

Trevena John

The Plowshare and the Sword: A Tale of Old Quebec



John Trevena

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CHAPTER I

THE FATHER OF WATERS

It was an evening of spring in the year of strife 1637. The sun was slowly withdrawing his beams from the fortress of Quebec, which had been established some thirty years back, and was then occupied by a handful of settlers and soldiers, to the number of 120, under the military governorship of Arnaud de Roussillac. The French politicians of the seventeenth century were determined colony builders. However humble the settler, he was known and watched, advanced or detained, by the vigilant government of Paris. The very farms were an extension, however slight, of the militarism of France, and a standing menace to Britain. Where, further south, Englishmen founded a rude settlement, the French in the north had responded by a military post. The policy of peace taught by that intrepid adventurer, Jacques Cartier, exactly a hundred years before, had become almost forgotten. "This country is now owned by your Majesty," Cartier had written. "Your Majesty has only to make gifts to the headmen of the Iroquois tribes and assure them of your friendship, to make the land yours for ever."

But Samuel de Champlain, the colony-maker who followed Cartier, was a man of pride who understood how to make war, but had left unlearned the greater art of bidding for peace. In 1609, acting under what he believed to be a flash of genius, Champlain brought against the Iroquois the Algonquins, their bitter hereditary enemies; and with their aid, and the use of the magic firearms which had never before been heard in the country of the wild north, he had utterly defeated the proud and unforgiving people who had won the admiration and respect of Cartier the pioneer, thus making the tribes of the Iroquois confederacy sworn enemies of France for ever. Had Providence been pleased to make Samuel de Champlain another Cartier, had the latter even succeeded the former, Canada, from the rough Atlantic seaboard to the soft Pacific slope, might well have been one great colony of France to-day.

It was, however, not the past history of that land, nor even its present necessities, which occupied the mind of the Abbé La Salle, great-uncle of the future Robert of that name, who, half-a-century later, was to discover the mighty river of Mississippi – which was to deprive the St. Lawrence of its proud birth-title, the Father of Waters – and explore the plains of Michigan. The abbé was lying, that spring evening, on the heights, smoking a stone pipe filled with coarse black tobacco from Virginia, and watching a heavy ship which rocked upon the swift current where it raced round the bend in the shore. He was building up a future for himself, a fabric of ambition upon foundations of diplomacy and daring. This senior priest of the fortress – there were two others, Laroche the bully, and St Agapit the ascetic – was a handsome man, powerfully built, of fair complexion marred only by a sword-cut above the left eye. Although priest in name, he was more at his ease flicking a rapier than thumbing a breviary; an oath was habitually upon his tongue; a hot patriot was he, and above all a fighter. He had fought a duel before his early mass, and had left the altar to brag of his prowess. He was, in short, one of the most notorious of that band of martial Churchmen, imitators of Armand du Plessis Richelieu, for which colonial France at that age was noted. Far from the eye of the mighty Cardinal and the feeble mind of Louis the Just, they swaggered through life, preaching the divine mission of the Church to the natives one hour, drinking deeply, or duelling in terrible earnest, the next. The lives

of the fighting priests of Quebec make not the least interesting page of that romance which three centuries have written around the heights.

Wooden huts were dotted thinly along the slopes, which ended where the forest of hemlocks began, about half a mile from the edge of the cliff; and below, where a log landing-stage jutted into the stream, a man-of-war flying the flag of France rode at her ease, a party of turbaned men, no bigger to the abbé's eyes than children, gambling at dice upon her fore-deck. Anchored beside the shore opposite appeared another vessel, more rakish in build, less heavy at the stern, and showing four masts to the Frenchman's three. A pine branch fluttered at the main truck, and a great bough of hemlock depended over her bows, completely draping the heavy and grotesque figure-head.

It was this latter ship which La Salle was watching with suspicion, as attentively as the distance would permit. The abbé mistrusted all foreigners, even when, as in this case, they came bringing gifts. He had recently been informed of that hasty alliance patched up between France and Holland, and the policy found no favour in his eyes; he frowned to think that a Dutch man-of-war should be permitted to sail up the St. Lawrence and cast anchor beneath the heights. Was there any genuine desire on the part of Holland to strengthen the hands of her new ally, or were the crafty Dutchmen playing some deep game of their own? The Indians, who surrounded the fortress as closely as they dared, were entirely hostile to the holders of the land. Rumours of at least one band of Englishmen, friendly with the natives, hiding in the forest or among the clefts in the rock, waiting to strike a blow when opportunity offered against the servants of King Louis, had been circulated by a French dwarf known by the name of Gaudriole, a malevolent, misshapen creature, who passed unharmed about the country, and escaped hanging merely because of his value as an interpreter of the various native dialects. The Dutch ship, which had arrived only that afternoon, might well have sailed northward with some plan of joining for the time with either Indian or English to wrest the mastery of the maritime provinces from the clutch of France.

While La Salle thus meditated with a mind to his own advancement, his keen ears detected the fall of footsteps over the crisp grass, and he pulled himself round to discover a priest, like himself wearing a sword, a stout man, panting after his long climb.

"What news, Laroche?" called the smoker, indicating the distant warship with the stem of his pipe.

"Corpus Domini!" gasped the new comer. "The sun strikes across yonder rocks like the fire of Gehenna. What news, ask you, of yonder piratical thief of a Dutchman? She is under commission, mark you, to pick a quarrel and fight us for this coast, for all the fair talk of alliance and the chopping up of the Spanish Netherlands between Paris and Holland – "

"What of Roussilac?" broke in La Salle.

"The commandant is now aboard the floating gin-tank, and there you may swear he shall impress upon the mind of Van Vuren, her master, the certain fact that Louis the Thirteenth is lord here, from the sea outward to wherever this endless land may reach. But we know the Hollander. A smooth rascal, who flatters to a man's face, and when his back is turned – Proh stigmata Salvatoris! Dost remember the Dutchman who pinked you in the shoulder at Avignon?"

He broke off with the question, and his fat body shook with laughter.

"A priest must remain a priest in Avignon," said La Salle sourly; "but he may here be a man. What news has this Hollander brought?"

"Why, that England is in revolt from end to end," answered Laroche gladly. "We shall find none of their clumsy ships, nor any of their barbarian fist-using soldiers here. The people have risen against the king. A man named John Hampden has refused to pay ship-money, a new tax levied to raise a fleet to defy the Pope, the Dutch, and the Cardinal, and this man carries the people with him. Also this Charles has made himself hated in the north by forcing some new form of heresy and insult to his Holiness in the shape of a prayer-book down the throats of the Scotch. All but a handful have

fallen away from him, says Van Vuren, even the lords temporal have begun to despair, and many are preparing to set out for the West."

La Salle's martial spirit flamed up. "Here?" he questioned eagerly.

"They would no more dare seek a home here than in Rochelle," went on Laroche. "They go south to take up the lands where the last of their mariners harried the Spaniards. It is reported that Lord Saye and Sele proposes to transport himself to Virginia, Lord Warwick to Connecticut, and the yeomen, weary of heavy taxes and fearing the extortions of the Star Chamber, seek information concerning New England now that the star of the old has set. We hold the seas, France or Holland unaided is strong enough to sink the rotten barques which the English call their fleet. There is no money forthcoming for new ships. Richelieu shall soon rule the world! Come down. We shall perchance obtain a bottle of wine along the Rue des Pêcheurs before vespers."

"I join you at Michel's after sundown," said La Salle. "At this present time I remain in the wilderness."

He stood up, brushed the dry grass from his almost entirely secular costume, and gazed landwards under the wide brim of his hat, until a crow came presently flapping out of the valley where the great forest began. The black bird soared over the heads of the martial priests, and dropped slowly to drink of the river.

"There are finer birds in yonder forest," muttered La Salle, a smile about his mouth.

"Ha! An assignation?" exclaimed the stout priest, and at the suggestion wiped his moist forehead and laughed loudly. Then he turned and rolled away down the slope, shouting a song of the cabaret which had been popular among the soldiers of Paris two years before. La Salle followed his progress with a cynical smile, before he also turned, and descended upon the opposite side out of sight of the river, and crossed the plain where the French were to rule for two centuries more and then to fly with the kilted men of Scotland at their heels. Here the cool hemlock forest murmured, the dense forest which stretched northward to the mud flats of the salt bay named after the adventurer Hudson, whose lost bones were somewhere tossed in its cold and lonely waters. The sun was hidden by the hills, big golden lilies stared at the priest, an indigo-winged butterfly tumbled into shelter to die at the ending of the day. The dew sweated out of the ground, and the foliage smelt like wine.

"This is better than the gutters of Paris," muttered the priest.

The bushes parted at the sounding of his voice, and a radiant vision stood before him, backed by the greenwood shade. A young woman, but a few years removed from childhood, stepped forth, hungrily regarding the abbé with a splendid pair of eyes, brown-red and full of fire, and burning with the health and passion of life.

This young maid was Onawa of the Cayugas, that boldest of the tribes of the allied Iroquois, who held the interior under their confederacy, all the plains, backwoods, the river and seaboard, with the exception of those spots where military posts had been established – the small palisaded farm, and even the trader's hut, being marked upon the map as military posts, and made so by the simple order, "*Le roi le veut.*" This girl had been present at the council fire when Roussilac had endeavoured to heal the breach between French and Indians by specious promises, none of which he intended to fulfil; La Salle also had been present, accompanying the commandant as the representative of the Church. The council had been a failure, owing, said the soldiers, to the trickery of Gaudriole, the only interpreter available; but in fact due to the overbearing manner of Roussilac, who fell into Champlain's error of relegating an uncivilised people to the level of animals; and to the innate hatred entertained by the Indians for their conquerors. The Iroquois sachems answered the representative smoothly that they would consider his offer of peace and the terms accompanying the same, and subsequently resolved that, though they might tolerate English and Dutch in their midst, their final answer to the white race who had armed the Algonquins against them could only be made by arrow and tomahawk. Onawa, who because of her sex was allowed to take no part in the discussion, held aloof, and regarded the figure of La Salle standing haughtily in the yellow glow of the fire. When the deputation withdrew

she followed and caught the priest's attention with a smile; and when night fell she was still watching the lights of the rude little town upon the cliffs.

La Salle was no woman's man. He was too healthy a soldier; but he was ambitious, and had moulded his policy upon that of his master, the character which did not shame to describe itself in the unscrupulous terms, "I venture upon nothing till I have well considered it; but when I have once taken my resolution I go directly to my end. I mow down and overthrow all that stands in my way, and then cover the whole with my red mantle." The daughter of an Iroquois chief had great power among her own people, and the priest reflected that he might add some fame to his name and win perhaps the red hat for his head, if he could secure the withdrawal of the hostile tribes; or, better, inflame them against the English, who were, so said report, but awaiting an opportunity to strike at the north. But a difficulty lay in his path; neither he nor Onawa could speak the other's tongue.

But this was not an overwhelming obstacle, because then, as now, the language of signs might make a dumb tongue eloquent. Thus it was not altogether by accident that the handsome abbé came to the fringe of the forest at evening, and it was not chance alone which brought Onawa from the camp into the enemy's country.

She held between her fingers a flower, a lily as golden as that emblazoned upon the royal standard; and while standing before him she placed the flower to her forehead, and then gave it him, without turning away her eyes, and without shrinking from his.

La Salle understood that she was expressing her willingness to give herself to him, with or without the will and consent of her people.

"By St. Anthony!" he muttered. "How shall I tell the jade that I have abjured women? Does she then desire me to strip and paint, that she may make of me a heathen husband?"

He shook his head, and the light changed in the eyes of the girl, and her brow wrinkled. He saw the sudden gleam of her teeth and heard her sigh.

"Jezebel of the forest," he cried, "name me this flower!"

He extended it with a sign, and the ready girl spoke softly a dissyllabic word. La Salle repeated it, again indicating the flower, and Onawa nodded vigorously.

"Ah!" exclaimed the priest. "Here is light out of darkness."

He came nearer and took the girl's hand, making the same sign. She spoke again. He touched her hair. Again she spoke. Then her cheek, her nose, her lips, her ears, and Onawa answered him every time, laughing delightedly as the priest pronounced each soft Iroquois word at her dictation.

"A few such lessons, and Gaudriole may be hanged," said La Salle.

Then, with a quick gesture, Onawa put out her fawn-coloured hand, and touched his right eye with the tip of one finger.

"L'oeil," answered La Salle.

She patted his cheek.

"La joue," he said.

She tweaked his nose, with a laugh.

"Le nez," he gasped.

She slapped his mouth.

"La bouche," he growled, adding, "I might have said, 'La grimace.'"

The girl was very near. He caught her and drew her up to him, and pressed his lips powerfully upon hers.

"C'est le baiser," he said carelessly.

The salutation of the kiss was unknown among the Iroquois. Onawa started, thrilling with a feeling altogether strange; then turned to him, putting back her head as a Parisienne might have done to receive her lover's salute.

"Le baiser *again*," she demanded, clinging to the word which had made life a new thing. "Le baiser *again*."

"By all the wiles of Satan!" exclaimed La Salle, thrusting her back. "She is in league with the enemy."

Again he held her before him, his arms slightly bent, and said haltingly in the tongue of the hated race, which he knew little better than the Cayuga: "You speak the English?"

Onawa's face lighted. "A ver' little words," she answered. Then she drew up to him, her eyes more eloquent, and softly repeating her bilingual request:

"Le baiser again."

It was dark when La Salle reached the group of huts planted upon the cliffs. The warships were invisible and unlighted, because lamps would have revealed figures patrolling upon deck, and there were keen-eyed enemies watching from either shore. The priest stumbled along the rocky path, his long boots kicking the stones before him, until he came near the waterside and the Rue des Pêcheurs, situated immediately below the main cliff on the site occupied to-day by Little Champlain Street. The way was inhabited, as its name implied, by fisher-folk who swept the wide river when times were fairly peaceful, and served as soldiers in war. There was no street in the accepted sense of the word. A few cave dwellings burrowed out of the rock; huts here and there, a tent, or a simple erection of sticks and stones plastered over with mud, were barely visible, sprinkled irregularly, out of the darkness along the high shore.

Where a worn pathway went round and curved towards the landing-stage, a square log-hut occupied some considerable portion of space. A very dull lamp smoked over the entry, below a board bearing the inscription, "Michel Ferraud, Marchand du Vin." A grumbling noise of conversation and the rattle of dice sounded within.

"Deuce and three for the third time!" shouted the high-pitched voice of the Abbé Laroche. "I'll throw you again, Dutchman – one more throw for the honour of the Church; and the devil seize me if this box plays me the trick again."

La Salle bent his head and entered the cabaret. He made two steps, then stood motionless, his fingers feeling for his sword-hilt.

Laroche looked up, the dice-box poised in his fat right hand, and a smile wandered across his face at beholding the attitude of his fellow-priest.

"The master of the Dutch man-of-war," he called, indicating the player who sat opposite him. "Sieur," he shouted over the table, with a burst of unctuous laughter, "the renowned swordsman, L'Abbé La Salle."

Then Van Vuren looked up.

CHAPTER II

AN ENEMY IN THE CAMP

At sunset Roussilac, the commandant of Quebec, after receiving reassuring reports from the sentries and thus closing his official duties for the day, went aboard the man-of-war. Having personally superintended the shipping of the gangway, to satisfy himself that immediate communication with the shore was cut off, he withdrew to his cabin, which he occupied in preference to his hut upon the slope. Before retiring to his hammock, he mentally reviewed his position, the difficulties of which had not been lessened by the unexpected arrival of the Dutch ship.

It had never been the way of Holland to go out of her course to be friendly. The commandant could not forget that she had colonised large tracts of country further south; he knew that, like England, she aspired to extend her influence beyond the seas; and what more probable than that, snatching at the opportunity afforded by this alliance, her government should have commissioned Van Vuren to spy out the land and report upon its possibilities?

Already sufficient dangers threatened the fortress. Disquieting rumours had reached Roussilac of late. The Indians, it was said, were growing more restless and bolder because they had discovered the weakness of the French. It was certain that a band of five Englishmen had been seen in the district by Gaudriole, and these were probably the precursors of more formidable numbers. The islanders, Roussilac knew, had a knack of appearing when least expected; and Agincourt had long since shown the world that they were never so formidable as when few in numbers, short of supplies, and worn after heavy marching. It was this fear which had induced the commandant to adopt the plan of retiring to the ship each night, so that, whatever might befall his men upon the mainland, he at least would be in a position of comparative safety.

By this it will be perceived that Roussilac was not altogether of that stuff of which heroes are made. Nor was he a man of exceptional ability. He had fought his way up to his present post of responsibility with the aid of fortune and a natural capacity for obeying orders, although, while he had been ascending, he preferred to forget his Norman parents and connections, merely because they happened to be poor and humble folk. His mother's brother and her husband, the latter driven out of France for heresy, were living upon a small holding, little more than a day's journey from the fortress; Jean-Marie Labroquerie, their only son, had lately joined the ranks of his small army; but the commandant was too proud, or perhaps too cowardly, to acknowledge these kinsfolk, and in his heart he found the hope that Madame Labroquerie, his aunt, a woman of bitter memories, with a sharp tongue and a passionate nature, would never seek to reach the fortress and shame him before his men. The selfish spirit of Richelieu was working on in Arnaud de Roussilac, as indeed it worked through the character of almost all the creatures of the Cardinal.

Still perplexed by the problems of his position, the commandant recited the prayers without which no soldier of the age could have deemed himself safe from the perils of the night, placed his sword ready to his hand, and retired to his hammock, although darkness had scarcely settled over the land. In a few minutes he was asleep.

These early slumbers were rudely broken by a heavy hand which seized and shook him by the shoulder. The glare of a torch hurt his eyes, when he opened them to discover the tanned features of D'Archand, the master of the ship, between the folds of the netting spread to exclude the ever-hostile insects.

"An attack," muttered Roussilac, in the first moment of consciousness. "A plague upon these English."

"Hasten!" cried D'Archand. "The fortress is in an uproar. La Salle has insulted the Dutch master, and a duel is imminent."

At that Roussilac awoke fully, and, stretching out his arm, drew the square port-hole open, admitting the sound of the tidewater under the ship's counter, and beyond, a sharp murmur of excited voices. Craning his neck, he discovered an intermittent flashing of lights along the pathway under the cliff.

"Now may the saints help me!" the commandant exclaimed, as he felt for his cloak. "I have no shadow of power over these priests. More willingly would I oppress a witch than cross a Churchman. Magic can only rot a man's body, but excommunication touches his soul. What is the cause of this quarrel?"

"I know not," answered D'Archand. "But duelling has been forbidden altogether – "

"By Church and State alike," the commandant interrupted testily. "The Cardinal might as well forbid the plague to strike his army. When the Church itself breaks the law, how is the head of the army to act?"

The captains speedily left the ship, ascended the winding path, and entered the street of fishermen.

All the inhabitants appeared to be gathered together upon the low ground, to witness the by no means unprecedented spectacle of a duel between priest and layman. They stood six deep under the cliff, with as many more upon the side of the river; old and young, women in soiled stiff caps, ragged settlers, and soldiers in faded accoutrements side by side. A ring of men, holding spluttering pine torches, or oil lanterns, the flames of which smoked and flickered up and down the horn sides, enclosed an open space where two shadowy figures swayed almost noiselessly, facing one another, each right arm directing a rapier which flashed continually in the confused lights.

"I would the challenger were any other than the Abbé La Salle," muttered Roussilac. "He would cut off my hopes of Heaven as readily as he shall presently run through yonder Dutchman."

"There is no finer swordsman in the new world than the abbé," whispered D'Archand in his ear. "If Van Vuren be killed, the Cardinal shall account you responsible, and I too shall not escape blame. This new alliance may not hold if the deed be known in Paris."

Roussilac started forward, and scattered the people, who were too excited to recognise him.

"Put up your swords!" he shouted. "I charge you, sir priest, in the King's name to cease fighting with this man, who is my guest and our common ally."

"Corpus Domini!" cried Laroche, staggering towards the commandant, his big face flushed with excitement and liquor. "Order the wind to cease, commandant, or yon river to stop its flow. Attempt to restrain La Salle when his blood is hot! Know you, sir, this is an affair of honour."

"It is not you who shall suffer from the breaking of the law, sir priest," protested the representative. "By St. Gris! a master-stroke!" he exclaimed, unable altogether to suppress his soldierly instincts.

La Salle, foreseeing an interruption, had closed with his enemy in a vigorous skirmish of rapid and clever feints, culminating in a stroke the admirable technique of which had wrung an involuntary testimony from the commandant. Van Vuren escaped by a side movement, which to the onlookers partook of the nature of a lucky accident. But there was a smear of blood upon the priest's rapier when he pressed again to the attack.

"Yon Dutchman shall be the only sufferer," said Laroche. "Only bloodshed can satisfy the Abbé La Salle. Nature must run her course. There stands a scar upon my brother's back, made by this Van Vuren's sword four years ago at the corner of a dark turning in Avignon. What was the cause? Well, commandant, a woman they say is always the cause; but my friend is, like myself, a priest, and therefore above suspicion so far as women are concerned. Dutchmen have hard heads and slow brains. It is also said of them that if they can run from an enemy with honour they will run. My brother was one night returning home after administering at a sick bed; beside a corner he heard a step, and, before he could turn, a sword point went in his back. The Dutchman's honour was satisfied. He ran,

but he was marked as he escaped. In Avignon during those days Van Vuren was known by another, and less honourable, name. But the devil may wear a halo and remain the devil."

While the abbé spoke, some heavy clouds, which had gathered over the heights, darkening the night, began to discharge themselves in rain, which presently lashed in so heavy a torrent that the pine torches were extinguished, and the men holding the lanterns had much difficulty to maintain the feeble flames. La Salle, with his back to the storm, drove the Hollander before him through the hissing rain, the people falling away as the duellists advanced, their blades gleaming and grating through the silvery lines of water. A muffled shout went up. Van Vuren had been palpably hit upon the shoulder. La Salle smiled grimly and still pressed on, lunging repeatedly over the captain's guard, taking every risk of a wound as he hastened to make his victory sure.

Roussilac cleared the road, the people only obeying when the soldiers prepared to enforce their officer's order.

"Gentlemen," cried the commandant, advancing, with an imprecation upon the rain, "drop your swords, I pray of you."

"The devil seize you!" shouted La Salle, throwing out his left arm. "His point was not an inch from me."

"Put up your swords," repeated Roussilac, boldly disregarding the remonstrance. "Sir priest, it is the will of the Cardinal."

These were potent words, and for one moment the abbé hesitated. He lowered his point with an angry side glance upon his interrupter, and the affair would then have finished had not a dark figure stopped out from the shadow under the cliff, and thrown itself into position with the muffled warning, "En garde!"

"Ah, dog!" cried La Salle, starting forward through the rain with scarcely a ray of light between him and his adversary.

When a line of lightning broke the sky, an exclamation burst from his lips and his bold cheek blanched. During that momentary illumination La Salle beheld his enemy clearly. He saw a mean man clad in a suit of faded red with torn and stained ruffles; his hair gathered behind and tied with a piece of grass; his hat broken out of shape and adorned sadly with half a plume. And when Laroche held up a lantern, the fighting priest saw further that what he had taken for a negroid skin was merely a mask which covered the stranger's face, slit with holes for the eyes and mouth.

"This," muttered La Salle, cold with terror as he warded off an attack which was far more aggressive than that of Van Vuren, "this is the work of Satan."

Roussilac touched D'Archand, pointing along the path which bent down to the river, and whispered, "Wait for the lightning."

When the flash passed, the master saw the big figure of the Dutchman hurrying to reach his ship, his sword still drawn in his hand.

"Then, who is this?" exclaimed D'Archand, with a frightened oath, indicating through the beating rain the man behind the mask.

Roussilac signed himself, and said nothing.

Laroche hurried up, his big face streaming, the lantern shaking in his hands like a will-o'-the-wisp, his attitude grotesque with terror.

"What witchcraft is here?" he shouted. "See you how this Dutchman has changed body and appearance as well as name?"

"Van Vuren is not here," said Roussilac gravely. "He ran when the abbé lowered his sword; and so soon as he had gone – nay, before – yonder figure stepped out of the darkness under the cliff and challenged La Salle. You see he has covered his face. It is the mad Englishman who fights for the love of fighting. And the English cover the earth like flies."

"I shall stiffen his arm, be he heretic or devil," said the stout priest; and he went and stood near the duellists, and, boldly facing the stranger, cursed him prolifically in the name of Holy Church and the King of Rome.

The stranger did not turn, and only acknowledged the anathemas by a perfectly distinct laugh which issued weirdly from the mask.

No man had ever called La Salle's bravery in question. Facing an enemy, who had started as it were from the rocks before him in the rain and the lightning, he met the resolute attack and parried every lunge. In truth, the priest was a fine swordsman; but his resource in skirmish and detail was here taxed to the uttermost. All he could do at his best was to hold out the short sword, which flashed in and out of the rain, controlled by a wrist of steel and an iron arm. The masked man gave forth no sound of hard breathing. He was a master of swordcraft, and La Salle knew that he had met his match. Here was no nervous Dutchman to be trifled with; no hectoring soldier with a hearty oath and bluff swagger. La Salle sweated, and his breath came pricking in hot gasps, and a cold thrill trickled along his back when he allowed himself to wonder who the enemy might be.

The stranger guarded against treachery, hugging the cliff lest anyone with hostile intentions might pass behind and reach his back. Had he moved out, he would assuredly have beaten down the abbé's defence; as it was, the latter was acting upon the defensive, and doing so with much difficulty.

The rain stopped on an instant. As suddenly the clouds fell back to admit the light; and the rugged shadows of the rocks traced fantastic shapes along the Rue des Pêcheurs.

The strained voice of Laroche broke the stillness.

"A touch!"

"Liar!" shouted back the hard-driven but proud priest, although he felt warm blood oozing between his fingers.

The masked man feared the light which followed the sweeping away of the storm clouds. He bestirred himself, fainted with amazing rapidity within and without the pass, then his limber wrist stiffened for the second, and his point darted in like a poisonous snake over the hilt and wounded La Salle upon the muscle of the sword-arm.

"A touch!" shouted the captains together, both too excited to have any thought for the law.

"An accident," gasped the proud priest. "A misfortune."

"Well, here's a touch!" called a deep English voice; and as the challenger made his nationality known he lunged beneath the abbé's blade, thrusting out until the blood spurted upward in a jet.

"Yes, yes. A touch – I confess," panted La Salle; and he staggered back, crossed his legs, and fell heavily.

"By St. Michael!" shouted the fat Laroche, furiously pulling out his sword and reaching towards the shadow under the cliff. "You shall pay, assassin, for this."

The mysterious stranger chuckled, disarmed Laroche in a moment, scratching the stout abbé's wrist with his point, and before the two officers and the handful of soldiers could bestir themselves, he had disappeared round the bend of the Rue des Pêcheurs. Roussilac ran to the ending of the way, but found no sign of the masked man, who had vanished as mysteriously as he had arrived.

CHAPTER III

CHRISMATION

The day following the duel La Salle was under the hands of the surgeon – who, in the ignorance of that age, treated his patient for loss of blood by letting yet more – and Roussilac was sending forth men with the charge to find the hiding-place of the Englishman, and to fail not at their peril. However, they did at that time fail. Not even the cunning hunchback Gaudriole had been able to discover the habitation of the mysterious swordsman who had dared to enter the fortress and openly defy its officers and men.

Even the Indian might have walked behind the scrub of tangled willow-growth over the cave-dwelling, and known nothing of it, had his eyes or his nose failed to discern the thread of wood-smoke often curling above the blackened crater of a hollow tree which had been ingeniously converted into a chimney. A grass-covered knoll made the roof of the dwelling, the entrance to which only became apparent from a stone causeway, shelving gradually between the roots of pine trees, and enclosed by massive logs which banked the eastern front of the burrow.

Upon the threshold of this rude home a brown boy was playing with a wolf-hound, while awaiting his father's return from that daring visit to the fortress.

Around him Nature thundered like a great organ. The leaden waters of the great discharge roared where the bush made a screen which no eyes could pierce; the falls of the Ouitaniche smoked below. Spray flew above the scrub, bathing the dog's fur and the strong arms of the child. The one bayed, the other shouted, to the hard north wind that swept overhead, lashing the branches, tearing the summits of the pines, snatching the dry wisps of grass and whirling them under the clouds. The dark bush groaned. The great rocks bore their buffetings with hollow protests. Ravens croaked as they swung up and down; divers wailed from the weedy creeks. The boughs chafed, and the plumed foliage clashed together, loosening a rain of cones and showers of pine needles.

"I want to grow. I want to be strong," shouted the boy to his panting companion. "I want to wear a sword and fight. I want to be a soldier and shed blood. I want to live!"

The dog broke away barking, and rushed through the scrub. The child ran after him, and they met upon the dripping rocks, which made a natural fortification to the cave beyond.

A magnificent spectacle rolled away, as full of sound and motion as a battlefield. Well had the Indians named that place the Region of the Lost Waters. Islands heaved out of the raging expanse, small and densely covered with torn vegetation, every ridge of pine-crested rock moaning under the north wind, splintered and rough and ragged, scarred like the duellist's arm. About these islands the separate torrents thundered, seeking outlets for escape. There were a hundred channels, each striving to be the main, each at war with all others, each leaping white-crested down to join its rivals at the stupendous fall. Every separate discharge lifted up its voice to drown the combined clamour of its rivals.

A canoe shot the rapids between two islands, quivering like an arrow in its flight. It swept down, a mere feather upon the water, with only a shell of rough bark between its two occupants and the hereafter. The steerer, a handsome and pure-blooded woman of the Cayugas, crouched like a figure of bronze against the cross-piece, wielding her paddle with an easy carelessness which spoke of perfect confidence. By a turn of her wrist the shell of bark swept off a projecting rock; by a deft motion of her body, almost too subtle for the sight, the canoe glanced from a reef where the waves were wild; another, more determined, motion, and the fragile thing pierced a sheet of spray and swept to the shore. The child caught the shell and held fast, while the man who had conquered the fighting priest jumped nimbly to the sand.

"Brave boy, Richard," he cried. "Your mother and I looked out from yonder bend between the islands, knowing that our son would be awaiting us. Tell me now, how have you fared during our absence?"

The boy put out his lean arms, already tight with muscle, to greet his mother.

"I have been hunting by the moon," he answered. "Last night I shot a deer, and to-day have cut it up. A portion of the meat is cooking now."

The soldier of fortune reached an arm round the boy's shoulders and drew him close. "You are a man, my Richard. You shall never know what it is to lack strength."

Night settled down. The lord of the isles left the cave, and, seating himself upon a bank, smoked a long pipe, which he had received as a gift from Shuswap, chief of the Cayugas, with whom he had allied himself by marriage. Silently he drew the smoke through the painted stem, then handed the pipe to his wife, and she smoked and passed the quaint object to her son, who smoked also with a strange expression of sternness upon his child's features.

"Was the meat good, father?" he asked, as he handed back the pipe.

"Somewhat too fresh, my son," the man answered.

"Was the deer well shot?"

"It was well done, Richard."

"It is not easy to shoot straight in the moonlight," the boy said. "But I shot no more than once. My arrow went true to the side of the neck, and Blood followed and pulled the creature down."

The great hound looked up with open mouth, and heavily flapped his tail.

The boy spoke both English and Cayuga, the former more perfectly than the latter. His father and mother spoke both languages, each having taught the other the words of a strange tongue. The woman was tall, of a type which was soon to grow extinct, her features as regular as those of a Greek statue, her eyes and hair a deep black, her skin a trifle darker than fawn-colour. Like all the proud daughters of the Iroquois, she knew well how to handle the axe and bow. Among her own people, in the days of maidenhood, her name had been Tuschota; but by her English husband she was called Mary.

He, the lord of the isles, was almost mean in stature, with a lean, careworn face marked with decisive lines of character, grey-eyed and thin-lipped. His body was clad in a much mended suit of faded red, an old hat partly covered by a broken feather, with moccasins and leggings of his wife's make. A short sword swung behind him by a rough belt of buckskin, and a hunting-knife, the blade hiding in a beaded sheath, hung closely to his right hip. It was hard to tell his age; he had the eager face of youth under the bleached hair of middle-age. His wife and only child called him Thomas or Father, as did the neighbouring Indians of the allied Iroquois tribes; but none of them knew him by any other name, except that of Gitsa, the sun, or, as they intended to convey, "The strong one who sometimes covers his face."

"Father," young Richard exclaimed nervously, "shall you go away to-night?"

"Be silent, child," said the mother. "It is not for the young to know the father's will."

"Nay, Mary," said the grave man. "I love the lad's spirit. Let him speak his mind."

Richard came nearer and put out his hand, a flush upon his brow. He patted the hound's back, its head, handled the frayed hem of his father's cloak, and then his brown fingers passed on to caress the hilt of the sword upon which his eyes had been fixed while his hand wandered.

"Father," he exclaimed, in a burst of boyish passion, "I want to wear a sword."

The man's grey eyes kindled as he heard this strong boy speak. Child as he was in years, the father's spirit was in him, and the father rejoiced.

"What would you do with a sword?" he said, frowning. "Would you cut your bread, or make kindling wood for the fire? Have you not your bow and arrows?"

"I can bring you down the bird flying, or the beast running. I can shoot you the salmon in the water. Now I would learn the sword, that I may go out with you, and fight with you, and – and protect you, my father."

The man did not smile; but he frowned no more.

"Son," he said, in tones that were still severe, "you are yet over young to join the brotherhood of the sword. The same is a mighty weapon, never a servant, but rather a tyrant, who shall destroy his wearer in the end. Know you that the Master of the world said once, 'All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword'? Even as the tongue is the sword, an unruly member which no man can restrain. It answers an enemy without thought, even as the tongue throws back an angry word. It passes a death sentence lightly, even as the tongue curses an enemy's soul. It strikes a vulnerable spot in one mad moment; and when the passion sinks, then the hand fails, and the eye shall close for shame. Only the sword changes not, remaining cold to the eye, ready to the hand, and responsive to the first evil thought in the heart. You shall wear the sword some day, my son. Be content till then."

"I want to fight Frenchmen," the boy muttered. "Father, let me draw your sword. Let me see it flash in the moon. Let me feel its point."

The father's hand closed upon that of the boy, pressing the little palm strongly against the hilt. "Do not draw that sword, child," he said. "The virgin hand should hold a virgin blade."

He rose suddenly and disappeared along the white causeway. The mother and son were alone on the knoll, the black pines torn by the wind behind, the spray flying in front. The mother put out her well-shaped arm to the smouldering pipe, and drew at the mouthpiece, watching the excited boy over the triangular bowl. She spoke in the liquid language of the Cayugas, "Remember that you are very young, my son."

Richard turned passionately, and fanned away the tobacco smoke which wreathed itself between their eyes.

"I have lived fifteen years. I am strong. See these arms! See how long they are, and mark how the muscle swells when I lift my hand. I am weary of killing fish and birds and beasts. I would kill men."

"You would be a man of blood, son?"

"Even as my father. He has taught me to hunt. But when he goes down to the great river he leaves me here. You he often takes; but I am left. He goes down to fight. I have watched him when he cleans his sword. There is blood upon his sword. It is the blood of men."

"With whom would you fight?" said the mother, her voice reflecting the boy's passion.

"With the savage Algonquins in the far-away lands, the enemies of the Iroquois. And with the Frenchmen whom my father hates."

More the boy would have said, but at that moment the lord of the place returned with a sheathed sword and a velvet belt. The sword, a short blade like that which he himself wore, as slight almost as a whip, he tested on the ground, and in his stern manner pointed out a spot upon the summit of the knoll where the moonlight played free from shadow, saying, "Stand there."

The boy obeyed, stretching out an expectant hand.

His father gave him the virgin sword, fixing him with his stern eye, and suddenly whipped out his own blade, and exclaimed, in a voice which was meant to strike terror into the child's heart, "On guard!"

The boy did not wince, but threw up his point like an old soldier, and his face became wild when along his right arm there thrilled for the first time an indescribable strength and joy as the two blades met.

By instinct he caught the point, and parried the edge. By instinct he lunged at the vital spots, stepping forward, darting aside, falling back, never resting upon the wrong foot nor misjudging the distance. His father, who tested him so severely, smiled despite himself, and Richard saw the smile,

and, confident that he could pass his father's guard, stepped out and took up the attack in a reckless endeavour to inflict a wound upon his teacher's arm.

The stern soldier of fortune played with the boy under the rushing north wind and the swaying light of the moon, while the mother stood near on the slope of the knoll, her eyes flashing, her nostrils distended, her bosom heaving with the passion of the sword-play. She noted how nobly the boy responded to his blood – the enduring blood of the high-bred Cayuga mingled with the fighting strain of the Englishman. She watched the sureness of his hand, the boldness of his eye. She saw how readily the use of the sword came to him, and once she sighed, because her husband had made her Christian, and she remembered the warning of the unseen God which her lord had lately repeated, "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

A cry broke from her lips. Her husband's sword flashed suddenly across her vision, drew back, lowered, and fell like the falcon which had made its blow, and the point sprinkled a few drops of blood upon the bleached grass.

"Thomas," she exclaimed in her native tongue, "why have you wounded your son?"

"It is his baptism to the sword," her husband answered.

Maddened, not by the pain in his shoulder, which indeed he scarcely felt, nor by the sight of his blood flicked contemptuously at his feet, but at the indignity of the wound, the boy rushed at his father, and hit at him blindly as with a stick; and when the master caught and held him, and by the act reminded him that he was yet a child, he began to sob violently with rage.

"You shall pay," he flamed. "I will have your blood for mine. I will fight you again. I will kill you. I will –"

"Peace, child," interrupted his mother. "He is your father."

"Take him and see to him, Mary. I did but prick his shoulder," said the father. "So fiercely did he press upon me that I feared he might throw himself upon my point. The lesson shall teach him prudence."

"I am dishonoured – wounded," moaned Richard.

The father opened his doublet and displayed his chest, which upon both sides was marred by many a scar. Richard beheld, and blinked away his angry tears, as the passion departed from him.

"Must I too be wounded before I am a soldier?" he said.

"Ay, a hundred times," his father answered; and the boy turned away then with his former look of pride, and permitted his mother to wash and bandage the slight wound upon his shoulder.

Soon they came out together to the knoll where the silent man sat with the north wind roaring into his ears the song of battle. He looked up when they were near, and called, "Richard!"

The boy came, subdued and tired, and stood before his father.

"Kneel."

The boy obeyed. The lord of the isles fastened the velvet sword-belt to his son's waist, secured the coveted sword in its place, then stood, and drew out his own well-tested blade.

With it he struck the boy smartly upon the shoulder exactly over the wound, smiling when the child compressed his lips fiercely but refused to wince, and loudly called:

"Arise, Sir Richard!"

CHAPTER IV

MAKERS OF EMPIRE

As the days passed, and Van Vuren's attitude of diffident friendliness remained unaltered, Roussillac's suspicions began to leave him; and even La Salle modified his former opinions when he again walked abroad and discovered that out of the seventy-five fighting men who made up the military complement of the Dutch man-of-war, no less than thirty had been sent out upon a hunting expedition in the western forests. These, and other circumstances, tended to impress the minds of the French officers that their ally was acting in good faith; thus the commandant relaxed his vigilance, and Van Vuren was permitted to go upon his way unwatched. The Dutchman came seldom to the fortress, because he feared a second meeting with La Salle; but he frequently stole under cover of night into the forest to the north, where the Cayugas had their camp, little guessing that these visits were known, not indeed to the French, but to a company of five Englishmen, who had been thrown upon the coast to the west of the settlement of Acadie during a storm of the previous October, and had wintered in a cave among the rugged cliffs some little distance beyond the falls of Montmorenci, believing themselves to be the sole representatives of their country in all that land.

These men – the sole survivors of an expedition which had set forth with the object of establishing a small colony in the north – wasted no time in repining over their ill-fortune, or considering the hopeless nature of their position. They engaged themselves in mastering the topography of the fortress and ascertaining the strength of its garrison; they watched the river, and noted the coming and going of each ship; they made themselves friendly with the Iroquois, and from Shuswap, the chief of the Cayugas, a man who loved the English, they obtained from time to time much information of value. It was one of their number, Jeremiah Hough the Puritan, who had followed Van Vuren to the Indian camp-fire; and when he discovered that the Dutchman was indeed faithless to his allies and was endeavouring to stir up the Iroquois to strike a blow against the French position, he returned with the tidings to his comrades, and the little council of five sat for a long night and discussed this Dutch policy with the cool shrewdness of their race.

As a result of their debate, one of the little band was deputed each night to lie concealed upon the shore and watch the Dutch ship. Simon Penfold, the leader, a spare, grey man of two score years and ten, but hard and hale as any oak in his home meadows, played spy on the first night; Jesse Woodfield, a yeoman scarce thirty years of age, did duty on the second, and handsome young Geoffrey Viner, the boy of the party, beloved by his comrades for the sake of his long fair hair and comely face, kept watch on the third. On the fourth night the task devolved upon George Flower, a middle-aged, sad-featured man, the captain's faithful friend since the days of boyhood; and the next night found stern Hough the Puritan lying among the willows above the shingle, with his cold eyes fixed upon a single star of light which marked the position of the Dutch ship.

These five men, who made up the little company of Englishmen venturing into the French colony, were yeomen of Berks, farmers of the valleys and fields watered by the Thames, men of good repute, who had been driven to leave their native shore and seek another home in the wide new world through the oppression of the agents of the greedy English king.

The man who had discovered Van Vuren's plans had indeed delayed his flight too long. Scarred and lined as were the faces of Flower and Penfold, their features had at least escaped the terrible mutilation which had been inflicted upon Hough as an outward and visible sign of the royal displeasure. His ears had been cropped close to the skull, his nostrils slit, his cheeks branded, as a penalty for having stoutly refused to supply any portion of the necessities of King Charles, according to the demand of the most honourable Court of Star Chamber. The strong black hair which spread

thickly over the Puritan's face, yet without hiding the trail of the branding iron and the primings of the executioner's knife, added a terrible touch to his dehumanised appearance.

It was on the fifth night after the watch had been appointed that Van Vuren played for his big stake. From a safe shelter among the willows, Hough observed a small fire upon the shore, and two men, one of whom appeared to be a native, watching beside the flames. Presently he heard a voice hailing softly from the darkness which overhung the river, and soon a black hulk loomed beside the shore.

Hough counted six men as they disembarked one by one, he saw the boat drawn up, and the beacon fire extinguished. That fire was still hissing under the water which had been thrown upon it when the Puritan crawled out of the thicket of red willow, and stood, leaning forward, listening attentively. When the sound of footfalls died away, he scaled the cliff behind, ran over the flat to the little river of Montmorenci, which was flecked with foam and shivering as it neared its long straight plunge, pulled a canoe from beneath the bushes, and shot across that dangerous passage as though it had been no whit more formidable than some sluggish reach of his native Thames. Had he dropped his paddle, death would have been inevitable; had he allowed himself to drift beyond a certain point the current would have dragged him down to the white bar of foam which marked a phosphorescent line across the darkness beyond.

Plunging again into the forest, he proceeded in the same headlong fashion, bearing to the right, always descending, until he struck a path through the interlacing trees, and finally reached rock-land and a cave cunningly concealed behind a screen of willow.

He whistled softly, and when his signal was answered pushed inward, drawing away a sheet of canvas which had been stretched across the entry to imprison more effectually the light. A fire burnt within, the smoke escaping from a shaft two hundred feet above; and round this fire were grouped his four companions, who started up with eager faces when the Puritan made his entry.

"Good news, I wot," cried old Penfold. "'Tis spoken already by your eyes, friend Hough."

"My eyes lie not," the Puritan answered. "Comrades, the Dutch have shown their hand. If we strike at once we shall assuredly kill their plan, and may perchance seize their leader."

In a few words he disclosed what he had seen.

"They go to hold council with the sachems," said Penfold, adding thoughtfully, "There will be no light until the dawn."

"Let us lie in wait for them beside their boat," the Puritan advised.

"Nay, let us fall upon them in the forest," cried Wood field.

"Not so," answered the leader. "A man cannot use his sword for the bush and the splintered growth from the pines."

"An Iroquois guide will accompany them," said Flower.

"The boat! the boat!" shouted young Viner. "That is the place."

"Peace, lads," cried Penfold, stroking his beard. "Let us discuss with reason. Why has this Dutch vessel made her way up the river? Roussilac would tell us that she has come to strengthen the hands of the French. Is it so? I trow not. It has ever been the policy of the Dutch to dissemble. Holland intends to keep the English from this coast if she may. Surely she desires also to drive out the French, in order that she may make herself mistress of the North American land. She is eager to make colonies, and she knows full well that the fortress may easily be defended once it be captured."

"She is, then, a privateer," exclaimed Hough.

"Not so. She is commissioned by the Government of the Netherlands to seize North America. The French are only a handful here. England has no fleet. Now is the crafty Dutchman's opportunity. Look upon this, my lads."

Penfold pulled a flaming stick from the fire and walked across the cave. He stopped where the side sloped as smoothly as a wall, and held the torch above his head, pointing to a map of the American colonies traced upon the wall of silica by charcoal. The design was roughly and incorrectly

made; rivers were placed where mountains should have shown, and the scale was entirely inaccurate; but politically it was correct.

"See!" cried the leader, passing a finger through Chesapeake Bay, and laying his hand lovingly upon the province of Virginia. "There lies the fairest of England's colonies. Here, mark you, flows the Potomac, and here to the north behold the province of Maryland. What country lies back in the beyond we do not know, because the Mohawks are masters there; but pass north along the coast and we reach New England, the provinces of Connecticut and Massachusetts, with the king's towns of Boston and Plymouth. Between lie our enemies."

He passed his fingers across the words written on the wall, "New Netherlands," while the four men murmured behind.

"Did the Hollanders acquire their colonies in fair fight?" demanded Penfold, returning to the fire.

He flung down the brand, and as the sparks showered upward he went on, "I say it was through deceit. During the glorious reign of our Elizabeth, of blessed memory, our men of Devon, our Grenville, our Drake, our Hawkins smoked out the Spaniards, and wrested these colonies of the new world from the King of Spain in fair fight. Fair do I say? Ay, surely one tight English ship was ever a match for three popish galleons. But mark you how the jackals followed the lion, even as travellers from the Indies tell us they follow to take of that which the lion shall leave. Where the land was free, where there was no tyranny of the church to dread, mark you how the Dutch jackals crept in, to find a home and found a colony under the protection of the golden lions of England."

"Come, old Simon," broke in Woodfield. "Enough of talk."

"Ay, ay. Put out the fire, my lads. Rub out yon map. We have a plan which, with God's help, shall perchance furnish us with better quarters than this poor hole in the rock."

Young Geoffrey stepped back, spat upon the white wall where the words "New Netherlands" appeared, and obliterated the Dutch colonies with the flat of his hand.

"Let the map now stand!" he cried, and the others gathered round the boy whom they loved, clashing their swords, and taking courage from the thoughtless prophecy which was in God's good time to be fulfilled.

Then the Englishmen went on their way through the dark night.

CHAPTER V

DOUBLE DEALING

The Dutch master had played his game of duplicity with no little skill. His arrogant attitude towards the head men of the fortress, his outspoken hatred for the wild north land and its uncivilised inhabitants, his outward indolence and distaste for fighting, were all subtle moves towards the object he had in view. The culminating stroke of practically disarming his ship by sending out thirty of his best men upon a hunting expedition was, he considered, a veritable inspiration of genius. The plan had indeed succeeded in its purpose of hoodwinking the French, and Van Vuren was satisfied, because he knew nothing of the venturers who had discovered his plans and were preparing to strike a blow against him for the glory of their country and themselves.

Six men were admitted into their leader's confidence, and five of these only at the last hour. Everything seemed to favour the enterprise. The night which had been chosen for the council between Van Vuren and the headmen of the Iroquois was very dark. No sound came from the sleeping fortress; not a light was showing upon the French ship. The usual sentries were posted, but the darkness was too impenetrable for the keenest sight to carry more than a few yards. Van Vuren stepped to the side of his ship, listened intently for some minutes, and when the silence remained unbroken whispered an order, and the five picked men clambered down a ladder and guided their feet into a boat which rode alongside. The master followed, the boat was pushed off, and floating down stream swung rapidly round the bend.

"To your oars," muttered Van Vuren.

The black water began to trickle gleefully under the bows, the rowers dropping their blades cautiously and lifting them high to avoid a splash. Soon a spark of light broke out upon the shore, at no great distance from the falls of Montmorenci, where the river of that name discharges into the mightier stream. Swinging the tiller round, Van Vuren aimed the boat towards that light.

Beside the fire awaited them a stout Dutchman, who had lived in New Netherlands among the Indians on the banks of the Schuylkill and there had learnt the language, and with him was an Indian squatting upon his haunches. The latter was naked to the waist; a round beaver cap came low over his forehead, and long hair streamed down his cheeks. His body shone like polished mahogany as the firelight played across it. He rose when Van Vuren approached, and remarked upon the exceeding blackness of the night, and the stout Dutchman answered in the native tongue, "It is well."

After drawing their boat up the shore and putting out the fire, the men listened again for any sounds of hostile movements, and when Van Vuren was reassured as to their safety the party set off along an imperceptible trail, following their Cayuga guide, who strode rapidly towards the cover of the forest.

At the end of an hour's march they drew near the camp and perceived the glow of the council fire. The boles of the trees became ruddy, and they smelt the acrid smoke which curled upward in wreaths to find an outlet through the solid-looking roof of foliage. There was no vegetation below. Splintered stumps projected stiffly from the conifers; sometimes a fallen trunk lay across the way; the peaty ground was soft with pine needles. A fox barked monotonously in the distance. Occasionally a gust of wind passed with a sigh and a gentle straining at the mast-like firs.

The party stepped into a clearing, and Van Vuren halted nervously, tightening the sash which secured his doublet at the waist. Nine men appeared before him, seated under a protection of skins stretched tightly across a framework of boughs, the whole forming a lean-to which might readily be moved, either to break the force of the wind or to afford shelter from rain. The men squatted cross-legged, the majority naked to the waist and shining with fish-oil, a few wrapped in blankets, the heads of all covered with fur caps adorned with pieces of white metal or black feathers. Only

one man was painted, and he showed nothing more than a triangular patch of red upon his forehead, the apex of the triangle making a line with the bridge of his nose. This man was smoking, and did not put down his pipe when the strangers arrived. The smoking was indeed a compliment, being the symbolic pipe of peace.

The nine were sachems of the great Iroquois tribes who in combination held the north of the continent: the Cayugas, Oneidas, Mohawks, Onondagas, and Senacas. The smoker was Shuswap, headman of the Cayugas, father of Onawa and Tuschota, and the chief doctor, one who professed to understand the language of the beasts, and knew how to hold communion with the dead. He looked up, drawing the stem of his pipe from his thin lips, and spoke:

"Do the white men, who come to us from the world where the sun never shines, speak to us now words of peace or of war?"

Van Vuren moved awkwardly when he saw the grave hairless faces peering at him through the hot vapour of the fire. At that moment the fat sailor from New Netherlands reached the clearing, panting like a dog. He presently interpreted the question, and his leader answered: "Tell the chief that we come from a world where the days are long, and where the same sun that warms this country shines from morn till night."

"That were waste of breath," muttered the seaman, who had none to spare, and he said instead to the council of nine: "The white chief has come in peace to seek the aid of the sun's children that he may overthrow his enemies."

"A people have taken my children to be their servants," said Shuswap. "That people armed the enemies of my race against me. Is the white man friendly with that people?"

"The French of whom the great sachem speaks are my enemies also," replied Van Vuren through the interpreter. "I would drive them from the land, and dwell here in peace beside my allies the great tribes of the Iroquois."

The crafty Dutchman reflected that, when the flag of the Netherlands waved over the heights, it would be easy to hold the Indians in the forest with a warship upon the St. Lawrence and a few cannon frowning from the cliff.

"The white man has called us into council," went on Shuswap. "What does he ask of us?"

At that the Hollander played his hand boldly. "I ask you to send your fighting-men against the French when I give the signal. I will sink the provision ship which lies upon the river, while your men sweep over the heights and capture the fortress. So shall you be avenged upon your enemies, the men who armed the Algonquins against you."

"It is well said," answered the council of nine.

"What signal will you give, that we may know when to make our attack?" said Shuswap.

"A raft of fire floating down the river."

The headman removed his eyes from the Dutchman and turned to consult his colleagues. They conferred for some minutes, without passion, without animation, apparently with no feeling of interest. Their faces were set, and they spoke with only faint motions of their lips.

"We will bring our children," said the old sachem at last. "When the fire is seen along the Father of Waters we shall make ourselves ready."

He bent forward, raised a short stick from the centre of the council fire, and held it out in his brown fingers, then dashed the brand suddenly upon the ground, and dreamily watched the upward flight of sparks.

"So let our enemies fly before us," he muttered.

"The sparks fly outward," said the sachem of the Oneidas.

"The Frenchmen shall not be able to stand before the children of the sun," they muttered with one voice.

The pipe was passed round with terrible solemnity, every Indian and Dutchman drawing once at the stem and handing it to his neighbour, and then the Hollanders left the clearing to return, well satisfied with their night's work.

It wanted yet three hours to the first breaking of the dawn, and the night was as dark as ever when the seven men came out upon the rocks, where they could hear the faint whisper of the river. There the Indian guide left them, and the Dutchmen, flushed with success, laughed and talked loudly, knowing that they were separated from the hearing of the French settlement by more than a mile of rock and bush. Advancing in single file, they came to the thicket of willow beside which they had left their boat.

"Is all well?" called Van Vuren, who walked at the end of the line.

As he spoke there fell a storm out of the night; a thunder of voices; the lightning of flashing swords; a rush of dark bodies around the boat. In the thick darkness all became confusion on the side of the attacked.

"English!" shouted Van Vuren; and, as the long body of the Puritan descended upon him, the master turned and fled, without honour, but with a whole skin. Only the stout seaman shared his leader's privilege of a run for his life, but him the far-striding legs of Hough pursued, covering two feet to the Dutchman's one. The wretch sweated and groaned as he flung out his aching legs, his great body heaving and staggering as cold as ice. He swore and prayed to God in one breath. He promised a life of service to the Deity, a treasure in the Indies to the pursuer; but prayer and promise availed him little. The mutilated man pressed upon him, and it was only the almost tangible darkness which prolonged his life for a few more agonised seconds. Then Hough bounded within reach, lunged fairly, pressing home when he felt flesh, and the fat Dutchman emitted a violent yell, and his big carcass rolled upon the rocks, his head settled, his mouth grinned spasmodically, his limbs twitched, and then he lay at ease, staring more blindly than ever into the night. Out of the six conspirators who had set forth that night, Van Vuren was the only man to escape with his life.

"Cast me these bodies into the river," said Penfold, wiping his sword. "But, stay. It were a pity to waste so much good clothing. Strip them first, lads. Naked they came into the world, and naked let them go out."

The bodies were denuded of their clothes and weapons. Five splashes shivered the face of the river, and then the Englishmen laid hands upon the boat and drew her down to the water. But an idea had occurred to Penfold, and he called a halt.

"We have the current to row against, and the night may break before we reach the ship," he said. "Let us disguise ourselves, so that French and Dutch alike may regard us as friends in the dimness of the morning. Here are five suits of Dutch clothing. There are five of us. We shall fight the easier in such loose-fitting trunks."

"Methinks they that fear the Lord have no need to adopt a cunning device," protested the Puritan.

"What know we about the ways of the Lord?" said his leader. "Does the Lord grant the victory to him who runs? Does He not rather send him a sword into his coward's back? The Lord, I tell you, helps that man who is the most subtle in devising schemes through which he may overthrow his enemies. A murrain on these garments! I shall be as a child when he has put on his father's trappings for the bravery of the show."

Already a grey-dark mist spread along the river where the night clouds were dissolving at the first light touch of the fingers of the day. The adventurers had but an hour for their project before the coming of the first light.

CHAPTER VI

THE INTRODUCTION TO A FIGHT

Upon the fore-deck of the Dutch ship two sailors were chatting idly beside a lantern's shaded light. They had tramped up and down, performing their duty in a listless fashion, until the general silence had convinced them that the officer in charge was asleep below. The determination to take their ease, which they thereupon arrived at, became strengthened by their belief that the vessel could not have been safer had she been at anchor-hold in the Zuyder Zee.

"Yon French ship has no sentries, I warrant," said Jan Hoevendend, the younger of the two. "What use, when a man may hardly see his hand when 'tis held in front of him? Your Indian does not attack by water, as Roussilac well knows. Neither shall he attack in such a darkness, unless hard put to it."

"'Tis a scheme of the master to deprive us of our hard-earned sleep," grumbled James Oog. "Come, comrade, let us rest here and smoke. Here is a parcel of tobacco which I dried yesterday in the sun."

The two sailors filled their pipes, lighted the tobacco at the poop lantern, and settled themselves aft speedily to forget their responsibilities. There was not a sound, except the hum of flies and the swirl of the river. There was nothing to be seen, beyond the gloomy masts and spectral rigging. The atmosphere remained still and close.

"This is but a poor country, Jan," observed the older man, after a few contented puffs at his huge pipe. "There be no treasure of gold or silver buried here."

"Nought but forest and rock, with a biting wind o' nights," replied Hoevendend. "'Tis a cold climate. The Indians say this river is thick with ice for a full half of the year."

"I wish for none of that. Give me the south. Hast ever been in Florida?"

"Nay. Is that land as fruitful as men say?"

"It knows no winter, and even in the midst of the year the heat is never so great that a man may not endure to work. The soil is so rich that grain dropped upon the ground shall spring into harvest in a month. Sugar and fruit grow there, and much timber for building. There is also game for the pot, and furs for a man's back."

"There are pestilent beasts, they tell me," Hoevendend grumbled.

"Well, man, there was never a paradise without serpents. True there are mighty reptiles, twenty feet in length, within the rivers, and monstrous scorpions upon land. But what of it? There are perils upon every shore. A man may sit out at night under a big moon, beside trees covered with white or pink blooms, every bloom as great as his head and smelling like wine, and he may listen to the Tritons singing as they splash through the sea, and watch the mermaidens – passing fair they say who have seen them – lying upon the rocks, wringing salt water from their hair. 'Tis a wondrous shore. I would rather own an acre of it than be master of all this country of cold forest where there is neither fruit nor flower."

"The fog arises yonder," said Hoevendend, pointing down the river.

The grey mass which he indicated ascended rapidly and drenched the deck with dew. There was as yet no light, but a heavy shadow had taken the place of the intense blackness, and the river was visible as it carried its current to the gulf. The two men rose suddenly, and hid their pipes when they heard the rattle of oars and splash of water.

"Shall be found at our duty," said Oog, with a husky laugh, and his fellow-seaman chuckled with him.

A boat was making rapid progress against the stream, Penfold, with an eye upon the fog and his right hand on the tiller, encouraging the rowers. The muscles sprang out from their arms, the sweat

flowed from their faces, despite the rawness of the air. Hough's mutilated countenance throbbed terribly beneath his efforts. The ship started suddenly out of the mist, and Penfold called softly, "Easy, lads. Spare yourselves now, for we have soon to fight." But immediately the men stopped rowing, the current dragged the boat down.

"The use of the sword will be as child's play after pulling against this stream," gasped Hough.

Again the men bent their backs, and the boat sullenly made way. Behind them the morning was breaking rapidly, the fog gathered in whiter folds, and some flickering bars of grey light crossed the track of the river.

"They must not see our faces nor hear us speak," Penfold muttered. Then he whispered sharply, "Heaven be thanked! A ladder hangs at her stern."

He drew the borrowed plume over his eyes, and lowered his head because he was facing the ship. His comrades gave way, driving the heavy boat upward with great strokes of the clumsy oars, until Penfold muttered softly, "Easy now."

The two sentries were looking down from above; but they perceived nothing of a suspicious nature, chiefly because they had no cause to fear the coming of the enemy.

Young Viner was the first to leave the boat, but Penfold was hard after him. They scrambled up the ladder, while the others secured the boat to the steps.

"Five men!" exclaimed Hoevenden, peering through the perplexing light. "Where is the sixth? Masters, where is the commander?"

"Here!" muttered an English voice, and the sentry fell forward with Penfold's sword through him. Oog opened his mouth to cry "Treachery!" but all the sound that issued therefrom was a death gasp, as Viner finished his career with a pretty stroke which effectually deprived the Dutchman of his hoped-for heritage in the south.

"A fair beginning," said Penfold, peering forward at the big cabins which gave the ship a curiously humped shape. "Now to smoke out the hornets. If we are mastered by numbers, we may yet save ourselves by swimming to the shore. All silent yet. But see – a gun!"

He rammed his sword up the muzzle-breach. "'Tis loaded. Fetch me yonder lantern."

Hough brought the lantern from the poop; but hardly had he done so when a head came out from one of the cabin windows, and a pair of frightened eyes swept their faces. In a moment, as it seemed, the ship was in an uproar.

"Now may God deafen the Frenchmen," prayed Penfold, as he swung the brass gun round and pointed its muzzle at the cabin door.

Viner and Woodfield were fastening down the hatches, while Hough ran forward, taking his life in his hands, and severed the cable. The ship quivered, shook herself like a dog aroused from sleep, and very slowly answered the downward pull of the stream.

But before the Puritan could return the cabin door burst open and the enemy swarmed forth. Hough dropped the first in his shirt, parried a blow from the second, turned and ran back, while old Penfold opened the lantern and brought the flame down to the portfire.

There was light now over the St. Lawrence under masses of wet cloud. An Indian canoe was flying over the water like a bird, urged by two pair of arms paddling furiously. She caught the floating ship, and as she made fast to the side of the steps the gun roared overhead, and after it an English cheer shook the mist.

"Keep to my side," said the man in the canoe. "Forget not that pass under the hilt I taught you."

Having thus spoken he bounded up the ladder.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIGHT

Although the majority of the thirty-six Dutchmen left aboard had been secured below hatches, those on deck were sufficient to make the odds heavy against the Englishmen. The unanticipated arrival of the lord of the isles and his son – who had been returning from their hunting ground higher up the river, when their ears were startled through the morning mist by the sound of English voices – brought up the attacking strength to the fortunate number of seven; but the new-comers were not even observed by the five adventurers during the excitement of the opening stage of that struggle in the fog.

That incautious cheer, which followed the noise of the gun, was defiant rather than triumphant. In spite of Penfold's careful aim the ball had merely crashed across deck and plunged through the cabin windows. A couple of hurriedly aimed shots came back in angry reply, but one passed high, the other low, resulting in a wrecked plank in the deck and the loss of a portion of rigging. The bark of seventeenth-century cannon was far more formidable than its bite.

"Have at them, my lads. Drive them over the side," thundered Penfold; and he rushed forward to clear the deck at the head of his gallant few.

Before the conflicting parties could meet, three Dutchmen, deceived by the tumultuous English cheer, had gone over the side to swim for shore. These men believed that at least a boatload of armed men had taken them by surprise, and they but obeyed the instinct which in certain temperaments recommends prudence in the form of flight.

"We stand too close together," rang out Penfold's voice. "Friend Woodfield, I had your elbow twice into my side. Separate a little, but let us keep in line."

"One rush forward – a strong rush to the cabins," shouted Hough. The five swords darted through the fog, and every point came back reddened.

Then they broke into a run, hoping thus to sweep the deck, but their weakness had by this time become evident to the defenders, who in their turn pressed forward, conquering by sheer weight of numbers. Each of the adventurers sought shelter for his back, a mast or bulwark, and each was driven to fight independently. Three men rushed upon Penfold and pressed him sore. The Englishman cut at the head of the foremost, but while his arm was uplifted the others took the advantage offered and ran in under his guard. Penfold drew his dagger and beat at them with his left hand. The second Dutchman scratched him deeply along the side. The third caught and held his left wrist, and shortened his rapier to run the Englishman through the heart. Penfold saw death before him, but only called grimly, "Fair play, ye dogs, fair play!"

The sword was dashed from his hand. He pressed back to avoid the plunge of the shortened blade, but the Hollanders had him at their mercy. Penfold prepared to make a last effort to break aside, when the foe who threatened him started rigid with a gasp of pain, and the leader of the adventurers saw the point of a sword dart fearfully from the Dutchman's chest. Then the man fell forward spitted from behind, and with him another of the soldiers, while the third of Penfold's assailants splashed heavily into the St. Lawrence.

The man who had saved the leader's life went on his way fighting with magnificent confidence in the strength of his right arm, and beside him went the boy, fighting with all his father's fervour, his brown face pale with passion, his little brown hands already oozing blood, and his short sword from hilt to point all bloody too.

"Angels or devils," gasped Flower, who was bleeding heavily from a wound in the thigh, "they fight upon our side."

"At them again," cried Woodfield. "After the brave stranger."

"He takes too much upon him. I am leader here," grumbled old Penfold unthankfully.

The valour of the stranger turned the scale. None of the Dutch could stand before that terrible blade. They gave way, were hunted back to the cabins, and there brought to bay.

"Yield you, sirs!" called Penfold.

Seeing that they had done sufficient for honour, the men yielded, gave up their weapons, and sought permission to finish their dressing. Before this request could be granted, a deep voice exclaimed:

"You grow careless, my masters. Know you not that a bird cannot fly unless she has wings to carry her?"

It was the stranger who issued this caution as he pointed with his sword over the stern.

The ship had drifted some eighty yards from her moorings, her keel grating more than once upon a drift of mud. She had remained close to the bank, out of reach of the strong central current, and now lay almost motionless, because she had reached the slack water where the river commenced its eastward bend. Behind her lay the fortress, already vested in the golden light of the morning. Between, where the white mist was stealing upward, came sailing a great hulk, and above the vapour could be seen the flag of France crushing its golden lilies against the topmast. At intervals came the indistinct murmur of voices, the flash of hurried sparks dropped upon touchwood, the rattle of cannon balls, the ramming home of charges down slim-waisted guns.

"Fool that I am!" exclaimed Penfold. "Fool and forgetful! Up the rigging, my lads, and set the mainsail. What breeze there is blows down the river. Drive me yonder fellows up, George Flower. Do you see that they set all sails, and if they be not ready to obey hurry them with the sword point."

The sailors were driven into the rigging to plume their ship for the benefit of a victorious enemy. The canvas flapped out, the ship veered towards midstream, and, instantly responding to wind and current, floated to the left of the island, with the Frenchman scarce a hundred yards from her stern.

A voice came rolling out of the mist, the voice of D'Archand. "Are you attacked by Indians?" he shouted. The master had undoubtedly made out the Indian canoe floated beside the steps.

"Let any man answer at his peril," said Penfold, glaring round upon the unarmed Dutch.

"Do we fear the French?" demanded Viner hotly. "Here are five – nay, seven – good Englishmen, for surely our stout allies here have fought as only English can –"

"There are a hundred men upon yonder ship," interrupted the leader, "men equipped with the newest weapons of Europe. It were madness to divulge our names and nation. Sir," he went on, turning to the stranger, "we are much indebted to you. Sir, you have fought like a brave man, and have helped us to overcome our enemies. What counsel do you give?"

"Answer Roussilac that Indians have come aboard, but that the crew are capable of defending themselves, if you will," the stranger replied. "So may you avoid his fire. Or with your pleasure I will undertake to answer the master myself, even as an Englishman should always answer a Frenchman."

"And how is that?" demanded Penfold.

The stranger indicated the brilliant flag, flapping in the sunshine like a wounded bird trying to fly but falling back. "By defying him so long as that emblem flies," he said.

Between heavy lines of mist, waved like the bar nebuly upon the shield of the woolcombers, the black stem and white deck of the enemy had become partly visible. Heads of watchers were peering over her side, their bodies hidden, their faces barely above the fog line. Before the cabins in front of the poop a canopy fluttered; under it a table, and upon the table six great golden poppies lifted their heads, their ragged petals flickering under the breeze. The Englishmen saw the bare head and richly caparisoned shoulders of a tall priest, who swayed monotonously from side to side, and muttered Latin in a deep voice. The table was an altar, the poppies were candles, and the priest was La Salle reciting the inevitable morning Mass.

The better-built Dutch vessel, being easily capable of sailing a knot and a half to the Frenchman's one, drew away, her main and fore sheets swelling till they were round as the belly of

some comfortable merchant of Eastcheap who had profited by a successful venture upon the Spanish Main. Very soon the voice of the militant priest became like the murmur of an overhead insect.

"Now by my soul!" cried Hough, with a quivering of his slit nostrils. "It were an everlasting disgrace to Christian men to stand thus idle and watch a priest of Baal offering sacrifice. Bid us run out the guns, captain, and drop a good Protestant cannon ball amid yonder catholic juggling. We have fought for our country this day. Let us now commit ourselves to the Lord's work, and snuff out yonder stinking candles, and end these popish blasphemies."

Penfold made no sign of hearing this appeal. He said merely, "They cram on yet more sail. But they shall not come up to us unless we are brought upon a bar, and even so they cannot pass us, because the water becomes narrow beyond. Where is friend Woodfield?"

"Guarding the prisoners at the door of the cabin and keeping an eye that they do not arm themselves."

"Listen to the men below," said Flower. "Our caged birds become weary of confinement, and beat their wings to escape."

Hough and the lord of the isles held their eyes upon the Frenchman, who was now one hundred and fifty yards away, and almost clear of vapour. When they could see that the guns had been unshipped and were pointing over the bows, neither man was able altogether to suppress his feelings.

"The curse of God shall surely fall upon us," cried the Puritan furiously. "When summoned to work in His vineyard we turn a deaf ear to the call. Did evil come to me when I dragged with mine own hands from the reformed communion table of our parish church at Dorchester a Jesuit in disguise, and flung the dog into our little river Thame there to repent him of his former and latter sins?"

"Peace, friend," said old Penfold. "Here is not England, nor stand we on English territory. Let yonder papists worship their saints and idols to their own decay. We are but few in number, though valiant in spirit, and with every man a wound to show. Remember also that this ship is not yet our prize."

"Croaker," muttered Hough disdainfully.

"Say rather a man to whom age has brought sound judgment," returned Penfold, unmoved.

"It is my turn," said the deep voice of the unknown. "Sir Captain, I have a favour to beg. There is a gun yonder on which I have set my eye, a brass gun of some twenty pounds weight, loaded with ball. If it displease you not, I will discharge that gun from the aftmost deck in such a manner that it shall harm no man. Sir Captain, I have some small experience in aiming the gun."

Penfold set his rugged face towards his questioner.

"Good sir," he said, "you are English among Englishmen. We are plain countrymen of the royal county of Berks, village yeomen of small degree, who have beaten our plowshares into swords; but you, I may believe, judging from your speech, are somewhat higher. Tell us, if you will, your name."

"My name is my own, my sword the king's, my life belongs to my country," said the stranger. "Enough to know that I am a man of Kent. If now I have answered you, sir, I beg of you to answer me."

"We should but reveal ourselves."

"Every minute widens yon strip of water between ourselves and the pursuer. She is sailing her fastest, and each minute sends us more of the wind which she has been taking from us. This breeze may endure for another hour, by which time we shall have reached the chasm which is called Tadousac. Sixteen years have I dwelt upon this river, good master, both in winter and summer, and no servant of King Louis, nor Indian of the forest, knows its waters better than I."

Penfold turned to the two associates supporting him. "What answer shall I give?" he asked.

"Consent," said fanatic and youth together; and Penfold gave consent against his better judgment.

Unaided, the stranger carried the short gun up the steps, rested it in position upon its crutch on the sloping deck, and arranged the priming, while the stern boy at his bidding produced knife and

flint. The men below awaited results with a certain curiosity, looking for little more than an explosion of powder, and the hurling of a defiant missile harmlessly into space.

It might have been the excellence of the aim, it might have been the working of Providence, more probably it was sheer commonplace English luck; but, when the quaint little weapon had howled, kicked viciously, and rolled over, there came the dull crash of lead with wood, a shower of tough splinters, and – most glorious sight for the adventurers' eyes – the top of the French mainmast, carrying the great white and gold flag, which had been blessed by a bishop upon the high altar of Notre Dame in Paris, sprang into the air like a pennoned lance, described a half circle, and plunged to deck, piercing the canopy as though it had been paper, missing the ministrant by inches only, scattering the candlesticks and breaking the candles before the eyes of the scandalised soldiers, who were concluding their devotions to the "*Ite missa est*" of the priest.

A great cheer ascended from the Dutch ship, making the cold, pine-clad hills echo and ring. Hough forgot his sternness, and laughed aloud as he clasped the gunner's hand. Old Penfold smiled grimly, with more inward jubilation than he cared to show.

"Now plume her, lads, and let us fly," he shouted. "Steer her around yonder bend in safety, and we may laugh at her cannon."

"The prisoners, captain! We cannot both fight the ship and hold guard over them."

"To the river with them," said Hough. "Let them swim ashore."

"There may be some who cannot swim."

"What better chance shall they have of learning? My father cast me into the Thames when I was but a whipster, and said, 'Sink or swim, my lad.' And I thought it well to swim."

Protesting, struggling, swearing in an unknown tongue, the prisoners were brought forth from the cabins and hurried over the side, the laggards helped by a cuff or kick at starting. The turgid river splashed with Dutchmen, like a school of porpoises, making with what speed they could – for the water was exceedingly cold – towards the rock-bound shore.

Great was the confusion upon the Frenchman when she became so notably disgraced, but presently D'Archand restored a semblance of order, and the men trailed off to their duties, probably not a little afraid at discovering that the ever-dreaded English, whose appearance north of far-distant Plymouth had become a familiar nightmare, were aboard their supposed Dutch ally. La Salle, who had immediately rushed into his cabin and there divested himself of his ecclesiastical finery, speedily reappeared in secular costume with his redoubtable sword naked in his hand. The abbé could swear as heartily as any soldier when put to it, which fact he proved beyond lawyers' arguments then and there.

"Body of St. Denis!" he cried. "See to your priming, knaves. Ah, hurry, young imp of the pit," kicking a scrambling powder-boy as he shouted. "By St. Louis, our Lady, and the Cardinal! This is a Dutch word, a Dutch troth, a Dutch alliance. We shall harry the traitors who have leagued themselves with our enemies, unless their master, Satan, lends them wings to carry them to the uttermost parts of the earth. We shall hang them speedily to the rigging, if the saints be favourable. Fire, rogues! See you not that she is slipping away from us? Ah, for a sand bank, or sunken rock, to catch her as she runs! Mark you now, when I throw a curse over them, how they shall be brought down in their pride."

Despite the malediction of Holy Church, the trim Dutchman swept on nearly a quarter of a mile ahead. Sailors manned the rigging, and crammed on as much additional sail as the masts would bear; the dishonoured flag was replaced; Roussilac paced the main deck, pale with rage, his fingers clasp and unclasp his sword-hilt. D'Archand hurried to and fro, issuing orders with typical French rapidity.

A jet of smoke broke over her bows, and a ball threw up a spout of water in the wake of the fleeing vessel.

"A most courteous and inoffensive messenger," quoth Flower, bowing to the enemy. "Captain, shall we not make a suitable reply?"

"I fear me powder and ball are out of reach," said the captain. "The noisy hornets below guard the magazine. Would that we had a flag to hoist over us, though it were nothing more comprehensible to our foes than the five heads of county Berks."

Another gun exploded, and after it another, and so they continued ringing their wild music, the balls falling astern for the most part, though more than one whizzed through the rigging, yet without doing more damage than cutting a rope.

"Take her wide round yonder point, master helmsman," cried the stranger. "There lies a mud-bank stretching under the water well-nigh to mid-stream. Mark you the place where it ceases by the ripple across the river? Steer your passage to the left of that ripple, and all shall go well."

"Methinks the wind blows more keenly," said Woodfield.

"There is coming upon us that wind which the Indians call the life of the day, a breath of storm from the west which endures but a few moments, blowing away the vapours of early morn and the last clouds of night," said the man of Kent. "We may be sure of that wind at this season of the year. After it follows calm, and the sun grows hot. Haul down the lower main-sail, Sir Leader. The heavy mist upon yonder hills tells us that the wind shall blow full strength this morning."

Even as he spoke a ball from the enemy's bows roared overhead, and snatched away a portion of the sail he indicated. The loose canvas began already to flap and the flying ropes to whistle in the wind.

"Let it remain so," said the Kentishman. "We have no need to take in our sail since they have saved us the work. Didst see how she staggered then? She shall never carry all that weight of canvas through the life of the day, and the wind bears more heavily on her than upon us. Ah, she gains!"

It was as he had said. The unwieldy vessel fell into the breath of the wind, and, righting herself after a sudden lurch, settled down into the water, ploughing a deep white furrow, every mast bending and every rope straining, every inch of canvas bellying mightily.

The Dutchman came out to avoid the mud flat. She began to make the bend, and her helmsman already saw the wide reach of river beyond, when a terrible shout ascended from the men who were caged between decks. At the same moment a pungent odour tainted the free air, and a thin blue vapour began to leak from the cracks and joinings of the planks.

The Dutchman was burning internally. Soon her deck smoked like a dusty road under wind, and the shouts of the prisoners became terrible to endure. The adventurers smelt the choking fumes, saw the curling vapours, and their faces grew pale with the knowledge that they had to face a more dangerous foe than the French, knowing well that any moment a spark or a flame might touch the magazine.

"Unfortunates!" groaned Penfold. "I had hoped to win this ship, and with her sail to Virginia, there to gather a crew of mine own people, and return hither to harry the French."

"To the boats," cried Flower. "Better be sunk by a cannon ball than perish like rats in a corn-stack."

The wind rushed down from the westward rocks with a shout. It smote the waters of the St. Lawrence, beating them into waves. It penetrated the womb of the Dutch vessel, and fanned the smouldering fire into life. It plucked at the cordage, fought with the sails, and bent the masts until they cracked again. It came in a haze through which the sun glowed faintly, and behind over the unseen heights the sky cleared and burst into blue patches, because the passing of the life of the day was as sudden as its birth.

Down went the mizzenmast of the Frenchman with its crowning weight of canvas, carrying away the spanker, the shrouds, davits, and quarter boat; and her sky-sails, which a moment before had raked the breeze so proudly, spread disabled in the river. She dragged on with her wreckage, while men with axes swarmed into the poop to cut away the dead weight of wood and saturated canvas. The mainmast curved like a bow from the main shrouds to the truck, but remained fast until the haze broke, and the sky became a field azure, from which the sun shone out in his might.

Flames were now pouring from the doomed ship, and the poop was a mass of fire. The Englishmen ran for the boats, into which they flung every article upon which they could lay their hands: swords and guns, axes, clothing, provisions, bedding, and even spare sails and ropes. Everything would serve some useful purpose in their life upon the shore. The lord of the isles alone took nothing. He entered his canoe with the boy, and before the adventurers quitted the doomed ship they had reached the shore and entered the cover of the trees, the man carrying the light canoe beneath his arm.

"Release the prisoners," cried Flower, as he cast his last burden into the boat.

"Not so," replied the vindictive Hough. "Let them perish like the men of Amalek before Israel."

"Nay, we are no cold-blooded murderers," protested Woodfield. "Unfasten the hatches, and let them save themselves."

"Have they not been delivered into our hands that we may destroy them?" said Hough.

"Now you would undo the good work, and raise up again a host to be our destruction in the time to come."

"Let us not argue, lest we be destroyed," said young Viner. "What says our captain?"

But old Penfold was lying back in the boat, fainting with exhaustion and loss of blood, and when Woodfield appealed to him he only murmured the death sentence of the Dutchmen, "Let Jeremiah Hough command."

"Cast off," said the Puritan. "Let the enemies of our country perish. The Lord do so to me and more also if I spare any of the accursed race who have sworn to sweep England from the seas."

So the boat pushed off, and came after hard rowing to the shore, beside the mouth of the little river which enters the main stream midway between Cap Tourmente and the cleft of the Saguenay. Up this river the men pulled to find a place for encampment, until the sweet-smelling pine forest closed behind and hid them from their enemies, whose flag they had flouted and beaten that day. While they worked their way inland a mighty explosion shook the atmosphere, the cones rained from the overhanging trees, the rock land thrilled, the face of the water shivered, and the birds flew away with screams.

"I fear me," said Hough, as he ceased his nasal droning of a psalm, "I fear me that the popish dogs have been given time to rescue the Hollanders."

True it was that the French had been allowed both time and opportunity for setting at liberty the wretches in the burning ship, but neither Roussilac nor any of his captains dared to lead the venture, knowing that any moment might witness the destruction of the ship. The master took in his sails, cast anchor, and waited for the end.

Thus the undertaking of Holland failed, as her treachery deserved. It was her one attempt at wresting the fortress from the Cardinal's grip. And from that day to this no man-of-war from the Netherlands has ever sailed up the gulf of the St. Lawrence.

CHAPTER VIII

COUCHICING

A month went after the failure of the Dutch venture, and the sachems of the Iroquois still awaited the signal of the raft of fire. Van Vuren had entered the fortress that morning which witnessed the loss of his ship, and there remained at the mercy of the French, spending his days in making friendly overtures to the commandant, avoiding La Salle – who still refused to believe that it was not Van Vuren who had been his cowardly attacker that distant night at the street corner in Avignon – and anxiously inquiring for news concerning the expedition which he had sent out to the west. The Dutchman was being punished for his treachery by the knowledge that a sword was suspended by an exceedingly frail thread above his head, for he strongly suspected that the dwarf Gaudriole was cognisant of his visits to the council fire. He was therefore afraid to approach the Indians again; but his mind was yet occupied with its former plot of seizing the fortress with their aid.

During that month Roussilac had not been idle. With half his men he had harried the country to east and west, that he might find and hang the Englishmen who had dared to occupy his territory and disgrace his flag. He did not venture into the forests of the north, because the Iroquois were masters there. Once the adventurers came very near to being taken, but bravery and English luck opened a way for their escape. They were, however, compelled to abandon their cave among the cliffs, and flee for refuge into the district inhabited by the friendly Cayugas; and there, a few paces from the brink of Couchicing, the Lake of Many Winds, they built them a hiding-place surrounded by a palisade, which they ambitiously named New Windsor. To the north they were protected by the face of the water, to the south by the primæval forest; on the west the Cayugas held the land, on the east the Oneidas, both tribes well disposed towards the English and bitterly hostile to the French.

Finding himself again defeated, Roussilac cast about in his mind for a sounder policy, and finally resolved to adopt Samuel de Champlain's cunning and stir up the Algonquins anew to attack their hereditary foes. Accordingly he despatched Gaudriole with a couple of soldiers to the north, with a present of guns and ammunition and a message to the chief Oskelano, praying him to descend straightway to the river, and view for himself the majesty and power of the representatives of the King of France. Oskelano, a treacherous and heartless rogue, snatched at the gifts, asked greedily for more, and consented to return with the dwarf to the fortress.

This move on the part of the commandant escaped the knowledge of the men who were busy in their way spinning the web of England's empire, fighting for their own existence and for supremacy at one and the same time. At their councils figured the lord of the isles – whose well-hidden shelter in the heart of the region of the lost waters had never been suspected by the searching party – and his stern young son. Since that unlooked-for meeting on the deck of the Dutch vessel the Kentishman had come into frequent contact with the men of Berks, and their common nationality, cause, and necessities had quickly forged a stubborn tie between them. But the geniality of the yeomen never succeeded in breaking down the reserve of their mysterious colleague. When asked to recount some portion of his past history he would but answer brusquely, and when they demanded to know his name he merely returned his former answer, "I am a man of Kent."

During that month another provision ship, the *St. Wenceslas* of Marseilles, had sailed up the St. Lawrence, and so soon as she had made fast and told the news of the world D'Archand lifted anchor and headed for home, carrying Roussilac's despatches, and those soldiers and settlers who, by reason of wounds or sickness, had become unfitted to fulfil their military obligations. The French Government had taken advantage of the dissensions which were rending England apart to send by the *St. Wenceslas* more emigrants into the new world – all picked men, destined by the Government to be established, willing or unwilling, regardless of soil or natural advantages, upon such districts as

might be considered to need strengthening, there to survive or to become extinct. It would be their duty to form, not a settlement capable of extension, but a military post; and they would be sustained by supplies brought over from France by warships. It was a weak policy, bound by the test of time to fail. The English motto was settlement and a friendly attitude towards the natives; that of her great colonial rival, aggrandisement and the destruction of the aborigines.

These facts were remembered by the venturers, when they beheld the coming of the one ship and the departure of the other, and, egotists though they were, the truth that they could not possibly form a settlement unaided became at last too obvious to be ignored. After repeated deliberations they decided upon a course which was indeed the only one open to them. The advice, that one of the party should attempt to reach the king's loyal town of Boston by overland journey and there beg for help, proceeded in the first instance from the man of Kent. He explained that the province of Massachusetts was well occupied by Englishmen of every grade – soldiers of fortune as well as artisans, farmers, and titled scions of great houses; and, he added, there were ships of war in Boston and Plymouth harbours. This advice found favour in the eyes of the others, and they proceeded to draw lots to decide which one should make the hazard. The lot fell upon Geoffrey Viner, the youngest of the party. His seniors at once held forth objections, grounded upon his youth and inexperience; but the boy as stoutly held out for his privilege, until the dissentients gave way.

At noon upon the day which had been selected for the young man's departure, the lord of the isles appeared at New Windsor to bid the messenger farewell. Geoffrey went out with him, and they stood alone in the shade of a hemlock, facing the lake and a white cascade which streamed like a bridal veil over the face of the rocks. After the Kentishman had imparted what little knowledge he had of the country to the south, he went on to fix deeply into the mind of his listener the importance of seeing Lord Baltimore, the Governor of New England, personally, and of impressing the papist peer strongly with the vital necessity of sending immediate succour to the north.

"And what if my Lord Baltimore will not hear me, or hearing will not believe?" asked Geoffrey anxiously.

"Give to him this ring," replied the other, drawing reluctantly from his left hand a gold circlet set with a stone bearing a coat-of-arms. "Bid him remember the promise made to this ring's owner one summer night in a Kentish orchard. Bid him also recall the words of King Henry the Sixth upon Southwark Bridge, hard by Saint Mary Overies, to his ancestor the keeper of the privy seal, and to mine the sheriff of Kent."

"Think you that our plans shall prosper?" the young man asked.

"Have no doubt. Believe that already we have succeeded. Persuade yourself that the French are driven out of their fastnesses, and the land from Acadia to Hochelaga gives allegiance to King Charles. As a man wills so shall it be. And yet be cautious."

"Should I not bid them attack Acadia first? It is but a small colony, and open to the water they say."

"Nay," said the other. "Let us fight with our faces to the sea. How shall it profit us to drive our enemy inland and disperse them as a swarm of flies which rises and settles in another spot? We must drive them eastward to the sea, where they shall either conquer or die. I pray you guard that ring."

As they moved away from the hemlock's shade a canoe swept over the lake and touched the sand, and two stern-faced Cayugas lifted their paddles, shaking the water from the blades. These brought a brace of land-locked salmon to the beach. A young woman followed, and after her an old man, his thick hair adorned with a bunch of feathers. These were Shuswap and Onawa, his youngest daughter.

The lord of the isles went forward, and met his native relatives upon the beach.

"Gitsa," cried the old man. "We greet you, Gitsa."

"Is it well, Shuswap?"

"It is the time of the wind of life, the good time," the old man answered. "The waters are free, and the animals breed in the forest. Where are the white men of the smooth tongue, Gitsa? Where are the men who came to us at the council fire and said to us, 'Your enemy is our enemy. Aid us now when we rise up against them'? Shall they return with the wind of life?"

"The north wind came upon them and swept them away," his son-in-law replied, employing the sachem's figurative speech. "You have something to tell me, Shuswap?"

"There is a strange ship come to the high cliffs, a great ship from the land of the accursed people," said the old man. "What is this that you have told us, Gitsa? Said you not that the King of England shall send many ships and men when the ice has gone, to drive out the men of France and restore their own to the tribes of the Iroquois? What is this that we see? The priest of France sends more ships, and more men who shall kill the beasts of the forest and the fish of the waters, and drive us back with their fire-tubes into the forests of the north where the enemies of our race, the Algonquins, lie ever in wait. Is there a king in England, Gitsa? Has he ships to send out? Has he men to put into them? Have you lied to the sachems of the Iroquois?"

"Be not afraid, Shuswap," said the white man. "You shall learn whether there be a king of England or no. But he has many enemies in the far-away world, and these he must conquer first. Even now we are sending a messenger to the king's country, and he shall return with ships and men, and the French shall flee before them."

The man of Kent spoke with a heavy heart. He dared not confess what he believed to be the truth – namely, that England was already embroiled in civil war.

"A tribe divided against itself shall be annihilated," said the sachem sharply, with the clairvoyant power of the primitive man. "The remaining tribes stand by until it is exhausted, and then fall upon that tribe, and it is known no more. Is it so with the English, Gitsa?"

"It is not so," replied the Englishman, a flush upon his tanned features. "England stands above other nations of the world, even as the sun is greater than all lights. She shines over the earth in her strength. Were there no England the world would fall into decay, the creatures who supply us with meat and fur would die, the fish would fail in the waters, the forests would wither, there would be no rain and no light by night or by day. The sun would turn black, the moon would fall into the sea, the very gods would die if England were no more. She shall take possession of this land in her own time, and Frenchmen shall have no place in it except as subjects of our king."

The old sachem lifted his cunning eyes and said: "It is well, Gitsa. But if it be so, why does not your king lift his hand and drive away his enemies, or blow with his breath and destroy their ships? Surely that would be a small thing to a king who governs the world."

"It would be a small thing in truth," replied the Englishman, smiling in spite of his sorrow. "But the ways of the king are not our ways. He allows his enemies to go upon their course, until a day comes when he shall say, 'You have gone too far.' It is thus that he shows his power."

"It is so," said the sachem gravely. "We cannot read the mind of him who rules. One year there are many animals in the forest, and we live in plenty. The next we starve. A small tribe overthrows a great one. A great tribe becomes too prosperous and is plagued with pestilence. The young men are smitten. The old live on. The wind destroys the forest, the river breaks its own banks. The lightning strikes down the totem-pole which we have raised for his pleasure. It is so. There is a mystery in life. The gods destroy their own handiwork. They remove the strong, and let the weak survive."

He passed on, an erect figure, in spite of his age, and treading firmly.

Onawa, a silent listener to their talk, stepped out. She was good to look upon, with her wealth of black hair, her large eyes, her rounded face, the cheeks and lips lightly touched with paint, her slim muscular figure. She could run against any man, and aim an arrow with the sureness of any forester of Nottingham. But she was headstrong, as changeable as water, and the Englishman did not trust her.

"Where have you been, Onawa?" he said.

"I have come from the camp with my father," she replied. "Where have you left your son? They say, among the tribes, that he grows into a great warrior. They say also that he carries wood and draws water and cuts up the deer which he has killed. Our young men despise a woman's work."

"I have taught him the duty of helping his mother," came the reply. "In my country a man lives for his mother or his wife, and her good favour is his glory."

The girl hesitated, a frown crossing her forehead. "Why are the French so beautiful, so bold-looking?" she asked suddenly.

"That they may captivate the minds and eyes of women who are weak."

"They are better to look at than Englishmen. They do not wear old garments marked with dirt. They do not let the hair upon their faces grow down their bodies. They do not talk deep in their throats. They are not serious. I love to hear them talk, to see them move. They walk like men who own the world."

"I have warned you against them," he said earnestly. "They are the natural enemies of your people. Consider! What Frenchman has ever married into your tribe and settled down among you?"

The girl laughed scornfully, and turned to go, grasping her long hair in her hand.

"You hide from them because you know that they are better men than you," she taunted. "It was a Frenchman who first came to our country from the other world. Perhaps there was no England in those days. The sun loves to shine upon Frenchmen. The English live in the mists. You have taken my sister for wife, but I – I, Onawa, daughter of Shuswap, would marry a Frenchman."

"Never shall I wish you a harder fate," retorted the calm man; and having thus spoken he turned aside towards the tiny English settlement to greet his friends and join again his son.

It was the first hour of night when Viner started upon his great journey. The forest was white with a moon, and sparks of phosphorus darted across the falls. When the wooden bars were drawn out of their sockets and the five men emerged from the palisade, the monotonous chirping of frogs ceased abruptly, and a great calm ensued.

In single file they passed along the dark trail, the wet bush sweeping their legs, the branches locked overhead. They rounded the red fires which marked the camping-ground of the Oneidas; they smelt the acrid smoke, and dimly sighted many a brown lean-to; the dogs jumped out barking. They passed, the lights disappeared, the silence closed down. Presently the trail divided; the branch to the left leading to the river, that to the right bearing inland to the lakes, rivers, and hunting-grounds known only to the Indians.

"Get you back now," said Viner, halting at the parting of the ways. "We are already in the country of the enemy. Bid me here God-speed."

There they clasped hands, and in the act of farewell Flower slipped into Viner's hand a little black stone marked with a vein of chalk. "Keep it, lad," he muttered. "One spring when I was near drowning in the Thames by being held in the weeds I caught this stone from the river-bed. Methinks it has protected me from ill. May that same fortune be on you, and more added to it, in the work which lies before you."

A ray of moonlight fell through an opening in the trees, and whitened the five keen faces.

"Superstition made never a soldier of any man," muttered the stern voice of the Puritan. "Fling that idolatry to the bush, Geoffrey, and go your way, trusting rather in the Lord with a psalm upon your lips."

"It is but a reminder of home for the lad," protested Flower gently. "We have each other. But in the solitudes what shall he have?"

"'Tis but a stone from our river, friend Hough," said Geoffrey timidly. "I thank you, neighbour," he added.

"Fare you well," said old Penfold sadly. "We shall lack you sore."

They turned away, and instantly became lost from the man who was going south, because the trail bent sharply. The little band of adventurers, now reduced to four, walked slowly and sorrowfully

towards New Windsor, until they came out upon the lake, and heard the beavers gnawing the rushes, and the wind splashing the fresh water up the beach.

"What has come to our nightingales?" said Penfold suddenly. "I like not this silence."

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