of communicating with Isidore; such things were not seldom done, and with a strong hand too, when it was found necessary to cut the gordian knot of a family difficulty. In this design she would be foiled, at least for the present, and with the help of M. Perigord and his friends Marguerite might be kept out of harm's way. In the meanwhile Clotilde would have an opportunity of appealing to her uncle, who, she fully believed, would never countenance any positive ill-treatment of one who might be said to have been bequeathed to the hospitality of the family. She might have doubted even her own ability to detach the marquis from the enemy's ranks but for one little circumstance, which was this. On hearing Isidore's account of the scene at the Chateau de Beaujardin, and the incident of the charred scrap of paper, Clotilde had gone and examined the stove in the apartment occupied by Isidore during his recent visit. Not a trace could she find of anything having been burnt there, and a minute questioning of the domestics had proved beyond a doubt that any story of the burning of the letter in that room was a fabrication. She knew well her uncle's intense abhorrence of anything like treachery or deceit. It was indeed this trait in his disposition that had led to his severity towards Isidore, and it was on this that she now relied for the success of her efforts to enlist the sympathy of the old marquis in favour of her cousin and her friend.

Absorbed in these thoughts Clotilde took no note of time or distance, while the growing darkness and the absence of novelty in a ride from Valricour to Beaujardin, to say nothing of the pre-occupation of her mind, kept her from observing anything outside of the lumbering vehicle in which she sat. They had jogged on for a considerable time, however, when the coach stopped. Under ordinary circumstances this would hardly have interfered with Clotilde's meditations, the occurrence being common enough at a period when in France, as in other countries, most of the roads, except those along which the king himself was accustomed to travel, were usually in a deplorable condition, notwithstanding the lessons left behind by those famous old road-makers the Romans, and in spite of the iniquitous road-laws which threw upon all but the nobles an intolerable amount of personal labour in the making and maintaining of the highways. But on the present occasion Clotilde's attention was arrested by the circumstance that men were busy changing the horses, and although it was now dark, she noticed at the roadside a great white

stone cross, from which she knew that they must have turned off from the direct road to Beaujardin. Surprised, and perhaps a little alarmed, she tried to open one of the windows to obtain some explanation, but it was so tightly fastened that she found this impossible. She tried the other, but that too defied all her efforts, and whilst she was still thus engaged the coach was once more driven on, and now at a gallop. Then, as she peered anxiously out, she observed that the horseman who rode close to the carriage was a much bigger man than the groom from Beaujardin who had started with them from Valricour, and that he was muffled in a great riding-cloak. Clotilde was one of those women whose courage rises just when that of others usually fails: without an instant's hesitation she stooped down, and the next moment the high wooden heel of one of her shoes sent the window-pane flying in shivers out upon the road. A touch of the spur at once brought her escort alongside of the broken window.

"Holloa!" he exclaimed, in a voice Clotilde had never heard before, "what is all this about?"

"Fellow!" she replied, indignantly, "what is the meaning of this? Who are you?—and why have we gone out of our road?"

"Ah, well," answered the man coolly, "of course it is natural enough that you should want to know, but——"

"Impudent scoundrel!" cried Clotilde, "stop the carriage this moment and let me alight, or ——"

"Look you, mademoiselle," the horseman here broke in, bringing his face at the same time close to the carriage window, and speaking sternly, though in a low voice, as if to avoid being overheard, "you seem to be a fine spirited young lady, and I should be sorry to let that bring you into more trouble. You are not going to Beaujardin this time. I have my orders to take you somewhere else. Now just listen, no harm will come to you if you keep quiet and go peaceably. What is more, I give you my word, if you choose to take it, that I am going to hand you over to the safe keeping of a lady who, I suppose, will treat you as a gentlewoman ought to be treated, but go you must—there's no help for that. 'Tis of no use trying to raise an alarm; that might only cost a couple of lives, perhaps," and here the speaker just opened his heavy mantle sufficiently to show the butt ends of two heavy pistols at his belt. "So, mademoiselle," he concluded, "be complaisant, and make the best of a bad business."

For a few minutes Clotilde felt overwhelmed and almost stunned at finding herself suddenly, and without the slightest warning, in a position so strange and obviously so full of peril. As soon as she could collect herself, however, a light broke in upon her, and with it a faint hope of escape.

"Whoever you are," she exclaimed, calling to her unknown attendant, who now continued to ride close to the window, perhaps to stop promptly any possible attempt to give an alarm, "whoever you are, you have simply made a stupid mistake, which will only get you into trouble. I am not the lady you suppose. No, sirrah," she added, as her anger made her for the moment forget her danger, "I am Mademoiselle de Valricour; so now you will see that if you dare to attempt to carry out your villainy you will have to pay dearly for it the moment that I can send either to Valricour or to Beaujardin."

"A very likely thing, no doubt," replied the horseman; "I have had that sort of trick tried upon me more than once; but to tell you the truth I neither know nor care a sou whether you be what you say you are or not. I have my orders and I stick to them, so there's an end of it." With these words the man dropped a few paces behind, and left Clotilde to a very different train of meditations from those which had been so startlingly interrupted.

There could not be a doubt that she had fallen into a trap intended for another victim, and that the object of this nefarious plot was to put a stop to the engagement between Marguerite Lacroix and the young marquis. The thought that such foul means should be used for the purpose against her bosom friend brought the hot blood into Clotilde's cheeks, and she stamped her little foot impetuously in the height of her indignation. Then she paused, and her colour fled again as she bethought her of what might be the end of it all if she should be unable to communicate with her mother or the Marquis de Beaujardin, and should be left to——

To what? More than once she had heard M. de Crillon talk—and very unconcernedly too—of the living death of those who unhappily became the victims of a *lettre de cachet*. Yes, she remembered well how once, in order to gratify her importunate curiosity, he had told her of people sent to Pignerol, St. Michel, or Isle Marguerite, never to be heard of more. He had actually taken to himself some little share of credit for the dread inspired far and near by the terrible length of the merciless arm which could strike down an enemy at the court of some foreign potentate. Not long since, indeed, it had dared to seize at Frankfurt a man too dangerous through his connection with the world of letters, and had consigned him to a living tomb, if even his life had been spared. She shuddered at the thought; but even the prospect of a fate so dismal could not long keep down the generous and heroic spirit of Clotilde de Valricour. "At least," she murmured, "I shall save poor Marguerite; nay, I perhaps maybe the means of enabling her to be happy with Isidore in spite of these cruel machinations."

How long the journey lasted the unfortunate girl had no means of knowing; it seemed to her an age, though in reality it was but a few hours. She became at last nearly exhausted with the

incessant jolting over rough roads, and plunging about in others that were little better than bogs. Excitement, however, and the continual apprehension of some unlooked-for catastrophe forbade all thoughts of sleep, and it was actually with a sensation of relief that she noticed that the huge carriage was rattling over a rough pavement, and heard the noise of great gates being swung to, and barred behind them. She looked out, and could just perceive that they had driven into a spacious court-yard, nearly surrounded by grey, sombre-looking buildings, at the great entrance door of which the vehicle drew up.



CHAPTER VII.



lighting hastily from the carriage, Clotilde ran up the great flight of steps which led to the door. As she entered, it was closed behind her, but to her surprise, and much to her relief, she found that the janitress was a nun.

"Tell me, good sister, tell me for the love of Heaven, what place is this? Where have these men brought me to?" she exclaimed, trembling with excitement.

Apparently somewhat astonished at the vehemence of the new-comer, the female answered only by making a sign to Clotilde to follow her; she then led the way across the hall to a spacious apartment, and there left her. Clotilde would have repeated her questions, but she was too late, and on trying the door she found it locked.

The fact that the house must in some way be connected with a religious establishment of some kind allayed her fears, however, and she cast an anxious glance around the apartment, which was lighted by a handsome chandelier suspended from the ceiling. Her quick eye soon noticed more than one little accessory, which showed that the room was habitually occupied by a lady, and one moreover with wealth at her command, and apparently of refined taste. Any further speculations, however, were interrupted by the entrance of a personage whose dress and bearing seemed to indicate that she must be the Lady Superior of the place. The poor girl's first impulse was to spring towards her new protectress and pour out her troubles to her, but in spite of herself she felt the impulse checked, and her overflowing heart chilled by the cold and supercilious look that made still more repellant a face repulsively plain.

Clotilde could only clasp her hands together and gaze at her new hostess, as if she felt that any appeal for help or pity from such a quarter would be hopeless.

"I presume, mademoiselle," said the Lady Superior at last, "that we may begin by taking it for granted that you quite understand the reasons which have induced your friends, for your own good as well as in your own interests, to take the course they have done."

These words were spoken in a voice so sweet, and with an air of such high and courtly breeding, that for a moment Clotilde forgot everything else in her surprise that they could belong to one so hideously ugly. But the feeling was only momentary; the terrors of the night, which might well have beaten down the boldest spirit, had passed away; and once more, face to face with one of her own sex, Clotilde was herself again.

"I can indeed guess, madame," she answered, with almost her usual vivacity, "what reasons

have induced those who should be dear to me to do this most wicked thing; but right glad am I to think that they have been foiled. By a strange mistake the bird they meant to catch has escaped, and I have for the moment fallen into the trap intended for another. I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance—a nearer acquaintance, indeed, I do not desire, if I am to understand that you are a willing party to this abominable plot—but I beg to introduce myself to you as the Baroness Clotilde de Valricour. May I beg the honour of your name and title?"

The lady's supercilious look gave place just for a few seconds to one of involuntary surprise, but it soon came back again as she replied, "Mademoiselle Lacroix will pardon me if I do not allow myself to be deceived by this little scheme. I have been made so far acquainted with the circumstances of the case as to know that much deceit has been already practised, in which I believe the young baroness you speak of has not been without her share, and this may be, for aught I know, some fresh and cleverly devised phase of it. I must be excused for believing that those who had the matter in hand would not make so very silly a mistake, and I have only to communicate to mademoiselle the object with which she has been brought hither."

It may well be imagined that Clotilde was not a little disconcerted both by the tone and tenor of this reply. Had she been able to frame any very definite wish during her journey, it would perhaps have been that she might meet with some such person as the Lady Superior of a religious house and claim her protection. Here she was in just such a position, yet with the clouds apparently gathering still more blackly over her. She would have been less surprised, however, had she known a little more about the antecedents of Madame de Varny, the Superior of the Ursuline Convent, the place to which she had been brought. Noble by birth, and pre-eminently lovely and accomplished, Madame de Varny had once been the proudest beauty of the court of King Louis, but having been attacked by that terrible scourge the small-pox, she had recovered only to find herself as hideous as she had once been beautiful. To be an object of loathing where she had formerly been courted and admired was more than her frivolous and worldly mind could bear, and she had retired to the seclusion of a nominally religious life, in which her rank and influence secured her the position she now enjoyed; but, like many of her class, she still clung to the world, and her intriguing disposition led her often enough to lend her aid, whenever those with whom she had been used to associate required it, to carry out some plot or scheme arising out of the debased and unscrupulous court life of that period. She was an old acquaintance of Madame de Valricour, and in her the baroness had found an able and willing confederate in the business now on hand.

"Madame," said Clotilde, after a short silence, "you will believe me or not, as you think best, and will make to me what communication you choose; it rests with me to decide how I shall act upon it."

"Not altogether," replied the lady, with a smile that had nothing very pleasant in it. "Mademoiselle will not have much choice in the matter. I shall not waste time," she continued, "by any allusion to the family circumstances to which you owe your visit here; they are as well known to you as to me—perhaps better. I can pity your infatuation of course; it must have been very great indeed to allow you to suppose that a personage so exalted as the Marquis de Beaujardin could for one moment dream of permitting an alliance between his son and one like yourself. Such a thing would be absurd, and of course the marquis and his relatives must prevent it by all and any means. It has been therefore arranged that a gentleman of excellent family, who it seems has had some opportunity of meeting you, and has, I hear, been much taken with your modest manners, as some foolish young men occasionally are, shall make you his wife. The marriage will take place here this afternoon; and I am permitted to tell you that the Marquis de Beaujardin has most generously taken it upon him to provide a dowry for you, notwithstanding your ingratitude to that noble family. You are indeed fortunate, my young lady, in so happy an ending to so lamentable an affair." Here the lady paused as if to receive the acknowledgments befitting such kindness and consideration.

"Indeed!" answered Clotilde at last. "Indeed! And pray, madame, what if, in the new character thus forced upon me, I should decline to accept the gentleman, and should fling my uncle's dowry in his face, and tell him that he ought to be ashamed of degrading himself by taking part against a poor orphan girl, whom he and his are bound by all that is sacred to love and protect? What then?"

The lady seemed just for a minute or so rather bewildered by Clotilde's vehement sally, but as soon as she recovered herself she replied with ominous coldness and decision, "I can scarcely suppose that mademoiselle could do anything so very silly; but if such should be the case, why there will be another ride in the coach, perhaps a longer one than the last. It will certainly not be to Beaujardin nor to Valricour. Where it may stop I will not pretend to say. But did Mademoiselle Marguerite never hear of such a thing as a *lettre de cachet*? Well, you will have some hours to think over it, and in the meanwhile you will be quite safe here; but pray do not cherish any foolish hope that you have any choice except between a ring and a ride to some place where you will not be less safe than here, but where you will most assuredly stay a good deal longer. Let us hope that you will be better advised, and accept the hand of Monsieur de Crillon."

The hand of Monsieur de Crillon! Yes, those were the words with which the imperious dame had swept out of the room, locking the door after her. Clotilde could scarcely believe her ears. Then he, too, who had allowed her, nay, led her to suppose that to win her hand was the object nearest to his heart, had consented for the sake of the promised dowry to wed one for whom he

cared not a jot, well knowing that the union could only bring misery, not happiness, to the victim of his selfish covetousness! Never till this moment had Clotilde suspected how much she really cared for him; but that was now a thing of the past. Happily she had learned in time how mean and despicable he was, and in her indignation she rejoiced at the humiliation he would experience on finding that the wicked scheme was marred, and that he himself would have the task of proving who she was, and bringing about her release. But it was a bitter thing to find herself in such a position, and to know that her mother, and even the marquis, were concerned in such a plot. It is scarcely to be wondered at that she at length gave way to her grief; her only comfort was that, as it had turned out, Marguerite had escaped the present danger, and as she thought of this she could not help feeling thankful that there would yet be a delay of many hours before the shameless de Crillon would discover how they had been foiled.

Somewhat reassured by these reflections, she proceeded to examine a little more calmly the place where she was detained. She now observed for the first time a side-table, on which a repast that might serve either as a supper or a breakfast was laid out, and on looking timidly through an open door she found a sleeping apartment, evidently intended for the expected prisoner. She was too excited as yet to take either food or rest, and sat down to meditate on the prospect before her. It would, however, be as painful as it would be profitless to follow her through the long hours that ensued; let us see, then, what in the meanwhile was happening elsewhere.

Madame de Valricour had remained at Beaujardin for the night, perhaps not caring to have to answer the questions with which Clotilde might be expected to meet her on her return home. What was her surprise when, early in the forenoon, a messenger arrived from Valricour with a note from Madame de Bleury, informing her that immediately on the departure of the coach on the previous evening Isidore had left the chateau in company with Mademoiselle de Valricour, and that they had not since returned. Utterly at a loss to account for so strange a proceeding, the baroness prepared to hasten home at once, but finally resolved first to make sure that the plot against Marguerite, which she deemed of the greatest moment, had been successful; and she accordingly set out for the convent. It was a ride of some hours' length, and she did not arrive until the afternoon was well advanced. Imagine her amazement and anger when, after hearing from the Superior an account of her interview with the young lady, she satisfied herself beyond a doubt that Clotilde was really there, and that it must have been Marguerite with whom Isidore had escaped from Valricour.

"Bid Monsieur de Crillon wait for me when he arrives," said she. "I shall want his help more than ever. In the meanwhile I will go and inform the curé that his services will not be required at present. I will then see my daughter, and take her home."

The little dwelling of Père Hypolite was at no great distance from the convent, and the baroness soon reached the small but exquisite garden, in which she found the priest busily engaged in planting out his choice flowers for the summer. A little later in the year and those flowers would outshine even the gay and splendid costume in which the baroness had hastily quitted the Chateau de Beaujardin. The unwonted appearance of a lady in such brilliant attire at once attracted the attention of Père Hypolite, who bowed respectfully as she approached him.

"You are Father Hypolite, the curé of St. Sulpice—is it not so?" said she. The old man bowed assent. "I have come to tell you that the marriage you were to have solemnised cannot take place to-day."

Père Hypolite looked somewhat surprised.

"The marriage!" said he. "I do not quite understand your ladyship."

"I mean the marriage of Mademoiselle Lacroix and a gentleman of rank who was to come here for the purpose," rejoined the lady. "The Lady Superior told me that you had been directed to hold yourself in readiness to perform the rite."

"The marriage of Mademoiselle Lacroix!" replied the priest, apparently amazed. "There must be some mistake. I did receive the directions of the Lady Superior, and the marriage took place this morning."

"This morning! Are you mad?" retorted the baroness. "What marriage?"

"The marriage of Mademoiselle Lacroix with the young Marquis de Beaujardin, who came here to St. Sulpice for the purpose."

"Fool! idiot! do you know what you are saying? There has been no marriage at the convent to-day. Are you mad?"

"Pardon me, madame," replied the priest, with dignity. "Even your ladyship's rank, whoever you may be, cannot excuse such expressions towards one of my holy calling. What I have told you is the simple truth. Little as I like these hasty and irregular proceedings, you must be well aware that one in my humble position must needs do the bidding of those who have a right to dictate to him in such matters. The persons I have named to you were married by me this morning soon after daybreak at the chapel of St. Sulpice."

For a little while Madame de Valricour seemed utterly confounded. As soon as she regained

her self-control she demanded of the priest a full account of what had occurred.

"It was simply thus," said he. "Quite early this morning Colonel de Beaujardin, whom I know of course by sight, came to me, and, not without some agitation, told me that he wished to speak to me as to the possibility of his being united to Mademoiselle Lacroix, who had come to the village under circumstances of peculiar difficulty arising out of some family differences. I told him that I had already received directions respecting the marriage of Mademoiselle Lacroix on her arrival here, though of course I knew nothing of the private matters to which he alluded, and that it was not for me to enter into them. He seemed somewhat astonished."

"No doubt. I should think so indeed," muttered the baroness between her teeth. "What next?"

"I assumed, as a matter of course, that the family desired the marriage to be kept secret on account of the disparity in the rank of the young people; but this was no business of mine, and I simply asked him whether I should repair to the convent, and at what hour. He then told me that it was his wish that the marriage should be solemnised, not at the convent, but at our little chapel here, adding that he would arrange, if possible, to meet me there in an hour's time. He did so, and the marriage took place in the presence of Michel Greboeuf and his wife. I have nothing more to add."

"You have said enough, in all conscience," ejaculated the baroness, passionately. "But you shall pay dearly for this, miserable creature!" and with these words the enraged lady hurried away, leaving the good old priest as thunderstruck as she herself had been but a few short minutes since.

Inquiring of the first person whom she met the way to Michel Greboeuf's house, Madame de Valricour at once bent her steps thither, and soon reached the spot. Anything more miserable and dilapidated than Greboeuf's cottage could hardly be conceived, though it was perhaps no worse than the dwellings of most people of his class in France at that time. Michel was standing at the door, and a very small exercise of Madame de Valricour's powers was required in order to obtain from him the fullest corroboration of all she had heard from Father Hypolite.

"Though, to be sure," continued the simple-hearted peasant, who was quite won over by the gracious condescension of so grand a personage, "I think the young gentleman did not come here intending at first to marry the lady, but only to leave her for a time under our poor roof; but when they saw what a place it was they were in a great taking, as you may suppose, and he went down to Father Hypolite to talk about it, as I told him that the good man was always ready to help anybody in distress; and sure enough he came back presently and said they were to be married at once. The poor young lady was in a terrible way about it, I can tell you, madame. However, we all went down together to the chapel, and that is how it came about."

"What! are they still here then?" asked Madame de Valricour, eagerly.

"O dear, no!" replied Greboeuf. "Our poor place is not fit for the like of them, for I assure you, madame, I think they be quite gentle folks."

"Poor place indeed! I should think so. What on earth could ever have brought them here?"

"Why, you see, madame, a cousin of mine, a M. Perigord, who is employed at the Chateau de Beaujardin, sent them here to me, and asked me to do anything I could to help them; and I would give the last drop of my blood to serve my cousin Perigord, for we should all have perished long ago but for his kindness. He kept us alive all last winter, when things were so bad. Ah, madame, you great folks don't know what the poor people suffer. We had no fuel and had to lie a-bed to warm ourselves, till we were obliged to get rid even of our beds and last bits of furniture for a mouthful of bread. But my cousin heard of it and helped us. As for those who haven't got such a friend, what with crown taxes, duties, fines, tolls, and forced labour on the roads, manorial dues, seigneurial rights, and I don't know how many more heart-vexing imposts and exactions besides, there's nothing left to subsist upon; and that's hard when one hears how grandly all the great folks live, and never lift a finger to keep the poor from starving."

"But where have they gone?" inquired the lady, eagerly.

"Well, madame, I took them on to the next village, where the gentleman got a good horse, and presently rode away with his young wife on a pillion behind him. They have gone to Nantes, where a brother of my cousin Perigord keeps an inn on the Quai La Fosse."

It was not long before Madame de Valricour was closeted with de Crillon, who had by this time arrived at the convent.

"We have come too late," said she, bitterly, after describing her interviews with the curé and Greboeuf.

De Crillon shrugged his shoulders. "I presume, then," said he, "that there is nothing more to be done."

"Nothing more!" retorted the lady, impetuously. "We have all the clue we want, and you have with you the king's *lettre de cachet*. I care not what becomes of her, so long as she is safely

placed where she will not trouble us any more; but mind, M. de Crillon, no harm is to come to my nephew."

De Crillon smiled. "Ah," said he, "I am to dispose of the young lady, so that Monsieur Isidore may come back and some day marry Mademoiselle Clotilde?"

"That was not spoken with M. de Crillon's usual acuteness," replied the baroness. "Isidore is more likely in his anger and disappointment to betake himself anywhere else than to Beaujardin, and in any case you know that he is now married, and cannot wed Clotilde."

"Well, then," said he, "I fail to see the drift of madame's proposal."

"What!" exclaimed the baroness; "do you know so little what a woman is as to suppose that I could ever brook seeing this upstart come to Beaujardin as Isidore's wife, to lord it over me, after I have had every one there at my beck and call for a score of years past? Think you I could live to be tolerated by that child when she came to be mistress of Beaujardin? Never! Listen to me," said she. "You have played your part well enough till now, and I engage that, on my return to Beaujardin, I will obtain for you from the marquis the dowry you would have had with Mademoiselle Lacroix but for the accident which you could not help. That is but fair. But it must be on the condition that this hateful girl shall trouble me no more. I know well enough, monsieur, that it will be no disappointment to you to touch the dowry without being obliged to take the bride with it. Nay, more, I will add that, if things should so fall out that Isidore should fail to inherit Beaujardin, and Clotilde should become her uncle's heiress, it will be for you to win her hand if you can, and thus some day become the owner of that noble inheritance. Of course, not a word must be breathed at Beaujardin about this marriage. I have nothing more to say; it is for you to do the rest."

Within an hour Monsieur de Crillon had started off in pursuit of the fugitives, and the great unwieldy family coach, with Clotilde and her mother inside of it, and two of de Crillon's myrmidons acting as escort, was rolling along, like some great ship at sea, and ploughing up the miry roads, on its way back to the Chateau of Valricour.



CHAPTER VIII.



n the following afternoon, after giving Madame de Bleury strict injunctions to keep a watchful eye on the movements of mademoiselle, the baroness repaired to the Chateau de Beaujardin for the purpose of making the marquis acquainted with so much of what had recently transpired as it was desirable that he should know. This was a business requiring considerable tact and discretion. She had found little difficulty in persuading him that it was of the highest importance to break off the intimacy between his son and Marguerite, and he had readily consented to give such an amount as might induce M. de Crillon, or any one else, to marry the girl, and thus effectually save Isidore from such a *mésalliance*.

After promising the dowry the marquis had indeed felt somewhat vexed with himself at not having asked her for a little more information as to the means by which she intended to carry out her plans and how Mademoiselle Lacroix was to be induced to agree to them. He always rather liked Marguerite, and even the high crime of endeavouring to inveigle his son and heir into a marriage so infinitely beneath his station could not quite stifle a feeling of pity for her. But it would have seemed so vacillating and so mistrustful to question Madame de Valricour's discretion that he had thought it best to let matters take their course, and this now relieved the

baroness from the necessity of much troublesome explanation. She accordingly said nothing whatever about the way in which Clotilde had been entrapped and carried off, nor did she mention a word about her own proceedings at St. Sulpice, but confined herself to informing the marquis that Isidore had fled with Marguerite, and that she had left it to M. de Crillon to follow up the fugitives, and endeavour to bring Isidore to reason, and persuade him to return to Beaujardin.

The marquis was of course most indignant at so flagrant an act on the part of his son, declaring that he would disinherit him and never see him again; and Madame de Valricour returned home well satisfied with her interview, to await, though not without some anxiety, such tidings as she might receive from M. de Crillon in the course of a few days.

She had, however, scarcely left Beaujardin when some one else sought an interview with the marquis. This was Monsieur Perigord, who, after being admitted into his master's presence, began, with much agitation, by imploring him to interfere in an affair of the most terrible importance. The marquis, who was well acquainted with the excitable disposition of his old *chef de cuisine*, supposed that some slight had been put upon him by the inferior domestics, or perhaps even by M. Boulederouloué himself, so he kindly told the old man that he would take care to see him righted if he would only be calm and say what was the matter.

"Calm, my master!" exclaimed Perigord, throwing himself at the feet of his patron; "who could be calm when such dreadful things are happening? Ah, monsieur, it is not for my poor self that I come to you; it is to plead for my unhappy young master, who, if you do not take some steps, will fall a victim to a most horrible scheme."

"Are you mad, Perigord?" said the marquis, somewhat irritated at such an interference in his domestic affairs by a person of that kind. "What silly nonsense is this?"

"It is no silly nonsense, monsieur. If you will but deign to listen to me I can prove beyond doubt that a dreadful plot, of which you cannot be aware, threatens not only poor Monsieur Isidore's happiness, but his very life—that madame the baroness, before she came back from St. Sulpice yesterday, sent off M. de Crillon with a *lettre de cachet* to Nantes, whither the young marquis has gone with his bride. Ah, monsieur, those terrible *lettres de cachet*! You know, we all know, what they mean. Alas, alas! my poor young master! He is lost if you will not save him."

Just for a moment the marquis fancied that all this might be only an exaggeration of the simple facts which he already knew; but Madame de Valricour had said nothing to him of having been at St. Sulpice, nothing about an actual marriage, nothing about a *lettre de cachet* even against Marguerite, much less against his own son. He began to be troubled.

"My good Perigord," said he, "I am afraid your zeal has outrun your discretion, but I can pardon you even if your attachment to me and mine has led you into some little extravagance. The thing can, however, be soon tested. How do you know that the baroness has been at St. Sulpice? Have you anything to show that your story about my son's marriage is not a mere idle rumour? How can you know anything about the *lettre de cachet* that you talk of?" And as he asked the questions the marquis quite regained his usual calmness and self-possession, which had for a moment been disturbed.

Monsieur Perigord was ready with his proofs; and with his master's permission forthwith summoned Michel Greboeuf, who had come to the chateau an hour since. Not only was he able to describe his own conversation with Madame de Valricour, from which her presence at St. Sulpice and her knowledge of the marriage at once became evident, but he stated that he had met at the little village inn a strange man who over his cups had let out that he was in the employ of a M. de Crillon, and that they were looking out for a youngster of quality, who would soon find out to his cost that his master had in his pocket a little document with the signature of His Most Christian Majesty, which would provide him with a lodging for life, if even worse did not befall him.

In spite of his agitation, the marquis succeeded in commanding himself so far as to be able to question Greboeuf more than once respecting the circumstances he had narrated; but the more he questioned the more clear it became that he was telling the truth. At best, Madame de Valricour's concealment of many things that must have been within her knowledge, and which Isidore's father had the most undoubted right to know, showed that she was deceiving him. Most of all his mind dwelt on the fact that she had learned that Isidore had fled to Nantes, whereas she had professed complete ignorance as to his whereabouts. With as much composure as he could assume the marquis dismissed Greboeuf with a handsome reward, and now turning to Perigord, said, "But even if we are sure that they have gone to Nantes, what clue have we as to where they may be lodged?"

"They have gone to my brother, Jean Perigord, who keeps an inn on the Quai La Fosse called the 'Great Gun.'"

"Can your brother be trusted?" asked Monsieur de Beaujardin, somewhat anxiously.

"He is as true as steel, monseigneur," was the reply, "yet so simple that a child may cheat him—so much the worse for him, poor fellow!"

"Sit down and write to him as I shall dictate," said the marquis.

Perigord did so, and his master read over what he had written. "You have been an attached and faithful servant to me, Perigord," said the marquis, "and you have now done to me and mine a service which I shall certainly never forget," and with these words he took the old man's hand and grasped it with undisguised emotion.

"Ah, monseigneur, you are too good, too condescending to one so humble as myself," exclaimed the old *chef*, the tears running down his cheeks as he spoke. "But you have deigned to listen to me. Yes, you will go to him—you will save my poor young master—is it not so?"

The marquis did not answer, but Perigord knew by the look his old master gave him that he had not spoken in vain.

Great was the surprise of everybody at the chateau when, soon after these interviews, Monsieur de Beaujardin gave orders that horses should be got ready by daybreak on the following morning, as he was about to make a journey. The marchioness flew to her husband to inquire the reason of such unusual orders, but he would tell her no more than that some business called him away, and that he should be absent for a week at least. He knew that anything he might tell her would soon be wormed out of her by the baroness, which in the present case might prove most undesirable. There were, however, others at the chateau who knew their own interests too well to let Madame de Valricour remain in ignorance of what was passing. Again she went to the marquis, but he refused to see her, and even sent so strange a message to her that she augured at once that something was going wrong, though what it was she could not ascertain.

In due time the travelling equipage was at the door, but as the marquis was stepping into it he was informed that his valet, François, without whom he never went half a dozen miles away from Beaujardin, had been suddenly taken ill and could not possibly attend his master on the journey. What was to be done? Despite his usual philosophic calmness, the marquis stamped with vexation, and stood irresolute on the great steps of the chateau, undecided whether he should start without the valet or wait till he got better.

"What is the matter with the fellow, Jasmin?" said he, as the latter appeared, bringing with him the travelling cloak, in order to deposit it in the coach.

"It is a fever, monsieur," replied Jasmin, bowing, "nay, it may be worse. Heaven send it be not the small-pox."

The marquis looked aghast. "I must go, there is no help for it," said he. "Louis must attend me instead."

"I will fetch him instantly," said Jasmin; but in five minutes he returned with the intelligence that Louis was not to be found, high or low.

"Then I must go alone," exclaimed the marquis, irritably, "I cannot wait. Stay, you have nothing to do, Jasmin, you can go with me."

"Monsieur honours me," replied Jasmin, with a bow. "If monsieur will step in and proceed, I will follow without delay, and overtake the carriage in a short quarter of an hour."

So the marquis entered the vehicle, saying to himself, "This is a useful fellow—ready at a moment. I am not likely to miss François. Indeed, I may find poor Isidore's man more useful to me as matters stand."

Jasmin was as good as his word, and soon joined the equipage, which proceeded on its journey. They then travelled with as much speed as circumstances would allow, and reached Nantes on the following day just as it was growing dusk, and put up at the great hotel of the place. Immediately on their arrival, and before Jasmin had had time even to change his travelling dress and heavy riding boots, he was summoned by the marquis, who told him to repair at once to the inn kept by Jean Perigord on the Quai La Fosse, and to desire the landlord to come to him without a moment's delay at the Hotel du Roi.

The first thing which the valet did, however, was to read a letter which Monsieur de Beaujardin gave to him to hand to Perigord. It ran as follows:—

"MY GOOD BROTHER,

"The Marquis de Beaujardin, my master, is about to proceed to Nantes on some business in which, as I am informed, you will be able to assist him. Render him all the aid in your power, and do not hesitate to give him any information you can, as the affair is one deeply concerning the honour and welfare of the whole family, to which, as you know, I have been so long and so devotedly attached.

"Always your loving Brother,
"ACHILLE PERIGORD."

Having made himself master of the contents of this letter, Jasmin wrapped himself in his cloak, for the wind was keen and the weather looked threatening, and sallied forth from the hotel. But he did not go straight to Jean Perigord's. On the way he stopped at another inn called the Hotel Turenne, where he inquired whether a certain M. de Crillon had yet arrived there. He was answered in the affirmative, and was presently shown into a saloon, where he found de Crillon, to whom he forthwith communicated the circumstances which had brought him thither with the marquis, showing him at the same time the letter from old Achille. The conference was short, and M. de Crillon concluded it by saying, "I suspected they would go to Maitre Jean's, and try to get away in some vessel sailing from this port, and my men are already on the look-out near the house. If, with the aid of this note, you can bring them here, or entice them on to the quay, the business is done." With these instructions, Jasmin once more set out.

It had now become dark, and he found the quay a very long one. He had traversed nearly the whole length of it without coming upon the "Great Gun," when he saw a sailor lounging under one of the trees that lined the road, and asked him if the inn was anywhere near.

"What! Jean Perigord's house?" answered the man. "O yes; I thought every one knew the 'Great Gun.' Come along, I will show it to you."

In a couple of minutes they reached the house. It was still open; a lamp was burning over the door, and there stood Jean Perigord himself, apparently looking out for some one. The sailor touched his hat and asked Jasmin for a trifle; the latter told the landlord to give the man something to drink, and they entered the house together. The man then tossed off his glass and left them alone.

"I will not ask if you are Jean Perigord," said Jasmin, as they entered the little parlour, "you are so like our honest old Achille. I have come to you on a delicate and most important matter; but first of all read this," and he handed to the innkeeper the letter from his brother, which he read with evident astonishment and perturbation.

"Now listen to me," continued Jasmin. "There is no time for beating round the bush. What about two young persons sent to you by your cousin Michel Greboeuf, of St. Sulpice?"

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Jean, in great agitation. "Do you know that they are here?"

"Of course," replied Jasmin. "When did they come?"

"Early this afternoon," said the innkeeper; "but I was not to say a word about it."

"Are they within?"

"She is; but he went out a couple of hours ago and hired a boat to take him to one of the vessels lying in the river. Ah! I thought, in spite of their being dressed like common country folk, they must be something more than they seemed. But," added he, abruptly, "I don't know why I should tell you all this."

"Nay, my good fellow," rejoined Jasmin, in his blandest way, "surely the word of our good old Achille is enough."

Jean glanced hastily at the letter as if to reassure himself, and then a thought seemed suddenly to strike him.

"Stay. Mercy on us!" said he, stepping back a little, "is it possible? Yes, I see—of course you are monseigneur the marquis. How could I be so stupid? Ah, monsieur," he added, "I can only be too glad to——"

"Hush!" cried Jasmin, interrupting him. "We are watched. Do you not see?"

And, sure enough, following the direction of Jasmin's eyes, Jean did see the man who had brought his visitor there emerge noiselessly from a dark corner near the open door and steal away into the street.

"Quick," said Jasmin, "go to her at once. Tell her all is well, but that she must come instantly to the Hotel Turenne."

"But she will never come without him," cried Jean, pleadingly.

"Tell her that you will bring her husband to her the moment he returns; but that if she delays, he will be lost. I will go on first and see that the way is clear."

With these words Monsieur Jasmin drew his cloak about him and disappeared. For a few moments poor Jean stood utterly bewildered, but the thought of the danger aroused him, and he hurried up-stairs to the chamber where Marguerite was sitting, anxiously awaiting her husband's return.

In a few hasty words, and not a little excited by his mission, the landlord bade her get ready

and follow him at once, adding that a good friend had come to aid them, and that she and her husband would soon be safe. At first she hesitated, but on his urgent assurance that she had nothing to fear, she forthwith put on her hood and accompanied him down the stairs, and they quitted the house.

They had proceeded about a hundred yards, and had just reached a part of the quay where some stone steps led down to a landing-place, when Jean heard footsteps behind him. He stopped and turned round, and was instantly seized and thrown to the ground, his assailant whispering to him as he held him down with a grasp like that of a vice, "Keep quiet, good Master Jean. This business does not concern you, and you shall be set free in a minute or two."

Jean Perigord had too brave a heart for that, however, and he struggled to get loose. He succeeded in raising himself a little, but it was only to hear a shriek, and to see the unhappy girl borne past him by two men, who carried her down the steps and placed her in a boat that lay at the landing-place. The next moment he saw two other men carrying past him what seemed to be the figure of a man struggling in the folds of a cloak that had apparently been thrown over him. The muffled form was thrown into the same boat, which was then instantly shoved off.

"Now, my good Jean," said the man, as he let go his hold of the innkeeper, "just go home and keep your tongue quiet—it will be best for you. I shall have an eye on you, and if you blab about what you have seen, why you will stand a good chance of sharing the same fate as your friends yonder. They have been arrested under the king's *lettre de cachet*, and if you meddle in the matter you are a dead man."

Half an hour later Monsieur de Crillon received the report of his chief *employé*, which was to the effect that the young marquis had been overheard whilst discovering himself to Jean Perigord, and that he and the young female who had previously reached the "Great Gun" had been seized and conveyed to the prison of Bouffay, where they awaited Monsieur de Crillon's further orders. "Let the horses be got ready and brought round at once," was the reply, and his follower retired to give directions accordingly.

In the meanwhile Jean Perigord had returned to his house in dire dismay at what had taken place, and his anxiety was heightened, if that were possible, by the reflection that he had very likely been made the means of decoying poor Marguerite into a trap. He could not help fearing, moreover, that the figure he had seen carried past him and thrown into the boat had been that of the poor young fellow her husband, who had doubtless been captured on the quay as he was landing. Without a thought about closing his house as usual, he threw himself into a chair and groaned aloud. What was he to do? Now he resolved to seek out the Marquis de Beaujardin at the Hotel Turenne; now again he shrank from such a step as he remembered that terrible injunction to keep silence about the matter. He was, however, suddenly aroused from his rueful reflections by the sound of hasty footsteps in the passage, and had scarcely had time to rise from his chair when there stood before him a young man, in the garb of a peasant indeed, but whose face and figure, to say nothing of his language and manner, were little in accordance with his homely apparel.

"You will be glad to hear, honest Jean," said he, "that I have managed it all, and have succeeded in taking passages in a ship that sails to-morrow morning. I must go and bring down my poor young wife at once, as I have kept my boat waiting to take us off to the ship. I can never repay you for your kindness, but——" Here he stopped short, and then added in some surprise: "How now, my good friend! you look as if you had seen a ghost."

That was, indeed, just what Jean himself was thinking at that moment. "Heaven have mercy on us!" he ejaculated. "Is it you? It cannot be."

"Are you ill, or crazy, or else what is the matter?" cried Isidore. "Has anything befallen her?" he added, as Jean stood there before him wringing his hands. Isidore was about to rush up-stairs, but the landlord grasped his arm and stopped him, and then in hurried and broken sentences he related to him what had occurred during his absence.

Incoherent as the narrative was, it sufficed to tell Isidore only too plainly what had happened; yet he could at first scarcely realise it all. Trembling with agitation, he pressed the innkeeper with question after question till nothing more remained to be told. "What could I do," cried Jean, despairingly, "when monseigneur the marquis himself—if, indeed, it was he—told me you would be all safe if I took her at once to the Hotel Turenne?"

"The marquis himself!" cried Isidore. "Are you mad? I will not believe it. What was he like—how old?"

"Perhaps a little older than yourself. I supposed, of course, that it was the young marquis, of whom my brother has often spoken to me."

"The young marquis! There is some horrible treachery in all this; but I will find it out, cost what it will. At the Hotel Turenne, did you say?"

Jean nodded an affirmative, and before he could add another word Isidore had rushed out of the house.

Dark as it was, he managed to find his way, after many inquiries, to the Hotel Turenne. As he reached the door two mounted men with a led horse came up; the master of the house and two or three of the hotel servants with lights were standing in the hall.

"Is the Marquis de Beaujardin staying here?" asked Isidore, abruptly.

"No, he is not," answered, the hotel-keeper; "but he came to the Hotel du Roi this afternoon; you will find him there. Stand aside."

At this moment a gentleman in a riding suit, and booted and spurred, passed through the hall and descended the steps, accompanied by the landlord, who officiously held the stirrup as he mounted.

"Stay," said he, bending forward and addressing the hotel-keeper in an undertone, "should a person named Jasmin come again, you will tell him that I am obliged by his assistance, which has been quite successful. Should he not return, send this message to him to-morrow at the Hotel du Roi; he is in the *suite* of the Marquis de Beaujardin." With these words the speaker put spurs to his horse and galloped off, followed by his attendants.

Isidore had not seen the speaker's face indeed, but he knew that voice only too well. What! had his own father then come there in league with de Crillon to hunt her down so relentlessly? Had they even employed his own discharged menial to personate him and entrap her? With his brows knit and his teeth set close, he bent his steps in the direction of the Hotel du Roi, but he had not gone far before he stopped; then, after considering for a minute or two, he turned and made his way almost mechanically to the Quai La Fosse.

The landlord was standing at the door, peering anxiously out into the darkness, but Isidore passed him without notice, and hurrying by into the little parlour threw himself into a chair; there, burying his face in his hands, he gave way for the first time, and broke into a passionate outburst of grief and despair.

Perigord stood near him for a while, not daring to intrude on his distress; but at last he approached him timidly, and laying his hand on his shoulder tried to calm and soothe him. Then, growing bolder, he began to implore him at least to try and save his own life. But Isidore seemed not to heed him. "His own life! What was life to him now—now that he had lost all that seemed to him to make life worth preserving?"

"For the poor young creature's sake," continued Jean, the tears running down his cheeks, "save yourself. Perhaps you may yet find some one; surely there must be some one who may have the power to help you to try and rescue her." As he said this, poor Jean shuddered at the thought of those terrible words about the *lettre de cachet*.

Perhaps the innkeeper's words reminded Isidore that his uncle, the Baron de Valricour, or possibly the Marquis de Montcalm himself, might yet do something for him, if indeed anything could be done. At all events it was useless to hope for aid from anyone in France. Somewhat to the honest innkeeper's surprise, he suddenly arose, and speaking with a calmness and dignity which quite awed the would-be comforter, he said, "You are right, good friend. I take shame to myself for showing such weakness. Yes, there are those who may still help me, if it be God's will; and if they can, I know they will not shrink from doing so. For the kindness which would have sheltered and assisted us, I can never repay you, but I can never forget it. Farewell! It is best for you that you should not even know my name. The boat that is waiting yonder shall take me back to the ship alone," he added, with a groan. "Ah, if ever I visit France again——"

He could say no more, but he grasped honest Jean's hand and left the house. The landlord hurried after him, but it was only to see him descend the steps of the quay and enter the boat, which, in a minute or two, was lost in the darkness.



PART III

THE FALL OF NEW FRANCE.



THE FALL OF NEW FRANCE.

CHAPTER I.



he Canadian summer has set in, coming upon the land, not gradually and imperceptibly as in many other climates, where a mild and genial spring-time intervenes between the seasons of extreme cold and heat, but suddenly, and, as it were, almost at a bound. But two or three short weeks ago the face of the country was still all white with the snows of many a long month, and the great St. Lawrence was bridged over from shore to shore with one broad expanse of solid ice of almost incredible thickness. Anon the vast mass broke up, with explosions loud as the roar of artillery, into countless rugged fields and hummocks, which, after floating up and down awhile on the bosom of the mighty tide, drifted away at last out seaward, to return no more. It is a trite trick of the mimic stage to make old Father Winter suddenly cast aside his hoary garments and stand forth at once in bright array bedecked with fruits and flowers; here in very deed, and on the grandest scale, Nature seems with one touch to sweep away the wintry snow, and with another to clothe the landscape with profuse and luxuriant vegetation. How strange to see the humming-bird dart like a streak of golden light among the fragrant shrubs; stranger still to see the butterfly, attracted by the lines of some stray wild flower, flutter away again, repelled by the chilling neighbourhood of the last remnant of a snow-drift lying in a sheltered corner, where no sunbeam ever finds its way.

It is a pleasant evening, and on a little wooded knoll, on the summit of a cliff that overhangs the St. Lawrence two or three miles above Quebec, there is a little group of persons, all of whom we have seen before. One of them is Boulanger, and in the man now seated beside him, notwithstanding his mean attire and his careworn look, the honest woodman had been at no loss to recognise his visitor of the previous autumn, Isidore de Beaujardin. The latter had been welcomed with a warmth and sincerity that touched him deeply, and although he had not originally thought of saying anything about his troubles to persons in so humble a condition, some mistaken suppositions on their part as to the cause of his reappearing amongst them in so unexpected a plight had led him to tell them that he had been obliged to fly from France. Even his own family had taken part against him he said, adding that he had not a friend in the world to whom he could turn for help or comfort. As he spoke this in the bitterness of his heart, poor Bibi, who stood by, was melted to tears, and the sturdy woodsman looked half disposed to follow her example; whilst Amoahmeh, who sat a little way apart, yet near enough to catch every word that fell from their visitor's lips, turned away, and bent her head over the work on which she was engaged.

"But, monsieur," said Boulanger at length, "there is surely your uncle, the Baron de Valricour, whom I remember well, and who is the most kind and generous of gentlemen one could possibly desire to have for one's friend—surely he can help you."

"It was indeed for that very reason that in my despair I resolved to come out here and secure his assistance, not for my wretched self, but for one who—who—" He paused awhile as his emotion overcame him; then he continued: "My evil fate still pursues me. I learned this afternoon at Quebec that M. de Valricour has just gone back to France on leave and will not return for some months. But why should I trouble your kind hearts with my sorrows? You would never have heard of them, indeed, but that I could not find myself within a couple of miles of you without sparing an hour or so to learn how it fared with my old comrade of the woods. And to think of finding Amoahmeh here too! I should scarce have known you again, my good girl," said he, reaching out his hand to her. "'Tis not a year since I left you a girl, and I find you quite a woman." The words were natural enough, for the contrast in Isidore's case between the once brilliant and handsome aide-de-camp of General Montcalm and the miserable-looking peasant of to-day was scarcely greater than that between the half-starved idiotic Indian girl of a year ago and the comely maiden, dressed in the neat costume of a Canadian country girl, who, rising from her seat, now stepped towards him, and taking the extended hand in both of hers, pressed it silently to her lips.

"Yes," said Boulanger smiling, "and I must tell you, monsieur, that it is not outwardly only that Amoahmeh has changed for the better. She has become a good Christian like the rest of us, and she proves it too, by helping in one way or another all whom she happens to come across, no matter at what cost to herself. As for outside appearance, I suppose monsieur knows as well as we do how that has been managed."

"I!" replied Isidore with some surprise. "How should I know?"

"Oh, I supposed you knew of course that monseigneur the Marquis your father sent her a letter some months ago, which we got through the subintendant at Quebec, enclosing a hundred louis for her, and thanking her from himself and Madame the Marquise for the way in which she saved your life at Fort William Henry. Ah, it was a beautiful letter indeed, so kind and condescending. We had not a dry eye among us when we had read it. We all agreed that monseigneur must be one of the best men in all the world, so generous and tender-hearted too."

The woodman stopped, for he could not but notice the pained expression that came over Isidore's face, and betrayed the conflict of emotions going on within him.

"Yes, I too thought so once, but that is over," said Isidore. "Would that he could have shown himself as tender-hearted and generous to poor Marguerite, if not to his own flesh and blood," he added bitterly, half-speaking to himself.

Boulanger hastened to change a subject evidently so painful to his visitor.

"And what may monsieur intend to do now, if it is not an impertinent question?" said he. "Surely you could rejoin the army here. Montcalm, I fancy, would be glad enough to help one who has already served under him so bravely."

"No, honest friend, there is no hope for me in that quarter. Montcalm could not help me even if he would. It would answer no good purpose were I to tell you why, and it is better for you that you should not know. I am no longer Colonel de Beaujardin, but a nameless wanderer. If you speak of me it must only be as Claude the poor French peasant; but it were best not to do so at all, or you may get yourself, and me too, into trouble. Yet something I must do, and I have resolved to go off to Cape Breton, where, as I have learned at Quebec, the English are about making an attack on Louisburg."

"On Louisburg!" exclaimed the Canadian. "Why, I should have thought they had enough of that last year."

"At all events," replied Isidore, "they will find the task no easy one with such a fellow as our brave Drucour in command of the place; but he will need all his skill and bravery too, for I heard before I left France of the great preparations the English have been making to ensure success this time. Some months ago their Admiral Boscawen sailed from England, and is now in command of a score of line of battle ships, and nearly as many frigates; they say at Quebec that his fleet has left Halifax, with more than a hundred smaller vessels, carrying a force of twelve thousand men to attack Louisburg. The English have fetched home a general named Amherst from Germany, where they have been helping our enemy, King Frederick of Prussia, and have given him the command, and there is also a Colonel Wolfe amongst their officers, who, they say, has already done good service. If they are as slow about making the attack as they have been in coming from England, they'll not take Louisburg this year. They have got a Minister now, however, who hates us thoroughly, and will give us trouble enough. I daresay you have heard of this Mister Pitt I speak of."

"O yes, I have heard of him sure enough, monsieur, but it don't matter much about him. I suppose they have not got any generals like ours, and when it comes to fighting, let them come, say I."

"You seem quite to forget, my friend, that these English once had a general called Marlborough," said Isidore.

"O yes, they once had," retorted Boulanger; "but as the famous old song says—"

*'Monsieur Malbrouk est mort,
Est mort et enterré.'*

Malbrouk is dead and buried at all events, and will not frighten us any more. But, seriously, monsieur, I suppose from what you say that you are thinking of going to help our brave fellows at Louisburg?"

"Just so," answered Isidore. "It matters little where I go just now—it is better to die like a soldier than live on thus; so I will now say adieu, and go back to Quebec, whence I must make my way down to Louisburg as I best may."

"At least, however," exclaimed the Canadian, "you must let us see first what we can do to fit your honour out a little better. Come, Bibi, let us have supper, and I will try what I can rummage out that may be of use to monsieur. If I can do nothing else, I can at all events furnish him with a rifle and powder-horn."

Then without waiting for the thanks which his guest was about to offer, the sturdy woodsman hurried away with his wife to carry his good intentions into effect.

Amoahmeh, who had remained at a little distance during this colloquy, now approached Isidore, as if about to speak to him, and as she seemed to hesitate, he gave her a smile of

encouragement.

"And the dear young lady who was so kind to me?" said she, inquiringly. "Where is she, monsieur—is she well?"

The smile was gone at once. Isidore's countenance fell, and he buried his face in his hands and groaned in the bitterness of his heart. Amoahmeh shrank back, and clasping her hands together exclaimed, "Alas! what have I said? I did not—I could not know."

There was a painful silence for a minute or two, then laying her hand timidly on Isidore's arm she said, "Oh, forgive me if I have distressed you—you to whom I owe so much—you who first told the poor lonely Indian girl where it is that we may surely hope to see again those whom we loved, and whom God has taken from us. Ah, it is hard to hear; but monsieur knows that if there is one angel less on earth, there is one more in heaven."

"Girl, girl!" exclaimed Isidore, raising his head, "you do not know what you are saying, or how you torture me. She is not dead—at least, for aught I know—but she is dead to me—lost for ever!"

Then as he marked the distressed and bewildered look with which she listened to him, a look so like the old vacant stare that he remembered too well, a strange fear came over him.

"My good girl," he continued in a soothing tone, "I grieve that I have frightened you, but my sorrow overcame me for the moment. Be comforted—she is yet alive, and, with Heaven's blessing, I dare still hope that some day I may find her again, and that we may yet be happy."

Touched by the deep sigh of relief with which Amoahmeh received these words, and by the tears that followed it, Isidore could not choose but tell her something of what had befallen Marguerite. Debarred as he had latterly been from consolation or sympathy, and without a friend to speak a single word of comfort or encouragement to him, it is scarcely to be wondered at that he should open his heart to any one who would pour balm upon his wounded spirit. But sorrow had already borne some fruit with him, and as he briefly told the story of the misfortunes that had befallen him, no word that savoured of anger or of vengeful feeling passed his lips, and though he could not but speak of grievous wrongs done both to her and to him, he forbore to use hard words against, or even to name, those who had brought this misery upon them.

"See," said he at last, with a melancholy smile, "I have been led, I scarce know how, to tell you a long story about myself; let us now talk of other things."

"But, monsieur," replied Amoahmeh, who had listened to every word with intense interest, "you have scarcely once spoken of monsieur your father. How could he suffer this? He is a great noble in France, surely he could have saved you? Do I not know him to be so good even to a poor stranger, that it is not possible he would let his own son, and a noble one as you are, to become the victim of such a dreadful thing as this *lettre de cachet* which you tell me of? Did you not see him at the last and tell him what had happened to her? Surely his heart must have melted if he had known all you tell me now."

Isidore remained silent for a little while. "To speak the truth," said he at length, "it is just this that oftentimes adds to my sorrow. I do feel that I ought at the very last to have made one more appeal to him; but, after all, what could it have availed me? He must have known it all, else why come there to hunt us down? Heaven forgive me if I have wronged him. At all events it is too late now. Let us say no more about it. Here is our good Boulanger come to call us in. God be thanked that I have found at least this ray of comfort in my trouble."

Seldom if ever had that humble dwelling seen so abundant a meal as that which Bibi had managed to improvise for their young guest, and when it was over the honest Canadian produced the promised rifle and accoutrements, and his wife and Amoahmeh did their best to add to them such trifles as might be useful in a campaign. Then, after many a hearty grasp of the hand and many a warm expression of his hope that they might meet again in happier times, Isidore bade his kind friends adieu, and set out on his return to Quebec.





CHAPTER II.



Two months passed away, and beneath the bright August sun the still waters of the St. Lawrence were reflecting the clear and well-defined image of its lofty and thickly wooded banks, when Isidore again stood on that well-remembered knoll, conversing eagerly with his humble Canadian friend. The contrast between the two men was even more striking than on the last occasion of their meeting there. Boulanger seemed if possible more hale and hearty than ever, and there was in his whole manner and deportment a vivacity and joyousness even greater than that which commonly characterised him. Still he seemed to check himself as much as it was in his nature to do, and paused more than once in his warmly expressed greetings as he surveyed the pitiable condition of his visitor, which was indeed more deplorable and wretched than when the hospitable woodsman and his wife had done their best to fit him out for his expedition to Louisburg.

"Alas!" said the Canadian, "we have already heard that it was all of no use and that the place has fallen, but as yet few particulars have reached us here, as you may suppose. Indeed I too have been away from here almost all the time, and have only just come back. But we must do what we can to recruit you a little, and then perhaps monsieur will tell us all about it." So once more Isidore found himself seated within the walls of the forester's dwelling, and as the meal went on did his best to satisfy his host's inquiries as to what had befallen him since their last meeting.

"I came too late to witness the beginning of the siege," said he, "for the fleet arrived there on the 2nd of June. They thought to take the place by surprise, but our brave General Drucour was not the man to let them do that, and he had already taken every precaution that skill and daring could devise to strengthen the defences in every direction."

"It was a pretty strong place even without that," said Boulanger. "I was down at Louisburg myself last year and know it well, with its great harbour that would hold all the British navy together, and the two great tongues of land sheltering it from the south-western and north-western gales, and Goat Island in the middle with its long reef of rocks."

"Just so," continued Isidore. "Well, there had been such a fog for the first week, and the sea broke on the beach so heavily, that even those bold English, with that fellow Wolfe to lead them, could not effect a landing until the 8th, and then they met with a pretty warm reception. It was of no use, however; our fellows were gradually driven back, and the siege began in good earnest. Every yard of ground was contested, but by degrees our outlying batteries were first silenced, then taken, and it was whilst this was going on that I reached the place. Besides our regular troops there were three or four hundred Canadians and some Indians; and being a soldier with some experience, I got the command of a company of irregulars. So matters went on, until at length the Goat Island batteries were silenced; but on the 9th of last month——"

"The 9th!" cried Boulanger. "Ah, I recollect that day well enough. I'll tell you about that presently; go on, I pray you."

"Well, on that night we made a tremendous sortie, and took the enemy by surprise. They were commanded by a British Lord—Dundonald was his name—but if the poor fellow was taken unawares he paid dearly for it, for he was killed, together with a great number of his men. Yet they were soon reinforced, and came on so gallantly that we were repulsed, losing many men and some prisoners. I, too, was hit, but luckily it was only a graze."

"What! You were in the sortie then?" exclaimed Boulanger, not a little excited by the narrative.

"Yes, and our brave general was pleased to say I had done good service in bringing off some of our men who were nearly surrounded. He offered at once to give me a company of regulars, and asked my name. But I told him plainly that I was under a cloud and could not accept his offer; still he insisted on giving me a few words in writing, which he said might some day be of use to me."

"The rest of my sad story is soon told," Isidore went on to say. "Three of our great ships had already been set on fire in the harbour, and the enemy kept up such a cannonade upon them that it was impossible to save them; but the town being, as you know, three or four miles from the

spot where the landing was made, the siege was not yet at an end. Ten or twelve days after the sortie, however, Wolfe had pushed on his attack almost up to the walls. Then the citadel was burnt, and on the day after that the barracks, and at last three great breaches were made in the defences of the place itself. The day following two more of our line of battle ships were captured and burnt by some of their captains, who made a sudden attack on them in the very harbour itself. All hope of further resistance was now at an end, and on the 26th the unfortunate Drucour was obliged to surrender."

"Yes, we have heard that," said Boulanger; "but General Montcalm has already done something to make up for that, though Louisburg has been such a triumph for those terrible English."

"It must indeed be something of importance to make up for what we have lost there," replied Isidore. "My old habits on the staff led to my knowing better than most people the extent of our misfortune. The English took and destroyed eleven of our great ships, and made nearly six thousand of our men prisoners, to say nothing of capturing 250 guns and fifteen thousand stand of arms, and, what is worst of all, they can boast of taking nearly a dozen of our colours."

"But how did you escape?" inquired the forester anxiously.

"Well, that is of little consequence," answered Isidore, "though that was strange enough after all. I told you that we had some Indians fighting on our side, and very well they fought too, though I do not care to have to do with those rascals. Fortunately there were none on the English side—I say fortunately, for I have always found there is more anxiety connected with watching against a handful of them than against any number of regulars; one never knows what cunning wiles and surprises they may be devising. Strange to say, the chief of our Indians, a fellow named White Eagle, seemed to have taken a mighty liking to me, and stuck close to me wherever I went. I fancy most of his tribe managed to escape at the last; but after the capitulation, when I found myself with a number of our Canadian volunteers lodged in a shattered block-house awaiting the decision of our captors, whom should I find seated quietly by my side but my friend the red skin."

"Eh?" exclaimed Boulanger with marked surprise. "What tribe did he belong to?"

"Oh, he was an Algonquin," replied Isidore. "I asked him how he came there when most of his people had got safe away? He only grunted the usual 'ugh'; but when most of the prisoners had fallen asleep, tired out with their long and weary work, he said to me quietly, 'When the sun sets, the pale face can escape and go back to Quebec.' Not a word more could I get out of him till night had come on. Then he touched my arm and pointed to the window frame, close to which we lay. The window itself had been blown out, indeed the place was riddled with shot holes, and the roof had been half blown off, so that what little light the moon did give shone right down upon us. Wondering what was to come next I watched him attentively, and saw him stealthily tie the end of a long wampum belt to the stump of one of the iron window stanchions. 'Slip down and drop; it is but a couple of lengths more to the ground,' said he. Without a word I crept to the window, and in another minute had slid down. The drop, however, was longer than I had counted on, and I fell rather heavily. 'Who goes there?' shouted a sentry on the wall, a little way off. Of course I lay as still as death, and fortunately the shadow of a buttress fell exactly across the spot where I had fallen. The sentry challenged again and fired, but as he did so the Indian dropped lightly down at my side, seized me by the arm and hurried me away. I suppose there was an alarm, but if they did miss me from amongst the prisoners, they probably did not think it worth while to give chase. Accustomed as we were to the ins and outs of the place, my friend and I managed easily to evade the sentries, and in a quarter of an hour more we were clear of them, and in the open country beyond the town. We did not slacken our pace, however, and in a couple of hours we reached an Indian encampment, where I recognised many of the red skins I had seen during the siege. At daybreak we moved off, and I returned with the tribe to the neighbourhood of Quebec. At parting the chief presented me with a new wampum belt, which he drew from beneath his vest, saying, 'Keep this in token that White Eagle has discharged his trust.'"

"What!" cried Boulanger, in great excitement. "Is that the belt which you now have on?"

"Yes," said Isidore, untying and showing it to him; "and I shall certainly keep it in recollection of my most extraordinary escape."

The forester gave one look at it, and uttered the word, "Amoahmeh!"

"Who—what?" said Isidore. "By the by, I have been going to ask you more than once what has become of that poor Indian girl."

"Nay, you ought to know better than I, to judge from this wampum belt," replied Boulanger.

"Why so? What has become of her?"

"Well," answered the Canadian, "if you had asked me a few minutes ago I should have spoken out pretty strongly about her, but I suspect she is not so bad after all."

"Bad! What do you mean?"

"Why, you see, monsieur," replied Boulanger, "you had scarcely left us a couple of days when

she bolted without a word, not even saying as much as 'thank ye,' or 'good-bye.' I did feel vexed, I confess, for I was quite sure she had joined a tribe of Indians that had been loafing about here for some time. I had more than once noticed her at work over a wampum belt, as if she had a hankering after her old life. 'What's bred in the bone is sure to come out in the flesh,' I said to Bibi, and 'you can't make a silk purse out of a pig's ear.' However, as she seems to have had some hand in your escape, I'll not say a word against her. But what does monsieur intend to do now?"

Isidore did not answer him, and Boulanger was making some remarks as to the need in which his guest stood of a long rest after so much fatigue and anxiety, when Bibi suddenly held up her hand, saying softly, "Hush, I declare he has dropped off."

There was no mistake about that—the seat which the young soldier occupied, and which very possibly did duty as a bed by night, made by day a particularly comfortable couch, covered as it was with a fine soft buffalo-robe of huge dimensions. More than once towards the conclusion of his story Isidore had nodded, but had roused himself with a spasmodic start. At last, utterly overcome by prolonged fatigue, he had sunk down gradually and fallen fast asleep.

"Poor gentleman," said Boulanger, in a whisper, "I don't wonder at it, and I would not wake him for the world after all he has had to go through."

So the little curtain was drawn as noiselessly as possible to keep out the rays of the now setting sun, and creeping away stealthily on tiptoe, the kind-hearted and hospitable couple left their visitor to his dreams.

The sun had not only set, but had risen again when Isidore was aroused from his sleep by the noisy gambols of Boulanger's little ones beneath the window. Refreshed by his long rest, he was soon fortifying himself still further by a hearty breakfast, at which the conversation of the previous day was at once resumed.

"I am quite ashamed of having talked of nothing but myself yesterday," said Isidore, "instead of listening to others. You were saying something about our having had successes to set against the fall of Louisburg, and I did hear a report that Montcalm had repulsed the English on Lake George, but of course I have heard no particulars. What does it all amount to?"

"I fancy I can tell you about as much as any one," answered Boulanger; "I happened to be there."

"You!" exclaimed Isidore, with some surprise.

"Yes. You must know that very shortly after you left us, and whilst I was fretting about Miss Amoahmeh's unceremonious departure, I found our folks at Quebec preparing to send up reinforcements to General Montcalm at Ticonderoga, where a great attack was expected."

"I thought so," said his guest; "indeed I heard even before leaving France that Pitt's plans comprised not only the attack on Louisburg, but simultaneous operations on the lakes, and also in the west, on the Ohio."

"Well, it is all up with them on Lake George, at all events," continued the forester. "I found they wanted guides at Quebec for the detachments going up country, and being unsettled and just in the humour for it, I offered my services, and so it came about that I reached Ticonderoga at the beginning of last month. It was on the 4th, just as Montcalm's scouts reported the embarkation of the English at the southern end of Lake George, on the way to attack us. You know that country, monsieur?"

"Of course; I was at Fort William Henry, you know. Ticonderoga, I recollect, lies just at the southern extremity of Lake Champlain, just where the northern end of the comparatively small Lake George almost joins it. What was the English force?"

"Ah, you gentlemen on the staff are always asking what's the enemy's strength. Well, I heard one of our officers say that General Abercromby had with him nine or ten thousand New England militia, and about six thousand English regulars. They had more than a thousand boats and barges, and I'm told that there never was a grander sight than to see them all coming up the lake on the 5th of July, with music playing and streamers flying, just for all the world like a holiday procession."

"They could not add to the beauty of that lovely lake," said Isidore, interrupting him. "Well do I remember it with its myriads of enchanting little islands mirrored in its clear smooth waters, and glowing all bright and lovely in the setting sun."

"A good many of those poor fellows only saw the sun set once or twice more," continued the Canadian. "They landed on the following day a few miles from Fort Ticonderoga, and marched forward at once, our small force of men stationed there retiring before them, and by some blunder losing their way in the thick woods lying between that spot and the fort. As it happened, they fell in that afternoon with a body of the English under a milord Howe—as brave an officer as ever fought they say—who was killed by one of the first shots fired; but his men got the better of ours, and we lost a few killed and some prisoners. Their general, however, seems not to have been good for much, and fell back; but on the day after that he sent part of his army forward

under another brave fellow, Colonel Bradstreet."

"I know," said Isidore; "the same who gallantly forced a passage up the Onondaga quite at the outset of the war. Well, go on."

"On the 8th they reached a place named Carillon, close to Ticonderoga, and began their attack on the fort. Some of the provincial militia came on first, but soon gave way, for our general, as you can guess, monsieur, had not only strengthened the fort with a formidable rampart some eight feet high, but had studded the approach to it with an abatis of prodigious trunks and branches of trees, which not only seemed, but actually proved impenetrable. On came the regulars as briskly and bravely as our men could have done, but it was only to be shot down in scores and hundreds by our sharpshooters sheltered behind the earthworks, who picked them off as they crossed the open and tried in vain to struggle through the abatis. Three times the attack was renewed by fresh troops, and the English fought splendidly; but even the Highlanders, though they climbed like wild cats, could only here and there get a few men through the tangled defences outside of us. At last their General Abercromby seemed to despair of success, and instead of trying some other point to the right or left, where I believe we were not half so well protected, he ordered a retreat. From that moment it was all up with them; their general's loss of heart seemed to affect even the brave fellows he commanded. When on the following day—the very 9th of July, monsieur, on which you were making your sortie at Louisburg—he gave the order to fall back towards the place where they had landed, a panic seized them. They fancied, I suppose, that all was lost, and there was a regular stampede for the lake, into which they might perhaps have rushed like a herd of bisons over a precipice, if that same Colonel Bradstreet had not made a stand against them and restored something like order. However, there they embarked as fast as they could, and went back to Fort William Henry, leaving nearly two thousand killed and wounded behind them, which was pretty well, considering that the troops our general had did not number more than about three thousand altogether."

"A great and glorious day for us indeed," exclaimed Isidore; "and from what you say of the nature of the conflict, I should hope it did not cost us very dear."

"Less than four hundred men in all," replied the Canadian; "so if we have lost Louisburg we beat them at Ticonderoga. And if they are proud of their General Wolfe, let them send him to fight Montcalm and we shall see who is the best man."

It may easily be imagined that Isidore had listened to this narrative with the deepest interest, and indeed at times with no little excitement. No sooner was it concluded than he started up, exclaiming, "I cannot stay here brooding over my misfortunes whilst such things are going on around me—it would kill me. No, I will not sit idle with my hands folded whilst others are shedding their blood for France. I have made up my mind to go to the army on the lakes. I should hardly be recognised now," he added, somewhat bitterly, "and if I were, what matters it? One can but die once, and I have little to live for save one thing, that seems every hour to become more utterly hopeless."

"Monsieur is right," cried Boulanger. "I also feel that there are times when every good Frenchman should be up and doing. We will start to-morrow."

"We!" rejoined Isidore, surprised. "You surely do not mean to leave your home again so soon?"

"As for that," replied the forester, "I had thought of it already. It is my chief business to be moving about for one thing or another, and the more I stick to that the sooner I shall be able to call this little place my own for good and all. So there's an end of it."

Isidore could not but think that the honest Canadian's attachment to him had something to do with this determination, and he would fain have persuaded him to reconsider his resolve, but it was to no purpose. The rest of the day was accordingly spent in making preparations for their departure, and on the following morning they set out on their journey.





CHAPTER III.



he capture of Louisburg was at once followed up by a descent upon the French settlements on the Acadian coast by Sir Charles Hardy, with half a dozen ships of the line and some frigates, carrying with them a small land force under the command of Wolfe. This was intended partly as a measure of retaliation and partly to draw away a portion of the enemy's forces from the theatre of war on the lakes. Miramichi and the villages along the Bay of Chaleurs and at Point Gaspé were partially or wholly destroyed, and although no needless cruelty may have been added to the inevitable horrors involved in such an expedition, the sufferings of the peaceful inhabitants of the devoted districts cannot but excite the deepest commiseration. Their dwellings were burnt, and the stores of provisions laid up for the winter totally destroyed, whilst the people themselves were either killed, taken prisoners, or driven out into the woods, where many perished with cold and hunger. Some of course managed to escape, and a few betook themselves to other places on the St. Lawrence, or, like Isidore de Beaujardin, ultimately joined the army under Montcalm.

It was in company with some of these fugitives, who had been organised at Quebec, that Isidore and Boulanger at last reached Crown Point, on Lake Champlain, where they found that no operations of any importance had been undertaken since the great repulse of the English at Ticonderoga. Skirmishes indeed occasionally took place along the border, and one expedition under Major Rogers, on the shore of Lake Champlain, kept the French on the alert. Whilst Montcalm was unable for want of a sufficiently numerous army to undertake any great offensive movement, Abercromby, disheartened by his late fruitless attempt on Ticonderoga, lay almost inactive in the neighbourhood of Lake George.

Such a state of things was distasteful enough to Isidore, who had hoped in the excitement of a busy campaign to be able to forget his sorrows, and who fretted continually over the mean and miserable position he was now condemned to occupy. He had begun to think seriously of returning to Quebec in the hope of meeting with his uncle the Baron de Valricour, when an event occurred which put an end, at all events for a time, to any such thoughts. As he was sitting one evening, disconsolately enough, on the parapet of a small outwork, he heard footsteps approaching him, and on looking up he recognised at once the small and well-remembered figure of the Marquis de Montcalm. Almost mechanically he rose and saluted. Montcalm, apparently struck by his appearance, stopped and eyed him curiously; his singularly retentive memory never failed him at such a moment.

"Truly," said he at last, "I could hardly have believed it possible. Who would have thought of seeing you here, Colonel de Beaujardin—and in such a disguise too!" he added, with a searching and somewhat suspicious glance at Isidore's costume, which had little of the soldier about it.

"I do not call myself Colonel de Beaujardin now," replied Isidore, bitterly, "but Claude Breton, general, at your service."

"Breton—Breton!" exclaimed the marquis, considering for a moment. "It was reported to me, I recollect, that a Canadian called Breton showed great courage and coolness in a little affair of outposts a few days since. Was it you?"

Isidore bowed slightly, but made no other answer.

Montcalm was silent for a minute or so, and fidgeted with his sword-knot, though he kept his eyes intently fixed on his *quondam* aide-de-camp.

"Monsieur de Beaujardin," said he at length, with his usual rapidity of utterance, "I believe you know as well as any one that I have always held that men seldom lose caste and come down in the world without some fault of their own. I should be sorry indeed to think this is the case with you, but you beyond all other men had at your command everything that could ensure an honourable and even brilliant career. What can have brought you to this?"

"No fault of mine, sir," replied Isidore, proudly. "I have been the victim of circumstances which it was beyond my power to control."

"Beyond your power! What! with a father in the position of the marquis to assist you?" rejoined Montcalm. "There is no man whom I would more willingly believe, or more willingly assist, but——"

"General Montcalm will have the goodness to remember that I have neither sought nor solicited his assistance," answered Isidore, haughtily.

"I do not forget it, sir," was the reply, "indeed it is that which justifies my doubts. I, at all events, am not changed, and if Monsieur de Beaujardin has nothing to reproach himself with, he may without scruple claim both sympathy and assistance from me."

Isidore was touched with the generous forbearance evinced by such a gentle answer to his rather defiant speech.

"Sir," said he, "His Majesty has done me the honour to issue a *lettre de cachet* against me, and not for all the world would I place such a friend as you have been in a false position, by asking at your hands what, as the king's lieutenant here, you have scarcely a right to accord to me."

"I accept the reason, and I honour you for it, de Beaujardin," said Montcalm, grasping his hand. "I grieve to find you in such a position, but I am happily not called upon to act on your information, of which, indeed," he added with a smile, "I will choose to doubt the accuracy. It is not for me to pry into your family affairs, but if you desire to confide in me, I will assuredly counsel and help you to the best of my power."

Isidore could not repel an offer of friendship so kindly and generously made, and as briefly as possible he narrated the circumstances that had led to his revisiting Canada. Montcalm listened to him attentively and without interruption.

"You are certainly more sinned against than sinning," said he, when Isidore had concluded, "and if you have in some respects acted hastily, it has been from noble and generous impulses. I take a real interest in the unfortunate young lady, whose father I well remember as a brave and devoted soldier. To restore you to your former position, or even to appoint you to a company, is plainly impossible at present, but I can give you active employment of a kind which will keep you out of the way of being recognised, and should an opportunity offer, I will not forget you."

Isidore was about to express a warm acknowledgment of this kindly assurance, but Montcalm interrupted him: "Wait until I have really done something for you," said he. "And now listen to me. The campaign here is virtually over. With the force at my command, I can do no more than hold Abercromby in check, and prevent him from detaching any considerable force beyond that sent away by him some time since under Bradstreet for the reduction of Fort Frontenac, which has been only too successfully accomplished. I have just heard that the place is taken and the shipping on Lake Ontario captured or destroyed. What could de Noyan do with a hundred and twenty men? The defence of the fort was hopeless in the absence of reinforcements, the absolute necessity for which de Longueuil seems to have neglected to report, unless indeed the Marquis de Vaudreuil purposely withheld them. I suspect as much, and if so, poor de Noyan will be sacrificed, for the king is not likely to hear the true state of the case."

"A disaster indeed," observed Isidore, who in the interest he felt in Montcalm's communication seemed to fancy himself once more the aide-de-camp and personal friend of his old chief. "We have lost, then, the command of the lake, and what is perhaps worse, our hold on the many tribes of Indians who used to make Frontenac their great place of assembly for concluding their contracts and alliances."

"You are right," was the reply. "Beaujardin, or Breton, I see you have not lost your head in spite of your misfortunes. Well, all that is past helping now, and what is almost as bad, we shall lose our hold in the West. General Forbes has long since left Philadelphia with some one thousand five hundred British regulars, chiefly Highlanders, and at least five thousand of those New England militia, for an attack on Fort Duquesne. Forbes is not the man to let himself be decoyed into such a snare as Braddock fell into, but he has to cross the Alleghanies and a tract of a hundred leagues or more through a strange and difficulty country, and that is not done in a week, or a month either. This brings me to what I have to say to you. I wish de Lignières, who is in command at Duquesne to know that I consider the place cannot resist such a force as will be brought against it; he cannot be reinforced, and he will do wisely to dismantle and abandon it, falling back on such points as circumstances may leave him to think best capable of defence. Will you take this message? and if so, how soon can you set out?"

"I am ready, and will start in ten minutes," was the prompt reply.

Montcalm smiled. "You are indeed worthy of a better fate than that which has unhappily befallen you. As for a guide——"

"I have with me the Canadian woodsman Boulanger, who took me from Oswego to Quebec two years ago."

"Boulanger! I recollect the man well; a better guide or a more trusty fellow you could not have." Saying this, Montcalm wrote a few lines in pencil on a leaf of his pocket-book and handed it to Isidore. "Now, adieu," said he; "when we meet again I trust I may be able to welcome you, not as Claude Breton, but as my old friend and aide-de-camp Colonel de Beaujardin."

"Farewell, sir," answered Isidore; "it will indeed be a proud and happy day for me should I

ever again find myself on the staff of a general whom our country will surely one day hail as the saviour of New France."

"No," rejoined Montcalm gravely, "that is no longer possible. It is now only too evident that, backed by a brave and energetic people, with almost unlimited resources, and assisted by their colonies in America, Pitt will not rest till our beautiful New France has become a British colony. But the great changes that lie before us will not end there. Mark me, de Beaujardin, those mad New Englanders with their foolish notions of independence will not long brook being ruled by a government three thousand miles off. The time will come, perhaps, when instead of fighting against France they may welcome her as an ally who will help them to shake off the allegiance they owe to their king, and France, unhappy France, will some day follow their example! I shall not live to see it, but you may. Once more, adieu!"

Boulanger, who was soon found, evinced no small delight at the news which Isidore at once imparted to him, and within the ten minutes which Isidore had named they were already on the way towards Fort Duquesne. The journey was a long one, a matter of some hundred and fifty leagues indeed; but it was diversified by many a little episode incidental to life in the woods and wilds, and Isidore scarcely knew whether he was most glad or sorry when it came to an end, and he had delivered to M. de Lignières the message entrusted to him. They had come just in time.

General Forbes, warned by Braddock's disaster in 1755, had halted at Raystown, nearly a hundred miles from the fort, in order to advance upon it by a new route, and thus avoid the gorge which had been the scene of the former catastrophe. The Highlanders, however, pushed on, and desirous perhaps of achieving the capture of the place before the main body could come up, had posted themselves at a short distance from the fort and challenged a combat in the open ground. This challenge de Lignières had accepted and had signally defeated them, unsupported as they were. But he knew that the magnitude of the force which was shortly to be brought against him would make resistance unavailing, and after dismantling the defences and destroying whatever could not be carried away, he evacuated the place, leaving the famous Fort Duquesne to fall into the hands of the British, and to be known henceforward by the name of Pittsburg.

It had been Isidore's intention after this event to make his way back to Quebec, and he and Boulanger set out again together for this purpose. Their route, however, lay in a different direction from that taken by de Lignières and the retreating garrison. They had just lain down to rest on the first evening of their march, when the Canadian's sharp ears detected the approach of footsteps, and before he could arouse his companion, they were surrounded by a small detachment of New England men sent out to scour the woods. Resistance would have been mere folly, and they were at once captured. At first they were in hopes that they might pass unnoticed as common Canadian woodsmen, but, unfortunately for them, they were searched, and the testimonial from General Drucour, which Isidore had carried about with him ever since the taking of Louisburg, settled their fate. They were, without further question, carried off to head-quarters, to be dealt with possibly as spies, but at the best as prisoners of war.



CHAPTER IV.

he Marquis de Beaujardin had awaited the return of Jasmin from his errand to the Quai La Fosse, first with impatience, then with irritation, but at last with anxiety; and as neither the valet nor Jean Perigord made their appearance, either that night or on the following morning, he at last



proceeded to the quay in person to search out the innkeeper. He found Jean still in great perturbation about the events of the preceding evening, and a visit from another totally different Marquis de Beaujardin so excited him that for a long time he refused to tell anything. At last, however, he was induced to do so, and the marquis learned that he had come too late, and that Marguerite had undoubtedly been seized, but that Isidore had certainly escaped for the present, though all inquiries as to whither he had gone proved wholly fruitless.

With a heavy heart Monsieur de Beaujardin returned to his chateau, quite powerless to take any further steps, for he felt that any attempt on Marguerite's behalf would be more likely to lead to Isidore's capture than to obtain her liberation.

Surprised at not seeing the valet again, Madame de Valricour tried to ascertain from the marquis what had passed at Nantes, but his only reply was a stern request that she would cease visiting Beaujardin altogether. As to his wife, the marquis confined himself to telling her that Isidore was safe, but had gone abroad. Of course the baroness soon heard this from her weak-minded sister-in-law, but she had learned from de Crillon that both the birds had been snared, and felt quite satisfied that the marquis had only sought to relieve his wife's anxiety by a made up story of her son's safety.

The return of the Baron de Valricour from New France on a short furlough did not mend matters. The baroness only told him that Isidore and Marguerite had eloped, at which he was very indignant: the marquis preserved a moody silence, feeling assured that the baroness had had some hand in what had occurred, but he had no proofs. What could he say? Besides, he hated such scenes as must needs ensue on a revelation of the little he did know. So there was for a time a great coolness between the two houses; but Madame de Valricour had now formed another scheme, and as incessant dropping will wear away even a stone, she soon contrived to induce the marchioness to insist on having Clotilde frequently at Beaujardin. The marquis had always been fond of his niece, and the fact that they both secretly grieved over the fate of Isidore and Marguerite drew him still closer to her. This was just what the baroness wanted. The match with Isidore was at an end, but the marquis might be induced to adopt Clotilde. She took her measures accordingly. Hints were now and then dropped about her returning to Canada with the baron, and taking Clotilde with them. The marquis did not disguise his reluctance to let Clotilde go. Now was the time to get him to insist on Clotilde's remaining at Beaujardin, perhaps to declare his intentions about the disposal of his property in her favour. Much to her surprise and vexation, however, she found, on the very first attempt to lead up to that subject, that both the marquis and his wife assumed without question that Isidore's absence was only temporary, and that he would certainly return some day to Beaujardin; she was therefore compelled, for a time at least, to let things take their course. The pretended journey to Canada with her husband was abandoned, and M. de Valricour returned thither alone. At parting, however, there was a reconciliation between him and the marquis, who, after narrating all that had come to his own knowledge respecting his son's marriage, and the events that had taken place at Nantes, expressed a hope that Isidore might have taken refuge in New France, and begged M. de Valricour to do what he could to ascertain whether such was really the fact. This the kind-hearted baron promised faithfully to do, and then departed for Quebec, where he arrived shortly before the winter set in.

A lively and picturesque scene enough is that presented by the little market-place of Sorel. December has come, and with it the usual heavy and incessant falls of snow. That of last night has added a good foot at least to the three or four that already covered the country all around. Yet there are the accustomed little groups of *habitans*, with their provisions and wares for sale, chattering and gesticulating as vivaciously as ever over the difficulty they had in getting there at all through the heavy snow-drifts, and apparently quite regardless of a temperature several degrees below zero. Look at that motley little circle there, some clad in yellow leather coats with gay coloured borders, others in buffalo wraps with leather leggings, but most of them with red or wampum sashes tied round their waists. One is crowing over the others because the "Grand Voyer," or Road Inspector, has already made a short cut from his village over fields and fences alike, marking out the new track with fir-branches stuck in the snow at intervals, so that by night or by day there is no fear of missing the impromptu highway. But it was hard work for all that. The rude sledge, which is little more than a couple of short wooden runners with boards nailed across them, and a short pole at each corner, plunges into the snow and then carries forward a mass of it until the obstruction becomes too great; the clumsy machine then mounts over it somehow, and again plunges down till the increasing traffic makes the road one series of hillocks and deep holes or *cahots*, which jolt and jerk the traveller enough to dislocate every joint in his body. They are, however, not quite so bad as that yet, and the hardy little Canadian pony looks ready for any amount of work as he stands there with three or four more in a row. The warmth in their shaggy heads has melted the snow and ice that stuck to them when they came in, and it has run down their faces, but no sooner has it done so than it straightway congeals again, and hangs down from their noses in icicles a foot in length. You may see some nearly as long as those which hang from the eaves and window sills of the house opposite that was on fire last night; they froze there as the water was dashed up against the building whilst it was still blazing within.

No wonder that yonder country woman is selling her milk by the lump out of a sack, or that her husband, who is a bit of a humourist, has stuck up on their legs his half dozen dead pigs to glare at the passers-by as though they were still alive. There are half a score of Red Indians too;

their tribe has pitched its wigwams in the forest at a little distance from the town, and they have come in to loaf about and pick up anything they can, or in the hope of getting some good-natured Canadian to treat them to the deadly fire-water. There they stand looking stolidly at the house of Pierre Lebon the baker, which is in a pretty plight, to be sure. It is a corner house, and round that unlucky corner the snow has whirled and eddied all night long till it has formed a pyramid-shaped hill twenty feet high against the side of the building, utterly burying the doorway, and even covering one of the upper windows, which it at last forced in. All along the little street beyond, for a score of yards at least, there is a bare patch of pavement on which the giddy blasts have not allowed a single flake of snow to settle.

Besides these Indians, there is a girl of the same tribe on the market-place, come to dispose of her little store of bark work embroidered with porcupine-quills, and gaily ornamented moccasins. She too is picturesque enough with her dark handsome face, surmounted by a quaint cap of white feathers, and her large cloak of white fox skins, beneath which peep out her scarlet leggings, and a pair of moccasins, not smartly decorated like those she has for sale, but made of plain buff leather, better suited to the great flat snow-shoes by her side, with which she has made her way hither across the deep snow. She speaks but little, yet her keen and watchful glances show that she is by no means unobservant of what is going on around her. See! one of the market women has stopped just in front of her, but it is only to have a good look at the glossy wrapper, white as snow, which glistens quite dazzlingly in the bright sunlight.

"Ah, child," says the woman, good-humouredly, as the girl rises and stands upright before her, "no one is likely to take you for the 'Black Lady of Sorel.'"

Contrary to her wont, for she seldom speaks except when directly questioned, the Indian girl exclaimed, "The Black Lady of Sorel, madame! Who is she?"

"Nay, my good girl," replied the woman, not at all displeased at being addressed as madame, "I don't mean a real lady, but the ghost who is seen sometimes walking on the wall of the fort—at midnight, of course."

"I have indeed heard say that there are ghosts," said the girl, "but I never saw one, madame."

"Nor I, child," was the reply, "and I am sure I don't want to."

"But what makes her walk about in such a strange place?" asked the girl, with unusual animation.

"You silly child, how should I know? My husband says that the soldiers at the fort, though they don't like to talk about it, declare it is the ghost of some very wicked person whom the king caused to be shut up there, and who, though she has been dead ever so long, is still trying to get out. But I cannot stop gossiping here, so good-bye. Don't be frightened at the ghost, child; it won't hurt you, though you are only a red skin."

Early on the following morning there was drumming enough to deafen one as the guard turned out in honour of Colonel de Valricour, who was received by the officer he had come to replace in the command of the fort. They held a long conference together on various points connected with the duties of the garrison, and these had been all duly disposed of when the old commandant thus addressed his successor—

"I have now only one thing more to do, monsieur, and that is to transfer to your keeping two state prisoners now in the fort. They were sent here two or three months ago, as the secret register will show you, and they pass by the names of Godefroid and Gabrielle. Their real names, however, as given in the king's warrant, are Isidore de Beaujardin and Marguerite Lacroix."

The baron started from his seat, exclaiming, "You do not mean to say——" but he could get no further.

"So it is," was the reply. "You seem startled, colonel. Ah, I hope these are not people in whom you are interested. I know nothing of them, but I supposed they must be highly connected."

"I am interested in them indeed," said the baron, greatly agitated; "in fact they are nearly related to me. To think that I should find them here, and that they should actually be placed in my charge."

"I am really concerned about it," said the ex-commandant. "It is a singularly painful position, for of course," he added, looking rather dubiously at de Valricour, "the king's warrant is a thing that one cannot play with or disregard, however distressing it may be to one's feelings."

"Sir," exclaimed the baron, sternly, "I do not want any suggestions from you in such a matter. I know my duty, and the king's warrant would be obeyed by me to the letter if it involved the very life of my own child."

"No doubt, no doubt," was the answer. "I have only further to say that it is a part of the minister's injunctions, as you will find in perusing them, that these two persons are not to be allowed to hold any communication with each other, and are to be carefully secluded from observation. Gabrielle has, of herself, chosen to wear a long mourning veil which she never

removes; but as to all that, Monsieur le Baron, it is for you to act according to your instructions. I will now prepare for my departure, and I do myself the honour of bidding you adieu."

"Is it possible?" muttered M. de Valricour, as he paced up and down the chamber when left to himself. "So the poor boy was seized, after all, and my brother-in-law must have been misled as to his being at large. And Marguerite too, whom I promised to protect. What! must I act as her gaoler? I could be thankful to any English bullet that would save me from this." He sat down for a little while and endeavoured to collect himself, but it was of no use, and more than one tear dropped on the floor as the old soldier bowed his head and prayed for strength to do his duty. "I never knew how much I loved the boy till now," said he; "but he was so frank, so brave, so generous. And the poor forlorn orphan! Well," he exclaimed as he rose from his chair, "I can at least comfort them separately. Each one at least may be consoled by knowing that the other is alive and well. Yes, I will go at once."

Proceeding straight to the apartment occupied by Godefroid, he tapped at the door. A soldier opened it and saluted: "The prisoner is very bad, sir," said he, "I fancy he must be half out of his mind, he talks such stuff, and if not well watched he is like enough to make away with himself."

Greatly shocked at this announcement the baron stepped forward hastily and entered the mean room, where the prisoner was lying on a pallet groaning most distressingly. Summoning up all his self-command the visitor approached the bed, but instantly started back exclaiming, "What is this?"

"Ah, sir," said the attendant, "he has been like this, off and on, ever since he was brought here. Sometimes he calls himself Jasmin, and says he has betrayed his master for money, like Judas; sometimes he raves about a letter which he says he wants to show, and then again he don't, just as he happens to be better or worse; sometimes he talks about a Madame de Valricour; but one does not mind what a man like that talks about."

"No, no, of course not," replied the baron hurriedly. "As you have always attended to him you can do so still. He sees no one else, I suppose?"

"Of course not," said the man; "I've been used to this kind of work before, sir—more's the pity—and I know my duty." Whereupon the new commandant, after a special injunction to the man to be watchful, returned to his own apartment.

"Yes, it is plain enough," said he, as he mused over what he had just witnessed. "They did seize the wrong man, and Isidore is no doubt at large; that is something to be thankful for at all events. I am very much afraid, however, that my lady the baroness has been more deeply concerned in this business than Beaujardin cared to tell me. Well, I can let Marguerite know that her husband is safe, and that I will make her hard fate as light as I can till something can be done."

With these words he rose, and passing along the corridor to the other end of the fort, presently reached the door of the apartment allotted to Gabrielle. He knocked gently at the door, but no answer was returned. He knocked again, and for the third time, then he impatiently pushed open the door.

The prisoner was standing at the opposite end of the room, and as she turned towards him he noticed the long black veil which was thrown over her head, and covered her face, descending almost to the ground.

"Marguerite!" said he, scarce able to hide his emotion, "Marguerite! Do you not remember me?"

She started; at first she had not recognised him, but the voice soon recalled to her recollection the kindness and sympathy he had shown to her when they first met at Quebec the year before. Still she made no answer.

"Why so silent?" said he, in some surprise. "You may lift your veil to me, for I am thankful to say that I am the new commandant of this place, and my heartfelt wish is to comfort you, and help you if I can."

There was a brief pause, then the veil was lifted, and revealed the face of Amoahmeh.

It was some little time before the baron could recover from the shock.

"What is all this?" he at last exclaimed. "Where is Marguerite—or Gabrielle—and who are you?"

"If Monsieur de Valricour has forgotten me, I have not forgotten one who was once so kind to me," replied Amoahmeh.

"What!" said he, as the words called up a recollection of the interest he had taken in Marguerite's *protégée*. "Why, you are the Indian girl who saved Isidore's life at Fort William Henry. How came you here?"

Amoahmeh did not at first reply: she was not sure how far her questioner was to be trusted with that secret.

"Do you know what you have done?" he continued, impatiently. "If, as I fancy you have helped her to escape, I ought to have you taken out and shot before you are an hour older."

"Amoahmeh is ready to die," was the calm rejoinder.

The baron strode up and down, scarce knowing whether to be most pleased or angry, yet sorely puzzled what to do.

"Stay," said he. "You were handed over to me as Gabrielle; it is no business of mine that my predecessor handed over to me the wrong person, and let the right Gabrielle escape. And yet, glad as I am for one thing," he added, looking compassionately on his prisoner, "it goes to my heart to think that you should be repaid for your devotion by such a fate as this, not to say worse still when I may not be here to look after you. I cannot let you go," said he, stopping abruptly in front of her; "no, I can't let you go. I don't care even to ask you where she is, or anything about her; you have been delivered over to me as Gabrielle, and my duty is to keep you safe. I might be shot—nay, I would rather be than betray my trust."

Amoahmeh knelt down and took his hand.

"Monsieur," said she, "if all the doors of this cruel place were open Amoahmeh would stay and die here rather than bring trouble on one who has been kind to her and them."

"You are a noble girl indeed," said de Valricour, as he raised her up. "Only one thing more—you need not fear my betraying you. How on earth did you discover that she was here?"

"I was at Quebec some weeks ago," answered Amoahmeh, "and overheard some of the market people talking about a ship which had arrived there from Nantes. The sailors had told them there were two mysterious passengers on board, who were said to be state prisoners. My heart leaped when I thought of what my poor young benefactor had related to me about the lady; and when I found that the vessel had gone further up the river, I traced it to Three Rivers, where I heard a similar report. With such a clue even a mere child of the pale faces could have followed the trail, and after some time, with Heaven's blessing, I was rewarded by finding out that the prisoners were brought here."

"Then they are both safe?" said the baron, eagerly.

"Yes, she is by this time far on the way to one who will befriend her."

"And he?"

"The great chief of the pale-faced warriors has sent him far away to the fort on the great river where the sun goes down."

"Do you mean to say he went to General Montcalm?" inquired the baron, eagerly. But Amoahmeh, fearful lest she might have said too much, hurriedly drew the veil over her face and only replied, "What should Gabrielle know of him?"

"Well, well," said de Valricour, "I will question you no more, though how you ever came in here and she got out is a mystery to me. But I have other matters to see to, so farewell for the present."

Two little scenes that had taken place within the walls of the fort on the preceding night accounted for the mystery. The clock had not long struck an hour after midnight, when one of the soldiers, who had just been relieved, entered the guard-room well-nigh covered with snow from head to foot, and looking as pale as death.

"You found it cold enough out there to-night, comrade," said one of the men, roused by his entrance; "if it goes on like this we must get half-hour reliefs again, or some of us will be found frozen to death on guard, like poor Jean Maret was last year."

"Cold!" ejaculated the sentry, "I don't care for cold, and I would as soon die of frost as see again what I've seen to-night."

"What! the black ghost?" inquired the other, but with bated breath.

"Black! I should think not, I've heard of that; but if ever there was a white ghost in the world I've seen one to-night, flying along over the snow where any human being would have floundered over head and ears, and at last it went over the edge of the fosse, where the fall would have broken any mortal's neck to a certainty. But lo! before I could look round, there it was again flitting right past me in a whirl of snow, and with a blast that swept me clean off my feet."

"Why didn't you send a bullet through it?" said his comrade.

"Through it! Yes, that's just it. Any bullet but a silver one made out of a crown piece cut crosswise would only go *through* that sort of thing. Who ever heard of killing a ghost? Well, I only

came to this horrid place last week, but if things are to go on like this, I shall pitch away my firelock and desert some night."

"Then you had better do it before de Loison goes, Comrade. He is an easy-going fellow enough, and don't like the bother of catching runaways, and says it is only wasting good cartridges. To-morrow we are to have old Valricour here instead; he is another kind of customer, for though he is as harmless as a baby, and as tender-hearted as a woman off duty, just try your tricks on him, and he will shoot you as soon as look at you."

"I don't care," replied the other doggedly; "I may as well be shot as frightened to death."

Perhaps a leaden bullet might not have proved quite so harmless as the superstitious sentry had supposed. When the apparition first vanished into the fosse opposite the corner of the fort, Marguerite was asleep, and dreaming that she was once more at Quebec, and listening to Isidore, as he sang that wondrously beautiful air of Stradella's. Presently she awoke with a sigh, but only to hear the enchanting melody continued in a low, soft voice. Was she awake, or still asleep? Hastily raising herself, she beheld, with a feeling of mingled surprise and awe, a tall slim figure clad in white, on which the night lamp cast just light enough to make it stand out from the surrounding gloom. The song ceased, and a chill blast sweeping through the chamber made her shudder. Was it the chill of death?

"Hush, lady! Fear nothing," said the apparition in a low voice. "It is Amoahmeh. Make haste, rise at once; I have come to set you free."

Scarce knowing what she did, Marguerite obeyed the strange bidding.

"Quick, put this on, and draw the hood well round your face," said her visitor, throwing over her the great white mantle. "Monsieur is alive and safe, and you will meet again if you can but escape from here."

By this time Marguerite had somewhat recovered from her amazement, though she could as yet scarcely grasp all the reality of what was passing.

"Amoahmeh! Is it indeed you? Merciful Heaven! Is he then really safe?" she added, clasping her hands.

"Quick, quick!" replied Amoahmeh. "This way, through the casement—slip your feet into these, they are no strange things to one who has been so long among us," and with these words she pointed to the snow-shoes which lay just outside the window, already half-hidden by the snow.

Marguerite shrank back alarmed, but Amoahmeh continued—

"Fear nothing, madame; I came up by the drift, which runs right down into the ditch. Turn then to the right, and you will come upon another drift, which will take you out upon the slope. At the foot of it you will find an Indian, who will conduct you to my tribe, and they will conceal you till they can make their way to Boulanger's cottage, near Quebec. Hasten, I beseech you. There is no time to be lost. If the sentries challenge you, heed them not, but speed on for your life."

"And you!" cried Marguerite; "you cannot follow in your moccasins only, and in that dress you must be seen, and may be fired upon."

"Fear not for me, madame," was the prompt reply. "I am still an Indian girl, and can laugh at any attempt to keep me in such a place as this longer than I choose to stay. Quick, if you would hope over again to see the one you love most dearly."

Scarce daring to breathe, in spite of all her courage, Amoahmeh watched the receding form as, with the parting words, "May Heaven reward you!" Marguerite passed into the raging snow-storm, and was soon lost even to the keen eyes of her deliverer. Still, however, Amoahmeh remained there bending forward, as if to catch some distant sound. At last it came. High even above the roaring and howling of the storm was heard what less practised ears might have taken for the shrill scream of an eagle winging its flight in safety to its nest. Then as she recognised the signal, Amoahmeh closed the casement, drew the black veil around her, and calmly lay down to rest, nor did she wake until she was aroused by the beating of the drums that announced the arrival of the new commandant.





CHAPTER V.



ix weary and trying months indeed to most of the personages who figure in this narrative were those which came to an end with the close of May, 1759. Even the Baron de Valricour, who always made the best of everything, had grown heartily tired of the forced inaction incidental to the long Canadian winter, when he received a despatch from headquarters relieving him of his command at Sorel and instructing him to take up a responsible post at Quebec. The despatch was accompanied by a private communication from Montcalm himself, one part of which ran as follows:—

"For these measures, my good old friend and comrade, as well as for any others which may suggest themselves to you, I confidently rely on your well-known zeal and experience. The crisis is indeed a grave one. We have as yet no certainty of any very material aid from France to enable us to carry on the next campaign, which I have reason to know that Pitt intends to prosecute with greater energy than ever. His plan is a grand one, comprising an attack against Niagara, an invasion on the whole line of Lakes George and Champlain, and a combined naval and military expedition against Quebec. The capture of Louisburg and Forts Frontenac and Duquesne last year have given the enemy the command both of the upper and lower lines of water communication, and a great hold over us on the north and west, whilst the support of a population of nearly four hundred thousand in the English American states gives them a formidable advantage in the south. Although some of the states are not a little dissatisfied at the cost entailed on them both in men and money, most of them are evidently ready to make any sacrifices required of them. New France, on the other hand, gives to us but a population of some sixty thousand to draw upon, and of those considered capable of bearing arms we can reckon on only a small proportion as available. This is a grave disadvantage indeed, where the necessity of carrying all regular troops across the Atlantic makes both sides so largely dependent on their colonial militia, whilst the great conference held by the English with the Indians last autumn has deprived us of the aid of many tribes formerly friendly to us. The situation, however, is not without some favourable features. It is easy enough to sit down and draw great plans, but quite another thing to carry them out within the few months which our summer here affords, and in a country where the distances are so great and the natural obstacles so many and so serious. Amherst is still far from ready, and I doubt his being before Ticonderoga much sooner than the end of July. Desertion, too, is already rife among his troops, and I foresee that it will become still more so. Bourlemaque will have some four thousand good effectives, so that, apart from the possibility of our repeating the success we gained last year, I think we shall not see Amherst on the St. Lawrence before winter sets in again. The fate of this campaign will be decided, not at Niagara or Ticonderoga, but at Quebec."

The baron had read so far with much interest, but calmly and quietly enough. As he went on reading, however, he became more excited, and at last started up with an exclamation of mingled pleasure and surprise. He was about to quit the apartment, when an orderly came in and informed him that a young person was without and desired urgently to speak with him: "Who is it?" said he. "I am particularly engaged just now." Whilst he was still speaking a female entered the room, and the orderly, after a moment's hesitation, retired and left them alone.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" inquired the commandant sharply. "I cannot attend to you now."

But instead of making any reply the intruder flung herself on her knees before him, sobbing convulsively and evidently in great agitation; then as she raised her head the baron stepped back, exclaiming, "Is it possible! Surely it is Marguerite?"

"Yes, it is I," said she, clasping her hands, and looking up to him with streaming eyes. "I cannot bear it longer. Since I left this place I have had no peace. How could I, knowing as I did that I had left one who had risked all for me, to suffer such a dreadful fate? I could not have been so wicked, but for the hope, stronger than all, of again seeing one I loved so dearly; but I have been rightly punished. Alas! I shall never see him more; but even if it were not so, I could not endure the terrible remorse that my selfishness has caused me. You who have been so kind and

noble-hearted will help me to bear my lot. I have come to give myself up; you will not—you may not refuse me."

He raised her up and embraced her tenderly, but for a minute or two he could not speak for emotion. "My dear, dear child," said he at length, "you have indeed shown yourself the worthy daughter of a most noble father, and Heaven will reward you for this high-minded and generous act. Nay, I rejoice to say that it has already found its reward. Listen to this," and then, as she stood wondering before him, he read to her the concluding part of Montcalm's letter, which ran thus:


"With regard to a more private matter, I rejoice most heartily that my efforts have at last been attended with success. If it has not already reached you, you will shortly receive from Paris an order cancelling the *lettre de cachet* under which your prisoners Godefroid and Gabrielle have been detained. I can sympathise with you in the pleasure this will give you as regards the latter; as to the supposed Godefroid of course it matters little beyond the fact that the real object of our solicitude, wherever he may be, is released from the terrible ban involved in the now cancelled warrant. Although many months have elapsed without his making his appearance, I cannot but hope that he is safe, as I may now mention to you in confidence that I sent him, accompanied by the guide Boulanger, to Fort Duquesne in the autumn, and under the peculiar circumstances many things might occur to prolong his absence."

Well might Isidore's young wife fall once more upon her knees to pour out her grateful heart in thanksgiving for tidings which changed her sorrow and despair into joy and hope. Her guardian left her thus engaged whilst he sought out Amoahmeh and communicated to her not only the news of her freedom, but that which seemed to touch her far more deeply, Marguerite's surrender of herself for the purpose of setting her deliverer free.

The two friends were soon locked in each other's arms, and the baron leaving them together went forth to make the needful arrangements for relinquishing his post and proceeding with them to Quebec.



CHAPTER VI.

 he month of July was drawing to an end, and the hot sun was glaring down on the parched earth with an almost tropical heat. Even in the dark recesses of the woods, where only here and there a ray could penetrate the thick foliage, there was a sultry closeness that seemed to overpower the wayfarer, instead of his being refreshed by a grateful shade. Look at those two men yonder, one stretched at full length at the foot of a pine-tree, the other kneeling by his side, and bending over him, both apparently exhausted with fatigue. From their thin hands and cheeks, bronzed as they are, one may well believe that want of food has helped to reduce them to their sorry plight, whilst, as a climax to their sufferings, one of them has been lamed by a snake bite, to which the other is applying some large leaves just gathered near at hand.

"'Tis hard upon us that it should come to this, just as we had got within a few miles of our journey's end," said the man who was hurt. "Listen! There is the firing again—a regular volley—and cannon too. They are attacking Ticonderoga, that's certain, just as they did a twelvemonth ago."

Here the speaker gave a groan, but not from pain.

"To think, monsieur," he added, "that you should be here, tending poor Boulanger, as if he were your equal, when you might have been striking a blow yonder for your dear France."

"It is only a pity, my good fellow," replied Isidore, "that I am not a red skin, so that I might find out the right sort of plant to cure this abominable bite and put you on your legs again."

"Never mind me, I beseech you, monsieur," said the Canadian, faintly; "I shall do well enough, I daresay. Only go and make your way to the fort—it cannot be many miles off—and then perhaps you can come and help me later when the enemy are beaten off."

"That I will not," was the reply; "I will die here with you rather than leave you alone."

There was in truth no mere sentiment in the words. Bravely indeed had Isidore borne up for many a long week; but fatigue and privation had told upon him far more than on the more seasoned frame of his companion, and with the misfortune that had befallen the latter, the strong hopes that had sustained him gave way, and he felt that he had no longer strength enough to proceed further.

"To-morrow," said he, with an attempt at an encouraging smile, "to-morrow I shall perhaps be able to carry you."

"To-morrow. Alas!" murmured Boulanger, turning away his face to hide his emotion. Then suddenly he raised himself, and pointed to a clump of undergrowth a few yards off. "Look!" whispered he, "a red skin!"

Isidore started to his feet, and levelled his rifle, but instantly threw it down, and stepping forward cried aloud, "What! my old friend White Eagle of Louisburg! Never was any one more welcome. Make haste and look to my poor comrade."

Without a word the Indian knelt down and examined the bite. Then he strode away, but soon returned with a handful of simples, which he carefully bound round the wounded limb.

"Not rattlesnake," said he quietly, "he will not die."

"I could have told you that, friend," said Boulanger, "but when a man's life depends on his walking on a bit with a leg as big as a bison's, it might just as well have been a rattlesnake for that matter, to say nothing of having had no food but a raw partridge between two of us for some days past."

The Indian opened his pouch and placed before them his little stock of food, of which they eagerly partook. Whilst they were thus engaged he sat a little way apart, to all appearance wholly unconcerned. As soon, however, as the provisions were demolished he arose, and addressing himself to Isidore, said, "Let the young brave follow me. The Canadian must stay here till you can send him help."

"Not a step do I go without him," replied Isidore, firmly. "If he stays here, I stay here too."

For a moment the expression on the chief's face seemed to bode no good, but it passed away, and after a short pause he set to work without a word, and in a few minutes had cut down a dozen branches from the nearest trees, and wound them into a rude litter. Then silently taking Boulanger up, and laying him upon it as if he had been a mere child, he took hold of one end of the litter, and signed to Isidore to take the other. He did so, and they at once set out with it, the savage threading the way through the dense forest with the most marvellous dexterity, and at a pace with which Isidore found it no easy matter to keep up. Refreshed as he had been by the food he had taken, and buoyed up as he now was by fresh hope on Boulanger's account as well as his own, he nevertheless felt that a march of any great length would be beyond his strength. Perhaps the Indian noticed this, for he presently slackened his pace.

"I hope we have done right to trust this fellow," Isidore said.

"There is nothing to fear," replied Boulanger. "If he had meant mischief our scalps would long ago have been hanging by the side of those others he has at his belt."

All this while they were gradually edging away from the sound of the firing, which could now only be heard at a remote distance on their right.

The Indian slackened his pace still more, and seemed to be listening eagerly as if for some expected sound. Suddenly he stopped, and the litter having been deposited on the ground, he turned to Isidore, saying, "White Eagle has finished his task." At the same moment he raised his rifle and discharged it in the air, and before the astonished wayfarers could utter a word in reply, he had darted into the thick wood and disappeared.

"It beats me altogether," said Boulanger; "he has brought us ever so far away from the fort, and yet I can't think why he should start off like that. He belongs to one of the Algonquin tribes, and they used to be allies of ours. Hush! There is some one not far off."

"Qui vive?" shouted a voice from the underwood near them.

"French! Long live King Louis!" cried Isidore, in reply.

The usual challenge followed, and shortly afterwards a French officer cautiously emerged from the brushwood, followed by a couple of his men. He seemed not a little astonished on discovering the number and condition of the supposed enemy, and roughly demanded who they were, and whence they came.

"Well, I suppose," replied Isidore, with a grim smile, "I must not feel insulted if my friend de Montenac fails to recognise in such a scarecrow his old comrade de Beaujardin."

"De Beaujardin!" exclaimed the officer, amazed and apparently horrified. "For Heaven's sake, how came you in this pitiable state? Stop, not a word," he added, "you are in no condition for talking now. Quick, my men, bring the wounded man along." Then taking Isidore's arm he led him away, followed by the soldiers, who at once took Boulanger under their charge. In a short time they reached an open space in the forest, where to his great joy Isidore found a considerable body of French soldiers regularly encamped. De Montenac, however, would listen to no questions until the wayfarers had been, not only well fed, but furnished with some better covering than the rags that hung about them.

The short Canadian twilight was gone, and night had come on, as Isidore related to his friend as much of his story as it seemed necessary to tell him. He concluded thus:—

"They kept us at Fort Duquesne all the winter, possibly not knowing exactly what to do with me, and a couple of months ago sent us off in charge of two burly New England militiamen, though I never knew what was our intended destination. These British are always boasting that one Englishman is a match for three Frenchmen, so I suppose they thought that two must be quite enough to guard a couple of miserable half-starved creatures like Boulanger and myself. They had not even taken the trouble to tie our hands, but simply made us go on in front. During the second day's march I noticed that they had both taken too much to drink, so just as we were going down a steep hill, at a signal we had preconcerted we dropped down right in front of them, and over our backs they went like a shot. Long before they could scramble up we had got hold of their muskets, and they were rather obliged than otherwise by our letting them decamp without giving them each a bullet by way of souvenir. Thanks to Boulanger's knowledge of his craft we have arrived here at last, though it has been no easy matter, I can assure you."

"I quite believe that, judging from your appearance," replied de Montenac laughing; "but I must now go my rounds, and after that you shall hear what news there is with us."

He was absent much longer than was required merely to visit the pickets. Isidore's practised ears indeed told him that there had been an alarm of some kind, and a shot had been fired in the wood. At last de Montenac made his appearance.

"The strangest thing has just now happened," said he. "My men caught a spy. He had managed to pass the sentinels, when one of them saw the fellow creeping away among the bushes, and as he did not answer or stop, the man shot him dead. I found on him a note of our strength, to say nothing of some English guineas, so the rascal fully deserved a rope instead of a bullet, but in one of his pockets I came upon this." Here de Montenac handed to Isidore a sheet of paper, the writing on which ran as follows:—

"To all whom it may concern.

"This is to certify that the person designated in a royal warrant as Isidore Marquis de Beaujardin, otherwise known as Godefroid, confined here during the royal pleasure, is released from further detention, and the authorities, whether civil or military, are required to permit him to pass freely.

"(Signed) DE VALRICOUR,
"Colonel Commandant of the Fort of Sorel."

Isidore sprang to his feet. "Where is the man?" he gasped out.

"You can see him; he lies dead not a hundred yards off." In a couple of minutes they had reached the spot, and Isidore no sooner beheld the upturned face of the dead man than he exclaimed, "Just Heaven! it is Jasmin."

As soon as he had recovered from the excitement into which this discovery had thrown him, Isidore acquainted his friend with the more private details of his story. "I must start at once for Sorel," said he; "I scarcely dare to hope it, but it may be that my unhappy wife was or is still detained there, and if so, with Heaven's blessing I may see her again. I shall indeed be thankful if my Uncle de Valricour has been her gaoler."

"Then you can march with us, at least a part of the way," said de Montenac. "Listen! there it

goes." As he spoke, an explosion like a peal of thunder was heard in the distance. "De Bourlemaque has evacuated Fort Ticonderoga and blown it up," added he. "We have been stationed here to guard against a flank movement and to keep open the road to Crown Point, on which we are to fall back."

"What! retreat without a fight!" exclaimed Isidore.

"We have scarce three or four thousand men to Amherst's twelve or fourteen thousand, and he is not an Abercromby to run his head against a wall for nothing. I believe we are not even going to hold Crown Point, strong as it is. No, no; forty or fifty leagues of well-nigh impassable country lie between this and the St. Lawrence, as you ought to know, Master Isidore, and that will fight for us without our losing a man. Amherst can only advance by water, and as we have armed vessels on the lake and he has not, why there is as much chance of his doing anything before the winter sets in again, as there is of my being made a Field Marshal."

Thanks to the Indian's simple medicines, and the subsequent care of the regimental surgeon, Boulanger was doing well, and was able, on the following day, to accomplish the short march made by the detachment. Nor was Isidore at first sufficiently strong to do more. They accordingly accompanied the troops as far as Crown Point, and then pushed forward alone. The journey which the travellers had undertaken was long and difficult. On reaching the northern end of Lake Champlain, however, they obtained a small canoe, in which they descended the Richelieu River, and thus reached Sorel.

Here Isidore, to his great disappointment, found that Baron de Valricour was no longer commandant of the place, and had quitted it for Quebec early in June. During the three months that had elapsed the little garrison had been changed, and the few guarded inquiries which he ventured to make respecting any persons formerly detained in the fort proved fruitless.

There was nothing for it but to go on to Quebec, where Boulanger indeed was anxious to rejoin his family, and they accordingly continued their journey, traversing Lake St. Peter, and passing down the St. Lawrence in their canoe. To their surprise and mortification they now found that for a considerable distance above Quebec small vessels belonging to the English fleet had the command of the river. Still they made their way onward, once or twice narrowly escaping capture by an English cutter, until they reached a spot called Le Foullon, about three miles above the great fortress, where a rugged and winding footpath led to the top of the lofty and precipitous cliff not far from the Canadian's cottage.

Arrived at the summit, they were instantly challenged, and then taken to the officer in command of the detachment posted there. De Montenac had taken the precaution to obtain for Isidore a despatch from General de Bourlemaque to Montcalm, and he was at once allowed to pass, as was Boulanger also when it was found that he was actually the proprietor of the house which had been appropriated as the captain's quarters. As to Bibi and the little ones, the Canadian ascertained that they had taken refuge in a less exposed locality near the city.

On entering the fortress, Isidore at once made his way through the town, and was then directed to the citadel. There, on the extreme and loftiest point, where the white flag of France still waved, stood Montcalm, "that little body with a mighty soul," surveying the vast landscape spread out below. In front lay the great lake-like sheet of water, six miles in length, and nearly half as broad, formed by the confluence of the St. Lawrence on the right, and the smaller river, St. Charles, on the left. Far away the united streams are again divided into a northern and southern channel by the picturesque Isle of Orleans. To the right hand is seen Point Levi, and the almost perpendicular banks of the St. Lawrence; on the left the more gradually sloping shore presents a long line of intrenchments and redoubts, reaching to a distance of seven or eight miles, ending at the great chasm into which the Montmorency River hurls down its waters in a fall of two hundred and fifty feet. Ranges of lofty mountains on every side form the fitting background of this unrivalled scene.

Montcalm's eyes were riveted on the English fleet, whose countless masts bristled all across the further end of the bay, and down the diverging channels beyond it; so deeply indeed was he buried in thought that he did not seem aware of Isidore's approach until the latter was close to him. He then turned abruptly and looked at the new-comer, but it was only for a moment.

"Welcome, welcome indeed!" said he, extending his hand, "not as Claude Breton however, but as my valued friend and comrade-in-arms, Isidore de Beaujardin."

"I can well believe that I have to thank Monseigneur for that," replied Isidore, bowing.

Montcalm waved his hand: "It was no more than was due to you," said he. "Fortunately a certain M. de Crillon, who seems to have been your evil genius, has been disgraced at last, and the task became an easy one. But whence do you now come, and what news do you bring?"

"As for myself, I must report to you, *pro formâ*, that I duly reached Fort Duquesne, where I was made prisoner, but subsequently escaped, and made my way to Ticonderoga. I left the army on this side of Crown Point, which has been evacuated, and I have to hand to you a despatch from de Bourlemaque. There is not a chance of Amherst reaching the St. Lawrence in time to cooperate with Wolfe."

"Thanks for that, at all events. My news is less cheering: Niagara is lost."

"I had hoped," said Isidore, "that Pouchot would have been able to hold out."

"Not so. The English General Prideaux was killed by the bursting of a shell in his own intrenchments, but Sir William Johnson took the command, and nothing could withstand that brave and skilful fellow. Aubrey came to Pouchot's relief with at least a thousand men collected from the other forts, but was beaten in a pitched battle before the place, which had to surrender at discretion, and the governor and garrison were made prisoners, but were allowed to march out with the honours of war. This and the loss of Frontenac make the English masters of all the upper country."

"But here," exclaimed Isidore, eagerly, "here we may yet retrieve it all."

"If it so please God," replied Montcalm; "but though all hope is not yet gone, our chance is but slender. We have kept the enemy at bay for nearly two months and a half, and on the last day of July we foiled a desperate attack which Wolfe made on the Montmorency redoubts yonder. If we could hold out till winter comes to our aid all would be well, but I have little hope."

"They are masters of all the right bank, are they not?" interposed Isidore.

"Yes, for many miles up the river. If I had had my way I would have thrown a couple of thousand men across and stopped that game, but de Vaudreuil overruled me at the outset. He is a traitor, and has ruined us. What can I do with barely three thousand regulars? The Canadian militia are indeed some five or six thousand strong, but I cannot rely on them with any certainty, and with such a fleet at his command it is impossible to say where Wolfe may next assail us. Look at it! A score of ships of the line, with frigates and transports out of number."

"But they have been here since the end of June and have done nothing. This bank of the river is absolutely impregnable, and it seems they cannot force the Montmorency lines."

"It is our last and only chance," replied Montcalm, "and if the worst should come, a battle before Quebec might save us. I have had, however, to send away a couple of thousand Canadians to try and save some of the harvest, which is sorely needed, for our commissariat is reduced almost to the last extremity. Yes, de Beaujardin," he added, "there is nothing left for me but to hold out and fight to the last, and die a soldier's death. I would not wish to live to see the fall of New France, but that must surely come. But de Valricour has of course told you——"

"I have not seen him yet. I came direct to you to report myself," said Isidore.

"Not seen him!" cried Montcalm in amazement; "but I might have expected that from you. Go—go at once—good news is in store for you at all events, and you are worthy of it." Then turning to an officer who had just come up, he added, "Send an orderly with this gentleman to Colonel de Valricour's quarters. Stay; Colonel de Beaujardin is reappointed to his old position on the staff. See to this at once."

Isidore would have thanked him, but Montcalm was already reading the despatch just brought to him, and with a full heart the young soldier bent his steps towards his uncle's quarters.

Passing out of the citadel, he had proceeded but a short distance when the orderly stopped.

"Here!" exclaimed Isidore, with some agitation, for the house pointed out to him was the very one in which Madame de Rocheval had resided, and where he had seen Marguerite for the first time.

Another orderly at the door bade him enter. He did so, and ascended the stairs as if in a dream. He did not even hear the man announce him, and as he stood at the open door of the saloon his eyes grew dim, and he could see nothing; but he heard a voice cry out, "Isidore! my husband!" and Marguerite was clasped in his arms.





CHAPTER VII.



t will be remembered that when M. de Valricour quitted France in order to return to Canada he promised the Marquis de Beaujardin that he would do his best to find Isidore, and report whatever he might learn respecting him. In those days, however, the communication between New and Old France was slow and uncertain enough, and it was not until the ensuing spring that the marquis received any tidings respecting his son. From what he then heard it could scarcely be doubted that Isidore was in Canada, and de Valricour was able to inform his brother-in-law not only that Marguerite had been a prisoner at Sorel, and had subsequently escaped through the devotion of Amoahmeh, but that Jasmin was actually a prisoner there. He was further enabled to send to the marquis the mutilated letter supposed to have been destroyed by Isidore, and this circumstance not only cleared away that imputation, but proved beyond question that Isidore had had grounds for supposing that his father had no objection to his union with Marguerite.

Full of remorse for his unjust suspicions, the marquis felt his old affection for his son revive more strongly than ever, and when he subsequently received further accounts to the effect that Isidore had gone to Fort Duquesne, but that he had not since been heard of, he could no longer restrain his ardent longing to seek out his lost son, and do him at least some tardy justice. In the first place, however, he proceeded to Paris in order that he might use all his influence to ascertain how matters stood in regard to the *lettre de cachet*, and, if possible, to obtain its revocation. To his astonishment he found that, through the influence of Montcalm, the king's warrant had already been cancelled; but about Isidore himself he could learn nothing, and he consequently resolved to proceed at once to Canada in search of him.

He had, however, by this time learned by experience that any plan of his might be thwarted if it once came to the ears of Madame de Valricour, and without even communicating his intentions to the marchioness, he returned home by way of Nantes, where he made arrangements for his voyage to Quebec. This was no easy matter; it was well known that the English fleet was already on its way up the St. Lawrence with General Wolfe's army to undertake the siege of Quebec, and French vessels could no longer hope to reach that place. But the marquis was prepared to pay almost any sum for the accomplishment of his object, and with the help of Jean Perigord the innkeeper he at last prevailed on a certain Maitre Duboscq to undertake the task, and endeavour at least to land the marquis as near Quebec as possible. This being settled, M. de Beaujardin proceeded home to take leave of his wife and inform her of his purpose.

He had reckoned without his host, and little knew that Madame de Valricour was well informed of all his movements. No sooner had he reached the chateau than that lady calmly informed him that she had resolved to go out and join her husband, and would feel indebted to him if he would write to Nantes and procure a passage for her.

Thoroughly convinced that the object of the voyage could only be to search out or to meet with Isidore, she felt that if she allowed the marquis to proceed alone her long cherished schemes would be wrecked at last and she resolved, come what might, to accompany him. Argument and persuasion were alike unavailing. There was nothing for it but to offer to take her out in the "Pompadour." Nor was she the only person who was destined to accompany the marquis, for on hearing of his intention old Perigord besought him with tears in his eyes to let him go too: "Monseigneur," said he, "I have served you faithfully from my cradle, do not compel me to leave you. Let me, too, see my young master once more before I die."

It was not the first time, by a score, that Duboscq had threaded the mazy channels of the St. Lawrence, or that he had baffled the pursuit of an English cruiser. The "Pompadour" was a tight little ship, and well in hand, swift, and drawing but little water, but much caution was required, and the voyage was a long one. Passing northwards through the Straits of Belle Isle to avoid the track of the English fleet, the "Pompadour" made a splendid run up the St. Lawrence, eluding one British vessel, and fairly out-sailing another, and at last came in sight of the rugged bluffs of Cape Tourment, about a dozen leagues below Quebec. It was, however, late in the afternoon, and as there was no hope of their reaching Quebec that evening the "Pompadour" hove to, and was about to anchor for the night, when Duboscq descried an English sloop of war about a couple of miles off, right ahead and standing towards them, and he at once went below to consult with the marquis, who immediately returned with him on deck.

It was evident that they had been seen by the English sloop, and the danger was imminent.

The marquis took in the situation at a glance: "The 'Pompadour' cannot escape, but we may yet do so," said he to Duboscq. "You have done your best hitherto, and I will indemnify you for the loss of your vessel. Lower your boat at once, and we may all reach the shore before the Englishman comes up. We may as well be captured on shore, if we are to see the inside of an English prison, but we may be able to make our way by land to Quebec."

The boat was soon lowered, but it would only hold three persons besides the two men required to row it; and Duboscq, as steersman, who, after landing their passengers, would have to return to fetch off the remainder of the crew. The marquis, with Madame de Valricour and Perigord, at once stepped into the boat, and as the beach was not far off, they were quickly rowed to the shore. "Now," said Duboscq, when they were fairly landed, "push on into the wood straight ahead, and I will join you there. We shall give our friends the slip after all, thanks to monsieur's suggestion."

The little party did as they were told, and presently stopped to await the coming of the others; but they waited in vain, and were destined soon to find out that they had only escaped one danger to rush upon another. From a lofty point overhanging the river an Indian scout had watched all that had occurred. Suddenly the wood rang with a terrible war-whoop, and half a dozen savages darted through the trees and came upon the panic-stricken group. The chief, who was a little in advance, sprang towards Perigord, but on perceiving that the party consisted only of two unarmed men and a woman, stopped short, making a sign to his followers to do the same. Then, contemptuously flinging old Perigord down, he snatched from him an ornamented casket which he was clutching in his hands: it was his master's strong box, which he had rescued at the last moment, and brought away with him from the ship. Wrenching it open the savage drew out the first thing that came to hand: it was the ribbon and order of St. Louis.

With an exclamation of surprise he held it up and examined it. He had seen the like once or twice before, but only on the breasts of Montcalm and Governor de Vaudreuil.

"Whose is this? Who are you?" said he, quickly regarding the old *chef* with evident astonishment.

"It belongs to the Marquis de Beaujardin," replied Perigord, piteously.

"Beaujardin! Beaujardin!" answered the Indian, with increasing amazement. "There is one of that name in the camp. Who is this Beaujardin?"

"His father—his father!" exclaimed Perigord. "Have you seen him? Is he at Quebec? My poor Isidore! He was lost, and we have come out here to seek him."

"Yes, Isidore—that is his name," replied the chief; and with that he turned to his warriors, and spoke to them rapidly, gesticulating vehemently all the while.

Perigord would have questioned him further, but the chief at first took no heed of him; after some further conference, however, he once more addressed his excited prisoner, saying, "It is well—the Frenchman shall see his son again."

"But in one thing you are mistaken," cried Perigord, with animation. "Yonder is his father—it is not I."

In some surprise the Indian looked first at one and then at the other, scanning alternately the plain suit which the marquis had been accustomed to wear on board ship, and the full dress costume in which old Perigord invariably waited on him. But apart from these the fiery black eyes, the dark complexion, and even the hooked nose of old Achille, and most of all the tears which had betrayed his emotion on hearing the name of Isidore, would have sufficed to settle the question.

"Is a chief of the Algonquins an owl that he cannot see in broad daylight?" said the Indian, contemptuously. "Does the cunning Frenchman think that a warrior of the red skins does not know the difference between a wild goose and an eagle?"

Then without further parley he gave the word for the march, and the amazed and terrified prisoners were hurried away into the woods.



CHAPTER VIII.



It is scarcely to be wondered at that, amid such events as were daily passing around her, poor Bibi had begun to despair of ever seeing her husband again. His avocations had often enough taken him away for a month or two, but more than a year had now elapsed without her even hearing of him. Proportionably great was her surprise and joy at his sudden re-appearance, and his happiness was not less real at seeing once more those he so dearly loved. What with Bibi's eager questions, and the prattle of the little ones, an hour or two had glided away swiftly enough, when Boulanger suddenly asked what had become of Amoahmeh.

Bibi shook her head. "She has been living here with us for some months," said she, "helping and comforting me as she only could do; but I am afraid that those horrid Indians have got hold of her again. Only this morning there was one lurking about here, and I am sure Amoahmeh must have seen him, for she has hardly spoken a word all day, and looked quite miserable. Just before you came she threw her arms around my neck, and said that very likely I should never see her again; and when I began to cry, and begged her to tell me what was the matter, she tried to cheer me by saying that she was only going to 'The Steps'—you know the place, up there on the Montmorency River. Then, before I could say another word, she was gone. In my joy at seeing you again I had forgotten all about it, that's a fact."

Boulanger's countenance fell, and after musing a while he said, "That's strange. Are there any Algonquins about here?"

"Oh, they are on the English side now," answered Bibi. "I heard only yesterday that a number of them, under a chief called White Eagle, had come into the English camp at Montmorency."

The Canadian started up. "And she has been so good to you whilst I have been away!" said he. "Put the little ones to bed, Bibi. I'll go up to the 'Steps' and see if I can find out what she is at."

"I wish you would," said Bibi. "I am quite anxious about her; but come back as soon as you can."

Boulanger kissed his wife and children, and then, shouldering his rifle, he quitted the cottage.

There are few spots near Quebec more picturesque than those so-called "Natural Steps" on the Montmorency River. Between almost perpendicular rocks, that look like huge stone towers, or the ruins of ancient walls, the little river foams and rushes along, over and between great flat slabs of stone, which here and there assume the shape of steps as regular as if the hand of man had fashioned them. The summits of the castellated banks are crowned with trees, and wherever their rocky steepness will allow of it, luxuriant shrubs grow in profusion from every crevice, and add another charm to the wild beauty of the scene.

Long had Amoahmeh stood alone on one of those rocky steps, pale and anxious, and evidently expecting some one to meet her there. He came at last, and White Eagle stood before her.

For a short time neither of them spoke; each seemed under some strange constraint. Perhaps the Indian could not shake off the awe with which his race regard all those who are, or have been, deprived of the light of reason. Amoahmeh had risen above such childish superstitions, but she seemed as though the chief possessed some hold over her which had power to subdue even her lofty spirit. She was the first to speak.

"White Eagle has bidden me come here. What would he have of me?"

"Can the daughter of War-thunder ask?" was the reply. "Did she not promise that if I brought back the young French brave from Fort Duquesne the wigwam of the chief of the Algonquins should remain no longer empty. He is safe in Quebec and among his friends; Amoahmeh will keep her promise."

"To whom did she give that promise? To a great chief who fought under the flag of France, ay, and one who professed to have forsaken the worship of Manitou for a holier faith. What is White Eagle now that he should ask her, or even wish her, to keep that promise?"

"He is not a girl that he should kneel at the bidding of a French priest," retorted the Indian,

with evident irritation, "nor a child that he should let a squaw choose for him what war-path he shall tread. Is Amoahmeh a cheating French trader, who, when he has gotten the red skin's peltries that he bargained for, refuses to pay for them? She will keep faith."

"Faith!" replied Amoahmeh, indignantly. "How dares White Eagle even name the word with the scalps of the friends he swore to fight for to the death hanging at his belt? Amoahmeh at least will never desert those she loves."

"Ay," rejoined the chief, passionately, "her white soul only loves the pale faces; she hates the red skin now, and would fain be happy in the wigwam of the young French warrior."

"Why does the great chief talk like a whining child?" said she, at once regaining her wonted composure. "Amoahmeh does indeed love the French brave, but it is with a sister's affection for one without whom she never could have known the way to happiness here and hereafter. Beyond this he is nought to her. He has a bride already, and it was even for her sake that Amoahmeh gave the hasty, the wicked promise that White Eagle wrung from her as the price of his help. She will yet keep it, yes, even though her heart should break, if he still bids her do so; but what she has not promised she will not do at his bidding. She will not forsake her faith, nor will she rejoice when his warriors come back from the war-path with the spoils of slaughtered Frenchmen. Let White Eagle choose, but let him beware, lest when the Algonquins again see the face of the daughter of War-thunder, and hear her voice, they dig up again the hatchet that they buried at the false counsel of White Eagle, and shout once more the war-cry of 'France and King Louis!'"

"That they shall never do!" exclaimed the Indian fiercely. "Listen! Amoahmeh is free. Let her go her way, but not with the glad heart she hoped for. Manitou has even now given into White Eagle's hand the father and the kinswoman of the young French brave. Amoahmeh might have saved them. Now let her come with me and see them die."

With these words the Indian grasped his tomahawk and sprang up the rugged path. As he reached the top of the bank he turned and waved the weapon aloft, as if to beckon after him the amazed and agitated girl. At the same moment Boulanger started up from the underwood, and with one sweep of his clubbed rifle dashed the deadly hatchet from his hand, then with another stroke he laid the savage at his feet.

To pinion the prostrate Indian's arms with his belt was the work of a minute; another sufficed for Boulanger to tear a couple of withes from a bush, and bind him securely by the ankles to the nearest tree.

"So you have gone over to the English, have you?" said he sternly, as the half-stunned chief began to recover a little. "By rights, I suppose I ought to have shot you down without mercy; but luckily for you I have not quite forgotten our last meeting in the woods."

As the Canadian uttered these words the sharp rattle of half a dozen muskets was heard at a short distance down the river. Then followed shouts, mingled with the terrific war-whoop, at which the dark form of White Eagle seemed to quiver from head to foot. Then all became still again.

Boulanger, with his knee on the Indian's chest, had listened to the sounds with breathless anxiety.

"The red skins have had the worst of that," said he at last, as he arose and grasped his rifle; "but there is something going wrong, or we should have heard more of it. Follow me, Amoahmeh."

Forcing their way through the dense wood for three or four hundred yards along the crest of the bank, they came at length to an opening through which they heard the sound of voices, and passing through the gap they were soon looking down upon the scene below.

There on the border of the stream stood a group of Canadian militia leaning on their muskets. Two or three Indians lay dead upon the ground, and near them lay also a female figure, by the side of which, with his hands clasped and his head bowed down, stood the Baron de Valricour. There was another prostrate figure, that of a spare old man, to whom two persons seemed to be attending. One of them was Isidore, the other Boulanger did not recognise—it was the Marquis de Beaujardin.

The story was soon told. That afternoon Jacques Duboscq, who had been captured on his return to the "Pompador" had been considerably sent on shore by the commander of the English sloop in order that he might inform the Baron de Valricour of the circumstances under which Madame de Valricour and the marquis had been put on shore at Cape Tourment two days before. On hastening to the military offices to see if any steps could be taken on behalf of their relatives, should they have fallen into the hands of the English, the baron and Isidore found that an Indian scout or spy had just come in with the intelligence that some Algonquins with three French prisoners had been seen that day encamped on the Montmorency River. In less than an hour Isidore and his uncle had set out for the spot, accompanied by a small body of picked men, and, guided by the scouts, they took the Indians completely by surprise, killing or dispersing them with a single volley. With instinctive ferocity, however, one of the savages had struck Madame de Valricour dead, whilst another singled out the marquis, as he supposed, and

grievously wounded poor Perigord.

Two rude litters were soon made by some of the Canadians, on one of which they laid the body of Madame de Valricour, on the other they placed old Perigord, and the party then set out for the lines at Montmorency. They had not gone far before the attention of Amoahmeh and the Canadian was attracted by a sound like the scream of an eagle, which was immediately echoed from afar: "Yes, our friend yonder is calling to his eaglets," said Boulanger, "and they hear him; but we can laugh at them and him too now."

On the way the marquis kept by the side of his old servant, more than once expressing his grief at what had befallen him.

"Nay, monseigneur," replied Perigord, smiling in spite of the pain he was evidently enduring, "do not mind about me. It was fortunate that those stupid savages mistook me for my betters. Besides, have I not seen my dear young master once again?"

Dear old Achille! These were the last words he spoke. When they reached the lines at Montmorency he was dead. The scheming and haughty baroness and the humble and faithful servitor had met the same fate. Death does indeed bring us all down to one level, but only in the grave—not beyond it.



CHAPTER IX.



he Marquis de Beaujardin and his son had met again, but under circumstances distressing enough to both of them, and it was with sorrowful hearts that they now proceeded together to Quebec. As they passed through the village of Beauport on their way, they became aware that a large portion of the English fleet had approached the shore, and was to all appearance making preparations for a repetition of the attack made on the neighbouring redoubts some weeks before, whilst other vessels were standing on towards Quebec. Night came on as Isidore and his father reached the town; there all was bustle and excitement, and every one was anticipating a fresh attack on the Montmorency lines before daybreak.

There was an attack indeed, but not in the quarter where Montcalm expected it. Before daybreak on the following morning the great mass of the enemy's forces, which had been secretly carried past the town to a considerable distance up the river during the night, was stealthily dropping down again, and was then landed on the beach at Le Foulon, now immortalised by the name of "Wolfe's Cove."

History scarcely contains a more exciting chapter than that which records this daring plan, and the equally daring manner in which it was achieved. Leading his troops up by a single narrow and rugged path—the Highlanders actually climbing up the precipitous face of the cliff itself—Wolfe had by daybreak arrayed his little army of between four and five thousand men on the Plains of Abraham, only a mile from the ramparts of the fortress. A couple of hours later Montcalm had led out his forces to try the issue of a pitched battle before Quebec.

At first the French outflanked and forced back the English left, but with a timely reinforcement Townsend stopped their further progress. There was, at the same time, some desultory fighting on Wolfe's right, which extended to the lofty banks of the St. Lawrence, but the decisive conflict took place in the centre, in which Montcalm had placed his few battalions of French regulars. These advanced with the greatest gallantry, inflicting serious loss on the English by their rapid and well-sustained fire, which, however, was not returned, for Wolfe was riding along the line encouraging his men, and forbidding a single shot until the word should be given. On came the French with loud shouts, advancing to within forty or fifty paces of the British line; then with one tremendous ringing volley the fate of the day was decided. The hitherto serried and continuous line of the French veterans was simply broken up into scattered and shapeless fragments, which nevertheless still tried to advance. They were, however, met with a charge which soon completed their discomfiture, and the battle was won. De Bougainville indeed subsequently came up and threatened an attack in the rear, but the bold front made by the English compelled him to draw off again without any serious attempt to molest the victors.

The story of Wolfe's last words, and of his death whilst the shout of victory was sounding in his ears, is an oft-told tale, and needs not to be repeated here. He had received three wounds, of which the last was fatal. Carleton and Monckton, too, had been severely wounded, and Townsend had to take the command. Nor had the French superior officers been more fortunate. De Senezergues and St. Ours were both struck down, and at last Montcalm himself was mortally wounded; but he refused to quit the field until he had seen the shattered remnants of his army safe within the protecting walls of Quebec.

Montcalm has been accused of infatuation in risking a battle on the open plain; but the charge savours perhaps of being wise after the event. With his customary candour he certainly declared, after the battle, that with such troops as the English had proved themselves he would have defeated thrice the number of such as he had himself commanded. But it was only on that day that he had learned how English troops could fight, and he might well be excused if he remembered how he had repulsed them at Ticonderoga. His force, moreover, though chiefly consisting of Canadian militia, on whom he could place no great reliance, was numerically double that of Wolfe, whilst the new position of the enemy on the plain before Quebec cut off all his resources, and any hope of succour from France was out of the question. A battle won might end the campaign for that year with honour, and his chivalrous spirit would not decline the challenge. He fought, and though he was defeated, friend and foe alike admired him and did him justice. After passing the night in religious exercises, he died on the day after the battle, and was buried in the garden of the Ursuline Convent, in a cavity made by the bursting of a shell—a fitting grave for such a warrior.

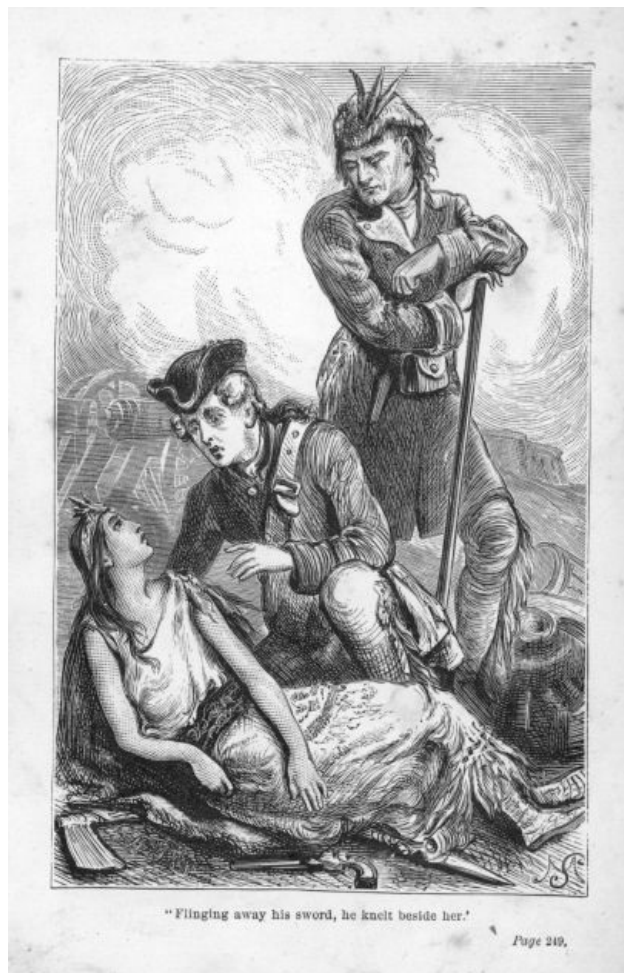
Almost the last to retreat within the ramparts of the citadel were a score or so of veterans belonging to Isidore's former regiment. Not having yet received any regular appointment, he had fought with his old corps as a volunteer all the morning, and most of the officers being by that time killed or wounded, he had tacitly assumed the command of this little band. They had nearly reached the gate of St. Louis when they once more heard the terrible war-whoop close in their rear, and as they faced about for the last time, a body of Indians came sweeping towards them from some broken ground near the river's bank.

"Stand fast, men, and give those fellows a parting salute," cried Isidore. The order was obeyed, and with such effect that the Indians stopped in their wild onset, and then fell back a little. One alone held his ground. He was their chief, and by the tuft of snowy feathers and ribbons that fluttered above his head he was recognised at once by Isidore and by Boulanger, who stood by his side, all begrimed with dust and smoke, and clutching in his hand the barrel of his broken rifle. It was White Eagle.

For a few moments faint and dizzy with loss of blood, for he had been wounded without knowing it, Isidore felt a strange half-conscious stupor come over him. Was this all a dream about the horrible massacre at Fort William Henry? There before him stood the very savage who had struck him down; there were the shouts, the shrieks of wounded men; there, too, was the dark figure darting swiftly past and placing itself right in front of him.

"Fire, fire! Be quick!" shouted Boulanger, as the Indian raised his rifle. It sent forth a flash and a puff of smoke, but the report was lost in the discharge of a dozen French muskets, which stretched the Indian dead upon the grass.

It was too late. With a loud cry Amoahmeh dropped down at Isidore's feet. Flinging away his sword he knelt beside her, and raised her up a little. She gave him one grateful parting look, murmuring faintly, "Amoahmeh knows where—it was you who told her." Then she closed her eyes, and Isidore knew that her brave and loving spirit had fled.



"Flinging away his sword, he knelt beside her."

Meanwhile the Indians, daunted by the stern reception they had met with, and by the loss of their chief, had fallen back in disorder, and the little troop that had discomfited them withdrew within the gates. Isidore and Boulanger were the last to enter, the Canadian bearing in his arms, as tenderly as if it had been one of his own sleeping children, the lifeless body of Amoahmeh.



CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.



our days later de Ramsey surrendered the fortress of Quebec, and with the fall of this last stronghold the conquest of New France was virtually accomplished. The French, under the Chevalier de Levi, did indeed commence operations in the ensuing spring, and they even attempted to retake Quebec, mustering about ten thousand men on the scene of the previous year's engagement. Murray, with a force amounting to less than one-third of that number, came out and gave them battle, but was worsted, and had to take shelter behind his ramparts; nevertheless the enemy subsequently withdrew without effecting anything beyond that barren success. The great drama, however, was drawing to a close. Amherst descending with his army from Oswego, Murray ascending from Quebec, and Haviland

approaching from Lake Champlain, converged upon Montreal; and so admirably was the plan of the campaign carried out that during the first week of September, 1760, an aggregate force of sixteen thousand men made their appearance before the defenceless city. On the 8th of that month Governor de Vaudreuil signed a capitulation, not in respect of Montreal only, but of the whole colony. Its inhabitants passed, for the most part with little reluctance, under the British sceptre. France had impoverished and disgusted them by misgovernment, and by over-government had destroyed in them all energy and self-reliance. Thus Canada became a British dependency, and there was no longer a New France. Under the terms of the capitulation all French troops with their officers, as well as the civil authorities with their families, were removed to France in British vessels; and thus it came about that those whose story has been told in these pages found themselves again in their native home.

The grant of a seigneurie on the banks of the St. Lawrence previous to the cession of the colony had restored the decayed fortunes of the Baron de Valricour, and he subsequently returned thither with Clotilde, whose descendants hold a high position amongst the old French *noblesse* in Canada to this day.

In the course of a few years the marquis died, and Isidore and Marguerite came into possession of the fair domains of Beaujardin. It may be added that whilst there was not one amongst all the tenants and dependants on the estate who did not regret the loss of their old master, they soon found reason to acknowledge that they were not less fortunate in his successor.

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